



Lt-Col Mengistu: 'a spirit of friendliness has always existed between our two countries'

INTERVIEW: Lt. Col. MENGISTU HAILE-MARIAM

NEED FOR HONEST DIALOGUE

On the eve of the summit meeting between President Nimeiri and Lt-Col Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia, scheduled for February 15 in Sierra Leone, Sudanow editor-in-chief El Fatih El Tijani, editor Sir Sidahmed and photographer Mohamed El Mahdi Nuri flew to Addis Ababa to interview Lt-Col Mengistu. Their interview was the first to be given by the Ethiopian head of state to any Sudanese journal. Their report.

IT WAS 11.28 Ethiopian local time — 14.28 GMT — when we were ushered in to meet Lt-Col Mengistu Haile Mariam: Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), head of the Council of Ministers and Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Army. His office in the Menelik Palace, now the headquarters of the PMAC, is a long salon with three doors, with red and white curtains covering the doors and windows.

To your left, chairs and a sofa to seat eight people; to the right, five more chairs. On the wall, an ornate clock that chimes every 15 minutes. There are five cupboards, and shelves of books — mainly Marxist literature, with Lenin's collected works especially prominent. There are four maps of Ethiopia on the wall.

There are two paintings of Lenin: one on a large vase. A third painting shows the triumvirate of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Other paintings show landscapes, and one is of a madonna and child.

Of Colonel Mengistu himself, there are three photographs: one is the official

black and white study; the other two are of him sharing a joke with Cuban leader Fidel Castro, and smiling with some children.

In front of us sat the Chairman. With him were Lt-Col Berhanu Bayih, the PMAC member for foreign affairs; Dr Fekle Gedle, the Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Major Yilma Girma, the Minister of Information and National Guidance.

There were no files on the President's desk, only a few magazines and books, some in English. There were two grey telephones to his left, and another at his righthand. Further to the right, a small globe of the world supported by two golden lions. In front of him, a statuette of Lenin and to the left, a model of a tank.

About five feet or so in height and now estimated to be in his late thirties, the Chairman was seated comfortably in a large, green chair. He was wearing a grey suit, crisp white shirt, red tie and black, polished boots. When he spoke, his voice was low but distinct; when he smiled, he did so shyly. When he listened, he listened attentively, with eyes screwed up and eyebrows knit together. Below is the full text of the questions and answers. The Chairman spoke in Amharic and his answers were translated into English.

SUDANOW *We should like to thank you for receiving us. We hope through our magazine to contribute to the*

normalisation of relations between our two countries. How do you think we Sudan and Ethiopia, might best overcome this present misunderstanding that has led to the deterioration of relations between us?

LT-COL MENGISTU Sudan and Ethiopia are neighbouring states who are closely bound by geography and history. The two countries share a common 2,000 kilometre boundary, and the fertility of Sudan is assured by the water that flows from the Ethiopian mountains.

However, the peoples of Ethiopia and Sudan have close and friendly relations not only because they share a common boundary and drink the same water, but also because they are linked by this political boundary, and share a common history and culture, which has forged the links between the two peoples. They also share similar aspirations and objectives — as they have done for centuries.

Moreover, throughout history, they have shared common sorrows and common happinesses. Let me cite a few examples: during the fascist aggression on Ethiopia, it was Sudan who provided a refuge for our compatriots; and it was in Sudan where our heroic forces organised themselves during the resistance.

Our Sudanese brothers fought alongside us in the liberation struggle against fascism. Not only that, but they died alongside their Ethiopian brothers and sisters. This, the Ethiopian people will never forget. Indeed, the people of

Ethiopia have always been behind the Sudanese, especially during their independence struggle during the days of colonialism. In 1956, Sudan got its independence, and the Ethiopians were as happy as the Sudanese themselves. In addition to that, the Ethiopian people contributed a lot to help overcome the difficulties faced by the Sudanese people during 16 years of conflict. (The war in the South).

This, then, shows the general spirit of friendliness that has always existed between our two peoples.

But, as you yourself have mentioned, it is also evident that a certain misunderstanding between the two countries has strained our relations. However, this state of affairs can be ameliorated and our traditional good neighbourliness can be restored.

Q *The Ethiopian Revolution is a unique experience in contemporary revolutionary history. Would you tell us about the problems that you have faced and how you solved them; and what your priorities are for the immediate future?*

A As you say, the Ethiopian revolution is, in some respects, unique. When the broad masses of Ethiopia rose to get rid of the feudal, bourgeois exploitative system on the basis of the class struggle, they were faced with internal class enemies who were against freedom and the interests of the broad masses. They were aided by external reactionary forces, who also encouraged secession in the north and aggression in the eastern and southern part of Ethiopia. These were the major problems that our revolution faced.

What is true is that the broad masses

Eritrea. Don't you think that a peaceful settlement is the only solution? And, if so, what kind of political settlement do you envisage?

A Our Sudanese brothers know full well that even before the situation in Eritrea reached its present stage, the Provisional Military Administrative Council of Socialist Ethiopia had exerted all the necessary efforts for a political solution to the problem.

The first step that was taken after the revolution, was to eliminate all sources of discrimination, especially those based on sex and religion. This was evident in the National Democratic Revolutionary Programme which was declared after the revolution. The PMAC also issued a nine-point political declaration about Eritrea. Thirdly, several steps have been taken both internally and at the international level (using both internal committees and asking the mediation of friendly countries) to bring about a settlement of the Eritrean problem.

Nevertheless, while these steps were being taken by the Ethiopian people and government, the secessionist bandits, aided and abetted by reactionary circles, persisted in their rebellion, causing damage to life and property in the region.

Now, however, these secessionist bandits have been crushed by the revolutionary liberation army and are bankrupt. The people of Eritrea, that is the broad masses of Eritrea, who have long suffered under the bandits, are now participating in the construction of the country on the basis of the revolutionary call of the motherland.

It has now become abundantly clear that it is not only the masses in the liberated areas, but also those who are still suffering, who are giving support to revolutionary Ethiopia. This is another political solution.

Q *How do you think the outstanding question of refugees in both countries can be solved? Are you likely to encourage the Sudanese refugees to return home soon?*

A Well, as far as the problem of refugees is concerned, one must remember that both Ethiopia and Sudan have ratified a number of international conventions. There is a UN convention on refugees, and there is an OAU convention, too.

This means that the two countries are willing to solve their refugee problems on the basis of these internationally-accepted conventions. So the question will be settled very easily. As far as Ethiopia is concerned, as long as the Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia are willing to be repatriated, Ethiopia will cooperate favourably with your government.



Eritrea: 'we have exerted all the necessary efforts for a political solution to the problem'

Q *To avoid any misunderstanding in the future, how do you think that those relations could be restored and cemented so that nothing like this could happen again?*

A This is a difficult question. In my opinion, there exists a strong bond of unity between our two peoples. Certainly, problems have arisen, but these minor problems can be solved and are not necessary. It means that steps must be taken to correct the mistakes that have arisen on both sides. There is a need for honest dialogue and for a sincere effort to restore normal relations.

In this respect, the meeting that is shortly to be held between President Nimeiri and me will, I hope, be an avenue for such understanding.

of Ethiopia, with revolutionary conviction and consciousness took up the necessary revolutionary political and military measures to overcome these problems. It is also evident that the main purpose of the revolution is to establish a society based on liberty, justice and equality. And we are struggling to this end.

However, since foreign aggression, internal reactionaries have brought incalculable damage to our economy. The immediate objective of the revolution is to rehabilitate those of our people who have been affected by this aggression, attempts at secession and international reactionaries.

Q *The Ethiopian Army has taken successful military measures in the region of*