

## PM at the UN

As Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia heads for New York to address the 48th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the entire country will be one in wishing her godspeed. Her presence at the august assembly is significant for a number of reasons. As head of her government, this will be the first time that she will be participating in a General Assembly session. Apart from representing a country that has time and again come through trials and tribulations, that has known the finest moments of victory, a supreme sacrifice, she will have to bear the added responsibility of representing, along with others, the Third World to which Bangladesh belongs.

Therefore, we expect her to set the tone of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). That way she can represent Bangladesh even better because the countries at the bottom share a common destiny. A welcome departure her speech can mark if Begum Zia does not resort to rhetorics — as most other leaders blithely do — but instead put forth some concrete suggestions concerning the UN role in development, particularly in a world that has fundamentally changed after the collapse of communism. Begum Zia should also refer to the need for a more active role the UN is expected to play in ensuring peace in the absence of cold war. In this respect, she should specially point to the inadequacy of the UN or international community's part in stopping the carnage in Bosnia.

With only one superpower left, the UN can no longer afford to play the second fiddle. Under the present arrangement, however, the premier international body can hardly do better. What it has done in Cambodia has exposed the body's shortcomings as well as indicated its potential as a peace broker. The shortcomings are because the mission has drained the UN's resources. In Somalia also it has failed and the mission has put severe strain on its material resources. Unless the UN goes through radical transformation, the body cannot match the challenges it will be confronting. Particularly, the small countries following an independent line are expected to come under intense pressure. The UN must be urged to protect them under its wings in such cases.

It is exactly at this point that Begum Zia will serve a much-needed purpose by weaving a vision for the Third World countries, with special emphasis on that of the SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation) ones. As chairman of the South Asian body, she has to promote the cause of the region and must pronounce what it expects of the UN. Even though the world has become a global village, without regional amity and cooperation the relations with the world at large cannot be based on equality and free from friction. Begum Zia is carrying a baton for a region which is home to more than one-fifth of the world population. If she can do justice to the vision, the SAARC will command the respect it should.

Then again, at this point the intriguing question of raising the water dispute with India at this forum comes. Press reports are not categorical if she will or not touch the issue. We would like to add that before internationalising the issue, we needed to do a lot of home work. Without an exhaustive preparation and doing everything possible to give a last chance for the bilateral and regional approach, raising the issue at the UN can be embarrassing. We would hope Begum Zia has gone at extensive length in working out details before opting for the move. Let her shine at the forum.

## Daniel Bull

What shall we call John Bull now? For the first time in 250 years John as the name of a boy child slid way down as the most likely one in Britain. Well, according a recent survey, the plunge is to the fortieth place. And imagine who takes John's place. No, Tommie is a wrong guess and so is Dick. In fact, there are two, evidently a single contender being not powerful enough to egg John out. So in stride Mathew and Daniel. How could public whim drop the easy and Biblically quite elevating monosyllabic John in preference to lesser saints with polysyllabic names no doubt to be shorn in no time into the diminutive Mat and Dan.

Can one hope to get any socio-psychological indication of a certain change in this? It would be decided an act of gearing and a bit foolish too to hazard that. Still it is very tempting to posit that the British have doffed the peculiarly English John — so aptly shown by the Prime Minister and the leader of opposition, both Johns — to don more European sounding names. Unluckily for British imperial prestige the new favourite names smack so unmistakably of things French and Fair Albion is in need of all our sympathy on this count.

The favourite names, for the new-born girl child in Britain are Rebecca and Charlotte — as British and as Biblical as can be. But whatever happened to Maggie for Margaret and Betty for Elizabeth? Have the British found a new love for the classic and the archaic?

Once upon a time Bengali wits used to deride British names as being full of improbable reminders of peculiar trades and even unloved animals. The Bengali people have picked up so many weird and inane names in the recent decades that can shame any other nation while the Hindu Bengalee names were distinguished by their caste-indicating second names — ending with the Brahminic Chatterjees and Bannerjees or more specifically so Sanyals and Maitras or the Vaidya Dasguptas and Senguptas — there was no need for a second name at all for the plebeian masses, either Hindu or Muslim till the turn of the century. Muslim names for the Bengalees of early this century betray a history of 'christening' by persons well versed in Arabic and the Islamic scriptures. Whole breeds of Hugs and Rahmans and Islams outgrew the simpler Arabic names beginning with Abdul or Mohammad and ending quickly with a Jalil or Khaleque or Sobhan and where the God's name was not invoked, with Hussein or Ali. Pakistan put an end to that and Bengali Muslims started taking on Bengali words specially for girl's names. As the War of Liberation neared, Bengali nicknames became part of the official Arabic ones for both men and women. When all that became a thing of the past, one suddenly discovered that Pakistani favourites of Ihsrat-Ismat-Iffat and Shakil-Kalim-Tanweers have tarried back in the patent Pakistani tandem style which must have travelled there from UP, India.

Now in this Bangladeshi tower of Babel how one longs nostalgically for Anwaras and Monowaras and the names freshly coined by our writers and poets. If only Guinness knew about this, Tagore could have been crowned with crowding his works with the highest number of people and his would have been the honour of minting the most names, new and shining and evocative of so many things.

# Ministers vs Governor: The Importance of being Bhandari

The pressure on the media in the Bhandari case and the CBI's cover-up raises serious questions, not only about the intentions of high-ups in the administration but also of those who run the newspapers. Why the information was sought to be suppressed?

ELDOM officials are asked to leave in the midst of central cabinet meetings. When that happens it means that ministers want to discuss something which they avoid doing in the presence of others. One such occasion arose the other day when the cabinet took up informally Governor of Tripura, Romesh Bhandari's attempt to implicate in a pay-off scandal three union ministers, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Balram Jakhar and B. Shankaranand, and former minister H. K. L. Bhagat's son.

Azad was most vociferous because he was supposed to have accepted Rs 50 lakh in London. Jakhar and Shankaranand, allegedly paid Rs 30 lakh each, were equally agitated and wanted to know why a person like Bhandari had at all been appointed as governor. All the three — and some other cabinet ministers who supported them — demanded immediate action against him. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, wearing his usual expression of injured innocence, kept quiet. But when pressed, his laconic reply, again typical of him, was: 'Give me three, four days.'

Rao left for China and South Korea soon after. He has been back for more than three weeks now. Three, four days have already spanned three, four weeks. Rao has reportedly not mentioned anything to Bhandari so far, although reliable sources confirm that the two have discussed 'some other matters' on the phone.

Rao's expression of 'three, four days' is not taken seriously. In fact, it has come to mean no action. He knows that the three ministers and Bhagat's son are up in arms against him but he also knows

that they cannot do anything. He expects they will gulp down their anger in due course as other estranged ministers have done in the past. Time, he believes, resolves fixed positions. He has not been proved greatly wrong.

Both the Congress and the opposition were highly upset over Law Minister H. R. Bhandari's observations against his colleagues and others in a TV interview, the 'objectionable' part of which was not used. During the debate on the no-confidence vote, Rao gave the impression that he would take necessary action against the minister in the course of a week, if not 'three or four days.'

Bhandari is thriving, much to the chagrin of those whom he had run down. It is apparent that if the prime minister were in a position to drop Bhandari, he would not have appointed him the law minister when Vijay Bhaskar Reddy quit the position to head the Andhra Pradesh government. He has admitted that the appointment was under pressure.

Picking up the Bhandari episode, he had secured two affidavits from an obscure Swiss national, Franco Sartori, supposed to be a manager of Harshad Mehta, the Bombay broker in the bank scam. One affidavit alleged that Sartori paid money to L. K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and some other Bhartiya Janata Party leaders from the accounts in Switzerland on the instructions of Harshad Mehta. The other affidavit mentioned pay-offs to

the three ministers and Bhagat's son. Fortunately for all of them, *The Statesman* spilled the beans before the affidavits could be used to defame them. The paper published their texts and told how Bhandari had employed all dirty tricks to obtain them.

Bhandari's ire against Bhagat is understandable because he considers Bhagat as his rival in the Delhi Congress politics. But why the three ministers? He has no personal

when *The Statesman* was at Bhandari's story for five days. The angry reaction by the BJP, the Janata Dal and the Communists to Bhandari's doings was also ignored by the press.

Another instance is not so blatant but somewhat similar: the bulk of the press did not use the cover-up by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) of a *hawala* transaction. In the course of investigation against a person, who was channelling foreign funds to the Kashmir militants, the CBI came to possess certain documents and diaries, which carried the names of beneficiaries, including some ministers who had served in the governments of Rajiv Gandhi, V. P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar. The amount disclosed is Rs 52.34 crore.

The CBI has said in a statement that 'the question of pushing up anything just does not arise.' Had this been the case, the CBI would not have exerted pressure on newspapers and news agencies not to use the disclosures. They were made available to the press, supported by the photocopies of the diary. A video magazine, *Kalchakra*, which has pictorially traced the entire case, has not been passed by the government-appointed censors. And the arrest of a CBI director general of police (DIG), who was in charge of the case, has made the government's role suspect.

Still more unexplainable is why no newspaper, except *The Statesman*, divulged the scandal. I know that news agencies are prone to pressure but why newspapers knuckled under is beyond my comprehension. There was not even a follow-up

ment that he authenticated the documents implicating V. P. Singh at Rajiv Gandhi's instance.

Who told Bhandari to get the affidavits is the question. True, he is more loyal than the king because he has been cooling his heels for years at the Congress foreign office cell for some job. But he is a cautious man who, during his 35 in the Indian Foreign Service, must have learnt that one does not put one's hand in fire without purpose.

It is, however, significant that Bhandari's appointment was as much in a hurry as his departure from Delhi. Tripura chief minister Dasarath Deb was never consulted about the appointment and he had come to know about it only when someone rang him up on Bhandari's behalf that at least two mercedes should be sent at the airport for the governor.

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