

JS proposal on CTG scrapping

Cabinet approval should be reversed, if necessary

WITH the cabinet okaying the JS Body's recommendation for doing away with the caretaker government, the AL government has virtually shut out the door for talks with the opposition on the issue and taken what we believe to be an unintended confrontational posture.

By cabinet approval the government has spoken on the issue. It has a ring of finality before being tabled in parliament. Evidently this contradicts the government's repeated offers to have a dialogue with the opposition to arrive at a common ground on the caretaker issue. Nothing has happened since the government's overtures for talks and Khaleda Zia's positive-sounding response to justify such a unilateral step. We are surprised, we are baffled.

The impression is unavoidable, by the turn of events, that the government has moved away from its stated position of having invited the opposition to come to the parliament with its formula to amend the caretaker system in the wake of the court verdict.

Clearly the government has not thought through the likely consequences of a unilateral move on the issue that should remain open for discussion for all practical purposes.

In this context, the opposition has already stated that all doors for talks on the caretaker issue have been closed. Can the party be blamed for assuming that position?

We would still like to believe, routes to political solution through discussion have not been altogether blocked despite the cabinet approval.

In view of the negative signal in the matter given by the government, it should be obliged to restate its position unequivocally on the caretaker question. We think the government must undo the damage by unequivocally declaring that the doors for talks remain open, and if necessary, cabinet decision will be reversed.

Celebrating Sufia Kamal

She remains our point of light

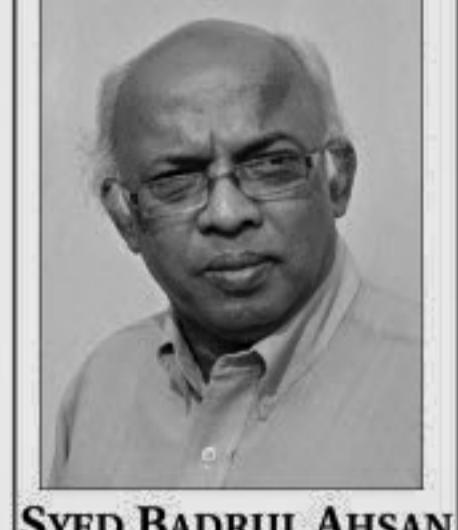
REMEMBERING Sufia Kamal is in large measure a celebration of the Bengali cultural heritage. The centenary of her birth, which was observed throughout the country on Monday, was indeed occasion for us to recall the significant role the poet played in our cultural ambience once she opted for a literary vocation in the early years of her life. She was an individual who, it can be said with pride, was our link with the past. Her interaction in youth with Begum Rokeya, Mohammad Nasiruddin, indeed with Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam were all pointers to the path that lay ahead for her, one which would define her own presence in the Bengali world of creative thought.

Surely the greatest tribute one can pay Begum Sufia Kamal is to recall the courage she demonstrated --- and in this she was amply encouraged by her family --- in emerging from a constricting conservative social atmosphere and going out into a wider world within the expanses of which she meant to give expression to her aspirations. And she did it with credit. Even as she engaged herself in literary pursuits, she remained fully aware of the poet's larger responsibility to society. And this responsibility she fulfilled marvellously well through taking part in all the progressive political movements which increasingly defined the Bengali persona after the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. She would not stay silent when the Ayub Khan regime sought to proscribe Rabindranath Tagore in Bangladesh. Likewise, in the mass upsurge of 1969, she spotted the beginnings of a political-cultural renaissance, which renaissance was to achieve round itself out through the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. But the arrival of freedom did not lead Sufia Kamal into complacency. In the years that remained of her life, she waged a relentless, brilliant struggle against the forces of bigotry and darkness.

Sufia Kamal was, and remains, a point of light for the nation. That is why it becomes easier for us to look with

GROUND REALITIES

Sufia Kamal: A mind wider than the sky



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

WHEN you remember Sufia Kamal, it is poetry and then more than poetry that you recall. It is the beginning, the

genesis of her creativity that you go back to. By any measure and in terms of the conservative Muslim social background she was born into, Sufia Kamal would be doing nothing remiss had she opted to lead a nondescript life behind the veil. And yet purdah, she must have reasoned at that early stage of life when impressions begin to shape themselves into a pattern, did not become her. That was boldness, perhaps with a ring of audacity to it, seeing that she came of zamindari stock in Barisal. And zamindars, landlords, were not always the best purveyors of cultural enlightenment. Sufia Kamal was to dig a tunnel out of conformity, a task in which her family pitched in with help. And, then, do not forget that the poet was fortunate in marrying a man, her first husband who was to die young, willing to go out on a limb to have her follow the call of her heart. In the years to follow, it was with the encouragement of her second husband that Sufia Kamal would move on, toward wider expanses of creativity.

In a very large measure, Sufia Kamal, until her passing in 1999, was our coruscating link with the past. She came in touch, at a very young age, with the celebrated Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a link which certainly fanned the flames of social ambition a little more in the young poet. She was set to go a long way, if the publication of her first poetical work in 1923 was any guide. It was an era when the Bengali cultural ambience was perpetually widening and redefining itself. In the relatively provincial confines of Barisal, Sufia Kamal was already demonstrating to her fellow Bengalis the truth that it was not the smallness of towns or expansiveness of urban

existence which defined the place of literature in life.

She was, you can safely suggest, simply proving Emily Dickinson's dictum true. The mind, her mind, was wider than the sky. The breadth of vision in Sufia Kamal would claim bigger, more meaningful space with her move in the 1930s to Calcutta, that perennial symbol of Bengali literary and cultural affluence.

Consider the temper of the times. Restiveness was beginning to underline Indian aspirations for national independence. The struggle between Subhas Chandra Bose and his detrac-

was an influence that would set the pace for her. And then, of course, her interaction with Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam in a significant way sealed her presence in the Bengali literary world.

You wonder, though, why the poetical movement in the 1930s, which involved some future luminaries of the modern Bengali literary era, did not quite touch Sufia Kamal. But, then, hers was a field that took in the broad richness of tradition. In Tagore and Nazrul, she spotted, as indeed so many others did, the Bengali renaissance. She corresponded with the



STAR

Sufia Kamal's was a life lived in the conviction that commitment was all. Hers was the spirit, as deafening as it was defining, that kept us going in the final years of her life.

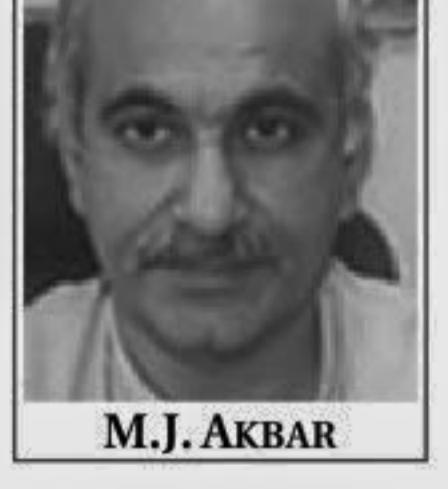
tors in the Indian National Congress, among whom were Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, was moving toward a final, decisive phase. Elsewhere, in Europe, Nazism and fascism were in the ascendant; and in distant America, the Great Depression was claiming its casualties in pitiless manner.

It was against this backdrop that Sufia Kamal sought to carve a niche for herself. The poem Bashanti, composed in 1926, was already behind her, a hint of what was yet to come from her treasure trove of literary thoughts. Mohammad Nasiruddin's

Nobel laureate. She was in epistolary contact with the Rebel Poet. It only added substance to the refined nature of her poetry.

Sufia Kamal's world of aesthetics turned a new corner with the partition of India in 1947. The mass migrations of people, the bloodletting, the sinister rise of communal hate must have driven the knife into her poetic sensibilities as she took in the new conditions into which politics had thrust her and her fellow Bengalis. A career that took roots in Barisal before finding space in Calcutta now came to rest in the yet small-town limits of

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

WE need to lay out the sequence if we want to assess the consequence.

In the June 12 issue of The Sunday Guardian our political

editor Kota Neelima broke a story that in one of the famous taped conversations A. Raja, the Telecom Minister, told lobbyist Niira Radia that

"Chidambaram has taken a lot of money." Her source was a CBI document, part of the written CBI evidence given to the Public Accounts

Committee of Parliament, headed by Dr Murli Manohar Joshi, based on an "Analysis of calls received from Income Tax Department." It was submitted by the Anti- Corruption Branch of CBI. This document is in possession of The Sunday Guardian.

Chidambaram, now home minister but in charge of finance during the substantive part of the telecom scam, has issued a statement that the "Raja" mentioned in the CBI note to Parliament was not A. Raja, the minister, but a certain K.R. Raja, an executive working for Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries. K.R. Raja has made a statement apologising for casting such aspersions on Chidambaram.

The case gets more curious at every

step. The questions have increased, not disappeared.

• CBI has been investigating these tapes for a year at least. How could it make a mistake in identifying Raja's voice in the audio when it must have heard that voice countless number of times? Do the Reliance Raja and the DMK Raja have the same voice? Could CBI not have checked the difference, if any, and sent this tape for authentication to a laboratory? Incidentally, the assumption that it was a private sector executive who believed that Chidambaram had got "a lot of money" does not make the allegation any less heinous,

since it is the private sector which has paid politicians in this scam.

• This conversation was obviously recorded from Radia's mobile phone, since the Mukesh Ambani Raja's phone was not, presumably, being tapped. Did CBI question Radia about whether she had any knowledge of this "large sum of money"? Or does CBI pursue allegations against a DMK Raja to the hilt, but is totally indifferent to allegations against powerful Congress ministers? It is the duty of CBI to investigate allegations of all corruption, which is why these phone taps were authorised in the first place. What efforts did the CBI make to either substantiate corruption by

Chidambaram, or absolve him? Or are we to assume that CBI has been ordered not to enquire any further when someone of the political weight of Chidambaram is involved?

Accusing the finance minister of corruption is as high a misdemeanour as we can get: Why did CBI not pursue this lead from the transcript? The matter could have been settled long before this paragraph went to PAC. Did CBI ever check with Telecom Minister Raja whether he had made that remark? If yes, what was his answer? If not, then why not? Raja is still in custody. Has CBI bothered to ask Radia about this since the story broke? And if the voice is that of Reliance Raja, as Chidambaram avers, then has

CBI asked the private sector executive why he made such a remark? If yes, what was the answer? If not, then why not?

• In the documents sent to PAC, CBI has consistently referred to principals by their surnames without adding initials before them. Chidambaram, for instance, has been mentioned only by his familiar surname in the relevant paragraph; there is no "P.C." before the surname. The context of the document tells us that the text refers to the then finance minister, and not to any of the millions of other Chidambarams who are citizens of

Who will provide the answers? Silence, or even bluster, is not an answer.

Dhaka.

Sufia Kamal plunged into handling the new circumstances, nevertheless, with her customary verve and enthusiasm. As editor of the journal Begum, she reached out to an audience she believed needed to be drawn out of the mist-drenched world of orthodoxy and conservatism. In the parochial state of Pakistan, she was a reformer absolutely unwilling to have Bengali cultural and literary traditions subsumed to the forces of communalism. In the narrow political circumstances of the times, Sufia Kamal remained, by choice, a voice of secularism in East Bengal.

You celebrate Sufia Kamal for reasons that have to do with your sovereign existence as free citizens of a free country. Hers was a loud voice, among all the other loud voices, which went into a defence of Tagore against the machinations of the Ayub Khan regime in the 1960s. As the mass movement against the dictator took form and substance in 1969, Sufia Kamal knew where she needed to be -- with the people. It was this complementarity of poetry and politics that energised her into a powerhouse in 1971, enough to add newer energy to Bangabandhu's struggle for Bengali emancipation. Sufia Kamal identified with Bangabandhu's goals; and the Father of the Nation discerned in her poetry the workings of a mind that would lend force to the gathering momentum for national freedom.

Sufia Kamal's was a life lived in the conviction that commitment was all. Her refusal to compromise over secular principles underpinned her struggle, post-1975, against political regression. Hers was the spirit, as deafening as it was defining, that kept us going in the final years of her life. That spirit yet drives us yet, as we strive to hold on to our heritage.

[Sufia Kamal, pre-eminent Bengali literary figure, was born on June 20, 1911, and died on November 20, 1999.]

The writer is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star. E-mail: bahsantareq@yahoo.co.uk

Silence, or bluster, is not an answer

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

June 22

1633

The Holy Office in Rome forces Galileo Galilei to recant his view that the Sun, not the Earth, is the center of the Universe.

1906

The flag of Sweden is adopted.

1940

France is forced to sign the Second Compiègne armistice with Germany.

1941

Germany invades the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa.

1941

The June Uprising in Lithuania begins.

1941

Various Communist and Socialist French Resistance movements merge to one group.

1945

World War II: The Battle of Okinawa ends when organised resistance of Imperial Japanese Army forces collapses in the Mabuni area on the southern tip of the main island.