

Middle East

efforts within the Club of Paris to consolidate Zaire's debt after economic conditions had brought the country to the verge of bankruptcy.

While most countries in the region continued to struggle against underdevelopment in relatively peaceful circumstances, social and political tensions surfaced, primarily in countries with Marxist-oriented governments. In Benin, an attempted *coup* led to a United Nations inquiry. In the Congo, President N'Gouabi and Cardinal Biayenda were assassinated in July. In Guinea, bloody demonstrations jeopardized the tendency towards relative liberalization that appeared to be developing.

In the latter months of 1977, Canada sought to provide effective supervision for its development-assistance projects in Madagascar. Canada signed an agreement in principle with Gabon to establish a line of credit of \$150 million.

At the end of the year, the coronation of Emperor Jean-Félix Bokassa of the Central African Empire took place amid pomp and circumstance.

In the Maghreb, the Algerian conflict over the Western Sahara with Morocco and Mauritania continued. The positions of the parties were still too far apart to permit optimism about a solution in the near future.

The most important developments during the year from Canada's bilateral standpoint were the Export Development Corporation's offers of trade credits of \$200 million and \$1.2 million to Morocco and Algeria respectively and the visit to these countries of a Canadian trade mission headed by Jean-Pierre Goyer in his capacity as adviser to the Secretary of State for External Affairs on matters relating to French-speaking countries and organizations. In addition, Mr Goyer visited French-speaking black African countries, and President Omar Bongo of Gabon visited Canada. Other visitors to Canada during 1977 were Lieutenant-Colonel Baba Diarra, Vice-President of Mali, Moumouni Adamou Djermakoye, Moussa Kargougou and Uamba di Lutete, foreign affairs ministers respectively of Niger, Upper Volta and Zaire, and Jean Boniface Assélé, Minister of National Education, Youth and Sports of Gabon.

The Arab-Israeli dispute took a dramatic turn in November when President Sadat of Egypt visited Israel on his own initiative in an attempt to break the Middle East peace impasse. Canada was one of the first countries to welcome President Sadat's initiative and Prime Minister Trudeau sent messages to both the Egyptian and Israeli leaders encouraging their efforts to work towards a comprehensive peace settlement. As 1977 drew to a close, direct negotiations had taken place in Cairo and Ismailia that provided grounds for cautious optimism.

Canada's developing links with the Middle East were demonstrated in 1977 by an increased number of Canadian ministerial visits to the region. During an April inspection tour of Canadian troops serving with the United Nations peacekeeping forces in Syria, Israel and Egypt, Defence Minister Danson also met with government and military leaders in each of the three countries. In May, Jean Chrétien, Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, led trade missions to Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel. In the last country, Mr Chrétien chaired the inaugural meeting of the Canada-Israel Joint Economic Committee. In July, Senator Perreault, leader of the Government in the Senate, met with several parliamentary leaders in Israel. At the provincial level, Premier Davis of Ontario visited Israel in the spring, while Premier Lougheed of Alberta travelled to Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel in the summer.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, who visited the Middle East in the autumn, was the last foreign minister to hold talks with both Prime Minister Begin and President Sadat prior to their historic meeting in Jerusalem. Mr Jamieson was pleased with this development, as one of the stated objectives of his own trip had been "to encourage the Israeli and Egyptian Governments to make all reasonable moves in order to bring about the kind of accommodation among the parties that is necessary before peace talks can resume". Mr Jamieson's visit also helped to advance