

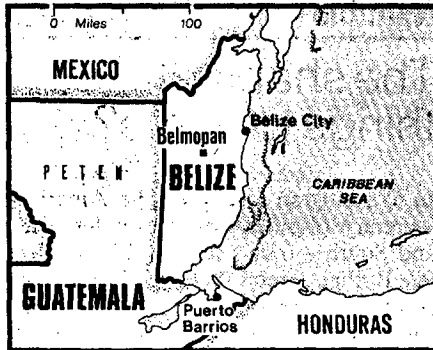
June 1988

## A closed book

FROM OUR CAIRO CORRESPONDENT

For years gossipy stories of improprieties at high level have been told in Egypt. Mr Osman Ahmad Osman made the mistake of telling some of them in his memoirs, "Pages from my Experience". Mr Osman, a millionaire contractor and close friend of President Sadat, wrote that he had sold villas to the children of the late President Nasser at a fraction of their true cost and that a former prime minister improperly promoted a land deal with a Kuwaiti company.

Many Egyptians were offended, and an embarrassed Mr Sadat banned the book from sale and ordered an official inquiry into the allegations. The inquiry reported that the stories were false but cleared Mr Osman of impugning the reputation of Nasser. Mr Osman has resigned as deputy premier for development affairs, a job created for him three months ago and expected to lead to higher things. However, he has kept his post in Mr Sadat's party, and may make a comeback when the fuss dies down.



agreement set off rioting in Belize, where Mr Price's right-wing opponents charged that he was "selling out" the country by agreeing that Guatemala should obtain road, port and oil pipeline facilities and certain rights on some of the little cays off Belize's coast and in the adjacent waters. Six lives were lost, and emergency regulations were enforced for three weeks.

The British minister of state who is handling the problem of Belize, Mr Nicholas Ridley, seems to have reassured its opposition leaders when he was there in the first week of May; and Mr Price had already promised them that a referendum would be held once the treaty's terms were settled. But much will depend on how quickly and satisfactorily the negotiations with Guatemala can be completed—and, perhaps, on the still delicate question of how long after independence (and in what form) Belize can expect to enjoy any British military protection.

pre-election guarantees. But he is not likely to show much interest in the proposals now coming out of Washington unless he is put under some new pressure from the front-line states.

## Belize

### Treaty talks

In New York on Wednesday Britain and Guatemala opened negotiations for a treaty intended to settle the question of Belize, whose prime minister, Mr George Price, is also attending these talks. The treaty is to be based on the heads of agreement that were adopted in March. The essential element in the March deal was that Guatemala would respect the independence and territorial integrity of Belize, which it had long claimed and repeatedly threatened to seize as soon as the British withdrew. In April, a constitutional conference in London prepared plans under which Belize is to become fully independent later this year.

So far, so good, one might think. But in Belize fears persist about what Guatemala may yet do. These fears are understandable in the light of the fledgling state's inability to defend itself against a neighbour which, seen from Belmopan, looms large (with 40 times Belize's population), and is ruled by generals who in the past have often used the Belize issue as a diversion from their failure to meet their own subjects' aspirations.

The announcement of the March

with all the means at its disposal, including the services of an astrologer who said that the stars indicated that polling day, May 9th, would be peaceful. Nearly two weeks later not all the returns have reached the capital, Katmandu, by pony, yak and other unhurried means of communication, but enough are in to show that more than half of the electorate of 7.8m turned out to vote. This can be counted as a victory for the forces of stability presided over by King Birendra.

The 35-year-old, western-educated (Eton and Harvard) king is a gradualist who is slowly surrendering the absolute power bequeathed to him nine years ago by his father. Last year he asked Nepal to choose in a referendum between a Westminster-style of government and the existing *panchayat* ("reconciliation") system, under which political parties are banned. The country voted narrowly for the status quo, chiefly because many people in the rural areas linked *panchayat* with the king, whom they regard as a reincarnation of a Hindu god.

The opposition complained that the reforms made no concessions to those who voted for a party system, and that constituency boundaries were unfairly drawn. The leader of the banned Nepalese Congress party, Mr B. P. Koirala, said that "no honourable and self respecting man will contest elections when there are so many constraints and humiliations." Mr Koirala became prime minister in 1959, in an earlier experiment in democracy, but was jailed the following year after King Birendra's father had dissolved parliament for "squabbling".

The election campaign was a mundane affair, with little discussion of the country's problems. Nepal is poor, and about 80% of adults are said to be illiterate: voting slips carried symbols to represent the candidates. But polling day was quiet. There was no repetition of the student riots two years ago. The astrologer, assisted by the boycott, got it right.

## Nepal

### Stars proved right

FROM A CORRESPONDENT IN NEPAL

One way to judge the result of Nepal's first general election for 22 years is simply to add up the number of votes cast. The opposition had called for a boycott. The government had urged people to vote

### Another vote for Birendra

