

In-from-the-cold Germans Still Find Things Chilly

Chadlin Tephaval writes from Bonn

The first anniversary of the unification of Germany passed without much celebration. The occasion was dampened by the growing realisation among East Germans that the process of joining the two Germanies has led to virtual domination by the capitalist West. Many on the eastern side of the Brandenburg Gate, begin to wonder whether they were better off under the centralised socialist state.

German unification: one year on



back on their feet and in control of their own affairs. But after electing western political parties in a general election last year and handing their country to them for unification, many Eastern Germans are now wondering if they got more than they bargained for.

Certainly they can now enjoy all the western consumer goods money can buy. Though food was not scarce before, it is now plenty and rich in variety. They can travel, speak their minds and criticise political leaders. The Stasi (secret police) and the party cadre are gone. But along with this new freedom comes a totally new way of life and attitudes that are often alien.

The state institutions that had shaped their lives — for most since birth — have disappeared. Some people feel like strangers in their own homes.

"It (unification) does not work when you do it quickly," said Robert Werner, 28, a state employee in Schwerin, capital of the northernmost East German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. "It's like getting rid of your own roots. There is nothing left to hold on to."

Another state worker, Annette Koptinger, 34, echoed the sentiment: "I would have wished for a slower process. Not this sudden crash."

Robert and Annette were members of the News Forum which spearheaded revolt against the Honecker regime. Like most Easterners today, they feel many good social

aspects of the GDR system should have been retained: free kindergarten, nursery and childcare had freed 80 per cent of East German women to join the labour force, compared to 50 per cent in the West.

In the East both parents were also allowed to take a maximum of six weeks off work to care for a sick child. In the West it is six days. And most important of all, there was a guarantee of a job for everyone even if this meant mental work and overstuffing.

While those that are employed are earning more than they used to under the GDR, Easterners are particularly angry that Westis sent to help reorganise and administer the eastern states get a higher pay than local Osis. Because of this measure and the generally depressed economic situation, the average wage in the East is about DM 1,600. In the West it is DM 2,800.

Retirement age was lowered from 60 to 55 and a significant number of people who no longer fit into the new Germany, such as the older communist functionaries, were simply paid compensation and relieved of their posts.

Western planners admit they overestimated the productivity of the old GDR economy. Said Claus Hoffmann, head of the national economy and social policy division of the Labour Ministry: "We thought the East's productivity would be at worst 50 per cent that of

the West. We found out it was only 25 per cent."

The first priority was to reorganise the socialist production machine into a capitalist one and to get state and local administration established and running. This could not be done without massive injection of funds and manpower, including a DM 800 million budget for environmental clean-up.

The takeover by Westis left the Osis flabbergasted. They do not understand these people they see as arrogant and bossy who either tell them what to do or speed by in Italian suits and Porsche cars buying up what remains of their former country.

And to many Westis the Osis are ungrateful, unimagineable free-loaders who do nothing but complain. "I would rather have reunited with France," quipped a male nurse in Bonn when asked about reunification.

The East Germans feel lost and defeated. Many are in a depressed and withdrawn frame of mind. Others are more desperate as the emergence of neo-Nazi groups and racial attacks on foreign workers testify.

Despite this, most Osis and Westis have a sense of distant optimism. They think that gradually the East can catch up and the social integration will be achieved in 10-15 years.

After all, they do share the same culture and time should heal current differences. When the European Community finally becomes a single market next year, Germany will be the leading partner.

— GEMINI NEWS

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A Mid-East Breakthrough

Credit goes to the tenacity of the US Secretary of State, James Baker that Israel, four Arab countries and Palestinian representatives have agreed to join the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid on the 30th of this month. However, while succumbing to Washington's pressure, all the parties concerned also recognise the changed realities on the international scene, marking the end of the superpower rivalry and the decline of Moscow as a factor in the Arab-Israeli conflict. If an Arab state, like Syria, can no longer rely on Kremlin for arms and political support, Israel also sees the difficulty of using Moscow's support for the Arabs as a bargaining point with Washington for increased military and economic support.

The package of concessions, offered by the US official, contains sufficient positive elements for the two — or rather three — sides, the Arab states, Palestinians and Israel. It is a breakthrough of sorts for all concerned that sworn enemies of four decades have agreed to sit together to study prospects of establishing peace between themselves, through a process which is still shrouded in ambiguity and contradictions. Starting with a three-day meeting, the process will go through two more stages involving direct bilateral negotiations between Syria and Israel, which may well be the most crucial part of the Madrid conference.

A country like Bangladesh which has consistently supported the Arab cause, the withdrawal of Israel from occupied territories and the establishment of the Palestinian state in West Bank and Gaza strip must note with dismay that it is Tel Aviv which has secured all the concessions from the United States, not to mention the diplomatic recognition from the Soviet Union, the co-sponsor of the Madrid meeting, leaving the Palestinians virtually empty-handed, with hardly anything to offer as a bargaining chip. Again, the United States has given a number of undertakings to Israel, even before the start of the Madrid meeting, such as that there would be no discussion on the future of East Jerusalem or on any proposal for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Israel has also been given the veto over the composition of the Palestinian team which, instead of occupying an independent entity, will form only a part of the Jordanian delegation. The worst part of the deal is that the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) whose legitimate representative character is recognised even by the United Nations has been kept out to win Tel Aviv's participation at the Madrid meeting.

Why have the Arab states and Palestinians agreed to join the talks? What can they expect from a meeting which extremist Palestinian groups have strongly denounced? Their real hope lies in bringing international pressure on Israel for the acceptance of UN Security Council resolutions, especially No 242, which make it obligatory for the Jewish state to withdraw from the occupied territories. They would also certainly use the meeting to call a halt in the settlement of Russian Jews in the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Finally, the big question is, how far will the conference go in paving the way for an independent state for the dispossessed people of Palestine? May be only a step, as a PLO spokesman said last week, in the beginning of long journey.

At this stage, all one can hope is that the conference will develop its own momentum and underscore the weaknesses and contradictions of Tel Aviv's position. Thus, the conference could slowly move away from its original terms of references and start talking on issues which are now regarded as taboos by the Jewish state. Much depends on the unity in the Arab ranks, the understanding that Jordanians and Palestinians sustain in their joint team and the international understanding of the issues concerned, especially the rights of the Palestinian people. If these conditions are met, Arabs can indeed look forward to a long conference, covering several stages, with guarded optimism about its outcome.

New Challenges before the UN

In a way the United Nations, on its 45th birthday, is back where it started from — in the grip of a unipolar world. In 1946 the United States, the grand victor of the just concluded global conflagration and the supreme promoter of the new global body, dominated world affairs. It was only in the mid fifties and early sixties that the socialist bloc began to assert itself and we started to see the beginnings of the bipolar world, which had been more or less the pattern of international politics till the other day. By the seventies, the United Nations membership grew to include many developing countries, specially the newly decolonised ones from Africa. Most of these countries grouped themselves in the Non-Aligned Movement. The NAM became a third force within the United Nations — if not in the global affairs — following the rise of OPEC. But all that began to change towards the end of the seventies. First with the weakening of oil power and more and more Third World countries becoming debt ridden. Now with the collapse of the socialist bloc, we are back again in a world which is dominated by a single power.

But as we said earlier, the UN is back to where it started from — only in a way. For in many other ways it is a different world. It was a war devastated Europe that the UN was concerned with then. It is a debt ridden, poverty stricken and over populated world that the UN has to deal with now. The problems of today are truly international in character. The complex challenge of development, with its linkages to ecology, human welfare, growth, trade, commerce, fiscal and monetary policies is something that only a body such as the UN can handle. The issues of pollution, climatic changes, deforestation, sharing of water and the all encompassing problem of environment are tasks that no country can solve in isolation.

But how effectively the UN will be able to function, will depend to a large extent on how the rich countries, especially the United States, allow it to function. For if the US uses the UN to push forward its own global agenda — as it did during the early years of the Cold War — then the World Body will again fail to fulfil the great hope that the people of the world bestow on it.

On the occasion of the UN Day we pledge our renewed commitment to its ideals.

WHEN the Berlin Wall came down in November 1989, Germans on both sides broke out in euphoric celebration. East and West Berliners sang and danced together in the streets after 40 years of separation. Soon the rest of the country forced the hands of the politicians and with amazing speed, the former German Democratic Republic vanished into history.

A year after the October 3 1990 reunification, the mood is far from festive. Euphoria has died a natural death — as always a victim of reality. With the Iron Curtain suddenly lifted, many "Osis" and "Westis," as Easterners and Westerners not always fondly call each other, found that there may be one Germany but two German peoples.

The work of reunification has proved much more difficult than expected. And the cost in monetary and human terms is extremely high. Western Germans are becoming weary of paying. This year alone they will be pumping DM 138 billion into the former GDR instead of the originally estimated DM 30 billion a year.

As most state-run companies closed, many Eastern Germans found themselves suddenly laid off and on the dole. Though only 842,000 of the nine million workforce are officially classified as jobless, two million are on "short-time labour" — being paid to do little or nothing.

Ironically the instantaneous "withering away of the state" is the major cause of economic and social dislocation in the East. The socialist state had organised and operated every facet of life there from the huge kombinat — centrally-planned multi-industry companies that produced everything needed in their production cycles — to municipal

administration, nurseries and youth clubs.

In its place Western law and administration has been imposed wholesale. Each of the 11 states in the West is responsible for setting up the administration in one of the five new states of the former GDR. The kombinats and other

state-owned properties were put under Western-run public trust companies called Treuhand, and are being carved into small pieces for selling off to the investors, mostly Western German businessmen.

The West reassures the East these are emergency measures designed to get them quickly

New Nepal Govt Gets Flak for Budget Proposal

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

EVEN as it aims to transform Nepal into its vision of "democratic socialism," the new government faces a daunting task — starting with its budget.

The government, the first elected one since the 1950s, recently presented its budget go howls of criticisms from many shades of political persuasions.

Not least among the criticisms is that the new budget will increase dependence on foreign aid at a time when economic policies are being realigned worldwide, including inside Nepal's powerful neighbour India.

Critics argue that the budget for 1991-92 (starting July 17) fails to respond to sweeping reforms to develop India into a free-market economy.

The total budget of 26.6 billion rupees includes development expenditure of 16.8 billion rupees. The foreign aid component is 3.5 billion rupees, including 2.9 billion rupees in bilateral grants and 532 million rupees in multi-lateral grants.

In the absence of a significant mobilisation of resources, critics say the dependence on foreign aid is going to increase from 52 per cent in 1990-91 to 70 per cent in 1991-92.

Aid has played a very critical role in the kingdom's development, meeting 70 per cent of its development bud-

get. The net deficit of 10.5 billion rupees in the current budget is expected to be met by 8.3 billion rupees in foreign loans and 2 billion rupees in local borrowings. Bilateral loans amount to 1.8 billion rupees and multi-lateral loans amount to 6.5 billion rupees.

"The political change that has come in the country should have been followed by a commensurate economic change," says Man Mohan Adhikari, leader in parliament of the opposition United Marxist-Leninist Party. "What we see is the continuation of feudal attitudes and foreign influence," he says.

"The budget is purposeless, verbose and just a collection of old policies," says Dr Prakash Chandra Lohani, a University of California-educated economist who is one of four members of the deposed government who survived the May 12 parliamentary polls.

"It does not take into account the wide economic reforms being introduced in India," he says, adding that the plan to make Indian currency freely convertible within five years would be in the interest of Indian exporters and at the cost of Nepal's exports.

India devalued the Indian rupee by 20 per cent against all currency and stream-lined trade procedures. The budget was presented a week after the Nepali rupee was also devalued

against the US dollar and 1.79 per cent against the Indian rupee following New Delhi's devaluation move.

"The tilt towards the poor and welfare is by all means welcome," says Dr Bhekh Thapa, former Nepali ambassador to the United States. But it could have been bolder, he adds.

The new budget comes at a time when Nepal is asking aid and development agencies for more. For example, the government is discussing with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) future projects under the fifth country programme starting 1992.

The UNDP has pledged US\$78 million for the five-year period ending 1996, an increase by 14 per cent over previous country programmes. An additional US\$15 million is expected from the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

"It is a big programme by our standards," says Jerrold Berke, UNDP resident representative in Kathmandu. He says Nepal is the eighth country with the largest UNDP assistance.

UN agencies as well as major donors have helped Nepal build its infrastructure in the last 30 years. But the potential for future development are hindered by shortages in capital investments.

Nepal's need for technical cooperation in the next five years will be far more in excess to the funds currently pledged by the UNDP. And Nepal wants to raise the level of assistance.

The central focus of UNDP activities in Nepal is the alleviation of poverty by expanding economic production, human resources development, strengthening of planning and administration and environment management.

For example, Mr Berke points out, "we think we need to give drinking water and irrigation projects to directly benefit poor farmers." But at the same time, he says, there

is an even greater need for institution-building so that the government is in a better position to administer its poverty alleviation programmes.

Although classified by the UN as a "least developed" country, Nepal has an excellent foreign exchange reserve and sympathetic Western donors who have welcomed the change from the partyless political regime to a democratic, multi-party parliamentary system.

The UNDP has invested more than US\$500 million in technical assistance grants since 1963. It has been involved in 123 projects with another 46 projects in the

pipeline. The focus of the economic programme of the present government is to alleviate poverty," says Dr Ram Saran Mahat, a respected economist who resigned his UNDP post in Pakistan to return home and help the new government. He is now an economic adviser to the Prime Minister.

Mr Berke of UNDP says he is "impressed by the openness, dedication and sincerity of the new government. The ministers are open minded and communicating with them is easier. They make you feel comfortable. I am pleased with these changes, the breath of fresh air." — *Dephneus Asia*

OPINION

Retreat to Barbarism?

Abu Abdullah

Tucked away inconspicuously on page 3 of The Daily Star dated October 11, 1991, there was a news item which made my head swim and my blood run cold. The editors had obviously decided that this bit of information did not constitute front page stuff. In my opinion it rated banner headlines and a black border.

A modest, understated caption — "Import of foreign books banned." Reading on, we learn that according to the Minister for Forests, Fisheries, Livestock and Environment, Mr. Abdullah Al-Noman, as reported in the local press the government has decided to "stop imports of foreign books excepting those required for research and reference". Further down we learn that according to the minister, "The government decision to stop import of books which are not in conformity with our culture and heritage will help flourish (sic) our own literature and culture."

A number of issues arise. First, when and how was such a momentous decision taken? Was a bill presented, debated, and passed in parliament? More important is the substantive issue: how could this step back into barbarism even be contemplated, let alone accepted as policy? For surely it is nothing less. To deny the literate people of a country open access to worldwide developments in literature, philosophy, or the social and natural sciences, except those that some government committee considers "required for research or reference" and also "in conformity with our culture and heritage", is a sure recipe for cultural and intellectual disaster. For culture, and the life of the intellect, can only thrive on the free flow of ideas. Cultural efflorescences have almost invariably been the result of cross-pollination, of the meeting of "alien" cultures. Think of the role of Islamic culture in the Italian Renaissance, or that of English in our own more modest but nonetheless astonishing awakening.

What is "our" culture and heritage? Surely we are heir to many heritages — not only

Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic, but also, perhaps more powerfully, the Gracco-Roman and Judaic cultural heritage as transmitted and transmitted by the English. To be sure there is a folk culture that has been largely untouched by the last. But folk culture, precisely because it is immune to cross-fertilization, is static, and cannot constitute the staple of a growing, developing, dynamic culture.

Imagine it, a future where you don't have access to Dickens, Hardy, Jane Austen, Balzac, Zola, Sartre, Camus, Marx, Kant, Max Weber, Tagore, Saratchandra, Tarashankar, Bhabhubhushan, Russell, Whitehead, except such of these authors as some committee has decided to be "in conformity with our culture and heritage" or "required for research and reference". Imagine your children growing up without Anderson, Grimm, Mark Twain, Shukumar Ray, Satyajit Ray. Is it this state of total cultural deprivation (only very partly relieved by piracy and smuggling) that is supposed to "flourish" our culture? Even in industrial policy protectionism is now out of fashion because it breeds inefficiency. In the field of culture, such protectionism spells nothing less than the death of the soul.

How finally, can a government that prides itself on being democratic arrogate to itself the right to dictate what its citizenry may or may not read? It is bad enough that from time to time I am denied the right to read a particular book because a committee of semi-literate bureaucrats and bigoted pseudo-scholars decide that I must be protected from its contents. A blanket ban on all imported books constitutes a total infringement of my right to choose and construct my own culture, of my right to views that differ from those of the powers that be, of my right to freedom of thought. It is authoritarianism run mad. Perhaps, as in Hitler's Germany, we shall start with ceremonial bonfires of the imported books that are already in the shops.

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.

Objective/essay type questions

Sir, The four Education Boards of the country introduced objective type questions for the SSC candidates from 1991 with a view to reforming the examination system. All the Boards sent a book of sample questions to each respective educational institution of the country in order to acquaint the candidates with the patterns to question well before the examinations are held. The SSC candidates for 1991 as such prepared themselves in the light of the sample questions for both objective and essay types. The Boards previously determined the pass mark for objective type part at 20 and that for essay type part at 16 marks individually, and thus the pass mark of both the types combined, was 36 altogether. Recently this has been revised fixing the pass mark of both the types at 33. A candidate now needs 33 marks either from objective type or from essay type or from both the types combined to be able to secure the pass mark in a particular subject. More clearly, if a candidate now secures 33 marks in the objective type without obtain-

ing any mark in the essay type he/she will be able to succeed in the whole subject examination. This will surely degrade the standard of examination system and facilitate a section of examinees to pass out easily. If the aim behind introducing this system was to bring about a reform in the total examination system why then such a concession has been given enabling the learners to pass in one part instead of both the parts? Why has the objective type of Mathematics been waived? This revised decision has greatly shocked a good number of ideal candidates.

Glass sheet factory

Sir, I noted with interest your front page article (Oct 19) about the lapse of a USD 1 m Belgian grant. The most depressing aspect of this news item is that it is acutely representative of the inverse-snobbery syndrome by which I mean there is a widespread assumption that donors are falling over one another to assist us and that the quantum of aid commitment is more important than the extent of its utilisation.

A very specific example concerns Usmania Glass Sheet Factory (UGSF). Apparently all points in the government are convinced that UGSF badly needs upgrading and a detailed Tk 31 crore (Approx) programme has been worked out. The Belgian Government have also agreed to contribute the total requirement in the form of a grant. On the one hand, UGSF itself as well as BCIC and the Ministry of Industries feel that if GOB on-lend the funds to UGSF, the BMRE would not be a viable project. They have, therefore, proposed that about 50 pct be passed on to UGSF as a grant and 50 pct be given as a loan at 12.5 pct interest.

It appears now that some genius at Plancom has decided that since UGSF is to be privatised in due course, it should not benefit from a part-grant. As I see it, this imaginative decision will lead to the following: (1) The opportunity to upgrade UGSF will be lost, (2) UGSF will sink into greater decay, (3) The Government exchequer will be deprived of Tk 15 crore, (4) the country will be deprived of Tk 31 crore and, finally, (5) when the Government actually seek to privatise UGSF, it will be as a lame duck instead of profitably going and modernised industrial establishment.

Confusion of spelling

Sir, From sometime past our capital city is being spelt in English as "Dhaka" instead of its original spelling "Dacca".

We, the Bangladeshis though use and write this new spelling, it has been very often noticed that letters and communications coming from foreign countries bear the spelling "Dacca" in the address.

"Newsweek" which is a very important English weekly of international repute has a very good market in Bangladesh. This journal without least care as to the decision of Government about the change in the spelling has for years been printing "Dacca" as may be seen in the "Subscription Rates" column on page 2 of its each issue.

"University of Dacca" is an age-old educational institution. We do not know if its Syndicate by any amendment had brought about any change in the spelling of "Dacca". In the distant future our posterity and research scholars would be in confusion as to whether there were in existence two different cities "Dhaka" and "Dacca".

Therefore, it is now perhaps proper for us that we do revert to the old spelling of our capital city "Dacca" in view of the fact that the old spelling is still popularly known to the world around and we have not only failed to make this new spelling widely known and that we have also failed to use phonetic sounds in other cases as we are still using "Bogra" instead of "Bagura" and "Chittagong" instead of "Chattagram".

Abdullah Al Abu Baker Binaji Brol, Dittajpur.