

## 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 no doubt 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 ones 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 Guddus  
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

sauntered over to me and said he could let me in if I gave him Taka 200. I refused him bluntly and decided to buy two tickets, one for myself and another for a relative. Then I went over to the counter with a Taka 500 note and asked the children too needed any tickets as well. I was told that they did not.

Then the officials at the counter asked for the passport of the passenger I was seeing off but unfortunately I couldn't produce it since she was already inside checking in at the counter. However, it didn't seem to matter much when they saw the note in my hand and told me that it was okay. This is where the story gets interesting. One of the officials at the counter took my money and asked me to accompany him to the entrance. When I asked for the tickets all he gave me was what looked like a ticket issued to someone else earlier. Moreover, instead of two he just gave me one ticket. I went in with the children, but came out shortly looking for the relative for whom I had paid also. After finding him, we went

back to the counter for his ticket. With a wave of the hand, the same official just told us to go.

I realised that my money was obviously not going into the authorities' coffers but into the pocket of those unscrupulous thugs wearing the official badges. However, remembering the unsavoury reputation of ZIA I did not take any action and just gave up.

Now I ask is there any use fighting this corrupt system? What hope is left for this country?

Dilkash Ahmed  
Gulshan, Dhaka

### Female power

Sir, The two female female political leaders are taxing the citizens with enough power distribution problems since the decade of the 1990s; and now it appears that a third experienced one may be inducted into the local political scene. If former President Ershad continues to remain in the jail (Janata Tower case). There is possibly fourth standby in another party: the capable sister

# 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.

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 entity. All that they wanted was security. Even the 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 separation which had taken a heavy toll of human lives and

property.

Strange, the Muslims learned little from the religious togetherness which may serve as 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.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

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.

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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

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.

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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.

## APEC Summit

# What Message it Carries for Developing Countries?

by AMM Shahabuddin

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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.

If Clinton is so much optimistic and hopeful about the great benefits of globalisation for the poor nations, then why the Seattle session of the WTO, hosted by American Administration, ended in a fiasco due to rowdy demonstrations by young activists, led by some NGOs? Why then in the World Bank/IMF session in Prague early this year had to pull down their shutters one day earlier? President Clinton had earlier, also at APEC Summits, to push his proposals for inclusion of two provisions in the new trade talks, namely, the workers rights and the environmental protection.

**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 conditions was much worse than that of the so-called bonded-labour prevailing in poor countries, and for which the Western countries often shamed 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 a proxy role 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 their carrots to the poor nations.

**When will the G-8 promise be fulfilled?** The poor developing countries have already become disillusioned with 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.

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## 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.

**I**n a dramatic development

of 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 persuade Israel to accept legitimate rights of the Palestinians and a state for them.

It is also heartening to note that another Arab Country, Jordan, which has border with Israel, has awakened all on a sudden to call upon the members of the Security Council 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 indiscretions unabated attack on the stone throwing Palestinians.

This has become all the more necessary in the context of Luke-warm attitude of the United States of America for sending UN peace-keeping forces to the disputed occupied Arab territories.

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 other powerful leaders of Arab countries to put pressure on Israel to resolve the dispute of Palestinians.

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