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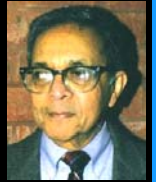
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

MAGAZINE FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Saving Family
Business
with
Employees'
Support



Effective
Development is All
About
People



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RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT AT 25



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Forward To The Future In Quest Of Global Security

By Ramesh Jaura

Europeans are finding it hard to keep their heads above water as tidal waves of an overwhelming desire for participation in governance pound at the Arab shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The challenge thrown down by Arab uprisings is however only one front in the uphill battle for achieving "security for the global world".

Is there a European answer to that challenge? Nobel Peace Laureate Mikhaïl Gorbatchev wanted to find that out, and his 'New Policy Forum' gathered together in Munich a cross-section of some fifty knowledgeable people from around Europe and beyond.

The subject of the two-day deliberations in March was chosen several months earlier, "but it assumed particular urgency, as though taken direct from the front pages of today's newspapers," as Gorbatchev put it on March 23, four days after the Paris Libya conference, which decreed "all necessary measures, including military" to enforce a UN resolution authorising a no-fly zone over the North African state with the declared aim of protecting civilians.

"The use of force is always a symptom of policy failure; this must be regarded as axiomatic. Conclusion should be drawn from this both by policy-makers and by those who seek to provide the intellectual underpinning for international politics," argued Gorbatchev true to himself and the policy of perestroika that ushered in a paradigm shift in a world plagued by ideological war.

The gathering he addressed comprised of some eminent policy-makers of yesteryears who continue to provide more than "intellectual underpinning" to governments of former colonial powers, hiding behind the label of the UN Security Council to further their post-colonial goals, not seldom under the garb of promoting and protecting democracy, which as former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine rightly pointed out, is "not instant coffee".

Gorbatchev, who recently celebrated his 80th birthday, had to pay a high price for abandoning the entrenched Soviet hegemonial attitudes and actions in terms of being catapulted out of power and had to reconcile himself with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

But his policies had a positive impact on the "common European house" he passionately campaigned for: several rooms began to communicate with each other intensively in the wake of the Berlin Wall tumbling down and two German states reunifying.

"International politics is not keeping pace with the rapidly changing world -- and that refers both to those who make policies and the intellectuals," Gorbatchev told conference participants in Munich.

'WAITING FOR THE STORM'

"It is increasingly evident that the old concept of security, based on defending the country's territory and protecting the inviolability of its borders and its national interests, has become too narrow. In fact, it condemns us to a purely reactive approach, to 'waiting for the storm'," he added.

"If we want to avoid the storm, two new factors affecting security today must be fully understood," he explained to some of the die-hards among participants in a famous Munich hotel, not far from the building where France, Britain, and Italy signed the notorious agreement with Nazi Germany permitting Hitler to annex Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland without Czechoslovakia attending those talks.

Former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Milon Zeman, was however a participant in the New Policy Forum's conference convened by Gorbatchev's New Policy Forum together with the Foreign Affairs Association in Munich. ☞

The word 'appeasement' was not heard. But one or the other present-day representative from the three signatories to the Munich Treaty perhaps had that at the back of his mind when fervently arguing for protecting civilians in Benghazi by firing missiles on Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi's forces.

Several other participants agreed with Gorbachev that the "international community" -- a synonym for the Western powers -- did not exercise its influence on Gaddafi to avoid getting things where they are today.

"The events there (in Libya) started not a few days but several weeks ago. Yet what was the response of the regional organization that according to the United Nations Charter must be the first to react, the Arab League? Did it try to influence Gaddafi's behaviour? And if the regional level faltered, then the UN itself should have acted much earlier to address the problem," argued Gorbachev.

"Perhaps the Security Council should have appointed a special envoy to be on site and to convey to the authorities its demands and monitor compliance with them. Perhaps some other way forward could (have) be(en) devised. Whatever the case may be, the Council should have addressed the different options instead of just watching from the sidelines," he added.

Analysing the overall situation in the region, the Nobel Peace Laureate hit the nail on the head when he pointed out that "Western democracies felt rather comfortable dealing with authoritarian regimes and, under the guise of fighting extremism and terrorism, sold weapons and befriended dictators and authoritarian rulers."

PUZZLING

A question many in Germany and elsewhere in Europe are asking is: Why French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, known for their close economic bonds with Gaddafi, did not fly to Tripoli and Benghazi to seriously negotiate a peaceful solution to prevent a crisis situation that has emerged meanwhile?

Equally puzzling is why the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon -- who in the meantime has come round to the view that the way out of the Libyan quagmire has to be a political solution -- also did not care to fly to Tripoli to convince Gaddafi to discard his adamant attitude.

Back in 1998, Ban's predecessor Kofi Annan travelled to Baghdad in an effort to resolve the weapons-inspection standoff, and postpone the U.S.-led bombings of Iraq to destroy weapons of mass destruction that did not exist.

The critical role of the United Nations and the global civil society in ensuring 'Security for the Global World' was emphasized by Roberto Savio, founder and chair of trustees of the Rome-based Inter Press Service news agency, and a member of New Policy Forum's academic advisory council.

Savio, also a senior advisor to Berlin-based Global Cooperation Council, stressed the need for giving voice to the voiceless by involving the global civil society in decisions on war and peace. Besides, "security" for the global world should be defined as "human security" and not as "military security".

Alexander Bessmertnykh, former Soviet foreign minister, pleaded for "civil disorders" -- similar to non-violent civil disobedience practised on a large scale by Mahatma Gandhi during India's independence struggle -- as a means to assert the voice of the global civil society.

Europe could indeed play a significant role in supporting moves to upgrade the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) into an Economic and Social Security Council on par with the Security Council in which the five permanent (P5) members -- Britain, France, USA, Russia and China -- have the final say by virtue of their veto rights.

ECOSOC is in fact the UN body from which much of the UN's human rights standards have emanated. However, human rights are also forming an ever-increasing aspect of Security Council deliberations on the maintenance of international peace and security.

"Recent humanitarian interventions demonstrate that the Security Council has a mandate to act in the face of massive human rights violations, and such interventions have been justified on the basis that such violations constitute a threat to international peace and security," says the British author Claire Breen in a paper published in the Journal of Conflict and Security Law.

Referring to this particular aspect, a representative of one of the western P5 member states said at the Munich conference that the UN Security Council was justified in approving military action against Gaddafi forces in Libya. "We have learnt from Bosnia."

He was referring to the Bosnian war -- the most devastating conflict in Europe since World War II (1939-45) -- in former Yugoslavia from April 1992 to December 1995), which ended with the internal partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, deployment of NATO-led troops, massive civilian casualties for the Bosnian Muslims, at least 100,000 people killed and over two million displaced.

And yet, said one conference participant, "it is necessary to change mind-sets, de-militarise thinking at top political and policy-making levels, which would imply that precious resources required for socio-economic development in Europe too are not spent on producing tools of destruction, and that arms producers halt all exports to conflict regions."

The world was looking forward to a "peace dividend" when the ideological war ended some twenty years ago. "Unfortunately the expected peace dividend has been squandered because Western policy-makers and the intellectual elite influencing international relations refuse to look ahead and instead prefer to look back to the future for buttressing their continued great power ambitions," said another participant echoing one of Gorbachev's insightful interventions.

One of the intellectual forces behind Gorbachev's transformation of Soviet foreign policy was Andrei Grachev. From the failed putsch in August 1991 until it was all over in December, he served as Gorbachev's press spokesman and confidant.

"The current international order has become unhinged and unstable," he says. "Supranational political and economic institutions are ridden with conflict and disagreement between their members. The hoped-for co-operation between states and the new world order at the end of the Cold War has failed to transpire. Rather, international affairs are now characterised by a world disorder as recent events exacerbate fundamental differences of opinion across the globe." ■

The Five BRICS Build An Alliance U.S. Need Not Fear

By Shastri Ramachandaran in New Delhi



As the globalised world continues the search for an overarching new order, the emergence of any new alliance of sorts is bound to be resisted, and resented, by dominant powers in the existing order. BRICS -- the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India and China which has expanded to embrace South Africa BRICS -- is no exception.

The first summit of the five emerging economies in Sanya on the Chinese tropical island of Hainan is a ringing affirmation that BRICS has arrived. It is dedicated to the pursuit of international political, economic and financial reforms with a view to correcting the big-power bias in institutions such as the UN and situations such as that faced by Libya.

BRICS would have been viewed with scepticism by the West

even if it was not a product of developing countries, just as those at the helm of a dollarised world were unfriendly to the euro as another global currency. The dollar vs euro analogy is relevant here as BRICS is committed to recasting the global monetary system and make it less dependent on the dollar.

Although the way to accomplish this was not spelled out, at Sanya, BRICS nations made a beginning by signing a pact to use their own national currencies instead of the dollar for grant credit to each other.

The currency of power is, well, currency. The financial meltdown was the result of systemic flaws in the economic powerhouses of the West. But recovery is being driven by the turbo-charged GDP growth of the poorer, developing nations.

It is only fair that those burdened with leading the recovery should want a say in improving and reforming the international financial system. And, central to such reform is a more broad-based reserve currency other than the dollar.

That will not happen anytime soon, but the articulation of such an aspiration by BRICS may compel developed nations to be mindful of the interests of developing countries. Since monetary reform can happen only at the end of a series of political and economic reforms, this may serve to make the West more flexible in matters such as expansion of the UN Security Council (UNSC).

INDIA IN SECURITY COUNCIL?

However, BRICS does not necessarily improve India's chances of permanent Security Council membership. Neither China nor Russia has come out openly in favour of India. On the contrary, India's thrust for a permanent seat is weakened with South Africa being clubbed as yet another aspirant -- along with India and Brazil. When the race for the UNSC begins in earnest, the present calculations and alignments may be rendered irrelevant, and every BRICS nation would be wooing the U.S. and the European Union (EU).

Therefore, BRICS cannot afford to, and will not, be a bloc opposed to the U.S. and EU. None of the five in BRICS would do anything that hurts bilateral relations with the U.S. For China and India, too, the U.S. is the most important partner, which explains the emphasis at the Sanya summit on BRICS not being anti-U.S. Actually, every member of BRICS would seek to use this forum to further advance their interests with Washington.

BRICS opposition to Western military intervention in Libya exemplifies this dilemma: Collectively it hopes to influence the course of international action, but individually, not one of them represented the BRICS stance in the UNSC.

When it came to the critical resolution, Brazil, India, Russia and China abstained (when the last two could have used their veto) and one (South Africa) voted for it.

Obviously, coming together as BRICS is easier than acting together as BRICS. All for one and one for all is a long way off. However, BRICS, in the larger interest of its own cohesion, may push India and China to sort out unresolved bilateral issues sooner rather than later.

Actually, there is only one issue: the boundary. Special Representatives of India and China are negotiating a settlement. In the mean time, there are occasional reports of transgressions that threaten peace and tranquility on the border. To address this, the two countries have agreed to a mechanism on border coordination and consultation.

If both sides stick to the negotiations and the mechanism, there is, really, no other problem. Stapled visas for Jammu and Kashmir residents were Beijing's "creation", which China, by all accounts, has agreed to end. In return, high-level defence exchanges, suspended because of the visa refusal to Lt general B S Jaswal, are to be resumed. The rising trade deficit in China's favour is not really a problem. With trade booming, periodic imbalances should not snowball into irritants, and the "undervalued" yuan is hardly a 'bilateral issue'. If BRICS spurs India and China to solve their problem, it would be no mean achievement. Impact, like charity, is best felt at home. ■

*The author is a political and foreign affairs commentator. A similar article first appeared in dnaindia.com.

What After Saudi King Abdullah?

By P. R. Kumaraswamy*



Who after? Democracies are often confronted by this question, especially after a strong and powerful leader. This is so when democracies tend to have arrangements for orderly power transfers and even leaders-in-waiting. Succession is a far more serious problem in the Middle East where state security is often co-terminus with regime survival.

Hence, when King Abdullah bin-Abdul Aziz decided to go to the U.S. in November 2010 for a complete medical check-up because of a slip disc and accumulated blood clot, the region worked into frenzy with rumours, anxieties and uncertainties. Initial reports indicated that the surgery was successful and the King moved to Morocco for convalescence. This, however, could not last and on February 23, 2011 Abdullah rushed home in the wake of regional upheavals especially in next door Bahrain.

Both the King and Crown Prince Sultan are octogenarians and Prince Nayif, who is the third in the line of succession, is not young either. Riyadh Governor Prince Salman, fourth in the line of succession, is not healthy. Indeed, Prince Sultan returned to the Kingdom to take over administrative responsibilities only hours before the departure of the King to the U.S.

For close to two years, the Crown Prince himself was convalescing in Morocco following treatment for reported cancer. Some fear that, given his deteriorating health, he might not even ascend the throne, or, should he make it, would reign only briefly.

In some ways, the current Saudi situation is reminiscent of the dying days of the Soviet Union when Moscow witnessed a march-past of leaders who died in office. This is largely because Saudi Arabia has seen only its founder King Abdul Aziz and his sons as rulers. Through multiple marriages, most of them political in nature, Abdul Aziz fathered at least 36 sons and 21 daughters.

Since 1953 five of his sons have been kings. For example, Hammud, the youngest son of the founder, is 63 years old. This leaves the country with a peculiar situation where uncertainty and questions are periodically raised over the long-term survivability of the al-Saud.

The royal family is equally concerned and conscious of the aging nature of the rulers and their health and, accordingly, has been making institutional arrangements for a smooth and orderly succession.

Since the appointment of Abdul Aziz's eldest surviving son Saud to the post in 1932, the Crown Prince has succeeded the King. In addition, there is the heir to the heir apparent or second deputy Prime Minister (in Saudi Arabia, the King is also the Prime Minister and the Crown Prince holds the office of Deputy Prime Minister) is the third in the line of succession.

Until now this arrangement has worked effectively. Abdullah, for example, became second Deputy Prime Minister in 1975 following the death of King Faisal and became the Crown Prince in 1982 upon the death of King Khalid.

Indeed, he was the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia since January 1996 when King Fahd suffered a major stroke and was incapacitated. The same kind of progress has been made by Sultan who became the heir to the heir apparent in 1982 and was made the Crown Prince when his half-brother Abdullah became the king.

In recent years, conscious of the aging nature of the dynasty the al-Sauds have introduced some additional changes. According to a new Basic Law introduced in March 1992, "rulers of the country shall be from among the sons of the founder King Abdul Aziz ... and their descendants" and that "the most upright among them shall receive allegiance" from the members of the al-Saud family. In short, the succession is moving from the horizontal to the vertical line, and seniority alone will not be the criterion. The additional condition of such a person being "upright" is seen by many as an euphemism for being acceptable to the wider royal household.

To further consolidate the process, shortly after ascending to the throne, King Abdullah added a new institution: *hay'at al-bay'ah* or Allegiance Commission. Announced in October 2006, it enables princes to have a say in the selection of future kings and thereby formalize the succession process. Chaired by the oldest surviving son of the founder, it includes sons and grandsons of Abdul Aziz.

Anticipating any eventuality, King Abdullah also visualized a transitory ruling council if either the monarch or heir apparent were unable to rule. Under such a situation, five members of the Allegiance Commission will temporarily take over the responsibility for the affairs of the state for a week before a permanent arrangement is made.

If one compares the Saudi example with other countries in the region, the importance of the office of the Crown Prince becomes more acute. Despite not having a child, the Omani ruler has not named a crown prince or potential successor. Both King Hussein and his son Abdullah have changed the crown prince of Jordan to suit their immediate family concerns, by replacing their brothers with their own sons and thereby ensuring the succession of their immediate offspring.

Survival is more critical to the al-Saud family than to the rest of the world. As Joseph Kechichian, a keen royal watcher and author of *Succession in Saudi Arabia*, aptly put it: the royal family has "reached a very high level of political maturity." This does not mean, however, there will not be jockeying for power, if not an outright power struggle. There are definite signs to indicate this. In recent weeks the sons of a number of influential princes have returned home. Prince Mutaib taking over full responsibility for the powerful National Guards from his father King Abdullah has to be seen in this context. Since its founding in 1962, Abdullah has been its commander and did not relinquish this position even after he became the King in 2005. ■

*Professor P. R. Kumaraswamy teaches at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and the views expressed here are personal and not that of any institution or organization. This article first appeared in full length on March 28, 2011 with the headline 'The Saudi Succession Puzzle' on http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/TheSaudiSuccessionPuzzle_prkumaraswamy_280311.

A Little Known UN Declaration Observes 25th Anniversary

By IDN Development Desk

Though hardly known beyond a circle of experts, the right to development is a human right enshrined in a United Nations declaration. As the world body starts commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Declaration, UN High Commissioner Navi Pillay has expressed the hope that it would draw wider public attention, particularly in the wake of popular uprisings in North Africa and the Gulf region.



Addressing a symposium in Berlin on February 24, 2011, Pillay called on governments and all concerned to seize the opportunity of the 25th anniversary to move beyond political debates and focus on practical steps to implement

the Declaration that was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 4, 1986.

The Declaration on the Right to Development defines such right as "an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized."

The Right to Development (RtD) includes full sovereignty over natural resources, self-determination, popular participation in development, equality of opportunity, and the creation of favourable conditions for the enjoyment of other civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The human person is identified as the beneficiary of the right to development, as of all human rights.

The right to development can be invoked both by individuals and by peoples. It imposes obligations both on individual States to ensure equal and adequate access to essential resources, and on the international community to promote fair development policies and effective international cooperation.

In view of this, Pillay made an impassioned plea for the RtD being "internalized within societies in all parts of the world". In developing countries as well as among underprivileged groups in developed countries, people must be educated about rights and entitlements, she said.

She added: "There must be a shared understanding that abject poverty and stark inequalities undermine the well being of all. In short, the right to development must be brought much closer to the hearts and minds of people to produce real change in attitudes and actions."

"I believe that together we can carry out these responsibilities which will make a real difference in the daily lives of billions around the world who continue to wait in hope for the realization of their right to development," she told a gathering of civil society and government representatives as well as diplomats at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

Stressing the close link between the UN Declaration and the current situation, Pillay said: "Let us not forget how the current wave of unrest first started. It was triggered by the tragic death of a desperate young man in Tunisia, who set fire to himself because he had lost his livelihood and hope."

The UN human rights chief pointed out that people were taking to the streets because of rampant poverty and inequalities, rising unemployment, a lack of opportunities, and the chronic denial of their economic, social and cultural rights, as well as their civil and political rights. "They have no regular channels to express their discontent; they are deprived of the benefits arising from the natural resources of their countries, and they cannot meaningfully participate in the decision-making process to change the situation," Pillay argued.

Before arriving in Berlin to address the symposium, Pillay had meetings with the President of the EU Commission, commissioners and ambassadors of EU countries and "found it interesting that they saw how important human rights are for their work."

UN CHARTER

"I will be watching them very closely to see if that is the case. I particularly enjoyed meeting the EU Commissioner for Development who now sees that all the money they invested could blow up overnight," Pillay said summarizing her meetings in Brussels.

"The right to development not only helps address these root causes, the Declaration also guides our efforts to find sustainable solutions because it puts people at the very heart of development," she said, adding: "The logic of the right to development, as expressed in the Declaration itself, is unassailable: Everyone has the right to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development."

Pillay stressed the relevance of the Declaration in guiding responses to multiple contemporary challenges. "In an increasingly interdependent world, we need responsible diplomacy and principled global governance based on shared duties and the mutual accountability of both developed and developing countries in a spirit of international cooperation, partnership and solidarity," she said.

The constituent elements of the right to development are rooted in the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants of Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as other United Nations instruments.

Through the UN Charter, member states undertook to "promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" and "to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."

Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights echoes these principles. ➔

A background paper by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) says that the primary inspiration for the modern articulation of the right to development comes from Judge Keba M'Baye of Senegal, who in 1972 argued that development should be viewed as a right.

He was able to secure a General Assembly resolution in 1977 which authorized a study of the issue and resulted ultimately in the adoption, in 1986, of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development, approved by 146 out of the then 159 UN Member States.

The Declaration sets out the particular requirements of the right to development itself, and, by extension, human rights-based development, and these are the requirements:

- Putting the human person at the centre of development,
- To ensuring active and meaningful participation,
- Securing non-discrimination,
- Fairly distributing the benefits of development,
- Respecting self-determination, and sovereignty over natural resources, and
- Informing all processes that advance other civil, political economic, social and cultural rights.

So as a human right, the right to development enhances accountability by virtue of its universality, by placing implementation responsibilities on individual States, and by requiring effective international cooperation in policies and action for development.

Further, the Declaration identifies those obstacles that frustrate the purpose of international cooperation, such as threats to peace and security, foreign domination and racism in all its forms.

Pillay said: "Rampant poverty and stark inequalities that continue to confront the world are affronts to human dignity, and a violation of human rights."

According to the latest UNDP Human Development Report, an estimated one-third of the population in 104 developing countries, or about 1.75 billion people, experience multidimensional poverty. More than half live in South Asia. Rates are highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, with significant variation across regions, groups and indigenous peoples.

The absolute number of malnourished people -- defined by minimal energy consumption -- which stood at 850 million in 1980 has now increased to around 1 billion worldwide.

The UN human rights chief pointed out that hard-won development gains have been reversed as a result of the multiple crises of the last few years, including food shortages, climate change and desertification, as well as the global financial crisis and the ensuing recession.

These upheavals undermined the ability of countries to mobilize resources for development, thus making it more difficult to achieve the internationally agreed upon development goals, most notably the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Even when progress on the MDGs is on track, stigmatized and neglected people, including minorities and people with disabilities, continue to be left behind.

At the same time, democratic deficits and weak governance at the national level, combined with the lack of an enabling international environment for development, continue to prevent full implementation of the right to development.

"Let me be clear: Human aspirations for development and well-being can be realized only when there is a solid national and

international accountability framework for development that respects equity and social justice as well as human rights. Such framework includes respect for the rule of law and for universal human rights, democratic participation and good governance. It requires an environment free from want and fear," said Pillay.

Yet, many developing and poor countries lack capacity or face other challenges that prevent them from meeting their primary responsibility for full implementation of human rights, including the right to development.

"They need assistance, and they should get it through networks of bilateral or multilateral solidarity. In turn, such solidarity must produce real and measurable changes on the ground. Positive change can be achieved through a human rights approach to development cooperation which keeps a focus on those who are likely to be most excluded and discriminated against," Pillay argued.

A human rights approach ensures equity and sustainability of development by empowering all people to claim their rights and to be active participants in decisions that affect them, rather than merely being beneficiaries of charity.

Germany has been one of the largest bilateral donors over the past two decades. Its contribution of roughly USD 12 billion in 2009 amounted to approximately 0.35 percent of its Gross National Product (GNP).

"I note that Germany has committed to achieving the internationally agreed target of 0.7 percent of GNP for Official Development Assistance (ODA) to developing countries by 2015 and I am very hopeful that such targets will be met through credible and measurable steps," said Pillay.

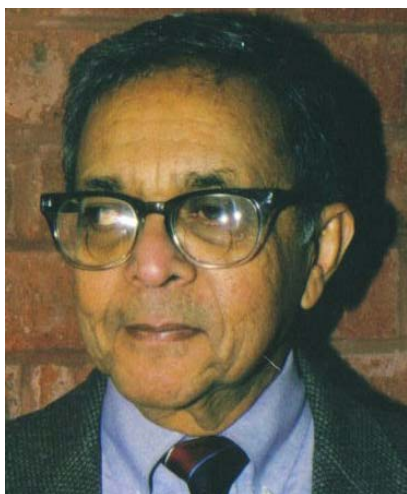
To best serve these purposes, she said, policy coherence across institutions, including the UN system, is of paramount importance. "We need to overcome the inhibiting polarization of the debate on development that places the developed countries and the developing world on opposing sides." ■

"There must be a shared understanding that abject poverty and stark inequalities undermine the well being of all. In short, the right to development must be brought much closer to the hearts and minds of people to produce real change in attitudes and actions.

"I believe that together we can carry out these responsibilities which will make a real difference in the daily lives of billions around the world who continue to wait in hope for the realization of their right to development"

'To The Hungry, God Is Bread'

By Ernest Corea in Washington D.C.



Finance Ministers and Central Bankers of the Group of 20 (G20) -- the world's top economic performers -- who met on February 18-19 in Paris, took a low-keyed approach to a potential world food crisis that was the subject of much analysis and agitated comment on the eve of the meeting.

Some commentators even assumed that the main purpose of the ministerial meeting was to discuss what could be an impending food crisis, and work out counter-measures. This was not to be.

The finance ministers are safely back home, but a sense of distress continues to hang over assessments of how high spiking food prices will reach. Remember: it is just three years since the last world food crisis, which was such a disaster for the millions already affected by food insecurity.

Now, the World Bank reports that its global food price index rose by 15 percent between October 2010 and January 2011. That is 29 percent higher than it was a year earlier, and a mere 3 percent below the peak of 2008. The Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Food Price Index also rose for the seventh consecutive month in January, averaging 231 points, up 3.4 percent from December 2010.

By way of response, World Bank Group President Robert B. Zoellick issued the grim warning that "global food prices are rising to dangerous levels and threaten tens of millions of poor people around the world."

In a separate response, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon summoned the UN's High Level Task Force on Food Security, for the sixteenth time since it was created in 2008, to review and respond to the facts of the current situation. Subsequently, Task Force Coordinator David Nabarro reported to the the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) that his group is "extremely concerned about the uncertainty around food supplies and changes in food prices."

COMING UP SHORT

G20 finance ministers, however, made only a perfunctory reference to food security and agriculture in their final communiqué. Perhaps they did not want to court the embarrassment of having to confess that agriculture and, therefore, food security in Africa was impaired because the world's economic powers had failed to fulfil their pledge to support agriculture in that continent.

In 2009, they undertook to provide \$22 billion over three years for that necessary and worthwhile enterprise. Up to now, they have come up with only \$350 million.

Or perhaps they did not consider these topics to be part of their portfolio -- thus, leaving them aside to be examined and acted on only by G20 ministers of agriculture when they meet later this year. That is a narrow, bureaucratic approach to issues that are universally significant, should attract universal attention, and even cause universal concern.

As Nabarro has pointed out, fluctuating food prices contribute to "food insecurity, poverty, hunger and political instability." Price instability can lead to systemic economic instability. It also can function as a catalyst of social upheaval, when a tipping point has been reached, thus causing political disruption whose effects might be felt not only nationally but regionally as well.

In fact, the recent and continuing political upsurge in the Middle East was initially misinterpreted as solely a case of "bread riots" no different from those that erupted before as a result of rising food prices and a shortfall of supplies in Egypt, among other countries, and subsided fairly quickly. There was much more to the Middle East upsurge than rising prices. Nobody can doubt, however, that the hardship caused by the rising cost of food contributed to anti-government fervour.

MIRED IN POVERTY

The composite account of world food price increases compiled by the World Bank is that wheat prices have doubled between June 2010 and January 2011, the price of maize (corn) has jumped by some 73 percent, while items that contributed to dietary diversity such as vegetables, including beans and yams, have increased as well in parts of Asia and Africa. The prices of edible oils and sugar have also risen.

A bright spot is provided by rice, the staple food of millions, with major production and consumption primarily in Asia. Rice prices, says the World Bank, "have increased at a slower rate than other grains." This is considered by many observers to be an important reason why the world does not face a crisis of 2008 proportions in 2011 -- at any rate, not yet. ➔

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Effective Development Is All About People

By Ernest Corea in Washington D.C.

On March 3 and 4, a group of teenagers and pre-teens in Springfield, a nearby suburb, underwent what was called a "30-hour famine." They fasted for 30 consecutive hours, breaking only occasionally for sips of water as nourishment.

They also participated in activities that required physical effort, just as the poor in food insecure countries would, even when enduring the pangs of hunger. To sharpen their awareness of how some of the very poor are forced to live, they created a small pool of polluted water, by placing mud in a sock, pouring water into the sock, and then squeezing the water out into a mini-pool; presumably the imagined "village centre" for washing and drinking.

A participant in the fast, describing his emotions at seeing the kind of polluted water available to young people of his age in some other parts of the world, said: "We are spoiled. We are spoiled brats."

PRACTICAL PURPOSE

The "30-hour famine" which is an annual feature is not going to end global poverty and hunger, but it serves many useful purposes

First, it was an event in which each participant was "sponsored" by well-wishers, family members or friends, and the funds raised will be used on projects in developing countries.

Second, every year, the exercise opens vistas of knowledge and understanding to a group of young Americans about some of the realities of life in the "developing world". The long-term result could be to build up a critical mass of people committed to grappling with some of the world's inequities. (One of the participants in an earlier "30-hour famine" is currently a Peace Corps volunteer in Asia.)

Third, it helps all those concerned with the event each year -- participants, parents, organizers, well-wishers, and members of the organizations that will carry out the projects for which funds were raised -- to understand that poverty, hunger, and its ultimate antidote, development, are about people.

They are not just about well-meant declarations by international organisations, learned discourses on development, and passionate debate over development assistance. They are quintessentially about people; about the disconnectedness of the poor, and the obligation of the societies in which they live to reconnect them. ➔

'To The Hungry, God Is Bread' (Continued from previous page)

➔ Additionally, the prices of maize in Africa have remained stable as a result of improved harvests. Food prices have not reached 2008 levels, and most state and multi-national agencies appear to possess a greater capacity for emergency action now. But higher prices have already taken their toll: the World Bank estimates that an additional 44 million people in developing countries have been thrown into poverty by rising food prices since June last year.

As always, volatile food prices have their most crushing impact on the poor who generally spend a greater proportion of whatever income they possess on food than do other segments of society. The World Food Programme reports, says Nabarro, that in the poorest households, "many are now paying 15 percent more for food than they did last year."

Some developing countries have found it necessary to expand their "safety nets" to support the most vulnerable among the poor as they deal with the impact of rising prices. Some households have adopted their own corrective measures to confront the problem: buying less food, eating fewer meals, reducing or suspending some expenses (for example, on health), borrowing more to meet their bills and, where opportunities exist, earning at multiple work places.

Such opportunities are limited, however, and the inevitable result is that the poor, already weighed down by their circumstances, are compelled to carry ever-increasing burdens. Not surprisingly, therefore, the UN Task Force informed ECOSOC

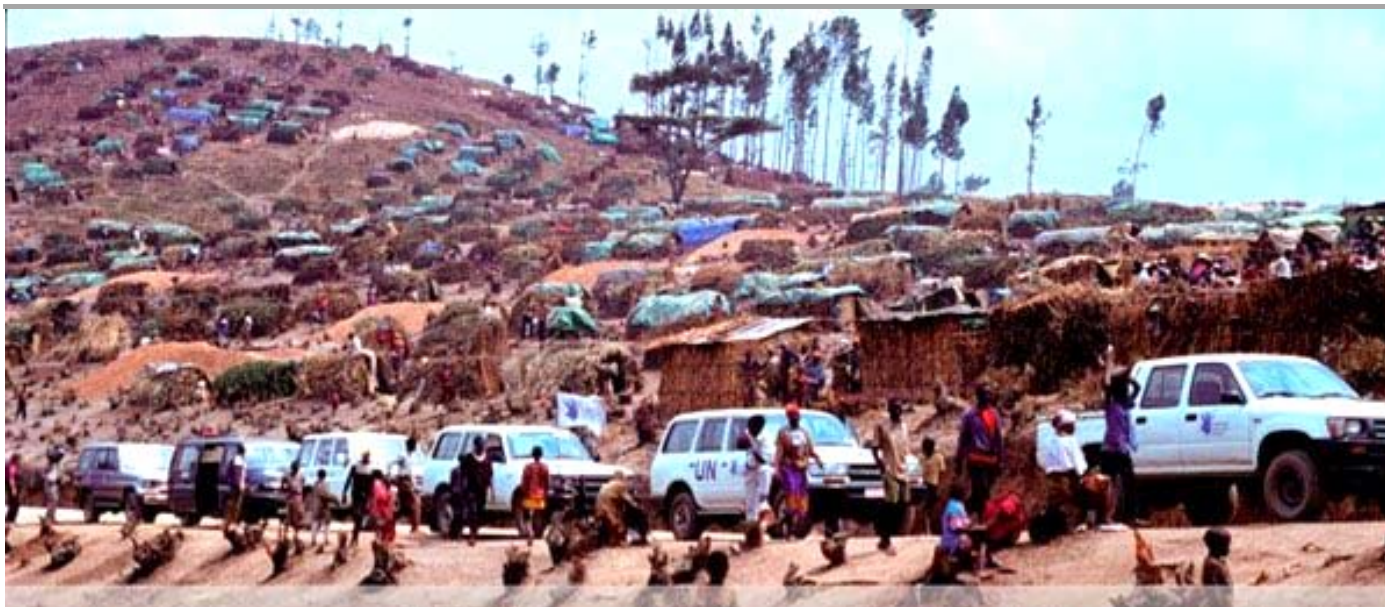
that "high food prices present a real threat: causing extreme poverty and endangering the lives and livelihoods of nearly one sixth of the world population."

GREATER TASK

International agencies have acquired the experience and the expertise to respond effectively when a food crisis occurs. If the current upward trends persist, turning sooner or later into a full-blown crisis, there will be plenty of hand-wringing and headlines, and there will also be attempts to help those affected.

The much larger and, in fact, more significant task is that of seeking to ensure that such crises are eliminated or, at least rare. What is required is not a series of reactive policies but a reorientation and transformation of agriculture and related practices. This will be a massive undertaking, and the temptation to wallow in excuses that justify inaction will no doubt beckon politicians and officials at national, regional, and international levels. If they continue to succumb to that temptation, as they have before, the world will lurch from one food crisis to another, causing more hardship and greater upheaval. Perhaps their resolve to take the long-term view and act boldly will be strengthened if only they can live by the principle that combating poverty and its inevitable product, hunger, is a moral imperative. As Gandhi said with his eternal wisdom: "To the hungry, god is bread." ■

DEVELOPMENT



Credit: World Food Programme

For, as the Declaration on the Right to Development states: "The human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development."

The Declaration, whose 25th anniversary was recently commemorated, also says that "development is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom."

KEY FACTOR

The currently escalating prices of food remind us that among the many aspects of life that coalesce in the processes and policies of development, few directly affect the poor as much as food insecurity. Many poor families spend as much as 80 percent of their meagre income on food. The corresponding figure for the well endowed is some 20 percent.

Even the slightest increase in food therefore becomes a crucial factor in the lives of the poor. Inadequate food and inadequate access to food causes malnutrition and undernutrition, in adults and children alike. This leads to disease, debilitation, stunting (in children) and, so often, premature, preventable death.

The publication "Hunger Notes" points out that "poor nutrition plays a role in at least half of the 10.9 million child deaths each year - five million deaths.The estimated proportion of deaths in which undernutrition is an underlying cause is roughly the same for diarrhoea (61 percent), malaria (57 percent), and measles (45 percent).

These linkages show why food price increases are watched so carefully in developing countries, by aid agencies, and by international civil society organizations engaged in a whole range of development activities. They know that the assumptions on which documents such as the Declaration of the Right to Development are based, and the hopes they raise, can be stood on their heads by an unexpected spike in staples.

The fact that food prices rose 2.2 per cent in February, on top of increases reported in preceding months, as recorded by FAO (the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation) is therefore a warning of what might lie ahead.

The only reason why these price surges have not already caused a "global food crisis on the scale of what happened three years ago" is that the "increase in the prices of rice, a staple for half the world, has lagged behind a jump for other grains," says the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).

This relativity-based assessment cannot bring much consolation to those -- 44 million of them, says the World Bank -- who have already been thrust into poverty and, thereby, hunger.

HUMAN RIGHT

The right of all members of the human family to have access to food has been proclaimed and confirmed by the world's nations functioning together as the "international community."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the foundation of human rights as they are now universally recognized, holds, for instance, that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food." ↻



Economic, Social and cultural Rights (1966) affirmed the "right of everyone to adequate food" and acknowledged that "freedom from hunger is a universal and fundamental right."

The World Food Conference of 1974 agreed that "every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition. In keeping with that principle, conference participants adopted the time limit of a decade (1984) in which to

eradicate hunger.

More recently, the first of the Millennium Development Goals set 2015 as the year by which to "halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger."

Noble sentiments. They embody the aspirations of those who wish to break loose from the demeaning calamity of hunger, and the commitment of men and women of goodwill to help end that condition. Unfortunately, however, human ingenuity has yet to devise a "fail safe" method by which to turn international declarations, proclamations, and other exhortations into living reality.

Poverty continues to be a dominant fact of life in many societies, and so does its debilitating consequence, hunger.

CONSIDER THIS

So, consider this. In the twentieth century, great progress was made across the world in so many aspects of life, including food security. Despite the progress, 925 million of us were counted as hungry last year, down from the peak of 1 billion in 2009 -- the result of the global food price crisis in 2008 and the economic recession of 2009 -- and up from 878 million in 1969-1971.

By way of comparison, 925 million is more than the combined population of Canada, the European Union and the U.S. Of the world's hungry, 578 million live in Asia and the Pacific, 239 million in Sub-Saharan Africa, 37 million in the Near East and Africa, 53 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 19 million in industrialised countries.

Experts at a number of international organizations estimate that:

- Almost all (98 percent) of the world's hungry live in developing countries, most of them in rural areas;
- Some two-thirds of the world's hungry live in the Asia-Pacific region which is home to over half the world's population;
- Over 60 percent of the world's hungry are women;
- Malnutrition and hunger-related diseases cause 60 percent of the deaths of children under age five every year in developing countries; a million due to lack of Vitamin A;
- One out of four children - roughly 146 million - in developing countries are underweight;
- Every year the World Food Programme (WFP) feeds more than 20 million children in school feeding programmes in some 70 countries.

ENOUGH FOOD

The extent of hunger in the world flies in the face of the fact that farmers produce sufficient food to feed the global population. "Hunger Notes," the publication to which reference was made earlier, points out that "world agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite a 70 percent population increase. This is enough to provide everyone in the world with at least 2720 kilocalories per person per day (as assessed by FAO)."

In other words, barring unforeseen crises, including natural disasters, political turbulence or war (cross-border or internal) nobody should go hungry. Yet, they do.

As V. Rajagopalan, a former Vice President of the World Bank has pointed out: The major problem of the world's poor and hungry "is not that of inadequate food supplies. Their problem is that they are poor. Some 90 percent of world hunger is caused by poverty."

The fact that poverty induces hunger does not suggest that anti-poverty programs alone will end hunger. Poverty is a complex condition and has to be "attacked" on many fronts including income generation, education, gender equality, housing, social integration, and welfare support.

Sustainable agriculture, which helps in poverty eradication, needs to be nurtured as well so that productivity, production, and natural resource management, are all embodied in pro-poor programs.

Bringing together these elements that sometimes seem disparate requires knowledge, foresight, and commitment to the cause of fighting poverty and hunger, and political will. The starting point of such an effort has to be the realization of the young participants in the "30-hour famine" that this is all about people....because people matter, whatever their circumstances might be. ■

'Get Ready for Development Cooperation in the Middle East'

By J. Brian Atwood* in Paris



Spreading demand for change in the Middle East and North Africa has Western governments scrambling to calculate appropriate diplomatic responses. As happened when Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union yielded to democratic forces, there will soon be demand from new and/or reforming governments for cooperation in political and economic institution building. Donor nations must be ready to respond.

Video of street demonstrations from Morocco to Yemen accurately emphasize the desire for freedom from authoritarian rule. It is also the failure of Middle Eastern economies to produce professional livelihoods that propels the youth of these nations to revolution. Paradoxically, the tool they are using to organize dissent is also their window to the future, the new technology of the information age.

When the commotion of the immediate struggle for regime change subsides, demand for jobs will not recede. Nor will it recede with the casting of ballots. Indeed, expectations that governments will create private sectors capable of producing meaningful employment will rise exponentially as new governments take office. Democratic elections will create a cacophony of promises, many revolving around reform of the economic systems.

Egypt's economy mirrored that of other parts of the region some ten years ago. It evolved as external investors and friendly governments prodded the Mubarak government to create a better investment climate, a private sector and the micro-economic systems that facilitate trade and investment.

Enlightened government leaders like Yousef Boutros Ghali moved as far as they could in this direction and reform paid off in dramatic GDP growth of some 7% in 2006 to 2008. That halved during the global financial crisis. New wealth has since been created, but it was not not equitably shared.

As opportunity expanded, the military wanted a piece of the pie. This tightly knit network invested in all manner of enterprises. Ironically, the military competed with civilian oligarchs who continued to manage the parastatals that were tied closely to Mubarak's government. As reform is undertaken elsewhere, planners would be wise to carefully examine the pitfalls of the Egyptian model and instead seek more inclusive growth.

Donors in Western nations will wisely wait for requests for assistance to emerge from the region, but that could come soon. Reform will take time. Democratic elections and newly reform-minded governments will produce plans that can be best implemented with some initial external help. Social services, disrupted by the street revolts, will need to be resumed. Short-term support for education, health care and food security will be required. Technical assistance and budget support will help governments begin the longer process of creating commercial codes, dependable tax systems, customs facilities and banks to finance new businesses.

Countries in this region, as Hernando DeSoto has observed, have hidden wealth -- dead capital, as he calls it -- that can be brought to life if the obstacles to private entrepreneurship are removed. Informal economies in these nations are large because the path to formality is strewn with bureaucratic processes designed to feather nests rather than create wealth.

The political life of the Middle East has been largely about various kinds of patronage, but it would appear that we have entered a new era. Demand rising from the streets is more complex than the call to remove the *ancien regime*. It is also a plea for the opportunity that a thriving private sector can provide.

Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union transformed centrally-planned economies over the past decade. It will not happen in exactly the same way in the Middle East, but. That would make the courage and sacrifice of this new generation worthwhile.

Economic development can flourish when civil society is allowed a voice. Entrepreneurs who are given the freedom and the space to take risks are an important product of more open societies. This is the message that everybody can hear loud and clear in the Middle East. Where there is a real commitment in these countries to take this message to heart, the donor nations will be eager to become development partners. ■

Donors in Western nations will wisely wait for requests for assistance to emerge from the region, but that could come soon. Reform will take time. Democratic elections and newly reform-minded governments will produce plans that can be best implemented with some initial external help. Social services, disrupted by the street revolts, will need to be resumed.

*The author is the Chair of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and is a former Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Indigenous Peoples Have A New Forum Now

By Stefano Colombo in Rome

Indigenous peoples comprise one-third of the world's one billion extreme poor in rural areas. They are among the most vulnerable and marginalized of any group. Spread over 70 countries and representing diverse cultural backgrounds, they share many concerns such as limited access to healthcare and education, loss of control over lands, displacement and violations of basic human rights.

In order to find a way out of their plight, they have been asking for a more systematic dialogue with United Nations agencies. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has responded with a series of initiatives in the past seven years and accumulated valuable experience in establishing constructive dialogue with them.

Such a dialogue will now be held in the so-called Indigenous 'Peoples' Forum under the auspices of IFAD. The forum was established in the wake of a two-day workshop that concluded on February 18 in Rome.

Organized by the Fund with the support of the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), the workshop was attended by about 30 representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations and IFAD staff.

IFAD is not new to such a consultation process. In establishing the Indigenous Peoples' Forum, IFAD will build on the lessons and experience deriving from the existing Farmers' Forum.

The group determined that the first global meeting of the indigenous people's forum will take place in conjunction with the IFAD Governing Council in 2013.

According to IFAD, the Fund's special interest in supporting indigenous peoples is based not only on poverty reduction, social justice and humanitarian concerns, but also the value that indigenous people in many cases contribute to sustainable agriculture, especially given the rich knowledge and understanding of ecosystem management that they have.

Explaining the rationale behind the forum, IFAD president Kanayo Nwanze said: "The work we do at the forum will be important, but we all agree that it is just one step in a long-term commitment to reaching our dual goals of equity and economic opportunity for indigenous peoples."

"It is important that an indigenous peoples forum in IFAD be established so that the indigenous peoples will have an opportunity to share their views and recommendations on how IFAD can respond more effectively to indigenous peoples' needs, aspirations and priorities," said Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Convenor, Asian Indigenous Women's Network and Former Chair of United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). "It will also enhance further the partnership between IFAD and indigenous peoples," she concluded.

Mirna Cunningham Kain, Chair Center for autonomy and development of indigenous peoples in Nicaragua and member of the UNPFII, said: "IFAD's policy of engagement with indigenous peoples offers an opportunity to address injustice that indigenous peoples has suffered in rural areas in the world and the establishment of an indigenous forum in IFAD is an innovative step, gives us voice and visibility that can and should help change rural development practices in our countries."

According to Joseph Ole Simel, Chairman of Africa indigenous peoples' climate change network and Executive Director, Mainyoto pastoralist integrated development organization in Kenya, the IFAD initiative on indigenous peoples forum is "a great idea of the 21st century for indigenous peoples".

"The forum will assist or enable both indigenous peoples and IFAD to deal with the problem of underdevelopment in a fundamental way. It will be the engine that will facilitate us to direct our efforts at the root causes of extreme poverty among indigenous peoples," he concluded.

From IFAD's perspective, the objectives of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum, as set forth in the annex to its Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples explaining the process, are to:

- share and discuss the assessment of IFAD's engagement with indigenous peoples among IFAD staff, Member States and indigenous peoples' representatives;
- consult on rural development and poverty reduction; and
- promote the participation of indigenous peoples' organizations in IFAD's activities at the country, regional and international levels.

The activities of the forum will focus on indigenous peoples' consultations and involvement in the development of IFAD's country strategies, project design, implementation and monitoring processes, and in policy dialogue and advocacy.

In so doing, the Forum will also support IFAD in implementing its Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples and in translating its principles into action on the ground. Moreover, the Forum will promote accountability by encouraging feedback by indigenous peoples' representatives on IFAD's operations.

IFAD works with poor rural people to enable them to grow and sell more food, increase their incomes and determine the direction of their own lives. Since 1978, the Fund has invested over US\$12.5 billion in grants and low-interest loans to developing countries, empowering more than 370 million people to break out of poverty.

IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized UN agency based in Rome -- the UN's food and agricultural hub. It is a unique partnership of 165 members from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), other developing countries and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). ■



Benghazi Revolt Seems To Come In Handy For NATO

By Jaya Ramachandran



Credit: PressTV

As 28 foreign ministers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and of the so-called "partner countries" met in Berlin within weeks of launching the military operation in Libya, they had reason to be grateful to the Benghazi uprising against Muammar Al-Gaddafi.

Benghazi has given a shot in the arm to hawks -- led by former colonial powers in the region -- keen to make NATO's "robust" presence felt in the Middle East and North Africa.

The significance of the Berlin gathering is also underlined by the fact that it is the first meeting of foreign ministers since NATO leaders approved the Alliance's

new Strategic Concept at a summit in Lisbon in November 2010.

The concept claimed a global military role for the Alliance, which many thought had become irrelevant after the end of the two ideological blocs triggered by the fall of the Berlin wall. As follow-up on Lisbon, the Berlin meeting showcases "NATO's role in working with partners to find cooperative solutions to common threats".

According to Alfred Ross, president of the Institute for Democracy Studies, New York, "the U.S. and its NATO allies deliberately lied to the world, including the UN Security Council, about the facts relating to the 'humanitarian crisis' and the military attack on Libya."

Ross says: "Since 1969, when Gaddafi, forced the U.S. military out of Libya Washington has been planning to return and overthrow him.

"In 1981 the CIA created the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL) to overthrow him. The NFSL launched a series of well-armed military attacks in the 1980s and created its own Libyan National Army (LNA)."

Ross points out that it was the CIA-armed NFSL and its spokesperson Ibrahim Sahad who launched the demonstrations in February (2011), which led to "the humanitarian crisis", adding: "This explains why, unlike Tunisia and Egypt the Libyan demonstrations were quickly militarized."

Meanwhile the British and French signed a military agreement on November 2, 2010 and began planning of the attack on Libya by no later than January 30, 2011. The evidence of this is a series of military web sites that Ross has compiled. These indicate, he adds: "The military plan was to attack a 'southern dictatorship' between March 21 and 25, 2011. The military web sites even indicate that the dictator's son might take over from his father. Since clearly the UK and France were not planning to attack the southern 'dictatorship' of Egypt, there is no question that the premeditated target was Libya."

Ross goes on to say in an E-Mail made available to IDN: "Clearly the U.S., Britain, and France reassured the CIA-created 'opposition' that if they attacked the army of Libya they had a well developed plan to attack. The (military) web sites even specify the fighter planes to be used in the March attack. The US and its military allies created the 'humanitarian crisis' which they used to justify the planned attack."

Independent of Ross' findings, France's role is of critical importance. Under the presidency of Charles de Gaulle, France was wary of what it perceived as a "special relationship" between the United States and Britain, and withdrew in March 1959 its powerful Mediterranean Fleet from NATO command, and three months later banned the stationing of foreign nuclear weapons on French soil.

More than half-a-century later, de Gaulle's successor Nicolas Sarkozy took the lead in convening the Paris conference on Libya on March 18, 2011 as it became obvious that in the wake of Arab uprisings, Benghazi revolt against Gaddafi -- who was allowed to erect his Beduin tent in central Paris in November 2007 -- needed be taken seriously in French and NATO interests on the whole.

Dubbed as Operation Unified Protector (OUP), the NATO military operation launched by 28 member states and six Arab countries -- including Qatar and the United Arab Emirates -- claims to be purported to "protect civilians and civilian-populated areas under threat of attack" from pro-Gaddafi forces, as envisaged in the UN Security Council Resolution 1973. They have put in place an arms embargo and no-fly zone in Libya.

Military action was first launched by France, the United States and Britain on March 19, before NATO took over the operation after overcoming French reservations about letting the Western military organisation lead it. The Berlin gathering on April 14 was preceded by the Libya Contact Group in Doha, the capital of Qatar, one day earlier, the London Libya Conference on March 29, and the March 18 Paris conference.

In a press conference after the ministers met April 14, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said: "All of us agree: we have a responsibility to protect Libyan civilians against a brutal dictator. The United Nations gave a clear mandate to do it. The people of Libya desperately need it. And we are determined to do it. Because we will not stand idly by and watch a discredited regime attack its own people with tanks, rockets and snipers."

The Foreign Ministers welcomed the outcome of the Contact Group meeting in Doha on April 13, and strongly endorsed its call for Gaddafi "to leave power": "Gaddafi and his regime have lost all legitimacy through their comprehensive and repeated refusal to abide by UNSC Resolutions 1970 and 1973." Insisting that there could not be a purely military solution to the current crisis, Ministers reiterated their strong support for the development of a political solution, as well as for "the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya," NATO stated. ■ .

Dengist China and Arab Despotism Are Two Different Worlds

By Shastri Ramachandran in New Delhi

The unceasing waves of protests and uprisings against Arab regimes have given rise to a tantalising question: Why have the winds of change sweeping the Arab world not had any effect on the Chinese people and aroused them against their own government?

There are many reasons for the absence of tumult in China. These reasons become clear if one takes an unbiased view of the country.

It may be argued that China, like many Arab countries including Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, has an authoritarian political order. True, but all dictatorships are not alike. Neither are all democracies. Doubtless, China is a dictatorship. It is the dictatorship of the Communist Party.

Unlike most Arab dictators who were, and are, propped up by external powers (mainly the United States after the sun set on the British Empire) for securing their own strategic, security, political and economic interests, the Chinese instrument of dictatorship is a revolutionary product of its own people and their nationalism.

The Arab leaders targeted by their own people are autocrats presiding over authoritarian regimes for personal aggrandisement. The families and cliques at the helm of these states enriched themselves, looted public money and stashed it away abroad; their repressive reign saw the people and their rights being trampled underfoot; and, their national, political and economic interests being sold out. Government was seen as being run for personal power and profit alone.

The issue was not over forms of government -- democracy versus dictatorship. The issue was, and remains, whether the state and the ruling elite are committed to the well-being of the people. By that yardstick, China is, in market lingo, an outperformer. It has fared better than some of our formal democracies, especially in the developing world.

Now consider China's political and economic history with that of the besieged Arab regimes, and it is evident that there can be no comparison made between the two.

Not too long ago, semi-feudal, semi-colonial China was backward and isolated. People were dirt poor. Mao's revolution unleashed the process of an epochal transformation that is still unravelling. The primitive, old China perished. On the political foundation laid by Mao, grew a spanking New China. Deng set in motion the impulses for the turbo-charged economic development and growth of the last 30 years.

Maoist China and Dengist China are different dimensions of the same country. Mao's focus was political liberation, Deng's economic emancipation. China as a political and an economic entity, each inseparable from the other, is a creation of the Communist Party.

China's all-round development in the 60-plus years since the proclamation of a People's Republic makes for a fascinating study. Its rise as a global power is based on its stability and prosperity; on the strengths of an economy that can feed over a billion people and meet the basic needs of the majority.

Its stunning economic growth has been inclusive. When it comes to education, business, employment, enterprise, travel and trade, there are no restrictions. Studies and surveys, including by credible western institutions, show that close to 90 per cent of the Chinese are content with conditions in the country and what they are getting out of it.

On the flip side, China faces serious challenges. Hundreds of thousands of "mass incidents" -- minor riots, social upheavals, demonstrations and protests -- have occurred across China in the last few years. These "mass incidents" do not always make headlines abroad like the Tibet and Xinjiang riots, but they point to the dark underside of rapid growth: income disparities, rising unemployment, displacement of rural populations, corruption, criminality, environmental degradation, slivers of extreme poverty, social malaise and the discontent of the deprived sections. These can emerge as threats to China's stability. China's lack of political pluralism allows no room for letting off steam. Political control is tight and dissent put down with an iron hand. The state's coercive power, as Tiananmen Square showed in 1989 can be crushing. Since then technology has spawned new options such as the Internet, blogs and social media. But then the technology of control, too, has grown to block Facebook and Twitter.

Since February 20, 2011 the date on which Internet postings sought to incite a Jasmine Revolution-type of stir in China, the government has clamped down heavily. Security, surveillance and Internet policing has been intensified. That suggests not that unrest is gaining, but that the government will not take any chances. On the other hand, people have shown that they can break through the tightest of policing when they have to.

The people, like the government, have too much at stake in what has been accomplished so far. On balance, the achievements of the Party outweigh its failures. The Chinese as a people have extraordinary endurance, and are not predisposed to swift and violent change. Change in China is always slow to emerge, and orderly. The leadership transition in 2002 was smooth. The next change of leadership is due in 2012.

President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao have had a splendid run until now. They are unlikely to either allow the situation to get out of hand or reveal the iron fist behind the velvet glove. The last thing the present leadership wants is blood on their hands when they can retire without fear of being disgraced. That may explain Premier Wen pleading for more openness and freedom to criticise the government. ■



Recalling Hiroshima Encounters In Times Of Fukushima Crisis

By Ramesh Jaura



Statue in memory of Sadako Sasaki in Hiroshima

Images of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, following an unprecedented nine magnitude earthquake and resultant tsunami inevitably rush to mind's eye my first encounter with Hiroshima in May 2008 and a second in September 2010.

A gentle monument in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park is festooned with thousands of paper cranes that symbolise humankind's fervent desire that Hiroshima and Nagasaki may never happen again. About one quarter of a million people died in the two cities where the United States dropped the first nuclear bombs.

Named the Children's Peace Monument (Genbaku no Ko no Zō), the memorial commemorates Sadako Sasaki and the thousands of children who fell prey to the atomic bombing or the radiation that penetrated their young and innocent bodies sixty-five years ago.

Sadako was two years old when the bomb detonated on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Three days later, a second nuclear bomb devastated Nagasaki. Her story has pierced my heart though it is one of the several poignant stories of young and old caught unawares by the atomic bomb.

I heard of young girls whose eyes melted as they were watching the parachute carrying the bomb. I heard of men, women and children whose faces turned into giant charred blisters. I heard of people seeking help in vain as their skin dangled from their fingernails.

I heard of entire families who were burnt alive as their houses tumbled in flames. And I heard of human beings whose eyeballs and internal organs burst from their bodies. I heard

stories of Hiroshima that was a hell where those who somehow survived envied the dead.

'ATOMS FOR PEACE'



Children's Peace Memorial

Unlike the nuclear reactors in Fukushima that by all accounts stand for the "atoms for peace" and were designed to support economic and industrial development in the interest of human welfare, the 'Little Boy' dropped on Hiroshima and the 'Fat Boy' that caused devastation in Nagasaki were intended as tools of destruction and programmed to annihilate targets without any regard for human life.

In retrospect, the radiation set free by the disaster-stricken Fukushima nuclear reactor in its impact is as lethal as the one that killed Sadako. And yet history will prove whether even the atoms for peace are in effect invincible tools of malevolence and annihilation or whether not enough was done or could have been done to harness the best of benevolence.

At any rate, the story of Sadako also drives home the pressing need to work and campaign for a nuclear-free world – as homage to hundred of thousands who died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As if by some miracle, Sadako and her mother survived the atomic holocaust unharmed. It is said that until 1955 when she caught cold and felt stiffness in her neck, she was a healthy, energetic child who never missed a day of elementary school. She loved singing and sports. In fact, she could outrun anyone in her class.

Sadako recovered from the cold but her neck stayed stiff. In the following days, her face was swollen. After various tests, the doctor told her father that she had leukaemia. "*She has a year left at the most,*" the doctor said.

Sadako was admitted to the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital. According to the story that has been recorded in the Peace Memorial Museum, some five months after being hospitalised, Sadako heard about a five-year old girl who had died of leukaemia in that very hospital. Knowing that she herself had leukaemia, Sadako wondered whether there was any chance of her surviving.

Months passed by. And hope appeared around the corner when in August high school students of the port city of Nagoya sent one thousand paper cranes to patients in the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital. Sadako's room was also brightened by cellophane cranes folded in many colours.

When she heard that if you "*fold 1000 paper cranes, your wish will come true,*" Sadako took to folding paper cranes fervently. She wanted to live. Into each crane she folded the wish: "*Let me get well.*"

But her illness got worse. In the morning of October 25, 1955 Sadako died. She was 12 years old.

Time will tell whether such stories will be repeated in the coming years in the aftermath of Fukushima nuclear disaster. But not sitting back is the way out, but commitment to creating the awareness of the need for action and mutual solidarity. This applies to nuclear weapons too. ➡

HIROSHIMA IKEDA PEACE MEMORIAL CENTRE

"If nuclear weapons epitomize the forces that would divide and destroy the world, they can only be overcome by the solidarity of ordinary citizens, which transforms hope into the energy to create a new era," says Daisaku Ikeda in his 2009 proposal for Building Global Solidarity Toward Nuclear Abolition.

A nuclear-weapon free world would either make nuclear power plants superfluous or lead to research and development (R&D) efforts to harness the atom in such a way that it offers the best for the humankind.

My September 2010 visit to Hiroshima gave me reason for hope that the Japanese youth has the ability and mettle to "create a new era". Encounters at the Hiroshima Ikeda Peace Memorial Centre, named after the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) president turned out to be tremendously encouraging.

Etched on my mind is the encounter with Yasuro Kubo, Vice President, Hiroshima Region and Executive Leader of Soka Gakkai, who greeted me with an affectionate smile, memorable souvenirs of the Memorial Centre, and tea and snacks on a hot September afternoon before we moved on to the hall upstairs.

More than one hundred mostly young but also middle aged persons waited to hear me – a journalist born in India and living and working in Germany for nearly 38 years – express my views on Dr. Ikeda's annual peace proposals and his unrelenting commitment to plead for a world without nuclear weapons. The attention and interest with which they listened was exceptional.

The Centre's commitment to peace and disarmament is underlined by the fact that it hosts a series of lectures by eminent people around the world, who have made significant contributions to the cherished goal of a world free of atomic arsenal.

In 2010 alone, the Soka Gakkai Hiroshima youth members sponsored a Hiroshima Study Lecture Series in conjunction with the 11th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates which took place at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park from November 12 to 14.

Guest speakers were Frederik Willem de Klerk, former president of South Africa, Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala, president of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, and the co-founder of Northern Ireland's Peace People, Máiread Corrigan Maguire.

Frederik Willem de Klerk spoke about the history of apartheid in South Africa, his experience of spearheading the dismantling of South Africa's nuclear weapons program, and the need to rid the world of nuclear weapons. He pointed out that in order to achieve this, feelings of threat which often lead to violence must be replaced with feelings of trust derived from dialogue. De Klerk, who was instrumental in abolishing apartheid, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993, together with the legendary Nelson Mandela.

Ambassador Dhanapala, whose organization the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs was awarded the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize, called the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki a crime against humanity. He emphasized that civil society has huge power to create change and influence governments and paid tribute to Soka Gakkai for its ongoing efforts toward the abolition of nuclear weapons.

The co-founder of Northern Ireland's Peace People, Máiread Corrigan Maguire, whose sister's three children were killed during the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, shared her experience of using nonviolence to end the conflict in Northern Ireland and emphasized the power of one-to-one dialogue. Maguire told the Hiroshima youth that because they come from a city that has directly witnessed the effects of a nuclear weapon; they have an important mission to persuade people around the world of the necessity for nuclear abolition. She also stressed the importance of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution which renounces war.

The significance of Maguire's talk was underlined by the fact that together with Betty Williams and others she founded the grass-roots organization called Peace People to promote the vision of a future free from violence. She is also a recipient of the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize.

As their response to the Fukushima disaster underlines, the Soka Gakkai youth is not only profoundly committed to a world without nuclear weapons, and violence in all forms but also to assisting the victims of Japan's triple disaster. They are engaged in relief activities in crisis-stricken areas, guided by SGI president who says:

"Buddhism . . . allows us to change poison into medicine and to transform our negative karma. There is no hardship or suffering that we cannot overcome, no darkness that we cannot break through. Now is the time to bring forth the vast and immeasurable power of the Buddha and the Law. The more challenging the times, the more important it is that we take a step forward based on powerful prayer. ■



Yasuro Kubo, Vice President, Hiroshima Region and Executive Leader of Soka Gakkai



Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park

Saving Family Business With Employees' Support

By Taro Ichikawa in Tokyo



Now an eminent CEO in Tokyo's Mitaka City, Masashi Takeuchi vividly recalls his days in Brazil's sprawling Sao Paulo, where he worked as a reporter for a newspaper that was rather popular with the Japanese community.

"My life was exciting because whatever I wrote was published the following day in the newspaper and I experienced a sense of accomplishment. At the same time, I learned a lot about the huge continent and what poverty means," says Masashi, the third generation president of the Takeuchi Unyu Kogyo (Takeuchi Transportation Industry) and Vice Chairperson, the Tokyo Trucking Association.

When Masashi returned home from Brazil, he presumed that father would entrust him with important management tasks. That turned out to be wishful thinking. He was assigned a series of menial jobs in different departments where he made boxes, packed at a distribution warehouse, transported cargos, cleaned toilets, and repaired work places.

"Life ordained at the bottom of the ladder was hard for me to understand those days," recalls Masashi. Recollecting his feelings some six months later, when he travelled to Brazil again, he says: "Although I was visiting familiar places, I felt a sense of estrangement as a tourist and realised that I belonged to Takeuchi Unyu Kogyo. So I made up my mind to live with the company," he adds.

He has no regrets. In fact, he is convinced that father did the right thing in putting him in all departments of the company because "it is important for a CEO to know all job sites".

Masashi Takeuchi was appointed as company president by father Kiyoshi Takeuchi at the age of 45 in the year 2000, who had succeeded his father Seitaro Takeuchi, the company's founder, when he died in 1984.

Masashi's appointment came close on the heels of a watershed in Takeuchi Unyu Kogyo's relations with Nissan whose new CEO Carlos Ghosn convened a meeting of suppliers and service providers in 1999 to announce a 'Nissan revival plan' for leading the automaker out of the red, which made snapping business ties with half of them necessary.

As a result, Mitaka factory for which the Takeuchi Company provided transport services and installed automatic reeling machines, was demolished after the textile division's transfer of the from Nissan to Toyota Industry Corporation, affiliated with the Toyota Motor company.

Also, the Ogikubo factory which housed the Aerospace Department for which the Takeuchi's provided maintenance and repairing facilities was closed as the department was transferred to another location. Further, steps were initiated for the closure of the Murayama Factory in 2001 with which the Takeuchi Company had business transactions since 1961. A miniature model of Nissan Skyline (the last model assembled at Murayama factory) is now displayed at the reception room of Takeuchi Unyu Kogyo.

A NEW ERA DAWNS

As the Nissan revival plan started unfolding, father Kiyoshi Takeuchi realised that the era in which the Tekeuchi Company and the Nissan were close business partners had come to an end. "My time is over now. A new era has dawned," he told his son and handed him over the presidency in 2000.

Masashi Takeuchi says that he learned a lot from the experience of the Nissan revival plan. "I thought that even a small company like ours needs to accept new values and new frameworks under the garb of globalization and reorganize itself so as to survive under the new circumstances."

This experience made him reflect not only management but also philosophical themes such as the way of life and how a human being lives life. "I thought that I would not be able to adjust myself to the new circumstances as long as I stick to conventional values. I was made acutely aware of the importance of surviving now. It made me realize anew -- what is otherwise a platitude -- that time is always changing."

It was only after April 2000 that the impact of the Nissan revival plan began to be felt by Takeuchi's. Although Masashi was conscious that it would be increasingly difficult to do business with Nissan in the future, he did his best to maintain some business ties with the company by actively participating in bids. (No bid was required before the Nissan revival plan.) He succeeded in some cases. The Takeuchi Company was contracted to transport auto parts from Nissan auto parts warehouse in Sagamihara city, Kanagawa prefecture, to Saitama prefecture.

Masashi also succeeded in making a contract for maintenance and repair works at the facility with IHI Aerospace Co. Ltd., which replaced Nissan's aerospace department that used to be Takeuchi's business partner, and opened a new business office near this client company.

The IHI Aerospace Co. Lt. had also got involved in the Hayabusa project, named after the Japanese fighter during World War II. Literally meaning 'peregrine falcon', Hayabusa is also the name of an unmanned spacecraft developed by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency to return a sample of material from a small near-Earth asteroid named 25143 Itokawa to Earth for further analysis. ☺

NEW CLIENTS

Masashi also found new clients in distribution business such as drug companies, which encouraged the Takeuchi Company to undertake a major investment to inaugurate its first logistics centre in 1998 and its second logistics centre in 2001 in Tokorozawa City in Tokyo.

The client drug company launched multiple chain stores in Tokyo and surrounding prefectures and requested the Takeuchi's to coordinate their logistics. It was the first time that the Takeuchi Company undertook an overall coordination of logistics - carrying goods, stock control, inspection, classification, delivery -- commonly called third party logistics or 3PL, which was not yet common in Japan at that time.

Takeuchi Unyu Kogyo was convinced that its future survival lies in cultivating new clients other than those from the auto industry, and subsequently focused on distribution business. This paved the way for the Company to start liberating itself from a conventional management style of dependence on Nissan alone.

On top of that, the new CEO strengthened the company's financial standing by attaching importance to cash flow and management by business computing. He was convinced that if there is a way for the Takeuchi's to survive in an era of globalization, he must go back to the basic principles of management and take a fresh look at all company assets, reassess their efficiency, and carry out drastic reduction of interest-bearing debts. Based on this conviction, he decided to scale down the company.



EMPLOYEES' SIGNIFICANT ROLE

"Management is a new way of thinking about the importance of employees. I think that I could attract more support from labour union members by coming up with a policy of making every effort not to lay off employees during the difficult period resulting from the Nissan reform plan. Our new business of running logistical centres grew and I came to feel that it was time to nurture workforces in our company under the new changing environment," says Masashi Takeuchi.

Consequently, he applied for ISO9001 and obtained the prestigious certifications. ISO enables employees to understand what others are doing and thinking about their works. Local business offices conduct internal auditing with each other and in this process employees working for different business offices can understand business operations of other offices and what their colleagues are doing. The idea was to adopt a management style where all employees can join in one body.



A miniature model of Nissan Skyline

He also made monthly statement of accounts transparent to all employees and applied the same format for monthly reports with check sheets so that employees working for different divisions/business offices can grasp what and how others are doing. Through these exercises, employees developed a sense of ownership.

"The most important thing as a transportation company is to avoid a traffic accident. Through consultation with the company's safety and health committee, we equipped all 30 trucks with a back monitor and a drive recorder. The aim of this is to prevent human error with support by that machine equipment and above all to protect lives of our truck drivers. Without safety, a company cannot continue to exist," says Masashi Takeuchi.

He adds: "As CEO, I feel that I have been able to do what I have wanted to do. I have been allowed to do so maybe because I like my colleagues and employees. I always feel that an employee comes to work for my company not just as a matter of coincidence; there must be some sort of providence involved. And I have my respect for that."

When a driver has an accident, the Takeuchi's tell him that if he is absolutely sure that he is not at fault, the Company would stand 100 percent behind him. In this regard, the drive recorder will protect him with evidences that would validate his account. Masashi Takeuchi's advice to the younger generation is: "We should be pleased and thankful to be able to live a normal life. We should not fear change. Fear exists in one's own mind. I admit that I have gone through a state of mind where I was driven to the edge by pressures and stress but I learned that one cannot survive unless one changes. It is important to keep moving forward without fear of change." ■

Post-Conflict Sri Lanka Confronts Challenge of Peace Building

By H. M. G. S. Palihakkara* in Colombo

When domestic processes fail to find solutions to internal problems, external forces find space to advocate or even impose solutions for their own political or strategic convenience. Sri Lanka is no exception. Leadership failures since independence by all governments and mainstream political parties contributed to externalizing the conflict from which Sri Lanka emerged in May 2009.



The instruments of externalization included a large and vocal expatriate community (or Diaspora as it calls itself) in a number of Western countries, as well as principals in the so-called "peace process" whose collapse eventually led to the military activity that eliminated the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, also known as "the Tigers"). Norway was the facilitator of the peace process, with a group of Western donor countries serving as "co-chairs" in an oversight role.

Closer to home, India was a major contributor to internationalizing the Sri Lanka situation and providing

intrusive military inputs in the periods before and after the ethnic violence of 1983.

External visibility to the conflict was increased, too, by an emerging trend among local political parties to canvass domestic governance issues abroad, to influence electoral strategy at home.

Last but not least, in a shrinking world where the forces of globalization and the power of information technology (IT) are both at play, no country remains isolated. Real time television, internet, remote sensing technologies, and armies of investigative journalists bring conflicts and humanitarian emergencies instantly to the drawing rooms of millions of homes all over the world.

SECURITY COUNCIL

It was in such an evolving international backdrop that Sri Lanka's security forces approached the final phase of its military operation. The LTTE had taken over 300,000 Tamil civilians as virtual hostages, and exploited these innocent victims as human shields, exposing them to the LTTE's own fire and to the crossfire between the two sides.

They also threw untrained and underage cadres to the battle, employed suicide bombers mostly among the unsuspecting civilians who were crossing over to government lines and, in fact, fired at civilians who were trying to leave.

In this scenario of imminent and massive blood-letting, the LTTE remained intransigent in its refusal to let the people go, despite calls by national and international leaders and bodies. Many international figures cautioned against an imminent "blood bath" on the beaches of Puthumathalan on the country's Eastern sea board. The LTTE and its Diaspora lobby dramatized this to good effect by threatening "collective suicide" at Puthumathalan.

The crisis created an unprecedented foreign policy challenge for Sri Lanka -- the most formidable, since independence -- when it received the attention of the UN Security Council. This was the first time that any issue concerning Sri Lanka's internal affairs, especially its security and integrity, went to the council.

The Security Council is the only organ of the UN which can issue a legally binding directive to halt a military operation in its tracks. A Security Council decree is qualitatively different from other similar calls, including a resolution in the Human Rights Council in Geneva which could only make a non-binding recommendation. Therefore, Sri Lanka was challenged to prevent the UN Security Council from issuing such a decree, because that would have given the LTTE leadership time to re-group, re-arm and resume their terrorist campaigns.

Any mandatory external intervention under the fiat of the Security Council could potentially have resulted in adverse far reaching implications on the fundamentals of the Sri Lankan nation state, i.e. its territorial integrity and sovereignty of its people.

Sri Lanka was able to meet the challenge by employing a multi-pronged strategy that harmonized military, humanitarian and diplomatic action. No resolution or any other decree was adopted by the Security Council directing the Government to end its action that was directed at bringing the conflict to an end. ☺

*The writer, a retired Foreign Service officer, was formerly Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary, and has held several posts of ambassador. He is a member of the Sri Lanka's Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission.

Having successfully achieved the complicated diplomatic task of preventing intervention during the conflict, Sri Lanka is confronted with more challenges in handling the less complex diplomatic dimension of the post-conflict peace building task. Some of the post-conflict challenges are examined below.

DOMESTIC EFFORT

Challenge of reconciliation and accountability: One of the key post-conflict issues projected at home and abroad is accountability or the question of compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) during the final phase of the military operation. The journalistic short-hand usually poses this complex question as the "war crimes" issue.

The Government has established a Commission on Reconciliation to address a broad range of issues that straddle the conflict and post-conflict period, including the humanitarian issues relevant to the conduct of the war.

However, certain pro-LTTE lobby groups abroad, and their clientele, have sought to side-step or even undermine this larger domestic reconciliation effort which encompasses both reconciliation and IHL. They have called for international scrutiny on the magnitude of the humanitarian and human rights issues that were manifest in the last stages of the conflict, and connected aspects of "accountability".

The pressure for such an inquiry has become greater, precisely because Sri Lanka was able to prevent action by the Security Council to halt the military operation which would have enabled the LTTE to remain a key player.

This is a challenge that needs to be handled in a careful and calibrated manner in which policies and institutions relevant to governance, the rule of law and diplomacy must work with each other rather than work at the expense of each other.

Sri Lanka needs to safeguard its national interests, the aspirations of its people of all communities, and the country's reputation as a long standing democracy. Towards this end, Sri Lanka needs to work with all countries, especially with those who may disagree with us on some issues, in order to project ourselves as a nation at peace and a venue for secure investment and good business during this post-conflict period.

We need therefore to preserve the independence of the local mechanisms created and to show those who voice their concern on accountability issues, that the Government is serious about addressing them. Most importantly, the Government needs to show the victims of the conflict, be they victims of LTTE terrorism or of military operations, that the Government is responsive to conflict related grievances as well as their root causes.

Diplomacy is crucially important in these efforts, because diplomacy is all about dealing with people with whom you disagree or agree to disagree, and about seeking common ground where none seems to exist.

This is especially so when such common ground may eventually bring benefits to the nation not only in terms of investment and economic activity, but also in the form of its image and reputation as a civilised society where peaceful dissent is seen as an enriching experience and an exciting democratic challenge -- not an act of treachery or treason.

The message to be emphasized is that the nation after emerging from an injurious and costly conflict still retains the strength of character and the political will to undertake remedial measures and course correction. We should not, instead, seek to market a message of infallibility.

WORLD ORDER

Challenge of Sovereignty: Defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation is fundamental to the foreign policy of any independent nation. It is the bounden duty of any diplomat to do so. This is because the notion of sovereignty is the bedrock on which the nation state system of the current world order lies.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of the sentiment of asserting the Sri Lankan sovereignty. This is justifiably so, considering the nearly three decades of terrorism inflicted by the LTTE upon the sovereignty and integrity of the nation in both diplomatic and territorial terms. Our soldiers and the political leadership provided by our President enabled the country to free itself from this manifest threat to its sovereignty and integrity. The nation reasserted the jurisdiction of the elected Government throughout the island, thereby exercising the sovereignty vested in the people as per our constitution. However, can we safeguard our sovereignty so valiantly reestablished by our soldiers, simply by sloganeering it?

There are several aspects to ponder. Firstly, sovereignty is something that cannot merely be preached but must be exercised. Sovereignty carries with it duties towards a country's own citizens. Where there is failure to discharge such duties, fertile ground is created for unwelcome intervention. ➤ (Continued on page 24)



Facing Human Rights Challenge in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka

By H. M. G. S. Palihakkara in Colombo

A challenge that preoccupies local and foreign opinion is the Challenge of Human Rights: Some countries focus their bilateral dialogue with Sri Lanka only on human rights. Our interlocutors invariably refer to human rights concerns in the country and even suggest progress on human rights as a condition for dialogue and business in other areas e.g. commerce, security and even people to people contact.

The fact is: Sri Lanka need not be defensive on human rights. There is no basis to consider human rights as a Western concept. Many of the core values embedded in the sutras preached by the Lord Buddha if put together, will constitute a great Bill of Rights predating and perhaps even surpassing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But human rights problems exist in all countries. Addressing human rights concerns is good in itself. They are very much a part of our constitutional obligations. We have voluntarily subscribed to about two dozen international human rights covenants. These accessions represent the exercise of our sovereignty. Therefore, the best way to reverse an adversarial relationship on human rights is to remove human rights concerns from bilateral agendas.

We can do this by, first, empowering our domestic mechanisms to promote and facilitate the full and effective implementation of our constitutional obligations on human rights and ensuring that our system of administration of justice is independent and robust. Second, we can broaden our bilateral diplomatic discussions beyond a single issue (human rights) into other areas of common interest e.g. regional cooperation, environment, terrorism, human and arms trafficking, non-proliferation, economic cooperation etc.

Continuing to argue that human rights problems should not be talked about because they are not unique to us might make for good domestic politics but is imprudent diplomacy.

Challenge of 'Diaspora': The phenomenon called the Diaspora has thrown up a number of issues including terminological accuracy. The dictionary meaning of the word Diaspora is that it represents a people denied of a homeland, legitimate or otherwise. The highly diverse Sri Lankan expatriate community may not fit that description.

However, the word Diaspora has become virtually synonymous with a vast array of external lobby groups (pro-LTTE and anti-LTTE, as well as pro-Government and anti-Government) focusing on Sri Lanka. Despite the ambiguity, therefore, we may continue to use the word for the limited purpose of discussion. ➔

➔ (Continued from page 23)

It is a fundamental tenet of sovereignty that the Government and its security agencies must have the monopoly of the use of force within its jurisdiction and no other entity within or outside the country can be allowed to impair that authority thereby undermining the rule of law. When a Government is unable to or unwilling to exercise that authority for whatever reason, certain crimes go unpunished; certain offenders enjoy impunity; and certain investigations waver.

When that happens, the principle of asserting the monopoly of the use of force and upholding the rule of law will be undermined and correspondingly, the exercise of sovereignty will be impaired. It is therefore imperative that illegal carriers of arms and irregular groups who undermine the rule of law and tarnish the good name of the legitimate security forces be brought to book, thereby consolidating the sovereignty rescued by the soldiers. A vigorous program of punishing offenders and upholding the rule of law is required for meeting this challenge.

Another consideration that needs to be borne in mind is, like everything else in the world of Einstein's physics, sovereignty too is not absolute. Although in the post civil war era of Europe, the popular belief was that sovereignty was almost absolute and enshrined so in the Peace of Westphalia treaty that has not been matched in practice. Moreover, the forces of globalization and wonders of technology, especially IT and connectivity explosion throughout the world, have rendered sovereignty a porous concept.

We therefore have to understand that in the modern world our sovereignty can be safeguarded only to the extent that we learn to live with other nations in an inter-dependent way, not in an adversarial way. Sovereignty has thus become a truly relative notion.

Sri Lanka has signed international treaties and other agreements, each of which require us to share with other countries and multilateral institutions reports and rationale for some of our sovereign decisions. This certainly is not a subjugation of our sovereignty to anyone else. This is an act of exercising our sovereignty, and expressing the strength of our system to be transparent, accountable and reasonable, first to ourselves and then to others.

Similarly, we as members of the same multilateral bodies, which look into the reports of other member states, have equal rights to observe and comment on others' reports, which are also expressions of the sovereign rights of those countries. In the modern world therefore we have to use the notion of sovereignty as a tool for dignified engagement and not as a cover for unilateral isolation.

Sri Lanka has always been up front in presenting itself to the outside world and has had a diplomatic profile quite disproportionate to its geographic or demographic attributes and military or economic clout. As a resurgent nation brimming with hope following the elimination of a terrorist menace, we should therefore look forward to asserting our sovereignty amongst ourselves and exercise it with other nations.

We can do so most effectively when we are at peace with ourselves and when we invest our military gains in sustainable political and socio-economic processes. Harmonizing our multi-ethnic and multi-religious society without pandering to elements of polarization is the way forward. Projection of this wholesome approach as the articulation of our sovereignty is indeed a priority task for our foreign policy establishment. ■

We know little about how the Diaspora works. We know even less as to how to deal with it. This was clearly demonstrated by fairly recent events where certain Diaspora groups were able to embarrass Sri Lanka and her President when he was abroad. Equally important is the effort by sections of the Diaspora to influence the UN Security Council as mentioned earlier. They have resumed their campaign to put Sri Lanka in the dock, as it were, in the post-conflict period.

If campaigns against Sri Lanka, by certain Diaspora groups succeed, the country could lose vital economic and political support by way of official development assistance, foreign direct investment and other business opportunities that will be needed to transform the decisive military success into a programme of sustainable prosperity for all Sri Lankans.

It will therefore be in Sri Lanka's interest to engage the Diaspora in two ways:

- By engaging those elements in the Diaspora who do not want to see the re-emergence of the abhorrent ideology and the institutional framework of the LTTE, and
- By launching clearly visible and humanely responsive policies, programmes and projects to address the real concerns of the conflict victim's communities, especially the minorities.

If these actions are taken in response to internal realities and not external pressure, and if they succeed, the hostile Diaspora will become gradually irrelevant, the constructive Diaspora will become progressively assertive, and the domestic reconciliation process will advance. The Diaspora's potentially adverse impact on Sri Lanka's foreign policy interests will correspondingly diminish. The contrary seems to be happening now.

Institutional Challenges: The Flagship institution of any Nation's foreign policy structure is its Foreign Ministry. The career Foreign Service constitutes its crew. Our Foreign Office, now with its significantly improved title of Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), is endowed with a good crew. Weather being so unpredictable these days, I do not want to call it an all-weather crew but having worked with them for some decades I do know that many of them are thorough professionals who can handle pretty rough weather.

They did so, for example, in the massive post Tsunami coordinating effort, the unprecedented airlift of our nationals from the war zone in Lebanon in 2006, almost 6,000 of them at virtually no cost to the government; annual diplomatic efforts at the UN and European multilateral venues since the late 1980s to deter intrusive Resolutions on Sri Lanka; successful preventive diplomacy effort at the UN Security Council; a sustained and painstaking diplomatic effort to get a European consensus to list LTTE as a terror outfit despite counter lobbying by a powerful group of countries and a multi-million dollar Diaspora. This action was successfully repeated in Canada.

NO CROWING

The significance about the effort of the professional diplomats involved was that they did not put up bill boards on the road sides announcing victory and claiming credit. Having got the LTTE ban quietly then they would go to work on the next objective quietly. They do so because diplomatic effort by definition is discreet business, one cannot have a high decibel strategy and one cannot crow about victory.



Eastern peoples' victory monument at Karadiyanaru junction. This was erected after the Sri Lankan government military forces' victory over LTTE in the Eastern theatre.

Crowing has two problems. You make your diplomatic counterpart on the losing side an enemy. You would also embarrass your diplomatic friend who supported you by clustering him into your camp as it were. So these professionals as far as I know do not crow. But the Government must give them projects, give them inspiration, and give them incentives. The Government must recognize them and not downsize their dignity.

Professionals cannot and will not publicise their success. Government must do it. Sometimes there is nothing to publish because in certain instances in diplomacy the greatest success is the absence of something, e.g. an adverse Resolution on Sri Lanka. You cannot advertise that as if it is a bridge or a road. It is also not a bright idea to advertise that absence or crow about it as you signal your adversaries to work harder next time.

Granted, like in all services all may not be well with Sri Lanka Foreign Service. As in any group of humans, the statistical law of the normal curve would apply here as well. There may be the fringe of the normal curve -- the miscreants in the woodwork. That is the irrelevant minority against whom disciplinary procedures must apply.

Like in the normal curve there is the significant majority who are hard-nosed professionals who have our national interest at heart. Like me, many of them have become public servants from the rural heartland of our country. I know that personally, having served with them during some critical periods in our national affairs. ➡



LTTE Sea Tiger boat patrolling during the peace.

The Government will be well advised to use this knowledge and experience judiciously and not lose it unwisely. Such a policy will stand in good stead in meeting the challenges ahead.

Challenge of Consensus: A new challenge in the foreign policy area is the task of domestic consensus building. Following independence, Sri Lanka initially had a good tradition of a broad based bipartisan approach to foreign relations. During the last 20 years or so however, especially since the 1983 communal violence, a pattern was emerging slowly but surely where foreign policy issues were being dragged into the parochial political discourse at home.

The massive outflow of people from Sri Lanka following the July '83 events, the progressive externalization of the conflict and the Sri Lanka political parties tragically exploiting these national issues for short term electoral advantage have all contributed to the unravelling of this consensual approach to foreign policy issues. It was no longer possible, therefore to decouple a highly externalized ethnic issue from an electorally politicized ethnic issue at home.

As a result, we have seen the rather disturbing and I would even say a shameful practice of domestic politicians taking up a range of governance issues with foreign countries and foreign organizations as they were either unable or unwilling to agree, or agree to disagree, on those very same issues locally.

The regrettable outcome of this practice is that successive Governments are obliged to deal with a host of domestic governance issues with bilateral and multilateral interlocutors as these very same issues are injected into such discussions by different local political parties. All political parties and all successive governments have contributed to this unfortunate situation.

It is so unfortunate that at one point, when the security forces were able to entrap the LTTE leadership into a small area of the No Fire Zone on the Mathalan coast and when the LTTE held 300,000 people as a human shield, a query arose as to why all democratic political parties in Sri Lanka did not see it fit to issue a unanimous joint call through the Parliament or through some other political forum calling on the LTTE to free these people and lay down arms.

Sadly even at that critical hour, once again our politicians failed abysmally to summon the necessary political will to reach such a consensus. As usual perhaps some did not want to give credit while others did not want to share credit.

It was said that had there been such a unanimous call from the democratic establishment of Sri Lanka against what is perceived to be one of the most ruthless terror outfits in the world, the UN Security Council was ready to reiterate that unanimous call. Once again, as events unfolded this was not to be. It is therefore important that Sri Lanka's political establishment gets back to the path of bipartisan foreign policy making of the past rather than allow vital foreign policy interests to be dissipated in parochial electoral politics.

Governance and foreign policy are functionally linked. So are the attendant challenges. When governance is in deficit, diplomacy cannot acquire merit all by itself. The converse is also true. Image building abroad cannot be significantly different from the Rule of Law reality we create for ourselves at home.

Challenges for All: 'Introspection' by all of us at three levels will help move the reconciliation process forward.

At the apex level, the top leadership of all sides on the political and ethnic divide must reflect on why successive leaderships failed to build a culture of consensus on critical national issues. They must also assess how they can bring about consensual democracy as against the currently prevalent adversarial culture.

At the community level, the civil society and its 'organisations' must reflect carefully on how to build bridges between national interests and their institutional interests without compromising their advocacy principles.

Thirdly at the level of the individual, citizens can and must find ways to use their franchise to educate their political leaders on the need to make course corrections towards consensus building on national issues.

We have to assume that all politicians are adults. We must therefore educate those adults in order to save our children from another round of bloodletting. When you get your governance act together, getting your foreign policy act together will be less of a problem. It is the job of the foreign policy maker to sensitize those who govern, to this stark reality. This may be quite a challenge but one that must be taken up. ■

The Ultimate Weapon of Terrorism

By David Krieger

Nuclear weapons are the ultimate weapon of terrorism, whether in the hands of a terrorist organisation or those of the leader of a country. They are weapons of mass annihilation that kill indiscriminately men, women and children. Most people fear the possibility of these weapons falling into the hands of terrorist organisations, but never stop to consider that in any hands they are terrorist weapons.

Given the terrorist nature of nuclear weapons and their capacity to destroy civilisation, what makes them acceptable to so many people? Or, at a minimum, what makes so many people complacent in the face of nuclear threats? These are questions I have grappled with for many decades.

The acceptability of nuclear weapons is rooted in the theory of nuclear deterrence, which its proponents argue has kept and will keep the peace. This theory is based upon many assumptions concerning human behaviour. For example, it assumes the rationality of political and military leaders. It seems quite evident that not all leaders behave rationally at all times and under all circumstances. The theory requires clear communications and the threat to use nuclear weapons in retaliation must be believed by opposing leaders, but as we know communications are not always clear and misperceptions may inform beliefs.

There is a madman theory of nuclear deterrence. It posits that to be truly believable, the leader of a nuclear armed state must exhibit behaviour that appears sufficiently insane to lead opposing leaders to believe that he would actually use the weapons. Thus, insanity, or at least the impression of it, is built into the system. At a systems level, can anyone doubt that the reciprocal threats of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) were truly mad, as in insane?

Another aspect of deterrence theory is that it requires a territory against which to retaliate. Thus, the theory is not valid in relation to a non-state terrorist organisation. If a country has no place to retaliate, there can be no nuclear deterrence. If a terrorist organisation acquires a nuclear weapon, it will not be deterred by threat of nuclear retaliation. This places a fuse on the nuclear threat, and means that there must be zero tolerance for a non-state terrorist organisation to acquire a nuclear capability.

There should also be zero tolerance for states to possess nuclear weapons. I am not limiting this observation to states that seek to develop nuclear arsenals. I mean all states and, most importantly, those already in possession of nuclear weapons. Current nuclear arsenals may be used by accident, miscalculation or intention. And so long as some states possess nuclear weapons and base their security upon them, there will be an incentive for nuclear proliferation.

Widespread nuclear complacency is difficult to understand. Most people are aware of the tremendous damage that nuclear weapons can do, but perhaps feel reassured that the weapons have not been used since 1945. The weapons are largely out of sight and out of mind. It is also possible that people feel impotent to influence nuclear policy and thus defer to experts and policy makers. This is unfortunate because until large numbers of people assert themselves on the need to eliminate nuclear weapons, the countries with nuclear weapons will continue to rely upon them to their peril and to the world's peril.

The New START agreement between the US and Russia is a modest step forward in reducing the number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons on each side to 1,550 and the number of deployed delivery vehicles to 700. The greatest value of the treaty may be in restoring inspections of each side's nuclear arsenal by the other side. But these steps provide only meagre progress. At the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation we advocate the following next steps forward:

- reducing the total number of nuclear weapons strategic, tactical and reserve to under 1,000 on each side;
- making a binding commitment to No First Use of nuclear weapons and to never using nuclear weapons under any circumstances against non-nuclear weapon states;
- de-alerting all nuclear weapons so that there will be no use by accident, miscalculation- or in a fit of anger;
- placing limits on missile defense systems and banning space weapons;
- commencing multilateral negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, which would ban all nuclear weapons worldwide in a phased, verifiable, irreversible, and transparent manner.

These steps would be indications that the immorality, illegality, and cowardice of threatening to use nuclear weapons were being met with a seriousness of purpose. It is not necessary for ignorance, apathy, and complacency to dominate the nuclear arena. With due regard for the sanctity of life and for future generations, we can do better than to live with such inertia. We can eliminate a weapon that threatens civilisation and human survival; we can move to zero, the only stable number of nuclear weapons. This is the greatest challenge of our time, a challenge that we must respond to with engagement and persistence. It is time to replace Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) with Planetary Assured Security and Survival (PASS). (COPYRIGHT IPS) ■

* This article is being re-published as part of a project sponsored by Soka Gakkai with IPS Japan and Global Perspectives as partners.

David Krieger is President of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (www.wagingpeace.org). He is a leader in the global movement to abolish nuclear weapons.



The Double Standards Of Nuclear Powers

By Ray Acheson



On 5 February, the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) entered into force. New START is an agreement between Russia and the United States that sets 1550 as the limit of how many nuclear warheads each country can deploy at any given time (down from 1700-2200 under the old arrangement). The treaty does not affect the number of nuclear warheads each country can possess, which is estimated at 8500 for the US and 11,000 for Russia. New START has been hailed as a victory by most arms control and disarmament advocates, who claim that while the treaty does not do much for disarmament, it should pave the way for actual reductions and will strengthen the relationship between the two major nuclear powers.

In reality, however, the treaty has stark consequences for the future of nuclear disarmament.

In exchange for US Senate ratification of the treaty, the Obama administration promised 185 billion USD for the modernisation of nuclear weapons, delivery systems, and related infrastructure over the next twenty years. Similarly, the Russian Duma adopted the treaty only on the condition that the government will invest in the development and production of new types of strategic offensive weapons and in "preserving and developing the necessary research and development base and production capabilities" of Russia's strategic nuclear forces.

In May 2010, all 189 states that are party to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) -including Russia and the United States- agreed to an action plan to advance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Action 1 of this plan commits all members "to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons". In 2005 and 2010, all of the NPT-recognised nuclear weapon states (China, France, Russia, the UK and US, which are also the permanent five members of the UN Security Council) espoused an "unequivocal undertaking" to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals. The obligation to disarm is a core element of the NPT, embedded in article VI, which also mandates an end to the modernisation of and investment in nuclear weapons by obligating the nuclear weapon states to negotiate a cessation of the nuclear arms race.

Despite these legal obligations, all of the nuclear weapon states are engaged in or have plans to modernise their nuclear arsenals and related facilities over the coming decades.

Modernisation of existing US warheads is ongoing to extend their life and other features, including in some cases additional military capabilities. There are also efforts underway to increase investment in new infrastructure for building nuclear weapon components. Russia's government has pledged its commitment to modernise all three legs of its nuclear forces -intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarines, and bombers.

In 2010, the French navy deployed a new submarine-launched ballistic missile, the M-51. It is expected that the missiles will be armed with a new warhead later this decade. The United Kingdom has postponed its plans to modernise Trident but has not scrapped the idea. China is deploying new mobile missiles and a new class of ballistic missile submarine, and reportedly is increasing its number of nuclear warheads.

As for those states not party to the NPT, new US intelligence reports indicate that Pakistan has expanded its nuclear arsenal over the last several years (to 90-110) and is building its capacity to produce more fissile material for nuclear weapons. According to NGO estimates in 2010, India is continuing to develop a triad of offensive nuclear forces and is planning to introduce several additions to its arsenal, including ballistic missiles, nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, and possibly a nuclear-capable cruise missile. The plans for Israel's nuclear weapon forces are unknown.

The implications of nuclear weapon modernisation for international security and the stability of the non-proliferation regime are grave. At the 2010 NPT Review Conference, the majority of states that do not possess nuclear weapons complained about the double standards of the nuclear powers, which seek to strengthen controls against proliferation while at the same time engaging in the refurbishment of their own arsenals. While the leaders of many of the nuclear powers have by now professed their interest in seeking "a world without nuclear weapons", their budgets and policies contradict this claim, leading to frustration and cynicism among non-nuclear states and threatening the integrity of the NPT.

As the Norwegian ambassador warned, "A world without nuclear weapons cannot continue to be just a vision. It is an objective which we, states parties to the NPT, are committed to achieve." The Western countries seeking increased restrictions on nuclear technology to prevent proliferation were unable to push through reforms largely because the majority of non-weapon states refused to accept more controls on their activities while the weapon states continue to invest in their arsenals and refuse to commit to a process and timeline for complete disarmament.

Plans to modernise nuclear arsenals cast dark shadows over prospects for disarmament in any near-term future. While some governments and a large number of civil society groups are trying to initiate negotiations of a nuclear weapons convention -a ban on nuclear weapons- the nuclear weapon possessors appear far from ready to engage in multilateral disarmament talks. But if the danger of nuclear war is to be eliminated, ceasing to plan and build for an eternal nuclear threat must come early, not late, in the process.

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Ray Acheson is the director of Reaching Critical Will, a project of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom that advocates for nuclear disarmament and monitors nuclear weapon issues. She is the editor of RCWA's reporting publications and also an anthology of NGO writings, *Beyond Arms Control: Choices and Challenges for Nuclear Disarmament* (2010).

Alternative Laureates Want Nuke Plants & Weapons Abolished

By Jutta Wolf

Laureates of the Right Livelihood Award and members of the World Future Council have called for a global phase-out of atomic power reactors as well as the abolition of nuclear weapons. In a joint statement, fifty laureates said the Japanese nuclear disaster had raised global awareness of the extreme dangers that can result from nuclear power generation.

"Grave as these dangers are, however, they are not as great as those arising from the possession, threat and use of nuclear weapons -- weapons that have the capacity to destroy civilization and end most life on the planet," laureates of what is also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize warn.

The conclusion they draw from the nuclear power plant accident in Japan is "that the human community, acting for itself and as trustees for future generations, must exercise a far higher level of care globally in dealing with technologies capable of causing mass annihilation, and should phase out, abolish and replace such technologies with alternatives that do not threaten present and future generations".

This, the statement published on March 29, 2011 says, applies to nuclear weapons as well as to nuclear power reactors.

While extending their "deepest sympathies" to the people of Japan who have experienced a devastating earthquake and tsunami followed by severe damage to the Fukushima nuclear power station, the laureates say, the disaster in Japan has demonstrated "once again the limits of human capability to keep dangerous technologies free from accidents with catastrophic results".

They argue that natural disasters combined with human error have proven a potent force for undermining even the best laid plans. Reliance on human perfection, they add, reflects a hubris that has led to other major failures of dangerous technologies in the past, and will do so in the future.

"What has occurred as a result of the confluence of natural disaster and human error in Japan could also be triggered purposefully by means of terrorism or acts of war."

The joint statement says that in addition to accidental or purposeful destruction, nuclear power plants pose other threats to humanity and to the human future.

The laureates warn that the large amounts of radioactive wastes that are created by nuclear power generation will remain highly toxic for many times longer than human civilization has existed. This is because there is currently no long-term solution to dealing with the threats these radioactive wastes pose to the environment and human health.

"Further, nuclear power plants, with their large societal subsidies, have diverted financial and human resources from the development of safe and reliable forms of renewable energy."

Establishing a linkage between atomic energy and nuclear weapons of mass destruction, the statement explains: "Nuclear power programs use and create fissile materials that can be used to make nuclear weapons, and thus provide a proven pathway to nuclear weapons proliferation."

This is evidenced by the fact that several countries have already used civilian nuclear programs to provide the fissile materials to produce nuclear weapons. Other countries, particularly those with plutonium reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities, could easily follow suit if they decided to do so, the laureates say.

"The spread of nuclear power plants will not only make the world more dangerous, but will make more difficult, if not impossible, the goal of a nuclear weapons-free world," asserts the statement issued by experts, activists, politicians, clergy, entrepreneurs and scientists from 26 countries.

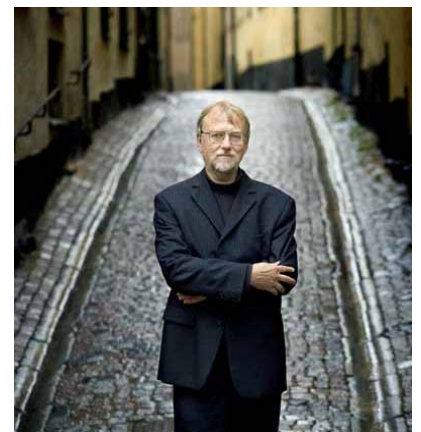
Countering the widespread argument that atomic energy helps tackle climate change, the joint statement argues: "Nuclear power is neither the answer to modern energy problems nor a panacea for climate change challenges. There is no solution of problems by creating more problems."

In fact, nuclear power does not add up economically, environmentally or socially, the laureates say. "Of all the energy options, nuclear is the most capital intensive to establish, decommissioning is prohibitively expensive and the financial burden continues long after the plant is closed."

Jakob von Uekull, founder of the Right Livelihood Award and the World Future Council, says: "To get a grip on climate change and on nuclear threats is not a technological challenge. It is a psychological and political challenge."

He adds: "With this declaration we want to demonstrate how strong the worldwide support for a global nuclear phase out is. We believe that a crisis can always be a chance for change."

Among the signatories of the declaration are: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai from Kenya, environmental activist Vandana Shiva and Ashok Khosla, Co-President of the Club of Rome, both from India, Maude Barlow, UN Consultant from Canada, Hafsata Abiola-Costello, human rights activist from Nigeria, Alexander Likhotal from Russia, President of the Green Cross International, Francisco Whitaker Ferreira from Brazil, Co-Founder of the World Social Forum and Erwin Kräutler, Austrian and bishop in Brazil. ■



Picture: Jakob von Uekull, founder of the Right Livelihood Award | rightlivelihood.org

U.S. Nuclear Plants Confronted 14 Serious Failures in 2010

By J Chandler in Toronto



A new report reveals that in 2010 nuclear plants in the United States experienced at least 14 "near misses", serious failures in which safety was jeopardized, at least in part, due to lapses in oversight and enforcement by U.S. nuclear safety regulators.

"While none of the safety problems harmed plant employees or the public, they occurred with alarming frequency -- more than once a month -- which is high for a mature industry," says the report authored by the prestigious Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS).

"The severe accidents at Three Mile Island in 1979 and Chernobyl in 1986 occurred when a handful of known problems -- aggravated by a few worker miscues -- transformed fairly routine events into catastrophes," says the report, adding: "That plant owners could have avoided nearly all 14 near misses in 2010 had they corrected known deficiencies in a timely manner suggests that our luck at nuclear roulette may someday run out."

The report was prepared by UCS nuclear engineer David Lochbaum and scheduled for release before the crisis in Japan began to unfold, but the disaster makes the its conclusions all the more significant.

It is the first in an annual series on the safety-related performance of the owners of U.S. nuclear power plants and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), which regulates the plants. The NRC's mission is to protect the public from the inherent hazards of nuclear power.

The UCS' overview shows that many of the significant near misses occurred "because reactor owners, and often the NRC, tolerated known safety problems," says the report.

It mentions as an example that the owner of the Calvert Cliffs plant in Maryland ended a programme to routinely replace safety components before launching a new programme to monitor degradation of those components. "As a result, an electrical device that had been in use for longer than its service lifetime failed, disabling critical safety components," according to the report.

"In another example, after declaring an emergency at its Brunswick nuclear plant in North Carolina, the owner failed to staff its emergency response teams within the required amount of time. That lapse occurred because workers did not know how to activate the automated system that summons emergency workers to the site," the report points out

Overall, Union of Concerned Scientists' analysis of NRC oversight of safety-related events and practices at U.S. nuclear power plants in 2010 concludes that:

-- Nuclear power plants continue to experience problems with safety-related equipment and worker errors that increase the risk of damage to the reactor core -- and thus harm to employees and the public.

-- Recognized but misdiagnosed or unresolved safety problems often cause significant events at nuclear power plants, or increase their severity.

-- When onsite NRC inspectors discover a broken device, an erroneous test result, or a maintenance activity that does not reflect procedure, they too often focus just on that problem. Every such finding should trigger an evaluation of why an owner failed to fix a problem before NRC inspectors found it.

-- The NRC can better serve the U.S. public and plant owners by emulating the persistence shown by onsite inspectors who made good catches while eliminating the indefensible lapses that led to negative outcomes.

-- Four of the 14 special inspections occurred at three plants owned by Progress Energy.

-- While the company may simply have had an unlucky year, corporate-wide approaches to safety may have contributed to this poor performance. When conditions trigger special inspections at more than one plant with the same owner, the NRC should formally evaluate whether corporate policies and practices contributed to the shortcomings.

Commenting the report, Chris Williams, a professor of physics and chemistry at Pace University with campuses in New York City and Westchester County, says: "In the United States, 23 of the 104 operational nuclear reactors are built on the same 1960s design by the same company, General Electric, as the reactors at Fukushima."

"They have been recognized to have serious design faults since the 1970s and have been regularly retrofitted (patched up) to address design vulnerabilities that are routinely discovered and that could lead to a core breach and the release of radioactive isotopes," adds Williams, the author of *Ecology and Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis*.

Williams points out that "California has a 99.7 percent chance of being hit with a magnitude 6.7 earthquake or greater within the next 30 years." This is because nuclear plants in California with the same design as Fukushima's are only built to withstand magnitude 7 to 7.5 quakes, while the one that hit Japan on March 11, 2011 was 9.0.

"We know a larger earthquake is possible because the 1906 earthquake that tore San Francisco apart measured 8.3. California would not be immune to a powerful tsunami such as the one responsible for the multiple meltdowns in Fukushima, and as crazy as it sounds, one nuclear power plant, the San Onofre facility located south of Los Angeles, is built right on the beach," writes Williams in *The Independent*, a New York-based free newspaper published 16 times a year on Wednesdays to print and online readership of more than 200,000.

Williams advises therefore: "Instead of waiting for another devastating nuclear accident to occur in the United States rivalling the one at Three Mile Island in 1979, we need to push the government to abandon plans both to relicense old plants for another 20 years and build new ones." ■

Fukushima Disaster Impacts India

By Shastri Ramachandaran in Mumbai

Uncertainty looms large over India's ambitious civilian nuclear programme as a consequence of the triple disasters that have struck Japan. For one, the civilian nuclear agreement, which New Delhi and Tokyo were negotiating, is certain to be indefinitely delayed.

Also, operationalisation of the India-U.S. civilian nuclear agreement -- touted as the biggest strategic and diplomatic accomplishment of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) is a ruling coalition of centre-left political parties heading the government of India-- may take much

more time than either New Delhi or Washington anticipated.

The India-French civilian nuclear agreement may be hit harder given the increasing stridency and widening protests against the Jaitapur nuclear power project.

The crisis in Japan would set back bilateral economic relations that were at an unprecedented high. While there may be a slowdown on some tracks, on others, there might be cessation of work altogether.

India-Japan relations, which thrived in the last decade and grew to become a strategic and global partnership, would lose much of the momentum it had gained in recent years.

The proposed civilian nuclear agreement would have been a high point of a bilateral relationship marked by more downs than ups (particularly after the first golden phase in the 1950s), with India's 1998 nuclear tests taking it to the worst level.

The turning point was U.S. President Clinton's visit in 2000. It opened Japan's eyes anew to India's potential and made it put behind the bitterness caused by the N-test. Since then, there has been no looking back with economic, political and strategic engagements moving at full speed.

Three ministerial summits every year, including of the two prime ministers, testify to the strength, depth, and potential of bilateral ties.

Although the bilateral trade volume at \$10 billion is far from impressive, taken together with ODA (official development assistance, which India tops worldwide), FDI (foreign direct investment) and FII (foreign institutional investors), the level of economic cooperation is exceptionally high. The only other country in that league with Japan is the U.S. This explains why the number of Japanese companies in India trebled from 250 to 750 in the last five years. Besides, two major Japanese initiatives -- the Delhi-Mumbai industrial corridor and the Chennai-Singapore corridor -- are under way.

With the calamity claiming Japan's resources and efforts, all projects, especially those involving construction and infrastructure companies, would be badly hit. The exception might be the Chennai-Singapore project. Strategic and defence cooperation would take a backseat though political relations have reached a stage where changes in either country are unlikely to cause upsets.

While India can take the investment pullout in its stride, the blow to civilian nuclear projects threatens more than power and infrastructure development. It might turn the clock back on the pursuit of N-power as an energy option and undermine the existing N-pacts with both the U.S. and France.

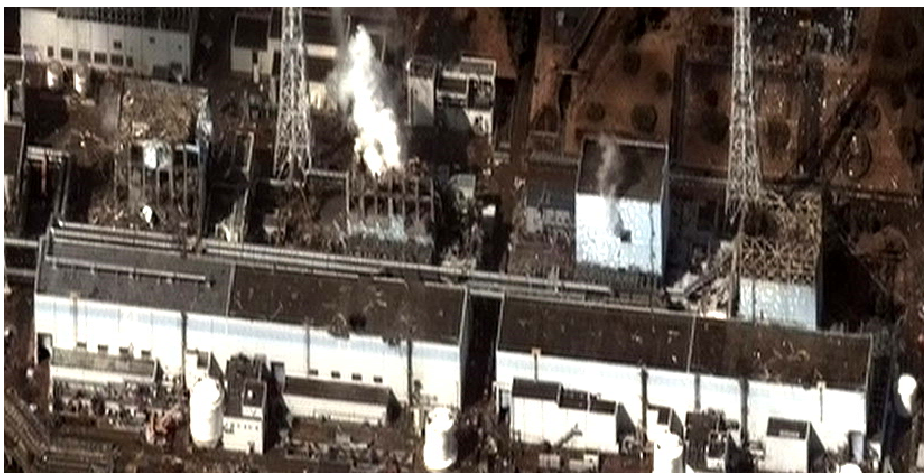
Japanese nuclear technology is rated as the best and most sophisticated. That is why GE, Westinghouse and Areva have partnered Hitachi, Toshiba and Mitsubishi. Japanese expertise, technology and components are at the heart of most N-power equipment. For that reason, India's N-agreements with the U.S. and France can come unstuck in the absence of Japanese consent; which may not be forthcoming in the absence of a bilateral accord with Japan.

The Fukushima nuclear catastrophe might rekindle the historical memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the radiation unleashed, and the moral issues when it comes to nuclear plants.

A traumatised people would resist Tokyo even considering a nuclear agreement with India in the near future. The prevalent sentiment in Japan may boost opposition to nuclear power in India and worldwide, too. Ongoing protests, such as the one against the Jaitapur project, would acquire a new urgency.

China is calling a halt to all its nuclear projects, Germany's closure of seven N-plants and the U.S. and India ordering a safety review may not raise public confidence. On the contrary, it might add to the prevailing opposition.

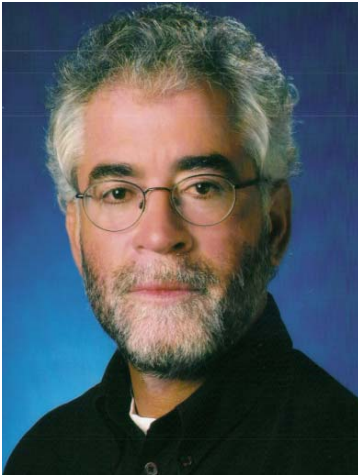
The issue is not about the safety of N-plants as such. It is about public sentiment and perception driven by an emotional charge. This bodes ill for India, for the future of nuclear power, and for the present model of growth and development. ■



Satellite image on March 16, 2011 of the four damaged reactor buildings.

The Stillborn 'Nuclear Renaissance'

By Julio Godoy



Since several years, a handful of international institutions, such as the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA), some governments and state-owned enterprises specialized in the construction of nuclear power plants have been publicising the view that atomic power is experiencing a renaissance.

In 2005, for instance, the NEA in its Uranium 2005 report, argued that nuclear power was set to play a significant role in the next 40 years, given the expected raise in world wide demand for electricity. The NEA also advanced then the now well-known argument that nuclear energy is a clean source, indispensable to fight global warming. It argued that "the extent to which nuclear energy is seen as beneficial in meeting greenhouse gas reduction targets could potentially increase the role of nuclear energy in future electrical generation."

This campaign was part of the effort of an international lobby to counter the global awareness of the perils of nuclear power, rising steadily particularly since the most tragic March 1979 Three Mile Island and April 1986 Chernobyl accidents.

Since 1979, and especially during the 1990s, numerous industrialized countries, conscious of the health and environmental risks, decided to phase out nuclear power. As a consequence, and as recently as September 2009, the European Nuclear Society listed new nuclear power plants under construction in only six European countries. The list, however, included 19 projects in Russia, which are under construction since decades, and which are therefore considered stillborn monsters. (<http://www.euronuclear.org/info/maps.htm>).

This campaign by the international lobby found its way into mass media, under the catchy phrase of the 'Renaissance of nuclear power'. Typical of this media resonance was a story by the German weekly Der Spiegel, published in July 2008, which claimed, quite inexactly, that "Dozens of new reactors (were) under construction." Der Spiegel corrects the claim later in the article, stating that "after decades of hesitancy, more and more countries are turning back toward the atom with well over 100 reactors either already under construction or in the planning stages." Both claims were far from true. (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,druck-565363,00.html>)

For, while it is true that several governments have announced plans to construct new nuclear power plants, most of these remain projects which, according to numerous experts and scientists, hardly will overcome the tough economic and technical obstacles nuclear power has to face. And those nuclear power plants actually under construction serve, at best, as examples of follies.

'THE FINNISH GRAVE'

Take the case of the Finnish Olkiluoto Nuclear Power Plant 3, probably the one reactor under construction most referred to as proof of the so-called renaissance of nuclear energy. The facility, which uses the European Pressurized Reactor (EPR) technology, authorised in December 2000, was set to start functioning in May 2009.

However, numerous construction setbacks forced the French constructor Areva already in December 2007 to postpone delivery to the summer of 2011. When the setbacks continued, Areva had to announce further delay: On October 2008, Areva announced that the Olkiluoto nuclear power plant could only be delivered in June 2012.

By early September 2009, drastic construction budget excesses -- the construction costs, initially estimated at three billion euros, have jumped to well over five billion, for a preliminary cost surplus of at least 55 percent -- and legal quarrels between Areva and the Finnish Teollisuuden Voima Oyj (TVO), which owns and operates the Olkiluoto complex, are threatening the completion of the plant. Now, the plant may actually start operations in 2014.

In late 2009, after several years of troubled cooperation with TVO, Areva threatened to lodge a legal complaint against the Finnish operator, to obtain compensation for the 2.3 billion euros losses incurred during the reactor's construction. If no compensation were to be agreed, Areva would stop the construction of the plant, Anne Lauvergeon, head of the French group, said to French journalists. ➔

In an interview with the French economics daily newspaper Les Echos, TVO deputy CEO Timo Rajala dismissed the claim as "a message addressed to the French", and accused Areva of lacking professionalism. "Areva sold us the EPR and only afterwards started the engineering works for the plant," Rajala said. (<http://www.lesechos.fr/info/energie/020146990147.htm>)

Steve Thomas, professor for energy policy at the Public Services International Research Unit, University of Greenwich, Britain, summed up the quarrels in an interview with the International Herald Tribune in 2008, "Olkiluoto has become an example of all that can go wrong in economic terms with new reactors". (Curiously, the link to Thomas' interview with the IHT is no longer available at the paper's online site. French anti-nuclear activists claim that the interview was erased from the server under pressure by Areva.)

Rajala's apparent coolness in the face of Areva's threats is understandable: While Finland may renounce one nuclear reactor, Areva cannot afford to stop the construction of the EPR of Olkiluoto, for it considers the model the company's key to the world.

That pressure led Areva to offer Finland the EPR under generous conditions. As The World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2009, written by several nuclear energy experts for the German environment ministry, put it, "AREVA needed a 'shop window' for EPR technology and Olkiluoto-3 would serve as a reference plant for other orders."

As an additional incentive and at the request of the client, AREVA offered the plant on 'turnkey' terms, that is, fixed price. It also took responsibility for the management of the site and for the architect engineering, not just the supply of the 'nuclear island'. Olkiluoto 3 is the prototype of the EPR technology. A second model is under construction on the French Atlantic coast; other EPR plants, at home and abroad, shall come. For instance, Areva has offered the construction of four EPR reactors in Britain.

However, the chances that Areva will build the reactors in Britain have all but vanished, after an expertise by the British Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) warned that the French EPR technology suffered of serious safety deficiencies in its control and instrumentation (C&I) systems.

In June 2009, in a letter to Areva, leaked to the British press, the NII expressed concerns that "the C&I architecture (is) overly complex." The C&I is considered the "cerebral cortex" of a nuclear power station, for it manages the computers monitoring and controlling the reactor's temperature, pressure and power output levels.

"It is our regulatory judgment that the C&I architecture appears overly complex," the NII letter said. "We have serious reservations about (Areva's) proposal which allows lower safety class systems to have write access (permissives etc.) to higher safety class systems."

The NII further called attention upon other concerns, especially the lack of safety display systems or manual controls that would allow the reactor to be shut down, either in the station's control room or at an emergency remote shutdown station. (http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/natural_resources/article6613960.ece)

Add to the technical warnings against the EPR the financial constraints imposed by competition and those forced upon states and other investors by the international economic crisis.

A September 2009 editorial comment in the French economic newspaper Les Echos pointed out that "a gas fuelled power plant

of 800 megawatts (MW) costs 550 million euros, and is constructed in four years. The construction of a nuclear power plant of 1,600 MW takes eight years, and costs up to six billion euros." An investor putting money into a new nuclear power plant has to wait at least eight years to end the investment -- if he gets to put the money together at all. In the comment, the newspaper quoted Yves Giraud, chief economist at the French energy provider EdF saying that, in the best of cases, an investor has to wait 25 years after the investment decision was taken to start covering the costs.

Here arises a first question on the financial feasibility of nuclear power plants: Who, in these tight fiscal and financial times, will put such amounts of money together, for an investment that promises insecure returns in 25 years?

IT'S ALSO THE TECHNIQUE

The sheer insurmountable financial obstacles the so-called nuclear renaissance faces are one problem. The other, by far much more important, are the technical, environmental, and health risks associated with nuclear power.

The catastrophe of Fukushima and Onagawa in Japan shows that even a country with a state-of-art technology cannot properly deal with what some euphemistically call the "residual risk" of nuclear power -- an euphemism, for this "residual risk" becomes the main feature of nuclear power when the radioactive meltdown sets in, as in Fukushima, Chernobyl and Three Mile Island.

The "residual risk" is even the central data in cases where the meltdown does not happen, as in the accident of the nuclear power plant in Civaux, France, in May 1998. One would rather not think of the "residual risk" in a nuclear catastrophe in a country like China, where even schools crumble down like sand castles after the first tide.

But even way below the nuclear meltdown, atomic energy represents an enormous collective danger, which should make it simply indefensible. An exhaustive list of examples of environmental and health catastrophes caused by nuclear power, from the extraction of uranium to the disposal of nuclear waste, could not be presented here.

Suffice it to say: In France, according to official documents leaked recently, 34 of the 57 nuclear power plants presently in operation suffer of a serial construction defect that in the worst case would paralyse the cooling system. That is, a nuclear meltdown in most of the French nuclear reactors is possible, due to construction errors.

In Germany, the irresponsibility of the operators of nuclear power plants is such that nuclear waste has been routing since decades in search of an appropriate final storage. In Japan, the mendacity of nuclear operators is legendary. They have been since years lying to the public, to conceal the numerous accidents in their nuclear facilities.

In a nutshell: The evidence of the health and environmental risks of nuclear power is enormous and should be most convincing. The international nuclear lobby has so far remained impervious to it. Will it remain so, after the worst conceivable nuclear catastrophes, such as the one just happening in Japan? Let's hope no, and finally accept that the renaissance of nuclear power which the atom lobby has been heralding was just the stillbirth of a monster. ■

Atoms Beyond Today

By Ramesh Jaura

Coming as it did in a year that marks the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident has caused panic among a large section of the population - and in the media on the whole – particularly in Germany. While such reactions are understandable to an extent, the fact is that some of the fundamental issues continue to be left out of public debate.

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Have necessary investments been made in research and development (R & D) to ensure the safety and security of nuclear power plants and to avoid devastating consequences that may result from natural disasters? After all, nuclear energy provides a critical contribution to industrial development.

Where do R & D investments aimed at ensuring the safety of nuclear power plants stand in relation to R & D expenditure on the military use of the atom or on military technologies on the whole?

Are the nuclear power plant operators aware of their responsibility that they must refrain from anything that endangers the security of the peaceful use of nuclear energy? Are they held accountable?

Have nuclear power plants been really erected, taking into account not only the geological situation of the places where they stand today, but also considering the situation as it would develop during and after the lifetime of a nuclear power plant?

Are nuclear power plants really operated only to produce energy for civilian purposes or are they secretly employed as laboratories for research and development of increasingly sophisticated nuclear weapons?

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This is of vital importance in view of the fact that, according to some nuclear physicists, nuclear meltdown would not occur if a nuclear power plant is used only for civilian and not military purposes.

It is regrettable that there is an utter lack of transparency in such vital issues and that some uncomfortable questions as mentioned above are not being asked by democratically elected parliamentarians or the media, which otherwise claim to champion the cause of freedom of expression.

At the same time, there is no gainsaying the fact that everywhere in the world we need an energy mix of all kinds of clean energies, including nuclear energy, and perhaps even a fusion of nuclear and renewable energies because renewable energies *per se* should not be expected to be sustainable and harmless as is often presumed.

I believe that if the same amount of research and development had been done to ensure safety and security of nuclear power plants as has been invested in developing nuclear weapons, we would have been spared disasters such as Fukushima and their like.

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These stray thoughts may appear naive, if not considered unworthy of any consideration. Of critical importance is that even in times of anxiety and panic against the backdrop of Chernobyl 25 and the Fukushima disaster, we must continue to focus our attention on the complete abolition of nuclear weapons, while ensuring the safety and security of the path to peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

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How about radioactive weapons?

Amidst growing apprehension that the U.S. and its allies might use radioactive weapons in Libya, as they are reported to have done in several local and limited wars beginning with the 1991 Iraq War, the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons (ICBUW) has called for a global treaty to prohibit such arsenal.

While denying reports that the U.S. has been dropping toxic depleted uranium (DU) shells in Libya, it has refused to rule out the use of such weapons in the future, reinforcing mounting concern about the 'collateral damage' to civilians in the North African country, whom the UN Security Council resolution 1973, seeks to protect.

"I don't want to speculate on what may or may not be used in the future," the U.S. air force spokeswoman, Paula Kurtz, told Herald Scotland on April 2, 2011. She admitted that the U.S. was using A-10 tank buster aircraft designed to destroy armoured cars and tanks, which are capable of firing 3,900 armour-piercing DU-tipped shells per minute.

Kurtz insisted that the A-10s had not been loaded with DU ammunition. "Weapons with depleted uranium have not been used in Libya," she said.

But critics say that the U.S. has sometimes been "economical" with the truth about the use of DU weapons. "We continue to seek a cast-iron guarantee that depleted uranium has not been used and will not be used in Libya," said Kate Hudson, the general secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

"The U.S. has a long history of only admitting to deploying this radioactive material months or years after it has been used," Hudson added.

DU is a radioactive and chemically toxic heavy metal. When DU weapons burn, they release a toxic and radioactive dust. "Hard targets hit by DU penetrators are surrounded by this dust and surveys suggest that it can travel many kilometres when re-suspended, as is likely in arid climates. The dust can then be inhaled or ingested by civilians and the military alike," ICBUW says.

DU is considered to be the cause of a sharp increase in the incidence rates of some cancers, such as breast cancer and lymphoma, in areas of Iraq following 1991 and 2003. It has also been implicated in a rise in birth defects from areas adjacent to the main Gulf War battlefields.

According to ICBUW, DU been used by the British and U.S. military forces in armour-piercing shells fired in the 1991 Gulf War, in Bosnia, Serbia and Kosovo during a series of wars, fought throughout the former Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1995, and in the war in Iraq by the U.S. and Britain in 2003, ICBUW informs. In addition, it is considered to be in use by around 18 other countries. ■

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Forward To The Future In Quest Of Global Security

By Ramesh Jaura IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis BERLIN (IDN) - Europeans are finding it hard to keep their heads above water as tidal waves of an overwhelming desire for participation in governance pound at the Arab shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The challenge thrown down by Arab uprisings is however only one front in the uphill battle for achieving "security for the global world". Is there a European answer to that challenge? Nobel Peace Laureate Mikhail Gorbachev wanted to find that out, and his 'New Policy Forum' gathered together in Munich . . .



The Five BRICS Build an Alliance U.S. Need Not Fear

By Shastri Ramachandran IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis NEW DELHI (IDN) - As the globalised world continues the search for an overarching new order, the emergence of any new alliance of sorts is bound to be resisted, and resented, by dominant powers in the existing order. BRICS -- the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India and China which has expanded to embrace South Africa -- is no exception.



Serbian Journalists Concerned About Media Environment

By Jutta Wolf IDN-InDepth NewsReport BERLIN (IDN) - Some five years after Serbia adopted a new Constitution, media environment in the country is deteriorating in the face of unreasonable court sentences, physical threats and political, economic as well legal pressure being mounted against journalists. All this and "delay" on the part of the government to formulate the promised 'media development strategy' is a source of concern, says the Vienna-based South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO), an affiliate of the International Press Institute (IPI), in a statement.



Laurent Gbagbo and the Road to Ignominy

By Alemayehu G. Mariam* IDN-InDepth NewsViewpoint SAN BERNARDINO, USA (IDN) - These are heady days on the African continent. These are days of joy. Africa's thugdoms are crumbling like clumps of dirt underfoot. These are days of grief and tribulation. After one-half century of independence, Africa continues to sink deeper into a quagmire of dictatorship, corruption and extreme violence.



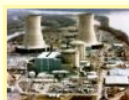
Time To End Corporate Impunity

By Nnimmo Bassey* IDN-InDepth NewsViewpoint LAGOS (IDN) - People who have suffered the impact of unjust practices and those who have been victims of abuse from corporate impunity will heave a sigh of relief the day directors of such companies are brought to court from behind their corporate shields. The spins and the twists in legal tangos that play out so impassively will become a thing of the past.



Benghazi Revolt Seems to Come in Handy for NATO

By Jaya Ramachandran IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis BERLIN (IDN) - As 28 foreign ministers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and of the so-called "partner countries" met in Berlin within weeks of launching the military operation in Libya, they had reason to be grateful to the Benghazi uprising against Muammar Al-Gaddafi.



U.S. Nuclear Plants Confronted 14 Serious Failures in 2010

By J Chandler IDN-InDepth NewsReport TORONTO (IDN) - A new report reveals that in 2010 nuclear plants in the United States experienced at least 14 "near misses", serious failures in which safety was jeopardized, at least in part, due to lapses in oversight and enforcement by U.S. nuclear safety regulators.



China Accuses U.S. Of Hypocrisy and Rights Violations

By Taro Ichikawa IDN-InDepth NewsReport TOKYO (IDN) - China has snapped at the U.S. with a detailed report on its "terrible" human rights record and accused it of "hypocrisy" and "malicious design to pursue hegemony under the pretext of human rights". Titled 'The Human Rights Record of the United States in 2010', the report was released on April 10, 2011 by the Information Office of China's State Council (cabinet) in response to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010 issued by the U.S. Department of State two days earlier.



There Will Be No Khomeini in Egypt, The Military Say

By Baher Kamal* IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis CAIRO (IDN) - "Egypt will not be Gaza or Iran, nor will it be ruled by a Khomeini." This is what the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of Egyptian armed forces, which manages the fate of this country since the popular overthrow of Hosni Mubarak on February 11, has stated. The SMC delivered this strong statement on February 5 to the new directors and chief editors of the state-run media, who have been appointed to replace the old loyalists of Mubarak regime, thanks to heavy public pressure.



Call For Banning Radioactive Weapons Gathers Momentum

By Jaya Ramachandran IDN-InDepth NewsReport AMSTERDAM (IDN) - Amidst growing apprehension that the United States and its allies might use radioactive weapons in Libya, as they are reported to have done in several local and limited wars beginning with the 1991 Iraq War, the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons (ICBUW) is calling for a global treaty to prohibit such arsenal.

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Summit on the Millennium Development Goals 20-22 September 2010

The UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals concluded with the adoption of a global action plan to achieve the eight anti-poverty goals by their 2015 target date and the announcement of major new commitments for women's and children's health and other initiatives against poverty, hunger and disease. [Visit the Summit website!](#)

What's Going On?

World Malaria Day -- A day to act



25 April is devoted to the fight against malaria, which afflicts as many as half a billion people in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and kills a child every 45 seconds. "Some countries have made enormous strides towards malaria control. Zambia, for example, achieved a 62 per cent decrease in deaths of children under five from malaria between 2001 and 2008; while Sri Lanka reached the milestone of zero reported malaria deaths in 2009," said Herve Verhoosel, External Relations Manager of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership. But efforts to achieve the targets set out in Roll Back Malaria's [Global Malaria Action Plan](#) and the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 need to be stepped up. See how [you can act](#).

Fragile gains in global AIDS response



Thirty years into the AIDS epidemic, investments in the AIDS response are yielding results, according to a new [report](#) released by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Issued ahead of a [High-level Meeting](#) of the UN General Assembly on HIV/AIDS in June, the report highlights that the global rate of new HIV infections is declining, treatment access is expanding and the world has made significant strides in reducing HIV transmission from mother to child.

Least Developed Countries can break out of poverty trap



A blue-ribbon report released ahead of the [UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries](#) in May says that these countries can break out of a decades-long poverty trap, depending on determined national action and international support. Pointing to the high incidence of conflicts in countries with extreme poverty and weak institutions, the [Report](#) by the [Group of Eminent Persons](#) says that "increasing marginalization of the LDCs is creating a future that we, as a global community, cannot afford."

World Water Day



Half of the world's people live in cities today, and the urban population is growing rapidly. About 828 million people live in slums or informal settlements, often without safe drinking water or toilets. World Water Day (22 March) focused on *Water for cities: responding to the urban challenge*. "Let us pledge to reverse the alarming decline in pro-poor investment in water and sanitation," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said.

UN Women -- for gender equality and the empowerment of women



UN Women -- the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women -- celebrated its creation at UN Headquarters on 24 February. "With the birth of UN Women, we welcome a powerful new agent for progress on gender equality and women's empowerment," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said. The General Assembly voted unanimously to create the new entity last year, combining four previous UN bodies. UN Women is headed by former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet.

The State of the World's Children 2011



The world is home to 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10 to 19. The vast majority of them live in developing countries and face a unique set of challenges. Investing in adolescent can break entrenched cycles of poverty and inequity and ensure that adolescence becomes an age of opportunity, according to a new report by UNICEF, [The State of the World's Children 2011: Adolescence -- An Age of Opportunity](#).

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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-  Universal Education
-  Gender Equality
-  Child Health
-  Maternal Health
-  Combat HIV/AIDS
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