

Aid for Moscow

The massive dose of aid from industrialist democracies sought by the Soviet Union for its economic recovery programme still remains far from becoming a reality. In the first place, there is scepticism in both London and Washington not only about the intentions of President Mikhail Gorbachev, more specifically about how far he can go in changing the structure of the Soviet economy, but also about the Soviet leader's ability to withstand political pressures developing in different republics. One can never rule out the danger of these pressures forcing a change at the country's top leadership, even the ouster of Mr Gorbachev himself, which would bring to a standstill the process of economic changes which Kremlin wants to put in motion.

Taking full advantage of the Anglo-American scepticism, Japan finds reasons of its own as to why it cannot immediately come to the assistance of Moscow in a substantial way. The recent visit to Tokyo of a liberal Soviet economist Grigori Yavlinsky as an emissary of Mr Gorbachev has done much in winning considerable sympathy in Tokyo for sweeping economic reforms favoured by the Soviet President. But, then, the Yavlinsky plan is not the only one being discussed inside the Soviet Union and outside. There is also a more conservative one promoted by the Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, which has generated support among more cautious reformers.

As a popular saying goes, it is very much a chicken and egg situation. The question is, which must come first, the change in the Soviet economy or the Western aid that may stimulate the change? The question which defies a simple straightforward answer will figure prominently during the discussion next week at the Group-7 summit in London. In all probability, the West and Japan will not turn their back on Moscow. Instead, they will find a way of coming to the help of the Soviet leader, but on their own terms.

By now, it is obvious that the uncertainty that surrounds the whole question of aid for Moscow is part of a broader scenario on which industrialised democracies seek to impose a so-called new world order as proposed by President Bush. It is assumed that Moscow's claim on the western aid would largely depend on its participation, full or partial, in this "new order". Unfortunately, very little has been said and still less understood about the new order. In all probability, it should be based on a multiparty democratic system which, in turn, actively promotes a market-oriented economy. Having largely met these conditions, countries in Eastern Europe can now expect substantial assistance, in the form of grants and long-term credits, from the proposed western-backed bank set up for this purpose. In this context, the Soviet Union remains in a difficult position. This is a pity, because if USSR does not get the assistance it so badly needs, the so-called new world order itself may become a half-myth and a half-reality. If President Gorbachev fails to carry out his economic reforms and if he is replaced — or his authoritarianism which will make a comeback to the Soviet Union, in one form or another. The G-7 Summit in London next week should read the writing on the wall.

Burma — Time to Wake Up

"It is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it; and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those that are subjected to it".

Thus wrote Burma's conscience, Aung San Suu Kyi, in one of her memorable essays published on this page last Wednesday. It was the day she became the fourth person to be awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought by the European Parliament. When one thinks of the other three who have been awarded this prize for selfless struggle against tyranny — Nelson Mandela, Alexander Dubcek and Anatoly Sharandak — one becomes aware of the enormity of the honour bestowed on Suu Kyi. Here, she becomes not a person, but a symbol — symbol of the Burmese people's struggle for freedom, freedom from tyranny, from fear.

Even when the struggles and sacrifices of the Burmese have so quickly faded from the collective memory of mankind, the 44-year-old Suu Kyi has continued to defy a military regime that seems bent on making brutality and deceit into traits exclusive to itself. Suu Kyi has stood up to Burma's tormentors in uniform because the spirit that drives her is an indomitable one, and the cause she struggles for is just, because it aims to restore the self-respect and dignity of her people.

..... even under the most crushing state machinery courage rises up again and again, for fear is not the natural state of civilised man", she wrote.

But it is this unnatural, un-human state to which Burma is currently subjected by the military junta called the SLORC and Order Restoration Committee (SLORC) — a gross misnomer, since 'law' is the last principle to which the regime in Rangoon adheres. But the Burmese people have not shown any lack of courage in the face of such tremendous odds. The resilience of Suu Kyi personifies her people's will to resist, to sacrifice their wretched today for a better tomorrow.

While Europe honours Suu Kyi — and by implication condemns the SLORC junta — other countries nearer home and behaving in a less than enlightening manner have secured for themselves lucrative business deals, which in turn have helped to strengthen a regime that should have lost all international credibility after it refused to implement the people's verdict given at the May 27 general elections last year.

The conduct of our own governments which have failed to condemn SLORC and carried on business as usual, does not fill our hearts with pride. We have won our own battle against illegitimate, authoritarian, military rule and now have to remain constantly vigilant that we do not lose our precious rights. That is why it is our moral duty to support those who struggle for the same. Suu Kyi's message from internment is not limited to Burma, it is a universal one. The Burmese people's struggle for freedom, justice and human dignity is the same, one, and indivisible from the worldwide struggle for freedom from tyranny and oppression. When will the world wake up? When will we wake up?

Party Politics - National Issues - Sovereign Parliament

By Muslehuddin Ahmad

BANGLADESH politics has an unfortunate and bitter past. Two of its presidents were brutally murdered but the nation remembers them with due reverence and gratitude for their great contributions for country's liberation and development.

Past achievements are not enough for the survival of a political party. The politics of BNP and AL evolved largely on the images of their two leaders. Fair enough. It is natural for these parties to project the past achievements of their leaders to boost their present party positions but personality cult must be avoided because of its inherent undemocratic character. Moreover, a party can not survive for long on the achievements of its past leaders, the present leadership must prove their worth.

There must also be an attempt to forget and forgive past mistakes party politics should also tolerate some parties flashing back sometimes on some of the mistakes and failures of other parties either to hide their own mistakes and failures or to give extra colour to their own performances, but deliberate harping on them in public vitiates political atmosphere which at times may even lead to national crisis. Reiterations are really not necessary as people remember them well and they are indeed in a better position to judge who did what for the nation. Sometimes such tactless repetitions bring disaster for the parties. Recent election results of a particular party which, according to various surveys and studies, was expected to do much better, tend to prove

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change country's vicious political environment and that led to the establishment of the present democratic parliament. The parliament is an assembly of people's representatives and not a gathering of various political parties and, therefore, it is the solemn duty of the Parliament to show total respect to the wishes of the people and work selflessly, if necessary rising above party politics, to establish a democratic system that will stop forever the emergence of autocratic rule. It is, indeed, the right moment for the parliament to seize the spirit and the momentum that has been created to fight all forms of corruptions and other anti-social activities for the establishment of a just and equitable society.

A determined parliament led by an equally determined

leader of the House and the responsibility of correctly guiding the House lying with the leader of the House as was rightly pointed out by the leader of the opposition, can help bring about necessary political, economic and social changes. The people have shown enough readiness to work for the changes and indeed they are awfully tired of the present mess in the country's affairs. However, for achieving success, all in the helm of affairs must act with total honesty in every aspect of political and state affairs.

an atmosphere of cooperation prevailed in the parliament which was evident from the speeches of many members and particularly the unusually cooperative statement from the leader of the opposition. It is upto the ruling party to use this atmosphere of cooperation by showing enough flexibility in its future consideration of the opposition suggestions. The differences in the amendment bills placed by both parties are important but not unbridgeable. Many suggestions have been put forward by individuals, professional

groups, human rights organisations including some suggestions from The Civic Watch an organisation launched some time ago that stands against all forms of corruption and other anti-social activities. The people expect the sovereign parliament to stand firm, solve them amicably and pave the way for a system that will ensure people's rule.

President of the country has reportedly expressed apprehensions about this. What a mess we are in! This was possible during autocratic regime but why now under the democratic government?

There is no harm in holding a conference as suggested by the Senate delegation but it is likely to end up in bouts of accusations and counter-accusations unless there is full cooperation among the concerned political parties and genuine desire to stop the campus violence.

The Prime Minister said she wanted to establish congenial atmosphere in the educational institutions on the basis of consensus. If she is determined she can do it but she has to change her own attitude on students politics which may induce the opposition leaders

Dishonest practices to come to power or to remain in power and also to amass wealth unscrupulously to make personal life highly enjoyable do not pay in the long run. There are enough examples all over the world including some in our midst.

The parliament witnessed its first success on July 2, 1991, when the bill for introducing parliamentary form of government was placed in the House. This will remain a memorable day. The Ruling party showed necessary political sagacity in accepting the will of the people. Despite serious rumbling in the parliament on some past references by the leader of the House while introducing the bill, which she ought to have avoided as full cooperation of the opposition was necessary for smooth passage of the bill.

Through the country is plagued with innumerable problems which the parliament would have to try to solve gradually, it must urgently attend to the most immediate and extremely serious national problem — the Campus Violence — which is sure to destroy the country's future. The government is no longer at a new-born baby stage. The country is baffled to see why a democratic government with all forces of the country under

remains to be seen. France argues that trade between the OCTs and other countries is more important than trade with Europe. For example, most of New Caledonia's nickel goes to Australia.

Now that they have equal access to Europe, the OCTs have to apply the EC's so-called anti-dumping duties and agricultural quotas and adhere to its protocol limiting rum exports to Europe.

Another development which could raise the status of the OCTs perhaps even more than their new access to EC markets, is the agreement to set up regular dialogue between them, representatives of the member states to whom they belong, and the European Commission.

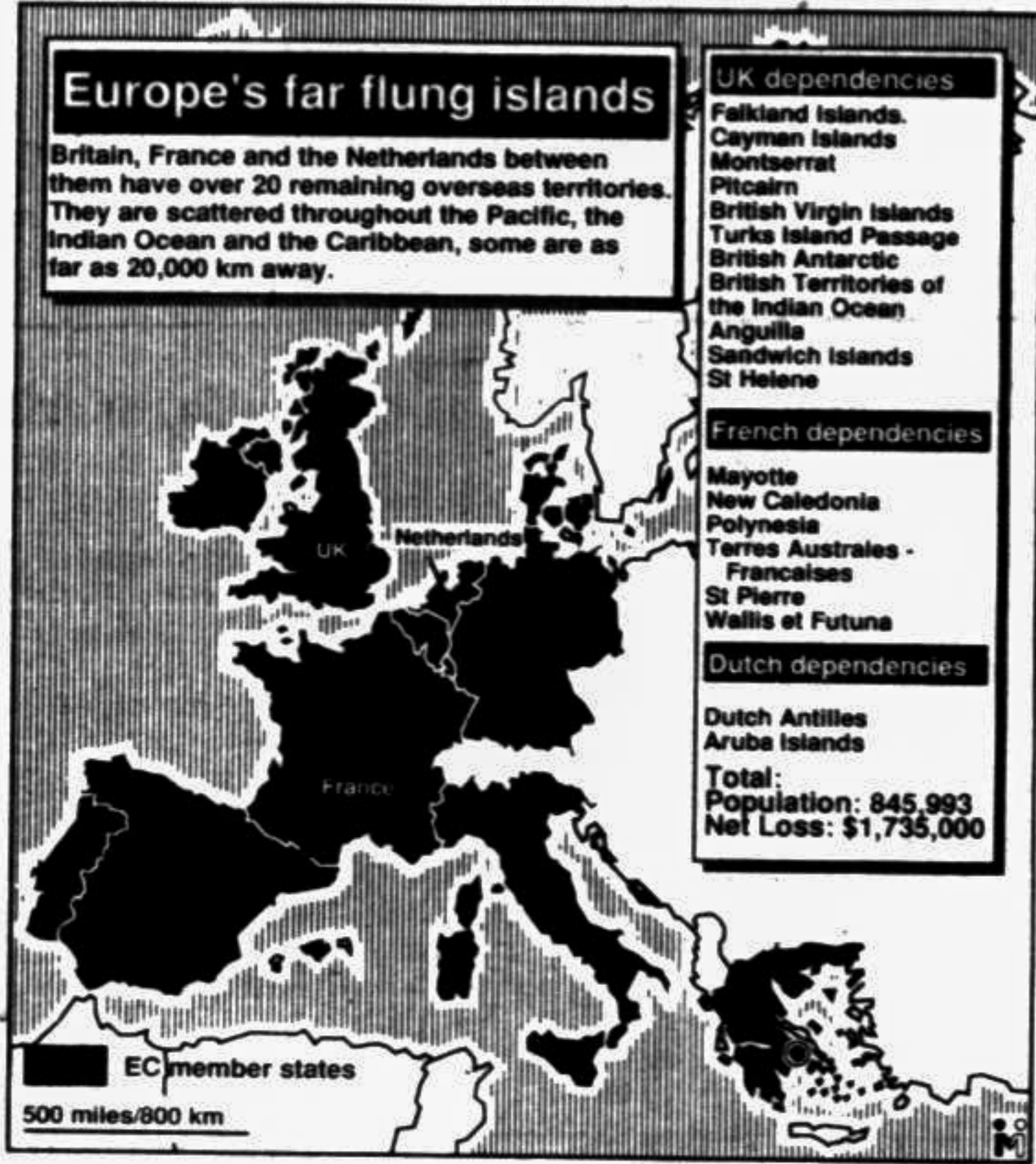
The total amount of aid to be granted to the OCTs under the new agreement, which is for 10 years, is ECUs 97 million (approximately US\$116 million). — GEMINI NEWS

HILARY CLARKE is a freelance journalist who formerly worked for the Asian Herald.

Small Island Territories Granted Access to Europe

Hilary Clarke writes from Brussels

Island territories still appended to former colonial powers in Europe have for years been clamouring for full access to the European market. Their case has been supported by the Netherlands but resisted by France and Britain. Now that they have been granted access it remains to be seen if French fears will be realised — namely, that the small territories will allow themselves to be used as a conduit for primary and secondary goods to flood into Europe.



Pacific countries (ACP) and the agreements are known as the Lome convention. The last convention was signed in December 1989 and, if some foot-dragging by Belgium and Denmark is overcome, it should come into force on August 1.

The majority of ACP states were colonies at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 but gained their independence in the five years

argues that this gives the islands the same status as the ACP countries — ie, that of developing countries, which it says they are not.

The status of the OCTs in the EC countries of which they are a part varies, but they all follow the relevant European defence and foreign policies. Feeble economies keep them tied to Europe; only New Caledonia has undergone any real movement towards independence, and a referendum will be held on that issue in 1998.

The islands of the Dutch West Indies form part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which in fact has three prime ministers — the Dutch one, one from the Caribbean island of Aruba and one from the rest of the Dutch West Indies.

OPINION Foreign Debt: Indian Perspective

Disturbing news is coming from our big and strong neighbour India. A few days back she mortgaged 20 tons of gold for 200 million dollars to tide over her foreign exchange crisis. But it was not enough. The Indian Government has flown another 25 tons of gold to London to be kept in the Bank of England as collateral for foreign debt servicing. India, it is said, has never failed to pay her foreign debts. She is also the biggest recipient of foreign loans.

This kind of predicament is reserved only for countries like Bangladesh which is one of the poorest in the world — the country which is battered and bruised by vagaries of nature so often and also bullied by her big neighbour at times.

India is considered to be a model for developing countries. During the last four decades she has made tremendous progress in the fields of industry, trade and commerce, science and technology as well as agriculture. She has developed the infrastructure on which she is firmly based. She is winning contracts in Africa to build railroads and powerplants, and at home testing all kinds of sophisticated rockets and missiles. She produces everything from needles to aircraft. This has been possible there by pursuing a policy of utmost restraint and stringent fiscal measures over the years. Industrially she is supposed to be the tenth advanced country and militarily the fourth largest power in the world. Indian products have a very large market. Her neighbours are also the lucrative business pockets of Indian goods, officially and otherwise, we have always known that Indian economy is as strong as the elephant of a Maharaja (well

fed and well groomed). Then why this crisis? How did it happen? The largest democracy has always been ruled by elected governments. She has very strong democratic institutions — outspoken opposition, free Press and an intelligent and powerful bureaucracy for running the administration. Apparently nothing should go wrong. She is unlike many so called developing countries where dictators call the shots and the people only obey without any say or protest. Then where is the catch? Why the strong elephant suddenly finds itself caught in the quicksand? Why should Indian economy slump in the arms of World Bank and IMF, devaluation notwithstanding? It is hard to believe that Indian political stalwarts have bungled with the country's economy or the bureaucrats mismanaged financial affairs. Nor is it conceivable that the wizards at the Reserve Bank of India were taking a nap while the termites were eating into the vitals of the vaults.

Who is then the villain of the piece? Well, the Indian business giants and the industrial tycoons must have a role to play. The subtle change in invoices, the juggery of figures, the indifference to tax evasion, private and surreptitious transfers of hand cash converted into foreign currencies and to foreign banks, the qualified handouts, the remittances of the hard earned foreign money of the large workforce abroad through private channels, huge expenditure on unproductive areas must have contributed to a great extent to this impasse. And what about the vast middle-class which has acquired a tremendous purchasing power? Are they not contributing to the saturation of the foreign ex-

change reserves by spending indiscriminately? And of course we must not forget the fourth largest military machine in the world. In the absence of a rich Brezhnev and a sly Gromyko India is obliged to spend from her own resources to keep her machine operative. A poor Gorbachev is of little help. When 400 million Indians live below subsistence level it is a pride to have terminators that can take care of disobedience, or fully and broadly the small and weak neighbours, or can brandish the sword in the air to scare an imaginary enemy! Bravo, sooner or later a day must come when you will be a prisoner of your own misdeeds. We have known it so many times. The laws of nature works in silence.

Well, does all this bear any lesson for us? If not, what use discussing their follies, or even credits? Does our own foreign debt that stands at Tk 27,695.09 crore worry us vis-a-vis our lesser capability to repay that, as stipulated, in different periods from four to 40 years? What happens if we can't or don't? Oh, no, we too have a little gold (accumulated over the years through seizures from illegal traffickers, if not otherwise possessed), and above all the austerity measure. Yes, austerity! But how much serious we are about some rightful discriminations (to support necessary development) and illogical indiscriminations (to check unnecessary drainage) in pursuing austerity? Whether we are pursuing this novel and only way of harmonising expenses with income in all sectors, or at all any where, is however, yet to be scrutinised.

Bairam Khan
Guilshan, Dhaka

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.

Faridabad roads

Sir, Faridabad is a well-known residential area in the old part of Dhaka city. About two lac people live in this locality. But most of the roads of this locality are in a bad shape. Hari Charan Roy Road, Faridabad Lane, Nabin Chandra Goswami Road, Dhalkanagar by part, Lalmonohar Podder Lane, I.G. Gate and Bahadurpur Lane are in very bad conditions due to lack of repair. As a result the people living here have been suffering much for want of modern communication facilities. Due to the worsening condition of the roads the area is also lagging behind in the fields of trade, commerce, education etc. to a good extent and most of the people of this place find little opportunity to enjoy the facilities of city life.

For obviating the miseries and sufferings of the people we

urge upon the authorities to take immediate steps for repair of the roads.

Mahbubuddin Chowdhury
17, Hari Charan Roy Road,
Faridabad, Dhaka-1204.

Towards general welfare

Sir, It is now evident that the BNP government is sincerely moving forward to establishing true democracy in the country. Placement of the Constitution Twelfth Amendment Bill for switching over to a parliamentary form of government in the Jatiya Sangsad on July 2, 1991 by Prime Minister and Leader of the House Begum Khaleida Zia reflects the goodwill and honesty of the BNP government. This is towards fulfilling the expectations of the common people who have been struggling for democracy since in-

dependence of this country.

We congratulate the BNP government and hope that they will actively work for the improvement of the lot of common people. We also sincerely hope that the Opposition will extend their utmost cooperation to help the government in executing projects that are exclusively meant for general welfare and development of the country.

M. Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor,
Bangladesh Agricultural
Institute, Dhaka-1207.

3-year savings certificate

Sir, Savings certificates of various categories are in circulation but only 5-year Savings Certificate is accepted as investment in the case of income tax calculation. The general savings are very much negligible compared to GDP percentage as indicated often by authorities and experts concerned. Under the above backdrop it would be just and appropriate if 3-year Savings Certificate is also considered as investment for income tax relief.

Sadik Alee
Maghbozar, Dhaka.