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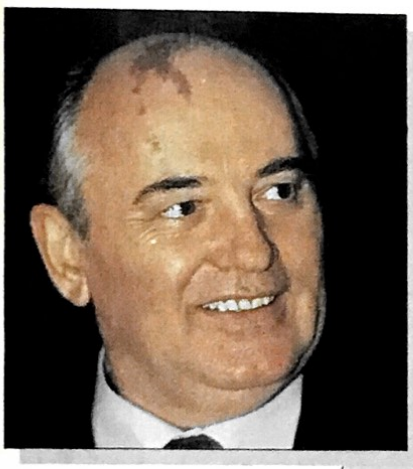

Mikhail Gorbachev

УСПЕХ ПЕРЕСТРОЙКИ В ТВОИХ РЕАЛЬНЫХ ДЕЛАХ

Afghan leader Najibullah

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Letter from the Publisher

Meeting President Najibullah of Afghanistan at a time when the future of his country, and his government, were being decided in Geneva (**Interview** *Page 14*) confirmed that ***South*** has a role to play not just as an organ of information but as a channel for global issues which critically affect countries of the Third World.

Najibullah addressed many of his remarks to neighbouring Pakistan, largely to assure Islamabad that the Soviet withdrawal will not be to the detriment of the region. The wider and more speculative implications that arise from this interview will be seen to snowball in the months following the signing of the deal in Geneva.

What will the Soviet Union really get out of withdrawal, apart from a domestic sigh of relief? Will the US continue to back the guerrillas? How will the agreement on Afghanistan affect other regional conferences? For the Pakistan government, is there life after being a frontline state? Will the *mojaheddin* go home or will they turn on Pakistan? And can Pakistan control them? The list of queries piles up now and will become far more complex as Soviet foreign and domestic policy evolves under Mikhail Gorbachev.

Najibullah's pragmatic politics are balanced by a measure of idealism often associated with his ideological line. Although these qualities equip him to navigate the difficult political currents he faces, much will depend on the regional and international pressure he is certain to encounter.

Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson, Prime Minister of Trinidad & Tobago, was the man chosen by the people to break the post-colonial mould. Predictably, popular euphoria at the magnitude of his victory in 1986 was tempered by economic realities. Robinson, an experienced politician, is now having to endure the difficulties of satisfying expectations while exercising caution in administering post-boom finances. In a special inteview with ***South*** Editor Andrew Graham-Yooll at his residence in Port of Spain, Robinson took a hard look at all these problems. The second part of the interview, dealing with social, cultural and regional issues, will be published later this year *(Page 48)*.

Another interview in this issue is with the British playwright Harold Pinter. On his return from Nicaragua, Pinter expressed strong views in a conversation at his home in London. The importance of these views is in the degree of the involvement of a leading intellectual in political issues. This has to be seen in a context different from expertise, because it would be safe to argue that there are few experts on the subject outside the academic community. The value of his observations lies in that he is a successful writer getting involved in social and political matters (**Book People** *Page 116*). ■

Humayun Gauhar

EDITORIAL

MASTERS OF THE ISTHMUS

The US and the western press have reduced the crisis in Panama to one man, General Manuel Antonio Noriega, and one issue, democracy. Washington's apparent pursuit of lofty aims is being used to justify extreme economic pressures, irrespective of whether they cripple the economy and involve military threats and the manipulation of local politicians.

What is generally ignored is that the US, rather than Noriega, is at the root of Panama's problems. As Raúl Leis, a prominent local commentator, says: "The key issue is our autonomy and survival as a nation. If we condone the US actions to oust Noriega, we are justifying the other 18 US interventions in Panama this century."

This does not mean that most Panamanians wish Noriega to stay. Drug-trafficking charges apart, the General is a controversial figure. His accession in 1983 to the leadership of the Defence Forces coincided with the introduction of unpopular IMF-type measures.

Also, Noriega has tarnished Panama's comparatively good human rights record in war-torn Central America. The Panamanians made detailed accusations against the General long before the US leaked information to the press in 1986. That they were unable to do much about it reveals the weakness of the system.

Panama has never had solid, representative, civilian political institutions. It is a client of the US, and this robs it of domestic politics. Indeed the US engineered the founding of Panama in 1903 with the sole purpose of building the canal. It then created a US enclave which cut the Panamanian isthmus in two.

The US troops stationed in the canal zone outnumber and are much better equipped than Panama's Defence Forces. Washington is empowered to send in reinforcements, without consulting Panama, should the canal be threatened. During the present crisis, Washington has greatly increased the number of US troops stationed in the canal zone, which is also the headquarters of the US military command for the region.

US influence even extends to the economy. Panama has no central bank, and uses the US dollar as its national currency. Washington has been raising the temperature on the economic front by starving the country of dollars.

Panamanians say theirs is the most dependent of all the independent nations of Latin America. Local politicians have usually understood that their survival rests more on their standing in Washington than on their success in serving the needs of the Panamanian people. Ironically, the dominant political role the military have played since the 1950s, from which Noriega is profiting, is also a result of US strategy.

But the Panamanians have never really adjusted to their lack of sovereignty. Resentment has bred a deep-felt nationalism and anti-Americanism, comparable perhaps only to that in Cuba before the revolution there. Nationalism has overshadowed all other political issues, which explains why the two most popular politicians of recent years have been Arnulfo Arias, who won four elections by restricting his campaign to the question of the canal, and the late General Omar Torrijos, who negotiated the canal treaties with the US.

Nationalism also goes a long way to explaining why Noriega, who has tried to wrap himself in the mantle of Torrijos, has enjoyed some support – even though the US economic squeeze has pushed most Panamanians on to the streets to demand that he go.

Torrijos, and hence the Defence Forces, won support by carrying out a minimal land reform and promoting labour power. Noriega has tried to capitalise on this by portraying the military as the representatives of poor urban dwellers and workers. He also exploits racial differences in this multiracial society. (Members of the largely middle-class opposition group, the Civilian Crusade, are called *rabi-blancos* – white backsides.)

The reformism of Torrijos is dead. Wages have slipped back to the level of the early 1970s; unemployment is more than 10 per cent. The service economy built by Torrijos has been badly hit by the political uncertainty.

Everybody in Panama knows that the currency squeeze, the strikes and threat of US military intervention will be lifted only when Noriega goes. They know that they need Washington's help to remove him; some are calling for US intervention.

But this is a sign of exasperation, rather than a considered strategy. In the long run, a hands-off policy by the US may be best for the Panamanians. The US may be campaigning to oust Noriega, but it is not about to forfeit its cosy and convenient ties with the Defence Forces. The best solution lies in an internal dialogue leading to free elections, with the US providing moral and diplomatic support.

Leis says: "A democracy achieved through foreign intervention would be a democracy dependent on the power which has manipulated this country's politics since 1903. The master cannot give freedom to his slave." ■

Inaction cuts no mustard

The 1925 Geneva protocol prohibiting the use of chemical weapons represents a rare example of the international community mustering the courage and consensus to outlaw categories of weapons on the grounds that their use is so inhuman as to be unjustifiable. This makes it particularly alarming that the world's governments are responding so meekly to recent violations.

It is sobering to consider that the nerve gas in chemical weapons is 100 times more toxic than the methyl isocyanate released in the Bhopal tragedy of December 1984.

That disaster was universally mourned. Citizen's groups in India and non-governmental organisations worldwide mobilised to press for the rights of the victims to damages and restitution. They sought to create a greater awareness of the extent of the disaster and how similar incidents could be avoided in future.

But the tragedy in Halabja and other Kurdish villages subjected to chemical weapons attacks by the Iraqi army in March has been shrugged off by the world. It has been dismissed as part of the carnage of war, for which no reparations or investigations are required.

The evidence of the appalling human cost of those attacks cannot be ignored: the risks of repetition, retaliation and escalation are too high. Iran has already warned that it may respond in kind, "depending on the reaction of the UN security council to the Iraqi action". This underscores the need for an acknowledgment by the UN that the Geneva protocol has been violated by a signatory. The security council must then deal resolutely with the problem.

There have been several allegations of chemical weapons attacks in recent years. But it has been proved that Israel used chemical weapons during its invasion of Lebanon in 1982. In the case of Iraq, the investigative machinery at the disposal of the UN Secretary-General has confirmed the use of mustard gas and nerve gas on more than one occasion. Yet the message which

these and other potential violators received was clear: allies will not be dealt with severely or even condemned explicitly. What is the purpose of verifying a violation if all this serves to prove is that international law and humanitarian principles can be breached with impunity?

In arms control, the superpowers create the standard of voluntary restraint which other nations feel obliged to follow. Regrettably, the US congress chose to ignore this in 1985 when it decided to abandon the moratorium on chemical weapons production and gave the Reagan administration the go-ahead to proceed with binary weapons output.

As justification for this decision, it was argued that Nato needed an arsenal of modern chemical weapons and, most disturbing of all, the ability to retaliate in a chemical war. Now few states will be prepared to deny themselves an option which is so cheap and deadly.

Governments have tried to shift the responsibility for containing the proliferation of chemical weapons on to the private sector. But the chances of private industry acting as an effective police force are so low that they can be disregarded. In fact, even the most stringent and sophisticated export controls are unlikely to be effective because chemical weapons can be manufactured from imported intermediate chemicals or from an indigenous petrochemicals or fertiliser industry base.

A comprehensive and global ban on the production, storage and deployment of chemical weapons has to become a central objective of disarmament campaigners in both developed and developing countries. Only then will we see any progress towards the signature and ratification of an international convention.

Pending a global ban, the creation of chemical weapons-free zones has been suggested. This may help to reinforce the taboo on the use of such weapons, but only a comprehensive ban can be considered adequate.

Civilians are most at risk in chemical war, but it is the defence strategists who are evolving and presenting policies for chemical rearmament. The extension of arms control agreements to include chemical weapons must figure high on the agenda of the June summit between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. How can the Soviet Union and the US congratulate themselves on their arms control efforts while a ban on chemical weapons is still awaited because of a lack of political will? ■

Why the South looks to Canada

Canada's responsibility in the North-South stalemate comes under global scrutiny in Toronto on 19-21 June, when the leaders of the seven industrial powers meet to bless or blast their own achievements. As host, Canada's participation will be essential to advancement – not only for Canadians, but also for much of the developing world with which Canada trades.

Although Canada's foreign relations are conducted very much with an eye and a half on what Washington will think and do, there is evidence of the first cautious steps being taken along independent lines. This was to be seen at the Commonwealth summit in Vancouver in October, when Canada led the gathering with a strong condemnation of the policy of appeasing South Africa.

Since then Canadian banks have provided an unexpected new initiative for easing the Third World debt burden (***South** April*). The Canadian proposal preceded by almost a month a similar plan launched by Amex.

The developing countries which trade with Canada have much to offer, and have the right to demand a much higher profile from Canada in the development debate. ■

The price of true patriotism

Like his namesake of old, the Israeli nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu refused to bow to the law of the land. Mordechai the patriarch challenged the all-powerful rule of Xerxes, saved the Jews from the wrath of the Persians and earned himself a place in the scriptures. Vanunu's attempt to save the Israelis from the wrath of a nuclear world ended with him receiving an 18-year prison sentence as a traitor.

Vanunu knew that patriotism in a nuclear world was not enough. Possession of nuclear weapons is not a national issue; individual loyalty is to a wider humanity. After living for years with the knowledge that his place of work, described as a cotton plant by the Israeli government, was a factory for weapons of mass destruction, Vanunu decided to tell the truth to the world. He did so not for personal financial gain, but to let Israeli citizens know what their democratically elected government was perpetrating against them.

He told his story to the London *Sunday Times*, and was then abducted from Europe by the Israeli secret service. A prolonged trial, held in camera, prevented even the merest hint of the proceedings from reaching the ears of the public or the press.

The verdict was equally hugger-mugger. Only one sentence from the 60-page judgment was made public: the defendant had been found guilty on all charges – treason, aggravated espionage and transferring information useful to the enemy.

For the majority of Israelis, prevented from hearing either the evidence or the arguments presented by the defence, Vanunu was nothing more than a traitor whose revelations threatened the survival of the state. Vanunu's argument, that his actions extended beyond patriotism to concern for the whole of mankind, was suppressed. The Israeli public remains steeped in apathy, the victim of a state propaganda machine which has persistently obscured the difference between security issues and military secrecy.

In the region as a whole, Vanunu's revelations may have had an adverse effect, encouraging the Arabs in their scramble to catch up with Israel. Vanunu did no more than confirm what had long been suspected – despite Israel's calculated assurance that it "would not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the region". By proving that Israel has the capacity to produce 100 to 200 nuclear warheads, he has removed the last constraint on Arab states already in the race to join the next nuclear generation (**Middle East** *Page 41*).

But is is not every day that traitors are nominated for the world's highest honour in the cause of peace. Vanunu's nomination for the 1988 Nobel peace prize was backed by a petition to the court signed by 20 leading scientists, 12 of them Nobel laureates. They described Vanunu as "a man of conscience", pleading: "No greater regard can be shown by the court for the decent opinion of humankind than by acknowledging the lonely courage of Mordechai Vanunu."

Richard Falk, veteran anti-nuclear campaigner and professor of international law at Princeton University in the US, was not allowed to testify on Vanunu's behalf. Had he done so, he would have echoed the sentiments of the petitioners: "Individual conscience is more important in the nuclear age than the security of the state. We cannot expect the state always to be right. It is necessary that individual citizens also take responsibility."

Vanunu's self-sacrificing gamble did not pay off – at least in the short term. But those who believe that patriotism is too narrow a virtue in a world faced with destruction will salute the courage and integrity of one man who thought the sacrifice worthwhile. ■

Our forecast calls for happy landings.

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