Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Sunday, November 29, 1998

### A Helping Hand from EU

Bangladesh is on the verge of opening a new chapter in its relations with the European Union (EU), particularly in trade. The EU, on the other hand, looks set to focus its development assistance programmes more towards household food security and human resource development. According to a visiting EU official, a new cooperation agreement between Dhaka and Brussels is now in its final stages of negotiation. This is important because, in recent years, the EU has emerged as one of Bangladesh's largest markets for garments, leather goods and frozen food. The contribution of the European Union states to the social sectors, both multilaterally and bilaterally, is also immense. Therefore, the importance of a cooperation agreement to bring all these diverse, mutuallybeneficial activities under an institutional framework, can hardly be over-emphasised.

In return, Bangladesh has already indicated its willingness to adhere to the international convention on protection of intellectual property rights, which has removed one obstacle to such an agreement. However, Dhaka's consent to "take back" illegal immigrants from EU states is likely to raise two important questions. Firstly, Bangladesh government traditionally denies knowledge of "illegal" immigrants abroad. Therefore, how can we "take back" people who, theoretically, do no exist? Secondly, the EU ought to take a humanitarian view of immigrants who may have crossed its borders without valid papers. While developing countries such as Bangladesh are indeed showing utmost sincerity about opening their economies to goods and capital from abroad, developed countries need to take a less rigid view when it comes to movement of labour.

The focus of Dhaka-Brussels relations, however, needs to remain firmly on trade and development. All efforts must be made to strengthen relations in these areas. While trade is principally going to be driven by the private sector, requiring a great deal of initiative and professionalism from the Bangladeshi business community, the EU can also help. The EU's continuation of GSP facilities up to 2001 is certainly appreciated, but Brussels needs to seriously address the developing countries' demand for zero-tariff access within the framework of the World Trade Organisation. Similarly, the EU can help the local business community further develop its entrepreneurial skills and marketing mechanism. In the final analysis, the greatest assistance the EU can provide Bangladesh is by enabling the private sector to grow through exports.

End Happily in Sight

Stalled since a year and quarter and looking somewhat remote in the face of odd border incidents, the resumption of Rohingya repatriation to Myanmar comes as a very happy turn of events. On Myanmar government's clearing the homeward journey of 7,000 among the remaining 21,000 Rohingya refugees encamped in Cox's Bazar since the eighties the first batch of eight families have gone back home kicking off the last leg of a long drawn repatriation exercise. Hopefully, the 14,000 refugees who are to be left out of this particular phase of repatriation will be accepted by the Myanmar authorities hot on the heels so as to wind up the entire process by the end of 1998. That is the best new year present Myanmar can give to the government and the people of Bangladesh and the UNHCR.

As of this moment, the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh and the UNHCR can feel justly proud of their success in steering one of the biggest repatriation exercises in the contemporary world clear of the stunning odds that rocked the boat many times over. Our congratulations to them for having not only achieved the repatriation of 2,29,512 Rohingya refugees todate, but also clearing the course for bringing the curtain finally down on the issue by the end of this year.

The happy combination of circumstances for the repatriation to go ahead is noteworthy. Especially when the Myanmar authorities have their hands full with a pro-democracy movement they must come to terms with given the world public opinion which supports it. The question about the 'voluntariness' of the Rohingya refugees' return occasionally raised by the UNHCR; the localised fundamentalist streak of an obstruction we discerned sometimes; and the vestigial diffidence of the Myanmar authorities all seem to have been left behind making room for a successful completion of the repatriation process. We welcome the prospect.

#### Trial of a Dictator

His crimes have finally caught up with him. The 83-year-old former dictator of Chile, Augusto Pinochet, faces the prospect of extradition from Britain for trial on charges of genocide in Spain. After bitter debates among the British, Spanish and Chilean lawyers the case finally went up to the highest British court, the Privy Council, where the judges ruled 3-2 in favour of Pinochet's arrest made earlier while he was receiving treatment at a London hospital and also allowed proceedings to be drawn at lower court for the extradition of the former ruler. What makes the Law Lords' verdict so significant is that it has overturned the ruling of the British High Court which had held that he enjoyed immunity from any legal process as former Chilean President.

General Pinochet overthrew the government of elected socialist President Salvador Allende in 1973 in a bloody coup in which President Allende died in the presidential palace. Pinochet ruled Chile for 17 years with iron hand ruthlessly suppressing all forms of opposition to his authoritarian junta. In the process, thousands of innocent people died and vanished in peculiar and unnatural circumstances. A sizeable number of Spaniards about 3000 — were also murdered or vanished

from Chile. As a strong advocate for democracy and rule of law this paper believes that General Pinochet should be extradited to stand trial for the massacre of the innocent people during his despotic rule. The judgment of the Law Lords will go a long way in restoring people's faith in judiciary and rule of law. This will remain an example for dictators and despots all over the world that 'crime does never pay', especially crime against humanity. And regardless of the height of their former positions or the time-lag since their diabolical acts they will have to answer before the bar of world public opinion one day.

# Mission Impossible

If it is a UN action it should be the obligation of all members to participate. Why should the US and Britain take the burden on behalf of the UN? Is the UN going to reimburse the cost of the war to the US and Britain? Are the US and Britain the authorised members to fight all wars on behalf of the UN?

aircraft would fly out of Gaza in a couple of hours time. All these would have been lost with the

RESIDENT Clinton's deci-

sion to overrule his top

advisors like Secretary of

State, Chairman of the Joint

Chief of Staff and abort

planned air strikes against Iraq

was appropriate and deserves

appreciation. His top Advisors

pressed for immediate attacks

saying "unusual favourable

conditions favoured US

military action". As various

reports indicate his national

security Advisor Samuel Berger

advised against attacks. The

reasons were obvious. Targets

at Iraq were identified but no-

body knew precisely what those

targets contained. The best

guess was that these contained

some secret and confidential

documents and other materials

that the US was looking for. But

at least 10,000 deaths - all or-

dinary Iraqis and not Saddam

and his advisors - the items US

was apparently interested in.

There are dozens of presiden-

tial palaces and nobody knows

where President Saddam lives.

Some people say and they say

it's no joke that there are many

Saddams (done by plastic

surgery) and no outsider knows

which one is the real President

would have provided immense

ammunition to the Iraqis and

other Arabs who support Iraq.

They would have gone wild to

raise voice against the US and

the UK. And the attack would

have been totally unproductive

when both the countries and

particularly the US have been

trying hard to find peace in the

Middle East. The air strike

would have totally nullified the

hard and laudable work done by

President Clinton himself and

his administration for days to-

gether in Wye River Plantation

at Maryland Today the Middle

East peace process is back on

track and the land transfer has

started taking place bringing

hopes to the millions in the re-

gion. There were tremendous

jubilation with the opening of

Gaza airport and Egyptian Air-line first landed followed by

Moroccan, Jordanian and then

by an Israeli Chartered flight.

Chairman Arafat's Presidential

In any case, the attacks

Saddam.

Pentagon rightly estimated

the risk was too great.

first strike against Iraq. Destruction of chemical and biological weapons by air strikes? Extremely dangerous if these at all exist. Attacks can never destroy all and would only help disperse these suspected weapons and particularly the biological germs in the region thus creating a dangerous situation. All the countries in the region should remain aware of these dangerous possi-

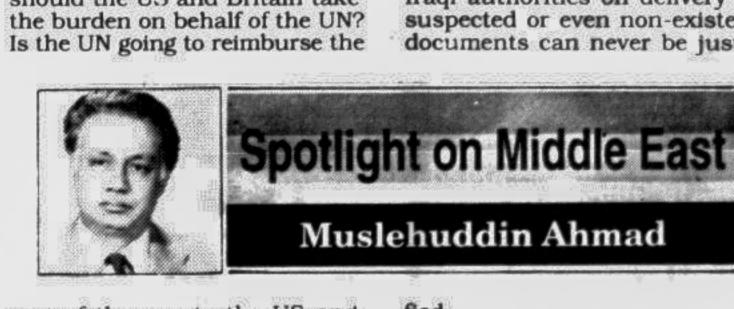
President Clinton could possibly see no support or at best lukewarm or even forced support of several countries of the region. The attitude of the allies except Britain was also not very clear. Some analysts say they resigned to the fate as Saddam remained adamant which the allies obviously did not like. The other members of the Security Council also could not be enthusiastic about bombing a UN member country without proper authorisation. Practically all heaved a sigh of relief when President Clinton decided not to launch the attack. This was evident from the statement of French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine who praised 'President Clinton's handling of the crisis and decision to cancel air strikes when Bagh-

dad accepted UN demand'. China's reasonable support for Iraq is well known. This time Russia's diplomacy worked well because of its ageold relationship with Iraq. Indeed, Saddam's toughness can be attributed at least partly to the fact that Russia would ultimately come to his rescue. Russia apparently "forced' Saddam to clime down and write a letter, howsoever ambiguous it might have been, and that opened the door for Russia to take up the matter at Security Council level. The opportunity was best seized by President Clinton, halted the strike and avoided the disaster — at least

for the time being.

The US administration said it did not need any authorisation from the Security Council though the planned attack was for violation of the resolution of the UN. The Administration argue that the authorisation exists which others say it does not. If authorisation was there then the question arises why other members do not participate. If it is a UN action it should be the obligation of all members to participate. Why should the US and Britain take the burden on behalf of the UN?

superpower's might should be used not to wage war but to bring peace in the world. The Gulf war was waged to dislodge the occupier but if one back at the situation prevailing at that time one could see that the occupier started leaving Kuwait and strong diplomatic pressure could have averted the war and the disaster that followed. Anyway that's a part of history now. But another war just because of the tussle between UN-SCOM's Chief Butler and the Iraqi authorities on delivery of suspected or even non-existent documents can never be justi-



cost of the war to the US and Britain ? Are the US and Britain the authorised members to fight all wars on behalf of the UN? These questions should be answered before undertaking war on behalf of the

However, if the war is in the security interest of these two countries, the decision should obviously theirs and nobody should have any say but in that case the name of UN should not be involved. As reports indicate, some members of the US Congress asked for proper authorisation from the Congress before starting the air strikes. If proper UNSC authorisation was there they probably would not have asked for authorisation from the Congress. They apparently see unilateral character of the US action. May be President Clinton had all those questions in mind and thus decided not to authorise the air strikes.

The threat to use force to achieve something and actual use of force are obviously two very different things. The only

Let the world and particu-

larly the US pause for a while a see what UNSCOM has been able to reveal so far. Seven and a half years is a very long time. How many more years it would need to complete the job? Indeed it can never finish the job. It has been entrusted with the Mission Impossible. Iraq is a vast country and if Iraqi authorities want they can hide things and take things from one place to another and it is virtually impossible for a team of foreigners to chase and find them. They can work for decades but still they will not be satisfied as they will always have doubts in mind and continue to ask for papers and documents as Mr Butler is doing now. He would continue to do so as it is absolutely impossible for any one to say at any stage that Iraq does not have any more of these weapons or any programmes to have those

Mr Butler cannot and will not take that risk. Moreover, he

will never get a "clean" report from his inspectors. There are inspectors like Scott Ritter who had regular contacts with Israeli Intelligence Agency -Mosad. This is why Butler and his team have been going round and round and making new demands and this process will continue indefinitely until the US Administration says — yes, we need no more search and that would depend on when there will be a new regime in Baghdad. Therefore problem lies somewhere else — not in the existence of chemical and biological weapons, if any, but with Saddam. If Saddam goes. Butler and his team will also go; no more search for these weapons. US administration also does not seem to be sure whether Saddam has those weapons. If he had he would have certainly used them during Gulf war when he fired as many as 39 scud missiles into Israel. After seven and a half years US laboratory detected traces of VX in the missile warhead pieces but reportedly negative reports were given by

Swiss and French laboratories. Therefore, it is no use insisting on something which may not exist at all. Even if they exist, these must be at laboratory level and do not pose any immediate threat to any one. Just to say that Saddam will develop them as weapons and use them against them neighbours is a far-fetched thing. Saddam knows that if he uses these weapons against neighbour he and his people will not escape as the distance is not too big. Therefore, on that assumption of existence of such weapons the UN cannot continue to keep a nation under siege for years and force its people including women and children to go without food and die of hunger and disease. Just a glance through the reports of UNICEF and World Food Programme will reveal the gravity of the situation

With Saddam's human

rights records and his desire to cling to power, the demand for a change is understandable. But that demand must come from Iraqi people and not from foreign countries. To work openly against a UN member country's regime, howsoever bad it might be, and promote opposition groups with funds are certainly not healthy developments in terms of international relationship.

However, if the US was determined to bring about a change as it is openly saying it, better course would be to work with the people of Iraq. If the US believes that Iraqi people are tired of Saddam which may as well be true, then why not cultivate relationship with them and with the splinter opposition groups which have their own agenda including grabbing money to live luxuriously abroad? It is futile to think that these people will ever be able to topple Saddam's regime. Seven and half years of sanction have totally alienated Iraqi people from those who are responsible for this. Therefore to bring back the people of Iraq into confidence sanction must be lifted immediately with the proper announcement that this is done to help people of Iraq. The amount that is meant to be used to feed the Iraqi opposition in exile should be spent within Iraq to gather support of the Iraqi people. One understand that the US has that agency and the ability to do so.

These sort of papers and documents on such weapons are not kept in Royal Palaces. This is absurd way of going about these things. Even if the present papers and documents are destroyed, dozens of countries around the world will be ready to provide those documents again within no time. It would only increase the cost. Monitoring cameras cannot detect those developments.

Just on suspicion that Iraq has chemical and biological weapons the people of Iraq have been put to untold sufferings by the world body which is supposed to look after the interest and welfare of the people of the member countries.

people. The party will not be

desperate to pull down the BJP

# Is Mid-term Election Feasible in India?

If the BJP feels that power is going out of its hand and the opposition comes too closer to gain it, then it may recommend dissolution of the Loksabha and fresh polls, although this is a remote possibility. No one would like to be held responsible for forcing fresh elections on the nation so early. Still, this can become a reality if conditions warrant.

MATTERS ##

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

AROUND US

▼ NDIAN political scenario has undergone sort of a sea-L change in recent days. Midterm election is being talked about by different quarters despite the fact that the current lower house of the parliament (Loksabha) is less than nine months old and no major political party has demanded a snap poll. Indeed, the Bharatiya Janata Party(BJP)-led multiparty coalition government has been walking a tight rope ever since it assumed power in March after the general elec-

tions had produced a fractured verdict. As the government was formed with the support of many diverse political parties and that too with an almost wafer-thin majority in the house, it was vulnerable throughout except for a brief period when explosion of nuclear bombs in the second week of May was seen as a shot in the arm for the government. Still, the weak character of the government notwithstanding. there was no real danger of a collapse for the government although some small recalcitrant partners of the coalition. at times, gave uneasy moments to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's ruling authority in New Delhi. The reason was simple. People wanted to see an authority to work for some time and would not like a situation if the government has to bow out of the office too early for internal problems or any other is-

Besides, who would form the government should the present government stepped down? When no single party or group could muster the necessary majority to form a government, will the parties opposed to the present ruling set-up be able to form a government? Then what sense does it make if the government is pulled down and others are not in a position to come out with requisite majority to set up a new one? After all, the country cannot remain

without an authority. These factors explain why the vulnerable Vajpayee government has remained firm in the saddle for all these months.

But certainly that scenario

has changed to some extent in the last few days and whether the present government will last long has become a major topic of political discussions. There are also talks about chances of the major opposition Congress forming a new government and even whether the developments that may come in near future would force the country to go for a snap election. India, which once witnessed strong governments that normally completed full term, is experiencing a different condition for last several years because no political party is being able to gain absolute majority in the elections and consequently, different forces come together to have a taste of power and in most cases, cannot remain together for long and the government collapses. Barring the P. V. Narasimha Rao-led Congress government, no other government in India in recent past could complete the normal tenure although the Congress under Mr. Rao did not get a clear majority in the polls but made up the gaps through different methods. That Mr. Rao even resorted to unethical means to remain in power is a different story. He is facing the music now and is charged with allegations like bribing members of other parties to win their support for majority in the par-

Since the people do not want frequent elections and the country cannot afford such a big exercise for financial and other reasons, it is desirable

that a government remains at the helm for a reasonable degree of time unless something extra-ordinary warrants it to quit. Mr. Vajpayee, certainly an experienced and popular politician for his own record and charisma, had been at the helm. albeit for only 13 days, but he and his government had to resign in the face of a difficult task to prove majority in the house. When he headed the government for the second time, many expected that he should

be there for some time so that

his performance as the head of

the government can be properly

assessed although the razor-

thin majority of his rule has

been a big headache. Why has suddenly been the talk that the present government may not last long, the Congress may seek to form a government or as a desperate move or last resort even general elections may be called prematurely? Support for the main opposition Congress among voters has, of late, increased significantly, that too, at the

cost of the BJP. When readers read this column, results of November 25 elections to four Indian states which have gone to voting on November 25 were yet to be fully announced. But opinion polls and other sources have only predicted a big setback for the ruling BJP in Delhi and Raisthan while gains in Madhya

Pradesh. Even if the BJP wins in Madhya Pradesh, this cannot obviate the defeats in Delhi and Rajsthan. In fact, this loss is seen as a weaning away of the electorate from the BJP-led government even though the state assembly polls have no direct bearing on the federal gov-

ernment.

This setback will obviously encourage calls from the opposition that BJP quit power. The small partners of the coalition may also distance themselves from the BJP in feat that the it losing ground. "Country may face mid-term polls," said Prime Minister Vajpayee as the outcome of the state assembly polls was getting clear. He did not say that the country was going for such a step or it is necessary but he did not rule it out as a possibility. The Congress working committee, scheduled to meet Sunday (today), will probably decide to prepare itself for power should the present government collapses under its own weight as a sequel to the state assembly polls. Congress does not want mid-term polls, the centre-left coalition of the United Front does not either, let alone the BJP.

But if the BJP feels that power is going out of its hand and the opposition comes too closer to gain it, then it may recommend dissolution of the Loksabha and fresh polls, although this is a remote possibil

government as it would not like to be seen in that perspective but will spare no efforts to form a new government when opportunities exist. ity. No one would like to be held responsible for forcing fresh elections on the nation so early. Still, this can become a reality if conditions warrant. However, all depends on the developments in the next few weeks. Congress, likely to be buoyed by the favourable state assembly polls, particularly in the im-

Congress is unlikely to call midterm polls immediately since it is now in an advantageous position to form an alternative government although it has to explore additional support. 'We will ourselves form a government rather than supporting others to come up with a secular government in place of the BJP-led one," said Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee. India is unlikely to experience snap polls in near future but it can not be ruled out after a reasonable degree of period.

#### **OPINION**

portant Delhi, would like to

avail itself of the good fortunes

which are now discernible. This

will also confirm that its new

leader Italian-born Sonia

Gandhi has been accepted by the

## "Who's Afraid of Genetic Engineering?"

MAS Molla

I have read the article by Mr Jimmy Carter (Ex-US President) captioned as above published in the DS page on 18.09.98 with rapt attention. From this very article I have come to know that nations ratifying the Bio-diversity Treaty of 1992 (the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro) sought an ad hoc team to determine whether the genetically modified organisms could threaten biodiversity. Under pressure from environmentalists, and with no supporting data, the team decided that any such organism could potentially eliminate na-

tive plants and animals. The article further informed that the members of the said team come from environmental agencies of more than 100 states excluding the USA. The team would complete its work within six months and present its final recommendations that might be a binding international agreement from early next year. Besides the members are pushing to regulate shipments of all genetically modified organisms and products

made from them. The writer anticipated that grain, fresh produce, vaccines, medicines, breakfast cereals, require written approval by the importing nation before they could leave the dock. This approval may take months. Meanwhile, barge costs would mount and vaccines and food would spoil. Mr Carter guessed an anti-biotechnology campaign by the environmentalists who "exaggerate the risk of genetically modified organisms

and ignore their benefits." Being a biologist of an underdeveloped country like Bangladesh, I cannot ignore the very many benefits of genetic engineering. We live mainly on the high yielding varieties of rice produced by our own agricultural scientists or imported from abroad. Our supply of fish, meat and milk is also dependent on hybrid animals. Most of our vaccines and medicines are genetically engineered goods. Although using these benefits of biotechnological developments, yet we are undernourished and lacking adequate medicare. Furthermore, the hybrid varieties of plants and animals are added to the natural biodiversity (if kept intact). That is why we, as a na-

But when we come to know that the US is protecting the genes of every species (most of which were known by others for centuries) in the biotechnological laboratories and patenting them as bio-resources of the patenting companies of that State, we cannot but denounce this practice. We become stunned in knowing that a company of Mr Catter's country produces Sterile Seeds (?) to be exported to us - the poor nations. This practice is both anti-nature and anti-human. because seeds are produced by plants naturally for the protection of their kinds (species). Thus the so-called seeds of cereals are some clusters of complex chemical compounds (mainly starch) and none should dare to term them as seeds which are artificially destined to produce plants once for all and die for ever. Antihuman because the seeds are to be imported by exorbitant price in every season for every crop by the poor countries like us and the benefit would be the socalled seed producers. I mentally participated the procession led by Mr AZM Obaidullah wine, vitamins and so on would Khan (the Ex-Deputy Director General of FAO-Asia-Pacific region and a poet of Bangladesh) against these activities in Bangladesh. Would

tion, cannot logically stand

against biotechnology.

ronmentalists of more than 100 developing countries for fools. The evidence lies in his statement: "Under pressure from environmentalists, and with no supporting data, the team decided that any such organism could potentially eliminate native plants and animals." How can it be right that such a large team would not base their recommendations on some supporting data? How does a knowledgeable man like Mr Carter think that the 'lesser humans' of such a large team cannot make a single 'greater human' like him?

Mr Carter also join us or we are

Mr Carter took the envi-

to expect his stand?

I am confident that if the recommendations of the team of environmentalists is implemented, the required checking of bio-engineered goods will be done in required speed so that these are not spoiled in the dock as Mr Carter feared.

No hartal pledge

Sir, The wonderful thing the present government has done is that it has made an unilateral declaration to abstain from hartal.

But some critics think that a right action has been taken at a wrong time. Had the government done this while in opposition, probably this would have been a unique instance in the world. In support, some recall a small story of the past. It goes like this:

"When and then". Politician's wife — "Dear,

when people are patriots?" Politician — "At our call when people resort to hartal, violence, arson, looting etc. then they are patriots".

come terrorists?" Politician — "At others' call when they resort to hartal, protests etc. then they are terrorists."

Wife — "And when they be-

Abdullah Dhaka

### Energy crisis

Sir, We are going through energy crisis in general and electricity crisis in particular. Now our PM has advised us to be more careful and economical about electricity.

This takes me way back in the '70s. The then president

Nixon of USA made similar request to his countrymen. He even told the vehicle drivers not to exceed 55 mph on the free way, high way and the express way. So much so there were stickers on the switch board of the offices — "Last man switch

But what we see in our country is just the opposite. Till today we do not have any standard time to switch on the street lights — sometimes it comes on 15 minutes before sunset or sometimes 15 minutes after. In every cosmopolitan city you will find in their newspapers 'light on' and 'light of time along with their weather reports. Then why is it so difficult

to standardise it in our cities? Sooner we do it better for the country. Thereby we will be saving thousands of units of electricity.

Mazhar Haq 52, Road- 28 Gulshan, Dhaka 1212

#### Hiv/aids scenario: The present option

Sir, The world epidemic of HIV/AIDS is now affecting the countries and people less able and prepared to effectively cope with it. Of the estimated 30 million currently infected worldwide with HIV, vast majority are in Africa and Asia; India alone has probably 8 million

people already infected with HIV and no sign of levelling off. Given the present mixture of complacence and extreme vulnerability, perhaps the early discovery of an effective vaccine and cure is the best thing that could happen. If and when that happens, these vaccines and drugs would also have to be widely available and affordable in countries that need them

That may be a tall order. Yes, current laboratory research is giving some promise, but there is no real breakthrough. Waiting for vaccines and drugs, it may be too late.

What is the realistic scenario? Heavy investment is needed to research and develop new vaccines.

HIV vaccine is a particularly complex undertaking at present. The western pharmaceutical industry is driven by profit motive. But is there a compelling incentive for the western pharmaceutical industry? Let us not forget that the perceived threat of the epidemic is declining in the West. Then is it realistic to hope that the industry will market a cheap and affordable vaccine anytime soon? Will the industry bring drugs that poor countries can afford to buy? In a free market economy, where is the rationale for altruistic or humanitarian concern? The UN agencies are

currently engaged mainly in advocacy and technical advice. Their ability to secure concessional delivery of HIV vaccines, when commercially available is yet to be tested.

In that scenario, what is the practical and realistic option available with the present scientific knowledge and experience? The only redeeming factor might be the degree and level of success with which the governments and civil societies in the already affected and underthreat countries create total population awareness so that most people are able and willing to adopt safe and responsible sexual practice and other preventive measures concurrently, these countries have to prepare existing infrastructure and health system to care for those already infected and minimise the severity of the impact of HIV/AIDS.

One epidemiological feature separates HIV/AIDS from other more familiar infections. It is an elusive enemy; by the time the epidemic becomes clearly evident it is already too late for many; while infection is spreading almost invisibly complacency is the usual response. Will the governments and societies harness the will to act early even without an established epidemic?

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