

NAM struggles to be relevant

► *NAM should focus on issues that concern all its members, such as the global economic crisis and climate change, rather than be stuck with age-old regional matters.*

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The 15th summit of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), held at the beautiful Egyptian resort town of Sharm-el Shaikh on July 11-16, provided a good occasion for Prime Minister Mr Manmohan Singh to engage with NAM Heads of State and Government. It showed that India's growing closeness with the US was not at the expense of its relations with the developing world.

The meeting at the summit between the prime ministers of India and Pakistan as well as their foreign secretaries added a touch of drama, following signs of more action underway in Pakistan against those responsible for the Mumbai attacks, and Zardari's admission of using extremist groups against India.

But recent revelations of LeT infiltration and plans to attack installations in Jammu & Kashmir dampened the prospects for this meeting. However, Mr Singh took the bold decision to resume talks with Pakistan, trusting the assurances of the latter that it would do all it could to stamp out terrorism from its soil. If terrorism occurs despite these assurances, it will, of course, have a negative impact on the talks, but the terrorists would no longer hold the veto over talks.

CHANGE OF GUARD

The leadership of the NAM passes on from Cuba to Egypt for 2009-2012. Egypt is one of the founders of NAM and will chair the movement for the second time since 1964. Its moderate Arab position will help steer NAM along a balanced path. President Hosni Mubarak, 81, is an experienced and senior leader of the developing world, but the 2011 Presidential elections in Egypt could re-open the issue of his successor and political reforms.

Iran is set to host the 2012 summit and take over the chairmanship of NAM for the period 2012-2015. Given the present Iranian regime's

controversial nuclear programme, its Islamic evangelism, and strident posture towards Israel and the West, Iran's chairmanship of NAM could prove to be a difficult period, though much could change by 2012.

In 2011, the NAM will also celebrate its 50th anniversary. It is, therefore, appropriate to look at the future of the NAM and its relevance to the international situation. In this context, the Ministerial Declaration adopted in Havana in April this year provides some useful insights into how the NAM sees itself and its redefined role.

The 15th NAM summit adopted its final documents, including a Sharm-el-Sheikh declaration, based on the lengthy Ministerial Declaration worked out at Havana in April this year. As expected, greater emphasis was added at the summit to issues such as the global economic meltdown, terrorism, West Asia, and reform of multilateral institutions.

The Havana Ministerial Declaration is a voluminous document running into 117 pages, covering almost all issues of international interest. The role of the NAM is defined as the "principal political platform for the developing world in multilateral forums".

Responding to growing unilateralist tendencies in the international system, such as the US-NATO led actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Havana Declaration calls for strengthening and revitalising the NAM to address the main challenges facing us today – promoting multilateralism, especially by strengthening the central role of the UN, and defending the interests of developing countries.

The declaration calls for further reform of the NAM, a more active role in multilateral forums, stronger interaction among ministers dealing with various sectors, and increased interaction and cooperation with civil society and the private sector.

In the post-Cold-war period, since 1991, the NAM has tried to



NAM should not remain merely a political platform for developing countries.

refocus its priorities and objectives. While bipolarity as the main threat to national independence has receded, it has been replaced by unilateralist and hegemonistic tendencies in the international system.

In this situation, the 2006 Havana summit reiterated that the 10 founding principles of the NAM are still applicable, and adopted a 25-point Declaration setting out the purposes, principles and role of the NAM.

LACK OF FOCUS

The NAM nevertheless remains a prisoner to traditional methods of work. The tendency of each and every regional issue to be covered in its documents has resulted in a loss of focus on global issues. Eighteen pages of the Ministerial Declaration

cover regional and sub-regional issues, of relatively little interest to most countries, and the agreed formulations often merely restate established positions and do not contain anything new.

The 40 pages dealing with development, social and human rights issues also suffer from a lack of focus, with the tendency of inclusiveness to dilute quality.

There is very little content on concrete mechanisms and processes for economic cooperation among members. The summit should give greater attention to recent issues of concern to all its members, such as the global economic crisis and climate change, and accord less priority to familiar issues which, however, are of concern only to some groups of countries.

The bipolarity of the Cold War

era and the present-day tendencies towards unilateralism also have had their effect on the NAM, especially its solidarity and cohesiveness.

There are issues that are highly divisive in the NAM, such as disputes among its members. The NAM did not succeed in ending the Iran-Iraq conflict in 1979. It has not been able to bridge the differences among the various proposals made by rival groups of members for enlarging the UN Security Council.

B2B TIES NEGLECTED

The extension of the NAM's activities to the business sector remains a weak area. Malaysia, which hosted the 2003 summit, made a creditable effort to stimulate B2B cooperation.

The first NAM business forum, focused on South-South cooperation, was held in Kuala Lumpur in February 2003, along with the 13th NAM summit, and resulted in the setting up of a NAM Business Council. Cuba hosted the second NAM business forum in November 2007, on the margins of the Havana International Trade Fair. However, the NAM business forum has failed to arouse much enthusiasm among business in member states.

A notable failure of the NAM is the inability to exploit the potential for concrete economic cooperation projects among its members. For example, Mr Singh's proposal at the 2006 summit for cooperation in energy security, energy efficiency and renewable energy has not been followed up, despite its obvious merit. The NAM sectoral groups on health, labour, education, among others, have remained merely deliberative forums.

The NAM needs an institutional framework for project development, financing and implementation. It has failed to exploit the potential for B2B linkages in investment, trade and technology cooperation among its members. Until these issues can be resolved, NAM will remain what its members have called it – merely a political platform for developing countries, and nothing more – and risks fading into irrelevance.

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