

The Daily Star

Dhaka, Tuesday, October 5, 1993

Need for Agricultural Reform

A report published yesterday in a government-Trust English daily says that loans meant for landless and marginal farmers in Netrakona are being channelised to benefit landlords and middle-class people through deceit and forgery.

The tale of our farmers, specially small farmers, has always been poignant. This time their plight has been made worse by the uneconomic low price.

In Netrakona, the landlords have resorted to malpractices evidently with the motive of tightening their stranglehold. While the farmers are in desperate need for newer loans, they have been served notices for repayment of their earlier loans.

Disenchanted farmers have seen year after year how the successive governments have let their cause down. Neither have they much confidence in the politicians.

No doubt, the present flawed agricultural policy cannot give the small farmers the patronage they deserve. Land reform will be the first step towards making agriculture competitive.

Murder after Murder after ...

Two persons were murdered in Dhaka city on Sunday just several hours after a businessman was gunned down in a crowded city street and in broad daylight — on Saturday.

September, combining half and half of the two bright autumn months of Bhadra and Ashwin, was the most crime crowded month in so many months.

Perhaps effective ways to counter the current trail of murder would be found in a sincere attempt to answer that query. Societal decay is a sure component of that answer but is too generalised to be meaningfully used.

ITS a pouring sky today, and its not just passing clouds but clouds with their separate identities lost in a general mass of continuous grey covering the entire sky.

Why did I start in this vein, I ask myself. My mind is full of thoughts, stray and disjointed, as it happens before a journey abroad.

With a respectable job, a loving husband, and a beautiful daughter; and with a monthly income slightly above the average in Russia, Helena should have been a happy woman but for one thing. She is a Jew — and more aware of it by the day.

The Jews living in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are going through a rough time. Some problems are shared with the rest of CIS citizens.

Jews are better off than the rest of their countrymen, though. They have a place to go to. Yet not all, especially the well-educated, want to emigrate.

Despite the economic reform programme the economies of the former Soviet states are in a mess. Statistics put the number of CIS citizens living below the poverty line at 80 per cent.

The current wave in the CIS has political dimensions. It is not just directed at the Jews as an ethnic minority. It is, rather, the vehicle through which certain groups express their frustration and anger at the present situation in the CIS region.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space.

6th Asian Art Biennale

Sir, As long as Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin was alive he never took his seat at the Institute of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka; once he stopped considering himself the Principal of that College.

There was a time when Runa Laila was not allowed to participate in the Radio and Television programmes of Bangladesh on the ground the lady had not "passed through the test formalities as per Government Rule."

But what has gone wrong with the Shilpakala Academy? The 6th Asian Art Biennale for the local Artists has been axed to a limit that would even put to shame our national artist Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin!

quite the same experience which we had two years ago. It is two years or three, I forget, and I do not care to check the dates.

Observing an election by a group of supposedly impartial people, concerned with the problems and prospects of democracy, especially in the fledgling democracies of South Asia and Africa, has, by now, become an established convention.

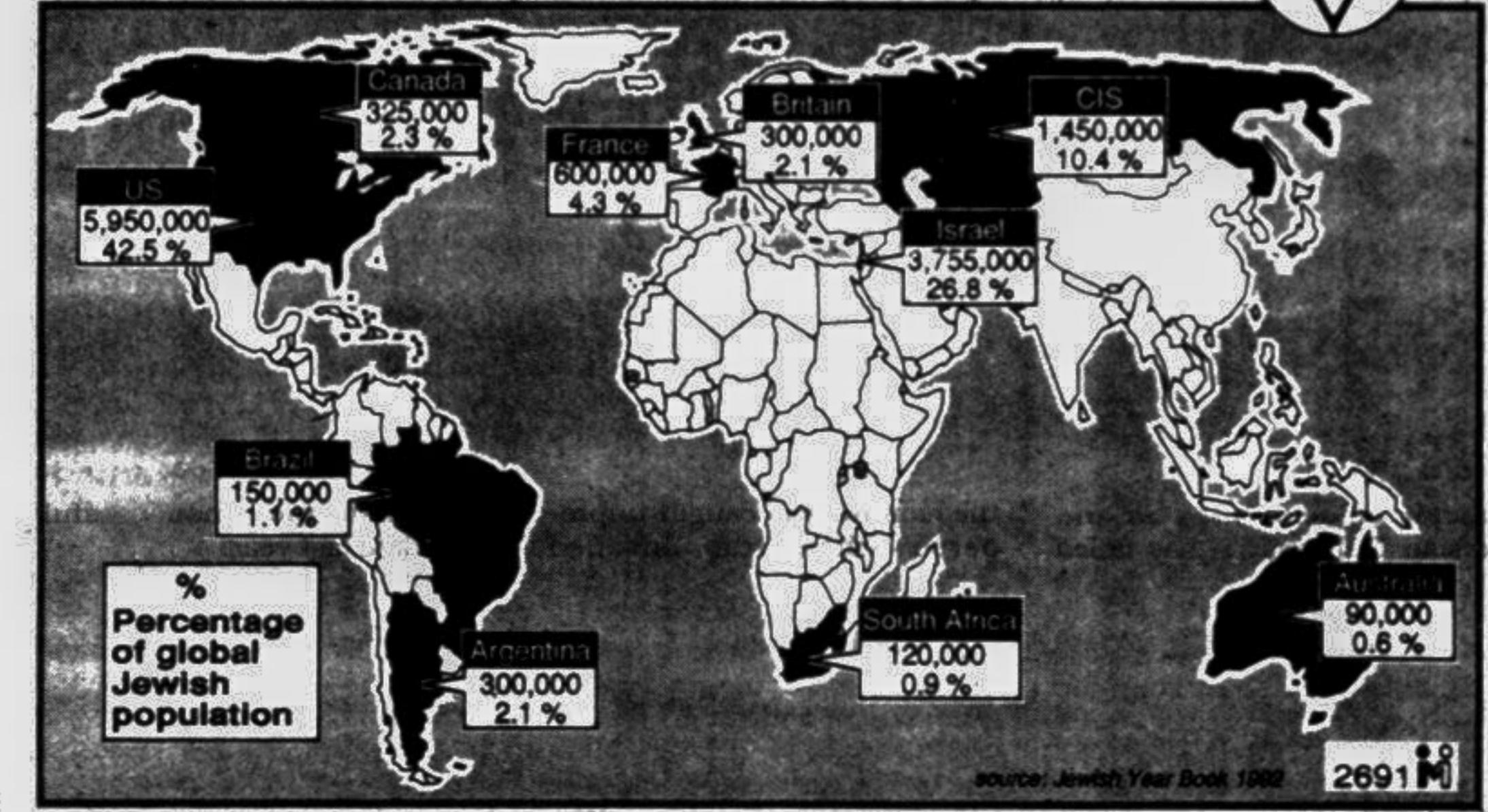
Jews Seek Promised Land in Post-Soviet Russia

Ahmed Badawi writes from Moscow

The Middle East peace deal will undermine Jewish emigration to Israel, especially from the former Soviet Union. Since the early 1970s, when Moscow loosened its immigration policy, about 750,000 Jews have immigrated to the West and to Israel.

The Diaspora

There are 14 million Jewish people in the world. These are the top ten communities



publics, particularly Russia. The nationalists blame the Jews for bringing the Soviet Union into existence. Loyal to the old Russian empire, the nationalists believe that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was an imperialist-Zionist conspiracy to bring the empire to its knees.

The Communists blame the Jews for architecting perestroika, which they say caused the disintegration of the empire and led to Western domination.

Elections in Pakistan

Sir, Elections are coming up in Pakistan. And once again the members of Ahmadiyya Muslim community are unable to take part in these elections.

"Myopic view of history"

Sir, Your editorial 'Myopic view of history' (23 Sept) is indeed an attempt to call a spade a spade. Emphasis on Ahsan Manzil seems to be overstressed.

Death of a monarch

Sir, The sad transition of a long celebrated personality like Belgian monarch does leave a void behind in the world community which takes long to be filled in.

Belgian aids to Bangladesh's development activities have been very important over the years. The recent imperial award to a Bangladeshi rural bank for its credit programme on women's employment generation has uplifted this nation's spirit to progressive living.

Elections and Observers

Is this business of 'observing' an election by a group of people committed to the concept of a civil society worth its while, or is it all an exercise in futility? The groups go with the best of intentions, but work under conditions, partly or largely set by the local authorities.

The manner prescribed by the Election Commission Meeting, the press, and leaders of the contending parties was part of the agenda we had set for ourselves, on both the occasions.

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

of PPP and of the combined Islamic Opposition, listened to the anxieties of the one, and the confident assertions of the other, and in our leisure, went through the clipping of the newspapers made available to us.

Both in Pakistan and in Sri Lanka, there was a government in power; in both cases there was an opposition full of complaints, bringing serious charges of omissions and commissions; in both countries we had elaborate rules drawn up by the Election Commission to ensure free and fair elections.

little different. The Chief Election Commissioner himself had invited us, and had drawn the programme of our visits. Special care had to be taken for our security. The law and order situation had improved, but not to the extent one would like to see.

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that was attached to us individually, we were provided with a guide, and the guides were drawn from the university faculty or from NGOs. The umbrella provided by the government for our movements was both unavoidable and uncomfortable. It seriously restricted our freedom.

And in both cases there was no doubt left in our minds as to which side the Establishment and the Administration was favouring. As it turned out, those already in power came out victorious, and it was left for the complaining opposition to add one more complaint regarding the fairness and impartiality of the entire procedure.

And that brings us face to face with the crucial question: Is this business of 'observing' an election by a group of people committed to the concept of a civil society worth its while, or is it all an exercise in futility? The groups go with the best of intentions, but work under conditions, partly or largely set by the local authorities.

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ussions leading to a consensus, and then disperse. We followed the latter course in Sri Lanka, and this was imposed upon us because there was no Centre behind this Commonwealth group of observers.

Observers are not monitors, and this has to be emphasised, if only to remove misconceptions and misapprehensions. Observing an election is a delicate job, needing lot of finesse, lost of circumspection. Observers are not able to do miracles; at most, they can put a brake on an unbridled lawlessness. The host governments feel obliged not only to provide them with reasonable facilities for their work, but actually needs them, in as much as they need the good opinion of the world. The so-called free-world of today perhaps is a little more free now than it was before the break up of the Soviet Union.

With autonomy for Palestinians in the occupied territories, CIS Jews seem safer than the Jews living in the West Bank or Gaza. Yet, the holocaust still vivid in Jewish minds, they are taking the threats seriously.

Alexander Libin, Israeli Embassy official in Moscow, said: "There is an upsurge. We help in every possible way and so far we have had no problems. Should any arise, we will solve it."

Those Jews know little about their religion and its practices and traditions. The life of an ex-Soviet Jew was centred around secular institutions within the framework of the Soviet system. In Israel religious institutions play an important role in social life.

After the collapse of communism, more than 350 Jewish organisations were founded all over the CIS. Synagogues were reopened in all major cities. Classes in Hebrew and studies in Jewish life and history have been started.

The aim, according to Chlenov, "is to ensure the survival of ex-Soviet Jews, right here in the CIS, as a part of world Jewry, and to provide them with a safe, decent homeland." — GEMINI NEWS

AHMED BADAWI is an Egyptian freelance journalist who recently visited Russia.

Plant-based food

Sir, Many of us tend to hold some kind of negative views about vegetarian diets. We often think that a vegetarian's health is always in jeopardy for the lack of protein and iron in his food.

Myopic view of history

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Death of a monarch

Sir, The sad transition of a long celebrated personality like Belgian monarch does leave a void behind in the world community which takes long to be filled in.

Moreover, they seem to nag meat-eaters to watch what they eat — as a favourite dish. Meanwhile, the veggie burgers are outselling beefburgers in some posh restaurants of the US. An estimated eight million to 12 million of Americans are said to have embraced vegetarianism.

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