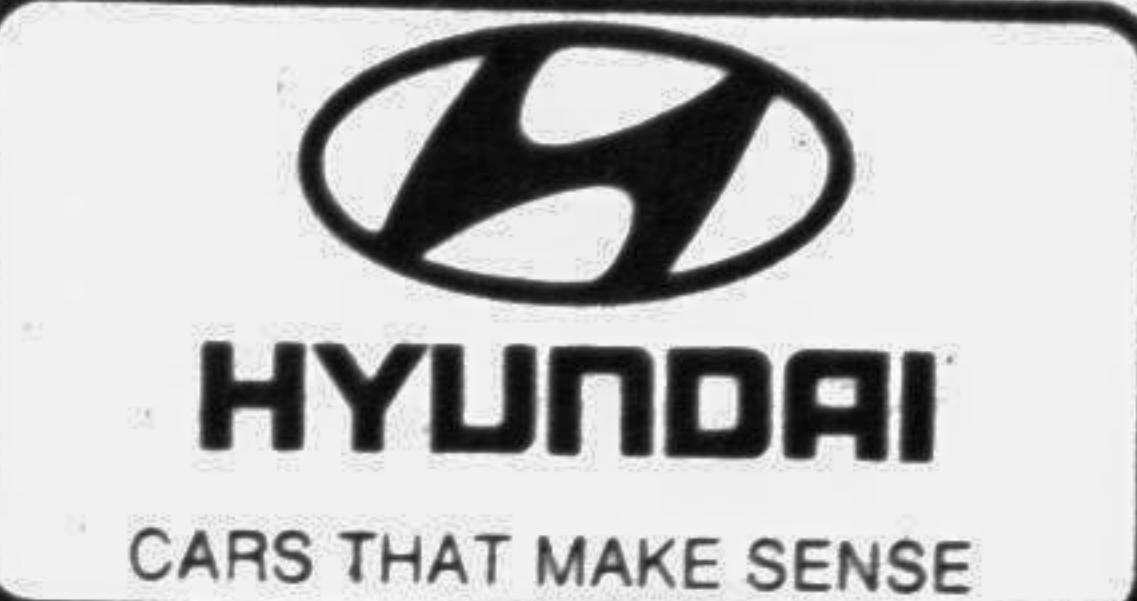


# The Daily Star BUSINESS

DHAKA SATURDAY, MAY 4, 1996



## Israel revokes Palestinian minister's travel permit

JERUSALEM, May 3: Israel revoked a Palestinian minister's travel permit Thursday, accusing her of smuggling Islamic militants into Israel, says AP.

Shlomo Dror, spokesman for Israel's top liaison with the Palestinians, said Social Affairs Minister Intissar Wazir abused privileges that allowed her to travel through Israel checkpoints without inspection.

Dror said Wazir, widow of a PLO chief whose 1988 death has been blamed on Israel, violated peace agreements and an Israeli closure by smuggling into the West Bank two university students active in the Islamic militant Hamas group.

Israel became aware of Wazir's actions while questioning a Gaza student who was caught without a permit at the West Bank university of Bir Zeit in March, Dror said.

The student told Israeli interrogators that he entered the West Bank in Wazir's car.

After 63 people were killed in a series of suicide bombings claimed by Islamic militants in February and March, Israel sealed off the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Palestinians were barred from traveling between the two areas. University students from the West Bank holding Gaza identity cards were ordered to return home.

Dror said that despite the closure, several Palestinians illegally, rode from Gaza into the West Bank with Palestinian officials.

"There were similar incidents and this is a violation of the agreement and it is very regretful because it hurts the trust between us and the Palestinian Authority," Dror said.

Israel radio said one of the students who rode with Wazir was Issam Muhamad, the brother of an Islamic militant who carried out a suicide attack in Gaza in September 1993.

Under the autonomy agreement, Palestinian officials receive special permits to enter Israel and travel between the West Bank and Gaza. The officials are excused from vigorous security checks at Israeli roadblocks.

"We want to continue with the VIP (very important person) passes, it serves their interest and to some extent ours, but they can't use it in this way," Dror said. Israel is reconsidering handing out the special passes altogether, he said.

Wazir was in Amman, Jordan on Thursday and could not be immediately reached for comment.

## Lebanon raises minimum wage

BEIRUT, May 3: Lebanon has ordered a 20-per cent raise in the minimum wage and increased other salaries in the private sector by at least five per cent, Information Minister Farid Mecari announced, reports AFP.

The minimum wage went up from 250,000 pounds to 300,000 pounds (around 190 dollars) a month, the minister told reporters late Thursday.

The government also decided on a 10-per cent raise for wage earners of between 250,000 and 800,000 pounds, and five per cent for workers who earn more than 800,000.

The rises — retroactive to January — were lower than demanded by the powerful trade union confederation CGTL, which wanted the minimum wage doubled and a 76-per cent increase on other salaries.

On February 29, the government ordered a curfew — for the first time since the 1975-1990 civil war — to prevent demonstrations planned by the CGTL in defiance of a ban on public rallies.

Inflation rose to 13.5 per cent last year, from 12 per cent in 1994.

## WB report on reforming public sector Govt inefficiency affects entire economy

Star Report

The same percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) is spent on running the governments of Bangladesh and South Korea but Bangladeshi citizens get much less value for their money in terms of efficiency and quality than their counterparts.

Mentioning this as an example of the inefficiency of the country's administration, a World Bank (WB) study.

"Government that works: reforming the public sector" to be released shortly, says the government "accounts for almost two-thirds of formal sector for GDP, its tentacles are spread all over through direct intervention and its inefficiency affects the entire economy."

The study has portrayed how the government has expanded itself on a large-scale on various grounds disregarding what it is providing to the citizens.

Since independence, the size of the government has virtually doubled in terms of ministries, departments and officials. The study has revealed that the "usual practice has been to create a new ministry, division or department" without attempting to eliminate redundancy.

Bangladesh has now 35 ministries while Malaysia has

24, South Korea 25 and Thailand 14.

The study has reviewed several government departments, programmes and 154 commercial public enterprises and found most of them failed to justify to be remaining in the government's hand.

It has categorically mentioned the Department of Co-operatives (DOC), the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) and the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB), the efficacy and efficiency of which are questionable.

The DOC that supervises 133,000 cooperatives has a staff of 4700 and costs the taxpayers Taka 270 million a year and yet most of the cooperatives are in a dysfunctional state. This raises the question of having such a huge staff to do so little specially when NGOs have immense success in group and social mobilisation, the study says.

The BMET that employs 2000 people and costs Taka 84 million annually to the taxpayers was supposed to train manpower for export. But there is no evidence of BMET's impact since most workers receive training on their own, the study points out.

The study has also doubted the role of BRDB against the

success of NGOs in credit programmes.

This raises the need for re-evaluating the rationale of the public sector programmes and assessing their value for money to the tax-payers with a view to refocusing the energies of government to the needs of the present and challenges of the future.

The study has suggested that a National Commission for Reforming Government (NCRG) be set up which will work independently to critically re-evaluate the rationale for each agency, and assess value tax-payers are getting for supporting agency.

The NCRG should address two issues — closing down and streamlining institutions and unbundling and contracting out activities — seriously.

Those agencies or ministries that have already lost or will lose their relevance in the future changing economic landscape have to be closed down. For example, the study cited, Ministry of Textiles and Jute will be redundant when all state-owned mills will be divested.

On the other hand, those functions which private sectors can do efficiently should be handed over for better performance, the study observed.

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