

## From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

### The Gorbachov-Gandhi 'summit'

*The Russian was seeking Indian support for his Afghan move, and he got it—in the short run.*

**M**r. Gorbachov took the opportunity of his Nov. 19-20 visit—scheduled months ago to confer the Indira Gandhi Peace Award on the Soviet President—to further the Kremlin's Vladivostok initiative. In particular, he sought Indian support for a new line on Afghanistan and tried to smooth over the Soviet rapprochement with China, India's adversary for more than two decades.

As the joint blast against "certain forces" violating the Geneva Accord issued by Gandhi and Gorbachov on Nov. 20 indicates, he was successful—for what it is worth—on the first account. Whether the effort to reassure nervous nannies in South Block (Foreign Ministry), on the China matter will prove successful in the long run, remains to be seen.

Extensive private talks with Prime Minister Gandhi—as much as nine hours in two days—gave Mr. Gorbachov the chance to convey the Kremlin's views and desires on a broad range of issues. He made clear that Afghanistan is the single most important focus of Soviet concern in South Asia right now, and undoubtedly confided that grave difficulties were being encountered in keeping the pro-Soviet government in power there.

In the event, Rajiv Gandhi joined Gorbachov in charging Pakistan and the U.S. with violating the Geneva Accord and in calling for the United Nations to convene an international conference on the matter. India is frantic that no pro-Pakistani regime be consolidated in Afghanistan, but lacks the credibility or political leverage to do much about it independently.

Cheerleading Soviet bluster on this

score is reassuring to South Block, and at least temporarily wards off the suspicion that perhaps the Kremlin's stated intention to improve relations with a democratically elected Pakistani government may be the seed of a change of heart in Moscow on this axiom of Indian foreign policy.

Though no hard information is available, Prime Minister Gandhi's report to the parliament Nov. 23 on the Gorbachov visit points to the fact that most of the private discussion was devoted to what Gandhi describes as the two leaders' agreement that "a new era is emerging in international relations." Gandhi told parliament that the Soviet Union is highly appreciative of India's constructive role in the Non-Aligned Movement and India's effort to promote peace, disarmament, and development. All of this, including the joint call for a new and just international economic order, was codified in the joint statement issued at the end of the visit.

Mr. Gorbachov's wish to have India play a more decisive role in his Vladivostok initiative for Asia-Pacific security was most probably a prominent theme. That means patching up with China, among other things, a timely topic in light of Mr. Gandhi's December pilgrimage to Peking.

There is every indication that Mr. Gorbachov's assurances on the China matter were taken to heart. Mr. Gandhi was not bluffing when he told the parliament that China was "unimportant" as far as the ties between India and the Soviet Union were concerned, and, interestingly, seconded M.P. Samar Mukherjee's proposal for a wider debate on the emerging relations be-

tween India, China, and the Soviet Union.

Indeed, the fuss that has been brewing here, nominally over the Sino-Soviet relationship as a whole, is actually a kind of shadow-play rooted in South Block's Pakistan fixation and the resulting paranoia that colors India's entire strategic outlook. Mr. Gorbachov took the unusual step of addressing the issue publicly at the outset—if only to keep the private agenda for talks clear for more important matters.

Otherwise, the visit consisted in the standard, pre-cooked fare that is obligatory when a superpower visits an underdeveloped nation, that, too, one with which it boasts a "model" relationship. The accord to supply two 1,000 MW nuclear power reactors had been finalized some months ago, and work on one of the plants has already begun. The announcement of a \$4 billion financing package was a flashy addition to the signing ceremony, though fine print of the credit deal was not revealed. The power plant is a solid anchor for still somewhat airy if enthusiastic talk of joint ventures and other possibilities tied to efforts to upgrade the two economies. Two-way trade now amounts to the equivalent of \$3.3 billion annually.

Lastly, the cultural agreement, including unveiling a statue of Pushkin in Delhi. These ties have a long background, given that the Russians' own research-backed claims to insight into the Aryan secrets and the overlap of Central Asian populations with those of the subcontinent makes it a practical matter. But they are clearly getting a new push under the baton of Raisa Gorbachova, who was featured in Delhi as the co-pilot of a joint Hindu-Russian magazine for women sponsored on this side by the Congress high command.