

# St Petersburg Shrugs Off its Leninist Garb

Charles Quist Adade writes from Leningrad

## Coup in Moscow

If a coup, backed by the might of the armed forces, can be called a victory, hardliners in Moscow have just won their long-awaited battle against President Mikhail Gorbachev, just replaced by his Vice President, Gennady Yanayev. This fits in with the prediction made by Alexander Yakovlev, a close ally of the ousted President, who on resigning from the Communist Party had warned about a coup by hardliners in the near future. What Mr Yakovlev had not known was that Mr Gorbachev would lose his job for "health reasons", a perfectly civilised ground for the leader's dismissal. Over the decades, coup leaders in the Soviet Union — and perhaps in other countries — have improved on their working methods.

More to the point, it is the timing of the coup that is most significant. On returning to Moscow, due yesterday, after a month-long vacation, Mr Gorbachev was scheduled to sign a new Union Treaty with Soviet republics, one that Kremlin had been working on for months and which had been just approved in a referendum. The treaty which offered increased powers to the republics was seen by the reformist group as the only way of keeping the USSR together.

If hardliners are determined to sabotage the proposed treaty, they are also firmly opposed to the reform programme planned and partly initiated by Mr Gorbachev. In a statement, announcing the change of Kremlin leadership, hardliners have plainly condemned the plan as one that has put the country in a "mortal danger", which also posed a "threat" to its "territorial independence and integrity." These references clearly touch on Kremlin's handling of the ethnic problem as well as to the growing openness of the country's decision-making process. On both the issues, the new leadership in Moscow would probably like to go back to the pre-Gorbachev era, whatever the cost and however short may be the duration of the exercise.

No matter how Yanayev & Co handle problems in these two areas, the real challenge facing the new leadership lies on the economic front. How is Kremlin going to fill the half-empty shops and run the factories, without the assistance and credits from the West for which so much of groundwork has been done by Mr Gorbachev? Will the United States and other industrial democracies still come to the aid of the Soviet Union, a country now under the control of hardliners and the army, country that may resort to military adventurism against some of its own dissident republics, such as the Baltic states? We believe, the answer to this question will — and, indeed, should be — in the negative.

At this moment, it would be an academic exercise to chronicle the mistakes and blunders which, committed by the Soviet leader, brought about his downfall. One shudders to think of what lies ahead of this great country, of the drift that is bound to set in, of the danger of chaos and bloodshed, and, finally, of the setback to hopes and dreams which the Soviet leader, one of the greatest and the most courageous men of this century, had raised for his country and for his teeming population.

It is too early to speculate on what the new leadership in Kremlin will now do to handle the situation or just to stay in power. Perhaps almost any method will be tried, especially during the six-month emergency, to silence all voices of opposition throughout the Soviet Union. One only hopes that it will not adopt methods similar to those used by the Soviet Union in putting down uprisings in Prague and Budapest during the Brezhnev rule.

Today, our heart goes out to the people in the Soviet Union in their hour of betrayal, but with the prayer that someone who may not be either Mr Gorbachev or even Boris Yeltsin may help the country to resume its journey to democracy and reforms, before it is too late.

## The Press Council

It is understandable — indeed welcome — that media practitioners should take advantage of the changed political climate in the country to examine the role of the press in Bangladesh. This was done, with a certain degree of thoroughness, on Saturday during a discussion on Bangladesh Press Council (BPC). Almost all speakers agreed that this press body which was set up in 1979 under an Act of 1974, has not been functioning well. During its 11 years of existence the Council has handled apathetically few complaints and consequently earned little or no credit for its supposed watch-dog role. This being the case all the speakers emphasized the need for reactivating the Press Council.

Some ideas emerged as to how this should be done. There appeared some kind of consensus that the press body's powers should be strengthened and expanded. At this moment a newspaper or news agency can be admonished and censured, if a complaint lodged against it by anyone is proved to be true.

Most people consider that this kind of "punishment" hardly provides any redress to the aggrieved party. However it is not yet clear as to how what kind of new powers can be given to the Press Council to make it more effective.

After all, a Press Council cannot function as an extension of the country's judiciary, outside the media scene of the country. Here it will be useful for BPC to study the working of Press Councils in other developing countries, including India.

In the long run much depends on the media accepting an updated code of conduct, one which takes a firm line against the invasion of privacy of individuals by the press, blatant sensationalism reflecting scanty regard for accuracy and truth, trial by the media often accused in a court case and such other offences which clearly violate the norms of a responsible press. Once such a code of conduct is put into effect, the watch-dog role of the Press Council will indeed acquire a new dimension.

In this connection, we suggest that the people in the charge of the press body should go into all this questions with the help of a study group. Instead of assuming that only one discussion just held on Saturday can give a fresh lease of life to an organisation which does have a significant role to play in the growth of the media in this country.

**L**ENINGRAD'S tale of one city with three names threatens to split the second-largest centre in the Soviet Union into two camps. Many burgers are outraged by a decision, arrived at by referendum, to have the city revert to its traditional name of St. Petersburg, and say they will defy it.

"This is the city of my pre-war childhood, and it will remain Leningrad till death," wrote one Leningrader.

The referendum was held on June 12, the same day the country held its first multi-party presidential elections. Leningrad decided it was time also to shed Lenin's name, and by implication his political heritage. The move has angered headline communists, World War II veterans and Nazi blockade survivors.

The city, on the banks of the Niva river, came into being as St. Petersburg in 1703, named by Peter the Great in honour of himself. In 1914 the name was changed to Petrograd. The ruling nobility argued that St. Petersburg sounded too foreign and religious.

When Vladimir Lenin died in 1924, his followers decreed that Petrograd, where Lenin masterminded the Bolshevik revolution of October, 1917, that toppled the Tsars, should be named after him.

Thus, many Soviets have come to see Leningrad as a city of two tales.

The first is of Peter the Great's achievement in creating a modern city of architectural beauty. Supporters of the name change draw parallels between Peter's aggressive modernisation and westernisation.

**What's in a name? For the citizens of Leningrad quite a lot. They have voted to change the name of their city back to St. Petersburg. What's in a name, they argue, is memories of the leader of the Russian Revolution and of a system that has been discredited. But for other citizens, especially those who were there during the dark days of World War II, Leningrad achieved a symbolism all its own. To change that, they argue, is to change history.**

tion of 18th century feudal Russia and Mikhail Gorbachev's efforts to tear down the iron curtain and democratise the Soviet Union.

The second tale is of Lenin, architect of the Soviet state, and his conversion of fledgling capitalist Russia into a communist stronghold.

But communism is no

longer in fashion in Gorbachev's Soviet Union. Lenin and his ideas now get part of the blame for the parlous economy.

Recent polls indicate that nearly 70 per cent of Soviets no longer regard Lenin's ideas as sacred. Three years ago the same percentage said exactly the opposite.

Among those who want the name Leningrad to stay are senior democrats, former communists and a few staunch anti-communists. Declared 82-year-old Galina Petrovna, a blockade survivor and war veteran who does not belong to the communist party: "Leningrad fended and defended me through 900 days

and nights of Nazi blockade. I was born and bred in the city on the Niva. You can't bite the hand that fed and protected you in the time of pestilence. So I voted for Leningrad."

They argue that to change the name of the city where Lenin made his first real gains is sacrilegious and a rewrite of Soviet history. That would contradict Gorbachev's glasnost philosophy of leaving "no blank spots in history," they say.

What then of Stalin and his legacy? A history lecturer at Leningrad University, when asked about the de-Stalinisation of Soviet history and political life in the late Fifties, said with a shrug: "Stalin cannot be compared with Lenin. The former was a monster."

After Stalin's death in 1953, Stalingrad, scene of one of the most decisive battles against Hitler's army, was renamed Volgograd by Communist Party decree. Many streets, schools and monuments named after Stalin or built in his memory were later changed or destroyed.

According to a writer in Izvestia newspaper, the tradition of renaming streets and cities was carried to a "heartless extent and subjected to unprecedented

politicisation after the communists seized power."

Kenigsburg, a former German town in what was Northern Prussia, was renamed Kaliningrad, after the first Soviet President. Hundreds of others in the Soviet far east met a similar fate in the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet disputes in the late Fifties and early Sixties.

Cities, streets and educational establishments which bore the names of Soviet leaders like Brezhnev, Zhdanov, Molotov and many more were changed overnight when those leaders fell from grace.

Thus, renaming, like the rewriting of Soviet history, became part of the political culture.

The radical mayor of Leningrad, Antoly Sobchak, says the renaming is more symbolic than official.

In response to criticism that the 150 million rubles to be spent in the renaming exercise could be used to repair Leningrad's pot-holed roads and other crumbling facilities, the mayor retorted that the money for renaming would not come from the city's budget.

It will come from voluntary contributions and the process will be extended through 10 or 20 years.

However, many Leningraders will know that real change has come only when the empty shelves in their shops are filled with basic goods.

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## St Petersburg: a tale of one city

Second biggest Soviet city was built on marshland won from Swedes in war

1703	Founded as St Petersburg by Peter the Great
1713-1918	Capital of Russian Empire
1754-62	Winter Palace built
1914	City renamed Petrograd
1924	Named Leningrad after Lenin dies
1941-2	Besieged by Germans for 900 days
1991	Referendum decides: Call it St Petersburg

## Afghanistan: Curtains for Najibullah?

cratic government for reconstruction. The peace plan has rekindled hopes of an end to the 13-year-old Afghan civil war by the end of the year.

But even before that happens, the bitter discord in Kabul's highest echelons may eclipse Najibullah who survived despite predictions of his government's swift collapse after the 1988 Soviet withdrawal



**Factional fights within his party and government threaten to unseat President Mohammed Najibullah just when it looks like the end of the Afghan conflict is in sight. Rajiv Tiwari of IPS reports from New Delhi.**

Prime Minister Mahmud Baryalai. Karmal's younger brother rehabilitated in 1989. But Baryalai's removal and the virtual house arrest of Karmal have failed to counter challenges to Najibullah from Prime Minister Sultan Ali Khatamand and even disgraced Khalq leader Shah Nawaz Tanai who fled to Pakistan after a joint coup attempt with Hekmatyar boomeranged in March 1990.

Though Tanai is cloistered in Peshawar, Pakistan, his hard-line leftist stance against Najibullah's national reconciliation policies find favour in extremist Khalq factions.

Meanwhile, former Afghan Defence Minister Abdul Kadir, who launched Karmal's overthrow of former President Hafizullah Amin and later de-

fects is also back in Kabul, the sources say.

Afghanistan's ethnic splits are coming to the fore within the Watan Party and Najibullah's astute creation of political space for himself by playing minorities such as the Hazaras and the Tajiks against the dominant Pashtoons no longer works.

After the fall of Khost where Tajek government troops were massacred by the rebels, central council member and Tajek leader Najmuddin Kawyani led an unprecedented attack on Najibullah, who is a Pashtoon, holding him culpable for the slaughter.

The changing political equations are also reflected in the Afghan army which is the backbone of endurance for any regime.

Three key 'Karmalite' generals governing strategic provinces — Mohammed Nabi Azimi in Kabul, Mohammed Afzal Lodin in Jalalabad and

Noor ul-Haq Olumi in Kandahar — are said to be functioning as independent power centres.

But the unkindest cut for the beleaguered president must be a recent commentary in the usually reticent Soviet Pravda newspaper which envisaged his removal much as it had in 1986 when Karmal was asked to proceed on sick leave to Moscow.

The Soviets are, however, not about to ditch the Watan Party which they would like to see emerge united after Najibullah's ouster, though Afghan analysts doubt if the rival factions will be able to stick together without him.

Just when Najibullah was beginning to win friends and influence his most bitter critics in the West, Afghanistan's puzzling history appears poised to take yet another detour.

It remains to be seen if the ex-chief of Khad (state security) is able to obliterate opposition to him with the ruthlessness which has been his trademark.

## 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.

### Democracy and DU

Sir, The frantic armed clashes between rival student groups yet once again forced the Dhaka University authorities to shut down for indefinite period and this has happened within only four months of BNP rule in the country. The whole nation is united on one point— whoever came to power so far, no one could control the situation. Needless to say, closing down can never be an instrument for restoration of peace. We have to think how to curb this impetuous and monotonous insanity.

What can be drawn as conclusion from the attitude of the present Government is that although it is eager to solve the crisis but yet heads of other 'big parties' have not yet shown any plausible interest in this regard. By making the ruling party responsible and by making lofty public speeches they cannot bypass their responsibilities. We demand a greater and positive role of these parties in mitigating the sufferings of the students. In few cases even the VC has been called a government agent, this is much to be deplored. The government has shown its respect to democratic norms and processes in many cases. And, if these parties come with suggestions, we positively believe the government will meticulously take them for consideration. We want only peace and congenial atmosphere for the pursuit of knowledge. This is the duty of all the political parties to provide us; we all be grateful to whoever come to our succour.

This is high time the crisis in educational institutions

should be announced as national crisis or treated as such. The VC's interview with The Daily Star last week and his recent statement that unless peace is assured, the University authority would not open the university are eulogistic indeed. This is not only my demand but I am sure that all the students do have the same feeling. Today even in colleges, political groups are out to create filthy atmosphere, crippling the whole educational institution. They are simply infiltrators out to annihilate our future. Any further anomaly should never be allowed at this apogee. The government should no more remain as a silent spectator.

Iqbal Ali Khan  
Shantinagar,  
Dhaka.

### Whither solution?

Sir, Howsoever we criticise the damaging and breaking of cars and buses by agitators to fulfill their demands, it is an accepted fact that it brings positive result for them. For some Government decisions, some innocent persons are being punished, harassed for no fault of them. We have nobody to complain for this — nobody to accuse for it, as we cannot identify the law-breakers; if it is lawbreaking at all! We call it movement! And then what do we do even when we can identify the persons who punish us for no fault of ours? I know a person charged by a Magistrate for cheating 'B' while looking after 'A' and her property with her consent. Whose influence is this and where is the solution? When

the law enforcers are misusing their power, who would give shelter to the poor victim who has no means and money to go for appeal to the higher law-enforcing agencies! Should appeal be the only solution? What about the wrongdoers who are placed in the society undaunted with power and not doing any movement? Or they?

Muntra Khan  
Green Road,  
Dhaka.

### Congratulations!

Sir, Now that the parliamentary system has triumphed over the presidential system it would be appropriate to congratulate the people and their leaders who have had shown their utmost determination to put the country on the rail again politically. It is difficult to say who did the most to make a history for the nation. Nor it is an occasion for recalling bitter experiences of the past when the people's movement against autocracy had many ups and downs and at times frustrations. August 6 was yet one more red letter day for the whole nation.

Although as a retired civil servant I was perhaps only a passive onlooker during all these movements, I was carefully scanning the role of the press and was happy to note that the journalists played the most vital role in guiding the nation to its pinnacle of success. At present the country is proud of its mighty and independent press. With malice to none, may I recall that in the midst of many hopes and fears, particularly BNP's alleged foot-dragging on the question of the 'system of government', it was 'The Daily Star' which opened mouth first and administered a warning, a bold one, and asked the concerned quarters to explain why it was averted to parliamentary form of government which the na-

tion had a right to know! Later the warning also came from a Danniell, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, who came to judgement at a time when the nation was at a crossroads. Despite mutual mud-slinging, the leader of the treasury bench Begum Khaleeda Zia and the leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina deserve commendation for their unique role during the political movement of the country.

Truth has a peculiar way of resurrection and it has been re-enacted on the soil of Bangladesh!

Abdul Kader,  
Purana Pallan,  
Dhaka.

### Employment in ME

Sir, A lot of Bangladeshis had to leave their employment in Iraq in favour of Bangladesh's stand during the period of illegal Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. Bangladesh along with other countries as per the resolution of the United Nations had extended full moral and material support to restoring independence and sovereignty of Kuwait.

Now Kuwait is freed from illegal Iraqi occupation and we sincerely hope that Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other friendly Muslim countries will come forward to provide employment to all those Bangladeshis who lost their jobs in Iraq. It is expected that the home government will also take necessary steps in this regard.

We are sincerely interested to become partners in the progress and development of Kuwait, KSA and other friendly Middle East countries.

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## OPINION

### Mongla Port Needs a Boost

It is reported that at Mongla Port articles worth crores of taka are lying under the open sky in absence of proper storage and security facilities. Mongla Port is the country's only natural port. The port is now running without modernisation and unfortunately without railway connection with Khulna. Railway connection to and from a port is simply essential. Even despite enormous limitations, the port has facilitated a great deal of industrial and commercial development in the western zone consisting of Rajshahi and Khulna divisions.

The river Jamuna divides the country into two zones — eastern and western. The western zone is hard hit in respect of the higher cost involved in transportation of goods. In the western zone, compared to eastern zone, there is the negative cost of production particularly due to absence of gas and total dependence on Dhaka and Chittagong for marketing the products. In such constraints the port tries to save both time and cost in respect of the movement of goods and services to facilitate development of western zone in particular.

As a member of Railway Consultative Committee, I visited Khulna and the Mongla Port. The conditions at the port are remarkably poor as in the past. So far as the industrial and economic development of the country is concerned, the conditions need to be improved remarkably without any further delay.

In Delhi I saw the "Samata Express" running daily between Delhi and Lahore. This train service is available without any change on the route between Delhi and Lahore. In Europe there is direct train service between capitalist and socialist countries even since the iron curtain days. In the perspective of the SAARC spirit, Mongla Port can well, also be used as a transit for Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal provinces of India as well as Nepal and Bhutan. The purpose of SAARC can be best served by the port. It will definitely bring about a substantial

profit not only to the western zone railway but also to the railway of the country at large.

The sanction of inadequate fund for the port has been the constant hindrance towards its development and potentiality. Chittagong was the country's single port. So, as an impact, it is not unlikely that a coterie of industrialists, business magnets, bureaucrats, politicians might have taken place. The development and modernisation of Mongla Port would naturally affect their foundation and it is even reportedly assumed that they might stand in the way of overall development and modernisation of Mongla Port. It is unfortunate that the interest accrued on the amount of loan needs to be met out of the revenue of the port even when the port is still in its infancy. All such actions tell upon the development of the port. Only 18 years back it would have costed only Tk. 2,100/- crore for its all round development and modernisation, if so undertaken. Despite that services at the port are cost efficient. In 1980 at Chalna Port loading and unloading of each ton of goods costed only Taka 20/-.

At Chittagong Port it costed Tk. 21/- and at Calcutta Port it costed about Tk.200/- . It used to take only seven days for loading and unloading a ship at Chalna Port. The work took minimum 10 days at Chittagong Port whereas it took 15 days at Calcutta Port.

In the context of all this it is urged upon the present democratic government to take all steps to connect Mongla Port by broadgauge railway with Khulna and to bring about overall development and modernisation of the Port including massive dredging of the river Pashur and construction of sheds, modern storage facilities ensuring safety and security etc. within shortest possible time. More funds need to be allocated and its continuity needs to be sustained, as of necessity with continuous foreign aid, assistance, loan etc.

Md. Anwarul Afzal,  
Raninagar, Naogaon.