

**New Move in ME**

Is the worm finally turning in the Middle East? It is still too early to tell, but something is certainly stirring. United States Secretary of State James Baker's second visit to the region since the end of the Gulf war has managed to produce an agreement from Israel on the principle of an international conference. The details, including the all-important issue of who should be at the meeting, particularly who should represent the Palestinians, remain to be worked out.

The Middle East drama has now been running for 44 years. Acts upon acts have been played out, with the final curtain nowhere in sight. Scenes have shifted from here to there, and back again; the stage has contracted, expanded, collapsed and re-risen; actors have come and gone, old roles have been changed and new ones adopted. But the grand finale remains elusive.

The trouble with this particular drama is that it has two different plots, chalked out by its two principal actor-directors, the Israelis and the Palestinians, pulling the drama towards two climaxes of opposite dimensions.

For Israel, a "good ending" would mean peace on its own terms. That means establishment of Greater Israel encompassing all the territories occupied in the 1967 war, and along the lines of kings Solomon and David's Israel as described in the Bible.

For the Palestinians, peace on their terms has always been beyond the realms of feasibility, mainly because their supporting cast, neighbouring Arab states, have proved too prone to backstabbing the principal actor, while Israel's support has resolutely stuck to its task. The Palestinians lost their country not in 1967, but in 1947 when the United Nations handed nearly half of Palestine over to European Jewish settlers in an outrageous partition plan. Their misery was complete during the 1948 war when Israel swallowed up more territory than she was allotted by the UN on the one hand, and king Abdullah of Jordan gobbled up the West Bank on the other. Few nations have ever had to confront a tragedy of such dimension.

Yet, it is always the Palestinians who are painted as the culprits, and told to mend their ways in order to earn the world's sympathy. And so they have. Palestinians have renounced their claim to the whole of Palestine; they have accepted UN Security Council resolutions recognising Israel's right to exist; they have renounced "terrorism".

Baker's visit to Israel this week makes some room for optimism, as it keeps the Palestine issue high on the political agenda. Furthermore, Israel's acceptance of the idea of an international conference may mean that she has effectively given up any hope of pursuing with the old policy of bilateral negotiations, based on the Camp David formula. An international conference would also mean that Tel Aviv could no longer pursue her expansionist plans. If Baker has truly managed to bring about this degree of transformation in Israeli attitude, then that will go down as a remarkable achievement indeed.

However, the issue of Palestinian representation should not be fudged in the manner of the old either. There is a move to fabricate an "alternative" to the Palestine Liberation Organisation inside the occupied territories. The idea is to have Quisling-type anti-PLO West Bankers set themselves up as "legitimate" representatives of Palestinians, thus drive an artificial wedge between Palestinians living inside the territories and those outside. Such a policy, if pursued seriously, would only lead to further alienation and sow seeds of greater conflict.

The PLO was recognised by the UN in 1974 as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The fact remains as true today as it did then, whatever Yasser Arafat's position on the Gulf conflict might have been. It is vital for the US and Israel to reconcile themselves to this simple truth if peace is to stand any real chance of success in the region.

**Save the Lifeline**

A culprit has been identified — one that has been instrumental in the creation of the current wave of diarrhoeal diseases. In the three districts of Chandpur, Jamalpur and Brahmanbaria some 3000 tubewells are out of commission. All three districts have reported a consequential rise in stomach ailments and their toll of suffering and life. The connection did not warrant any special knowledge to establish.

In some areas of these districts — as also in many others not so far reported — as many as one in three tubewells are out of order.

Lack of maintenance is universal in all cases of tubewell failure. The tubewell is set up in most cases through support of government agencies. Whose baby is it after that? Perhaps of the people it serves — which is how it should be. But there can be a thousand reasons for a community failing to properly maintain a tubewell. Big among those are, first, want of appropriate spares, and then want of right people who can fix them. And the third big reason can very well be the placement of the tubewells and conflicts arising out of that making co-operation a forbidding order.

Now comes a technical reason. The pipes used in sinking tubewells are plastic ones and they are reported to choke up so very soon and easily. Whatever the reasons of tubewells falling sick, it never should have been a mountain of a job to keep their health under strict surveillance — to be backed up by urgent action to remedy any problem cropping up.

Tubewells are the only means of supplying as many as 110 million of our people with not only potable but anyhow usable water. This is very literally a lifeline of our people. Government must do all in its power to cover all of our 120 million souls with tubewell water and then ensure that all the contraption are in order all the time.

**I**N 1990 along 93 Soviet soldiers died in clashes with civilians. The number of servicemen assassinated in the army and the navy in the past four years, statistics say, equals the toll of Soviet soldiers killed in the 10-year Afghan war.

Between 11,000-12,000 servicemen — a whole division — have been killed in the past years. Similar numbers deserted and went to prison. Soldiers in Berlin sought asylum and some traded their military uniforms and guns.

Such are the woes of the Soviet armed forces as it braces itself for radical reforms in the Soviet Union. Progress has so far been slow and painful.

The army finds itself caught between the energy of perestroika (reform) and the inertia of Stalinist hangover and conservatism, the drive toward professionalism and the drawback of mediocrity, the lure of patriotic instincts and the wrath of civil outrage.

Before the Afghan withdrawal, feelings among commissioned and non-commissioned officers ranged from hope to a sense of purposelessness. Until perestroika, they had been considered the vanguard of "socialist patriotism" and "proletarian internationalism".

Since Afghanistan and then the military crackdowns in Tbilisi, Baku, Osh, Oseti and the Baltic Republic when hundreds of innocent civilians were killed, there is no longer a public mandate or empathy for such an army.

The armed units of the USSR comprise not only the Soviet Army, formerly known as the Red Army, but also border troops and civil defence forces, all under the command of the Ministry of Defence.

The Ministry of the Interior is in charge of the Militia (People's Police) and their riot units. The Committee for State

**How the Soviet Army Fell from its Patriotic Pedestal**

Charles Quist Adade writes from Leningrad

*The once vaunted Red Army has fallen on hard times. Now known as the Soviet Army, it is no longer regarded by the public as being in the vanguard of patriotism. Instead it is tormented over the crackdowns it has had to carry out in the Baltic republics and elsewhere and wracked by killings and desertions. Since glasnost the Soviet people have discovered that what really went on in the army for so long was hidden from them behind the barbed wire of the barracks.*

Security, popularly known by its acronym, the KGB, has guards battalions at its disposal, and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) has its own semi-armed industrial militia (Druzhina).

As a result Soviet society is heavily militarised. Military instruction begins at pre-school age and until recently was compulsory at all academically-oriented schools, vocational schools and universities.

The militarisation of all public life, which is inescapable, has proved counterproductive. Although ostensibly meant to increase the will of the Soviet people to defend the country against imagined foes, it was, in fact the government's means of holding on to power. Its attempt to discipline and intimidate dissident forces failed.

Pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary generations were brought up in the spirit of sacred adoration and worship of the Red Army, which had defeated Nazi Germany.

With perestroika and glasnost, new thinking spread to military journalism. The army was no longer painted in the colours of heroism and great feats.

Instead the army was described as infested with "problems and deficiencies" that had been hidden from the civilian population behind the barbed wire of army barracks.

For the first time, the press reported mass assassinations, suicides, bullying, drug addiction, homosexuality and other problems.

President Mikhail Gorbachev, following an undertaking made at the United Nations General Assembly in 1986, allowed military expenditure figures to be published for the first time.

The civilian population felt appalled at the huge military burden they had to bear while their shops were empty. Some estimates put it at 40 per cent of the national budget.

These facts, coupled with the employment of troops to maintain law and order in several parts of the country, have

led to the growth of anti-army sentiments in Central Asia and the Caucasus, where ethnic conflicts have raged for nearly four years, and in the rebellious republics of Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova and even in the Russian Federation.

Women and children were killed when troops dispersed peaceful demonstrations in 1989. At the same time, they avoided using firearms when, according to press reports, it was necessary to stop a mob of frenzied hoodlums (in Sumgait, Azerbaijan, and Ferghana, Uzbekistan).

In many cases, as the Novoe Vremya weekly writes, the use of Union armed forces aggravated relations between the centre (Moscow) and local districts, and intensified or gave rise to anti-Russian sentiments.

Brawls between civilians and soldiers have become frequent. Servicemen are branded fascists, murderers, invaders and other unpleasant epithets.

One newspaper report says

soldiers detached for work in industry and health care services are met with open hostility from a public that has learned of cases of lynching, corruption, abuse of power, and arms trading on the shadow market.

Anti-army sentiments reached the apogee after the mid-January Baltic armed crackdown. In demonstrations all across the country, anti-army slogans were shouted and the defence and interior ministers and the KGB chief were asked to resign.

Before then, a number of republics refused to permit their young men to be conscripted into the Soviet army. In the Baltics, native soldiers serving in the Soviet army were asked to desert.

Mothers hide their sons, and conscripts, who no longer see it as their "sacred duty" to serve in the army, have deserted in droves.

Enrollment quotas in some republics were not met. The

defence ministry launched a "hunting expedition" to round up draft dodgers, and youngsters of call-up age in hiding and to retrieve stolen ammunition.

Defence Minister Dmitry Yazov has announced plans for democratisation. These include revision of the military code, and provision of economic and social security to soldiers leaving active service, including Afghan war veterans and soldiers repatriated from Eastern Europe and Mongolia. According to press reports, the plans remain largely unimplemented.

Chief of Defence Staff Marshal Akhromeyev and hardline military MPs have charged that "false democrats seek to discredit, weaken and divide the Army. The Army has been desecrated and no one speaks up in its defence."

Akhromeyev believes "the military have been abandoned to face the professional, anti-socialist forces."

The Shchit (Shield) Union for the social protection of servicemen and members of their families was set up by a group of democratically-minded peoples' deputies (parliamentarians) to advance reforms in the army and particularly to provide social security for soldiers, ex-soldiers and their families.

Among other things, Shchit seeks to press for the creation of a professional army, the institution of civilian alternative to military service, voluntary conscription (service) and depoliticisation of the armed forces.

It says: "Our primary aim is to create an army with a human face. The soldier must be seen as a citizen in uniform."

— GEMINI NEWS

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**Some Aussies Cool to Asian Migrants**

Harold Pieris writes from Colombo

**T**HE news that a Vietnamese boy—Thanh Chi Nguyen—impressed the South Australian Cricket Association so much that he was awarded their first Junior Cricket Foundation scholarship shows that Asian migrants to Australia have generally adapted well to their new environment.

Yet the question of Asian migration has from time to time been the subject of controversy, not only in Australia but also in Canada and the United States where the patterns of settlement have been similar.

This has been the subject of a recent study by Professor Lakshmi Jayasuriya and Dr. David Sang which places in perspective the past and current trends of Asian immigration to Australia.

Professor Jayasuriya, who was honoured with the Order of Merit by the Australian government, was Professor of Sociology at the University of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and later President of the university's Colombo campus. He is now Head of the Department of Social Work and Social Administration of the university of Western Australia in Perth. Dr. Sang is in the Department of Psychology of the same university.

Says Mr. Jayasuriya: "Since the Great Immigration Debate of 1984, Asian immigration has been in the media spotlight and an embarrassing item on the Australian political agenda."

The respected Australian historian, Geoffrey Blainey, had warned "with evangelical zeal" of the danger of the continued high levels of Asian immigration.

But Mr. Jayasuriya says "the

two main political parties, Labour and Liberal alike, though fearful and uncertain of the long-term political implications, managed to steer clear of this debate by some deft political gamesmanship.

There are two questions at issue—the extent of the Asian migrant intake to Australia and secondly the adaptation of these migrants.

Asian migration to Australia is not a recent phenomenon. It became an issue in the mid-19th century when there was an influx of Chinese immigrants to work in the goldfields. There were also pockets of other immigrants such as Indian indentured labourers and Melanesians.

This was resisted by the white population who raised the cry of the "yellow peril". Then, for over six decades a White Australia policy prevailed not only in domestic policies but also in external relations.

But after World War II there was a dramatic change due mainly to economics. Australia embarked on a large-scale immigration programme. She ceased to be a British outpost and opened her doors to other non-British European immigrants. This soon transformed Australia from a parochial mono-cultural society to a cosmopolitan, polyethnic, multicultural society.

Then in 1966 the immigration entry requirements were further liberalised. Non-Europeans with professional and technical skills were allowed entry. This shift was initiated by the Liberal government but had the implicit support of the Labour opposition. The compelling reasons were political, economic and social.

But thereafter Australian

immigration policy was free of any discrimination on grounds of race, colour, creed or national origin. However, lobby groups keep challenging this policy, fearing that Asian settlers constitute a threat to social harmony, cohesion and stability.

Professor Jayasuriya and Dr. Sang note that Australia's share of migrants from Asian countries conforms to the intake pattern in the US and Canada—the world's other major immigrant destinations. The decline in the European intake of both countries is also due to less bidders for immigrant slots due to considerably improved

for the Asian component of the Australian population is between 3 per cent and 6 per cent—more likely 5 per cent. This is certainly not Asianisation on the national scale, as feared by some.

But it is more important to consider how these new settlers have adapted. Have they contributed to disharmony, social instability and failed to integrate? Professor Jayasuriya and Dr. Sang conclude very definitely that Asian migrants have adapted well to their new environment.

Aggregate data with regard to nearly all major social indicators, including crime rates,

level of these migrants.

On the other hand, Chinese and Vietnamese migrants who have job handicaps have successfully established themselves in small family businesses, hospitality industries and agricultural activities. These could develop into permanent and stable economic endeavours or be a temporary stage of their development in a new society.

Thus, describing the debate about Asian immigration as "irrational," the Australian writer Max Harris has argued: "We should pursue immigrants

who have the skills most desperately needed for Australia's efficiency and development. A substantial increase in Asian immigration is in the national interest.

Professor Jayasuriya and Dr. Sang say the available data on the social profile of Asian migrant groups from the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, China, India and Sri Lanka, suggests that they are more similar to native-born Australians than other migrant groups such as those from Southern and Eastern Europe.

—DEPTHNEWS ASIA

**OPINION**

**The Government has Tasks Ahead**

The appointment of Begum Khaleda Zia, as Prime Minister has been acclaimed by people of all walks of life and many world leaders. Her assumption of office can rather be treated as shouldering many a challenge ahead of her new government. On the contrary, it perhaps offers her the best opportunity to get closer to the people and guide them towards an economic emancipation.

The autocratic regime of Ershad has dashed the economy to pieces. It will take time to rebuild. The government at the moment will require to consider effective steps to revitalise this sector. Some donor countries have already assured the government of possible aid. The development, as I believe, is mostly dependent on the proper and optimum utilisation of foreign aid.

Late President Ziaur Rahman had caught world attention as a proponent of the politics of production, not as a leader of talk talks. His "canal digging" programme yielded a positive impact on attainment of a "bumper" crop. This programme can be started afresh to give a boost to the production sector. With a definite and comprehensive plan, more barren lands can be brought under cultivation. There is no dearth of potentiality and man power. If our human resource is appropriately utilised, we will surely be able to increase food production and a sizable amount of foreign currency can be saved which is being spent to import foodgrains from abroad.

Bulk of our population is illiterate. It is, therefore, obvious to say that expansion of education programme aiming at removal of illiteracy will get top priority in the politics of the government. Lack of proper education or even simple literacy bar people from thinking how to plan a better future. With an increase in the number of government primary schools, more people can get the privilege of education. It is expected that the budget allocation for education will be enhanced by the government as a part of fulfilment of one of the election pledges

of Begum Khaleda Zia and her party—BNP.

We are industrially a backward nation. Very little has been done to increase the number of industries. Setting up of more industries can ensure job opportunities for the unemployed. It is hoped that the industrial policy of the government should thoroughly be recast to meet the existing need. Loopholes or blemishes of the previous policies should be reexamined and removed.

In the past we had the chance to host an "Investors' Forum". But in absence of a stable or representative government, foreigners were disinterested to invest under joint venture programme. Now the situation has changed. So, the government should not lose the opportunity to inspire the foreign entrepreneurs to set up industries on easy terms.

Our health sector demands a fresh look. An acceptable health policy with a sense of dedication to serve humanity has to be formulated; this is a long-term demand of the health employees. Most of the physicians have a tendency to be urban based overlooking the miseries of the rural people which is quite unfair. The privileges they receive are too meagre, some complain. The Rural Health Complexes should be modernised and upgraded as far as possible. The government should also take steps to detect the actual problems faced by the health-sector people and solve them immediately.

We hope that the present leadership will make all-out efforts to fulfill its promises to the nation. A ray of hope for betterment has been reflected in the first ever address of Begum Khaleda Zia to the Secretaries and Additional Secretaries whom she urged to be free from the vice of corruption. She said, the prime task of her government was to build a corruption free, people-oriented administration and make all educational institutions free from terrorism. It is also who can help translate her words into action.

Md. Atiquil Karim  
Dhaka.

**To the Editor...**

**Age limit and session jam**

Sir, Mere raising of age limit will not help remove frustration of the students if employment opportunity is not increased. Again by raising the age limit we are going to accept the present session jam of the universities as a permanent feature. The authorities of education boards and universities may go slow to hold examination and finish the courses. The guardians may be taxed to bear expenditure of education for the extended period. Again the total span of service will be limited if retiring age is not increased simultaneously.

There is no autocratic Govt now; so there is no fear of closure of universities or any clash in the campus. The university teachers if take pain to examine the scripts fast and arrange to hold examinations in due time and can publish the result quickly, the session jam can be

avoided. If time limitation for holding examinations and script examinations is not fixed, the raising of age limit for employment will be fruitless. It may not lessen burden of expenditure on the shoulder of the guardians.

The present session jam can be minimised by holding final examination for those who have completed the courses while in case of those whose courses have not been completed, the period of course may be shortened and arrangements be made to hold final examination at the earliest. Some concession of time may be considered in matters of courses only as it was done in 1962.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury, Kalabagan, Dhaka.

**An appreciation**

Sir, Please allow me to take the opportunity of congratulating you on the standard of The Daily Star.

I personally find it eminently readable and well-presented. Admittedly, I am biased in that I subscribe to the contents of most of your editorials. Furthermore, I am gratified that your "Letters..." do not contain the contributions of some regular letter writers whose offerings grace the pages of your competitors.

May I suggest, however, that (i) arrangements are made to publish the monthly prize bond winners' list and (ii) your "drive carefully..." box containing rules which are actually violated by most of us.

Nazre Dastgir Mohakhall, Dhaka.

**Age limit and tenure of service**

Sir, You congratulate the present Govt. of Bangladesh for enhancing the age limit of students towards entry into Govt. service. It is really a commendable spirit of the present Govt. But at

the same time we would request the Govt. to enhance also the limit of Govt. service upto the age of 80 years as it was maintained in the past while the age limit towards entry into Govt. service was 25 or 27 years, and the tenure of Govt. service towards superannuation was up to the age of 55 or 57 years. That a Govt. servant could serve upto 30 years.

So, we would request this democratic Govt. to enhance also the tenure of Govt. service upto 80 years of age and announce it at the earliest. By doing this the administration will not only gain the positive benefit of a few very experienced hands at the moment but also we will have the justice as well towards retaining the tenure of Govt. service to 30 years. This does not add to the problem of unemployment anyway.

Shahriar Meher Ebne Mizan, Dip-in-Engg. (Elect.) Final Year, Malibag, Dhaka.