One of the basic tenets of our foreign policy has been non-alignment. As an element of foreign policy non-alignment means independent of blocs, peaceful coexistence, global peace, disarmament, struggle against all manifestations of injustices like imperialism, colonialism, apartheid etc. After India's adoption of non-alignment as the core element of its foreign policy, it also became a model for other newly independent countries. Most of them adopted it as an instrument for independence in international relations. Soon non-alignment, in addition to a significant perspective of foreign policy, became a movement of solidarity and cooperation among the newly liberated countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was thus founded as a solidarity movement for giving voice to Third World Countries. Its essential purpose was to maintain equidistance in cold War rivalries and advocate principles for the promotion of world peace and cooperation. In due course of time, NAM became the largest membership movement as also the largest peace movement in the history of humanity. In both, in its founding and later consolidation and development, India played a significant role. In fact, in many ways India has been considered as a non-formal leader of the NAM.

BIRTH OF NAM

The Non-Alignment as a movement was founded formally in 1961 at Belgrade in Yugoslavia, it called the first Summit Conference of Non-Aligned Nations. This Conference was sponsored by Eipt, India and Yugoslavia, seeking to enhance the international influence of the participants vis-a-vis the great powers and the existing military alliances. In this Conference 25 countries participated as member- states. The criteria for invitation to this Conference was composed of the following five points:

(i) The country should have adopted an independent policy based on coexistence of states with different political and social systems and should be showing a trend in favour of Non-Aligned policy.

(ii) The country concerned should be consistently supporting the movements for national independence.

(iii) The country should not be a member of any multilateral military alliance concluded in the context of Great Power conflicts.

(iv) If a country has a bilateral military agreement with a great power or is a member of a regional defence pact, the agreement or pact should not be one deliberately concluded in the context of great power conflicts.

(v) If it has conceded military bases to a foreign power, the concession should not have been made in the context of great power conflicts.

ORIGIN OF NAM AND INDIA’S ROLE

Though as a formal organised movement NAM started with the holding of the Belgrade Summit of Non- Aligned countries in 1961, its seeds were sown by India, particularly by Jawaharlal Nehru even before attainment of India's independence. It was in the broadcast made by Jawaharlal Nehru on 7 September, 1946, a week after the Indian Provisional government was formed. Nehru said:

"We propose, as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past two world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale. We seek no domination over others and we claim no privileged position over other people. But we do claim equal and honourable treatment for our people wherever they may go, and we cannot accept any discrimination against them. We believe that peace and freedom are indivisible and the denial of freedom anywhere must endanger freedom elsewhere and lead to conflict and war".
It is quite clear that Nehru was articulating the ideas of decolonisation, national independence, non-bloc politics, peaceful coexistence, eradication of racialism and the need for the developing countries to play an active role in international affairs. It was at the initiative of Jawaharlal Nehru that India became the venue of the first forum of the liberated nations, when representatives of 28 countries met in New Delhi in March 1947 (before formal declaration of independence of India) at the Conference on Regional Cooperation among the Asian Countries known as Asian Relations Conference. At this Conference Bandaranaike from Sri Lanka, both by the force of his conviction and under the influence of Nehru's ideas, declared: "I am convinced, and we all hope that this conference will lay the foundation of a broader cooperation between the free and equal States in Asia, lighting not only for their nation's future, but also in the name of humanity, peace and progress".

The Asian Relation Conference thus can truly be called the foundation stone for NAM. Nehru who had organised this Conference observed: "For too long we of Asia have been petitioners in the Western Courts and Chancelleries. That story now must belong to the past. We propose to stand on our own feet and to cooperate with all others who are prepared to cooperate with us. We do not intend to be the play-thing of others."

BANDUNG CONFERENCE

Along with Nehru some other leaders in the world were also projecting these perceptions of newly independent countries. President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, President Gamel Abdul Nasser of Egypt (then called United Arab Republic), President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and President Ahmed Soekarno of Indonesia were prominent among these. Together with Nehru they evolved a coherent outlook and position on Non-Alignment. These leaders were largely instrumental in channelling the emerging changes towards the liberation of the people of the world and towards evolving a new vision of the world order. They rejected outright the notion that East-West relations alone constituted international affairs and asserted their own role in shaping these affairs.

On the initiative of these leaders the conference of Afro-Asian Nations was held in Bandung (Indonesia) in April 1955. The participants from 23 Asian and 6 African States represented mainly the people of young States which had been setup as a result of the new balance of forces of democracy and freedom on the one hand and of colonialism and oppression on the others. The states participating in the conference did not belong to any military or political blocs, arid they had taken clear and definite positions the problems facing mankind. Despite their different perspectives, the countries represented at the Bandung Conference arrived at a common position in the larger interest of world peace.

One of the most important achievements of the Bandung Conference was the Declaration on World Peace and Cooperation. This declaration embodied the principles of Panchsheel which were first stated in the Preamble to the agreement between India and China in April 1954. These were five principles of mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-belligerence, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual advantage, and peaceful coexistence.

The final communique of the Conference did not limit itself to the enumeration of the region’s pro-Hems but also called for concrete steps to be taken for disarmament and safeguarding of peace in the world. The Conference served as the major support of the bridge linking the Afro-Asian, European and Latin American people and the role they intended to play in the New World Order. Nehru asserted at Bandung "There is no doubt that our influence will grow. It is growing in fact, and we do exercise some influence even today. But whether our influence is great or small, it must be exercised in the right direction."

The Bandung Conference was followed by a tripartite meeting in July 1956, between Nehru, Tito and Nasser at Brioni. In this meeting affirming the Bandung principles, the three leaders, in a joint statement rejected the division of the world into rival power blocs as one which had the effect of perpetuating confrontation. They also asserted their conviction that the policy of Non-Alignment pursued by them had to a certain extent, contributed to the lessening of international tension and to the development of equal relations between nations. They reiterated their resolve to carry forward that
policy and to evolve a collective framework for that purpose. The differences in their social and political systems hardly constituted an obstacle. The Brioni meeting was a landmark in the ongoing process of consultations which eventually led to the convening of the first Non-Aligned Summit at Belgrade in 1961, heralding the formal launching of the Non-Aligned Movement.

INDIA’S PIVOTAL ROLE AT NAM

It is quite clear that in the founding of NAM India not only played an active role as one of the founders but in many ways it was the initiator of the Movement. As we have already seen non-alignment as a concept of global politics, as a foreign policy premise and as a perspective of maximising national interest of the newly liberated countries was a vision Indian national leadership had developed during its freedom struggle itself. The vision became the core element of India’s foreign policy after independence and of other countries which attained independence from that period onwards. Soon, it became a movement of solidarity, cooperation and understanding among the newly independent countries; these countries are known as the Third World or Developing Countries. The non-aligned movement, thus, emerged from India’s initiative for formulating an independent foreign policy. This independent foreign policy was based on a solid moral and sound political foundation. It was a non-partisan foreign policy. India’s moral approach to international politics was further projected through the Panchsheel in 1954. Within three years, eighteen countries had endorsed the Panchsheel principles in joint communiqués with Indian leaders. These principles were practically incorporated in the Ten Principles declared at Bandung. In addition during its initial years of independence itself, India played a very active role in peaceful resolution of some complex international issues and persistently lobbied in United Nations for disarmament. All these made the idea of non-alignment, the initial basic tenet in India’s foreign policy, a mechanism providing link between the coordinated actions of the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial forces, as an assertion of independence in foreign affairs, as a process of weakening of power blocs, as a symbol of defiance against big power domination and as a diplomatic innovation in the phase of politics of confrontation and cold war. Over forty years of its existence the NAM has been developing a comprehensive political philosophy, a programme of action, and a new and positive system of international economic and political relations. From its founding India has remained one of the most active members of NAM and has played a pivotal role in its various activities and developments.

- PRAKASH ARULAPPA