

# New Vision of Gaddafi to Unify Africa

by Harun ur Rashid



**Col. Gaddafi appears to have now a new vision of uniting the states of Africa. He feels that Africa has continued to be exploited and neglected and he is against any plots hatched by those who "want to rob Africa of its resources and hamper its development." In a recent interview with the French daily, Le Figaro, Col. Gaddafi said: "I fought at the time of national liberation. But now one can throw away the gun to work for peace and development. That is my role."**

LIBYA'S leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi (57) celebrated the 30th anniversary of his revolutionary government last month. The very fact that he has ruled Libya for 30 years in a volatile world is itself a great achievement. Under his rule Libya has continued to be the focus of attention of the international community. Some in the West think of him as a "maverick" politician who is known to have provided funds to the leaders of all kinds of freedom movements in other countries which the West considers as "terrorist organisations". Those who fought and continue to fight for their political independence adore him as the "true leader" of the suppressed people. Very few leaders have provoked as much controversy in the West as the Libyan leader.

Mr. Gaddafi was only 27 years of age when he was instrumental in overthrowing the monarchy in 1969 and ushered in a new era for Libyans and the Kingdom of Libya was converted into the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

It is interesting to note that Col. Gaddafi is known as the "leader of the revolution" but he does not hold any official position in the country. He is neither the head of the state or of the government. The Ambassadors accredited to Libya do not present credentials to him. In fact many Ambassadors came and left the country without meeting Col. Gaddafi.

A father of eight, Col. Gaddafi lives a very modest personal life. He is known to have not amassed any wealth inside or outside the country. Often he lives and meets for-

eign visitors inside a tent in a desert. I had the rare opportunity to able to meet him, in a remote desert in-between Tripoli and Benghazi, as a leader of Bangladesh trade delegation in 1987 while I was Additional Foreign Secretary in Dhaka. He has a strong presence and possesses charisma. He spoke slowly in Arabic and was well briefed in world affairs including the issues of the Indian sub-continent. He asked me a few pointed questions on South Asia to which I responded.

Col. Gaddafi likes to recall the tribal and desert origins of Libya's Arabs. He belonged to the Gaddafi tribe that roams the deserts of eastern Libya. The tribe is known to be fiercely independent and were the first Arab people in the world to be bombed by the Italian air force in 1911.

Libya was ruled by Italy as its colony in the early part of this century and after the second world war, the victors granted full independence to Libya under King Idris. King Idris allowed British and US military bases in the country. With the discovery of oil in 60s, it increased private wealth and social tension grew. King Idris was slow to respond to the social changes after the oil wealth. Furthermore the young people were angered by the King's failure to enter into Arab-Israeli war in 1967.

Against this background, Colonel Gaddafi together with a few army young officers took steps to depose the King and took political power through the formation of a Revolutionary Command Council. (The King lived in Egypt and died in 1983). All the military officers were Arab nationalists to the core and

which appeared to ignore the nitty gritty of Arab politics and the unions did not last long.

Col. Gaddafi is deeply committed to the welfare of his people. The quality of life in the country soared in an unprecedented manner during his rule. Education, technology, infrastructure, housing, health and equality of women became the hallmark of his administration.

The introduction of women in the armed forces demonstrated his liberal views. The five million population have a per capita income of about US\$5,410.00 and its principal export is oil. He built the largest water development project to bring water from the Sahara desert to coastal cities costing approximately US\$ 3.3 billion. Germany, South Korea and the European countries participated mainly in the development of the country.

He is a leader who appears to be highly misunderstood in the West and by some of the leaders in Arab countries and Africa. The US severed its diplomatic relations in 1981

with Libya. Britain did in 1984 after a policewoman died when a Libyan embassy personnel fired from the embassy on demonstration outside its embassy in London. (Recently the diplomatic ties with Britain resumed). The US bombed Tripoli in 1986 accusing Libya of involvement in terrorist attacks on a West Berlin club frequented by the US soldiers.

Libya's relations with the West deteriorated sharply in 1988 when the US and Britain sought the extradition of two Libyans accused of the bombing of a Pan Am jumbo over Lockerbie, Scotland which led to the deaths of 210 people. Since April, 1992 Libya was under UN sanctions because Libya denied its involvement with the bombing of the plane and refused to surrender the two suspected Libyans for trial. Since the surrender of the suspects in March of this year, the sanctions have now been suspended but are not withdrawn by the UN under pressure from the US.

There is a view in the West that his 30 years could be divided into three phases: first 10 years in which Col. Gaddafi tried to unite with any and every Arab country, another 10 years during which he pursued

the countries on the artificial borders. Claims and counter-claims of territories are not infrequent in the Arab world and led to armed conflicts among them. Libya-Tunisia claim on the continental shelf in the Gulf of Sirte and Libya-Chad territorial conflict are instances in point. Morocco's claim on Western (Spanish) Sahara divided the Arab world and is yet to be settled under the auspices of the UN.

Second, geographically Arab world consists of Asia and Africa. In the absence of common geography, special role is usually placed on the cementing role of Islam. Islam is divided into various sects and sub-sects and the interpretation of precepts of Islam varies from ultra-conservatism to liberalism. Pan-Arabism also collapsed because of the rise of nationalism. Each country has its own national past and culture which should not be merged with those of others. It is the distinctiveness which separates one nation from the other. Furthermore, Islam could not become a unifying force as it should have been because of the nationalistic fervour harboured by each Arab nation.

Third, the Arab world is ruled by a variety of state institutions — from monarchy to elected Presidents. Any new idea propagated by an Arab leader to reform the existing institutions might not be welcome in certain part of the Arab world. In fact, political liberalism focussed on the essential concept of government by consent and socialism opposes the exploiters and manipulators for the protection of the society. Both liberalism and socialism are perceived as threat to the existing institu-

tions. Furthermore, often rivalry among the leaders did not help a united Arab position. Col. Gaddafi's quest for Arab unity met enormous obstacles and often hostile responses.

There is a view that the inherent disunity in the Arab world must have disillusioned the Libyan leader. He perceived that many of the Arab leaders have not been able to support his vision of unity and solidarity among the Arab people.

In the light of these developments, Col. Gaddafi appears to have now a new vision of uniting the states of Africa. He feels that Africa has continued to be exploited and neglected and he is against any plots hatched by those who "want to rob Africa of its resources and hamper its development." In a recent interview with the French daily, Le Figaro, Col. Gaddafi said: "I fought at the time of national liberation. But now one can throw away the gun to work for peace and development. That is my role."

Col. Gaddafi is the longest-ruling Arab leader after the deaths of King Hussein of Jordan and King Hassan of Morocco. The Libyan leader who hosted the extraordinary session of Organisation of African Unity (OAU) last month said that time had come for Africa to unite, disband costly armies and work for development. The world will closely watch him whether he succeeds in his new-found mission.

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## LETTER FROM EUROPE

### Sir, are You Taking a Walk or Loitering?

by Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam

*Over forty years ago, Spain was basically an agricultural country and had an easy lifestyle. . . Today, Spain is a highly industrialised country, its towns and cities have grown larger, motor vehicles have invaded the country like swarms of locusts and Spaniards live under much greater stress. Yet the Spanish passion for life has not disappeared. . . The Spaniard still takes his paseo ( does not loiter ), drinks his chatos ( does not get drunk ), goes to the toros ( does not consider himself a sadist ).*

A few years ago, when I was visiting the United States on behalf of the Spanish subsidiary of a US multinational company, my boss (who was trying to strike up an intelligent conversation with me about cultural differences and culture shocks) asked me, "What, in your opinion, is the most common pastime of the ordinary Spaniard that is shared by both men and women?"

"Off the cuff, I would say," I started to reply to his question, then I realised that one does not answer one's boss off the cuff, particularly if the boss is a well-read cultured person. So I paused and began to think about it before giving him an adequate answer.

The immediate reply that flashed across my mind was, "football" because so many men spend so much of their spare time on the ritual of football, which not only means playing football but also watching football matches live on the television, reading specialised newspapers and magazines on football and talking excitedly about football in bars, cafes and at work places. But I realised that that is a predominantly male pastime. So I hesitated and thought that it must be los toros (the bull fight and bull running). That is not true either because it is a seasonal pastime. It is also male dominated and is followed only by a minority (although quite vociferous) of the Spaniards.

Finally, after a little while I answered, "pasear" (to go for a

stroll). My boss (an American from the mid-west) was bewildered. He had difficulty in understanding what I meant. Trying to be polite, he said, "You mean going for a walk, but where to?"

I answered, "Nowhere." "What do you mean? Walking aimlessly without a destination?"

I said, "Yes, walking, only for the sake of walking."

"That would be construed as loitering in the US and a loiterer is liable to be picked up by the police for questioning", he concluded.

Now, as far as I know, a loiterer is someone who moves about without a purpose. The Spanish paseo ( stroll ) has at least two clear objectives : to relax and to have fun.

Just as an average American does not understand how walking or strolling can be considered as a pastime, an ordinary Spaniard has difficulty in understanding the American obsession about automobiles. Last year, one of our Spanish neighbours sent his son to Phoenix, Arizona to stay with some relatives there for a few months. The idea was for the young man to learn English and at the same time to expose himself to another culture. A few days before his departure, Francisco came to see us with his parents to say goodbye and also to have a chat about America and the Americans. Over a drink my wife, who is an American, asked him whether he had an international driving licence.

Francisco said, "Yes, I have a driving licence, but I am not planning on driving there."

"If you are going to live with your relatives in a suburban area, how are you going to move about? How will you go to the university or even do your shopping?"

"Oh, I shall use the public transport or use my legs," Francisco replied sportingly. I could see from his eyes that he was thinking that my wife was either a snob or was utterly stupid.

"In the suburbs, you will not find an adequate public transport system. There are hardly any side-walks for the pedestrians. Besides, the Americans go everywhere, even to do their shopping, by car."

Francisco was flabbergasted.

"Then how does a visitor manage?"

"Well, if it is a short visit, you stay in the downtown area, where there is a good public transport system. If it is a long stay, and you live in the suburbs either you rent a car or persuade a friend or family member to

lend you a car."

Francisco left our home thinking that the Americans were an incredibly eccentric people.

Many years ago ( in the fifties ), when I first came to Madrid as a young man, it had the look of a medium-sized provincial town. The atmosphere was relaxed but the streets were busy. Trams criss-crossed the entire city. The underground system was cheap and congested but quite efficient. There were buses but not many private motor vehicles. The shops used to open at ten and close for lunch at two. After a break of between three and three and a half hours, they used to reopen and close at nine or nine-thirty in the evening. The government offices and banks functioned only in the mornings, from eight or eight thirty until lunchtime. Since the salaries were low, many people had a second job in the private sector in the afternoon where they worked until 8 or 8.30 in the evening.

Later, I had the good fortune

to travel up and down the country (usually on business and sometimes for pleasure as well). I found that in most places, people followed more or less the same routine: start early in the morning and then continue may be at a different place) until fairly late in the evening with a long mid-day break of between two and three hours when they would go home for lunch and a short siesta (nap). The streets would then become virtually empty of traffic except occasional trams and buses. There would hardly be any pedestrians on the roads. Then at dusk, when the sun had gone down and the temperature had cooled off slightly, all of a sudden, as though at the wave of a magic wand, the streets and boulevards would become full of pretty young women in beautiful dresses, little children in sports outfits and immaculately turned out senior citizens ( both men and women ). This was the time for the paseo and gentle flirtations among young people when the terrace bars and coffee shops became full of clients. Many women would come to collect their husbands and novios ( sweethearts ), wait for them patiently outside their places of work and then stroll back home with locked arms. They would often pause at the terrace bar to have a few chatos ( small glasses of wine ) or a beer with some tapas ( appetizers ).

This is true that with the huge increase in the number of automobiles on the Spanish roads, the massive entry of women in the labour market and Spain's entry into the Common Market ( which has practically eliminated the long lunch break and the siesta in most places ), this scenario has changed considerably but the Spanish passion for the paseo ( the stroll ) still persists. This is also true the wide boulevards in the city-centres have been narrowed or have completely disappeared to make room for the automobile, but the footpaths and sidewalks have been widened, where the Spaniards can still take their walks and

do their window shopping. The Spanish strollers have virtually taken over the esplanades, the ramblas and the promenades by the sea. The ecological move to close off many streets to motor vehicles in the city-centres of Madrid, Barcelona and other large towns has indirectly been beneficial to the strollers. Many smaller towns are also introducing similar measures primarily to lower the pollution level of the air their inhabitants inhale. Municipal authorities are also encouraging the people to use bicycles to move about the town. Unfortunately, in contrast with the Dutch, the Spaniards do not like using bicycles because Spain is not as flat as Holland is and because Spanish streets do not have separate lanes for bicycles.

While in small-town America (even when everything is at a walking distance), people hop into a car to do small grocery shopping or to go to the Post office or visit the library, an Englishman under similar circumstances walks to these places. A Spaniard would also walk but preferably in the company of a friend or a family member. In larger towns and among the younger people the automobile culture is taking roots. I have seen my neighbours, particularly the younger ones, driving to the gymnasium or to the movie house and spending half an hour or more trying to park the car and then finally leaving the car a mile away from the place of destination or double park at a crossing, creating monumental traffic jams and the possibility of their vehicles being towed away by the police. They also like going to American-style shopping malls (one can not go to these places except by car), which are located on motorways outside city limits, than going to the nearby grocery shops. It seems to me that there is a direct correlation between the size of the town and the compartmentalisation of different activities (at least in Europe). Let me explain.

Supposing that a Spaniard wants to do some physical exercise and run some errands. In a small town he will most probably combine these two activities -- walk to these places to do these chores which, by the way, sounds quite sensible to me. But in a large town, he will use his car (with all the corresponding inconveniences of parking, pollution and traffic jams) to run these errands and then drive to the Gym or to the park to do some physical exercise.

We once stayed at a friend's place in Bristol (in England not in Connecticut, US). I remember, we used to go everywhere on foot. There were wide foot paths and innumerable pedestrian crossings. Most English suburbs have similar facilities. As far as my experience in the United States is concerned, it has been completely different. For a rich country such as the United States, there are few side-walks and pedestrian crossings in its suburbs. Actually, I should not complain too much. Whenever I visit Dhaka, I have more or less the same difficulty because there are hardly any footpaths in Dhaka either. I can understand the unwillingness of the Bangladeshi authorities to build footpaths in Dhaka because of financial constraint, but I do not quite understand the American situation unless of course, it is due to cultural differences.

The Spanish habit of ir de paseo or go for a walk has positive physical and psychological effects on the people. With greater industrialisation and the advancement of civilisation, human beings are becoming more and more sedentary. We no longer stalk the animals to hunt for food. The use of agricultural machinery have saved us from tilling the land and harvesting by manual methods. We spend many hours daily sitting in front of a computer or a television set. Yet overabundance of food (at least in the Western world), induces us to consume more food than we need. The result is obesity with its corresponding negative effects on health. In order to avoid gradual atrophy, both the human brain and the human body need regular exercise.

Many years ago I read somewhere that if one wants to have a healthy existence, one should follow four simple rules: to do some exercise daily, to have some social life (to communicate with one's fellow beings), to eat frugally but to have a balanced diet and, from time to

time, to take a break from the daily routine in order to gather oneself together and to reflect on the relative value of things surrounding oneself. Strolling, if done regularly, gives one the opportunity to comply with most of these rules. As an anecdote, it can be mentioned here that Aristotle's school in ancient Greece was known as the Peripatetic (walking or strolling) school because much of the teaching and subsequent discussions used to take place while teachers and students were walking or strolling. Was it just a coincidence or the great master wanted his pupils to learn that both the human brain and body need exercise and if possible at the same time? This is true that a Mediterranean country's overall climate is conducive to such activity. Not many people would enjoy taking a walk (even though it is always preferable taking a walk to taking Prozac) in a place where it is depressingly windy and cloudy most of the year and the temperature is near freezing point. This is probably one of the reasons why in north European countries, more people have psychiatric problems and the suicide rate is higher than in the Mediterranean countries, especially Spain.

If one walks approximately an hour everyday, besides helping the muscular activity of the body, it also increases the coronary circulation. Besides the Mediterranean diet, the paseo has, I am sure, contributed to the greater longevity (very close to that of the Japanese) of the Spaniards.

Over forty years ago, Spain was basically an agricultural country and had an easy lifestyle. I used to think that Spanish habits like the paseo, the bull fight etc. will disappear with the industrialisation of the country. Well, I was wrong. Today, Spain is a highly industrialised country, its towns and cities have grown larger, motor vehicles have invaded the country like swarms of locusts and Spaniards live under much greater stress. Yet the Spanish passion for life has not disappeared. It may have changed to some extent because of changing circumstances of life. The Spaniard still takes his paseo ( does not loiter ), drinks his chatos ( does not get drunk ), goes to the toros ( does not consider himself a sadist ) and generally enjoys life without being hedonistic (and unlike the Christian fundamentalists does not feel guilty about it).

## Netaid Aims to Change the World through Hi-tech Pop

Hi-tech computer companies, a bevy of pop stars and the United Nations are joining forces to raise money for the world's poor. The organisers hope that fans will use their computers to listen to three concerts and donate money on-line. Gemini News Service looks at a computer-based community of interests.

by Sebastian Naidoo

A glittering cast of rock and pop stars is to urge Net users to change the world by surfing into a stylish new Website launched in September by Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair.

Backed by the United Nations and three leading United States hi-tech companies, Netaid aims to harness the Internet, the worldwide computer link-up, to build a global "community of interest" to fight poverty in developing countries.

The site is to host the largest-ever live concert staged on the Web, with singers George Michael, Puff Daddy, David Bowie, Bono, Bryan Adams, Robbie Williams and Sting headlining three overlapping concerts in New York, London and Geneva on 9 October.

"It's all very well crying, but if you don't put your hand in your pocket, it is just part of your evening's entertainment," George Michael told reporters in London. "Even though the media has lost interest in Kosovo, [refugees] are still having a desperately hard time," he added.

The concerts will be broadcast live through 125,000 simultaneous "streams" (video feeds), ten times the scale of any similar Web event. Hardware, design and support are supplied free by Cisco, Akamai and KPMG.

Between songs, stars will ask online viewers to follow hyperlinks through the site and pledge cash to any of 50 charities working to wipe out poverty.

Netaid has also set up a charity to channel funds towards projects in Kosovo and Sudan. Organisers expect to 50 million "hits" (visits to the site) per hour during the concerts. The site can handle 1,000 donations a second.

"Everyone has a certain responsibility to do something



Robbie Williams: Live concert on the Web

about poverty around the world," says Robert Piper, Netaid website manager for the UN Development Programme. "There's a project out there for everyone. And the Internet offers us extraordinary ways to personalise the donation process, by giving people more choice on where their money goes."

While charities have been investing in the fundraising potential of the Internet for sev-

eral years, Netaid is the first commercial portal (gateway on the Internet) to open a donations hotline to organisations like Oxfam, CARE, World Vision, Grassroots International and Global Exchange.

An anti-hunger site launched in the US three months ahead of Netaid relies on corporate sponsors to pick up the bill for donations. Every time a visitor to the site clicks the "free food" button, a sponsor

pledges some food. A million-and-a-half donations were made in the first three weeks of September.

"You get a real sense of participation from the hunger site," says Sarah Norris, internet development manager at the UK-based Charities Aid Foundation (CAF). "We've learnt that simply providing content isn't enough for people. They want to do something."

Online financial pledges through Britain's two main gift sites — both run by CAF — have swelled over the year since last summer, with one of them, CharityCard, seeing a rise from 1.5 per cent to 5 per cent of total donations.

Not only does the site inspire donors to dig deeper into their pockets, says Norris, it also gets them surfing back for more. With plans to set up a long-range site after the concert fanfairs die down, this is just what Netaid will want to hear. Its relaunched site is to include chat-rooms, classified advertisements, listings, a guide to NGOs and more space devoted to anti-poverty projects and helping the UNDP build on its schemes to deliver Internet links to impoverished communities.

"Netaid is much more than a one-shot deal. The big prize is bringing North and South together by taking the middle-man out of the equation," says Piper.

"Engagement from the North and empowerment in the South will really change the world — and we won't settle for anything less than that."

To watch the concerts online you will need Realplayer software, available free at <http://realguide.real.com>.

The author is a journalist specialising in human rights issues. He is New Editor of OneWorld Online, a super-site dedicated to development and human rights.

## Garfield

by Jim Davis

