

Ten years later in 1998, I asked myself the question: Was 1988 in any aspect an unusual year for the world or for me? More for the World than for me! The ascent of Mikhail Gorbachev to become President of the USSR and his decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and later from Hungary and East Germany, were the first signals indicating the end of the USSR, but were then not understood. In June two million black workmen held a three-day general strike in South Africa, protesting against the apartheid laws, action that led to the end of racial discrimination. At the XXIV Olympic Games in Seoul, Ben Johnson won the 100 meter race but because his drug-taking was discovered, his gold medal had to be returned. This led to much stricter anti-doping laws.

Were these events a foretaste of things to come? Perhaps more than the earthquake in Armenia, which destroyed the town of Spitak with 55000 dead. More than the terrorist bomb which exploded over Lockerbie in Scotland inside a Boeing 747 Pan Am flight which resulted in 258 dead, then the worst aviation accident in Britain. Or the death of 50 miners in a German brown-coal mine? After 10 years, these three disasters can only be considered as normal events in the long-term flow of history.

My own life during 1988 must also be judged as normal. I travelled widely, in February to Washington, Boston—AAAS, and New York, which I had often done before, and this brought me new articles for publication in ISR. In the same month I visited the Dutch Delta works against flooding, and I was most impressed by their macro-engineering effort, then nearing its successful completion [see Title 365]. I had fun in June when friends took me to the famous 24-hour motor race at Le Mans and I enjoyed participating at the Club of Rome Meeting in Paris in October, where I met old friends from India, Romesh Thapar as well as Dr Karan Singh and his beautiful wife.

Later that month I was again in India and in Australia. In Melbourne I got to know Dr David Solomon of the CSIRO Division of Chemicals and Polymers who invented the Optical Variable Design, OVD, incorporating it in banknotes to make them practically unfakable [see ISR 14/4, page 399]. He explained to me his 10-year research effort, which in my opinion was a most brilliant example of interdisciplinary science and technology, as the Australian \$ 10 banknote proved. I was proud to publish the first scientific account of this in ISR.

I returned from Australia via Hong Kong and India, where in New Delhi I saw the construction of the new beautiful Bahai Temple by local labour on bamboo scaffolding. Its huge white vaulted roofs can only be compared with those of the Sydney Opera House, which needed computer-controlled technology.