

The OAU and African Renaissance : Openings for Bangladesh

by Dr Abul Kalam

Africa's untapped resources offer tremendous opportunities for shared investment of the Bangladeshi entrepreneurs. Some of the Bangladeshi primary produce, semi-finished commodities and finished consumer-oriented products (some of which are world-class) would find easy access to African markets

AFRICA is re-awakened. It is no longer "the dark continent", as it was often deemed. Like most other parts of the Third World, Africa also went through a process of imperial scramble for possession, colonization and exploitation. Since the 1950s the winds of independence had swept through the continent. But Africa had an additional agony, that of Apartheid. It had traumatized Africa for over five decades. In the meantime, Africa went through a process of political regeneration, anti-colonial struggle, liberation, non-alignment and soul-searching through its continental entity of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Yet Africa, for much of the past few decades, was perhaps more an object, rather a subject of international relations. It was affected by the vicious legacies of colonialism and marginalized under the heels of big power chauvinism, Apartheid and Cold War. It had little role to play in global affairs.

Apartheid is currently a matter of history. The leader of the erstwhile anti-apartheid movement in Africa, acclaimed world-wide for his perspective and vision, Nelson Mandela, has emerged a role player, mediating in the continent's civil strife and has earned a reputa-

tion for his "go-between" role in Africa's conflict situations.

Once again, Africa seems re-awakened to a new reality.

Mandela, symbolizing the vision of a new Africa, has been welcomed and honoured as a state guest in many of the world's capitals. Among others, Bangladesh was also a long-standing candidate to receive and honour the South African liberation hero, to which he is well-entitled. Eventually he came to Bangladesh on a very sombre occasion, the day of silver jubilee celebration of the country's independence, perhaps also to soothe the sagging popularity and fledgling morale of our persuasive Prime Minister.

The new African renaissance has both internal as well as international implications.

Internally, Africa seems poised to take a greater responsibility,

to quote Mandela, "for her woes and use the immense collective wisdom it possesses to make reality of the idea of the African renaissance." At the political level, it may mean greater commitment to democratic practice and accountability, political accommodation of the dissenting forces, and sensitivity toward human rights. All this would mean overcoming the Africa's age-old problems of military coups and conflicts. Efforts have been underway to find permanent peace in the feuding countries such as Sierra Leone and Somalia, Angola and Liberia. Economically, efforts to form an African economic community has also been revamped.

Externally, the new Africa also wishes to assert her right to be an equal partner in world affairs. An African renaissance internationally thus contemplates that, again to quote Mandela, "Africa refuses to be passive onlooker in a changing world, [a] hapless victim to modern machinations by the forces historically responsible for her woes." To place the African view in positive terms, Africa wants two seats, with veto powers, in an expanded Security Council of the United Nations. With the two seats the African leaders want to take into account the interests of both Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arabic-speaking north. The African leaders are in no mood to compromise on their demand for veto powers, as a OAU dignitary has equated "a seat without veto powers to a castrated bull."

Certainly, not all that they desire or wish are "moonshine and roses." The election of

cal and economic relations." Africa currently looks beyond colonial legacies, Apartheid and Cold War intrusion. The search is on for a new destiny; it is time for a political and economic renaissance in Africa. Like the rest of the Third World, Africa no longer can ignore the call for democracy and development, human rights and accountability.

The new African looks toward a new future, legacies of autocracy and conflict, disharmony and disease, hunger and poverty continue to haunt Africa and constrain its progress. Yet the African leaders have set themselves to stake the claim of their continent to be a major player on the world stage. As they met in Harare (4-5th June) in the 33rd annual summit of the 53-nation Organization of African Unity (OAU), they seemed determined to shake off their image as "wretched onlookers." African leaders are unwilling to accept the view that "Africa is an insignificant partner in international politi-

ghana's Kofi Annan to the much-cherished position of the UN Secretary-General after Egypt's Boutros Boutros Ghali gave Africa a renewed confidence. The ultimate defeat of the old imperial colonialists as well as neo-colonialists in the form of Apartheid added further potency to Africa's growing world aspirations. Africa's old colonial and neo-colonial nightmare may be over. Africa saw the change of the old guards, and new African faces have come to international limelight. Kofi Annan or Nelson Mandela may symbolize the hopes of a new African renaissance, but the internal aspirations are plagued by the continent's age-old legacies and problems, whereas the international aspirations are subject to a global consensus. As it appears, the current permanent members of the UN Security

Council balk at the idea of giving veto powers to the developing countries of the Third World, be it India or Indonesia, Brazil or South Africa. Already Germany and Japan have been pushing hard to join the rank; what seems certain that Africa's insistence in similar privileges will make the bid by the economic colossus of Europe and Asia more difficult.

Africa, despite its current stances of renaissance, has to go a long way towards resurgence. Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, and now Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) look like critical patients awaiting surgery. Nigeria, Sudan and Congo are still "non-functioning giants" of Africa. Southern Africa, emerging from long struggle against imperial exploitation and Apartheid, offers a ray of hope for Africa's future. Opportunities for devel-

opment there provide additional growth potential, especially in the countries where peace has been restored, like Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire, as Runk Khan wrote (*The Daily Star*, 10 June 1997). Currently facing the challenges of democracy through consensus, South Africa alone is undergoing the tests of freedom, while at the same time upholding the responsibilities of freedom.

As Africa adjusts itself to global change and reform there gets momentum, opportunities for countries such as ours loom large. Africa's desire to expand its multilevel ties with fellow developing countries are well-known. Bangladesh's expected participation in the groups such as D-8 and the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) would offer her the necessary openings for being a partner in Africa's development. It has an established cultural affinity with Africa's north and also has had a consistently broad political comradeship with the rest. Having served in Africa's peacekeeping in many an instance, Bangladesh shares the aspira-

tions of the African renaissance more than other nations.

Moreover, Africa's untapped opportunities offer tremendous opportunities for shared investment of the Bangladeshi entrepreneurs. Some of the Bangladeshi primary produce, semi-finished commodities and finished consumer-oriented products (some of which are world-class) would find easy access to African markets.

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Garfield



by Jim Davis

James Bond



IAN FLEMING'S

Earth Summit+5 Ends with Little Progress on Environmental Issues

Judy Aita writes from UN HQ

After five days of speeches from international leaders and weeks of intense negotiations, the General Assembly special session on the environment ended June 28 without much agreement on how to put into practice protective measures adopted five years ago.

Negotiators were also unable to come up with a separate statement expressing a political commitment to action on the environment.

Razali Ismail, president of the assembly called the overall result "pretty sobering". But, he added, the session was "a very honest attempt" that did not "try to sweep things under the carpet, to put a gloss on something that is not there." This special session was known as Earth Summit+5 because it came five years after the unprecedented gathering of world leaders in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for a summit on the environment.

The failure to agree on a political statement sent a message: developing nations also blocked agreement. Developing countries had "a sense of being aggrieved" because some of the promises of the past five years were not kept. Therefore, he said, they were not in a very agreeable mood. During the five-day summit, delegates heard from 198 speakers that included President Clinton and 41 other heads of state and 44 environment ministers. Over 160 UN member-nations participated along with 34 other groups, including UN agencies and non-governmental organizations representing women, indigenous people, farmers, trade unions, the private sector and youth.

The special session was able to come up with a document called "The Program for Further Implementation of Agenda 21". It called on governments to follow through on the ambitious plan of action (known as Agenda 21) adopted at the Rio Earth Summit.

Clinton said that the science is clear and compelling:

"We humans are changing the global climate" and "no nation can evade its responsibility to confront" the problem. Applauding the European leaders' push for agreement on a 15 per cent reduction by 2010 when the countries that have signed the current climate change treaty meet in Kyoto, Japan in December, Clinton stopped short of making any US commitment. This was not unexpected, but disappointing to environmental groups nevertheless.

"We will work with our people—and we will bring to Kyoto a strong American commitment to realistic and binding limits that will significantly reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases," he said.

"We must all do our part—industrial nations that emit the largest quantities of greenhouse gases and developing nations whose emissions are growing

rapidly," Clinton said. "Here in the United States, we must do better. With 4 per cent of the world's population, we produce 20 per cent of its greenhouse gases. Frankly our record since Rio is not sufficient... So we must do better, and we will," the president promised.

In adopting "The Program for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21" in the early hours of June 28, delegations agreed to hold another comprehensive review in 2002. But the program contained no concrete steps for cutting greenhouse gas emissions, protecting forests, increasing aid to developing countries or dealing with toxic chemicals.

The program did not that the position of many countries on greenhouse gases was still evolving. It also recognized that there was widespread, but not universal, agreement that it would be necessary to consider legally binding targets for emissions of these gases by developed and East European countries by specific dates, such as 2005, 2010 or 2020.

On forests, the session recommended that governments work through an ad hoc, open-ended forum toward a consensus for a treaty or other international arrangement to preserve the world's forests.

The text stressed the need to move toward sustainable patterns of production, distribution and use of energy. It also called for the transfer of energy technology to developing countries.

The writer is USIA United Nations Correspondent

HERE and THERE

Rickshaw Sramik League

cers was met by the sincere efforts of the state minister in charge of the Ministry of Social Welfare.

He said the upgrading of the social welfare officers would help them contribute to the socio-economic development of the distressed, unemployed, orphans and the retarded as well to the implementation of the poverty alleviation programme as pledged by the Prime Minister.

The president said that the members of the association would play a pioneering role in successfully implementing the programmes of the government.

Clarification by ISPR

Attention of the army headquarters has been drawn to the reports published in a section of the press about the recovery of rocket launcher from the city's Arambagh area, an ISPR press release said yesterday, reports BSS.

The press release said the reports about the power and characteristics of the recovered rocket launcher quoting the army and its members, are not true. In fact, it said, the army did not issue any statement in any newspapers in this regard.

The press release said the publishing of this kind of misleading statement or remark without the consent of the concerned department or officials could not be desirable for the sake of keeping the army above all controversies.

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cers was met by the sincere efforts of the state minister in charge of the Ministry of Social Welfare.

In a joint statement Mohammad Montu and M. Mujibur Rahman, president and general secretary respectively of DCRLS, deplored BNP for calling hartal and said, when the Awami League government adopted a budget for relief and rehabilitation of the poor the opposition BNP could not reconcile to it. They alleged the opposition BNP wanted to leave the country as hostage to terrorists and toll collectors.

Social Welfare Officers ASSOC

Bangladesh Social Welfare Officers Association yesterday expressed its gratitude to the government for upgrading 480 officers of the Social Welfare Directorate into the class one post, reports BSS.

In a statement M Abdus Samad, president of the association, said the order about the upgrading of the officers of Social Welfare Directorate was supposed to be issued four years ago. But he said, the order was delayed due to various administrative complexities.

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