

## Pay Commission Award

The assurance held out to two separate delegations of government employees by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia that the authorities would consider the Pay Commission recommendations would be welcomed by all concerned. One concern, among others, is that the Prime Minister's statement should not raise too much expectations that the administrations may be unable to meet.

There is little doubt that government employees, virtually of all sections but especially of the Class Four category, are badly in need of relief to tide over the rising cost of living. The last Pay Commission submitted its recommendations in 1984, which were only partially implemented a year later. Since then, through interim reliefs provided to the government employees, there has been a total increase of 30 per cent in financial emoluments, over a period of five years. This increase has fallen far short of the rate of inflation, officially estimated at ten per cent per year or over fifty per cent during the period. This increase does not compare favourably with the rise in the emoluments in the private sector, in general terms, during the same period. Here, one must recognise the fact that the wage structure in the private sector too suffers from serious anomalies and that certain categories of workers in privately-run industries are also in need of relief.

In broad terms, this position is accepted by the authorities. If it was not the case, there would not have been this assurance offered by none other than the Prime Minister to consider possible implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

However, despite all its good intentions, the present government faces serious difficulties in making any new large-size financial commitments in purely administrative overhead expenses. In this particular area, the established policy of the government is to reduce what is often regarded as "unproductive expenditure", not to raise it further.

The authorities should find a way out of this predicament, without, as far as possible, making a departure from the established policy as just mentioned. In the first place, any relief offered to the government employees at this stage or later should be regarded as an investment in human resources, an investment that can contribute to both output and efficiency in the government service. In other words, the question of raising the morale in the administration certainly deserves attention. In some ways, it is also linked to the government's drive against corruption.

In view of only limited resources being available at its disposal, the government cannot perhaps consider anything more than a partial implementation of the Pay Commission's recommendation. While a small portion of this implementation may well be in cash, there should be some innovative ways, perhaps in adjustments of pay scales, of offering the concerned employees some relief and, what's more, some hope for the future. In this context, any immediate relief offered to pensioners should be treated as a separate — but an urgent — issue.

Whatever the authorities are able to do in this matter, there is bound to be some disappointment among government employees over the government's decision. Let it be understood by all concerned that if the economic recovery programme undertaken by the authorities yields results, the country will be in an infinitely better position than it is today to take another look at the situation and offer interim relief to all those who may not be getting their due right now, in full measure.

## Science is No Delivery Van

The 14th National Science and Technology week came to a close on Tuesday. The week was opened on July 6 by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. The closing was done by Professor Badruddoza Chowdhury, Minister for Education and Culture and the Deputy leader of the House in the Jatiya Sangsad. All this goes to prove the importance the present government attaches to science and technology.

Such an occasion as this, by way of inspiring and stimulating as a catalytic agent, can transport itself from being a mere picture of what goes in a particularly backward and impoverished country under the head 'science and technology' to becoming a tremendous boost to creative endeavours in those fields. And then there is the other frightening prospect of this being reduced to a routine affair — a matter of going through motions, some people getting some money and some youngsters getting some pats on the back. While the S&T Week is decidedly done in a more active and meaningful and more participatory manner than the numerous other weeks the government observes nationally, the fact of this too sliding into an indifferent 'show' of school things cannot altogether be dismissed. Still, the way to our first possibility, the possibility of a scientific blossoming of the national mind and the 'week' becoming a peephole on to it — remains wide open.

But that will remain an unrealised dream as long as social and political leaderships, particularly the government remain quite ignorant of the meaning of science and impervious to the 'scientific attitude' while the society, in spite of being club-footed — what with its material backwardness and what with its stunted colonial mind — in many respects, is being prodded willy-nilly into the 21st century. Our leaderships remain innocent of the contaminations of the scientific spirit — the spirit of questioning and searching, analysing and quantifying and going into the very kernel of the stuff Time and Universe is made of, that is.

Most of our scientific manpower — whether in the academies or government institutes and laboratories or industry — seems to remain immune to the same contaminations. And such a permeating atmosphere in the country proves no problem for the top brass exhorting the young people to take to science only because science is seen to be some tool which is to be used patriotically to raise the nation out of its present material problems. As long as this continues science weeks will perform continue to be dead routine things meaning nothing. Science is not some delivery van. It is an important part of what constitutes humanity — not just some tools and processes.

We want to make a suggestion. How about organising throughout the nation a series of popular lectures on the meaning and methodology, philosophy and the history of the sciences right from the 15th National Week?

In Bangladesh farming is considered to be a dreary occupation. It is meant for those who are not educated. The concept of a 'bhadralok' or gentleman farmer is missing in our vocabulary because it is against our very culture and instinct. We tell our children, "go and study; otherwise you become a chasha." Sometime 'chasha' means uncultured, brute. Modern education was introduced in our part of the world by a colonial government to create a bunch of clerks to serve their administration. It became the escape value from the drudgeries of farm-life. It is inconceivable that a person with a college degree will hold the plough, cut the grass or tend the cow. His hands have turned soft; they are suited to a pen only. Can agriculture flourish in such an environment?

The Permanent Settlement in Bengal led to the creation of a land-owning class of Zemindars and Talukdars. Under them tiers of rentier class also developed. Down below were the actual farmers who from sunrise to sunset worked and toiled to provide the 'bhadralok' class with their plateful of daily meal. After 1947, The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act abolished the Zemindari system. The act envisaged creation of a class of small to

medium size landowners who would undertake self-cultivation and promote agricultural modernisation. But 'bhadraloks' can never be farmers. Agriculture is an occupation of the unfortunate. In such an environment, can agriculture flourish? What happened as a result is the emergence of share-croppers or 'bargadars' without any legal occupancy of tenurial rights. Even a relatively moderate land-owner, even at the cost of an income loss, tends to lease out land to 'bargadars'; and the dominant landowning class is happy with half the produce received from the actual tiller of the soil and look for other non-farm opportunities to augment his income. The landowners would invest in the education of their children who eventually leave the village and become absentee landowners. The interest in land of those who own the lands is therefore getting increasingly remote. In such an environment, can agriculture flourish?

In most of the villages of Bangladesh today, half the rural households are either landless or near-landless. The small group of very small landowners is engaged in self-cultivation while the more numerous groups of owner-cum-tenants are the real actors in the agriculture sector. But they are up against heavy

odds: cost and return studies have established beyond doubts that after parting with half the produce, it is not possible for the share-croppers to meet the high cultivation costs of modern high yielding varieties and yet obtain a reasonable return. Further, the collapse of the farm-gate price during the immediate post-harvest period and the high cost of credit combine to make farming unprofitable. Mortgage and foreclosures follow. As a result, the

and credit; the inevitable outcome is bound to be intensively irrigated agriculture with diversified, year-round high-value cropping. How the desired agrarian structure can be brought about? Given the low value attached to farming by those who are landed, it is most likely that if opportunities are thrown open to them to part with the land against lucrative compensation to invest in say a rice mill or a brick-field

ensures peace and maintains harmony of village life. What has been suggested here is payment of compensation by means of transfer of non-agricultural assets which are productive or by investment cash for creating new non-agricultural assets which are not only productive but would produce a rate of return at least equal to or if not more than the land which he should hand over.

mediately feasible, then cash compensation given in the shape of investment cash compensation given in the shape of investment cash only for setting up of manufacturing or service enterprises, would result in a massive surge in investment for growth and development.

The agrarian reform scheme as outlined above can best be illustrated through a hypothetical example. Let us take a village called Adharpur, the abode of darkness which is the grim reality in Gram Bangla today. Suppose there are 1200 acres of cultivable land within the vicinity of the village and half of which is at present share-cropped. At a compensation of Taka 100,000 per acre, the total investment cash compensation for 600 acres would come to sixty million taka. If the amount is invested for irrigation, fertiliser blending, pest control services, a rice milling-cum-feed manufacturing plant, poultry hatchery, etc. then the investment over a period of time, should not only give handsome returns to the former landowners but provide the vital inputs and render the critical services essential for the development of the self-cultivated farms of Adharpur.

In such an environment agriculture can flourish.

## From LDC to NIC by Shated Latif

landed acquire more land although not interested in promoting the productive use of land. The grim reality in Gram Bangla today is exploitation of land for the opportunities elsewhere. In such an environment, can agriculture flourish?

No, it cannot. Therefore, in our march from LDC to NIC, agrarian reform should bring about a fundamental restructuring of the rural economy which in itself become the prime-mover on the high growth path of economic development. In a scenario where nine million hectares of farm lands are managed by six million owner-operated consolidated farms of one or two hectare size, vigorously supported by irrigation, inputs

whereby his returns would be enhanced, the landed rural households should be interested to do so. The land thus released can be settled to a share-cropper — the real farmer — on a long term lease and he is further supported through public investment for land and water development. Common sense would say that the genuine farmer will then work and work, plant the highest yielding varieties of crops, apply fertiliser, kill pests and produce at the maximum. There is no greater incentive than the secured land occupancy rights for a considerable length of time.

The real problem is to take over the land from the landed through a stable process that

# Israeli Immigrants Push into West Bank

Benjamin Cohen writes from Jerusalem

The Israeli government is proud to have provided a home to the thousands of Jewish immigrants arriving in recent months. But it is less keen to talk about the problems those immigrants will have finding work and housing. Israel's worsening economy provides little hope for improvement and racial tensions are worsening as many immigrants and poorer Israelis move into the occupied territories.

In the last 18 months, 250,000 Jews have arrived in Israel seeking a new life. Most of these immigrants came to escape an uncertain future in the Soviet Union. They have disappeared from the headlines in recent weeks however, as Israel faced the arrival of 14,000 more Jews, this time from Ethiopia.

In a spectacular operation code-named 'Solomon', after the ancient Israelite King who married an Ethiopian Queen, the Jews were airlifted from Ethiopia just a few hours before the fall of Addis Ababa to rebel forces on May 24.

The mission was masterminded by Uri Lubrani, a veteran Israeli diplomat with links to the Mossad intelligence agency. Lubrani says the operation was organised closely with the United States. In an interview with the Jerusalem Report magazine, he described Herman Cohen, the US assistant secretary of state for African affairs, as the key player.

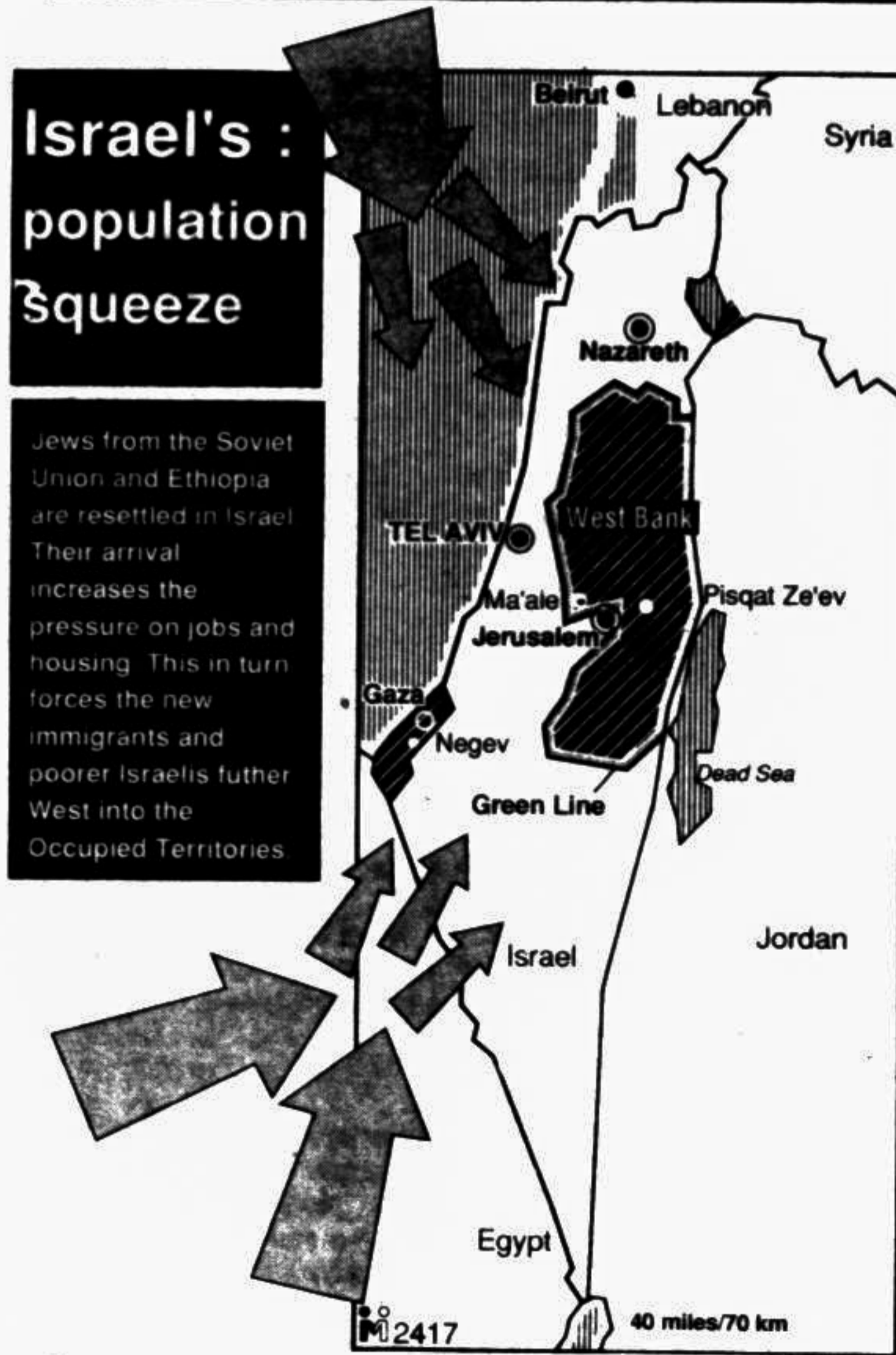
About 2,000 Jews remain in Ethiopia. The rest are now in Israel, many reunited with relatives who were airlifted during 'Operation Moses' in 1985.

But a secure future for the Ethiopians, or 'falashas', is by no means assured. Israeli leaders, buoyed by the success of the airlift, are reluctant to acknowledge the long-term problems that the immigration will generate.

Welcoming the Ethiopians at Tel Aviv airport, Defence Minister Moshe Arens said that it was 'Zionism being realised: the state of Israel doing exactly what we've always wanted it to do.'

The reality is that the worsening economic situation inside Israel will limit what can be done for the immigrants.

While the airlift itself was meticulously arranged, little attention had been paid to the future of the Ethiopian Jews. There are no guarantees on jobs and housing. The Ethiopians have been placed in various hotels around Israel and the Jewish Agency (a quasi-state body) has said that it wants to properly house the immigrants within a year.



This seems overly optimistic since a large number of the Ethiopian Jews who arrived with Operations Moses in 1985 are still in absorption centres. Indeed, many of the Ethiopians who have spent time in Israel are now disillusioned. Shaul, a 17-year-old high school student who was reunited with his parents after Operations Solomon, said that

he would 'go to the US if I could afford it. Life is better there'. His 19-year-old friend Gilat agreed, citing the lack of jobs in Israel as the central problem.

However, conditions in Ethiopia were so bad that Israel may seem cosy by comparison. Mamu Wasser, a 67-year-old farmer, described how he fled to Sudan when Ethiopia was ravaged by

famine. Three of his four sons died during the journey. He added that the emigration of Jews to Israel had caused the Ethiopian public to scorn them. 'Why would I miss Ethiopia now that I am here?' he said.

For young Ethiopians, though, initial feelings of hope are likely to evaporate once the economic situation becomes clear to them. Unemployment among Soviet Jews living in development towns — small outposts on the fringes of Israeli cities — is running at a mammoth 80 per cent. Given that the Soviet Jews are, in the main, highly qualified professionals, the outlook for the Ethiopians is bleak.

Tension is developing between the United States and Israel over housing policy, due to fears that Israel is directing new immigrants towards the occupied territories. Despite US Secretary of State James Baker's claim that settlement in the West Bank is the biggest obstacle to peace, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has retorted that 'all of Israel (including the occupied territories) is available for settlement.'

As rents spiral upwards in cities within the 'Green Line' that separates Israel from the occupied territories, immigrants and poorer Israeli families are finding a better deal in towns like Ma'ale Adumim, Gilo, Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev — all of which are in the West Bank.

As a result, Palestinian Arabs are becoming increasingly squeezed. With the four-year long intifada searching for a new direction, and a decisive rightward shift in Israeli politics in the wake of the Gulf war, the wave of Jewish immigration promises further land

confiscation and political repression. And while the US has been explicit about its dissatisfaction with the situation in the occupied territories, the Bush administration has ratified a housing aid agreement with Israel and will provide subsidies to help with the cost of immigration.

Palestinians living with in Israel are also worried. Right-wing Housing Minister Ariel Sharon has expropriated much private Arab land for Jewish settlement. In the northern city of Nazareth, in the Wadi Ara and Misgav areas of the Galilee, and in the Negev, Jewish settlement is being extended. According to Hassan Khutaba, head of the council in the northern village of Retneh, 7,300 dunums (nearly equal to a square 270 km by 270 km) of land have been confiscated

this year in the Nazareth area alone.

Even though such measures may go part of the way to meeting their housing needs, the chances of employment are slim. Some Soviet Jews have replaced Palestinians as road sweepers and construction-site workers, but jobs above the menial level will be hard to find.

It seems inevitable that a severe crisis will emerge in Israeli society over the next decade. Growing numbers of Soviet Jews are trying to find alternative destinations, chiefly the US and western Europe.

About 25 Soviet Jews in Israel have committed suicide during the last year out of desperation, although the Absorption Ministry has not released any figures. And for the new generation of Ethiopians, who will grow up with only dim memories of their homeland, platitudes from the Israeli government will not be enough. — GEMINI NEWS

BENJAMIN COHEN is the Middle East editor of War Report, a newsletter on international conflict published in London.

## OPINION BCCI Disaster and Depositors' Nightmare

The action of Bangladesh Bank has made many of BCCI depositors bankrupt overnight. The depositors are now passing their days in mental agony and nightmare. Their only consolation is Bangladesh Bank statement that the action has been taken to protect the depositors and its refutation that it has started the liquidation process of BCCI in Bangladesh.

Protection of the depositors is one thing and actual payment out to depositors of their monies on demand is quite another. Bangladesh Bank's primary objective in supervising, guiding and controlling the commercial banks of the country is of course protection of the banks' depositors. That is precisely what the Bangladesh Bank does, among its other duties and functions. This is done by Bangladesh Bank by ensuring that the commercial banks' doors open to the depositors — and certainly not by asking the banks to close them. Even if a bank has a run, the central bank steps in as lender of the last resort to save it from collapse. If it does so, the depositors having got payment of their deposits come to realise their folly and in no time put their monies back to the bank, thus causing no much disruption in the banking and financial system. BCCI in Bangladesh has comfortable liquidity position as is clear from various newspaper reports. To my knowledge, there is no instance that BCCI even dilly-dallied payment to its customers, not to speak of not being able to pay at all. Why then such an on-going bank has been suspended from operation? For protecting depositors? What a novel way of doing it! The depositors have not yet been told when they would get their deposits back — and how much.

their said statement and refutation as long as 'hope is poorman's bread.'

Having protected the depositors' interest thus, it is high time that Bangladesh Bank now protects its own — for that matter the country's — interest and moves immediately to get the foreign currency balances/deposits/placements of BCCI, Bangladesh and those of other Bangladeshi banks with BCCI, London/Abu Dhabi/Hong Kong and other places. For this purpose, senior officials from Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Bank and BCCI should immediately fly to those financial centres and claim the foreign currencies and try to get them transferred to new accounts to be opened separately for each foreign currency with any other dependable bank in the name of Bangladesh Bank itself or in the name of any local nationalised bank. Simultaneously, it should make immediate arrangement for negotiation of export bills pending with BCCI, Dhaka/Chittagong/Khulna through another local bank and get the export proceeds credited to the new foreign currency accounts as aforesaid wherever possible. Failure to do this immediately may render the shipping documents stale, thus giving overseas importers' valid reason to refuse payment. If these documents are sent out after arrival of carrying vessels or are not sent out at all, the goods will be released by the oversea buyers against shipping indemnity and later they would refuse documents, if presented to them at all, on one pretext or the other. The country will lose substantial foreign currency and the Bangladesh exporters' business will certainly be affected very badly, decreasing our export earnings, as well as the countries foreign currency reserve.

Let the depositors of BCCI live on hope (rather than on their deposits) doled out by Bangladesh Bank in the form of

Abul Mohsen Uttara, Dhaka.

## 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.

### "A Banking Disaster"

Sir, Your learned editorial 'A Banking Disaster' (July 8) stimulates further thought on the subject. I think I am one of the multitudes who will wholeheartedly support your sound view that the BCCI, whose success in mobilizing a very large amount of deposits in the country testifies to the professional proficiency of its Bangladeshi employees, should and can be salvaged rather than be closed down. The Bangladesh Bank's assurance, though somewhat belated, to depositors that the ratio of assets to liabilities indicates no cause for concern provides further proof of the soundness and solvency of the BCCI.

ing with the situation facing BCCI, ways through which the institution can be saved" is definitely based on practical prudence. In this connection two proposals reported to have been made to the Finance Ministry and the Bangladesh Bank have drawn our attention: (1) The BCCI with all its assets and liabilities be merged with an existing large commercial bank, and (2) The BCCI be 'refloated' under a new name with the new bank accepting all the assets and liabilities of the old one.

Your editorial observation 'there are many ways of deal-

ing with the situation facing BCCI, ways through which the institution can be saved" is definitely based on practical prudence. In this connection two proposals reported to have been made to the Finance Ministry and the Bangladesh Bank have drawn our attention: (1) The BCCI with all its assets and liabilities be merged with an existing large commercial bank, and (2) The BCCI be 'refloated' under a new name with the new bank accepting all the assets and liabilities of the old one.

The proposals are said to be under active consideration of the authorities at the highest level. The question of the employees (nearly 400) future is also vitally linked to it. Their

### Retiring age

Sir, The government has increased the age limit for entry into public jobs from 27 years to 30 years. The BNP during the JS election campaign often pledged for more jobs but the budget does not indicate anyway towards creation of more jobs. On the other hand more service holders are pressing to increase the retiring age from 57 years to 60 years or more while some sectors are already enjoying 60-65 yrs as retiring age limit.

Under the above circumstances, I am tempted to request the JS members to reduce the retiring age to 55 years or limit it to 30 years of service, whichever comes earlier.

We urge upon the Government of Bangladesh the urgency for dealing with this burning issue of far-reaching social, economic, political and human significance on a priority basis.

Further, all personnel who are employed after attaining 57 years age, should be retired forthwith considering the job scarcity. Let the authority look into the matter.

Sadat Karim Siddiqui, Dhaka.

Sadik Alee Maghbazor, Dhaka.