

Food for the future

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JACQUES DIOUF

RIDING on the momentum generated by the recent food crisis to focus on longer term challenges, some three hundred top international experts meet at FAO in Rome next Monday and Tuesday (October 12 and 13) to figure out how to make sure we have enough to eat 40 years from now.

For over the next four decades, the world's population will grow by 2.3 billion and become richer. Meeting the demand of the world's 9.1 billion inhabitants in 2050 will require 70 percent more food than we currently produce. So unless we take the right decisions today we risk finding the global cupboard dangerously bare tomorrow.

All the more so as in the years ahead the world food system must deal with the growing challenge of climate change which may reduce potential agricultural output by up to 30 percent in Africa, and by up to 21 percent in developing countries as a whole, but also with exacerbated transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases. At the same time the sector will have to cope with a smaller agricultural labour force as some 600 million people move from the countryside to the cities, and with increased

competition for land and natural resources, including from the bioenergy sector.

How we respond to these challenges will determine how well we can feed the world tomorrow. But, just as important, we must also see to it that people are fed today. That means ending the plight of the 1.02 billion people currently suffering hunger and malnutrition by acting decisively to eradicate hunger completely and rapidly.

With last century's Green Revolution, the world succeeded in averting a massive famine in Asia and Latin America in the 1970s by spending 17 percent of development aid in building irrigation schemes, seed production systems, fertiliser and feed plants, rural roads and storage facilities.

In rising to a similar challenge today, the path we follow must necessarily be a different one besides boosting investment in agriculture, we need to make more efficient use of energy, chemical inputs and natural resources, and focus more on the needs of smallholders and rural farming households.

In this connection, one significant challenge will be water as we will need simultaneously to expand the land area under irrigation while using proportionately less water. The key to squaring that



Still not enough.

circle lies in water-harvesting and techniques that improve water use efficiency and soil moisture.

As the rural and farm population is reduced, agriculture will increasingly become more capital- and knowledge-intensive to produce more and higher quality food for bigger and richer urban populations. Therefore substantial investments will be needed, including in research and development because future production increases must over-

whelmingly come from sustainable yield increases and improved cropping intensity rather than from bringing more land into cultivation.

Farmers too will need to be better trained to take up the new methods and technologies, and that will require spending on education and agricultural extension. Most of those investments will come from the private sector and from farmers themselves.

However, to make private investments

in agriculture attractive, substantial sums of public money must also be spent on infrastructure, education, technology and extension systems. Investments are needed in facilities and equipments. Outside of mere subsistence agriculture there is no point in producing food unless there are roads and vehicles to bring it to markets, unless there indeed is a market, and unless produce can be stored and kept from perishing.

But naturally neither funding nor record harvests will by themselves be enough to secure that everyone has the food they need. If people go hungry today it is not because the world is not producing enough food but because such food is not produced by the 70 percent of the poor whose main livelihood is agriculture and who cannot afford to eat their fill.

Thus feeding everyone in 2050 will also require poverty reduction strategies, social safety nets for both poor producers and consumers and rural development programmes. It will need better governance and the establishment of the kind of socio-economic conditions that improve people's access to food. Also important is a reform of the agricultural trade system so that it is not only free but also equitable.

The High-Level Expert Forum on How to Feed the World in 2050 will inform the World Summit on Food Security scheduled in Rome on 16, 17 and 18 November 2009 when Heads of State and Government from FAO's 192 Member Nations will take important decisions on policies and strategies to ensure that everyone has enough to eat both today and tomorrow.

In 2050 what to eat will no longer be a problem for many of those of us already getting on in years. But I see it as my solemn duty, as it is surely ours as a global community, to do all we can to banish the spectre of hunger forever and make sure that our children and grandchildren can eat their fill and enjoy a healthy life.

Jacques Diouf is Director-General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

The brinkmanship continues

Perhaps there is something in what Nehru said in 1962, that the clash between China and India is a clash between two ideologies, two cultures, and two different ways of viewing the world.

KULDIP NAYAR

CHENGHIS Khan would be proud of today's China -- the so-called socialist heir to Marx and Engels -- that has more in common with the marauding hordes of times past. It's no wonder a portrait of Stalin was prominently displayed at the parade celebrating Beijing's 60th anniversary. One of the world's most tyrannical and inhuman rulers, responsible for the murders of tens of millions of Russian women and children, his picture is still placed proudly in the office of the CPI (M) politburo in Kolkata.

Therefore, it was not surprising that CPI (M) secretary-general Prakash Karat underplayed China's recent intrusions and attributed Indian criticism to the "strategic alliance" between India and America. Those who remain sentimental about Beijing are confusing today's China with communism that represented the cleansing thoughts, reformist ideals and passions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Such people cling to China with all its faults because they have drifted away from the ideology of the true left. If they have any spark of intellectual honesty left in them, they

should have tried to rescue communism from China and not allowed themselves to use this ideology to justify their conquests.

Both the CPI and CPM, which claim to represent the Left, still have the same reverence for Beijing as they did when the Chinese undertook the Long March under the leadership of Mao Tse-Tung. Back then, the goal was to build an agrarian economy from the bottom up. Capitalism, which the country has now adopted for its development, did not fit into the scheme the Chinese pursued at that time. Out of capitalism grew the idea of superiority in arms. This is not the China of Mao Tse-Tung's dreams, but that of a dictator driving his people for the benefit of the elite.

The way China behaves towards India today invokes memories of the run up to what happened in 1962. The forcible building of the infamous Aksai Chin Road and the gruesome murders of our border patrol men, whose bodies were tied to the tails of horses, is a sad chapter in the history of our bilateral relations, and something we hoped had been buried. However, recent incursions by Chinese soldiers into Arunachal Pradesh have been accompanied by written



How friendly is friendly?

boasts that they can take over the whole place in a couple of days. This is hardly a manifestation of the Hindi-Chini bhai bhai equation. Beijing may be the beneficiary of a \$50 billion bilateral trade, but Chinese officials seem to be asking how a pygmy like India can compete with the economic and military might of China.

I thought China occupied in 1962 all the territory it had claimed, and then declared a unilateral ceasefire. It did not even agree to the Colombo proposals, which suggested the withdrawal of 12.5 kilometres from the positions the two sides held. India, though a victim, complied with the proposals. Many years later, when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi

visited Beijing, he agreed to give sanctuary to the Line of Actual Control.

Over the years, border talks between the two countries have not resulted in any firm borders either on the Laddakh or Arunachal side. But the middle sector, including Sikkim, has been recognized by China. Why has it intruded into Sikkim now and left its evidence in the shape of large, red Chinese characters painted on rocks? This definitely indicates a change in Beijing's thinking. No sovereign country can take this behaviour lying down, nor can we condone China's claim that Arunachal belongs to it. Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India and New Delhi has made it clear

more than once.

The latest irritation has come in the shape of visas granted to people originating from Kashmir. Instead of the standard type, the visa has been attached to a separate piece of paper stapled on to the passport. This is nothing more than a childish prank designed to convey that China can lay down the law and get away with it as well. The result has been that students given this new visa cannot go to the universities of their choice in China because India does not recognise this visa.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh continues to commend a relationship of peace and goodwill despite these provocations. I concede that China is far ahead of us in military prowess. They have more conventional weapons as well as nuclear devices. Yet, India is not the same as it was in 1962. Economically, it is an emerging giant. It may not have allocated as much money to defence as the dangers on its borders warrant. Jawaharlal Nehru also made the same mistake. He wanted to develop the country instead of having a large military arsenal. But if the Chinese want to articulate that power lies in the barrel of the gun, New Delhi may also be forced to re-order its priorities. Perhaps we should take a leaf out of Vietnam's book. Here is a small country that has also suffered a border dispute with China, but stood its ground and refused to kowtow.

Perhaps there is something in what Nehru said in 1962, that the clash between China and India is a clash between two ideologies, two cultures,

and two different ways of viewing the world. One is the democratic live and let live philosophy and the other is a never to be questioned authoritarianism without a free press, free judiciary and a free vote.

We are not on weak ground, but what I cannot understand is the series of statements by service chiefs declaring that India cannot take on China. The outgoing naval chief, Admiral Suresh Mehta, said the country had neither the capability nor the intention to match China's force. The new air chief, RV Naik, says the strength of our air force is one-third of that of China's and we cannot match it. These are not statements for public consumption. If we are ill-equipped in military strength, the chiefs can communicate this to the government, which is the right authority to take care of any inadequacies. Otherwise they are not only demoralising the people, but also misleading the government.

One thing evident is that we do not have enough expertise on China. India, by now, should have encouraged the development of scores, if not hundreds, of experts capable of dissecting and analysing every Chinese move. Both Russia and Japan have, over the years, amassed sufficient information to help them deal with the Chinese. We can learn from them and see how they have been neither cowed down nor intimidated. Force, however strong, cannot, and should not have the last word.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist

Where is the next CNG station?

In Dhaka with the worsening traffic situation, running any automobile on petrol is quite unthinkable. Yet one question remains. Why do we always see long queues in front of the CNG stations irrespective of time or place?

NUSRAT WAHID

COMPRESSED Natural Gas, commonly known as CNG is almost a household name. With the rise in petrol prices the most common and preferred form of energy for running vehicles is CNG. It's considered to be among the most environmentally friendly substitutes for gasoline and costs ¼ the price of petrol. This alternative fuel might be a long-term solution to reduce the reliance on gasoline for the auto industry. In Dhaka, with the worsening traffic situation, running any automobile on petrol is quite unthinkable. Yet one question remains. Why do we always see long queues in front of the CNG stations irrespective of time or place? It is simple. The demand for it is much higher than

the supply. It doesn't take much to realise that as consumers we need more of these stations.

So why don't we have more? One may wonder whether owning a CNG station is a good investment or not. A straightforward answer would be, most likely! It is bound to take off as there is a huge demand for it. One has to drive around, sometimes for miles, to get to a station and even when you can find one, chances are you will need to stand in queue for a while. Most of us use CNG despite this because running a car on petrol is much more expensive. So why aren't more in demand CNG stations opened? Because, it's not very easy to acquire the required permits to open a CNG station.

Let's take a look at the actual experience recently opened CNG station.

The work was initiated in January 2008 and the station became operational in June 2009 -- it took one and a half years to acquire the required permits. For a typical CNG station, one requires permission from the Titas Gas Company, which demands a number of clearances from the following agencies:

RPGCL (Rupantorito Praktik Gas Company Limited) Permission: To obtain this, one needs a trade license, a No Objection Certificate (NOC), a bank solvency certificate, a layout plan for the proposed CNG station and a Deed of Land as a proof of selected location for the station.

Explosive Department Permission: This consists of 4 separate permissions to be obtained sequentially. The permission can be obtained from the Ministry of Environment certifying that the project will be environment-friendly. This is a very important permission, which usually takes a long time. This is followed by the permission from the Fire Service Department of that designated location, so that they are aware and will provide relevant support as per requirement. Next, permission from the Police Dept. of that location is required to certify that

the station will not trigger any extra traffic congestion and finally, permission from the Department of Roads and Highways.

DC permission: This may be obtained with a consent letter from Titas Gas.

Once all these permissions are in place, one needs to submit an application to Titas Gas on a prescribed form. Titas Gas will then carry out a survey to verify that all the conditions for setting up a CNG station have been met. The agencies previously mentioned are supposed to do this verification prior to giving their own clearances; hence, it is not clear why Titas Gas has to repeat these verifications. Once the survey is completed, a board meeting of Titas Gas takes place for the formal approval. After this, the gas connection will be established.

In this particular case, the approval from Titas Gas came in December 2008, six months after the investor started the process of obtaining the clearances and permits. It was expected that, within a week, Titas Gas would provide the connection from the source to the location of the proposed station. Yet the investor

had to wait for 4.5 months for the connection. In this particular case, Titas Gas failed to provide the support (both logistical and technical) which they were meant to. This led to an extra cost of Tk. 4.5 lacs. The investor had to buy the equipment himself in order to expedite the entire process.

There was also a delay at Chittagong Port. Here again the RPGCL permission for clearance was required since CNG station equipment is duty-free. This time too, the clearance came too late. What should have taken 7 days, took 2.5 months. A fee (Tk. 2.5 lacs) was charged by the port authorities as the goods couldn't be released on time. This single venture took 9 extra months and I have been told that the rate for the 'unofficial fee' varies depending on the location of the proposed pump and also on the financial status of the investor.

From a regulatory viewpoint the failures include:

- Delayed processes creating unanticipated costs are quite high.
- Too many steps before obtaining permission from Titas Gas
- Unofficial Fees
- RPGCL's role and its questionable

delays

- The failures of Titas Gas.

There can be numerous reasons why there aren't enough CNG stations. Some may lack the capital to open such a station. But at a cost of four to five crore Taka, this is not necessarily a huge investment and given the demand for CNG, the payback period is not very long. The problem seems to be elsewhere. At the moment, most investors that have invested in this venture, or are willing to do so, talk about the same problems as seen over and over again. There are too many steps to take, permissions to obtain in too many different places. The question that now remains, why can't there be one rule for all, one operational cost for all and last but not the least, one department for all the required permissions and licenses? With some effort, these changes can be made with very little effort. If the appropriate authorities think about it, the entire system can be reformed almost overnight. Currently it seems like the hassle isn't worth it.

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