

INDIAN SCENE

The Teachers' Strike and After

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.

THREE things require to be said regarding the teachers 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.

The same device was adopted when the Fifth Pay Commission was appointed. This committee 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 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.

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

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 accepted after all.

To this extent the expectations of teachers were belied. They assumed, and not too wrongly, that it would be possible to intimidate the Centre into accepting their point of view.

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.

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.

A second factor was equally relevant and this should make the teachers pause and reflect over what they do during the next few years.

Now that perception has

changed. Most people think that teachers have failed to perform despite the fact that they have been given high wages. In plain words, most people think that, as a community, these teachers are overpaid and underworked.

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.

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.

The writer is a former Vice Chancellor of Delhi University.

Famine Stalks South Sudan

by ASM Nurunnabi

HUNGER 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.

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.

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.

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.

encourage the Sudanese government and the SPLA to engage in broader discussions that could, hopefully, pave the way for a sustainable political settlement.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Internet Bazaar Gets Humming in Delhi

by Taani Pande

WANT to go shopping in the capital without having to trudge through crowded alleys carrying a cartload of goods?

"made painless" with an increasing number of market complexes setting up sites on the Net. In the capital, two major shopping complexes — in Connaught Place and Lajpat Nagar — have begun to market their wares on the Net.

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 reach out to a larger number of people.

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.

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.



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

GENERAL 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 Abdulsalamu Abubakar, was asked at his first world news conference in Abuja, what he intended to do about the suffering endured by the prisoners.

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.

The story Wole Diya told, on release from seven months in jail, 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 the cane.'

'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 lavvies were broken.'

'Before I got there, they had kept some civilian 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 [luxurious] Nicon Noga Hilton Hotel in Abuja.'

'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 (editor of the *Classique* newspaper).

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

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.

'So they could not help just taking me to the military hospital. There I was sleeping in handcuffs and chained to the bed.'

Charis Anyanwu, publisher of *The Sunday Magazine*, was also jailed merely for reporting that there had been a coup attempt against Abacha.

Chief Olabiyi Durorajoye, 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 day.'

Chief Frank Kokori, of the Petroleum Workers Union, also said: 'I was taken to a prison in the desert — Bam, 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 confinement.'

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 citizen, 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 animals.

The writer is a Ghanaian who was editor of *Drum* in West Africa for three years before resigning to write the novel *The Gate Boys*. He freelanced in Ghana and is currently reporting and writing plays in London.

Domestic Violence Peeps Out of Closet

Suwendrini 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

they had been abused at least 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.

"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 equality."

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 times to leave him," confessed the woman who looks much older than her 42 years. "But every time I try, my parents and in-laws 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."

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 their situation.

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."

One respondent in her 30s 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 women.

"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 wives."

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.

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."



A collection of small advertisements and notices. Includes 'James Bond' by Ian Fleming, 'OUR RADAR HAS SPOTTED DOGGY HERE FIRST! EVIDENTLY A HELICOPTER IS TRACKING THE SUB.', 'BELOW DECKS ON THE MYSTERIOUS YACHT...', 'VICTOR-1 TO CRUISE... SOME KIND OF DARK STAIN ON THE WATER. BEARING ABOUT 045. LOOKS LIKE AN OIL SLICK!', and 'LET'S SEE... SOMETHING 21 IS WITHIN VISUAL RANGE... RADIO A SIGNAL TO THE DYE MARKER!'.