

## Saudi-Bangladesh Ties

The instruction by King Fahd to his government to speed up the process of reforms, originally announced on March 1, adds a special significance to the national birth anniversary of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia being observed today. According to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), the monarch met with members of the committee on Sunday and ordered it to meet next week to start adapting current laws and procedures to the new basic law that guarantees some personal freedom and security from arbitrary search and arrest.

The basic law, often described as a new constitution for the kingdom, provides for the creation of an appointed Council and similar provincial assemblies which will give Saudis outside the Royal family their first formal say in state affairs since the present monarch's father King Abdul-Aziz created the kingdom in September 1932.

There is little doubt that the implementation of the announced reforms will mark a step forward in modernising the political system in Kingdom. It is a cautious move, not necessarily aimed at introducing democracy in the country at this stage. However, it is surely a well-intentioned attempt to create a basis for popular participation in the running of the government and then using it as a starting point for further reforms. Again, what would be noted by experts with gratification are some changes in the laws, providing for personal freedoms and security from arbitrary search of homes of citizens and arrests.

On this auspicious day today, Bangladesh has a number of special reasons for wishing every success to Saudi Arabia, not only in the field of political reforms but also in such nation-building areas as education, health, agriculture, housing and environment. At a time when so many countries, especially in Africa and Latin America, have so thoughtlessly squandered their surplus income from the oil boom of the seventies, Saudi Arabia has earned the admiration of many countries, including Bangladesh, for being a model of progress and durable development.

What is most gratifying, Saudi Arabia has used a sizable portion of its income from oil in providing loans and grants to a number of developing countries, Bangladesh being one of the beneficiaries. While one assumes that this assistance will continue, experts from both our countries should examine prospects for some variations to fit in the new realities in our changing world. For instance, we should place strong emphasis on Saudi investment in the private sector, on an increase in our export to Riyadh and on our closer co-operation in multilateral agencies, including the Islamic Development Bank. Here, our shared objective should be to turn our relationship into one of partnership, based on mutual reliance.

We trust, in the years ahead, the two countries will put in their best efforts in promoting the Third World causes which have been identified in the recent Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Saudi Arabia whose ratio of development assistance to its GDP is the highest in the world must take an assertive position in international fora, much more than it has done so far, and play a leadership role. In carrying out this responsibility, Saudi Arabia will find in Bangladesh an ally committed to a lasting friendship.

## Art and Struggle

We are thankful to Shabana Azmi and Farooque Shaikh as also to those who made their sojourn to this eastern subcontinental state possible for wafting in a life-giving fresh breeze that has more intellectual molecules in it than that of glamour. We feel proud to have Ms Azmi among us, albeit for a short while, if only because both her intellect and her art have for long been distinguished by a kind of unflagging social commitment. We feel one with her when she says art has no way in the Third World but to reflect social awareness and act as an instrument of changing society from one of woes to that of weal.

While she is very right in pointing out that art doesn't act quick as politics does — the observation could well be supplemented by the fact that art works deep and the changes wrought by it are lasting, contrasting sharply with the rather superficial ways of politics. It is not politics par se that gives a people its liberty and freedom from want — but something that forms deep down the bowels of the society over centuries and finds spasmodic expression in short-living political action. The politically wrought formal changes in state or, if those go far than skin-deep, social structures, have to be sustained and developed into fruition by those self-same deep-working things. In both that precede and succeed politics — the maximum is possibly contributed by the fuzzy and rather unuseful pursuit called art.

Shabana Azmi is in fact carrying forward a very old subcontinental tradition of realising social good through effecting a change for good and beauty inside the individual — which is almost all of the business art is about. That stupendous visionary and minister of the simple joys of the mundane life, that irrepressible social and political activist — Rabindranath — taught us as much. It is so gratifying that Azmi works in a medium so close to the heart of the Master. Not only in Raktakarabi or Muktdhara or Achalayatan does Tagore plead for radical social changes and actions that can bring them about — he goes on transcending these coarse and primary limitations to man's endeavour to soar ever higher in Dakghar and Raja. And what better supremely political masterpieces can we get in world literature than we get in Char Adhyay and Ghorey-Bairey.

Theatre in Bengal, followed lately by film, has been very politically aware and socially committed. During the autocratic decade the Natak Sarani or Bailey Road of this city was called the only liberated area in the whole of the country — free from the clutches of both dictatorship and fundamentalism. We are sorry that because of her "glamorous Bombay" connection — which is more in the mind of her admirers than in herself — she is not being able to mix with the glorious cultural resistance workers of Bangladesh as one of them. We expect her to visit again this land which fought a gory war to uphold its art and culture and language — and won.

# Pressure is on to Speed up Scam Probe

There is a sudden coolness in the government's attitude. In the beginning one got the impression that Narasimha Rao wanted the truth to come out. But it turns out that he is afraid of the fallout. It appears that the purpose of the government was to have a perfunctory type of inquiry on the lines that an earlier JPC held on the Bofors gun scandal.

seems that the Congress members have been told not to concede even an inch to the opposition.

Ironically, it was Congressman, S S Ahluwalia, who had brought to the JPC notice a note as well as the briefing that the state finance ministers, Rameshwar Thakur and Dalbir Singh, gave to the Congress members on how to evade answers to the questions on the scam. Those were initial meetings where the Congress had not drawn any line for its members. This was done after the JPC unanimously passed a resolution for the breach of privilege against Thakur and Dalbir Singh.

When Narasimha Rao was informed about the resolution at Jakarta, where he was attending the NAM summit, he advised caution till his return. That explains why the Congress party's spokesman did not comment on the privilege motion for three days. Nor did any minister come to the defence of either Thakur or Dalbir. They were left high and dry.

Only on his return did Narasimha Rao inform the party to stand by the two. The prime minister's decision to protect them was reportedly not because he had any love lost for them but because he could visualise that their exit would make Finance Minister Manmohan Singh's stay untenable. At Narasimha Rao's instance, Manmohan Singh fired his shot in defence of Thakur and Dalbir and then followed a cacophony of noises

for support. Shivraj Patil, the Lok Sabha Speaker, kept the privilege motion pending not knowing what to do with it. The JPC is under the Speaker and he is fully competent to take action even against a Rajya Sabha member (Thakur is from the Rajya Sabha) in consultation with the chairman of that House. But Patil did not want to be singled out for the decision. He found a technical

appeared before it to emphasise that they had 'acted' on the 'order' of the ministers. What probably made the government really nervous was the fact that some members were flushed with secret information from inside the government departments, banks and intelligence agencies.

If the effort to defeat the inquiry reflects the thinking at the highest, no government

formation leakage." Jaswant Singh, former finance minister, wants a list of the shareholders of the Fairgrowth Financial Services Limited, which claimed the scalp of former commerce minister Chidanbaram.

Jaswant Singh, a Bharatiya Janata Party member, has asked, among other things, how R L Malhotra, former RBI governor, was retired prematurely and how the present governor was appointed. George Fernandes, the Janata Dal member, has sought all reports and communications on the scam which the Reserve Bank, securities exchange board of India and other government agencies have sent to the finance ministry. T N Chaturvedi, former comptroller and auditor general, has made a tall order: copies of instructions, directives, circulars and guidelines issued in respect of security transactions during the last five years. (The auditing of nationalised banks is done by private auditors, not by the government's auditing departments).

In addition, there is a list of some 100 people, who are sought to be summoned as witnesses. They include Manmohan Singh, Pranab Mukherjee, deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, VP Singh, Madhu Dhandavate, former finance minister, K P Geetalkrishnan, finance secretary, M S Ahluwalia, secretary of economic affairs, Rajagopal, cabinet secretary, the RBI governor, Bimal Jalan, former fi-

nance secretary, K Madhavan of the CBI and chief officers of ANZ Grindlays, Citibank, Bank of America and Standard Chartered Bank.

R N Mirdha, who heads the JPC, will ultimately decide which questions should be forwarded to the government for reply and who from among the witnesses be called for evidence. He cannot be arbitrary in his decisions. Were he to apply blue pencil too liberally, he would invite the wrath of the opposition members in the JPC at a time when the impression going around is that the Congress wants to hide certain things. On the other hand, the Congress which is afraid of disclosures, expects Mirdha to help the party. He agreed with my observation when I told him the other day: "You are doomed both ways."

The opposition members in the JPC are increasingly afraid that the government will not let them see the relevant documents and files. If Mirdha or the government comes in the way, the opposition members may first appeal to the Speaker and then to the nation. At present, they are disappointed because the pace of inquiry is slow and because they are not getting the papers. They were hoping to bring out an interim report for the winter session of parliament.

However frustrated the opposition members may feel, they should give a long rope to the government, the Speaker and Mirdha. The scam is the biggest scandal India has faced since independence. It is not the failure of system, as the government says, it is a culmination of crime, forgery, cheating and tax evasion. The opposition members owe it to the nation to unravel the scam; patience, not petulance, will help.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

way out by refereeing the matter of Thakur to the Rajya Sabha chairman.

Patil still has to decide on Dalbir, a Lok Sabha member. The only difference now is that the Speaker has the satisfaction of putting on test the Rajya Sabha chairman, a Congress nominee who also has a good equation with the opposition. However, if both were to go by the law ministry's advice, what Thakur and Dalbir did would not come within the purview of privilege.

Delhi is agog with rumours why Narasimha Rao changed his tracks. So many ministers and officers from the economic ministries have dipped their fingers into the honey pot that Narasimha Rao had no option except to back track on the inquiry. It was an interesting hearing of the JPC the other day when two officers

department or agency will part with any worthwhile information. The 120 odd questions, which the three study groups of the JPC have prepared, may never be answered, at least not in full. As many as 95 questions relate to the Reserve Bank of India alone, ranging from the role of its governor on transactions of securities to the policy of granting licences to foreign banks. The questions posed to the finance ministry are primarily directed against the finance minister and the RBI governor Venkatarman.

One dozen JPC members have also submitted separate questions. Rabi Ray, former Speaker, has demanded documents relating to what is known as 'Coupon Rates scandal' in which the foreign banks are alleged to have made huge profits at the cost of nationalised banks due to inside in-

## Owen — Back in the Eye of the Storm

Derek Ingram writes from London



LORD OWEN  
Brusque and irresistible

They made much progress, but in the end the initiative ran into the sand. Owen's style did not always go down well with African leaders, and Ian Smith was his old slippery self.

When Carrington moved in the Owen-Young proposals were taken off the Foreign Office shelf, dusted down and became the basis of the Lancaster House settlement that led to peace and the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. Carrington took great credit for that and the skill with which he handled the situation should not be underestimated.

But Owen's success in first breaking the Rhodesia logjam two years earlier, was forgot-

ten, and Carrington and the Tories had no wish to admit the key role a Labour Foreign Secretary had played. Owen was always on the right of his party, and when Labour made Michael Foot leader and veered increasingly to the left he walked out and formed a new party. He was always his own man and he deplored what he called "smudge and mudge." But leaving Labour was probably a fatal mistake.

In due course the party moved into the centre ground Owen had wanted it to occupy. If he had stayed and fought from within the party Labour might have returned to power many years ago and Owen might eventually have become prime minister. Instead, his Social Democratic Party collapsed — many say because he was an impossible colleague —

and at the last election he did not stand.

He went to the House of Lords as Lord Owen and began to search for a new role. Although those who had followed him to the false dawn of democratic socialism felt let down by Owen, he often remained the voice of common sense. His actions may have annoyed the voters, but what he said did not.

Whether on domestic issues like the future of the health service and national defence or on the future of the European Community or the breakup of the Soviet Union, Owen has always had the knack of winning a favourable public reaction.

It is not just the attractive way in which he always puts over his views, but people tend to feel he articulates what they

are thinking and that he seems to be talking common sense.

He was always listened to with respect in the House of Commons, and his outspokenness has sometimes moved dithering politicians into decisions. When a few weeks ago restlessness was growing in Britain that the West Europeans were being slow to act on Yugoslavia he advocated force against the Serbs.

His remarks stirred the pressure for action, but did not help when Britain put forward his name to the European Commission to succeed Lord Carrington as chief negotiator. Prime Minister John Major, currently in the EC chair, had to persuade the other eleven countries that the former Labour minister was the right man for the job.

Whether he can make more

headway than Lord Carrington found possible to achieve no one can tell. The shoe is now on the other foot. Where once Carrington picked up Owen's groundwork on Rhodesia Owen now finds himself picking up Carrington's on Yugoslavia. And at his side is Cyrus Vance, who as Carter's Secretary of State, was his opposite number in Washington when they were working on Rhodesia.

One thing is certain. No one will brief himself better on the Balkan situation than David Owen.

In Whitehall officials at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will view his return to their sphere of operations with mixed feelings. As Foreign Secretary he was not popular with them.

He was sharp-tongued, some would say bullying, and he did not always take their advice. He shook up their routine and in 1979 they were glad to see the back of him. The patrician Carrington was much more to their taste.

Some years after Owen had left, however, officials began to speak rather differently. They admitted that Owen always did his homework thoroughly. He was regularly in the office early and left late and knew exactly what was in his papers.

Owen admits now that as Britain's youngest Foreign Secretary, promoted straight into the Cabinet to hold one of the three great offices of state, he was in those days rather brash.

Now, having been through a log political fire, he is already at 54 being talked of as a statesman. A new career as international trouble-shooter seems to beckon.

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## To the Editor...

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.

### Bangladeshi Olympians

Sir, Triumphant enough, Bangladeshi athletes have been able to uphold national image as well as the spirits of Olympics with dignity as none of them flunked the drug tests, nor did they lose sporting manners at the 25th Olympiad.

Winning medals only is not the sole objective of participation in such a competition, sportsmanship is and that is more graceful for both the competitor and the nation he/she represents.

The fact that many female athletes of different countries recorded better performances than Bangladeshi male athletes' must not dishearten promising Bangladeshi Olympians, since miracle happens in sports like a Bangladeshi male swimmer ended up in the women's pool — gracious amigol

All the Right KENNEDY DELIGHT

desh learnt at this Olympiad should be guiding her buddy athletes all the way to the glorious platform in the next meetings since the possibilities of developing performance capability are boundless.

Scientific practice with standard facilities will be the requisites for aiming for Olympic medals. Proper diet is also a major factor in sports performance reflected by many champions' menus that include some of the less popular foods in Bangladesh. For medal winning stamina and strength, LDC Bangladesh may have to start it all over again with the next Olympiad is still another four years away.

Just for a record, sex discrimination can be minimized in athletics with all identical events for men and women. Otherwise, what's wrong with separate Olympiads sexwise?

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### SSMC

Sir, It is encouraging that the present democratic government has given emphasis on the expansion of medical education in the country with a view to producing more medical graduates for realizing the objective—"Health for all by the year 2000". A number of new medical colleges has started functioning or on the way to start.

Meanwhile, it is felt that the government should also put equal emphasis on ensuring necessary facilities to the old medical colleges. For instance, Sir Salimullah Medical College (SSMC) is running with a number of academic and infrastructural problems. It has shortage of teachers, students, especially girl students' accommodation, adequate lab and hospital facilities, stable electricity supply etc. Moreover, the location of the SSMC is itself a highly polluted congested place of the old Dhaka city. Everyday the teachers, students and others have to experience a serious traffic-jam to reach the Milford Hospital or the SSMC campus. Often it kills valuable hour of the teachers and students.

May we draw the attention of the government to the situation and urge the authority concerned to take urgent steps to solve the problems of

SSMC and other medical colleges in the greater national interest.

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### Human rights violations

Sir, I take the opportunity to inform you that during my recent visit to Nepal, I was shocked to learn that about 40,000 Bhutanese nationals have taken refuge in the eastern part of the country. I visited the refugee camps in eastern Nepal and was deeply moved to see that they are on the brink of starvation and death due to lack of food, medicine, and clothing. However, the newly formed democratic government of Nepal, the mainstream political parties, human rights groups and the local people of Jhapa, eastern Nepal, have been helping these refugees with relief measures as such as they can but unless international support is extended these refugees will have no other option but to perish in an alien land.

The People's Forum of Human Rights, Bhutan (PFHRB) have issued a leaflet to foreigners requesting them

to give it a media publicity.

The southern Bhutan is inhabited by the people of Nepalese-origin since 1624 AD forming about 53 per cent of the total (600,000) population. Bhutan is ruled by an absolute monarch in whom all legislative, executive and judicial powers are centralised. Political activities and political parties are banned in the Kingdom. The only political party, "Bhutan People's Party", is a democratic organisation founded on June 2, 1990 which has been functioning from exile in view of the restrictions on political parties in the Kingdom. The government, have called the ongoing movement as anti-national labelling it as a terrorist movement and a move for creation of greater Nepal.

The Bhutanese movement is not a movement for cessation, it is mainly for the establishment of human rights and multi-party democracy in Bhutan. The instances of human rights violation in Bhutan may be summed up as follows: a) There is no freedom of expression, speech and press; b) There is no religious and cultural freedom; c) Political freedom is totally banned; d) Formation of groups, associations and unions is prohibited; e) Organisation of peaceful processions, rallies, demonstrations and protests is banned; f) Bhutanese citizens are not allowed to move freely.

tional dresses. The dress worn by the ruling class (Gho for men and Kira for women) is made compulsory for every Bhutanese citizen. Any one found without this dress is either fined heavily or jailed. TV viewing has been banned; g) People are arrested arbitrarily and tortured by using third degree measures. Even gang rape of the female detainees is alleged as rampant.

Mr. Tek Nath Rizal, once a member of the Royal Advisory Council, and presently the Chairman of PFHRB protested against the merciless violation of human rights and was imprisoned in Bhutan for a few days in June 1988. Later, after his conditional release he managed to escape to eastern Nepal's Jhapa district for self-exile. Suddenly on November 15, 1989, he was mysteriously abducted from his residence at Birtamod (place of self-exile). From reliable sources, it is learnt that presently he is undergoing rigorous imprisonment in Bhutan. In the course of the pro-democracy movement, more than 5000 people have been arrested and detained. Their fate and whereabouts are unknown even today while 50,000 are living as refugees in India and Nepal, it was revealed by PFHRB in the leaflet distributed to foreigners.

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