

BOTTOM LINE

Military action against Libya



THE UK, US and France, on March 19, attacked Libyan leader Col. Muammar Gaddafi's forces in the

held cities of Benghazi and Tobruk. The resolution was sponsored by Lebanon on behalf of Arab League, a member of the Security Council. There were 10 votes in favour, (Bosnia Herzegovina, Colombia, Gabon, Lebanon, Nigeria, Portugal, South Africa, the US, UK and France), no votes against, and five abstentions, including veto-wielding China and Russia as well as Brazil, Germany and India.

On March 19, France hosted what it called a "decisive" summit with the European Union, Arab League and African Union, as well as UN chief Ban Ki-moon, on taking UN-sanctioned military action in Libya. France's Ambassador to the UN, Gerard Araud, said he expected military intervention within hours of the summit.

The UN Security Council resolution is a victory for the rebels and France, which, became the first country to recognise -- on March 10 -- the rebel leadership in the eastern city of Benghazi, and said that it would exchange ambassadors with the Libyan National Council

The military operation in Libya is different from that undertaken in Iraq in the following ways:

- The UN resolution was sponsored by Lebanon on behalf of the 22-member Arab League. Earlier, the Arab League suspended Libya from the organisation, which is unprecedented in the history of the Arab League;
- It is authorised by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which relates action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of peace and acts of aggression. No such resolution was adopted for the Iraqi war;

first action to enforce a UN-mandated no-fly zone.

Pentagon officials say the US and the UK have fired more than 110 missiles, while French planes struck pro-Gaddafi forces attacking rebel-held Benghazi. Missiles struck air defence sites in the capital, Tripoli, and Misrata.

Col. Gaddafi has vowed retaliation and said he will open arms depots to the people to defend Libya.

The UN Security Council resolution (number 1973) was adopted on March 17, authorising military intervention to protect civilians in Benghazi, the rebels' headquarters, from the advancing columns of Libyan forces loyal to the Libyan leader in response to the blood-curdling threat by Col. Gadhafi to the rebels.

The UN resolution demanded an "immediate ceasefire," but most importantly it authorised nations "to take all necessary measures ... to protect civilians ... and civilian populated areas ... including Benghazi."

"All necessary measures" were approved to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya and protect the civilian population. They are the key words. They amount to a mandate for bombing runs to destroy tanks and artillery bearing down on the rebel-



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- The support of the Arab League for military action has provided the Western powers enough justification for military operations which, according to them, are necessary, legal and right;
- All member of the UN including Bangladesh are obliged to join in affording mutual assistance in carrying out the measures

decided by the Security Council (Article 49 read with Article 25 of the UN Charter). So far Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Qatar, Spain, and Sweden have decided to join the military action. Warplanes from one or two Arab countries are expected to join the military operations in a symbolic,

but important, effort to deny Col. Gaddafi the claim that he is under attack by Western powers. Egypt is shipping small arms and ammunition to the Libyan rebels, The Wall Street Journal reported.

In Benghazi, the eastern city where the Libyan uprising was born, joyous residents thronged the main square, cheering the protection of a Western-led air armada capable of wreaking immense destruction on the Libyan forces.

But shortly after the United Nations resolution was passed, Tripoli executed a remarkable about-face on March 18, saying it would call an "immediate ceasefire and the stoppage of all military operations" against the rebels because, as a UN member, it is "obliged to accept" Security Council resolutions." The announcement came from the Foreign Minister of Libya Moussa Koussa.

However, the next day, a Libyan government spokesman called the resolution illegal as the UN had no right to intervene in its internal matter and, obviously, the ceasefire declared by the Gaddafi regime did not hold on the ground. Pro-Gaddafi forces attacked Benghazi despite declaring a ceasefire a day earlier. Reports from the city said that government tanks and artillery had bombarded the city and there was fighting around the university.

US President Barack Obama, who has talked about a no-fly zone for several weeks, said: "We cannot stand idly by when a tyrant tells his people there will be no mercy."

Col. Gaddafi warned: "Any foreign military act against Libya will expose all air and maritime traffic in the Mediterranean Sea to danger

and civilian and military facilities will become targets of Libya's counterattack."

But the Libyan air force is reportedly aging, ill-maintained and no match for modern warplanes. The last time Col. Gaddafi sent a pair of his fighters against a U.S. naval battle group -- in 1986 -- they were shot down before even coming close to the U.S. warships.

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All across the Arab world, simmering unrest has bubbled into uprisings, sometimes met with violence by existing regimes. In Yemen as well as Bahrain, government crackdowns have left protesters dead in recent days, although nowhere has the scale of violence matched the brutality of the Libyan regime's response.

It may be recalled that in 2005, at the UN World Summit, more than 150 heads of state and government unanimously adopted a declaration on the responsibility to protect civilian population of a state by international collective action from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, if that state is unable or unwilling to protect its civilians or worse, as in the case of Libya, if that state is the author of such criminality. The resolution of military action against Libya is to protect the civilians and aims at global justice.

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

A Nobel laureate does not retire

ATIQUUL HUQUE CHOWDHURY

WHAT an amazing country Selukus!" From my school days I used to hear from my elders about this remark of Alexander the Great to one of his generals. His comment has been pervading my thoughts for the last several months centering round a quite negative situation prevailing in our country regarding Nobel Laureate Prof. Yunus. This admirable international personality is being misunderstood, maligned and insulted in his country. This is extremely unfortunate and painful.

As days pass, it is becoming absolutely clear that the jealousy, vengefulness and anger that have been accumulated, not in the minds of the common people but in some high-ups, burst forth all on a sudden just after the telecast of a report by a Norwegian reporter in a Norwegian TV channel. It is as if some of us had been waiting for a long time for this opportunity and, at long last, when the opportune moment arrived, then shells started hitting a great global personality one after another. The cat is out of the bag and it is clear as daylight what was hiding inside.

There is no denying that Prof. Yunus' social business model has attracted youths to academics and businessmen to governments in different countries. According to world leaders, the social business concept of Dr. Yunus can help deal with important issues like education, habitation, health and food. Dr. Monmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, while inviting Dr. Yunus to deliver his historic speech in a joint session of the Indian Parliament said: "Dr. Yunus is truly an exceptional human being who

has revolutionised the idea of micro-credit and made it accessible to the poorest of the poor."

If reputed psychiatrists Frued or Elis were alive today, one would have liked to know their considered opinion about Dr. Yunus' case. If anyone from Bangladesh seeks an opinion from any famous foreign psychologist as to why Prof. Yunus is being maligned by some quarters in this way in his own country, and if that psychologist offers any positive comment on Prof. Yunus, then both the parties would be considered part of an international imperialistic conspiracy.

The most unfortunate side of the story is that even after the government of Norway had declared that no corruption was involved in the transfer of funds by Prof. Yunus, accusations of corruption have

thirty years, not for his own benefit but for the welfare of the poor of this country in particular and the world at large, be requested to stay as a guide, philosopher and friend of the Grameen Bank as its chairman? Isn't he the founder of Grameen? If this man is guilty of corruption and misappropriating money, the matter should be investigated and a White Paper should be issued on this.

The people of the country have the right to know how many poor women have committed suicide for not being able to repay Grameen's loan in time. Who are they? Where did they live? Without any proper statistical evidence, no one will believe in emotion and sentiments in this age of information technology.

In future, no one in this country, who has the ill luck of becoming a Nobel laureate, will be willing to accept the Nobel Prize

fearing that he/she might be condemned and maligned in his/her own country.

Finally, it is the earnest wish of the neutral citizens of Bangladesh that institutional or political view should not be the reason to treat the Grameen Bank in this way. It is not the property of any person or a particular government. It is a national property, and its preservation is the responsibility of all national parties and governments. This is absolutely necessary today, when Prof. Yunus is alive, and also when he will be no more with us.

The word "ex" cannot be inserted before a Nobel laureate's title; he does not retire or go on LPR. He serves his country and the world till his last breath.

The writer is a playwright and a media personality.

1898 Lepers Act needs to be repealed

MARTIN ADHIKARY

PEOPLE affected by leprosy have always been alienated from the mainstream everywhere in the world since time immemorial. Literature, films, arts, songs all depicted this alienation and stigma in all human civilisations. In the Indian sub-continent the segregating Lepers Act 1898 was passed in order to segregate persons affected by leprosy from the society and even from their own families.

Leprosy is perhaps the only disease which carries a social stigma even after a patient is cured. People affected by leprosy were legally forbidden to live in the society, or to enter into any public job or profession. They were taken to live and die in asylums or specialised places of treatment. In fact, there was no effective treatment in those days. In the absence of modern scientific and effective treatment people with leprosy used to get visible deformities and disabilities in various forms and degrees. So there was a widespread stigma attached to this health hazard.

Since the 1980s, WHO prescribed the most effective cure for leprosy, which is multi-drug therapy (MDT) -- a cocktail of dapson, clofazimine and rifampicine. Millions of leprosy-affected people have been cured since then as a result of timely detection and appropriate treatment with this medication. The latest truth about leprosy is that leprosy is no curse, it is a bacteria-caused disease that is curable, and that there is no place for discrimination against people affected by

leprosy.

Leprosy is a very mildly infectious disease. Almost 99% people have natural immunity against it. The bacterium loses its capacity to infect any person after its carrier receives the first dose of MDT. So the scenario is altogether transformed after the introduction of this medicine. From 1985 up to now around 1, 85,000 leprosy-affected people have been cured.

It is good news that the United Nations adopted a resolution last December 21 on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their fam-

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ily members. Submitted by the Japanese government and supported by 84 member states this historic and landmark resolution was carried out. The guidelines and principles provide a very holistic approach on how to deal with the entire issue of leprosy-affected people and how their human dignity could be restored and how the governments of different UN member states could mainstream them.

I fervently solicit the kind attention of the honourable Speaker of our Parliament to consider the passing of the Lepers Act

1898 Repeal Bill 2010, which was tabled up by Janab Saber Hossain Chowdhury, MP on June 3, 2010 and which has been reviewed, scrutinised and reported on by the Parliamentary Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolution (chaired by Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru, MP), a meeting which I was invited to attend.

These principles and guidelines provide in unequivocal terms that persons affected by leprosy and their family members should not be discriminated against on the grounds of having or having had leprosy. Provisions should be

made to ensure that persons affected by leprosy have equal access to human rights, that they can live within their own communities with proper human dignity, that they can participate in public and civic life and activities, including the enjoyment of the rights to employment and receiving of medical care at all health care institutions and not only at specialised hospitals or clinics.

The repeal of the ancient segregating Lepers Act 1898 is badly needed. This will pave the way for the promotion and protection of the rights and dignity of the people affected by leprosy. The stigma around leprosy is rooted in myths and wrong notions about the disease, and it cannot have any place in our world today. Stigma is manifested in social exclusion and discrimination resulting in limiting of opportunities for people affected by a disease, the eradication of the causes and consequences of which should be on our public agenda.

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