The Baily Star

Dhaka, Saturday, September 21, 1991

Israel and the US

Israel's insistence that it would not put a halt to its current policy of building more Jewish settlements on occupied Arab territories on the West Bank of the river Jordan has once again become a major obstacle to the Middle-East peace process. The Bush administration, which appears to be putting in greater efforts to find a peaceful settlement of the 43-year old Arab-Israeli dispute than any previous US government, is trying to link a proposed US \$10 billion loan guarantee for Tel Aviv to a freeze on new settlements on the West Bank. For its part, Israel seems determined to get congressional approval of the loan guarantee without making any commitment about settlements.

President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker's insistence on linkage is a longoverdue application of financial leverage which the US undoubtedly holds over the Jewish state. but that too leaves a lot of room for doubt. The loan guarantee is designed to enable Israel to pay for the rehabilitation of the hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews who began arriving in numbers last year. To begin with, why is the US congress even considering extending financial help to Isreal to settle European immigrants when over three million Palestinians do not even have the right to return to their homeland Secondly, what guarantee is there that, even if Tel Aviv were to agree to a linkage. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir would not use the money to finance settlement of new arrivals on the West Bank in some ways other than direct government grants for construction?

There is no logic why the United States, which has championed Tel Aviv's cause for the last four decades for one reason or another, should continue with the same policy. For one thing the strategic "threat" which Washington perceived coming from the USSR, has vanished into thin air; Arab states, most of which lent total support to the US in the battle against Iraq last year, can no longer be viewed as "pawns" in a grand Soviet design to capture the oil wealth of the region; most importantly, all Arab countries and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, have accepted Israel's existence as a reality. One thing now remains - the recovery of the national rights of the Palestinian people.

With the collapse of Soviet power around the globe, the US is now the only power left with effective influence in the region. It is now Washington's job to shift Tel Aviv from its unrealistic and unacceptable position, particularly relating to the issue of Palestine. The Arabs need to see an even-handed US approach to the issue if Washington is to prove its sincerity. Any US financial help to Israel to settle European immigrants is likely to have a negative impact and hinder the cause of peace in the region. Bush and Baker obviously have a tough job on their hands, but they have little choice but to force Israel to agree to the idea of a Palestine state on the West Bank. A halt to new settlements would be merely a minor step in that direction, and the world must not be hoodwinked into believing that Tel Aviv was making a major concession if it agreed to Bush's idea of linkage. The Arabs have made all the concessions required of them by the US, and now Washington must extract the same from Israel. Without that, Arabs will quite justifiably lose faith in US ability or even willingness to be a fair arbiter in the dispute, leading to a premature and potentially disastrous end to the current peace process.

Celebrating the Six **Brave Ones**

It was a most unusual function at the Jatiya Press Club on Wednesday. The Directorate of Youth Development was the organiser of the event - a memorial meeting recalling the drowning of six young men while on a relief mission during the deluge in 1988. One does not know much about the working of that directorate. And one is sure they have very little to do in a country where the young cannot expect to pass out of universities before eight years instead four, and cannot land a job even after that. Where most of the renowned seats of learning have been reduced to arenas testing gunpower. Where a sizeable population of young people have already gone over to practising mastani and taking drugs. But Wednesday's was a most gratifying fare. We do not know if this directorate or for that matter any other government agency such as not charged with propaganda generally hold such functions where services and activities of people other than members of the government are celebrated and where members of the public are welcomed to participate. And the occasion of the function was a most worthy one. We commend the directorate's initiative in the matter and shall be looking forward to holding of similar functions.

Professor Badruddoza Chowdhury speaking on the occasion said that for informing the coming generations of the sacrifice of the six young men their saga of self-denial together with the story of the unprecedented floods of 1988 would be there in the text books. One ardently hopes that the pledge will be redeemed even after Professor Chowdhury's ceasing to be education top man.

The whole nation seems to have quite forgotten about the '88 deluge. could it be that governments have an active interest in making people forget about bad experience even if they be of earth-shattering magnitude? It is quite understandable why autocratic regimes should do so. It is unthinkable that a true representative and accountable one would do the same about the April 29 Doomsmonday in which upwards of five lakh people were killed in one sweep. While the present government does a good thing of reminding the people of the '88 floods, it should not talk of that cataclysmic strike only to ruminate on its grand achievements in the tragic weeks that followed. If we are sincerely going to celebrate the sacrifice of the six people let us also remember successive governments have been squeezing out the scope of spontaneous and private relief thus discouraging the whole thing out of existence. Although the absence of such relief in the Sylhet floods as also in the present one in North Bengal is quite noticeable. let it not be said that this comes as an expression of government policy.

Shamir Defies a Superpower President

ITLER said — he never started the war - it was the Jews who started the war. At that time

Jews dominated the German economy and made considerable inroads into German politics. Strong nationalistic sentiments of the German people led to strong anti-semitic feelings. Hitler took advantage of it. Antisemitic feelings is still prevalent in many parts of Europe. Recent desceration of Jewish graves in some areas shows the

gravity of the problem. There is apparently no such problem yet in the US and indeed nobody would wish it to have one even in the remotest future. After all, all Jews are not Shamtrs. Even in Israel there is "Peace Now" movement in exchange for land and there are members of the Jewish community who suffer imprisonment for supporting peace and having contacts wit the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). A recent survey showed that 60 percent of Israelis are in favour of land for peace, 80 per cent want Israel to attend the peace talks and 67 per cent for freezing of settlements. But still signs from the Shamir government the ominous; his ultra-rightist government is making things difficult for the Bush Administration. Shamir has

To bring some balance in America's political handling of the Arab affairs and partly compensate the Arabs for the disastrous effects of Bush's Operation Desert Storm (ODS) that largely destroyed not only much of Arab infrastructure but also the spirit of Arab na tionalism and whatever was left of Arab unity, President

been regularly defying Bush -

a superpower president.

Bush launched the M-East peace initiative and asked Israel to exchange "land for peace". Shamir rebuffed saying Israel would never vacate Israel's "biblical land."

President Bush called on israel to halt settlement in the occupied territories in exchange for Arab's withdrawal of trade embargo on Israel. This was supported by the summit of the major industrialised countries and the Arabs also agreed. But Shamir defled; building of settlements continued despite repeated calls from the Bush administration. Last week Secretary Baker reportedly said, "I think the President will be willing to go to the American people because it is their tax dollars that

by Muslehuddin Ahmed

would find it almost impossible to repay such a big amount and the US would ultimately have to advance special funds towards repayment of this loan or increase the annual aid quantum. However, President Bush gently asked Shamir to delay the submission of the able support.

This angered Bush very

timistic about the peace process and said, we are on the "brink of a historic breakthrough." But Shamir government has been deliberately delaying the peace process and are bent upon building enough settlements that would more than double the Jewish population which is already over 1,00,000 in the occupied territories. According to some reports the Israeli government "is now planning a new wave of building that would irrevocably alter the political geography of the West Bank and Jerusalem..... Another belt of Jewish settlement around

he said, "We are the United States of America and we have a leadership role around the world that has to be fulfilled. And I am calling the shots in this question in the way I

think it is best." Many around the world do not appreciate US's self styled world leadership. A leader never says he is a leader others confer it on him. But this time Bush's assertion of leadership is the result of his military action in the Gulf and he may be within his right to project it with a view to concluding his mission — a mission apparently to have permanent peace in the M-East. All would agree that there has never been before so op-

portune a moment for peace in

the region. President Bush de-

serves all good wishes on earth

to achieve peace there. But

this is an uphill task because of

the Congress. He can not take

for granted, as he did in case

of action against Iraq, Capital

Hill's yes votes for launching

another Operation Descri

Storm—this one requiring no

bullet but a vote for stopping

all aids including the present

loan guarantee. The vote

against another desert guy -

Shamir who is no less stubborn

and intransigent than Saddam,

should be in place until israel

stops all settlements and

vacates the occupied

right; let the domestic politics of the US not be guided by the Jewish interest. The US politicians must curb this unhealthy trend in the US politics before it is too late. However, even without abandoning its support for the Jewish state which should be treated like any other friendly country of the US, America can play its global role in an even handed manner provided its leaders on Capitol Hill become aware of their super power role.

America's own interest is far more important than defending the selfish interest of Israel which has lost its strategic importance after the fall of the Soviet Empire and with the new equation and alliance with the important Arabs countries. Under the new situation, American forces can land in some Arab soil at some moments' notice and that also to fight another Arab country. It can also station forces and store equipments, if necessary. All these make Israel strategically redundant. Let the American politicians get over their fear of Jewish influence in American election. Let the Jewish interest not overshadow the electioneering process of the US.

President Bush appears set on his new course. He has the ability to defend and promote the interest of the United States world wide and not depend on so-called Jewish influence in domestic politics. Principle, equity, justice and above all peace should figure more important than a second term in office. In any case a second term seems almost certain for Bush.

The author, a former Secretary and Ambassador, writes on national

loan application. Shamir completely ignored President Bush's call and submitted the loan application. The idea was to completely bypass President

Bush and his administration and reach the US Congress where Israel enjoys consider-

much. "He is gritting his teeth

President Bush appears optimistic about the peace process . . . But Shamir government has been deliberately delaying it and is bent upon building enough settlements that would more than double the Jewish population which is already over 1,00,000 in the occupied territories.

will be supporting settlement activity that we used to characterise as illegal and which we now moderately characterise as an obstacle to peace."

On the question of proposed direct peace negotiation with Arabs, which Israel itself has been longing for, Shamir remained defiant for a long time. However, when agreed to join, he made it severely conditional on Palestinian representation. This was almost saying no to the peace negotiations. Baker has not been able to untie that Israeli knot yet.

To add salt to the injury. Shamir asked for \$ 10 billion loan guarantee from the US, which will enable Israel to borrow at a concessional rate. Indeed, this loan guarantee virtually means aid or loan by the US government as Israel

and his patience is being tried" an administration official said. Bush has asked Congress to delay consideration of the loan application by 120 days for the reason that this loan guarantee would enable Israel to settle the Jewish immigrants in the occupied territories which 'could well destroy our ability to bring one or more of the parties to the peace table."

Bush also gave a threat to use his presidential veto in case the Congress went ahead with the loan request. The Congress seemed to have taken the threat seriously. It apparently also got disturbed by the false accusation by some Israeli cabinet ministers that Bush was anti-semitic. One cabinet minister called President Bush a liar.

President Bush appears op-

Israel's annexation of the city irreversible." As it seems, the Bush ad-

Arab neighborhoods and make

Jerusalem would seal off its

ministration is determined to pursue the peace process. During this week's visit to Israel Secretary Baker remained firm with the Shamir government on loan guarantee issue and said, "I don't want to indicate an inch of flexibility beyond six points that we have proposed, which are damn forthcoming." Backer's firmness made Shamir back down somewhat. However, there were complaints that the Bush administration was attaching too many conditions on the loan guarantee. Indeed, similar firmness of the US administration can put Shamir firmly on the peace course.

President Bush's determination on peace is reflected in

territories. However, Bush appears firm. He already said, "Too much is at stake to let domestic politics take precedence over peace." President Bush is

and international issues.

Indian Premier's Choice of Women Colleagues "When I drew the blinds of said one did not have a right to Priya Darshini writes from New Delhi

NLY 28 women made it to the 512-seat Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) in India's elections

Women's current membership does not depart much from their ratings in the previous nine Lok Sabhas, which were 22,27, 34, 31, 22, 16, 28, 42 and 27, respectively.

As a small minority, the women MPs have to strive hard to make the most of their role on the political stage. Perhaps the new Prime Minister, Mr PV Narasimha Rao, feels some sympathy for their position. He has inducted six women into the Union Council of Ministers. The council, composed of Cabinet members and non-Cabinet State Ministers, has a membership of about 50.

One woman has also been included in the 15-member Cabinet. She is Mrs Shiela Kaul, who will look after Urban Development.

A maternal aunt of the late Mrs Indira Gandhi, Mrs Kaul represents Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, which was also Mrs Gandhi's constituency. Mrs Kaul was Minister of State for Education, Culture and

Social Welfare in 1980.

One Minister of State with an independent charge is Mrs Margaret Alva, formerly a State Minister for Youth Affairs, Sports and Child Development.

Now in her third five-year term in Parliament, Mrs Alva was a lawyer in the Supreme Court and had fought cases against gender-based discrimination in public employment. She is not totally happy with her present portfolio as Minister for Personnel, Public Gricvances and Pensions, but said she is "honoured to work with Mr Narasimha Rao in whatever capacity."

Given charge of the Youth, Women and Child Development Ministry is Ms Mamta Banerjee from West Bengal. Ms Banerjee, 36, is known for her grit-and determination. Ms DK Taradevi, 38, has

also been appointed as Minister of State. She became a member of the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) after serving in the Lok Sabha from 1985 to

The Deputy Minister for Welfare, Ms K Kamala Kumari, is the first tribal from the South to be inducted into the Union Cabinet. She was

Despite an unexciting showing by women in

the June elections, a handful of women politicians will soon be making their mark at the ministerial level in New Delhi

elected from Bhadrachal in Karnataka State where she had been involved in running welfare hostels for tribal students. Now on her second term in Parliament, she has actively worked for the formation of women's councils and has taken and interest in family and child welfare.

Ms Girija Vyas, Deputy Minister for Information and Broadcasting, is making her debut in Parliament from Udaipur. A Rajasthan University teacher with a doctorate in Philosophy, she was Minister of Tourism in the last Congress Cabinet in Rajasthan State.

Other victors in the election are worth noting. Ms Jayalalitha, well-known as a former actress in Tamil films, routed her opponents to become not only the first woman chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, but also the head of an

Assembly with virtually no

members of the opposition. At 26, Decpika Chikhlia is the youngest MP in the Lok Sabha. She became popular as Sita in the teleserial Ramayana. Many say she got into Parliament "by a fluke." At the moment, she seems reconciled to the observation that she is meant to be seen and not heard, but expects to overcome her ignorance of party politics in due course.

For Mahendra Kumari, a former Princess, election to Parliament was a personal as well as a political achievement.

A member of the royal family of Alwar in Rajasthan State, Mahendra Kumari killed her first tiger at the age of 14. However, a sharp line dividing royalty and commoners kept her in her ivory tower. And she was in purdah (veil or seclusion) until four months ago.

my car and crossed the threshold of my private quarters to become a commoner. I felt I had a new life," she says.

Mahendra Kumari coined her won appeal to the electorate: "Look, your Princess has come out of purdah to be one of you. If she loses, it will be your loss, too. I will go back into purdah and never know you and your problems."

However, she attributes her success at the hustings to her late husband, Prince Pratap Singh who was a popular man. "He was given to charity and really cared for the people. That's what seems to have mattered.

Mahendra Kumari plans to build a network of volunteer women's organisations at the grassroots. "Women are more hardworking. They understand how people and children feel. And I believe they are more honest," she says.

She also has a passion for protecting wildlife. As a Princess and a hunter, she recalls, she has shot five adult tigers and some bears and panthers. But she gave up hunting when she got married. "My husband discouraged it. He take any life if one could not

There are also women who lost in the elections, but who are not likely to fade from the political scene.

Nimmi Bai, a prostitute, says: "I have resolved to continue my fight on the political front. Women prostitutes will contest the next Lok Sabha elections and Assembly elections from all major cities of India to focus attention on their long-standing demand for the right to vote."

She says about 2,000 prostitutes in the capital and many more among the country's two million prostitutes were turned away from the polling

Nimmi Bai is also campaigning for special services for prostitutes, such as mobile dispensaries to give them free medical treatment.

Interestingly, although all political parties announced they would field a large number of women in the elections, none really did so. This partly accounts for the poor showing of women at the polls.

Depthnews Asia

OUR years ago, life on

Licka Street was quiet, boring even. Today, half the people on the street have fled because the village of Borovo Nasclje, on the Croatian side of the Danube river, is at war with itself.

Borovo Naselje had a population of about 3,000 people, with equal numbers of Croats and Serbs, most of whom worked in the local shoe factory or in the harbour of nearby Vukovar, a picturesque, baroque town now under siege by Serb rebels and regular Yugoslav Army units.

Croats form the majority of Vukovar's population, but Serbs dominate the surrounding villages. The Croats in Vukovar are defended by the Croat National Guard, an irregular army formed earlier this year by the nationalist government of Croatian President Franjo Tudjman.

"Everything started when Tudjman came to power," said Milan Jovanovic, who fled with his wife and three children to Vajska, on the eastern Serbian

Yugoslavia Is There Hope for Licka Street?

bank of the Danube that is not yet affected by Yugoslavia's civil strife.

Said Jovanovic: "At first there were provocations and nationalistic songs and symbols. There was harassment in the factories. In the end, my brother was shot down in Licka Street. The bullet came from a Croat home." Even while he spoke, sporadic gunfire could be heard from across the river.

The Receiving Centre for Serbian Refugees from Croatia, set up by local Red Cross volunteers in Vajska's village school, has registered more than 10,500 people since fighting started in the Vukovar area on May 2. Most refugees are women, children and elderly people. The men have stayed to fight.

While Serbs escape from

The only victims in the ethnic war between Serbia and Croatia in Yugoslavia have been the Croatian and Serbian people who have been forced to flee their homes. Branko Milinkovic of IPS reports from Vajska, Yugoslavia.

Croat-held territory into Serbia, Croats flee Serb-held areas to other parts of Croatia. The federal Yugoslav committee of the Red Cross in

Belgrade has registered a total of 130,000 displaced persons to date. The actual number, the Red Cross says, may be much higher since many refugees do not register, but just move in with relatives or friends.

Of the registered refugees,

some 70,000 are Serbs who fled to Serbia, while more than 45,000 Croats escaped to Croat-controled areas of Croatia. The others took refuge in Bosnia, said Snezana Stoskovic, information officer at the Red Cross headquarters.

"Most of them prefer to stay in areas close to their homes or in urban zones, but if the conflict escalates and the number of displaced persons increases, we shall try to put

them in rural areas as well, Stoskovic added.

"Technically, the Yogoslav Red Cross is not well equipped. So far we have managed to deliver first aid, food packages and medical materials to the refugees and their hosts," said Rade Dubajic, secrctary of the Yugoslav Red

Many people fear that the conflict, which has cost hundreds of lives, will escalate to a full-fledged civil war, but not all are willing to take part. Early last month, the Croat weekly Arena described the "depressive dilemma" that young men are facing as the choice between "a passport or

a gun." "Thousands of young Serbs have been in hiding for months to avoid being recruited by the federal army," said Stojan

Cerovic, editor of Belgrade's independent weekly Vreme. "Aren't they displaced persons as well?"

Some weeks ago, Cerovic published an appeal to recruits to descrt from the coming civil war. "It was certainly a very strong demand, but I believe it is the only efficient way to avoid large-scale bloodshed at the moment," said Cerovic, who is also president of the local anti-war movement.

be willing to fight on both sides, to guarantee a long and bloody conflict. Among them are many of the refugees, who fear the loss of their homes and property.

But enough people seem to

"The only way for me and my family to return home, is if Vukovar becomes our," said Jovanovic, who doubts that the harmony that existed in Borovo Nasclje will ever return.

"Daily life with Croats is inconceivable now, but the coming battle will be so devastating that I wonder if any kind of life will again be possible on Licka Strect," he said.

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.

Bangladesh Bank counters

Sir, I had an opportunity to deposit money at certain counter of Bangladesh Bank the other day. Previously, the counter-clerk would receive the challan, make entry in the register himself and deliver the spare copy of challan forthwith, to the person concerned. But now, this system has changed. The counter-clerk now receives the challan and hands over the

same with the entry register to his assistant for recounting and entry. So long the assistant makes entry and returns the entry register to him, the counter-clerk does not receive further challan at the counter. So, the gap period is spent with no work or with tabletalk. At other counters also, the

same thing happened and the

persons concerned with the

challans were found quar-

relling with the counter-clerks

for the delay. The object of

new system is surely to speed

cally slows down the work, then what is the benefit of adopting the new system? In fact, the office hours being shortened, everyone is running after time and nobody can spare a short while to go So, the time-killer factors

up the work, but if it practi-

causing chaos in public dealings should be stopped.

Mahfuzur Rahman Dhaka.

Autonomy of agricultural colleges

Sir, The inter-ministerial committee formed by the government to work on various issues relating to autonomy of the three agricultural colleges of the country including Bangladesh Agricultural Inst-

itute (BAI), Dhaka, is now preparing draft ordinance. The committee is using the ordinance of BIT as the main ref-Meanwhile, when contacted

with BIT officials, we came to know that there are some defects and limitations in BITs Ordinance. As a result, the BITs are now facing problems. We have already communicated this matter to the committee. Since BIT is a new model, it is natural that there should arise some problem. And we are keen to remove those problems and limitations from our ordinance and administrative set-up. We sincerely hope that the government would grant us autonomy keeping in view the greater welfare of the agricultural colleges as well as of the

nation. It may be recalled here that the government has earlier

announced its decision to set tle the autonomy issue of BAI and other two agricultural colleges by December 31, next.

M. Zahidul Hague Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

Floods

Sir, Present floods in the northern port of the country engulfing all the districts of Rajshahi Division are unprecedented. The entire vast region is under water. Aman, Ropa paddy crops, sugar cane plants all are washed away. Just before the floods the region was badly hit by draught. Even during the severe draught the peasants planted twice Aman and Ropa crops but failed to nourish and maintain the

age of irrigation facilities. Before floods, a famine situation was also prevailing in many places. Besides the colossal loss of crops, properties and even lives, massive erosions of rivers are remarkably significant this time. Many roads, houses, embankments are destroyed or washed away. Relief materials are extremely scanty. Sufferings of people are indescribable. In the context of this, it is

urged upon the government to

announce the affected areas as

"distressed area" and to send

growth due to the acute short-

relief materials on an emergency basis. Philanthropists, NGOs - national and international - are requested to stand by the affected people.

Md. Anwarul Afzal Raninagar, Rangpur