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The Nobel Prize For Peace

The award of this year's Nobel Prize for Peace to the UN peace-keeping forces has been universally applauded as a well-merited recognition of the services that the UN has quietly rendered over the years without any fanfare. There are over 10,000 troops involved in monitoring ceasefires between warring groups in areas as divergent as Kashmir and Lebanon, Cyprus and Korea. The latest to be added to this list is the Gulf, where a small Bangladeshi unit has joined the UN contingent.

Peace-keeping has its risk. About 700 soldiers are known to have lost their lives in the pursuit of this duty; an American member of the force in Lebanon is now being held as a prisoner by one of the numerous factions in that unfortunate country. But no one has suggested, in spite of the setbacks that peace-keeping has encountered, that the peace-keeping forces should all be withdrawn. Wherever they have been stationed they have performed the difficult task of keeping combatants apart, without exposing themselves to any serious charge of partisanship. The Nobel Committee's decision is a confirmation of the praise and honour they have on the whole succeeded in earning.

This year's award will certainly not raise eye-brows in the way certain past decisions have been questioned. Awards have sometimes gone to persons with none-too-distinguished political records or to persons whose specific contributions to world peace have not been easy for the public to determine. At any rate, one is on safe ground in saying that there have been few cases, since the peace-award was instituted, where the Nobel Committee's decision has not taken the world by surprise. There have indeed been times when it has been difficult to resist the conclusion that the peace prize was designed to reward narrowly defined achievements.

This year's award is also a signal of a welcome revival in the UN's fortunes as a world body whose rôle in the settlement of disputes is once again being eagerly sought. The truce arranged between Iraq and Iran by the Secretary General, Javier Peres de Cuellar, represents a major triumph in an area where neither combatant would accept the arbitration of the OIC, though the latter body consists of fellow-Muslims. The Namibia dispute is nearer settlement today than it has been ever before, thanks to the patient diplomacy of Mr. Peres de Cuellar.

All this is an encouraging omen for the third world especially. The UN is the only forum where poorer countries can have their voice heard, where they can air their grievances in freedom. A more powerful UN should mean a better world.