

Lessons from IMF-WB Meetings

There are unfavourable signals coming from the industrialised world, which suggest that it will be a long time before developing nations derive anything like the so-called peace dividends from the end of superpower rivalry between Moscow and Washington.

This disappointment was reflected in the recently-concluded meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). The disappointment was not so much about what was said as about what was not said about the future of the North-South relations.

The fault did not lie with the IMF-WB meeting. What was lacking was the environment of hope, which our columnist has rightly attributed to the "Anemic recovery in the industrialised countries" and to the growing differences over exchange rates.

In more ways than one, it is the developing world which is certain to pay the price. For one thing, the aid climate has gone from bad to worse. If, in place of aid, the developing countries turn to investment, as indeed they do, or put in increased efforts to raise their volume of trade, they do not necessarily find easy solutions.

In time, multilateral agencies may find new answers for dealing with the situation. What is obvious, some of the old solutions, including a few of the conditionalities offered by these aid agencies, may no longer work in the way they expected even a year ago.

The Slyest of Masters Preserves Himself

Did Diego Maradona muck up his first serious match after an 18-month exile in soccer wilderness, as a news headline suggested on Tuesday? No sir, nothing can be far from truth. Thank lord, coach Carlos Bilardo's timely call and Maradona's own good judgement in opting out of the Sevilla match against Athletic Bilbao in the 75th minute of the play allowed the maestro to escape the ordeal with nothing worse than leaving the field "limping and looking tired".

That all of them would be only too eager to pounce on Diego at the first go, was child's knowledge. His low-profile mastery didn't give them a wink of a chance until the 75th minute. Till that moment he was instrumental in giving his side a one goal lead, the score originating from his own free-kick — and was busy holding off Bilbao incursions by holding himself to defensive rear action.

Bilardo had said before the match Diego was only 40 per cent fit. Why did he should play him then? Perhaps it was more Maradona than Bilardo who wanted that he play. It was a point of honour with Maradona and also one of keeping the morale of the Sevillans. A paltry 40 per cent can not match the hundred per cent all the world saw in dazzling display in the last two World Cups.

Isn't this what we call turning a full circle? Wasn't Maradona also laid down in his last outing against Bilbao years back? That should explain much of his "inspiring" game for his team in their first engagement of the Spanish League. Football has long ceased to be a one-hero Armageddon. How the small master relives the lost glories of days ruled Pele!

Is Turkey's Coalition Government in Trouble?

GENERAL elections were held in Turkey last year. The True Path Party (DYP) of Suleyman Demirel came on top although it failed to gain enough seats in the Parliament to form a Government of its own.

Including the political leaders. When politics was allowed to function again Mr Ozal appeared on the political scene with his Motherland party. Mr Ozal as Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey had been elected to preside over an affiliate body of the OIC in Jeddah, where he was serving as the Assistant Secretary General.

Arshad-uz Zaman writes from Istanbul

Prime Minister and Mr Inonu his coalition partner because of lifting of ban on political parties. Recently the Turkish Parliament took the matter to its logical conclusion. The party of Mr Ozal as well as the party of Mr Demirel are offshoots of the Democrat Party of Mr Adnan Menderes, who was toppled in a coup of 1960 and later tried and hanged.

Menderes is reported to be making some moves to revive the Democrat Party, which at this point of time does not look like a serious effort. It is the rebirth of the CHP which is making the political landscape of Turkey go through profound convulsions.

Ozal moved upstairs by his election to the post of President, he has chosen to remain very much in the political arena, rather than the olympian heights of the Cankaya Presidential palace. The replacement of his hand-picked successor Mr Akbulut by Mr Yilmaz, has led to overt strains within the party.

All this politics would not be any more than business as usual were it not for the high drama that is being daily enacted in the south eastern part of Turkey. The Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) is locked in battle with the Turkish Security Forces and daily casualties on both sides are in the double figure.

On both sides are in the double figure. The PKK is often striking out at targets in big cities including Istanbul. Turkish leaders have held lengthy discussions with their neighbours, specially Iran and Syria. It seems the Kurdish problem will be around in Turkey and the region for a long time.

In the late seventies Mr Demirel and Mr Ecevit were involved in coalition making and the combination in those years were truly incredible. Turks like authority and a clear chain of command and in those years developed a holy fear of the word coalition. The present coalition has been a balm to the Turkish psyche. The question agitating the minds of all observers is it going to last?

The author is retired Ambassador and Assistant Secretary-General, OIC

The Chief whose Voice was Heard like Thunder

LOSE in the middle of the political storm that has covered Canada for many months stands a man of calm and dignity. Most Canadians would fail to pick this 46-year-old lawyer out in a crowd, or even in an office lift, for he is short and looks unassuming. But in his first year in a top political job, he has made a permanent mark.

This is Chief Ovide Mercredi, who has the title of National chief of the Assembly of First Nations. This means he is the elected head of the nearly 600,000 Canadians who have legal status as Indians, but his influence goes a good distance further than those numbers. And he is noticeable enough when he wears his ceremonial headdress made of the tail feathers of a bald eagle.

During the past year, he has proved himself the most skillful of negotiators. Even Jacques Parizeau, leader of the Quebec separatists, recently paid him a grudging compliment.

He said the Chief had gained more from the lengthy round of constitutional talks than had Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa. "Where Bourassa sowed, Mercredi harvested," growled Parizeau.

It is, of course, the role of the Parti Quebecois leader to be little the efforts of Bourassa, his rival; others have said of the agreement reached between prime Minister Brian Mulroney and the 10 provincial premiers on August 22 that it was a "win-win" situation, that every side gained something. But Chief Mercredi has certainly seemed to gain the most of all.

Which is remarkable because, for much of the time, neither Mercredi nor any other native leader was invited to the bargaining table. But he made sure he was there when it mattered.

Canadians vote on October 26 in a referendum to approve the premiers' agreement on radical changes to the way Canada is governed.

It will almost certainly be the most important vote in the country's history. If a majority of Quebec voters, who make up about one-quarter of the electorate, say No in the referendum, it will be a halfway house to seceding from the rest of Canada.

The country would probably break up within five years, after the separatist Parti Quebecois won the next election in Quebec.

Despite the concentration on Quebec's demands to take over more powers from Ottawa, Chief Mercredi managed to keep the issue of aboriginal rights near the top of the long agenda.

He may seem an odd person to be a champion of aboriginal rights. For a start, he has never lived on an Indian reserve. In fact, he was only officially recognised as an Indian a few weeks before he was elected their national chief.

The reason lies in the antiquated Indian Act. His grandfather was a French-Canadian trapper in northern Manitoba; so his father was Metis (of mixed blood). He himself has married a non-native, so their daughter Danielle is in turn not officially recognised as having the birthright of a Cree Indian.

Early in life Ovide showed he was a fighter of his rights. He grew up speaking only Cree, but when at seven he first went to school the teachers told him he had to speak English all the time. His response was to say nothing at all in class during his first year.

As one biographer, Roy MacGregor, has related, the young Mercredi reached a turning-point in his life one afternoon in a Catholic priest's house. He was by then the church organist, an on the priest's table he found an old copy of Life magazine which was full of photographs of the life and death of Mahatma Gandhi, the funeral pyre and the thousands of mourners.

Clyde Sanger writes from Ottawa

Canadians soon vote in a referendum that will almost certainly be the most important poll in the history of their country. They will decide whether to approve changes in the way Canada is governed. The provinces would get new powers and Quebec would become "a distinct society". But the big gainer will be the Indian peoples—thanks to the remarkable Chief Mercredi.

A second ugly experience came when the high school principal in Le Pas told him he lacked intelligence and was wasting the school's time.

He quit school, and started drifting and drinking around Manitoba towns. But he pulled himself out of that pit, and got accepted as a mature student at university. There he met Elijah Harper, and the two Cree students became vigorous activists for native rights, persuading the university to start courses in native studies.

In 1990 as an established lawyer Mercredi was at the elbow of his friend, now Chief Elijah Harper, who as a member of the Manitoba legislature played a crucial part in preventing the ratification of the Meech Lake Accord. They opposed this set of constitutional amendments because it dealt only with Quebec's concerns and ignored aboriginal rights.

They had been pushed aside too often. In 1983 a far-sighted report of seven MPs under Keith Penner urged the government to recognize Indian self-government and create "a third order of government" for the 630 Indian communities, separate from provincial and municipal levels. The Penner committee also argued for special representation in the federal parliament, as the Maoris have in the New Zealand parliament.

Three times the First Ministers — that is, the prime minister and his 10 premiers — held a conference with native leaders, but could not agree how self-government could work in practice for tiny Indian bands, the largest being 12,000 Mohawks in Ontario. In 1987 the First Ministers gave up, and turned to the problem of Quebec's demand to be recognised as "a distinct society".

The summer of 1990 changed all that. Elijah Harper's stand was followed by the armed resistance of Mohawks behind the Oka barricades and the blockade of roads, bridges and railways in several provinces. The protests were for land rights, or for preserving forests against logging companies.

But when the new round of constitutional talks began a year ago, Mercredi still had to use unconventional tactics to get his points across. He effectively took over a Toronto conference scheduled to debate another issue. In August, when only the premiers were invited by Mulroney to a lakeside retreat, he stood outside with the reporters to grab the premiers' attention.

He was also prepared to match his strength against Quebec. He caused a storm in a committee of the Quebec National Assembly by questioning whether self-rule was legally possible for the whole province.

The northern part of Quebec, where some 10,000 Cree fear further disruption from the Great Whale phase of the massive James Bay hydroelectric scheme, was a late addition to the province. If French-Canadians can claim self-determination as a people, so can the Cree.

In the agreement that now goes to the referendum, he has won a remarkable amount of ground. Natives, whether they live on reserves or in towns, are deemed to have "an inherent right to self-government", that is, a right that predates the arrival of Europeans.

Returning to the Penner report, a "third order of government" will be created alongside the federal and provincial governments. The constitution will entrench the rights of native peoples that were written into the treaties made between 1870 and 1920.

A point close to Mercredi's own heart, the Metis peoples in Ontario and western Canada will for the first time be recognised as having land and resource rights.

To gain these points, he gave some ground. Native leaders will have to spend five years working with governments to define self-government before they can take cases to court. They gain no new land rights from the August 22 deal, and have to conform to Canadian laws in matters of "law, order and good government."

Nevertheless, the new government heralds a totally new era for Canada's native people. Each Indian band council will work out what services they will provide for their own people — from schooling and clinics to courts — and negotiate their own patterns. It acknowledges them as a "distinct society," but without imposing apartheid.



CHIEF OVIDE MERCREDI

Bringing the gentle rain

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Chief Ovide Mercredi will have earned the praise which Saskatchewan elders heaped on him when they gave him the eagle headdress and said: "Your voice will be heard like thunder. You will be heard from afar. At the same time, your voice will be what the thunder brings, the gentle rain."

CLYDE SANGER is a former Director of Information at the Commonwealth Secretariat. A journalist in Britain, Africa and at the UN, he has lived in Canada since 1967.

OPINION The Importance of Operational Research

A Mawaz

I am reacting to Mr M A Baque's article published in The Daily Star (Sept 15), limiting my observations to only one aspect, namely, research. In the developing countries, there is a tendency to ignore operational research in administration, and in practically every office or organisation. Even in pure research establishments (declared as such), the priority accorded is usually so low that the R & D results, even if useful, are ignored, or at best treated with indifference, as there are so many other administrative priorities to keep the policy-making officials busy. These day-to-day priorities are so urgent that it more or less becomes a standard practice to go in for ad hoc decisions ("First do this, then we will see").

We are so much deprived of the basic necessities of life that we like to see 'action' and 'visible' efforts all the time, maybe for psychological satisfaction. Research is an 'invisible' activity, behind the scene, not of much interest or attraction to the laymen; forgetting that the long term effect of a good research application might be of considerable benefit to the nation in the long run.

We look at the research setups in the various offices, it will be found that in the majority of cases there were no research cell where one was necessary; or the existing cells were more or less languishing. The periodical 'progress reports' from the research units would not make exciting reading all the time. Research is time-consuming and silent work, so the results can not be ordered within a time limit; but data analysis reports should be available without notice, depending on the availability of ready inputs. The executives studying the research reports should be research oriented, which is not generally the case in the LDCs.

Research cells should be manned by senior, experienced personnel and specialists, with smart, young research assistants trained for research work. The cells must be provided with the standard tools. The problem is input

Nothing new is being said here, but a proper atmosphere is needed for a perspective look by the Administration (confined not only to science and technology). We could start with a National Advisory Committee reporting to the Prime Minister.

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.

Utrail school

Sir, Some 13 years ago, on May 4, 1979 precisely late President Ziaur Rahman came to visit our home village Utrail in Shitbar thana under Madaripur district. During his visit, representative of our village and eminent social workers late Al-haj Abdul Kader Chowdhury requested him to turn the local private school into a full government high school. The president agreed to the proposal and instantly granted a Taka two lakh sanction (President's letter No 17/10 (2)-79-456(10)-7th May 1979).

But following Zia's sad demise the school never turned into a government institution. The local people, willing to keep a school for their children, however, regularly raised fund to keep it running. On November 11, 1989, the verandah of the school was ravaged by a severe tornado. Presently, the existence of the school is being threatened by the merciless erosion by the Arial Kha river.

Meanwhile, I took initiative to meet the present Health Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf in their connection. According to his suggestion, I requested the State Minister for Education on July 18 last. The State Minister forwarded the case with his recommendation to the Education Secretary on August 15. But sadly, I could not meet the secretary ever since.

So, through your column I would like to appeal to the relevant authority to take necessary steps regarding the school quickly.

Ariful Kader Chowdhury, Mogh Bazar, Dhaka

News-reading

Sir, Although news-reading is an art experiences impel the listeners and watchers to do a new requirement which does not fall within the domain of art that is, a modicum of attention and sincerity of the news-readers and the authorities to show on equal extent of sincerity to the duties.

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