

A Setback for Gorbachev

President Mikhail Gorbachev who faces almost a desperate situation at home certainly deserved a major success in his historic visit to Japan. Sadly enough, far from achieving this success, the Soviet leader has returned to Moscow without any assurance from Tokyo for a large-scale assistance and investment that the Soviet Union needs badly to avert economic disaster.

At the end of the visit, there was no longer any doubt that the issue blocking a massive Japanese economic cooperation was the ownership of four desolate islands which the Soviet seized at the close of World War II. Japan has been pressing for their return, without which it would not sign the long-delayed peace treaty with Moscow, but the Soviet leader is under pressure at home to keep the four islands.

On the four islands — Etorfu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and the Habomai group — a relatively minor agreement reached during the talks was that the two sides would discuss in future a number of concessions made by the Soviet Union, such as the abolition of visa requirements for Japanese nationals visiting the islands and reduction of Soviet military presence in the disputed territories. It is not surprising that the Japanese side has shown little interest in these concessions. After all, it is not looking for a consolation prize. It is asking for the ownership of the four islands, an issue on which Tokyo enjoys widespread international support.

Most analysts now agree that lack of agreement on the ownership of the four islands cast a shadow on the talks almost right from the start. This means that the two sides had made inadequate preparation for the summit or had failed to appreciate the gravity of the main issue, the future of the four disputed islands, in the overall context of Moscow-Tokyo relations. Here, one tends to be more critical of the position of Moscow than that of Tokyo.

There is no question that the four islands belong to Japan, and that the Soviet Union treats the matter of its continued control of the disputed territories as one of prestige. President Gorbachev is also under pressure at home not to make any territorial concessions whether they involve the Baltic states or some barren islands on the Japanese coast. Herein lies a challenge facing the Soviet leader. He must convince his people, as he has done on so many complex issues, that the country cannot expect the Japanese economic cooperation, on the scale it needs for its survival, without giving back what rightfully belongs to Tokyo. Having disowned so many things which were done by the Stalinist Soviet Union, it does not make sense for the new leadership in Moscow to hang on to a legacy, the ownership of four Japanese islands, that belongs to another time.

It is said that, on the positive side, the visit of the Soviet leader to Japan has brought about a thaw in the Tokyo-Moscow relations. President Gorbachev himself has talked about prospects for "building a new era of relationship" between his country and Japan, similar to that of Moscow-Washington ties. This raises the hope that future development in Moscow-Tokyo relations may make the latest setback a thing of the past and the two countries will work towards building a constructive relationship, with the ownership of the four disputed islands no longer serving as an obstacle.

Spurt in Violence

There has been a sudden spurt in the incidence of violent crime. While the crime profile of the whole nation has taken a bad turn in recent times, Dhaka city is specially going through the throes of a mugging and murder wave. Nine persons were murdered in the city in different cases of stabbing and shooting in the span of the last one week. This is nothing if not alarming.

Yesterday's morning press was dominated by two unusual crimes in the city. In one, what has been called by one newspaper as 'murder-film style', four motor-cycle riders speeding ahead of a trail of terror created by fire cracker explosions and smoke, attacked Saturday evening a video shop at Salimullah Road, Mohammadpur. The owner saw them coming and escaped to a nearby house while his employee Hasan Ali stuck to his post and was shot dead by the young hoodlums.

In the other, one electronics shop in the Stadium area was the scene of a rampage — all of its goods and furniture broken to pieces — and the owner grievously shot at. The men of the shop next door mounted attack shaking the whole Stadium shopping area into a very bad panic.

But the day's bill was far from complete with these two incidents. A maid servant was brought dead to hospital from Malabagan area the same Saturday evening. Three were brought to hospital with bad shot wounds from Gulshan. Two were stabbed in Gupibagh and Mirpur respectively. Another, Reazuddin, was stabbed at Armanitola. An officer of a local bank was chased by a group and killed by a bomb attack at 11 in the night same day in front of Dhaka College. The Gupibagh and Armanitola stabbing incidents were also results of group raids.

This is only one day's tally and one quite reasonably suspects this is far from a complete list — the missing ones failed to reach hospital and police. And Saturday was but only a typical day of the week featured by strangulation of a newly-married wife and the brutal death of a businessman at the hands of another group of miscreants. And this picture is in turn typical for the whole of the country. Group clashes are occurring everywhere and at Nazirhat miscreants dared police and in the ensuing battle 30 were hurt — the day before. On the same Friday two were killed and 35 hurt in a clash in Jessore. The same night in Ishurdi 70-year-old Maziuddin was murdered in sleep by miscreants breaking into his house.

We denounce the violence and the sheer cruelty involved in these crimes and demand quick and effectively deterrent punishment for the culprits — in order that the spurt is arrested. But we fear more the danger of the whole society turning into a case of mass psychosis as a result of continual exposure to such horror stories. Only a sick mind — already injured to cruelty — can take in a day's morning press such as comes now with any amount of unflappability. Aren't we all already diseased that way, even for a wink of it?

Stop this dangerous thing, we say to government as well as to all still fit to be called humanity.

Six months after one of the most extraordinary election upsets in Canadian history, newspapers are impatiently posing the question: "When will the New Democratic Party put its stamp on Ontario?"

When, in other words, will a quiet revolution begin to take place in Canada's richest and most populous province?

The answer, probably, is soon. The budget about to be presented by Treasurer (for Finance Minister) Floyd Laughren is likely to spell out the most socialist agenda of any government in the history of Ontario.

Many Canadians would retort: "That's not saying much." True. From 1943 the Conservatives held power in Ontario for an unbroken stretch of 42 years. Then the Liberals took over, initially with a minority government that had the backing of the New Democrats.

In 1987 the Liberals, under Premier David Peterson, won a landslide victory with 95 seats out of 130. They seemed set to run the province for decades. But last summer Peterson committed the blunder of calling an extremely early election for no particular reason except that his party was high in the polls.

It was also the first election in Canada after the fiasco of the Meech Lake attempt at constitutional reform, and David Peterson as a prominent supporter found himself being blamed in part for the mess it left.

So in September came an election night which took even NDP leader Bob Rae by surprise. The New Democrats, with 38 per cent of the popular vote, won 74 seats. The Liberals, with 32 per cent, won only 36. The Conservatives stumbled behind with 20.

It brought to power a quite different type of person from the lawyers and businessmen

The Unlikely Man Runs the Richest Province in Canada

Clyde Sanger writes from Ottawa

The new political wind that blew into Ontario last year in the shape of a New Democratic Party government could profoundly affect the national scene in Canada. British Columbia and Saskatchewan may also soon become New Democrat at a time when the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney and the Liberal opposition are both trailing in the opinion polls.

Ontario had known. The new Education Minister, Marion Boyd, had run a counselling clinic for battered women; the budget she had to manage jumped from \$250,000 a year to nearly \$6 billion. Labour Minister Bob Mackenzie is a former steelworker. Laughren's father was a farmer.

Altogether, Rae has appointed an unprecedented



BOB RAE
From a showbiz family

number of women to the Cabinet — 12 among 26 Cabinet posts.

He is an unusual leader himself. Still only 42, he comes of a showbiz family. His grandmother Neil, who escaped to Canada from Glasgow shipyard life, put her three children on the stage as "The Little Raes of Sunshine."

Bob's father Saul in turn escaped from that life to become a senior diplomat. So Bob Rae had a childhood around embassies in Geneva and Washington.

A Rhodes Scholar at Balliol College, Oxford, he wrote a critical thesis on Sidney and Beatrice Webb, founders of the Fabian Society, and concluded that "they weren't really democrats, they were elite theorists."

He learnt about the darker side of British society from mineworkers' children in summer camps. He stayed on to work in a legal aid clinic in North London with Irish immigrants, Cypriots and West Indians.

Back in Canada he did legal work for the steelworkers, became a federal MP in 1978 with a special interest in finance. In 1982 he switched to being provincial leader, but

seemed to be making little political progress.

Family life was marked by tragedy. His wife's parents were killed in a car accident and his younger brother died of lymphatic cancer after Bob had donated bone-marrow in a bid to save him.

His party came to power with an activist agenda, especially in social reform. In his speech opening the legislature in November he promised, for instance, to "address the shame of child poverty" and to "deal resolutely with violence against women and children."

There are plans to reform pensions and to raise the minimum wage to 60 per cent of the average wage.

The New Democrats have introduced legislation to take the child support and spousal support payments ordered by a court directly out of an employee's pay cheque.

Three-quarters of the 81,000 support orders in Ontario are in default, amounting to \$334 million in unpaid payments and affecting more than 10,000 children.

Premier Bob also moved to promise self-government to the Mohawk Indians in the province, after last summer's armed standoff at Oka in

neighbouring Quebec.

As well, his government declared a moratorium on building any new nuclear power plants, and Energy Minister Jenny Carter instructed Ontario Hydro to divert \$240 million from plans for reactors to schemes for energy conservation.

The New Democrats have come to power in the trough of a recession which has hit Ontario heavily. Laughren recently estimated 260,000 jobs had been lost in the past year, many industries decamping southward to the United States or Mexico, since the US-Canada free trade agreement.

Nevertheless, he differed publicly with his fellow provincial finance ministers who have favoured belt-tightening as the way to climb out of recession.

He has instead put an extra \$700 million into public facilities, and hinted that his budget might run a \$6 billion deficit.

The Rae government has had to make compromises, for example on rent control and pay equity schemes. It also accepted the takeover by British Gas of a major Canadian corpo-

ration, and bargained with the Varsity Corporation (formerly Massey-Ferguson) to let it move headquarters to the United States in return for a \$5 million contribution to a fund it has set up to guarantee more severance pay for laid-off workers.

In March, while Rae took a short holiday, his government suffered a silly embarrassment. Days after announcing a ban on sexism in beer and alcohol advertising, Consumer Affairs Minister Peter Kormos appeared as a (fully-clothed) pin-up in a Toronto tabloid paper.

Journalists unearthed the fact that an adviser to Kormos on sexist advertising was a convicted wife-beater.

Rae returned, angry at what he called this "soap opera" and, when Kormos refused to resign, fired him. He lost both a colourful minister and the Cabinet's expert on automobile insurance, currently a controversial subject.

But the Laughren budget will lift discussion to the biggest issue of how Ontario is to recover as the country's main economic engine.

And by summer Bob Rae will be central to the question of whether Canada survives as a single country or sees Quebec break away. Ontario, with 9,500,000 people in a country of 24 million, is major voice by itself.

If, as is likely, the governments of British Columbia and Saskatchewan are soon headed by New Democratic premiers, Rae's party will become a critical force in constitutional talks. — OCEAN NEWS

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Secularism Advocates Civil Marriage Law in Lebanon

Mounir B. Abboud writes from Beirut

There are 37 major religious leaders in Lebanon, and 35 of them are totally opposed to making civil marriage a legal practice.

"We are fully aware," says lawyer Salah Matar, "that civil marriage does not go down well with the religious authorities. This does not mean we have to stop fighting for this right. But we will have to go slow."

Salah Matar is preparing a draft law to allow and regulate civil marriage in the country.

At present, Lebanese couples who want a civil marriage have to go to Cyprus or Turkey or even France for it.

Their union is recognised by Lebanese authorities in the sense that they do not get arrested or brought to court on their return. But Lebanon itself has no law on civil marriage, and no single law on matrimony.

There are in fact no less than 16 distinct marriage laws currently applying to Lebanon's 16 different religious commu-

nities, said Mohsen Slim, a prominent Lebanese lawyer.

Slim and other civil marriage advocates feel that this disjunction in the legal bases which govern the affairs of the Lebanese family, and the insularity which the various religious laws are imposing on the various sects in Lebanon,

are responsible for the national disunity in which are rooted most of the nation's internal problems.

Said Salah Matar: "If you don't want to look at it from the national unity angle, look at it from the angle of personal freedom."

"Lebanon prides itself on being a secular state, in the sense that all 16 of its religious communities, along with a couple of religious minorities, are free to live and worship as

they please. The state is theoretically supposed to interfere in religious matters only to guarantee freedom of belief in keeping with the Constitution."

But the absence of legisla-

tion on civil marriage "makes a

difficult for them."

The situation is that each religious community merely co-exists with the others, securely walled in, instead of people living together as one community.

Mr. Matar spent two years preparing the draft law on civil marriage. His crusade, which has the support of political parties, extends to the following:

The establishment of a civil authority on marriage and divorce for all Lebanese, regardless of their faith;

The establishment of a civil court with a special magistrate whose duties will include performing the marriage ceremony in accordance with a civil marriage law applicable to all religious communities in the country;

The prohibition of polygamy as a provision of the civil marriage law; and

Civil legislation which will

cover related matters such as inheritance and divorce.

But turning these hopes to facts will take some doing, lawyers Matar and Slim admit.

Lebanese couples started going abroad to be married in a civil court in the early 1970s when the Late Democratic Movement came into existence.

Mik Choraieb, founder of the Movement, said their aim is to eliminate concessionalism from the social and political life of the country, and to establish a purely secular order in both society and politics.

"The creation of a late society, of course, involves the encouragement of civil marriage," said Choraieb. — Depthnews

OPINION
Some Ideas for Economic Progress

Rated one of the poorest countries in the world, the last thing struggling Bangladesh can afford is political instability.

Decade long autocratic rule of H. M. Ershad not only shattered the country's economy and destroyed democratic institutions but also cast serious shadows of doubt among the donor nations.

Now Begum Khaleda Zia has won a fairest and freest election ever held in Bangladesh and appointed experienced professionals to key ministerial positions.

Such a sensible course of action at the very beginning of her administration should eliminate these doubts.

As we all know, the key to the entire economy is the inflow of international aid. In receipt of some U.S. \$2 billion a year, aid funds have been crucial not only to feed the country but also to finance its development projects. The aid flow is already being constrained, as elsewhere, largely due to the deteriorating international climate. If the politicians fail to see sense and cannot put forward viable and stable government, which consequently leads to a loss of confidence and aid cutbacks, Bangladesh could face economic disaster once again.

The paradox in the tale of poverty of Bangladesh is that its land is immensely fertile and landscape dissected by the numerous tributaries of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra as they drain into the Bay of Bengal from Himalayan ranges. A third of its land area remains under water several months a year. But the waters also deposit thick layers of fertile silt capable of producing three harvests a year. With proper control over the great river systems, irrigation and more extensive use of fertilizers, World Bank experts calculate that the country could easily quadruple its present food production. Although the Ganges water distribution is a political minefield involving India, this is not beyond the reach of careful diplomacy.

With good neighbourly relationship and give and take attitude, the country can overcome this problem.

The land also provides raw materials for industry and through exports of traditional commodities, it provides much, if not most of foreign exchange. If agriculture is neglected, hunger becomes more severe than need be.

Unemployment, underemployment, income disparities, rural-urban migration, social and political unrest are exacerbated.

If we examine the post-colonial economic history of the Third World countries, it appears that most of them tried to minimise the development of agriculture and mineral raw materials and moved to industrialisation quickly in order to reduce dependence on external source of finance. But, unfortunately their newly produced finished products not only faced increasingly severe trade barriers abroad, but also failed to compete at home against external competitors. This strategy ballooned the import bills of industrial raw materials and capital goods, and thereby magnified the dependence on foreign finance. Contrary to the planners' desire, industrialisation suffered as much as agriculture.

Once dismissed by Henry Kissinger as an international basket case, Bangladesh came with a few hundred thousand tons produce capacity of feeding itself in 1980. This was mainly due to bountiful weather. But the largest ever harvest was also a result of President Zia's cheerleading tours of Bangladesh villages, backed up by the largest ever inputs of fertilizer and tube-wells, plus incentive pricing and procurement. If the present government continues the same agricultural strategy, together with effective birth control programmes, Bangladesh can achieve sustained self-sufficiency in food production by the turn of the century.

Geographically, the country is rather well placed to benefit from the South-East Asian economic miracle. As the room for further expansion in Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea is limited, multinational companies are constantly searching potential avenues for investments.

If Asian business interests take the country seriously, Bangladesh with its planned export processing zone in Chittagong and huge gas resources, which can provide much needed cheap source of energy, the area can become the natural home for low cost textile industries and simple electronic assembly plants.

Anam Ahmed Chowdhury
Fulbari, Sylhet

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.

Literacy

Sir, In the Bangladesh TV news of Friday the 19th of April, there was an item in pictures depicting the joyous celebrations of the people marking the attainment of one hundred per cent literacy in the Indian State of Kerala and this can be a moral, a model and a heart warming event for all the people in the third world countries.

The people of Bangladesh have shown great courage and resilience in the worst calamities, and it was once said that what Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow.

Because we have not been in Kerala we cannot fully fathom the cause and the efforts that were made to achieve the most desired goal of people's salvation and emancipation.

The object could only be attained by the full participation of an elected and representative State Government, the total commitment of the local community, and above all a self effacing and courageous leadership who dedicated themselves to a great cause of humanity.

Kerala has disproved that poverty is the basic and primary cause of illiteracy.

With total dedication, commitment and unselfish

leadership Bangladesh can achieve a hundred per cent literacy by the year 2000. This is not a dream, but this can be a reality if patriotism and sacrifice is forthcoming.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
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Developing LDC

Sir, The good news is: more aids are coming, and the bad news is: ...

The UN Conference on LDCs in Paris was a grand opportunity of a positive outcome for Bangladesh having had the privilege of a special speaker. Bangladesh, in turn, played the distinct role impressively and proved her worth as the Voice of Third World.

A country of over 110 million people, and characteristically underdeveloped Bangladesh has achieved appreciable successes in many areas ever since her liberation which must be inspiring other LDCs to find reasonable bases for their aspirations.

With revitalized optimism following Paris session, an LDC like Bangladesh should get herself re-organized based on down-to-earth approach rather than on castle-in-air. What would be the right

method to adopt should be the first priority to start with for any scheme for this poor nation.

Likewise, one of the first moves should be the setting up of trade relations with more countries including Comecon's, but not to be easy on EEC nonetheless. Prospects of Bangladeshi markets in Africa and Latin America still seem to be a twilight zone expecting the full moon. Apart from SAARC states, ASEAN must be commercially significant for Bangladesh.

On the whole, looking for new and viable economic relations globally will undoubtedly be a fruitful venture even if initial investment may be a dominating factor. Also, all the plans and policies that ought to be in active files of Bangladesh for formulating sequential measures to face up to the Vicious Circle possessing LDCs should be re-evaluated over the changed scenario.

All in all, plans for LDC Bangladesh should essentially be judicious not only for the foreseeable future but also for the times beyond.

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Sodium lights

Sir, We do not know how expensive the sodium lights are, and whether a poor country like ours can afford them extensively.

However, we notice that most of our important highways within the capital are lighted with this light. Well so far so good and we tend to feel proud of the facility.

But the most disturbing fact is that, we often notice that these lights are not put off late into the day i.e. till 7 a.m. in the morning Raju Ahmed, Dhaka.

Tolerance in Islam

Sir, Often we misquote certain Quranic verses. For instance, sixth verse of the Surah, Al-Kafirun (The Unbelievers) which read "Lakum di nukum wolla din" (You shall have your recompense and I shall have my recompense). In the Holy Quran certain verses are being abrogated by Allah, the Almighty, as the Quran states in its Section 13, verse 106— "whatever communication we abrogate or cause it to be forgotten, we bring on better than it or like it: Don't thou not know that Allah has power over all things."

So, the 6th verse of Surah Kafirun has been abrogated by another verse stating—"Innaddina Endallahil Islam" (Islam is the only acceptable religion to Allah). Of course, the verse definitely teaches us to show tolerance to the religion of others keeping in mind Allah is the Super Power to bring men to the right path.

A spirit of tolerance in the society is the most important pre-requisite for the successful operation of a democratic system in a Muslim dominated country. There is a well-known Islamic principle of "No compulsion in faith" (Al-Quran III : 256) which prevents Muslims to interfere with the religious life of non-Muslims.

M. Zahidul Haque
Dhaka-1207.