INDIAN SCENE

The Teachers' Strike and After

HREE things require to be said regarding the teachers L strike which ended only

recently. The first one is that the teachers insisted upon getting the scales recommended by the UGC. But they did not succeed in that attempt. A bit of background history needs to be provided here. In the mid-80's, the UGC appointed a committee to survey the situation and recommend revised scales of pay for teachers at the college and university level. This was more or less concurrent with the Fourth Pay Commission which went into the question of how much to pay to Central Government employees.

The same device was adopted when the Fifth Pay Commis-. sion was appointed. This com-mittee made its report in early. 1997. As per normal procedure, the report was processed by the UGC. Last time, the report of the committee appointed by the UGC was accepted by the UGC except for a few marginal changes. This time the UGC decided to virtually reopen the entire report.

This had two unforeseen consequences. One was the extraordinary delay that took place. While decisions about other categories were made, those in the case of teachers remained pending. Secondly, it led the teachers to adopt a posture which, it is clear in retrospect, was to pitch their expectations too high.

For reasons that do not have to be analysed here, the UGC suggested a scale of pay which was higher than what had been

Dr Amrik Singh writes from New Delhi

While the all India battle is almost over, the battle in the States would have to be fought all over again, or almost so.

adopted even in the case of the IAS officers. The assumption was that if a high claim was made, something higher than the existing level would be ac-cepted after all. This did not happen. The Central Government stuck to the recommendation made by the UGC appointed committee and did not budge from that point of view despite the three-week long strike and everything else that was said and done.

To this extent the expectations of teachers were belied. They assumed, and not too wrongly, that it would be possi-ble to intimidate the Centre into accepting their point of view. But this did not happen. And this brings us to the second point.

why did the government hold out despite all the pressures exerted? According to teachers, the IAS officials who control policy making to a large extent were opposed to the UGC recommendation. Had it been accepted, the scales of pay for university and college teachers would have been higher than those sanctioned to the IAS. This was not acceptable to them therefore and they opposed it vehemently. But it would be too much to assume that decision making is controlled by the IAS to the extent that, if it oppose

something, it would get rejected. Two other factors worked against the teachers. Both of them were weighty in their own way and this fact needs to be understood and acknowledged.

One of them was that when parity with Class-I officers was conceded in 1973, the number of teachers in the system was about a lac and a half. During the last quarter century, it has more than doubled; it is something like three and a half lacs now. The scales of pay since then have been revised twice over. Therefore the incidence of financial commitment was quite high. The Central Government found it difficult to allocate so much to higher education. One has only to look at the almost stagnant grant given to the UGC to see the point that the government has been trying to cut down its commitment to higher education. What the teachers wanted was the exact opposite and hence the stale-

A second factor was equally relevant and this should make the teachers pause and reflect over what they do during the next few years. In the early 70's, public opinion was with the teachers. The general feeling was that they were seriously underpaid.

Now that perception has

changed. Most people think that teachers have failed to per-form despite the fact that they have been given high vages. In plain words, most people think that, as a community, these teachers are overpaid and underworked. Therefore the teachers' organisations, both the all India one and the Federation of Central University Teachers, failed to generate any significant degree of pressure.

The third issue is no less important. According to the agreement arrived at with the Centre, if any State has any serious or 'immediate' difficulty in meeting its commitments. the Centre would sympathetically consider its request for assistance of more than 80 per cent which is the current rate of

assistance. This is a clear recognition of the fact that while the all India battle is almost over, the battle in the States would have to be fought all over again, or almost so. Most states are in a difficult financial situation and are unable to meet their commitments. That being so, while some would come around, others would plead lack of re-

Whether the Centre reacts sympathetically or not remains to be seen. Likely enough, the enhanced grant will not be forthcoming so easily as is hoped. Therefore, if we think that we have heard the last of this problem, it would be rather over sanguine.

sources.

The writer is a former Vice Chancellor of Delhi University.

- Mandira

To Hell-and-Back Horror Stories from Nigeria

Recently released former head of state General Olusegun Obasanjo said jail conditions in Nigeria were the worst in the world. Now that most prisoners have been freed their stories are revealing just how much they suffered. Gemini News Service's correspondent has been reading their accounts. Cameron Duodu

writes from London

TENERAL Sani Abacha. The Nigerian head of state who died in June, has been called a "lunatic" by Kunle Ajibade, editor of The News Magazine published in Lagos.

Ajibade was one of many journalists jailed by Abacha for no other offence than that he published details of an alleged

coup plot. The enormity of the suffering inflicted on him in prison for this non-offence convinced him that the man in whose name he was tortured could not have been sane.

Whether Abacha was a lunatic or not is now irrelevant. What is amazing is that in almost all cases the people who actually carried out the tortures are still at their posts.

The new Nigerian leader, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, was asked, at his first world news conference in Abuia, what he intended to do about the suffering endured by the prisoners. His answer was stitute civil actions against those who abused their human

The scores of testimonies that have surfaced since Abacha's jails began to open indicate that if Abubakar's advice is followed, hundreds of civil actions could ensue.

Two of the most notable Abacha detainees can no longer avail themselves of such actions: Chief Moshood Abiola winner of the 1993 presidential election, and General Shehu Yar'Adua, deputy head of state under General Olusegun Obsanjo between 1976 and 1979. Both died in detention.

But Obasanjo, jailed for the same alleged coup plot as Yar'Adua, did survive and could conceivably claim millions of naira from prison authorities.

Quite a few of Abacha's detainees were not politicians, but merely happened to be related by blood, to people Abacha did not like. One such was Wole Diva, younger brother of General Óladipo Diya, Abacha's deputy head of state (who would have been executed for alleged treason if Abacha had not died).

The story Wole Diya told, on release from seven months in iail, is one of the worst of the horror stories yet told.

He said: "I saw hell. I was detained along with 67 others. both military and civilian, at Abuja. Each time there was the call of nature; and any of us wanted to go, the guards would give that person six strokes of

"There were these two officers, both of whom worked for my brother. In their case, permission to visit the toilet attracted 12 strokes. Our hands were chained, even when we wanted to eat.

Kunle Ajibade's story is just as gruesome: 'They dumped me in one of their cells in the Directorate of Military Intelligence headquarters, where I stayed for a week. All the louvres were broken.

"Before I got there, they had kept some civilians there for punishment and they had urinated in the cell and it was stinking.... I was there from morning till night for one solid week Later on, when I started complaining about the mosquitoes and the terrible conditions of my cell, one soldier said I should consider myself lucky and that I was in a kind of fluxurious Nicon Noga

Hilton Hotel in Abuja. The soldier added: "Dat Tell [magazine] man [assistant editor George Mbahl na him know wetin dem dey call cell now o!" (Pidgin English for: 'It is he who knows what a bad cell is really like!')

Ajibade was later transferred to the "real cell" the soldier had talked about. "When they opened the door," Ajibade revealed, "you would think that you were in one of these out-ofthe-way rooms in an 18th Century house.

"They had built this iron railing before you even reached the padlock. Inside, they had to ask somebody to dress up and get out of the way. The person was lying down on the stinking floor like a dead man.

"It turned out to be George Mbah. On the bare floor. That's where they pushed me into, too. Barely three hours later, they also brought Ben Charles Obi leditor of the Classique news-

"It was a damp place. That time, it was raining heavily in Apapa. No light in there. And

Gen Sani Abacha and two of his victims -Gen Shehu Yar'Adua and Chief Mashood Abiola. Both died in jall

because of the dampness, and the area was very bushy too, the mosquitoes were just too many. We were in there for about a month before I collapsed. I was

just vomiting blood. "Se they could not help just taking me to the military hospital. There I was sleeping in handcuffs and chained to the

Charis Anyanwu, publisher of The Sunday Magazine, was also jailed merely for reporting that there had been a coup attempt against Abacha. On her release she was asked whether she had been allowed to listen to the radio while she was in prison.

Anyanwu replied: "What radio? Radio is forbidden in prison. Television is forbidden. Newspapers are forbidden. Even most types of books are forbidden, unless they are religious books and most types of inconsequential books. In Kirikiri prison in Lagos, they gave me books about Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother of Great Britain, and the rest of it."

Chief Olabiyi Durojaiye, of the National Democratic Coalition leadership, said : "It is a case of mental and physical quarantine. I was quarantined, put in seclusion and locked up day and night.

"That was the case for the first 11 months. When I pressed that birds, lizards and ants are enjoying the free air of God whereas I as a human being, was locked up in one room day and night, they allowed me to come out for three hours each

Chief Frank Kokori, of the Petroleum Workers Union, also said: "I was taken to a prison in the desert - Bama Prison in Borno State where there was intense heat.

"My pains were aggravated because of the extreme weather conditions. It could be extremely hot, and very cold at other times. For four gruesome years, I was in solitary con-

finement." The prisoner's accounts made a point of thanking those people, especially foreigners. who took the trouble to write to them in prison and send them books and other gifts. All said such kind gestures kept their spirits alive.

After reading these accounts one question keeps popping up in my mind: Is all this torture necessary just to enable an individual to retain power at the expense of his fellow citizens? When will it become possible for an African ruler to think of himself as just another citizens, with the same equal rights as all other citizens, and stop using them as if they were his personal toys?

Hopefully, as many torture victims as possible will follow Abubakar's advice and take their torturers in court. Exposing them to the public glare, and perhaps reliving them of every cent or kobo they possess, is one of the few ways to make sure people will learn that being put in charge of fellow human beings on behalf of a political regime does not give carte blanche to treat them like ani-

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Famine Stalks South Sudan

TUNGER is a dreaded phenomenon in most of Africa, particularly in the Sub-Sahara region. Mass starvation is more or less endemic in the whole region. A persistent combination of civil war and drought drives millions to the brink. The resulting tragedy presents nightmarish aspects to the outside world, giving rise to an overwhelming sense of anguish and

Countries like Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan can have wars and manmade crises specially in matters of food supply and distribution both locally or for supplies from UN or international sources. That is reportedly what is happening in Sudan to explain the food crisis that has gripped it. The auxiliary factors compounding the crisis include, interalia, the religious antagonism between Islamic North and Afro-Christian South, SPLA or Southern People's Liberation Army and their international supporters. The latter are reportedly egging them on to fight to topple the Islamic government of the North. The government forces of the North are said to be engaged in preventing the UN or other supplies of food relief from reaching the starving South. thus perpetuating the food famine to the mounting distress in the most seriously hit areas. such as the Bahr el Ghazal province.

According to reports, World Food Programme (WFP) is feeding nearly 2.4 million. about half the population of Southern Sudan, involving 12 rebel areas with their increasing starvation. In mid-July, a British foreign office minister named Derek Fatchett succeeded in getting opposing forces in the long-running civil war to agree to a limited truce for a 3-month period to allow through much needed relief. This was said to be a significant step forward. Not only would it enable more aid to get through to Bahr el Ghazal, where the famine is worst, it might also

by ASM Nurunnabi

encourage the Sudanese government and the SPLA to engage in broader discussions that could, hopefully, pave the way for a sustainable political settlement. In this context, it may be noted that donors have begun to think in other terms than keeping helping with food and relief only to keeps the North and South from fighting endlessly. As the observers feel, a political solution to the conflict

is a must by now. The United Nations has already put in place plans to deliver food to thousands of starving people in southern Sudan, taking advantage of the agreed three-month truce period. The WFP plans to deliver 15,000 tons of food per month in Sudan over the next four months. A WFP official said that the food delivery would be made through three safe passage corridors opened under the cease fire terms by trucks on a road from Uganda. In addition, some Ilyushin 75 aircraft would be used for the purpose.

According to a highly placed official of the UNICEF, the famine in Southern Sudan is likely to last for another 15 months, and will extend beyond the current three-months. ceasefire in Bahr el Ghazal. It is, however, argued by aid offi-cials that the three-month ceasefire is too short a period and too narrowly restricted to one area.

Aid officials called the crisis Sudan's worst since 10 years ago when a quarter of a million people died of starvation following a drought and heavy fighting between the government and SPLA.

In response to the present extremely tragic situation, UNICEF and WFP are supporting feeding programmes for more than 2,000 malnourished children and are providing therapeutic and supplementary feeding to Sudanese who are too weakened by famine to eat

There are reportedly tremendous obstacles in the path of the aid agencies. The terrain in the famine-affected areas is poor, with many treacherous roads through which aid convoys must pass. According to an aid agency official, even if all fighting stopped, it would not be possible to rush in there with thousands of tonnes of food because of the terrain that has to be negotiated in Sudan.

Bahr el Ghazal province is at the centre of Sudan's civil war. The province is home to soldiers and leaders of the Sudan People's Liberation Army which is battling a national government dominated by northern Arabs. The SPLA is seeking more autonomy for black southerners who are mostly Christian or members of tribal faiths. The conflict, in fact, dates back to 1956 with a 10-year break in 1972. London is taking increased interest in Sudan this year — the centenary of the British conquest of the vast African country. Now the new Labour government in London is said to be wanting to tackle a dispute that is partly a hangover from colonial days. Many leaders of the South's predominantly African populations regarded British policy in the north as traditionally

favouring the Islamic north. The British Foreign and Commonwealth office said that the humanitarian initiatives that have been taken in Sudan get the backing of the Inter Governmental Authority on development (IGAD), a seventeen-nation regional grouping that is working with the Khartoum government and the SPLA for a negotiated settlement. IGADsponsored Sudanese peace talks, which was due to take place in Addis Ababa this month, may have to be relocated due to the current standoff between two principal players in the process, Ethiopia and

The SPLA, long engaged in fighting pro-Islamic forces in the North, had previously backed the creation of a single secular state. Peace moves now have focused increasingly on a separation of the South. A big dispute now is where the boundary line would be drawn. The United States, which tacitly supports the SPLA in its fight against Sudan's Islamic government, is the largest donor of food aid amounting to dlrs 75 million in contributions this year

The SPLA, whose top officials live comfortably in neighbouring Kenya or else where. deny claims by relief agencies that they divert relief food for their troops. Government forces often loot or burn food stocks if they fear rebels will get them. The Sudanese government does not allow military transport aircraft, which have the largest capacity for aid drops, to fly into southern Sudan for fear they could be carrying arms for the rebels. And the United Nations is criticised for cooperating with both the governments by not pushing hard enough against the flight ban and the Analysts are unanimous

that a political solution has to be the chief goal for the two parts of the country to strive for, and for the international community to help advance it. The suggested political solution would involved peace talks between Sudan's Islamist northern-based government and animist and Christian southern-based rebels. There is apprehension in some quarters that outside help towards a political solution will remain a far cry if it is tied to any axe to grind. In the opinion of some observers, a way out of the senseless conflict may emerge from the referendum recently ordered by the Khartoum government and accepted by the rebels. It is widely felt that the world as well as regional peace, effort need to be directed towards it with keener interest.

Domestic Violence Peeps Out of Closet

Suvendrini Kakuchi writes from Tokyo

"At the urging of the United Nations, we officials realised Japan also had to take on the issue of battered women to prepare ourselves toward the target of gender equality."

THE low status of women in Japanese society is no secret but officials in this country have expressed surprise at the large number of women violently treated by men.

After decades of ignoring the problem, officials say there may be thousands of battered women across Japan who tolerate their partners' abusive behaviour partly out of fear of social scorn.

The officials' acknowledgment of the reality of domestic violence comes on the heels of a survey on battered women by

the Tokyo metropolitan government. The survey, released in August, covered 1,553 women who had been experienced violence by their husbands or partners at least once.

The results were astonishing," said Yuko Omura, an official in charge of the survey "The problem of battered women is just coming out of the closet in Japan and we find that it needs immediate attention.'

Nearly seven per cent of the respondents said their partners physically assaulted them frequently, while 24 per cent said

twice. Sexual violence was the top form of abuse and included domestic rape, being forced to tolerate their partners watching pornographic films or indecent material, and having husbands or partners who did not accept their responsibility in family planning.

they had been abused at least

"What was alarming were the cases of rape," said Omura "While the percentage was low at one per cent, this still brings the number to around 29,000 women if taken on the ratio of the total number of married women living in Tokyo, which is 291,000.

Respondents in the survey also told of severe violence that often resulted in fractures, swollen faces or limbs.

The survey was conducted as a result of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Explained Omura: "At the urging of the United Nations, we officials realised Japan also had to take on the issue of battered women to prepare ourselves toward the target of gender equal-

But officials were ill prepared for stories like that of 'Keiko', who endured physical and psychological abuse from her husband for two decades. A mother of three. Keiko helps her husband run a photography shop in suburban Tokyo. She says her husband works hard. but drinks so heavily at night,

then becomes violent. She has suffered two broken teeth as a result of his attacks and fractured her wrist when he tried to push her down the stairs in a fit of rage. Keiko says her husband refuses to discuss his problems with her and tells her to leave if she is not happy.

"I have tried several time to leave him," confessed the woman who looks much older than her 42 years. "But every time I try, my parents and inlaws tell me to endure the situation for the sake of my children."

She is willing to endure life with her husband for a few more years but "when my children leave home, I then, at last, can think of a new life." Nobuko Kishi, director of a

Tokyo counseling centre set up primarily for sex workers, says Japanese society seems to have built up tolerance toward domestic violence against women.

Part of the problem, she says, is that battered women are reluctant to talk about the abuse to outsiders, and society puts family before individual concerns. Indeed, almost half of the Tokyo survey respondents said they had not consulted anyone about their situation.

Most of these women, in their 50s, explained they did not want to reveal their problems to outsiders and shame the family. Many of the respondents in their 20s, meanwhile, had consulted other people. The overall impression among respondents, however, was that they were powerless to change

Satoru Saito, a psychiatrist at the Institute for Family Functioning in Tokyo, commented: "Battered women are not socially incompetent women or obedient women. They can be teachers, doctors, nurses, or lawyers. Some men feel threatened by these women and so are physically abusive."

their situation.

One respondent in her 30's said her husband became violent when she went with her friends. She wrote: "He beat and kicked me and dragged me around by my hair. I was forced to apologise on my knees." After trying to keep her marriage intact for 10 years, she successfully sought a divorce.

But experts say more often than not, battered women are willing to take abuse for much longer. Police say their intrusion in family matters is often not welcomed by many abused

"If battered women clearly express their desire that their husbands should be arrested, we will do so," said Tomoko Sakaguchi, head of the Office for Crime Victims at the Metropolitan Police Department. "But often the women take back their requests for help when they

cool down." "We must begin by helping women to speak out against violence by telling them that there is no shame in seeking their rights to be free from abuse by their husbands," said Omura. "Men also have to be aware of what they are doing so that they, too, can get help to get rid of the habit of beating their

More women are beginning to seek outside help. According to Omura, the counselling centre headed by Kishi is now full of battered women seeking solace and advice.

wives."

Counsellors are calling for more shelters for battered women - there are now three or four of them - and more informative workshops. Lawyers see a need to toughen existing laws.

"Violent husbands are rarely prosecuted unless wives suffer serious or fatal injuries," said lawyer Tomoko Hirayama, who specialises in divorce and other civil cases. "Courts can issue temporary restraining orders. but abusive husbands are not punished for violating orders." - IPS/APB

Eritrea. Internet Bazaar Gets Humming in Delhi

T ANT to go shopping in the capital without ▼ having to trudge through crowded alleys carrying a cartload of goods? Simple. Log on to your favorite marketplace on the Internet and just click. From a simple pen to flowers, candies and jewellery, everything can be ordered on the Net here now. Shopping is now being

"made painless" with an increasing number of market complexes setting up sites on to the Net. In the capital, two major shopping complexes - in Connaught Place and Lajpat Nagar — have begun to market their wares on the Net. Log on to lajpatnagar.com or connaughtplace.com, and you can visit sites that promise to cater to all your needs - furnishings

by Taani Pande to decorate your home or your car, clothes, electronic goods, books and magazines, toys, gifts, footwear, jewellery, software and food.

Catalogued under different headings, the sites provide a description of the goods available along with pictures of some of them. If you click on the food sites, which offer anything that tempts the palate from

"Chinese to typical south Indian dishes", you have a listing of all the eateries in the shopping complex. According to Akshay Julka, the manager of Valentino's, a popular eatery in Lajpat Nagar, the need to advertise on the Net was to reach out to a larger number of

The potential customers are expected to place their orders









and these can either be delivered right at their doorsteps or they can come and collect it themselves, he said. "This takes away from the usual waiting time," he told India Abroad News Service.

Another site — a vegetarian's paradise - is bababazar.com, which provides everything from pickles and pastes to fresh fruit and vegetables. And the purchases are home delivered within 24 hours, anywhere in the capital. According to a regular user of the site, it is a "boon for all those people - particulairly Net surfers - who work

late into the night and do not

find time to go shopping."

The site functions through a membership system and each member who wishes to shop here is allotted a shopping basket and a personal identification number. Just click on the shopping list, collect your purchases in your shopping basket and place your orders. The goods are delivered the next day. Other eateries like the Nirula's have also set up their own sites on the Net and deliver food right at the doorstep.

However, going on the Net also has its disadvantages, as the Nirula's staff learned recently, when they received an order from Alaska! Cinema theatres too are beginning to realise that "painless booking" via the Internet is a cost-effective way to lure customers. The Priya multiplex was among the first in Delhi to launch such a service: You book your ticket over the Net, walk into the theatre half an hour before the movie starts and collect your ticket.

Today, the number of tickets being booked on the Internet has increased tremendously, and the owners

are considering introducing a special offer for Internet According to customers. Sandeep Sawhney, whose Combit Advertising helped set up the site (pvr-movies.com), it has been a success. However, he says the market for Internet transactions in the country is very limited. "Priva was a success because it is based in Delhi. where there are about 30,000-40,000 Internet users," he said.

Carrying out transactions

on the Internet is still not a booming business in the country. There are an estimated 2.3 million personal computers in the country and a little more than 120,000 Internet subcribers. Most sites are merely serving as advertising billboards for companies to display their wares. The surfer, or potential customer, still has to order the goods over the phone (numbers are listed at the sites) and pay up when the goods are delivered.

"One of the biggest hurdles to

cond cting transactions on the Intenet is that in India you need a signature verification for payment on the credit card. So we are targeting an international market and are also planning to set up an e-commerce site," Sawhney told IANS. Many others seem to have the same idea. Log on to indiaforum.com and you can buy anything from cards and cakes to toys and gifts. You can also send these to your relatives and friends in 100 different cities in the country. The site, which has a catalogue order form that has to be filled up while placing orders, also offers special discount on gift items during Indian festivals. Currently, it is offering various discounts for Diwali.

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