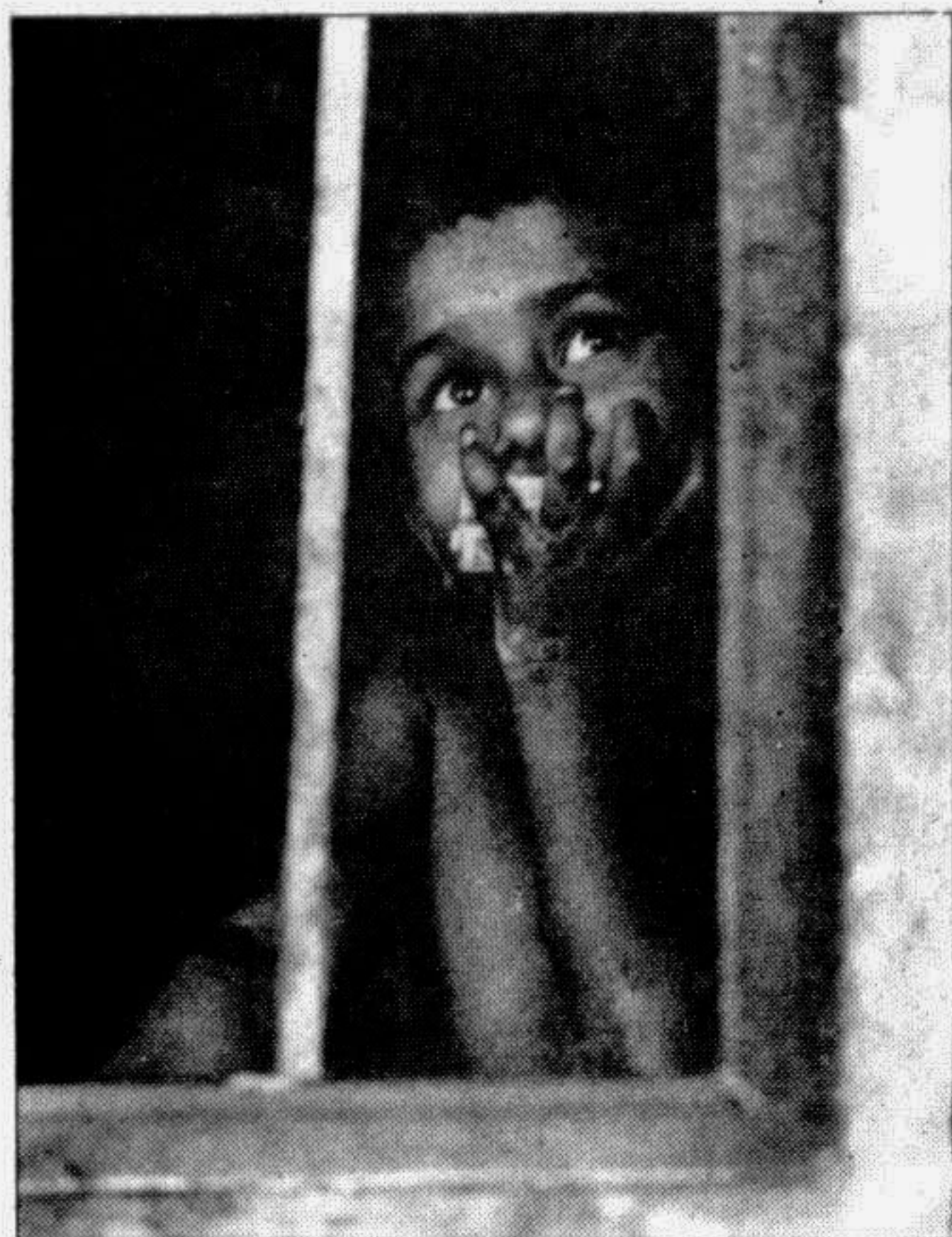


## FOCUS

## Child Sexual Abuse

## Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence

by Farah Ghuznavi



It has become increasingly clear in recent years, that one of the most pervasive and damaging experiences for children in today's world is the danger of being sexually abused by those around them. Pervasive, because it is more common than any of us would like to believe. Damaging, because it can completely traumatise a child and leave its after-effects on levels of the psyche which cannot even be reached without extensive professional efforts being made to do so. These after-effects can play a major part in shaping the child into the adult that he or she will eventually become, and hence it is crucial to understand just how such abuse can affect the children concerned, and how adults around them must try and deal with the scars left by such experiences. Please note that while child sexual abuse affects boys as well as girls, for the purposes of this article, the female pronoun is used.

It has been established that the perpetrators of such abuse are often those whom the child is taught to trust most — adult friends, relatives, servants and in some cases, even parents. While it is terrible to have to look at the world with such suspicion that these fundamental relationships are called into question, what is even worse is the utter vulnerability of children to the actions of such adults. And that is what makes it essential for us to face the reality around us, and protect children from such predators, much as we may wish to pretend that none of this is happening.

What is striking is the power relationships between the child and the adult concerned in such situations. The children concerned often have no-one to turn to. All of their lives, they are taught to believe adults without question. If an adult is going to take advantage of that trust to abuse a child in this vile manner, how is the child supposed to fight back?

We must certainly learn to watch carefully for the signs of such abuse in children around us. We often tend to underestimate the extent to which such incidents take place, because it seems inexplicable to most of us that anybody could be so twisted as to have sexual feelings towards a child. Nevertheless, we must learn to watch out for our children, because if we don't acknowledge that the threat exists, we certainly can't take any measures to protect children against it. It is important to remember,

however, that even the most vigilant adult cannot always be there to look after a child, and in that case, we must prepare children in a way that they can also learn to protect themselves, without frightening them unnecessarily. They must know that they always have someone to turn to, if they find themselves in a situation that they cannot handle.

The deviants who carry out these acts on children will almost invariably use coercion in order to achieve their aims. Often, the coercion may degenerate into outright threats. For example, telling a child that she is bad and dirty, and that she will be punished if she tells anyone else about what is happening. In this way, the child herself is made to feel responsible for what the adult is doing to her and learns to be afraid of the consequences of discovery. This fear of discovery protects the abusing adult, while making the child even more vulnerable to blackmail on the part of the adult concerned. When doing this, the adult is also assisted by the lack of knowledge on the child's part about what is actually going on, and the child's confusion and fear grow as a result.

To compound matters, the child often faces the trauma

of not being believed, if she even tries to tell another adult about what is being done to her. It may be very difficult for a child to explain exactly what form the abuse is taking. Very often, other adults will not realise the significance of what the child is saying, or will dismiss it as indicative of a child's unreasonable dislike of a friend or family member. In the worst cases, the child will be reprimanded for her behaviour in objecting, and the sense of isolation will grow even greater.

That sense of isolation, the belief that these things are being done only to her, and that she is somehow responsible for it, and that no-one will believe her if she tries to say otherwise — these are the very things that help the abuser to continue the abuse of that child. The sense of shame and guilt that is deliberately fostered in the child by the abuser can stay with her for the rest of her life. And may mean that she will never discuss what has happened to her with anyone. This, in turn, means that those experiences are never dealt with or exorcised, and the scars of such childhood experiences never fade.

These experiences may mean that a child will grow up unable to trust, unable to

touch or be touched, unable to love, and ultimately unable to have a healthy adult relationship with any member of the opposite sex. If we are to stop that from happening, then it is crucial to acknowledge that sexual abuse of children is taking place all around us, and to learn to look for and recognise the signs of such abuse. If we go on closing our eyes and praying that it goes away, we will not be able to deal with the problem. As adults, we have a responsibility to protect every child from such molestation, and we can't do that unless we are willing to acknowledge the extent to which this is happening around us.

When providing tips for how to help prevent child sexual abuse, one point that is often stressed is that children must be taught to go on, telling adults about what is going on, if the first adult that they tell refuses to believe them. Similarly, if sexual abuse is to be stopped, we must be prepared to listen to what children are trying to tell us. Many people feel that these things should not be discussed, but if children are not warned about such things, how do we expect them to know what to do when something like this does happen?

Finally, society needs to 'de-criminalise' its attitude to those who have been victims of child sexual abuse. By making the subject something that can only be discussed in whispers, by increasing the aura of shame and disgrace that surrounds it, all we do is make it easier for those sick adults to perpetrate their crimes on innocent children. We isolate those who have suffered at the hands of such abusers by making it seem as if they have something to be ashamed of. We have to stop punishing the victims of abuse, and learn to seek out the perpetrators instead. And in order to do so, we have to make our children aware of what to watch out for; however loath we may be to do so.

It would indeed be a lovely world if children could automatically be allowed to retain their innocence and security until they reach adulthood, but in a world where such evil predators exist, in a world where you cannot provide the security for children to grow to adulthood in blissful ignorance of such matters, we have to ask ourselves — who will have to pay the price for the consequences of our refusal to face up to the realities which surround us?

## Computer Education: Planning for Lower Levels

by Dr. M. Kaykobad, M M H Azad Khan and Dr. MA Rashid

RECENTLY the National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB) has gone for modification of the syllabuses of SSC and HSC levels. We will restrict our attention to the computer science subject only. Worldwide trend suggests that computer science is one of the most dynamic subjects of study at all levels and therefore, it is natural to expect that only relevant educationists and practising experts of the discipline will be engaged for such an important job concerning syllabus enrichment. The members of the syllabus modification committee are expected to have appropriate degrees and experience of teaching similar subjects, practical experience of designing similar syllabuses, based on international standards, experience of identifying various problems related to the implementation phases, and above all, clear vision of the present trend and future directions related to the dynamic developments in the field. The content of the syllabus should be at par with the aims and objectives and should be able to guide the students to utilise the knowledge in practical application

B.Sc. and M. Sc. degrees in computer science and engineering. For the last 11 years the CSE department has gathered the experience of educating students having completed the college education, has learned about the weak and strong points of our school-leaving students in learning the various aspects of this new discipline. The same is true for Khulna University which has recently turned out its first batch of students. Shahjalal, Jahangirnagar and Rajshahi universities have been teaching undergraduate courses in the relevant disciplines for three, two and one year respectively. Sadly enough the relevant authority has been unable to take advantage of involving the CSE teachers of these universities including BUET, which is the pioneer in introducing this branch of science and technology in our country. BUET at least has the unique experience of already successfully producing 80 graduate students in three batches. Was the relevant authority ignorant of the fact? Did it consider the teachers of these departments unsuitable to be represented on the syllabus committee? It is hoped that the Government agencies

Department of BUET comprises seventeen teachers, all having formal computer education, whose total strength far exceeds the strength of any other relevant department of any university.

It is not true that the presence of these departments, in particular CSE Department of BUET, is not within the knowledge of the Government. Many government organizations including various ministries, do take expert advice from this department. It may be mentioned here that the CSE graduates are also contributing as teachers in the development of relevant departments of various universities of the country. Publication of papers in prestigious international journals of computer science, both by the teachers and undergraduate students alike, does indicate the standard the CSE department is able to maintain in education in the country.

It is sad to learn that even in a committee of 7 members for the syllabus, no teacher of relevant departments having undergraduate teaching experience was included. It is also ridiculous to learn that in the list of writers of text books again teachers of these depart-

finished product of this curriculum and will be facing problems in bringing the students up to the mark. Inclusion of graduates completing a curriculum in this discipline should be encouraged because their experience would undoubtedly enrich the quality of the curriculum.

There are reasons to be disappointed with the fact that even a single member for the highly experienced departments of other universities of the country is not included in the committee of seven. A bigger committee with greater experience could probably contribute more effectively towards the goal. With this half-hearted effort, can we achieve what we really are aiming at?

We think for the greater interest of the nation, the committee for the syllabuses should be revised to include teachers having undergraduate teaching experience since they are the closest to know about the 'preparation with which a student should enter into a CS or CSE curriculum of a university.

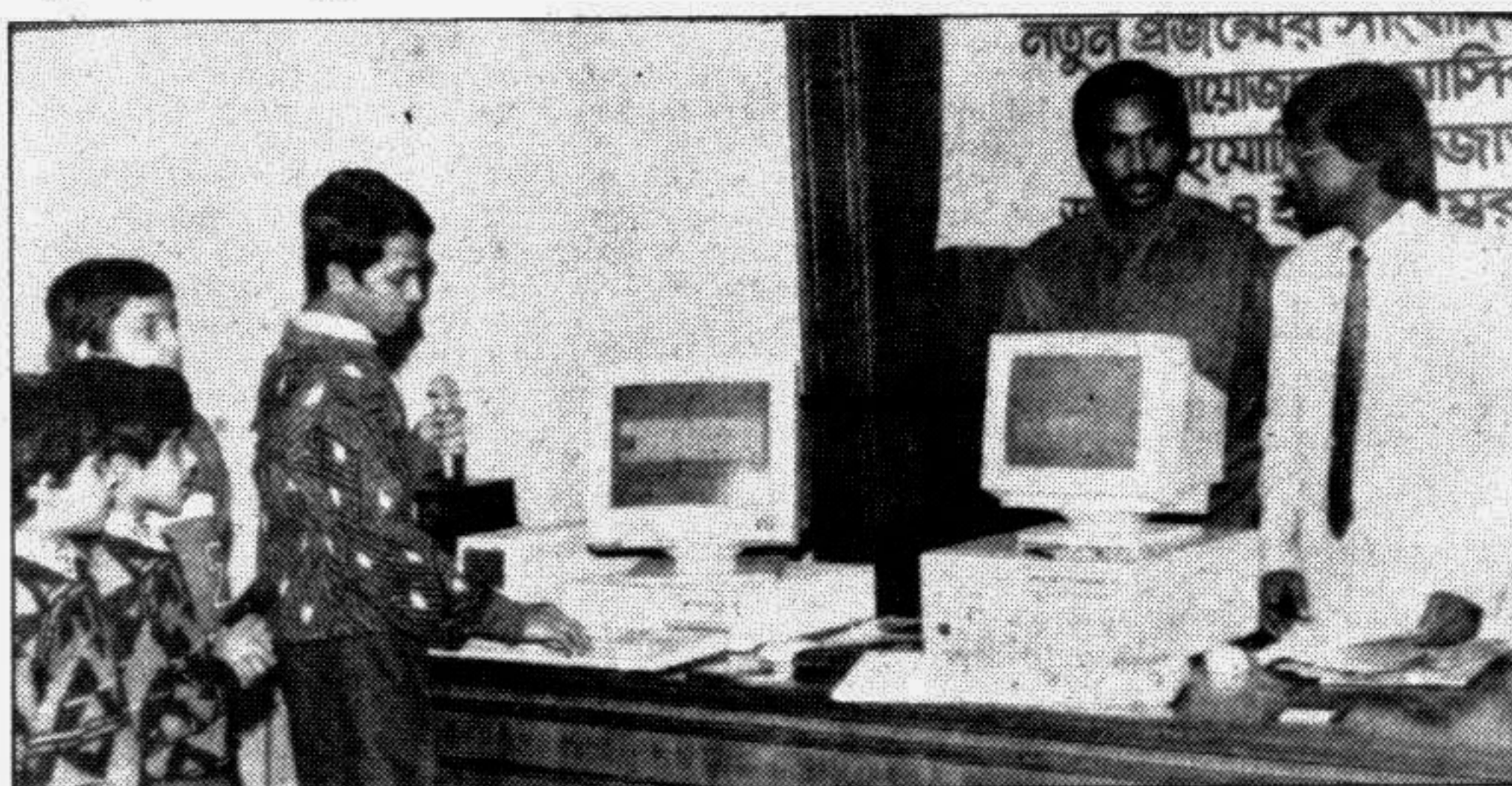
The relevant authorities, in particular the Ministry of Education, should also deeply think over a few other 'prerequisites to ensure that parts in computer education make for an effective whole: A growth path for the SSC and HSC students taking computer science. What about a strongly-accented introduction of computer science at the degree level for producing the necessary school and college level teaching manpower with formal education in computer science? Teachers with no formal education in computer science will only be able to confuse students with misconception about computers.

It is hoped that the relevant authorities should take into consideration the points raised in this article, and act judiciously for the greater interest of the country.

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areas as well as help them to continue higher education in this discipline. One should also bear in mind that these subjects are part of formal education and not something like technical training for immediate jobs.

The closest course in respect of level that has ever been launched and completed is that offered by the computer Science and Engineering (CSE) department of BUET. This department is the first in the country in opening a formal course in the discipline, in producing graduates with

should be able to organize resource personnel from all over the country to get such work done in as best way as possible, and not in a piecemeal and uncoordinated fashion. The absence of representatives from relevant departments of the said universities questions the ability of the relevant authority to organize and coordinate such events successfully. It may be mentioned here that these universities have a number of teachers having formal education in this branch of science and technology. Moreover, the CSE

ments are absent. Exclusion of representatives of these departments from such an important assistant involving national interest in no way, indicates their inability to contribute to the task, rather it shows inaptitude of the concerned authority to recognize those who should have been recognized at the first sight.

For acceptability of the curriculum and courses it is advisable to get the teachers of as many universities as possible to have the task done properly. These teachers will be working on the

He was just off a plane and so his sleeping through the meeting seemed excusable. He sat, head bowed and his voluminous robes flowing about him as the meeting droned on in the antique surroundings of a British royal palace.

Who should sign the letter? the officials asked earnestly.

Who indeed? Uninvited, Commonwealth heads of government had decided that a group should mediate in a non-Commonwealth country. But surely no Nigerian — let alone a former Nigerian head of state — could possibly write a formal letter to President P W Botha, custodian of apartheid, of all people.

The more so one couched in civil terms, suggesting a meeting, and least of all could he do so in December 1985, as war raged in the townships and there were scenes of carnage nightly on the world's television screens. It would be one thing for a former Prime Minister of Australia, Malcolm Fraser, to do so as co-chairman, but quite another surely — for General Olusegun Obasanjo.

The discussion circled and then seemed to stall. At last, the general opened a single eye. "Tell me," he asked quietly, "What am I?"

"The co-chairman," the officials hastily assured him. "The co-chairman of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (EPG)."

"If I am co-chairman, then we both sign," he said, and slumped back into what was quite clearly a receptive guise.

Right from the start he had established his credentials — and not just as an equal and co-chairman of the group — whose work Oliver Tambo, president of the African National Congress (ANC) until his death, would come to describe as "the watershed" in the breakthrough for a negotiated end to apartheid. He had established

## The Day Obasanjo Defied the Apartheid Guns

By Jeremy Pope

The military regime in Nigeria has jailed the country's former military ruler, General Olusegun Obasanjo, and is reportedly threatening to execute him. Since he handed over power to civilian rule Obasanjo has become a much respected international figure. In 1986 he co-chaired the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (EPG), whose mission marked a watershed in ending apartheid in South Africa. His remarkable role in South Africa is described for Gemini News Service by a man who was at his side during the mission.



General Olusegun Obasanjo  
'A courageous and principled act'

himself, too, as intensely practical, adroit and pragmatic.

The next six months, on and off the road with the general and his cavalcade, were extraordinary. He had an ability to mesmerise South African cabinet ministers and the captains of South Africa's industry alike, adopting always a cool, careful and considered line. He was a general, indeed, who chose the ground on which he would fight, and who did not needlessly flirt skirmishes with the enemy.

He was completely relaxed when arrested with others of our group, as battle raged in Alexandra township, near Johannesburg, and no one in the Carlton Hotel could possibly forget how he passed himself off as being "just a hotel waiter." It happened when a journalist got through to the EPG office on the phone at a time when we had decided to wait quietly.

In the office at the time were a general answering the telephone, an archbishop operating the photocopier and a Tanzanian prime minister-to-be dispensing coffee to all. One moment I will always treasure was walking hand-in-hand with the general, the two of us alone in the main streets of Cape Town.

Just what Capetonians must have made of the sight of a West African in flowing robes walking in this way with one too conspicuously white is anyone's guess — the more so as the ban on sex within the races (let alone sex within the genders) had yet to be lifted.

Yet if for Obasanjo the pinnacle was when he became the first non-South African African to meet Nelson Mandela, for others of us it was reached late on a hot and dusty day in the middle of South Africa's desert-like Karoo region. The day had been long,

The activists we had met with in De Aar for breakfast had been arrested by mid-morning, and the general was on the phone to South Africa's then foreign minister P W Botha. By early afternoon, Obasanjo was standing in the pulpit of a crowded church in Graaff-Reinet, where boys danced in the sanctuary with wooden AK-47s and the general preached a sermon on liberation theology of which any Latin American Jesuit would have been proud. So, too, would any Southern Baptist.

"We have come to see apartheid," he said. His eyes squinted and a low growl rose from the congregation. "We have come to smell apartheid." He screwed his nose up theatrically and the growl grew louder. "We have come to touch apartheid." His pointed finger leapt as though electrocuted as the growl became a shout. "And we have come to taste

apartheid." His face contorted and gagged, as if by a mouthful of salt and the audience erupted in a full-throated roar. This, too, from a speaker taken completely by surprise when the parish priest offered him the pulpit.

By late afternoon we had flown in our charter plane to a township where the taste of tear gas soured the air and (with outdoor meetings banned) the hall in which we were to meet residents was crowded to at least three times its capacity — and had been since early morning.

Outside casspirs (South African armoured cars) lurked barring our way. Impassively the soldiers eyed us with suspicion. Who were we? What were we?

After the prayer the crowd emerged, subdued and obviously surprised. A few minutes ago the had been ready to rush outside and throw bricks and themselves into the muzzles of the waiting guns. Now the casspirs loomed between themselves and their homes, but the mood was subdued.

"Come on, general," one of us shouted. "We've got

quietly as the noise would allow. "We have come here to help you, and you can help us. I am going to ask the Archbishop of Canada to say a prayer, and then I want you all to go home quietly. And without any trouble. That is how you can help us. If there is trouble, our ability to help will be reduced."

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and principled act I have ever witnessed. It is something I have seen in him again and again: an ability to empathise with anyone and everyone. A willingness to help, no matter who.

From the highest to the most humble, General Obasanjo exemplifies that quality which the poet Kipling captured when he wrote,

"To walk with kings, nor lose the common touch."

I can think only of one failure — if, indeed, it can be so described.

We were in Soweto on our first day in South Africa, in a combi van. Our driver was on edge. Glaring at me, he muttered: "One word of Africans and you're dead!" It was

doubtless good advice, but of greater utility to someone who knows what the words are one should avoid uttering.

We stopped at a set of traffic lights and a car careered round the corner towards us, in reverse. Its doors flailing open. A police van followed, also in reverse. The vehicles slalomed past us before the car finally veered off the roadway and slammed into a tree.

The driver rolled out and sprinted away, zig-zagging into the distance, seemingly aware that the policeman would jump from his van and shoot at him. Which is precisely what he did.

But he missed. The man disappeared into a line of huts, and the policeman returned to his van and drove off quietly in the opposite direction.

The general insisted that we get out of the van and try to find out what happened. Quietly he questioned the dozen or more bystanders,

Chase? What chase? What chase? Policeman? What policeman? A shot? Was there a shot? In the police state, no-one, not even an eye-witness, sees a thing.

Yet even there they recognised him. Greeted him cheerfully. But no, they'd seen nothing.

Once the report of the EPG was published, the general was on the road — throughout Europe and the US, promoting the findings about the intransigence of a white supremacist government which was simply not prepared to negotiate. And that the ANC and Nelson Mandela were indeed people the world could do business with, that they were slaves to no-one's philosophy.

The sanctions unleashed by the US Congress throughout the late 1980s were due in no small measure to the general's quiet powers of persuasion — sanctions that ultimately unlocked the process of negotiation.

Back in South Africa with him again the following December, the irrepressible general was at his effervescent best. Passers-by, total strangers, would accost him, welcoming him back. Ministers would bring out the last of treasured Irish whiskey. Everywhere Obasanjo's advice and guidance would be sought, but invariably offered quietly and with a humility that rendered his words all the more telling.

Those who do not know him see only the contradiction: the only Nigerian general who, as head of state, handed the governance of his country back to the people. Those who do, see the committed democrat. An intensely human person. One who suffers with the oppressed just as he can exult with the victorious.

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