

FOCUS

The Legend of Ram Sagor

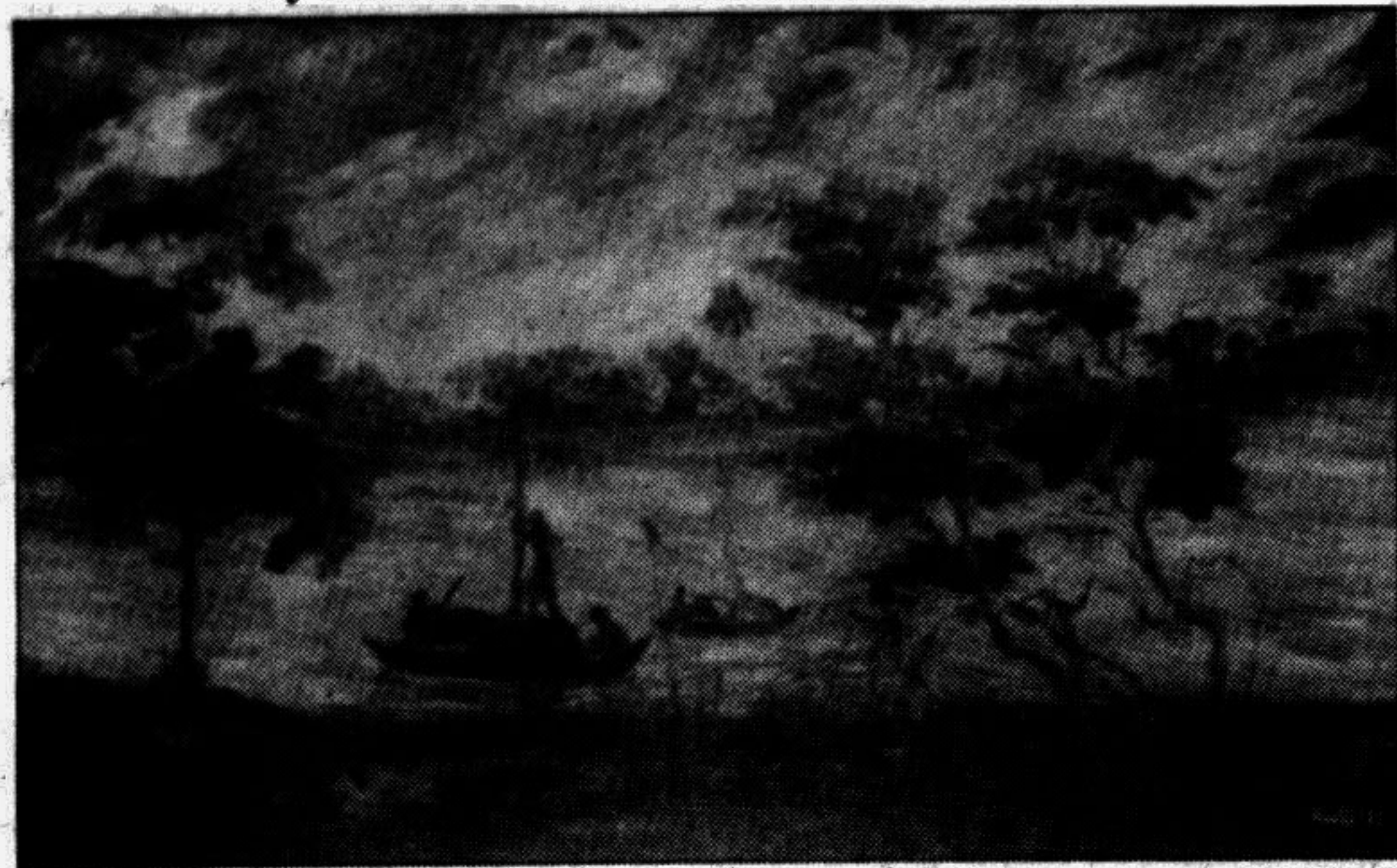
by Morshed Ali Khan, back from Dinajpur

THE legend goes that during the mid part of the 18th century, a terrible drought hit the regions of Dinajpur. An acute shortage of water not only hampered agriculture, the main means of survival for the population, it also forced the people to undertake great deal of extra work by fetching drinking water from far away places. The drought continued for years, and the people's agony day by day turned into anger.

In the year 1750, the whole region was under the rule of Raja Ram Nath who, realising that his people were subjected to enormous hardship due to this natural calamity, embarked upon the most ambitious project the area had ever seen.

Thousands of labourers were recruited to excavate a water reservoir over an area of more than one kilometre, just a few miles away from today's Dinajpur town. It was by no means an ordinary pond. Its grandeur even prompted people spontaneously to call it the Sagor (the sea) of the area well before it was completed.

In 1755, five years after the work had started, the Sagor was dug up. But to the utter disappointment of the Raja, the labourers and the people of the area, the bed of the Sagor remained dry. There was no water even after the workers had dug nearly 50 feet into the earth over this vast area. Millions of tonnes of soil from the excavation was heaped around the Sagor to give the whole area a hilly look. But in the middle of these man-made hills, the



Courtesy — Farzana Azim Kanta

Sagor was still dry. As legend has it, the worried king one night had a dreadful dream. He was ordered by the Gods, in his dream, to sacrifice his beloved son Ram. And only then the Sagor would be filled by water and thus serve the people. The Raja, obeying the orders of the Gods, built a small room in the middle of the Sagor and asked the prince Ram to spend the night inside. As the prince entered the room, its only exit was sealed up.

The next morning people woke up to find the Sagor filled with crystal clear water. Ever since, the Sagor is known as the Ram Sagor. The sacrifice of the prince has

helped millions of people to live. At present, the remains of the Raja's palace around the marvellous Ram Sagor is almost extinct, but still a huge Ghat, made during the time, can be seen in a derelict state. Time has engulfed the kingly grandeur.

The Ram Sagor is now under the Ministry of Forestry and Environment. The actual lake area has been leased out to the Grameen Bank for ten years. The Bank is doing extensive cultivation of fish in its water.

On top of the hills a beautiful bungalow, overlooking the 1133-yard-long and 400-yard-broad Ram Sagor, adorns the area. With its

70.56 acres of park area, the Ram Sagor is one of the best promenades of the country. A footpath paves its way on the hilly banks around the whole area amidst a variety of trees and plants. Thousands of known and unknown birds can also be seen and heard. And from any point of the promenade one can have the breath-taking view of the legendary Ram Sagor.

Every year thousands of people come here, particularly in the winter season, to picnic. The officials of the Forestry department have said that Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation and the Forestry department are to launch a massive project to turn the Ram Sagor into a "major

tourist attraction". A huge modern looking Ghat has already been built and soon, "motorised speed boats" will be available for hire by tourists.

But locals find the whole project "grossly short of respect" for the environment and tranquillity of the area. The majority of people feel that by introducing motorised boats, the department will pollute the water as well as the air. Also, the tremendous noise generated by a speed boat would not only drive away the wildlife which has found sanctuary here for so many years, but also disturb those people who come here for its tranquillity.

Moreover, hundreds of anglers from different parts of the country have found the Ram Sagor a delight for the sport of fishing for many, many years. According to the locals, huge fish are often hooked in the vast waterbody. Nowadays, under the Grameen Bank fish-cultivation project, anglers converge at the banks twice a week.

"With the introduction of the speed boats in the Sagor, angling would definitely disappear," said Hasan Mian, an elderly local angler who claimed to have been angling in the Ram Sagor since his childhood.

The locals still believe that the Sagor was a gift of the Gods to the people of the region and it is the duty of us all to safeguard it from "bad eyes".

The Gods may otherwise turn the Sagor as dry as it was before Ram dared to lay down his own life.

To Let the Disabled Die Murder or Mercy?

A British couple's fight for the right to allow their disabled son to die raises legal, moral and ethical questions. Gemini News Service debates whether euthanasia is murder or mercy, especially when the patient is a child and unable to voice his wishes.

PAMELA COWAN writes from London

IT'S tough parenting a disabled child — I discovered that 14 years ago when my daughter was diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

I vividly recall my shock and disbelief when a pediatrician informed me my beautiful six-month-old baby had cerebral palsy, a condition resulting from a lack of oxygen to the brain which causes permanent brain damage.

In a way, coming to terms with a child's disability is like dealing with a death in the

family. You cry, you deny you rage and finally you accept it. Our lives changed dramatically. Every day centered around Shauna's physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and later, speech therapy.

As I tried to balance spending time between Shauna and my older daughter, I felt incredible guilt because Shauna's needs always dominated.

Shauna's progress was torturously slow while she learned to walk, talk and read. She got frustrated, yet she never quit trying, and

trifled in Battleford, Saskatchewan sparked an emotional and highly-controversial debate across Canada about the "mercy" killing of a disabled child.

During the trial, a surgeon's testimony confirmed Latimer's claim that Tracy was in pain because of a dislocated hip. But many people suffer chronic pain for a variety of reasons — surely pain is not justification for murder.

If a parent killed an able-bodied child there would have been public outrage, but because Tracy used a

Cerebral Palsy

- Affects 1 in every 400 births (Britain)
- Commonly caused by:
 - Injury during birth
 - Infection of mother during pregnancy
 - Lack of oxygen before birth
 - haemorrhage
 - meningitis
 - hereditary factors



Fiona and Con Creodon with Thomas

Three types:

- Spastic**
muscles very rigid or weak
 - Athetoid**
loss of posture control, often unwanted movements
 - Ataxic**
problems with balance, shaky hand movements, irregular speech
- Not all people with CP have impaired mental abilities
- No cure, but treatment can ease effects

Banning "Banned" Pesticides

by Zayed Mohammad

WHAT are you having for lunch? Vegetable? Fish? Think twice. Your sumptuous meal with fish and vegetables could be your last. As recent research findings (conducted by Institute of Food and Radiation Biology (IFRB), under the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC), in collaboration with the Department of Environment (DoE) have revealed, residues of toxic pesticides were found in vegetable crops, including lalsakh, palansakh, cabbage, lady's fingers, potato, brinjal, cauliflower, tomato, cucumber, banana and also in dried fish.

Another study of BAEC, monitoring of pesticide residue in foodstuff and the environment, warned that misuse and overuse of agrochemicals on vegetables and food storage was increasing. A research by the BAEC also detected alarming concentrations of Dichloro-Diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT) and its toxic metabolites, following persistent usage of organochloride insecticides during sundrying of fish prior to storage. Although the production of DDT, which belongs to the Dirty Dozen group of excessively harmful pesticides, has been discontinued in Bangladesh and its use is banned for agricultural purposes in Bangladesh this deadly chemical is seeping into Bangladesh, from India in abundance. Recent surveys have pointed out that the concentration of DDT in humans in Bangladesh is 12.5 parts per million (ppm) which is at least five times higher than that in the UK.

These disclosures have not only turned heads within Bangladesh, but have caused panic in the countries importing vegetable and fish from this country. Alarmed authorities in these countries

have already informed and Advocacy (IDPAA) of Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendra (PMUK), under the auspices of the Coalition of Environmental NGOs (CEN) of the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), are advocating for a ban on the import and use of those pesticides, which belong to the Dirty Dozen group of excessively harmful pesticides.

As for the local consumer, toxic concentrations of pesticide and metabolites, in vegetables and other foodstuffs, which are deposited in the fat tissues and remain dormant, may cause many incurable diseases. One adverse human health effect is the poisoning of the central nervous system that may ultimately cause cancers.

This contamination of our daily foods by highly toxic pesticides contradicts the policy directions enumerated in the Environment Policy 1992. The Environment Policy clearly states that the application of agrochemicals, artificial materials and inputs which adversely affect the fertility and organic properties of the soil, and also cause adverse impacts on man and animals, are to be regulated. This Policy also calls for encouraging application of different natural fertilizers and insecticides. From a health and sanitation perspective, the Policy is all for the prevention of activities which are harmful to public health in all spheres including development activities in the country.

In pursuance of the existing Environment Policy, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) and the Institute of Development Policy Analysis

and Advocacy (IDPAA) of Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendra (PMUK), under the auspices of the Coalition of Environmental NGOs (CEN) of the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), are advocating for a ban on the import and use of those pesticides, which belong to the Dirty Dozen group of excessively harmful pesticides.

This endeavour is also marked as a protest against the double standard followed by the developed countries in formulating and exporting certain pesticides to developing countries, while they remain banned in the countries of origin. It may be mentioned here that only four of the Dirty Dozen, are banned for agricultural use. But the efficacy of such a ban is questionable as they are widely available in the local markets.



Do we know what is inside the fruits we pick?

Considering the proven harmful effects of the Dirty Dozen group of pesticides, the NGOs are urging the Government, in the public interest, to cancel registration of the already registered brands of the Dirty Dozen, and thereby initiate effective restriction upon their import and distribution within the country.

A quick perusal of the existing pesticide laws of the country will testify that the prevailing regulatory regime is not totally inadequate in banning the import and use of the demonic Dirty Dozen. The Agricultural Pesticide Ordinance, 1971, as amended by the Agricultural Pesticides (Amendment) Act, 1980, and the Agricultural Pesticides (Amendment) Ordinance, 1983, provides for cancellation of registration of a brand of pesticide. According to Section 7 of the Ordinance, read with Section 5 (4) (d), it clearly states that upon application for registration of a pesticide the satisfaction of the Government is necessary to the fact that the applied-for pesticide is not generally detrimental or injurious to vegetation, except weeds, or to human or animal health when applied according to directions. The Ordinance further provides that, if at any time after the registration of a brand of a pesticide, the Government is of the opinion that the registration has been secured in violation of any of the provisions of the Ordinance, or the rules, or that the pesticide is ineffective against pests, or hazardous to vegetation, other than weeds, or

to human or animal life, the Government may, after giving to the person on whose application a pesticide had been registered an opportunity of being heard, cancel the registration.

Needless to add that the irremediable use, or rather abuse, of hazardous pesticides are continuing, owing to the lack of will of the Government to move and act with the changing times. After so many conclusive research findings, the capability to ignore is strictly the capability of an entity that is deaf and blind, and it is extremely difficult to awake a person who pretends to be asleep for some reason!

It might be added in this context that even the Prime Minister while addressing the "International Workshop on Biological Nitrogen Fixation Associated with Rice" held in November, 1994, realized the havoc pesticides are wreaking on our country when she stated that indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides in the name of growing more food is polluting the environment and this process is threatening public health. Despite the indiscriminate use of the "Dirty Dozen", hope still abounds in hopelessness, and we hope that the PM will act upon her timely realization in safeguarding the interest of the nation, and not that of a few cashing in on the mysterious inactivity of the state mechanism. No need to forget that we are not deprived of environmentally sustainable options once we decide to get rid of these hazardous pesticides.

The Author is an Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh who also works with the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA).

her persistence has inspired many able-bodied people.

Thomas Creodon also has cerebral palsy. The 23-month-old boy has recently been the focus of media attention in Britain as his parents, Fiona and Con Creodon, fight for the right to allow him to die.

Hours after he was born he started convulsing and tests done a few days later revealed Thomas has extensive brain damage.

"We wanted to let him go naturally — we didn't want him tube fed, but we were told it was a basic human right," said Fiona Creodon in a telephone interview with Gemini News Service.

Doctors believe Thomas is deaf and blind, so he is fed every four hours by tube — even though he shows no signs of hunger.

"They've (doctors) told us there's no way they can stop that. We were told to wait and see. Well, we've waited and we've seen. Thomas is constantly retching, his color changes, we have to suction him, he cries constantly and he convulses every day, in spite of getting three anti-convulsants twice a day.

"And when he starts having fits his breathing is noisy and laboured. We came to our decision after a lot of soul searching. We feel he is in a lot of distress. We're not taking the law into our own hands but are going through the courts."

In early August at a private hearing, a High Court judge in London ruled that Thomas be made a ward of the court. Although Thomas remains at home, the court must grant permission before his medical treatment can be changed.

The next legal step will be the submission of medical evidence to the court outlining the severity of Thomas's handicap. Then a judge will decide if Thomas lives or dies.

John Burman, the Creodons' lawyer, expects the case will be heard before the year is out. Fiona forcefully states she and her husband are pursuing legal action out of love for their son, not to escape caring for a child many would describe as a burden.

She says they have refused numerous offers from friends to help care for their son because "we don't think it is fair to ask anyone to look after Thomas."

However, Thomas does spend three days a week at a respite centre to give the couple time to spend with their other two children.

Unlike the Creodons, some parents of disabled children do take the law into their own hands. Such was the case in Canada in October 1993 when Robert Latimer killed his 12-year-old daughter, Tracy, who had cerebral palsy.

Latimer placed Tracy in the cab of his farm truck and directed carbon monoxide from the exhaust pipe into the cab.

He confessed to police that he killed Tracy because he could no longer watch his daughter in constant pain. The subsequent murder

wheelchair, could not talk or feed herself, her murder was labelled as "merciful" by the news media.

Latimer was convicted to a life sentence with no parole for 10 years. He appealed the ruling, but in July the provincial Court of Appeal upheld the conviction. He plans to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada.

How do we know what Tracy wanted from life? She couldn't tell anyone she wanted to die because her life was unbearable. And that's the point.

Disabled people are vulnerable because often they cannot express their wishes or defend themselves. But their vulnerability must not make them targets for murder.

Fiona says emotionally: "As far as we know he doesn't recognise us. We are incredibly attached to him. I can't imagine life without him, but when you look at the horrendous problems he has, well, I wouldn't like to be kept like that. The kindest thing is to let nature take its course."

Improvements in maternity services and neonatal care mean that fewer babies develop cerebral palsy at birth as a result of lack of oxygen or jaundice, but they also mean more babies with very low birth weights survive and such babies are more likely to have cerebral palsy.

Perhaps modern science's ability to prolong life has gone too far. Perhaps we should let nature take its course, especially when intervention can result in a lifetime of suffering.

But does it make sense not to take advantage of medical advances? But at what point do we intervene — at birth, or do we wait 23 months?

And who in effect plays God — parents, judges, or the medical profession?

I fear that if Latimer's sentence is overturned or the Creodons win their court battle to allow Thomas to die that will open the door for wholesale killing of the disabled.

Every individual has the right to control his or her life and to share in its opportunities, challenges and responsibilities. Yet Thomas is kept alive solely by force feeding, his seizures are uncontrolled by modern medicine, he cries out in pain.

Surely Thomas' quality of life must figure in the life-and-death decision before the court. How humane is it to watch him suffer when there is no relief or cure for his disabling condition?

No two people with cerebral palsy are affected in the same way. Therefore, we must judge each case individually.

"They've God with our little boy from the beginning, keeping him alive. It took us a long time to get the strength to approach the lawyers. It's a decision that we no longer have to make on our own. We'll abide by the decision. At the end you have to do what is best for your child."

PAMELA COWAN is a Canadian journalist

Japanese Least Keen to Become Australians

by William Gasson

Migration is a sensitive issue in Australia which is experiencing an increasing flow of people from Asia

JAPANESE migrants seem to be the least enthusiastic about taking out Australian citizenship.

Women migrants are more motivated than men to become Australians because citizenship gives them a chance to vote.

New South Wales, to which Sydney belongs, is the migrants' preferred state. These are some of the information gathered by Australian Citizenship, a report issued by the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research.

Migration is a sensitive issue in Australia which is experiencing an increasing flow of people from Asia. The net overall number of migrants — longer-term arrivals less departures — increased 83 per cent last year or from 33,900 in 1993 to 81,900 in 1994, according to Bureau of Statistics figures.

Inward migration flow and natural increase has given Australia a population growth rate of 530 people a day. The

country's population, which grew at the rate of 1.09 per cent last year, passed the 18 million mark sometime in April.

The impact of the migrant flow on Australia generates numerous studies, including the recent Australian Citizenship, which showed that the rate of Japanese migrants seeking to become fully-fledged Australians was the lowest at 22.9 per cent.

By comparison, migrants from Viet Nam (85.4 per cent), Laos (90.3 per cent), Myanmar (88 per cent) and Cambodia (83.4 per cent) are nearly four times as keen to become nationals of their host country.

"In these (latter) cases there would seem to be particular reason for becoming Australian citizens as quickly as possible," said the study. "Previous experiences, such as political tension and violence, or perceptions of an uncertain future, would be paramount in forging a new identity in a new land."

On an Asian regional basis,

the percentage rates are all quite high: Southeast Asia, 74.3 per cent; northeast Asia, 62.3 per cent; and south Asia, 77.0 per cent.

Citizenship rates for other Asian nations include the Philippines (80.7 per cent), Indonesia (59.9 per cent), Singapore (69.4 per cent), Malaysia (54.1 per cent), China (62.6 per cent), Taiwan (58.7 per cent), Hong Kong (75.2 per cent), Korea (52.7 per cent), India (77.5 per cent), and Sri Lanka (77.6 per cent).

New Zealanders came second lowest — after Japan — on the scale with 27.2 per cent but that is thought to reflect their attitude of being simply "long-term visitors" from across the Tasman Sea. Migrants from the Ukraine, the Baltic States, Greece and eastern European countries

head the list with ratings that exceed 90 per cent.

The survey based its results on data collected in the 1991 Census when Australia had a citizenship rate of 66.8 per cent. It is estimated that figure would be around 70.7 per cent in 1994, leaving still about one million migrants eligible for citizenship.

While women migrants want citizenship to be able to vote, men want it because it gives them a sense of belonging. Overall, the main reason is that migrants want citizenship so they can live permanently in Australia.

When it comes to choosing where to live Down Under 43.4 per cent of migrants overwhelmingly select New South Wales based on July-December 1994 figures. The Northern Territory (10.6 per cent), Tasmania (0.7 per

cent) and the Australian Capital Territory which is Canberra (1.1 per cent) are the least preferred areas.

The population pressure is on Sydney, the New South Wales capital, with its population of around 3.7 million people. The city takes around 40 per cent of the country's incoming migrants prompting state premier Robert Carr to call for measures to curb the inflow and divert migrants to other areas.

His plea fell on unsympathetic ears. Federal Immigration Minister Nick Bollock pointed out the economic benefits that came Sydney's way with the influx of migrants. He added: "In this area of globalization, we can't say to the rest of the world we want your money but we don't want you."

The level of migrant preference for the other states are: Victoria 23.2 per cent, Queensland 14.9 per cent, Western Australia 11.7 per cent, and South Australia 4.4 per cent.