

Leaders Speak Out

We are grateful to Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia for talking to this paper last week...

The two long interviews, extensively reported elsewhere in today's issue, deal with wide-ranging subjects, raised in candid questions and then answered in a forthright manner...

Thanks to the two interviews, we have a fairly clear idea not only about the thinking of the two parties but also on how the minds of the leaders are working...

The interviews reveal an area, regrettably, a narrow one, of a broad understanding that already exists between the two leaders...

While economic experts here and abroad should be relieved that both support the country's liberal policies towards foreign capital...

The concern of this paper or perhaps of the nation as a whole lies elsewhere. The two interviews have focussed on the differences between the two leaders which, we fear, may well have sharpened in recent weeks...

At this moment, there is very little interest among political parties in formulating a code of interest for the election and still less interest in developing a national consensus...

Overcrowded Schools

Unabated population growth brings the problem of how to accommodate the ever-rising number of students. Already, there are not enough schools, and within the schools there are not enough facilities.

Success only compounds the problem. Schools that have made a name for themselves attract more students.

For the public schools, money also plays a part as the search for revenue inevitably increases the overcrowding. It is often said that pupils who fail admission tests can still find places by payment of hefty donations.

Clearly, there must also be more schools, a difficult enough task to accomplish but one made even harder by the accompanying need to ensure that standards do not decline.

Creating substandard schools that collapse or linger unproductively is no solution either. Converting the garage into a classroom is no answer to the need to educate our millions.

LIKE a flash of lightning on a summer night, an international crisis can suddenly illuminate a murky situation.

*First, and perhaps most important, the events of August 1990 called into question the fashionable cliché that the post Cold War world had become multipolar.

*Second, the events in the Gulf called into question the view that the United States had entered a period of decline and withdrawal.

Shortly before the invasion, Paul Kennedy, the Yale historian whose Rise and Fall of the Great Powers had helped to launch the 'declinist' side of the debate over America's global position...

In fact, the natural economic decline of the United States from its artificially high position at the end of World War II had tapered off by the mid 1970s.

Third, the clichés about economic power replacing military power in a post Cold War world were falsified when Saddam Hussein's armoured columns swept across the Kuwait border.

*Fourth, the crisis in the Gulf confirmed the extent to which the Soviet Union had declined as a superpower. While the Soviet Union provided a major power with a formidable nuclear arsenal...

*Fifth, the events of August showed the importance of soft power as well as hard power. Soft power is the ability to co-opt rather than command, and an important manifestation is the ability to build coalitions in international institutions.

regional conflicts than they were during the Cold War era.

*Sixth, the early success of the Security Council in quickly defining the situation in the Gulf suggests that the United Nations may play a larger role in the post Cold War order than had previously been imagined.

*Seventh, the concern of the United States to encourage its allies and other to share the burden suggests that although the United States will remain the leading power in world politics, it will not be the world's sole policeman.

have succeeded in its claim that the incursion into Kuwait was merely the reclaiming of a lost province.

For 40 years, the United Nations had been hamstrung by the Cold War. The major exceptions were modest peacekeeping activities and one large action in Korea.

*Eighth, the concern of the United States to encourage its allies and other to share the burden suggests that although the United States will remain the leading power in world politics, it will not be the world's sole policeman.

combined with an extremely poor donor response - under \$1.6 billion - is worsening the situation.

The Food is There, but Where's the Political Will?

by Jules Van Os

For the first time in four years the world is producing more food than it consumes. Yet in Africa famine is striking again.

famine threatens and is still most reluctant to turn to the West for help.

At the local level, though, aid can get through, according to Sarah Hughes of Christian Aid, who recently visited Sudan.

However, the increases are mainly in the developed countries. The situation in large parts of sub-Saharan Africa is deteriorating.

Following a second year of insufficient rainfall and continuing civil wars, Ethiopia and Sudan will need massive international help to avert famine in 1991.

More than 10 million people are threatened by starvation in the Horn of Africa. The extent of the famine will be more severe than in 1984-1985 which triggered a massive response in aid from the West.

This time Sudan will be badly hit by famine. The situation is deteriorating fast. Almost certainly tens of thousands of people will starve to death even if the Sudan government and all relief agencies start working with maximum effort now.

starvation is a rapid change in the policy of the Sudan government.

In Mozambique, suffering from a 15-year-old civil war, about 1.9 million people will need food aid.

The provinces of central Mozambique and Zambezia are particularly affected. One million people are displaced by war. Many are without medicine or salt and so vulnerable to easily preventable illnesses such as measles and diarrhoea, which can be as lethal as starvation.

Among recently displaced peasants, levels of chronic malnutrition are reaching 20-50 per cent in children under five. Drought cut the 1990 rice harvest by more than 50 per cent. Mozambique currently produces only about 15 per cent of the food it needs.

Agreement to end the civil war could exacerbate the crisis. It would bring back nearly a million refugees, now living mostly in Malawi, and increase the number of people facing starvation.

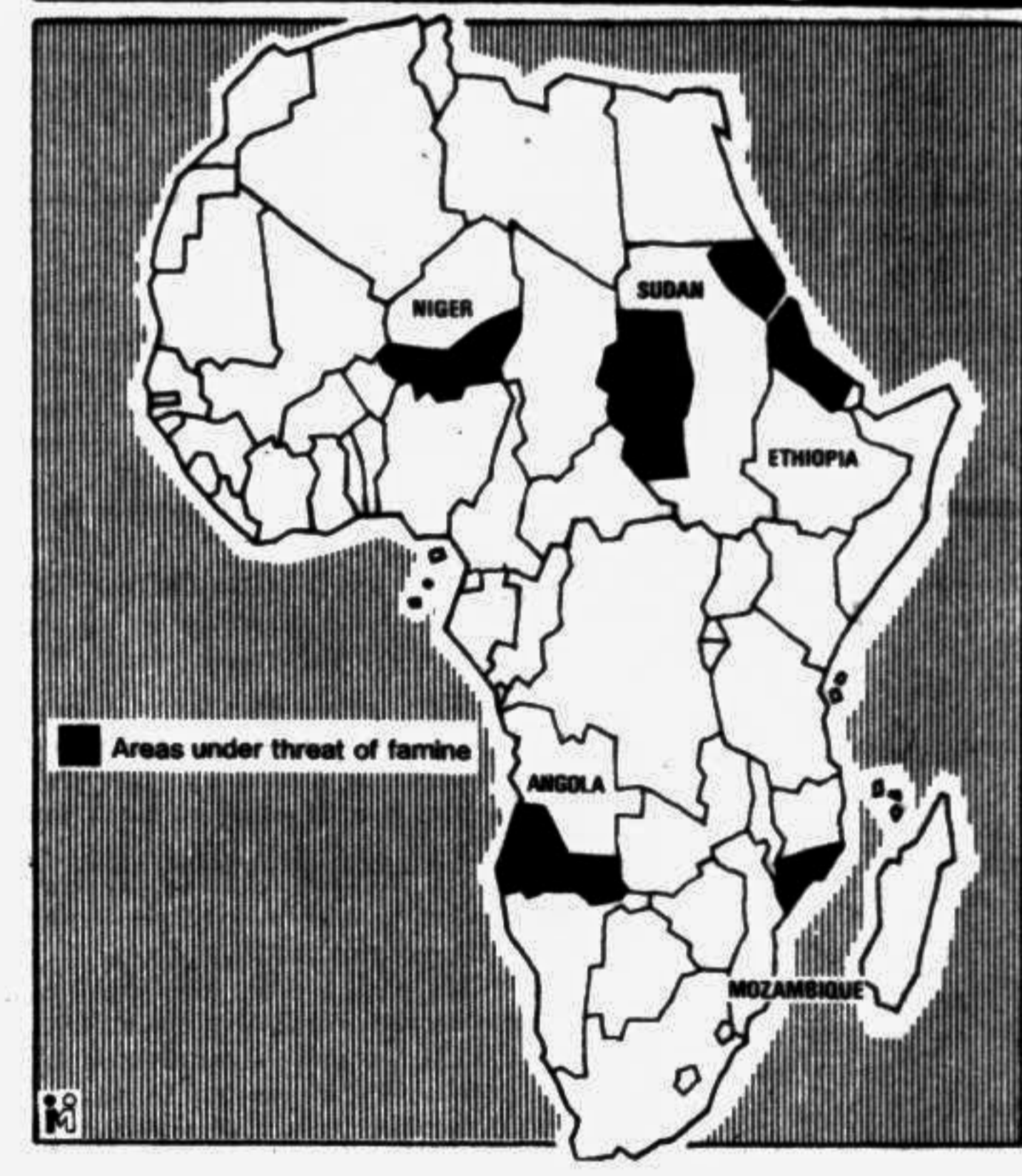
In Angola famine is already raging in the south. About two million people face severe malnutrition, most of them in the central and the southern provinces. UN reserves in Angola are in imminent danger of running out and this,

need food aid. An estimated 200,000 tonnes are wanted this year.

Adequate food supplies are available to avert famine in Africa this year. The key obstacles are the lack of political will of some donors to deliver the food aid, in some cases, the reluctance of African governments to accept that there is a famine and to receive foreign aid.

As Edward Saouma, FAO Director-General, said in his year-end message: "If the world has been capable of breaking down the political barrier between East and West, it should be able to attack the economic divide between North and South."

Famine hits Africa again



To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts.

Text-book prices

Sir, The prices of many text books prescribed by the English-medium schools in the city are exorbitantly high. For example, the English Reader costs above Taka 500.

The educational authorities should review the working of the English-medium schools in the major cities of the country, and strengthen the monitoring system to tighten up on the compliance of the national guide-line on the running of such schools.

have enough FE for higher education).

A Guardian Dhaka

Waiting room at bus stand Sir, The bus passengers of Patiya Sadar (former Sub-Divisional HQ) feel a great inconvenience in absence of waiting rooms and other facilities at Monsef Bazar, Old bus stop and Court Area bus stand in Patiya town.

Hundreds of bus passengers, both male and female, badly suffer for want of waiting rooms. Female passengers are often found insecurely standing on the road. Absence of toilets also is causing immense problem for the passengers specifically the females and the children.

arrange for other amenities at Patiya town bus stand, at the earliest.

Fardul Alam Chowdhury Patiya, Chittagong

More flowers for our delight Sir, There was a time when flowers for sale are not a common sight in Dhaka. Things are different and much better now.

Not only do we have more florists in town but we notice street vendors selling flowers, particularly rojonganandha, marigold, roses etc. The price of flowers have also gone down. Previously there was only one place i.e. the gate of the High Court, where flowers were available.

Movies in cinema halls

Sir, It has been a long time since I and my family have seen an English movie at cinema hall though there is nothing to bar us from watching them at home courtesy, the family VCR.

Inconsiderate neighbours

This man, no doubt mentally abnormal gets to the top of his house and sings very loudly on certain nights. This severely disturbs my tenants who have complained to me. I took up the matter but he claims fundamental right. I discussed it with the local Ward Commissioner but he is missing since the fall of Ershad.

Right from buying the ticket in advance, to getting dressed and reaching the hall on time is gone. The atmosphere provided by the decor, the lobby restaurants, chips and coke all together provided a kind of family entertainment which VCRs can't. They focus on the movie alone which after a time becomes just another kind of glorified TV watching.