

reflection

# Sour Notes: dHAKA Receives Its Comeuppance for Being Off-tune!

By Dr. A.H. Jaffor Ullah

**D**ISSONANCE is the very much in vogue these days in capital city Dhaka. Take for example what went on in nation's TV in the evening musical program after the nightly news on July 4. It was truly a summer surprise. You might as well call it an epoch-making event. Really! The reverberated sound of Rabindranath's tune sung in a nontraditional way (the purist claims it to be a butchering of the Tagore's mellifluous melody) echoed all over the metropolis long after the musical soiree by the ill-fated band dHAKA had ended with a sour note.

In Bangladesh you often hear stories where people blow things out of proportion. The recent fiasco about Tagore's song performance by the band dHAKA is one of those amplified distortions. Granted these sophomore singers made a boo-boo out of their performance, but the BTV is reacting very nervously about the whole incidence.

I think it was a bad joke from the start. The band members and their leader (who says he is an English honors graduate of DU) misjudged the taste and temperament of the listeners and they hopelessly made a fool out of themselves. Why did these neophytes decide to render the "Rock-Jazz Fusion" version of Tagore's song? Who knows? May be, they badly wanted to be in the Guinness Book of World Records, for being the first to offer the "Rock-Jazz Fusion" rendition of Tagore's song. This "unique" rendition of Tagore's song hit

If my assessment is correct, then I think that in the West the musicians would think twice to take lieder (A German art song in the style of a ballad for solo voice and piano) or any such music and then give a modern rendition of it. Austrian composer Franz Shubert wrote some 600 melodious lieder in early nineteenth century. Similarly, German composer Robert Shumann also wrote a good number of outstanding lieder in 1835-1856. These lieders remind me of Tagore's song. I enjoy them profusely. But I don't think in the West any musician would step forward to improvise (distort?) the beautiful lieders. If, some does, then it would be considered a bad taste. Western sensibilities will prevent any budding or for that matter a mature musician to do that.

a dissonance chord right away with the *Sudhi Somaj* (connoisseurs).

First came the protest note from none other than *Bangladesh Rabindra Sangeet Shilpi Sangstha*, the vanguard of Rabindra Sangeet in Bangladesh. Next the newspapers in Dhaka joined the cacophony of blistering attacks on dHAKAites (to be pronounced dacoits). The poor spokesperson of the group was swallowing his pride and hastened to add that he would reply to the accusations of the TV-authorities (the Government side) in time. The original accusations brought by TV authorities were written in *Durbodhlu* (hard to decipher) Bangla. The band leader said he can't reply it in Bengali because the language is alien to him. How funny is that he sang the distorted Tagore's song hopefully in Bengali. Or, was it in

Bangali?

On July 9 the DS published an interview of Ms. Sanjida Khatun, a prima donna of Tagore's song. Listen to what she has to say - "Someone sang a Tagore song in a band show on July 4, after the news in Bangla. The song was *Na chahiley jaarey paawa jay, je, agiley ashey hatey...* With the song three girls swung their bodies around in an indecent movement, ridiculed the song and throughout the song, the melody and even the lyrics of Rabindranath could not be found. This is a beautiful song and they have distorted it in an indecent manner."

From the description of Ms. Sanjida Khatun I gather that the rendition of Tagore's song accompanied a sexually explicit "dance" by three women. Naturally, the aficionados of Tagore's song

felt that the somberness and gravity of Tagore's song were grossly violated by the Young Turks. These budding musicians should have thought the pros and cons of experimenting with an established genre of music.

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forward to improvise (distort?) the beautiful lieders. If, some does, then it would be considered a bad taste. Western sensibilities will prevent any budding or for that matter a mature musician to do that. I could not figure out for the life of me why these Bengali musicians thought they could get away with "butchering" Tagore's song the way they have done it. Never mind the accompanying lascivious dance!

The Dhaka TV is treating the whole episode as though it is the end of the world as far as Tagore's song is concerned. The are making the matter worse. A gaffe had already been made by the band members of dHAKA. It is no surprise that they goofed up; looked at the way they display their moniker. I smell some serious identity crisis here! All the TV authorities had to do

was to reprimand the group for being naughty and tell them not to repeat the episode. Period. But, no! That won't work here. The authorities are treating the matter as if a grievous error was made and now the band member has to pay a heavy price for their mischief. The DTV authorities have gone an extra mile to summarily discharge the person who was in-charge of its production. I think it is harsh and inhumane. People do make mistakes and a formal rebuke was all that necessary. The DTV folks are making much too much out of it. Furthermore, they think that the onus is on them to be the guardian angel of contemporary arts. If, the band dHAKA wants to experiment with new art form, then the authorities should not stifle their indomitable spirit. I am sure after going through this hell they have gotten their comeuppance.

The tall order of the day ought to be forgive and forget. Tagore's creation is too towering; no one should feel that a handful of experimental musicians is going out there to sabotage Tagore's music. One hundred musical groups as dHAKA cannot even make a dent in Tagore's music, let alone amputate it.

For heaven's sake, can we hear now some sweet notes? Please!

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## profile

# Understanding Dashrath Patel

by Suneet Chopra

WHEN I first met Dashrath Patel at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) in New Delhi, he burst into deep, tormented tears at the mention of the name of Harindranath Chattopadhyay. I immediately understood why; around me were works repeating the lines of the poet in P. Sundarayya's "Telengana People's Struggle and its Lessons", describing nature's equalising power, but in their own way: Nought is superior or inferior To aught in her untamperable plan Of oneness and equality; no heedlessness dwells in her countless details, every detail, Worthy of life, is conscious of itself And of its station in the masterpiece.

It is only from this perspective of the unity of each creative effort with others and its essential harmony with nature that one can understand the sweep of Patel's activity. Indeed, Sadanand Menon, in his curatorial note, highlights Patel's "extraordinary body of artistic work - including figurative, narrative and impressionist paintings from the late forties... the transition to conscious abstraction in the middle phase and contemporary mixed media and multi-media collages in recent years." The same myriad quality of nature affects each medium he touches.

Take ceramics; his hand flits "from the village potter's wheel at Vastrapur,

On an artist whose work spans a wide range of creative activity, taking the ordinary aesthetics of daily life beyond their limitations.

Ahmedabad, to glazed pottery at Bombay potteries, to his path-breaking work in glazes and art ceramics at the School of Art, Prague, to his setting up of the ceramics department at the National Institute of Design and the industrial ceramic prototypes he made there for the NID showroom and, later, for the Rural Design School at Sewapuri." And nowhere do we see it falter. Even when he picks up mass-produced objects of use, such as bags and notebooks, he transforms them and liberates them from their pedestrian existence. One might say, just as he has liberated himself from the shackles his extraordinary creativity had been burdened with under the patronage of a state, Harindranath had mocked in the following words: Dashrath Patel at work.

You government Of brutal tyranny, of tinsel crowns. Self-puffed exploiters, seeming benefactors. You arms-empowered heroes, one-day actors, Time's bloody bubbles that shall burst - and soon! So he kept himself vulnerable and open to critique and, at a stage in his life when most people sink into comfort and sedentary celebrityhood,

he chose to tread a path of uncertainty and re-learning all over again," Sadanand points out.

Can one not see in him the picture of Bhishma, lying on his bed of arrows, the father-figure of so many unworthy sons? Indeed, the tears Dashrath Patel shed that afternoon for Harindranath may well be those of the father-figure of the Mahabharata who could not but have suffered to see how the path of conventional duty had so cleverly led him to its final impasse. Dashrath was wiser. But, as in the case of Proust, to regain lost time one has to pay a terrible price. HOW then does one look at his exhibition, first shown at the NGMA both in New Delhi and in Mumbai? It spans a wide range of creative activity, from architecture to assemblages, installation and photography. And yet, behind it all, a remarkable respect for the inborn aesthetics of the working people. But he does more than that. Taking the ordinary aesthetics of daily life, he extends them beyond their limitations. "I think I was merely aware in a very strong way of my own limitations," he explains.

"I was aware that I was not adequate

in my language and that my basic education was not enough. So I had this feeling, this fear of being limited. I always felt the need to learn and do something more than was needed in related fields." This "doing something more" is the artist in him as opposed to the craftsman who only does what is required. Or the fruit and vegetable packers, who are masters of simple design but do not try to work out original solutions to things.

They react to a need to organise elements, but do not "see" them as an artist does, or express themselves in the process of organisation. "Photograph of an Islamic shrine." This comes out in the most concrete manner in Dashrath Patel's first encounter with another artist, Henri Cartier-Bresson: "He was really interested in seeking." Patel points out, "Taking photographs was secondary. His main interest was in seeing. He was interested in everything around him and in knowing what people were doing... When I exhibited at the Galerie Barboz, Cartier-Bresson had come to see. Afterwards he put his camera in my hand and said, 'Can you shoot a frame for me?' At that time I hated the

camera. All I wanted was to draw at the time. I said, 'I don't do photography. Why should I?' He said, 'You are clear in your drawing, but I also want to know what you see with another tool.' So I clicked a shot and forgot about it. Couple of weeks later he invited me home for a meal and to meet his wife. He showed me many prints. He held up one and said, 'You like it?' By then I had already forgotten that I had shot a picture with his camera - I had done it with so much resistance and prejudice.

I said, 'Yes, it's very well seen!' He said 'It's you and it's important you buy a camera and work with it! That's how I got my first camera.' But 'seeing' is only part of it. Creating the 'seen' within one is another, and being able to communicate its impact widely is yet another. Dashrath Patel has managed to do so on a very wide canvas indeed. The axis of his eye seems to revolve around sharp contrasts of light and shade, something that is natural in an environment with strong sunlight. And the slatted light falling on the wall behind him in his studio gives us an insight into his mixed media abstracts, as also the Sewapuri dhurrie with a similar motif.

In fact, the impact of light and shade enters his sight in the form of sharp colour contrasts, as in his wooden bowls with a lacquer finish, as also his photograph of an Islamic shrine. The harsh light of the Indian sun seems to drain away the subtleties of the palette, so it is challenged by our artists with pure bright colours - a challenge that is imbibed not only from Rajasthani miniature art, but also from the craftsmen. And one cannot help but wonder if his use of silver foil is not inspired by the mirror work of Gujarat. Perhaps the most valuable lesson we learn from Dashrath Patel is not what he can or cannot see, but the simplicity with which he reminds us that everyone has that capacity to see.

It is this faith in him that forced him to leave behind the artist's canvas and enter the much more public world of the open exhibition, the fair, the theatre and of the public world that enters our most private existence as design. And in all this he has remained an artist, not only doing what is merely required of him, but reminding us of the vision required of us as thinking human beings confronted by a world that is constantly moving forward. This is neither the general run of things nor easy to achieve. And this also distinguishes him from the craftsman.

Courtesy: The Frontline of India

## fiction

# The Canvasser

by Banoful

This year the birth centenary of our national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) is being celebrated in the national and international arena with great enthusiasm and huge ceremonies. But it is also the birth centenary year for other renowned Bengali writers like the poet of *Ruposi Bangla Jibanananda Das* (1899-1954), Sharodindu Bandopadhyay (1899-1970), Banoful (1899-1979), and Sufi Zulficar Haider (1899-1987).

"Banoful" was the pseudonym of Balaiachand Mukhopadhyaya, born on 19 July 1899 at Moniharupur, Purniya, Bihar. By profession he was a doctor; he started his literary pursuit by writing parody and satire poems in the *Shanibarer Chithi* in 1978, the year he was matriculated from an English High School, Purniya. He parodied Rabindranath Tagore's famous poem 'Ur-bashi' as 'Shala' in the *Shanibarer Chithi*, the famous literary magazine of the period.

Later on, he became famous for his short stories published in the *Probashi*. There are as many as 13 collected story books and 14 novels to his account. He had tried to change the structure and

format of stories written in few printer sheets. His first story collection *Banofuler Galpo*, was published in 1936. The greatest poet Rabindranath Tagore praised him as 'Udvid Bigyan' (the Botanist) after the publication of his second book *Banofuler Aro Galpo* (1938). His first novel was *Trinokhanda* (1942 Bangla) and he had written two biographical plays - *Srimadhusudan* (1939) and *Vidyasagar* (1942).

He breathed his last on 9 February, 1979 in Calcutta.

The *Canvasser* is a story, from Banoful's *Banofuler Shrestha Galpo* (1955 Bangla) and translated by Badrul Hassan for *The Daily Star*.

**K**ATYAYONI was the root-cause of the quarrel. When Katyayoni's utterance had words afflicted into Bhairab heart-burning and caused an internal feud between them, right that moment, if Bhairab did not meet the canvasser Hiralal such an incident would not have taken place.

Katyayoni had been longing for a fancy sari for long.

small suitcase in hand shouting and staring at him.

He was smiling.  
He was Hiralal, a canvasser.

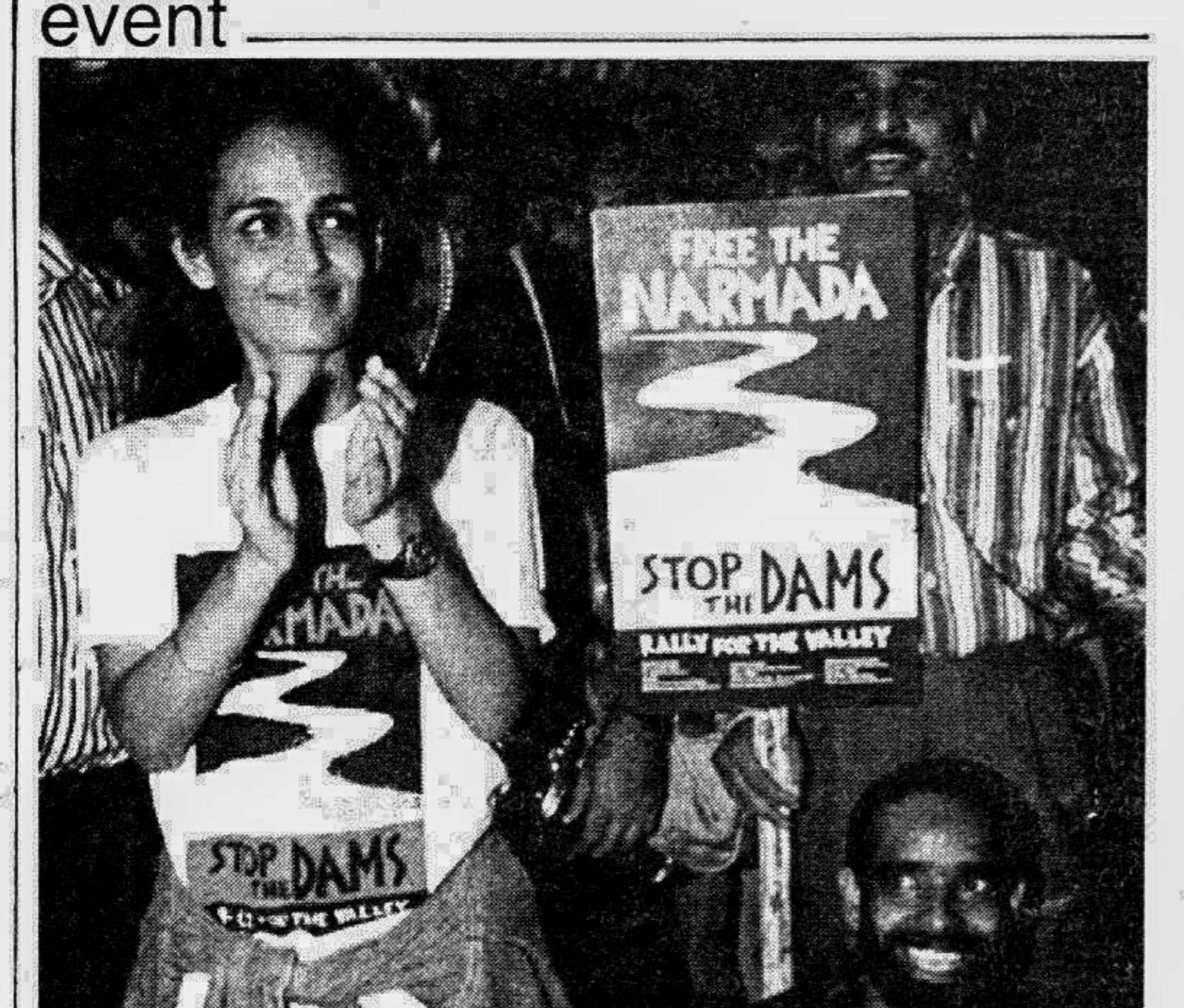
Canvasser Hiralal was not supposed to come into a remote village. He was supposed to pay visit to the city. He did go there; but the poor fellow had slept in train journey and was "over-carrid" to this remote village.

(Continued)

## Literary Quarterly

Dhaka will soon witness publication of a scholarly journal in English entitled *Literary Quarterly*. The journal will provide an exciting platform for intellectual debates and welcome new and challenging ideas, and most importantly it will promote creative writing in English. Interested authors are invited to send their manuscripts to GPO Box No 3633. All subjects considered: fiction, criticism, non-fiction, poetry, says a press release.

## event



Indian Booker prize-winning author Arundhati Roy (L) claps her hands during a demonstration on the platform of a Delhi railway station on Thursday before she and over 100 environmental activists set off for a four-day trip to the Narmada valley to protest the building of a large dam there. Arundhati maintains that the building of the dam, which resumed recently after a ban was lifted by the supreme court, would result in an environmental nightmare.

AFP photo