United Nations, the august world body, celebrated its 25th anniversary on October 24, 1970. The silver jubilee of an organization is indeed an ideal occasion to impartially reflect, critically analyze and objectively evaluate its performances and accomplishments. According to Mr. U. Thant, UN Secretary-General, the UN had averted a third World War, on at least two occasions. “First of all, I must say that the United Nations has been able to avert World War III at least on two occasions; first at the peak of Korean crisis in 1950 & 1951 and secondly in 1962 at the peak of the Cuban missile crisis”, he said. On the other hand, Mr. Henry Cobot Lodge who headed a commission at the instance of President Nixon, to find out what was wrong with the UN, has cited two major shortcomings in regard to the world body. They are first, “the failure of its members to make it the paramount means for maintaining international peace and security” and second, ‘its misuse as both an unwieldy and ineffective debating society and a propaganda platform”.

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October 24, 1945, marked the official birthday of the UN when 51 nations became signatories to the UN charter and the organization was set up with its permanent headquarters in New York. Its objectives are

- to maintain international peace and security;
- to improve relations among nations, recognizing the principle of equal rights and self-determination of all peoples.
- to help solve international problems-social, economic, cultural and humanitarian, and promote respect for human rights and basic freedoms; and
- to serve as a base for coordinating the action of nations to attain these common goals.

The UN charter is a testament of human faith in the future of mankind. It sets down the noble human ideals and aspirations. The easiest thing in the world is to lay down objectives. The hardest thing is to work for and realize them. Among the UN’s structural units, the most important are the General Assembly and the Security Council. The General Assembly consists of all member nations each having one vote. A two-thirds majority is needed to pass resolutions on important questions, such as new members, recommendations on peace and security, electing members to the Councils, etc. Other questions are decided by the simple majority. No member has veto power in the General Assembly. The Security Council is responsible to keep world peace. The original 11 members were subsequently increased to 15. The US, USSR, Britain, France and China are its five permanent members and have veto power. The remaining 10 are elected by the General Assembly for 2-year terms and have no veto power. Though each member has a vote, one veto by any permanent member overrules the other 14 positive votes, which is an anomaly. The Security Council is dominated by US and USSR, the other 3 permanent members having faded into insignificance.

In 1945 men thought that the peace of the world could be safely underwritten by the five major powers—the US, Russia, Britain, France and China—who emerged victorious from the Second World War. The idea of mortgaging the peace of the world to the Big Five was based on the assumption that their comradeship in war would continue in times of peace. This hope was belied even before the end of the war. The cold war among them started even before the hostilities ceased. The horrifying dimensions of
the potentialities of nuclear warfare proved a more effective deterrent to war than the debates of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

It is not easy to assess the UN’s performance. The UN has survived for 37 years and increased its membership to 157 nations with many Afro-Asian and Latin-American countries gaining independence through influence, direct and indirect. Even China, accounting for one-fifth of the world population was admitted as a member of the United Nations on October 26, 1971.

The two dominating member-countries US and USSR and other countries also disregard UN decision and conduct discussions outside UN—the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks at Helsinki, the Agreement between the Warsaw Pact countries and West Germany and Britain’s decision to sell helicopters to South Africa are glaring examples. In the current West Asian talks the UN only played a minor role with Gunnar Jarring heading a fact-finding mission. Neither Israel nor the Arab countries can by themselves carry on a war, and it is only US backing Israel and USSR backing UAR that makes this situation possible and keeps the cold war alive.

While what the UN has failed to achieve looms large compared to what it has, the very fact that it has survived 37 years and increased its membership from 51 to 157 is a sign of its vitality. Every country, big, middle and small, has benefitted through UN intervention at one time or another. Economic and military power concentrated in a few developed nations now, but it is also a fact that political effectiveness is dispersed and there is increasing awareness of international public opinion with the newly independent Afro-Asian and Latin-American nations joining the UN. US sphere of influence has shrunk and USSR is not succeeding in its proselytization efforts. The mere existence of the UN as a forum for international public discussion is a curb on strong countries overrunning weak countries and causing a disastrous holocaust.

To make UN more effective and purposeful, it should be a real world body, with the entire world represented including smaller communist countries which will deny them the advantage of immunity from UN decision they now enjoy.

Middle powers like Brazil, Pakistan Italy, Japan, UAR, should be given greater powers. The veto should be abolished. If necessary, the 2/3rd majority may even be raised to the 3/4ths majority on very important matters. The developed countries should contribute
1% of their GNP to the UN. A few small countries–Belgium, France, and W. Germany already give more than 1%. International agreements should be ratified by the UN after public discussion before the final implementation for optimum benefits and elimination of adverse reaction. The UN must create a permanent emergency force to which every member-nation will contribute men who will all have UN citizenship recognized by all member-nations to enforce UN decisions and sanctions where necessary.

In retrospect, if there is a lesson to be learned from the record of the UN over the past 37 years, it is that goodness and idealism are not enough. In prospect, if it is to stop aggression, ensure world peace and provide solutions to problems posed by colonialism, racialism or other causes, it should be strengthened and reorganized immediately. The UN must have not only the will but also the means to enforce its decisions.