

## From New Delhi by Susan Maltra

### Mr. Gorbachov comes to town

*Behind the rhetoric, there is little evidence of a qualitative shift in Indo-Soviet ties.*

On Nov. 25-28, Soviet Communist Party leader Mikhail Gorbachov and his wife, with a huge retinue of big guns, made their first state visit to a non-bloc developing nation. The Indo-Soviet relationship is based on many shared perceptions, not the least of which is a mutual enthusiasm for the ceremonial "big show," what in India is called *tamasha*. So, while the visit was elaborately prepared and billed as marking a "milestone," the big overlay of *tamasha* makes it difficult to see just what was actually accomplished.

The so-called New Delhi Declaration signed by the two heads of state is a piece of rhetoric which claims to be the basis for a new world order. That's a bit exaggerated. Undoubtedly, New Delhi was responsible for the formulations, but how seriously can one take the paeans to individual liberty and freedom, over the signature of the Soviet state boss?

As far as the economic and science-technology agreements are concerned, they are essentially statements of intent. A subsequent expert confab will be used to work out the latter, while, as we shall indicate in this column next week, the economic relationship, boosted with a large new Soviet credit, is not without difficulty for India.

The lengthy joint statement issued at the end of the visit, reemphasizes many known issues and positions, starting with nuclear disarmament, but, on the main point, which could

have marked a new departure in the relationship, and was certainly so intended by the Soviets—namely, Mr. Gorbachov's Asia-Pacific "collective security pact"—India gave no endorsement. Indian officials consistently point out that Asian security is a far more complicated matter, hardly comparable to Europe (where the "Helsinki process" is the Soviet model of reference), and is, moreover, no new idea. Jawaharlal Nehru was talking of it in the 1940s.

If the concluding joint press conference is any clue, the visit was largely Mr. Gorbachov's show. He took the opportunity to display the new sophisticated political and diplomatic style with which he seeks to transform the appearance, if not the substance, of *Matushka Rus*. Elevation of the Indo-Soviet relationship as a model of "peaceful coexistence" between two large nations with different social systems was integral to this tactic.

At the same time, he said, both India and Russia feel deep responsibility for the fate of the world in these times of crisis. He appealed for "new political thinking" about international relations, and was careful not to take up the issue of Pakistan or even the U.S.A. in a direct way.

But if it was Gorbachov's show, there is no denying India's willingness to provide the stage—albeit with entries and exits controlled. India has a great interest in a stable relationship with the Soviet Union on purely geograph-

ical terms if no other. And since the official, if foolish, assessment here is that Gorbachov represents a progressive and potentially "liberating" current in the Soviet Union, his promotion is not surprising. Moreover, India's long-term commitment to nuclear disarmament and official opposition to the American Strategic Defense Initiative add to the logic.

More immediately, India has made no secret of its discomfiture over the U.S. arming of Pakistan, the latest installment of which—the mooted transfer of AWACS—provided the immediate backdrop for Gorbachov's visit. It is this American policy which has kept the fulcrum of the Indo-Soviet relationship—namely, military hardware—firmly locked in place. The fact that the Soviet troops in Afghanistan are the ultimate reason for India's weapons need is not lost here.

As an Indian newsman put it to Mr. Gorbachov, "You say you're a friend of India, yet your military intervention in Afghanistan has caused us more trouble than anything else in the last 15 years." That the Soviet Afghanistan policy and the rapprochement with China remain deeply sensitive issues for India points to the fact that there is more to the Indo-Soviet equation than meets the eye.

Ultimately, the substance of the visit was whatever took place during an unprecedented 10-hours of private dialogue between Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and Mr. Gorbachov—and that may never be known, if the report that the sole party to the talks was a Russian translator is true. Otherwise, besides concerned ministers and an address to parliament, Mr. Gorbachov met the leadership of the two Communist Parties (Moscow recently recognized the Maoist CP-Marxist now ruling West Bengal state). There are unconfirmed reports that his desire to visit Calcutta was quietly refused.