

Back to Number 1 Problem

CERTAINLY, population control has been a major success for Bangladesh. Unfortunately, success seems to have instilled a sense of complacency in the policy-planners to the extent that they no longer deem the issue significant enough to be incorporated in the active list of the development agenda. Even worse, there were virtually no serious discussion on the matter over the last few years, not even in the parliament. The reality is far more threatening than the government's apparent indifference may suggest. The way things are the best scenario is that the country's population will be plateaued somewhere around 180 million in the next 25 years; the worst is 230 million. On the whole, the situation is still ominous, especially when we are struggling to meet the basic needs—food, shelter, clothes, healthcare and employment—of the current population, let alone the projected one.

Our policies in this regard have so far been devoted to the lone goal of fertility reduction, and quite justifiably so, for not long time back the country was faced with the threatening prospect of a population explosion. Nevertheless, our failure to address socio-economic implications of population growth has led to such disastrous consequences as rise of unemployment rate, incongruity in demographic distribution, urban migration, etc. The policy-planners should learn their lessons from the mistakes in the past. Unfortunately, it seems, they have not been able to come out of their euphoria following the country's acclaimed success in fertility reduction.

The population issue, as speakers at Sunday's CPD-sponsored dialogue on *Population, development and urbanisation: the emerging issues* have put it, is not restricted to fertility reduction; rather it involves such different aspects as "structure of demographic changes and its implications for economic restructuring needs"; "human capital accumulation factors" like education, health and nutrition, etc. Major task ahead for the planners is to formulate and thereby execute a policy that takes cognizance of the population growth and its socio-economic impact. To that end, the first step, however, is the recognition that population still remains a major problem and must be addressed accordingly.

Flood Information Gap

FLOOD is now a distinct possibility. What we are keeping our fingers crossed for the time being on is whether it would scrape through the land as a normal monsoonal flood, or develop into an abnormal one slightly above the tolerance level. Or indeed it would end up being the catastrophic deluge we have known in 1988 and 1998. Ershad Hossain, the director of Meteorology Department thinks that the floods this time around are not going to be as severe as the last floods. In a meeting of Met experts on Sunday, who scrutinised all the data including Landsat images available at this point in time, the forecast to emerge was this: seasonal lows might cause more than average showers and eventually floods in the northern and central parts of Bangladesh.

Let's be prepared for the worst. One cannot be too sure about things these days when the behaviour of the seasonal winds and particularly the sea tides that determine the clearance of flood waters into the sea has become unpredictable due to global warming. In a context like this it is imperative for the Met office to urgently operationalise the multi-functional long range radar we have recently procured from Japan. Moreover, the latest understanding with India for transmission of flood-related information to Bangladesh on a 48-hour basis, instead of the 72-hour basis as in the past, must now come to good use.

We can see that the government has instructed some ministries and the Deputy Commissioners at the district level to be on the alert and mount preparedness against flood in good time. If we have learnt anything from the last flood it is this: we took too long a detour to believe it would be as bad as it really proved to be in the end. Some valuable lead time was lost there. Can we afford to, do it again?

We are voicing here a three-fold demand before the government: First of all, we want an authentic status report on the flood situation and preparedness. Secondly, a scientific prognostication of the calamity so that none of its stages catches us napping; and finally, a daily briefing on the situation from now on.

Show No Mercy

RASHIDA was engaged in a grim struggle for survival with her two children. She was living in a shanty at Lalbagh earning her keeps from the back breaking toll at brick chipping until she fell victim to the sexual greed of a bunch of local rogues allegedly led by Khalek on Saturday. Rashida in her sleep was attacked by the goons and as she refused to succumb to their greed Khalek beat her up mercilessly and finally poured acid on her person. As the passers-by gathered on hearing her screams the culprits fled away. She was taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition where she lost her fight against death on Sunday morning.

Shamsu Mia, Rashida's husband who works in Saudi Arabia, did not bother to look after his family. The result was the migration of Rashida to Dhaka from her village home in search of livelihood. The children have now been rendered orphan, and in the absence of near and dear ones, they seem thrown on the street. Only the other day Mayor Hanif thanked Haji Selim, the MP from Lalbagh area, for having eradicated crime in his area. Not a week has passed since and yet Rashida's life has been taken by scoundrels of the same locality.

Women like Rashida are being harassed across the country by organised gangs of mastans and terrorists. In the present case, the identification of the culprit or culprits is not in any doubt at all. We strongly feel that exemplary punishment should be meted out. Let us all hope that at least one such case has been dealt with properly.

BJP's Flawed Kargil Strategy

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

In the long run, nothing would suit Washington more than playing midwife to a South Asian Camp David. This will place it in the very heart of Asia, next to China, just where the Great Game was played between Russia and Imperial Britain.

SIX weeks into Operation Vijay, New Delhi is wildly oscillating between pressure to cross the Line of Control, and kowtowing to Washington to push Pakistan to withdraw forces from Kargil. Both approaches have grim consequences.

The first means escalating the conflict towards full-blown war, including a nuclear exchange. The second risks inviting Washington to become South Asia's policeman.

Under vacillation, the government's strategy is falling between two stools. Meanwhile, the Kargil toll mounts: Rs. 30,000 a day in supplies, Rs. 800 crores in ordnance, above all, loss of 200 lives and displacement of 260,000....

The government is whipping up chauvinism to duck Parliamentary debate and cover up its responsibility. Look at its Kargil record:

- It relaxed LoC surveillance, ignoring intelligence reports—until it was too late. It is guilty of strategic miscalculation, political misjudgment and breach of military command.

- It failed to use diplomacy and drafted troops into high-altitude zones without acclimatisation or snowshoes.

- It launched airstrikes without computing costs, or ef-

ficiency, conceded by air chief Tiplis to be unsatisfactory. A month later, it even intensified airstrikes.

The military results are indifferent. The army has pushed back intruders by three km (of the seven encroached). Its successes are largely limited to two of five sub-sectors.

In short, the government is replicating Mr George Fernandes' early errors. It cynically uses poor, sincere, jawans as fodder in its mills of chauvinism. The BJP, which has divided India as no other force, is now exhorting us to stand 'united'!

Its government is under two kinds of pressure. First, hawks want the army to cross the LoC. The chief of army staff on June 23 revealed as much. Inside the BJP, a vicious communalism is growing. This is expressed in full malevolence in the RSS weekly *Panchajanya* (June 20), which advocates the 'final solution' to 'centuries-old aggression' from 'Mohammad Bin Kasim to Mian Nawaz'.

The editorial demands India use nuclear weapons against Pakistan. This is because all Muslims are 'barbarians' by their 'very nature'. Nuclear weapons will 'finally' settle scores with them! Such fascist sentiments underlie the BJP-Jana Sangh's long obsession with nuclear weapons—an obsession independent of our security environment. These sentiments represent no 'lunatic fringe', but the Hinduva mainstream. They explain why the BJP decided, at the Sangh's behest, to conduct last year's nuclear tests. Mr Vajpayee hid that decision from his Cabinet and even from the defence chiefs till May 9. A small, unaccountable, Sangh-centred cabal, not the Cabinet, has called our nuclear shots.

No wonder there have been a dozen hostile verbal nuclear exchanges between India and Pakistan. Each has threatened the other with the 'ultimate weapon', 'any weapon', 'pre-emptive use'. For each mad mullah in Pakistan, there are ten Sangh fanatics with 'thermonuclear ripostes'.

Vajpayee confidante Brajesh Mishra brandished the nuclear

sword on June 20 when he said: 'We have a policy of no-first-use... But if any attempt is made against us, God forbid, we will go all out.' Mr Vajpayee and Mr Fernandes have since made provocative nuclear statements too.

At the opposite end, the government is under pressure from people like Mr Jaswant Singh to invite G-8 intervention in South Asia. As the *Washington Post* reveals, the G-8 Cologne statement was inspired by Mr Vajpayee's letter to Mr Bill Clinton, in which he speaks of pressures to cross the LoC.

This letter is a mix of entreaty and subtle blackmail. Like Pakistan's post-May 1998 tactic to exploit its weakness to win economic concessions, it was meant to push the U.S. to pressure Pakistan.

The Zinni-Lanpher visits fully support this assessment. A mid-level U.S. official doesn't turn up on a Sunday for a 45-minute meeting with India's National Security Adviser, unless there is prior Indo-U.S. agreement on 'mediation' or 'intervention'.

All this means only one

thing: granting the U.S. a privileged status in South Asia. Rationalisations can be trotted out—e.g. India has no supporters in NAM or the neighbourhood (a good question is, why?). But once the U.S. is privileged on Kargil, how can it be denied a role in Siachen or Kashmir?

In the long run, nothing would suit Washington more than playing midwife to a South Asian Camp David. This will place it in the very heart of Asia, next to China, just where the Great Game was played between Russia and Imperial Britain.

Whatever this might do for the BJP, it will undermine India's long struggle to minimise Great Power influence in this region. India will have become a U.S. camp-follower.

That is the deeper meaning of Mr Jaswant Singh's fantastic theory of Pakistan's 'global conspiracy' around Kargil: spread Islamic fundamentalism, 'jihad' and narcotics. This plays on the worst paranoia of the U.S. Right about 'fundamentalism'—to fight which 'Hindu India' must join

with America which is reported to have lent its support to India, by asking Pakistan to withdraw its 'intruders' from Indian territory. Of course, Pakistan replied that it had no control over these 'indigenous' Kashmiri 'freedom-fighters'. It has also asked America to take a 'balanced' stand on the issue, otherwise it would encourage India to be more hostile.

However, G-8 group leaders, where America is a powerful member, have issued a warning not to escalate the situation and show respect to the existing LoC, without naming Pakistan as the culprit. This has prompted former Indian Prime Minister Gujral to say that 'G-8' statement is likely to open a 'new window' to take the Kashmir issue back to UN. So the Vajpayee government has got more than what it wanted, indirectly, it has 'internationalised' the Kargil problem, and for that matter, Kashmir issue. The third party entered the scenario in a very subtle way.

Pakistan Faces Hard Music

Pakistan had to face the 'hard music' from one of its best allies—America. It has been pointed at as an 'intruder' into the Indian side of Kashmir for having violated the LoC, accepted as the official frontier between the two parts of Kashmir. LoC stretches over thousands of miles, spreading over plains and high mountain

peaks, including the 'highest battle field' in the world—Siachen sector, where Pakistan and Indian soldiers are on guard round the year. In this battle-field, more soldiers from both parties die of being frozen than in fighting every year. In the current fighting in Kargil and other sectors—in the cross-border artillery firing to destroy each other's 'camps', hundreds of innocent poor villagers have been uprooted from their hearths and homes along the LoC, and a large number of men, women and children killed. Besides, the heavy casualties of soldiers on both sides are a daily occurrence. But that doesn't seem to matter much to the diplomats. Soldiers are made to bear the brunt come any, what they are trained to do or die. To borrow a diplomatic parlance, they are 'expendable'.

Meanwhile, President Clinton has sent a high level delegation, headed by General Anthony Zinni, C-in-C, US Central Command, for holding talks in Islamabad and New Delhi to find ways to 'defuse' the worsening situation, said to be the 'worst' in the last 30 years. The delegation held talks with Pakistan Prime Minister and the Army Chief on the current situation in Kargil and other sectors. US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Gibson Lanpher, a member of the delegation that held talks in Islamabad, visited New Delhi on a 'briefing mis-

sion' on the outcome of the Islamabad talks. The whole 'operation' shows how America is deeply concerned about the deteriorating relations between the two Sub-continental neighbours which have recently gone nuclear. Undoubtedly, the two 'adolescents' need some sort of 'supervision' and 'guidance' to exercise full control on their newly acquired nuclear weapons. It is heartening to hear that both countries, under 'growing pressure' of America, are now considering a peace-plan, 'broached' in Islamabad, and perhaps 'brokered' by America, from behind the scene. Let us wait cross-fingered to see the outcome.

BJP Gains Big Mileage

One thing, however, is clear and certain. BJP has definitely gained huge 'mileage' over other political parties in India out of the present crisis. BJP has proved that it is a party that can face Pakistan's challenge and save the integrity of India at any cost. It has been successful in garnering international support, in its favour for its fight against 'Pakistan-backed intruders' and their 'ouster' from Indian soil. Now they can say boldly, and India's Defence Minister Fernandes has already announced that the 'intruders' will be cleared of Indian soil before September next, clearing the way for holding the scheduled mid-term election to the Indian Parliament. 'Let September come', is perhaps now the slogan of the Vajpayee government. Till then, let all concerned count their 'chicks', even before they are hatched.

The 'king-fisher' will have the last laugh!

The writer is a retired UN official.

'War-game' of Blood and Tears in Kashmir

by A M M Shahabuddin

It is heartening to hear that both countries, under "growing pressure" from America, are now considering a peace-plan, 'broached' in Islamabad, and perhaps 'brokered' by America, from behind the scene. Let us wait cross-fingered to see the outcome.

WHO is fishing in 'troubled waters'? This undoubtedly seems to be rather an odd question when we are being 'bombed' day in and day out, during the last six weeks or so, with incessant 'war of words' from distinguished political and national leaders of both India and Pakistan. India has accused Pakistan of backing Pak-trained militants who have intruded into the Indian Kashmir crossing the Line of Control (LoC), accepted by both countries as official 'frontiers' between the two parts of Kashmir under the Simla Agreement. The Pakistan-backed 'intruders' are said to be occupying huge areas inside Indian territory, on high mountain ranges. Pakistan denied all such allegations saying that it has no control over the guerrillas as they are 'indigenous' Kashmiri freedom-fighters. So India has gone into full military operation since May 9 last, with air and ground action to dislodge them from their occupied areas and push them back into Pakistan held Kashmir over the LoC and it claims success in doing so and re-establishing authority at many important 'points' recaptured from the intruders.

A Boiling Pot

The Kashmir problem is not a new. It has been there for the last 50 years. The boiling pot has been there all along, assuming more aggressive posture against India by the Kashmiris since 1989. During the last ten years over 20,000 people are said to have been killed, although the Kashmiris put the figure above 50,000. The border skirmishes are also not a new thing and there have been thousands over, the LoC with disputed frontiers overlapping each other. There have been serious Indo-Pak talks, held in New Delhi and Islamabad particularly during the last two years, to resolve all their disputes, including Kashmir, but with no tangible results. The BJP-led Indian government seems to have taken a more dashing approach to find a lasting solution to Indo-Pak problems, including Kashmir. And Vajpayee's most daring and plausible 'bus diplomacy' undertaken in February last rekindled new hopes in the minds of the peoples of the two

'hostile' countries to witness the dawn of a new era in their relations. The Lahore Declaration was considered a big mile-stone in their relations. The establishment of 'hot-line' between the two prime ministers to diffuse any crisis in the offing was looked upon as a great 'safety-valve' to avoid any deepening crisis, particularly when both the nations have successfully become 'nuclear powers'.

A 'Costly Divorce'?

But one fine morning everything collapsed like a house of cards. All hopes of a new era were dashed as an unexpected bolt from the blue dealt a deadly blow crushing all efforts to establish peace and harmony between the two peoples. Everybody was taken aback. How could this have happened, after taking all such nice reconciliatory measures? It was like a 'costly divorce' looming large on the horizon even before the Lahore 'honeymoon' ended. All sorts of wild questions crossed the confused minds of the two countries. Some were thinking how Nawaz Sharif, such a soft-spoken nice person, could play such a dubious game? Some others were grumbling how such a polished diplomat like Vajpayee, who showed so much sincerity in running the 'bus diplomacy' to Lahore with open arms to embrace people there, could stoop so low? Only history could reveal in due course what the real game was behind the scene. Some even asked: could it be a 'fixed' game between Sharif and Vajpayee? But it is better not to stretch your imaginations too far.

Bus Service Continuing: Hopes Not Yet Dead

It is better to be grounded with hard reality than to fly with questionable assumptions. Today, the fact of the matter is that 'war-cry' from both sides has gradually assumed threatening posture. Indian army officers are thinking

of even crossing the LoC to enter Pakistan-controlled Kashmir in pursuit of the fleeing intruders, subject to the approval by the political leaders, which is not likely to be forthcoming. Pakistan threatens that it is ready for any eventuality to defend 'every inch' of its territory. A dreadful 'war-like situation' is prevailing everywhere. The peoples of both countries are being fomented with a sort of 'war hysteria'. But where is the end? Nawaz Sharif has asked Vajpayee to put off the 'big fire', otherwise the peoples of both countries will suffer terrible losses. Indian Home Minister Advani is marching much ahead of Prime Minister Vajpayee when he called Pakistan a 'rogue' state and described it as a 'terrorist' state. But when two quarrelling parties call each other a 'thief' or a 'burglar', you need a 'third party' to hear both parties out and then deliver judgement. However, in the midst of a heavy storm and huge smoke and fire, there still burns a little lamp that raises feeble, but renewed, hopes about the future. And that is, the follow-up of Bajpayee's bus-ride to Lahore, the Lahore-New Delhi bus service is still operating, without any obstruction.

'G-8' Statement

As things in the 'war fields' of the now-famous Kargil Drass and other sectors on the Indian side of the LoC are sliding from bad to worse, both India and Pakistan have been put in a 'tight situation' of their own creation. Both are in the 'hot soup' of their own making. On the one hand, India, opposes tooth and nail any third party intervention in the Kashmir issue insisting that it is a bilateral problem between India and Pakistan. On the other hand, in the present context of things, India is trying hard to win international support to its side against Pakistan. It world sent emissaries to different capitals, including one to the 'G-8' group meeting held in Bonn, Germany. It has gained success

with America which is reported to have lent its support to India, by asking Pakistan to withdraw its 'intruders' from Indian territory. Of course, Pakistan replied that it had no control over these 'indigenous' Kashmiri 'freedom-fighters'. It has also asked America to take a 'balanced' stand on the issue, otherwise it would encourage India to be more hostile.

However, G-8 group leaders, where America is a powerful member, have issued a warning not to escalate the situation and show respect to the existing LoC, without naming Pakistan as the culprit. This has prompted former Indian Prime Minister Gujral to say that 'G-8' statement is likely to open a 'new window' to take the Kashmir issue back to UN. So the Vajpayee government has got more than what it wanted, indirectly, it has 'internationalised' the Kargil problem, and for that matter, Kashmir issue. The third party entered the scenario in a very subtle way.

Pakistan Faces Hard Music

Pakistan had to face the 'hard music' from one of its best allies—America. It has been pointed at as an 'intruder' into the Indian side of Kashmir for having violated the LoC, accepted as the official frontier between the two parts of Kashmir. LoC stretches over thousands of miles, spreading over plains and high mountain

peaks, including the 'highest battle field' in the world—Siachen sector, where Pakistan and Indian soldiers are on guard round the year. In this battle-field, more soldiers from both parties die of being frozen than in fighting every year. In the current fighting in Kargil and other sectors—in the cross-border artillery firing to destroy each other's 'camps', hundreds of innocent poor villagers have been uprooted from their hearths and homes along the LoC, and a large number of men, women and children killed. Besides, the heavy casualties of soldiers on both sides are a daily occurrence. But that doesn't seem to matter much to the diplomats. Soldiers are made to bear the brunt come any, what they are trained to do or die. To borrow a diplomatic parlance, they are 'expendable'.

Meanwhile, President Clinton has sent a high level delegation, headed by General Anthony Zinni, C-in-C, US Central Command, for holding talks in Islamabad and New Delhi to find ways to 'defuse' the worsening situation, said to be the 'worst' in the last 30 years. The delegation held talks with Pakistan Prime Minister and the Army Chief on the current situation in Kargil and other sectors. US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Gibson Lanpher, a member of the delegation that held talks in Islamabad, visited New Delhi on a 'briefing mis-

sion' on the outcome of the Islamabad talks. The whole 'operation' shows how America is deeply concerned about the deteriorating relations between the two Sub-continental neighbours which have recently gone nuclear. Undoubtedly, the two 'adolescents' need some sort of 'supervision' and 'guidance' to exercise full control on their newly acquired nuclear weapons. It is heartening to hear that both countries, under 'growing pressure' of America, are now considering a peace-plan, 'broached' in Islamabad, and perhaps 'brokered' by America, from behind the scene. Let us wait cross-fingered to see the outcome.

BJP Gains Big Mileage

One thing, however, is clear and certain. BJP has definitely gained huge 'mileage' over other political parties in India out of the present crisis. BJP has proved that it is a party that can face Pakistan's challenge and save the integrity of India at any cost. It has been successful in garnering international support, in its favour for its fight against 'Pakistan-backed intruders' and their 'ouster' from Indian soil. Now they can say boldly, and India's Defence Minister Fernandes has already announced that the 'intruders' will be cleared of Indian soil before September next, clearing the way for holding the scheduled mid-term election to the Indian Parliament. 'Let September come', is perhaps now the slogan of the Vajpayee government. Till then, let all concerned count their 'chicks', even before they are hatched.

The 'king-fisher' will have the last laugh!

The writer is a retired UN official.

South Asia Needs a Peace Process

by Stephen P. Cohen

In South Africa, the Middle East and Northern Ireland, the U.S. and other countries have supported a long-term process of regional reconciliation. Like these other war-torn regions, South Asia needs its own peace process, which over time can be strengthened by the emergence of new generations in both India and Pakistan who are no longer obsessed with the struggles of their parents and grandparents.

THE military conflict between India and Pakistan over the Kargil area in Kashmir could yet turn into a major regional crisis. Hard-liners in both countries mistakenly believe that they can exhaust their opponent by a slow-motion, low-intensity war. But given the two sides' newly developed nuclear capabilities, the conflict in Kashmir is no longer just an ugly sideshow; it is a serious threat to stability in South Asia that will require a long-term, international peace process. Like the Middle East, South Asia has become a global concern.

India and Pakistan are locked in a complex struggle. Like a Russian *matruska* doll, Kargil is nested within the larger Kashmir problem, which in turn is nested within a still larger India-Pakistan problem. Although the dispute over Kashmir began more than 50 years ago, the current crisis is the result of a bold Pakistani incursion earlier this year across the Line of Control, the post-1972 name for the old cease-fire line. The Pakistanis caught the Indians by surprise, but like Pearl Harbor real victory may be an illusion. India responded by unleashing its air power in Kashmir for the first time, representing a significant escalation of the conflict.

Despite the hope that the Line of Control would evolve into a permanent border, neither state now seems to accept this most logical of solutions. Pakistan cannot bring itself to back away from its demand for a plebiscite on independence in India-held Kashmir, where it has long provided support for local Kashmiri Muslim separatists. For its part, India refuses to hold such a plebiscite (which would undoubtedly result in a vote for independence from both India and Pakistan), while maintaining a claim to 'Azad' Kashmir, which it calls 'Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.'

Across the border thus initiating a full-scale war with Islamabad. The worst-case scenario is that this episode will lead one side to use nuclear weapons. Nuclear strategists in both countries have discussed the use of 'tactical' or battlefield nuclear weapons, and barren Kargil and its environs would be an ideal place to use them.

Although the Kashmir situation looks murky at best when viewed from close, it should serve as an object-lesson in what happens when outside parties with interests and influence in the region—the U.S. in particular—allow problems to fester. Washington has been

disengaged from South Asia for years. Its only consequential diplomatic initiative has been the talks between Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and his Indian and Pakistani counterparts. These talks, now in abeyance after eight rounds, were initiated only in the wake of the nuclear tests of May 1998, and do not focus on the causes of regional conflict.

Fortunately, there are other approaches that are at once subtle and more promising. In South Africa, the Middle East and Northern Ireland, the U.S. and other countries have supported a long-term process of regional reconciliation. Like these other war-torn regions, South Asia needs its own peace process, which over time can be strengthened by the emergence of new generations in both India and Pakistan who are no longer obsessed with the struggles of their parents and grandparents. Such a process might also benefit from the widespread realization that economic development in South Asia has fallen behind East Asia, Southeast Asia and even parts of Africa. Finally, the process could be helped by the more active engagement of the smaller South Asian states. These would be the first victims of a large-scale India-Pakistan conflict. While wary of antagonizing India, they can certainly help mobilize the international community.

It is far too soon to talk of a 'Camp David' for South Asia, but it is not too soon for the concerted states of the international community to bestir themselves. If not, the fighting now taking place over the Kargil Road will either be repeated in one guise or another or lead to a wider war. If ever there was reason to care about the battles taking place in Asia's hinterlands, this must certainly be it.

The author is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute. This article appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* on June 24, 1999

To the Editor...

Indo-Pak war

Sir, The Indo-Pak cross border tensions are indeed a matter of concern for all the inhabitants of the sub-continent. The situation is escalating day-by-day towards a full fledged war. It is obvious that when one of these *nouveau* nuclear powers is on the verge of losing in the conventional war, it would not hesitate resorting to its nuclear defences. It is thus useless to lie back complacently by just asking for the enforcement of restraint of nuclear missiles.

This grave situation immediately calls for pragmatic intervention of the G-8 to wiff off the imminent disaster bound to have a detrimental influence on the whole South-East region.

Ms Manjari Dhamandi, Dhaka.

Change the leadership

Sir, It appears that some of our political leaders of both the ruling and the opposition parties are either suffering from superiority complex or inferiority complex for their own shortcomings, imperfection and fault. They are always engaged in making charges and counter charges against their opponents, attacking, condemning and finding fault with one another for their personal gain and profit.

Why don't these political leaders come forward telling the people their own drawback, corruption, inefficiency, dishonesty, abuse of power, mistakes and accumulation of wealth?

Can anyone claim and prove that any of our government headed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin, Manoor Ahmed, Khondkar Mustaq, Ziaur Rahman, Justice Sayem, Justice Satter, H M Er-

shad, Begum Khaleda Zia or Sheikh Hasina has been neat, clean, judicious, pious, corruption free and efficient?

We are in desperate need of a revolutionary change in the growth, selection and election of leadership of our different political parties.

We have two major political parties in our country. We have observed and tasted the activities and performances of both. Almost everything appears to be in a hotch-potch, disarray and confusion. We fail to see any light at the end of the tunnel.

We feel it's time for a change.

O. H. Kabir 6, Hare Street, Wari Dhaka-1203.

Publicity and new demands

Sir, At intervals of one year, I searched in the bazaar, as a retail consumer, for locally produced corn oil and sunflower oil (good for health); but the same are not available. I am offered imported corn and sunflower oils, which are too expensive for a middle-class family.

Today mustard oil has been replaced by imported soyabean oil as the main cooking medium. There is no government publicity or efforts on easy marketing of alternative local edible oils, to reduce the huge foreign exchange spent on import of edible oils (the cycle is similar to the huge import of powder milk, which has now come down to half the value).

This huge dependence on imports for a major cooking medium must not be allowed to continue as per national policy. The official publicity is not enough on this issue.

Thus there is a gap between R&D, new varieties developed, and the marketing of improved products, through the development of proper distribution sys-

tems, so that the farmers and cultivators do not become hostage to the private middlemen (the service sector is weak). Our land is fertile and production at the rural end is enough, but the distribution and marketing of agricultural products are still lagging far behind. Initially this arrangement cannot be left entirely in the hands of the private sector, because the farmers do not have the economic, financial and holding or bargaining capacity against the private financial businessmen.

The role of the bigger local NGOs in helping to develop the base of the storage, transportation, distribution, and marketing of rural products have to be spotlighted for public awareness. Also,

The whole chain has to be made workable, and the weak points in the chain removed.

A Zabr Dhaka.

BR exam

Sir, The Bankers Recruitment (BR) examination is going to be held very soon. But the question is where the examination will be held? The centre is only in Dhaka and the applicants who do not stay in Dhaka will have to face a tremendous problem.

A candidate will have to pay a large amount of money for transport, to stay in Dhaka and other expenditure which will be really a burden. If the candidate is a female, she will have to face more problems and need to spend more than a male applicant.

Note that the BCS exam is also held in some centres out of Dhaka.

So I fervently request to the BRC to arrange examination centres in every division.

Abdul Hye Chowdhury SUST, Sylhet.