

From New Delhi by Paul Zykofsky

Countdown for the Non-Aligned

The March New Delhi summit—the first since 1979—promises to be the most important since the movement was founded.

Officials in the Indian Foreign Ministry have started using a novel type of desk calendar. The most prominent aspect of these calendars is not the date, but the large red numbers emblazoned on them. The numbers—which last time I looked stood at 54—mark the countdown to the Seventh Non-Aligned Summit meeting to be held in New Delhi in early March.

The last summit, held in Havana in September 1979, was attended by 52 heads of state or governments. This year, out of a total membership of 96 countries (plus the PLO and SWAPO), over 70 heads of state or governments are expected to attend what promises to be the largest—and most important—summit since the movement was officially founded at Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1961.

India's Foreign Secretary and the Secretary General-Designate of the Summit, Mr. K. Natwar Singh, noted at a Jan. 4 press briefing that the meeting "takes place when important matters of peace and development are on the agenda . . . the eyes of mankind will be on the Summit."

Singh stated that the major theme of the summit will probably be the "world economic crisis." This concern was reflected in a recent speech by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in which she condemned the developed nations for keeping the developing sector "imprisoned in the monetary system, the financial institutions, and other ideas developed by the powerful and affluent nations for their own profit."

Two days later, the Secretary in the External Affairs Ministry in charge of Economic Affairs, Mr. Romesh Bhandari, warned that if a solution is not found soon to the international economic crisis, the "entire financial system of many countries" will collapse.

But it is not yet clear if all the non-aligned nations are fully aware of the severity of the world depression, which has been manifested most directly in the debt crisis facing the large debtor nations of Ibero-America, such as Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. Neither Brazil nor Mexico are members of the Non-Aligned, and Argentina has traditionally kept a low profile since it joined in the mid-1970s.

The demand for a moratorium on payments and the establishment of a new development-oriented international monetary system, however, has been part of the Non-Aligned Movement's resolutions since the Colombo summit of 1976. The implications of the Ibero-American situation will undoubtedly be conveyed to the rest of the Non-Aligned members at a meeting of the coordinating bureau to be held in Nicaragua from January 10-14 to discuss Ibero-American problems.

African countries are also facing severe debt problems, although one East African diplomat indicated to me that the developing nations often shy away from unilateral action on debt because they fear a total cut-off of the food imports on which they depend.

Several diplomats I have spoken to are also concerned that attention will

be diverted away from these critical economic problems—as has happened in the past—by the more intractable political issues. There is a wide divergence of political and ideological views among the nations of the Non-Aligned, which range from Cuba on the "left" to Singapore on the "right." Issues like the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the independence of Puerto Rico, seating of a delegation from Kampuchea, and the conflicts of Chad, Morocco, and between Iraq and Iran could take up time.

In an effort to narrow differences before the conference begins, India's three secretaries in the External Affairs Ministry have been travelling extensively for consultations with large numbers of member-states. After these consultations, the Indian government will finalize the draft statement by the end of January. Formal discussions at the foreign ministry level will then begin on the first of March, and the heads of state will arrive in New Delhi to open the summit on March 7.

According to some reports, the Indian government is trying to reduce the length of the statement, which has become longer and longer at each summit. Natwar Singh acknowledged that all the members would like a brief final document "with clear focus and thrust."

There is no doubt that the Non-Aligned Summit will establish India's role as undisputed leader of the developing-sector nations. Not only is India the most populous nation of the Non-Aligned, but it has built up a broad-based industrial and agricultural economy capable of producing everything from consumer foods to entire steel plants, and is largely self-sufficient in food production. And Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is widely respected for her ability to keep a firm, independent foreign policy course for India.