

"Bus Diplomacy" and Vajpayee's Dhaka Visit

The Omens are Positive

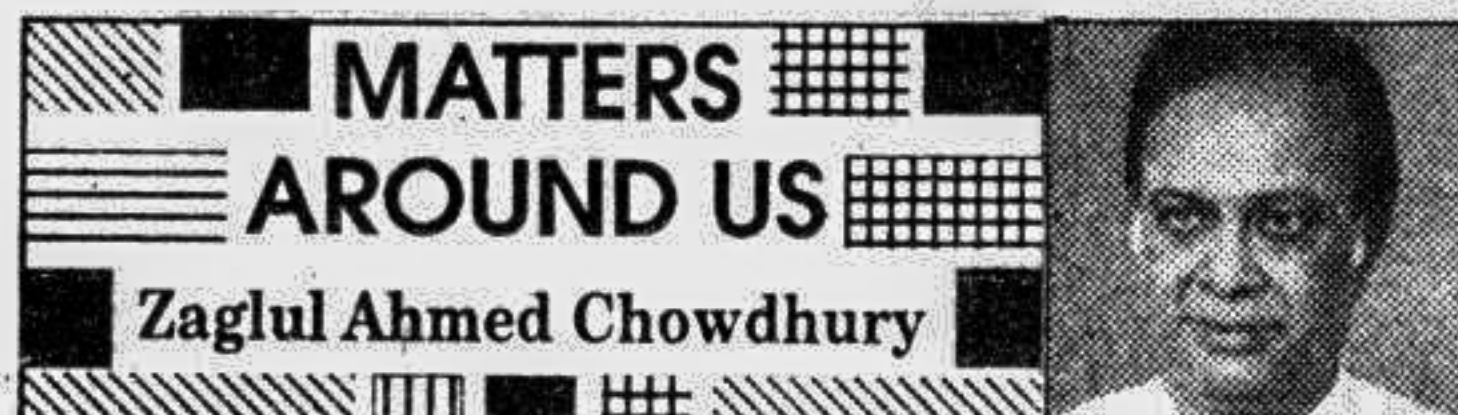
Bus Diplomacy should increase people-to-people contact and interactions, and this should also be seen as an apolitical issue as far as possible. Let us hope that the service will be of immense benefit to the people of two countries

THE South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) has now blossomed into a full-fledged regional economic forum. One may say that the progress of the SAARC over the last fourteen years has not been up to expectations. Some quarters feel that the achievements, meaningful they are, though, have been somewhat slow. This impression notwithstanding, there is no denying that the SAARC has come a long way in forging co-operation among different areas in a region often convulsed by disputes and hostilities. A major objective of the forum, formally launched in 1985, has always been to develop and enhance people-to-people contact in the South Asian region.

Towards that end, "bus diplomacy", a term coined in the wake of the launching of the Lahore-Delhi bus service, is certainly a step which has been welcomed by a large section of people in the region because this would facilitate real people-to-people contact regardless of political fallout — if any — of this measure.

First there was the one between two hostile neighbours, India and Pakistan, last February through the Delhi-Lahore service, and now there is another between Bangladesh and India through the Dhaka-Calcutta service. On both occasions Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was involved. He was there in Pakistan along with his counterpart Nawaz Sharif and here,

in Bangladesh, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. It was his second visit to Bangladesh in more than two decades. He was here as the external affairs minister on the Morarji Desai's Janata Party government in the late 70s. Mr. Vajpayee's role at that time is still viewed as one of the best as far as India's ties with the neighbours are concerned. As external affairs minister, he also made a trip to China that marked a friendlier approach in some ways to the Sino-Indian relationship following the 1962 border clash.



MATTERS AROUND US
Zafar Ahmed Chowdhury

However, this does not mean that only money and milk flowed together when Mr. Vajpayee was the external affairs minister. There were problems then and there are problems now. But one can agree that if his tenure as the external affairs minister was largely greeted as a good one for the neighbours, the "bus diplomacy" with some of the neighbours during his tenure as the prime minister also deserves praise. If relations between India and Pakistan have turned hostile again over the situation in Kashmir, it is because of the decades-old dispute that the two countries failed to resolve. The bus service that has been intro-

duced between India and Pakistan is not responsible in anyway for the current war-like conditions between them.

On the contrary, the very fact that the service is in force even during the tensions is a pointer that it has helped significantly to further contacts among peoples of those two countries when they were at odds. The Lahore declaration signed following the bus journey by Mr. Vajpayee was widely acclaimed as a bold step towards peace but this has unfortunately been put now at jeopardy by clashes and tensions in Kashmir.

The formal inauguration of the Dhaka-Calcutta service by the prime ministers of the two countries will definitely facilitate the travel of common people of the two countries. In the absence of the train service and high cost involved in the air travel, trips by road is generally followed by many people but this involves manifold formalities and annoyances. Certainly the direct bus service will minimise these inconveniences and will particularly be useful for patients, students and others. It is wrong to say that it will only facilitate travel by vast multi-

tude of only two countries but people from other countries of the region will also be benefited by this. India and Pakistan have also the direct railway link by the Samjhota trains (The Train of Understanding) which does not exist between India and Bangladesh. The West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, took intense interest in the introduction of the bus service between Dhaka and Calcutta. He is also excited about a train service. When the bus service was introduced between Delhi and Lahore, some political organisations called a general strike in Lahore but the government of Nawaz Sharif put its foot down because it was a programme that benefited people of the two countries as they have divided families, relations and friends on either side. Here also some organisations called programmes coinciding with the visit of Mr. Vajpayee. But major opposition parties distanced themselves from such programmes like observing "Black Day". Well, in a democracy, political parties are entitled to have their own policy and programmes. It was good to see that none really spoke openly as such against the bus service. The protest was on other issues.

Bus Diplomacy should increase people-to-people contact and interactions, and this should also be seen as an apolitical issue as far as possible. Let us hope that the service will be of immense benefit to the people of two countries.

Indian Bid to Ease Relations with China

by Harun ur Rashid

India-China relations are complex and dominated by thorny issues for more than three decades. Unless these issues are addressed, the relations between the two countries are likely to oscillate between toughness and sweetness.

THE two-day (15-16 June) visit of India's Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh to China is of great significance. The primary purpose of the visit appears to ease the bilateral relations with China after India detonated its nuclear devices in May last year on the pretext that India's security was perceived to be threatened by China. This open and public vindication of nuclear tests in Rajasthan desert rekindled the bilateral relations between the two giants of Asia.

India's Foreign Minister was reported to have said after the visit that "The Pokhran Chapter is now behind us.... We have lost some time but that phase is over". The statement is reassuring to every one. Although the visit has been characterised by mutual good will, political pundits believe that the visit may not achieve the desired outcome unless some of the issues affecting adversely their bilateral relations are addressed.

Another question remains whether the visit was hastily organised to give a clear message to Pakistan that India has mended its relations with China which would not get involved in the armed hostilities break out on Kargil sector in Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

The fact that the visit by India's Foreign Minister to China took place after eight years demonstrates its import on one hand and its causes on the other. The period of 8 years is long enough to indicate that all was not well. This implies that the relations were not adequately good enough during the last eight years to pave a way for India's Foreign Minister's visit to its northern neighbour.

The question is: why? It is an admitted perception that both countries appear incapable of dissipating the suspicion and ill will which infected their relations in the aftermath of Sino-Indian border war in 1962. The alleged occupation of each other's territory on the Himalayas continues to be the bone of contention and this dispute clouded in the past

the attempt to normalise the bilateral relations. Several intermittent meetings were held during the last 37 years to resolve the border dispute which remains unresolved till this date.

Both countries harbour misgivings on each other's motives and actions. Both have a desire to assert as the dominant power to influence the events in the region. In other words, both want to call shots in the regional geo-strategic architecture. There is a perception of rivalry in attaining their respective goals and objectives. However diplomatically both countries would deny the rivalry syndrome. The neighbouring countries in the region appear to perceive such undercurrent in the region.

The refugee of the Dalai Lama and his followers in India appears to be another eyecore in their relations. China considers India's action an interference in its internal affairs. India explains that its land is open for refugees and it adheres to a time-honoured tradition of the country.

India's relations with China appear to be complicated by India's reported claim that Pakistan was able to launch its missile programme with the assistance of China and its ally North Korea. Pakistan, however, rejects this claim and considers the accusation an insult to the knowledge and expertise of its own scientists.

Another Indian concern appears to be the reported establishment of a Chinese base on Myanmar's coastal islands (Coco Islands) in the Bay of Bengal. India suspects that the purpose of the base is primarily to monitor the activities of its navy in the Indian Ocean.

China condemned India's explosion of nuclear devices as it breached the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NNPT) regime. Soon after the nuclear tests China indicted India in a Security Council resolution for violating the NNPT framework. India maintains that the NNPT is discriminatory and accuses five nuclear powers of running an exclusive nuclear club. India argues that it is un-

der no compulsion to abide by the rules because it did not sign the NNPT.

Apart from the above prickly issues, there are broader questions as to their respective strengths in economic and military terms in the last two decades or so. During the last 20 years, India appears to have slipped behind China both economically and strategically. It appears that India's role in regional and global affairs has diminished to a large extent compared to that of China. The reasons are not far to seek.

In the 80s China under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping set out economic reforms while keeping its political system intact. China realised that the challenge in the present day world of intense competition was to build a comparative advantage in relation to other countries. Only in this way would China have the strength to face the challenges. China understood that the best way to make the country strong was to become an industrial, technological, economic and military power-house. China turned to the West and developed close relations. This relationship facilitated China to acquire the sophisticated technology and expertise from the West.

For about 20 years China had averaged 9.8 per cent annual economic growth under the reforms begun by the late leader Deng. Let me refer to certain bare statistics to appreciate this phenomenon. In 1997, China's foreign trade volume was US \$563.4 billion, up from a meagre figure of only US\$35.7 billion in 1978. Its agricultural output reached US\$517.9, 3.4 times that of 1978 and the industrial output in 1997 reached 14 times the 1978 figure. Even in the economic down-turn in South East and North Asia for the last two years, China achieved more than 8 per cent growth in its economy and the most remarkable is the fact that the local currency yuan was not devalued against the mighty US dollar while most of the countries in the region devalued their currencies between 30 and 80 per cent. Within the

next 20 years or so, China would claim to be the second largest economy in the world surpassing Japan.

On the other hand, India had a regulated economy and ran a policy of protectionism to safeguard its indigenous industries. In 1991, India for the first time abandoned its moribund planned socialist economy in favour of a vigorous free-market system and continued the major reforms to combat mounting budget and trade deficits. As the boom in China appeared in mid 90s to plateau, India hoped to capitalise on the search by foreign investors for a new high-return destination for their capital. Due to the late start in de-regulating its economy, India lagged behind China in its economic growth.

The economic prosperity led China to build a large modern defence capability. New Delhi watched silently the development of Chinese nuclear arsenal and missile systems in 80s and 90s. Prior to halting its nuclear tests in 1996, China tested tactical nuclear weapons of a kind that the US and Russia had not tested since the 70s. It is reported that China turned Tibet into a strong strategic base. India's Prime Minister justified the nuclear tests last year by saying: "We carried out the tests for national security". The question is: from where did India perceive a threat to its security? Surely not from Pakistan? It was evident from India's Defence Minister's statement that India's target was pointed to China.

The above will indicate that India-China relations are complex and dominated by thorny issues for more than three decades. Unless these issues are addressed, the relations between the two countries are likely to oscillate between toughness and sweetness. However, the visit has opened a new process, although its pace may proceed at its usual pace-glacial. Any forward movement is better than no movement.

The writer, a Barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

by Jim Davis

Garfield ©



James Bond



Liberation and Beyond

by J N Dixit

Towards Military Conflict

Part-III

ANOTHER over-arching and macro-level political factor which impacted on the Indian policies at this particular point of time was the tremendous ground-swell of public opinion not only in Bengal and Assam but all over India in support of Bangladesh liberation struggle. There was growing impatience in Parliament and in the media about India not providing open military support to the liberation struggle and not putting a stop to continuing military oppression of the people of East Pakistan. Leaders like Siddhartha Shankar Ray and Triguana Sen from West Bengal stressed the emotive support for the struggle sweeping through the people of West Bengal. Leaders of other parties across the political spectrum urged decisive action by the government of India to stop the military atrocities. Mrs Gandhi and her cabinet came to the conclusion that operational support to the freedom fighters of Bangladesh would have to be qualitatively increased and sustained if the freedom struggle was to succeed. They also came to the correct assessment that this would lead to an open conflict with Pakistan for which India should be prepared. The Ministry of External Affairs, the Indian intelligence agencies and the Services Headquarters of the three armed forces were therefore instructed to prepare for the implementation of this policy option. By the third week of October when the UN General Assembly debates were coming to an end, Mrs. Gandhi decided that she would undertake a direct and personal diplomatic initiative visiting capitals of important powers to explain to them India's predicament, the rationale of Indian policies towards the East Pakistan crisis and to persuade them to make a last attempt at influencing Pakistan to release Mujibur Rahman and re-start political negotiations before matters got out of hand.

In contrast the Yahya regime's attitude was becoming progressively truculent, obdurate and insensitive to the profound political crisis afflicting Pakistan. An example was Yahya's behaviour at a press conference at the United Nations Headquarters when he visited the General Assembly in September-October, 1971. Half way through this conference one of the foreign correspondents asked him to confirm or deny the results of the general elections held early in 1971 in which Mujibur Rahman had got a majority. The correspondent went on to quote statistics of election results



Mindless destruction by the occupation Pakistan army.

and asked Yahya Khan for some additional factual information about the proportion of Bengali citizens in Pakistan compared to the citizens from other provinces constituting his country. Yahya's response was startlingly rude and inept. After emphasising the legitimacy of Pakistan's military operations in the post election period in East Pakistan, he said something to the effect that he was the President of Pakistan and could not be bothered about giving statistics and factual information. Then he pointed his finger at one of the senior officials sitting with him at the conference, probably Aga Shahi, his ambassador to the UN, and told the correspondent that he must ask such questions from 'one of my stooges'. They would be able to give you this kind of routine information.

In the meanwhile, the Mujibur Rahman trial continued. All indications were that a ruthless sentence would be awarded to him. Mrs. Gandhi commenced her world tour in November during which she visited Moscow and Washington, apart from important West European capitals. In the days preceding this, from mid-October onwards, India had stepped up its support to the Bangladesh Freedom fighters qualitatively. Indian army and naval units were put on a state of alert to give support to the freedom fighters, were the Pakistani forces to take any decisive military action affecting Indian territories. Nixon was naturally aware of these developments. He had already created what has come to be known as 'Washington's Special Action Group' of his National Security Council to deal with the East Pakistan crisis. Nixon also initiated a series of exchanges with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and asked Henry Kissinger to interact with Soviet Ambassador in Washington Dobrynin, to pressurise the Russians to function in Tandem with the US to prevent India from providing support to the liberation struggle. Soviet response was tactful but firm. Gromyko had told Nixon on September 29 that though avoiding war in the sub-continent is desirable it is Soviet Union's judgement that the risk of war would entirely be rooted in 'Pakistani provocations and intransigence'. By early October Nixon had asked Alexander Haig, the Deputy National Security Adviser, to pressurise the Indians again on their refusing to agree to proposals of withdrawal of troops from East Pakistan border. In reciprocation of which Pakistan would also pull back its forces. The US Senate and House of Representatives were progressively critical of the Nixon Administration's pro-Pakistani tilt, which only provoked Nixon to be more aggressively pro-Pakistani. His entire approach was to continue support to Yahya Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and to somehow sustain the basic position of the West Pakistan power elite on the political future of East Pakistan. Bhutto and Yahya

Khan were encouraged to articulate a number of vague and shifty proposals for a political settlement which did not address the basic demands of the people of East Pakistan, negation of which had resulted in the East Pakistan crisis.

Mrs. Gandhi received a sympathetic and supportive hearing in the Soviet Union and a non-committal response in other European countries. She had two meetings in Washington with President Nixon on November 4 and 5, 1971. There is no better description (though from the American point of view) of these crucial meetings between Mrs. Gandhi and Nixon than one given by Kissinger in his book, White House Years. He says: "Nixon had no time for Mrs. Gandhi's condescending manner. Privately, he scoffed at her moral posturing, which he found all the more irritating because he suspected that in pursuit of her purposes she had in fact fewer scruples than he. He considered her indeed a cold blooded practitioner of power politics. On August 11 Nixon had admitted to the Senior Review Group that in Mrs. Gandhi's position he might pursue a similar course. But he was not in her position — and therefore he was playing for time. He, as did I, wanted to avoid a showdown, because he knew that a war would threaten our geopolitical design, and we both judged that East Pakistani autonomy was inevitable, if over a slightly longer period than India suggested. (In fact, India never put forward a specific time table, implying throughout that yesterday had already been too late.)"

Mrs. Gandhi, who was as formidable as she was condescending, had no illusions about what Nixon was up to. She faced her own conflicting pressures. Her Parliament would be meeting in two weeks, thirsting for blood. Though she had contributed no little to the crisis atmosphere, by now it had its own momentum, which, if she did not master it, might overwhelm her. Her dislike of Nixon, expressed in the icy formality of her manner, was perhaps compounded by the uneasy recognition that this man whom her whole upbringing caused her to disdain perceived international relations in a manner uncomfortably close to her own. It was not that she was a hypocrite, as Nixon thought; this assumed that she was aware of a gap between her action and her values. It was rather than for her, her interests and her values were inseparable.

The conversation between Nixon and Mrs. Gandhi the next day confirmed the never-never land of US-Indian relations. Mrs. Gandhi made no reference to Pakistan at all. The entire meeting was confined to a world view in which Mrs. Gandhi asked penetrating questions about our foreign policy elsewhere, as if the sub-continent were the one corner of peace and stability on the globe. She gave us honour grades everywhere except there. Nixon on his part was willing enough to ignore the subject of the previous day, partly because he dreaded unpleasant scenes, partly because he correctly judged that this was Mrs. Gandhi's way of rejecting the various schemes we had put forward. It was a classic demonstration why heads of government should not negotiate contentious matters.

Because their deadlocks seem unbreakable, their tendency to avoid precision is compounded. Thus, Mrs. Gandhi's visit ended without progress on any outstanding issue or even on a procedure by which progress could be made.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in October the Director in charge of External Publicity in the Ministry of External Affairs and myself as Director in charge of the Special Unit dealing with the East Pakistan crisis, were sent to Calcutta. The objective was to have an exchange of views with officials of the Mujibnagar Government and with senior colleagues in the Branch Secretariat of the Ministry to make an assessment whether the liberation struggle could be sustained by the Bangladesh freedom fighters without direct military intervention by India. We were told by the officials in Bangladesh Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed's office that while a guerrilla warfare could continue for many years, the various groups of the freedom fighters would not be able to overcome the Pakistani military without direct Indian military support.

Col. (ret'd.) MAG Osmani, who was titular head of all the freedom fighters, gave a clear assessment that if there was no direct military support from India, the youthful groups fighting the liberation struggle would be reduced to crying on a hopeless struggle which may ultimately fade away. He urged Indian military intervention as early as possible.

The following specific suggestions were made by the Mujibnagar Government in exile to the Government of India: —Bangladesh Government should be given formal recognition and Bangladesh's existence as an independent country should be legally acknowledged by the Government of India.

—A Joint Command should be formed between the Indian armed forces and the Mukti Bahini of Bangladesh to draw up immediate plans for full-scale military operations against the Pakistani armed forces in Bangladesh.

India should indicate to the United Nations that given the dilatory attitude of the majority of members of the organisation, India and Bangladesh would not countenance any intervention by the United Nations which may aim at a compromise scaling down the demand for complete independence of Bangladesh. Mrs. Gandhi had decided to respond positively to all of these demands by the time she returned from her trip to Washington. Our intelligence sources had conveyed confirmed information and assessments to Mrs. Gandhi that the Special Action Group of the National Security Council of the US, under instruction from President Nixon had commenced orchestrating strategies at the United Nations and in the important capitals of the world to resist the liberation struggle of Bangladesh and to sustain the approach of General Yahya Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto towards meeting the political crisis in East Pakistan. India therefore came to the conclusion that before the US took any pre-emptive action in support of Pakistan, Bangladesh freedom fighters' efforts should be given more operational support. By mid-November, Mukti Bahini groups had intensified their operations sufficiently all over Bangladesh to make the Pakistani military command a trifle desperate. Bangladesh freedom fighters after each of their operations were getting sanctuary in Indian territory. The military high command in Pakistan, therefore, decided on a policy of hot pursuit into Indian territory including some air strikes despite East Pakistan having only 12 or 14 planes.

Enormous Haze Found over Indian Ocean

by William K. Stevens

The brownish haze is composed of several kinds of minute byproducts from the burning of fossil fuels for industry and transportation. The scientists say these elements, including soot and sulfur droplets, are blown out over the ocean from the Indian subcontinent, China and Southeast Asia during the winter monsoon, when prevailing winds sweep down from the Himalayas and out to sea.

SCIENTISTS have discovered to their surprise that a haze of air pollution about the size of the United States covers the Indian Ocean in the wintertime, and they say it may have important implications for global climate and the environment of both Asia and the tropical ocean.

The brownish haze is composed of several kinds of minute byproducts from the burning of fossil fuels for industry and transportation. The scientists say these elements, including soot and sulfur droplets, are blown out over the ocean from the Indian subcontinent, China and Southeast Asia during the winter monsoon, when prevailing winds sweep down from the Himalayas and out to sea.

In the late spring and summer, the experts say, the winds reverse as part of the summer monsoon and blow the haze back across the land, where it combines with monsoon rains and falls out of the atmosphere as acid rain. The summer monsoon is now under way, although the scientists said they had no direct evidence of how the haze was currently being affected.

They do know that it persisted over the ocean, from the

Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea southward past the Equator, throughout six weeks of intensive scientific surveillance by aircraft, ships, balloons, satellites and land stations in February and March.

The results were announced by the National Science Foundation, which sponsored the \$25 million project in part, and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego.

"It appeared as if the whole Indian subcontinent was surrounded by a mountain of pollution," said Veerabhadran Ramanathan, the director of Scripps' Center for Clouds, Chemistry and Climate, which coordinated the project. Ramanathan and Paul J. Crutzen, director of the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry, in Germany, are the co-chiefs of the research project.

The cloud of atmospheric aerosols, as the tiny particles and droplets of pollution are called, has at least two important implications for the environment: The acid rain it produces may harm both terrestrial and marine life, and the aerosols alter the earth's climate by reflecting solar radiation and thereby cooling the part of the earth beneath the haze. The new findings are sure to complicate experts' efforts to

pin down whatever influence human activity is having on global climate.

Industrial aerosols have long been known to affect North America and Europe, where most of the earth's industry has been concentrated. Scientists believe that aerosols are diminishing over those two continents as a result of environmental controls, but aerosol emissions have been increasing in Asia as industry grows there, and that growth is expected to continue.

Globally, the cooling aerosols have combined with heat-trapping greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide to help produce a crazy-quilt pattern of human-induced climatic change. Like the aerosols, greenhouse gases are produced by industrial and transportation combustion, and scientists say they tend to warm the planet as a whole while aerosols cool some regions. Greenhouse gases generally persist in the atmosphere for decades or even centuries, while aerosols can rain out of the atmosphere in only a few days.

The persistence of the Indian Ocean haze, its extent and its thickness were all surprises, Ramanathan said in an interview. It covered about 3.8 million square miles, roughly the

combined area of the 50 states. While industrial aerosols in Europe and America are generally confined to within 2,000 feet of the earth's surface, he said, those observed above the Indian Ocean rose to about 10,000 feet, far higher although still below, say, the cruising altitude of commercial airliners.

Preliminary results of measurements, Ramanathan said, indicate that the aerosols reflected enough sunlight to reduce the amount of solar energy absorbed by the ocean by about 10 per cent. This, in turn, means that less water will evaporate from the sea, producing less rainfall.

In addition, some of the aerosols are sucked up by huge thunderstorms that characterize the equatorial region and are then mixed with water and deposited in the ocean as acid rain, which could affect marine life. A complicating factor, he said, is that because of incomplete combustion, the haze has an unusually high proportion of soot. Soot is dark, and absorbs solar radiation. This would tend to counteract the cooling effect of lighter, liquid aerosols that reflect sunlight.

This piece appeared in The New York Times June 10, 1999 issue.