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FAMINE RESPONSE:

THE 1984-85 ETHIOPIAN FAMINE

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Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end.

- Immanuel Kant
Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, 1785

It is a fundamental responsibility of governments to work together for higher food production and a more equitable and efficient distribution of food between countries.

- Universal Declaration on the Eradication
of Hunger and Malnutrition, Rome 1974

FAMINE RESPONSE: THE 1984-85 ETHIOPIAN FAMINE

Habibul Haque Khondker

The Ethiopian famine of the 1984-85 has been one of the most tragic episodes in recent history. The Ethiopian famine like most other famines before it was the outcome of a complex set of interacting factors. It was precipitated by a drought, degrading environment, a civil war and a series of politico-economic factors one of which was the land-reform initiatives taken by the Derg (also spelt Derg)¹ government. Some of the politico-economic roots of this famine lie in the very nature of the global system. Some writers even attributed the famine to the revolution of 1974 that overthrew the old Regime of Haile Selassie.² The crisis, after some time, evoked an international response which was extraordinary to say the least. Rather than exploring the causes of this great human tragedy at any great length, in this paper we examine the pattern of the response to the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85.

The phenomenon of famine response, thanks to media, has attracted widespread attention in recent years. Such media events like 'Bandaid' 'Live aid' etc. have also helped to arouse world-wide consciousness. In a sense, famines have been rediscovered in the late twentieth century. Famines, like wars, are constant reminders that despite (or - as some writers hold - because of) a whole range of scientific, technological and organizational developments and visible improvements in the living conditions of people in many parts of the world, there remain problems amidst us which are more befitting to the Middle Ages. The Shahel famine of 1973-74, the Bangladesh famine of 1974, the Kampuchean famine of 1979, the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85 are the recent episodes in a long series of tragedies accompanying

humankind since time immemorial.

Although the heightened awareness and concern for the famine victims are encouraging signs, these should not divert one's attention from the factors which create the famine situations in the first place. By and large, most people including the administrators and a number of social scientists see famines as events. For the administrators these are events whether 'man-made' or 'nature-made' or mixtures of both which call for emergency intervention. From the administrative point of view it pays off to see famines as extraordinary events or periods of crisis to which the administrators can react. And the administrative actions, if these can be executed without political interference and other interruptions, seek to attain a status quo ante. Attempts to eliminate the conditions which cause famine are hardly taken. For the social scientists who perceive famines as events highlight the catastrophic nature of these breakdowns in a taken-for-granted social order. Very rarely attempts are made to scratch below the surface to study the structural conditions which render certain countries, and certain regions, classes and status-groups therein more vulnerable to famines than others.

Amirta Rangasami has defined famine as a process rather than an event. On the basis of her field experience in India she suggests that a period of scarcity usually sets off a process of starvation in an impoverished community which leads to famishment and eventually to death. "The Famine process can be broken up into three distinct periods: the onset of the process can be termed 'dearth'. ...To describe the second phase, I will use the term 'famishment'. ...For the third and final phase, which subsumes the physiological as well as the social, I shall use the term 'morbidity',..."³ Official

definition of famine coincides with the last phase of this process. The definitional aspect of famine is relevant to us specially for its implications for the response and the effectiveness of the response in terms of saving human lives. If famine is defined as death on a large-scale resulting from starvation the last stage in Rangasami's definition - the response will not be very effective. More lives could have been saved had interventions been made earlier.

In modern history, perhaps the whole issue of famine response never received more attention than it did in India under the British rule. Famines were not the consequence of British colonialism in India notwithstanding such claims made by a number of Marxist historians. History of famines in India predates the British, even the Muslim rulers before them. The British rule by introducing and in many cases expanding the commercialization of agriculture made the peasant economy more vulnerable to famines. Yet famines were counterproductive for systematic economic exploitation. A certain degree of hunger works well as a whip to keep the peasants and agricultural workers disciplined but when the peasants and the agricultural day labourers are overtaken by hunger, they leave their homesteads and wander away in search of food with destructive consequence on agricultural production. The British rulers were keenly interested in embarking on timely relief measures not only for humanitarian grounds but also to check the downward spiral of falling land revenues. But in the carefully crafted Famine Manual, the colonial rulers listed unusual wandering of people as an indicator of the impending famine. The Bengal Famine code of 1913, section 34 (clause 2) states that at the time of drought one of the items on which the superintendent of Police shall submit periodical reports to the District officer is "any wandering of needy, starving persons".⁴

But the brisk migration and an unusual wandering were signs of an advanced stage in the famine process.

Famine is both a process and an event. It is what Bruce Currey calls a "Syndrome". "Syndromes," Currey writes, "by definition not only have several signs, but also they usually have several as yet undermined causes." ⁵ The response activities which, viewing famine as a process, aim at prevention of famine and the activities which emphasizing the event-like features of famine adopt curative measures are both important. It is, therefore, important to consider both the short-term and the long-term anti-famine measures.

In discussing the patterns of response to the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85 we need to discuss both short-term and long-term responses. Short-term response includes emergency relief measures and the outpouring of generosity, long-term response includes the structural factors which constrain the short-term response. The geopolitical factors are particularly important in the discussions of famine and famine response in Ethiopia.

The response to the 1984-85 Ethiopian famine has been unprecedented not only in terms of generosity of the general public, private groups and the voluntary agencies in the western world but also by the indifference and callousness of the governments of the western countries, Soviet Russia, its East European allies - and that of Ethiopia itself. Private citizens and groups all over the world responded to the crisis with a heightened sense of fellow feeling and such efforts like bandaid, liveaid, and sportaid raised not only much needed funds but also a good deal of public awareness in the West about the famine victims in Africa. The media also played a praiseworthy role in disseminating news of the famine. The Vietnam war is regarded as the first major war on television. In the same vein,

the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85 was the first major famine on television.

In order to understand the international aspect of the response to this famine we need to put in perspective the global political situation in which Ethiopia was at the time of the famine. In so far as the response of the Ethiopian government to the 1984-85 famine is concerned one would detect a great deal of mismanagement, ill planning, and inefficiency. Political considerations were often at the forefront of the relief activities. But if we compare it with the response of the Haile Selassie government to the famine of 1972-74 a certain degree of improvement can be noted. One of the major improvements being the formation of the Relief and Rehabilitation commission in the aftermath of the 1974 revolution. According to an independent observer in 1983:

Before the revolution (of 1974) the people would throw themselves at the mercy of the Emperor in the knowledge that the State traditionally felt obliged to care for them. When so many people died in 1973 there was widespread protest that the State had failed in its duty and the famine was a contributing factor in the downfall of the Emperor. The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission was set up in part to ensure that such a failure would never be repeated. It has developed strategies for the prediction and early warning of famine through regular monitoring of crop yields and grain prices. Whilst many argue that these measures are not precise enough to be effective, they indicate the commitment the RRC has made to pre-disaster planning and the seriousness with which it views its obligations.⁶

It may be a worthwhile exercise to explore in details the differences between the response of these two regimes: one ostensibly a feudal - imperial, the other a Marxist, in order to judge their relative efficacy and commitment to the welfare of the people. But our concern in this paper is less ambitious. It is also useful to examine not only the response of a government to a crisis like famine, but also to investigate the long standing policies and structural bases of these

governments to assess their contributions to the causation of the famine in the first place. Some writers, like Paul Henze, attribute the famine of 1984-5 to the land-reform policies of the Derug government. The Soviet-style collectivization policy not only resulted in a decline in food production but also decline in coffee production, resulting a fall in export earnings.⁷ But contribution of the land-reform programs to famine was only one of the factors in preceptitating the crisis. There were several other factors involved which are to be taken into account.

Let us try to put the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85 in a clearer perspective. Ethiopia, is an agricultural country. Agriculture provides employment for 85 percent of the labor force and accounts for nearly 50 percent of the gross domestic production (GDP). Agricultural exports - mainly coffee, hides and skins, oil seeds and cotton - provide 90 per cent of Ethiopia's foreign exchange and taxes on coffee are the largest single source of government revenue.⁸ Geographically, the country can be divided into the highlands of the north and the lowlands of the south. A land of great physical diversities, Ethiopia is a topographers delight. Covering more than 472,000 square miles in size, land is not scarce in Ethiopia in comparison, say, with South or South-East Asia. On average 11 percent of all holdings lie fallow each year.

Historically, Ethiopia, earlier known as Abyssinia, was not a single compact bloc clearly marked off from the countries surrounding it. Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) had laid the first foundation of a centralized Ethiopia at the beginning of the 20th century.⁹ Famines in Ethiopia are not new. Father Lobo, a Jesuit priest from Portugal who lived in Ethiopia from 1624 to 1633 describes one of the famines in Tigre during his stay in the following words:

"...Our house was perpetually surrounded by some of those unhappy people, whom want had compelled to abandon their habitations, and whose pale cheeks and meagre bodies were undeniable proofs of their misery and distress. All the relief I could possibly afford them could not prevent the death of such numbers that their bodies filled the highways;...."¹⁰

References of famines are found in the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries. And from 1540 to 1800, 23 major famines are recorded.¹¹ But the most devastating famine with far-reaching demographic, political, and economic consequences in modern Ethiopian history was the Great Famine of 1888-92. This famine was caused by a combination of natural calamities : major rinderpest epidemic, drought, harvest failure, and an outbreak of locusts and caterpillars.¹² Geography then, as it now, played a vital role in causing famines in Ethiopia. It is the geographical setting which is both a blessing and a curse for Ethiopia.

The famine of 1984-85 was neither unanticipated nor unusual. The storm cloud of the famine was seen in the long-term environmental degradation of catastrophic proportion in parts of Ethiopia especially in the north as well as the absence of the long rain in the summer of 1983. The damage done to the environment in Ethiopia is a tragedy in itself. So many trees have been felled for fuel that forests cover only about 3 percent of Ethiopia's terrain. Denuded soil erodes rapidly and gives up its moisture easily. And with so few trees to harvest, farmers have had little choice but to burn dung for fuel, robbing the soil of vital nutrients. Rapid population growth has aggravated Ethiopia's environmental problem because less and less land is being left fallow while more land of marginal potential has been coming under the blow. Environmental degradation in Ethiopia, in the form of erosion and deforestation, has been going on for centuries.

According to United Nations estimates, Ethiopia currently loses around 1.6 billion tonnes of its precious topsoil every year through wind and water erosion. Population pressure has especially contributed to deforestation. A century ago about 44 percent of Ethiopia was forested; however the incessant search for fuelwood and construction timber by the ever-burgeoning population meant that, by 1950, the forest area had been reduced to 16 percent.¹³ Today it is down to 3/4 percent - all of which is in the south; the north is completely bald.

Another important cause of soil erosion has been poor and unplanned management of water resources: This meant, according to Oxfam, that

Water cascaded off the bare slopes at high speed, washing topsoil indiscriminately off the land during the rainy season; while in the drought there was no reservoir from which to irrigate crops. The rain also washed loose stones and boulders, once anchored by tree roots, from the hilltops down into the fields below, making the land more difficult to work and further decreasing its fertility. What protective vegetation remained after every available hectare had been cultivated was grazed and trampled to extinction.¹⁴

Prior to the 1972-74 famine, and to the revolution, nothing was done to reverse the trend of ecological degradation. The disaster seems to be a continuous one. While Wollo and Tigre were desperately trying to recover from the effects of the 1972-74 famine, the south-eastern lowlands of Harerghe and Bale were falling into the grip of an equally severe drought which by 1975 had seriously disrupted the way of life of the nomadic pastoralists of the Ogaden. The disruption was further complicated by the Ogaden war of 1977-78. Ogaden was a bone of contention between Ethiopia and its neighbor in the east Somalia. In 1948 the Ogaden was incorporated into the empire, to the dismay of Somalia which had historically considered it culturally and

politically a part of its own territory. Since Somalia's independence in 1962, she has persisted her claim on the Ogaden which was escalated into a full-scale war between Somalia and Ethiopia in 1977. Although Soviet Russia was an ally of Somalia until the mid-1970s it supported Ethiopia in this war. Soviet and Cuban aid and military force was instrumental in defeating Somalia's invasion of the Ogaden.

The political disruptions in Eritrea, Tigre and Wollo also played a major role in the creation of the famine. Whether Eritrea in the northern core was historically a part of Ethiopia is matter of considerable debate. According to some writers neither 'Eritrea' nor 'Ethiopia' as presently constituted existed in the pre-colonial period.¹⁵ Ethiopia was one of the exceptions in being able to escape colonial domination. In the heyday of European expansionism in Africa, Italy established its foothold in Eritrea. The defeat of Italy in 1941 ended the domination of Eritrea. The 45 years of foreign domination did much to create a separate Eritrean consciousness, and there were groups within Eritrea who were determined to maintain an identity separate from that of Ethiopia. The Eritrean problem was "solved" by the United Nations which worked out a plan under which Eritrea would be federated with Ethiopia and maintain an autonomous existence. The federation was tenuous from the first days of its inception in 1952. Through the shady but deft political manipulations of Haile Selassie, Eritrea was absorbed in Ethiopia in 1962. But the incorporation was neither smooth nor did it go unchallenged. The Eritrean Liberation Front and its subsequent factions continued to press on with their demands for creating an independent Eritrea and by early 1978 at the backdrop of the Ogaden war of 1977 they were able to claim control of most of Eritrea. Both the old and the new post-revolutionary regime considered Eritrea vital to Ethiopia's interest because of the former's position on the Red

sea. Without Eritrea, Ethiopia is land-locked. The two primary ports of Massawa and Assab are located in Eritrea and provide Ethiopia access to the Red sea. The Eritrean war which has claimed more lives in internecine conflicts than in the confrontation with the Ethiopian army¹⁶ played a major part in worsening the impact of the famine. In some of the places the Ethiopian government did not send relief foods and in some others it could not. The Eritrean movement also radicalized the movement for autonomy in the neighbouring province of Tigre which was also worst hit in the famine of 1984-85. Anti-government guerillas claimed that the Marxist Mengistu government withheld food relief from rebel-held areas of Eritrea and Tigre.

Complicating the natural factor and the civil war was the land reform efforts of the Deruge government of Lt. Col. Mengitsu. The land reform, according to Marina Ottaway, rather than removing obstacles inherited from the imperial regime, added new obstacles to agricultural development. In old-regime Ethiopia the overwhelming majority of the peasants cultivating the land had to give the landlords part of their crop either as feudal dues or as rent. Besides, tenant farmers had no security of tenure, which was a major disincentive to investment. "The 1975 land reform nationalized all land, abolished feudal dues and rents, and imposed a low tax on land. However, it also destroyed the few mechanisms for agricultural growth that had developed during the preceding decade and it created a potentially serious problem of land fragmentation."¹⁷

Moreover, Ethiopia did not possess a bureaucratic agency that could implement the land reform, and it had neither the time nor the resources to create such an agency."¹⁸ The land reform program based on the slogan "land to the tiller" was enforced in 1978, four years after the overthrow of the old regime. The collectivization program

was a failure in economic terms although politically it helped the socialist government mobilizing the support of the peasants. From 1974-8 GDP rose by only 0.4 percent,¹⁹ while from 1970-81 its growth rate declined by 50 percent.²⁰ From 1973-84 hunger still affected some 15 million people, while by the late 1970s agriculture grew at merely 0.5 percent, as per capita income at \$120 remains the fifth lowest in the world.²¹ Most strikingly, in 1978 food production remained 16 per cent below its level of 1970.²²

The percapita calorie intake in Ethiopia declined in the 1970s, and in 1980 it stood at 76.4 percent of the required intake compared to 87.2 percent in 1970.

TABLE 1:

CALORIE SUPPLY PERCAPITA (Percentage of Requirements)

Year	1960	1970	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Intake	90.8	87.2	76.8	79.8	78.4	74.2	73.6	76.4

Source: World Tables, The Third Edition, Vol.11. World bank, 1984, p.30.

From a strictly economic point of view, that is in terms of the output of food crops the land reform was ineffective with disastrous consequence. But from a larger politico-economic angle it was necessary to break the pattern of fuedal landownership in the countryside. The land reform itself was not an unwise step under those circumstances but one would be hardpressed to see the rationale for coercive collectivization program that the deruge government adopted except for its politico-ideological advantages.

Unlike the famine of the early 1970s, the Deruge government did not try to suppress the news of famine. In 1973 although concern was raised about the spreading drought, the imperial government of Haile Selassie refused to acknowledge the crisis. Afraid that the image of Ethiopia and more particularly of his regime would be tarnished if world publicity were directed at Ethiopia's inability to feed its stricken population, Haile Selassie refused to allow international relief organizations to come to Ethiopia's aid. The relief organizations also remained silent in the initial phase of the impending disaster and went along with Ethiopia's cover up of the famine.

Minister of Information of Haile Selassie told a polish author:

...death from hunger had existed in our Empire for hundreds of years, an everyday, natural thing, and it never occurred to anyone to make any noise about it. Drought would come and the earth would dry up, the cattle would drop dead, then peasants would starve... its not bad for national order and a sense of national humility that the subjects be rendered skinnier, thinned down a bit. Our religion ordains a strict fast for half of all the days in the year, and our commandments say that whoever breaks the fast commits a deadly sin... A man starved all his life will never rebel. ...The usefulness of going hungry is that a hungry man thinks only of bread. He's all wrapped up in the thought of food.²³

By late 1972 there were many early signs of a crisis in the making. In December 1972 the Ethiopian Red Cross was already trying to help over a thousand refugees from Wollo who had arrived outside Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital. By early 1973 crowds were lining parts of the north-south highway through Wollo, stopping buses and cars to ask for food.²⁴

The imperial government refusing to take any responsibility for dealing with the crisis, drought spread to famine claiming 300,000 people in eleven regions. According to a 1974, UN Food and

Agriculture Organization Report, 2 million Ethiopians were made destitute by the famine between 1973 and 1974.²⁵ Whole villages and districts were deserted while life was shattered; in some areas there was nothing left for Ethiopian peasants to return to. The famine with its disastrous economic consequences became Haile Selassie's political coffin. It is clear that the seriousness of the famine was systematically minimized by the government at the early stages despite the grim warning sounded by the Ministry of Agriculture in November 1972. Only in November 1973, some eleven months after the drought began, did the emperor permit relief supplies into Ethiopia. Only then did it leak out to an astounded World that organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) had participated with Haile Selassie in covering up the tragedy.²⁶

By February 1974 when Haile Selassie had made the first public pronouncements on the famine, the monarchy and the entire feudal system with it was already disintegrating. In the wake of civil disturbances reflecting public concern over increasing prices, soaring inflation, unemployment and the spreading famine, dissident military forces took over a number of Ethiopian cities and surrounded all public buildings in Addis Ababa. The creeping coup culminated in the overthrow of Haile Selassie on 12 September 1974, the day after the disastrous film on famine was shown on T.V.²⁷

Emperor Haile Selassie sought to hide the famine and in doing so contributed to his ouster. By contrast, the Marxist government of Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam appealed for international aid and geared up emergency measures to combat famine. "But despite the Government's accomplishments," The New York Times reported, "representatives of most private relief agencies and diplomats said in interviews (in

early September, 1984) that Ethiopia had failed to place sufficiently high priority on feeding its hungry people.

In addition, several international economists argued that Ethiopia's commitment to the expansion of state farms and other socialist policies was hindering the development of the country's agriculture.²⁸

The 1984-85 famine was also preceded by two successive droughts. Based on the droughts of 1982 and 1983, FAO estimated that Ethiopia's total crop production for 1984 would be severely curtailed: down by at least 30 per cent on the year before with a resultant shortfall between 1.7 and 2 million tonnes. This was roughly equivalent to the ordinary consumption of between 6.5 and 8 million persons.

As early as May 1981, Ethiopia's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission in a U.N. sponsored conference spoke of an alarming deterioration in weather conditions in Ethiopia with rain failures and drought becoming the norm in many parts of the country. It was predicted that unless international community took swift action this would certainly lead to famine. "To alleviate the suffering of the people", The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) admonished, "emergency assistance, such as grain, supplementary food, edible oil, drugs, vaccines, transportation and communication facilities, are urgently required."²⁹ The warnings continued, growing in stridency and frequency, throughout 1982 and 1983; however, they aroused absolutely no international interest.

On 19 January, 1984, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) warned that the food supply outlook for Africa in 1984 remained serious. In a continuing downward spiral, cereal production dropped 1.4 million tons in 1983 from the 1982 level in the

24 most severely affected countries.

By the beginning of 1984 Ethiopia faced an emergency on a quite unprecedented scale and, in March of that year, the RRC reported that upwards of five million people were at risk because Ethiopia could produce only 6.2 million tons of grain a year, one million less than it needs.³¹ This report was picked up by the western media, received some response from the western public, but, other than eliciting a few lethargic pledges, was ignored by western governments. Although the shortfall was then estimated to be one million tons, the RRC requested only 450,000 tons because the commission could hope to reach only 50 per cent of one million tons through the existing roads and railroad transport. Kenneth King, the UN representative to Ethiopia in a BBC interview in August, 1984 said, "Just by an administrative bureaucratic stroke 50 percent of the people who were affected - 2.6 million - were just written off."³² In August 1984 the RRC made this disturbing statement at an international gathering in Addis Ababa: "We have had no grain in our stocks since mid-July. The situation becomes even more grave when one sees the uncertainties of the March pledges by donors. Since our March appeal roughly 87,000 tonnes of grain and 8,000 tonnes of supplementary food were expected. Unfortunately, however, no shipment of the pledged food has yet been received. Despite our repeated requests to donors to push forward the arrival time of food commodities, the response is still very slow..."³³

It was not until late October 1984, when the BBC film exposed the true extent and horror of the Ethiopian disaster, and when people of the industrialized nations began to demand action from their governments, that the brakes were taken off and that food aid began to be despatched in significant quantities.³⁴

The UNICEF representative in Addis Ababa said: "we have been asking for help since early 1983. It seems you have to have thousands
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of corpses before people will sit up and take notice."

By October 1984 hunger in Ethiopia had become starvation. It is only at that stage the international community began to respond.

In Britain alone, by mid-November 1984 - less than a month after the news of the famine had first broken - Oxfam was able to report that its Ethiopia appeal had already raised over 2 million. Thanks to the early warnings of its field officers, Oxfam had despatched 14,000 tonnes of wheat to Ethiopia in September and, with the new money available, it was now possible to follow this up with further shipments and with deliveries of special "high-energy biscuits" - 65 tonnes of which reached the starving of Korem in the first week of November. In the same short period, Save the Children Fund's appeal also raised 2 million. A shipment of 1,500 tonnes of milled wheat was purchased and subsequently delivered in Assab in early December. Twenty-one tonnes of high-energy foodstuffs were also immediately flown to Addis Ababa. Christian Aid had raised 1 million by mid-November of which 650,000 was immediately distributed - mostly in the form of cash grants to relief organizations working in guerrilla-held
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areas of Eritrea and Tigre.

Thanks to the media coverage, private groups and general public from all over the western world responded to the Ethiopian generously. A pizza parlor in a small New England town, a parish in England and many people who did not even know where Ethiopia was or how to spell it contributed to the relief fund.
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In USA, National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) broadcast the BBC report on the Ethiopian famine which graphically showed the impact of famine especially on the

children. In the 36 hours after the film was first aired, more than 10,000 people called Save the Children to offer their help.³⁸ In the Northwest territories of Canada, two Eskimo villages raised \$7,000 for Ethiopian relief.³⁹

Although the response of the charitable organizations were remarkable, the response of the governments were rather slow. The slowness in the response of the governments was not simply due to bureaucratic inefficiencies. There were important politico-ideological factors involved.

Because of its direct access to the Red Sea and its location in the north of Africa, Ethiopia has been viewed by the superpowers as strategically and geopolitically important. Ethiopia is located overlooking the shipping lanes through which shipment of oil from Persian Gulf states to western Europe and the United States takes place. Commanding the narrow Straits of Babel - Mandele, Ethiopia - or a power allied to it - would be able to close the Red Sea in the event of global hostilities and would be well placed to control or disrupt the oil output of Arabia. Thus, both the United States and the Soviet Union have viewed Ethiopia as geographically central to their own national interests. Between 1953 and 1970, half of all United States military aid to Africa was sent to Ethiopia and the amount of military aid during the period totalled \$305 million.⁴⁰ The U.S. was by far the main supplier of arms and other military equipments to Ethiopia, and in addition 2,813 Ethiopian officers and pilots were trained in the USA itself at a cost of \$6.8 millions.⁴¹ The US-Ethiopian alliance did not reverse dramatically after the revolution of 1974. The US assistance continued as Soviet Russia remained a major backer of Somalia. But in 1977 at the onset of the Ogaden war between Somalia and Ethiopia the super power alliances were reversed.

Since 1977 more than \$3,000 million in military aid has been sent by the Soviet Union in Ethiopia, with estimated annual interest payments of \$200 million.⁴²

Between 1975 and 1980 Ethiopia imported a total of \$2310 million worth of arms of which \$1100 million worth of arms were imported in 1978.⁴³

TABLE 2:
ARMS IMPORTS IN ETHIOPIA, 1971 TO 1980 (IN MILLION DOLLARS)*

Year	Arms Imports	Total Imports	Arms Imports as percentage of Total Imports
1971	10	189	5.2
1972	10	189	5.2
1973	10	214	4.6
1974	10	283	3.5
1975	30	296	10.1
1976	50	355	14.0
1977	440	392	112.2
1978	1100	516	213.1
1979	210	567	37.0
1980	480	722	66.4

* Constant 1981

Source: World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1971-1980
U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. 1981 p.47.

Ethiopia, which desperately needs to concentrate all its resources on development, currently spends some \$440 million each year on its military forces. It has the largest army in black Africa - 306,000 men in 1984 - which includes one armoured division with 900 tanks. It was alleged that to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the coup that brought Mengistu to power, the Ethiopian government spent more than 100 million dollars in September, 1984 at a time when the signs of famine were becoming clear.⁴⁴ At that time as many as 10 million Ethiopians or a fourth of the country's population, were on

the edge of starvation and 100 people were dying each day.

The Ethiopian government of Lt. Col. Mengistu was warned of impending famine in 1982, in a report from a group of experts headed by Keith Griffin, an Oxford university economist. The Griffin team recommended immediate food rationing and heavy new emphasis on rural development. Mengistu ignored the advice. Instead, he poured 46 percent of Ethiopia's gross national product into military spending, buying at least \$2.5 billion worth of arms from the Soviet Union.⁴⁶

Friendship with Soviet Russia did not stand in good stead at the time of the crisis. Soviet block countries donated 30,000 metric tons of food of which 10,000 tons were from the Soviet Union itself. They also provided trucks, planes and helicopters to help in the distribution of relief.⁴⁷ Soviet food aid consisted of rice which is not particularly popular with the Ethiopians whose staple is Teff. But Soviet press presented the Soviet involvement in the Ethiopian famine relief with a twist. According to one report in Izvestia:

"Soviet cargo planes have already transported the first hundreds of tons of grain from the port of Assab to the administrative centers of the provinces of Tigre and Eriteria."⁴⁸

Izvestia neglected to mention that the food Soviet planes carried was donated by the western countries.

The United States responded slowly at first to the looming crisis. At the World Bank meeting in September, 1984, France proposed a special-aid program for Africa. The United States was not interested in that proposal. Ethiopia's status as a Soviet ally inhibited U.S. relief.⁴⁹ Although the United States was slow to respond it was the largest donor of all food aid to Ethiopia. In the

fiscal year 1983-84, which ended in September 30, 1984, the U.S. sent more than 130,000 metric tons in food assistance to Ethiopia. The U.S. and Britain also provided cargo planes to carry supplies to famine victims.

Although after an initial inertia U.S. government responded to the Ethiopian famine generously, the fact that the United States did cut off development aid to Ethiopia contributed to the unfolding of the crisis in the first place. All U.S. long-term economic aid to the Ethiopian government is banned by U.S. Congress because U.S. property was expropriated without compensation by Mengistu when he seized power in 1974.⁵⁰

The Ethiopian government was seriously constrained by logistical problem. Hans Einhaus, the director of UNDR0, said in Geneva. "The response in the case of Ethiopia was magnificent, but now we have 54 aircraft waiting to be unloaded at an airport which normally can deal with just three or four planes a day."⁵¹

A government spokesman told a meeting of international donors in New York on December 18, 1984 that Ethiopia needed 496 10-ton trucks, 834 22-ton trucks, and 50 cross-country vehicles. A special United Nations office coordinating aid in Ethiopia estimated at least 400 new trucks and the repair of another 400 trucks inside the country.⁵² The response of the international community in this regard was also favorable. Mercedes helped the Ethiopian government with spare parts and promised 90 trucks. The Fiat company promised 138 trucks, and the Austrian government 20 trucks. In Ethiopia, the Mengistu government by January, 1985 freed between 300 and 500 military trucks to carry grain from the Red Sea port of Assab.⁵³ In March the government made available more trucks including 60 short-haul military vehicles.⁵⁴

The most controversial features in the response of the Ethiopian government to the famine of 1984-85 were a) blocking food aid in the rebel-held areas, and, b) relocation of the famine victims. Both these policies were based on political considerations. Another action of Ethiopian government which attracted criticisms was its failure to give relief food priority in unloading at the ports. The Ethiopian government agreed earlier that relief aid would have priority over other types of cargo and that three of the six berths at Assab would be available at all times for unloading relief shipments. The World Food Program was coordinating the arrival by sea of relief supplies in Ethiopia. In January, Kurt Jansson, the United Nations Assistant Secretary General in charge of emergency operations in Ethiopia, complained to Government officials that ships delivering Soviet-made military equipment were occupying the relief berths while ships loaded with donated grain waited at anchor. The Soviet ships were moved soon afterward and the Government reconfirmed its commitment regarding priority for food.

In another incident West German ships carrying food aid to Ethiopia had to return from the ports without delivering the food because the Ethiopian authorities insisted that they pay a port-entry fee at Assab of \$12.60 per ton.

Apart from these bureaucratic mismanagements the Deruge government deliberately withheld food from going to areas like rural Eritrea. In December, 1984 a reporter wrote, "Rural Eritrea abounds with stories of people being turned away from the government's distribution centres". The government was also accused of using food as a political weapon. It was alleged that the government gave 120kg of grain a month to members of its urban associations (Kebelles); a

further 90kg a month to those who join the Ethiopian militias; and 50kg for each individual involved in operations against the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). According to the EPLF, 20,000 Eritreans were conscripted into the Ethiopian army in 1984 with the lure of food.⁵⁷

Amidst wide allegation of the Ethiopian government's attempt to block food-aid to the rebel-held areas, some donors attempted to give these desperate groups food-aid via Sudan. A ship carrying Australian food delivered 3,500 tons of food for relief in Ethiopia and was in waiting at the harbor with a load of another 6,000 tons of food for the people of Eritrea and Tigre to be delivered via Sudan. The Ethiopian government intercepted the ship and its cargo was impounded.⁵⁸ This incident created a diplomatic furor between Ethiopia and Australia. The Ethiopian government's policy of planned starvation in Eritrea and Tigre forced thousands of refugees in the neighbouring Sudan; a country already afflicted with food scarcity. By January 1985 over 100,000 Ethiopian famine victims had availed themselves of Sudanese hospitality and were awaiting placement in permanent settlements along the Sudanese - Ethiopian border.⁵⁹

In March, 1985, the United States committed 80,000 tons of food to Sudan in addition to 750,000 tons already provided or committed.⁶⁰ The Ethiopian government's plan of relocating people from the famine-affected northern areas to relatively fertile south had also disastrous consequences. According to one report it claimed a death toll of some 100,000. The relocations had little to do with combatting hunger. They were part of Ethiopia's civil war with at least five ethnically based guerrilla groups. They were planned as early as 1981, a former Ethiopian general told the head of a Swiss

humanitarian group, after the failure of Lt.Col. Mengistu's "Red Star" offensive in the rebel-dominated northeastern provinces of Eritrea and Tigre. The program was directed, not by the regime's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, but by its "Office for the Nationality Problem."⁶¹ The chief motive behind the resettlement of people from Tigre and Wollo might indeed be to deprive the TPLF (Tigre People's Liberation Front) of grass-roots support. First starved half to death, then divided up in scattered communities all over the southern provinces they would no longer pose any threat to the Deruge government. The climatological consideration that vast areas of the north have become wastelands was a secondary consideration. A report in the London Times cited figures from an internal document of the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission in Addis Ababa which showed that Wollo was receiving less than a quarter of the food it needed during the first four months of 1985. The report suggested that the government was either neglecting or deliberately mistreating Wollo in favor of resettlement areas and an attempt to win hearts and minds in other parts of the country.⁶²

The delay in food distribution in the affected areas was severely compounded because the Ethiopian government was using the trucks available to transport starving people from the north to south.

In 1986 Ethiopia finally halted its mass resettlement programme designed to move more than 1.2 million famine victims following a barrage of criticism by western aid donors. Since October, 1984 about 600,000 people, or half of the government's target, was moved from the famine affected northern provinces.⁶³

The two conclusions that can be drawn from the experience of the recent Ethiopian famine response are illustrative of the dilemmas of

the contemporary global situation.

Firstly, governments were slow to respond to this crisis. This charge applies to all the governments in the west, east and that of Ethiopia itself. And this generates a real concern and leads us to question the efficiency and the very nature of the present global political structures. The Ethiopian tragedy belies the myth of human progress, and the advancement of civilization. It leads us to the pessimistic conclusion that the present world order is incapable to meet such challenges like the famine of Ethiopia and that humankind is far from solving the very basic problem of mass-starvation. The threat will continue to loom large unless and until corrective measures are taken to create a more humane and stable world order. It is more than a question of collective disaster management or adopting a collective approach to solve the crisis. The question, at heart, is the question of inequality and poverty on a global scale. Why there should be hapless and abject poverty in a world of plenty? The presence of famine itself is a glaring example of the inequalities in the control of resources on a world-scale. The solution to the problem of famine and hunger entails a solution to the problem of poverty and, in turn, inequality, "Putting an end to hunger is a challenge to the world's economic system, requiring complementary national and international measures. Only major efforts of investment, planning and research can make enough food available for the six billion people the world will probably hold by the year 2000. But not only must the food be there; people who need it must be able to buy it. The reduction of poverty itself is equally essential for abolishing hunger."⁶⁴

Secondly, despite the bureaucratic indifference, the general public, private groups, church organizations, voluntary agencies all

responded to this crisis very generously and played an effective role in persuading the various governments in undertaking emergency relief measures. The politico-economic barriers and ideological considerations gave way to the moral concerns of the general public. And that was the most redeeming aspect of it. The governments of the United States and other western countries responded somewhat generously only after the general public and, in the case of the U.S., the Congress mounted pressure on the government.

The response of the general public provides a silver lining in an otherwise gloomy situation and leaves some room for hope. The global concern of the general public, private groups and a number of religious and lay organisations reaffirm the unity of humankind and signals, however faintly, the creation of a sane and humane global order free from hunger, starvation and misery.

What is of utmost importance is to channelize the global humanitarian concern into programs and activities leading to elimination of poverty and malnutrition. Famine, in a sense, is the tip of the iceberg which is the underlying crisis. "Even when Ethiopia is free of famine, 2000 children are thought to die each day of malnutrition and related illnesses."⁶⁵

Global attention must be focused on the underlying causes of poverty. As the report for the Independent commission on International Humanitarian Issues posits: "The tragedy in Africa must be reversed. A new will and common purpose to do so is emerging. If these can be harnessed to practical actions for reform, the cycle of disaster that now afflicts the continent can be broken."⁶⁶ Let's share this optimism and add to it that the repetition of this tragedy can be avoided by reformulating the strategies of development.

Development which "must", as Sen suggests, "concentrate on 'entitlements' of people and the 'capabilities' these entitlements generate." Sen continues, "Ultimately, the process of economic development has to be concerned with what people can or cannot do, e.g., whether they can live long, escape avoidable morbidity, be well nourished, be able to read and write and communicate, take part in literary and scientific pursuits, and so forth. It has to do, in Marx's words, with 'replacing the domination of circumstances and chance over individuals by the domination of individuals over chance and circumstances.'" ⁶⁷

The great challenge that is posed by famine in Ethiopia or elsewhere in our time forces us to reexamine the conventional paradigms, theories and concepts and, in a certain way, it also forces us to reexamine the role of social sciences and the social scientists in a society beset with problems. Sociologists have been particularly conspicuous by their non-involvement in the studies of famine. The field in sociology which comes close - though, not close enough - to tackling the issue of famine and food crises is Disaster Sociology (or Sociology of Mass Emergencies.) Disaster Sociology is focused on disasters; their consequences on communities, response and post-disaster adjustments and re-adjustments. Disasters which sociologists traditionally look at include a wide variety - both actual and perceived - from natural calamity to nuclear accidents which have the commonality of abruptness. It is the sudden disruption, the breakdown of the community which tend to arouse interest among the sociologists. Famine is a disaster with a difference. It does not strike abruptly like, say, a cyclone or an earthquake. Famine is more a creeping disaster which follows certain predictable (therefore, not unavoidable) paths giving off warnings which, however, often go

unnoticed either deliberately or by bureaucratic incompetence, or both. The unenviable contribution of sociology to the studies of famine has fortunately been remedied by other disciplines, namely, history, economics, geography and, to some extent, anthropology.⁶⁸ Here it might be useful to draw a distinction between sociology in the narrow sense, ie. mainstream sociology versus sociology in the wider sense. In the narrow sense sociology is what sociologists do. In the wider sense sociology is a non-discipline, it is a window on society and, therefore, not an exclusive preserve of sociologists. Interestingly, because of the nature of famine which is social phenomenon per excellence most of the studies which start off from various intellectual disciplines turn out to be contributions to sociology. The contributions of such French historians as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie,⁶⁹ Pierre Goubert⁷⁰ on French famines in early modern period or the works of Steven Kaplan⁷¹ or Appleby⁷² on the relationship between political regimes and famines are also valuable contributions to historical and political sociology. It will not be too much of an exaggeration to say that sociological literature on famine is quite substantial despite (or because of?) the indifference of the mainstream sociology.

The neglect of famine studies in the mainstream sociology⁷³ can be attributed to two factors. First, Disaster Sociologists have a bias for studying community-based, that is, micro-level crises which famine, though its presence may be severely felt in particular regions, is a macro-level crisis. Besides, the processual feature of the famine crisis can not be adequately handled with the existing conceptual frameworks, theories, and research techniques of Disaster Sociology. Secondly, as a sub-field of sociology, Disaster Sociology emerged in the North American academia and North America has been

fortunate enough not to experience any famine. It is, therefore not a coincidence that North American Sociology has paid such a scant attention to famine. Disaster Sociology since the publication of Prince's study of the Halifax explosion in 1920⁷⁴ has been preoccupied with problems more relevant to the developed, industrialized societies. The only exception to this tradition is a little known contribution of Pitirim Sorokin,⁷⁵ the founding Chair of Sociology at Harvard University. This exception can be explained by the fact that Sorokin was a Russian emigre to the United States who had had first hand experience of hunger and social disruptions in Soviet Russia. The hegemony of American Sociology in the rest of the world has so far created stumbling blocks for the development of new fields (or sub-fields) of inquiry more relevant to the experiences of The Third World societies. In view of the changing global circumstances, now is the time for change.

In an interview, the late Prime Minister of Sweden, Olof Palme said: "In the long range, I see two main dangers to peace: one is the arms race and the other is the gap between the north and the south."⁷⁶ The anti-nuclear peace marches in various countries in recent years, the global outpouring of sympathy for the famine victims of Ethiopia are the instances which provide the social scientists with the opportunities that they must seize to promote and help create a saner world free from hunger and war and the threats of both.

Many problems remain. Problems which cannot be wished away. It is within the framework of these contingencies of bureaucratic overrationality and the vested-interests of super-powers, and the unsatiable profit-hunger of the multi-national corporations that social scientists must operate with and for the people. The

outpourings of public generosity and the intransigencies of the bureaucracies and governments eloquently testify the contradictions of our time. The contradictions must be resolved in favor of sanity and humanity.

NOTES

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CONCEPTIONS OF KINSHIP AND
KINGSHIP IN CLASSICAL CHOU CHINA

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