

Dhaka, Tuesday, April 2, 1991

## Famine in Africa

Yet another threat of famine now casts its shadow over parts of Africa. The latest report from London which monitors the situation in the troubled continent better than any other world capital, says more than 20 million people may be facing the disaster, a majority of them in six countries: Sudan, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Malawi, Angola and Liberia. Pledges made so far by the international community, especially western nations, to help Africa avert the famine appear to be hopelessly inadequate. Only about five million pounds are said to have been promised, while in Ethiopia, only 20,000 tonnes of foodgrains have been delivered against the estimated need of a million tonnes. The situation seems almost hopeless. Africa is certain to face yet another difficult year in 1991.

There are several reasons which have contributed to the worsening of the situation in Africa. Most traditional donor nations and UN agencies are now far too preoccupied with the relief operation in Kuwait and Iraq to think of the needs in Africa. The international aid agencies are also concerned with the needs of the so-called frontline states and of countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Philippines which have suffered heavy losses due to the Iraqi aggression. Again, the needs of the emerging democracies in Eastern Europe and, for that matter, of the Soviet Union are also making new demands on traditional aid agencies.

It cannot be denied that whatever may be the priorities facing the donor agencies, there is a general aid fatigue which affects the food assistance programme for Africa. The scenario has remained largely unchanged for more than a decade, with more and more people coming to believe, sometimes without much justification, that efforts from within Africa do not always match the international programme. More cynical ones assume, without realising that there are some food surplus countries, say, like Zimbabwe, that Africa is incapable of feeding itself.

While a number of these assumptions are incorrect, there is no doubt that the lasting answer — perhaps the only answer — of the food problem lies within Africa. In the first place, civil wars in many of the countries facing the threat of famine have halted all normal economic activities, including production and distribution of food. The situation is so bad — and almost shameful — that international food supplies cannot even reach certain areas, due to obstacles placed by either the government forces or rebels.

It seems a number of countries in Africa facing economic mismanagement which contributes to the food crisis are essentially authoritarian states whose resources are plundered by dictators and where there is no genuine popular involvement in economic projects. If the political system changes in favour of popular democracy, as it is now happening in Mali, a new process may be set in motion bringing hope where there now exists only despair. After Mali, Somalia and Liberia may be next in line to find their new destiny.

Africa has no shortage of good, competent leaders. Unfortunately, they do not run their governments. However, as opinion makers, they must keep on spreading the message that political salvation and economic progress go together. You cannot feed the nation unless you give it political freedom, in the real sense of the term.

## A Tribute to A. K. Khan

An important chapter in Bangladeshi entrepreneurship comes to a close with the death on Sunday of Abul Kasem Khan, a noted industrialist and politician of Chittagong, whose influence and reputation extended far beyond his home base as well as the country as a whole. And, indeed, this reputation was not of yesterday's origin. In the days when, soon after our independence from British rule, local businessmen of what was then East Pakistan had found only a small place in the commercial world or in the industrial field, primarily due to lack of incentives, the late Mr. Khan emerged as a symbol of our nascent pioneering spirit, a spirit that took several decades to make its impact on a nationwide scale in Bangladesh.

The late industrialist was anything but just another successful businessman. In a way, his commitment to trade and commerce formed part of his abiding concern for the advance and progress of his people. It is possible that it is this concern that prompted him to involve himself in politics. He was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly of India in 1946 — an abortive move to save the undivided country — and then continued to be a member of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. Later, he successively served as a Central Minister in Pakistan and a member of the Opposition, before taking up a prominent role in the War of Liberation for Bangladesh where he lost one of his brothers and three nephews.

In his wide-ranging activities, from business and politics to philanthropy and social work, the late Mr. Khan was constantly guided by a set of traditional values, such as honesty, integrity, hard work and dedication to duty. Indeed, by practising these values, the A.K. Khan Group of Industries became a model of reliability, while the Eastern Mercantile Bank, the first-ever East Pakistan based bank, set up by the late industrialist, turned out to be a source of inspiration for the next generation of young bankers in Bangladesh.

The late Abul Kasem Khan has left behind a legacy that the new generation of Bangladeshi entrepreneurs should treat with respect, a legacy that should be part of our emerging business culture. One day when this business culture which must be based on a combination of modern management techniques and old traditional ethics and values gains roots in this country, we shall look upon the contribution of the late Mr. Khan as an integral part of its foundation.

# End of Gulf War Shakes up Markets

by Alan Chalkley

*It is a very sad thing to say, but wars usually turn out to be good for investors in general*

SINCE hostilities began in the Middle East, most of the world's stock exchanges have firmed up, after an initial hesitation.

This seems to have surprised some people, who did not read up their history.

After that initial shock, stock exchanges always rise during wartimes. The reasons are obvious ones: wars damage property and kill people, but they create vast and immediate demands for products and labour.

So, looking to the future, investors estimate that when peace is regained even greater demand will arise to rebuild the damaged assets and revive the standards of living.

The 1939-45 war actually lifted the economies of the US and the UK from a long depression. The Korean war set Japan on a steep rise in industrial output. The Vietnam war set the US on a domestic boom which has only recently begun to wane.

It is a very sad thing to say, but wars usually turn out to be good for investors in general.

Wars shake up old systems, open up new opportunities. The price may be terrible in human lives and property, and one could wish that those new opportunities could be encouraged without the bloodshed

and the explosions. But those are facts of war.

A "world index" of share values shows a general fall of 20 per cent during 1990, but that was not entirely due to the Gulf crisis of August onwards. A shakeout of overvalued shares was already taking place in Tokyo and Taipei much earlier.

But then the world index began bottoming out in November last year, and revived steeply in February as the Middle East hostilities came to a close.

All round the world in recent months, lower interest rates have begun to make shares more attractive. And the Gulf war was a thorough testing-ground for much military hardware, for which the market is now going to soar (metals may benefit from this trend, by the way).

The Southeast Asian countries, plus Japan, Korea and Taiwan, are already raising their military spending; the total is expected to be some US\$40 billion this year. Malaysia and Thailand have both embarked on big defence

spending of about US\$2 billion each.

A quick look round the leading financial markets in recent weeks:

### The US

Unemployment has fallen over the last eight years from 11 per cent of the workforce (that was in 1981-82 during the last oil price crisis) to 5 per cent. By end-1990 the rate had risen to 6 per cent, but these are historically low figures for the American economy — the workforce is very mobile, and the social security system tends to put, at least for certain groups of people, a premium on drawing benefits rather than working for a living.

Wages have now steadied in the US, after having risen for eight years. The average pay is now over US\$10 an hour. To many other countries, that sum must seem out of this world, it being the equivalent of 280 pesos, 78 Hong Kong dollars, 18,000 rupiah, 180 Indian or 220 Pakistan rupees.

250 baht, 28 ringgit — for one hour!

Wholesale prices rose about 7 per cent during 1990, which is high. Towards the end of 1990, industrial output dropped, so it looked as if the economy was entering a period of stagflation. But businesses seem to have become cleverer at adjusting to changed environments very swiftly.

Usually at the onset of a slump, inventories of goods pile up fast in the warehouses and shops — but this time they have risen only moderately. Thus some analysts say the slump will be shallow and short.

Some trends were worrying, though. Sales of new dwellings fell 17 per cent last year, indicating overproduction of housing against growth of income; hence the steep crash of many savings and loans banks.

Corporate debt has piled up since 1983 and now amounts to an overlarge 38 per cent of gross national product. Some harsh surgery in many corporate balance sheets has be-

come necessary, with much distress selling of assets.

Despite all this gloom, the Dow Jones index on Wall Street rose steeply to the 2,600 level in mid-January this year, and a month later was close to 3,000. So the general body of investors thinks that better news is on the way soon.

### Japan

Signs of slower economic growth have surfaced for the first time in ages in Japan, but unlike the US recession the Japanese slowdown shows that the authorities are guiding the economy along its path of re-trenchment. The financial system is being restructured and public works are being expanded.

The official Economic Planning Agency has scaled back its estimates of growth, and some private analysts say that this growth will be the lowest in 20 years. Nevertheless, the economy is not losing its underlying strength.

Tokyo's stock market has swung wildly in recent months. Once upon a time, back at the end of 1989, the

leading Nikkei share price index stood at 39,000. By August last year it was down to 23,000, and then it wobbled — 25,000 in mid-December, down again, up again, until by mid-February this year it had climbed back to 25,000.

As the Iraq crisis drew to a close it reacted back to 26,000. The outlook is that prices will rise only hesitantly all this year.

### London

The outlook for Britain is uncertain. Industrial output is down sharply, leading to stagnation, accompanied by rising prices ("stagflation").

The thing to remember in these days, however, is that the giant economies of the West and even of Japan are not the overwhelming influences that they used to be. More and more of the trade of the Asian countries, and also the finance that goes with it, is between the countries of the region.

The markets in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, India, Taiwan — these are all buoyant. They could be the source of great "cooperative prosperity" by the interchange of trade and finance.

— Depthnews Asia

FAMILY Planning is a highly personal and conjugal decision. But success of the family planning movement cannot be ensured till a community approach to the problem is taken. This is particularly true of a developing country like Bangladesh with its over population and socio-economic drawbacks where population control is one of the most pressing national priorities.

Not that community participation in family planning is a novel concept. Some emphasis on it has already been laid in many countries, Bangladesh not excluded. But here family planning is yet to gain momentum as a community-based movement and a component of uplift as understood in the total community context.

It is relevant to point out that though success of the population programme in Bangladesh is still very modest, the initiation of some community-based activities such as involvement of local leaders, organizing locality-based group meetings, etc. may be said to have paid off in a limited way. Our society is not yet industrialized or highly individualistic. In things concerning family and household welfare a common villager is apt to follow the advice of the community leaders. If it were left entirely to his personal initiative to practise contraception, it is doubtful that many would have done, and continuing doing, so. Thinking as a group has its own dynamics which can catalyse individual action within the group.

Local representatives like Union Parishad and Upazila Chairmen have for sometimes been the prime target of collective "motivation" activities. Holding group meetings at the local level under their sponsorship has the potentiality of disseminating the message in rural society. But here it is necessary that the community is enabled to perceive the

magnitude of the population problem within local frame of reference. Often world statistics and national data have no meaning for the common villager. That the population of the union or upazila is galloping at an alarming pace; that two of the three soccer fields of the area have already been turned into crop land due to population pressure; that trees and thickets have disappeared; that despite the introduction of more motor launches river communication is becoming more and more perilous due to overloading of passengers — are the most directly perceptible consequences of baby boom in the eyes of the common villager.

Some time ago the family planning department of the Government of Bangladesh in collaborating with the international uplift agency Pathfinder organised six workshops at Bagerhat, Madaripur, Pirojpur, Kishoreganj, Shariatpur and Jamalpur involving UP Chairmen. A distinctive aspect of these workshops was that the population problem was sought to be highlighted by quoting local statistics. Examples: Kendua Union in Madaripur had a population of 9859 in 1951, in 1990 the population was 22,986; in 1951 the union needed 1417 tons of food, now

it needs 3287 tons; in 1990 the union had 3659 school-going children of whom 2048 were enrolled in schools, 9 schools and 39 teachers were needed for that purpose; in 2000 there would be 4521 school-going students of whom 2531 would be actually enrolled in the schools while 11 schools and 48 teachers would be needed for that purpose; in case of universal primary education, however, the number of schools and teachers to be required will add up to 18 and 90 respectively. In Sikdar Malik Union in Pirojpur per capita arable land has come down from .74 acres in 1951 to .26 acres in 1990. These socio-economic indices had greater comprehensibility, hence greater impact on moulding popular thinking and behaviour.

Apart from Union Parishad and Upazila leaders, the other local leaders who can play a key role in enhancing community participation in family planning movement are the school teachers and religious leaders and youths and women's groups. They can establish the necessary linkage with the nuclei of family lives and lend momentum to the family planning movement.

It should be remembered that there are two sides to

family planning movement, one is motivation (an overused, all-purpose jargon meaning both convincing and persuasion on the agent's part and interest and desire on the subject's part) and the other is 'service delivery'. In simpler words, demand and supply. Demand creation must be matched with supply augmentation. If supply of contraceptives and service delivery facilities are expanded, they have the effect of fuelling demands. There is a local saying, if you see a barber you feel you need a haircut. Higher availability leads to higher demand which means wider contraceptive use.

But the dynamics of community movement does not stop with the user. After the user is convinced — 'motivated' — he can convince others and this catches on and the trend is set. Group meetings and inter-personal contacts at community level between users' and non-users can accelerate the process.

No practice can enjoy social vogue and become a trend-setter unless there is an added prestige attached to it and its votaries are held in high esteem. From this belief flows the ideas of honouring and rewarding two-child parents.

Since 1987 the government in cooperation with an international uplift agency has started organizing an annual reception for two-child families. This is an innovative programme taken up by this country (Indonesia has a comparable programme of holding annual reception at the Presidential palace for long-term family planning users). Till now only a limited number of two-child families are covered by the programme held both in Dhaka and in some selected districts and upazilas. But its value is not merely symbolic; it can eventually set the trend of the community. The participating families by coming to the reception make their decision of having no more than two children publicly known to the rest of the community they live in. They make their choice visible and underline the fact that one's private and conjugal option can be quite in consonance with social needs. They

become examples for others to emulate.

At the district and upazila levels sports events were organised for the children of the two-child families and the participating two-child families received certificates signed by the District Commissioner and the Deputy Director of family planning and some token awards accompanied the certificates. We think, however, that the certificates should be signed by public representatives rather than public servants.

Community leaders may also help to create a public awareness about the link between higher rate of reproduction and infant and maternal mortality. The benefits of massive immunisation programme can thus be maximised to promote smaller family norms. If couples realise that the chance of survival of their children has improved, their urge to have larger families will weaken. The EPI programme in this country is quite successful and this year more than 80 per cent coverage is claimed by UNICEF and other sources. If community awareness about the linkage is created, the impact of EPI upon family planning is bound to tell.

We do not know what the report of the recent census has in store for us and we cannot afford to delude ourselves with any optimistic projection. The fourth five-year plan envisages an increase of acceptors from 7.3 million to 11.6 million by 1995. In this race against time community awareness and participation are a critical factor.

## OPINION

### Friends, not masters

Once again, the nation lends its ears to, and has its patience tested by, the now-familiar ramblings of another newly-elected government.

The desire to have corruption-free society, where the maximum benefit of the entire national development reaches the maximum number of people, is something that has been declared by each successive government to a people that are burdened by all the trappings that come with the nation being one of the poorest in the world.

One of the main urgent issues facing the Government is the need to streamline the administration that is called to deliver all the promises to the 'maximum number of people.'

How can an administration (essentially designed and evolved from the colonial days) be expected to be people-friendly? Nowhere in the world, except perhaps a couple of countries (where the ordinary citizens are still paying the price) in our sub-continent, is there such an administration with such outdated orientation to 'serve' the people. It is even more preposterous to expect such an administration to redeem itself and its nature!

Decentralising the administration and bringing it close to the rural people is the logical step to take, provided only that the government servants at that level are made accountable and answerable to the local representative of the people. The whole purpose of decentralising has been defeated (sabotaged?) and made counterproductive in the past because the Local Government servants are appointed from Eden Building and are only answerable to their overlords in Dhaka! This situation must be reversed immediately and the powers should remain vested with the local representative and all

appointments, transfers and dismissals should be made by him. This would give instant relief and restore the confidence of the people in the Local Government officials.

It will be disastrous for the government to seek recommendations from the bureaucrats to re-orient themselves. As seen in the past, bureaucrats have a way of dealing with such situations. The whole issue will get snarled up in formation of 'reform' sub-committees and writing of expensive and unproductive volumes of reports for the benefit of an insignificant few. It will be a long drawn out exercise by the end of which, a general disillusionment will set in throughout the country.

Instead what is probably needed is a national forum to discuss and recommend ways and means of constituting an accountable and answerable service-oriented bureaucracy. Such a forum should be constituted by drawing eminent citizens from all relevant fields, like public administration, social sciences, commerce and industry etc. including members of the defence forces and the existing bureaucracy.

Whatever happens, we must not lose sight of the need to have an administration that will remain accountable and answerable to the elected representatives of the people. Let us not forget that in the ultimate analysis, it is the government bureaucracy that delivers or impedes the deliverance of the promises made by the national leaders to the electorate. One earnestly hopes that finally the impoverished people of this land will get an administration, the members of which shall remain friends, not masters, of those they serve.

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## 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.

### "Recast the media..."

Sir, Your post-editorial on Media, captioned "Recast the Media, a Challenge Posed by Khaleda Zia," was indeed a good piece of writing.

The writer no less than your editor, Mr. S. M. Ali, was very straightforward and clear as to what character the media should take in future, if it is to be recast.

Criticizing the BTV, for its poor programme presentation during the election,—i.e. in his opinion it could have been a lot more imaginative,—he further went on to say that we would want a change in the attitude taken by BTV, once it has been given certain freedom to manoeuvre.

It is high time that the BTV decided where to draw the line while reporting on the daily activities of the Government in power. Commenting on the general performance of the TV, the writer very rightly says that we do not want a repetition of what hap-

pened during the last regime. It would be of least interest to us to see on the mini-screen as to how many cabinet meetings our Prime Minister has presided over in a day.

After a long time, we have some one talking about what we had wanted to say but had remained unsaid.

Very humbly does he make a very useful suggestion to our esteemed Prime Minister, that we would be more happy to know that she is busy in the gigantic task of rebuilding our country's economy etc. rather than being shown on the TV, right from the time the news began till it ended. She should be heard more and seen less. Her presence be felt through her activities, except when on occasions suggested by the writer.

We do sincerely believe that the writer, a veteran journalist himself, has thrown light in the right direction. His article does have some very strong points to be pondered.

An Admirer

### Literacy: Where are we and why?

Sir, The BBC quoting the literacy statistics of India, in the morning broadcast on 28th March stated that the literacy rate of India was 52%, that of the state of West Bengal 57.2% and of Kerala 90.59%. The literacy rate of Bangladesh is 24% approximately and of its female population 13% (approximately).

The economic take off does not happen, if the literacy rate is less than 40%.

For us now there is a lot of hard work to do, and less of those 'development' talks in the TV and Radio.

The Government with the political mandate that it has, and Dr. A. Q. M. Badruddoza Chowdhury as the Education Minister, let us hope and pray that some truthful change will take place.

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### Fake driving licence

Sir, The news of tragic end of a brilliant DU female student under the wheels of a speeding Municipal Corporation's van near Mouchak Market is really heart-rending. It unveils the truth that majority drivers of the heavy vehicles like buses and trucks hardly care for mini transports or pedestrians. You