

Indo-Soviet relations: Is there a sea-change coming?

by Susan Maitra and Ramtanu Maitra

The four-day visit of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov to Delhi beginning Nov. 18 is not expected to be quite like Gorbachov's visit in November 1986. That was a well-orchestrated media-hype projecting two new leaders, Rajiv Gandhi and Gorbachov, as the key initiators of world peace. This time, however, observers are keeping their ears tuned to catch-phrases and nuances which indicate a shift in Indo-Soviet ties.

On Nov. 3, *The Hindu*, a news daily acclaimed for reliability, put out a front-page story suggesting that while the Indo-Soviet relationship may be strengthened as a bilateral economic relationship, India has been essentially cut out of the strategic picture. *The Hindu* proceeded to point out that the Indian government-run news agency PTI-TV had been unable to secure a television interview with the Soviet President and was politely told to pack up by the Soviet Foreign Office. More significantly, *Izvestia* commentator Alexander Bovin stated in a television program on Indo-Soviet relations that it was time Soviet media commentators wrote the truth about happenings in India, keeping in mind Soviet national interests. It was an unmistakable reference to the already charged pre-election atmosphere in India where Gandhi faces a puffed-up opposition challenge.

This little flap is instructive. Moscow has a secure foot in virtually every camp on the Indian political scene, and is most, likely simply, taking precautions to prevent any recurrence of the embarrassment it suffered in 1977 when Soviet media promotion of Indira Gandhi's electoral victory proved so disastrously wrong and biased.

The strength of the Gorbachov delegation—including Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, Deputy Foreign Minister Rogachov, and four others—and the itinerary for the visit, which includes three or four sessions with the prime minister, makes it clear that the Kremlin has in no way written off Mr. Gandhi as yet.

While there is no indication that anything has changed in the Indo-Soviet relationship per se, it is clear that the new strategic policy of the Gorbachov regime, with its priority on

a new superpower condominium to prominently include China, has some indirect implications for India. That the implications for India are highly disturbing has less to do with the Soviet intent, than with the illusions fostered in New Delhi by India's hopelessly blinkered foreign policy perspective, in which Pakistan is inevitably the touchstone of strategic assessments.

Vladivostok and beyond

Rhetoric aside, the 1986 visit of Gorbachov, which culminated in the so-called Delhi Declaration by the two leaders, had already given premonitions of Moscow's changing attitude toward Asia as a whole. In his July 1986 speech at Vladivostok, Gorbachov emphasized the Soviet interest in the Far East and Asia-Pacific. Once again, while speaking at Krasnoyarsk recently, Gorbachov underlined that Soviet policy toward Asia, cloaked as it is in proposals on Asian security, will be to seek arrangements with China and the United States.

By contrast, the Delhi Declaration is a mere jamboree of words. It is apparent that India, which is trying to play a role in bringing about a peaceful solution to the Kampuchean conflict, does not figure except in a subsidiary way in the Soviet President's scheme of things in the Asia-Pacific region.

Moscow's change of attitude toward Beijing became crystal clear in the months following the 1986 visit of Mr. Gorbachov. During a visit to Delhi at that time, Anatoly Dobrynin, the geopolitician *par excellence*, who has recently zig-zagged his way back to Gorbachov's close coterie of advisers, told the Indian media in no uncertain terms that the Kremlin expects India to better its relations with the People's Republic of China through negotiations. Dobrynin brushed off press questions which tried to pin down the Soviet response in case of a hypothetical China-India confrontation; that China occupies a large chunk of Indian territory and points its nuclear warheads toward India were of no apparent concern to Mr. Dobrynin.

Instead, he offered the Soviet model of dealing with China. "It took us 15 years of negotiations," he said. It is interesting to know from Mr. Dobrynin himself that Moscow and Beijing have been negotiating since 1972 and at the same time keeping up a facade of confrontation. For the Indian Foreign Office mandarins it was the equivalent of having a bucket of cold water dumped on their heads.

Afghanistan

An similar cold shower has been unfolding in the Afghanistan-Pakistan arena. On the Afghanistan issue, the Indian government, both past and present, has taken a narrow, cynical view which, in the event, served Soviet interests quite well. But since Mr. Gorbachov accused Mr. Brezhnev of making "a mistake" in sending troops into Afghanistan, the Indian position in support of the intervention has become shaky to say the least. For the first time, in the United Nations on Nov. 4, India joined the mainstream in supporting a Resolution on Afghanistan calling for Soviet troop withdrawal—a decision to which Moscow is already committed through the Geneva Accords.

But despite appearances, the key to India's Afghanistan policy is not appeasement of the Soviet Union: It is the discomfiture of Pakistan. (The same logic, incidentally, holds good in the case of India's policy toward Kampuchea. The late Indira Gandhi recognized the Heng Samrin regime not only to express her support to Vietnam, but also to aggravate the Chinese who were and still are backing the murderous Pol Pot clique.) India's quest for a coalition government in Kabul—as opposed to a mujahideen-led government—is acceptable to both the Soviet Union and the U.S. State Department.

Though India claims that a mujahideen-led administration in Kabul will further strengthen Islamic fundamentalists and lead to instability in the region, it is evident that a Kabul controlled by the mujahideen will provide Pakistan, who nurtured and armed them for about a decade, significant leverage in Afghanistan: It is this prospect which is New Delhi's greatest concern. From the Soviet side it is essential that the Moscow-run People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the ruling junta, stay in power in some form or manner so that Moscow can keep its options and assets intact for future eventualities. In particular, Moscow would like to keep the road between the Soviet border and Kabul open, to allow speedy access to Pakistan if needed.

Shifting equations

The convergence of interests between the Soviet Union and India on Afghanistan, however, is no more than that: a convergence of views arrived at by very different paths. While the Soviet Union is no doubt unhappy with Pakistan for delivering a bloody nose to the Kremlin, with the help of U.S.-Chinese-Saudi financing of arms, its view of Pakistan is not distorted by paranoia. Only recently, the Soviet Union

has agreed to provide Pakistan with a U.S. \$3.8 billion financial support package for cooperation in 12 infrastructural projects. The agreement is significant because of the size of the financial commitment and the fact that Moscow signed this agreement with the late President Zia's handpicked cabinet and not with any pro-Soviet Pakistani.

Though India takes pride in the essential pragmatism of its foreign policy, it remains to be seen how India reacts to the pragmatism of others. So far, the Soviet orientation toward China and the United States has proceeded without visible substantive reaction in India. In truth, there is not much India can say: Its wounds are largely self-inflicted. The Soviet security blanket, against Pakistan and China in particular, that India had enjoyed for the last 17 years, may not be completely withdrawn, but the Soviets have indicated that the cold is not that severe. Now India needs a policy, not the illusion of one.

For the Soviets, China can not only open the door to the Asia-Pacific region, where a number of nations are coming up fast economically and where the hope of investment in the development of Siberia is located. China is also important for the Middle East. In recent years China has developed high-level contacts in the Gulf area through arms deals and otherwise. In this respect India has very little to offer. India's problems with Pakistan over the decades has not endeared it to most of the Muslim nations in the Middle East, a fact which has been evident whenever India and Pakistan are locked in war. In 1971, for instance, when Pakistan struck first, the Arab nations prevailed on India to show restraint. India's official stance on Afghanistan these last eight years has further diminished its credibility among the Muslim nations. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's genuine initiatives of recent months toward the Arab nations, so far have had little impact.

Solid economic ties

In spite of it all, India is and will likely continue to be an ally of the Soviet Union. Indo-Soviet trade, a much ballyhooed item with the local media, has begun to grow once again after having been stagnant for years. The actual trade turnover between the two nations is likely to reach U.S. \$3.9 billion in 1988. The aim is to more than double that by the year 1992.

According to experts in New Delhi, the trade features "complementarity" of the two economies, with each filling in the gaps in the other. The composition of trade items has undergone vast changes over the decades. While in the 1950s, 50-70% of the Soviet exports to India consisted of machinery and equipment, today it is primary commodities such as crude oil, petroleum products, fertilizers, and non-ferrous metals that constitute 80% of Soviet exports to India. The Indians, in return, send tea, coffee, tobacco, spices, jute, leather products, and woolen knitwear, as well as some light engineering items to Russia.

Beauty of lower tuning draws new endorsements

On Saturday night, Nov. 5, American television viewers nationwide were treated to a unique demonstration of what a Verdi opera would sound like if it were sung at the pitch the great Italian composer desired. In the course of a presidential election campaign broadcast, independent candidate Lyndon LaRouche showed a brief clip from last April's historic Schiller Institute conference in Milan, Italy, where the world-renowned baritone Piero Cappuccilli sang part of the aria, "Nel balen di tuo sorriso" from *Il Trovatore*, first at the tuning of A = 432 as intended by Verdi, and then at today's higher concert pitch of A = 440.

The Italian baritone showed how the "color" of the music was distorted at the higher tuning.

Maestro Cappuccilli is one of the leaders from the operatic world of an initiative to return to the classical composers' lower tuning pitch, and is backing a bill now before the Italian Senate to establish A = 432, which is equivalent to the "physicists' tuning" of a Middle C set to 256 cycles per second, as the official tuning fork in Italy. He praised LaRouche for his efforts to organize this initiative to save singers' voices, and the musical classics.

Meanwhile, a new group of internationally famous artists from both the world of opera and the classical German song form known as the *lied* have added their names to a petition supporting the Italian legislation, which was introduced by Senators Mezzapesa and Boggio.

The initiative has now won the backing of nearly every

great soprano alive, starting with Renata Tebaldi, who addressed the Milan conference. Miss Tebaldi reigned supreme over the Verdi repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera of New York, from the 1950s until she retired from the opera stage 11 years ago.

In October, soprano Dame **Joan Sutherland** and her husband, conductor Sir **Richard Bonyng**e, were delighted to sign the petition. The world-famous Australian couple is known for promoting the beautiful and demanding operas of the Italian "bel canto" era, having revived and recorded many seldom-heard works by Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini from the early part of the last century.

Two American-born Metropolitan Opera sopranos, **Leona Mitchell** and **Grace Bumbry**, have also recently signed the petition. Speaking from Milan, Miss Bumbry, who began as a mezzosoprano and now sings dramatic soprano roles, said that the "Verdi tuning" should be made standard not only in Italy, but around the world. **Louis Quilico**, a baritone from Canada who sings the great Verdi roles at the Metropolitan Opera, also signed.

Among *lieder* specialists—singers of the songs by Schubert, Beethoven, Mozart, Schumann, and Brahms—**Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau**, the German baritone, is outstanding. Not only has he performed and recorded the entire Schubert song repertoire, but is author of a book on Schubert *lieder*. Fischer-Dieskau signed the petition backing the Italian A = 432 tuning law in October, along with **Elly Ameling**, the Dutch soprano considered by many to be the top female *lieder* recitalist singing today. Earlier, other great *lieder* artists, the German bass Kurt Moll, German tenor Peter Schreier, and Austrian mezzosoprano Christa Ludwig, had endorsed the A = 432 campaign; like Fischer-Dieskau, these singers also frequently perform as soloists in classical oratorio and opera.

The trade is distorted because the ruble is pegged a notch above the U.S. dollar when in reality it is worth no more than U.S. 25¢. But from the Indian viewpoint that does not seem to matter, since the payments are made in rupees which otherwise have very few takers in the world market. More importantly, India can buy from the Soviet Union using rupees such essential items as MiG fighter aircraft, T-72 tanks, Kilo-class submarines and all sorts of military hardware which the West often refuses to sell to India even against hard currencies. The Indian rupees also buy a lot of Soviet technology.

It is also significant to note that the Soviet Union is coming in in a big way to help India overcome the dire electrical power shortage which has stunted agricultural and industrial growth. The Soviet Union has agreed to provide India with two nuclear power plants, 1,000 MWe each, at terms ac-

ceptable to India. Recently India's Energy Minister Vasant Sathe announced that the Soviet Union would provide assistance to create an additional capacity of 6,000 MW in the power sector during 1990-2000 A.D.

Besides the power sector, the Soviets are involved in almost every aspect of India's industrial and technological development. The deals, which have been coming in torrents since Gorbachov took over Moscow, are beneficial for both. The Soviets, who find it hard to market their products and somewhat backward technologies, are happy to give them away at reasonable prices. India, also finding it difficult to market its products in large volume and earn sufficient foreign exchange, is happy to buy with rupees what they probably could not have bought even if they had hard currency.

It is an arrangement which is expected to outlast the geopoliticians.