

Hillary's *dadagiri* overshadows

Mamata's *didigiri*



KOLKATA, 8 MAY: The air is yet to be cleared about the conflicting claims by chief minister Mamata Banerjee and the US consulate over whether US secretary of State Hillary Clinton had during their high voltage meeting yesterday actually raised the "contentious" issues of FDI in multi-brand retail trade and Teesta water sharing, but the city witnessed US *Dadagiri* (domineering) over *Didigiri* and its diplomatic, manipulative powers like never before.

Sources said the US consulate's insistence that Mrs Clinton did "touch" on the controversial issues was intended to send the message across that after the US secretary of State herself had unequivocally announced at an interactive session an hour before the Writers' Buildings meeting that she was going to discuss the twin issues, there was no question of "suppressing" what had actually transpired.

The implicit message, diplomatic sources said, was that Miss Banerjee was dealing with the US secretary of State and not with any UPA top leader with whom she could have the upper hand. How the Trinamul Congress chief would address her constituency after seeking US assis-

ance is "only her concern", sources said.

Mrs Clinton had been forceful when she explained during the interactive session that she would discuss the two vexed questions with the chief minister and explained in great detail why water and FDI in retail were of paramount importance. Her remark that the "contentious issue" of water may lead to "destabilisation, dislocation, refugee (influx) and famine" was an obvious hint at the grave implications the fate of the Teesta water sharing agreement will have on the political scenario in Bangladesh.

Her reference to Kolkata's "geopolitical importance being increasingly felt" is to be seen in the context of the possible political backlash on Bangladesh if the Teesta agreement finally doesn't materialise. The USAs concern is echoed by Bangladeshi diplomatic circle as well.

The dire economic plight of the state Miss Banerjee has inherited after becoming chief minister puts the US in a position to push through its agenda, sources said. Miss Banerjee can ill afford to scupper the opportunity to get US assistance by adopting her usual belligerent posturing whenever things don't

go the way she wants them to. Hence, she had to keep mum after the US consulate went ahead with its statement contradicting her claim of not having discussed the two controversial issues at all.

Sources said it was intriguing the way two "school kids" were allowed to raise the issues of India's oil import from Iran and Israel-Iran conflict during the interaction with Mrs Clinton by the anchor of the television channel that hosted the show. "Surprisingly", Mrs Clinton spoke at length on the issues spelling out the US stand and tried to pressure the Indian leadership "with diplomatic suavity" not to import the crude from Iran.

The "planted" questions by the high school students were posed at a time when an Iranian