

NAM NAMby-pamby Affair (11-10)

The fact that the government of India had bid — and withdrew its bid — for hosting the summit of the non-aligned countries early next year should not detract from the fiction the movement has come to represent. The importance of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), whose foreign ministers met in New York last week to finally decide on Jordan as the venue for the coming summit, is actually its growing unimportance. If NAM has been reduced to an irrelevant gathering, thanks to its failure to re-found itself to address the changed global realities, then countries that comprise this grouping have only themselves to blame. The end of the cold war, the collapse of the Soviet Union and consequent demise of the socialist bloc — once seen as “natural allies” of NAM — the sweeping tides of globalisation, the emergence of a new economic order and resultant rise of regimes such as the WTO have all contributed to blunt any little ability NAM might have assumed to influence the direction of developments. Ever strong on rhetoric and resolutions, NAM, which railed against the industrialised North and their grip on the world's economy and resources no longer even talks about a New International Economic Order or a New World Information and Communication Order. On the contrary, non-aligned countries, such as Malaysia and India, failed to capitalise on their strengths in information technology to attempt any recasting of the prevalent imbalance in the information order. If there are any successes to boast of in tilting the scales in favour of some developing countries it is because of the entrepreneurial initiative which most non-aligned states have done little to encourage.

Given this abysmal record, there appears to be no hope for a NAM that persists in floating along on the beaten path, occasionally boosted by hot air about economic inequalities, cooperation for development, disarmament, South-South partnership and unilateralism of “some countries”. NAM must recognise that the non-aligned countries are home to the majority of the world's poor; that many of them have a poor record of democracy and an even poorer climate for economic empowerment and social emancipation; and that they are bedevilled by a variety of conflicts within and between them. There are no dividends, at home or abroad, in continuing to flog colonialism or imperialism for their plight. If NAM wants to recover any relevance, it must reorient itself to doing business in a world where what matters most is economic strength. It must set itself achievable economic priorities, forge new trade and business partnerships between the non-aligned, evolve a common agenda and arrive at a new compact to maximise its clout in international organisations. What happened at the Doha meeting of the WTO, where every developing country struck bilateral or back-room deals, leaving India to fight a lone battle, ought to be instructive: that if India alone could push WTO so far, then the non-aligned acting in concert could accomplish much more in undoing unfair provisions in international regimes on environment, labour standards, patents, subsidies and intellectual property rights. Unless the non-aligned countries realise this potential as well as their collective strengths and interests to drive the economic bargain so necessary for the survival of the South, NAM can never scale the summit to be seen or heard by those who dominate the world.

M. K. ...

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 NOV 2001

India withdraws bid for NAM summit

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, NOV. 15. India on Wednesday withdrew its bid to host the next summit of the non-aligned movement (NAM) and the choice fell in favour of Jordan, diplomatic sources here said.

The decision came at a meeting of the non-aligned Foreign Ministers in New York on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, attended the deliberations. 10/1 6/1 v

India, which had offered to host the summit following the abrupt withdrawal of its earlier commitment by Bangladesh, stepped back when Iran and Jordan also expressed interest in holding the meeting. The Indian offer was aimed at demonstrating its political will to pitch in at a difficult diplomatic moment for the non-aligned movement.

But the Government was not interested in competing with any other nation in leading the move-

ment for the next three years. South Africa is the present chairman and the last NAM summit was held in Durban in 1998.

The summit was scheduled to be held this year in Dhaka, but was postponed because of the general elections in Bangladesh. The decision by the newly-elected Government of Begum Khaleda Zia to walk away from that commitment forced NAM to look at other options in Asia as it was Asia's turn to host the summit. Mr. Singh is believed to have withdrawn India's offer once South Africa announced the interest of Iran and Jordan to host the summit. After consultations between the two nations, Iran too stepped back and the choice of venue was clinched in favour of Jordan.

This is the first time Jordan, a key moderate political voice in West Asia, will be holding the summit. India had hosted the leaders of the non-aligned movement in 1983, under the leadership of Indira Gandhi.

THE HINDU

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India bids for NAM summit

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, NOV. 12. India is believed to be the front-runner among various candidates to host the summit of the non-aligned nations early next year.

The Foreign Office here is tight-lipped on the state of play within the NAM on choosing the host country. Diplomatic sources, however, suggest there is a reasonable prospect that New Delhi may be the eventual choice for the summit. A final decision on the venue for the summit is likely to be made at a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Non-aligned movement (NAM) in New York later this week, the sources added.

The abrupt move by the newly-elected government in Bangladesh led by Ms. Khaleda Zia to back away from the commitment to host the summit has put the choice of venue right on top of the NAM Foreign Ministers meeting beginning Wednesday.

The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, who travelled to the United States with the Prime Minister, has stayed back in New York to attend the ministerial meeting.

Iran and Malaysia have also offered to hold the meeting in their capitals, the sources said. South Africa is the current chairman of the NAM. And now it is the turn of Asia to hold the summit.

Hosting the summit in India after a gap of nearly two decades is likely to be quite popular here, political observers say. The Congress and other Opposition parties are likely to welcome India devoting some diplomatic energy

towards its traditional constituency in the NAM.

In recent years, India's emphasis was on building relations with the United States and other major powers, and renewed activism within NAM could give a sense of balance to India's foreign policy.

Expressing his personal views, Mr. K. Natwar Singh, who heads the international affairs department of the Congress, said it is "entirely appropriate for India" to step in at a critical moment in NAM affairs.

Mr. Singh, then a senior official of the foreign office, was actively involved in organising the 1983 NAM summit in New Delhi. Then, as it might now, the NAM chose India to host a meeting that was originally scheduled to be held in Baghdad. The Iraq-Iran war at that time made the movement look for an alternative capital.

There will be huge organisational problems in hosting the NAM summit at a time when the threat of international terrorism looms large and security requirements for heads of state have become much more expansive.

But the real challenge for India, or any other host nation, will be to breathe new life into the non-aligned movement and make it relevant to the times.

Considerable international skepticism, some of it within the NAM itself, will have to be overcome in whipping up political enthusiasm for the summit. But there is no shortage of big issues, like international terrorism, on which the movement can make a large political contribution at this moment.

THE HINDU

13 NOV 2001

Zealots force Bangla minorities on the run

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, October 28

FOR MANY Hindus in Bangladesh this Puja brought no *pratima* or pandal, no beats of the *dhak*, no joy.

Fear of fundamentalist attacks forced many people to flee their homes and cross borders to Malda, North and South Dinajpur. Organisers toned down the festivities with most of the 1,400 Pujas in Bangladesh being a lowkey affair this year.

Sources say attacks on minorities have spiralled since Khaleda Zia came back to power this month. In the third week of October, about 50 families sought refuge in Malda and other West Bengal districts. All of them reported atrocities committed by fundamentalists owing allegiance to the BNP.

The refugees are from Pabna, Jessore, Nachon, Shibganj, Rajshahi and Dinajpur districts, said one of the refugees. "Many are still coming in from Noakhali, Maguda and even Chitragong. Some have entered Tripura as well."

Deben Mahanta of Kashidanga village in Shibganj district, who has taken refuge at Habibpur in Malda, said: "We were not even allowed to organise the

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Puja. Dhaks were banned. They said we are pro-India and anti-Islam."

One of his countrymen, Hementa Barman of Dikul village in Dinajpur, is now in Bengal's South Dinajpur district. He said the "atrocities" increased after the strike against Afghanistan.

The spectre of attacks has been so large that some of the Puja committees did not put up pandals or install idols. In place of the *pratima* the *mandap* had a *mangal ghat* instead. Even the famous Dhakeswari Mandir at Dhaka lacked the usual colour and gaiety.

The only bright spot has been the Durga Puja at the Ramakrishna Mission ashram in Dhaka, which was celebrated in a modest but its usual way.

The Zia Government had assured India of a peaceful Pujas after the VHP staged demonstrations in New Delhi. But a senior Bangladeshi official says there has been little difference in the situation.

"There is a Hindu minister in the BNP Cabinet. But despite assurance from Deputy Minister for Water Resources Gautam Chakrabarty that the Government would ensure peace during Pujas, the reality is different."

Khaleda sets tough terms on Page 7

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