

NOTE

## U n r e s t i n A r a b W o r l d

A Correspondent writes :

WHILE THE OIL-RICH Gulf is struggling to pull their nationals from government jobs, and promote profit-making private sectors, poorer and more populated states in North Africa are faced with rising food prices, huge joblessness, and an increasing gap between rich and poor. The economies are growing far too slowly for a rapidly growing labour force searching for jobs. Unemployment rates in most Arab countries is around 20%, but the level of joblessness among younger nationals exceeds 40% in most cases. Years of schooling and higher education tend to raise joblessness ; exceeding 20% for those with tertiary education in Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan. With more than 60% of the population being under age 25, frustrations in the Arab world, are also sharpened by the lack of political reform and persistent allegations of corruption.

Tunisia is an authoritarian state being ruled by the firm hand of president Zein al-Abidine ben Ali, who relinquished powers in mid Jan 2011. A month earlier to the president's stepping down, when police seized a fruit and vegetables stall from a young man, since he had no license, the man set himself on fire. Protests and unrests spread to several towns in Tunisia, cascading in long weeks of rioting in Tunisia, over unemployment. The death toll is about eighty. Twitter followed the riots closely in Tunisia, which is a rare source of information in a country with no press freedom. Activists are now describing the events as the 'Jasmine' revolt, after the national flower of Tunisia. The slogans of the protesters were on political freedom, corruption and social disenchantment. The government has announced that investors in provinces that absorbed graduates, would be granted tax exemptions.

There were riots in neighbouring Algeria recently, over rising food prices. Even though a major exporter of Natural Gas and government spending rising by 24% annually, Algeria is faced with joblessness, a housing shortage and suspicions of corruption. Youths are on the streets of Algeria, protesting against rising prices of staples, like sugar and cooking oil. In the growing despair of lack of economic reforms and unemployment some protesters in Algeria, Mauritania and Egypt have set themselves alight in fire. After Egypt it is Yemen that is on boil. And everywhere Uncle Sam is playing his nefarious game of 'divide and rule', while accommodating the mood of the people in the streets in some cases. They won't hesitate to support regime-change in their client states like Egypt and Jordan if it suits their strategic interests. □□□