

Boris Yeltsin's overreaching authority led to the recent parliamentary crisis, writes Hari Vasudevan

Binding the Russian superman

The current crisis in the Russian government has made a public spectacle of the country's April Congress of Deputies. It is, however, not the straightforward result of a tussle of power between President Boris Yeltsin and his parliament. Nor is it a war in the social, political and economic "black hole" that many predict will be the fate of the Commonwealth of Independent States. In circumstances where there is no constitution, the crisis is an important episode in the struggle to evolve a balance of powers in a political system where authoritarian tendencies are fast emerging. But a clear-cut course is impossible where sentiment and unfounded fears reign.

The dominance of Mr Yeltsin in Russian politics has reached alarming proportions in recent months. Through carefully cultivated links with military leaders and support for united Commonwealth forces, Mr Yeltsin has excellent rapport with the old Soviet officers. He commands widespread international support. He controls Russia's prime ministership and government. He has created deputy prime ministers without consulting parliament — Mr M. Poltoranin for information, Mr Y. Gaider for economy, Mr G. Burbulis for government. His special nine-party coordination committee to integrate presidential policy and the predilections of parliament collapsed by the end of January, and he did nothing to revive the institution. He announces his decrees with great fanfare, and his special representatives are considered arrogant and corrupt.

Parliamentary authority has declined. It is evident parliamentarians find the President's work more interesting than their own. Thus the resignation of the Republican Party leader, Mr Sulashkin, from the White House to become presidential representative in Tomsk. Outside parliament is developing a presidential mystique. One academic declared, "He is a charismatic leader, he has mass support and the people believe in him." Mr Yeltsin is portrayed as superhuman. It is argued that what makes him unusual is precisely that he is not just some elected leader, the product of "rational judgments", but a figure who is important because, in some inexplicable manner, "for Russia and for



A new czar in the making

the people he is the man who expresses their interest". The Solzhenitsyn group of publicists, who are dominant in the political and literary journal *Novy Mir*, suggest that parliamentary forms are of little value given the tasks before the Russian Federation. Their rhetorical stress on patriotism, spiritual values and Russianness, which Mr Yeltsin echoes, raises questions concerning the credentials of the ballot, political parties, and other democratic conventions.

It is imperative to comprehend these circumstances. It is because of them there has been revolt in the blocs that provide the basis for Mr Yeltsin's strength in the Supreme Soviet. One has been the Democratic Russia forum, which controls 45 per cent of the Congress of Deputies and was the main anti-Communist Party group in the days before the August coup attempt. Another has been the Movement for Democratic Reforms, founded last year by ex-communists such as Mr Gavril Popov and Mr Eduard Shevardnadze, which has the support of some 26 parties, 23 "movements" and social organisations and six trade unions. Last week, at the Congress of Deputies, representatives of both blocs called President Yeltsin to account.

Mr Ruslan Khasbulatov, Speaker of the Supreme Soviet, was one of the rebels. He expressed his irritation concerning the power monopoly of his old friend, Mr Yeltsin. Others who took a firm stand against the President were members of the People's Party of Free Russia of Vice-President Rutskoi, Mr Gorbachev's supporters and the Communists of Russia, the old regime's "hardliners". This is an unholy combination of radicals and old communists. What brought it into being was an irritation with the arrogance of the President. An irritation that reached such a pitch that democrats who had no genuine desire to see the President out threw in their lot with those who hated Mr Yeltsin and Russian radicalism.

The majority of deputies did not vote for the no confidence motion suggested by Mr Khasbulatov on April 6 even though this was tactically directed against Mr Yeltsin's government rather than the President. Both Democratic Russia and the MDR support the economic reforms, though they insisted on modifications to soften the blows of the reforms.

But democrats could and did insist on major concessions from Mr Yeltsin's style of government during the Congress of Deputies. Mr Khasbulatov was not alone in this. Ms Yelena Bonner and the Sakharov group of parliamentarians have been a major force in enforcing such demands. Mr Burbulis, the Deputy Prime Minister whose sole political asset was the President's favour, as a consequence, was stripped of his position though remaining a member of the government. In depriving Mr Gaider of control of finances, Mr Yeltsin showed that he has had to take account of parliament's doubts about economic reform. He has been forced to agree to the appointment of a prime minister. And, as a boost to parliament's self-esteem, two ministers have left the government and returned to the assembly: Mr Sergie Shakhrai, who resigned his position as presidential foreign policy

adviser, and the Social Democrat representative, Mr Alexander Shokhin.

Mr Yeltsin's authority, though, remains untouched in many ways. A lot of deputies still think he is indispensable. Members of Democratic Russia and the MDR believe executive authority of some sort has to be preserved to deal with the various extra-parliamentary tactics employed by Mr Alexy Sergeyev and his Russian Communist Worker's Party, Liberal Democrats and patriotic groups. These tactics include the "hunger marches" organised by Mr Sergeyev in December and January and the violent demonstrations staged in February and March. Mr Stanislav Shatalin, a key radical democrat, a leader of the MDR and a member of Democratic Russia, stated recently that the drastic steps were needed against these protests and the president required to take them.

In an interview given in February, Mr Shatalin expressed his fears that there is "afloat a careful, all-round, well-

planned preparation for counter-revolution...On every street corner, newspapers are sold that are as fatal as snake poison: they spread chauvinism, racism and the call for the use of force and the overthrow of constituted authority...Without impunity, they spread propaganda the like of which earns a prison sentence in the most democratic countries in the world..."

True, the old "hardline" Russian Communist Party is in a poor way. Mr Sergeyev and his RCWP, an offshoot of the old party, are important in the Urals and Moscow and the old "apparatchiki" are influential in local government. But the old Left is weak in crucial areas elsewhere. When trade unions once attached to the Communist Party called for a general strike in the Kuzbass in the first week of March, the whole affair came to nothing. Independent trade unions and the Council of Workers' Committees dismissed the call as reactionary and designed to undermine the nascent democracy of Russia.

Public opinion

polls conducted by *Izvestia* in March showed over 45 per cent (20 per cent "don't know") wanted the Communist Party banned.

But Russia's democrats are suspicious of public opinion today. They have had too contradictory poll results after months of snap polls and opinion readings. Mr Shatalin and others are wary to conclude that despite economic circumstances, the majority of the public are mentally unwilling to reconsider old-style communism again. As the public opinion scholar Ms Tatiana Zaslavskaya recently pointed out, many of the ills of the old order came from the sense among many that slogans of "social justice" and "equality" were not followed in practice. Such preoccupations may come to the fore again in a "get-rich quick" environment.

Democratic deputies also have a weakness for Mr Yeltsin. As Ms Ilya Roitman of the Democratic Party of Russia pointed out, the President and deputies had had a common objective in the past. That is, the "struggle against the totalitarian regime." Mr Yeltsin enjoyed immense credibility and, now, the political parties find themselves "in the role of hostages to this credibility credit." Criticism of Mr Yeltsin is occasionally seen as "betraying their interests".

Mr Yeltsin has used these fears and sentiments to his ends. But today he is cautious since he knows a Constitution is essential to save the Russian Federation. This is the only way to get around separatist movements in Siberia, Tatarstan, the Bashkir and Volga region, while preserving elements of decentralisation essential for limits on state spending. A referendum which shows he is popular will not be good enough. So Mr Yeltsin has come cap in hand to the democrats and has had to pay in suitable coin. For it is only parliament that can provide a constitution and only political parties, with their local networks, that can make it work in autonomous regions and republics.

But no one really knows how much the President will have to concede since it is not clear how much democrats want him to concede. It is likely that, in current circumstances, the polygon of power in Russian politics will be tilted in Mr Yeltsin's direction.

Sustenance, not Big Macs

Russia today teeters between dictatorship and chaos. The changes of the past several years, as radical as they have been, are not irreversible. Former US President Richard Nixon is right to warn that a "new despotism" lurks in the shadows. If our young, inexperienced democracy fails to provide a better standard of living, the ghosts of the past will be even more monstrous when they return.

Our situation today looks like a great tragedy. The Soviet Union was a kind of Tower of Babel and when it collapsed, some people were wounded, some crushed, in the ruins.

All of us are hostages in these ruins of our own creation. But as always it is the children who will play the guilt of their ancestors. They are the most tragic victims of any kind of transition.

As a Russian, I can't complain if a foreign country gives

children of great geographical spaces, and thus both pioneers who know the wonderful taste of discovery in the wilderness. As a poet and a Russian, though, even in these desperate times and even when we have all accepted the virtues of the market, I must stress the importance of joint ventures rather than a mentality of wholesale buyouts.

A form of this new danger is already taking shape across Russia and Eastern Europe, especially as subsidies for the arts are being slashed. I call it "The McDonaldisation of European Culture."

Who then will want to travel to Moscow, Warsaw or Budapest? What will become of the wonderful Polish *katchka* when Big Macs and Kentucky Fried Chicken capture the local palate? What will become of such great filmmakers as Poland's Andrzej Wajda or Hungary's Istvan Szabo if Hollywoodian cops and robbers are the only images to grace the theatre marquees of Warsaw and Budapest?

I especially oppose the beautification of war on the big screen, which I call "warnography." Russians could make great films with Americans if we cooperate on a mutual basis instead of merely being asked to provide the backdrop for trivial comedies and spy thrillers.

In the absence of such cooperation, it would be a mistake to allow artists of the East to become orphans, now that we are nearly broke and subsidies have been divorced from state control. In Russia, we must be concerned first with medicine, then education, then the arts.

In such uncertain moments, who can say whether he is an optimist or pessimist? I know that I am against professional pessimists. In this at least, I agree with President Bush's recent remarks about Russia. I am also against professional optimists. Both push humanity into the abyss.

Yet the dark prophecies of professional pessimists push humanity into the abyss of disbelief, of mistrust in ourselves. It is time to climb out of the abyss. It is time to trust ourselves without illusion.

As Walt Whitman wrote long ago, fundamental compatibility lies in the fact that both Russians and Americans are


By Yevgeny Yevtushenko

me only a stale crust and not a fresh loaf of bread. We know we created our own deepest problems. Nonetheless, if I were an American, I would agree fully with Mr Nixon's criticism that the present level of US aid to Russia is "pathetically inadequate".

If America adopts an inward looking nationalism now, during the still treacherously slippery slush of the first spring after the Cold War, it will betray its own traditional interest. And America is not the only country that will drown if as the current election campaign portends, it dives too deeply into the waters of internal preoccupation.

I don't believe in hand-outs. I do believe in giving a hand. With a hand, Russia could become part of civilised Europe and join the vast zone of market democracies that peacefully stabilise the continent. We could join the borderless, passportless Europe of the new era. Even a Europe with one currency. Together with our unfortunately quarrelling Ukrainian brothers, with whom we share the cradle of our origins.

The author is Russia's most renowned poet



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CANBANK MUTUAL FUND CANGROWTH SCHEME 1989

ABRIDGED BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31.3.1992

	(Rs. in lakhs)	(Rupees in Lakhs)
LIABILITIES		
1. Unit Capital	6,016.79	
2. Reserves and surplus		
2.1 Unit Premium Reserve	—	
2.2 Other Reserves	532.30	
3. Loans and Borrowings		
3.1 From Bank	—	
3.2 From Others	—	
4. Current Liabilities & Provisions		
4.1 Provision for loss/depreciation in value of investments	—	
4.2 Provision for doubtful accrued income	0.71	
4.3 Provision for income distribution	1,805.04	
4.4 Other Current Liabilities & Provisions	169.04	
TOTAL	8,523.88	8,523.88

ABRIDGED REVENUE ACCOUNT FOR THE PERIOD 1.1.1991 TO 31.3.1992

	(Rs. in lakhs)	(Rs. in lakhs)
1. INCOME		
1.1 Dividend	103.60	
1.2 Interest	175.52	
1.3 Profit on sale/redemption of investments (other than interscheme transfer/sale)	1,691.36	
1.4 Profit on interscheme transfer/Sale of investment	282.62	
1.5 Other Income (Including Provision for depreciation in value of investments no longer required)	305.49	
TOTAL	2,558.59	
2. EXPENSES AND LOSSES		
2.1 Management/Trusteeship, Administrative and other operating expenses (Including interest on loans from other schemes, deferred revenue expenditure written off)	180.47	
2.2 Provision for depreciation/losses in value of investments	—	
2.3 Provision for doubtful accrued income	0.71	
2.4 Provision for doubtful deposits/current assets	—	
2.5 Loss on sale/redemption of investments (other than inter-scheme transfer/sale)	319.13	
2.6 Loss on inter scheme transfer/sale of investments	—	
	500.31	
NET INCOME	2,058.28	
APPROPRIATIONS:		
Income Distribution:	1,805.04	
TRANSFERRED TO RESERVES	253.24	
TOTAL	2,058.28	

CANBANK MUTUAL FUND CAN80CC(90) SCHEME

ABRIDGED BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31.3.1992

	(Rs. in lakhs)	(Rs. in lakhs)
LIABILITIES		
1. Unit Capital	15,811.46	15,878.27
2. Reserves and surplus		
2.1 Unit Premium Reserve	—	—
2.2 Other Reserves	4,119.46	1,835.93
3. Loans and Borrowings		
3.1 From Bank	—	—
3.2 From Others	—	—
4. Current Liabilities & Provisions		
4.1 Provision for loss/depreciation in value of investments	—	—
4.2 Provision for doubtful income/deposits	—	—
4.3 Provision for income distribution	—	—
4.4 Other Current Liabilities & Provisions	1,004.47	234.49
TOTAL	20,935.39	17,948.69

ABRIDGED REVENUE ACCOUNT FOR THE PERIOD 1.4.1991 TO 31.3.1992

	(Rs. in lakhs)	(Rs. in lakhs)
	Current year	Previous year
1. INCOME		
1.1 Dividend	1.67	—
1.2 Interest	2,211.40	2,057.93
1.3 Profit on sale/redemption of investments (other than interscheme transfer/sale)	487.95	468.51
1.4 Profit on interscheme transfer/Sale of investment	—	1.02
1.5 Other Income (Fees Commission & Brokerage & Commitment fees)	38.79	46.27
TOTAL	2,739.81	2,573.73
2. EXPENSES AND LOSSES		
2.1 Management/Trusteeship, Administrative and other operating expenses (Including interest on loans from other schemes, deferred revenue expenditure written off)	243.49	219.24
2.2 Provision for depreciation/losses in value of investments	—	—
2.3 Provision for doubtful accrued income	—	—
2.4 Provision for doubtful deposits/current assets	—	—
2.5 Loss on sale/redemption of investments (other than inter-scheme transfer/sale)	212.78	512.50
2.6 Loss on inter scheme transfer/sale of investments	—	6.06
	456.27	737.80
NET INCOME TRANSFERRED TO RESERVES	2,283.54	1,835.93

Notes:

- Investments are valued at cost
 - Market value of Equity/Preference Shares Rs. 17,403.33 lakhs.
 - Market value of Debentures/Bonds Rs. 311.85 lakhs.
- There has been a change in the method of valuation of investments from market value to cost. In view of this method of accounting, Revenue Account for the period ended 31st March, 1992 has been prepared instead of Statement of Operations prepared for the previous year. Hence, corresponding figures for the previous year for Revenue Account and the Balance Sheet are not given.

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