

## Non-government teachers' woes

Stricken by law enforcers, disregarded by govt

**W**E find it very difficult to understand the psyche of our policemen insofar as it relates to maintenance of public order. The same pre-emptory violence that it inflicts on the political agitators is replicated in almost all cases without exception, as we have seen done in the case of striking teachers belonging to the non-government schools, colleges and madrasas. The result- seven of the teachers sustained pretty grievous injuries.

The teachers are on strike to press home their demand, which they are entitled to do, and they had set out on a procession along a route that was known to all, something that the law of the land also allows them to do. What, may we ask, were the compelling circumstances that forced the police to go physical on a group that are not only an educated lot, they are a docile lot too, and violence is not a part of their disposition. It is inconceivable that our so-called well-trained police force could not deal with a group of motley individuals who were ventilating their genuine grievances peacefully, without the extensive use of their batons. Or is it because this group of striking teachers belong to the opposition camp that they were the subject to cruel police action?

This regrettably carries a very wrong message to the public. One would have hoped that being professionals in their own rights their behaviour would have been guided by a feeling of mutual respect, and reports do not suggest that at anytime the teachers had resorted to violence. Thus, under these circumstances it would have been only natural to expect the police to extend some courtesy to a fellow professional. But humane behaviour is a commodity not to be found in a group that has come to consider anyone on the streets as a potential adversary. Therefore, one is not surprised by the harsh treatment meted out to the teachers.

We urge upon the police, in particular those that are responsible for its training and employment, to impress on the need for restraint and the skill to desist from resorting to actions that compound a situation rather than pacify it. At the same time we urge the government to address the grievances of the non-government teachers without letting political considerations influence policies. And for this we are convinced that nothing short of intervention from the highest level would do.

## Children among dengue victims

Special care needed

**O**VER the weekend, 53 people afflicted by dengue fever got themselves admitted into city clinics and hospitals. Both in terms of overall patient intake and admission of children, the situation is not alarming as yet, but there is sufficient cause for concern.

The worrying thing is indeed that there are several child victims. While the adults can take precautions keeping away from accumulated rain water in a flower or plant tub, or empty coconut shell and trash can where aedes mosquito thrives, the same can be playthings for toddlers thereby exposing themselves willy-nilly to dengue bites.

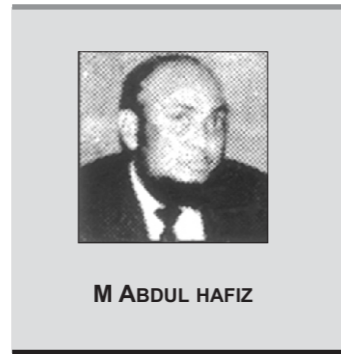
In other words, the children need to be especially cared for -- both preventively, and curatively obviously when they are stricken with the fever. It is learnt on good authority from a pediatric specialist at Mitford Hospital that some of the children had haemorrhage in the eye and have shown rushes all over their bodies. What an agonising sight for their parents!

Besides, what is important to note is that the resistance power of the children against dengue being very low, once afflicted by it their condition deteriorates swiftly. After all, the child immunisation programme which has been a much-acclaimed success story in Bangladesh has nothing against dengue.

Monitors of the situation this year regard the trend of dengue patients reporting to hospitals of the own volition as a healthy sign of a growing awareness among greater number of people against the affliction. Those stricken by ordinary dengue are reporting to hospitals and going away completely cured. Very few have to undergo intensive care with a constant monitoring of platelet counts.

The bottomline question, however, remains: what is the Dhaka City Corporation doing to improve the sanitation status of the city so that it is not infested with aedes, the agent for spread of dengue.

# Russia and China teaming up in Central Asia?



M ABDUL HAFIZ

**C**HINESE and Russian interests seldom converged in history. They frowned at each other even when they were ideological allies. As communist colossuses, they fought each other along their extended borders and charted their own chosen parts. Now there seems to be conciliatory trend in their relations at long last and both are closely cooperating with each other in Eurasian politics.

The recently concluded fifth summit of the six-member Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is privy to those subtle changes which may subsequently result in a tectonic shift in the region's strategic landscape. Comprising Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the SCO has been enhancing its role as part of a conscious effort by its most important members, Russia and China to assert themselves in the region.

True, both Moscow and Beijing were supportive of the US decision

## PERSPECTIVES

**This common concern with growing US penetration into Central Asia -- a region traditionally perceived as a natural area of influence by both Russia and China -- led to a remarkable strengthening of Sino-Russian ties, both bilaterally and in the context of multilateral organisation, such as SCO. The two countries had already expressed their common resolve "to strengthen their strategic coordination." There is evidence of this in the staggering growth in bilateral trade which has registered a jump over 37 percent over the previous year's total.**

to oust the Taliban regime from Afghanistan and also extended some assistance to the US -- reflecting not only their own concern about the proliferation of terrorist forces in their backyard but also because they wanted to improve their bilateral ties with the world's most powerful country. However, the Bush administration with its proclivity for unilateralism tended to take such support for granted.

But what perturbed both Russia and China most was the blatant US attempt to entrench itself in Central Asia -- even after the fall of Taliban -- on the pretext that it needed to establish bases in the region as a part of its world-wide fight against terrorism. Notwithstanding this explanation, both Russia and China were left in little doubt that the US had in the meantime expanded its agenda well beyond the war on terror and was planning to extend its influence in a region that had huge energy resources

and was important also geo-strategically.

This common concern with growing US penetration into central Asia -- a region traditionally perceived as a natural area of influence by both Russia and China -- led to a remarkable strengthening of Sino-Russian ties, both bilaterally and in the context of multilateral organisation, such as SCO. The two countries had already expressed their common resolve "to strengthen their strategic coordination." There is evidence of this in the staggering growth in bilateral trade which has registered a jump over 37 percent over the previous year's total. Even more significant has been the coordination in the defence field including joint exercises of their armed forces. Apparently both the countries have been in their real earnestness coordinating their Central Asian policies to oppose the expansion of US influence in the area.

To this end they have encouraged those countries that permitted the US to establish bases to now close them down, as Uzbekistan has already done; others will be persuaded to follow the suit with the incentives of political support, economic assistance and trade concessions to keep them out of the US sphere of influence. There will however be tough competition because the US also would adopt the same strategy to keep its bases intact in Central Asia.

An energy-hungry Japan's assertiveness to support the US policies in the region has instinctively helped bring Russia and China closer. Both are, to an extent, affected by Japan's nakedly pro-US policies in the Pacific.

While Russia is never oblivious of its 1905 defeat at Japanese hands and continues to keep under her occupation the Kuril Islands of Japan, the Chinese also

bitterly remember the episode of Manchuria's occupation during early last century.

Moreover, the energy issues and politics are deeply entwined in the dynamics at play in the region. Russia's current economic boom is driven by massive earnings from its world-wide energy sale. China, acutely short of energy resources, however, requires a huge quantity of it for her economy. Russia and central Asia are the closest and most declared source of energy for China which has been naturally pushing for strategic pipelines to bring in gas and oil from these countries. Obviously there is real possibilities of a clash of interests between those of the West and China.

The crisis over Iran's nuclear program has also given both Russia and China added clout for they are also veto-wielding members of the UNSC where the fate of Iran's nuclear ambitions will be finally decided. They are convinced that the Bush administration's concern in Iran issue goes far beyond Iran's nuclear program and is meant to bring about a regime change -- a proposition both Russia and China straggly oppose. They are part of the international coalition that opposes Iran's nuclear program but defends its right to civilian nuclear technology.

On the eve of the SCO summit, Russian President Putin stated that "the SCO has gained influence and now evolved into a pow-

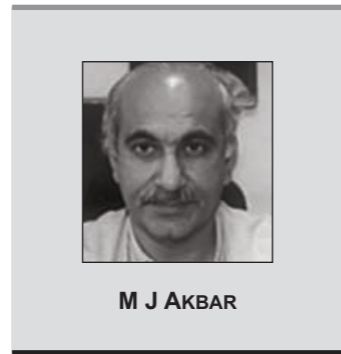
erful regional organisation and a significant stability factor across the Eurasian continent." Whether or not it is so, the SCO is by now steering ahead of fighting its declared evils of "terrorism, separatism and extremism" and is now engaged in "efficient mechanisms of regional integration and benefit from their intrinsic edge in energy and other natural resources."

As the SCO comes of age there is new polarisation in and out of the SCO. For example, out of the countries enjoying observer status, Iran's President Ahmed Nejad stole the limelight in the just concluded summit by asserting his viewpoints most convincingly before at least two world leaders whose countries would matter in decision making with regard to Iran's nuclear future.

Another important observer, India, was conspicuous with its low-profile representation. It is presumed that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's decision to stay away from the summit was meant to a reassure the US legislators, in the process of reviewing the US-India nuclear deal that India was still "playing ball" with the US. But whatever the shape the SCO takes in future, its commitment to protect Eurasia from the clutches of the outsiders is confirmed beyond any shade of doubt.

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# Terror and Sensexocrats



M J AKBAR

**T**HE anguish of terrorism breeds a thousand questions, each troubling, one more difficult than the other. Anger is inevitable, but insufficient. Judgment is necessary, and retribution essential, for a state cannot be impotent against those who seek to destroy its peace. But it is equally vital to understand the problem, if only to better understand the enemy. Solutions are eventually found not by the judge, but by the scholar. The hunt for villains is incomplete without the hunt for answers.

The answers do not belong to easy questions. A parade of the usual suspects is necessary to police work. Pakistan has topped just about every list of suspects that I can recall. Let us agree that some intelligence agency in Pakistan is clever enough to be guilty each time. We then also have to agree that we have been able to do nothing about it.

There is a pattern. Delhi accuses, Islamabad responds with denial and a request for hard evi-

## BYLINE

**Of the thousand questions that trouble me, two leave me helpless. Who and where are tomorrow's terrorists? Why did yesterday's terrorists in Mumbai target first class railway compartments? The answer to the second will offer clues to the first. Terrorists succeed because they keep ahead of those on their tail. Mumbai's terrorists are now mining the many layers of anger in a complex metropolis vulnerable to innumerable forms of misery. Examine the events that preceded the train terrorism in July and you can see the seismic tremors building, whether connected or separate, in advance of the earthquake.**

dence. Threats follow from Delhi; cease, or else. Sometimes the "or else" is accompanied by the rattling of sabres. In 2001, after the attack on the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly building on October 1 and the Parliament building on December 13, the rattling of sabres was heard across the world.

Then? Then nothing happened. On 25 August 2003, bombs left 40 dead in south Mumbai. On 29 October 2005, 59 died in Delhi's markets which, till that moment, had been humming with Diwali joy. Each time the Prime Minister dressed wounds with rhetoric about Pakistan. What happened?

A lot of nothing. Why do the usual suspects remain usual? Who are the fifth columnists of our country? "Suspect" is a word as wide as the horizon since hard evidence is rarely offered to back up the suspicion. Is suspicion a device to appease media frenzy, to buy time, or to ensure that the people are

diverted from asking hard questions of their own government?

Why are the usual suspects not penetrated, exposed and uprooted during the fallow months between terrorist outrages? The latest on the list of regular suspects is SIMI, the Students' Islamic Movement of India. The mention of SIMI certainly encourages some television channels to fill their screens with caps and beards. SIMI is a public organisation with office-bearers. If they are guilty why cannot the police destroy them while the conspiracy is being hatched instead of waiting for the violence to blast our lives? Their name has been fed to the media before. What did the police do after that? "The usual suspects" is a phrase from the film Casablanca and is used by a cynical police chief who knows that suspects are obligingly expendable during a crisis.

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terrorists?

Why did yesterday's terrorists in Mumbai target first class railway compartments?

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Terrorists succeed because they keep ahead of those on their tail. Mumbai's terrorists are now mining the many layers of anger in a complex metropolis vulnerable to innumerable forms of misery. Examine the events that preceded the train terrorism in July and you can see the seismic tremors building, whether connected or separate, in advance of the earthquake. Even nature intervenes to rev up the Misery Index.

Mumbai now has three major religions: Hinduism, Islam and Wealth. These broad categories may have soft edges, allowing much seepage, but the contours are valid.

The rich were always a separate culture. Now they have their own gods, their own demons, their own

rituals, their own prayers and, naturally, their own sacrificial goats. In this respect, as in so much else, Mumbai is only the advance face of India.

India is divided into two worlds: a political democracy, where the poor live, and an economic "Sensexocracy" in which the rich and the rising middle class bow to consumerism, salaries and a stock exchange. The Sensexocrats are the new Brahmins, the new ruling caste. It is not an accident that the finance minister of India, Palaniappan Chidambaram, declared, after the train terrorism, that the Mumbai Sensex had survived. The Sensex was safe and, therefore, his India was safe.

The democrats of our serfocracy are permitted the privilege of voting once every five years. That is their only relationship with power. Very suitably, they are given a holiday to celebrate such a festive occasion, which of course also serves to reinforce our image abroad as a free nation. But the freedom of the poor ends with that vote. Other freedoms are the privilege of the Sensexocrats, a prominent sub-caste of the group, equivalent possibly to the Kayasthas, who are the media. (I am a sensexocrat of the media sub-caste.)

Sensexocrats periodically offer democrats economic crumbs from a Barmecide's Feast (a feast in which food is an illusion). When democrats get angry, the Prime Minister, whoever he may be, gives a speech with a carefully depressed face. When democrats get desper-

ate and resort to violence -- as the Naxalites are doing -- Delhi, lost in dream world delirium, selects a response from Alice in Wonderland: "Off with his head," said the Queen!

The terrorists of Mumbai are expanding their theological base. Marx thought religion was the opium of the masses. He never paused to consider what religion might one day think of Marx. The mixture of communal venom and Marxist anger is just the kind of acid that the desperate need to set off a deadly conflagration. Some politicians can, of course, never resist encouraging such fires.

Is this where the next terrorist is coming from -- from the despair of the underclass of Mumbai? Is the Naxalite a terrorist? Is the Naxalite a fundamentalist? These questions are urgent and relevant. Terrorism is born in the mind, and that is where any battle for prevention has to take place. The police and the army can take charge of the cure. But if prevention is better than cure, then it becomes the responsibility of the political class and its surrogates, including the media. It is they who must engage in the tough task of reducing despair, and spreading social justice along with prosperity.

Why do I feel helpless? Because the answers lie in nuances and the Sensexocrats are blinded by headlines.

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# Koizumi's hollow Middle East visit

## CLOSEUP JAPAN

**It is interesting to note that during his brief visit to the Palestinian territory, Koizumi not only failed to meet the elected Palestinian Prime Minister Ismael Haniye, but didn't even mention his name in any of the meetings and press conferences that he spoke at. It was as if Hamas was totally non-existent, and the election that saw the group gaining widespread support of the Palestinian people was an illusion not worth mentioning.**

### MONZURUL HUQ

**I**N the holy city of Jerusalem there stands an ancient wall where the Jews grieve for the destruction of a temple that once stood at the site, and pray for its restoration. This expression of grief (high and loud) is intended to show the world their religious devotion as well as sense of belonging to a place from where they were once uprooted and driven away to distant countries.

Now that they have returned to the promised land, with the blessings of the mighty and powerful of the present day world, they do not hesitate to show their religious fervour at a place

right beside which stands the third holiest place of the Muslims after Mecca and Medina. There is no harm in the visiting of such a place by dignitaries who regularly go to Jerusalem on official trips. But when the wailing of children and mothers, victimised by the brutality of an invading army not far from the holy site, tends to touch the sky, any dignitary setting foot near the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem is supposed to hear that cry too, despite the fact that the high-pitched laments of the Jewish believers might drown out all other sounds.

I'm not sure if the Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, could

hear the sound of the other laments touching the sky when he posed for a photograph at Jerusalem's Wailing Wall during his recent visit to the Middle East. We didn't hear him say anything, while he was standing there, about the sufferings of the Palestinian people, as Israel continued its all out assault on the Gaza strip to punish the Palestinians for taking an Israeli soldier prisoner and not releasing him without a firm commitment from Israel that it, too, is to release Palestinian prisoners, hundreds and thousands of them, serving prison terms, often unjustified, in Israeli jails.

As the laments of the

suffering people are all around, it is obviously bad public relations to go to a place where those responsibilities tend to shed tears for something that happened more than two thousand years ago. But bad public relations is what it is has been throughout the brief visit of the Japanese premier to the region, and the Wailing Wall incident is just a small part of that.

Koizumi decided to visit Israel, Palestine and Jordan on his way to Moscow to attend the G8 summit. Policymakers in Japan might have thought that success in the Middle East would probably be seen as a diplomatic coup for the

country if Koizumi could go to Moscow after ensuring even a modest breakthrough in the stalled Middle East peace process by pursuing the Israeli and the Palestinian sides to continue dialogue. This would enhance Tokyo's position at the summit in which Japan will be trying to get sanctions imposed on North Korea for country's missile test-fire in early July. But neither Koizumi himself, nor the policymakers in Tokyo could probably guess what a bad time lay ahead for the Japanese leader in the Middle East.

Koizumi's first stopover was Jerusalem where he held talks with his Israeli counterpart, Ehud Olmert, as Israeli troops continued military action in Gaza bringing untold misery to hundreds and thousands of Palestinians trapped in the region. Koizumi, as a result, had no other option but to express concern about Israel's military incursions in Gaza. Speaking at the welcoming ceremony before his meeting with the Israeli leader, the Japanese premier called on Israel to reach a peaceful agree-

ment with the Palestinians. In reply, Olmert simply praised Japan for playing an important role in the Middle East political process but ignored the call.

The next morning the Koizumi entourage came to know about the bombing of the Palestinian foreign ministry building and probably realised what a futile call their leader had made just the day before. And from then on the downward slide continued as the Hezbollah assault and the subsequent Israeli retaliation firmly shut the doors on all hope.

Koizumi's meeting the next day with the Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas at Ramallah turned out to be a mere formality where Japan went back to the practice of checkbook diplomacy by pledging an aid package worth \$30 million. The Japanese aid package includes \$25 million for water supply infrastructure as well as medical equipment for clinics in the Gaza Strip.

It is interesting to note that during his brief visit to the Palestinian territory, Koizumi not only failed to

meet the elected Palestinian Prime Minister Ismael Haniye, but didn't even mention his name in any of the meetings and press conferences that he spoke at. It was as if Hamas was totally non-existent, and the election that saw the group gaining widespread support of the Palestinian people was an illusion not worth mentioning. The rest of Koizumi's visit to Israel was just to provide photo opportunities, as in addition to the Wailing Wall he had also been to the holocaust museum that Israel never forgets to take the dignitaries to.

So, with what success did Koizumi head towards Moscow to attend the G8 summit? A quick answer is definitely no success at all. By extending her naked military invasion deep into Lebanon, Israel not only ignored the call of the Japanese leader, but also clearly showed how the country evaluates any diplomatic initiative taken by Japan.

It is true that during his meeting with the Israeli leader Koizumi proposed a

four-party economic forum that would include Japan and Jordan in addition to Israel and Palestine. The forum would discuss economic cooperation in the region by using Japan's official development assistance fund. He also proposed that Israelis and Palestinians work on a joint agricultural project as a confidence building measure based on economic assistance. Though the Israeli leadership had given verbal consent to the ideas, the intensified fighting that followed overshadowed the whole issue.

As a result, the Japanese leader had to move to Moscow without the coveted prize that his policymakers were eyeing. Hence, the negotiation in Moscow is bound to be a tough one and it will be hard to convince the hosts that the North Korean issue can be resolved only through imposing sanctions against the country.

Monzurul Huq is a columnist for The Daily Star.

