

Summit will Push the Door Ajar for South Africa

Derek Ingram writes from Harare

Under what conditions South Africa might be invited to rejoin the Commonwealth, a world summit to help the poor, human rights, the environment, the future and composition of the Commonwealth itself—these will be among the topics to be discussed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) about to open in Harare.

Campus Crisis and Teachers

October 10, the day a year ago when the pro-democracy movement in the streets picked up irreversible momentum through establishment of an enduring unity among student groups, passed off Thursday last the way it was not supposed to. The first anniversary of that historic day was marked on the Dhaka University campus by separate commemoration rallies, followed by some of the heaviest gunbattles seen for a long time.

One year in politics is a long time, so the saying goes, but that piece of "wisdom" can hardly explain, let alone excuse, the alarming deterioration in the academic atmosphere and law and order situation in not only Dhaka University, but at educational institutions throughout the country. Only four days ago, a student leader of Munshiganj was brutally murdered while undergoing treatment at a local hospital; on Thursday, the Agricultural University at Mymensingh was shaken by bomb blasts and gunshots.

The crisis in the education sector has well and truly gone beyond tolerance. Whatever other preoccupations the government may have had in recent past — constitutional change, transition etc. — are all behind us now. Besides, "other preoccupations" can never be a full-proof justification for indifference to the campus situation, since a government — any government — is responsible for whatever that goes on in the country. No government can operate on a piece-meal basis.

The new education minister, Zamiruddin Sircar, recently met student leaders which gave rise to renewed hope for the future. But that too has, as with previous rounds of "talks", proved to be a false start. There is a prevailing impression that all parties to the "dispute" view one another with intense suspicion, and that there is an all-round lack of sincerity to solve this crucial problem. How else could one explain seemingly minor incidents leading inexorably to major battles?

While we wait for the student-politicians to put the interest of education above petty party politics, and the government to break out of its inertia, we would like to see some initiative coming from the teachers of Dhaka University. The teachers are no doubt aware that they are suspected by many of being involved in student politics, with some even being accused of acting as "advisers" to various student parties. Naturally, in order to gain the confidence of all the students they have to sever their links, if any, with student politics and put the interest of the university first.

During the anti-Ershad movement last October, teachers of Dhaka University defied government closure order and held classes on the campus. Regrettably, no such laudable concern for education was shown by teachers during the 48 days when the university stayed shut earlier this year. But we believe they can, indeed must, play a major, positive role to bring back peace on the campus. They must urge students to conduct politics in a manner that does not adversely affect campus atmosphere, while publicly refusing to have anything to do with "students" who openly take part in violent activities. This will require a great deal of moral courage, but then, a unified approach by teachers should carry a great deal of moral authority. If the teachers fail to act in the interest of education and their students, then what future can we offer this or the next generation?

Cricket and South Africa

The debate about whether South Africa should be allowed to take part in cricket's 5th World Cup (WC) to be held jointly by Australia and New Zealand next year, is still a live issue. The white-dominated republic was re-admitted to the game's governing body — International Cricket Conference or ICC — last July, but it was decided not to make the Springboks the ninth team in the WC as preparations for an eight-team tournament had already been made. But that was not the end of the innings, merely a break for poor light. The matter will now be decided by a special meeting of the ICC at Sharjah on October 23.

Understandably, South Africa, which is reputed to possess one of the more formidable cricket teams in the world, is eager to make a grand re-entry after 21 years in the wilderness. The hosts are no less eager, because the Springboks would undoubtedly give a greater competitive edge to the tournament by making the level of cricket on offer better and more exciting, consequently ensuring fatter returns on investments already made. Not surprisingly, the hosts have let it be known that they can accommodate the old-newcomers into the WC itinerary within a matter of days.

Objections to South African's participation come mainly from the West Indies, India and Pakistan, with Sri Lanka expected to back them. These countries have long been strong critics of sporting links with apartheid South Africa, and they are naturally not overkeen to hurry things too much. Of the ICC's eight full members, Australia, England and New Zealand have a long history of cricketing relations with Pretoria, links that were maintained even during the "banned" years at the unofficial and individual levels.

If, as seems likely, the eight full members fail to reach a decision on October 23, then the matter will be thrown open to the associate members of the ICC such as Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Denmark and others. It will be a rare opportunity for the minnows of world cricket to swim with the sharks, and contribute to a major decision. Bangladesh should use this occasion to make its weight felt, by resisting South Africa's inclusion into next year's WC line-up. The arguments should be two-pronged but simple: there is no good reason to give Pretoria special treatment by changing the itinerary at this late stage, and secondly, South Africa should be asked to re-establish itself in the far-flung family of cricketing nations by touring and playing Test matches and Limited Overs Internationals with the other seven full members of the ICC before taking part in any quadrennial extravaganza. Bangladesh may even consider taking the lead in proposing South Africa as the venue for the 1996 World Cup.

THE myth that the Commonwealth is only about South Africa will be shattered in Harare — at least that is the intention of the nearly 50 leaders who are about to sit down together under the chairmanship of President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe for their two-yearly summit right on the front-line.

That does not mean they believe South Africa is finished business. Far from it. The general feeling is that the situation is moving towards irreversibility and that, however difficult the years ahead, there is no going back. And the Commonwealth can claim a major part of the credit for change.

In what may prove to be a historic statement the leaders will push the door ajar against the day when it is fully open for the return of South Africa to Commonwealth membership.

There is no way the Commonwealth will re-admit South Africa until a new and fully democratic constitution is in place and the last vestiges of apartheid have gone. The mood in Harare will be optimistic that the day is not so far off, despite the current bloodshed and the threats by right-wing whites.

Nelson Mandela and other political leaders from South Africa will be in the wings in Harare to give the summit their latest assessment and to say what they believe Commonwealth countries can do for the new South Africa.

Even if much of the international press focuses on South Africa, the summit will spend most of the time looking ahead to the role of the Commonwealth in a world that is already politically unrecognisable from the way it was on the day their last meeting ended, October 24 1989.

Only days later the Berlin Wall came down. Communism died in Eastern Europe and then in the Soviet Union itself.

The United States emerged as sole superpower. In the middle of it all came the Gulf War.

While the Commonwealth was directly affected by none of these events, indirectly every member country has been profoundly involved. The whole direction and thrust of the Commonwealth, which contains one-third of the world's countries and a quarter of its population, may have to change like everything else.

With foresight the Kuala Lumpur summit set in motion what is called a high-level appraisal of the role of the Commonwealth in the Nineties and beyond. The findings of this two-year study will be the most important item — if not the most scary — on the Harare agenda.

The day before the summit opens two presidents and eight prime ministers, chaired by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, will consider recommendations to be passed on to their colleagues.

In a constantly changing world, the Commonwealth has an endurance record that far outstrips most other international organisations. That its role needs redefining no one would dispute but that it fulfils an important international role is fully proved by the record of its activity set out in the just-published first report of the new Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku of Nigeria.

Whether it be training diplomats in Namibia, advising Mozambique on multi-party systems, observing elections in Bangladesh, setting up a tropical forestry laboratory in Guyana, or training people in the Pacific to assess the impact of global warming, the Commonwealth imprint is scattered worldwide in projects large and small.

The Commonwealth has seen in recent years great expansion. In Harare in August delegates representing every member country held the first Commonwealth Forum of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). They will be sending their own delegation to Harare to lobby the summit — the first such NGO presence.

Another group — representing organisations of doctors, trade unionists, journalists and lawyers — have landed a hot potato on the summit agenda: human rights. A report pressing for Commonwealth countries to pay much greater attention to human rights will be before the leaders. It is a sensitive issue that in the new global climate they will have to tackle.

Controversial, too, will be the issue of Commonwealth membership. The Commonwealth is becoming internationally popular. Countries with little or no historic connection with the British Empire want to join. An application to join from Cameroon will be before the leaders. Mozambique, formerly a Portuguese colony, would also like to come in.

The Commonwealth is split on the issue. In a sense a precedent has already been made with Namibia, which was never a British colony (it was German). The key is language. With English as a common language, no one wants Commonwealth conferences resorting to interpreters and headphones.

Zimbabwe would like to see both Mozambique and Angola (and South Africa in due course) in the Commonwealth. Others like Tanzania are not so sure. The summit will have to set down some guidelines for membership.

The big problem in Harare is likely to be money. The Commonwealth is a most economical organisation, but to become more effective it needs extra funds.

Although every member makes some contribution to the Secretariat, and most pay into the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC), only four members are in the industrialised class — Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Their financial input to the CFTC is minuscule in terms of their aid programmes. In 1989 the four put \$1 billion into the United Nations Development Programme but only \$44 million into the CFTC.

The four do give about 41 per cent for their bilateral aid to Commonwealth countries, but it is not visibly Commonwealth aid. One proposal before the meeting will be that one per cent of this aid should be specifically earmarked for the Commonwealth.

Many Commonwealth countries are very poor, but a few like Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Nigeria and India are these days by no means at the bottom of the economic pack.

The richest industrialised Commonwealth country, Britain, has shown no inclination to push much money in the Commonwealth direction. Its contribution to Commonwealth organisations totals much less than the sum it gives to a single United Nations agency.

Margaret Thatcher was no fan of the Commonwealth. She disliked multilateralism, preferring to deal with countries bilaterally. Her obsession with lifting sanctions against South Africa further put her off the Commonwealth.

All this was reflected in constant niggling about the budget of the Secretariat and other Commonwealth bodies. Since she went John Major has changed the tone.

The phasing out of sanctions helps him to bring Britain out of the Commonwealth cold. He is expected to make a good impression in Harare and the leaders hope he will come up with a more positive approach on finance.

Even more important than money will be indications that Britain is prepared to take more interest in the Commonwealth than it has for many years. With the reappraisal of the Commonwealth and the possibility of an eventual return of South Africa the prospects look brighter than for a long time.



The 28th Summit

Commonwealth Heads of Government conference in Harare to 28th since series began in 1944. In that year five countries attended. This year 48.

This is the 11th meeting outside London.

Others:	
Lagos	1966
Singapore	1971
Ottawa	1973
Kingston	1975
Lusaka	1979
Melbourne	1981
New Delhi	1983
Nassau	1985
Vancouver	1987
Kuala Lumpur	1989

Commonwealth facts

Largest Commonwealth Country:	India (pop:814 million)
Smallest:	Nauru (pop:8,000)
* As special members	Nauru and Tuvalu do not attend summits

ROBERT MUGABE
Zimbabwean Prime Minister who chairs the talks



Azerbaijan: Communism Entrenched

They believe the main obstacle to this is none other than their president, Ayaz Mutalibov, until last month the elected communist party chief of Azerbaijan.

The president supported the coup of the communists," said Mamedov Tofig. "We, the people of the Azerbaijan, denounce him," declared Tofig, clapping his right hand to his chest.

Mutalibov who Azerbaijanis say has virtually ruled the largely Muslim republic like a warlord, threw his support behind the hardline coup plotters but immediately withdrew it when the putsch collapsed.

Because of that, the people gathered at Shahidlar Khyabany say the President has lost the people's mandate.



The collapse of Soviet communism and ceding of central control by Moscow have not quite relieved Azerbaijan of its authoritarian communist leadership. Cris Yabes of IPS reports from Baku.

But Mutalibov is not going to give up that easily. He ran unopposed in the recent presidential election and promptly claimed victory in the polls boycotted by the main opposition party, the Azerbaijan Popular Front.

"He wants to keep his power and serve as dictator," declared another speaker who claimed that in one polling place, voters were bribed with sugar and cigarettes to vote for Mutalibov.

The political rumblings in the Azerbaijan capital of Baku typify the resistance of entrenched communist control in the Soviet republics. Despite the rapid political changes that have seen the break-up of the dominant Soviet communist party, Azerbaijan is finding it difficult to chart a political and economic future free from the orthodoxies of the past.

The Popular Front, whose attempt to seize power in January 1989 was crushed by 20,000 troops sent by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, has plenty of potential leaders but does not appear to have the strength to crack Mutalibov's power base.

The Front's main leader, Abulfas Elchibay, is reported to have been beaten up by Mutalibov's "thugs". On the day of the elections, about 20,000

Popular Front supporters demonstrated at the central square to oppose the polls.

To chants of "freedom, freedom," they demanded that the elections be stopped, parliament dissolved to give way to a "new democratic" body open to all political parties and the nationalisation of all properties of the communist party.

But it is easy to see why the opposition has not been able to score any victories: the press and other state-run institutions are under the President's control.

At the Lenin Institute in Baku, the chief of the election committee, Guliyev Sardaz Musa, herded employees into the school's voting station, boasting to foreign reporters of that the turnout was massive.

Apparently heeding orders, the voters simply stuffed their ballots into the box without checking their preference. To prove his point, Sardaz Musa made one of them write on a piece of paper in Russian: "I

vote for the best candidate and I congratulate him heartily." In fact, Mutalibov was the only candidate.

Mutalibov is a smart politician, quick to follow the winds of Political change. Shortly after the downfall of the communist party, the towering Lenin statue that once stood on the central square — now renamed Liberty Square — was taken down in the middle of the night reportedly on Mutalibov's orders.

But for every Azerbaijan who denounces Mutalibov and the communists, there are others who support his hard-line stance against Armenia on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh the Armenian-populated enclave inside Azerbaijan.

The Nagorno-Karabakh issue seems closer to the hearts of some than even that of free republic independent of Moscow. "We thank Mikhail Gorbachev for giving us democracy," said Elman Bayramov, a student at the Institute of Foreign Languages in Baku. "But we want Nagorno Karabakh to remain in Azerbaijan."

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.

Press freedom

Sir, Bangladesh is in the list of 65 states having least press freedom, according to the US based media monitoring organization Freedom House. By contrast, most of the European countries and United States that are regarded as the most advanced societies belong to the "most free" press category.

Freedom of press is generally thought of as a synonym of freedom of expression (of thoughts and facts) through mass media, without which there will be an impediment to the advancement of civilization in broader perspectives.

Modern societies owe most to the mass media that virtually accelerated the pace of transporting the knowledge loads of what can be referred to as the ingredients of modern civilization. Imperative as it is, press media function like an open institution that educates people collectively or singularly.

A Third World society like that of Bangladesh will not make much progress unless the members of the society use their rights to information gainfully, specifically to the

knowledge on continuing developments in the multimodal world. Many of the developing countries are still deprived of free press (in true sense) curbing development process substantially that consequently feed back the 'vicious circle'.

Counter to the restrictions on exchange of knowledge in this era of information explosion because of the state policy imposed on mass media may be a possible self-censorship by the mediamen under compelling circumstances which will gradually contribute highly to the national character-building.

M Rahman
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For the children of stranded Pakistanis

Sir, Since liberation of Bangladesh, thousands of stranded Pakistanis have been eagerly waiting for repatriation to Pakistan, their homeland. But due to various factors their desire is still not being materialized. This way, for about last 20 years, they have been standing on one leg with a hope to leave at any moment, and as such they did not get

time even to think of educating their children. As a result their children are being deprived of the light of education. As they are ready to go to Pakistan, they do not feel it necessary to make their children involved in getting education in local language which, they think, may not be helpful when they will be in Pakistan.

I have a great feeling for these innocent children who have been kept neglected, and want to do something fruitful by opening a venue to educate them at least in Arabic, English and Urdu. Keeping in mind this object, I, in 1987, established such an institution but could not keep it running in individual capacity.

As the repatriation is not certain to be implemented soon, I appeal to the embassies of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as well as to like-minded philanthropists to please come forward on humanitarian ground to establish a good school at Mirpur, Dhaka to provide education to those ruining innocent children.

F M Abdul MATH
11-C, 11/2/4-Mirpur, Dhaka.

Cantonment Education Board

Sir, M. Zahidul Haque, Assistant Professor of Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka seems to be full of 'ideas'. However, his recent comment on SSC and HSC examinations happen to be

dumbfounded (letter Oct. 2).

He may have some truth about 'Cadets' being taught under special conditions but he has failed to look at the social side of those students who after HSC do not stay at their respective colleges. Rather they are made to face the odds of social behaviour as done by the students of the country in general. Here they are misfits and do not even know how to talk, mix, and behave with others as would have been normal. The Cadets find it impossible to believe that 'freedom' is something they have not learnt during their academic learnings at the Cadet Colleges. While there's so much gap between the two groups should we still create another one by having a separate Board to be known as Cantonment Education Board?

I am simply bewildered to think what he means by saying: "This will create an impartial and healthy competition among the students as well as among the institutions" (?) while the fact remains that the student community has no arguments about any situation. The fault lies with the authorities concerned who run all institutions.

I would rather prefer that we stopped separating people from people and made them to feel alike as much as possible. Then there would be lesser 'hate', 'dislike' and a sense of patriotism would grow.

Nahtasha Kamal,
Dhaka.

OPINION Wrench, Pliers and Bills ...

Someone just knocks at the door with a sly wrench in hand, asks for your gas bill book. You can very well understand why he is for; to disconnect your gas line. Trembling starts — you start explaining various things, but no excuse. Order comes, you meet our boss and explain your position. You see the boss who immediately makes a bill of several thousand taka in duplicate and asks you to deposit by the following day. With hands clasped together you pray for more time but the boss replies, 'no, I can only allow six hours time'. But 'some one' politely suggests to see his boss if more time was needed, simultaneously he enquires from one or two persons what was the news of building number so and so, and so on. We know the story of a sly fox and now we find the story of a 'sly wrench.' Watch your house if the gas is not disconnected while the housewife was cooking for you. They call the party involved in gas disconnection 'gas separatists group'! Titas is now in a fury.

Insulated pliers are another mischief makers. May be your electricity is gone, and that while you are going to bed in a summer of the year! Your 'computerised bill' made it very correctly, every month around six hundred forty-six taka with unit consumption varying between 271 and 289 throughout the year. Your meter knows the pattern of your behaviour with electricity and so the bills are made. The meter reader wants that somebody should search for him. It is not unexpected in a country where the per capita income is low and Pay Commission recommendations still remain unimplemented. If

you get hold of that person make out another slice of your cake. But it is not ended here... A big three-page bill with 'thefts' written on it, without considering the literacy rate of the country but justifying the exorbitant amount on it, asks you to pay within a fortnight or else you might see another person with an uninsulated pliers tightening your water supply knob close to the meter while you are taking your bath with soap rubbed on after the day's work! But get ready to forego another piece of pie. Those are not the end of the day's affairs.

You receive every month excessive bill for your telephone. If you try to enquire the reasons, you receive a proverbial reply in the language of the railway (used in the Railway receipts): 'The equipments are old and torn, liable to be damaged in warm and humid weather.' If you become annoyed and do not pay the bill, then, may be this would be the day when you receive a polite but fat 'temporary disconnection' notice to make your journey through the 'live-long' day with bills and bills but not a single one to pay with your means! Look for the balance piece of the pie to make your day mechanically laughable.

Let us now look for the VAT team to visit our houses. Tell your housewife to make a habit for green vegs. Because after cooking value is certainly added, and who knows, may be liable to be taxed! It is very difficult to smile smoothly in Bangladesh, so you must learn to live without it.

Anisuddin Khan,
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