

# Only Peace can Bring Hope of Plenty

by Ogen John Kevin Aliro

## Time for Serious Negotiations

With the hope of an early end to the Gulf war fading and both President Bush and the Iraqi leader bracing themselves for a longish war, efforts for a peaceful solution to the Gulf war is being intensified. Several countries and groups of countries are taking separate and collective initiatives to strengthen the peace efforts.

Bangladesh has joined the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) initiative led by its current chairman Yugoslavia. The move is to get Iraq to comply with the Security Council resolution demanding an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. President Gorbachev has sent a note to the Iraqi leader a few days back, which the Soviets have termed as 'keeping communication channel open'. Quiet lobbying by India and few North African countries, especially Algeria, is also going on. In a bold move the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Nawaz Sharif has embarked on a tour of four Muslim countries—Iran, Turkey, Syria and Egypt—in search of a peaceful solution of the Gulf war.

We welcome all initiatives for peace. But we must remember that this war started not for any want of peace initiatives but for a lack of interest on the part of the warring parties to move away from their entrenched positions. In this regard it must be mentioned that the Iraqi President showed a consistent inflexibility that did not contribute towards a serious diplomatic effort to prevent the war from breaking out.

During the first few days of war, Iraq has shown a greater ability to withstand the Allied attack than was first imagined. Its resilience has surprised all. This is all the more indicative of the fact that the war will drag on longer than at first anticipated. This realisation must strengthen our resolve to find a peaceful solution. The NAM initiative, in which Bangladesh is actively participating, is something the Iraqi leader should consider seriously. The commitment of NAM countries to the Palestinian cause has been principled and consistent. President Saddam can count on the support of all these countries for a more forceful and active participation in finding a solution for the Palestinian problem, once he agrees to withdraw from Kuwait. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who is known to have close relationship with Iran, and is linked to Turkey under a new regional formula, can convey a similar message. However, his credibility with Saddam is greatly lowered by the presence of Pakistani troops on the side of the multinational force.

Southeast Asian countries, especially Malaysia and Indonesia have so far kept a low profile on the Gulf issue. Their traditional links with the Arab world, including Iraq, places them in a good position to help the peace process.

On the other hand the US and other members of the UN Security Council should also show some signs of agreement to work towards the solution of the Palestinian issue and other Middle East problems at some stage, sooner the better. All this cannot be done in the open. Through secret diplomatic negotiations some formula will have to be worked out that persuades Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait.

## Gulf War and Vegetables

The beat of a butterfly's wings, according to chaos theory, can set off a complex chain of events which culminates in a typhoon on the other side of the world. This rudimentary attempt to explain causality seems to satisfy a basic human perception of the inter-relatedness of things. How can we pick a path through life if everything is disjointed, unrelated?

Like all the best theories, it pleases because of its all-embracing simplicity. Its flaw is that it offers no guide on how to establish the chain of events that it postulates. Which beat of which metaphorical butterfly's wings set off the events that has led to the Gulf War? If only we could tell, perhaps we could prevent such a conflict re-occurring by interfering with the chain.

These musings on the links between distant events are provoked by the news that the price of vegetables in Bangladesh has risen because of a beat of a butterfly's wings, or at least because of events in the far-away Gulf. Some of the connections are clear - a sustained rise in the price of oil may indeed force up costs in this country. Others are more tenuous, or more tortuous.

We recall a period in the late 1960s when lychees suddenly became unobtainable in Chinese restaurants in Britain. Puzzled customers, denied their just desserts, received no satisfactory answer when they asked waiters for an explanation. In due course, a brief item about the forbidden fruit appeared in a newspaper. The issue was given the authority of print. Within days rumours spread that lychees were unobtainable because China was preparing for war and had therefore stopped exporting food.

The rumour provided a neat link between cause and effect, filling in that difficult gap between the butterfly's wings and the typhoon. It was, for a time, as convincing as the real explanation, which was a misdirected consignment of tins of lychees, which finally turned up at their proper destination and thus averted fears of war.

In the case of Bangladesh in 1991, the war is real but some of the fears of its effects are less firm. It seems that a number of people well versed in chaos theory are cashing in on the public's perception of cause and effect to push up prices which are not logically connected. There is little that can be done against hoarders and profiteers, except ensure as far as possible that adequate supplies of affected products are available - and to remind ourselves that the link between the war, however serious its implications, and some of the reactions being experienced in Bangladesh are about as real as the chain of events between the beat of a butterfly's wings and a typhoon on the other side of the world six months later.

FIVE years after the great Ethiopian disaster Africa is again threatened by famine which could wipe out over 10 million lives in Ethiopia, Niger, Sudan, Angola and Mozambique.

Aid agencies such as Action Aid and Oxfam are worried that the overall death toll could exceed that of the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85. What makes the situation so alarming, says a United Nations report of December 1990 is the poor response from donors.

In April 1990 Mozambique asked for 200,000 tonnes of maize for free distribution to 1.9 million starving people. By November, halfway through the appeal period, only 110,000 had arrived.

As a result malnutrition levels are rising, rendering the people even less prepared to cope with the famine. The same fate awaits millions in Sudan, Angola and in the Ethiopian provinces of Eritrea and Tigray, where at least seven million people are in urgent need of food.

But, says Anne Lloyd-Williams of Oxfam: "Fatigue and the plight of the eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are diverting donor attention from Africa... Besides social infrastructure and services are ruined and it is unlikely that these fragile, war-weary governments can cope with their disasters." It seems, then, that the solution to the current famine in Africa is not necessarily increased donor support, but resolving the civil wars that displaced millions of civilians who, given peace, could easily feed themselves.

More than 1.5 million in the western Sudan province of Darfur have seen their

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crops fail, while hundreds of thousands in southern Sudan suffer severe food shortages mainly as a result of the long running civil war, not drought.

In Mozambique and Angola the soils and rains are sufficient to support the predominantly agricultural populations. But the peasants abandoned their farms to escape fighting between government forces and rebels.

The US-backed UNITA of Jonas Savimbi has mined roads and fields in Angola, forcing peasants to flee their farmlands for the apparent safety of the towns. So even if there was no drought in the last three years, Angola would still suffer severe food shortages.

It is no coincidence that areas threatened by famine are also the major areas of regional and internal conflicts in Africa. Why, for instance, is there no famine in Burkina Faso which is more prone to drought than Angola and Mozambique?

There is desperate need of more relief aid and general food aid. But war has again imposed its hurdles on transport. While food and medical supplies are urgently needed, they cannot efficiently be distributed because roads are inaccessible or, in the case of Angola, have been mined by rebels.

According to a recent UN report, agency, the DPCCN, should move 18,500 tonnes

of emergency supplies a month. Only an average of 13,000 tonnes is being moved due to limitations of war. Convoys must often wait for military escorts to protect them against attacks by the rebel Renamo movement.

In some cases, journeys take much longer because trucks must be preceded by heavy equipment opening up long-issued roads, or improvising fords over rivers where the US and South

African-backed rebels have blown up bridges. Ferrying of emergency supplies remains in the hands of the DPCCN simply because insecurity makes such work unattractive to private truck owners. In November the DPCCN lost six trucks in a single ambush in the south-east province of Inhambane.

Mozambique has to straddle supplies to save lives in areas where access overland is impossible, but donors claim the cost of \$1,000 per tonne is "prohibitive" and funds have dried up. Without the war this would hardly be necessary. Beyond the current emergency, therefore, the solution to famine lies in an end to the wars that have devastated these countries, wars that have been partly sponsored from outside, by South Africa and the US in the case of Mozambique and Angola.

What use is it for the US to send several thousand tonnes of food and medical supplies if the trucks will go up in flames before they get to the starving civilians?

Or indeed, what difference does it make whether the US sends hoes and seeds to peasants in Angola who will never plant them because their farms are strewn with UNITA land mines provided by the Americans?

If thousands more die of starvation in Sudan than last time, it will not be because the drought has been worse. No. It will be because both the West and the Sudanese government are using food as a political weapon.

The West, led by the US, is hesitant about helping famine victims in Sudan, citing the Islamic fundamentalist government's support for the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August. This does not seem to worry the government in Khartoum, which sees famine as a weapon to punish Southerners for their support of the rebel Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA).

Even claims of "donor fatigue" are unacceptable in the face of the famine threatening millions in Africa—a calamity that grew out of central as the Soviet Union and the US encouraged conflict on the continent as part of the Cold War.

Indeed, the West has a moral obligation to help avert famine in Africa. First, emergency food supplies must be sent in to save lives, but the best the world can do for Africa is to help end the long running civil wars in Mozambique and Angola moves in the right direction seem at last to be under way. The US and Soviet Union have apparently realised the need to help end the conflicts.

The Soviet Union can similarly help defuse the civil war in Ethiopia, but the situation in Sudan is more complex since the government in Khartoum has become accustomed to its isolation.

Even when the wars are over, the need for rehabilitation and reconstruction of social and physical infrastructure destroyed in the fighting will be enormous. So would the need to rehabilitate the millions displaced internally in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Sudan or returning from neighbouring countries.

When all this is done the West, and perhaps everybody else, can start talking of donor fatigue. But this may not be necessary. Next time round, in the safety of their farms, the millions now threatened with starvation will be better equipped to fight drought rather than politically-inspired famines.

GEMINI NEWS  
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## Secessionist Movements Crack Corners of Indian Union

by Sumanta Banerjee

What are the causes for these uprisings? Primarily two: the Indian government's attitude of indifference to grievances of these areas and again the government's determination to impose a centralised system on them.

(Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Assam). While in the former, the ideology is primarily based on religious fundamentalism and the tactics on terrorism (often indiscriminate), in the latter, the ideology of the various insurgent groups is oriented towards their respective tribal identities with a tinge of socialist rhetoric and their tactics mainly based on guerrilla operations and quite often, full-fledged military formations to confront the Indian army.

In Punjab in the north-west, the Sikh secessionists gathered around numerous armed groups are aiming at an independent 'Khalistan' based on their strict interpretation of tenets of Sikhism-tenets which were formulated in the 16th-17th centuries, much of which have not only lost their relevance today, but are also in direct conflict with the needs and tastes of the modern generation. Thus, the Khalistanis are insisting on every Sikh man wearing beard and turban and every Sikh woman covering her head! Those who defy are targets of Khalistani terrorism. The terrorists are not only wreaking their vengeance upon representatives of the

Indian government-bureaucrats, police and security forces-but also upon opponents within their own Sikh community as well as Hindus, (who constitute over 40% of Punjab's population). Similarly, in Kashmir, the two main secessionist groups -- the JKLF (Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, which wants an independent Kashmir) and Hizbul Mujahideen (which favours Kashmir's integration with Pakistan)-swear by Islam, and are imposing the 'purdah' on women. Like the Khalistanis, the Kashmir secessionists also are allegedly being trained by Pakistan and are primarily resorting to terror tactics directed against Indian government officials, liberal and secular minded Kashmiri Muslim individuals and leaders, and Hindus.

The secessionists of the north-east on the other hand are fighting for their respective tribal homelands, and have so far refrained from any major killing of non-tribal people, or from expressing any religious fundamentalist doctrine. The NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland), the PLA (People's Liberation Army) of

Manipur, and the ULFA in Assam are at present the main secessionist groups operating in the area. Unlike the Khalistanis and Kashmiri terrorists, they are not patronized by any foreign government, but they have found shelter in the bordering Kachin state of north Burma where for many years now the writ of Rangoon has not been running. Through co-ordination with Burmese secessionist groups (which have been fighting Rangoon for more than four decades now) like the KIA (Kachin Independent Army), these north-east Indian insurgent outfits have managed to build up small, but regular armies of their own, which quite often confront the Indian military forces. There are reports that an Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front, consisting of the north-east Indian and Burmese secessionist groups has been set up.

The ULFA of Assam is the latest secessionist outfit to crop up in the north-east. While the other groups are tribal-based, ULFA consists of Assamese Hindus who are fighting for an independent Assam. This is the first time

that a section of India's majority Hindu community has taken up arms in order to break away from the Indian Union.

What are the causes for these uprisings? If we take a look at the history of these movements, it will be seen that they have been primarily caused by two factors: one, the Indian government's attitude of indifference to the economic grievances of the common people of these areas;

and two, the government's determination to impose a centralized political system on them which threatens the socio-cultural identity of the various communities living there. Whenever accumulation of the ignored popular grievances have manifested themselves in desperate militant agitations, the Indian state have responded by treating them as simple law and order problems and deployed armed forces to suppress them. Such repression invariably directs itself against the readily available innocent citizens instead of the invisible armed insurgents.

The innocent victims of state repression get increasingly alienated and many among them join the insurgents. According to the Indian government's own admission, the number of terrorists both in Punjab and Kashmir have gone up over the last few years, in spite of deployment of armed forces in increased strength in these two states.

The anti-insurgency operation of the Indian government take a heavy toll of innocent lives and leave behind a trail of destruction in the furrows of which a new generation of insurgents is born. Thus, the cycle of violence continues.

The roots of these violent confrontation between the state and the various insurgent groups lie in the unresolved contradiction between the Centre and the outlying states, between the Centre's insistence of centralization on the one hand, and the aspirations for autonomy among regional and other groups on the other.

As long as India's political leadership fails to change the present constitutional structure and evolve an alternative framework that would allow more autonomy for the various regions and communities, frictions between the latter and the Centre will increasingly take violent forms and assume secessionist tendencies.

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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.

### Austerity

Sir, As a citizen of one of the poorest amongst the third world countries, I feel it is time that we think seriously about what is coming to us and take some constructive austerity measures immediately.

1. Introduce petrol rationing with immediate effect without any leniency to any one -- to be followed with strict rigidity.
2. Rationing of essential commodities.
3. Put an effective check on price hike of essentials.
4. Restriction on the generous grant of foreign exchange with relaxation only to foreign exchange earners.
5. Effective control in use of fuel and power.

Time has come we should learn to sacrifice our personal comforts for a greater cause. Ever since Independence we have not sacrificed anything in the truest sense of the term. Any corruption to compromise

the above are to be dealt with iron hand. Above all a committee should be formed with a High Court Judge to oversee its implementation. A.M. Faiz Dhaka -1205

### Conservative journalism

Sir, I congratulate you on the appearance of your daily, which at least at first sight seem to reflect the sober and reflective point of view. I think in the deluge of irresponsible journalism which seems to have travelled with us since British rule, your paper may be one of those rare exceptions which project the solid and conservative point of view.

Although this view has never been popular, history is proving that radicalism of all sorts is quite destructive. Not only is communism buried in the land it first took roots, but it has withered in all other places including Bangladesh.

Thank God for that. Conservatism doesn't stand against progress. On the contrary it supports development by not taking unnecessary risks. Europe and North American's global supremacy is a result of following that stance and nobody can deny that Japan is such a mighty economic power, because both in politics and business it remains faithful to conservatism. Let your paper become the voice of the people, who are tried and tested, true to their task and willing to accept scorn by doing what they think is right, ignoring the scorn. Bashir Afzal Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

### Parks

Sir, Dhaka has a number of parks some of them quite old, like the Ramna Park, which has existed for a very long time. However, the point which I would like to stress is that, parks should be planned in such a way that they provide a relief from the mundane hard concrete of which our city is built. The emphasis must be as much as possible on natural set up and beauty. More trees, more grass, more greenery, rows of flower beds is the magic of a park, both for the young and the old. Unfortunately, often we find con-

crete pathways and steel constructions replacing the grass and trees.

Surely we can improve our parks and make them look more naturally beautiful with a little bit of imagination. Alim Sobhan Uttara Model Town

### Kitchen garden

Sir, In view of the rising prices of essentials, I think all of us should think of having a kitchen garden. Sometimes only a very small piece of land is available for the purpose, but if it is planned efficiently it can produce at least a part of our daily food need with the added satisfaction of having grown it oneself. The growing of "Kazi Plara" was given great boost by publicity of the Agriculture Department and many people have started growing it on their terrace. Similar publicity can be given about growing of different vegetables in limited spaces. The local nurseries can help people with seeds and a talk about how to grow it. Ramiz Choudhury Shahjahanpur, Dhaka.

### Development agenda

Sir, Your editorial of January 19, 1991, under the heading "Development Agenda" pointed out the

necessity of reviewing the past, in the hope of attaining a better future. In so far as the political aspirants are concerned this is, perhaps wise advice, but once in office, it is our experience that politicians and their sycophants soon forget such lofty ideals, and repeat the mistakes of the past.

So far as the seminar organised by the Bangladesh Economic Association is concerned, it is an annual exercise which becomes the forum where great minds speak intelligently on various economic issues. They appear to be able to identify problems and have solutions to it. What they do not have is the political clout to translate their ideas into action which takes into consideration, the tremendous impact of resource constraints. In other words we are good at planning, but it is the implementation part which is often readily abandoned for something new. Only long term planning and slow but sure implementation of any progra-

me, will produce results. Short term successes are just as well short-lived. Sylvia Mortaza.

### Pollution

Sir, This is time when much is being written and said about environmental pollution. This is mainly done to create social awareness of the problem.

How is it that we find a number of vehicles, with a large black cloud behind them making a person cough, gasp for air etc.? I suppose a number of times attempts had been made to educate people through the media or otherwise, say by observing traffic weeks whereby such vehicles, were fined and asked not to operate, until they did something about it.

Sadly enough, all these do not seem to have had any impact whatsoever. The vehicles continue to leave a trail of black fume and we continue to be the victim of pollution. Sharmin Akhter Banani Dhaka.