

# The Role of the UN in the Post Cold War Era

by Naeela K. Sattar

## A Nobel Laureate in Chains

The time is approaching soon when Aung San Suu Kyi will be referred to not merely as the leader of Burma's opposition, but as a champion of the global movement towards democracy. That transformation is now inevitable and will be fully justifiable, since the Burmese ruling military junta called SLORC — State Law and Order Restoration Committee — is determined to keep this fearless champion of people's rights under arrest and shut away from civilisation.

An exclusive report in this paper last Tuesday quoted the ambassador of Belgium to Bangladesh Michel Geuens who recently spent four days in Rangoon, saying that the SLORC junta's treatment of Suu Kyi had become even harsher since she was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. The prize, according to SLORC, was an interference in Burma's internal affairs. But the Nobel did Suu Kyi justice, as it accorded international recognition of her struggle to help the Burmese people win democratic rights that have been denied them by military regimes in Rangoon for over three decades.

The emerging picture is a highly disturbing one. There is little doubt that the SLORC is trying, through what tantamounts to psychological torture, to compel Suu Kyi to leave the country. That would give them the chance to prevent her from ever returning. In that context, reports of Suu Kyi's illness may not be fictitious, as deliberate mistreatment in isolation could make her sick enough to go abroad for medical attention. That she has refused to give into a ruthless regime so far, is a measure of her courage and sense of hope.

At the same time, SLORC itself is not devoid of optimism. It has felt strong enough to refuse to implement the people's verdict given in the general elections of 1989 when Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won a sweeping victory. SLORC's policy seems to be based on the premise that given time and enough pressure, majority of elected NLD members' spirit can be broken, thus forcing them to frame a constitution that would legally perpetuate the military's dominant role in Burmese society. Power could then be "handed over" to a compliant political authority.

Burma's misfortune is that the world at large, particularly its close neighbours have continued to play a negative role, prolonging SLORC's existence and the people's sufferings. General Saw Maung's recent red carpet reception in Beijing showed China too was not averse to the Burmese people's misery.

Given the absence of international pressure and presence of regional assistance in the form of business deals, the SLORC has little reason to be apprehensive, so long as it can keep its own people gagged and tied. But how long can this cruel farce be allowed to continue? Have we not come to the stage, in the wake of the Gulf War, collapse of totalitarianism in Europe and a general awakening about human rights across the globe, where all nations must put their foot down and say "No" to SLORC? Can the world truly afford to carry on treating this insult to humanity as just an internal matter of Burma?

One thing is quite clear by now: appeasing SLORC will not free Suu Kyi nor allow the elected representatives to take power in Burma. But we can safely assume that establishment of democracy is what most countries in the region wish to see in Burma. But since appeasement in the form of business deals or political silence would not achieve that goal, then has the time not come to apply pressure of the sort the SLORC will understand? Suu Kyi has held out for over two years against tremendous odds, but she needs the world's help now.

THE post cold war era visualizes the shift in the balance of power and many political analysts are vocal about the issues of multilateralism in the present form of the new world order. This moment, they assert, should not be missed in order to establish a bolder, more representative and a more democratic United Nations. This momentum is claimed to be set by a speech to the Congress by President Bush on 11 September 1990 where he spoke of "a new world order... struggling to be born, a world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle, a world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice, a world where the strong respect the rights of the weak". Such a world, laments Senator Gareth Evans, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, is far from being born in the existing system if one is an "Iraqi Kurd, a cyclone-ravaged Bangladeshi, a starving Ethiopian, a Serb or Croat living in fear of civil war, or a Palestinian waiting for the Post-Gulf peace talks to bear fruit." So what shape then should the present structure assume to mobilize the changes for a more democratic world order?

**The Security Council:** The rationale behind the five-power membership has ceased to exist. The Allied "Big Five" of World War II are now not the only big powers. Two alternatives are being considered by different analysts: the first alternative disapproves of the whole idea of a big power directorate. However, to abolish the Security Council altogether would be a drastic alteration of the whole idea of the UN. The other alternative considers a change in the present format. They suggest that a more representative directorate may be formed by including countries like Japan, Germany and China and maybe the Russian Republic and India. Rotating seats may also be allotted to a country each year out of different blocks such as the Latin American, African, East European and Arab blocs. The permanent memberships may be based on some general objective criteria like gross national product or population or military power, which will leave the possibility for further inclusion or exclusion with the change of power perspectives on those criteria.

Another mode of change is suggested by Japan which is to extend the number of memberships by seven to include Japan, Egypt, Nigeria, Germany, Mexico and Brazil. The veto power is also criticized as undemocratic. Some suggest its complete abolition on the ground that the last four decades have not heard the "nyet" enough times for it to bear any substantial significance.

**Peace Enforcement**  
The UN has set a glowing

example of successful implementation of collective security in the Gulf War crisis. However, it is argued that it lacks the basic framework to ensure further collective roles in the future if the nature of aggression is different. It is argued justifiably that any country facing aggression cannot anticipate a collective cooperation in peace enforcement in the present backdrop. The only way to make a system of deterrence based on US collective security to work is to elaborate the system by pushing for greater commitments.

An enhanced role for peace-making is expected from the UN even though this is still a sensitive area where nations tend to be protective about their sovereignty and national privacy. Yet, the UN can play a role before any volcano of armed conflict actually erupts. In cases where i) the parties actually seek help, ii) where misunderstandings may result in disruption of peace outside the territorial jurisdiction of the conflicting states, iii) in case of irreconcilable national interests the UN may interpose to fend off armed conflicts till a long term solution is found.

**Disarmament:** The UN can strengthen the existing multilateral arms control arrangements such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Biological Weapons Convention and conclude a convention for banning chemical weapons.

**The General Assembly**  
It is asserted that the general assembly lacks legitimacy. This has failed as a Global Parliament because of its weak composition and voting system. It is now functioning as a mere recommendatory body without any binding force. It is suggested that an infrastructure is required to be built to make definitive recommendations and binding regulations. To do this, each state should be represented not by unelected officials but elected representatives from respective bureaucracies of each state.

The structure may also be changed to form a bicameral Assembly. It is suggested, with a lower chamber consisting of representatives elected directly and in accordance with each member state's population. The present two-third majority may also be replaced by a simple majority in each Chamber which may increase the assembly's legitimacy.

Competence in administration may also be improved by selecting professional staff on the basis of professional abilities measured through competitive exams rather than selecting through preference as is the present trend. Mid-career improvements may be

made through systemized staff colleges in order to retain professional excellence.

**Democratization**  
The UN can and must recognize a normative right and create a process for monitoring compliance in order to abolish totalitarian regimes. This may be done by exerting degrees of nonviolent pressures, depriving such regimes of the privileges that a member of an international community usually enjoys. It should also encourage and support democratization processes by devising a universal and credible procedure for monitoring elections as was done in Bangladesh in 1991. It must be sufficiently institutionalized to determine whether or not an election was in "substantial compliance" with international norms. Nations reluctant to commit themselves in this respect would then stand embarrassed before the world and their own populations.

The UN has not created a new world order. Rather, the new world order may create a new UN which would be more democratic, more representative and an upholder of world democracy. This UN in turn will attempt to ensure the rights of all nations, big or small, wealthy or poor and assure peace for the world for the future generations.

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## Palestinian Exodus from Kuwait Cramps Jordan

John Ross writes from Amman

Palestinian refugees already constituted a majority of Jordan's population before the Gulf War. Since the war ended, most of Kuwait's 400,000 Palestinians have been forced to flee, and most have crossed into Jordan. Their arrival is straining the kingdom's already precarious political and economic situation.



those beasts," he says, claiming that one of his persecutors was an American who spoke bad Arabic.

In July, Kuwaiti security agents forcibly deported Elyan to Jordan. "They didn't let me go until I could walk," he winces. Now the powerfully-built Elyan strides through the dust of Al Baqaa and glares west: "Jordan is for me the same jail. I'm broke. All there is the military. The only solution is for us to go home again."

Elyan no longer lines up outside the US embassy in Amman every day in hopes of getting a visa. "What's the use? I have no sponsor." He suspects he is barred from the US because of his political affiliations anyway.

US embassy press officer John Owen says there has been an upsurge in visa applications by Jordanian passport holders since the war ended. One morning hundreds line up before dawn. Owen confirms that applications are screened in Washington to weed out "sympathisers of Saddam Hussein."

Siyan Khalid recently arrived in Amman from Kuwait City. As director of the Palestinian Women's Commission in Kuwait, she had shown a group of US human rights lawyers around Kuwait City in July. In September, police summoned her for questioning. Three days later she was deported, with no explanation. "They even tried to take my jewellery at the airport," she recalls.

Now Khalid is bunking in an uncle's spare room, a pronounced step down from the spacious apartment where she lived until July. Like Elyan, Khalid's upbringing has stirred a burning desire to return to Palestine. "Here it is, the end

of the 20th century, and we don't have a homeland yet," she says wearily.

One Jordanian city where Palestinians have concentrated is Zarqa, 30 miles northwest of Amman. Sometimes dubbed Little Palestine, it is a gritty, overcrowded place with streets named for West Bank villages. Some 80,000 refugee families have piled into Zarqa since the Gulf War, living in their cars and in half-finished hovels on the dry hillsides. The influx has Zarqa's schools and hospitals bursting. Public transportation is so burdened that it takes hours just to go to the downtown business district.

A flamboyantly-dressed Palestinian woman grumbles that the water truck used to come every three days but now is limited to once-weekly distribution. She says her name is

## Co-operatives, of course

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia hit more than one right chord when she addressed on Tuesday a prize giving ceremony of the cooperative societies. The societies should be revitalised as a true movement, the co-operative law should be recast to give the societies a truly democratic base and added effectiveness and these should be raised by steady and sure hands from the morass of corruption and inept performance to which these organisations have over the decades sunk. One can hardly write a better prescription for the co-operatives of the nation.

Co-operatives were launched in undivided Bengal with the spirit of a movement. But something was basically flawed at its very beginning. The co-operatives were a government-launched and managed 'movement' which at best can be a contradiction of terms biding a garbling of concepts. The Prime Minister has apparently glossed over this important little point and perhaps like the founding fathers of our people's efforts to improve the economic situation by broadening the base of ownership of means and self-management is thinking again in terms of government spear-heading a movement which it possibly can not. Co-operatives in order to click as a movement must never be privy to privileges and weighted opportunities that push these out of normal and fair business practices and make them into sure dens of spinning some quick and dishonest money.

The post-October Revolution world used to be dichotomised as East and West or socialist and capitalist. That was understood to represent a conflict between 'co-operation' and 'competition'. Now that socialism has taken a very bad jolt both as an economic system and as a philosophy of social dynamics promising a fairer and better balanced society, some may be tempted to see in the political denouncement in eastern Europe an end of the 'co-operation' approach to production and distribution. But this is confusing the issue. The co-operative 'movement' was launched in many nations of the world not as a replacement for 'competition' but more as a means of tempering rabid capitalism in order that it thrive better. The collapse of socialism in eastern Europe has indeed brought out in bold relief the necessity of promoting 'co-operations' within a framework of market economy. Co-operatives are of vital importance in the making of a healthy socio-economic reality in Bangladesh.

We are in full agreement with the Prime Minister in all that she has suggested as antidotes for the 'co-operative' ills. But care should be taken first to undo the system of inefficiency and corruption that rules over the co-operative scene in order that things can change there and make that amenable to dynamic pro-society shaping.

will do little to ease current refugee pressures on King Hussein's delicately balanced government. In a September speech to the European Parliament, the king asked for \$4 billion to bail his country out of post-war difficulties.

The monarch painted a gloomy picture for the Europeans. Refugees have boosted unemployment to 26 per cent of the workforce since the Gulf War, and Jordan has only been able to find work for five per cent of new arrivals. A third of the Jordanian population has now slipped under the poverty line, and 34,000 refugees are still arriving monthly from the east.

Al Baqaa refugee camp outside Amman is where many of the newcomers will stop. Since February, the population of the United Nations-run village has swelled from 90,000 to 160,000. Open sewers run in the camp's streets and officials with the UN Relief and Welfare Agency say schools are too crowded to function properly. Like their Jewish cousins, Palestinians view education as

a driving force in their culture, so the deprivation is particularly hurtful.

Mousa Elyan, 26, a Palestinian and former Kuwaiti government accountant, says he was detained by Kuwaiti police and tortured for several months because he had been identified with a left-wing Palestinian party.

For Elyan, the trek to Jordan strikes an angry chord. After the 1967 war in which Israel seized the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights, Elyan's parents fled the West Bank carrying their child in their arms. "I have been here before," Elyan says, surveying the dusty, crowded camp to which fate has returned him.

Elyan, a supporter of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), a Marxist group, is bitter about beatings he suffered at the hands of Kuwaiti authorities. "They hit me with chairs and tire irons all the time. Once, they hung me up by my thumbs for three days. I saw five of our women raped by

## OPINION

### Prostitutes Need Rehabilitation

Six years after the tragic death of Sabmcher, a poor village girl of 13 years, in Tanbazar brothel of Narayangang, the demand for removal of the brothels again gained ground recently. A clash took place the other day between the agitators and police on the issue at the same venue.

It is true that prostitution is a mean 'profession' certainly devoid of social recognition and also a hateful offence punishable by 'Shariah' law. But Islam perhaps does not permit such 'abolition of the prostitutes' as demanded by the activists of so called UnIslamic Activities Resistance Committee. Islam is a religion of peace, logic and tolerance. The demand for abolition of prostitutes without provision of their proper rehabilitation is not justifiable. Rather, it is cruelty and denial of their fundamental rights to live.

It should remember very carefully that Islam do prescribe punishment for vices like adulteration and theft etc, but certainly not before fulfillment of fundamental needs like food, shelter, clothing and marriage etc. In this connection I may refer to a story relating to theft committed during the reign of Hazrat Umar (R): It was reported to Umar (R) that some boys in service of Hatib Ibn Abi Balta's had stolen the she-camel of a man from the tribe of Muznah. When Umar (R) questioned the boys they admitted the theft. So he ordered their hands to be cut. But on second thought he said, "By God, I would cut their hands if I did not know that you employ these boys and starve them so that they would be permitted to eat that which is prohibited unto them." Then he addressed their employer saying, "By God, since I have not cut their hands I am going to penalise you with a fine that shall pain you" and he ordered him to pay double the price of the she-camel. (Islam the Misunderstood Religion).

This episode illustrates a very clear and express principle: punishment will not be inflicted where there are circumstances which impelled one to commit crime. Hazrat Umar (R) did not carry out the punishment prescribed for theft (cutting the hand) during the year of famine when there was some doubt that people might be impelled to theft by hunger.

From the above examples it may be said that the present movement against the prostitutes of Narayangang sans provision of alternative livelihood is quite unjustified and an act that Islam, under the present circumstance, does not approve.

As an individual I hate prostitution but not exactly the prostitutes who were compelled to be there due to hunger and starvation or pushed there by social injustice or kidnapped and sold to brothels. They are very much the victims and product of the society. I believe, saner people would always advocate for their proper social and financial rehabilitation, because they are also human beings like us.

The prostitutes expressly said in the recent press conference that they were ready to return to normal life if they are so allowed by the government and society. So, it is the duty of the present democratic government to genuinely rehabilitate them and also that of the social leaders to help them return to normal life through all possible ways.

The very existence of prostitution is not a sign of healthy society, nor does it increase the prestige of the country. I disagree with the notion that "prostitution is a necessary evil and it maintains social balance."

In fine I would suggest that the government may set up some garment (or such feasible) industries in Narayangang and elsewhere in the country to financially rehabilitate the prostitutes and the social leaders create humane feelings for them through the media so that they can be socially rehabilitated, too.

Md. Ekramullah Kafi Zigatola, Dhaka.

## To the Editor...

**Exams and Responsibility**  
Sir, Your very constructive suggestion could not be more timely (editorial of November 4). If a little foresight and managerial competence was shown earlier the examinations and the publications of the results could have been completed by now.

I would now like to make a special request to all the Universities regarding the publication of the results. This may be done within sixty days from the date of the examination. Further more, if there is a likelihood that the results would be delayed, because of the external examiners, this may be temporarily done with keeping in view the greater interest of the examinees, the guardians and the nation at large.

Shahabuddin Mahtab  
Dhannondri R/A, Dhaka

**Dhaka-Mongla Road**  
Sir, Mongla, the second seaport, has been kept rather neglected by not connecting it with Dhaka, the capital city. The port can help much in earning local and foreign currencies. But, with pain we note that no government so far has taken any fruitful step to construct the all important road. Did they fail to understand the importance of a sea-port? Nepal is suffering a lot for having no sea-port, whereas we have been blessed with such a nice sea-port at Mongla, near the ground Sundarbans. It is regrettable that our governments so far gave us more political sensations than thrill of constructive action. Many important things bearing greater national interest have remained neglected.

Why should we need to write about it? Is not it known to the government that the second sea-port of the country deserves consideration on priority basis?

It is now hoped that good sense will prevail and Dhaka-Mawa-Tekherhat-Gopalganj-Mollahat-Fakirhat-Mongla Road will soon be completed. Let us see deeds, not hear talks.

F.M.A. Matin  
Mirpur, Dhaka

**Campus violence**  
Sir, The Leader of the Opposition and the Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina on October 30 announced on the floor of the Parliament suggestions. But, with pain we note that no government so far has taken any fruitful step to construct the all important road. Did they fail to understand the importance of a sea-port? Nepal is suffering a lot for having no sea-port, whereas we have been blessed with such a nice sea-port at Mongla, near the ground Sundarbans. It is regrettable that our governments so far gave us more political sensations than thrill of constructive action. Many important things bearing greater national interest have remained neglected.

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F.M.A. Matin  
Mirpur, Dhaka

**Delight in disorder**  
Sir, I am elated when somebody takes lot of troubles from a

wrong stand to move me an inch, but falls. I am enchanted when I see, because of my innocence, somebody's plot falls flat before his expectation. I am congratulatory to the slinking of a dubious beloved. I give a radiant smile to the people who weep with one eye and smile with the other. There is grin of derision when I see the sycophants misguide the boss with flagrant lies. I laugh at the reverend landlord who does not behave in socially approved ways. I am gratified with the leftover. I am rapturous with the false case filed against me. I am in euphoria when obsessive remembering and memory trigger tears. I can bear up well against "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". I am comfortable with loneliness. I am only half way down the life. I become an increasingly reticent man to bear the whips and scorns of time. So, I do not like to take my shirt off and show you the scars. Not that I am striving for perfection to reach excellence. After all, I am not a Job of the scripture. Nothing but the truth is that I get delight in disorder.

K.S. Nazmul Hasan  
Dhannondri, Dhaka