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PM's Malda visit put off

OUR BUREAU

March 20: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has postponed his Malda visit hours after district Congress president Abu Hashem Khan Chowdhury said Mamata Banerjee was not welcome at the foundation ceremony on March 26 for an engineering institute named after his brother A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury.

A fax message from Special Protection Group director K.M. Yadav to the district magistrate late last night said the "proposed visit of the Prime Minister to Malda (West Bengal) has been postponed".

On Thursday, Mamata had said she would attend the foundation ceremony where the Prime Minister was also expected.

Learning about the postponement, Abu Hashem immediately left for Calcutta from where he took a flight to Delhi this morning to try and persuade the Prime Minister to attend the event as scheduled.

The fax message from Delhi did not mention any reason for the postponement of the Prime Minister's visit.

Sources in the Prime Minister's Office said the visit was put off because of a meeting scheduled on that day with the Chinese vice-minister for agriculture.

Other sources acknowledged that they were aware of the differences between Abu Hashem and Mamata Banerjee but added that they were "unsure" if the deferment was related to the "political tensions" between the two. They sounded uncertain whether Singh's visit to Malda would take place before he left for the US on April 11.

The postponement of the visit prompted a softening of tone. Abu Hashem, apparently irked because Mamata had cold-shouldered his railway proposals for Malda, had said yesterday: "I have made it clear to the Prime Minister that we will not allow her (Mamata) to take political advantage of such a solemn occasion."

Today, his brother Abu Naser said: "Who said Mamata is unwelcome? This is nothing but propaganda. Mamata is very welcome..."

Even Abu Hashem said from Delhi: "Mamata is welcome to come to Malda. But why does she have to come to my event when she has stopped talking to me after I pointed out to her that Malda had been ignored in the railway budget?"

Yuppy by day, writer by night

CHARUSUDAN KASTURI

New Delhi, March 20: Materials engineer Vikram Rana remembers the day Chetan Bhagat spoke to him and other students at his college, IIT Guwahati, as the day he decided to become a writer.

He had had a love of writing since childhood. "I used to write and perform skits. But when I saw Bhagat standing in front of me, students looking at him in awe, I thought, 'Why not me?'" said the 24-year old, who today balances fiction-writing with a job in Singapore with Schlumberger, the world's largest oilfield services corporation.

Also 24, IIT Bombay alumnus Animesh Verma has already witnessed his second book disappearing off the shelves, the economic recession — a key theme in the book — apparently striking a chord with readers.


They may not write Salman Rushdie-like literature, but a growing breed of young Indian professionals is penning pulp fiction, and their success is quietly spurring dozens more to join the trend.

Many are inspired by the success of best-selling author Bhagat — an IIT and IIM graduate — who has seen two of his books form the seed for big-ticket Bollywood films.


Some others cite the recession, and its impact on the dreams of the young at institutions like the IITs and IIMs, as their motivation to write.

But all of them appear to be penning their own life experiences in an easy-to-read fiction format that sales numbers suggest is attractive to readers.


TURNING A NEW LEAF




NOVONEEL CHAKRABORTY
 ● Age: 25
 ● Education: BBA from Calcutta
 ● Books: 2
 ● Aspiration: Scriptwriting, has ignored advice to do an MBA from parents



VIKRAM RANA
 ● Age: 24
 ● Education: Materials engineer from IIT Guwahati
 ● Day job: With an oil-drilling company in Singapore
 ● Aspiration: Writing pulp fiction, inspired by Chetan Bhagat's campus visit



RAVINDER PAL SINGH
 ● Age: 27
 ● Education: Software engineering
 ● Turning point: Took up writing to deal with a personal tragedy — the death of his girlfriend in an accident



ANIMESH VERMA
 ● Age: 24
 ● Education: IIT Bombay alumnus
 ● Books: 2
 ● Theme: His second book is based on the experiences of IIT students struggling to land jobs, or losing them, because of recession

"The trend of young professionals wanting to write fiction is growing so fast that I today receive between 15 and 20 proposals every day," said Jayanta Bose, MD of the Delhi-based Srishti Publications.

Bhagat's background helps young professionals relate to him, and his success in turn motivates them to try their own hand at a career in fiction-writing, Bose suggested.

"The recession, and the disillusionment it brought to

many youngsters, may have also turned them towards writing as an outlet to express their emotions," he said.

Verma's first novel, *Love, Life and Dream On*, which he wrote while he was still at IIT, dealt with the 2005 Delhi bomb blasts and the anti-reservation protests that rocked the capital over the next three years.

His second book, *I Am Broke...Love Me*, follows a young Indian investment banker based in the US who loses his job in the recession. The book is based on his

experiences during placements last year at IIT Bombay, where companies that used to queue up with jobs refused to hire, and includes anecdotes from IIT seniors who lost plush jobs. Released in February, it has already sold over 5,000 copies and publishers have had to order a second reprint.

Novoneel Chakraborty, 25, was in the final year of his BBA course in Calcutta when he started penning short stories and sharing them with select friends. After two success-

ful books, he is now writing a script for Bengali film director Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury.

"My parents wanted me to pursue an MBA but I decided to follow my heart," he said.

Another Calcutta boy, Dipangshu Das, is only in third year of medical school — RG Kar Medical College — but is already a successful author courtesy his first and only published book, *The Journey to Nowhere*.

Chandigarh-based software engineer Ravinder Pal Singh took to fiction-writing

as a way of tackling personal tragedy after his girlfriend died in an accident.

"I never thought I would be an author. But when I was done with all the crying, I thought, 'Why not let it out in the form of writing?' It has helped me share my grief with so many others," Singh, who works with Infosys, said.

Today, he is a role model for others at work — at least 20 colleagues have come up to him and asked him for advice on writing their own books, he said.

Headley's right to silence

K.P. NAYAR

Washington, March 20: The guilty plea by terrorist enabler David Coleman Headley in principle allows Indian courts to seek his deposition by video in the trial of Ajmal Kasab, but it also allows the American to refuse to testify or to remain silent after he has sworn as a witness to tell "the whole truth and nothing but the truth".

The fine print of Headley's plea agreement which was filed before Illinois district court judge Harry Leinenweber on Thursday says: "At a trial, defendant (Headley) would have a privilege against self-incrimination so that he could decline to testify and no inference of guilt could be drawn from his refusal to testify."

The same principle applies to any interrogation of

Headley by Indian officials on American soil. Under US law, the voluntary presence of an accused during interrogation on a crime or as a witness — either voluntarily or under subpoena — in a criminal trial is deemed as "co-operation".

However, as part of such co-operation, Headley could repeatedly respond to any question either from an Indian judge or lawyer at Kasab's trial or from Indian officials across the table with the standard answer: "On the advice of my lawyer, I respectfully invoke the Fifth Amendment and say no further in the matter" or any variation of the same answer accepted under law.

The Fifth Amendment, sacrosanct to every American citizen, guarantees the right to everyone — including non-citizens — during any proceed-

ing of a judicial or law enforcement nature on US soil that "no person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime... nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself".

The Fifth Amendment was built into the US Constitution to protect people against the abuse of authority in any legal procedure in America.

Many Indians recently became familiar with the Fifth Amendment when the Salahi couple, who intruded into the White House state dinner for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last November, appeared at a US Congressional hearing and took refuge in the amendment in answer to every single question.

At one point, a frustrated Congressman asked Tareq Salahi if he wore a tuxedo to

the state dinner. Another asked if Salahi was present at the White House during Singh's visit.

His separate answers to both questions were that on the advice of his lawyer, he was invoking the Fifth Amendment.

Home secretary G.K. Pillai was out of his depth when he claimed yesterday that "if there are other offences, which are not covered under the plea agreement, then, of course, extradition is still possible".

Headley's plea agreement says that he cannot be extradited to India, Pakistan or Denmark after he is convicted of the various terrorist charges now before the court, "including conduct within the scope of those offences for which he has been convicted".

■ Indian pipe dreams, Page 4

Buddha bends party to his will but only over Presidency

College pulls CM out of a shadow

ASHIS CHAKRABARTI

Calcutta, March 20: From PDG days to the Presidency University Bill is a great leap for Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

In pushing the bill with rare grit, he has finally walked out of the shadow of his original mentor, Promode Dasgupta, the man who is credited with making the Bengal CPM what it is and who still remains the chief minister's model in most party affairs.

It was Dasgupta who set the agenda for the CPM's education politics that applied as much to primary schools as to Presidency College. The same agenda informed the CPM's original policy on the teaching of English.

At the centre of it was the party doctrine that education must be rid of the control of "elitists" and made "democratic". Presidency was, to PDG and his party, the ultimate symbol of elitism in education in Bengal. The anti-English campaign was part of the same political agenda.



Bhattacharjee, Dasgupta

But dismantling elitism and democratising education was merely the ideological mask for a political design. It was, in reality, the party's way of infiltrating the middle classes. In villages and small towns, teachers were the most effective tools of social control. It was not enough to make the CPM a party of workers and peasants; it had to be a teachers' party as well.

Like most of today's leaders in the Bengal CPM, Bhattacharjee rose in the CPM as a PDG protégé. He may have taken some lessons in governance from Jyoti Basu, but as a

party animal he remained completely sworn to PDG's ways. That is why the Presidency bill is a political turnaround for him personally, if not for his party which is still largely wedded to the former CPM strongman's legacy, which was later carried forward by Anil Biswas.

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