

## **15<sup>th</sup> Non-Aligned Conference & Bangladesh**

*by Barrister Harun ur Rashid*

*Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.*

The 15<sup>th</sup> Non-Aligned Conference is being held in a resort city of Sharm el -Sheikh in Egypt and the heads of state/government will be meeting on 15-16<sup>th</sup> July. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina left on 14<sup>th</sup> July for the summit. The last NAM conference was held in Cuba in 2006.

Bangladesh wanted to hold the NAM summit in Dhaka in 2001 but with the coming into power of BNP-led government in 2001, it did not proceed reportedly for “security reasons.” An alternative venue was chosen and the NAM summit was held in 2003 in Malaysia.

It will be a good gathering of heads of states/ government at the 15<sup>th</sup> NAM Summit in Egypt.. Bangladesh Prime Minister reportedly is expected to meet on sidelines as many as 12 leaders including India’s Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. It is reported that some burning bilateral and regional issues including the proposed Tipaimukh dam could be subject of discussions with Dr. Singh.

### *NAM & Its Objectives:*

The NAM consists of 118 developing countries (two-thirds of humankind). It is a unique organization because it has no permanent secretariat. In New York, the diplomatic missions coordinate the Nam activities. Ordinarily the summit is held every years and the host nation continues to be the chairperson of the NAM until another summit is held.

NAM was founded in 1961 in Belgrade. Only 25 countries attended the Belgrade meet. The seed of NAM was, however, sown at the 1955 Bandung ( Indonesia) Conference of Asian-African leaders.

The principal purpose of NAM was to distance itself from the influence of two super powers during the Cold War. Non-Alignment is not neutrality. The policy of neutrality has the connotation of being “isolationist”, while the underlying principle of Non-Alignment is active involvement in regional and global issues in such a way, not influenced by pressure of any super power.

The core principles of NAM are:

- (i) Mutual non-aggression ,
- (ii) Mutual non-interference in domestic affairs
- (iii) Equality and mutual benefit
- (iv) Peaceful co-existence

Bangladesh joined the NAM in 1973 and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman participated in the NAM summit at Algiers in the same year. The decision was motivated by his desire to widen and broaden Bangladesh’s relationship with other developing countries. His attendance was a big exposure soon after independence for Bangladesh and many Non-Aligned leaders were impressed by his personality.

One of the important features of the Non-Aligned Movement is the flexibility of policy of member-countries as there is no compulsion of bloc votes. Bangladesh is able to decide an issue on its merits from its national perspective and vote for or against it.

#### *Past record of NAM:*

Although the leaders of the NAM played a key role in the process of de-colonisation of former colonies, they neglected the most fundamental economic and social issue, i.e. reduction of poverty in the member-countries. The leaders frittered away their energy on political and ideological issues than those on "bread and butter" questions.

The gap between rich and poor countries is larger at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than it was at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is estimated that 800 million people go hungry in NAM countries.

The member-countries have failed to make greater use of their own resources, national and collective to make them self-reliant. They also did not take united action as a group in securing global reforms through negotiations with industrialized countries.

Corruption and nepotism plagued almost all NAM countries. Greater dependence on imports of luxuries of life had been allowed for comforts of rich to the neglect of needs of vast majority of poor.

Some of the leaders have no accountability, considered their countries as private property and acquired weapons to crush public dissent to continue their power.

#### *Future Directions of NAM:*

NAM should help redefine the organisation because the world is no longer defined by the two warring Cold War blocs. Many suggest the NAM has to devise its policies and priorities if it wants to play key role at the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They have to focus the economic management and social harmony for the benefit of their people so that they get access to education, higher quality of life and political freedom.

At the 21<sup>st</sup> century, combating terrorism, pandemic diseases and adverse effects of global climate change, as well as security for fresh water security, energy and food, among others, are to be accorded top priority.

Globalisation has distorted the pattern of trade for developing countries. Access to markets of goods from NAM countries to rich industrialized countries would be more beneficial than that of aid. Bangladesh as the leader of LDCs may demand greater free access of their goods to global market.

Furthermore mobility of labour from developing countries has been restricted or prohibited while capital is allowed freely to move in and from NAM countries. The NAM countries must seriously devise ways and means as to how global communication, migration, investment and trade can bring benefits to them.

Another challenge is how to resolve conflicts or inter-state disputes among them. Yet one rarely hears leaders of warring countries to express their firm determination to resolve the disputes or sources of conflicts.

A mandatory dispute-resolution mechanism may be considered within NAM to mediate or arbitrate or judicially settle the inter-states conflicts.

Another fact that has dogged the NAM countries is the division among them, some of them are pro-West, and some of them are anti-West. Many observers say the conference is a gathering of disharmonious voices. The split weakens the NAM as it is unable to speak in unison on core issues.

Finally, NAM has to re-invent itself and direct its energies to remove poverty among their nationals. The days of political rhetoric is gone, socio-economic development with equitable distribution of national wealth among people should be the main focus of NAM.