

# New Priorities in a Changing World Shape our Tasks

by Emeka Anyaoku

Secretary General, Commonwealth

## Warning from Helmut Kohl

Chancellor Helmut Kohl has been both forthright and brave in reminding his people that without the contribution of foreign workers, many of whom have been under attack from extreme rightist neo-Nazi elements, "the affluence of Germany would not have been possible at all." In a statesmanlike address on Wednesday, he cited the contributions to the country's economy by six million foreign residents and warned his people that unless Germany got a grip on the growing violence, the nation was in a danger of suffering a deep crisis in public trust, at home and abroad, in democratic institutions. What impact the crisis might have on the economy remains to be seen. In a separate statement made at the parliament, Kohl virtually admitted that his country, Europe's economic giant, was in a recession which might slow down the reconstruction of what was once East Germany, aggravating the restiveness among the rightist elements in the country.

The warning from Kohl came within two days of the killing of three Turkish-Germans, including a 10-year old girl, in Berlin, while in other incidents, neo-Nazis murdered an anti-fascist activist and another man whom they thought to be Jewish.

In terms of number, victims of these neo-Nazi attacks may be counted in fingers. But it is the pattern that underlines the rightist upsurge that has somewhat belatedly started causing concern to the Kohl administration. Previously, the federal prosecutor Alexander von Stahl had seen "no proof of a political motive" behind the assaults. However, after the killings on Monday, the same official was obliged to declare that "the unknown attackers want to reestablish a National Socialist dictatorship in Germany."

All these warnings, including the latest from the Chancellor, should have come earlier to emphasise that the issue in Germany is not immigration or a fringe juvenile delinquent phenomenon but, as the *Washington Post* put it two days ago, "murderous racism" and a threat to cultural pluralism. The *Post* is also right in describing it as a Europe-wide problem "and to some extent a universal one."

However, at this moment, the responsibility lies with the German authorities to deal with this situation, firmly and decisively, to ensure, first, that the rightist violence does not escalate further and secondly, to set an example for other European nations as to how this unprecedented threat to human rights should be contained. Opinions within the administration remain divided as to what measures — and legislations — should be used to go after the neo-Nazi groups. A crackdown is said to be imminent. One view, offered by the Institute of Terrorism Research, suggests that "the justice system that proved so effective in the past has yet to hit hard this time." On the other hand, an opinion poll shows that 77 per cent of Germans are ready to accept a temporary suspension of civil freedoms "if terror by the left and right could be stopped that way." Here is a proof as good as any that an overwhelming majority of Germans want "this madness let loose by a minority of racist neo-fascist elements to come to a permanent halt, paving the way for the return of sanity and order, cultural co-existence among various ethnic groups and economic resurgence to a country which is held in esteem inside Europe and outside. In achieving this objective, Kohl faces a number of difficult options. We trust, despite his delay in seeing the seriousness of the situation, his measures will reflect the spirit of the forthright statement he issued on Wednesday, defending the place of foreign residents in Germany's socio-economic life.

## Fog Jam on the Padma

Bangladesh still is in a state where the multitude doesn't count. It is only the elite that matters. And Bangladesh's very special elite consist mostly of assorted suckers sitting on piles of money and not those but for whom this state would not have been here in the first place, not to speak of being alive and kicking. If this is being bitter, it can be more bitter than what the four thousand and odd passengers were feeling stuck up in buses stranded on board the giant ferries connecting Aricha with Daulatdia and Nagarbari — the life-line of the northern and western districts, half of Bangladesh, that is — for long eight hours. And in the chilliest night of the season, they were cooped up in their buses from midnight to eight in the morning of Wednesday — their carrying vessels rendered unmovable by deep fog.

The cause of the bitterness is well justified. This is not the first time that this has happened. It is a regularly annual feature accounting for a major share of riverine accidents. One cannot help remembering the full three-day long fog that enveloped all the southern rivers and made all riverine communication stand still in the year before last. One wonders if these unending strand of tragedies and sufferings have been able to move the conscience of those who matter into doing something to improve fog-time navigation.

One has still to hear of vessel search lights and stationary light signals on shoals and shores being made specially to penetrate fog. This becomes cruelly ironic with almost all the towns of Bangladesh, for reasons unknown, being decked with hyper-expensive sodium lamps specially invented to see through fog.

The only explanation of the lapse is what we started with. The rickshaw-riders may constitute the majority of road-users but they must use the Indira Road, which is, for all practical purposes, a lane — and neither the VIP Road nor the spacious entry to Manik Mia Avenue. Truly, it is still a long way to democracy.

HAROLD Macmillan, a former British Prime Minister, memorably described the surge of Africa's independence struggles of the 1960s as "a wind of change blowing through Africa". It was significant, perhaps prophetic, that he was speaking in Cape Town. The political transformation in South Africa for which many have fought, including the Commonwealth, and for which much blood continues to be shed, now seems much closer, but the final demise of apartheid and the birth of a new South Africa still remain elusive.

In addition to sending eminent observers to the inaugural proceedings of CODESA late last year, I have myself in the past twelve months held extensive discussions and negotiations with all the parties during three personal visits to South Africa. This followed the mandate given to me by Heads of Government at their meeting in Harare last October when they determined that the Commonwealth should render whatever assistance might be helpful to the negotiation process.

Crucial to a resumption of those negotiations has been the need to address the rising tide of violence which has been so corrosive of the necessary bond of trust between the principal parties. Commonwealth mediation has, therefore, recently assumed a different format insofar as we have now a group of observers, based in the Durban and Johannesburg areas, to observe and encourage measures to end the escalating violence there. This is in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution of August 1992 and involves our team working alongside UN, OAU and EC monitors. It is a long and difficult process but I am encouraged to hope that

this Commonwealth and international presence can help those genuinely working for peace and order and contribute to the building of confidence among all the parties.

The wind of political change is again sweeping across Africa and throughout the world. At the vortex of what in some countries is almost a hurricane is a welcome commitment to transparency in government and to democracy. The Commonwealth Secretariat has vigorously and effectively pursued its Harare mandate in this field. In the pre-electoral stages, the Commonwealth has provided the services of elections experts and constitutional lawyers to advise on desirable changes to accommodate multiparty systems. The Commonwealth can also assist vital preparatory arrangements such as voter registration and electoral organisation. And, not least, there are ways the Commonwealth can sometimes help in building confidence in

the electoral process and encouraging inter-party dialogue. That was the purpose of my recent visit to Kenya.

All in all, in this new phase of democratic development where the exercise of free political choice has been part of a wider process of building democracy, the Commonwealth in the last two years has been invited to monitor general elections in Zambia, Ghana, Guyana, Seychelles, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Kenya. The Commonwealth Observers I have appointed, each acting in their individual capacity, have presented independent and impartial assessments of the conduct of these elections, thereby contributing to the credibility of the results and the stability of internal political relations in these countries. Their assessments in the last two years have rarely been

challenged, because the Commonwealth way does not involve a hasty superficial reckoning by 'outsiders'; rather, it involves, in a deliberate and often lengthy way, bringing, in response to the host country, the experience of the Commonwealth into contact with that country's political and legal processes.

The Commonwealth's role in this regard derives from an appreciation that the Harare priorities are a true reflection of the most significant concerns of our times. Good governance widely defined refers to constructive and meaningful relations between governments and peoples. While this involves political freedom and democracy, good governance must also have an economic dimension. Accordingly, providing for an acceptable quality of life for their citizens has become a priority aspect of the current movement for change in Commonwealth countries.

Commonwealth Finance Ministers, meeting in New York in September of this year, were particularly seized of change as it relates to development needs. They voiced grave concern at the delays in achieving a successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round of the GATT talks, which sought to improve the international trade environment and boost confidence in a multilateral approach to world trade agreements. They recognised other impediments to economic recovery, such as the decline in capital flows and the continued magnitude of the debt burden. Our discussions in Kampala highlight the many ways in which the Secretariat, through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation and in other ways, has

sought to assist the development objectives of Commonwealth members.

There are indeed many significant economic changes afoot. Moves towards a single market in Europe, a free trade area in North America, and the emerging economic communities and groupings in Asia, in the Caribbean and in Africa typify the increased trend towards regionalism. The signing of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community is a hopeful development for Africa. The protocols calling for sub-regional economic integration go beyond mere economic schemes, to encompass truly shared aspirations and plans for regional political and social development as well. We can also commend countries of East Africa seeking to revive the cooperative objectives which once inspired the East African Community.

However, regionalism favours world economic growth and development if, and only if, it does not work against multilateralism. Introspective schemes which threaten market access for third countries diminish the salience of development restructuring programmes and increase the overall vulnerability of interdependent trading partners. The Commonwealth's conclusions in similar vein of the Change for the Better Report had been widely discussed and welcomed.

Change is also stripping away stereotypical perceptions of social and economic development strategies; and the Commonwealth is sharpening its tools better to assist the whittling process. There is now growing recognition that the magnitude and interdependence of global problems defy attempts to compartment-

alise them into issues to be addressed within the conventional limits of individual societies. The concerns with environmental degradation and climate change stems not merely from disapproval of pollution, for example, but necessarily from a real concern for the very survival of worldwide ecosystems and peoples. Similarly, many now accept that our environmental and developmental aims are in fact inseparable.

Again, we know that security is no longer just a question of the political or military capacity to confront an aggressor. Security can be threatened by poverty, by terrorism, and by the resurgence of ethnic and religious fundamentalism; its enhancement therefore often requires economic action as much as any other.

These many changes in the political and economic arenas herald extraordinary opportunities for an enhanced role for international organisations. Thus, to use the Latin tag, *tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*. As the times change, so do we change with them. At Port Moresby in 1990, I alerted you to my concern that the Commonwealth Secretariat's structure and resources should be better tailored to its priorities, as part of the reappraisal of the future of the Commonwealth. Commonwealth priorities for the 1990s and beyond have now been authoritatively identified by Heads of Government in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991.

The article is based on the address delivered by Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth at the 11th Commonwealth Senior Officials Meeting, held at Kampala, Uganda earlier this month.



The Secretary General of the Commonwealth delivering his address at the Kampala meeting

AUSTRALIA'S decision to buy 18 surplus US F-111 fighter-bombers in a garage sale last month may have saved the recession-hit nation a lot of money, but it has revived a whole swag of questions about who the country's potential enemies are.

The Australian Defence Ministry announced the deal for the second-hand swing-wing jets at a bargain price of US \$ 100 million from the United States which is phasing the F-111 out.

The supersonic fighter bomber which was first produced in the 1960s, but carries a lethal load of heavy ordnance. It has a range of 5,000 km and the 18 planes will bring to 40 the total number of this type of aircraft in the Australian Air Force.

The jets can fly to Bangkok and back from Australia's northern coast, and is making some South-east Asian nations nervous.

Indonesia, Australia's nearest neighbour with 180 million people crowded into a densely-populated archipelago, that feels most threatened by a buildup in Australia's offensive air power.

"I find it contradictory that there is this outward-looking Australia that wants to feel comfortable with its neighbours and then you find

## Australia Buys Bombers, but Who's the Enemy?

Australia buying the F-111's. The neighbours will ask: strike? What for?" the Indonesian ambassador to Australia, Sabam Siagian, said in a television interview.

These fears were heightened this week when the federal opposition coalition unveiled its post-Cold War blueprint for Australia's defence that seeks to deter would-be aggressors by developing a more powerful long-range military strike capability.

Titled 'A Strong Australia', the report challenges the conventional notion that Australia's military should be structured to counter an attack on the continent's northern shores. The huge island-continent, rich in natural resources, is more than twice the size of India, but has only 17 million people.

Instead, the opposition coalition wants the defence forces to deter rather than counter such an attack with an enhanced strike capability.

The Liberal-National Party coalition is strongly tipped to win federal elections next year. Party officials say if they win, they will upgrade the weapons systems of the ageing F-111's in the Australian Air Force, increase range by mid-air refuelling capability and equip them

Australia is buying more long-range bombers amidst a debate about its defence needs. Kalinga Seneviratne of IPS reports from Sydney



with cruise missiles. At the same time, the coalition says it will invite the United States to make greater use of base facilities in Darwin and Freemantle, including possible stationing of US military aircraft in Darwin.

This month, US and Australian Air Forces held four-weeks of joint exercises off Australia's northern shores involving some 70 aircraft to test tactical combat skills of Australian pilots.

The Australian decision to beef up its air force comes amidst a frenetic arms race in East Asia as nations adjust to a post-Cold War multi-polar world.

Last month, Taiwan announced the purchase of 70 F-16 fighters from the United

States. China is upgrading its air force with Soviet aircraft. Malaysia is trying to decide between US or Soviet-made warplanes.

Alexander Downer, the opposition spokesman on defence said under a coalition government, Australia will work closely with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore to promote joint-venture manufacture of military equipment.

Australia is a small but significant participant in the international weapons trade, exporting some 80 million dollars worth of military equipment each year — most of it aircraft and helicopter parts to Thailand, Indonesia, the South Pacific and even Bangladesh.

"In the current defence modernisation programme we have created a lot of jobs, essentially we are seeing the beginning of a military industrial complex in Australia," says Graeme Cheeseman from the Australian Defence Force Academy.

But some experts are not so sure Australia needs such a big military budget, and they have called for a better definition of what the country's defence goals should be.

"With no foreseeable military threat, we spend as much on defence as all of the South-East Asian and South Pacific countries put together," says defence consultant Alan Wrigley.

According to Michael O'Connor of the Australian Defence Association Australia needs to be able to defend its merchant shipping lanes from potential regional aggressors.

But who are these potential aggressors? The Defence Department in a recent report, had to stretch its imagination to hint that India, China and Japan as potential military threats to Australia.

Senator Sid Spinder, defence spokesman for the opposition Australian Democrats Party, sees more of a need to protect Australia from illegal emigrants fleeing impoverished Asian countries. In the latest incident, another boatload of Chinese refugees made a highly-publicised landing on Australian shores.

"We need less firepower and more surveillance and patrolling of northern Australia," Spinder said. "We can't justify beefing up our war-fighting arm when we can't detect a boat-load of unarmed Chinese landing on the Western Australian coast."

## 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.

### Of oranges

Sir, Permit me to offer my thanks as a Maulvibazar for the nice write-up you published wishing Maulvibazar well. This is about oranges in Maulvibazar. But there is a small technical snag, the primary area of the orange cultivation is in Beani Bazar police station (previously known as Jaldhub) which falls in the Sylhet district. But that does not make much difference in the context of your writing.

Now to come to the subject, this orange known as "bitter orange" is botanically different from the orange that we know and eat. It is big in size, its skin is thicker and contains more essential oil. If you peel one such orange your hands will be soiled by the essential oil, coming out of the skin. Why it has chosen that area is known to the soil chemists. The plant can be grown anywhere, but its life will be very limited. At my homestead in village Mansur Nagar in P.S. Rajnagar there was a plant which bore fruit for six years then died out. Obviously the nutrients in the soil had been exhausted.

On the question of harassment by the police on the plea of smuggling, it is to be noted that there is no such plantation in the areas of India adjoining Beani Bazar. This vari-

ety of orange grows in the central province of India and is popularly known as "Nagpuri". You may please do a very good service by educating the police in the matter so that the cultivators may be saved from harassment.

Coming to the question of smuggling and orange I would like to recapitulate that Dr I H Osmani, the then D C of Sylhet, had invented a system of rationing by introducing a voucher for the orange growers of Sylhet (in the adjoining area of Khasia Pahar). He would get the production estimated and entered in a printed voucher book which a gardener was obliged to fill in every time he sent his product out and hand over the counter-foil of the voucher to the police.

Now about government efforts. The then Government of East Pakistan had established a horticultural farm at Jointapur in Sylhet district. In that farm several experiments were started to produce a new variety. The farm being in the border unfortunately became a victim of the War of Independence.

You can make the plants more vigorous and more fruit yielding by manuring but that may be economically unworkable.

A horticultural board was created to look after the field

of horticulture. It does not exist now. One of the five Directors under the D G Agriculture looks after this field. Maybe fortunately the person occupying the chair now is from Beani Bazar, so can't we expect some attention?

P A Basir  
Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka

### Kidney disease and children

Sir, My attention has been drawn to the heart-touching news report "Kidney disease grips babies" followed by a timely editorial "Facilities for Kidney Treatment Needed" which appeared in 'The Daily Star' of November 7 and 10 respectively.

The kidney disease situation in our country is indeed very alarming. The government should take immediate measures to provide medical treatment to the kidney patients particularly to the children attacked by Acute Renal Failure (ARF). This is an urgent need of the common people which the democratic government should have met on an emergency basis.

Incidentally, the photograph of the baby named Maria Mohsin, an ARF patient, which appeared with the news report is the niece of one of my colleagues. I would fervently request the medical authority to arrange good treatment for Maria and other children so that these innocent souls could survive to share their heavenly love and feelings with us.

M Zahidul Haque  
Assistant Professor,  
Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

### Road needs repair

Sir, The road at Ibrahimpur proceeding towards Begum Rokeya Sarani, Shewrapara, Mirpur is an important public thoroughfare of this area. But the condition of the road begs description. It has developed many potholes here and there and when there is little rain, mud and water accumulates making its condition very much deplorable. A few months back, Dhaka WASA authority cut the road to construct sewerage system line. They did their work and left. Now nobody comes to see us in what condition we are in.

We the people who have to use this road everyday are very much hard hit. We doubt if there's any one to look after this tragic condition of an important thoroughfare although it is in the Dhaka City Corporation's purview. On the other hand, the Old Airport Road and Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue are being recarpeted fast in connection with the ensuing SAARC summit. May we ask why we pay the taxes to DCC — for recarpeting the potholed roads and not to pay heed to the sufferings of ordinary tax payers? It is fact that the City Corporation authorities realise taxes from the city dwellers at a very irritating rate but do not seem to take any note of the inconvenience suffered by them. But why?

It is our earnest request to the relevant authorities that they take emergency measures to repair this important road.

Abul Hasnat Md Rafiqul Islam  
Ibrahimpur, Dhaka Cantonment

## OPINION

### Care of the Aged

ASM Nurunnabi

IN many countries, not only the number but also the proportion of older people is growing. This has significant implications for both health administrators and economic and social planners.

The ageing of the population is a matter of serious concern, and calls for a multi-sectoral approach to the associated problems.

Elderly people living with their families both give and receive emotional and material support. The family's role in ensuring the care and well-being of the elderly is important and qualitatively different from that of any care-giving institutions. However, urbanization, industrialization and modernization have contributed to the break-up of the extended family system. Households, formerly comprising many families, have been split up into a number of small families living in their own apartments, often a long way apart. As families become smaller and women participate increasingly in the workforce, the support traditionally provided to the elderly is being eroded.

The family should be considered the basic building block of society. Schemes, therefore, should be introduced with a view to preserving and strengthening the traditional family system and encouraging families to care for the family. A policy is also necessary to keep elderly people physically and mentally fit for as long as possible so that they can maintain their normal daily activities and living arrangements. Families are expected to play the primary role

in caring for the elderly. Since the elderly prefer to live with their children, every encouragement should be given to the families who take on the responsibility of looking after old parents.

Since the major causes of morbidity and mortality today are diseases associated with unhealthy life-styles, it is desirable that people should have healthy life-styles throughout their life so that on reaching old age they present society with fewer health problems. Education curriculum should be introduced, including material aimed at the traditional family values and teaching the young to love and respect the elderly. A senior citizen's week should be organized annually to promote the status of the elderly and demonstrate the contributions they can make in the community.

The elderly consume a disproportionately large amount of health care resources. Consequently, as the number of older people grows, an increasing burden is placed on the families and communities. Despite the efforts to help the elderly to live with their families, there is a continuing need to provide alternative living arrangements. Homes for the aged may be considered a last resort and attempt should be made to confine their use to people who cannot be cared for in their own homes for reasons of physical or mental infirmity. Families suffering financial hardship in looking after elderly parents or grandparents may be granted concessions in the matter of taxation and other facilities.