# Teachers can really make a world of difference

Vice Chancellor of Rajshahi University **Professor Sayeedur Rahman Khan** tells Zafrin J Chowdhury

N August this year, Professor Sayeedur Rahman Khan took charge as the 18th Vice Chancellor of Rajshahi University. A professor of physics, Dr. Khan has been teaching at the university for three decades now. During this period, he has proved his prowess both as an academic and an administrator. He has done his doctoral and post-doctoral research in England on solid state physics. Professor Khan has authored two books on physics, published by Bangla Academy, and dozens of articles in internationally renowned scientific journals. His academic career took him to various countries and earned him several awards.

In a candid conversation with The Daily Star held recently, the Rajshahi University Vice Chancellor outlined his vision of the educational institution he is at the helm of and how he plans to take it into the new millennium. Excerpts:

The Daily Star (DS): In your first meeting with the faculty members, you have talked about improving the academic atmosphere at the university. Where do you think the current academic atmosphere falls short and how do you plan to do away with the inadequacies?

Sayeedur Rahman Khan (SRK): I meant a number of things when I said that. As you know, two and a half years ago this campus was under siege. We have been able to overcome that situation, now we do not want to give terrorism any chance. There are issues and concerns encompassing both teachers and students and having great bearing on the academic atmosphere of the university that need urgent attention. We shall try to address some fundamental issues. To begin with, classes at various departments are not held regularly. The major share of this responsibility goes to the teachers. Regular classes determine a lot of other events that follow: progress of degree. timely examinations and results. If we are unable to ensure smooth progress of our degree programmes, we shall not move

forward. There is also the urgent need to update and modand curricula to keep pace with global standards. Only by overcoming our own problems, can we aspire to match the international environment.

The university's goodwill is another issue. Sometimes we see in the press things about the university that are not very complimentary. Some are stray incidents but they tarnish the image of the whole community and reflect our failures as teachers. Each one of us should be careful not to be contributory to any such incident. A university's ranking depends not so much on its physical facilities as it does on its activities and on its teachers, their performance in the classroom, their contributions and their achievements in research These add to the university's prestige in a way that nothing else can.

DS: There are allegations that the quality of university level education is deteriorating. What are your comments on this with regard to Rajshahi University?

SRK: It is difficult to defend our position in the face of this criticism. I admit that Rajshahi University is also a victim of such a deteriorating trend. But I also firmly believe that we can and must turn around. I reiterate the importance of our attention to regularise classes, exams and results. Upon taking care of the basics, other things will also turn around. A sound academic atmosphere will allow us to invest our efforts to improve in other areas. I am hopeful of turning things around with the help of my col-

DS: Do you have any specific plans for the teachers to get more involved in academic

and research activities? SRK: Yes. I believe academic exchange programmes are one way that can benefit us. As a teacher at the Department of Physics, I worked to establish link programmes with some foreign universities, for example the Department of Physics has Sandwich Programme with the Upsala University in Sweden and it has been of tremendous benefit. We have gained in every possible way; from their valuable experience, expertise, and research opportunities. We also took advantage of their advanced laboratories and sophisticated equipment, most of which we cannot afford. I will encourage my senior colleagues in Rajshahi University to take initiatives to establish link programmes for their respective Departments. I will also encourage the teachers to produce quality publications for international journals. We have some faculty members in this university who are internationally reputed in their re-spective fields. Others should also come forward with their contributions to the academic arena. Rajshahi University already has a staff development programme and I will see to it that more teachers make effective use of this.

DS: It is evident from different unattended needs that the university is faced with fund constraints. Are any measures taken to attract more funds?

SRK: Universities are run on a limited budget. The government allocates funds through the University Grants Commission. A sum of money is distributed by UGC according to the budget placed by a university and its requirements. The allocation for Rajshahi University in 1998-99 was Tk. 30 crore. In the current fiscal year we have received 36 crore taka. But this increase is not proportionate to our growing needs. Over the last two years we have recruited 150 teachers, and some staff. It is having an impact on the budget. Salary and allowances cannot be deferred, we have a Tk 2.75 crore deficit in this sector. Teachers are not getting their exam remunera-tion and other bills due to this shortage.

DS: Why then such a large number of recruitment?

SRK: Because many departments needed more teachers. Many posts were also lying vacant. Among the 150 recruitment that I mentioned, only 30 to 40 posts have been created. Others were already there to be filled. We have put a hold on recruiting administrative staff for the time being.

DS: What steps have you taken to manage this shortage? SRK: We have approached

the Ministry of Finance through UGC to increase our allocation. But you know the government also has its own fund constraints. Shortage of funds is a reality we live with. But I would say lack of co-ordination is no less a problem than deficit. Optimising use of our facilities and better financial management will enable us to allocate funds for underserved needs. For example, duplication of valuable equipment causes wastage of resources in the Science Faculty. Creating a central facility that different departments can share could prevent this. Some journals are also of common interest to various departments. Copies can be made instead of each department subscribing the same journal separately. The money saved here can be spent to get other texts or journals.

We are also working to mobilise internal funds, which the government also suggests that we should do. Rajshahi University is rich in land property. We have agricultural projects underway. We have rented out shops around the university stadium. Hopefully, we shall have more shops for rental on the Natore Road. These are some of the income generating projects of the university.

I can show you an optimistic picture here. These projects are managed by the Pro-Vice Chancellor's office, I was in that office for the last two and half years, therefore, I know. We have been able to make a net profit of seven to eight lakh taka annually from a new housing project near the Shaheed Shamsujjoha Hall for house tutors. It solved some of the accommodation problems for teachers. We shall invest our future income in similar and other areas and projects.

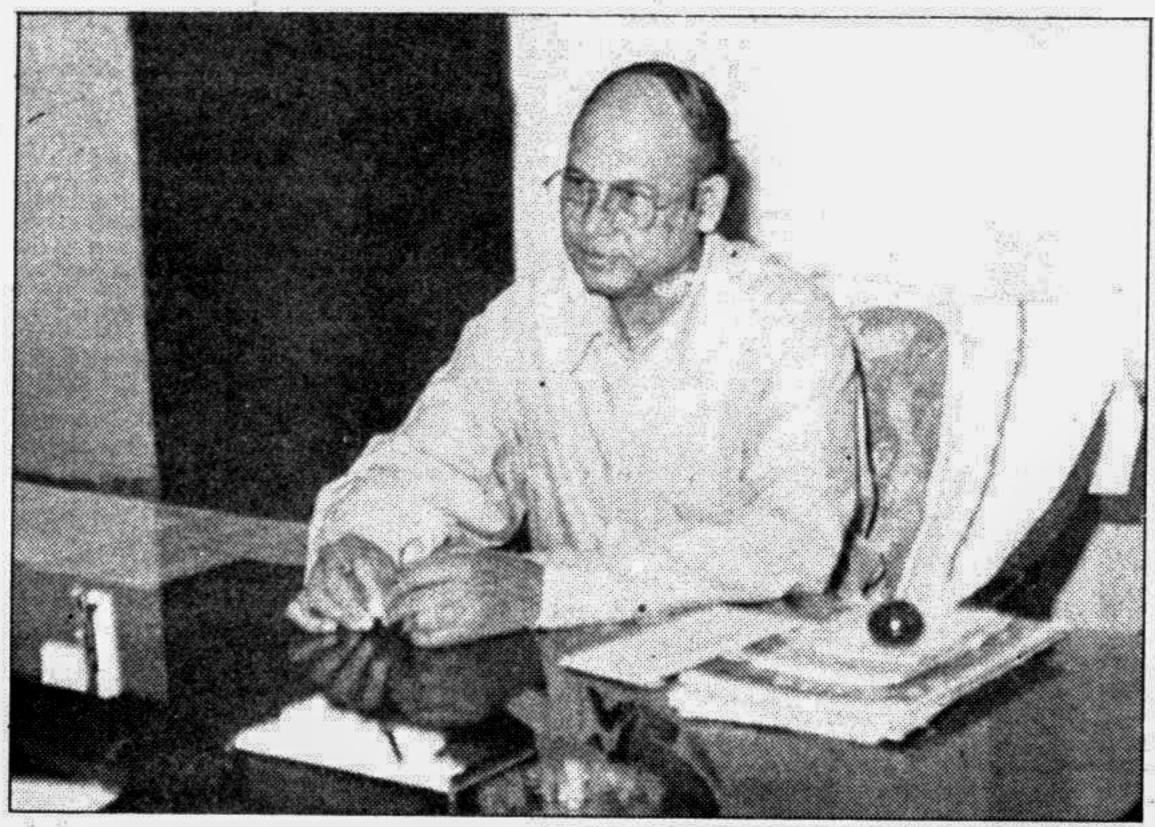
We shall also think about revising students' fees. It is very low even compared to other universities. We can generate some resources for the university by increasing the fees realistically but within the means of our students.

DS: There are other problem areas that, we feel, need urgent attention. The library is vital to the academic improvements you talked about, but it is largely outdated. We have heard for quite some time now that Internet facilities will be available. Telephone services are in a poor condition. Accommodation problems of teachers and students; need to invigorate sports and cultural activities etc. What are your thoughts in SRK: You are right, the li-

brary is a central element of the university and its modernisation is vital. Better universities of the world take pride in their modern libraries. In as much as we realise the inadequacy of our library, it is difficult to overcome the problems of such a big set-up overnight. However, steps towards modernisation have been initiated that we hope will change things for the better before too long. We will take the help of information technology to make extensive reading materials available to our teachers and students. We are working on the Internet facilities, hopefully in another six months the library will have on-line services. I have also arranged for diskettes to be mailed to us with the abstracts of latest publications in the leading journals of different disciplines. This way we can scan the abstracts for articles that interest us, place orders or download those particular items from the Internet. We need not buy the entire journal for which we may not have any other use. I believe we can significantly improve the library facilities, we have good fund allocation in this area that we will use. But you must have noticed that very few teachers and

students visit or use the university library. We need to take an interest in making the most of We are in the process of installing a digital PABX exchange that will be in operation shortly; this will improve telephone communications of the

cation.



Terrorism is under control now, but not totally eliminated. There are different kinds of terrorism, and the terrorists are on the lookout to create unrest. We are doing whatever necessary not to give them a chance. The university administration is vigilant, we have been able to put a strong proctoring in place. Presence of police forces on campus once was considered unholy, something that students opposed and resisted. Now the students themselves ask for it at times.

university. We are working to resolve the accommodation problems as I said earlier. Foundation stone has been laid for a new residential hall that will be named after the father of the nation. This will largely ease out students' accommodation problem. Session jam is creating a huge pressure on students' accommodation facilities, 20,000 students are living on campus instead of 8,000 we can normally expect if we do not have session jam. Construction of a Teacher-Student Centre is nearly complete, and will be inaugurated early next year. The fourth science building is under construction. Most departments have computers, Social Science Faculty has a central computer pool for teachers and students. Plans have been finalised to build a dean's office with conference facilities that will connect all three buildings

of the Social Science Faculty. I think sports and cultural activities are in order. Few universities will match the physical set-up that we have for those activities. We have our own stadium, gymnasium, football cricket and hockey grounds, tennis and squash courts. Tournaments are regularly held. We have a full-fledged Physical Education Department well equipped with instruments. If enough is still not happening, it is because of lack of initiative and enthusiasm. We have a large auditorium for cultural events: The Kazi Nazrul Islam Auditorium. It is engaged almost every evening. Cultural events are part of everyday activities on the campus. I am in favour of extra-curricular activities, they help create congenial atmosphere among stu-

DS: How would you respond to the complaint that our academic curricula are not suited to the real need of our country. Instead of teaching out students things with which they can contribute positively to our development, are we not giving more emphasis on foreign, theory-based curricula which is unrelated and irrelevant to us and serves no practical pur-

**SRK:** University as the name implies should impart knowledge that is universal. We try to give a student the footing in his or her discipline. At the same time, we must also study the job market as we offer subjects and courses. The current market demands are for subjects such as computer programming. agree that we should design and update courses in such a way that they respond to and suit the needs of the market. But in university education there will always be contents that may not be market-driven, but are important for learning and acquiring knowledge. Otherwise it won't be university-level edu-

DS: The University administrative offices are in most cases overstaffed and inefficlent. There are too many people doing too few things. Even ordinary businesses do not get done in due course. Where do you think the problem lies, and how can it be rectified? SRK: I have started to ad-

dress administrative issues. Some of the problems are old and deep-rooted in the system. I have called explanations from some of the staff for being slow and negligent. This should be a lesson for others. You know what, it is difficult to change things that have been allowed to grow such deep roots in the past. A standing committee that

is supposed to oversee these things rarely meets. The university staff have got used the special facilities given to them in the '80s. It is difficult to take them back, though that may be a contributory factor to the present situation.

DS: Do you have any plans towards automation? Bringing in computers and trained staff may make a whole lot of differ-

SRK: Yes, of course. We are working at bringing computers and trained staff in some offices to begin with. The Registry and the Accounts offices will start computerised record keeping and data management in the

DS: At the beginning of this interview, you talked about the university being under siege in the past. How does the situation stand now? Would you say terrorist activities have been contained, and things are under control? What makes the presence of police on the campus necessary?

SRK: Terrorism is under control now, but not totally eliminated. There are different kinds of terrorism, and the terrorists are on the lookout to create unrest. We are doing whatever necessary not to give them a chance. The university administration is vigilant, we have been able to put a strong proctoring in place. Presence of police forces on campus once was considered unholy, something that students opposed and resisted. Now the students themselves ask for it at times. It is part of our preparedness to counter any untoward incidence on campus. I hope we should be able to do without them in future.

DS: Do you think students politics is a reason behind campus terrorism? How far do you think students should be allowed to get involved in politics? As far as I know, many students enter politics not driven by ideological convictions, but because of some of their practical needs are taken care of if they join a party. For example, a seat in the hall, or protections if they run into

SRK: Banning student politics altogether may have a negative impact. Students are currently allowed political activities under certain guidelines. Their political activities are restricted by a timetable, each students' group has been given different schedules to prevent confrontation.

I do not think that terrorism is an outcome of student politics alone. It is largely our failure that we have not been able to educate and make aware our students against the vices of terrorism. It is a teacher's duty to guide his or her students. If the teachers really care, if they spend time with the students and not try to avoid them, I believe it really can make a difference. As a Provost of a residential hall, I used be in constant interaction with students. As I took the initiatives to talk to them, they would also come and talk to me about their prob-

lems or whatever goes on in their minds. They were gentle and cordial. I never encountered disrespectful or abusive behaviour from any student. think interaction and guidance help. I know that teacher student relations are going through a testing time, but the teachers will have to design their own mechanisms to make this work. We are here for the students and they should not be made to suffer in any way.

DS: Do you think overpoliticisation of teachers leaves a negative impact on the academic atmosphere? Don't we have instances where students are used in power politics to fulfil teachers' ambitions and for serving party interests? SRK: I do not know. I have

always had a political identity, you know that. I headed and led various administrations within the university. I have never let my political belief get into the way of discharging my duties. I believed myself to be guardian of all students, and treated them equally. Politics has become a reality in the universities, as a Provost, when sat down to discuss something, I called the leaders of all the student groups and treated them at par. Never thought of giving extra benefits to one party or discriminating against the other. Even as a teacher, I feel a strong commitment to all my students, they are all equal as far as I am concerned. Whatever political ideology they may subscribe to. teachers must rise above any kind of partial attitude. When one is a teacher, or holding an office of the university, he should forget about any external influences that may prevent him in carrying out his responsibilities in all fairness.

DS: Do you believe the same for teachers? That the recruitment of teachers, and distribution of positions and privileges equitably among teachers on the basis of their eligibility, and not on other considerations like party interests etc.?

SRK: Absolutely. Recruitment of teachers and their appointments in various posts of the university should be based on merit. I can not say that there have never been deviations. But I do not support it. A university teacher, in his or her career, produces so many students; by taking in someone who is not fit for the job, we would have a cumulative ill-effect. In distributing the offices of the university, my policy is to strike a balance by proportionate distribution of posts.

DS: What are the prospects holding RUCSU polls in near future?

SRK: I do not see an immediate possibility. Reducing the session jam tops our priority. RUCSU elections will be held on the basis of consensus among students' groups when the atmosphere is ready.

DS: Thank you very much for your time. (The interviewer is an Assis-

tant Professor at the Department of Mass Communication, Rajshahi University)

When one is a teacher, or holding an office of the university, he should forget about any external influences that may prevent him in carrying out his responsibilities in all fairness.

## Expanding access to outdoor facilities

by K. N. M. Hossainul Haque

OR more than last one decade, people of the world have been consistently told about 'Health for All by the year 2000'. But at the last leg of the 20th century, we come to know that 2004 is the new deadline of 'Health for All'. The main reason underlying this rescheduling is known to be lack of pre- . paredness of most developing countries.

As a front-line LDC (Least Developed Country) the situation is not very different in case of Bangladesh. Despite her wellpublished successes in the fields of population control, prevention of diahoerreal diseases. mother and child care, primary health service and immunization yet there are still many disadvantages as well. The existing state of primary health service can be cited as an example. In last one decade, trilteral effort of government agencies, private entreprenuers and national and international NGO's have largely enhanced the quality and the quantity of primary health service facilities. But increase of facilities does not necessarily ensure access to those facilities. Wide access to primary health service is still a far cry for general people, particularly those living in metropolitan areas like Dhaka

#### The meaning of

'outdoor Before elaborating on outdoor facilities of Dhaka city in detail, let me explain what the term 'outdoor' stands for in this write-up. In all the medical facilities, be it full scale hospital or simple health centre, there are two wings in general: outdoor and indoor. Almost all the departments of a medical facility have both outdoor and indoor. When a person goes to a hospital for treatment, he/she at first registers his / her name at the outdoor of respective department. If the attending doctor of the outdoor finds that the person needs to be admitted, he / she will take steps to admit that person into indoor. On the contrary, if the person's problem is treatable in outdoor, he she will be rendered necessary treatment at once. If the doctor decides that minor diagnosis is not enough for a person's treatment, he / she may advice for some detail tests (i.e X-ray, ECG etc.). Such tests are generally done by diagnostic laboratories of the hospital which is also situated in the outdoor Now-a-days, diagnostic facilities are also available outside hospitals and clinics. Besides, advice and training on particu lar health complications is also available in outdoor. For example, the family planning department of Dhaka Medical

pregnant women. Thus, we see that hospital outdoor is such a place which provide minor treatment, indoor admission, diagnostic tests and advice and

training for patients. Outdoor facilities of Dhaka city: The

dynamics Now let us take a look at the range of outdoor facilities currently available in Dhaka city. Medical facilities that provide outdoor services in Dhaka can be broadly grouped as follows mainly in terms of size, ownership, service coverage and In terms of size, the health

treatment method. facilities of Dhaka can be classified as very big, big, medium and small. Very big facilities are hospitals with 500 or more beds (i.e. Dhaka Medical College Hospital). Hospitals with 100 to 500 beds (i.e. National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases and Hospital) are big facilities Hospitals and clinics or dispensaries with 50 to beds (i.e. Dhaka Hospital) and 0 - 50 beds (i.e. Dhaka Dental College Hospital) are medium and small facilities respectively.

in terms of service coverage. medical facilities of Dhaka city can be classified as general and specialized general medical facilities and treat all diseases in general. Specialized medical facilities can be sub-divided into two: those which treat particular kinds of disease li.e. cancer, chest disease, diabetes) and those which treat particular kind(s) of patient (i.e. labourers, government, em-

ployees, police). In terms of treatment method, medical facilities of Dhaka city can be classified as Allopathic, homeopathic and ayurvedic. Majority of hospitals, clinics and dispensaries of the city use allopathic treatment method. However, there are a good number of homeopathic dispensaries and ayurvedic dawakhanas around the city. Besides, the only government-run homeo medical college hospital and the only government-run ayurvedic medical college hospital of the country are also situated in the

There are about 25 hospitals, 28 dispensaries, 1 health complex and 1 clinic in the city that are run by various government agencies. The exact number of medical facilities in the city. which are not operated by gov-

ernment, is not available.

The problem is reinforced by the pressure of people from out-side Dhaka city. Absence of quality health facilities at local level and presence of improved communication with Dhaka enable people of the surrounding areas of Dhaka city to come to city hospitals for treatment. Again, there is lack of special-

ized hospitals in others parts of the country. So, people even from far-flung areas of the country come to specialized hospitals in Dhaka for treat-

Apart from lack of hospitals and clinics, the outdoor medical facility of the city also suf-fer from lack of doctor, nurse, technicians, medicine and med-

ical instrument.

#### Extension of outdoor facilities: Alternative course

From my point of view. any reform concerning outdoor facilities of Dhaka city should fulfill two tasks: both quantitative and qualitative expansion of outdoor facilities in the city and ensuring the access of medium and low income people to outdoor facilities ought to be ensured. For achieving these goals, I propose the following steps:

Setting up one dispensary or clinic at each ward of Dhaka city. It will provide a host of outdoor facilities including treatment, diagnostic tests, advice and training for patients. For doing this, private clinics and diagnostic centres of the city can be organized under a single network and utilized for this purpose. An arrangement may be worked out with these institutions that everyday for couple of hours, they will render outdoor service to general people at a minimum

Private hospitals, both general and specialized, can be brought under a single network. The whole city can be divided into several hospital districts with each hospital in charge of one district. Like the clinics, the hospitals will provide outdoor service for some hours everyday at minimum

Facilities of homeopathic and ayurvedic treatment have to be increased and expanded all over the city. As the cost of these treatments is generally very low, their increased availability will be of great help for low-income people. Quantitative and qual-

itative development of district, thana and union level health facilities on an equal basis with Dhaka city. Particularly, increased number of specialized hospitals has to be set up at other parts of the country. This will reduce the outside pressure on medical facilities of Dhaka

P.S. The author of this article is indebted to UMIS of the Directorate-General of Health Services, Mohakhali, Dhaka

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### Bofors scandal inching closer to resolution

By Tarun Basu from New Delhi

OR well over a decade, it has Heen the metaphor for corruption in high places

College operates consultancy

and training programme for

As the tortuous investigation into the Bofors gun purchase scandal moves into its final stages, the whodunit into one of the murkiest business deals that involved bribery. abuse of power and political cover-ups, finally seems close to being cracked.

From a perusal of the formal charges filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the federal investigative agency, it is clear that it may not be possible for those tracking the destination of the kickbacks in the estimated \$ 1.2 billion deal to finally nail the Indian recipients. But what investigators are seeking to establish is the existence of a criminal conspiracy and breach of trust, among other things, by the accused to gain advantage for themselves or for their alleged benefactors.

Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has been formally charged by the CBI, along with four others, with "entering into a criminal conspiracy" and "abuse of official position". He is also accused of "causing wrongful gain to private persons/others and corresponding wrongful loss to the government of India" in the deal signed between the Indian government and AB Bofors of Sweden on March 24, 1986, for the purchase of 400 units of 155 mm howitzer guns, vehicles and ammunition for the Indian

However, Gandhi's name has not been sent up for trial as he died in 1991 and hence figures in what is called "column 2" of the CBI charges.

Others named as accused are former Defence Secretary S.K. Bhatnagar, Indian businessman Win Chadha. Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, who was known to be close to the Gandhi family and Martin Ardbo, former president of AB Bofors of Sweden, erstwhile manufacturers of the howitzer gun. All were accused of committing offences under the country's Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947.

Following sequence of events emerges from the case made out by the CBI:

- the Indian Army had on the basis of extensive field trials in December 1982 recommended purchase of 155 mm field guns in the following order of priority: i) Sofma of France; ii) Bofors of Sweden; and iii) International Military Services of

Britain. Thereafter, only Sofma and Bofors were shortlisted by a negotiation committee set up by the government for the purpose of clinching the deal.

- When negotiations picked up between the Indian government and the representatives of these companies some time in mid-1985, with New Delhi insisting that there should be no middlemen in the deal, there was the curious entry into the negotiations by businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, whom the CBI court document described as the "Italian family friend of (then) Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi"

Quattrocchi apparently, acting through AE Services of Britain, entered into a consultancy agreement with Bofors in November 1985 under which it was to be paid three per cent of the total value of the contract if Bofors got the deal. So sure was AE Services of getting through the deal that, according to a clause in their agreement, it would have ceased to effect if by April 1, 1986, the contract was not awarded by the Indian government to Bofors. AE Services was finally paid an equivalent of \$7.3 million, which was exactly three per cent of the advance paid of the government to Bofors at Nordfinanz Bank, Zurich Following this, in a sudden

volte face, the Army Headquarters suddenly put up a note saying that while both guns met the minimum parameters, "Bofors gun enjoyed a clear edge over the French gun". Bofors finally got the Letter of Intent from the Defence Ministry on March 14. 1986, which was duly approved by Gandhi, who was also the Defence Minister at that time.

- After the Swedish Radio broke the story about kickbacks in its broadcast of April 16, 1987, it was the curious behaviour of Gandhi that stands out in the thread of investigations. Gandhi first scotched a Swedish government investigation on the plea that his government had already received a report from Bofors denying the allegation of kickbacks. Thereafter, a visit by Bofors officials to India was stalled by Gandhi on the pretext that a Joint Parliamentary Committee had been set up to probe the

The CBI has tracked the trail of the AE Services commission through banks in Panama. Geneva and Channel Islands and traced it to a company owned by Quattrocchi and his wife Maria. The CBI also, as per its court documents, tracked

another set of commissions to Win Chadha who continued to represent Bofors in India despite denials by the company that it was acting through its Indian agents.

CBI officials believe that they have got closest they can get to having a watertight case but acknowledge the extradition of key accused like Chadha, Ardbo and Quattrocchi could pose problems.

Ardbo, for instance, has scoffed at suggestions of extradition and the Swedish Foreign Ministry has backed him by saying "we have never extradited any Swedish citizen so

"There is no question, whatsoever, that Sweden will extradite him to India, whatever the circumstances," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Asa Arvidson told India Abroad

Ardbo himself said it was wishful thinking on the part of the Indian government to have him extradited and said "the Indians know precisely which persons have been paid the money and how much and

All the accused have earlier denied allegations of involvement in the scandal. Gandhi had during his term as Prime Minister denied in Parliament that he had taken any kickbacks in the deal.

The CBI seems to be banking on Win Chadha to turn approver in the case, though no one is saying so specifically. Chadha, an old, ailing and broken man after the death of his wife, lives in Dubai with what CBI thinks may be dubious identification and travel documents. With the government having cancelled his passport. Chadha had gone and secured a passport from the South American nation of Belize. But its validity may also have run out.

"Chadha is a man in the know," confides a CBI source. "If there is anyone that Ardbo would speak to it is Chadha. But in his present condition, how much he is able to tell us, if at all, remains a moot question."

The CBI has sought from Switzerland early despatch of the remaining set of documents that have been held up in yet another legal roadblock. CBI sources say charges may be fi'ed against more persons, though whether Gandhi's name is deleted from the charges depends on any deal that the government reaches with the main opposition Congress party led by Gandhi's widow Sonia.

-India Abroad News Service