

UNSC resolution on Palestinian state is welcome *Its implementation awaited with bated breath*

N EARLY five and a half decades too late, the League of Nations' successor the United Nations has approved of the creation of a Palestinian state. Big power endorsement of a Jewish state had been proclaimed as far back as in 1948. In all that time, distrust and rancour between the two communities have deepened -- thanks to the Palestinians being discriminated against through that 1948 handiwork of the big powers.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) in a resolution introduced on Wednesday by none other than the United States of America has endorsed a Palestinian state. The nuance of the word 'endorsement' is rather intriguing, the overture evidently falling short of proclaiming the creation of a Palestinian state.

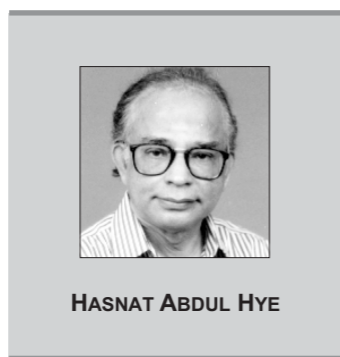
Even so, it has features that mark it out as a positive development in an otherwise hostile Middle Eastern environment. First and foremost, this comes as a historic pronouncement of the UNSC's meaningful involvement in the ME affairs beyond passing pious resolutions only. This paper having consistently advocated a hands-on UN role in the Middle East, as distinguished from a monopolistic one by the US, has reasons to feel modestly vindicated there. The veto powers' complete unanimity of approach to the question as reflected by the latest UNSC resolution must be welcomed but what stands out is the United States' self-inspired piloting of the move in the first place. After years of vetoing UN Mideast resolutions with an unabashed bias towards Israel, the US deems it fit now to pull the weight of the UNSC behind the task of conflict resolution in the Middle East. Indirectly, this is an admission of failure on the part of the US, albeit based on a pragmatic realisation that howsoever powerful she might be, the Israeli-Palestinian impasse cannot be resolved by her alone. On the other hand, it also implies that the inherent capacity of the US to clinch a change for the better is great. And still better would be the US' role in world affairs if she can bring herself to believe that much of the international terrorism the West is fighting today is rooted in the ME imbroglio.

Tactically one might think the US could have agreed to a Palestinian state -- the peace accords she had brokered for the Palestinians and the Israelis earlier on envisaging autonomy for the former only -- to curry favour with the Arabs prior to launching an attack on Iraq. If that proves to be the case, then she won't carry conviction with her latest overture in the UNSC seemingly championing a separate state for the Palestinians.

Violence in the Middle East is spiraling out of control. Ariel Sharon has always believed in killing the Palestinians off to clear the field for the Israelis to enter. His atrocities must be stopped by the US at once. If this does not happen, there would be grounds to think Sharon is being given time to carry out his extermination mission in the classical style of Hitler or Milosevic. The US Vice President Dick Cheney is in the area and special envoy Anthony Zinni is headed for it. It is time the US stepped in to chasten Sharon once and for all. Rather than carrying out charades of study or fact finding missions, the US better play a genuine role in bringing Sharon to senses; for, the Palestinians are bleeding far too much for any good to Tel Aviv.

Both the entities living in peace within recognised borders, which the UNSC resolution seeks to ensure will remain a distant dream unless there is a genuine change of heart in the US and a corresponding sea change in the attitude of Tel Aviv. So long as Sharon refuses to vacate the territories Israel had occupied after the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict, and Tel Aviv does not stop receiving the US high tech military support, there cannot be any peace in the Middle East. Saudi Prince's peace formula has the potential to provide a breakthrough there.

War and peace



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

SOUTH Asia has the unenviable distinction of having three major hot spots. The civil war in Sri Lanka has racked the island country for two decades ravaging its economy and pulverising its society. Nearly eighty thousand people have been killed in the ferocious guerrilla war where no holds are barred. Among the casualties are one president of Sri Lanka, one former prime minister of India and one eye of the present president. The war has intensified the divide between the ethnic Sri Lankans who are in the majority and represent the ruling authority and the minority Tamils who are waging this guerrilla war for Eelam, independence. The rebel leader Prabhakaran is arguably the most shadowy leader in the world today and his ruthless pursuit of the guerrilla war has amazed the government forces and the outside world. Side by side, the total dedication to the cause of insurgency and willingness to lay down lives of the Tamil fighters have kept the longstanding war raging with full fury taking a heavy toll of life. Civil rights violations caused by both sides are numerous and have become a routine. As is expected, the scale of these violations weighs heavily on the government side. The country as a whole has suffered immensely in terms of social cohesion and economic growth. But for the civil war Sri Lanka would have graduated into the category of emerging tigers long ago. But as elsewhere, politics has taken command at the expense of social development.

Up in the north two sub-

continental neighbours, India and Pakistan, are locked in a bloody conflict indirectly over dispute regarding Kashmir. Neither country has accepted the present division of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, India claiming the whole of it and Pakistan supporting the right of self-determination of the Kashmiris. Cross-border violence has not only destabilised the normal life of people on the Indian side with frequent allegations of human rights violation but also embittered relation between the

ing military preparedness by both countries. The development of nuclear weapons missiles had their origin in this dangerous dispute and now threatens annihilation of civilians over a large swathe in both countries if war starts and goes out of control. Needless to say, the armed conflict in Kashmir has diverted scarce resources to unnecessary and unproductive defence expenditures at the cost of socio-economic development in the two countries. The tense relation has also spilled over in other

state of emergency and called in Army. With this the bloody guerrilla war has now reached a new phase and perhaps the peak. Meanwhile, the country continues to suffer economically, socially and politically. The fledgling democracy is gasping for breath and the impoverished people are being further marginalised. The seeds of distrust sown by the guerrilla war have divided the society placing it precariously on the edge. According to a prominent journalist (C K Lal) even the intelligentsia are

Prabhakaran almost extended an olive branch taking advantage of the assumption of office by the new premier belonging to the opposition party. Prabhakaran showed signs of concession declaring that their goal was neither terrorism nor separatism. The new premier Wickremasinghe, keen to bring an end to the bloody conflict, invited the Norwegians to have another go at peacemaking through mediation. The Norwegians brokered a sort of truce between the two sides, which has now formalised

provide for an institutional mechanism to implement and monitor the progress in the same. To carry forward the process and reach formal agreements on specific issues the involvement of big power(s) and the UN is essential. Due to the interest taken under Clinton administration the second phase in the peace process made some progress, though not very smoothly. The Bush administration put paid to this ongoing 'implementation' phase with consequent aggravation in the conflict. While Sharon is hostile to Oslo Accord, Bush administration seems to be ambivalent to its implementation particularly after the victory in Afghanistan. The lesson of this experience is that while a neutral country like Norway has to mediate and broker a peace agreement in broad terms the specifics must be negotiated through the coaxing and cajoling efforts of a big power like America. Designating a side as terrorist is misleading, particularly when it is fighting for autonomy and freedom targeting the army as the opponent. For settlement of the civil and guerrilla wars in Sri Lanka, Kashmir and in Nepal the Oslo Accord promises to be a model. It should be accepted as such by the parties in the conflict and then move into the implementation stage with the help of America (or European Union) and the UN. If bilateralism works nothing is more welcome and satisfactory. If it fails Norway-America-European Union-UN peace axis should be given serious consideration by both the adversaries and the peacemakers. The alternative is continuing bloodshed and misery for the people of the countries concerned and violence spilling over in a larger area. Branding such violence as terrorism is no solution to the problem.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

For settlement of the civil and guerrilla wars in Sri Lanka, Kashmir and in Nepal the Oslo Accord promises to be a model. It should be accepted as such by the parties in the conflict and then move into the implementation stage with the help of America (or European Union) and the UN. If bilateralism works nothing is more welcome and satisfactory. If it fails Norway-America-European Union-UN peace axis should be given serious consideration by both the adversaries and the peacemakers. The alternative is continuing bloodshed and misery for the people of the countries concerned and violence spilling over in a larger area. Branding such violence as terrorism is no solution to the problem.

two arch-enemies. India accuses Pakistan of harbouring, training and arming the militants while Pakistan considers the militancy as the home-grown struggle for freedom. Identification of Kashmir's freedom struggle as the core issue by Pakistan has blocked progress on all other fronts in their bilateral relations as India considers interference of Pakistan as the main cause for the guerrilla war in Jammu and Kashmir. After the suicide attack in the Indian parliament there has been mobilisation of army on war footing by both countries. At present eight million members of the armies of the two countries are dug in along the entire border in an eyeball to eyeball confrontation. It is a powder keg with a very short fuse and a cataclysmic clash can take place at any moment due to miscalculation or fresh provocation. The dispute over Kashmir has vitiated the bilateral relation between the two countries since their birth in 1947. The continuing tension and conflict have involved heavy defence expenditure and escalat-

areas like regional cooperation through SAARC. The neighbours of the two countries are also apprehensive of the fall-out of a nuclear war if it breaks out. Kashmir is a problem for the entire region and because of nuclear weapons, for the world at large.

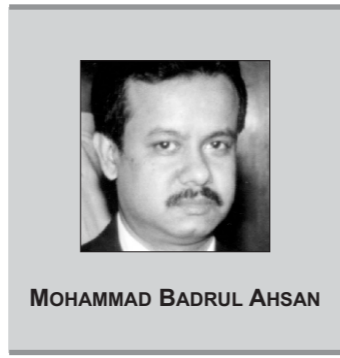
In Nepal an incipient radical movement has now grown into a formidable guerrilla campaign. The Maoist underground force has become so powerful and confident that they attack not only at night but in broad daylight also, killing indiscriminately both civilians and armed elements of the government. As in a few isolated pockets in the world, the Maoists in Nepal are still following the romantic idyll of a just and fair society free from all exploitation. As elsewhere, they, too, think that end justifies the means. The death and destruction wreaked upon the country in cold blood are part of their strategy of armed struggle. Nepalese police force proved no match to the savage attacks. When the government started losing control over an increasing area the king declared

divided over which side to support. In the emergency the democratic political process is being undermined and side tracked. The future of Nepal looks grim and uncertain in all respects.

To the outside world the mini wars in South Asia meant nothing more than mere footnotes in the larger saga of current affairs. No attempt was made either by a big power or an international agency like the UN to diffuse the situation and restore normalcy. They went along with the stand taken by some countries, e.g. India, that the problems were internal or bilateral and did not lend themselves to external mediation. After twenty years of bloody war and eighty thousand dead in Sri Lanka the only step taken by America was to include the Tamil guerrillas in the list of terrorists. About the same time Norway tried to mediate in the dispute and sought to broker a peace. The peace initiative floundered on mistrust and suspicion on two sides, particularly lukewarm interest shown by the government. But last November the rebel leader

the cease-fire offered earlier by the Tamil Tigers. They now hope that a cease-fire agreement will be reached formally by the two sides. The only uncertainty is the attitude by the Sri Lankan president who has expressed reservation about the cease-fire agreement. Distrust and suspicion over the real motive of the Tigers is also holding the army from going all the way in responding. Be that as it may, the silver lining is the peace initiative and mediation of Norway, an outsider who has no axe to grind. The small Nordic country has already established its credentials as a mediator and peace broker in the case of Palestine-Israeli conflict. The war of attrition in Palestine continues due to the arrogance and ruthlessness of the Israelis but a basis for peaceful settlement has been put in place by the Oslo Accord. Being informal and non-binding the Accord does not have adequate inherent strength to propel the peace process forward. More specifically, apart from general outline of the process the Accord does not

The Renaissance Man



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

I N the first or second meeting with him, he would tell you with unflinching conviction that he became a father without ever having to get married. Then he would readily explain before you misunderstood him that his father had died leaving behind eight children, seven of whom were raised by him. His face would glow with the smile of someone who has just tricked you, his hand circling over his chin as if winding down an imaginary goatee.

By the third encounter he would give away another secret. His father was a selfish man, who had lived only for himself. His beady eyes would radiate sorrow like steam from a heat engine, as he would narrate the mistakes of his father that still haunted his family. He resents that the father, who was an honest man, brought too many mouths into this world without having the means to feed them.

He talks like a victim, one who has been licking the wounds of life for too long, his face expanding and shrinking in the treatment of grief that hardened his soul. He

wishes that his father had lived to see how the same people, who received free treatment from him, grumbled after his death that in the matters of the world their benevolent doctor was not wise at all.

What is a father (?) he would ask you, if life has travelled to Earth inside meteorites blasted into space by cosmic impacts. Men make too much out of their relationships, which are no more than bubbles inside blips. Father gives the seed of life, the progenitor who

unwed sisters, and two brothers still unprepared for life, he is tugging at the burden, which his father couldn't lift.

Poverty and privation made a rude entry into the house when his father lost his job for doing an autopsy that upset powerful people. All eight children and their parents were suddenly struggling as needs prowled amongst them like beasts of prey. He once went to Eid prayer wearing the physician's apron that belonged to his father,

was left off by that fallen soldier.

It was an irony that he aspired to live in the wilderness and altered state of mind inspired by the daze of dope, alcohol and sophistic arguments. In reality, life captured him in the bizarre mesh of love and emotions, his footloose mind trapped in the illusions of blood and flesh. A roaring engine had suddenly stalled, a nimble wind frozen in its flight.

Then the turn for his mother who had fallen mentally ill one day at

about her death with tears waiting to explode in the corners of his eyes; his lips trembling like the doors of a wobbling house, which is ready to fall apart.

He would tell you that he was born in a family of victims, his father of his honesty, his mother of her innocence, and his siblings of their luckless upbringing. But he put himself under a class apart, one who has been the victim of his destiny like a spider caught in its own web. He hates his condition,

love, it becomes the face of hell on earth. Marriage, he professed, was nothing but legalised persecution of one person by another, a bipolar torture chamber for both husband and wife.

He had also lost faith in lots of other things. Vice, he said, was the virtue of the strong, character being a mask to hide the face of an opportunist. Honesty he despised most, which was the pride of his father that felled the family. Courtesy, he said, was the fear of reprisal if one humiliated others. Greed was to the soul what air was to the body, and ambition was opportunity cost of moral bliss. He never believed in god and life after death, his concentration being on this one life to live.

If you can get him high on dope or drink, and if it is a breezy evening or a rainy night, he might open up to tell you everything about what he missed in one life. His glassy eyes would shine in the reflection of his soul, glazed over by the passion of a sailor who is steering his ship through the fogs on a ruffled sea.

He would rub his hand over his chin like an Aladdin rubbing his magic lamp and a smile would appear soon on his face like the genie. With a few more drinks or puffs of smoke, that genie would change into something else. It would look like someone who had left him ages ago because his father was an honest man, and he had to raise seven children for him.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

What is a father (?) he would ask you, if life has travelled to Earth inside meteorites blasted into space by cosmic impacts. Men make too much out of their relationships, which are no more than bubbles inside blips. Father gives the seed of life, the progenitor who replicates his own futility in the destiny of his progeny. But why should the seed obligate the plant if it has to disappear once the plant has grown?

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He tells that according to Charles Dickens, papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prisms are all very good words, which give pretty forms to the lips. He grew up arguing with his papa, his lips forever formed in war-like readiness to fight his father who, like a spirit, entered his body since his death. His life is nothing but an extension of his father's, its only purpose being the completion of what his father left unfinished. With three

because the family couldn't afford new clothes and his old clothes were frayed and tattered. To this day, he remembers that white peace of cloth that was the last relic of his lost innocence.

Soon his father died like an insect trapped inside its own cocoon, his pride of honesty rinsed to the last drop by the ugly hands of fate. His father died shortly afterwards, wrecked within the vaunted shell of his honesty and surrounded by a family that looked like a disaster. That is when the father in the son arose from the hollowed chest of his dead father, and picked up the fight from where it

sundown when a hot wind blew over her while passing under a Banyan tree. His father was still alive when it happened. Towards the end, she would be confined to bed for months until bedsores wore away her rotting flesh, her life ebbing slowly under his eyes as he watched her suffer in pain.

His mother asked him to get married without waiting like a dwarf to reach the elusive moon. He must find a girl and settle down in life with her, was her last wish. The source of his life then depleted one midnight in her sleep, fading like a picture that has been copied many times from its copies. He would talk

past, present and future, his emotions singed in the fire of grief, his fate sealed in the tragedy of recurrent sorrows.

The whole world insisted that he needed a wife who could stand by him in his critical times. His brothers, sisters, friends, colleagues, and even the barber who cuts his hair told him that life was a structure that stood firmer if erected on four legs of a married couple than two legs of a single life. The persuasion bothered him for some time until he grew impervious to the idea of marriage. When man and woman enter wedlock without

OPINION

Law, order and pollution

OMAR KHASRU

I N the last three election cycles two parties succeeded each other. Informed and enlightened, persons can form their own opinion about the shortcomings, and there is a whole slew, and virtues, and there is but a shred or smidgen of it, of the two major parties. The simple, common, everyday decent people are sick and tired of the claims and counter claims, blames and counter blames, petty bickering and shady dealings, prevarication and fabrication, finger pointing and crummy handling of the state of affairs by the two parties. People were upset at the last government, much of which was vented in the Awami election debacle. People voted against a party that

represented widespread corruption and unremitting patronage of terrorism by party godfathers with the active support and corroboration from the highest level of the government. People voted for a better day, for improved law and order, safe streets and secured home, along with fresh air and less pollution, a relief from the veritable gas chamber that Dhaka has become.

The hodgepodge alliance led by BNP has so far been a major disappointment. It has failed to mitigate main concerns of the people, despite iron clad election pledges and promises. Rather than improving the law and order situation, there seems to have been a marked deterioration. The current Home Minister sounds more and more like his previous

counterpart. His incessant claim of the improvement of law and order to a tolerable level may be in his fancy imagination and syrupy semantics and those of his underlings. But to most objective and impartial observers and, more importantly, to the victims of everyday terror, injustice and crime, the claim sounds hollow. There are innumerable and interminable instances of vicious, savage, inhuman and major crime, reported in the pages of the news dailies. The newspapers are printing the failings and foibles, and the predictions and propensities to talk and puny little accomplishment of the current regime with plenty of gusto, as they should. The columnists are having a dreamy heyday. The coverage of similar misrule, mis-

carriage of justice and criminal proclivities of the previous regime was muted and tepid. The current carefree, unfettered, all out, no holds bar coverage should be the norm in a democracy. The party in power must be held accountable.

The recent photograph in Chittagong, of three top-notch terrorists hobnobbing with Ministers, including the Deputy Home Minister (DHM), published in a section of the press, distinctly implying a nexus between criminals and politicians, was shocking but not surprising. The unholy alliance among criminals, cops and politicians has been an open secret and took an endemic proportion during the last regime. The current regime seems to be maintaining the continuity. The visceral and cursory reaction of the DHM,

who may or may not have been aware of their presence, was an order to arrest the terrorists pronto. A prominent Chittagong ruling party leader described the same three terrorists as sincere, dedicated, selfless workers of BNP, who supposedly suffered unjustly during the previous regime. What do you think will be the outcome of the conflicting signals from two prominent BNP leaders? The best guess is the terrorists will remain free to roam around; the news and the memory of the embarrassing incident will fade as new outrageous, incongruous and contemptible items overtake the old news. The reported minority persecution has been a shameful saga, irrespective of the scale and extent of victimization, something that the

Home Minister tried to minimize and obfuscate. The spate of murder, kidnap, rape and murder or suicide of young girls, especially that of Mahima, added to rampant extortion and terrorism, makes claims of law and order betterment a mockery and a charade that nobody in right mind or clear conscience buys into.

Dhaka city was largely air pollution free for a couple of days during the welcome and merciful strike by the two stroke engine baby taxis and tempos. People suffered long delays and cumbersome commute but we endured because the haze of air pollution had dissipated and you could actually get a glimpse of the blue sky through the unplanned monstrous high-rise skyscrapers. Traffic jam had shown a marked

improvement. But alas, the pollution-free, environmental bliss was short-lived. The baby taxis and tempos were soon back. The over 20-year-old trucks and buses are back with a fresh coat of colorful crude paint and phony fitness sticker. Air pollution and intractable traffic jam in the city, if anything, are worse than before. There seems to have been a greater influx of mostly outdated, outmoded, dark smoke belching vehicles on the streets. All the promises of banning old trucks and buses, getting rid of two stroke engines and replacing leaded gasoline and diesel engines with natural gas powered vehicles have fallen by the wayside, replaced by promises of distant future enforcement.

This government has been

voted in overwhelmingly to perform certain basic functions and alleviate the suffering of the common people. Other than outlawing the use of polythene, the rest have been shelved or unfinished, while the string of unfulfilled promises grow longer by the day. If the regime does not learn from history, it will be condemned to the fate of Awami League in the next election. But, as we all know, the lesson from history is that we never learn any lesson from history. The credo seems to be, 'live for today, grab all you can, while you can, disregard tomorrow and yearning of the people.' The more things change the more they remain the same. Life goes on torturously, haltingly, depressingly and distressingly, and the band plays on merrily and boisterously.