

# Is Bush Being 'Gorbachevised'?

Like the Soviet President who is acclaimed abroad but hugely unpopular at home, US President George Bush is finding that his foreign policy triumphs could actually work against him. **Jim Lobe** of IPS reports from Washington.



class, much like the Soviet public, is fed up with a leadership which does not appear to care about their deteriorating plight.

A string of polls showing that a strong majority of the public believes Bush is spending too much time on foreign policy and not enough on domestic problems, point to problems for the man who clearly wanted to devote his term to building a "new world order" to replace the Cold War ended by Gorbachev.

"Almost every foreign policy success he gets now is an advertisement for what seems to be making people most angry," said Greenberg, who earlier this year gave the key-note address at a meeting of all Democratic senators and representatives.

Indeed, the slogan, "Come home, George," is fast becoming the Democratic Party's 1992 campaign theme. The party put on sale last week a new t-shirt that reads: "George Bush went to Rome and all I got was this lousy recession."

This theme actually echoes what an increasing number of Bush critics and friends, including some of the most venerable pillars of the US foreign

policy establishment, have been saying with increasing urgency over the past five months.

"What is desperately required" is a "psychological turn inward", said William Hyland, editor of the prestigious *Foreign Affairs* journal, writing in the *New York Times* newspaper.

Hyland, a Soviet expert who has served in senior positions in both Republican and Democratic administrations, argued that foreign policy problems, "are no longer that urgent" compared with the domestic problems faced by Washington, particularly the "constant squeeze on the middle class."

"If America's economy does falter, so will the underlying source of its international power," wrote Robert Hormats, a top international economic aide to former Presidents Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter. Columnist and former diplomat Leslie Gelb warned Bush, "our nation is falling apart."

Bush has ignored this advice, scoring it as the sour grapes of the "declinists" — a group of historians who in the

1980s argued that Washington had exhausted itself in its competition with Moscow and was now over-extended in its military commitments abroad vis-a-vis the size and strength of its economy.

But the "declinists" appear to have support — strong majorities now say that Washington is "on the wrong track" or "in decline". The contrasts with poll results last spring when Bush was still basking in the glow of the Gulf War.

Bush's decision to put off his trip to Asia suggests the White House has finally gotten the message.

What this means, according to some US officials, is that Bush's efforts to build a "new world order" — particularly in the Middle East — may be effectively put on hold until after next year's elections.

Just as Gorbachev's ability to dominate world affairs from late 1986 to 1990 was eventually undermined by a free-falling economy and slippage in the Soviet people's confidence, Bush's pose as the master of the world's "only superpower" is being compromised by mounting domestic problems.

And if he cannot work to bring improvements in the economic well-being of the electorate over the next year, he may find, like Gorbachev, that his vaunted foreign policy achievements will actually work against him.

## The SAARC Summit

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia leaves today for Colombo to join six other heads of government of SAARC in a determined bid to put in a new lease of life into the seven-nation alliance. Indeed, there should be some relief in South Asia that the summit which was originally scheduled in the Sri Lankan capital from November 7 to 9 but was unexpectedly postponed due to the inability of the King of Bhutan to attend it, is being held after all. On the other hand, there may be doubts in many minds as to how much can be achieved by a 10-hour summit. Some will also wonder if the meeting is not a mere formal ritual to allow the President of the Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom to hand over the chairmanship to President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka.

The scepticism is understandable, even well-founded. The difficulties faced by the alliance just in organising its summit meetings, not to mention the cynical comments made by the media in the region and outside, do not raise the level of confidence about the future of the grouping. We believe, the primary task of the leaders attending the one-day summit is to take note of the growing popular disenchantment about the alliance instead of assuming that such a feeling does not exist. They should then proceed to discuss and, hopefully, adopt measures which would help in dispelling the prevailing negative feelings about the association that, all said and done, still represents the best effort to build bridges of co-operation among the seven nations in the region. It is for the leaders and their foreign ministers to decide how this should be achieved. But we know for sure that this cannot be done by rhetorical statements or by a refusal to recognise the realities of the situation. What is needed is a lot of hard thinking and close consultation among leaders, covering the issues and problems which, directly or indirectly, have thwarted the progress of SAARC.

In the process, leaders of the grouping should agree on the need to reaffirm the objectives of SAARC as outlined by the countries concerned when the alliance was launched in 1985. Here, their main concern should be to ensure that the alliance faces no undue stresses and strains caused by problems in the bilateral relations among member nations. Of course, this is easier said than done. However, in our view, an increased thrust towards the implementation of socio-economic projects, undertaken by the alliance, may help the confidence-building process. Keeping this in mind, the summit should also agree on some new projects, such as the setting up of a regional meteorological centre in Dhaka as proposed by Bangladesh, projects which offer immediate and most visible benefits to the member states. It would certainly help the grouping if its new projects turn out to be a little ambitious, involving the active participation of the private sector and non-governmental organisations. At this stage, the leaders should also carefully consider bringing in high officials or even the heads of ministries of trade and industries in the planning of new projects.

We assume that during their private consultation, the summit leaders will touch on the bilateral issues and see how the tension caused by some of them can be lowered. We see nothing wrong in their discussing an issue like Kashmir and in leaders of India and Pakistan briefing their colleagues from other five countries on their respective positions. Similarly, the discussion should also provide an opportunity to Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to offer his assessment of the visit of Prime Minister Li Peng of China to India, for the benefit of heads of government from other six countries. As leaders whose political maturity calls for no proof, the seven leaders can indeed use the forum for frank exchanges on all issues, just as their counterparts in Southeast Asia do in ASEAN, but making sure the projects undertaken by SAARC are not overshadowed by political differences among member nations of the alliance.

## A Devious Move

It is hard to accept the claim of the Government Radio in Rangoon that Nobel Peace laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been expelled from the country's opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). Ms Suu Kyi who has been under house arrest for more than two years had led her party to victory in the national election last year. But the military junta refused to accept the electoral verdict, and faced student demonstrations and growing unrest in different parts of the country.

If NLD leadership has indeed "expelled" Ms Suu Kyi for her alleged links with the rebel groups and foreign organisations, the move has undoubtedly been forced on the opposition party. According to dissident groups in Bangkok, party leaders were compelled "at gun point" to depose their leader. The groups in the Thai capital also say that hundreds of NLD members have been jailed by the military government in Rangoon.

An extremely serious situation within Burma which had turned critical in recent months is now decidedly extremely alarming. The junta seems capable of doing almost anything to hang on to power by any means which one would shudder to contemplate.

The outside world which is all for the overdue change in Burma in favour of a democratic regime, based on the electoral verdict, must now act. But one is not sure what it can do to bring about the change. The only way lies in a concerted action undertaken by ASEAN, the United States, Japan and China, which must tell the junta in Rangoon in no uncertain terms that enough is enough. The envoys of these countries, based in Rangoon, must deliver the strongest possible protest on the junta and treat the move as the beginning of a process aimed at the restoration of a legitimate democratic administration in Burma, headed by Aung San Suu Kyi.

US President George Bush's decision to delay a long-anticipated trip to Asia in the face of criticisms about his handling of domestic affairs has some policy analysts asking whether Bush is being "Gorbachevised".

They are referring to the irony that Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev appears to have become extremely unpopular at home despite winning unprecedented acclaim abroad for almost singlehandedly ending the 45-year Cold War.

Over Gorbachev's six-year tenure, each trip abroad seemed to bring down his popularity at home another notch, as if his successes in foreign policy served only to highlight his inability to deal with domestic problems.

"Is the same thing happening here to George Bush?" Asks Stanley Greenberg, a top Democratic Party opinion analyst currently working with Arkansas Governor and Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton.

That appears to be precisely the calculation of White House political advisers who reportedly persuaded Bush that a two-week trip to Asian this month could seriously damage his political position at home and reduce his chances for re-election next year.

And the loss of a Pennsylvania Senate seat in last week's US mid-term elections by Bush's long-time Richard Thornburgh to a little-known Democrat seemed to confirm that the US middle

# Peace Now Movement Could be Coming into its Own

by Benjamin Cohen

If the Middle East peace process ever arrives at a successful outcome Israel's Peace Now movement is likely to claim some credit. Peace Now represents an Israeli conscience rejected by the ruling Likud Party.

Recent polls suggest that up to 50 per cent of Israelis identify with its ideas in one way or another.

Since the State of Israel was created in 1949 pockets of its Jewish society have opposed government policies towards the Palestinians. While many of these movements and organisations have been consigned to the political margins, Peace Now has overcome these obstacles.

While right-wingers regard Palestinian self-determination as incompatible with the aims of a Jewish State, Peace Now has consistently argued that an accommodation with the Palestinians has to be reached if Israel is to enjoy a secure future.

The impetus for Peace Now came in 1977 when Egyptian President Anwar el Sadat tried unilaterally to reach a peace agreement with Israel. The Camp David accords, brokered with the mediation of US President Jimmy Carter, established full diplomatic relations between Egypt and Israel.

For the Palestinians, who condemned Sadat's actions as treachery to the Arab cause, the accords promised auton-

As the Arab-Israeli talks drag on, the long-established movement in Israel known as Peace Now may have an increasingly important role to play. It represents an Israeli conscience opposed by the ruling Likud Party and argues that the "Middle East problem can be settled only by talking and not by military action."

omy in the territories occupied by Israel following the 1967 war. The Shamir government remains committed to the autonomy plan, which is still rejected by the Palestinians.

Nevertheless, Peace Now argued that the agreement between Israel and Egypt meant that peace could also be achieved with the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world. The movement grew when Israel invaded Lebanon in June 1982, with the goal of finally crushing the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

The war provoked international outcry and deep discomfort within Israel. In July 1982, one month after the invasion, Peace Now held a protest rally in Tel Aviv attended by 100,000 Israelis.

Peace Now hit the headlines again in October 1982, following the massacre of Palestinians by Israel's Lebanese Christian allies in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Beirut. Some 400,000 Israelis at a rally in Tel Aviv demanded Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. The protest was one factory that

provoked the resignation of Prime Minister Menachem Begin. At the same time, by emphasising its loyalty to Zionism and Israel as a Jewish State, Peace Now earned itself a mainstream respectability denied to other groups.

The basis of Peace Now's programme is that the continued occupation of Palestinian land is unethical and against Israel's true interests. The central theme of Peace Now documents is that the Palestinian question will be solved through talks not military action.

This argument has influenced even member of the Likud. For example, Moshe Amirav, formerly of its central committee, recently told the Palestinian monthly *Ma'a-Nas* that the war in Lebanon led him to the conclusion that there is no military solution to the Palestinian problem.

Since the Palestinian intifada began in 1987, Peace Now has campaigned for talks and against extended Jewish settlement on the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

When regional peace talks began in Madrid in late

October, Peace Now held a rally in Tel Aviv — an estimated 80,000 attended — which involved a mixture of self-congratulation and support for the negotiations. Peace Now also took the rally as a sign that a rift between the Israeli left and Palestinians, which developed because of Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein during the Gulf crisis, was over.

Although the Israeli right shuns Peace Now for its willingness to concede territory, the movement also has its left-wing critics. Despite the success of its pre-Madrid rally, Peace Now would not send delegation to the Spanish capital for fear of being seen as trying to upstage Shamir in the world's press.

Left-wingers charge that this indicates Peace Now's political weakness. Israeli journalist Michel Warshawsky says this has put Shamir in an ideal position:

"He can trust them as long as he believes that there is any place for negotiations in order to gain time and American support, and he can trust the right-wing when he comes to

the conclusion that the time has come to blow up the conference, or at least squeeze further concessions from the Palestinians, the Arabs and the Americans."

Mattiyahu Peled, a former Israeli general and now a leading light in the radical Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (ICIPP), echoes these sentiments:

"The Peace Now movement is one of the worst things that has happened to us. Nice people in Israel get together two or three times a year and shout a few slogans."

"They go home satisfied that they have done the job, but they are not prepared to shake the system. So this is a substitute for real action."

However, as Israel tries to stall the progress of the talks

Peace Now may be compelled to challenge the Shamir government directly. Elections are to be held in Israel within the year, and the indications are that the Zionist Left parties, which are close to Peace Now will form a unified bloc.

Also, the Israeli Labour Party passed a resolution in favour of talks with the PLO at its November convention. As a result, Peace Now may issue an explicit call to vote for parties which will freeze settlement construction and enter the talks with more enthusiasm than the Likud.

Such an act would be welcomed by Palestinian leaders in the occupied territories, who are keen to work with the Israeli left and show the Israeli public that they genuinely want co-existence.

What may eventually evolve is a change in Peace Now's identity: instead of merely advocating negotiations, the movement and its allies will try to take charge of them.

GEMINI NEWS  
BENJAMIN COHEN is a freelance journalist based in London.

## To the Editor

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Voters list

Sir, Voters list on the basis of which last general election of Feb was held contains many mistakes. All the political parties have complained in respect of that. Many eligible voters have been excluded. On the other hand, many names appear on the list existence of which in the area concerned cannot be much endeavoured to be explored. For urban areas, particularly in the capital city, holding number against the name of the voter should be there to facilitate to locate and ascertain inclusion of a particular person. Otherwise, it takes much time to locate a voter from the list.

The percentage of mistake in the voters list of urban area is very high which naturally demands its cancellation and issuance of orders for preparation of voters list afresh. Never in the past such high percentage of mistake crept in the list. There is reason behind it. That occupation of polling booth and driving way voters by exploding bombs and indiscriminately stamping the ballots became the modus operandi of elections. Voters almost lost their confidence and interest in elections. Therefore the persons who were engaged to prepare the voters list did not venture to travel from house to house. The voters also did not feel encouraged to see for themselves whether their names really appeared in the list. These factors helped much the multiple mistakes and errors to remain in the list rather unnoticed and un-recified. But then the situation has changed absolutely. The Acting

President, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, had been very much able to hold a free, fair and neutral election under an unbiased impartial election commission. It has given a chance to those to apply to the district Election Commission office whose names do not appear on the list. But the method to approach for the purpose is very troublesome. A man who becomes desirous of inclusion is first to run to election office and procure form. The form requires to be accompanied by the school certificate for the proof of age and holding tax receipt. Then he is to submit the form personally. Desired co-operation from the office of the district Election Commission is lacking. A man who did not have schooling and has grown old, how can he prove his age? A man who resides in vacant plot which has no holding number, how can he include his name? Where from families living in slums will get the holding numbers?

Therefore, the method or procedure requires to be modified. We request the concerned authority to give us a chance with a procedure very simple to include our names in the voters list without much troubles so that most of us literate or illiterate, rich or poor, can exercise our political right. **Md Khalidur Rahman Kazipura, Mirpur, Dhaka.**

### Garment industries

Sir, No doubt that garments industry has appeared as blessing for the nation. On one hand, this industry is reinvigorating the broken economy and, on the other hand, it is

playing an unprecedented significant role in female awakening through the provision of employment for thousands of women. But recently a sign of thunderbolt is there — facing it from two sides, external and internal. Such foreign countries as have been beaten in this field for their internal disorder now seem to be active, in saboteur ways in this country, to regain their lost business. And then the systematic fault in government, semigovernment and bank insurance is not less responsible for the living disorders in this industry. Moreover the disregard for law and lack of foresight of the leaders are gradually pushing this industry towards destruction. We should not forget that such destruction of market for our tea, jute and finally leather was summoned in international and thousand of our workers had to live an inferior life with the burden of non-employment. Proprietors and the money lending institutions had to face a great crisis.

The inhabitants of the country shall consider whether the promoters of garments industry have been playing genuine role or not. The destruction any way, of the industry shall not only hasten the financial reverse but also impede livelihood to laes of workers of which the major portion is female, and shall lead to a dreadful employment crisis.

It is said that the Factory Act has not been materialized fully and it is being pressed much to materialize the Act cent per cent in garments industry. But none considers the point that if the Factory Act is to be maintained fully then first the buildings housing most of the factories shall have to be changed or reconstructed for which about a year shall be needed. It should be thought that who shall pay the wages of the workers shall — they be kept without in fact, the well-known quarters think that the Factory Act is not so much maintained in any other

industry as in the garments industry barring some exceptions. Even in some cases the wages are three to five times of the wage announced by the government. Yet all the civil sayings seems due for the owners!

It is strange that when there are twentythree registered in all the industries with jute included, there are about one dozen federations in the garment industry alone! It is however, said that most of those federations have no legal existence. In our country's law the activities of unregistered federation is prohibited and a punishable crime. But some of them are picking up thanks by calling openly even press conferences.

Democracy does not contain anarchy. All expect good trade union activities. But if it is in the method against the law and that threatens destruction then it is a sign of thunderbolt to be called. However, we only wish let the garments industry expand more and there be friendly relations between the owners and workers. It is expected by all the patrons. If needed, the factories be rescued by re-issuing clauses for some ineffective clauses of Act. **Md Nasiruddin Gopibagh, Dhaka.**

### Smuggling

Sir, The government has taken strong decision on check smuggling. We welcome the decision and sincerely hope that all the quarters will extend their fullest cooperation in getting our nation out of this curse.

Meanwhile, it is often heard that while in the higher strata of our society with high connections are actually involved with the trafficking of foreign and other illegal goods. It is expected that the authorities will take appropriate measures to apprehend the undercover smugglers' circle. **M. Zahidul Haque Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka.**

## OPINION

### OIC : Thought-provoking

Perhaps, S M Ali was 'prophetic' when he pondered over the not-too-bright affairs of a vital Muslim organization like the OIC. His plea for a 'shake-up' (The Daily Star Dec 8) is thought-provoking and very timely.

As can be seen from the outcome of the Dakar summit, disunity seems to be more visible than before due to the absence of the influential leaders of the organization though not without valid reasons for their absence. The situation has been the natural consequence of the Gulf war, an unpardonable crime committed by Iraq. According to an agency report, "Saddam Hossain appeared more isolated than ever after the few remaining friends stayed silent as Islamic leaders endorsed tough UN sanctions against Iraq."

Be that as it may, the Gulf war must have brought some 'home-truths' and 'lessons' for the member nations. The two Gulf wars have been the shame for the prestigious world body of the Muslim nations. Has not time come when the Muslim world must awake from the slumber and take up their mundane business more seriously? Any more follies or anti-clock-wise thinking will push the last nail to sound the death warrant of the much-needed organization. Half-hearted unity cannot stop the rot. Even huge expenditure by some leading nations, such as, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, for the welfare of the poor nations will be of no avail.

In view of the problems now faced by the Muslim world, perhaps it will not be out of context to point to a well-thought-out 'plea' for what may be called 'true Muslim diplomacy', put forward by no less a diplomat than Mr Abdullatif Abdullah Al-Miannane, the outgoing Saudi Ambassador to Bangladesh, for better understanding among the Muslim nations. While speaking informally, and in a reminiscent mood, as the longest serving Ambassador and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, at a farewell reception organized by 'Bangladesh-Saudi Arabia Brotherhood Society', he observed that while serving for long seven

years as the Ambassador from one Muslim country to another Muslim country like Bangladesh, he genuinely felt that the so-called 'diplomatic norms' which were mostly framed by the Western countries were found 'inadequate' in many respects, specially while dealing with typical bilateral and Muslim issues.

In fact, the diplomatic relations between two Muslim nations are quite different from others. As such, it is genuinely felt by many Muslim quarters that the Muslim world should ponder over the matter and frame completely separate sets of diplomatic norms, more pragmatic and meaningful, in keeping with the dictates of Islamic culture and mutual obligations.

There is no denying the fact that from historical, religious, cultural and fraternity points of view the Muslim nations are supposed to know each other more closely and more informally which the Western-type diplomacy would not permit normally. For example, when natural calamity befalls a Muslim nation, another Muslim nation cannot, and should not, wait for routine diplomatic procedure, norms or etiquette to be meticulously followed before permission to rush relief materials to the affected country. What happened when Bangladesh was devastated by cyclone in early part of this year? On hearing the news of cyclone on radios, Saudi government rushed several plane-loads of relief materials within three days of the calamity.

It is well within the jurisdiction of the 45-nation OIC to frame norms of Muslim diplomacy and preferential rules to deal with the problems concerning the Muslim nations. The OIC's proposed Islamic Chamber of Commerce, ministerial standing committee to oversee activities of its organs, and many other things, such as liberalisation of visa could be the beginning of the formulation of 'Muslim diplomacy' aimed at better understanding and cohesion of the Muslim world.

Abdul Kader Purana Paltan, Dhaka