

Long Live UN

The United Nations is fifty now. By the standards of individual nations this may not be much of a life's time. But for nations of the world joining in an entity and continuing as such is a success of unprecedented proportions and significance.

The thousand failures of the first true world body of the peoples add up to an impressive pile and then pale before any of UN's true achievements. For one, there is this world without a third world war taking over. Two, the UN's extension beyond its first role — political and as such the most visible of its many aspects — into human and material development of all mankind is something that has very effectively and, pregnantly as well, changed the human context and is shaping changes in the outlook for humanity — doing something meaningfully affecting the human condition.

The best tribute to UN on its completing a half-century is: a world on the threshold of the third millennium and without UN anywhere around is improbable, impossible, inconceivable. Let us begin to appreciate that in its weaknesses lie the strength of UN and that its best achievements came by ways other than polling around.

Near, Yet So Far

The threat of the coming week-long hartal is most disappointing. Though it is from dawn to dusk, the programme will effectively shut down the economy for one-fourth of a month. No offices, organisations and factories will be able to operate during the day-time.

Except for a blockade of roads, railways and water ways on the 6th of November, the real stoppage of work starts from the 11th. All programmes prior to that are confined to mass demonstration. This gives us till the 10th of next month — good 20 days — to resolve the political crisis.

We feel that significant progress has been made in the talks between the two sides. There has been sufficient clearing of issues and removal of misunderstanding for a substantial agreement to take place.

How ever, what worries us is the possibility of any vested group throwing a spanner in the wheels at the last moment. We also express our serious apprehension about leaders making personal attacks which create bitterness and animosity, pushing back the possibility of any immediate understanding.

DU's Bad Stomach

About 26.8 per cent of the resident students of the Dhaka University suffer from gastro-intestinal diseases or various complaints of the stomach. The figure comes from a survey made by the food and nutrition department of the university.

It is common knowledge that of these students whoever keeps in health does so by not eating at the hall canteen. That explains the low figure for women student sufferers, put at 9.7 per cent.

The food in every residential hall is bad and poor. It consists mostly of ingredients strictly tabooed by diet experts. It is understandable that the caterers supply only what a students food charge would allow them to.

Subsidies per year per student vary from university to university by even thousands of taka. Will it hurt DU to add a thousand taka to its usual dole and see that its students eat better — and healthfully good stuff.

SPANISH exile and Oxford professor Salvadore de Madariaga wrote in 1960 how a Venetian bomb, on September 26, 1687, falling on a Turkish powder magazine blew the Parthenon to pieces. He reacted, "men had risen to that height where such beauty is conceived... men had fallen to that depth where such beauty is destroyed."

From 1960 till October 24, 1995 when the international community is pre-occupied with the razzamatraz of the celebration of Golden Jubilee of the UN, the world has come a long way in striving to ensure that the accidental magazine explosion will not take place.

A strong supporter of the United Nations, Madariaga was deeply aware of the failure of the League of Nations to avert the World War II. By 1943, the Moscow Declaration had recognised the necessity of establishing at the earliest practical date, a general international organisation based upon the principle of sovereign equality of all peace-loving states, large and small.

With decolonisation and the consequent emergence of new nation-states, the membership of the world body has today jumped to 188 from the original 51 that signed the Charter in San Francisco. The on set of the cold war predictably created a divide in the UN. The

newly-emergent nations more often than not took an anti-West posture as if to ask them to expiate the sins of colonialism and demanded social and economic justice. The result was the shibboleth of new international economic order (NIEO). New International Information Order, the formation of the G-77 and the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Countries such as Bangladesh, with its admission in the UN agencies in Geneva, Vienna and Rome, between '72 to '74 and with the admission to the UN proper in September 17, 1974, had always been exerting a moderating influence on the world body so that the differences between the developed and the developing countries could be narrowed down.

But the disenchantment of the Western democracies who were also the major contributors to the UN budget continued to escalate. US ambassador Charles Lichtenstein perhaps encapsulated most articulately the Western position when he said in September 1983, if the UN members did not appreciate the US position, then they should, "seriously consider removing themselves and this organisation from the soil of the United States."

While taking stock of the past 50 years, the major actors, headed by the United States will, I believe, take a more mature and understanding look at the achievement of the United Nations. Would the world be a better place without the United Nations? The answer would, perhaps, be an assertive 'no'. The faults and foibles of the UN are no greater or lesser than those of the member-countries composing the United Nations.

Re-inventing the United Nations at 50: Mark II

At 50 the UN would do well to ask how effective its programmes have been in member-countries. Over 20 years ago UNDP Administrator Bradford Morse and later trouble-shooter Victor Urmbricht told me in extreme reaction that 10 years of extensive programme in Bangladesh would help us reach the take-off stage. What has gone wrong, if any?

ingly anti US, anti-West and anti-free enterprise. Verily has it been said that the world body reached its nadir when it equated Zionism with racism by resolution 3379 in 1975! When the United Nations meets on the East River on October 24 to celebrate its 50 years of coming of age, many of the world leaders including most of the Western heads of state will perhaps take a second look. The collapse of the Berlin Wall has dramatically changed the configuration of world powers.

ment and women, the most important contribution of the UN till now has been in the area of nuclear non-proliferation. As a member of the Expert Group, set up by the UN Secretary-General, on the economic and social consequences on arms race and military expenditures I can vouchsafe that without the UN framework the agreements on the nuclear weapon-free zones, treaty of Tlatelolco inspired by Ambassador Garcia Robles of Mexico, treaty of Rarotonga, African nuclear weapon-free zone, the Antarctic Treaty, the Threshold Test Ban Treaty, the PTBT wouldn't have been possible with the signing of the CTBT in Geneva in 1996.

ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has stated very succinctly in a number of documents, particularly in the agenda for peace — 92 and 95 — agenda for development 94 and on United Nations and nuclear non-proliferation. Through these handy monographs the Egyptian-born UN Secretary-General has drawn the attention of the world to the United Nations. He has said, and rightly so, "Development has to be oriented towards each person beyond that must rise a recognition that this human community includes generations yet to come!"

While sceptics may refer to many failures, the cognoscenti will also list a myriad success stories. Apart from population, environment and women, the most important contribution of the UN till now has been in the area of nuclear non-proliferation.

Today Bangladesh is striving hard to make its nascent democratic process a success. Our constructive engagement with the international community is achieving greater dimension. The first JCGP mini-summit in Dhaka from February 6-8, 1994, set the agenda not only for Bangladesh but the whole world — an agenda for peace and development. The UNDP summer session of June 1972 in Geneva allocated the IPE of \$18.5 million in favour of Bangladesh. From this modest beginning UNDP today account for one of the largest programmes in the world. The Joint Consultative Group on Policy meeting in Dhaka, first-ever held outside New York and Rome, was thus a natural outcome of the close relationship between the UN and Bangladesh.

For Bangladesh, the 50th anniversary in New York will have a particular significance.

If there is one nation-state born on the umbilicus of the United Nations, it is Bangladesh. The relationship between the UN and Bangladesh is therefore very close. Its sanguinary birth presaged it and the War of Liberation consolidated it. As Thomas Oliver wrote in his book, 'United Nations in Bangladesh', "The ten million refugees and the millions of displaced Bengalees were re-absorbed quickly and quietly. Law and Order was by and large preserved. The threatened mass slaughter of minorities did not take place. Most important of all, the people were fed. The credit for this achievement," as he said "goes in the first place to the people and the government of Bangladesh".

Times have changed. So have national priorities. Member-states want investment and capital. Export-led economic growth is the new buzzword. Even bleeding-heart liberals now take comfort from Joan Robinson — "There is only one thing worse than being exploited by a capitalist and that is not to be exploited at all..."

2,000 of our valiant and patriotic soldiers engage in peacekeeping in blue helmets around the world. At 50 the UN would do well to ask how effective its programmes have been in member-countries. Over 20 years ago UNDP Administrator Bradford Morse and later trouble-shooter Victor Urmbricht told me in extreme reaction that 10 years of extensive programme in Bangladesh would help us reach the take-off stage. What has gone wrong, if any? The programmes should not become a vicious circle of self-fulfilling prophecies! "UN's costly secretariat, its cronyism legions of bureaucrats its high salaries and lavish perquisites" — as in the words of Heritap Foundation Vice-President cannot be dismissed out of hand.

While UN member-states should allow themselves turn for soul-searching, one would dare say that US Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick perhaps struck the correct note in her remark, both about the UN and also as a response to her sometime colleague Ambassador Charles Lichtenstein. Yesterday's Terrorists are today's peace-makers! Peter Mashihenge and Nelson Mandela of ANC, South Africa, SWAPO leaders the President and Foreign Minister Ben Guirirob in Namibia, Chairman Yasser Arafat and Zehdi Labib Terizi of PLO, Izhak Shamir and Shimon Peres of Israel have all become votaries of constructive engagement in keeping peace. Andrew Young must be looking back with bemused feeling: he lost his job as US Ambassador to the UN for his informal meetings with the PLO representative in New York!

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's participation at the solemn UN anniversary at 50 would assume special meaning only in the light of the above: if we succeed in adding yet another bulwark to the dream of the Founding-Fathers of the UN and save this fragile Parthenon of peace, shall we become worthy member-states of this very human institution.

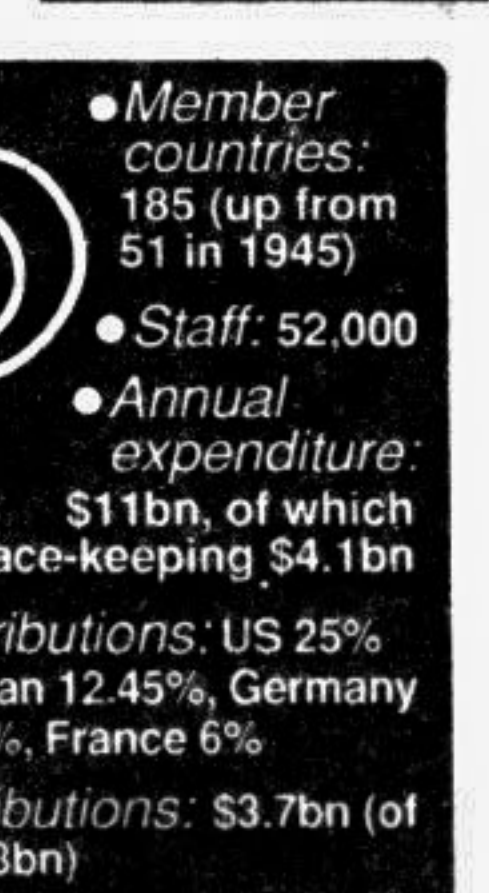
Leaders Line up for the 50-Year Photo Opportunity

Elvi Routtinen writes from New York

Despite the world body's deepening financial crisis — only about 70 of the 185 member states are up-to-date with their contributions — the UN is preparing for a big party. Gemini News Service looks at the plans for the organisation's 50th anniversary (24 October) celebrations

The UN's half-century

Secretary-Generals



Member countries: 185 (up from 51 in 1945) Staff: 52,000 Annual expenditure: \$11bn, of which peace-keeping \$4.1bn Main contributions: US 25% of total budget, Japan 12.45%, Germany 8.93%, Russia 6.71%, France 6% Arrears in contributions: \$3.7bn (of which US owes \$1.3bn)

bringing blessings was the head of the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, whose October visit provided a small-scale dress rehearsal for the complexities to come.

Muzi Falconi, his equally hard-working deputy, Russia's Igor Novichenko, and his staff have had many meetings with each country's permanent mission to the UN. Many capitals have also sent advance teams to be taken around and shown ex-

actly what their national leader would be doing after arrival and when and where it would happen. Each leader will be greeted at the airport by Muzi-Falconi or senior official. Muzi-Falconi and Novichenko will make dozens of trips to meet the aircraft arriving at all hours from all over the world.

Ever discreet, Muzi-Falconi smiles and says simply: "An interesting job!" Undersecretary-General Joseph Verner Reed comments: "The only thing we can't control is the weather."

Less easy to control will be the New York traffic, notorious for its gridlocks. Each leader's motorcade is limited to four cars and an ambulance, with a New York police escort to clear the way. Nevertheless, it will take a near miracle for everybody to arrive on time for the six planned commemorative Assembly sessions and other events.

In the General Assembly Hall, another miracle is called for. All speakers — regardless of importance in the international pecking order — have been asked to limit their oration and eloquence to five minutes. Leaders known for their loquacity, such as US President Bill Clinton and Cuban President Fidel Castro, will find the time-limit a hardship — as no doubt will most others, unaccustomed to being told to curb their tongues.

The time-limit is necessary to ensure that events do not stretch and interfere with the evening concerts and dinners, like the Clintons' Sunday night dinner for all the leaders at the nearby New York Public Library. In work day hours, the

UN's catering operations manager, Michel Boyer, expects to prepare and serve some 7,000 meals a day for the heads of state and government, the foreign ministers, ambassadors and other delegation members, their retinues of personal aides, an army of American Secret Service personnel and 4,000-5,000 journalists.

"No problem", says Boyer. "We'll serve simple, easy but good food. Nothing elaborate."

Whether "simple and easy" will suffice for the presidents and kings is yet to be tested but an elaborate menu for the three luncheons hosted by the Secretary-General and Mrs Leila Boutros-Ghali would be inappropriate given that the world body is facing its biggest-ever cash crisis (with \$3.7 billion of unpaid dues), cutbacks in contributions threatened by the US Congress, and allegations of waste and inefficiency. Security is a key issue, and the UN Security and safety service has its hands full. Security chief Michael McCann, his deputy Michael Hall and assistant chief Joseph Martella say they are ready for all eventualities.

Hall, a cheerful Australian with a can-do spirit, was tested at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September. His UN security unit of 50 men and five women were a calming presence in the middle of much turmoil, when the 5,000-strong Chinese security forces harassed participants of the non-governmental organisations' forum that ran alongside the main conference.

All his tact and diplomacy will be needed to smooth the ruffled feathers of diplomats and bureaucrats when they are steered away from restricted areas by UN security officials.

As usual during the Boutros-Ghali years, however, the toughest restrictions will fall on the media. Reporters will have to submit to so many X-ray machines that many expect to glow in the dark.

ELVI ROUTTINEN is Gemini News Service correspondent at the United Nations in New York.

To the Editor...

Aricha-Nagarbari Ghats

Sir, Aricha and Nagarbari ghats are the main links between the eastern and western parts of Bangladesh. Problems of the ghats are as old as ghats when constructed. Recently government has decided to shift the ghats (Aricha to Baruria and Nagarbari to Notakhal) at a cost of Tk 20 crore. Local people is opposing the move. Shifting of the ghats will not have lasting solution without river training works.

Nobel peace prize and Nuclear test

Sir, The peace-loving and environment-conscious citizens all over the world are perhaps greatly encouraged and inspired to find the Nobel Committee has awarded this year's Nobel Peace Prize to veteran anti-nuclear campaigner Joseph Rotblat of the United Kingdom. This prize was stated to have been awarded to Joseph Rotblat and Pugwash organi-

Member countries

sation founded by Rotblat specifically for their protest against French nuclear tests. We sincerely hope that France will stop their nuclear tests for the sake of protecting the earth from environmental hazard and to halt arms race among the super powers for promoting world peace and friendship.

M Zahidul Haque

Assistant Professor BAI Dhaka