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# 28Mar89 CUBA: GORBACHEV, CASTRO WILL GET ON WELL BUT WHAT ABOUT POLITICS?

By Lionel Martin

HAVANA, March 28, Reuter - Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and President Fidel Castro are unlikely to allow political differences to harm ties between Moscow and Havana when they meet in Cuba next week.

Gorbachev, who will be arriving a week after the first multi-candidate elections in the Soviet Union for almost 70 years, is expected to get on well with Castro.

But diplomats here say Castro is likely to express fears the United States could take advantage of Moscow's bid for peaceful superpower relations to prevent revolutionary changes in Third World nations.

They say Castro will also insist Gorbachev's perestroika or "restructuring" reforms could undermine the Cuban revolution if applied on the Caribbean island.

Elections to the new-style Soviet parliament dealt a blow to the Soviet Communist Party at the weekend when voters rejected many officially-backed candidates.

But the consensus among Havana diplomats was neither of the two men would do anything to jeopardise the close ties between Moscow and Havana.

The outgoing personalities of the two leaders will ensure they receive the attention of the Western media.

"Who could ask for better superstars?" a Western diplomat said at a Havana reception this week.

Unlike previous Cuban-Soviet summits, this one features two men who are contemporaries. Gorbachev, 58, is five years younger than Castro.

In contrast, when Nikita Khrushchev embraced Castro in September 1960, the bald Soviet leader was 66 years old and the black-bearded leader of the newly-triumphant Cuban revolution had just turned 34.

Each succeeding Soviet party leader until Gorbachev - Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko - was old enough to be Castro's father.

All this has changed.

One Havana-based Soviet journalist noted many similarities between Gorbachev and Castro, who have met three times in Moscow.

"They are both dynamic, charismatic and audacious and both have changed the course of history in their own country."

"Castro led a seemingly impossible revolution that brought communism to his island just 90 miles (145 km) away from the United States," he said.

"Gorbachev is leading a seemingly impossible transformation that is attempting to revitalise our vast and complex country."

Diplomats say Castro and Gorbachev are both outgoing men who seem to take strength from mixing with workers, farmers and people from different walks of life. They both seem fond of plunging into crowds.

During the three-day visit, Gorbachev will probably accompany the Cuban leader on forays to factories, farms, schools and scientific institutions, a Cuban official said.

People who have been with the Cuban leader on such visits, which are usually shown on Cuban television, say he looks at ease, asks lots of questions and voices many opinions.

Castro is expected to show off to Gorbachev some of the achievements of the Cuban revolution. Likely sites on the agenda are Cuba's modern scientific and technical institutions that specialise in genetic engineering and public health.

Gorbachev's host is already a living legend, a revolutionary warrior and political leader who has guided his nation's destiny for 30 years. When Castro took power Gorbachev was a local Komsomol - Young Communists' League - leader. He is now in his fifth year as Kremlin chief.

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