

# The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

## 1990: A YEAR HISTORY MOVED INTO THE FAST TRACK

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When, on November 19 1990, 22 leaders of the East and West blocs assembled in the splendour of the Elysee Palace in Paris to put their signatures to a treaty that formally ended the Cold War, several found they did not have a pen. Mikhail Gorbachev had to pass his to Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and then to borrow another to sign something else. Not for the first time in 1990 politicians were caught unprepared.

Leaders from 12 nonaligned nations, seated separately, looked on as witnesses of a solemn undertaking by the Europeans "that they would maintain only such military capabilities as were necessary to prevent war and provide for effective defence."

Under the treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) the unbelievable was to happen: 60,000 items of military equipment - tanks, guns and planes - were to become scrap. President George Bush called it a "beautiful day," but warned that Europe was entering "unknown waters."

Not only Europe. Bush was on his way to Saudi Arabia, where as Europe declared an end to war, he had built a massive force to confront a single small rebellious country, Iraq. The era of superpower confrontation ended, and within months the dangers posed by the indiscriminate scattering of compact and terrifying modern weaponry were becoming real.

With the invasion of Kuwait by President Saddam Hussein on August 2 the world confronted a situation that had developed over many years as a result of the proliferation of nuclear and chemical knowhow. Iraq was highly militarised, possibly near achieving a nuclear capability.

Now not major powers, but small nations, threatened global peace. Several small countries already had nuclear knowhow. If Iraq was not stopped, others could follow. That was the nub of the crisis.

True, as many charged, there was an element of hypocrisy in the reaction against Iraq. Israel had long stood pat on occupied land and its is highly doubtful in the US would have acted in the same way if oil had not been involved - but lines drawn in history are always rough.

The new world order formalised by the treaty in Paris had made action against Iraq possible. For the first time the United Nations was acting in the way conceived by its founding fathers in 1945: a state's sovereignty was to be guaranteed by all the member countries and aggression dealt with by them. Hitherto conflict between the US and the Soviet Union had prevented such joint UN action.

Now the superpowers were on the same side and resolutions were almost unanimously agreed. The five permanent Security Council members voted for sanctions against Iraq and later for stronger action, with China in the last instance abstaining. Only Cuba and the newly unified Yemen Republic opposed sanctions throughout.

In other days UN action against Iraq would have been impossible. In a Cold War situation the peace would have been kept, as it always was, because neither superpower wanted a world war, but probably at a price: acceptance of the occupation of Kuwait.

Saddam probably did not apparently expect the near-unanimous world reaction to his invasion or the arrival on his doorstep of troops, ships and planes from nearly 30 countries. The entire Middle East was thrown into turmoil. Unlikely alliances were made overnight - the gathering of 300,000 US soldiers in strictly Muslim Saudi Arabia was extraordinary in itself. Syrian, Egyptian and Moroccan forces lined up against Iraq and the US and Britain made it up with President Assad, once accused of condoning hijacking and bombing airliners.

The Kuwait invasion had many immediate global consequences. It hoisted oil prices, though not to the extent of the OPEC hike in 1974; it led to the flight of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, mostly of Asian origin; and the holding of westerners as hostages, released in packages when it was politically advantageous to Iraq. The Asian migrants gathered in desert camps and, until airlifts home

dispersed them, faced starvation.

In the last weeks of 1990 the armies sat and confronted each other in the desert, waiting in dread amid dire warnings of sudden and terrible bloodshed, although the US and Iraq did at last begin a dialogue in early December and Saddam freed the remaining hostages.

It was an alarming second half of the year and at least as potentially as serious as the Gulf crisis was the collapse in December of the four-year world talks on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the body set up to liberalise trade after World War Two. The breakdown was caused by the failure of the rich countries, notably the European Community and the US, to reduce farm subsidies.

The breakdown heralded greater protectionism and a trade war in which the losers would be poor countries, whose delegates hung round the talks helplessly while the big powers quarrelled. As the food mountains piled up in Europe and the US more of their people would starve.

Uncertainties about world trade and the outcome in the Gulf came at the end of a year that had started with such excitement and hope. In Germany they were still celebrating the destruction of the Berlin Wall while in Romania the hated Ceausescu had just been

wing Christian Democratic Union.

Kohl's new Germany had taken on board huge problems: a broken, polluted industrial wasteland in the east that would take years to rebuild, people with low living standards and a growing flood of refugees from eastern neighbours where life was even harder.

Reunification, creating the biggest state in Europe, produced remarkably few anxieties in the rest of the continent and in the Soviet Union, although for decades the possibility of such an eventuality had filled them with dread. The new Germany was seen as permanently purged of its once-aggressive tendencies.

The Soviet Union, now so preoccupied with its own survival resisted for a while the idea that East Germany should be absorbed into NATO, but by mid-year Gorbachev conceded even this and agreed to a three-year phased withdrawal of Soviet troops from Germany. Demoralised and short of food and clothing, they began to cause a law and order problem in East Germany. The Warsaw Pact virtually dissolved.

Events in Europe had moved with unbelievable speed. Although the Soviet Union remained one of the world's two most heavily armed states, it was rapidly losing superpower status. The Baltic states pushed for inde-

pendence, with Lithuania actually making a unilateral declaration. Gorbachev, by personal diplomacy, temporarily stayed his hand, but Georgia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Uzbekistan, Moldavia and Armenia all declared varying forms of sovereignty. Mongolia started to go its own way and Soviet troops began to pull out.

Most serious of all for Gorbachev were the moves by the Russian Republic, which on May 29 elected his long time rival Boris Yeltsin as its President. Yeltsin wanted a rapid economic revolution in the Soviet Union with a free market economy. Gorbachev wanted to go slower. All through 1990 this public debate took place, with Gorbachev clinging to his unpopular, Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, main proponent of slower change.

Bad distribution led to food shortages. Prices soared. In Moscow a single egg cost the equivalent of three dollars. Despite a record grain harvest, the system had collapsed. The republics on longer cooperated in sending supplies where they most needed.

Fearful that the situation could lead to dangerous unrest and led by Germany, Italy and Canada, western countries began sending food to the Soviet

Union. Some individuals sent food parcels. Other ex-communist countries were also in need as they wrestled with the transformation to a market economy. In cities like London street collections were being made for countries like Romania.

Events in Europe and then in the Gulf had a profound impact on the rest of the world. Hardly a political or economic situation in other continents was unaffected. The end of communism and moves for sovereignty and multipartyism in its very birthplace created movements for greater political choice in developing countries. The switch to free enterprise and away from centrally controlled economies in the East began to change poli-

tics. Governments came under pressure to adopt more democratic systems. Constitutional changes were mooted or agreed in Algeria, Benin, Congo, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Tanzania, and Zaire, as well as Ethiopia, where Col Haile Mengistu did a surprise political U-turn. In Zambia, its economy gravely sick, President Kenneth Kaunda faced violent unrest over prices. At first he resisted pressure for a multi-party state, then agreed that a new constitution be drawn up.

While these changes were speeding by what was happening in Eastern Europe, Western governments, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) all took advantage of the continent's desperate economic state to make assistance conditional on a switch to a market economy.

Africa, nearly three decades into independence, was at a turning point. It had learned, like everyone else, from bitter experience and a second wind of change was blowing. Almost every country was in economic trouble, by no means all of its own making. Poverty and disease, particularly Aids, was taking a terrible toll. Old leaders in countries like Zaire and Malawi hung on while the new generation that had grown up since independence was waiting in the wings.

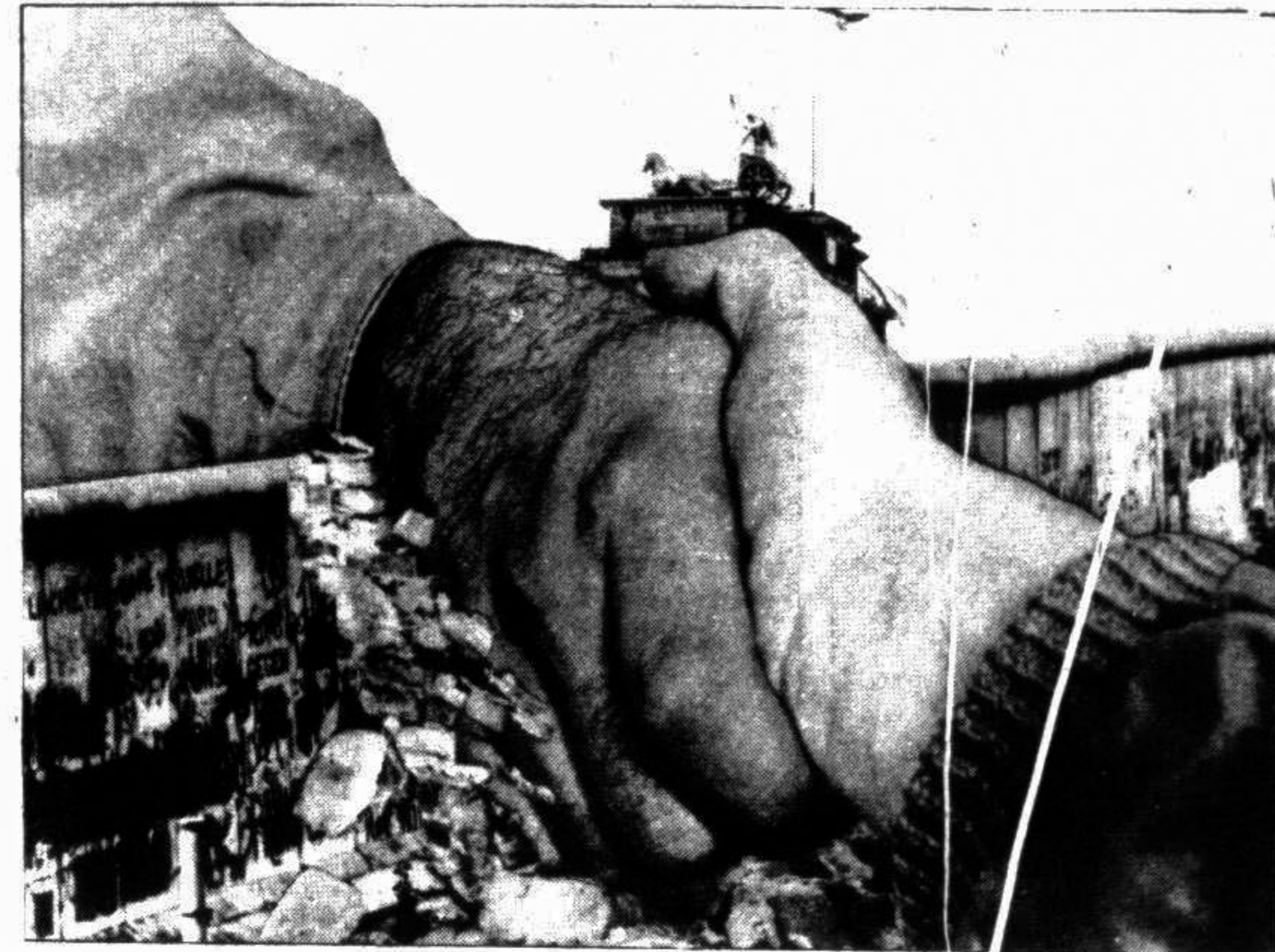
Instability remained. President Ibrahim Babangida narrowly escaped in a coup attempt in Nigeria on April 22. Rwanda was invaded abortively by rebels from Uganda in October. A coup failed in Madagascar. King Moshoeshe was unseated in Lesotho and replaced by his son. President Hissene Habre was swept out of power in Chad after a lightning strike in November from Sudan bases by Idriss Deby, his former commander-in-chief. In the long war for independence Eritrea made great progress against Ethiopia.

In Liberia, President Samuel Doe was overthrown and assassinated in a ferocious civil war which claimed thousands of lives. In despair at what was happening in their region the five countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent a peacekeeping force which rapidly turned into an intervention force. It tried to eject all three warring factions and eventually forced a kind of peace, but the situation in Monrovia remained horrendous.

If Asia was less affected by the waves from Europe its politics became more volatile. The newly-elected Indian minority government of V. P. Singh soon became insecure. Tension between India and Pakistan renewed violence in Kashmir subsidised, but Singh was soon fighting for survival. The catalyst was his decision to revive shelved proposals that would reserve 27 per cent of all government jobs for people of low caste. Singh's eyes were on the vast pool of votes among the underprivileged masses.

The plan put the international focus back on the inequities of the Indian caste system. Students and young middle class people took to the streets. Some burned themselves to death. Hindu fundamentalists, who were helping to keep Singh in power, marched on the north Indian town of Ayodhya to build a temple on a mosque site. Dangerous communal violence threatened. Singh's coalition partner, the Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party, withdrew support. Singh's own party split and he resigned in favour of Chandra Shekhar, leader of the breakaway faction.

Shekhar took power with only 62 seats, buttressed by



A celebrated photomontage by Peter Kennard depicting unification of two Germans—one in a series 'Images for the End of the Century.'

Rajiv Gandhi's Congress (I) Party which had no wish at that stage to take over government. Shekhar had barely enough MPs to fill the government posts and his regime looked even shakier than Singh's.

In Pakistan, the 20-month-old government of Benazir Bhutto was dismissed on August 6 by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, acting under pressure from the military. Bhutto was accused of misuse of power and her husband was held in jail on corruption charges. An interim government was installed and in elections held on October 24 Bhutto's defeat was complete. She lost heavily to a nine-party coalition and Nawaz Sharif took over as prime minister.

Bhutto claimed election rigging, but no firm evidence emerged even from international observers critical on some points about the conduct of polling. The first reign of a woman over a Muslim state had ended, but not the chequered political history of the Bhutto family.

Bangladesh then took its turn for political change. People had long shown dissatisfaction over President Hussain Ershad, a soldier who came to power in 1982 by bloodless coup and succeeded only partially in civilising his government. In November a state of emergency was declared and 70 people died in street violence in Dhaka. On December 4 Ershad resigned. A caretaker government was formed pending elections.

In Sri Lanka the government of President Ranasinghe Premadasa was more firmly entrenched, but bloodshed was unabated in the bitter war with the Tamil Tigers in the north. India withdrew in March a peacekeeping force that had ended up making war and ousting them from Jaffna. Colombo and the Tigers began to talk peace. Then the Tigers attacked Sri Lankan camps and the army moved on Jaffna again and besieged it. For three months the city was without water and electricity. Civilian casualties were put at 4,000.

In an episode reminiscent of the 19th Century, the Tigers laid siege to Jaffna fort, trapping civilians and 200 government troops. After 96 days the army sent men across the lagoon in dinghies and relieved it. Then they abandoned the fort and the Tigers raised the flag of independence from the battlements. Sri Lanka's agony went on.

Better news came from Afghanistan, where contrary to most speculation at the time of the Soviet withdrawal, the government of President Najibullah not only survived, but began to make peace with some of the Mujaheddin guerrilla groups and began talking about forming a coalition. And in Nepal, following months of agitation, King Birendra ended the country's non-party system. A new government was sworn in led by Nepali Congress leader Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. The King's powers were reduced,

the whole local government system reformed and the dispute with India, which had led to a blockade of the country, ended.

The situation in Cambodia also held out some hope as pressure from the Soviet Union for a settlement increased. But talks in Paris and Jakarta and acceptance of a UN peace plan by the four warring parties followed by the formation of a 12-member Supreme National Council to embody Cambodian "independence, sovereignty and unity" still seemed to leave full agreement some way off.

Less promising was the situation in Burma, where after elections held in May the army stayed in power and the woman leader of the winning National League for Democracy, Aung San, remained under house arrest. The country continued to be an economic backwater in a region of rising prosperity. By contrast, neighbouring Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore maintained high growth rates exceeding most countries in the West and remained politically stable.

In Singapore the main architect of its amazing growth, Lee Kuan Yew, stepped down at the end of November after 26 years as prime minister. His deputy, Goh Chok Tong, took over, but Lee remained the 'Senior Minister' and was expected to drive the car on the back seat. Over the campaign in Malaysia, Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamad won a handsome victory in a controversial snap general election. A general election in Japan re-

Bangladesh). The threat to the environment was as much on everyone's mind as the changes in Europe and the Gulf crisis.

Majors conferences on the environment were held in the Hague, London, Bergen, Geneva and Montreal. World leaders laid out their rhetoric, but action fell far short of expectations. Agreement to halve the use of chlorofluorocarbons by 2000 did not meet 'green' demands.

The US and other big powers were not ready to move drastically when it came to forcing powerful industrial interests to dig deep in their pockets to clean the air we breathe, the water we drink and earth we grow our food on.

Nor were the developing countries prepared to curb their meagre growth if they were not going to be financially helped to eradicate the pollution the rich had been teaching them to spread. The Pacific, meantime, also had its political upsets. In Australia Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke won another election, but in New Zealand, the Labour Party replaced its leader, Geoffrey Palmer, only weeks before an election. Mike Moore briefly became prime minister, lost desastrously and a National Party government moved in under Jim Bolger. In Papua New Guinea the long-simmering revolt in Bougainville led to a peace accord signed in a New Zealand warship, but within days the agreement collapsed. Philippine President Cory Aquino



shot and Bulgaria was following East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary in expunging communism with breathtaking speed and devising democratic constitutions.

In a matter of months total revolution and taken place in most of eastern Europe almost without bloodshed. Only in Romania had people died and, even there, comparatively few. In rapid succession all four countries moved to multi-party elections.

In Poland, where transformation had started years earlier and parties had multiplied, ex-shipyard worker Lech Walesa was in December elected President a decade after formation of his Solidarity Movement.

In East Germany, interim prime minister Hans Modrow was replaced by Lothar de Maiziere in March elections. Chancellor Helmut Kohl seized the opportunity for reunification, achieving by July 1 a single currency and then complete reunification on October 3 - only 11 months after the Wall had come down.

On December 2 he crowned his achievement. A general election - the first all-German polls since 1932, which produced Adolf Hitler - produced a crushing victory for his right-

seemed to be opening a new chapter called The End of Apartheid. Mandela emerged as a fit and dignified figure of 71, measured in his words and with a bearing of leadership that won him support wherever he went.

De Klerk opened an immediate dialogue and Mandela toured the world to win international backing. The two men, so unlike in background, seemed to find those in Europe. The African National Congress (ANC) and other political parties, even the Communists, were unbanned, exiles allowed home, many political prisoners released.

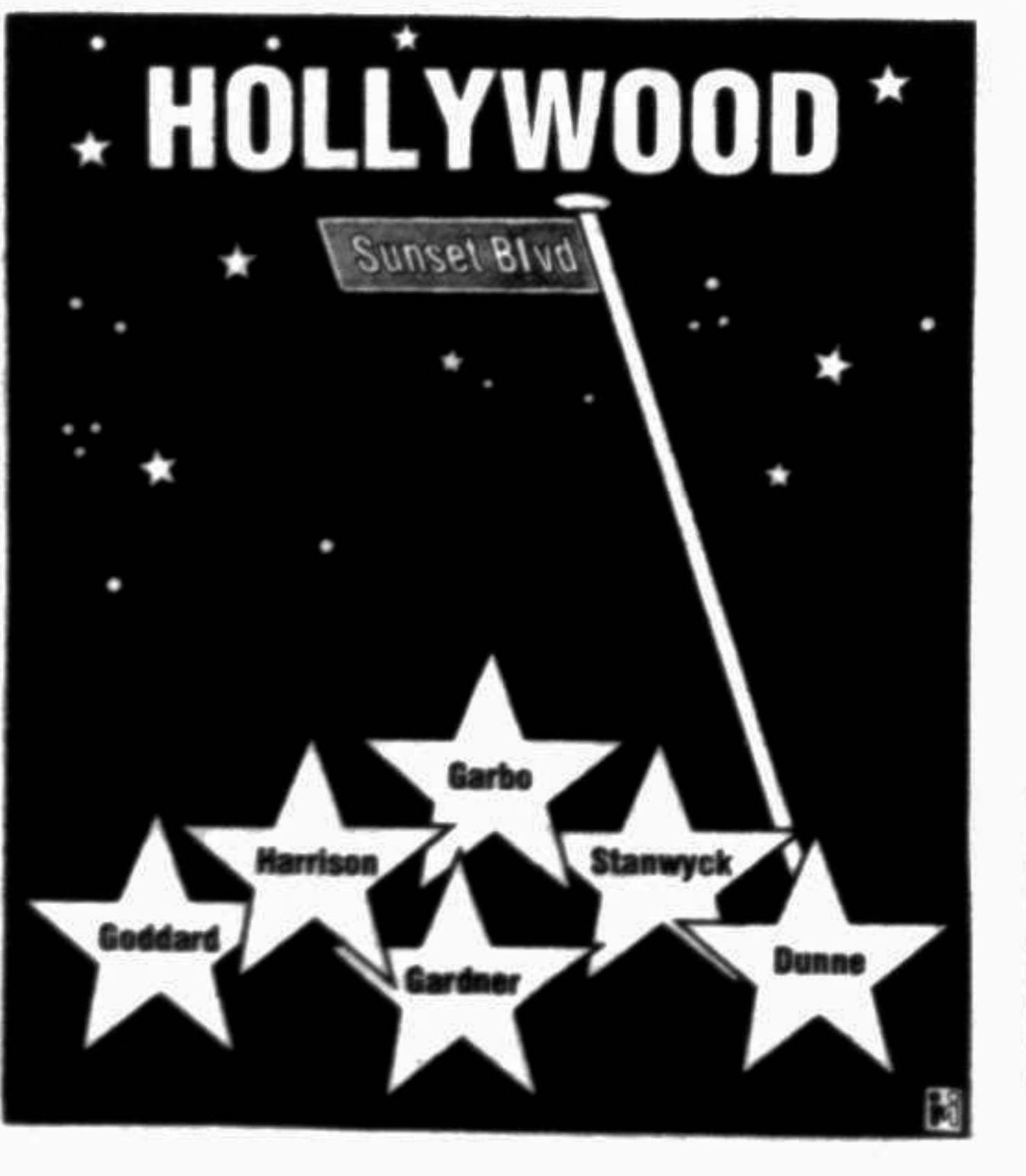
De Klerk pledged to remove all apartheid laws and retained the support of the bulk of his National Party. The year was seen as a prologue to 1991 when full constitutional talks would lead to elections with full black participation.

South Africa began to win back some respectability. De Klerk travelled to Europe and later the US, where his country had long been shunned, but not yet could he win the lifting of sanctions, which Mandela had advised should stay in place until apartheid had truly disappeared.

There was a backlash. Supporters of the Inkatha Movement, led by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, and with support from the right-wing in the US, had long been in violent conflict with ANC supporters in Natal. Now the conflict spread. Hundreds died, often in pitched battles. Appeals by Mandela for peace failed.

A second turning point in Southern African was the independence of Namibia. After hanging on there illegally for so long, South Africa now cooperated with the United Nations and withdrew under UN supervision. Elections and the working out of constitution - one of the liberal in the world - proved far easier than anyone expected.

On March 21 Sam Nujoma, leader of the liberation movement, the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), became President of an independent republic. Recognition on the pattern so successfully followed by President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, was Nujoma's policy. Its fulfilment was eased when SWAPO won a comfortable but not overwhelming majority, giving other parties on vital say in the running of Namibia. The Namibia exit was an-



In a year of political surprises one of the biggest came right at the end. In Britain the sudden resignation of Margaret Thatcher, for more than 11 years Prime Minister of Britain and longest serving of western leaders. Her departure surprised people overseas even more than it did the British. Although opinion polls had long shown her increasing unpopularity, the challenge to her leadership within her own Conservative party did not seem at first serious.

But proposals from the European Community for a single European currency had divided party and cabinet for months. Thatcher was firmly against the concept and even when she finally agreed to British membership of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism discontent continued. Ministers had become fed up with her tone and confrontational style. They turned on her.

In the first ballot in a curious voting system the 374 Conservative MPs gave her 202 votes. On the day after announcing defiantly 'I fight on... I fight to win' Thatcher quit in a second ballot - John Major emerged winner with 185 fewer than Thatcher had originally received - and became Prime Minister.

Thatcher, with unusual resignation, said 'It's a funny old world' and went off to live in a London suburb.