

Time for Israel to Wake Up

With Israel laying down new conditions, the prospects of a solution emerging out of the forthcoming Middle-East conference become slim with every passing day. In its latest statement, Tel Aviv has declared that it will oppose the inclusion of a PLO delegation at the conference. Furthermore, it has asked for an undertaking from the United States that the Bush administration will not support either a division of Jerusalem or a creation of a Palestine state in the occupied Arab territories.

All these are tough conditions whose acceptance by Washington or the international community as a whole would make a nonsense of the whole purpose of the proposed peace conference on the Middle-East.

Let us quickly examine all the three demands made by Tel Aviv. To keep the PLO out of the peace conference would be very much like staging Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. In recent weeks the PLO has made a number of statements which are generally positive in character. Whether this organisation takes part in the conference as an independent entity — and this is what one favours — or as part of the Jordanian delegation, it must surely take part in the conference. Who else can speak for the Palestinians?

On the question of creation of a Palestinian state, the consensus in the international community is clearly in favour of giving this deprived people a homeland of their own. It is such a homeland that can, slowly but surely, develop mutually beneficial relations with the neighbouring Jewish state. Similarly, the future status of Jerusalem must be considered with an open mind, without any preconditions laid down by any of the involved parties.

There may well be more than one solution to this complexed problem. For instance, some years ago the Vatican had suggested that Jerusalem, a holy place for Muslims, Christians and Jews, should be internationalized, perhaps under the control of the United Nations. One cannot say that this should be the best solution, but surely it is one that must be considered seriously. It is certainly infinitely better than leaving the whole city under the control of Tel Aviv.

It is high time that Israel carefully considered the purpose and objectives of the proposed Middle-East conference. This may be the last chance for the countries in the region to set up a frame-work for peace, harmony and stability of the region. Prospects for the success of this conference have considerably improved with the softening of positions by Syria and the PLO.

Israel has so far done nothing to match the changed mood among the Arab states. We do not expect Israel to start making concession at this stage. However we do not think that Israel is helping the process of peace by laying down pre-conditions, and demanding undertakings from Washington.

Time is running out in the search for peace in the region. It is a pity that this realisation does not seem to dawn on Tel Aviv.

The Sweltering Arrival of Sharat

People in Dhaka, perhaps elsewhere in the land too, are thirsting for a big splash that would cool the present heat spell. The pit-a-pat English-style drizzle occurring intermittently over the last two days are not helping things much. People are sweating under the moving blades of electric fans.

Imagine where there are no fans to temper such infernal temperature. Even if table fans are finding their way into the slum *jhupris*, most households still do not sport such handy cooling devices. And the plight of their inmates is left better undescribed. People who live perpetually under the moving fan at least for seven months every year, can only be pitied when there is some problem with power supply. And if you can be sure of anything at all — it is this that power will fail and at hours it is most needed.

The Shravan this year has been rather nig-gardly. It didn't quite pore itself the way it does usually. Then we forgot about that and are angry at August being so rudely sweltering. If we have thought of the time as rather being Bhadra, we could be in a better frame psychologically to take the heat and complain less. The Bengali people are in three minds about thinking of their yearly calendar. No newspaper in the world possibly gives as many dates on its folio line as ours do: the Bengali, the Christian and the Arabic.

Bhadra cannot but be a little suffocating with a splendrous sun beating down in place of sad overcast skies of the preceding month impregnating the earth with renewed fecundity. Wind also dies down and a stillness all around makes of the glorious sunshine a regular instrument of torture. Even after all that Bhadra ushers in Sharat — or better still the duo Sharat-Hemanta — an autumn like of which you wouldn't have anywhere else on earth. This is a typically Bengali season, so much different from the Fall of the temperate zone countries or Pat-jhar, meaning the same fall of leaves, in the upper subcontinental region.

If it is a little tedious with the heat now, Sharat is already here to dazzle us into forgetting all that. Think of the *Shuul* and its fragrance greeting you first thing in the morning — in a setting of glittering dewdrops on the grass, the heat can become bearable.

Agrarian Reform and Small Farmer Development

AND consolidation and creation of uniform, owner-operated one to two hectare farms, all over the country is one of the two long term objectives of the agrarian reform programme. The other objective is the rapid evaluation of one million entrepreneurs from the presently non-cultivating landed rural households which has been dealt with in my previous article last week. At present, cultivation is carried out in marginal farms of an average size of upto one hectare fragmented into 10 to 20 miniscule plots spread out over an area of two square miles on the average. The basic condition for consolidated small farms must be fulfilled for achieving intensive irrigated agriculture.

The proposal as outlined so far suggests that 70 per cent of the land would be taken over by the government. This combined with the 30 per cent of arable land presently owned by the actual farmers would be demarcated into consolidated farms with a minimum size of one and a maximum size of two hectares with more farms near around one rather than two hectare size category. If the average size works out to be 1.25 hectare, and 8.5 million hectares of net cultivable lands are available by the year 2000, then our target group ought to be 6.8 million small, but modern farmers. Given the family size of five to six persons for each of these farm families,

what had been paid for the land. On the other hand, with the expected increase in farm productivity as well as farm gate prices, rent at 5 per cent of output value would come close to the desired level when the farmers themselves could pay for the cost of agrarian reform.

The continued existence of the consolidated farms is fundamental to sustain agrarian reform. But earlier, we have proposed that the taking over 70 per cent of land owned by 10 per cent of rural household should be adequate to achieve rural household can be allowed.

The important objective of retaining the consolidated farms must be built in to the legislation. It is for this purpose only that all the cultivable lands should ultimately be owned by the Government. Otherwise, it is not necessary. But who will inherit the farm upon the death of the leaseholder? The farm cannot be divided and there must be only one leaseholder in order to avoid informal fragmentation of the farm. Given this basis, the experts can work out the legal arrangements so that the indivisibility of the farm is upheld under all circumstances.

Production Bias

Another important dimension of the legislation for leaseholding is its production bias. If land is left fallow, desired productivity levels are not maintained or liabilities like payment of rent are not met, the lease may be cancelled. While the farmer must enjoy the inherent right to uninterrupted cultivation, he at the same time is obligated to fulfill the national aspiration to maximize production from the extremely limited amount of land available in the most densely populated country of the world.

It would be necessary to undertake separate studies to work out all the relevant details of the legislation. The purpose here is to develop a

From LDC to NIC by Shated Latif

compensation and it was estimated at Taka 38,043 per hectare being the sum of the discounted (at 12 per cent) stream of value added for 25 years. Annual rent in order to pay back to government the NPV at 12 per cent interest over 25 years would be Tk 4,706 per hectare. But the amount is excessive and at the present state of agriculture, more than 5 per cent output value per hectare. Hence the suggestion is that the annual rent may be fixed at 5 per cent of gross output value upto a maximum of what the payment would be if the farmer-leaseholder should pay for the land compensation. The principle involved here is that government cannot charge more than

the second objective for promotion of entrepreneurs. But for sustainable small farmers development perhaps all the cultivable land should be taken over and then resettled as leaseholdings of consolidated one to two hectare farms. Otherwise fragmentation of land through inheritance for the land not taken over by government cannot be legally avoided.

Thus cultivable land only be owned by government. However it must be leased out for a certain number of years. But fragmentation of leaseholdings must be banned by law. Similarly sublease in whole or part must be illegal. At the same time, not more than one leaseholding for any single

Volcano Helps Close Deal on Military Bases

Abby Tan writes from Manila

IT was a volcanic eruption that hastened an agreement between the Philippines and the United States over the presence of the US's two military bases on Luzon Island.

Before the Mount Pinatubo volcano awoke in June, devastating the region and causing heavy damage to the bases, negotiations over the future of the installations were deadlocked.

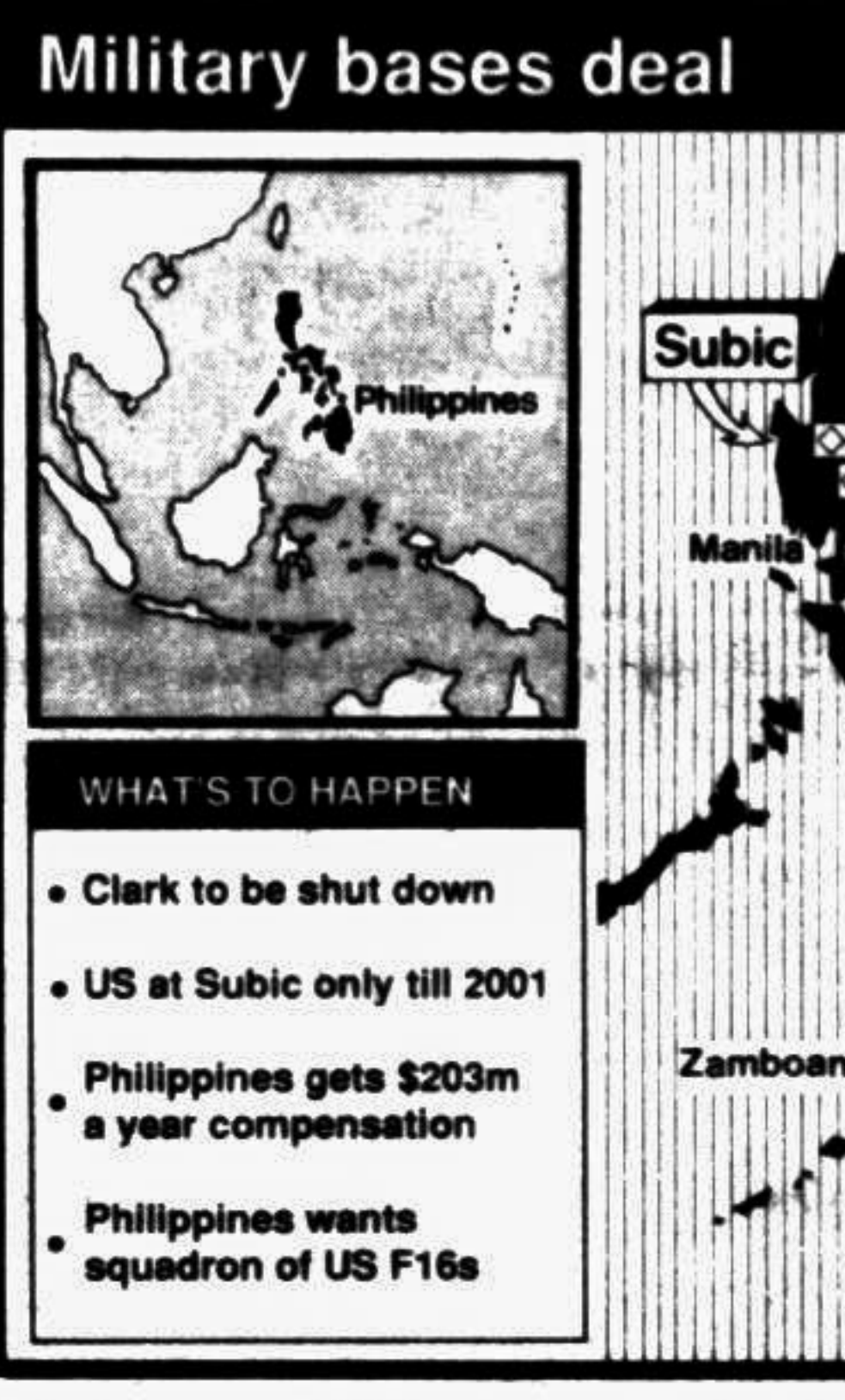
The two sides fiercely disagreed over how long the bases should stay and how much the US should pay for them to stay there. But on July 17, it was decided that Clark Air Force Base would shut down completely and that Subic Bay Naval Base would stay for only 10 more years.

Continued eruptions of Mount Pinatubo have made Clark useless since aviation in the region of the mountain is too hazardous. It had been an important airlift center for US Pacific forces. The adjacent Crow Valley gunnery range is buried under six feet of volcanic ash. The range had been used for years by US allies — the air forces of South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Thailand and Singapore.

In the agreement, the US will clean up parts of Clark and give it back to the Philippines by September 1992.

The 14 months of talks were accompanied by endless

While Filipinos were still debating whether the economic benefits of a US military presence were worth the infringement upon their independence, mother nature intervened and forced the issue. Fourteen months of rocky negotiations with the US over its two military bases were brought to an end by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo.



debate among Filipinos over how to handle ties with the former colonial master. One

trigger a sense of abandonment and betrayal among Philippine conservatives who see the US as a benevolent ally.

"But it will eventually lead to a more pragmatic view of Philippine-America relations and remove the last trace of romanticism from it. The relationship will be demystified," said Mango.

Many believe the bases infringe upon the sovereignty of the country. But for most the economic benefits of having the bases have outweighed the discomfort.

About 42,000 Filipino workers have lost their jobs at Clark because of the eruption that affected 600,000 people in the region. Together, the bases accounted for five per cent of the Philippine gross national product.

Subic Naval Base will be maintained until 2001, by which time the US will have been present in the Philippines for more than a century, since colonisation in 1898.

Subic is a supply depot of the US Seventh Fleet and has

played a major role in projecting US power through decades of world conflict: the Vietnam war, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the recent Gulf War.

Some say the presence of the US, even if scaled down, is still of great comfort to South-east Asia. Said Jusuf Wanandi, head of the Jakarta-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies: "The US is viewed as a benign superpower and its presence necessary for the maintenance of regional peace and stability." Wanandi was speaking at a security conference in Manila.

There are fears, Wanandi said, that if the US leaves the region completely, other powers will find the vacuum too appealing.

Wanandi said the bases treaty will allow nations in South-east Asia time to fashion their own regional order to head off anyone aiming to fill a power vacuum left by departing US forces.

The \$203 million annual military and economic pay-

ment the Philippines gets in the deal after 1993 is \$120 million less than the US was offering for Clark and Subic before Mount Pinatubo erupted and changed the nature of the treaty negotiations. For 1992, Congress had already been asked for \$323 million in appropriated funds for the Philippines.

The government has no alternative plans to employ displaced Clark workers and has been caught somewhat flat-footed by the volcano and the US withdrawal.

Despite widespread opposition to the bases, the Philippines had long used their presence as leverage when negotiating with the US for aid. The new treaty brings home the message the US has been sending during negotiations: as world tensions diminish, the value of the facilities is declining.

Most predict the treaty will get the two-thirds majority it requires in the Senate of President Corason Aquino's government. Grandstanding by senators who are against the bases has noticeably diminished as it became clear that the government had little leverage when bargaining with the US.

— GEMINI NEWS

ABBY TAN is a Singaporean journalist who has been based in Manila since 1971.

Children: Caught Between Two Wars

AT a United Nations relief camp in southern Sudan nursing mothers hold on to tiny bundles wrapped in dirty sheets — the youngest victims of famine and war.

The children's bodies are covered with sores, large lifeless eyes look out from their hollow faces. An emergency food drop was too late to save these babies. Political and logistical hurdles in strife and famine ridden southern Sudan delayed the relief flights.

The mothers are huddled at Koet Camp on the banks of a Nile tributary, some 1,000 km south of the capital Khartoum. They arrived here in the past week after trekking 250 km without food from refugee camps in Western Ethiopia. Some gave birth on the way.

As the onset of the rainy season renders inaccessible the marshes of the southern Nile region, yet another human tragedy is unfolding in the Horn of Africa.

Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees have returned to southern Sudan after the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in Ethiopia shell their refugee camp. The refugees had been living in the Itang Camp in Ethiopia for the past four years to escape the

civil war in their own country. Itang was being administered by the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Front (SPLF) which has been fighting a separatist war in Sudan's chiefly-Christian south against domination by Muslim rulers in Khartoum.

The OLF itself is one of several Ethiopian rebel movements that overthrew president Mengistu Haile Mariam. The group is closely aligned with the Khartoum government.

The Sudanese refugees fled OLF shelling only to be bombed by their own government as they crossed over into Sudan in June. So far, 150,000 returnees have been registered in seven camps set up by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the villages near here.

UNICEF has been operating an airlift of non-food, mainly medical supplies from Lokichogio near Kenya's border with Sudan, using two Twin Otter light aircraft under the US\$170 UN emergency programme 'Operation Lifeline Sudan'.

But the airstrip at Nasir

badly malnourished children are brought forward for inspection. Doctors find out they are brothers and have been separated from their parents on the trek out of Ethiopia.

They are packed into a UN boat and taken to the Panyanyang camp for unaccompanied minors, five km downstream. There are about 5,000 children here, many of them orphans or separated from their parents. They used to be looked after by the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) at Itang Camp in Ethiopia.

In eight groups, the children walked a distance of 250 km from Itang, escaping just hours before the refugee camp was shelled by the OLF.

Lowku Kery, deputy director of the Itang school said the camp had to be evacuated in a hurry. They could hear guns and fighting as they fled towards the Sudanese border. "We then advised the children to eat anything edible — wild grass, and rats," Kery said.

After a four-day walk, the children reached the border where they had to take cover

Caught in between two overlapping civil wars, Sudanese children fled shelling by Ethiopian rebels only to be bombed by their own government. Now, they are dying in refugee camps. Dede-Esi Amanor of IPS visited one of the camps in southern Sudan last month. His report from Koet, Sudan:

near here was bombed last month by Sudanese Air Force planes, and now the dirt runway has become bogged down in mud, making it difficult for the relief planes to land. From the airstrip, supplies are transferred to the camp sites by flat-bottomed river boats.

Another UN agency, the World Food Programme (WFP) is preparing to begin a twicedaily air drop of food here after the Khartoum government finally allowed it under donor pressure.

An estimated 1,000 tonnes of food are needed to prevent mass starvation, officials say, much more than in the 1988 tragedy when 250,000 southern Sudanese died of civil war-induced famine.

All the Sudanese returnees

as Sudanese Air Force jets bombed the refugee column. Aid workers here describe how the last batch of children staggered into camp last week "like walking skeletons."

Small tents have been erected in the camp for those children close to death. In one, a boy of 10, only skin and bones, lies barely breathing.

Under the shade of a tree, UNICEF worker Bernadette Kumar records progress in a health clinic. Here 500 children who are 75 per cent malnourished need daily penicillin injections for severe skin infections. Many need skin grafts because the sores are too far gone.

"The nutritional status of these children is severely compromised," Kumar says, deliberately using dry clinical terminology so the pervasive misery does not affect her work.

Most of the children have responded to treatment, and supplementary feeding with high-energy biscuits flown in by UNICEF has brought down malnutrition levels. But unlike other returnees who will try to make their way home, nobody knows what will happen to the 'unaccompanied minors' of Panyanyang.

To the Editor...

Smelly business

Sir, I'd like to regale your readers with a personal real-life story of dog sniffing man officially, after reading of the incident described in a letter 'Beast inspects man' (Star, Aug 14).

I am not aware if the dog (I was involved with) had the rank and status of a gazetted officer. Of course Mr Dog is driven in a car escorted by a government officer. His (the former's) courtesy, tact and diplomacy were admirable, as he never opened his mouth to growl at the suspect Homo

sapiens.

Two years ago I was travelling by train from France to Italy on a first class Eurorail Pass. At the Italian entry check-post, the Immigration Officers, as usual boarded the train and started checking each passenger. When my turn came, I silently handed over my Bangladeshi passport. The officer looked at me and my PP several times, and then went out of the compartment. I assumed I looked respectable enough as a Director of an international organization (I keep the papers ready — just in case...).

The officer returned with several other officers, and all of them looked me over silently for quite a while. Then they went out of the compartment door and had a *chhoto* meeting in the corridor, leaving through fat official books. Then they left (the PP was still with them). Soon after a huge dog entered, duly escorted, and started sniffing me and my baggage. At last my visa was stamped (I had to take a connecting flight from Rome). No word was spoken during the whole process.

Outwardly I felt amused, but deep inside I felt the humili-

tion of carrying a certain passport — we are that famous to the outside world!

Name withheld
Dhaka 1207.

SAARC-ASEAN land route

Sir, There is a land route connecting SAARC and ASEAN countries via Burma. Burma is not a member of SAARC or ASEAN. From Chittagong in Bangladesh, the road runs upto Singapore via Ukhia in Bangladesh; Buthidaung, Magwe, Prome, Rangoon, Pegu. Amherst in Burma, Bangkok, Sankia in Thailand, Taipei and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and then Singapore. From Singapore to Indonesia and onwards by sea. This sea journey is also less costly.

The road is motorable. It needs ferries on few points. If Burma is approached and agreed to allow use of the road, it will comfortably connect ASEAN and SAARC countries in the presence of Grand Trunk Road and reduce the cost of travel substantially. It will ultimately help to develop the whole vast region socially, culturally and economically. Tourism may be developed

remarkably. Almost all countries in Asia are ultimately connected by the road and easy sea journey. It will ultimately help to enrich the fellow feelings among Asian countries because of easy and less costly travel by common people.

In the context of this, would the Governments of SAARC and ASEAN countries and Secretariates take step to develop and use this land route via Burma?

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National Railway Consultative Committee.