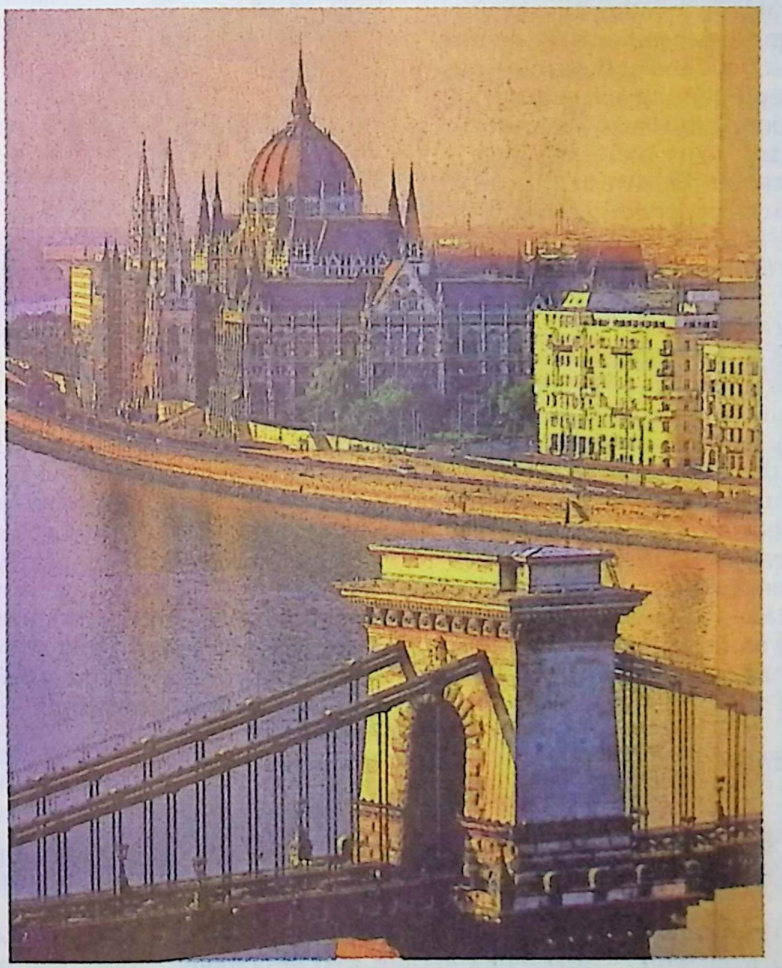
Building and the Concert Hall after they were nearly destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. In recent years, many international hotels have taken over old buildings and reconstructed them in modern style, but keeping the ambience, the architectural pattern and tradition. The Hilton hotel has, however, been built in a very modern style-almost as a giant glass house. You may like it or hate it. We spent a lot of time visiting the Heroes' Square, with its magnificent colonnades and a grandiose monument to the Millennium in the middle. Construction began in 1896, the year in which the one thousanth year anniversary of the Magyar conquest of the country was celebrated. The visit to the Riverside Promenade was an unforgettable experience. Lined by trees and with plenty of benches to sit, one can silently contemplate without being disturbed by the sound of traffic or human beings. We went to an old Tavern up on a hill on the Buda side at night for a rest and drinks in the most romantic of surroundings. There, a local singer, accompanied by a piano accordion sang many ballads and even though we did not understand the words, it conveyed a message of love and romance.



Parliament Building and Chain Bridge on the Danube

From a brief visit to Budapest, we got the impression of melancholy among its people. Admittedly, we met only a few, but whoever spoke painted a picture of the past with historic injustices on the Hungarian people, who call themselves the Magyars. They settled in this area in the ninth century. Before that, the Romans came in the first century AD, found plentiful underground springs, and called the city Aquincum or "abundant water." They ruled for about three centuries. The Magyar people adopted Christianity in the year 1000. Gellert, a monk of Venetian origin, is given credit for the spread of the religion. The highest church on the mountain named after Gellert on the Danube bear testimony to a tragedy. That was the merciless killing of Gellert, who was put inside a barrel, systematically nailed from outside and then thrown in the Danube. The Turks defeated the Hungarians in 1541 and ruled for one hundred and fifty years. The Austrian monarchy held long sway over Hungary for centuries, until it was brought under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the First World War, Hungary became a republic.

In the post- Second World War period, Soviet Russia's rule is remembered with a great deal of bitterness. The Hungarians had sided with the Nazi Germany and the Soviets had lost eighty thousand of their soldiers in liberating Hungary. But the undemocratic, monolithic, and secular soviet system was anathema to Hungarian culture and traditions. Finally, the world saw the Hungarian uprising in 1956 led by Imre Nagy and the rolling of the Soviet tanks in the city, brutally crushing the shortlived national resistance and freedom. Imre Nagy was sentenced to death for treason by a kangaroo court and his body was left hanging in a public square. In his place, Janos Kadar, the puppet communist leader was installed as the premier. Even after half a century, Kadar and his rule is so much hated that no one has occupied his room in the prime minister's office since. I clearly remember reading about the tragic suppression of the Hungarian and Czechoslovak revolutions against tyranny in the fifties, well before the velvet revolutions of the nineties, which brought democracy to most of the East European nations. ■