

## FOCUS

## Need for 'Constructive Engagement' with Myanmar

Bangladesh has much to gain from its relations with Myanmar. Apart from ensuring regional stability, the two countries' border trade can be sped up for their mutual benefit. Better surface communications between the two countries and linking Bangladesh with the proposed Asian Highway can accelerate trade and investment between them.

by Mansoor Mamoon

states termed this extension of economic collaboration and cooperation to Myanmar as 'constructive engagement' — a new terminology in the context of multilateral diplomacy which, in other words, means, helping in the process of opening up through dialogue and partnership in economic ventures with the age-old dictum that if economic liberalisation can be effected it will be followed by political liberalisation as in South Korea.

The ASEAN member states were motivated by various factors in their eagerness to befriend SLOEC. Not that Myanmar is an extremely resource-rich country, particularly in respect of hydrocarbons with an estimated 33 trillion reserves of natural gas. But mainly because of strategic reasons — SLOEC's over dependence on China, which was reportedly heavily arming and aiding Myanmar. China stood solidly behind an internationally isolated regime and till 1994 provided one billion US dollars worth of arms and ammunitions.

China was also providing all logistic support in building a deepwater port at Kyaukpadaung which could also be used as an outlet to products from Hunnan, China's neighbouring province with Myanmar.

China was also rapidly projecting its naval power using its naval bases and facilities in the offshore islands of Myanmar which Beijing was helping in shoring up in the Indian Ocean near Malacca straits — South East Asia's major commercial crossroads much to the concern and consternation of the countries in the region as well as India.

The ASEAN member countries thought it appropriate to lessen as far as possible Myanmar's heavy dependence on China, if not totally delink it from its traditional and dependable ally. SLOEC was also happy to find alternative avenues of support and responded positively to the overtures of the South East Asian countries. mClose economic ties with and flow of FDI from the ASEAN have brought about radical infrastructural development in Myanmar, particularly in respect of rail, road, port and hotel development. Example can be cited of the I.1 billion US Dollar pipeline project from offshore drilling site in the Andaman Sea across the northern tip of the isthmus of Kra to Bangkok in which France's TOTAL and American UNOCAL were reportedly involved. Other such important projects were also completed or are underway.

For Myanmar it is a story akin from rags to riches — the country posted on an average growth rate of more than five per cent per annum. Economic benefits have made SLOEC leadership confident that it alone can hold the country together and Aung Sun Suu Kyi admits in her 1994 meeting with Bill Richardson that democracy cannot solve all the problems that the country is faced with, especially the problems of multi-racism and ethnic strife which manifested through the outbreak of guerilla or jungle warfare.

Between Bangladesh and Myanmar there exists a number of issues which need to be thrashed for the relations of the two neighbouring countries to bring to a level of cordiality. About twenty thousand remaining Rohingya refugees need to be speedily repatriated. The present rate of repatriation at a snail's speed is discouraging. Then there is the issue of demarcation of maritime boundary. Bangladesh's inclusion in the proposed Asian highway and accelerated trade and economic cooperation between the two countries which share a seventy miles border between them.

In December 1991 in the wake of influx of Rohingya refugees there had been border

incursions by Myanmar's army in which one BDR personnel was killed and a number of others were injured. Bangladesh put its army, airforce and navy into full alert. The relations between the two countries reached their lowest ebb. Tensions ran high along their common border as the militant groups belonging to Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) were active in their encounters with the Myanmar army being financed and getting arms from the Middle Eastern sources. Since that time Myanmar has largely beefed up its defence potentials and its air power is reported to be double of Bangladesh's strength.

In view of the development in the region it will be prudent on the part of Bangladesh to enter into constructive engagement with Myanmar as the ASEAN member states did. Under the sub-regional grouping with the acronym of BIMSTEC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) Dhaka has already entered into structured economic cooperation with Yangon. With Myanmar's formal entry into ASEAN Bangladesh has become a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia. Through Myanmar

and Thailand under BIMSTEC Bangladesh is now poised for spreading its external wings to South East Asia — an advantage which except India no other South Asian country enjoys.

Bilaterally also Bangladesh has much to gain from its cooperative relations with Myanmar. Apart from ensuring regional stability, the two countries' border trade can be speeded up for their mutual benefit. Better surface communications between the two countries and linking Bangladesh with the proposed Asian Highway can accelerate trade and investment between them. There is also a proposal for setting up of a special economic zone at Teknaf in Bangladesh with manufacturing facilities under joint venture utilising raw materials from Myanmar (The Daily Star May 25). Bangladesh can explore its market for various goods like RMG, textiles, ceramics, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals etc in Myanmar and purchase various agricultural goods at a much cheaper price from there. A coastal shipping service between the two countries, and building a jetty at Teknaf and a bridge over the river Naaf can also boost trade and economic cooperation between the two countries.

All these call for seriousness on the part of Bangladesh and its intent of purpose for constructive engagement with Myanmar keeping in mind the reality obtaining there — with SLOEC firmly holding the reins of power in Yangon with the simultaneous strategic backing from China as well as the economic support being provided by the ASEAN.

## SIERRA LEONE

## UN Battling for Itself

by Jonathan Power

WHEN Kofi Annan, the UN's Ghanaian Secretary-General, visited Rwanda in May, 1998 he ended up being pilloried in an aggressive press conference for presiding over the UN's "hands off" policy during the genocide of the Tutsis by the Hutus four years previously.

Journalists were quoting from Philip Gourevitch's shocking, then just-published, book, "We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families". In it he charged that the UN had ignored a cable from its local commander warning of the impending genocide.

As William Shawcross tells it in his important new book on the UN, "Deliver Us From Evil", "His voice almost cracking, Annan ended by saying that 'too much was made of one cable and that if information was indeed the only problem then peacekeeping would be much easier. We would not be having problems in Kosovo because everybody knows. We would not have had a problem in the Congo because everyone knew we had to separate the troops and the refugees. Why didn't it happen despite the information? Later everybody knew that there were refugees left behind when one million went back to Rwanda. Why didn't the information make us go and save them?'"

Ever since the Rwanda genocide the corridors of the UN have been pervaded by a heavy sense of guilt. For his part, President Bill Clinton tried to make amends for America's obstructive role by actually going to Rwanda and making a contrite apology. Yet as we all know from day to day life, guilt on its own doesn't always engender better behaviour. Neither, come to that, does having more information. We either have the will because we have the conviction, or we don't.

Thus, until a week ago, we had to watch the unfolding carnage in Sierra Leone, as did Kofi Annan, with hands clasped, baited breath, wondering how far the situation had to spiral downwards in the direction of genocide or mass killings before the resolve of the Security Council made itself apparent.

Meanwhile, we were swamped with information on children being conscripted into the rebel army and children at large having their limbs amputated by machete.

"How much information do they want?" Kofi Annan doubtless asked his wife.

The Secretary-General is supposed to bake bread without flour much less yeast.

A man with an ego would have quit long ago. One of Annan's predecessors, the Burmese U Thant, suffered similar attacks, when in 1967 he ordered a UN peacekeeping

force to honour an Egyptian government request to withdraw from its soil, triggering an Israeli attack on Egypt and the Six Day War. "He suffered irreparable psychological damage" and his physical health steadily declined, recalls a biographer.

Walter Lippmann described the odds in one of his telling columns in the *New York Herald Tribune*: "The cause of the opposition to the UN from East and West is a determination not to have the UN succeed in what it is attempting to do. For if the UN succeeds, there will not be a communist government in the Congo. That is what Khrushchev hated about Hammarskjöld. And if the UN succeeds, there will not be a restoration of white supremacy in the Congo and that is why money, propaganda and clandestine intervention are being employed [by the French, the Belgians and the British] to frustrate the UN."

Moreover, the political and managerial complications over Sierra Leone are reasonably compared with the Congo. Brian Urquhart, a former head of UN peacekeeping, described the effort to persuade the rebellious, secessionist leader Moise Tshombe to agree to the National Reconciliation Plan as "like trying to get an eel into a bottle".

By this measure the UN operation in Sierra Leone is a haven of good sense. The Security Council is reasonably united. The diamond traffickers and some of the companies that may have their own agenda but they do not have the ear of Western governments, as did the copper miners of Katanga forty years ago.

Very much for their own reasons, the British have got involved in Sierra Leone and perhaps even saved the situation. Prime Minister Tony Blair sent in a naval task force to evacuate British and other foreigners. Once they got their feet on the ground, finding their superior training gave them a cutting edge and backed by a favourable press at home they've stayed on, secured the capital and helped with the capture of the murderous rebel leader Foday Sankoh.

But such ad hocing is not good for the UN in the long run. Insisting on operating outside the UN chain of command, the British follow in the footsteps of the bad example that the U.S. set in Somalia. And now the Nigerian military is talking about operating in Sierra Leone outside the UN as well. This is no way to revitalize the UN, nor to build up the reputation of its peacekeeping department for future conflicts.

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## IRELAND

## From Conflict to Peace: An Evaluation

by S M Mizanur Rahman

Ireland would be given the status of Dominion and it would be declared independent being included in the British Commonwealth. But the Protestant-majority Northern Ireland would be treated as a province of the United Kingdom. In 1920, Southern Ireland was divided into 26 Counties and Northern Ireland was divided into six Counties. In 1921, according to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, Southern Ireland was declared an independent state under British Commonwealth.

The country was divided on the basis of the majority Catholic population and minority Protestants. But, Southern Ireland, did not accept the division of its territory with a part of it being included in Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom. In 1937, in a mass poll for United Ireland, the 26 Counties of the Southern Ireland attained sovereignty. In 1948, the two Irelands unitedly declared independence. This year, having passed a bill in the Irish Parliament, they declared an Irish Republic and came out of the British Commonwealth.

After declaration of independence by both the northern and southern parts, inter-communal riot started there due, apparently, to British conspiracy. The British Army occupied Northern Ireland in 1969, under the pretext of controlling communal riots, although Southern Ireland remained as an independent state. In the following year i.e., in 1970, Irish Republican Army (IRA) was formed and independence struggle started in Northern Ireland. In 1971, when the political situation went from bad to worse and brutality and murder was common everywhere, Brian Coker was appointed Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. This time, the political scenario had changed unprecedentedly. Mr Howard Smith, Head of the Office of the Representative, Foreign Office Diplomat, Belfast recruited Frank Still of the British Secret Intelligence Service M-16 in Northern Ireland. He began to discuss the situation with the common people, the Catholics, as well as the members of the IRA. He also held talks with the Protestant groups of Northern Ireland who

were loyal to the British. (Frank Still realised the fact that, it would be quite impossible to defeat the IRA by military power. So without a political solution, there was no other alternative to resolving the Ireland issue.) Then he played central role in arranging the first communication between the IRA and the British government.

The failure of IRA's talks with the British Government was due to the demand placed by the IRA that the British should have to leave Northern Ireland by 1975. The effort to solve the political problem of Ireland had ceased in October 1993 after heavy clashes between Catholics and Protestants. Later on in February 1994, America's initiative to help solve the Ireland issue gained a political footing when IRA leader Jerry Adams was offered visa by the American government. Next year US President Bill Clinton handed over responsibility to George Mitchell, the former US Senate Member to resume the negotiations. In mid-1996, discussions took place under the presidency of George Mitchell. A political and not a military solution was sought for through mutual understanding and discussion. The independent Southern Ireland government always supported the guerilla fight in Northern Ireland although Ulster did not want to be united with the Catholic-majority 26 Counties of the Southern Ireland.

On 6th April 1998, on the basis of an understanding, George Mitchell presented an elaborate proposal. Sinn Fein recommended the proposal in favour of acting the Joint Council independently. As a result, the majority representation of the Protestants would remain valid. But the Ulster Unionists refused the proposal and suggested for modification to the British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish Prime Minister Barty Ahern. Obviously, the British and Irish Prime Ministers were in favour of such an agreement that would satisfy both the Unionists and the Sinn Fein.

**The Peace Accord**  
The peace agreement signed on 10th April 1998, has the provision to revive the withdrawn local assembly of 1972 of Northern Ireland. This agreement has provided the basis of formation of the Northern Ireland government. According to this peace treaty, although Northern Ireland would not be

this self-rule the direct jurisdiction of the British government over this province has ended. The British government handed over power to the Inter-Party government as part of the peace agreement of 1998, and as a result, the sectarian strife in the province has ended.

London devolved power to the new cross-party government in Belfast as part of the peace accord. The Irish Republican Army was also expected to



an independent state, it would have little link with the independent Southern Ireland. According to the Britain-Ireland Treaty of 1981, it would also have provisions to summon the inter-governmental council.

The autonomy of Northern Ireland came into effect from 1st December 1999, and due to

name a go-between to an international body set up to oversee parliamentary disarming. The Irish government was to modify the country's Constitution to delete those sections making a territorial claim over Northern Ireland. British Prime Minister Tony Blair told the Parliament in London on 1st December 1999 that, "one huge giant step forward has been taken." In Belfast, Protestant David Trimble, who is First Minister of the new government, said the sectarian wrangling would be put aside. "We are going to have an institution with responsibilities... that is going to change the climate in Northern Ireland," he said.

**The Crucial Moment**  
The alleged non-compliance by the Irish Republican Army with the condition to surrender their arms to a decommissioning body within two months of the formation of the cross-party government, which is said to have expired on 31 January last, seems to have obscured somewhat the hopes and aspirations. On the other hand, the Ulster Unionist Party threatened to "collapse" the newly formed government by withdrawing their representatives, if the IRA did not begin decommissioning of their arms by February 12 (when their policy-making body met).

On the contrary, the IRA denied violation of any provision of the accord which provided them time upto May 2000 for disarmament, and they had already appointed a 'go-between' to discuss with the International Decommissioning Body, about handing over their arms. But the UUP hardliners said that they agreed to sit with their

extreme rivals — the IRA and its political wing Sinn Fein on condition that the disarmament would start within two months from the date of the formation of the government. The crucial moment seems to have arrived to sustain the achievement earned by the vigorous strategic effort of political leadership. Obviously, the sincerity of the leaders will be put to the test of fulfilling the provisions of the treaty in the greater interest of the people of Northern Ireland irrespective of their sects.

**Britain's Direct Rule Again:** Britain on 10 February 2000 adopted emergency legislation giving it the power to suspend Northern Ireland's power sharing administration as last ditch efforts to find a deal on IRA disarmament stalled. The British Government would also make commitments on troop reductions. Blair's official spokesman said they were still hoping for progress, while "clearly acknowledging that there is very little time left before we have to suspend the institutions." Whereas, Gerry Adams said, Sinn Fein had been "working itself to the bone" to end the row, but the party, which wants to end British rule, fears a potentially bloody split in the republican movement if it presses too hard on decommissioning. The IRA's political wing Sinn Fein, however warned that a suspension would be disastrous, making the prospect of disarmament ever more remote.

**IRA's Pledge to Disarm:** The Irish Republican Army officially announced on 7 May 2000 that, it would soon start to disarm — a breakthrough that should make lasting peace possible in Northern Ireland after 30 years of bloodshed. The outlawed IRA pledged to reveal its secretly stored tons of stockpiled weapons to international arms inspectors. According to IRA, "the process would render its arsenal 'completely and verifiably beyond use.'" Britain and Ireland, as part of a diplomatic push announced they would extend the deadline for total disarmament from May 22 — the target set in 1998's Good Friday peace accord — to June 2001. Britain and Ireland also announced the appointment of two international statesmen Cyril Ramaphosa, the former African National Congress Chairman and Martti Ahtisaari, Finland's recently retired President to lead the arms-dump inspections.

The British and Irish Governments warmly welcomed the IRA's long-sought pledge saying it met their requirements and cleared the way for restoring power to Northern Ireland's Catholic-Protestant administration. US President Bill Clinton, in a written statement called the IRA pledge, "a significant step toward realising the full promise of the 'Good Friday Accord.'" Gerry Adams, leader of the IRA-Linked Sinn Fein Party said, "This is a life-and-death, blood-and-sweat, emotional, painful step for the IRA to make — because it wants this to work."

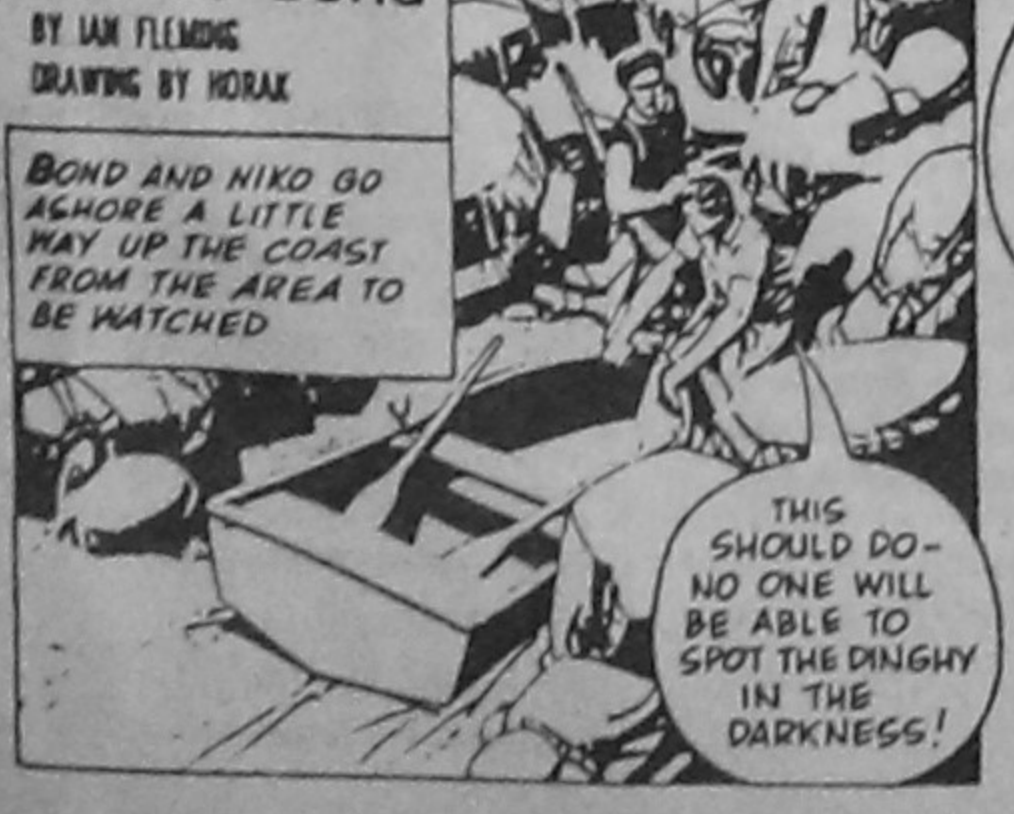
On the whole, can observe a positive sign towards lasting peace in the Northern Ireland. The time has come to avail of the opportunity of the IRA's pledge of disarmament by the British Government so that Catholic-Protestant administration's power might be restored in the Northern Ireland. The peace-loving people all over the world are eagerly waiting for a lasting peace and congenial socio-political environment in the Northern Ireland.

The writer is a historical geographer. The article is based on write-ups and reports on Northern Ireland published in the local English and Bengali press.

## TOM &amp; JERRY



## James Bond



## By Hanna-Barbera

