# The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

## Palestine on Fire

Dhaka, Saturday, September 28, 1996

Reporters from different areas of Palestine have preferred to call what has engulfed the autonomous region as war rather than mere agitation. A state of emergency has been imposed on the whole area after a total of 40 persons have been killed and hundreds injured, almost all by Israeli bullets. Israel has responded by imposing a state of emergency in contiguous Israeli parts.

The raging battles in Ramalla and Nablus and Bethlehem between Palestinian masses and Israeli soldiers were gaining in intensity all the time yesterday and no let-up can be expected in the coming few days. For President Yasser Arafat has instructed his armed forces — meaning of course his police force — that they resist the Israeli attacks with all the might they can muster.

The most serious eruption in Palestine since Yasser Arafat got kind of self-rule for his Arabs was occasioned by an archeological project involving tunnels under the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has tried to assuage the Palestinian anger by assuring that the tunnels involved nothing of importance to any religion. That doesn't alone promise to be enough to stop the shooting confrontation. More hopeful news is coming from the battle lines where fighters are saying they would stop action provided the other side does. And already Israeli army is trying to change tack.

This latest violent outburst in Palestine once again proves what a dangerous powder-keg is this old Semitic internecine hostility and that Netanyahu should have been the last man to have an effective spot in the scene. Palestine is not only Palestine, it is the whole of Middle East when things come to a head. Any farther escalation and we shall be back to square one — the Arabs versus the first powers of the west which would be very unsettling for the whole globe.

In Bosnia the west led by America saved the Muslims in spite of age-old equations that say Christians cannot help Muslims against Christians. When will the west begin to see the truth that the cause of a permanent peace in the Middle East is not helped by supporting Zionists like Netanyahu. And a peaceable Middle East is very helpful to the western interests in many ways.

### Why this Move?

We consider the decision of the finance ministry to shift the custom's valuation department from Chittagong to Dhaka as ill advised. When both the previous and the present governments are committed to making Chittagong the 'commercial capital' of the country why should an important department, as mentioned above, be shifted from the port city?

All indications are that we are going to witness a significant expansion of our port city in the coming years. With the expected rise in foreign investment, the setting up of a separate EPZ for the Koreans, and possible one for the Japanese, etc. the expanded use of our premier port is definitely in the cards. Then again with the general rise of our commerce, both import and export, the business of the Chittagong port is bound to rise many times.

With all this in view how could the finance ministry decide to shift the head of the custom's valuation department to Dhaka escapes our logic. What we also find difficult to understand is as to how service of this department is likely to improve if the office is located away from where the action is taken. There must have been an overwhelming logic to set up the office in Chittagong in the first place, and then to keep it there for the past several decades. Now, when that same logic is becoming stronger, the decision to shift it to Dhaka is quite incomprehensible.

As it is, too many things in Bangladesh are Dhaka centred. In fact there has been a long standing grievance of the people of other urban centres, not totally unfounded, that too many things are based in Dhaka, and that this trend should be reversed.

We find the above decision to contradict the recent policy speech of the Prime Minister made from Chittagong, where she pledged to make our second city a place of far greater importance than it has ever been before.

### Self-killing, Lawfully

World's first living being has died in Australia's Northern Territory of his own volition and lawfully and with a doctor helping him to die. A hurdle has been crossed but to where who knows! Moral qualms have always balked against crossing this moral hurdle felt so badly for by those suffering long from terminal diseases. As man must not kill man, man must also must not kill himself or herself. And moreover one must not abet any suicidal act, whatever the circumstances. And last of all a doctor cannot help putting out human life in any manner. The qualms have been exacerbated by Nazi attempts to abuse euthanasia — mercy killing — by putting to death Jews saying they were being helped out of what was not life but shameful exis-

The objections have not quite subsided in Australia itself. An MP is going to move Australian Parliament to throw this "territory" law out. And Cardinal Clancy, chief of the Catholic church in Australia has called the date of the death a "shameful day for Australia."

But religious dissent and resistance have hardly ever been able to thwart what man has been bent upon doing — from siring out-of-wedlock progeny to birth control. The need for euthanasia deaths will ring all the louder all over the globe, now that the hurdle has been crossed somewhere. Mankind's best answer to the moral quandary will be to end the phenomenon of long-standing terminal illness, through medical and scientific progress. Until that is achieved things would go on as so many of the same moral nature have continued for ages — unresolved and varying from society

to society.

## Reflections on Rural Living Standards

One of the important indicators of secondary living standard is prestige items. These items include radio/cassette-player, television, watch/clock, bicycle/motorbike, ornaments etc. Access to prestige items by the rural households increased over the years. . .

etc. The CHRD conducted survey data show that access to prestige items by the sample rural households increased over the years. For example, only 12 per cent of the rural households in high irrigated areas had a radio/cassette player in 1988. In 1995, about one-fourth of the households reported to have owned the same item. In low irrigated areas, the proportion rose from nine per cent in 1988 to 22 per cent in 1995. About 23 per cent of the households in high irrigated areas reported to have had watch/clock in 1988. The share rose to about 40 per cent in 1995. In low irrigated areas, the share is 25 and 44 per cent, respectively. In 1988, one in every 100 households had a TV (high irrigated areas). In 1995, seven households out of every 100 reported to have a TV set. Likewise, access to other prestige items also increased marginally. The findings further show that the access to such prestige items increased for all land size groups viz. landless, marginal, small, medium and large land owing households in rural areas.

RADITIONAL concerns

on the degree and dime-

nsions of rural poverty

mainly hover around per capita

income and consumption

levels. This way of looking at

poverty is now being seriously

contested with the argument

that income or consumption

per capita is just only one com-

ponent of the panoply of pover-

ty correlates. Equally relevant

are, as empirical findings tend

to show, factors such as access

to clothing, shelter, health and

sources Development (CHRD) of

Jahangirnagar University re-

cently completed an income

and expenditure survey on rural

households. A total of 425

households from 22 villages

were chosen for the research

purpose. The households again,

were drawn from highly irri-

gated and low irrigated villages

The total sample population

was 2.399. In an earlier article

in this column, we said that the

per capita income of rural

households is estimated to be 8

254 for 1995. The per capita in-

come growth is estimated to be

about five per cent per year be-

tween 1987 and 1995. In this

article, we shall make an at-

tempt to present information

on non-income opportunities of

households in rural areas. The

statistics used for the purpose

are drawn from the said sur

vey. The results are prelimi

nary in nature and many war-

rant a revision if needs arise in

Access to Prestige Items

tors of secondary living stan-

dard is prestige items. These

items include radio/cassette-

player, television, watch/clock.

bicycle/motorbike, ornaments

HE resignation of P V

Narasimha Rao as the

president of the Indian

National Congress has come as

no surprise. In fact, it was very

much on the cards for a rather

long time but Rao and his

supporters successfully coun-

tered the growing demand of a

change in the Congress

presidentship ever since the

party lost power at the federal

government in the last general

elections. The change has not

occurred till now despite the

electoral debacle mainly for

two reasons - Rao somehow

remained firm in the saddle be-

cause his personal performance

in the elections was fairly good

even though the party suffered

humiliation and there is no

such unanimous leader within

the rebel faction or in the entire

Congress who could be imme-

diately accepted as a replace-

ment of Rao. However, these

factors only contributed to the

delay for a change in the leader-

ship which was otherwise in-

evitable lest the vast organisa-

to the resignation of Rao as the

president of the Congress but

has been chosen as a stop-gap

arrangement as the interim

president by the working com-

mittee till the party convention

is held to elect a new president.

Several names like Sharad

Pawar, Rajesh Pilot, M

Karunakaran and Ghulam Nabi

Azad who are known to be in

the anti-Rao camp figure

prominently as the probable fu-

ture Congress president while

persons like former external af-

fairs minister Pranab Mukher-

jee or party general secretary V

N Gadgil are also being men-

tioned for the position from the

group of leaders known as "Rao

loyalist". Obviously Narasimha

Rao will want to see that one of

his confidant is chosen for the

job which will give him enough

leverage in the affairs of the or-

ganisation even if he is not in

its helm. By the same token, the

dissident leaders who have so

far opposed Rao for this posi-

tion will like to see to it that

their views are dominant in the

party matters and this will not

be possible in the event a Rao

loyalist is chosen for the party

congressman with long record

of service to the organisation

and enjoys certain degree of

confidence among the party

workers because he has been

handling the financial affairs

of the big organisation for a

long time. But he lacks the

charisma and laudable organi-

sational ability that is required

Sitaram Kesri is a dedicated

Sitaram Kesri is no answer

tion faces another split.

One of the important indica-

subsequent periods.

The Centre for Human Re-

sanitation, education etc.

Clothing

After food, clothing assumes an important item of basic needs of the households. Information on the availability of clothes was sought by asking two questions: (a) whether each adult household member was

endowed with a minimum of

two pieces of clothing i.e. lungi

or saree and (b) whether each

household member owned a piece of winter clothing. The CHRD survey data tend to show that in 1995, one in every ten adult population did not own a minimum of two pieces of cloth in rural areas. That is, one-tenth of the adult population in rural areas (be it male or female) did not report to have possessed at least two lungis (for male) or two sarees (for female). The APT study of BIDS found the proportion to be 17 per cent for 1990. In the high

land size groups, the landless adults are relatively in a more disadvantaged situation. About 16 per cent of the landless adults do not have access to winter clothing. This compares with 10 per cent in marginal groups and five per cent in small groups.

In terms of the access to winter clothing. 12 per cent of the female adults are found deprived compared to one-fifth of the male adults so deprived. In the low irrigated areas, about 16

## Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

tion is relatively less than that in low irrigated areas. Available data further show that one-tenth of female adults do not have access to the minimum basic requirement compared to about seven per cent of the male adults.

The aspect of deprivation is more starkly seen when one considers the access to winter clothing. The average percentage in this case seems to be 18. That is, 18 per cent of the rural adults do not have any access to winter clothing. In the high and low irrigated areas, the shares are about 15 and 21 per cent, respectively. Among the different

per cent of the female adults do not have any access to winter clothing compared to about 28 per cent of the male adults. In the high irrigated areas, the proportion is 12 and 18 per cent

Access to Tubewell

Water/Sanitary Latrines
During the time of the survey
in 1995, 94 per cent of the sample households reported that
they used tubewell water for
drinking purposes. This compares with a share of about 86
per cent in 1988. The improvement could be in evidence for
all households across farm
sizes. However, the proportion

of households reporting to have used tubewell water stood at about 97 per cent in high irrigated villages compared to 85 per cent in low irrigated vil-

However, only one-fourth of rural households seem to have access to sanitary latrines in 1995. This compares with only 13 per cent in 1988. The skewed distribution of the access is evidenced by the fact that threefourths of the large land owners reported to use sanitary latrines in 1995 compared to only 12 per cent of the landless households, one-fifth of the marginal households and 28 per cent of the small farm households. On the other hand, the graduate of households in large and medium groups took place at a much faster rate than in other land size groups.

Housing

The survey findings further show that about 15 per cent of the rural households live in 'jhupri' (a match-box type house made of leaves). About onefourth of the landless group live in such fhupris. One-fifth of the rural households live in durable houses with one plus rooms. Sixty per cent of the large land owing groups live in such durable-room houses. The share of medium and small land owing households are 45 and 22 per cent respectively. However, only one in every twenty of landless households live in durable houses.

School Attendance
The survey data show the

The survey data show that 70 per cent of the population belonging to age group 6-10 reported to have attended primary schools in 1995. This compares with a share of about 51 per cent in 1988. There is thus a remarkable improvement in terms of primary school attendance. The improvement is more pronounced in the case of girl students where the proportion rose from 43 per cent in 1988 to 68 per cent in 1995. On the other hand, the boys recorded a rise from 58 per cent

in 1988 to 73 per cent 1995.

The attendance performance with respect to secondary schools does not seem to be that much eulogising. In 1988, 36 per cent of the age group 11-16 used to go to school, whereas in 1995, the share is only 39 per

#### **Health Status**

During the survey, 87 per cent of the household members were found to be healthy while one-tenth reported to be often sick. In 1988, the same proportion reported healthy but the share of often sick was 12 per cent.

#### Conclusion

The preliminary results of the CHRD household level survey data thus tend to point out that over the years, there have been modest improvements in the availability of some nonincome opportunities to the rural households. Access to prestige items increased and development of human resources took place in rural Bangladesh. The basic question, however, remains as to whether in other countries of our socio-economic standings, the rate has been higher or lower.

# The Congress and Politics of India

by Zaglul A Chowdhury

The question that comes to the fore in the wake of the resignation of the Congress president and choosing a new president in place of Rao is the extent this change or, for that matter, the chief of the Congress which is either the ruling party nor the opposition, will affect the course of Indian politics in the current phase.

for the president of a big organisation which ruled world's
largest democracy for most part
of its history as an independent
nation barring occasional
short spells that also proved
not much successful when
viewed from the point of stability of India.

Now the question that comes
to the fore in the wake of the

resignation of the Congress president and choosing a new president in place of Rao is the extent this change or, for that matter, the chief of the Congress which is either the ruling party nor the opposition, will affect the course of Indian politics in the current phase. Paradoxically, the Congress is the second largest parliamen-tary group in the Lokshaba but with a somewhat peculiar position in the governance of the country which is once again not totally uncommon in parliamentary political system although only seldom experienced. The ruling coalition of which the Janata Dal is the major constituent is surviving at the centre at the support of the Congress which in any case cannot extend support to its arch political enemy, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) whose government failed to muster the necessary support after remaining in power for the briefest spell following the last polls.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the charismatic leader of the Indian political scene was the prime minister of the BJP government but no major political parties except some regional ones like in the Punjab and Haryana states extended support which was not enough to keep the government in power at the Centre. The Congress was faced with a delicate situation because it was opposed to both BJP and the coalition that comprises Janata Dal and the communists which were strong critics of the Congress and the party remained ambivalent for sometime whether to support the coalition in the event of the collapse of the BJP government. Given a choice, it prefers the coalition to the BJP and the present H D Deve Gowda government is walking a tight rope of power in New Delhi with the sensitive support of Congress

from under the feet of the ruling government.

The Congress had no other option but support a government since the Indian electorate is not prepared for another election after the collapse of the BJP government and the people would not have liked the Congress back in power in that situation with the support of other non-BJP parties since the last elections were a mandate against the Congress. So the Congress opted for extending support to the coalition of several centrist and leftist parties without joining the government with enjoying a distinct advantage of having a say in the affairs of running the country even though its views are not always taken as mandatory by the ruling coalition.

It was evident when Inderji Gupta was made home minister signalling the share of power at the centre for the first time by the communists. Congress was lukewarm to this preposition but Prime Minister Deve Gowda finally stood to his decision even though the Congress was not tavourably disposed to this position going to its critic, a veteran CPI leader and parliamentarian Indarjit Gupta. The Congress, in the process, remains a party which has extended support to the formation of present government without sharing the power and hence deprived itself of the opposition status in parliament that has gone to the BJP and its leader Vajpayee. This position of the Congress notwithstanding, the party is uniquely placed to call shots on the longevity of the present government although any effort to pull down the government at present or in near future may not be well taken by the Indian people who want the elections not taking palce so

But the Congress remains a powerful broker in ruling the country and this is how the party that led Indian independence movement and remained at the centre-stage of national politics but currently on the wane due to many reasons still appears a factor in shaping the destiny of Indian nation. The new Congress president Sitaram Kesri has scotched speculations on party's support to the Deve Gowda government.

saying the support will continue. However, it is not known for how long. The Congress holds the key on the fate of the government because it's withdrawal of support will automatically lead to the collapse of the government which is too short of a majority in the Lokshaba by its constituent coalition

Now, the issue that attracts attention is whether Narasimha Rao has become a spent force after relinquishing the party presidentship. Certainly not, as he is likely to remain the leader of its parliamentary party. Rao won from two parliamentary seats in the last elections - one from his Andhra Pradesh and another from Orissa, Congress stronghold. Additionally, he also got his son elected from a constituency in the home state and all these helped him retain position as both party chief and

party despite a severe electoral debacle for the party when it is left with lowest number of seats in the lower house for the first time since the independence of the country.

The criticisms about Rao's

leadership were not unexpected and later the dissidence exacerbated. Rao, known for his intel-lectual calibre a minister for external affairs, demonstrated sufficient organisational capacity both as the head of government and as party chief when he was catapulted to these positions after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. He also showed his maneeuring skills when he began with a minority government but later engineered support and finally completed a five-year term for his government.

Rao's influence in party may have diminished but remains in tact in some frontal organi-

sations like the Youth Congress. But certain recent developments highlighted by the criminal case against him by a non-resident Indian have sufficiently embarrassed him and the organisation. This left him with no other options but to resign at least temporarily Whether he stages a comeback to the centre stage again remains to be seen. His ambitions for another stint as prime minister or as ceremonial president of the republic is not unknown. Presidency may not be difficult if the present coalition government continues till the expiry of the term of incumbent Dr S D Sharma. The position of Rao within the party till such time is also important and also crucial will be his fate on the criminal case.

In any case, the Congress will find an opportunity to regroup itself and strengthen the organisation after the exit of Rao who is likely to pull the string from behind the curtain as far as possible to take things in his favour. Nonetheless, the Congress is expected to enjoy a large degree of ascendancy in the Indian politics in the coming days.

ters, the law makers come up

and demonstrate honesty and

## OPINION

# Corruption versus Good Governance Shaikh Md Wahid-Uz-Zaman

Broadly speaking, any immoral act can be termed as corruption. In Oxford dictionary dishonest or wicked behaviour has been termed as corruption. Corruption in our society often means that kind of action where 'extra' monetary transaction takes place for getting a thing done. Grafts, kickbacks or bribery are the terms used for that kind of unfair transaction of money. If we look into the matter more specifically taking the case of Bangladesh only. by corruption we mean usually the unfair practices resorted to by

the employees in public offices. Question may arise as to why corruption has become an allpervasive affair in our society It is complained that hardly anything can be got done in a government office without spending money. The government employees and officials receive their salaries from the public exchequer built up with the tax payers' money. It can't be accepted that the public servants would have to be paid once again in an unfair way for giving service to the members of the public. We often talk about corruption, the practice of bribery in government offices But do we ever enquire into the matter as to why this sort of corruption exists? Not only that, it is spreading all around like anything. We find that at times the political leaders make promises to eradicate corruption from the society whenever they would be in power. But they never think that it is not corruption which need to be eradicated, rather it is the causes of corruption that

are needed to be eradicated. As a matter of fact, the salary structure of the government for different categories of the employees is not at all commensurate with the prices of the minimum essential commodities required for a person with four-member family. Suppose, an employee at the lowest tier of the government service structure gets an emolument of around Tk two thousand altogether a month. So, one can easily imagine how a person can meet his bare necessities now-a-days with such a meagre amount of money! Again, in the hierarchy of civil service, a beginner receives an emolument of Taka five thousand a month. A civil servant. as anybody knows, is a class one officer of the government enjoying a lot of powers and authority. With Taka five thousand per month, it is really difficult for him to maintain

minimum standard of life even

with a small family of four members only. Again, the top civil servants, the secretaries to the government get a salary of Taka ten thousand (supposedly, as per government pay structure) per month. I don't dare criticise their standard of living and how could they live with this money when a chauffeur of any foreign agency operating in our country draws more than that amount a month?

There is no doubt about the fact that in order to ensure quality in the administration of the country we need to attract the best talents and brilliant youths towards the civil service of the country. If we fail to do so our attempts to institutionalise democracy would be totally frustrated. Because, the efficiency and efficacy of the civil service or the permanent bureaucracy, by whatever name we call it, are the most essential elements as these provide the mechanism with which the elected representatives of the people function. The formulation of policies of different ministries, the preparation of project papers, implementation of the government policies at the grassroots level, its regular monitoring system, maintenance of law and order, administration of justice, collection of revenue, information feed back, preparation of budget, fiscal measures including tariff and taxation policies - all these tasks, by now, have become quite technical and cannot be properly dispensed without an efficient, well-trained and properly groomed cadre of civil servants.

These cadres of civil servants should be properly paid off by the government within the obvious budgetary limitations of the government. But before fixing up the package of emoluments one ought to be realistic and take into considera tion the market prices of various essentials of daily life. We have to ensure a minimum acceptable standard of life required for a gentleman (fourmember family) in a modern society. The government has to attract the best products of the universities for manning the civil service free from all sorts of corruption and immoral acts. In return, the people of the country would be able to get the best service from its civil ser-

Only lip service would not do anything to eradicate corruption from our society unless our political leadership, the minis-

austerity in their deeds. In the past, we have seen that one of the heads of the government in our country immediately after assuming power went to office riding a bicycle once in a week. He also declared a crusade against corruption in the beginning but eventually his regime ended up as one of the most corrupt ones in the history of our country. Again, we have seen in the recent past that one of the closest family member of another head of the government advertised floating of shares of his company in the national dailies giving address of the official residence of the head of the government. This was really shocking and still there was hardly any public reaction about it. In a developed society, such an act of utilising the official position of the highest public office of the country for personal gains could be enough to bring a fall of government. But our people perhaps never mind such sort of things. We still remember the tragic fate of President Nixon for allowing bugging of telephone of the opposition party's office on the eve of presidential elections in the USA.

We have achieved indepen

dence for about 25 years. Now the members of the public demand a welfare-oriented good governance. Moving from door to door for getting things done in a public office has to be stopped. Civil servants should behave like public servants as they are paid off salaries from the tax payers' money. Our Prime Minister aptly said that, "We are not masters but the servants of the people. Allow us to serve you." This is the correct and expected attitude of the publicly elected chief executive of a democratic government. This attitude ought to be echoed by the entire mechanism of the government i.e., the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Only then a healthy service-oriented system of public administration can be developed in the country. The civil servants should be the friends of the people, not their masters. We should not forget that an honest and dedicated civil service can be ensured in the society only when the minimum requirement of a civil servant to lead a gentleman's life can be guaranteed. Corruption would then be automatically eradicated from the public offices for the causes of corruption would be no more there.

A joke

Sir, The Daily Star of 18.9.96 Apa, not MP! Oh, really?

Apa, then where is my chocolate (Norms of the Republic)?

Nur Hossain 151, Bangshal Road, Dhaka.

## Our Mayor

Sir, September, the 19th was a day for Dhaka dwellers. Because, the DCC Mayor went out of his way and pumped out rain-stagnant water from a particular area by borrowing a number of water pumps from the BADC. For this, he certainly deserves a pat. Because, this is the first occasion, he went out of his way like a good Samaritan to mitigate city-dwellers' sufferings, since he took over as DCC Mayor.

But cynics say, it was done to please his party chief and to facilitate the high-ups' journey to the FBCCI Reception venue, at which the PM was the chief guest. From such precedence, can't we expect from him, the same initiative for all other areas of DCC till he is in the chair. The CAB (Consumer Association of Bangladesh) has also made similar appeal to the authorities (DS 21 Sept).

which can pull the rug anytime

A R Choudhury Uttara, Dhaka

### Agri-education

Sir, In order to bring about the desired change and development into our agricultural education system, all the agriculture colleges of the country should be given both academic and administrative autonomy. Such autonomy would initiate competition in the agri-education sector. Recently on the directive of the Agriculture Minister the Director General of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) in consultation with the wing directors of BARI, principals and teachers' representative of the three agri-colleges has submitted unanimous proposal to the Ministry of Agriculture suggesting the latter to sanction BITtype autonomy to all the agri-

colleges in the country.

Meanwhile, it may be mentioned here that there is a pro-

vision for establishing a 'university for agriculture and technology' in Dinajpur in the Kudrod-e-Khuda Commission Report. The teachers, students, officers and employees of Maji Mohammad Denesh Agriculture College, Dinajpur have been demanding converting of the College into a university.

On the other hand, the teachers, students, officers and employees of Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka have been pursuing the authority to upgrade nearly a century-old Institute, founded by the great leader Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haq into a university. In the same way the Patuakhali Agriculture College can also by upgraded to a university in that region.

In fact, what we feel is that the university system of education can bring about desired changes in our agri-education sector and improve the quality of agriculture education in this country.

It is, therefore, sincerely expected that the government will take appropriate steps considering the greater interest of the nation.

A Zahidul Haque Associate Professor Haji Mohammad Danesh Agriculture College, Dinajpur.