

Solidarity with the Palestinians

TWO hundred and 89 people, mostly Palestinians, have died so far in the last two months of unrest in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; the death toll is highly likely to keep rising. As the world observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinians, the issue of an independent state for them remained as fuzzy as ever. The Israelis have held firm on their position despite recently adopted United Nations Security Council resolutions, which denounce excesses on the Palestinians. The Barak government also appeared unmoved when Egypt, a main voice of moderation in the Middle East, recalled its envoy to Israel on November 22, with Jordan, another moderate Arab state, quickly following suit. In response, Israeli commandos and troops only intensified operations in the occupied territory. Similarly apathetic Israel has been to the resolutions of the Arab League summit in Cairo and the OIC summit in Doha. On both occasions, the member-states stopped short of severing links with Israel. Seemingly, Tel Aviv draws strength from a tacit support from Washington. With both Governor George W Bush and Vice President Al Gore, now engaged in tortuous legal battle for US presidency, publicly voicing support for the Barak government during the electoral debate early this month, the Washington-Tel Aviv equation would remain more or less the same. Realistically, therefore, implementation of the UNSC resolutions, adopted with the US abstaining and implicitly opposing, stands very little chance at this point in time.

To carve a niche in the apparently rock solid stand-off, the peace and freedom loving nations across the world must come together and force Israel back to the negotiations table. US, on its part, must realise that its blind support to the Israelis is not only causing bloodshed in the occupied territory but also pushing the whole region on to the brink of a lasting conflict. With the moderate Arab nations gradually hardening their position on the Palestine issue and the radical ones raring for a showdown, a repeat of 1967 could well become a reality unless Washington persuades Barak and Chairman Yasser Arafat into another round of peace talks sooner than later.

Whenever the negotiations resume, and we hope these do sooner than later, there must be no concession over the fundamental Palestinian claim for an independent and sovereign state. The Palestinians certainly deserve a land they can truly call home.

Watchdog for Law Enforcers

ONE could be forgiven for harbouring the notion that the police in this country have become an organisation virtually independent of any state control. While charges of corruption, mismanagement, inefficiency, professional negligence, excesses, etc have been plentiful, governmental inquisition into these allegations have been rare, and prosecution and punishment of the delinquent police officials even rarer. To make matters worse, successive governments have used the police as a political tool and, in return, awarded the latter a kind of immunity to any criminal investigation and prosecution. That is not the end, however. The police, in a bid to ingratiate themselves with the ruling party tended to ignore criminal and terrorist acts perpetrated by its activists. Then, there is the 'you scratch my back and I will scratch yours' deal between the notorious criminals and terrorists, and the police. Although ideally the police ought to be seen as the custodians of law, they have, by and large, ended up on the wrong end of the law. Whereas the people, who, in the ideal scheme of things, should command the police's loyalty, have become a victim of the latter's malfeasance and malpractice. The protectors, directly or indirectly, have turned into predators; not all of them but those that have are enough to earn a bad name to the force.

While inefficiency and corruption within their ranks have played a substantial role in this regard, extra-professional interference has largely contributed to the police's rather morbid metamorphosis into protectors of anti-social elements. Over the years, instead of investing thoughts and money into modernisation and enhancement of the police force, the political leaders have devised ways and means to further its use to meet partisan ends. As a result, the police have weakened, both in terms of number and equipment in the face of a spate in criminal activities and smuggling of small arms into the country. Simply put, if one factor could be attributed to the police's decline, it is political interference in their professional work in place of the right kind of political will to modernise them.

Therefore, the responsibility to redress the situation devolves upon the politicians. There should be a convergence of opinion amongst the leaders across the political divide to carry out extensive police reform which is the need of the hour now. As part of that endeavour we should have a watchdog body to oversee police work, consisting of government, private sector and civil society representatives in addition to the parliamentary standing committee on law and order which is in existence.

To the Editor...

Pak Deputy High Commissioner's remarks

Sir, I was appalled after reading the comments made by Mr Irfan Raja, Pakistan's Deputy High Commissioner at a seminar on 27 November. This diplomat is not a disgrace to his profession if he actually thinks that there is no reason for Pakistan to apologise for its war crimes and furthermore for publicly expressing his sentiments.

The whole world knows what happened in Bangladesh in 1971. Millions of Bangladeshis who lost their near and dear ones will give the Deputy High Commissioner the gory details of how they were murdered, millions of photographs are available with proof of the atrocities committed by his people and yet he attends a seminar and shamelessly declares that the Bangladeshis were the one who initiated the war?

I was an 8-year old living in London during the war, but I was old enough to comprehend that

something terribly wrong was happening in my country! Mr Irfan Raja's comment is similar to the Nazis saying that the Jews deserved to die. I do not think he has a clue as to how sensitive this issue is amongst the Bangladeshis. I am of the opinion that the government should send the diplomat packing not back to his High Commission but to his country before he faces the wrath of the people!

Farhan Qudus
Banani, Dhaka

Ticket to dishonesty at ZIA

Sir, On 21 November, I went to ZIA International Airport to see off a relative. As I tried to peer inside from the entrance doorway, one Ansar guard told me I couldn't do that and if I wanted to go in I have to buy a ticket with Taka 250. I stood back and started pondering whether to buy the ticket and whether I needed tickets for my two minor children as well. The same guard then

If, after 53 years of independence, some Muslim intellectuals consider it necessary to hold a seminar in Delhi on the future of Muslims in India, it is a sad commentary on the community as well as the republic. It means that the Muslims have not been able to make the rulers realise in the last five decades that they count in the country. It also means that the republic of India has failed to give a sense of security, much less participation, to nearly 150 millions of the Muslim population. One can argue that after the partition, which was based on the two-nation theory, some consequences were bound to visit the Muslims staying back in India. There may also be something in the contention that the creation of Pakistan, a separate Muslim homeland, was sure to affect the mind of the Hindus who had opposed the subcontinent's division. But when such feelings persist or take a firmer shape, even after 53 years, the belief in secularism comes into question. In fact, the entire debate before independence had boiled down to communalism versus secularism. The Muslim League's agenda was 'the emancipation' of Muslims and, therefore, parochial in character. The Congress, on the other hand, propounded the theory of all Indians being one nation and was, therefore, secular in concept. The League founded the Islamic state of Pakistan and the Congress a democratic polity with no state religion.

Secularism was expected to take roots in India but it did not.

What saved the country was, in fact, the sense of horror and hatred which the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi created against communalists. They ran for shelter. But the responsibility to spread and sustain the essence of secularism was that of the Congress. It had led the freedom struggle, espousing the cause of secularism. The League was never a party to it. Nor did it believe in it.

If the Muslims in India still have doubts about their future, they must lay the blame on the Congress and other secular parties. They have been found wanting in their faith in secularism. It looks as if the members of the Congress and other parties were not secular, to begin with. Their bias was hidden behind the zeal for independence. They came in their true colours after the partition.

Probably things would have been different if Pakistan had become a secular state as its founder, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, had envisaged. He said after partition that Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Hindus and Muslims not in the religious sense but otherwise and become either Indians or Pakistanis. He could not impose his will. In any case, he died early. But why it went awry in India, which had seen Hindu and

Muslim leaders fighting against the British side by side during the freedom struggle, is the question that still baffles.

The main reason for secularism getting derailed in India was the pernicious effect that the influx of Hindus from Pakistan had on the psyche of the majority. After fighting and opting for secularism, it

Abul Kalam Azad, began to be looked at as a Muslims' leader. He had braved all the indignities which the majority of Muslims had showered on him when he was stoutly opposing the creation of Pakistan. Independent India did not recognise his sufferings and sacrifices in the manner it should. A few days ago, when his

and multi-cultural society. It rightly adopted a constitution which recognised all Indians equal before the law without caste or creed. Still, the country could not escape the labels of majority and minority, which was the League's thesis. The labels have affected the psychology of Hindus and Muslims in India.

India should have stuck to its secular principles and practices without any compromise. Schools, colleges and universities should not have been allowed to carry denominational names. Prayers at public meetings and inaugural ceremonies beginning with religious prayers should have been banned. Nehru once vainly tried to do away with the column on religion in official forms. When they saw religious mores intact after partition, the Muslims too clung to their identity. The label of minority did not bother them. In fact, it gave them security. All that they wanted was segregation in the name of religion was acceptable to them as long as it acted as a shield against attacks on their life and property. They were afraid to assert themselves lest they should be held responsible for separatism which had taken a heavy toll of human lives and

property. Strange, the Muslims learnt little from the religious togetherness which may serve as a defensive mechanism but which has kept them in ghettos in a free India. Their priority should have been to break the values in the name of religion and get education. The madrasas, most of them, have become training grounds for fundamentalists.

True, the Muslims feel at home and safe with their co-religionists. But in the process, they have cut off themselves from the mainstream. They talk about secularism but they tend to pick up fundamentalists as their leaders. No Muslim with liberal views has caught the community's imagination.

Some among them want to have a Muslim political party.

But this has been tried before and it has proved to be a disaster for Indian Muslims. They cannot afford to play the game of numbers. They have no alternative to secularism. In fact, they should put all their weight behind secular forces and they have to work for a society which keeps religion separate from politics. Had the pressure of parties representing the Hindu point of view not been relentless, the space for secularism would have expanded. For political purpose, these parties have changed the very meaning of secularism and have equated it with Hinduism. Things are worsening because the BJP is pushing prejudices, not even the ideology they claim to have.

Secularism under Pressure

Indian Muslims have no alternative to secularism. In fact, they should put all their weight behind secular forces and they have to work for a society which keeps religion separate from politics. Had the pressure of parties representing the Hindu point of view not been relentless, the space for secularism would have expanded. For political purpose, these parties have changed the very meaning of secularism and have equated it with Hinduism.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

was swept off its feet, and commitment when the communalists on both sides came to occupy the stage. Mahatma Gandhi went on saying till the assassination that Hindus and Muslims were his two eyes.

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, expressed similar sentiments. But the traumatic experience had shaken the country to the roots. Most Congressmen were found wanting, their secularism turned out to be skin deep.

Even Congress leader Maulana

112th birth anniversary was celebrated, there was only a handful of people present at the function. The Congress leaders were conspicuous by their absence. It is true that a country, which had 82 per cent Hindus as its inhabitants, could have declared itself a Hindu Rashtra. After all, Pakistan, with the majority of Muslims, had become Islamic. But how could India go back on all that it had stood for? The ethos of freedom movement was secularism which drew inspiration and sustenance from its pluralistic

APEC Summit

What Message it Carries for Developing Countries?

by AMM Shahabuddin

How long the clash of interests between the two unequal partners in development -- the rich and the poor nations -- will continue? It is gradually assuming a menacing posture as clearly manifested at several global economic meetings held recently.



Leaders of the APEC member-countries assembled for the summit

Auckland and also at WTO session of Seattle. But there is no doubt that America still carries a great weight on APEC as it was evident from the inclusion in the Brunei Declaration of some proposals on the line suggested by Clinton in his speech, such as, launching of the WTO trade talks in 2001 and expression of sympathy with the victims of 1997-98 financial crisis, urging them to keep with painful economic reforms for better days to come.

However, after much beating about the bush, the Summit Declaration was the product of a compromise reached between the two warring groups, giving a concrete clue to launch the WTO trade talks next year. With reference to this, the Declaration, *inter alia*, said: 'We agree that a balanced and sufficiently broad-based agenda that responds to the interests and concepts of all WTO members should be formulated and finished as soon as possible in 2001, and that the round (of WTO trade talks) be launched in 2001.'

Another failure apprehended: President Clinton's stand was, however, challenged by Thai Trade Minister Mr Supachai, who will become the next Chief of WTO in 2002, at the expiry of the divided term of incumbent, Mike Moore, former prime minister of New Zealand. [Mr Moore was strongly supported by USA against Mr Supachai, supported by the developing countries in the last election of WTO's new Director-General. Later as a compromise, the two candidates were taken as

elects and their term of office was equally divided, first to assume office was Mr Moore. Mr Supachai opposed Clinton's insistence on launching the WTO trade talks in 2001, adding that any fixation of date for launching the talks was likely to be another failure which, according to him, would be disastrous. But ultimately Clinton had the last laugh. Only time will show what happens to the future of the talks.

Proposal for workers' rights: But why the developing countries were opposed to Clinton's insistence for inclusion of the provisions of workers' rights and environmental protection in the future round of WTO trade talks? Because the poor nations consider these two as their most important assets with which they can face the developed countries for competition with their products. Knowing this fully well, the developed countries, led by America, want to cut the root and then water the plant with sprinkles of globalisation. Hence acceptance of this demand of the rich nations would be tantamount to signing their own death-warrant, by undermining their key competitive advantages in global economy their ability to exploit readily available cheap labour on one hand and make full use of abundant natural resources on the other. It is, therefore, sheer hypocrisy on the part of the developed countries to demand workers' rights and environmental protection.

Labour exploitation by developed countries: Perhaps the developed countries forgot, or

they pretend to forget, that they were not born rich. They had also to begin from a scratch or a starting-line and pass through many hazards in the long journey with ups and downs, before reaching their present stable stage, after centuries of struggle. History is replete with tragic stories of their merciless exploitation of cheap labour and environment, available in their country. And in the case of America, it imported shiploads of millions of slave-labours from Africa, whose working con-

dition was much worse than that of the so-called bonded-labour prevailing in poor countries, and for which the Western countries often shed so much crocodile tears. So it would be better on the part of developed countries not to put their hands elsewhere when their own closets are still full of skeletons. The tragic legacy of African slave labours in America is still crying hoarse in slums inhabited by the poor black people, now so-called African-Americans. Hence, they should not forget that Rome was not built in a day. So what they had achieved after centuries of struggle cannot be expected of the poor developing countries to achieve overnight, except using a magic wand!

Moreover, the developed countries shouldn't try to push their proposals about workers' rights and environmental protection through WTO, as it is none of its business. Another UN agency, ILO, is there to look after the interest of the workers. So let not WTO go out of its way to play surrogate mother to workers' issue. WTO has already earned the name and fame of being a rich men's club. They should try to get rid of showing new carrots to the poor nations.

When will the G-8 promise be fulfilled? The poor developing countries have already become disillusioned at the behaviour of

the developed countries. They had earlier expressed their dissatisfaction at the failure on the part of G-8 nations who had promised at their session in Cologne (Germany) last year that as much as \$100 billion worth of debt burden of the poor borrowing nations would be wiped out. But unfortunately, nothing tangible has been done so far to honour that promise.

Therefore the bottomline is: How long this clash of interests between the two unequal partners in development, the rich and the poor nations, will continue? It is gradually assuming a menacing posture as clearly manifested at several global economic meetings held recently, including Seattle, Okinawa and Prague. Before it goes out of control, it is time for the developed countries to come out of the fool's road and face the ground reality. The earlier they realise their mistake and come forward to share their proverbial summer ice with the poor nations, relieving them from the torture of continuous winter ice, it would be better for both the conflicting parties as well as for the global economy as a whole. Then only the David-Goliath episode will come to a peaceful end. Otherwise will continue to haunt the relationship of the developed and the developing countries, casting the most ominous shadow over the global economy, and all that it means. Let the darkest hour, just before the dawn, be over as quickly as possible.

The writer is a retired UN official.

A New Turn in Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

Since there is likelihood that the United States would exercise veto power in blocking the resolution at the Security Council, therefore, the proposal of France and Britain, in favour of UN observers' team, merits consideration. The Arab countries should pursue to translate this proposal into action.

IN a dramatic development Egypt, one of the moderate Arab Countries, which entered into peace accord with Israel, has awakened all on a sudden to call upon the members of the Security Council of the United Nations for holding an emergency session following helicopter gunships rocket attacks by Israel in the Gaza Strip. This call was followed by the recall of the Ambassador from Israel by Egypt. This appears to be a new turn in the stalemate situation in the Middle East. The situation is the inevitable consequence of the Israeli indiscriminate unabated attack on the stone throwing Palestinians.

It is also heartening to note that another Arab Country, Jordan, which has border with Israel, decided not to send a new Ambassador to Israel, but both Egypt and Jordan till the writing of this article refrained from severing diplomatic relations with Jewish state. It seems that these two Arab Countries have reservation about severing relations with Israel despite resolutions passed by two summit conferences, the Arab League Summit on 22 October and the OIC Summit on 9 November 2000.

Another significant development is that a good number of Arab countries have requested for an urgent meeting of the Security Council.

The continued violence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and Israel's atrocities against Palestinians prompted the leaders at the OIC Summit to take a firm stand against Israel, which inspired them to stand united in calling for placing United Nations peace keeping forces in the Bank and the Gaza Strip to protect Palestinians. This appears to be

very positive stand taken so far in the OIC Summit, but this stand needs to be pursued vigorously to raise at the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council as well. Although it is likely that any resolution by the Security Council on this issue would be vetoed by the United States of America, therefore, it would perhaps be logical for oil rich Arab countries to consider re-locating their investment in American banks and other organisations to put pressure on the United States to pursue Israel to accept legitimate rights of the Palestinians and a state for them.

This has become all the more necessary in the context of lukewarm attitude of the United States of America for sending UN peace-keeping forces to the disputed occupied Arab territories and non-implementation of OSLO peace agreement Israel signed with PLO.

Meanwhile, France and Britain, main architects for the creation of state of Israel betraying genuine desire of Arab's are in favour of sending UN observers team to the Israeli occupied Arab territories. Since there is likelihood that the United States would exercise veto power in blocking the resolution at the Security Council, therefore, the proposal of France and Britain merits consideration. The Arab Countries should pursue to translate this proposal into action. This appears to be something better than nothing in the existing circumstances.

Yasser Arafat's latest move to cajole Russia to play as an actor in the peace process in the Palestinians-Israelis conflict is a futile exercise. The Russian Federation is not acceptable to its allies in the Eastern Europe as all of these

countries are in the process of entering in the orbit of the only military alliance: NATO and aspiring to become partner in progress with the European Union. Moreover, Russia does not wield influence within CIS (commonwealth of independent States) comprising break away states of the Soviet Union.

However, Russia could play an important role in piloting an agenda in the Security Council for despatching UN peace keeping forces to occupied Arab territories as Russia is one of the permanent members of the Council, which enjoys veto power.

As suggested in my last article Arafat, a pro-western leaning leader, does not enjoy the authority he claims to have in the occupied territories despite the verbal support lavishes on him. He should cultivate leaders of the European Union and some powerful leaders of Arab countries to put pressure on Israel to resolve the dispute of Palestinians-Israelis conflict.

In his connection, it may be repeated that the economic life of the industrially developed countries depends on oil, of which a very large proportion derives from a group of developing countries associated in the organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. The eleven Countries of OPEC supply about 87 per cent of Western Europe's oil and about 80 per cent of Japan's while USA receive about 30 per cent of its requirements from these countries. The oil is possibly the only weapon to manipulate supplies to Western Countries in order to exert pressure indirectly on Israel to evacuate Arab territories to establish an independent State for Palestinians.