

## DU's Dig at the Press

The Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor and Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Friday gave a bit of their minds to the press. The former castigated 'some newspapers' for their 'baseless and fabricated reports' on alleged sexual abuse of some female students by a couple of teachers. And the DUTA made it into a chorus condemning 'the malicious campaign' and asking all concerned to 'refrain' from it 'when an investigation into the allegations is in progress'; but, let's add it is an internal probe led by Professor Shahadat Ali.

So long as I am not criticised or my dirty lines are not washed in public I am a respecter of newspaper freedom marveling at its wonderful merit and defending it to the hilt. But when it grills me, maybe in public interest, so what, I cannot help saying: 'curse be on your freedom.' That about sums up the dual attitude towards newspaper exposes. But for consistent media vigilance and reportage on sexual harassment on the campus, girl students who these days are coming forward with allegations of sexual exploitation would have been as reticent as before buckling under threats of black-mail. It can hardly be overstated that were it not for the mind-boggling exposes made of Jahangirnagar University orgies which generally sensitised people about indignities being committed upon our daughters and sisters, the DU female students who felt wronged might have preferred not to volunteer any information about the goings-on.

If newspapers had not reported extensively who would have known, for example, that the girl students had duly informed the authorities concerned about the gripping sexual perversity on the campus making a havoc with their lives? It is the newspapers' duty to place facts about such aberrant teacher or student behaviour under close public scrutiny and demand justice for the victims. So, report we must, comment we shall. All that is sought to be underscored is: please listen to the female students' complaints and respond adequately.

The tendency to blame others may be construed not only as blinkered self-righteousness but also as an attempt to cover up or shield misdeeds by a handful. If in the name of protecting image we allow the rot to continue, then will it not be a contradiction in terms, will it not be cutting the roots of the tree as we try the futility of sitting on its branches?

The public have the right to know. We urge the VC and DUTA not to stay focused on the wrong end of the issue.

## Firemen on Holiday

The damaged Titas Gas pipeline on the Turag riverbed is yet to be repaired and gas supply fully restored to parts of the city. The damage was detected last Tuesday when pressure in the pipeline fell appreciably and consumers in the western part of the city suddenly faced untold miseries. The supply position of gas has been fragile for some time now due to short supply from sources compounded by additional consumption because of winter and Ramadan. The already unhappy situation was exacerbated by the damage in the pipeline at Mirpur. Though the damage has been detected by the Fire Brigade divers quite a while now no attempt could be made to plug the hole until Saturday as Titas Gas authorities apparently failed to impress upon the firemen the necessity for an urgent action.

According to press reports the Fire Brigade personnel refused to work on their weekly holidays and it now appears that they would not work before Sunday to repair the damage. Titas Gas authorities have also sought the help of Bangladesh Navy, now appears but nothing positive has come out so far. They are still discussing the matter with the Navy.

While the firemen enjoy their weekend and gas company finalises with the Navy, thousands of gas consumers suffer silently for months on end. The once-efficient gas company responsible for supply of pure natural gas to its customers has been showing signs of slip-ups. Why should they take so much time to do a job as essential as that? And in particular how can the firemen refuse to work on weekend in an emergency? Isn't Fire Department under essential services category? It seems that there is hardly any coordination or cooperation among various public organisations and there is a total lack of accountability too. If the public utility bodies like the gas company and Fire Brigade create problems instead of rendering services to the taxpayers then the people have a right to demand an early government intervention in the matter. Should we request the fire goddess not to visit us on weekends? What a pity!

## Deal At the Port

At last, there is light at the end of the tunnel for Chittagong port. After months of labour troubles, which threatened to paralyse the port from time to time, three unions representing dock workers and the port authority have signed an agreement that offers handsome incentives for enhanced productivity. The deal, if implemented with total sincerity by both parties, could lead to 25 per cent increase in workers' wages and 40 per cent increase in productivity. Now, given the importance of the port to national economic life, the agreement certainly comes as welcome relief.

However, it remains to be seen whether the agreement has the desired effect of establishing long-term productivity and efficiency at the port. Chittagong port is not known for its productivity even in best of times. Recent labour troubles had even threatened to force international shipping lines to blacklist Chittagong. In recent months, the unions, with active encouragement of local political leaders, have also been campaigning to thwart government plans to set up a container terminal in the private sector. Obviously, it would take an incorrigible optimist to expect the agreement to lead to better times.

The offer of incentives to enhance productivity is a sound management move. But much would depend on the sincerity of the union leaders to ensure that the agreement succeeds. The idea should be to free the port of all disruptive agitation, and turn it into the most productive and efficient port in the Southeast Asia region. At the same time, the government ought to press ahead with its plans to privatise port operations, because competition is the only guarantor of productivity.

# Congress Concentrating Power in Sonia

**Just as power got concentrated in Indira Gandhi, it has happened so in the case of Sonia Gandhi. She is the one who nominated leaders of legislatures in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. There was no meaningful election to find out who had the majority of members behind him or her. The AICC has authorised her to select persons for the party's bodies, whether in a state, district or city.**

was the plank, which Congress adopted in the assembly elections, it believes it would reap more dividends if it were to push the fight further. The pressure is to do it sooner than later. Even the time for fresh elections is being fixed, some time before October next. The party does not want to wait because there are fears that the atmosphere may change to the disadvantage of Congress.

The argument is valid up to point — but only up to a point. The vote in the assembly elections was not so much for Congress as against the BJP. There was no third choice before people. In the Lok Sabha elections, Congress will have to reckon with the non-BJP parties, which have the same secular, pro-minority and pro-backward appeal. In fact, the way in which they have hammered the BJP in the recent months has helped Congress in the assembly elections.

Congress has yet another problem. Four states — Bihar, Tamil Nadu, UP and West Bengal — which return some 200 MPs in the 545-member house, have strong regional parties.

Congress has no showing there so far. Assuming that the party is making some headway in Bihar and UP, as Congress president Sonia Gandhi has claimed at the AICC session in Delhi, the gain is not so much

as to convince anyone that the party will come to have an upper hand in the next 12 months. It took three elections to decimate Congress in UP and Bihar. It may not take that much time to destroy Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party in UP and Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar. Still they are no pushovers. If at all, more than one election will be required for Congress to gain in UP and in Bihar, particularly the last where Laloo Prasad Yadav has won all the

Gandhi sees.

There is no doubt that Muslims, who constitute 14 per cent of the electorate, are returning to Congress, which was their refuge from partition to the end of the eighties. Then they found themselves insecure in the atmosphere where the party began to mis secularism with communalism to placate the Hindus. Sonia Gandhi has sent right message to them through her speeches. She has been able to recapture their attention. But they have neither forgotten nor

government had pushed her misdeeds to the background. There was no other party to which people could turn. The emergence of Congress is primarily because of the BJP failure to govern.

True, the BJP did not pursue its agenda of building the Ram temple at the site where the Babri masjid stood once. But the party's image remains soiled, thanks to Human Resources Minister Murti Manohar Joshi on one hand and the alliance partner Bal Thackeray of the Shiv Sena on the other. BJP have not allowed the BJP to live down its old image of purely communal outfit.

LK Advani, the hard-core, has done less harm to the party than Joshi, who has further alienated the Hindu intelligentsia and the minorities through his flimsy fields of education and culture. But he has beaten Advani in popularity with the RSS for his staunch Hindu stance. Joshi is, however, not to be blamed for commending the patriotic song of Vande Mataram, even though the UP government withdrew the order. A fatwa by Muslim theologian, Ali Mian, against the song smacked of fundamentalism, which looks like contaminating more and more Muslims.

The Congress moves to win

back not only the Muslims but also women (33 per cent reservations) and Dalits (20 per cent reservations) indicate that the party is seriously trying to rectify its mistake of alienating them. But if the party does not change its habit of playing court, it is bound to come a cropper once again. The AICC session has evoked the same old fears: the *durburi* atmosphere of sycophancy. Speaker after speaker sang Sonia Gandhi's praises. Not even once did she object to the adjectives they used. Flattery was the undoing of Indira Gandhi and her son, Rajiv Gandhi. Sonia Gandhi should know this.

Just as power got concentrated in Indira Gandhi, it has happened so in the case of Sonia Gandhi. She is the one who nominated leaders of legislatures in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. There was no meaningful election to find out who had the majority of members behind him or her. The AICC has authorised her to select persons for the party's bodies, whether in a state, district or city. Even Indira Gandhi said 'no' to such a responsibility.

The AICC session has at least ended the ambiguity about who will be the Prime Minister if and when the party comes to power. It was argued earlier that because of her Italian background, she would nominate either Dr. Manmohan Singh or former Speaker PA Sangma. Now it is clear that she wants to be the Prime Minister. Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh has even set the year: 1999! Whatever message it may convey, humility is not the one.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldeep Nayar writes from New Delhi

four assembly bye-elections.

How can Congress get in outright majority if it wants to go it alone? Sonia Gandhi is reading too much in the victory in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Congress can go up to 200-220 from the 140 it has at present. Still it will need 60 or 70 more to have a majority in the house. On the one hand, it wants to cash in on the atmosphere and, on the other, it does not want to depend on any other party. The two are contradictory. There is yet no polarisation in the country as Sonia

forgiven the demolition of the Babri masjid, which took place at the time when Congress was at the helm at the Centre.

The main advantage of Congress is that there is no all-India alternative to it. The BJP and the communist parties are strong in only certain states. In Congress, the recovery of power is more negative than positive. This happened in 1980 when Indira Gandhi returned to power. Although she had committed untold excesses during the emergency (1975-77), yet the non-performance of the Janata

# Congress Come-back Worries Rivals in Uttar Pradesh

Sharat Pradhan writes from Lucknow

**The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP), which have been the main players in the state for the past 10 years, seem headed for a tough battle with the Congress, which had ruled Uttar Pradesh for four decades before going into virtual political oblivion.**

is unwilling to accept that any kind of challenge from the Congress party could be in the offing.

The Congress might have made it in Rajasthan, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh in the recent state assembly elections, but Uttar Pradesh is a totally different ball game. Yadav told India Abroad New Service. The Congress gained in those states not on its own, but mainly because of two factors — firstly, the failure of the BJP and, secondly, because the SP was not so much on the scene in those states.

After repeated fragmentation, the Congress is at present the smallest group with only 15 members in the 425-member Uttar Pradesh Assembly as against the SP's 109. A fractured BSP has 40 while the BJP remains the single largest party with 175.

Yadav goes on to ask, "Even if the Congress gains, how much will its graph rise — at best by 10 per cent, which means that it may register an increase from its present status of three per cent to 13 per cent. To what avail? Can it dream of coming to power with a mere 13 per cent votes?"

Behind the harsh words is the fact that Yadav failed to get Congress support in pulling down the government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and projecting him as the prime ministerial candidate of a secular front. Yadav's only hope is that whatever gain the Congress makes, it will be at the expense of the BJP and not his party. But it is very obvious that the Congress is eyeing the vote shares of both the BJP and the SP. The new head of the Congress, Uttar Pradesh unit, Salman Khurshid, has already succeeded in making an impact on the so-called vote banks that were once with his party but were later usurped by smaller groups.

Congress President Sonia Gandhi's efforts to win back the Muslims — by offering repeated apologies over the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and by appointing Muslims to prominent party posts — appear to have made a difference. There is definitely some softening in the attitude of Muslims towards the Congress even though they may not be ready yet to switch loyalties from Yadav's SP. However, a thinking process has begun and the mi-

norities have once again started seeing an alternative in the Congress party.

Says Fasih Ahmed, a former army colonel: "The post-Ayodhya period had witnessed a sudden (Muslim) antipathy towards the Congress and there was a natural drift towards the SP simply because Muslims could see none else as capable to keep communal forces at bay. What had really gone deep in their minds was the firing then Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav had ordered on violent 'karsewaks' (Hindu volunteers) who stormed the Babri mosque in 1990."

Interestingly, it was only in retrospect that Muslims began to praise Yadav for what he did. "You see, our initial reaction to the firing on 'karsewaks' was not favourable for Yadav, whom many of us blamed for the nationwide communal fervour that the firing had provoked," Ahmed says. "But after the Babri mosque was pulled down in 1992, Yadav got an opportunity to tell all and sundry that if he had not resorted to firing, the act would have been committed two years earlier. That seemed to make sense and led the Muslim majority to fall

in line with the SP."

In the six years that have followed the demolition of the mosque, the minorities have seen Yadav both in and out of power and their hopes have been belied. "What have we, after all, received from Yadav apart from him terrorising us about the 'communal' BJP?" many Muslims ask.

"Yes, we are fully aware how communal the BJP is, but what harm has it been able to cause to us ever since it has been in power?" asks Ejaz, a student. "Still Yadav insists on creating a fear psychosis among us, obviously to ensure the support of minorities." Likewise, a section of the Dalits is disillusioned with the BSP, which claims to be a champion of the backward classes. Members of the backward classes continue to remain divided between the BSP and SP.

Apart from Muslims, what the Congress is expecting to fall in its lap is a section of upper caste Hindus who had crossed over to the BJP over the past decade.

Political commentator S.V. Singh told IANS: "Both minorities and Brahmins have one thing common about them —

they prefer to side with that party that has the potential to ride to the power pedestal." He feels that under the current political circumstances, the Congress alone is seen as the potential political power centre.

Many of those who had earlier crossed over from the Congress to the BJP are utterly disappointed. We had pinned much hope on the BJP but the party has missed a golden chance," says a senior Brahmin bureaucrat.

The writing on the wall is clear. The failure of the BJP to deliver the goods, the complacent attitude of the SP towards its main support base of minorities and indifference of the BSP towards its Dalit supporters seem to have paved the way for a slow but steady return of the Congress.

While true resurgence would require much more spadework, the beginning has been made by Khurshid. What appears a major handicap is an able and dedicated team which he has not been able to form yet. The younger lot in the party however has faith in Khurshid's leadership. "He is the first youthful leader in so many years and I am sure, with the transparency that he believes in, the Congress would return to power not very long from now," says Devendra Pratap Singh, a former Member of the Legislative Council from Rae Bareilly.

— India Abroad News Service

# Primakov's Still-born Strategic Triangle

**Mr. Primakov's "strategic triangle" involving three leading players in the present-day world politics leads to a string of obvious questions — is it Moscow's desperate attempt to demonstrate that it is still capable of making important overtures in global diplomacy? Is it just a proposal mooted for the sake of sounding important? Why did the Russian prime minister make a proposal that drew immediate world attention but was considered as a "non-starter"?**

RUSSIAN Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov fired a diplomatic salvo during his recent visit to New Delhi when he proposed a new 'strategic triangle' comprising China, India and Russia. The proposal caused raising of eyebrows in different circles not because the proposal was first of its kind but for the timing and the countries chosen for the group. The Primakov project sparked off intense speculation in the diplomatic circles across the world on the its objective and the Russian premier's intentions.

The Russian prime minister's proposal certainly brought back memories of the cold-war era when Moscow played an important, and at times assertive, role in the world affairs. Mr. Primakov's 'strategic triangle' involving three leading players in the present-day world politics leads to a string of obvious questions — is it Moscow's desperate attempt to demonstrate that it is still capable of making important overtures in global diplomacy? Is it just a proposal mooted for the sake of sounding important? Why did the Russian prime minister make a proposal that drew immediate world attention but was considered as a "non-starter"?

Mr. Primakov's call for for-

ing the "strategic triangle" was met with lukewarm response from his host India and straight rejection from China. The Indian leadership did not make any commendable reaction about the call of the Russian prime minister who was visiting the country and this gave ample indication of New Delhi's mind over the issue although two countries enjoy traditionally good relations and Mr. Primakov's visit to India went off quite well as Moscow and New Delhi signed agreements aimed at cooperating in different fields — mainly defence. Two sides also spoke of forging yet closer ties in the coming days. But India rather expectedly refrained from welcoming such a proposal from its guest. The obvious reason for this appears the involvement of China.

An alliance of China, Indian and Russia is clearly implausible when judged against the backdrop of current international scenario. First, Beijing is against such an alliance and more importantly, its ties with India are well known. While the

process of normalisation of Sino-Indian relations are progressing well, the ties are still at a level of friendliness with a major bilateral dispute remaining unresolved. Moreover, the relationship suffered jolts in recent months when the defence minister of the present Indian government, Mr. George Fer-

is a socialist nation while the latter has abandoned socialism and opted for multi-party democracy. China, despite differences on certain deeper interpretations of socialism both being communist nations at that time and two having the rivalry over their influence in global arena, certainly admired

had excellent relationship with New Delhi. President Boris Yeltsin was to make the visit to India but he could not come due to health reason. Moscow has been the main supplier of weapons to India for a long time. Today Russia is cash-strapped and the visit of Prime Minister Primakov had more to do with business and selling of goods rather than diplomatic designs. The ruling circles in India are relatively favourably disposed to present leadership in Moscow than the opposition particularly the centrist and leftists, and to an extent even the Congress are not that warm to present Russia as much as they were during the Soviet period. In the event of any change of government in India, New Delhi's ties with Moscow may not be that close although their traditional cooperation in some areas will continue.

Mr. Primakov is no stranger. A former journalist with good links with the Arabs and a former head of the KGB, he has the reputation of surviving the odds. He has adorned the current position at a difficult

time and enjoys considerable influence over the government and maintains good links with all parties including the communists. He is clearly annoyed with the United States and Britain over bombing in Iraq. Russia was not consulted and felt ignored despite its good relations with the West and recalled its envoys from both the countries. It took a hard stance this time on the bombing issue. China has also adopted a similar position and both disapproved the bombing in Baghdad.

Moscow has lost its big say in world affairs with the disappearance of the Soviet state and is seldom taken seriously as it has to look after its own deteriorating economic and other problems. The disapproval of the American actions in Iraq coupled with the visit to India — the largest country in South Asia — might have encouraged Prime Minister Primakov to call for something 'big' or even 'dramatic' in the diplomatic front and the result was the 'strategic triangle'.

But international watchers feel it was "still-born" as was done without any ground work whatsoever. It was more a kind of kite-flying. The Russian federation stands in contrast in this regard with the former Soviet Union.

And to the honorable chairman of the Managing Committee and noble Parliamentarian, it is our great prayer: As there arises an inevitable need of an overbridge connecting the school's southern gate with the other side of the street in the south, we do earnestly urge him to help build an overbridge even if on his own accord, as a generous gift to the nation's beloved children. A great work for the society is always performed by the charity of a spontaneous and generous soul.

Richard Tapas Adhikary (teacher)  
Wilkes Little Flower School  
Kakrail, Dhaka.

## To the Editor...

### Bravo Iraq!

Sir, Finally the USA and its surrogate ally Britain have stopped their unilateral bombing on Iraq. But it is clear that the heroic people and the government of Iraq has won by not bowing to the threats of the western imperialists. The heroic resistance put up by Iraq can be compared with the resistance put up by the people of Russia against the sanctions of the inhuman Nazi army during the second world war. We can see that the onslaught of the modern war machine cannot daunt the spirit and determination of a nation which wants to remain independent in all respects.

Basudev Das Rozario  
180, East Tejguri Bazar  
Telgaon, Dhaka.

### First aid boxes in buses

Sir, While road mishaps are increasing everyday, precau-

tionary measures should also be adopted in every spheres of our activity specifically in the transport business. Once there was a public conscience to preserve a first aid box during long bus trips. Some inter-city bus services however are well-equipped with devices for initial treatment for sudden sickness or any sort of road accident. This may be a good news for some, but not for all. Laws should be enacted in this regard.

Istekhar Ahmed  
Officer, AB Bank, Head Office (ID), Dhaka

### Plea for an Overbridge

Sir, The noble-hearted Ms Josephine Willes visualized the dreaming buds of the beautiful and fragrant flowers in the hearts the country's small children. Perhaps we visualize too,

however with no realization at all. Spirit and love for others awakened the mother in her. She wished that children would kindle the lamps and remove darkness from nation's heart like inextinguishable flames. She hoped that they would be patriotic and chivalrous soldiers fighting within and without and settle Bangladesh dignified in the global family. For this they would acquire wisdom by learning and be forged with honesty, integrity and love for the distressed. All these precious moments of realization made her consider the only piece of land she owned at Kakrail to be dedicated to the greater cause of the children of the nation.

Ms Willes then consecrated her own land (at Kakrail) where she founded 'Wilkes Little Flower School' in 1956. Since the moment millions of children have been blooming into an expedited Wilkes Family spreading all over the country

today. About 4000 boys and girls are being groomed up now. Their ventures of gaining wisdom and learning are going on with doubled vigour through many examples of success.

Unfortunately, the city's dire traffic jam has boomed as the most alarming phenomenon now-a-days. Even it hardly spares the school-going children in the heart of the capital 'Wilkes Little Flower School' at Kakrail. It is a vivid example. Its 4000 students suffer the mess everyday. Parents, mostly mothers, and their kids find it very risky to cross the street south of the school, even through its zebra crossing.

Hundreds of cars, auto-rickshaws, jeeps, minibuses, lorries, buses, rickshaws recklessly rush along, from the east or from the west, for there is no proper and long-time traffic control at either the Kakrail crossing or Ramna Church crossing. Consequently, the

plight turns panicky, when the drivers/owners seem to have been cruelly unconscious of it and play away their respective vehicles at fast speed, disregarding children's long-awaited pass-over. It is always witnessed that two traffic police cannot suffice to ensure safe passage of the school-goers at the time.

In this case, at least provision of a special service by two traffic police at the Ramna church point, two at the Kakrail crossing (near Isha Khan Hotel) and another two at the children's crossing point seems to be a must. Just for the time being, our school needs this generous traffic service particularly during the pass-over times of the thousands of children, from 7:00 AM to 8:30 AM, then from 10:30 AM to the mid-day and again after 4:30 PM to save the nation's many promising Wilkes Flowers from accident.

Blessed and fortunate are we