

## Human Rights and the Gulf

Disturbing reports have emerged from Kuwait in the past few weeks. The Palestine Liberation Organisation and Middle East Watch, a London-based human rights organisation, have both spoken of a systematic campaign of repression against Palestinians, Jordanians, Yemenis and others living in Kuwait. Non-Kuwaitis, whose governments were sympathetic to Iraq during the Gulf war, are being picked up by Kuwaiti army units at check-points and from their homes; prisoners are being subjected to beatings and other methods of torture. Middle East Watch says around 40 Palestinians have been executed without trial; the PLO puts the figure at over 200. Torture is reportedly taking place in police stations under army supervision.

All this is happening while the US and other Western and Arab nations are maintaining a heavy military presence in Kuwait, bearing a moral, if not legal, responsibility to make sure that no vengeance takes place after victory. Furthermore, the United Nations, which played a leading role in re-establishing the Emir's authority, carries a greater burden to ensure the safety and civil rights of expatriates living in Kuwait. On the basis of reports received so far, both are failing in their duties.

Human rights violations in Kuwait are of immediate concern because of the direct role the UN and the US played, and continue to play there. But Kuwait is merely a symptom of a disease afflicting the entire region. Violations of human rights are endemic from Morocco to Iran, with a few exceptions such as Algeria, Egypt and Jordan where efforts have been made in recent years to democratise public life. Lebanon, once an oasis of peace and prosperity in a desert of repression, is now a thoroughly brutalised country. Syria is ruled by a man who did not think much of demolishing an entire city — Hama, in 1980 — in order to put down a challenge to his rule. Religion is widely used to impose strict social control, particularly on women. The massive force now being used by Saddam Hussein to keep himself in power is yet another sign that the very culture of the region seems to regard human life as a most expendable commodity.

A total disregard for life's sanctity and disrespect for a man's right to freedom — religious, political and cultural — lie at the root of the problem. This denial of rights strikes at the very dignity of man.

Many had hoped the Gulf crisis would usher in a new era of enlightenment, of reform and democratisation. But the tortures in Kuwait and slaughter in Iraq have rudely awoken us to the reality of the region. It is no longer enough to look for excuses as to why such a situation exists, because brutality, whether in the Middle East or South Asia, should not be legitimised by providing a historical "reasoning" for it. We do not expect the UN to meddle in the internal affairs of Kuwait or Iraq, but if the international community remains indifferent to the tortures and killings, then the high moral ground currently occupied by the UN may become the first true casualty of the Gulf war.

## Nobody's Business

Some of the architectural milestones and, as such, best kept edifices are graves of important people. Calling them mausoleums or mazars and makbaras or samadhis only reflects a recognition of the eminence of the interred personality and of the way man has tried to immortalise him or her.

Whether it is the celebrated Taj or Sher Shah's architectural world-beater at Sasaram, graves are a sad place — their brilliance as a show piece only enhancing the effect. And the graves and cemeteries of lesser mortals can only be more so, what with an ambience shot with stillly desolation. This can be one reason why people try to make the cemetery as living a place as those that it houses are dead. The two contrary things join to make the graveyards — or even, say, Noor Jahan's tomb — a very remarkably elevating place to visit. One cannot help becoming a little too philosophical.

There is no scope for such beautifully sad thoughts on eternal resting places if one goes on a visit to the war cemetery at village Kollapathor in Kasba upazilla of Brahmanbaria district.

In the cemetery lie the remains of 51 freedom fighters. All of them fallen in action. It will be hard to find many austere spots of such importance. More so because the cemetery had been a result of purely people's action. No government order built it. Abdull Mannan, a resident of the village, donated 65 acres of land for burying heroes that fell in the battles all around Kasba. It is sad that no one knows about this patriot. The villagers on their own collected bodies, salvaging them from impossible situations, buried them in Mannan's donated yard.

For many years this continued to attract hundreds of visitors, most of whom must have been the martyrs' dear and near ones. It became a halloed place for pilgrimage. There was talk of now building protection walls around and then of setting up a dak-bangalov. Nothing happened. After nineteen years, there is not even a good road to the cemetery.

One is tempted to compare Kollapathor with the war cemetery in Chittagong where some dozens of World War II heroes lie buried. It is one of the musts for all new visitors, very high in the list of things one must do. Why? Because it is so lovely. And this is a cemetery 46 years old, and is maintained by the Imperial War Grave Commission from some 10,000 miles away.

This country's birth was clinched by the Liberation War. Those that shaped our victory on the battlefield are first among those that must be remembered as fashioning this land. Fifty-one of those lie in Kollapathor. The condition of the cemetery there is an infallible index to how we remember them. Which is in turn a measure of our awareness of independence. Something holed in so very important spots.

If paternity testing was routine in cases of disputed parentage, could "grand paternity" testing also be possible in cases where there were no parents?

The question was asked by a human-right group in Argentina, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo.

The Grandmothers are trying to reclaim grandchildren kidnapped or born in captivity during Argentina's internal "dirty war," in which an estimated 12,000 people died.

Many opponents of the military government and many people simply suspected of leftist sympathies were kidnapped, tortured and disappeared without trace.

Argentina has an active black market in babies. In those days the military did not kill captive pregnant women until after they had given birth. The babies were then sold, adopted by childless military families or given away as presents.

The grandmothers' intelligence network kept a look out for children with dubious certificates enrolling in school. Their problem was how to know or prove that they were their grandchildren and children of "disappeared" persons?

A group of Argentine women sought the help of scientists in the United States. Stanford geneticist Luca Cavalli-Sforza believed he knew just the person. He sent the grandmothers to Marie-Claire King, a Berkeley, California, mathematician involved in cracking genetic puzzles.

King is a brilliant mathematician and geneticist, who discovered humans and chimpanzees share 99 per cent of the same genes. Other attributes made her eminently valuable to the grandmothers.

She was a most sympathetic grandmother herself and the same age as many of the missing women. Her granddaughter, Emily, was the same age as the disputed children.

Furthermore, King had Latin American experience. In Chile she had seen first hand the brutality of the military which had overthrown Salvador Allende in 1973. Student's headless bodies turned up on the Santiago university campus where she taught.

She agreed to help the grandmothers identify their grandchildren and flew to Argentina. The grandmothers

# Grandmothers Find Children of the Disappeared

Frank Nowikowski writes from Buenos Aires

A group of grandmothers in Argentina has been painstakingly trying to trace children born or kidnapped in the years under military rule when thousands of people disappeared. In the US they found a woman scientist who is one of the world's leading geneticists. She agreed to help and, working together, 49 out of a possible 210 children have been identified. Some have been reunited with their real parents. The remarkable detection work goes on.

has a file of children suspected of being the children of people kidnapped and killed. They might be their own grandchildren. But the children were now older and one twist in the puzzle was: which children belonged to which grandmothers?

They followed up every lead and every rumour as it surfaced. They talked to neighbours who witnessed the kidnappings, released prisoners, janitors who worked in detention centres and midwives who delivered babies there.

They amassed a tremendous amount of information on these children. Often they knew the time, date and place of birth, the child's sex and name, and they could track the

child's movements. School staff would inform the grandmothers if a child appeared with suspect birth certificate or phony medical records.

King had been working on trying to identify the genetic markers which make some women inherit breast cancer. Her mathematical skills had enabled her to map paths through family trees in the search for hereditary cancer genes.

For the grandmothers King at first matched the genes in the immunological system which identifies "self" from "non-self" (HLA-typing) in the way doctors do when matching organ transplant recipients with donors. The possibility of a match by chance is small.

The first case was that of eight-year-old Paula Logares Grinapon, kidnapped with her parents in 1978. The grandmothers were alerted when Paula was registered for kindergarten with suspicious documents.

In this case the grandmothers were known. A child resembling Paula had suddenly appeared in the home of a grandmother who had worked in the detention centre to which Paula's parents had been taken. The guard and his wife refused to supply blood samples for the gene matching-test. "They always refuse," said King.

Paula was HLA-typed, and so were her maternal grandmother and both her paternal

grandparents. Her maternal grandparent had died, but his HLA-type was reconstructed by typing his surviving children.

Paula's HLA-type was very rare in the Argentine population, but it matched that of her two grandmothers. King's conclusion convinced the court: a 99.8 per cent probability that Paula was the granddaughter of Elsa Logares. The girl was reunited with her grandmother in 1984.

To date 49 children out of a possible 210 have been identified. In many cases the children and their natural families have been reunited. Shared custody has been arranged in cases where the adoptive parents did not know that the children were stolen.

Sometimes the grandmothers suspect a child is from disappeared parents, but they do not know which parents. All the hundreds of grandparents have been HLA-typed and the results kept on file.

Limitations in the HLA-typing approach are obvious when ten grandparents are matched to one child, as is possible with large numbers of comparisons. In other cases there are too few living relatives for confident matching. It was obvious to King she needed a more accurate system. She turned to mitochondrial DNA.

King's mentor at Berkeley had been biochemist Alan Wilson, who developed the "Eve Hypothesis." It holds that all living humans have a common ancestor (Eve) who lived in Africa 200,000 years ago. Wilson drew this conclusion by studying worldwide differences in mitochondrial DNA, which is subject to very slow evolutionary change.

Mitochondrial DNA is passed on to children of both sexes only from the mother. It

is not subject to change from mating, and is therefore identical in maternal lineage over the span of a few generations.

To verify the parentage of any child all that is needed is a mitochondrial DNA match from a blood sample from any of the child's maternal relatives — mother, maternal aunt, maternal uncle, maternal grandmother.

The technique is new and has not been tested in Argentine courts. King sees the forces ranged against the grandmothers as gathering strength. Many "dirty war" criminals are being pardoned and freed from prison. Some military families are trying to overturn court decisions and regain custody of children.

With time and as the children grow older, there is a debate about whether it would be less distressing for them to be left with their adoptive parents.

In Paula Logares Grinapon's case, the detention centre guard appealed against the court's decision, arguing not that the child was not who the grandmothers said she was, but that Paula could remember no other family but his.

On entering her grandmother's home, Paula recognised the room in which she had slept and asked for her old doll, though she was less than two years old when she last saw it.

This period of Argentina's dark history is well known. When the adopted children now about 15, approach adulthood they may seek out their own family histories.

The genetic history of the grandparents has been recorded so that even after their death it can be used to identify their grandchildren.

Even great-grandchildren of the "disappeared" will be able to trace their families. "The record can't be destroyed anymore," King told Discover magazine.

At any rate the grandmothers could never rest with the information they have. Said one: "Am I supposed to walk to the door of the man who murdered my daughter and ask if he is taking good of my grandson?" — GEMINI NEWS

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Relatives of Argentina's 'disappeared' at a protest meeting

# 'Ugly Americans' Return to Beirut

Mounir B. Abboud writes from Beirut

AN American military helicopter landed recently inside the American Embassy compound in the Christian suburb of Auker.

On board was the new US Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who lost no time in getting down to business.

After his arrival, he submitted his credentials to President Elias Hrawi and began a series of meetings with government and Army leaders.

The event closed a dark chapter in American-Lebanese relations which had lasted 15 months during the reign of renegade General Michel Aoun. Angered by Washington's refusal to back him and his policies, Gen. Aoun sent his supporters in September last year to blockade the US Embassy in Auker. But he was unprepared for what followed.

Washington pulled out its Ambassador, then John McCarthy, and all his 30 American staff members. Even senior local staff were recalled to Cyprus and the US Embassy was virtually closed for the first time since the civil war broke out 15 years ago.

The Embassy relocated in

Auker after the original mission in Muslim West Beirut was destroyed in a massive car bomb explosion in April 1983.

Recent developments cleared the way for a return of American diplomacy to this country. These were the topping of Gen. Aoun in a Syrian-led military operation in October 1990, and the creation of a security zone under the control of the Lebanese Army and the central government. Since December, the 250-square-mile area was free of all militias.

Of course, it was not immediately known how long Ambassador Crocker would stay. In remarks to reporters after his meeting with President Hrawi, the 41-year-old Ambassador indicated that the release of American and other Western hostages would help bring back foreign diplomatic missions.

He served notice of his intention to give priority to securing freedom for the American captives, believed held by pro-Iranian factions. How successful he will be remains to be seen.

Mr. Crocker was the chief political officer at the US Embassy in Beirut during the traumatic days targeting the Americans—the attack against the Embassy, the killing 241 Marines in a car bomb a few months later, and the beginning of the abduction of Americans and other Westerners. He served in the post between 1981 and 1984.

American suburbs, remained unsecured. Very few hostages were freed. Politically, the Lebanese government can find in the US another power to lean on for support. The Lebanese press said in editorials that a renewed American presence will mean that the political and diplomatic ground will no longer be monopolised by the Syrian factor alone. The newspapers expressed the view that

Politically, the Lebanese government can find in the US another power to lean on for support

The new Ambassador promised that the US diplomatic mission will be in full operation once the security situation permits. At any rate, his arrival has had psychological, political and material consequences.

Psychologically, it gave a moral boost to Lebanon during a sensitive transitional period. It sent out a signal to other foreign governments so they may consider sending their

own diplomats back to Beirut.

Most diplomatic missions left after West Beirut, where the main embassies were situated, fell to the control of Muslim militiamen in February 1984. The deployment of Syrian troops here three years later to end militia rule was not a sufficient inducement for the diplomats to return because several areas, notably the

American Ambassador use his influence with Christian militia chief Dr. Samir Geagea so he may ease up his conditions for completing the withdrawal of his guns and munitions for East Beirut quarter of Ashrafiyeh to enable the Army to take over.

At the material level, there was the prospect of American aid. The Ambassador brought a promise of American military assistance to help the government of President Hrawi wrest control of the country from private militias.

A Ministry of Defence spokesman said after a meeting on December 1 between Ambassador Crocker and Army Commander General Emile Lahoud: "The envoy expressed his government's support to the rise of a strong Lebanese Army and American readiness to provide the Army with whatever it may need to fulfill its national duties."

Official sources said President Hrawi was considering making a trip to Washington, and that the visit was likely to take place after the Beirut security plan is consolidated and after the national unity government was formed. President Hrawi plans to ask US President George Bush for reconstruction aid.

The government has disclosed the text of a letter from President Bush to President Hrawi which was carried by Ambassador Crocker. "As you move forward towards fulfilling peace goals, the United States and other friends of Lebanon continue to support your laudable efforts," Mr. Bush wrote.

The promise of military assistance constituted a shift of sorts in the US stand. In the past, the American administration insisted that before new aid could be sent, the Lebanese government must pay about US\$9 million in old military debt. The cash-strapped government here has been unable to meet this obligation.

— Depthnews Asia

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Shortage of water

Sir, An acute water shortage is being faced by dwellers in different parts of the city. With the heat of the summer quite unbearable the water shortage simply adds to the discomfort of the city dwellers who depend entirely on tap water.

This is even more terrible in the month of Ramzan, as people need more water to clean and do other things.

It is said that the reason behind this sudden shortage of water is that the level of water in the city of Dhaka is descending. Moreover it is the over-population which the city's supply of water cannot cope with. In other words, the ratio of water to the population residing in the

city of Dhaka is just not enough.

Whatever the reason or reasons, the problem has to be overcome.

It is our ardent appeal that the concerned authorities look into the matter and take steps before it is too late. We just cannot exist without water.

Rehana Banu, Shantinagar, Dhaka.

### Manhole lids

Sir, It is a common sight to pedestrians of Dhaka city, to find a manhole without a lid. Obviously the cover was initially there, some mischief-maker must have stolen it.

Those who steal these, must keep in mind that they may also be victims of their own deeds. For many accidents do occur due to

manholes not having any cover. The accidents sometimes prove to be fatal even. For once a person falls into a deep manhole, he may die due to suffocation or presence of poisonous gas there.

Thus it is our appeal to those who want to make some small money out of this "business", to please stop this method and start thinking of some other alternative what may not be criminal as well as hazardous.

Wahid Rahman Mirpur, Dhaka.

### Watermelons

Sir, With the coming of summer, watermelons throng our market. It is one of the many favourite fruits of a Bangalee. It can be had both as juice delicacy as well as sliced pieces.

It is liked both by young and old. The very sight of a chopped red watermelon is enough to make one's tongue savoury with delight.

The big bulky fruits are seen piled on each other in front of a fruit shop or if

the fruit seller is sitting on a pavement, he has them piled up in front of him. But a buyer has the privilege to see the inside maturity of the fruit before he buys. The reason being that the more red coloured ones are considered to be sweeter. But this chance is given only on condition that the buyer must eventually buy from that particular shop.

However, we should not forget that even though it is so popular an item, and so commonplace, but its price is sometimes beyond the purse of a commoner!

Hayat Habib, Malibagh, Dhaka.

### Biman in Tokyo

Sir, Friendly relations are not always based on economic factors; that is what Biman's resumption of Tokyo flight proves. Dhaka-Tokyo route was unprofitable for Biman that cost the budding airlines one of the liveliest commercial centres in the world.

With steadily flourishing economy, Japan's currency (Yen) has been growing

stronger remarkably against the major ones. The all-around development of this Asian country in such a short time after her defeat in World War II that destroyed two of her big cities—Hiroshima and Nagasaki, by American atom bombs—is unparalleled in the civilised history. "From ashes to palaces" is what has virtually been made possible by the valiant Japanese who have earned admirations world-wide by virtue of their socio-economic developments as well as of generosity. The booming markets for Japanese affordable technologies have specifically been attracting the investors of all types from around the world and have transformed their society into a magnificent one.

Naturally, tourists from everywhere are flocking to the re-built Land of Rising Sun to have a glimpse, to experience the new nation, and to explore the trade relations, at least. Similar is the tendency of average Japanese at present owing to their economic power

that has popularised them as one of the preferred nations in the world of travel and tourism.

Having had the favourable travel trend, especially Japanese travel-mania, all the major and many fortune-seeking airlines of the world are flying to and from Japan lately with very busy schedule connecting important domestic and international cities. Bangladesh Airlines seems to have succeeded in entering the arena of fiercely competitive travel trade at this time with her flag carrier landing again in Tokyo (after 9 long years) as her 26th international destination. Biman's fleet of DC10-30 for long routes should hopefully do a good job now as a "Home in the Air", unlike the Boeing 707s in the past, as far as Japan is concerned. Moreover, JAL-Biman mutual co-operations may be of great help to Bangladesh which is fortunately a major recipient of Japanese aids.

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