

Leaders Speak Out

We are grateful to Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia for talking to this paper last week. In two separate exclusive interviews, which was, indeed, a privilege for a newspaper as young as The Daily Star. We like to think that the privilege granted to us underscores a recognition for this paper by the leaders of the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

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 by the leaders of the two parties. Neither tried to evade any question. In her own way, each one showed that she knew her mind.

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, on issues ranging from the future of the private sector to the use of foreign capital in our industrialisation programme, from the demand to repeal the Special Powers Act to the trial of Hussain Mohammad Ershad. It is for the first time that the two leaders have been most specific on a number of issues covered during the interviews.

The interviews reveal an area, regrettably, a narrow one, of a broad understanding that already exists between the two leaders, but several differences in their interpretations of the political movement that led to the fall of the Ershad regime and serious divergences on the question of possible changes in the political system in Bangladesh.

While economic experts here and abroad should be relieved that both support the country's liberal policies towards foreign capital and the growth of the private sector—this, we believe, has been already communicated to aid agencies and donor countries—the two leaders remain strongly committed to a democratic system for this country and firmly opposed to forces which, for reasons of their own, would like to undermine the country's transition to a constitutional form of government. In this respect, the credibility of the two leaders and of their organisations should remain above doubt.

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. In answering questions, the two leaders took every opportunity to revive contentious issues which had marred the past relations between their two organisations, just as they did not hesitate to indulge in mutual recriminations in relation to their present policies. Maybe this is inevitable at the time of an election which, as some say, is usually fought and won on the basis of differences among contending parties, not on consensus. However, we believe that in the volatile situation that exists in the country today, a bit more moderation and less of verbal attacks from all sides would contribute to creating the right kind of climate for a free and fair election.

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 on political and economic issues, backed by all groupings in the new parliament after the election. Let us hope that on all these matters, political parties, especially AL and BNP, have not taken their final positions. A bit more rethinking on the part of both Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia would be welcome by all, especially by moderate middle-of-the-road forces in the country.

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. As usual, the poor are at a disadvantage. The only remedy is the enforcement of regulations limiting the number of students in each establishment.

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. It is essential that schools do not sacrifice quality while catering for quantity. Many of the schools which are currently mushrooming have a propensity to take in teachers with minimum qualifications. Too often the result is five students instead of one—but the five are poorly educated, with an inadequate knowledge of essential subjects.

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. In an article on overcrowded classrooms in the Education page of the Daily Star, an educationalist suggested a possible remedy by incorporating what is known as the in-school-off-school Approach and an innovation known as Education Development Project. Both attempt to use very large classes with up to 80 students. These methods—which utilise special charts, flashcards, self-learning kits and self-evaluation techniques—require training and facilities and are yet to be tested in Bangladesh. Certainly, however, the education authorities must constantly monitor the feasibility of new approaches.

LIKE a flash of lightning on a summer night, an international crisis can suddenly illuminate a murky situation. Many analysts have tried to describe the shape of a post Cold War world, but its portrait remains uncertain. Though the storm in the Gulf may have effects for years to come, certain preliminary lessons about our new world are already visible from early lighting flashes.

"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. As the Economist put it, Multipolarity is not only bad English, it is sloppy thinking. The term implies a world of five or six equally balanced great powers, shifting alliances to maintain order in a historical analogy to the 19th century or the 1930s. When one looks closely, however, one sees that the Soviet Union is declining as a power. China remains a less developed country. Europe lacks unity and Japan's power is unidimensional. The references to Germany and Japan as new superpowers, so fashionable at the time of the July summit in Houston, seemed to wilt under the August sun in the Gulf. Only the United States possessed the broad range of military and other forms of power that enabled it to organize an international response to Saddam Hussein's aggression.

"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, responded to those he labeled 'revivalists' (including this author). "The drop in Cold War tensions", Kennedy wrote, "has caused a reduction in the value many people put on military power... the one measure of power in which the United States has a clear advantage over the other countries."

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. Since then the American share of world product has held constant at 23% of the total, or roughly the level it was before the war. While the United States has many problems which need attention, the aggregate numbers indicate that they did not add up to continuous decline. In manufacturing, which held constant as a share of GNP, productivity increased by more than 31/2% per year, in the past decade. In other words, the declinist's portrait of the United States as merely a

military dinosaur seemed a caricature in light of the American response.

"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. Military power proved crucially important in preventing Saddam Hussein's from gaining control of 40% of the world's oil reserves and a position to hold the world economy for ransom. It is far too simple to argue that we have entered the Japanese era or the age of the trading state or world politics. Similarly, the fact that the protective role of force is important for other issues besides countering the Soviet threat means that the end of the Cold War does not lead to a radical devaluing of the American military capability.

"Fourth, the crisis in the Gulf confirmed the extent to which the Soviet Union had declined as a superpower. While the Soviet Union will remain a major power with a formidable nuclear arsenal, the crippling of the Soviet economy and its inability to cope with the demands of the information revolution have made the Soviets much less formidable as a factor in

regional conflicts than they were during the Cold War era.

Moreover, the domestic preoccupation with economic reform and the resulting new thinking in foreign policy led to a level of cooperation with economic reform and the resulting new thinking in foreign policy led to a level of cooperation in the United Nations which has been unthinkable in past Middle East crises.

"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. It was important for the United States to have the hard power represented by its forces in the Gulf region, but it was equally important to organize United Nations resolutions that defined Iraq's actions as violation of international law requiring enforceable sanctions. The legitimacy provided by such resolutions allowed Saudi Arabia to accept foreign troops on its soil. Egypt to send troops, Turkey to close the pipeline and many more crucial actions. Without the UN defining the issue as an illegal invasion, it is possible that Iraq might

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

"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. Contrary to some cynical comments, the crisis in the Gulf is about far more than the price of a gallon of gasoline. It is about the institutional shape of order in a world in which the bipolar cleavage no longer defines all issues.

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. But the UN force in Korea was the exception that proved the rule, made possible only because of the Soviet boycott of the Security Council in 1950. The Soviets quickly learned not to repeat that mistake. Now, if the United Nations does not rise to the occasion in a case of blatant aggression, its role in providing order will have been severely diminished in a Cold War world.

"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. Neither public nor Congressional opinion will tolerate the overreaching that led to the mistakes and excesses of the Vietnam period. In part the American concern with burden-sharing is justified. Why should American tax payers alone foot the bill for benefits of stability which are enjoyed by citizens of Europe, Japan and other countries? In part, the concern with burden sharing reflects the unnecessary self hobbling effect of the federal government deficit. And in part it may show that the Americans are learning that they will have to use multilateral measures for effective leadership in a post Cold War world.

It is too early to draw a bottom line under the crisis in the Gulf, or even to predict whether these lessons will eventually be undone. Nor should we assume that the Gulf will be typical of future crises in a post Cold War world. But the lightning flashes of the early days of crisis suggest that at least some of the previous predictions about a post Cold War world have been too simplistic. —By arrangement with the Executive, Hong Kong.

A former Rhodes Scholar, Professor Nye is Director, Centre for International Affairs, Harvard University and one of the America's leading experts on international affairs.

ECONOMIC NOTES

The Gulf Crisis : Seven Lessons

By Joseph S. Nye Jr.

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. She said: "The local government is very helpful. The central government will accept de facto the help coming in. Most of us aid agencies are going ahead anyway and will battle through bureaucracy."

The combination of civil war between the Muslim north and the Christian south and the drought wiped out almost the whole harvest of 1990 and threatens eight million people with famine.

The areas most affected by drought are the provinces of Red Sea Hills, Kordofan and Darfur, which are controlled by the Khartoum government. If the government lets aid agencies launch a fullscale relief operation more practical barriers such as poorly maintained roads, lack of spare parts for trucks and disorganisation have to be faced.

An estimated 1.2 million tons of food are needed to avert famine in Sudan this year. All of this would have to be imported. The only chance of reducing deaths from

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. An estimated 200,000 tonnes are wanted this year.

The provinces of central Mozambique and Zambesia 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. The rest, depending on the amount of international food aid, will have to be imported.

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,

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

Aid agencies have become embroiled in countless hours of negotiations with the rebel UNITA movement.

The government has no effective control over much of the country, so no reliable information on malnutrition levels, war and drought victims, is available.

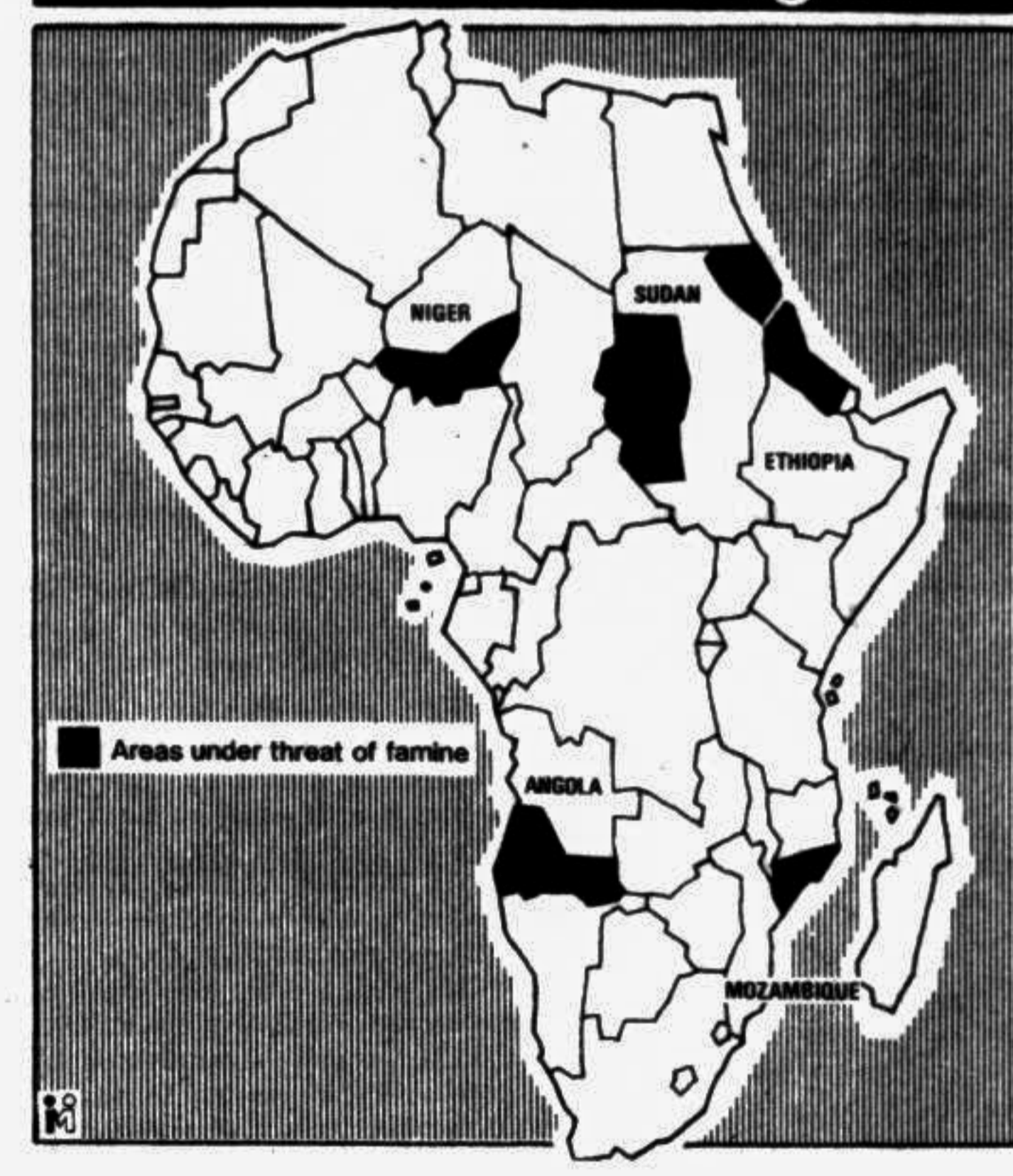
In the Sahel, Niger faces a sharply deteriorating food supply. Below-normal and badly distributed rains since the middle of the growing season have severely affected crops and the 1990 cereal output is poor for the second year running.

Prospects for off-season crops are also unfavourable. The most affected areas are Defla, Tahoua, Tillabari and Zinder departments. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), one to two million people are at risk. Farm stocks are already low and food needs will be 100,000 tonnes.

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." -GEMINI NEWS

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. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

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. Several other books are priced between Tk 400-650 each. These publications are printed abroad; while some of the other books are printed in a neighbouring country. Very few books are locally published and/or printed.

For a poor country like Bangladesh, this is an unrealistic situation. Many guardians have no option but to place their wards initially in an English-medium school, as their children were living abroad and were studying in the English medium. Here they take up Easy Bengali course to start with (this course is fortunately available).

The educational authorities should review the working of the English-medium schools in the major cities of the country, and strengthen the moni-

toring system to tighten up on the compliance of the national guide-line on the running of such schools. The cost of education must commensurate with our standard of living, notwithstanding the fact that there is great disparity between the top and lower brackets.

It is disquieting to note that education is being commercialised in the city, with tutorial centres sprouting like mushrooms. When I asked a guardian why one tutor was not enough to teach two or three subjects at school level, I was told that nowadays the private tutors are "specialised" in subjects (maybe armed with their photo-copied notes!).

The 'O' level examination is quite popular here, but it is not clear how the local publishers are co-operating in this English-medium sector; Vis-a-vis the book-sellers, who would be content to import the books. We can hardly afford to waste foreign exchange on the import of text books at school level (we do not

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. Their suffering becomes more acute during the rainy season when they find no alternative but to stand under the open sky and brave the brunt of rains. Also the terminal becomes muddy in the rainy season. There is no systematic parking of vehicles either. Buses and mini-buses are parked helter skelter creating much trouble for the passengers.

I would urge the concerned authority for construction of at least a tin-shed, waiting room and

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 rojoni-gandha, 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. Thus the price was also very high. But now due to easy availability the situation improved. We would like to see such improvements in other things too, so that we do not have to depend on a other countries for a lot of things, as we do now.

Tawheed Anwar
Sobhanbagh
Dhaka

Inconsiderate neighbours

Sir, Through the columns of your esteemed daily I wish to bring to your

notice the plight of those who are burdened by inconsiderate neighbours. I am a resident of Kalabagan Bashiruddin Road, living in my own three storied house on the ground floor, while the rest is rented out. It is my only source of income having invested my entire savings including my earnings in the last few years. Unfortunately life is becoming extremely difficult due to the peculiar habit of a neighbour who is driving me crazy and my tenants away.

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. The police won't take a case but asks me to "make up". But how can I make up. The other neighbours are very heavy sleepers and don't mind but my tenants are threatening to leave.

Under the circumstances what should I do? The man is generally well behaved except for his singing.

Dr. Alfaz Tarafder
Kalabagan
Dhaka

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. But somehow VCR provides a different kind of fun then going to the movies and we do miss it.

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.

The authorities can't argue in terms of censorship because we want to watch family movies and VCRs have made the idea of censorship redundant anyway. So could we have our beloved movies back? Movies can never replace the ordinariness of home viewing.

Dr. Fortaz Ali
Sobhanbagh, Dhaka.