

Arab Nationalism and British Intrigue

Aloo J Dastur

Jordan: A Political Study, 1948-57 by Aqil Hyder Hasan Abidi; Asia Publishing House, 1965; pp 251, Rs 25.00.

JORDAN exemplifies the position and role of Great Britain in the Middle East between the two World Wars. Having made secret treaties during the war of 1914-18, which conflicted with each other, Britain and France parcelled out the Turkish Empire between them. In this nefarious task Britain found able aides in the sons of Sheriff Hussein. The elder, Abdullah, was created "Amir of the area east of the Jordan river and Transjordan become a British Mandate.

Abdullah was sustained in power by lavish financial grants by Britain and assisted by British officials. Arab notables who previously detested Turkish imperial rule now disliked British imperialist control over the budget, finances, army, economic development and foreign affairs. The little desert country formed an important link in Britain's imperial lifeline. The strongest Arab armies were the Arab Legion and Frontier Force trained by the British. British policy paid off during World War II when Abdullah proved a steadfast friend.

He earned his reward in 1946 when he was recognised as king of Transjordan and became a little less dependent on Great Britain. Yet he was strongly criticised by the Arab League for continuing in subservience to the British. This blocked the country's entry into the United Nations. Abdullah himself never became popular in the other Arab countries specially Egypt and Saudi Arabia because of his ambition to rule over greater Syria.

Entry of Palestinian Arabs

If he could not translate his dream of Great Syria into reality he created the Hashmite kingdom of Jordan after the Palestine War. When his Arab Legion alone of Arab armies successfully resisted the Israeli attack he incorporated what remained of Palestine into his enlarged kingdom; with a small area he had also to take in nearly a million people, half of whom were without shelter or means of support. The Jordanian Parliament confirmed the union in April 1950.

Till then Abdullah had had a rather easy time; thereafter his troubles started. Challenges were thrown at him from several directions — his relationship with Britain, attitude towards Israel, the general economic si-

tuation in the country, and above all, his disinclination to share power with the Parliament. He regarded Great Britain as his benefactor and protector; the Palestinian Arabs now in Jordan held Britain responsible for their fate and misery. Of all Arab rulers he was the only one who harboured lurking recognition of Israel and even made secret peace overtures surrendering the Rutenberg region to the Israeli army: all the while he maintained the strictest secrecy and even indulged in subterfuge and falsehood when the surrender leaked to the people. The economic situation deteriorated with the large refugee influx. Political conditions developed a fluidity because of the clash which arose between the incoming Arabs who were better educated, more politically conscious and more ardent in their nationalism than the Jordanians. Abdullah's patriarchal superciliousness did not and could not impress them. He also clashed with his Chamber of Deputies. His softness towards Israel incurred Arab wrath and on July 20, 1951, he was murdered.

Dr Abidi brings into bold relief Abdullah's policies running counter to the prevalent Arab mood. He delineates the impact of the character of the king on his desert kingdom and without conscious effort shows how he could not fit into the conditions created by the second World War. He could not reconcile himself to the new world of the Arab League and a militant Arab nationalism: he paid the price with his life.

The Talal interlude is well delineated. The world was led to believe that he was not in his proper frame of mind; he was compelled to be "a king on holiday" by going to Europe "for rest and convalescence". The facts were that Talal unlike his father had the makings of a democratic king, and hence was kept in the background during the long spell of Abdullah as Amir and King. As king he gave a new constitution to his people, which sought to make the government function on the twin bases of responsibility and responsiveness. The Chamber of Deputies was given wider powers. A Workers' Bill of Rights was introduced in the legislature. Talal sought greater co-operation with the Arab world and a little less reliance on the British. The people were

with or for the new king. All this was "not to the taste of some of the interested foreign powers. Nor were they liked by the local oligarchs". If the father was murdered for his autocracy the son was deposed for being a democrat.

His son and successor, Hussain, educated at Harrow and Sandhurst, had been impressed by British institutions but not deeply enough to work them in his country inspite of Talal's effort. The nationalist fervour which was unleashed by Talal could not be curbed. This became increasingly evident when the Cold War projected itself in the region. Always under British control and influence the monarchy and the oligarchy favoured joining the Baghdad Pact; but effective opposition by political leaders prevented Jordan's entry. The revolution in Egypt and the abolition of the monarchy there had its own reaction in the country. It intensified the feelings of Arab nationalism — a force under-estimated by both Britain and France.

Hussain's Troubles

Hussain's troubles have been many and varied: but a single undercurrent is the conflicts created by the incorporation of a part of Palestine. Abidi analyses cogently the problems and prospects of integration which is not yet complete. Diversities exist in the social, economic, political and above all emotional spheres, but gradually the kingdom is being knit into a single whole, the lead being taken by the Palestinians. They are again wailing to form a political opposition in the legislature something not known before the union. The contrast between the pre-union and post-union politics is sharp. The place of Jordan in the Middle East and in world affairs depends not only on how the country conducts its affairs; it depends rather on how the Arabs as a whole shapes their future and how far Jordan can loosen the chains that bind her to Great Britain.

Jordan shares with other Asian countries the fluid politics of having too many political parties. These fall roughly into four categories: pan-Arab, parochial, pan-Islam and Marxist. Since Abdullah's days there is a ban on the propagation of Communist literature although the Communist Party as such exists. The constitution

recognises the right of forming parties, but in practice the government must grant a licence to form a party! In spite of these handicaps the parties are playing their role in gradually drawing Jordan into the Arab fold and releasing the British economic and military hold.

Abidi's treatment is historical and analytical. He has relied in the mariti

on primary sources and his documentation is as perfect as can be. Starting out with sympathy he has pinpointed the weaknesses in the political structure and functioning, and their causes; he has disclosed the long and ill-disguised aim of Great Britain in sustaining the monarchy and controlling the army; he has revealed the efforts at bringing the

country more in to the political and economic vortex of the Arab world; in short, he has succeeded in projecting a true image of the little desert kingdom.

To put the finishing touch to a wellknit doctoral dissertation Abidi furnishes an excellent bibliography, which will certainly be the envy of all Ph D Students.

Problems of Raising Agricultural Production

Report on a Seminar

C V H

AT last the cobwebs that enveloped thinking on food production problems in Andhra are being cleared up. The two-day seminar on food production convened by the State Chief Minister, K Brahmananda Reddi in Hyderabad, on November 1 and 2, contributed to this result by throwing into prominent relief the factors that stood so far, and that stand even today, in the way of augmenting the food production potential in the State in the immediate future and later. Many of the bottlenecks disclosed by the deliberations could have been eliminated earlier; that they were not is a bud commentary on the absence of administrative initiative and lakadaisical execution. We may assume that urgent follow-up action will follow now, and that the tempo generated will be a lever for achieving the objective of national food self-sufficiency at least by 1971. The action programme for the short-term discussed at the seminar is designed mainly to clear the ground for raising a second rice crop on an additional acreage and to remove obstacles to increasing the yield of the rabi crop.

Inter Slate Dispute Settled

The raising of a second paddy crop in an extra 1 to 15 lakh acres (if other steps had been taken the acreage could have been presumably substantially increased) is interlinked with the availability of adequate irrigation facilities and other essential inputs. The major proportion of this acreage will have to be in the Krishna and Godavari basins and in the area served by the Tungabhadra canal system, the Nizamsagar reservoir and Pennar basin.

So far as the Krishna basin is concerned, the problems of supply of water from the Tungabhadra reservoir, which is the main source of irrigation for the

second crop, have now been satisfactorily settled between the Andhra and Mysore Governments, eliminating the earlier uncertainty on that account. It is gratifying that the Centre has agreed to shoulder responsibility for supplying fertiliser, seeds, implements (including diesel engines and drilling equipment for wells) and plant protection equipment urgently needed in this connection. Assured of these inputs (one can only hope that all these will be available in time for this year's rabi crop) farmers would be able to expedite transplantation of seedlings for rabi sowing immediately, to avoid the prospect of shortage of water supply during the summer months.

White many of the issues raised at the seminar (there were only a few on which what may be considered firm recommendations were made) are beneficial from the standpoint of increasing production, their effectiveness will naturally be realised only later. Surprisingly, one heard that routine activities such as the removal of silt in the Krishna and Godavari canal beds and improvement of drainage facilities in the delta area had been either held up for years or that work has been proceeding at a painfully leisurely pace. The excuse that funds and machinery for undertaking these urgent works are inadequate, may cover many sins and much lack of foresight, but it is not a convincing explanation why funds were not asked for in time or available funds were not utilised to the maximum advantage.

Somewhat more inexplicable, however, is why the proposal made by the Chief Minister, K Brahmananda Reddi, some time back for creation of a special drainage improvement fund, with initial capital provided by the Government, to be replenished by imposi-

tion of a cess on lands which will directly benefit from drainage schemes, which was an excellent idea, was not pursued so far. The drainage problem in the low-lying delta areas, which are subject to inundation by floods and from which flood water cannot be easily drained is a long-standing one and legislation, if necessary, has to be introduced to create the fund suggested. As proposed, it will not be a burden on the general revenues while on the other hand it can be utilised also to implement the recommendations for permanent control of floods that the Mitra Committee appointed by the Central Government is expected to make.

Supply of Inputs

Discussions at the seminar on the problem of supply of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and agricultural credit disclosed serious drawbacks in the manner and methods of providing these essential inputs. Blackmarketing in and adulteration of pesticides was admitted by official spokesmen and also adulteration of fertiliser and underweighting of supplies sold in bags. Granting that fertiliser is in short supply, the principal problem was equitable distribution of the allocated quantities to all the farmers in an area. The co-operative societies, through which the distribution is now being made, have been bitually misusing their privileged position and blackmarketing the commodity. Plant protection material supplied by Government has been, found to be adulterated and the spraying equipment faulty.

As for seeds, research farms in the State have been putting in some hard and intelligent work to develop hybrid strains of maize and bajra and conducting experiments on Taichung Variety