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**RELEVANCE OF NON-ALIGNMENT IN THE NEW ORDER**

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# India's role in perspective

By ARVIND KUMAR

**T**HE recently-concluded Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit at Durban has once again raised the issue of its relevance and validity in the present order. There is, however, nothing new in the approach (of questioning that relevance) because India is the pioneer of non-alignment and a founder member of the movement.

However, there has been in India (and outside), for some years, widespread skepticism regarding NAM, which is a very unfortunate, negative post-Cold War development. This skepticism has arisen because of the circumstances under which the vast majority of NAM members played a role in legitimising nuclear weapons (as in the April 1995 international conference on the Non-Proliferation Treaty) and in supporting (essentially at the initiative of Western nations) the so-called Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), both at the Disarmament Conference and the 51st session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1996. India also suffered a setback when it got just 40 votes in support of its candidature for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council. It was an obvious indication of India's diminished clout with 113 members of NAM.

## Bilateral disputes

The 12th summit at Durban also started on a bad note for India. The new and current chairman of NAM and the South African President, Dr Nelson Mandela, raised the Kashmir issue at the opening of the summit. It was unfortunate also because India never expected the issue to be raised by South Africa. The timely reaction by India's Prime Minister, Mr Atal

Behari Vajpayee, compelled South Africa to retract and apologise. It was told in clear terms that it had no business to bring bilateral issues to such fora. India made very clear its position that there was no room for any kind of involvement of external countries in these issues. It is generally believed that South Africa raised the issue to internationalise the problem.

## Global role

This act of Dr Mandela's also constituted a setback for NAM. Conventionally, bilateral disputes have been kept out of NAM. If they were allowed to dominate proceedings, NAM would degenerate into a forum for slanging matches and propaganda wars by those involved in disputes. It has to be borne in mind that the main purpose of forming NAM was to build up a bloc of nations which would keep themselves away from the dispute of the two erstwhile superpowers. The need of the hour for the NAM members, therefore, was to stand united, preserve its philosophy and strengthen its global role.

India had the added responsibility of conveying its security concerns and explaining its position in clear terms to the Afro-Asian nations. India had to convince the 'new nations' (both Afro-Asian and Latin American) all over again of its security concerns. But the time has surely come to build confidence among the members and prevent future faux passes. India must exploit the inherent wisdom of its political philosophy and the durability of its diplomatic stamina to regain the confidence of the developing world.

It bears remembering that the recently concluded SAARC summit at Colombo had also ended on an unpleasant note when Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga hinted that bilateral disputes could not always be kept out of such deliberations. This was basically an indirect way to lobby against India. India certainly cannot take these things lightly.

India, however, emerged as a winner at Durban because the resolution it put forward was endorsed by the members of the summit. The other important point to note is that the 150-page declaration did not contain critical reference to India and Pakistan for conducting nuclear tests and is regarded as a diplomatic victory for India. Pakistan too is pleased with the declaration. India conveyed to the member nations that the series of nuclear tests conducted by it should not be considered acts of proliferation. The resolution on Nuclear Weapons Convention to be held in 1999 was endorsed by the member nations. The main objective of this nuclear weapon convention is to arrive at an agreement on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

## Fair commitment

The declaration also said that the complexities arising out of the nuclear tests in South Asia underlined the need to work harder to achieve the avowed goal of nuclear disarmament. This shows a fair commitment on the part of member nations in general and India in particular. India has been pleading its case since the 1950s. The commitment made by India

and Pakistan in the declaration about the moratorium on nuclear testing shows a positive attitude to exercise utmost restraint.

India has certainly done a lot over the years to rediscover non-alignment as a foreign policy choice for nations. It is both a recognition of India's continuing role and constructive contribution to non-alignment that every host country seeks India's advice and guidance on devising the agenda of summit conferences.

## Greater validity

Even if circumstances have weakened and diluted some of NAM's resolution and drive, there is no doubt that the essential principles of non-alignment remain relevant and valid. If anything, they have in some ways assumed even greater validity after the bipolar world was replaced by unipolarism and the emergence of big power dominance in practically every sphere. The pursuit of NAM is also more relevant today because the movement espouses the right of nations to independence and development, regardless of where they belong. It has also a positive role to play in promoting human rights.

The Durban summit, however, failed to provide a blueprint for NAM's future agenda. If NAM has to survive as an effective and cohesive group of developing nations, its members should continue to strive for a world where there is lesser injustice and greater fairplay. The member nations should work together to realise and achieve this goal and usher in a new order.

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