

# War ends for the time being

## The peace activists must initiate peace building

THE siege on Yasser Arafat, confined to his room in Ramallah for weeks, has been withdrawn but it's hardly the end of the war. Most of the field reports filed from the area say that the roots of violence go much deeper than what may be uprooted by short term US brokered deals. Hate as we might feel to say reigns. Peace is still only a hope and one hopes all the parties involved Israel, Palestine and the US really see that peace with dignity will actually benefit them all.

One lesson that has been learnt from the last violent episode is that the tolerance threshold for Israeli mayhem by the western world is much higher than thought before and this fact has to be factored in now in all future negotiations. The surrendered six Palestinians, all except one members of the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and another, a PLO operative who has been accused in the arms import deal, from Iran to Palestine, will be tried in Israel under some degree of international observation. But instead of rage, Palestinians must now be realists. The people of Palestine should be the ones to decide how and to what degree they are ready to travel to secure peace. At least this phase of peace.

Sadly, anger and hate always been more successful in the region and only voices of death and fire are heard properly. The PFLP had recently regained a lot of its clout after it killed the Israeli tourism minister, and the outfit itself discards the Oslo accord. On the other hand, the Jenin operations have shown how far the Israelis are ready to go to achieve their objectives. But after the trial begins, fresh batch of suicide bombers will be ready and another round may begin.

Conventional approaches to peace will not work in Palestine and the older leadership in Israel, Palestine and Washington must display its capacity to think fresh and daring. To find peace, the 'impossible' thoughts of peace activists must now be given a chance. The words of the peace activists in Israel in particular now deserve to be heard.

Power unfortunately always resides with the unreasonable and the believer in force. Unless that force is snatched away and given to those who believe in the common sense of a just peace and neither in "security above all" nor "revenge for the past", the dead children of Jenin will be the permanent and the only memory possible.

## Whither Press freedom?

### Violence rages on for the public watchdog

MAY 3 was observed as World Press Freedom Day in Dhaka by drawing attention to the problem of reporting facts that are unpopular with various power constructs including the state. The meeting organised by a media outfit presented an audit of media violence. The focus was on security of journalists and various speakers including those from outside Dhaka described their personal experiences. The meeting also heard from Tipu Sultan and Prabir Sarker, the two most well known victims of physical violence, for whom the media stood up unitedly and the issue gained wide publicity.

But speakers also pointed out that violence against media practitioners was not an isolated issue and it's linked to the matter of managing the state. It was also stated that perpetrators include the socially powerful, the criminal, the administration and the affected politicians. It was aptly reiterated that journalism is a profession that is always dangerous and International Labour Organization (ILO) has recognized this fact officially. It's against this background that we must look at the national context.

In Bangladesh, incidences of violence against and intimidation of media is increasing. While some cases do get more publicity than others, most are swept away by a variety of reasons including lack of accurate information and a sense of impunity of the ruthless powerful. Many now feel that to get justice one must also be properly connected.

But to offset that feeling it's important that we recognize the role of media and its function in institution building. Providing security will not happen in isolation, but as the watchdog of the people and as reporter of national governance media has extra responsibility with which has come this extra burden and threat, hence the need of protection.

Violence will not end by making appeals to the authorities who initiate, condone and encourage such acts in many cases. It's the people who can't remain passive in such circumstances anymore. The media and the public must realize their mutual needs and forge unity at all levels and make the world safe for each other.

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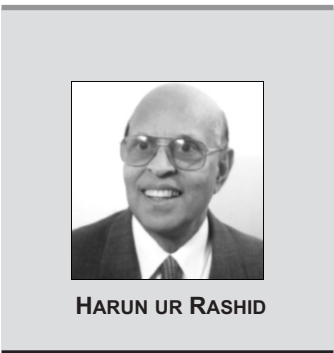
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# Israel's defiance of UN decision: Ominous implications



ISRAEL has been successful in derailing the UN Fact-Finding Mission to the Middle East. The UN Secretary General failed to receive Israel's co-operation to the UN Fact-Finding Mission led by former President of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari. The Mission and its members were stuck in Geneva for days and were not able to proceed to the Middle East.

The UN Security Council in its unanimous decision of 15-members approved the Fact-Finding Mission (not investigative mission) to uncover truth as to what occurred in the Palestine refugee camps in Jenin in the West Bank. Israel first agreed to the visit of the UN Mission and its Foreign Minister Peres said that there was nothing to hide. Now Israel has refused to let the Mission to do the job. There is a growing speculation that Israel has realised that the UN Mission would be able to uncover truth which Israel is trying to hide from the world.

Amnesty International in its preliminary report suggested gross violations of humanitarian law by Israel in Jenin. The other observers from Europe have expressed deep shock at what happened to the civilian population by Israel's military intervention. Palestinians called it a massacre of civilians. No civilians should be killed under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and if any state does, its leaders may be liable to charge of war crimes.

Israel wanted to pick and choose the witnesses before the team.

Third, Israel wanted the acts of Palestinian suicide bombers to be a part of the mandate of the UN Mission. Israel is fully aware that the mandate of the Council was very specific as to what occurred in the refugee camp in Jenin.

What does Israel's conduct signify?

The UN Secretary General did what he could do to implement the

under the Charter including the decision of the Security Council. Article 6 states that a member of the UN which has persistently violated the international co-operation (in breaches of peace) contained in the Charter may be expelled from the UN. South Africa was debarred in attending the UN General Assembly during apartheid era for its violation of UN resolutions.

Israel appears to have set a very dangerous precedent under inter-

cil's resolution in the way as Israel did.

Israel's defiance to the UN will have significant implications. It is likely to alienate the Arab people because of practice of double-standard policy towards Israel by big powers. It will put to severe tests the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Kuwait to contain the seething sentiment at what ordinary people in the Arab world will perceive half-hearted attempt of the

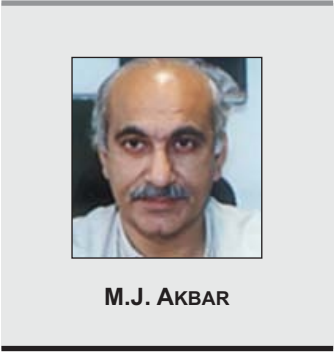
differently from Israel. Furthermore former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's arguments before The Hague Tribunal of double-standard of international community towards his regime will appear to be buttressed by Israel's defiance to the UN.

The motive of war on terrorism is likely to be questioned in the Arab world by Israel's conduct. Israel has demonstrated that it cares less of the views of international community because it has possessed superior arms including nuclear weapons in the region. Israel is behaving like a "spoilt child" without fear of international punishment or sanctions. The orientation of greater co-operation in a global society is likely to be replaced by international anarchy if Israel's conduct is followed by other states.

The UN is the most visible element in securing a stable world order. Its success depends on co-operative interaction among states including respect and observance of its decisions. If a state, such as Israel, can flout its decision, it not only undermines the confidence on the UN but also may lead to the "law of the jungle" in the post-cold war era. The UN stands as a symbol of hope and peace for international community and regrettably Israel seems to attack its very edifice on which it stands.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

## Dilli dur ast



WHICH of the two is funnier: a government flying off the handle, or an Opposition soaring away on a flight of fancy? The colour of such humour is black, of course; but then we are no longer in control of our choice of entertainment. We have to live with what we have.

I am completely baffled by the inability of governments to appreciate a lesson as old as fable and as new as fact: you cannot put the genie back in the bottle. You cannot put a monster into political play when you need it and then expect it to go back obediently to bed when you need to reappear with your respectable mask. You cannot get away with deception either. Facts refuse to change when they become inconvenient. Moreover, the days when facts could be buried under various forms of pressure are over. I am not talking about a demarche from the European Union here; India has never lived behind any curtain, iron or bamboo, or indeed that horrifying curtain of European collusion and silence behind which the rape (the word is not a metaphor) of Bosnia continued for years before the Americans intervened. India is a democracy in fact and spirit. It has media and civil institutions that rise to meet the challenge of oppression, using the power of honesty and conscience to shake the power of authority. A Gujarat awakens that conscience

and suddenly even a dormant government institution on human rights discovers a soul. A retired police officer like Julio Ribeiro uses the weight of his reputation, the authority of his contribution to the nation's fight against terrorism in Punjab to draw a line in Gujarat. NGOs move in to serve the afflicted and speak the truth that is being denied by ministers. The courts wait to lend their credibility to the cause of civilised values. The multiple

television channel takes its own decision about how to handle a developing story. If there is one thing that media people guard with extreme jealousy, it is their independence, and this includes independence within their own tribe as well. But media has to be sensitive to both the street as well as its own values. Frankly, there is no daily demand on the conscience of a mediaperson, which is why you might get the impression so often

are discussing maladministration, or power used for malice and deliberate, wanton terror. We are talking about state terrorism.

If the BJP does not remove Narendra Modi from Gujarat, then Narendra Modi will remove the BJP from Delhi. Indians, of all hues and religions, may at times get swayed by the powerful hypnotism of communal hatred, but India will never elect a government that permits the use of hate as policy.

The Congress response to this

of change were blowing even through the CII, so everybody please take note and begin practising genuflections. After hearing the speech someone commented that the CII had been renamed the AICC, but we can ignore once again such disobedient humour.

We noted at the beginning of this column that no one had told Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee that you cannot put the genie back in the bottle. But he did know another proverb, which he conveyed to

party is in familiar disarray. The most high-profile Congress MP from Andhra Pradesh, T. Subirami Reddy, who has just been rewarded by Sonia Gandhi with a Rajya Sabha ticket, has his own definition of a political party. For him a political party is something that happens at a five-star hotel. So where are the 272 Lok Sabha seats going to come from that will make Sonia Gandhi the next Prime Minister of India?

The BJP has recognised its weakness in Uttar Pradesh and done something about it. It has overruled its own regional leaders and come to terms with Mayawati. If this alliance holds in a general election, which of course is not certain at all, both will benefit. Instead of building her own alliances in UP, Sonia Gandhi chose to spurn the opportunity offered by Mulayam Singh Yadav. It is possible that her new political advisers have told Sonia Gandhi will win in UP; and maybe such advice fetches rewards.

You can get serious indigestion if you stuff yourself with khiyali pulao. Anyone in Lucknow will be able to explain what that means, if Mrs Sonia Gandhi cannot understand this simple Hindustani.

I suppose switching to a foreign language like Persian is not much help either, but there is another saying in Persian that might be relevant: Dilli dur ast.

The Congress can come to power in the next elections. The BJP is doing its best to ensure that. But for it to happen, the Congress has to get back to the harsher world of reality, rebuild its political links across the space it has lost among its traditional voters of the north, work hard to protect what it has achieved in its own states, and believe that it is a long, hard and bitter road ahead to power. Riding a high horse takes you nowhere very fast.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

### "Mir Zafar, the Uzbek and we"

This is in reference to Mr Tintin's comment on my letter.

I am in full agreement with the Transparency International report that, stands high (!) above all the other countries in the world from the viewpoint of widespread corruption. I accepted that report in shame, with my face down. But at that time I saw some Bangladeshis, who were staunch opponents of the then government, rejoiced over that report. In my view, they are the traitors.

I do not agree with the FEER report that Bangladesh is a cocoon of terror. In one place the report says, "...The overseas community, while concerned about increased violence, also seems to downplay the threat. ..." In a very short stay as only for three days, the FEER reporter could unearth the cocoon of terror in Bangladesh, which, the overseas communities, who reside in this country, cannot even smell!

We must stomach healthy criticism, but not the criticism based on false assumptions. Even if the report has some basis, then we should be ashamed, horrified and on our guard, not delighted.

The extremist evangelical Christian organisations in the USA enjoy more public support in that country

than the public supports now being enjoyed by the Jamaat-e-Islami party in Bangladesh. It does not mean that the USA has turned into a cocoon of terror.

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