

Australia seeks greater Asian engagement

from the
RINGSIDE

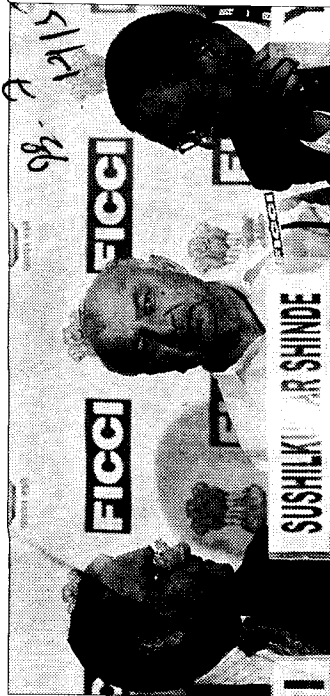
NK Singh

Australian Davos Connection (ADC). It brought together senior policy makers, academics and corporates to discuss complexities ranging from human resource development, security to environmental management.

THE rhetoric that the 21st Century belongs to Asia is rapidly becoming conventional wisdom. The scorching pace of growth of the two large demographic entities India and China, as well as the growth of other Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, with revival in Japan, lends credence to the view that the centre of economic gravity is shifting to Asia. In western countries this evokes a mix of fear and pragmatism. Australia is no exception.

Fear can be seen in reactions like limitations on outsourcing, defensive sabre-rattling in US dealings in China regarding exchange policies and generally the emergence of potential security rivals. The opportunities created by an expanding market, a large reservoir of skilled labour, increased knowledge-based activities and flocking of investors are an evidence of the pragmatism.

From Australia's perspective, emerging Asia offers new opportunities and challenges. To consider these issues, an interactive conference on the broad theme of Future Summit 2006 has been sponsored by the Australian government under the aegis of the



The Power Minister has to think afresh

Growth using the same technologies as in the past may not be sustainable; the pattern of resource consumption required not only to employ these workers and prevent unrest in doing so, as well as to provide for increasing consumption as income rises is not possible without improvement in energy output ratio

Asia is a key driver in this growth—it would account for 53 per cent of the increase during this period. India and China will be the main contributors. The two together will account for 54 per cent of the increase in population in emerging Asia, out of which India alone accounts for 31 per cent of the population increase. By 2025, India's population would be close to 1.4 billion and while the basic forces of demographic shift contribute to higher growth, it may also hamper it if enabling policies do not support the projected

growth levels.

Growth using the same technologies as in the past may not be sustainable; the pattern of resource consumption required not only to employ these workers and prevent unrest in doing so, as well as to provide for increasing consumption as income rises is simply not possible without improvement in energy output ratio. Besides, while the workers can play a constructive role in the world labour market, providing essential services, this would be limited by the extent to which they have acquired relevant

skills. Skills not only to compete with other people but to compete with technology and labour-saving technology and to excel at all kinds of tasks that only people can do.

The labour force can contribute not only to efficiency and competitive production but achieve higher growths of consumption, savings and investment. This critically depends on policies to secure growth, including human resource development. Otherwise the flip side can be unwanted migration, overcrowding, famine and violent conflict for finite resources.

Second, energy management. Energy demand is driven largely by GDP, increased population and trends. Emerging Asia will be the key driver in the growth of world's energy market as it would account for 47 per cent of the increase during the same period, with India and China accounting for 75 per cent of that. This implies a 63 per cent rise in oil consumption, 70 per cent in gas consumption, and 57 per cent increase in coal.

Environmental sustainability would be central to growth strategy. We cannot develop in the same way as the West without provoking serious and irreversible environmental damage. It is in our interest to be leaders in Green Technology. What India and China do can particularly make or break our ecology and eventually the global economy. The biggest man-

made source of mercury pollution, for example, is power plant emissions from rapidly industrialising countries. This does not mean losing sight of economic growth and profits. Actually "green solutions" are seen as the next big disruptive technology and is an area where big fortunes can be made.

Third, why are these questions on emerging Asia being asked in Australia? Is it because they have found themselves misaligned, with growing realities of Asian growth rates, and need to integrate more closely with Asia and are worried on issues of energy, environmental sustainability and unwanted migration? From India's perspective, cooperation with Australia in meeting its energy needs, particularly coal and other raw materials, is significant. It is also a destination for private investment and where migration policies offer greater scope for skill-based technologies. Australia in turn seeks the opportunities of a growing Indian market and has multiple lessons on some of the changes that India needs to undertake, micro-economic reforms enabling harmonisation of regulations between states, and above all managing economic policy in a federation.

Australia seeks greater Asian engagement. This would be in everyone's interest.

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Sudan govt suspends all UN mission work in Darfur

REUTERS

KHARTOUM, JUNE 25

SUDAN has suspended the work of a UN mission in its violent Darfur region after accusing the world body of transporting a rebel leader who opposes a recent peace deal, a Sudanese official said today.

"The suspension applies for all of Darfur and this will continue until we get an explanation," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Jamal Ibrahim.

He said the ban was imposed because a UN helicopter had moved rebel leader Suleiman Adam Jamous, who rejects a peace deal signed on May 5 without consulting the government.

It excludes two bodies affiliated to the UN mission, the World Food Programme and the UN children's agency (UNICEF), Ibrahim said.

A UN spokeswoman said the mission had not received any formal communication from the government.

In recent months UN relations with the government has been strained as Khartoum has resisted international pressure for a UN takeover of the struggling African Union mission monitoring a shaky truce in Darfur.

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Hundreds protest Islamists' takeover of Somalia capital

Mogadishu (Somalia): Hundreds gathered in northern Mogadishu on Tuesday to protest an Islamic militia's takeover of the city after weeks of bloody fighting with US-backed secular warlords.

Members of the militia, which has alleged links to Al Qaida, kept defensive positions about 2 kilometres from the protest, but did not move in to stop it.

On Monday, the militia became the first group to consolidate control over all of Mogadishu's neighbourhoods since the last government collapsed in 1991 and warlords took over, dividing the impoverished country of 8 million into a patchwork of rival fiefdoms.

Tuesday's protest, though, showed it may be difficult to keep control of the capital. The protesters, most of them members of the Abgal clan, carried signs saying, "The Unity of Abgal is Sacred" and urging the militia to pull out.

Three of the main leaders of the secular alliance are from the Abgal clan, including former Minister of Commerce



Gunmen allied to the warlords guard a rally against Islamist militia in Mogadishu

Muse Sudi Yalahow, who is holed up in a hospital in northern Mogadishu and reportedly trying to negotiate with the Islamic leaders.

The Islamic militia is gaining ground just as the UN-backed interim government

struggles to assert control outside its base in Baidoa, 250 kilometres from Mogadishu. Weapons prices soared there on Monday amid fears that the militia could head to Baidoa next. The militia's advance is raising fears that the nation could fall under the sway of Osama bin Laden's terrorist organisation.

Omar Jamal, director of the Somali Justice Advocacy Centre in St Paul, Minnesota, said the Islamic militia's victory in Mogadishu was a major turning point in the country's history. "It is exactly the same thing that happened with the rise to power of the Taliban," he said, adding that the extremists are "using the people's weariness of violence, rape and civil war" to gain support for a government based on Islamic law. The battle between the militia and the secular alliance has been intensifying in recent months, with more than 300 people killed and 1,700 wounded—many of them civilians caught in the crossfire of grenades, machine guns and mortars. AGENCIES

CIA funding to Somalia warlords draws criticism

Mark Mazzetti

Washington: A covert effort by the Central Intelligence Agency to finance Somali warlords has drawn sharp criticism from American government officials who say the campaign has thwarted counter-terrorism efforts inside Somalia and empowered the same Islamic groups it was intended to marginalise.

The criticism was expressed privately by US government officials with direct knowledge of the debate. And the comments flared even before the apparent victory this week by Islamist militias in the country dealt a sharp setback to US policy in the region and broke the warlords' hold on the capital, Mogadishu.

The officials said the CIA effort, run from the agency's station in Nairobi, Kenya, had channeled hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past year to secular warlords inside Somalia with the aim, among other things, of capturing or killing a handful of suspected members of Al Qaida believed to be hiding there.

Officials say the decision to use warlords as proxies was born in part from fears of committing large numbers of American personnel to counter-terrorism efforts in Somalia, a country that the US hastily left in 1994 after attempts to capture the warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid and his aides ended in disaster and the death of 18 US troops.

The US effort of the last year



has occasionally included trips to Somalia by Nairobi-based CIA case officers, who landed on warlord-controlled airstrips in Mogadishu with large amounts of money for distribution to Somali militias, according to US officials involved in Africa policy making and to outside experts.

Among those who have criticised the CIA operation as short-sighted have been senior Foreign Service officers at the US Embassy in Nairobi. Earlier this year, Leslie Rowe, the embassy's second-ranking official, signed off on a cable back to State Department headquarters that detailed grave concerns throughout the region about American efforts in Somalia, according to several people with knowledge of the report.

Around that time, the State Department's political officer for Somalia, Michael Zorick, who had been based in Nairobi, was reassigned to Chad after he

sent a cable to Washington criticising Washington's policy of paying Somali warlords.

One US official who travelled to Nairobi this year said officials from various government agencies working in Somalia had expressed concern that US activities in the country were not being carried out in the context of a broader policy.

"They were fully aware that they were doing so without any strategic framework," the official said. "And they realised that there might be negative implications to what they are doing."

Some Africa experts contend that the US has lost its focus on how to deal with the larger threat of terrorism in East Africa by putting a premium on its effort to capture or kill a small number of high-level suspects.

Indeed, some of the experts point to the US effort to finance the warlords as one of the factors that led to the resurgence of Islamic militias. NYT NEWS SERVICE

Darfur: seeking progress on all fronts

The people of Darfur need much more than aid. They need protection on the ground and they need peace, not just on paper but implemented and enforced throughout each and every village across the region.

Jan Egeland

I FIRST spoke to the U.N. Security Council on Darfur two years ago, calling it ethnic cleansing of the worst kind. Today, I could simply hit the rewind button on much of that earlier briefing. The world's largest aid effort now hangs in the balance, unsustainable under present conditions. If we are to avoid an imminent, massive loss of life, we need immediate action — from the government of Sudan, the rebels, U.N. Security Council members, and donor governments.

The carnage in Darfur is escalating, spilling over into Chad. Another 200,000 people have fled for their lives in the last four months alone. More than two million people are displaced.

Marauding, government-backed militias prowl the countryside on a scorched-earth campaign of terror, systematically destroying lives and livelihoods with impunity. Rebel attacks continue against civilians as well as humanitarian operations.

We now have 14,000 unarmed aid workers, mostly Sudanese, in Darfur, but only half as many African Union troops on the ground to enforce a failed ceasefire in an area the size of Texas. Indeed, as in Bosnia a decade ago, humanitarian relief has been one of the only effective responses the world has mounted to the savagery in Darfur. Instead of healing the wound, the world has preferred to apply bandages to an open haemorrhage.

Of course, humanitarian bandages are essential to saving lives. Over the last two years, we have made huge progress on the humanitarian front. In 2004, we had only 230 relief workers on the ground to assist 350,000 people. Today we help ten times that number — half of Darfur's population. Working together, U.N. agencies and NGOs have reduced deaths among those displaced in Darfur by two-thirds from their 2004 levels while halving malnutrition rates in 2005.

Today, however, these lifesaving achievements are being swept away by increased violence by all sides, and increased obstructionism by the government of Sudan. Both conditions severely restrict our ability to reach those in need. Indeed, they could force an end to the world's massive relief effort in Darfur, putting millions of lives at risk.

Donor support flagging

Meanwhile, funding for aid has all but dropped off. Donor support in Europe and the Gulf States is seriously flagging. Our U.N. appeal for lifesaving support has less than 20 per cent of funds needed. Last week, we announced we will soon be forced to cut



In this August 26, 2004, picture, Sudanese boy Bashir Abdel Aziz, 7, carries drinking water, drawn from pumps provided by international aid agencies at Abu Shouk camp, in North Darfur, Sudan, where more than 40,000 displaced people were receiving food and shelter from international aid agencies. The World Food Programme is so strapped for funds in 2006, it has halved rations for Darfur refugees. — PHOTO: AP

daily food rations in half. More cuts — and hence more lives lost — will follow without further, immediate resources. We urgently need progress on all fronts — security, humanitarian access, and political engagement — to prevent the death toll in Darfur from rising exponentially.

First, we need strengthened security for the people of Darfur. The African Union's

dedicated but overstretched forces must be immediately strengthened during this transition period to better protect the population.

Protection for the population is as fundamental as it is urgent. Aid workers must also be able to help all those in need without fear of kidnapping, armed attacks, carjackings or official harassment. Current conditions are

intolerable. If they continue, humanitarians will be forced to withdraw, severing a lifeline that sustains hundreds of thousands of defenceless civilians. All sides — the government, militias, and rebels — are responsible for the appalling security conditions that threaten the lives of the people of Darfur and make humanitarian efforts increasingly impossible.

Secondly, we need to reach all those in need. Unfortunately, here again we have backtracked on progress made last year. Humanitarian access is now the worst it has been since the spring of 2004. In western and northern Darfur, aid workers can directly reach only 40 per cent of the population due to increased insecurity.

Access also hinges on better cooperation from the government of Sudan and the armed groups. Unfortunately, we have encountered only the opposite. Aid workers in Darfur are forced to cope with threats, intimidation, and an Orwellian nightmare of unending bureaucratic restrictions that effectively, and intentionally, impede our ability to help those in need. Last month, for example, a leading relief NGO responsible for running a camp of 90,000 displaced people was forced to pack its bags. The government will now oversee the camp directly. Needless to say, there are grave reasons to be concerned about the safety of camp residents, given the government's track record in protecting its own citizens.

Humanitarian aid is vital for saving lives, but aid alone is a fatally insufficient response to the world's killing fields. Unarmed relief workers can keep people alive today, but they cannot prevent them from being murdered, raped or forced from their homes tomorrow. Let us not repeat the tragic error of Bosnia's "safe areas" before Srebrenica. Humanitarianism should never be used as a fig leaf for political inaction.

And yet, this is precisely what is happening today in Darfur.

The people of Darfur urgently need aid, but they need much more. They need protection on the ground and they need peace, not just on paper in Abuja but implemented and enforced throughout each and every village across Darfur. Finally, the people of Darfur need U.N. member states in Africa, Asia, and the Arab world — as well as in the West — to demonstrate moral leadership. We need deeds, not just words. Nothing less will help save lives today or bring peace tomorrow to the people of Darfur. Nothing less will end a repetition of "never again." — **courtesy: UNIC New Delhi**

(The writer is the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.)

05 MAY 2006

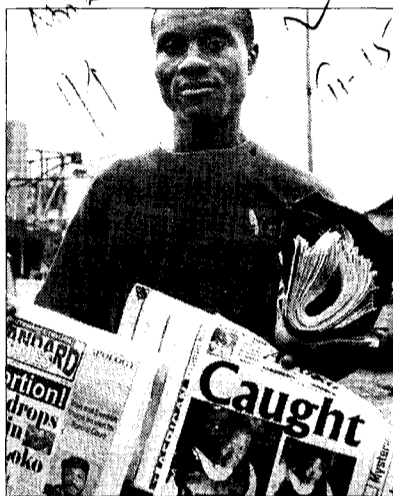
Taylor trial evokes violence fears

Freetown (Sierra Leone): Trial in Africa is too risky for a man accused of fomenting bloodshed across West Africa, international prosecutors said in requesting that Charles Taylor's trial for crimes against humanity be moved to The Hague in the Netherlands.

The former Liberian president is set to become the first African head of state tried for war crimes before an international court. He has been indicted on 11 counts for allegedly supporting a brutal rebel movement in Sierra Leone, Liberia's neighbour to the north.

He helped pioneer the use of child soldiers, often kidnapped from their parents and drugged, and his fighters still are believed to roam Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Liberia.

Taylor's "mere physical presence back in the region could be disruptive and destabilising and we've heard reports that Sierra Leoneans are worried



A Liberian selling a newspaper with the headline 'Caught' in Freetown

that his trial in particular could cause security problems", said Edgar Chen, a lawyer with the Coalition for International Justice, on Thursday.

His first court appearance, expected to be at the UN-backed Special Court in Sierra Leone, won't be before Monday, said Peter Andersen, a spokesman for the tribunal, which was convened to try those held most responsible for the horrors of Sierra Leone's civil war.

Andersen said court officials had requested the trial be moved. "But I wish to stress that it would be the Special Court of Sierra Leone sitting in The Hague," he said.

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf also raised concerns about stability on Thursday, saying in an address to her nation that The Hague would be a "more conducive environment" for Taylor's trial than so close to Liberia, where many still support him. AP

Khartoum, Darfur rebels sign deal

ABUJA (NIGERIA): The Sudanese Government and a major rebel movement in Darfur signed a peace agreement here on Friday, marking a notable progress in an international effort to end years of bloodshed in western Sudan.

The agreement, which was reached after two years of hard talks between the Sudanese Government and the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM), appeals for the disbandment of rebel forces and the disarmament of the government-backed "janjaweed" militia. At the signing ceremony held at the State House in the Nigerian capital Abuja, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo spoke highly of SLM leader Minnie Minnawi, saying that he was "not just a military commander but also a political leader."

The signing ceremony was delayed for three hours, as mediators tried to persuade the smaller faction of the SLM to sign up to the deal. An SLM spokesman said the group still has concerns over whether the Sudanese Government is ready to share power. — Xinhua

Jacob Zuma seeks to make a political comeback

ANC leader acquitted of rape charge by HIV positive woman

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's former Deputy President Jacob Zuma on Tuesday said he was willing to run for election as the country's next President, wasting no time launching a political comeback attempt after his acquittal on rape charges.

Mr. Zuma told a news conference he was immediately resuming his duties at the ruling African National Congress (ANC), which alone would decide whether to nominate him to succeed President Thabo Mbeki in 2009.

"Personally, over the years I've never refused a task by the ANC and I'm not about to do so now," Mr. Zuma told the news conference after Monday's verdict in a trial that opened deep divisions within the ANC leadership.

He sought to limit damage from the case, issuing a public apology



Jacob Zuma

for having unprotected sex with an HIV-positive woman and declaring himself a committed supporter of women's rights.

"I erred in having unprotected sex. I should have known better

and I should have acted with greater caution and responsibility," said Mr. Zuma. "For this I unconditionally apologise to all the people of this country."

Conspiracy theory

Mr. Zuma portrayed himself as undaunted, telling reporters he was confident the South African public would see through what he again described as a shadowy political campaign against him.

"The campaign is clear, I don't think anyone does not see there is a campaign," Mr. Zuma said, again declining to specify who he believed was behind the alleged plot.

Both the rape charges and the corruption case have fuelled accusations by Mr. Zuma's supporters that he is being politically sidelined by his enemies in the ANC — often seen as shorthand for Mr. Mbeki himself. — Reuters

AP/IC
11/19
10/18

10 MB 2006

122 die in battle for Somali capital

Thousands flee Mogadishu as fighting between militias escalates

MOGADISHU (SOMALIA): Secular fighters and Islamist extremists traded artillery and mortar fire in Somalia's capital on Wednesday night, despite mediators' efforts to broker a ceasefire in fighting that has left at least 122 persons dead.

Most of the victims were civilians caught in the crossfire. Mogadishu residents were fleeing on Thursday amid fears the fighting will get much worse in a country that has known little but violence and chaos for more than a decade.

Major battle ahead

"The fighting continues killing our brothers and sisters in front of us, so we decided to leave the city rather than watching them in a pool of blood," said Khasim Siidow, a father of eight children, who was on a minibus to Wanlaweyn, 90 km south west of Mogadishu.

Fighting has escalated steadily since Sunday, when the extremists, who have alleged ties to Al-Qaeda, tried to capture a strategic road through northern Mogadishu from the warlords, who are linked to the United States.

Both sides have been squaring off for a major battle for control of the city in recent weeks. This latest fighting appeared to be only the beginning. Militias in other parts of the city have not joined in the fighting



HOUNDED OUT: Residents of Somalia's capital Mogadishu hide behind a water-tank during clashes between rival militias on Thursday. - PHOTO: AFP

yet, but they continue to man their defences and tensions are rising.

The battle between the Islamic Court Union and the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism has centred on the northern neighbourhood of Sii-Sii, with neither side gaining an advantage. While the alliance has held the road

through Sii-Sii, the courts have controlled the neighbourhoods on either side.

Medical officials reported that 26 persons died in the fighting since nightfall on Wednesday. Twelve shells missed their targets, landing on civilian homes far from the fighting, witnesses said. - AP

12 MAY 2006

200 dead in Nigeria blast

Agbe Beach (Nigeria), May 12 (Reuters): A pipeline explosion killed up to 200 people on the outskirts of Lagos today, leaving charred corpses on a sandy beach where locals tapping the pipe to steal fuel ignited the blast.

The Red Cross said the pipeline blew up in the morning while thieves were siphon-

ing fuel into jerry cans for sale on the black market. The massive explosion cooked everything within a 20 metre radius.

Only grey calcinated skulls and bones were left of five people who were closest to the pipeline, which had been dug out of the sand and bore marks of drilling in several places.

About 100 blackened, unrecognisable corpses were strewn on the water's edge a few metres away, where the golden sand was still steaming hot this afternoon.

Some bodies, charred and bloated, floated in the waters of the creek, which is only about a mile from Lagos city centre by boat.

"You can see the corpses. Some are burnt to ash. Others are remnants... We estimate 150 to 200 people died," Lagos police commissioner Emmanuel Adebayo said.

Theft of petrol and crude oil from pipelines is common in Nigeria, an oil producing country where the vast majority of people live in poverty.

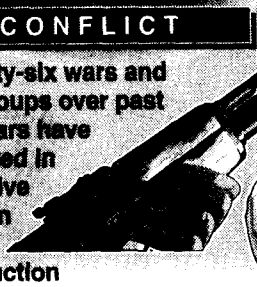
13 MAY 2006

African agriculture in crisis

The number of Africans needing food aid has doubled in a decade: 200 million people are malnourished and almost 41 million are in urgent need of food aid. The United Nations says man-made causes - conflict, poor governance, trade barriers and HIV/AIDS - are responsible for more hunger than natural disasters

CONFLICT

Twenty-six wars and 186 coups over past 50 years have resulted in massive falls in food production



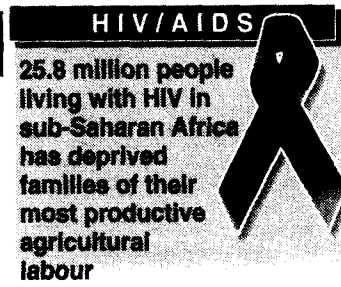
POOR GOVERNANCE

Corruption, collusion and nepotism has led to lack of investment in rural economies



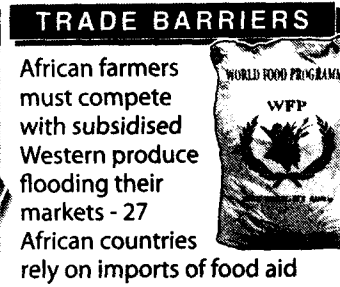
HIV/AIDS

25.8 million people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa has deprived families of their most productive agricultural labour



TRADE BARRIERS


African farmers must compete with subsidised Western produce flooding their markets - 27 African countries rely on imports of food aid



1 MALI

11.4 million
2.4 million
21%


Causes: After-effects of 2004 drought and locust infestation



2 NIGER

10.8 million
3.7 million
34%


Drought and locust infestation in 2004



3 CHAD

9.7 million
270,000
3%


Refugees fleeing Central African Republic and Darfur in Sudan. HIV rate: 4.8%



4 SUDAN

32.2 million
8.5 million
26%


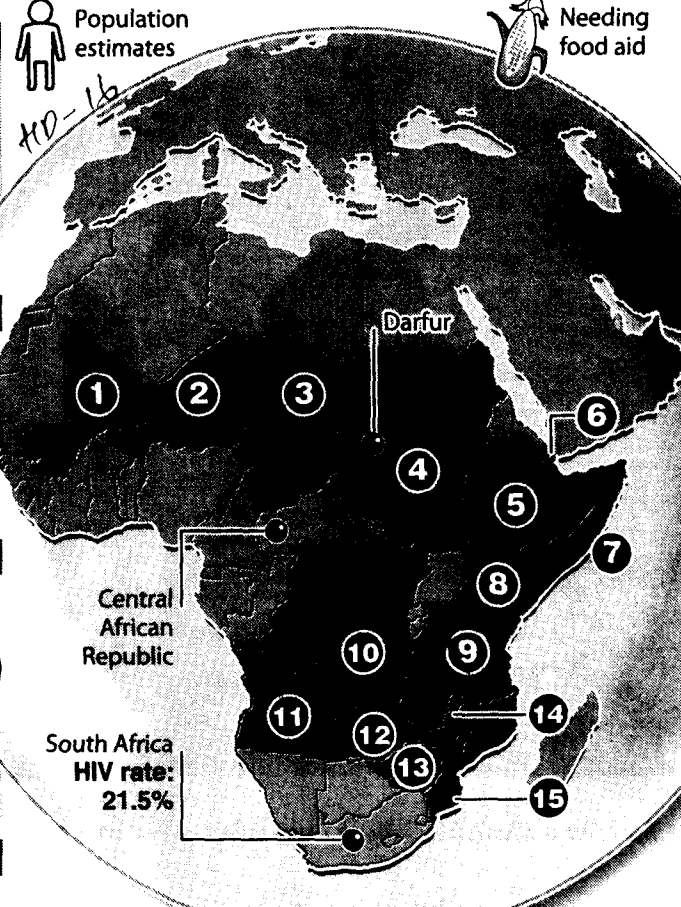
22 years of civil war in south has left 6 million displaced people. Conflict continues in Darfur



5 ETHIOPIA

77.4 million
1.8 million
2.3%


Drought, refugees, over-population HIV rate: 4.4%

6 DJIBOUTI

790,000
150,000
19%


Drought



7 SOMALIA

8.2 million
2.0 million
24%


Five cycles of failed rains have killed half of all herds. 15 years of civil war



8 KENYA

34.3 million
3.5 million
10%


Droughts in north



9 TANZANIA

38.4 million
3.7 million
10%


Drought has slashed hydro-electricity production HIV rate: 8.8%



10 D.R. CONGO

52.8 million
3 million
6%


Five years of war, conflict continues in east. Disease has ruined cassava crop



11 ANGOLA

15.9 million
900,000
6%


Decades of war



12 ZAMBIA

11.7 million
1.2 million
10%


Drought. HIV rate: 16.5%



13 ZIMBABWE

13.0 million
4.3 million
33%


Economic and political crisis. HIV rate: 25%



14 MALAWI

12.9 million
4.9 million
38%


Lowest maize harvest in decade. HIV rate: 20%



15 MOZAMBIQUE

19.8 million
500,000
2.5%

HIV rate: 16%



Sources: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, World Food Programme, UNAids

06 MAR 2006

THE HINEY

New Premier for Jamaica

KINGSTON (JAMAICA): A Cabinet Minister narrowly beat a former Rastafarian in internal presidential elections for Jamaica's ruling party, positioning her to become the next Prime Minister and first woman head of the state. Portia Simpson Miller, Local Government Minister, received 1,775 votes, while Peter Phillips, National Security Minister, came in second with 1,548 ballots, said Danville Walker, director of elections on Saturday. About 3,800 delegates of the People's National Party voted. Three Cabinet Ministers and a party vice-president were vying in the internal election to replace the party's president, Jamaican Prime Minister P.J. Patterson, who said he would resign by April after 14 years on the job. Since the PNP



Portia Simpson Miller

holds a majority of seats in Parliament, its president automatically becomes Prime Minister. — AP

2-11-006

THE HINDU

Museveni wins Uganda election



Yoweri Museveni

KAMPALA: Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni won the country's first multi-party polls since 1980, according to official results released on Saturday giving him an insurmountable lead over opposition challenger Kizza Besigye.

The Electoral Commission said Mr. Museveni had taken 60.8 per cent of Thursday's vote to Besigye's 36 per cent with 91 per cent of polling stations reporting, making his bid to extend a 20-year hold on power an unannounced certainty.

The commission did not declare a winner but the results ended Mr. Besigye's last hope of forcing a run-off — required if no candidate takes more than 50 per cent — mathematically impossible.

Final results were due later on Saturday.

Mr. Museveni's ruling National Resistance Movement party claimed victory on Friday, saying the 62-year-old had secured a third elected term with at least 63 per cent of the vote. Mr. Besigye's party threatened to reject the results, alleging irregularities and accusing election officials of altering returns in favour of Mr. Museveni. — AFP

26 FEB 2006

THE HINDU

Ugandans vote in huge numbers

KAMPALA: Ugandans turned out in droves on Thursday for landmark polls dominated by President Yoweri Museveni's bid to beat the most serious challenge to his 20-year rule from Opposition leader Kizza Besigye.

Security was tight for the East African nation's first multi-party elections in 26 years as long lines of voters queued at nearly 20,000 polling stations despite fears of unrest after a tension-fraught campaign punctuated by violence. The process was disrupted in parts of the country by heavy downpours that rained chaos on open-air voting centres. About 10.4 million Ugandans are eligible to vote for one of five presidential candidates and the 310-member Parliament but the campaign has been overshadowed by the main contenders in the race. — AFP

THE HINDU

27 killed in Nigeria toon riots

REUTERS

Onitsha, February 22

AT LEAST 27 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in the eastern Nigerian city of Onitsha on Wednesday by Christians taking revenge for the killing of Christians in northern Nigeria at the weekend.

An eyewitness saw at least 27 bodies, some burned and others with their stomachs cut open, as thousands of youths brandishing cutlasses and sticks ran through the streets chanting slogans and harassing passers-by.

Security forces guarded religious buildings and patrolled streets in several cities after violence spurred by the Prophet cartoons forced thousands from their homes.

"The political atmosphere is very bad and with a lot of unemployed youths. So this kind of crisis starts easily," said Adamu Abubakar, a Red Cross official in the northeastern city of Bauchi.

In UK, the far right British National Party (BNP) is reportedly seeking to exploit the cartoon controversy by using the blasphemous sketches in its local election campaign in May, reports HTC from London. The BNP is feared by all the major political parties for its record of stirring racial emotions over issues of immigration. Its leader, Nick Griffin, has been tried for inciting racial hatred.

CARTOON CONTROVERSY | Danish daily publishes apology in Saudi-owned Arab daily

Nigeria faces world's bloodiest toon riots

AGENCIES

KANO, FEBRUARY 19

Troops enforced a curfew in parts of northern Nigeria today after protests over cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad triggered riots in two cities that left 16 people dead and 11 churches burned. In recent weeks, Muslims around the world have been protesting against the publication of caricatures of the Prophet, but Nigeria's unrest was the bloodiest and most sectarian yet seen.

In the Borno state capital Maiduguri, Muslims turned on the local Christian minority after police broke up a rally against the drawings, burning shops and churches, and killing 15 people, police spokesman Hazirwendi said.

In Katsina, police opened fire into a crowd of stone-throwers, killing one and injuring others, he said, adding 220 arrests were made in the two incidents so far.

A witness told AFP that



Protesters throw stones at police during a rally in Islamabad

trouble had only broken out in Katsina when the crowd had begun protesting against rumours that President Olusegun Obasanjo might change the Constitution to allow him to stand for a third term.

The decision by some rioters to turn against their neighbours will revive fears of communal unrest in a region where many Muslims and Christians have been killed in

tor-in-Chief Carsten Juste and was also posted in Arabic on Jyllands-posten's website under a link titled "a new formulation for the apology."

"We did not set out to offend or insult any religion. We apologise for being misunderstood and reiterate that we did not intend to target anyone... I hope this clears the misunderstanding and god bless," said the statement, the move comes after at least 32 people were killed and dozens wounded since Tuesday in violent riots over the cartoons sweeping through Libya, Nigeria and Pakistan.

On the other hand, several people were injured in police firing and violent clashes between Pakistan's security forces and members of Islamic parties who defied a ban today and held a protest rally against the publication of Prophet cartoons. Seeking to avoid a repeat of violence that occurred in a similar rally here on February 14, which left at least two people dead,

Danish cartoonist has no regrets

LONDON: The Danish cartoonist whose depiction of Prophet Muhammad sparked worldwide violence has broken his silence, saying he has no regret for his action and that freedom of expression and the press were vital to a democratic society. In an interview to the Glasgow Herald Kurt Westergaard claimed he had no regrets about his actions, despite the \$one million bounty put on his head last week by a Pakistani cleric, which has forced him to go into hiding. Asked if he had expected the controversy the caricatures would spark, he replied simply, "No, no." When asked if he regretted drawing the cartoon or its publication, he said again: "No."

heavily armed police and para-military forces fought pitched battles with members of Islamic parties at the busy Abpara junction. The government had banned today's protest.

—AFP/PTI

A sign of return to order in Liberia

West African nation is savouring a fragile peace and normality

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Rory Carroll

They do not always work, and when they do motorists tend to ignore them. But for Liberia, the arrival of the first traffic lights in 16 years is reason to celebrate.

After almost two decades of war and anarchy, the West African nation is savouring a fragile peace and with it the promise of normality. The capital, Monrovia, may still resemble an apocalyptic ruin, but it does now boast the country's first working traffic lights, the BBC has re-

ported. The lights, erected near the port, are supposed to impose some order on the chaotic traffic that has clogged streets since peace ushered in a boom in the use and ownership of cars.

Symbolic location

The location is symbolic: the port was a key battleground when rebels closed in on Monrovia in 2003 and forced the then warlord President, Charles Taylor, to flee into exile. With so many buildings destroyed and so few jobs for a youthful popula-

tion born and reared into mayhem, the flashing green and red offers cautious but tangible evidence that normality may be returning to what was once a stable and relatively prosperous nation.

But there are regular electricity blackouts. And it does not help that many motorists are too young to know basic road rules, such as what the signals mean. Older drivers will need to unlearn war-time habits of speeding and weaving to dodge mortars. Traffic police hope that

the lights will be extended to the rest of the city to make directing motorists less like herding cattle. The election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who was inaugurated as President last week, has raised hopes that Liberia can utilise the goodwill of the U.S. and African governments to help rebuild.

The President, who was feted at this week's African Union summit in Sudan, has promised to restore electricity to Monrovia within six months. —
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Ailing Emir of Kuwait Steps Down, Ending a Succession Crisis

By HASSAN M. FATTAH

KUWAIT, Jan. 23 - Kuwait's ailing emir, Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah, stepped down as head of state late Monday, ending a weeklong succession crisis that pitted the opposing branches of the Kuwaiti royal family in an extraordinary public battle for control. He is to be replaced by the current prime minister, Sheik Sabah Ahmad al-Sabah, officials said.

The emir agreed to step down after a late-night meeting of family elders on the eve of an extraordinary parliamentary session that was to begin deliberations on deposing him, in accordance with the Kuwaiti Constitution. Parliament is to meet Tuesday morning, when it is expected to accept the emir's abdication.

The emir's health was at the center of a deepening struggle that began almost the day after the death of the previous emir, Sheik Jaber al-Sabah, on Jan. 15.

Sheik Saad, a portly 76-year-old who has suffered from colon cancer and is thought to be gravely ill, insisted he was fit for the job, and was to take the oath of office on Tuesday evening. But he has been seen publicly in the last week in a wheelchair and has not spoken in public, prompting many to wonder about his mental capacities in addition to his health.

Some of the emir's supporters saw the constitutional battle as a ruse to settle old scores and concentrate power in the Salem branch of the family, now led by Sheik Sabah, who has been de facto ruler of Kuwait ever since Emir Jaber fell ill in 2000.

Kuwait has long been governed by a gentlemen's agreement in which rule switches back and forth between the Salem and Jaber branches of the Sabah family. Sheik Sabah presumably would have been crown prince under Emir Saad. But the political crisis had put even that tradition in question, as others vied for the post.

"Everyone knows that that there's an old rivalry between Sheik Sabah and Sheik Saad; what you see is an outgrowth of that," said Muhammad al-Jasem, who recently stepped down as editor of the daily Al Watan and of Newsweek Arabic, the Arabic-language version of the newsmagazine.

The current standoff, Mr. Jasem said, was essentially a case of old familial rivalries gone public. "There is a total breakdown of trust between either side," he said.

Deposing the emir would have required a two-thirds majority in the 50-member Parliament, which was far from guaranteed. The emir's backers, meanwhile, sought to encourage him to read the oath of office to stem the debate over his fitness for office and gain full powers.

Over the weekend, the fight spilled into the streets of Kuwait City, with supporters of each sheik putting up posters and mysterious rumors circulating that foreign dignitaries were secretly landing in Kuwait to help end the standoff. There were reports of a video recording of Sheik Saad speaking, apparently to prove he was lucid.

The standoff had begun to take a toll on the country. Concerns grew over security and stability, with the Kuwaiti stock market plummeting Saturday after Sheik Sabah's threat to depose the emir. Meanwhile, the succession crisis threatened to delay a parliamentary decision to allow international oil companies back into Kuwait to help develop its northern oilfields.

Many Kuwaitis saw the crisis and its conclusion as a victory for Kuwait's Constitution and the rule of law. Despite the heated battle, they said, life went on as normal in the city-state, and its basic stability was never in question.

"You have to be impressed that in a developing-world nation, built on tribalism and run by one family, you can go through something like this while life goes on outside, without security men or tanks on the street," Mr. Jasem said. "Maybe in the gulf we look bad," he added, speaking of the unusually public nature of the battle, "but to the world we should look good."

Africa's only woman head of state



TRAILBLAZER: Liberian President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.
- PHOTO: REUTERS

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf will have an impact well beyond her own country. ✓

Cameron Duodu

On JANUARY 16, 159 years after the first modern nation in Africa was established by freed American slaves, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf will be inaugurated as its first woman President. She will also be the continent's first woman elected head of state. The challenges she will face are immense. Liberia has just emerged from 15 years of civil war, in which its people have been butchered and demoralised; there is no electricity in parts of the capital, Monrovia; water supply systems have been almost universally destroyed and schools looted or burned down; and hospitals and clinics exist in name only.

Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf has spent most of her working life with international organisations, such as the World Bank and U.N. development programme, and private financial institutions, including Citibank in New York. She intends to use her experience to negotiate finance deals that can put the Liberian economy back on its feet. She will also encourage the million Liberian refugees to return home.

Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf was imprisoned in the 1980s by one of Africa's most brutal dictators, Samuel Doe. Doe's successor, Charles Taylor, charged her with treason and jailed her. After her election victory last November, she told me: "I have been kept going all these years by my irreversible commitment to democracy and the social and economic development of Liberia."

One of her tasks is to bring on board George Weah, the football superstar she beat in the presidential run-off. He had attracted the support of many of the young and jobless who, in the civil war, acted as hired guns. They have now been disarmed by the U.N., and some look to Mr. Weah to fill their pockets with his football dollars. Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf recognises the danger they could pose to the nation's rebuilding. "My priority will be to educate our young people and provide them with opportunities for reintegrating," she explains.

She has calmed the disappointed Mr. Weah, whose election petition against Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf — claiming fraud in some areas — nearly rekindled violence in the country. It is expected that Mr. Weah will have a seat in her new Cabinet.

Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf is aware that her performance will be used as a marker that will either push or halt the progress of women throughout Africa. A Unicef report a month ago estimated the number of young women who undergo genital mutilation in Africa and the Middle East at about three million a year. Worse still, their traditional child-rearing role often prevents African women from entering politics in large enough numbers to change such odious practices.

Only Uganda and Mozambique have set aside seats for women in parliament, but even there men try to manipulate the process so that they can keep out "strong" women. And because it is men who control the budgets, health services throughout Africa are still inadequate — even in Nigeria, an oil-rich country, one in every 18 women is likely to die from pregnancy-related causes.

Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf could be forgiven if she concentrated solely on Liberia's problems. But her style is to confront problems wherever she sees them.

She will need firm principles to withstand the international carpetbaggers who will flock to Liberia. She will also have to use her financial expertise to balance Liberia's need for massive overseas investment against the tendency of donor organisations to dictate the national interests of recipient countries.

And there is serious concern in Liberia that Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf's economic policies will be wedded to free-market principles.

She must not devote herself to the interests of the few in the vain hope that the benefits of their wealth will trickle down to the huge numbers who wallow in poverty.

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(Cameron Duodu is a Ghanaian novelist and journalist.)

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