Israeli aid

Hidden cooperation revealed

Rehovot

AFTER a decade of discreet silence, Israel's programme of scientific and technical cooperation with developing nations has suddenly surfaced. Last month, the International Cooperation Department of the Foreign Ministry announced that Israel had hosted 28,000 trainees from developing countries between 1958 and 1983, and during that same period some 8,500 Israeli experts had worked overseas.

The programme really began in 1957, when Israel helped to create Ghana's Black Star Shipping Line and to organize Ghana's Trade Union Congress. In the years that followed, cooperation flourished on many levels.

During that period, Israel worked not only with national governments but even with some liberation movements, for example training nurses from underground groups in Mozambique and Angola. Although most developing countries cut off diplomatic relations with Israel after the Yom Kippur War in 1973, it now

appears that cooperation has continued with most of them, but quietly.

The emphasis of these programmes has always been on agriculture, but experience has shown that transferring technical know-how is much easier than transferring social forms. The so-called "Rehovot Approach" to integrated rural planning, has, however, proved itself in many developing countries. The aim of this approach, taught so far to 1,000 students from 50 countries at the Rehovot Settlement Study Centre, is to make life in rural areas more attractive so as to stem the flood of country people to urban slums.

The seven-month course, four months of which are spent in Israel, concentrates on the creation of new jobs as well as of a network of economic, social and community services. Comprehensive plans have been prepared for the Lampang Region of Thailand, the Neru Region in central Kenya and several places in Latin America. One group of Israeli experts is now working in Fiji on plans for a multi-purpose rural services centre and the development of rural cooperatives, in collaboration with no fewer than 20 Fijians who have studied in Israel.

In medicine, Israel no longer provides a full-scale six-year course in medicine for students from developing countries, but instead a one-year course in public health and an MA course in community medicine. Much of the effort is concentrated in ophthalmology, as the result of which a dozen African countries have advanced eye clinics. Feasibility studies are first carried out by Israeli physicians; local doctors and nurses are brought to Israel for specialized training and, finally, expatriate Israelis are seconded to this clinic for a couple of years.

As might be expected in a country with enormous financial problems, there are people in Israel who question the wisdom of spending money on cooperation with nations which often do not have diplomatic relations with Israel, and which regularly vote against Israel in the United Nations. Mr Johanan Bein, director of the Foreign Ministry's International Cooperation Department, is philosophical. He says that the total cost of the programme is not large and that more than half of Israel's costs are borne by other countries, mainly in Western Europe, which sub-contract work in fields such as arid-zone agriculture.

Bein also notes that a few African countries, including Zaire and Liberia, have recently re-established diplomatic relations, and that in others without formal links, such as Nigeria, the Ivory Coast and Ghana, Israeli companies are now involved in development programmes much larger than the Israeli Government could have mounted. There are also hopes of a further political payoff, illustrated by the fact that among the 13,000 students from 100

nations who have participated in labour studies programmes run by Israel's General Federation of Labour, there are now 37 secretary-generals of union federations, 300 chairmen or secretary-generals of individual unions, over 150 members of parliament and several dozen ministers, including three prime ministers.

Politics apart, there is also a sense of mission. Forty years ago, chemist Chaim Weizmann, due to become Israel's first president, was corresponding with Maung Kyi (deputy secretary of the Burmese National Planning Department) and with a number of Indians, including Jawaharlal Nehru, about possible scientific cooperation between the Jewish State on the one hand, and India and Burma on the other. Even at the lowest point in relations between Israel and the governments of developing countries in 1973, when most of her long-time friends had turned their backs on her, Golda Meir, then prime minister, said that political disagreements were "no excuse for disowning or belittling . . . an attempt on the part of one country to better human life in other countries".

Nechemia Meyers

Israelis visiting China

Rehovot

AMBIGUITY continues to attend the status of Israelis making scientific visits to the People's Republic of China. So much is clear from the experience of Dr Smil Ruhman, professor at the Weizmann Institute, at the First International Conference on Computers and their Applications in Beijing this summer.

Although Ruhman was an invited speaker listed (with his affiliation) on the programme, he notes that Israel was not listed among the overseas countries participating in a report on the conference published in the *China Daily*. Technically, this may have been correct, because Ruhman entered China on a US passport, having dual nationality.

Others, such as Mordhai Avron, have been less fortunate. Invited by the organizers of the 11th International Sea-weed Symposium to give a talk at Qingdao in June 1983, and listed in the official programme, Avron was told to apply for a visa in some country with which China has diplomatic relations. In the event, he was told by the Chinese Embassy in the United States that a visa could not be issued there and, eventually, by the conference organizer, Dr Tseng, that the invitation to speak was conditional on possession of a visa.

Ironically, Ruhman has returned from China brimming with enthusiasm for the opportunities for collaboration, in which, he says, Israel has some distinctive developments to offer the Chinese. He, like many others, hopes that Chinese policy on passports will change.

Nechemia Meyers

Democratic elitism

CHINA, as part of its policy of reversing the anti-intellectual attitudes of the Cultural Revolution, has inaugurated a scheme of state awards for "the promotion of scientific and technological advances". State prizes for science are a feature of most socialist societies, but the Chinese regulations, promulgated last month, contain a unique feature — the decision of the adjudicators is not final.

According to the recommended procedure, the names of the winners chosen by a special examination committee must be published at least three months before the awards are conferred. Complaints against the winners may be lodged within that period. Such complaints will then be investigated by "appraisal units", who will then report back to the examining committee for a final decision. If no complaints are sustained, the winners will receive their prizes.

There are three classes of award, each consisting of a citation and medal together with a sum of money (15,000 yuan — £5,000 — for a first class award, down to 5,000 yuan for a third class). Provision is also made for a "special-class" award, of greater (but unspecified) monetary value, for a "scientific and technological advance that makes special contributions to socialist modernization".

In the case of joint achievements, the cash is to be divided "rationally" according to the contributions of individual team members to the project, with those who made greater contributions getting the greater rewards. "It is impermissible", the regulations warn "to practise egalitarianism."

Vera Rich