

How Sub-Saharan Africa Lost Out to Ghali of Egypt

Ted Morello writes from United Nations, New York

The appointment of a new UN secretary-general was keenly debated in the corridors of power round the globe. The choice of distinguished Egyptian diplomat Butros Butros Ghali — the first African to be elected to the post — has evoked mixed reaction among many African diplomats. Some of them see Ghali as a compromise candidate sponsored by powerful Western countries like France.

resented by Trygve Lie of Norway, Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden and Kurt Waldheim of Austria, and Asia by U Thant of Burma.

Also strengthening Africa's hand was the pledge of China, buttressed by its Security Council veto power, to hold out for an African. This time, too, the Africans changed their strategy.

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) formally nominated six candidates. The rationale was that if the powerful Western bloc rejected all six, it would lay itself open to charges of ethnic discrimination.

Following the OAU lead, the 106 members of the Non-aligned Movement and the 46 members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference approved the six. Later, two other African countries unilaterally announced candidacies.



BUTROS BUTROS GHALI Unabashed Francophile

Supporters of the OAU list threatened that unless the Security Council approved an African, its recommendation would be rejected by the General Assembly, which has the final word. The Africans would have had no trouble rallying the simple majority necessary to approve or reject. Thus, the Assembly-Security Council candidate shuttle could have continued until the Council sent up a name acceptable to the African bloc.

Neither the US nor Britain, both of which wield veto power, was enthusiastic about an African. None of those from the sub-Sahara was considered to have the diplomatic and administrative qualifications or to enjoy the international status required.

Besides Ghali, the OAU candidates included Finance Minister Bernard Chidzero of Zimbabwe and Olusegun Obasanjo, a one-time Nigerian head of state. The three others, all UN officials, were Kenneth Daddie of Ghana, James Jonah of Sierra Leone and Michel Doo Kingue of Cameroon. The two who entered the race on their own were Nguema Francois Owono, an official from Gabon, and former Burundi diplomat Mwanze Terrence.

Faced with a determined African power bloc, opposition weakened. Ghali was accepted with neither the pro — nor anti-African factions fully satisfied.

Nevertheless, he was a compromise that all five veto-wielding Council members could rationalise accepting. China had fulfilled its pledge to

hold out for an African. The US and Britain decided they could live with him. France had supported Ghali from the outset. The Soviet Union, awash with domestic crises, was willing to go along with any majority decision.

Predictably, earlier reservations about Ghali were buried in post-election expressions of satisfaction of varying sincerity. In the customary facade of solidarity, Africans closed ranks.

Ibrahim Gambari — Nigeria's UN ambassador and current OAU president who himself was at one point considered a candidate, commented on Ghali's election: "We wanted someone nominated by the Organisation of African Unity, and we go that Africa's victory is a real one."

Privately, black Africans made no secret of their preference for a fellow sub-Saharan. It was explained that the inclusion of an Egyptian on the OAU list merely reflected the membership of other North African Arab states and the need to woo Arab and Islamic support from outside the continent.

The outcome was a setback to hopes that Chidzero would get the job. In the secret straw votes taken over several weeks to narrow the field, he had run neck-and-neck with Ghali. And at one point he held an 11-10 lead. France was said to have engineered the last-minute defection of four Chidzero supporters.

That cut his backing in the decisive formal voting the night of November 21 to seven — two below the nine needed

to stay in the race. Because all voting is secret, it was impossible to be certain who were the defectors. A suspicion was that the US refused to support Chidzero because of his advocacy of economic statism, a concept vociferously opposed by US President George Bush.

Yemen, which has condemned Cairo's peace pact with Israel and its Persian Gulf war support, was almost certainly a defector. Yet its objections were among the most persuasive in winning Ghali's support from Washington and London, the Gulf war's two hard-liners and friends of Israel.

French backing for Ghali stemmed in part from his unabashed Francophilia. Aside from his warm ties with Paris officials, he speaks French as well as he does English and his native Arabic. Fluency in French was a condition imposed by France in the selection.

Ghali's diplomatic credentials are rooted principally in the key role he played as President Anwar Sadat's right-hand man in the talks that led to the signing in 1979 of the treaty ending 30 years of war between Egypt and Israel.

To this day, the pact is the only such accord between the Jewish state and its Arab neighbours. Two years earlier, he had accompanied Sadat as deputy foreign minister in the president's historic breakthrough trip to Jerusalem, a surprise visit that startled the world and paved the way to the treaty.

The peace pact resulted in Egypt being ousted from the outlawed OAU. Ghali was credited with negotiating Egypt's readmission to the regional organisation. He was also influential in winning the release from a South African prison of Nelson Mandela, the African National Congress leader.

Under the UN Charter, Ghali is an international civil servant with no greater loyalty or attachment to Egypt than to any of the organisation's 165 other member states. Nevertheless, it is not particularly comforting to Israel that the two top-ranking UN officials — Ghali and the current General Assembly president, Samir Shihabi of Saudi Arabia — are Arabs. However, Israeli diplomats said after Ghali's election that he was "fair-minded".

Though he is an Arab, Ghali is a Coptic Christian, and his wife is Jewish. A main reservation about him is his age. At 69, he is the oldest candidate to hold the post. Perez de Cuellar, two years his junior, was 10 years younger when he took over.

Questions have also been raised about whether Ghali is physically strong enough to meet the gruelling duties. He was incapacitated for months by a liver abscess two years ago.

But it was pointed out that Perez de Cuellar, who under went heart bypass surgery a few years ago, has followed a daunting regime, including a bruising schedule of global travel.

Ghali, a sophisticated, Westernised scholar, is a professor of international law, a Fulbright scholar at Columbia University in New York and the author of scores of publications. He is the scion of one of Egypt's most distinguished Coptic families

— GEMINI NEWS

TED MORELLO is a UN correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor.

Definite Time-frame for Repatriation

During the meeting with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, the Pakistani Premier Mr Nawaz Sharif assured our PM that plans were afoot to take back the stranded Pakistanis who are waiting to be repatriated for the last two decades. We welcome the assurances of the Pakistani PM but cannot fail to express our concern at the expression "gradually" used by him. Time and again we heard of resolutions and plans. Successive Pakistani leaders made pledges after pledges to take back their citizens from Bangladesh where they have been forced to live against their will ever since the birth of Bangladesh. But seldom have we seen any real move towards solving this great human tragedy. Mr Sharif, when he was the leader of the opposition and the Chief Minister of the Punjab province, declared that he would work for the resettlement of the stranded Pakistanis in his province as resettlement in Sindh was becoming difficult. Now Mr Sharif is in the driving seat. We see no reason why he cannot make good his promise. But his use of the word "gradually" has surprised us a bit. What does the Pakistani Prime Minister mean by the use of that qualifier for the process of repatriation?

Twenty years is a long time in anybody's life. We had stated in our previous editorials that most of the stranded Pakistanis have wasted the prime of their life waiting to go to the land of their choice. The youngmen of twenty of today were the unborn children of their parents when they decided to opt for Pakistan. These people have a right to settle in their own country. Now if after all these years they are told the repatriation will take place "gradually", the question that naturally comes to everybody's mind is "how long is gradual?" Since definite pledges have taken more than twenty years to materialise, the pledge for "gradual" repatriation may take — who knows how long. All arrangements for the logistics of repatriation is at hand. The international community has also made the necessary finances available to pay for its cost. What is now waited is Pakistan's definite decision to make good the promise they made to their own people, to the world and of course to Bangladesh.

This question of the right of the stranded Pakistanis becomes more urgent in view of the fact that twenty years have past since these people were promised to be taken back to their country. For twenty years they have been living in camps and counting days for reunion with their families. And for twenty years Pakistan has dragged its feet on the matter. The international community has never been given any satisfactory answer as to the delay in implementing this promise. Whatever may have been the reasons in the past, it is now time that steps be taken to end the suffering of these innocent victims of an historical development. The stranded Pakistanis have been made to live as Stateless people even though they very much have a State to call their own. The Prime Minister of Pakistan should now set a definite time-frame for repatriation.

Filling up Job Quota for Women

There is a sense of triumph in many important areas of world opinion, most of them naturally situated in the industrial West, over the collapse of communism. It will not at all help us in the undeveloped East to forget that we are not socio-economically so placed that we can share in the jubilation and build our cenotaphs after interring everything that great human endeavour of seven decades meant and represented and taught. We must beware of not throwing the baby out with the bath-water.

One good lesson of socialist proselytization was the emphasis on the truism that emancipation would not come to woman until she has been gainfully employed or all her labour is paid for and she can contribute significantly to the family budget. If our society, badly as it is in the need of all-round progress, has to have a balanced development, the foremost item on the card of needs would be the elimination of the gender imbalance. The best way to this would be bringing about a radical increase in the number of paying jobs for women. The great and now-supposed-to-be-failed socialist experiment also taught us a very good way to go about this business.

Our successive governments, not excluding the administrations during the Pakistani colonial dispensation, have been willy-nilly responsive to the weight of logic and common sense on the one hand and the trends of the times — of going for more and more women in education and medicine. Bangladesh has also been keeping to trend rather enthusiastically.

The first meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women's Affairs was held at the Sangsad Bhaban on Tuesday. Of the diverse items the meeting deliberated on what was non-fulfilment job quotas for women in primary schools and colleges and government establishments. Any reader will suspect a gap in the foregoing sentence. Is the quota for women teachers in the high schools full up? He or she should be well-advised to be wakened to the absurdities of our educational realities. There perhaps is no quota for women teachers in the high schools! Girls' schools employ male teachers all right. And again there are girls' colleges as well and that hasn't stopped both boys' and girls' colleges to employ both male and female teachers. Education, let us exclude madrasa education from this category, is at no level in Bangladesh segregated genderwise. Why should educational employment be? If there is no problem in letting male children and male young people to be taught by women teachers, where can the wrong be in women teaching boys? This is a lacuna which should be taken care of as soon as it is identified.

The more serious aspect of the non-fulfilment of the job quota reserved for women lies elsewhere. What's holding induction of the required number of women? Non-availability of eligible women? That cannot be true. Male pressure is what prevails and people in authority in all such establishments are either not very serious about their duty in this respect or are plainly giving a damn to the whole despicable business. The quota fulfilment work is something required by the state of its paid functionaries. It is now for the state to take to task all who have been responsible for not only disobeying government direction but also seriously undermining the very spirit of our Constitution.

A violent wave of racist attacks against foreigners and asylum-seekers is making the foreign population in Germany insecure and fearful.

They say the police seems to be impotent against this type of aggression, and unable to give them the protection they need.

Most foreigners interviewed by the media and social psychologists admit that they no longer go out at night, avoid strolling along the boulevards, fear for the safety of their children and perceive a growing animosity towards them.

This fear has been reinforced by a series of brutal attacks by gangs of ultra-rightist neo-fascists against foreigners in the states of Bayern, Saxony and Brandenburg in which many were hurt.

These assaults have increased as concern rises over the large number of eastern European and Third World nationals seeking asylum in Germany — a figure which could reach 200,000 by the end of this year — mainly for economic reasons.

The German constitution grants asylum to all people who allege persecution on political, religious or racial grounds back in their native land, but German law distinguishes between these kinds of refugees and so-called "economic refugees."

But the present system of processing applications to distinguish between political asylum-seekers and economic migrants is slow and much criticised.

Alarmed by the extremist violence, government officials and politicians have condemned the attacks and urged Germans to help by intervening to stop attacks on the foreigners.

To the Editor...

Yunus Emre

Sir, It was with particular satisfaction that I noticed the valuable contribution you have made for the success of our recent function on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the Turkish poet, Yunus Emre (The Daily Star, Dec 5).

I am confident that our co-operation will further develop in the coming days.

Ahmet Ermisoglu, Ambassador of Turkey, Dhaka.

Enfant Terrible

Sir, My sincere thanks to you for publishing "Columbus protestors warm-up for the 500th anniversary." It was indeed invigorating to hear the American-Indian viewpoint and reactions to the so-called discovery of America. Today we know that earlier to Columbus, Arabs, Vikings and Phoenicians had visited the so-called New World. That the earlier groups namely the Phoenicians, Vikings and Arabs had friendly contacts with the great cultures and civilizations of that land and as traders, sea-farers and colonizers had benefitted both the New World and the Old World.

I was going through the

Germany

Racist Offensive Against Foreigners

A resurgence of racist attacks against immigrants has left foreigners in Germany terror-stricken, reports Roberto Ampuero Espinoza of IPS writes from Bonn.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl warned that the actions of the extremists "constitute a shameful blot on the country" and seriously compromise the country's image abroad.

There are an estimated five million foreigners living in Germany, a country of 78 million. Most were encouraged to come by the government which needed labour for the country's booming factories during the "economic miracle" of the 1950's and 1960's.

Erwin Kuckel, a sociologist from the University of Erlangen, said the racist attackers "are mostly young men with low wages, social failures in contemporary German society who are disillusioned and frustrated, and who intend to take their frustrations out on foreigners."

He added that these constant attacks and threats are generating insecurity among foreigners, inducing them to also organise into groups to protect themselves.

So far, racist aggression has resulted in the deaths of at least three African immigrants, many injuries and unknown numbers threatened and terrified by verbal abuse.

Bavarian tv reported recently that an Argentinian

married to a German and their six month-old baby daughter were the object of attacks and insults from racists on the street.

"Until recently racist attacks were directed against Africans and scruffily dressed poor foreigners," one Latin American diplomat told IPS. "But now racism is directed against all those who aren't Germans."

Marta Perez, a Spanish maid in a German household, told IPS: "I arrived in Germany young and healthy 30 years ago. I paid my taxes and my social security, but now that I am old and ailing, they want me to leave."

Ralph Giordano, a distinguished German Jewish writer declared at a forum in Frankfurt that racism is a legacy of Adolf Hitler's National Socialist institutions which though "dismantled and destroyed forever in Germany, their effects remain deeply inculcated in people's mentality."

He expressed the hope that German pro-democratic forces would win this struggle against racism and extremism.

In recent weeks there have been massive rallies by organi-

sations opposing attacks against foreigners and urging the formation of a multi-cultural society in Germany.

Gregor Gysl, president of the formerly Communist Party of Democratic Socialism

expressed the fear that racist groups are again gaining ground in Germany. He warned that "history was open" in this direction.

Internationally, the racist attacks are reviving old preju-

OPINION

Backwater of Asia

Gholam Mohammad

The Daily Star organised a Media Round Table (MRT) on 19 November. The present state of our economy and future options for our development were debated. Emphasis was laid on achieving national consensus being the most effective instrument to resolve issues having far reaching consequences.

Those who participated in the MRT included the Planning Minister, the Industries Minister, an ex-Finance Minister, Chief Whip of Jatiya Sangsad, two leading opposition MPs, named, Tofael Ahmed and Rashed Khan Menon, Secretary, ERD, some of our leading economists. Presidents of DCCI and MCCI, Executive Secretary ESCAP, Resident Representative of World Bank, Resident Representative of UNDP etc., Secretary to the Prime Minister's secretariat was also present. Prof Rehman Sobhan performed the responsibilities of Moderator of the MRT.

The MRT from the viewpoints of representation and deliberations, has assumed the shape of an important reference.

Assuming a national daily's resource and other constraints, we consider The Daily Star has responded to an urgent national task before it was too late.

In the MRT, however, the absence of a representative from our labour front/trade unions was quite strongly felt. Inter-action of ideas on this account, has remained incomplete.

What is immediately required, is a systematic follow-up action as under: 1) Bengal rendering of the deliberations and its mass circulation; 2) Setting out priorities; 3) Preparation of a paper for our Jatiya Sangsad for discussions of the issues by the people's elected representatives towards attaining a consensus within the Sangsad first; 4) Inclusion of responsible labour leaders in the panel for future debate/discussions.

What is very crucial is the statement of our Planning Minister to which no objections were tabled except for mild, defensive observations of Prof. Rehman Sobhan. In point of fact, his statement at one part or the other, was corroborated by the Opposition MPs' present. Some important points of the statement are reproduced below in the words of the Planning Minister, himself: 1) Upto 1965, Pakistan's industrial development was a model (for developing countries). It was taught in Harvard. Korea took the TFYP of Pakistan. 2) In the then East Pakistan, the private sector was more vigorous than the public sector 3) We (the then

East Pakistan) were exporting US \$ 50 million more than South Korea. 4) We (the then East Pakistan) were head and shoulder above these nations like — Thailand, Korea, Indonesia, in textiles. 5) But the change in Industrial Policy came in 1971. What happened is the nationalisation programme which demoralised the whole industrial sector; Today you are getting the snow-ball effect — today the whole industrial sector is vitiating. 6) Industrial Policy started from 1982.

Now to quote the participants on our present situation in their own words which deserves very serious attention and examination in juxtaposition with our political landscape:

"When we go out of this country and find that other countries which were poorer than us like Thailand or Korea, we feel the pang in our heart that we could not do it."

— Rashed Khan Menon

"We were better off as Mr. Kibria and the Planning Minister pointed out, than Korea in 50's and 60's."

— Tofael Ahmed

"Now if we look at the domestic investment of the last decade, Bangladesh's investment declined from 16% to 11-12%. In Pakistan, it is close to 18%. India 24%, Sri Lanka 21%, Thailand 31%, Turkey 22%, China 36%, Korea 35%, Hong Kong and Singapore around 30.35%.

"Per capita income of India/Pakistan is roughly US \$ 400, Sri Lanka US \$ 450, and we have around US \$ 180.

"During the last decade, real wages of the workers went up by 33% and productivity of workers went down by 18%."

— M. Syeduzzaman

"In 1962, the Koreans used to eat the bark of trees as in 1991, we are doing."

— Tofael Ahmed

"Bangladesh today is quite literally a backwater of Asia. Even Nepal is doing better than us."

— Rehman Sobhan

the best place where Siberian ducks are coming and finding waterways where there are small fish. I tell you that this is the place for foreign investors. And good foreign businessmen who finds that a labour per day is something around one dollar, they are bound to come rushing as the Siberian ducks."

— SAMS Kibria

At this stage, we have to look back and forth, of course deeper indeed, into the causes of our becoming the "Backwater of Asia" in their historical perspective.

Following are the important contemporary political events: 1) In the then East Pakistan, a fierce political movement culminating into the war of liberation war going on (1948-1971). 2) Sheikh Mujibur Rahman master-minded Bangladesh with people's support, as an independent state, with specific political and economic systems (1972-1975) 3) Ziaur Rahman reversed those systems and re-defined Bangladesh by omitting Secularism. In the process of reversal, a strong group of vested interests developed (1976-1981). 4) Ershad represented the vested interests; his require being the longest in the Bangladesh history came to be identified as Autocracy with all its evils (1981-1990). 5) Political consensus, the first of its kind, was achieved at all levels of the society and Ershad was replaced by a caretaker Government of Justice Shahabuddin who supervised free and fair elections, acknowledged as such unanimously, both at home and abroad and assumption of office as Prime Minister by Begum Khaleda Zia took place. 6) Again by political consensus, the form of government was changed making it accountable to the Jatiya Sangsad (1990-1991).

The MRT has provoked us into a serious re-thinking over what has been happening to us at different periods of time briefly summarised above. Our past is very rich, full of lessons learnt at heavy costs already. We have to re-gain our sense of direction lost for reasons known to us the sooner, the better. The most effective instrumentality for this purpose, is said to be the national consensus.

The MRT which examined the national issues, has recommended a national consensus on economic issues so that the policy-continuity notwithstanding the change of Government, can be ensured, priorities clearly defined and sensitivities exactly identified. This would be a really painful process. But our response should nonetheless, be prompt and positive.

"I think, there is a consensus about development of the private sector but of course, there is a difference about the privatisation policy."

"These defaulters who have taken so much money from the Banks, why have they not invested in this period of time, where have they invested?"

"Does private sector mean private loot?"

— Rashed Khan Menon

"National consensus is not just between the Government and the Opposition. My concept is a bit deeper and wider. Consensus must pervade the society as a whole.

"I assure you that this is