

# Fundamentalist Fervour Deters Development

by Md Asadullah Khan

DESPITE 40 years of unprecedented economic progress and after democracy's spectacular triumph over totalitarian communism in the former USSR and other parts of the world, the demons of racism, ultra-religious zealotry and another form of authoritarianism has popped out in the countries namely Algeria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Egypt and, unsurprisingly, the countries of the subcontinent are not far from the race.

As it appears, an ultra-Islamic revival and fervour far from the Islamic code of life as ordained in the Holy Quran and Hadith has almost seized the country to a considerable extent. In absence of clear government policy and action in cracking down on the zealots creating an unstable situation in the society by issuing self-styled verdicts that suit their convenience, the state of affairs in the country has taken a worsening turn. But one should have expected that our knowledge of the advancement of the West and Japan should have vaccinated us against this paranoid nationalism based on fanatic ideologies.

Reports of repression against women, torture for dowry to the extent of causing death of the wife and other forms of repression including rape and trafficking in women carried by the national dailies with each passing day are causing serious wounds in our psyche. Repression continues unabated in different parts of the country. Reports about the killing of Zesmin (23) in Lakhimpur of Noakhali by her husband Hashim, mysterious death of Akhtar Banu (20) in the village Shahapur of Comilla and brutal killing of Mariam in Barisal have stunned people with any amount sensibility and human feelings. More worrisome, reportedly almost about 500 women are being smuggled

out of the country every month mostly for jobs not sanctioned by religious injunctions.

After Nurjahan in Sylhet, Fatwa has taken another life in the village Debidwar of Comilla. Monwara Begum (35) committed suicide after receiving eight (8) lashes (Dorra) with 10 canes bundled together. The punishment was inflicted on her by an arbitration council headed by the Imam of the Debidwar Thana Gate Mosque. In another incident reported by the national dailies, Dilara Begum, abandoned by her husband Siraj Mia about three years back, was inflicted with 101 lashes. Her father Abdul Khaleq was humiliated beyond measure. The accomplices, responsible for the birth of Dilara's baby and already known to village stalwarts, went unharmed. Fazira Begum of Kamalraj hailing from the same area where Nurjahan earlier last year met her fateful end was awaiting 40 "dorras".

Perhaps in an effort to gain ascendancy in the social hierarchy in the name of religion, the Fatwabaz clerics seem to have sold out their religious principles for the sake of perks, privilege and patronage. But in the country people worry that this sort of ultra-religious activities by a group of people could erode much of the tolerance that Islam really espouses. At the same time moderates and liberals feel convulsed about the spectre that looms up with an organised effort by a section of people turning the country into a militant theocracy. Ironically, the phenomenon of trade in human beings in the Persian Gulf area has long been a subject

of discussion. Why not the self-styled clerics in our country upholding the cause of Islam speak against and expose the ugly human realities practised in those places? Well-educated Americans and Europeans backed up by their powerful and advanced nations, experience little discrimination in those countries. But for the much greater mass of Muslim and non-Muslim guest workers from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Philippines — life there is a daily confrontation with exploitation discrimination and even physical abuse by their employers. If our people and government would have raised their voices, it would perhaps have stirred up compassionate and

where these dirty activities are being perpetrated almost routinely with impunity?

Shockingly, Prophet Muhammad's (SM) precepts as a code of earthly behaviour that galvanized Muslim societies with hope for renewal and growth are being lost sight of by the religious zealots. The whole world have reasons to be profoundly happy about the way medieval Europe crouched when Islam reached the apogee of its power. Islamic culture and Muslim civilisation had wondrously radiating brilliance and electrifying influence for over five centuries in the world. After taking over in the last half of the ninth century, Fatimid rulers of Egypt ushered in a brilliant

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influential citizens in the Muslim nations to lobby their rulers to guarantee full human rights as per Islamic tenets to all guest workers in their lands.

Paradoxically, in our country marriage is often a type of slavery. In most cases women here have no right to leave the house without husband's permission, to keep their own earnings, to resist humiliation to testify in court at par with men. To be sure, Islam never advocated all these practices. Why not the zealots in our country protest these abominable practices and hold religious commission in different parts of the country

era of peace and progress. It is during this period that the great Al-Azhar Mosque and the university of Cairo sprang up disseminating knowledge of all varieties. Researchers and scholars of the world drank deep in the fountain of that knowledge. At the same time, how can we tend to forget the messages of Quran, revealed in Medina, that are so much tolerant of minority views and other faiths? Today in most places of our country tolerant view and liberal attitude towards religion have given way to oppressive, illiberal and harsh measures, hitherto unknown in the earlier days of Islam. The cam-

# Code of Conduct for Vice-Chancellors in India

Dr Amrik Singh writes from New Delhi

*It is only when the conduct of a Vice-Chancellor is scrutinised that it becomes clear whether he lived up to the code of conduct or not. It goes without saying that quite a number would fail to stand the scrutiny.*

WITH things being what they are, off and on those concerned with the non-performance of university and college teachers raise a question: cannot there be a code of conduct for teachers? The fact of the matter is that there is one. In 1987, after the scales of pay were revised last, a code was worked out between the teachers' body (AIFUCO) and the UGC. To what extent it has been implemented is another question. Some time ago, when I asked a member of the executive of this body about this issue, he looked surprised. Perhaps, he had never heard of it.

That apart, one point made by most teachers is: everyone talks about a code of conduct for teachers, what about a code of conduct for Vice-Chancellors? They have a point. There ought to be a code even for Vice-Chancellors. Quite a number of them act in ways which are questionable — to put it no more strongly. A good deal of the problem arises from the fact that most of them are political appointees. They got appointed not because they deserve to be appointed but because they have connections with politicians. In the minimum, they are acceptable to whosoever is in power.

That being so, a case for a code of conduct for Vice-Chancellors is unanswerable. While the faculty is the most important element in a university and the one which generally speaking is permanent in character, Vice-Chancellors come and go. In

most cases, their term of appointment is 3-year though in certain cases it is even 4 or 5 years. It is, therefore, all the more important that those who are appointed for a tenure of 3-5 years conduct themselves according to a certain code of conduct.

In 1994-95, I happened to head a committee to review the working of the 10 universities in Andhra. In our report, we suggested as follows: (i) A Vice-Chancellor is obliged not only to honour the Act, the statutes, the ordinances and the regulations but also to ensure that these are honoured both in letter and spirit.

(ii) His functioning as the chief executive of the university must not only be fair and just but must also be seen as such. In other words, whatever he does must be both open, and transparent.

(iii) Generally speaking, a Vice-Chancellor is expected to leave the University in a better state of health than what he inherited. This should refer in particular to the academic performance of both its teachers and students, the financial situation, the strengthening of the faculty, the upgradation of syllabi, innovative programmes and student services.

(iv) Every university has a public image. It should be the constant endeavour of the Vice-Chancellor to improve that public image. Towards this end, his interaction with industry is particularly important in today's situation.

(v) Raising funds from the public or from any other

source should be an important part of his job.

As would be seen, all these sound very innocuous. In general terms, it cannot be otherwise. It is only when the conduct of a Vice-Chancellor is scrutinised that it becomes clear whether he lived up to the code of conduct or not. It goes without saying that quite a number would fail to stand the scrutiny. To put it modestly, they have all kinds of skeletons in the cupboard to hide.

In recognition of this fact, another recommendation which has a bearing on this issue might also be mentioned. We came across several cases where bank reconciliations had not been done for over a decade. In one particular university, there was a separate cell to deal with this assignment. We were surprised to learn that it had been abolished and that was the reason why no bank reconciliation had been done. At whose asking? We enquired! There was no satisfactory answer. The conclusion that we came to was that the State government had been casual even in ensuring that the funds given were spent properly and economically.

In this connection, we made another recommendation. In several cases, audit objections had not been cleared even after a decade of those having been made. Presumably, there was no defence of the improprieties committed. In any case, almost half the people who had committed them had either

retired or gone out of office. In a few cases, some of them had even passed away. How are such problems to be dealt with?

We were of the view that before a Vice-Chancellor retires, and the date is invariably known, there should be a special audit of the university finances. If he sanctioned unauthorised expenditure or indulged in waste or extravagance, let him explain why he did so. To ask such questions, after he has retired and gone away is neither here nor there.

There should be nothing difficult about following this procedure. All that the State has to do is that a procedure is laid down and then implemented. Our psychology is that when passions have been aroused and things are hot, action can be taken. But once the heat is allowed to cool down, even embezzlements can be explained away.

It should not have been necessary to say some of these things but for the fact that the integrity of most people who are now nominated to this august office leaves a lot to be desired. Having a code of conduct for them — which in the nature of things has to be voluntary in character — and a more stringent control over expenditure than exists today, would help to improve things significantly. It is time that State governments gave urgent attention to this problem.

— Mandira  
The writer is a former Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University.

# Integrated Education for the Blind

by Mariette Jansen

HELEN Keller International (HKI) is an international Non-Government Organization (NGO) currently working in 39 developing countries mainly to improve the situation of the blind and to prevent blindness. It is named after Helen Keller, a deaf and blind woman who showed great courage and commitment in helping other people with disabilities. HKI has been working in Bangladesh since 1978. One of its projects is 'Technical Assistance for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind' (TAERB). The overall goal of TAERB is to provide technical assistance to both governmental and non-governmental organizations which provide services to the blind.

In Bangladesh, it is estimated that 35,000 children become blind each year. Of those afflicted, 80 per cent are from very poor families. Due to lack of awareness, inadequate facilities and poverty, parents of visually impaired children often are not willing to invest in the education of their children. As a result, the education rate of blind person is very low. To make education more accessible for blind children, the Government of Bangladesh initiated the system of integrated education for the blind in 1974. Since 1994 TAERB/HKI is assisting in this programme.

What does integrated education for the blind mean? It means that blind children attend regular schools and share classes with their sighted peers. Currently there are 51 integrated schools throughout Bangladesh: 47 are run by the government four are private.

Each school has a resource teacher, provided by the Government through the Ministry of Social Welfare. The resource teacher specifically addresses the special needs of the blind. Even though the blind children are spending most of the time in regular classes, the resource teacher spends some time to teach the blind in separate classes, e.g. to teach Braille. This is a system of reading

and writing for blind people, consisting of six dots which make it possible to write all the letters of the alphabet and all the figures. However, a resource teacher is not teaching only. He/she also has to provide information to the regular staff, to the parents and, most importantly, to the blind children themselves. Therefore, he/she has to be up to date concerning the latest developments regarding education of the blind.

Another task of a resource teacher is to be a counselor: to blind students (by working through obstacles they encounter in integration and by other problems they are facing because of their blindness).

\* to teachers (by assisting/advising them regarding integrated education).

\* to parents (by motivating them to send their children to school).

Furthermore, in schools that are fortunate enough to have a hostel for the blind, the resource teacher has to be its supervisor. A hostel is not often available for the blind, yet when it is, it makes it much easier for them to attend school. In the rural areas children often have to travel long distances to reach school, and for the blind this is an even greater impediment. They could easily become discouraged and then decide not to attend school. If there is a hostel, this impediment does not exist.

Integrated education for the blind is just a first step towards integration into the society as a whole. Until now, society showed a lack of willingness to treat the blind as respected members of the community. Therefore TAERB/HKI is trying to support the Government's efforts to improve the situation of the blind in Bangladesh. After all it's not the handicap that makes a person disabled, it's the attitude of the society that makes someone feel disabled!

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burst of anti-western sentiment in the region and Algeria, even being an oil-rich country, is now lost in a political and economic morass. Battered by government mismanagement and corruption, the economy is sinking like a stone. Unemployment is estimated at 30% of the work force. In a world, the situation is desperate and, without a shadow of doubt, Algerians now want to come out of this chaotic situation.

In our case, when we need enormous sums in western aid, technology and investment to overhaul the economy, fundamentalist pressure to wall off the country from the outside world by limiting access of women will prove to be a deterrent to economic expansion and development.

Discarding the Fatwa-politics and a fortress mentality that have, of late, seized a section of the country, the government must exhibit flexibility in different frontiers that include wooing western investments in, say, tourism, oil exploration and industrial reorganisation. Without a shadow of doubt, the liberators of the country and people who broke away from Pakistan in 1971 envisioned a modern, democratic state based on justice, fair-play and equality of sexes and races where religion would surely be followed but not necessarily enforced. Examples of good governance in the countries like Pakistan, Sudan and Iran where state and religion have been mixed up are far from satisfactory and hardly encouraging. Even in Pakistan where 97% of the population are Muslim, sharia court's ban on interest payments, for example, is routinely dodged by banks that offer profit on deposits instead. Many devout Muslims in Sudan who initially welcomed the fundamentalist

coup and its promises of organisation and order following the disarray of previous government, are now fearful about the outcome. Happily, the broader concept of Islamic culture and economy is complete by itself. It needs no alien influence. And Muslim civilisation led the world in the past, and will continue to do so if only moderation is practised.

uses of some universities and colleges have become hostages to a section of 'activists' belonging to the fundamentalist group who rather have earned a bad name for Islam. Devout Muslims are often shocked to hear that the name of their faith, which means submission to Allah can summon up such images of violence. Apart from the concern for lives and freedom that might be in jeopardy, moderates fear that this wave of fundamentalism unleashed by extremist groups may have an innate passion to fulfill a lust for power, might destabilise Muslim societies driving large armies of emigrants on the march for safety, peace and a tranquil environment. People in our country and elsewhere often forget that this region's mixed races with different faiths have to live together if they want to sustain a formidable growth rate.

Islam can never be illiberal. Revealed through Prophet Muhammad (SM) it is among the most egalitarian of religions. Certainly one of Islam's strongest appeals down the centuries was to people who felt victimized and deprived of worth. In theory, with an ethic that allows merit to be rewarded, Islam ought to serve as a solid platform for political flexibility and economic growth. In attempting to diagnose the problem, we must see that fundamentalist activism, as apparent, is nothing but a sort of psychic disease and its young followers are mostly urban, unemployed and profoundly unhappy with the politics they have known.

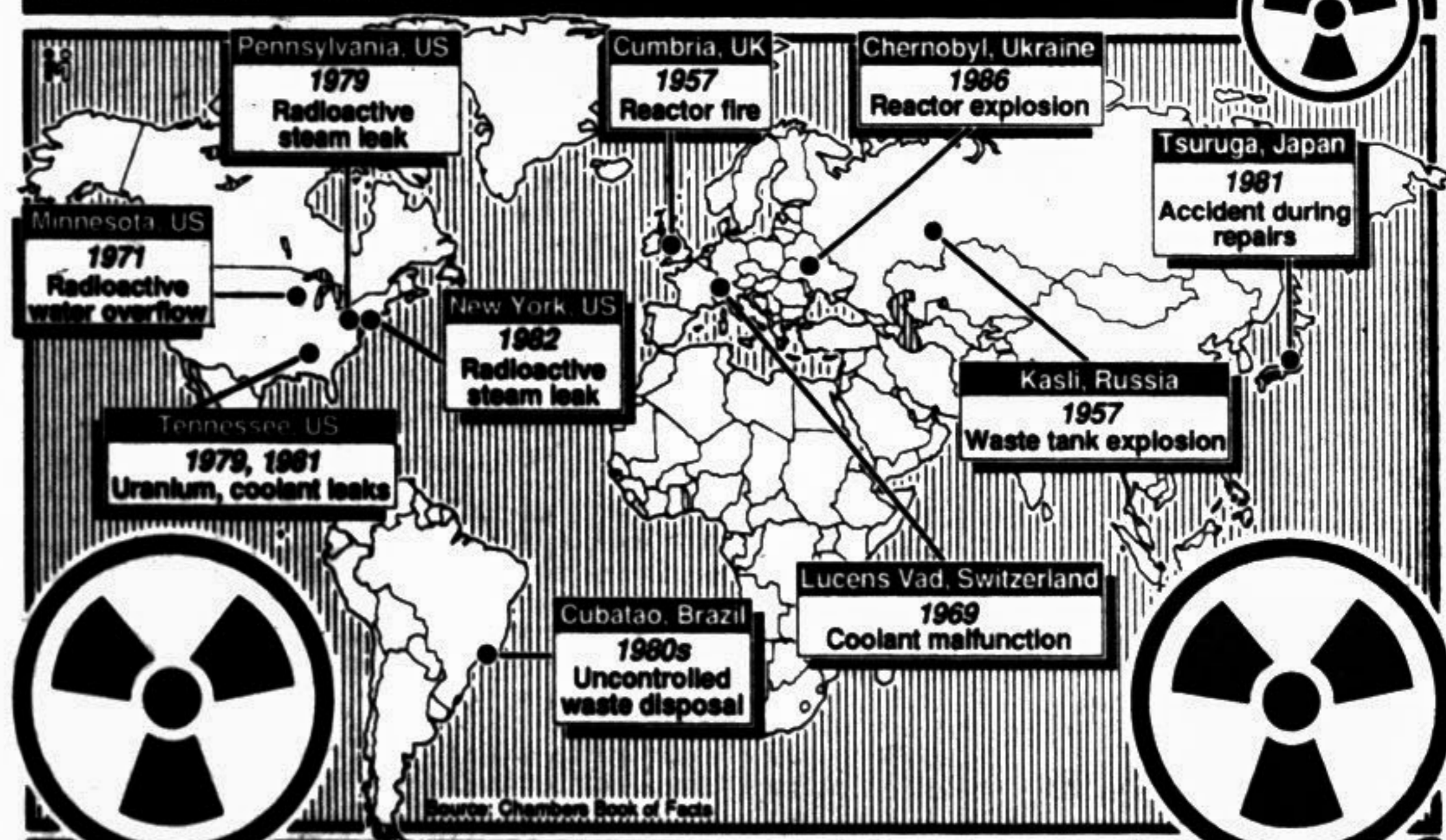
In Algeria, while most Algerians profess to be devout Muslims, they do not wish to see the tyranny of socialism replaced by a tyranny of the fundamentalists. Sermons most frequently issued by the clerics in that country have, no doubt, galvanized the discontented, especially when the country is mired in political and economic chaos. The Gulf war sparked a fresh

# Tackling the Toll of 'Chernobyl AIDS'

Barry Chamish writes from Tel Aviv

Radioactive contamination from a nuclear explosion in the former Soviet Union is blamed for the high incidence of cancer among Russian migrants to Israel. But there are sceptics.

## Nuclear alert



back of Russia: 'In Russia the people like me who tried to salvage the situation at Chernobyl are treated like heroes. All the rescuers received special privileges and lifetime pensions. When I decided to move to Israel, I had to forfeit the privileges or not receive a Russian passport. "Soon after I arrived in Israel I realised what a mistake I had made. We're not worth a thing here. In Russia, Chernobyl victims are given bi-annual checkups which measure the amount of radiation in the body and its effects. Here, there is no preventative treatment and no compensation when someone falls ill."

Journalist Nevo, however, points out that "it's true Chernobyl victims are treated well in the CIS (the former Soviet Union) but only in relation to the rest of the population. The Ukrainians did not evacuate the areas hardest hit by radiation so even if a victim is getting the best treatment, he is not going to recover if he's receiving new doses of radiation every time he takes a drink of water."

Undeterred, Kalinitski organised his rescue workers group and lobbied the Knesset (Parliament) for suitable health care and compensation for Chernobyl victims living in Israel.

In 1994 he flew to Moscow to sue the Russian government on behalf of Israel's Chernobyl survivors. He lost his case but the resulting publicity caused the Israeli government to arrange high-level meetings with the Russian and Ukrainian ministers responsible for Chernobyl. Both governments turned down Israel's request for compensation, claiming lack of funds.

So, Israel's Chernobyl survivors must earn a living, cope with a new culture and language, while not receiving any preventative health care.

Says Dr Miriam Katz, a psychiatrist for a religious organisation which brings children from the Ukraine to Israel: "The children grow up with friends and relatives dying one after the other. Imagine the effect on them of not knowing if they will be next."

The common effect on almost all the new immigrants has been given the name 'Chernobyl AIDS'. Dr Katz explains some of the symptoms: "The fear triggers many social problems including divorce, alcoholism and physical abuse, which lead directly to an inability to earn a good living, which triggers more social misbehaviour."

The extremes of this anti-social behaviour has caused a rift between Israelis and the new arrivals from Russia, who are dismissed as "primitive". In the past year anti-Russian sentiment has been fuelled by reports of gang rapes and murders by Russian youths. In May, a Russian youth murdered a friend in a satanic ceremony, reportedly commonplace among Chernobyl adolescents.

Other symptoms of Chernobyl AIDS noted in recent studies include depression, nightmares, cold sweats and high blood pressure — all symptoms, some doctors point out, of mass hypochondria.

According to a report by Professor Yigal Ganit, director of the Talbieh Psychiatric Hospital, a third of all immigrants from the former Soviet Union since 1989 suffer from serious psychological disorders. From such studies,

the Health Ministry concludes that the physical illnesses of the Chernobyl survivors have been exaggerated.

Dr Gad Reinert, head of the research department of Carmel Hospital and a member of the Health Ministry policy team, says, "they come to us with ailments that don't exist. Often they claim their hair is falling out and we discover that their rate of baldness is perfectly natural. This is a population of losers blaming us for their problems."

Overlaid Goodman was a colonel in the Soviet Army in charge of the motor pool during the Chernobyl rescue. He was exposed to radiation for a month but is afraid to admit it in Israel, because of attitudes like those of Reinert.

He says: "I've changed from a quiet, confident person to a nervous wreck. My wife and I had a child, now I worry every moment that it was a mistake, that we passed on horrible characteristics to her and that they'll show up in a dreadful disease some day."

"The worst thing about the radiation is that you never know when the results will strike. It's the constant fear that drives people mad. There is no sympathy for what we are going through in Israel and we have to keep it bottled up or face discrimination and that just feeds the fear."

Russian activist Alexander Tenzer has mounted a campaign to force the Health Ministry to provide radiation counts to Chernobyl victims and to set up specialised care for them.

— GEMINI NEWS  
BARRY CHAMISH is the editor of "Inside Israel", a monthly intelligence newsletter.

## James Bond



## TOM and JERRY



## James Bond



## James Bond



## James Bond



## James Bond



## James Bond



## James Bond

