

FOCUS

UN Day

Will UN Ever Get a Real Shake-up to Stand Upright?

by AMM Shahabuddin

One western columnist rightly said that the UN "is the world's most complex bureaucracy, often sinking under the weight of inertia that results from a heavy mixture of nepotism, incompetence, administrative spats and clashing ambitions."

THAT dream organization in the 35-story glasshouse at Manhattan on the bank of the East River in New York, which literally rose like the mythical Phoenix from the smouldering ashes of the Second World War, replacing its 'cousin' the League of Nations, today hangs on the threshold of the 21st Century, physically almost immobile and financially a broke! As the old adage says that 'the empty sacks will never stand upright', but an 'empty vessel sounds much'. It applies well to the United Nations (UN) as it stands today. Its founding fathers must be turning in their graves to see this pitiable condition of the much-adored organization which was established by them in 1945, after prolonged discussions at the San Francisco conference, mainly for the purpose of saving the world from the 'scourge of war', and maintain peace, harmony and security among the nations of the world.

It would be ridiculous to expect too much from the world body when it is economically gasping for breath and politically limping on borrowed crutches. Sheer rhetorics by the delegates from the member countries at the annual sessions of the General Assembly won't be able to rejuvenate it. Something tangible, rather than mere rituals, is necessary.

The Axe must Fall at Right Place

Undoubtedly, the Annan proposals are sound and are expected to have far-reaching effects provided the 'axe' falls at right places and at right times, instead of cosmetic surgery here and there. These proposals have got an added significance and an inherent strength because for the first time such reforms have received the strongest possible support from US President Clinton in his recent forthright statement at the current General Assembly session had assured that America would pay its dues to the UN of about 1.5 billion dollars, about half of total dues of 2.6 billion dollars, owed some 100 other member States. At the same time Clinton lent his full backing to Kofi Annan's reforms package and has urged other defaulting members to pay up their dues.

It is always the Republican-dominated US Senate that creates hurdles against payment of US dues. They bluntly question the wisdom of spending US taxpayers' money on some UN programmes that look unproductive and wastage. Already unkind remarks have been voiced by some of the Republicans against the Annan plan as 'remarkably modest', 'representing the status quo'. They are in favour of more drastic measures to put the UN house in order by closely shaving the all-powerful UN bureaucracy who

rules the roost. Senator Grams, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Sub-Committee on International Operations, had opined that Annan was 'stymied by bureaucratic interests trying to protect their turf'. It would, therefore, depend a lot on Clinton how far he can persuade the hostile Republicans to follow his line of action both in the interests of America as well as the UN.

UN Bureaucracy : A 'By-word'

But the question arises why this US distrust of UN bureaucracy? This is valid reason for such a long-standing distrust expressed by the Republican senator against the UN bureaucracy for mishandling and wrong use of funds. That's why the Republican had consistently and persistently opposed payment by USA of its dues to the UN. Actually, the UN bureaucracy has become a proverbial by-word in the corridors of the UN. It's they who run the 'show' without any 'show-cause' notice from any quarters. In the past the Secretaries-General, however powerful they might have been, became pawns in their hands, except perhaps Kurt Waldheim, who is considered as the 'least popular' Secretary General for his drastic reforms measures. But he lacked the most needed support from powerful quarters as Kofi Annan has been lucky to enjoy from the US President Clinton. So Annan would be under pressure from the US congress to make drastic cut in the strength of the UN bureaucracy to put them in their proper size. It would be a hard and challenging job on the part of Annan. But the most relieving feature is that he enjoys the 'blessings' of Clinton.

The UN bureaucrats, on the other hand, would fight to their last ditch to oppose the reforms and to sabotage them from inside to protect their vested interests. But the hornet's nest must be broken. Incidentally, one western columnist rightly said that the UN 'is the world's most complex bureaucracy, often sinking under the weight of inertia that results from a heavy mixture of nepotism, incompetence, administrative spats and clashing ambitions'. They often 'sit through endless administrative meetings, but not to discuss great problems of peace and war, but bureaucratic bickerings about hiring of some body's wife's nephew'. What a

mighty picture of the ruling snobs in their den!

And that outspoken Canadian, General MacKenzie, who was the first Chief of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Bosnia and secured the Sarajevo airport from the Serbs for safe landing of incoming humanitarian shipments, blasted the UN bureaucracy, including then Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, for lack of vision and proper planning before thrusting UN troops to the field 'to be killed'. And jokingly, he said to pressmen in Canada, 'Don't get into trouble after 5 pm New York time, or on Saturday and Sunday, because there is no one to answer the phone'. And finally, the Canadian General hit the bull's eye, as to why the USA refuses to pay its UN dues, saying because it 'knew well how the money is being wasted by the civilian bureaucracy in New York'. Hence the Annan reforms plan has a positive role to play to remove the misgivings about the free-for-all UN bureaucracy. Then only nor-

malcy will return with regard to both US regular contributions and pay-up of the dues of about one and a half billion dollars.

1985 World Bank Reforms Disaster

The General Assembly members should therefore be quick to support the US-backed Annan reforms proposal to put the UN financing and work programmes back on track, by dealing properly with the wild 'white elephants' that are playing havoc in the UN. But one thing must be remembered by the Secretary-General that the 'axe' should not create panic among lower level officers and ten thousand staff members of the UN Secretariat and in the political sector. Whenever the question of cutting the staff comes, it is they who are made 'scape goats'. The disaster of the so-called 1985 shake-up in the World Bank is still fresh in the minds of all. That shouldn't be repeated in the UN in the name of 'reforms'. In the case of the World Bank, every employee

was asked to resign to get new appointments which were given from top down. The result was the bungling of the highest order. Not surprisingly, new recruits were from some bureaucrats' 'underlings' (often friends). To quote London Economist, 'Cronyism thrived, staff morale plummeted, and the bank remained as inefficient as ever'. So repetition of this black precedence should be avoided while giving a new shape to UN administration.

Political Reforms: A Must

Mr Kofi Annan, however, has left out from his reforms package the urgently needed political reforms for the smooth functioning of the world body in the political sector. It's a happy sign that President Clinton, in his recent speech at the current 52nd session of the UN General Assembly, deliberated the issue in right earnest. And as a first step, he suggested the enlargement of the present 15-member Security Council, the most powerful evocative body of the UN, of which five are

veto-wielding Permanent Members — USA, UK, France, Russia and China. Asia, being the largest in population, has the poorest representation. Hence number of both the non-Permanent and Permanent members should be raised to give proportionate representation to all regions. It goes without saying that Asia should get at least two more Permanent Members, besides the present member China. And of these two, Asia's economic giant, Japan, has almost been assured of a 'slot' in the proposed expansion of the council. And as for the second seat, there may be several aspirants, including, most prominently, India, Indonesia and Malaysia.

But the question would remain whether the new Permanent Members would be given 'veto' powers to make them of equal status with the present five other Members. If not, then all the Permanent Members, both old and new, should be stripped of their 'veto' power so that all of them can speak on the same 'wave-length'.

Military Staff Committee to be Revitalised

But political reforms shouldn't stop with the expan-

sion of the Security Council. The next most vital issue would be to reactivate the 'almost dead' the Military Staff Committee which was originally set up by the founding fathers under Article 46 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter to take full leadership and responsibilities in peace-keeping and peace-making operations. The tragedy is that during the last 50 years of its existence, the Military Committee has never been given the opportunity to play the vital role for which it was created. If Clinton takes bold initiative to revitalise this moribund committee, it would take off much of the present load from US shoulders and it won't have to field its forces, along with other NATO forces, under American leadership, where a volatile situation arises. Bosnia is a case in point.

Let President Clinton prove his mettle again to put the UN in its full glory, regaining its lost identity, ready to take all responsibilities to cope with combustible situation, like Bosnia. Let the multi-national NATO forces, led by USA, be placed under the UN Military Staff Committee, along with US logistics to work under UN Flag, wherever necessary. Thus Clinton can revive the world body from the sad history of paralysis. The 'go-decision' lies with him.

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Prosecution Witnesses

Continued from yesterday

Cross-examination of the 26th prosecution witness in Bangabandhu murder case, Naik Gunner (retd) Jamrul Islam, began when the court resumed this (Wednesday) morning.

Following are excerpts from his examination by advocate TM Akbar, defence counsel for accused Lt Col (LPR) Muhiuddin:

Q: In how many places sounds occur when a cannon shell is exploded?

A: I don't know as I never exploded cannon shell.

Q: When did you get the charge of ammunition store?

A: In February, 1975.

Q: What was your duty time there?

A: From 6 am to 6 pm with a two-hour recess.

Q: Did you go on retirement while discharging that duty?

A: No, a havildar replaced me five to six months before I went on retirement.

Q: Was there any roll call during your service?

A: Yes, a havildar called roll every evening.

Examination by advocate

Bahini?

A: Yes.

Q: They were in different uniforms.

A: The Lancer were in black uniform while others in khaki.

Q: Can you say how many Lancer members were there?

A: 100 to 150.

Q: How long had you been at Balurghat?

A: Less than half an hour.

Q: The army personnel were in how many rows there?

A: There were not in rows.

Q: Besides Lancer, how many army personnel were there?

A: 60 to 70 Artillery people.

Q: Were you not intercepted while entering the Ganobhaban?

A: None intercepted.

Q: Did you see other soldiers at Ganobhaban?

A: No, I didn't notice.

Q: Did you notice the soldiers' barracks there?

A: No, I didn't.

Q: Where did you listen to radio at Ganobhaban?

A: Under a tree on the ground.

Q: Did you hear from radio that army had captured power led by Khandakar Mushtaque?

A: I can't recall.

Q: You told the IO that you heard from radio that army led by Khandakar Mushtaque Ahmed captured power.

A: I can't recall.

Q: You didn't tell anybody earlier... did you tell the court the fall in?

A: I can't say about other batteries. My battery went.

Q: Were there other batteries personnel at the airport when you left the place?

A: Yes.

Q: By how many vehicles you moved from the airport?

A: By only one car.

Q: Did you know why Rakhi Bahini will attack the army?

A: No.

Examination by adv Abdur Razzak Khan, defence counsel for accused Lt Col Sultan Shahriyar Rahim Khan:

Q: You gave a statement to CID on 31/10/96.

A: Yes.

Q: You were carrying an SLR with how many ammunition?

A: 10 rounds.

Q: Did you tell that IO that you didn't have to use bullet?

A: I can't recall.

Q: Did you see many army personnel at Balurghat?

A: Yes, I saw.

Q: Did you also see Lancer

Examination by adv Khan

named Rakhi Bahini.

Q: Did you know whether it is good or bad?

A: I had no idea about that. Q: Where is the transit camp, where were you brought after being repatriated from Pakistan?

Q: When did you come to CID office with police guards?

A: I didn't go there with police guards.

Q: Did local police give you any paper for your identity?

A: Yes. I went along with the paper.

Q: Did you show the paper after coming to CID office?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they keep the paper or return it to you?

A: They kept it.

Q: Then police told you to reply to questions of CID, otherwise you will be an accused. It depends on your reply whether you will be a witness or an accused.

A: They didn't say like this.

Q: Did you not consider Rakhi Bahini as rival?

A: No. I didn't.

Q: Hearing firing, can you identify the type of arms?

A: No.

Q: Can you identify the arms if you hear firing of small arms?

A: No, I can't say.

Q: Do you violate rules in your long service life?

A: My senior officers can say.

Q: Even brigadier and colonel ranking officers were hanged in 1981-82 for crimes in army.

A: This is not know to me.

Q: Many sepoys of Dhaka Cantonment were hanged in martial law tribunals. Do you know it?

A: I don't know.

Q: I means you are an introvert. You didn't care many big incidents in the cantonments.

A: I was a soldier. I don't know.

Q: Do you know that a sepoys' revolution took place in Dhaka Cantonment in November, 1975?

A: Yes, I know it.

Q: While joining the service, you took oath that you will protect the government. Correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Mention the names of the artillery personnel who were posted at Kalabagan.

A: Siraj, Jalal and me.

Q: Did you see Rakhi Bahini?

A: I never saw Rakhi Bahini.

Q: It means you have no idea about them.

A: I knew there is a force

I came to know.

Q: Major Farooq Rahman was in charge of the transit camp where you came after being repatriated from Pakistan.

A: I don't know.

Adv Abdur Razzak Khan, also the defence lawyer of accused Hon Capt (retd) Abdul Wahab Joardar, declined to cross-examine on behalf of him.

— UNB

Further texts of cross examination will be published as and when received.