

## MIRROR OF THE COUNTRY

YURI GLUKHOV

The day in Damascus begins at the rather early hour of six a.m. with the ear-splitting din of roaring motorbuses, hooters tooting for all they're worth, conductors calling out stops and vendors of comestibles loudly touting their wares.

The Semiramis Hotel where I had put up overlooks a busy square, upon which converge many of the capital's thoroughfares. At this early hour the central neighbourhoods as glimpsed from my windows resemble islets in the incoming tide of traffic which gathers momentum with every minute, floods streets and squares and beats against the pavements.

As soon as I emerged from my hotel I was carried away by the flow which deposited me right in front of the City Hall in Port Said Street. Enclosed in an underground concrete culvert here is the Barada, the river watering the Oasis of Ghutah where Damascus is located. A fly-over is going up across the square.

"Don't be surprised by the changes," I was told at the municipal council. "The capital is being rejuvenated. Damascus today is celebrated not only for its historical sights, but also for its new districts."

One new district is Mezza, conspicuous for its broad avenues and modern blocks of flats whose architecture is a blend of traditional Oriental motives and modern Western features. The new Damascus is also clambering up the slopes of Mount Qasyun, which overlooks the city from the northwest. When the construction of satellite towns starts, the capital is expected to cross this crest.

"We have no intentions of cutting back on crop areas in the Ghutah Oasis, but seek to confine and concentrate the industrial zone thirty kilometres southeast of the

city," says Adel Sidki, General Secretary of the regional administration. "The traditional textile industry will continue in the lead as before. As for new urban construction, our policy is not to let it encroach upon old buildings and quarters. We even have a Society of Friends of Damascus whose aim is to protect historical and architectural monuments."

## In Complex Conditions

One million of Syria's population of almost 8,000,000 reside in Damascus, a city which mirrors the national spirit, the country's cultural traditions, concerns and problems. The stress is on the efforts to extend progressive reforms in depth, raise the working people's living standards and consolidate the country's independence and territorial integrity.

That Syria's present social and economic development is proceeding in complex conditions must not be lost sight of for a moment. The visitor soon spots Damascus's still-existing protective colouring and the people in military uniform in its streets. The consequences of Israel's 1967 aggression have yet to be eliminated. The ceasefire line is but sixty kilometres away. More than two-thirds of national resources are diverted to military needs to counter the aggressor.

Yet despite these difficulties, the people of Syria have made noteworthy progress. The national income has increased from 6,400 million Syrian pounds in 1970 to 22,200 million in 1975, while the average per capita income has increased from 986 to 2,991 pounds.

On the building of Syria's Parliament, which is called the People's Council, I saw slogans urging the nation to mobilize in order to accomplish the tasks before it, tasks

that were defined when the M.P.s discussed the target figures for the country's fourth five-year development programme. Under this plan, which takes in the five years ending 1980 capital investment is to aggregate 55,100 million pounds (against the 14,000 million in the previous five-year period), of which 44,600 million pounds are to go into the public sector. Slated is an annual 12 per cent increment in production, as compared to a fraction over 8 per cent in the previous five-year period. Besides industry, much will be done to boost agriculture, with 240,000 of the 640,000 hectares that the Euphrates hydro-power project has made cultivable to be brought under cultivation.

The public sector will account for around eight of every ten planned construction jobs. Assistance is also to be provided to the private sector. In recent years generally private enterprise has been encouraged. All investors in industrial projects are exempted from taxation until they begin to show a profit. Control of foreign currency operations has been relaxed. The question of setting up joint state- and private-owned enterprises is under consideration, with plans to encourage both local and foreign investment in this field. Foreign investors will also have opportunities to start enterprises in the tax- and duty-free zones, of which there are five: in the neighbourhood of the ports of Latakia and Tartus, outside Damascus, in the vicinity of Damascus airport and in the region of the Syrian-Jordanian frontier.

## Clashing Views

The five-year programme came in for active discussion both in Parliament and the press. In a critical analysis, the newspaper Tishrin has underscored the disparity between the targets set and Syria's potentialities as regards material and manpower resources. It has noted that the plan does not specify the spheres of private investment, though this is to account for 17 per cent of total investment, running to 9,400 million pounds. Indicating the working people's deteriorating material conditions, the newspaper Al-Thawrah has called for an evenly spread distribution of the economic burden on all segments of society.

Communist M.P. Wahid Mustafa

July

Parliament  
 struggle around  
 development.  
 bent o  
 progress as a  
 profits in every  
 orienting the  
 "open doors" p  
 with the  
 critical view  
 circles of the p  
 foreign investm  
 The clash of  
 development  
 told at the he  
 country's Gen  
 Labour Unions  
 are actively str  
 implementation  
 reforms that th  
 has charted. I  
 by its tactic  
 leverage to  
 regimes to toe  
 exists a range  
 city across th  
 I was remind  
 ment in the c  
 Progressive Na  
 incorporates the  
 Renaissance  
 Communist Pa  
 Union, and of  
 trations. The  
 General Fed  
 Unions, which  
 more than a  
 active. The tr  
 by Mahmoud  
 tion Secretary  
 were safegu  
 among which  
 powerful pub  
 passing virtu  
 dustry, for  
 domestic tra  
 security syst  
 ment of nat  
 upshot of th  
 of thousand  
 have been d  
 The Syria  
 mouid Salam  
 task as one  
 social and e  
 with the de  
 al and publi  
 tached grea  
 ship and  
 Soviet Unio  
 political, m  
 ing was gro  
 In calls  
 August 1  
 Central Co  
 Communist  
 Syria's Cor  
 NEW TIME

when the M.P. get figures for five-year development. Under this plan the five years investment is 100 million pounds (over a period), of which 50 million are to be spent. Stated is an increment compared to a fraction in the previous year. Besides industry to boost agriculture of the 640,000 Euphrates hydro has made cultivable under cultivation or will account for every ten planned. Assistance is also the private sector generally private encouraged. All industrial projects are taxation until they profit. Control of operations has been a question of setting and private-owned under consideration. courage both investment in this field will also have start enterprises in free zones, five; in the neighbourhoods of Latakia, Damascus, Aleppo and the Syrian.

old Parliament of the acute class struggle around problems of national development. The bourgeoisie, he said, is bent on using economic progress as a means to increase profits in every conceivable way; it is orienting the country on an "open doors" policy and a closer link with the capitalist market.

A critical view is taken in various circles of the possibility of extensive foreign investment. The clash of views around roads of development is not abating, I was told at the headquarters of the country's General Federation of Labour Unions. Bourgeois elements are actively striving to obstruct implementation of the progressive reforms that the national leadership has charted. Imperialism is changing its tactics, using economic leverage to get progressive Arab regimes to toe its line. Yet there exists a range of major factors cutting across these machinations.

I was reminded of the establishment in the country in 1972 of the Progressive National Front, which incorporates the ruling Arab Socialist Renaissance Party, the Syrian Communist Party, the Arab Socialist Union, and other democratic organizations. The above-mentioned General Federation of Labour Unions, which has a membership of more than a quarter million, is active. The trade unions, I was told by Mahmoud Salame, the Federation Secretary for Economic Affairs, were safeguarding their gains, among which he put first the powerful public sector now encompassing virtually all branches of industry, foreign trade, part of domestic trade, banking, the social security system and the development of natural wealth. In the epoch of the agrarian reform, tens of thousands of peasant households have been deeded land.

The Syrian trade unions, Mahmoud Salame emphasized, see their task as one of facilitating further social and economic reforms, along with the democratization of political and public life. He said they attached great importance to friendship and co-operation with the Soviet Union, whose comprehensive political, moral and material backing was greatly appreciated.

In calls issued for the coming August 1 general election, the Central Committee of the Syrian Communist Party emphasizes that Syria's Communists believe reliance

on grass roots, the consolidation of the Progressive National Front, and broader co-operation with the U.S.S.R. and other socialist countries essential to safeguard national sovereignty and achieve economic independence and social progress.

### Spectrum of Co-operation

I myself chanced to see all over Damascus diverse tokens of the amicable ties of co-operation between the U.S.S.R. and Syria.

Bookshops in Damascus are currently selling Fares Zarzour's new novel "Urge of the Time," whose characters, Syrian and Soviet experts, engineers and workers, built the Euphrates power complex, one of the biggest in the Middle East. Generating today 97 per cent of Syria's total electricity output, it daily nets the national exchequer the sum of 855,000 pounds, Syria's Minister of Power Engineering Ahmed Omar Yousef stated early in June.

Soviet and Syrian hydrologists carried out successful prospecting to provide the rapidly growing capital with adequate resources of water.

The rainbow profusion of cottons and silks that one sees at the Khoumassia Textile Mills in Damascus, an enterprise employing 5,000 workers, is a veritable feast for the eye. A large part of the output is shipped to the U.S.S.R. and other socialist countries.

Since the threads of Soviet-Syrian co-operation are so firmly interwoven into the fabric of everyday life in Syria, no wonder its people received with such great satisfaction the fruitful results of the visit which Syrian President Hafez Assad paid to Moscow last April and of the talks he had at the time with the Soviet leadership.

By evening, when the golden disc of the sun had sunk beyond the rooftops to bring long shadows into play, I took myself off to the city's old quarter to roam the narrow crooked lanes around the Omayyad Mosque. The old minarets along with the modern high-rise buildings were sharply silhouetted against the sunset-painted sky, producing a fascinating interplay of past and present.

Damascus

operative farms. Democratic forces regard the new legislation as imperiling a paramount gain of the April revolution, the agrarian reform which placed the land in the hands of those who till it. Apprehensions are also voiced that the alliance between the ruling Socialist Party and the Centrist Social Democrats will impel the Mario Soares administration still further to the Right.

### IRAQ—KUWAIT

On July 20 Iraqi and Kuwait troops were withdrawn to a distance of one kilometre on either side of the line that the Arab League had demarcated in 1961. This was done under an agreement reached by the joint frontier commission at a meeting in which Kuwait's Deputy Home Minister and Iraq's Basra provincial governor took part.

For several years the two countries could not agree as to the frontier line. In early July representatives of the two governments had talks in Baghdad, agreeing to settle disputed issues peacefully and sketching several concrete measures, more specifically a troop withdrawal in the frontier area.

### LEBANON

Representatives of Syria, Lebanon and the Palestine Resistance met in the Lebanese resort town of Chitour on July 21 to discuss ways and means of finalizing implementation of the 1969 Cairo agreement regulating the terms of the presence of Palestine Resistance movement in Lebanon. It was decided to create a standing committee and two subcommittees to work out a detailed scheme to stabilize the situation in Southern Lebanon. It was also agreed that Palestinian units would be withdrawn from Southern Lebanon to the areas specified in the Cairo agreement.

The need to resist Israel's continuing threats and provocations that aim to undermine the security of Lebanon's frontier areas was also noted.