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## Down to Earth

### Public Woes at City Post Offices

By A S M Nurunnabi

Postal service like other mediums of communication has vastly expanded as part of the current revolution in information technology. Some of the factors contributing to it include spread of education, greater eagerness of the people to maintain contacts at home and abroad due to steady growth of private and public businesses, and increasing number of Bangladeshis living abroad. Our ordinary people remain satisfied if adequate infrastructural and manpower facilities are provided for taking care of their mails and expeditious disposal of other related functions. However, the standard and extent of postal services offered have failed to keep pace with its growth.

Nowadays, people take to franking facility as a measure against pilferage of postage stamps from their mails. This essential facility is available at most of the city post offices. At the GPO, such facilities are available at several counters. Yet during rush period, customers' suffering is aggravated as they are sometimes required to form two queues - one for weighing the letters/packets and the other for franking them. The whole procedure is extremely exasperating if the articles also require registration. The same practice is also

followed in other city post offices where franking facility is available. Even where franking is not available, the registration formalities for mails using postage stamps, the writing of receipts for registration takes sometime for the clerk which results in the lengthening of queues at the registration counter. Moreover, such registration is normally done only within fixed hours.

Lately there has been a discernible lack of faith in postal workers regarding delivery of mails to their proper addresses, giving rise to proliferation of courier services in many areas of the city under private management. The courier service system, by and large, ensures proper delivery of mails to their addresses at a little extra cost. The popularity of this private service is steadily growing as against postal service. The extension of this service to overseas destinations has been undertaken by a network of some other enterprises.

Departmental sources mention certain operational aspects that affect quick delivery of mails. First, some people forget to mention the postal code when addressing their letters resulting in delay in sorting and transmission to the appropriate zone for delivery. Secondly, in many of the high-rise buildings

which have at present greatly increased in number in the city, it poses a tremendous challenge to the postmen to deliver mails to different floors. In such situations, installation of a central mail box downstairs is advised, which is seldom followed.

With the rapid growth of the city, the needs of the city-dwellers for the services of the Postal Department are steadily increasing. The Department is said to be aware of the need for establishment/relocation of post offices at important growth centres that have lately come up in the city. In pre-independence days, mail boxes were located at important roadside points and these mail boxes were cleared at specific hours by postal workers employed specially for the purpose. Such mail boxes are conspicuous by their absence nowadays except as some isolated spots, that many believe, are not cleared regularly as in the past.

The above-noted deficiencies in the operation of the Department are the reasons for many miseries suffered by the general public. The problems of this labour-oriented service Department merit attention of the authorities concerned on a priority basis.

### Acid thrown on mother, son in Chandpur

By Staff Correspondent

A mother and her minor son suffered burn injuries when a miscreant threw acid on them at their house at village Haripur under Haziganj thana in Chandpur on Wednesday, said sources at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday.

The victims are Jahanaara Begum, 28, and Iman Ali, 5. "Kalu Matabber, a union parishad member threw acid through a window while we were sleeping," Jahanaara said, adding the incident took place in the early hours of Wednesday.

Earlier, Kalu had proposed sex with Jahanaara, but she refused it. When the two were sleeping at that time Kalu threw acid on them through a window of their house.

Jahanaara received injuries in her face while Iman allowed his body. They were sent to thana complex and later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

### Clash over cricket match in Sirajganj: 45 hurt, 5 houses torched

SIRAJGANJ, Sept 29: At least 45 people, including two UP members and three women, were injured as residents of two villages clashed over a cricket match at Khaga in sadar upazila today, reports UNB.

A dozen houses were ransacked and five set on fire during the clash between villagers of Khaga and Bhurbaria.

Witnesses said the clash erupted following a decision of the umpire against a player. The supporters of Khaga became agitated and attacked the people and players of Bhurbaria, they said.

The two sides used lethal weapons during the clash. Five houses were set ablaze - four at Bhurbaria and one at Khaga during the clash.

Of the injured, 23 were admitted to Sirajganj General Hospital. Of them, condition of UP members Abdul Aziz and Yakub, and Abdul Barez, Rahela Khatun, Jarina and Momena Khatun were stated to be critical.

### Clarification

Dr Borhan Uddin Khan of Department of Law of Dhaka University yesterday refuted the allegation of plagiarism brought against him by his colleague Dr Farmin Islam as 'totally unfounded.'

He said that the publication referred to in the allegation was a draft version and was co-authored with a colleague as consultants for Centre for Development and Policy Research, a DU-based research centre.

The study titled 'Impact and Implications of Labour Laws' is an original work of the authors and contains all the references and sources consulted, Dr Borhan affirmed.

DU authorities on Thursday formed a probe body to investigate charges of plagiarism brought against Dr Borhan Uddin Khan by Dr Farmin Islam in a written complaint to the VC.

### EC will send observers during next polls

The European Commission (EC) has decided to send a 26-member election observer team to Bangladesh during the next general elections.

Talking to UNB leading MPs at the EC Headquarters in Brussels hinted that they were keeping a close eye on the situation in South Asian nations, including Bangladesh.

"We are watching political situation and waiting to see the outcome of the upcoming general elections with much interest," said Thomas Mann, Member of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrat) in the EU Parliament.

While reshaping their trading relations with Bangladesh in a new context, the union of European nations would "like to see improved human-rights condition in the country."

"We're urging both the government and the opposition to

try to use more democratic tools to resolve their differences," said Sandro Serrato, an official at the EC Headquarters, who looks after Bangladesh affairs.

He said problems should be settled through dialogue, instead of hartal and other violent manifestations.

On May 22 this year, Bangladesh and EC signed a Cooperation Agreement in Brussels for broader interactions in political, economic, trade, environment, science and cultural sectors. Commerce Minister Abdul Jalil and EC Commissioner Chris Patten initiated the agreement. The agreement, however, is yet to be enforced.

For proper implementation of the agreement, a Joint Commission would be set up comprising senior officials from both sides. The EC proposed a meeting of the joint committee in Dhaka late January or early February. Dhaka is yet to confirm the date.

## Privatisation Consultants ask Biman for more information on its 'financial health'

By Shehab Ahmed

Consultants from the Citibank of New York preparing bidding documents for off-loading 40 percent shares of Bangladesh Biman to a strategic partner have asked for more information from the national carrier on its financial health.

Biman sources said the consultants have asked Biman to send more information on audit reports and passenger and cargo figures by October 5.

Earlier, the consultants had presented the 'draft information memorandum' to the Biman management board and left Dhaka on September 21.

They were scheduled to send the final report on September 27 but they sought more information to finalise the report, the sources said.

Biman had earlier asked the consultants to prepare a new estimate of its assets, rejecting the preliminary assessment which reportedly put the value of its assets at 100 million dollars after depreciation. The assessment came under criticism by Biman employees.

The national airline has 14 aircraft including six DC-10-30 and three Airbus A310 and a staff strength of 5500. It connects 24 international destinations and it is going to add one

DC-10-30 and one Airbus A310 to its fleet by December this year.

It has also planned to acquire four wide-body aircraft, either Boeing 777-200 ER or Airbus A340 on long lease, swapping four of its DC-10-30. Bidding for them closes on October 10.

When contacted yesterday, Biman officials said they are hopeful that the consultants would finalise the information memorandum soon and send it along with two separate sets of bidding documents by October 15.

One set would be for retaining the corporation status of Biman and another would be for converting it into a Public Limited Company. Both aims at attracting a Strategic Partner who would be offered 40 per cent shares.

The deadline set for the bidding is December 31.

The government would retain 51 per cent shares and the employees would be given nine per cent.

Biman has taken up the restructuring and commercialisation programme under a World Bank aided two million dollar project.

### Extortionist stabbed to death in city

By Staff Correspondent

An extortionist was stabbed to death in front of his house at Maniknagar in the city last night, police and witnesses said.

Tuhin Rana, 22, son of Abdul Latif Mollah was stabbed by the members of his own group at about 8 pm over distribution of looted money, said sources close to the victim.

He was rushed to a nearby private clinic where the doctors declared him dead.

Police confirmed the death. No case was registered and none was arrested till writing of this report last night.

### Jackal's meat served to students?

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Sept 29: Rajshahi university authorities today suspended the dining hall manager of Mader Box Hall following an allegation that meat of jackal was served to students last night.

Several hundred students took out a procession on the campus at midnight last night and staged a demonstration in front of the Vice-Chancellor's residence demanding punishment of the persons responsible. They also hurled stones at the residence. Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Police and witnesses said, two street urchins told the students that jackal's meat to them at the dining hall last night that manager Hasan had been serving jackal's meat to them for a few days.

Being suspicious, the students searched the kitchen of the dining hall and found the

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### Restaurant owner shot in city

By Staff Correspondent

Miscreants shot a restaurant owner at Sukrabad in the city yesterday.

A gang of four entered the Kastauri restaurant at about 6.30 pm and had an altercation with its owner Zakir Hossain, 35.

At one stage, the gang shot at his forehead and hand. Zakir was first to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital and later shifted to the Orthopaedic Hospital.

When contacted, the duty officer of Mohammadpur police said they had sent their team to the spot.

### 150 injured as villagers clash in Habiganj

HABIGANJ, Sept 29: At least 150 people were injured, 13 of them seriously, in a clash between two rival groups of villagers at Nizampur in sadar upazila today, reports UNB.

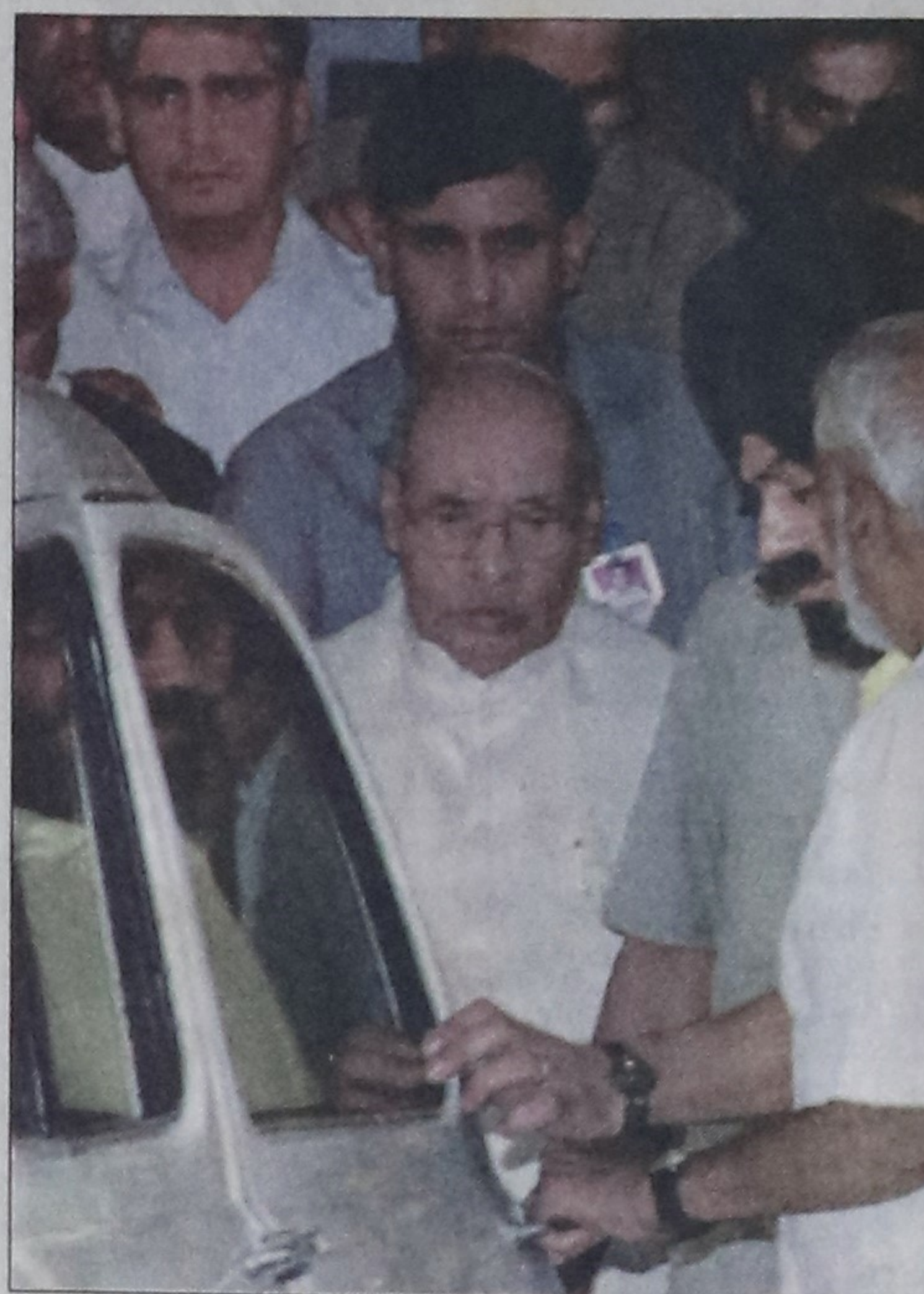
Witnesses said, two rival groups - one led by Siddique Ali and the other by Abdul Latif - clashed over possession of a land.

Several hundred people from seven villages, including Fakirabad, Dariapur, Chakrampur, Sukripura and Saidpur, took part in the clash that continued for four hours.

Thirteen of the injured were admitted to sadar hospital.

Nine of them were identified as Adam Ali, 40, Dalim, 20, Jalal Mia, 25, Abdul Latif, 55, Shahabuddin, 25, Shamsu Mia, 25, Abdul Ali, 55, Ayub Ali, 30, and Bilal, 20.

## Rao, Buta Singh convicted in '93 bribery case



Former Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao (C) leaves Delhi's Special Court yesterday after being convicted on charges of corruption related to a 1993 million-dollar bribery scandal. — AFP photo

NEW DELHI, Sept 29: A New Delhi court today convicted former Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao on charges of corruption related to a 1993 million dollar bribery case, reports agencies.

Rao and a former cabinet colleague Buta Singh were both found guilty of criminal conspiracy under three separate sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

The trial court of Additional Sessions Judge Ajit Bhartihoke, who pronounced the judgement in the case, held Rao and Buta Singh guilty of offences under Sections 120 b IPC (Criminal Conspiracy) read with Sections 7, 12, 13 (2) and 13 (1) (d) of the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988, as well as substantive offences under Section 12.

The judge fixed October 11 for deciding the sentencing for their role in the conspiracy to defeat the July 28, 1993 no confidence motion against the then Congress government headed by Rao by bribing the MPs to vote in favour of the government.

If the punishment awarded to them is more than three years, the two would have to be arrested at the court room. In the case of sentence being less than that they could be given time for a month to appeal in Delhi High Court and they could remain on bail till the disposal of their petitions by the High Court. RD Rana, who was counsel for Rajeshwar Rao, a relative of Narasimha Rao, said Rajeshwar Rao was among the nine who were acquitted in the case.

## Floating sex workers in Ctg pose threat to public health

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Sept 29: Floating sex workers numbering several hundred have posed a public nuisance and a threat to public health in the port city with the authorities doing little to contain the menace.

Physicians and social scientists fear that if such sexual activities continue unabated, it would lead to spread of AIDS and various venereal and skin diseases.

A senior official of CMP seeking anonymity said, "We chase them from their hideouts and sometimes arrest them. But when we send them to court, their pimps take them back on payment of fines and the practice continues."

He went on, "At times, some of the illegal sex workers howl over face prosecution but after their release, they return to the same practice as they are not interested to do any other work - in garments factories or other sectors. I think it will be difficult to divert them to other jobs."

The sex workers known as 'Nagarbadhu' are mostly seen roaming around Chittagong stadium, Paripahar where court buildings are located, ORB area, Chittagong rail station, GPO and the City Corporation Office. They become very active after the evening and resort to sexual activities even at open places.

Talking to this correspondent, Associate Professor of Skin and VD department at Chittagong Medical College Hospital Akhtar Hossain Chowdhury said, "We found a large number of patients in the hospital wards and our chambers who were suffering from different venereal and skin diseases after having sex with gay girls in the city."

He said, "These gay girls are really risky for spreading contagious diseases including AIDS and other venereal and skin diseases."

Prof Dr Anupom Sen, a social scientist, said "Such sexual activities by gay girls at open

places were not seen in this city about 20 years ago. But the problem arose due to various social and economic factors. Erosion of human values, family disintegration and natural disasters forced many poor girls to become sex workers. But such a menace continued here unchecked."

Sen further said, "This could cause spread of AIDS and bring about social decay. To address the problem, the gay girls need to be rehabilitated by providing them other jobs."

Sources said some of the residential hotels in the city are involved in 'flesh trade' in collusion with a section of law enforcing agency personnel.

Earlier in 1978, a brothel in the city's Sadarghat area was dismantled following eviction of the sex workers by local people, backed by the administration. But the sex workers were not rehabilitated and they spread to different areas of the city and continued their activities, the sources pointed out.

## Hajj policy for 2001 announced

The government has announced the Hajj policy for the year 2001 with provisions for making the pilgrimage both under government and private management, reports BSS.

The Holy Hajj will be held on March 6 next year subject to the appearance of the moon. Pilgrims intending to perform Hajj under government management can obtain their residence facilities along with pilgrim pass, visa, Biman ticket and foreign currency through the Hajj office here, an official handout said here Thursday night.

Those interested to perform Hajj under private management should procure their Saudi visa through the agencies approved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Their air fare and foreign currency amount will be fixed respectively by the Biman authorities and the Bangladesh Bank, the handout said.

As many as 10,000 pilgrims this time may go to Saudi Arabia from Bangladesh to perform Hajj under government management by Biman flights. The per person total cost for Hajj will be Taka 1,02,036.00 including house rent of Taka 16,800.00 to be deposited in advance.

The intending pilgrims (under government management) who have failed to deposit house rent by September 28, will have to deposit the full amount (Taka 1,02,036.00), which includes the house rent to concerned banks on special consideration by October 25, the handout said. They have been asked to procure Hajj forms, fill them up and submit those along with the deposit to

### Navy, police

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and police already raided 10 houses, including the house of the pourasava chairman, to nab the suspects."

Police are looking for the municipal chairman's son, Biplob, and his brother-in-law Hasu Chairman in this connection.

Meanwhile, some sensational information reached here from several sources. "Actually the terrorists are killing time through giving assurances to the DC and the SP. The assaulters took the body to the bank of the Meghna and threw it into the water on the other side of the sluice gate," the sources said.

## News Analysis Congress in a sticky pan

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Sept 29: The political battle between the ruling CPI (M) in West Bengal and Trinamool Congress on the issue of law and order in the state is also witnessing an intense battle of wits between India's ruling BJP and main opposition Congress led by Sonia Gandhi.

Responding to Trinamool Congress' demand for dismissal of the Left Front government in West Bengal, BJP says such an action by the federal government is possible only if Congress supports it. The BJP's contention is based on the fact the country's ruling alliance led

by it does not have the requisite majority in the upper house of Parliament which has to approve dismissal of a state government.

The Congress is caught in a sticky situation. While the party does express concern over alleged atrocities by CPI (M) against its political adversaries in West Bengal, it does not want to be seen doing anything against the Left Front which would make it (Congress) vulnerable to the charge of siding with the BJP-Trinamool, political analysts say.

Political quarters here were abuzz with speculations after a

meeting between Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee and senior Congress leader from West Bengal Priyaranjan Dasgupta last Friday when they discussed the law and order in the state.

What was noted with significance that after the meeting Dasgupta told reporters that he personally was in favour of declaring the places, which were rocked by clashes between CPI (M) and Trinamool workers, as "disturbed areas". That is a step only the Vajpayee government can take.

The Left parties' leaders pri-

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