

UN and Peace

The observance of the International Day of Peace, like many such days and decades, has become ritualistic. Since 1981, the opening of the United Nations General Assembly every year has been observed as the International Day of Peace highlighting the importance of peace and stability for a better world to live in. This year, however, the UNGA session suddenly finds itself placed in a situation unrecognisable from what it was just before the end of the cold war. Given this uniqueness of the time, a completely new set of relations between and among states and different approaches to the existing problems ought to be in order.

A turning point of history, the disappearance of the threat of the cold war from the world scene has indeed set into motion certain new forces necessitating the review of the earlier world order. With the rise in localised and ethnic tensions, frictions and even neo-racial sentiments in parts of the world, the UN is set on course of asserting its role in a more constructive manner than it has so far played. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has certainly left the world body somewhat unbalanced and the consequent outcome of this process to be both highly positive as well as negative for the world. Positive, in the sense that the UN can play an effective peace-keeping role in the feuds throughout the world; and negative, in the sense that the balancing power will be always missing.

Notwithstanding the fact that the chances of the globe going perilously close to annihilating itself have become slim, it is as yet far from being perfect. Just at this moment, disharmony, turmoil, tension, bitter feuds and hatred between nations and ethnic groups or races have been threatening the establishment of a just and peaceful order in the world. From Bosnia-Herzegovina to Myanmar to South Africa to Georgia, a former Soviet republic, it is the same story of tension running high. There are other candidates to deserve UN mediation for a lasting peace in a number of regions. Even Cambodia's transition to a peaceful order has proved frustrating and at times traumatic. Somalia's is yet another case of both internal turmoil and almost unprecedented famine demanding political will and at the same time international aid for adequately addressing the dual problems.

It is precisely at this point that the UN role as a peace-keeper vis-a-vis a development agency should come under scrutiny. There is a feeling, specially in the less developed part of the world, that the increasing occupation of the UN in peace-keeping will leave the development issues on the back burner. If new realities have forced upon the UN the political compulsions of re-assessing its role — as is evidenced by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) stress on the removal of veto power enjoyed by the five UN member countries — there is enough scope, specially in the context of the world getting divided into economic blocs, for prioritising the development areas. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks, now bogged down, should be revived to play their due role.

Apparently, though, the straight-cut solution to the world's economic woes, according to many, is the rechanneling of resources from the defence to development, the real business however will be highly complicated and a real challenge. We are concerned about how the UNGA deals with the emerging situation to strike a balance between the two. We also strongly feel that the UN ought to put more emphasis on development issues so that, for instance, the famine in Somalia is brought into focus and the international community come forward with aid to help save the famine victims. As for Bangladesh, a more active role by way of pushing the NAM resolutions is what it should play at the UNGA.

Killing of Journalists

When journalists give their lives in performing their duty, as it has happened in several countries, like in Thailand and the Philippines in Asia, the reaction of the international community seldom goes far enough to make the governments of countries concerned accountable for what, more often than not, turns out to be brutal murders. Cases of beatings of newsmen, unauthorised arrests and other harassment by agents of law enforcement bodies usually go unreported.

In this context, what has been happening in Turkey calls for strong condemnation and possible action by groups concerned about freedom of journalists. According to a report in *The Times* of London, in the first eight months of this year, seven journalists have been "murdered" in that country. Many, it is said, had been working for pro-Kurdish publications in southwest Turkey. Besides these murders, there have been also reports of all kinds of harassment, including arbitrary detention, faced by newsmen.

The murder rate of journalists is the highest ever documented in Turkey whose human rights record was particularly bad during the martial law period, from 1987 to 1984, but it had gradually improved with the return of the parliamentary democracy. It seems that the improvement has either slowed down or come to a halt where security of journalists is concerned. The New York-based "Committee to Protect Journalists" says, the number of murders of newsmen in Turkey is "the highest of any country in the world so far this year", while a spokesman of Writers in Prison Committee and Director, Index on Censorship, both based in London, have described Turkey "as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for the press." Meanwhile, September 9 was observed as a day of international action for press freedom in Turkey by a newly formed consortium of freedom of expression groups from Europe, Africa and the Americas. (For some inexplicable reasons, Asia remains unrepresented in the grouping.)

It is high time Ankara took due notice of the international outcry over murders of journalists. If it is the policy of the government to frighten the pro-Kurdish publications into silence, it has certainly chosen the wrong way of dealing with a problem that calls for sensitive political handling. Journalists here would earnestly hope that Turkey, a good friend of Bangladesh, would take early steps to ensure safety and security of journalists, regardless of their political, ethnic or professional affiliations, and safeguard their freedom of expression to the fullest measure. On this issue, there can be no half way measures in Turkey or, for that matter, anywhere else in the world.

NEED FOR INTERACTIONS AT ALL LEVELS

SAARC Must Strive for Consensus for Economic Progress

by Kamal Hossain

At the outset I would like to share with our readers what I had occasion to say at a recent SAARC seminar. The transition to democracy in Bangladesh coincides with similar transitions in our own region and in other parts of the world. The scale of the change globally suggests that we might be at a juncture of history which marks a transition from one historical epoch to another. As we approach the beginning of a new century and a new millennium, we find ourselves in the midst of change on an unprecedented scale.

In the words of one perceptive observer: "What was beyond the grasp of imagination yesterday, except perhaps in the fertile minds of futurists and fiction writers, has already happened today. Future shock is yesterday."

At the global level, there are assessments being made as to who will be winners and losers in the emerging dispensation. In these assessments most if not all of us in this region are counted among the losers. This should impel us to concert our efforts with a sense of urgency to make our own assessments of regional cooperation which might improve our chances of being among the winners...

red. Prolegues of authoritarian regimes accumulated illegally acquired wealth. They in turn built up armed squads and organized bands of submermen, which are used to subvert rule of law, which if established poses a threat to those who had become accustomed to prosper beyond the pale of law. Under authoritarian regimes the administration and law enforcing agencies have been perverted to serve the narrow interest that such regimes present. The role of the opposition in societies where we are engaged in a transition to democracy involves constantly contending against those legacies of authoritarian regimes, which present serious obstacles, to the functioning of democratic institutions.

An equally negative legacy is the hangover of authoritarian attitudes and the absence of respect for democratic values on the part of elected governments and in society at large. The opposition is too readily identified as the enemy of the state. The opposition is thus

have suffered from repeated assaults upon democracy and imposition of authoritarian regimes. Thus for many of us the role of opposition has had to go far beyond the role of the opposition in an established democracy. In order to restore and sustain democracy, far greater risks have had to be taken, many lives have had to be sacrificed in opposing authoritarian regimes and the powerful interests which have sought to entrench themselves.

Those of us who are in the midst of a transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy have an uphill and difficult task. Under authoritarian regimes tendencies which are subversive of democracy are systematically nurtured.

pushed into a role of total opposition, which rules out the possibility of bi-partisanship, of building consensus on vital issues needed to implement development strategies aimed to serve the people's interests.

Today we need to assess our experience in order to identify the main impediments to nurturing democratic values and environment in which the rule of law, respect for human rights, a free press and other democratic institutions can gather strength to make the State more responsive to people's priorities, we need to adopt strategies to empower disadvantaged sections of the population.

We need not only to strengthen our own grassroots organisations, but also to promote popular unity and consensus and broad-based coalition of people of all sections, in support of democratic values and norms — of tolerance, respect for the rights of others, and a commitment to resolve differences through persuasion, negotiation and rational discussions and not by resort to violence. It is only by doing so that we can exorcise the horrors of political assassination from our societies. The oppositions of today can only become the governments of tomorrow if they can win the hearts and minds of people. They must develop moral authority and win confidence by demonstrating that they themselves practice what they preach. What is needed is empowerment of our people — who alone can protect democracy against the predatory elites who feel threatened by the establishment of genuine democracy.

We need to explore the ways in which we can cooper-

operation than political realities in our region have so far permitted. Unresolved issues and ethnic and sectarian conflicts have vitiated the political climate. Political tensions have contributed to growth of military expenditures beyond accepted levels, and these in turn had led to the emergence of authoritarian structures. Such expenditures continue to divert resources away from priority areas of social and economic development.

Our efforts should be directed to improving the political environment in our region. We should move our governments to attach the highest priority, if this is not already being done to a resolution of outstanding issues and removal of sources of tension. Ethnic

A recent practical step at the people's level in regional cooperation was the exchange of regional teams of observers

in the elections held in a number of our countries. Some of us had the privilege of being election observers in more than one of our neighbouring countries. A regional human rights organisations to monitor human rights and the observance of certain shared values stemming from our common commitment to upholding universally recognised human rights might be another useful initiative that may be added to our agenda.

What are the basic common objectives on which we could arrive at a consensus? Clearly, the first on the list must be peace and stability in our region. The next would be development in the interest of the people in each of our societies. A test of development put forward by one of our economists may well be commended: to what extent does such development improve the conditions of the bottom 50 per cent of our population?

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benefit of all our peoples. The challenges that face us are well encapsulated in the words of George Verghese in his seminal study entitled *Waters of Hope*: "The glaring contradiction of the world's most poor unable to garner the bounty of one of the world's richest natural resource regions in which they live is an indictment that can no longer be evaded. Not a little has been achieved over the past 40 years. But not enough. Political stability and the social fabric are threatened as populations multiply and justly demand equity and opportunity."

Thus, while the problems which face us are daunting and the record of the last four decades is one of many failures and missed opportunities, nevertheless, through these four decades, we have through experiences are renewing our commitment to the common goal of peace and stability within our region and to economic and social change within our societies in the interest of our peoples in a democratic political order. In pursuing these objectives, we believe more dialogues and increased interaction between our peoples at all levels could significantly contribute towards building an environment for more effective regional cooperation in South Asia. There should be active interaction not only among political leaders, but at all levels, among leaders of professional organisations — lawyers, journalists, university teachers and writers — among trade unions and students organisations and all other conscious sections — so that we can harness the intellectual, material and above all, the moral resources of our peoples — meaningfully to respond to the challenges of the future.

The article is based on a speech delivered by the writer at the recent seminar of opposition leaders in Karachi, in his capacity as a former foreign minister of Bangladesh.

Big Business Steps Up Pressure for South Africa Talks

Mondli Makhanya writes from Johannesburg

Growing international pressure on all the parties in South Africa to return to the negotiating table is now backed by big business, which has swung against the government. Businessmen were impressed by the success of the ANC's week of action and general strike. They want the country, to move quickly to an interim government and a constituent assembly.

THABO MBEKI
Time to extract concessions

ting of parliament in October.

International intervention may now speed the resumption of the democracy talks which collapsed after the June 17 massacre of 45 people at the Boipatong township south of Johannesburg. When the ANC pulled out from the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) in the wake of the massacre, the UN Security Council appointed a special envoy to investigate the violence and the political impasse.

The envoy, former United States Secretary for African Affairs Cyrus Vance, visited the country, met all major political groupings and reported back to Boutros-Ghali who then recommended several steps towards speeding the transition to democracy.

Boutros-Ghali's recommendations centre around the strengthening of the Goldstone Commission, which was appointed by the government to investigate violence and has

been sitting for 10 months under the supervision of the country's most eminent judge, Richard Goldstone.

A group of 30 UN monitors were sent into South Africa to beef up the National Peace Accord agreed by over 100 organisations in September last year as a formal structure to end the political violence which had claimed 4,000 lives in four years.

Despite the fact that most major parties signed the Accord, 2,000 more people have died since September. Various parties openly flaunted in because there is no effective way of enforcing its guidelines. The UN monitors will therefore ensure that whoever breaches the Accord faces international censure.

Also among the recommendations are an "independent, eminent and impartial person" to be appointed to add "impetus and cohesion" to Codesa and that a deadlock-breaking mechanism be put in place at the talks.

The government and the ANC have their part to play. Government is urged to release remaining political prisoners and implement the Goldstone Commission's recommendations on curbing violence as a means of creating a climate favourable to negotiations.

The Commission had recommended greater security around migrant hostels which have been a source of most of the violence and a ban on the carrying of dangerous weapons in public — both of which the government has been slow to

do. Boutros-Ghali has also urged the ANC to return to negotiations.

These recommendations and other pressures from the international community will be taken seriously by the two parties since both are vying for the moral high ground in the eyes of the world.

A key faction within the ANC is impatient to get back to negotiations. This group, led by ANC international affairs director Thabo Mbeki, is aware the government is in a weak position both internationally and domestically and feels this is the time for the ANC to extract concessions.

The ANC protests, it is pointed out, have shown the ANC and its allies have the capacity to cripple the economy and the government now realises this. White business community sentiment has also swung against the government. The main business organisations tried to avert the general strike by proposing a one-day shutdown of all businesses, but backed off when the government objected, lest it seem that big business was lining up with the forces ranged against the state.

But senior business leaders have told the government in private that they want the country to move quickly to an interim government and a constituent assembly.

Businesses feel political uncertainty and its accompanying high level of violence are destroying business confidence and delaying South Africa's full re-entry into the international

business community.

It also established the ANC firmly as the main black liberation movement, as it carried out the protests in the face of stern opposition from the PAC and far left movements. The PAC had been claiming that the failure of Codesa vindicated its anti-negotiations stance and it was expecting a flood of disenfranchised ANC militants to defect to its camp.

For Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party the success of the protest was a massive blow. The general strike received very high levels of support in the kwaZulu homelands, which the party sees as its stronghold and its main electoral base in the coming poll.

De Klerk's government has also been plagued by scandals in the last few months. A senior judge implicated one of the chief negotiators and one of De Klerk's closest confidantes, Minister of State Affairs Gerrit Viljoen, in a corruption racket involving millions of rand while he was still Minister of Development Aid.

Then the nation's top pathologist Jonathan Gluckman disclosed that he had seen nearly 100 prisoners who had died from police assaults and labelled the police as "out of control." Gluckman said he had alerted senior government ministers and the State President about the assaults but nothing had been done.

Most damaging of all are continuing revelations that government authorised the assassinations of left wing oppo-

nents during the 1980s. This has implicated the Minister of Correctional Services Adrian Vlok and head of Military Intelligence Christofel van der Westhuizen in the deaths of anti-apartheid activists Matthew Goniwe and four others whose bodies were found in charred cars on a motorway.

The police and the defence have been named in an investigation into the unsolved gunning down of anti-apartheid academic David Webster outside his Johannesburg home in 1989 and the security forces have recently been involved in attempts to assassinate renegade policeman Dick Coetzee, who first revealed the existence of state death squads in 1989. The plot was failed by British police in London, where Coetzee has lived for three years.

So close to high echelons have these revelations come the government launched proposals for a blanket amnesty. The ANC denied government claims that it had agreed to the plan. The ANC believes the 300-400 political prisoners still in jail should be freed under the existing amnesty and that security force members involved in violence should be prosecuted, not given amnesty, as the government wants.

The ANC and other parties have pushed hard for this every since talks began in 1990, but the government would dearly love to prosecute agents responsible for atrocities against civilians.

Faced with all this, the De Klerk regime has no choice but to compromise, and its opponents have vowed to maintain the pressure until there is concrete agreement on a new constitution.

— GEMINI NEWS

MONDLI MAKHANYA is on the staff of the Johannesburg Weekly Mail.

To the Editor...

Law and order

Sir, The law and order situation of the country has precipitously deteriorated in the recent days, endangering the life and property of the people. Newspapers are filled with the news of mugging, hijacking, robbery, killings etc. So that disorder appears to be the order of the day.

The most shocking dimension of this state of affairs has been the role of the law enforcing agencies. It is very often alleged that they are less committed to their duties. Even in some of the cases their alleged underhand maneuvering also can not be ruled out to rigorously analyze these events. Shame on this high-sounding rhetoric of democracy, wordy commitments of the democrats. A society to live with security of life and prop-

erty is the innate desire of all, but even after the formal institution of democracy, this remains to be a "golden deer", out of reach of the people.

That the society is vitiated by a handful of vile elements is more or less known to all. Specially, the law-enforcing agencies are very well aware of those, but for one reason or another, they are either unable or unwilling to bring them to task. In a truly democratic polity, the law-enforcing agencies play an independent role as do the other agencies and organs of the government. Yet ours is a polity, where this still eludes us.

With the tempestuous unfolding of recent events amounting to the attempt on the life of a prominent parliamentarian Rashed Khan Menon, the home minister no

longer enjoys wishes of the masses for his long tenure. A sceptic can brush it aside as no measure to improve the law and order situation, but one should remember that this could at least strike at the very heart of the people impressing the government's trust sincerity to improve the law and order situation even if the measure went against the interests of it.

Plots are evils when conducted in a truly underhand manner when these bring disaster when condoned by the sections supposedly to resist them. All concerned to this unhealthy situation have some roles to play to make it healthy, specially, some sections enjoy more authorities to do so. Since no use is better than abuse, so the above step is called for, giving a boost to

democratic political culture, thus allowing some others to make efforts to improve the deteriorating situations.

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What a revelation!

Sir, The versatile Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda appears very keen to be in the limelight — no matter whether on point or out of it. Harping on debatable issues appears to have been his favourite pastime. In recent days when the Jatiya Sangsad was in session, he sparked off quite a furore by his emotionally charged remarks pointed towards opposition benches. Nevertheless, his over-enthusiastic wordy duel did not spare his cabinet colleagues

from unwholesome embarrassment. It was, however, the timely intervention of the Speaker that neutralized the commotion.

Outside the sacred arena of the Jatiya Sangsad too he maintains to adulterate his listeners in meetings. The other day addressing a BNP-sponsored public meeting, he dug out again an old but ostensibly settled issue claiming two queer things in one breath. Unlike his fellow partymen, he attributed the dubious glory of proclaiming independence on March 26, 1971, to Ziaur Rahman from the makeshift Radio Station at Kalurghat, Chittagong. Mr. Belal Mohammad, one of the main architects behind installing the temporary Radio Station — a direct witness, told us recently in his dispatch to a vernacular daily that Maj Zia read out a

declaration on March 27, 1971 evening "on behalf of our President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who is with us". The minister's untenable claim, unknowingly abnegates his leader's image being drawn into such an untrue episode.

The Hon'ble minister had made another funny observation that Sheikh Mujib did not declare independence in his historic March 7 (1971) speech in the then Race Course (now Suhrawardy Uddyan). It seems that Barrister Huda would have liked to attribute the immortal part of Mujib's speech: "...the struggle this time is the struggle for liberty, the struggle this time is the struggle for freedom," to someone else in his eerie attempt. It is indeed ridiculous.

Azam Khan
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