

# NAM: Need for women's role in decision-making

Putrajaya (Malaysia), May 10

**ENCOURAGING MORE** participation of women in decision-making, India and 83 other Non-Aligned Movement nations on Tuesday agreed that the proportion of women at such levels should be at least 30 per cent in both public and private sector bodies.

"We hereby commit ourselves to adopt affirmative action policies to increase the proportion of women at the decision-making level, at least to a minimum 30 per cent in both public and private sector bodies, including in the legislatures," the Putrajaya Declaration and Programme of Action on the Advancement of Women in NAM member countries said.

The NAM delegates at the end of the two-day meet, the theme of which was 'Empowering Women in Facing the Challenges of Globalisation', agreed to formulate and adopt policies to increase participation and representation of women in all commissions, tribunals, lo-

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### THE COMMITMENT

To adopt affirmative action policies to increase the proportion of women at the decision-making level, at least to a minimum 30 per cent in both public and private sector bodies, including legislatures.

### TALKS ABOUT EQUALITY

Gender responsive budget should be developed to ensure that women's contribution in the unpaid and informal sector is quantified and included in the national accounting systems

cal government bodies and statutory bodies, among others, set up by the government with a view to achieving equal representation of women.

The nine-point declaration said gender-responsive budgets should be developed and institutionalised to ensure that women's contribution in the unpaid and informal sector is quantified and duly included in the national ac-

counting systems.

"We commit ourselves to provide women, especially marginalised and vulnerable categories of women, access to financing in particular micro-credit and marketing facilities and provide corresponding capacity-building programmes in gender awareness, fund management, and other appropriate skills," it said.

The NAM delegates also agreed to promote research on the impact of globalisation and trade liberalisation on women's economic status to develop better understanding and mainstreaming of women's issues in decision-making processes. They said strategies needed to be formulated to effectively address circumstances causing negative impacts of globalisation on the situation of women and girls worldwide.

Earlier, HRD minister Arjun Singh, said the Indian policy-makers, in spite of many constraints, had recognised women's welfare as an essential component of all development schemes.

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# A new non-alignment?

It is a pity that the term "non-alignment" has not been able to transcend its Cold War baggage. The term, in its core meaning, referred to an agnosticism in the great Cold War ideological duel that enjoined countries to keep a respectful distance from the two superpowers. In practice, non-alignment was hypocritical because countries who espoused it often flouted its principles; it was ineffective because most countries had no real power to affect the international system. The non-alignment movement became identified with a group of whining nations who did not have the power to act in the big league.

Whether or not this perception of non-alignment reflects more the condescension of posterity than historical truth, is a debatable matter. But after the Cold War the term seems to have lost whatever residual significance it possessed. Capitalism, for all its warts and variations, is the only game in town. There is no war between great ideological systems. There also appears to be, for now, one super power with such overwhelming military dominance that the idea of non-alignment seems like an irrelevant relic of the past. Countries like India have always harboured the ambition of shaping the rules of the world order. Now that India is poised to become a significant economy, intensely engaged with the outside world, the passive and idealistic pieties of non-alignment seem beside the point.

Yet, it could be argued that it is precisely in the current moment that the core aspirations of "non-alignment" need to be reiterated and reinterpreted to give India's foreign policy a new cogency. While there is every reason for India to pursue an intense economic and political dialogue with the US, India has to be wary that this dialogue does not, slowly and unwittingly, lock India in the embrace of the US. There are three dangerous



**India must talk to the US without getting locked into its embrace**

PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

signs that this could happen. At no point in our history has the Indian elite been so closely locked into the economy and society of one single country. The Indian diaspora in the US is, in terms of a strategic vision for India, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, its presence has given India unprecedented leverage. On the other hand, the social hopes and aspirations of India's elites are now so thoroughly shaped by the US, that there is a real danger that we may close ourselves off to other possibilities and interests. Non-alignment was at least as much about preserving pockets of an alternative cultural imagery, as it

thinking than a clear consideration of our interests. Simply put, we have to keep all options open.

Finally, there is excess euphoria over what the NSSP (Next Steps in Strategic Partnership) means for India. Although this treaty has enabled the US to put economic sanctions behind us, and provided a framework of military and technological cooperation, India will again have to ensure that it does not commit to any measures that lock its future strategic independence. The Americans are going to extract a significant pound of flesh for this cooperation by insisting not just on export control regimes, but also inspection regi-

**Non-alignment was at least as much about preserving pockets of an alternative cultural imagery, as it was about political strategy**

was about political strategy. While the US will remain a significant source of intellectual, financial and even moral capital, India will have to be vigilant that this thorough social lock-in does not blind it to the diversity of its real interests.

In many circles there is a craven desire for American strategic attention. One symptom of this is the zeal with which many in India think of it as a potential US ally in the game called Sino-US rivalry. What the contours of that rivalry are, and what role India might play, are extraordinarily vague. But the extent to which this has become staple talk in strategic circles is disquieting. It represents more wishful

measures to make these controls effective. Only a doctrine thoroughly insistent and vigilant about strategic independence can guard against the temptations NSSP will offer. American mediation in putting pressure on Pakistan has given rise to a sense that its role is indispensable. But American presence can also be a source of long-term distortion in the politics of the sub-continent.

Too much dependence on the US will come with a heavy price. First, it rests on an unfounded assumption that the structure of global economic power will not change significantly over the coming few decades. But even the US is bracing itself for a shift in global power. Second, the US

operates through a system of alliances that recognise its unquestioned hegemony. Powers like India and China clearly have a strong sense of their own zones of economic interchange and influence. The Americans will continue to put pressure that abridges our initiatives in the region. India should insist, as it rightly did, that it is in its interests to cultivate such relationships with Iran as it deems fit. America's opposition to the pipeline from Iran is not cogent politics or economics: it is simply an assertion of hegemony.

We are beginning to acquire a role in the international system for two reasons. One is, undoubtedly, the economic transformation that is currently underway. But it is also because for the most part we have zealously guarded our strategic independence, most manifestly in the area of nuclear policy. If the US has come to seek an engagement with us, it is because we did not go to them, but charted our own path. Any forms of alignment that will let the US take India for granted will only diminish our bargaining power.

The core building aspirations of non-alignment were: strategic independence, resistance to too much superpower intrusion, diversified military supplies base, long-run objectives of creating indigenous capability, a disposition to keep options open, a preference for ensuring that our natural social and economic links are not abridged for someone else's strategic interests. More optimistically, the hope was that this would also give India the ability to be a cultural and political mediator. We may not have fulfilled these objectives, and often were powerless to do so. But there is every reason to believe that these still befit an emerging power like India. Under the velvet glove of non-alignment was a realist fist: there are no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests. At least that is one lesson we can learn from the Americans.