

BOTTOM LINE

Significance of UN vote for Palestine resolution



BARRISTER
HARUN UR RASHID

P ALESTINE resolution for admission into the UN as an "observer non-member state" was adopted on December 29 by a huge majority (138 in favour, 9 against, 41 abstentions). All European countries except the Czech Republic either voted for or abstained. It is a big success for the Palestinians.

Chairman of Palestine Authority Mahmoud Abbas addressed the General Assembly ahead of the vote. Referring to the recent Israeli assault on Gaza, he said that Palestine had come to the UN at time when Palestinians were "still tending to their wounds and still burying their beloved martyrs of children, women and men who have fallen victim to the latest Israeli aggression."

"What permits the Israeli government to blatantly continue with its aggressive policies and the perpetration of war crimes stems from its conviction that it is above the law and that it has immunity from accountability and consequences. The moment has arrived for the world to say clearly: Enough of aggression, settlements and occupation," he said.

He said that the Palestinians were not seeking to "de-legitimise" Israel, but to affirm the legitimacy of Palestine as a state. This recognition of an upgraded UN status was the beginning of a final serious attempt to achieve peace. The General Assembly is called upon today to issue a birth certificate of the reality of the State of Palestine.

Ms. Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) executive committee member, described the bid as a "last-ditch effort." "We believe

the two-state solution is in jeopardy because of Israeli actions. We want to ensure that the world is still committed to the establishment of a sovereign viable democratic free Palestinian state to interact as an equal," she said.

The interesting fact is that Israel's arrogance and failure to negotiate with Palestinians for the last 20 years since the Oslo Accord has put off the European countries, some of which at one time were ardent supporters of Israel.

Despite strong objection from the US and Israel, European countries changed their positions this year on Palestine issue, compared with the vote on Palestine in October 2011 on Unesco membership.

Italy, Denmark, Switzerland, Portugal and Georgia switched from "abstain" to "yes," Germany, Netherlands, and Lithuania switched from "no" to "abstain." Sweden switched from "no" to "yes."

The UN has three categories of entities: (a) member states, (b) observer non-member states and (c) observers with no voting rights. The General Assembly has upgraded Palestine status from (c) to (b) category. The new status has many ramifications and some of them deserve mention as follows:

First, it is an indirect recognition of the Palestinians' claims on statehood in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip. It strengthens its hand in negotiations with Israel for a two-state solution.

Second, it allows Palestine Authority to participate in debates in the General Assembly. Third, it allows them to join a number of UN agencies, as well as the International Criminal Court (ICC). The last one is important because Palestinians can go to the ICC for any atrocities Israel inflicts on them constituting crimes against humanity. Even the illegal Jewish settlements uprooting the Palestinians could constitute crimes against humanity. If it is found that Yasser Arafat was poisoned by Israeli agencies, Palestinians could go to the ICC against Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu tried to bluff the Western countries by saying that giving such status would obstruct the peace process, and the US fell for it but not the European countries.

Former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert reportedly said that he did not

see any reason why Israel should oppose it. There was no nexus between upgrading the status of the Palestinians and the peace process through negotiations.

In April 2003, the US together with the EU, UN and Russia (known as the Quartet) released its roadmap that outlined a three-stage programme leading to an independent Palestinian State by 2005. By the end of 2012, no Palestine State has been constituted because of Israel's defiant policy of continuing illegal settlements in Palestinian lands with impunity.

Palestinians would have secured 46% of their lands

in 1947 after the UN divided the Palestinian land in two states -- Israel and Arab state. Now they will get only 22% because Israel has built illegal settlements on occupied territory, including East Jerusalem, after 1967. The settlements have fragmented Palestinian territory.

Desperate and frustrated, Palestinian officials have since pursued a new diplomatic strategy: asking individual countries to recognise an independent Palestinian state with borders following the ceasefire lines which separated Israel and the West Bank before June 1967. According to the PLO, more than 130 countries including Bangladesh have already accepted Palestine as a sovereign state.

The Quartet must put pressure on Israel to halt illegal settlements in occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and create an environment in which both states -- Israel and Palestine -- can live peacefully with secure and viable borders.

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Another fact is the changing dynamics of the region, which go against Israel. Egypt has a Muslim Brotherhood President which supports Hamas in Gaza. Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia supported Hamas during the recent fight with Israel. Iran has become a major regional player and it has extensive influence on Lebanon's Hezbollah, Iraq and Syria.

The sooner Israel realises that the regional environment is increasingly going against it, the better is for it to sit with Abbas for two-state solution with secure borders.

The writer is former Bangladesh ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

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The nexus: Undocumented migration and violence against women



The United Nations in Bangladesh and The Daily Star have joined hands to raise awareness on violence against women, as part of the UN Secretary General's global UNiTE campaign. This is part 2 of a series of articles that will appear in The Daily Star until December 10, focusing on the context, the policy interventions, and the actions needed in combating violence against women in Bangladesh.

NISHA

THE boom in the working age population in Bangladesh struggling with poor employment generation in the occupations and industries of the formal economy and under-employment in the informal economy has created an environment where labour force participation is largely poverty-driven. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the unemployment rate among women is nearly double that of the rate for men, the labour force participation rate of women is about one-third of men, and the formal sector employment is only about half of men. Women are largely concentrated in the invisible informal economy with disproportionate presence in the low-productivity agricultural and low-wage domestic work and unpaid family labour work. Abject poverty, therefore, has a female face in Bangladesh. The situation has weakened the bargaining capacity of the workers at large and opened the door for women workers' exploitation in the domestic economy and trafficking into the economies of the sub-continent, the Middle-East, East Asia and other countries of the world. The invisibility of women workers gives an impression that women are not economically active and, therefore, they are less capable than men to participate in economic decision-making. This impression leads to exclusion of women from a decision on their migration as well as from the process leading to migration.

The invisibility also creates an artificial sense of women's fragility and presents them as dependents, who would not make a decision to migrate if they have a choice, and who are in need of overt protection. This false sense leads to women's exclusion from the discussions on safe migration, creating a high level of lack of information about legitimate official channels among women. It paves the way for an imposition of excessively restrictive regime which makes documented migration harder for women. The combined effect of all these is that a right to movement is not seen as one of the fundamental rights of women. Women with an intention to migrate for making a better life for themselves and their families are looked upon. They do not have platforms where they can openly

present the difficulties they encounter with an expectation that they would find support and solutions without being further victimised or controlled.

The resultant scenario is one where migration through family referral or on pretext of marriage becomes a quicker method to convince women to migrate and ends up making women easy prey to informal and often illegal channels to obtain regular labour.

A woman who undertakes international migration through undocumented process or irregular channels or as a trafficked person is not only far more vulnerable to abuse, sexual exploitation and labour slavery than men and women who migrate through legitimate official channels but is also seen as a criminal by the authorities in the destination country of. The branding as a criminal restricts the avenues of legal and safe return. She is also far less likely to be accepted if she were to return to her family. The solution lies in recognising women as an economic actor, capable of deciding on alternatives for livelihoods and with a right to movement. It is important that legitimate migration is made easily and openly accessible to them. Migrant Bangladeshi women workers have contributed enormously to the economies of the countries of the sub-continent. It is essential that this contribution is recognised and negative perceptions about the migrant workers addressed in the destination countries.

Since international movement of workers often involves two or more countries, it is important that safe migration-based approach to trafficking is pursued and the solutions are sought through:

- Regional cooperation to formulate and implement safe migration procedures as well as to address the situation where India and Pakistan have become transit countries for wider international trafficking for not only women and girls from these countries but also for those from Bangladesh and Nepal;
- Gender equitable policies on migration and migrant workers' employment, which are consistent with the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration, and which provide non-binding principles and guidelines for a rights-based approach to labour migration;
- Open availability of work opportunities in various countries respectful of international labour standards, especially, migrant workers right to a written contract, fair wage, safe working conditions and protection from sexual violence at workplace, and other rights as enshrined in international instruments such as the ILO Convention 189 and Recommendation 201 on the Decent Work for Domestic workers;
- Joint mechanisms for the monitoring of recruitment processes and commonly agreed standards for the regulation of the recruitment agencies.

In addition to the above, it is of utmost importance that the formulation and implementation of robust social protection in Bangladesh is pursued to support women in their social role as well as when they are faced with difficulty in the process of or during migration and upon their return.



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How to help your own child who has a disability

JULIAN FRANCIS

MY earliest childhood memory is of my elder brother sitting, it seemed to me, permanently, in a push-chair and sometimes in a wheelchair. It was something that as a young child I accepted, not knowing it was unusual. My brother, who died in 1999 at the age of 55, was severely mentally handicapped with Down's Syndrome and learnt to walk when he was 6 years old and was not able to speak. I should emphasise, however, that he had a definite character and personality and at the residential home at which he lived he was a useful, helpful, and cheerful member of society.

Our elder son, Neil, also has a severe learning disability and, when he was diagnosed as such within a year of being born in New Delhi in 1975, we were told by doctors there, as well as in UK, that he was unlikely to ever talk and was expected to walk by the age of about 5-6 years. My wife and I were obviously depressed and completely at our wits' ends, but that did not stop us from searching out all possibilities of finding a cure. We tried all types of Indian medicine and my wife began to spend a considerable amount of time deep in prayer. This brought her inner peace which helped her deal with the situation in a better way. At the same time we provided every type of stimulus to our son and he began to walk at the age of about 2 years and now, aged 37, can hold a reasonably good conversation, though he cannot live independently at all.

We have always tried to tell our son Neil, and his younger brother Rohin, now aged 31 and who is a cardiologist, that there is no part of the English vocabulary that includes the do it." Neil has

Parents of children with disabilities of all kinds in Bangladesh must never feel ashamed or embarrassed that they have a child with a disability. As parents, you must love all of your children equally and have as much fun with them as possible even if they cannot see, speak, hear or understand.

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From these observations, it can be seen that Neil is able to participate fully in life even though he will not ever be able to live independently. He has all the emotions that you or I have and an enormous sense of humour. He also has the capacity to laugh at himself. Neil's situation is very different from that which faces the child with a disability in Bangladesh, particularly if that child lives in a rural area. However, I have made these few comments and observations from my personal experiences with the hope that it might encourage others to feel less lost and hopeless when they know their child is handicapped in some way.

Parents of children with disabilities of all kinds in Bangladesh must never feel ashamed or embarrassed that they have a child with a disability. As parents, you must love all of your children equally and have as much fun with them as possible even if they cannot see, speak, hear or understand. When our Neil was young, I used to play the fool a lot of the time, so parents in Bangladesh must unwind and become a little bit crazy too. Just getting Neil to laugh was like giving him a good medicine as he would be happy and he would eat well and complete all his daily activities in time and this made his parents happy too. So, parents should "let their hair down" and have fun with their children.

The writer, who has been associated with the development of Bangladesh since the War of Liberation, received the "Friends of Liberation Honour" from the Bangladesh Government earlier this year.