orate and hard realities like

ambitions, power struggle and

other factors come to the fore.

Already with their confidence

that Congress will form the

next government, lobbies have

been at work to project some

leaders like Mr Pawar of Maha-

rashtra as "national leader"

rather than regional ones. The

challenge will surface soon

when the issue of the election

of the parliamentary party

leader comes up after the

polls, even if the Congress

does not go to power. The

leadership crisis is likely to be

more acute if Congress wins

majority seats in the Lok

loyalty to Rajiv, is drawn from

his Doon school friends or bu-

reaucrats. This group is known

to have wielded considerable

influence during Rajiv's time

and may find it difficult to

Dhaka, Wednesday, June 12, 1991

Curing Our Health Woes

Addressing a conference of doctors in Dhaka on Sunday. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia raised several points which should provide a good basis for approaching the issue of health care in Bangladesh in a comprehensive manner. However the PM's complaints about doctors being reluctant to go to upazilas is not a new one, nor is her observation about the city's private health clinics being too expensive for the urban poor. But the mere fact that the PM herself has raised the points indicates, hopefully, that the government intends to act.

But what we are not so comfortable with is Prime Minister's assertion that a medical university would soon be established. Considering that we do not have the capacity to absorb all the graduates currently produced by the six existing medical colleges, and that the standard of the output vary widely from college to college, the case for a whole new institution, with rather debatable cost-effectiveness, does not seem a very strong one. It would be far wiser to use the available resources to make existing facilities more efficient.

The problem with doctors in upazilas is a most serious one, since the bulk of our population lives in rural areas. Poor management, lack of medicines and proper maintenance of equipment have robbed upazila health complexes and substations of much of their intended usefulness. Furthermore, chronic absenteeism among doctors posted at upazilas has itself become a disease in need of urgent cure. A great deal of efforts and resources now need to be expended in order to rejuvenate this grass-roots level of medical care. Ways have to be found, through consultations with medical associations, to provide the necessary incentives as well as inspiration for doctors to approach rural duties in a more positive frame of mind.

The surplus of doctors we have at present in effect means wastage of trained and educated human resources. We need to search for ways to utilise these resources created at an enormous cost to the taxpayer in the first place. One idea is to offer preferential credit facilities to doctors to set up private clinics in rural areas. Many doctors remain idle due to lack of employment or funds. Financial institutions should move to fill this credit gap, allow doctors to apply skills at home rather than in foreign countries and increase the level of medicare available to rural folk.

However, doctors in upazilas form only one aspect of rural health care, and the issue has to be approached in conjunction with other initiatives. One such initiative can be the setting up of a programme to train and recruit paramedics, who can play a significant role in rural areas, particularly in villages away from upazila centres at union level. Cadres of well-trained and motivated medics could play a vital role, not only at times of epidemics, but at all other times.

The essential approach should be to emphasise primary health care, with prevention being the main focus of the drive. The community itself, with help from para-medics and rural doctors. can then look after its own health needs, minimising the necessity for expensive hospital care and excessive dependence on medicines. For that, of course, we need to have a thorough campaign to disseminate health-related information right through to the grass-roots level. Community and personal hygiene, along with proper nutrition, for instance, can go a long way towards eliminating the threat of many diseases such as diarrhoea and cholera. The problems are well-know and the issues well-charted, what we need now is action. But it has to be a kind of action that involves every level of society, from the professionals at the top right down to the landless villager in the union.

Farewell and Thanks

The members of the US Task Force are leaving Bangladesh today, after performing a highly commendable humanitarian task. Soldiers usually defend their own country and destroy whatever is targeted for them under the term 'enemy'. Seldom are they involved in humanitarian operations, and that too thousands of miles away in a far-flung third country. The U S Task Force, by coming to the assistance of the cyclone-hit people of Bangladesh has set a new and eminently laudable challenge before soldiers everywhere to come to the aid of the suffering humanity. We express our sincere thanks to them and to the soldiers, technicians, and professionals of all other countries who, so generously, came to the assistance of Bangladesh at a very critical period in our life.

Given the enormity of the task and the challenging circumstances under which it had to be accomplished, the US Task Force did an efficient and timely job that aided our own relief efforts and greatly helped to reduce the suffering of our people. Their presence gave us the needed extra boost that made the relief operation more effective and fast.

It is not the huge tonnage of food and essential items they ferried or the number of sorties they flew that is so unique here; but the fact that thousands of war weary soldiers, eager to return home awaiting reunion with their families, should take the time and make the effort to help the needy, the injured and the destitute.

Their, action and those of the other countries, set a new example, worthy of emulation by all, of humanitarian assistance in the otherwise complicated and wordy world of international cooplation.

Congress after Rajiv — Challenges and Prospects

HE second phase of Indian elections begins How will Congress fare ? Will it be brought back to power in a sympathy vote for Rajiv ? What is going to happen to the Congress party, as a result of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination? These are some of the questions uppermost in the mind of India watchers. How the party faces the situation after the death of its president attracts world attention for many reasons. For, the future of the Indian politics and the challenges and prospects facing a traditionally dominant political organisation in India are inseparably linked with the functioning of world's largest democracy. Rajiv was a highrisk political figure, particularly after the failure of his peace overtures in Punjab and later in Sri Lanka. Yet the Congress was taken by surprise by Mr Gandhi's death at an obscure place in southern Tamil Nadu state last month. It is interesting to see how the one hundred and six year old political organisation that led India to freedom from the British rule copes with the situation. The crisis facing the party has been particularly compounded because of the timing of the death of Mr Rajiv Gandhi, coming as it did midway through an election which itself is seen crucial for the future of the country. In fact the death of Rajiv's mother Mrs Indira Gandhi, who was both prime minister and Congress president when she was assassinated in 1984, did not create a

ated by her son's killing. The situation before the Congress today, therefore, is something the organisation never faced and the subject of speculations about Indian political scene is now on the

void comparable to that cre-

crisis within the Congress itself and how the organisation deals with the leadership issue as the party goes the elections and the post-election devel-

opments. The refusal by Rajiv's widow Italian-born Sonia Gandhi to steer the Congress at a critical phase following the killing of her husband disappointed some party leaders. After wavering for some time, they chose Mr P V Narasimha Rao as interim party president. Mr Rao, a senior party leader, was successful as a minister and is known for intellectual qualities but less for organisational capability. His appointment was a measure to prevent further controversy over the party leadership since Mr Rao is more acceptable because of his

by Zaglul A Chowdhury

an old and vast political organ-

isation ! to monopolise inflüence over For all their qualities as the party. He concentrated more on running the governparty chiefs and government functionaries, today's sad specment. His political acumen, tacle in the Congress owes secular outlook and sagacity much to Indira Gandhi and Rahad made him the automatic jiv Gandhi's handling of the orchoice for prime ministership ganisation. Many Congressmen until his death in 1964. The do not feel happy with a situa-"Nehruvian" trend did not die tion when the organisation had with his death as his daughter to lean on the widow of Rajiv took up the reigns after a brief for leadership of a party known interregnum. What, however, for nurturing growth of politiappeared somewhat disturbing cal leaders. Jawaharlal Nehru for the Congressmen was that became Congress president for Indira Gandhi introduced her the first time in 1939 and own style in organisation while Indira Gandhi in 1957 and her running the government both through a long political was in Nehru line and earned

> The Congress has been without any elections for last

acclamation

that Nehru made no attempts

gressmen are stressing the need for "collective leadership" in the organisation even though an interim president has been chosen. This highlights the precarious condition of the party. There is no scope for a single leader to run the affairs of the organisation with full authority. Even the choice of Mr Narasimha Rao would have run into problems had he not been asked to occupy the top organisational position only temporarily. There are experienced and dynamic leaders in the party but they have not been allowed to come in the forefront at the national level and consequently, many of as "group" leaders.

them are seen as the leaders of a particular "region" like the Another factor that could be potentially dangerous in the "Hindi belt" or "South" or even leadership issue is the "coterie" that had emerged surrounding Rajiv in last few years. This group, mostly made up of persons having personal

> push through its wishes now. As the Congressmen are slowly recovering from the shock of the untimely and tragic death of their leader. new options are being examined by the party leaders. Restructuring of the organisation may be premature now, but partymen are examining the issue. Future of the Congress party lies in how quickly and smoothly they overcome the present leadership crisis and following that how much it can democratise the inner work-

> The writer, who was posted in New Delhi as a correspondent, is a regular contributor

ings of the party machinery.

With the selection of Narasimha Rao as party president, for the moment or at least for the foreseeable future the hold of the 'Nehru dynasty' on the helm of affairs of the most well-known political organisation has come to an end. But the question is how could an organisation like Congress come to a situation where it had to turn to the foreign-born wife of its slain leader for leadership?

less involvement in party affairs compared to many other Congress leaders who are perhaps more competent but are potentially controversial because of their involvement in factionalism and group politics

within the organisation.

With the selection of Mr Rao as party president, for the moment or at least for the foreseeable future, the hold of the "Nehru dynasty" on the helm of affairs of the most well-known political organisation not only of India but in this region, has come to an end. But the question is how could an organisation like the Congress come to a situation where it has to turn to the foreign-born wife of the its slain leader for leadership when there would have been no paucity of leaders for such

coming less and less frequent in the later years when Rajiv become Congress president in late 1984 after assuming prime ministership in the wake of his mother's death. The move was welcomed by the Congressmen although not unanimously. Since then not once did Rajiv hold any election for the party hierarchy.

process. During their time the

election to Congress presi-

dency was a regular affair, be-

It is possible to trace the leadership issue of Congress to the Nehru era when he himself did not take kindly the leadership challenges of Sardar Ballavbhai Patel, Mr P D Tandon or Acharya Kripalini. But despite critics' contentions that Nehru seldom encouraged the second line of leadership, it can at least be said that there was strong claimants for the post of prime ministership. One can reasonably argue

fifteen years. Sycophancy reached its peak when Congress president D K Barooah once said "India is Indira". Party leaders looked for nominations rather than elections in the organisation and patronage of the "Nehrus" was considered as essential qualification to adorn the high organisational positions. During Indira, and later, Rajiv's time, a provision was made for a "working president" while the prime minister held the position of the party president. The working president, late Kamalapati Tripathi often gave vent to feelings for complete separation of the posts of the chiefs of the government and of the organisation, but his

clamour was seldom heeded. Today, after the refusal of Mrs Sonia Gandhi the Con-

Sathe (Maharashtra). Arjun Singh (Madhya Pradesh). Balram Jhakar (Punjab). Sharad Pawar (Maharashtra), Mr N D Tiwari (Uttar Pradesh), Mr Karunakaran (Kerala), Mr Gulam Nabi Azad (Kashmir) and Mr Pranab Kumar Mukherjee. Mr S S Ray and Mr A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury (West Bengal) have all stressed the need for a "consensus" in choosing the permanent party president and the leader of the Congress parliamentary party after the election.

Leaders like Mr Vasant

The talk of "collective leadership" notwithstanding, leadership issue in the Congress could accentuate as the grief and shock that have gripped the organisation and the Indian people would slowly evap-

on the Indian scene.

is split. A wide range of out-

Why Cameroon Wants to Join the Commonwealth

by Kaye Whiteman

French West Africa

Nigeria

How British Cameroon

HE application from this West African republic of 10 million people was first mooted in 1989. Cameroon has been pressured into membership of the French language grouping. sometimes known as la francophonie.

As a bilingual country, with French and English as official this action by joining the sisted links with either for

Owing to misunderstandings about observer status (the Commonwealth has no observers) the application was made in the wrong way, and too late. It was thus not possible to give it serious consideration at the last Commonwealth summit in Kuala Lumpur, in

A ministerial delegation

The rationale for Cameroon's application comes western-most provinces were and are still described as

English-speaking. It does not matter that not all the two million people in those provinces do not in fact speak fluent English. Less than half the eight million in the rest of Cameroon can make real claim to be Frenchspeaking. The terms anglophone and francophone are

In 1961 those provinces voted to join Cameroon, thus almost recreating the old pre-1914 German colony. But for more than 40 years they were ruled by the British from

After former French Cameroon became independent plebiscites were held in 1961 to decide the fate of the neighbouring British Cameroons. They led to the north joining Nigeria and the south going to Cameroon. In 1972 the federal republic of Cameroon became a unitary state under an increasingly authoritarian government. Now, as multipartyism takes root it is applying to join the Commonwealth.

languages, it wants to balance Commonwealth, having re-

October 1989.

from Cameroon was present, but cooled its heels in the corridors. Now, however, a serious application has been made. It will be considered first in London in June, then at the next full summit in Harare in October. It could prove a vital element in Cameroon's increasingly fragile political stability.

from the fact that the two once administered by Britain,

thus highly relative. Nigeria, first as a League of

Cameroon



Nations mandate, then as a UN

trust territory. The British colonial tie was a real one, and although after 1961 the British largely lost interest in Cameroon, the English-speaking

Cameroonians kept the British connection alive, especially through educational ties.

The English language was never dropped. In the idealism of Cameroonian reunification, the francophone elite was obliged to learn English. For years, the reunification seemed to be working. There were especially no regrets when the anglophone area escaped the Nigerian civil war

in the Sixties. In 1972 came a major blow. President Ahidjo staged a constitutional coup, and abolished the federation which had been the basis of reunification in 1961. To many "west of the

Mungo" — the river which divides the old West Cameroon from the rest - federation had

seemed a guarantee of their

liberties.

The de facto single party created in 1966 also created unhappiness, as did the spread of Ahidjo's repressive security system. The "anglos", as the French-speakers came to call them, became disillusioned with their lot - a disillusion fuelled by the Seventies oil booms. Although most of Cameroon's oil is offshore from the anglophone areas, they felt they profited little from the vast revenues.

The main battlefields, however, were legal and educational. Administratively, there was French-style centralisation with prefects, as well as the gendarmerie, but the integration of two contrasting legal systems has still not been perfeetly achieved.

Likewise attempts to centralise the education system have caused mounting resentment at the apparent disadvantages suffered by the anglophones.

South to

Cameroon

500miles/800km

British

Cameroon

Ironically, these concerns became aggravated when President Paul Btya, a southerner, succeeded the northerner Ahidjo in 1982. Hopes were high that Biya might have ushered in an era of liberalisa-

After some modest moves in that direction, a bloody but unsuccessful coup by northerners in April 1984 brought back tight security.

In 1989-90, Cameroon, like other African countries, began to be affected by the agitation for greater democracy. It was certainly ripe for change. But Biya all along has been reluctant to concede, and has

seemed to be yielding to pres-

For the anglophones, the moment of truth came on May 20 1990. A new political party. the Social Democratic Front (SDF) staged a rally in Bamenda. No permission had been given, and after the rally, police fired at peaceful returning crowds and killed six youths.

No such brutality had been seen before in the anglophone areas, in 30 years of independence. The shock was profound. A month later, Biya conceded the point on multi-par-

In between he had been to a Franco-African summit and been lectured by President Francois Mitterrand on democracy.

It was too late for the hearts and minds of the anglos, who have been at the centre of mounting opposition. Few would go as far as the extled lawyer Gorji Dinka, who advocates an "independent republic of Ambazonia" (after the Ambas One offshore oilfield), but a wide range of opinion west of the Mungo now favours a return to federation.

In the last two months Biya has faced mounting tension, violent demonstrations and strikes, as he has refused the demand for a "national conference." He has appointed a northern Prime Minister, Sadou Hayatou, and released political prisoners, but everything has seemed to be done grudgingly.

Multi-partyism now exists, and even his own ruling party

spoken independent newspapers now exist. But both parties and press are still harassed by the hated political police, the CENER, and other arms of the security forces. Populations are beginning to separate. The bi-lingual university of Yaounde, has virtually disintegrated.

In such troubled circumstances, the question is bound to be asked: Is this the right time for the Commonwealth to accept Cameroon, even if other criteria are met ?

The answer must be a categoric Yes. If there were an embattled French-speaking minority in an English-speaking country, would not the francophones do everything in their power to show solidarity?

Now the Commonwealth is not, nor should be, a specifically linguistic grouping, even if English is its only working language.

The actual and potential ties of Cameroon with the Commonwealth, however, cannot be ignored, especially because of the lifelines and international connections it can

Nigeria will be strongly pressing Cameroon's case. Cameroon stability involves Nigerian stability, and the internal balance in Cameroon is increasingly a Nigerian interest, although Nigeria has to tread carefully, as it can easily be presented as a bogeyman.

The only objection might be that the Cameroonian president does not speak good English, and Commonwealth summits allow no interpreters. That seems like a quibble faced with the geo-political imperatives, involving both African stability and democracy, which are now in play. -**GEMINI NEWS**

KAYE WHITEMAN is Editor-in-Chief of the weekly magazine West Africa.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Railway

Sir, It is disquieting to note that Bangladesh Railway is incurring loss to the tune of Tk. 140 crore annually. A poor country like Bangladesh cannot afford the pain of such colossal loss in one service sector alone. Every year before presentation of budget we hear about the colossal loss of railway. But, why the situation has not been improved. It is an admitted fact that railway journey is still comfortable and safer. But why travelling passengers are avoiding it? Why traders are not sending their goods by railway? There are a lot of reasons which have declined the earning of the rail-

The trains do not run in time. The compartments, in

most cases, do not have nominal facilities like light, fan, water etc. There are no enough security measures in trains. The genuine travellers do not get seat, whereas it is always occupied by the ticketless passengers. The Inter City trains have already developed habit of late running. Inter City train tickets, sometimes, are not easily available. During festival time these tickets are sold in blackmarket. In the case of goods- train, wagons are not easily available. Booked goods cannot reach the destination within time. There are also reports of pilferage, and also that of surplus staff.

All measures be taken to provide basic facilities in the trains. The trains should run strictly on time. All ticket

checkers must be given a target of recovery of revenue in their respective areas. The freely available. The security measures be tightened, pilferage checked and the surplus staff utilised in other sectors. The railway land presently occupied by others should be recovered and given on long lease. This way railway may not remain a loosing sector.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury Sonali Bank, Principal Office, Barisal.

Domestic Savings

Sir, We have been listening to sermons on the virtues of domestic savings since Pakistani days. Normally domestic savings comprises savings and investments in banks, insurances, share purchase etc. I paid Tk 750 per annum for a Postal Life Insurance policy for 20 yrs and received Tk 24,800/- as final settlement. could then buy six tolas of gold with one year's premium but now with 20 yrs premium and profit I cannot buy six to-

las of gold. The Investment Corporation of Bangladesh's annual reports show that 50% goods-train must run timely of the companies could not pay and the wagons should be any dividend on an average during the last four years. Many companies failed to give dividend for the past consecutive four years while government is crying for privatisation. Several deductions are made on bank deposits, bank accounts etc. Thus how the government expects domestic savings unless proper incentives are given! Let the authority look into the matter seriously and honestly. Sadik Ali

Moghbazar, Dhaka.

Where default is at a premium!

Sir, From time to time one comes across prominent advertisements put in by the WASA and the PDB at considerable public cost, offering special concessions to defaulters if they paid up their arrear dues within a particular period. The concessions represent a total exemption of all

accumulated surcharge and interest which are public money. Are not such exemptions tantamount to a premium on default as well as an open invitation to the defaulters to continue to default in the future too in order to enable them to obtain similar exemptions at the cost of non-defaulters?

Surely, it would seem more logical if the defaulters were required to pay all arrears with surcharge and interest within a particular period, failing which the surcharge and interest would be enhanced at a higher rate. I suppose, everything in our country is upside down, such as an honest businessman having to pay five to six times more tax than a dishonest one who, by not paying tax regularly, accumulates plenty of black money and suddenly one day is permitted to make his black money white by paying only a fraction of what was otherwise due by

A. Qayyum

US Task Force

Sir, Every coin has two sides and we can argue for ever the motives of the US Marines' arrival in Bangladesh for cyclone relief work.

But talking to the affected people and seeing what has been accomplished, one cannot doubt the benefit and miracle the US Task Force has accomplished within such a short time as they carried out their relief operation. Let us be a grateful nation and thank the US Marines, President Bush and the people of the United States of America for coming forward in such a way with such a great help in such a short time. It was a humanitarian cause and they have done a humanitarian deed. It goes to prove that an army is not just for "fighting" a war. In peace time it can be used for a better cause for the humanity and mankind. It should be a lesson to all for constructive utilization of human power.

A. Chowdhury Nakhalpara, Dhaka.