

Demonic Fatalities

A report carried in a Bangla daily says that children of the under-privileged class are increasingly falling victim to indiscriminate use of bombs and crackers. Implicit here is an unpleasant fact that the difference between politics and terrorism is fast disappearing. The similarity between the two in their growing reliance on bombs is disquieting. Here the hard fact is that the bomb-makers and bomb-wielders both receive generous patronage from the political bosses.

Although the purpose behind the use of bombs in politics and crime is mostly to intimidate opponents, the number of unsuspecting victims among the children is rising at an alarming rate. In the current year alone as many as 13 children got killed of the 600 wounded by the bombs. The figures of the dead and wounded in the capital city should speak of the threat that compares well with the dreaded prospect of the Vietnamese children found staring in their faces in the post-war era. Today an international law is waiting to be framed for banning the manufacture of land mines. How do we then counter the threat of the clandestine manufacture and use of bombs, the prime victims of which are those who are not the original target.

The crucial point is how to stop the illegal practice. The best and most reasonable way is to strike at the source of these deadly devices. Some are from across borders, others are home-made ones. To stop them at their sources different methods have to be applied. But the virtue of keeping a strong vigil must receive the utmost recognition. There is not much of a point blaming the police for not acting after the recovery of abandoned packets of bombs in garbage cans or some such places. When political patronage is there, the police are manifestly handicapped to go for any all-out action. What we need is a political consensus — in the same way international conventions are held on delicate issues like arms treaty ban or nuclear tests — on this tricky and treacherous issue.

Why Minimise It?

Many have sighed with relief with the passing of the cyclone without taking an apocalyptic toll. Most of these must be people residing far from the area that is said to have been brushed by the elements. Two hundred fishermen are missing and many bodies have already been washed ashore which may be some of theirs. Up to ten thousand houses have been levelled. Ten thousand shrimp fields and 20 hatcheries have been destroyed. More than one lakh people have directly been affected as a result of the 140 km/h gushing and the 8-foot water surge. This is the size of our having been saved. This is a very wrong approach to disasters and the suffering of man and loss of his wherewithal.

What is, however, gratifying is the paltry figure of loss of human life. This seems to be more the doing of some progress in preparedness for the disaster than wholly being providential. Men knew. And this time they evidently cared. And however meagre, the variegated built-up shelters came very handy and were used to capacity. This is great progress indeed. The toll figure will swell with time, specially with the sea casualty confirmations coming in. Even that would not minimise this positive gain.

By now the tidal waters must have receded. Leaving acute shortage in housing, thousands of tubewells unworkable and thousands needing medical attention. And before everything else many will need food support. The problem with our relief operations is that the first supply of necessities arrives in quanta worse than skimpy and fails to be effective in any manner. When things come in big chunks, the emergency has passed and most of the material find their way to families not touched by disasters, almost as a rule. The disasters visit us so regularly and by now there are so many agencies to take on the aftermath that there should have first of all emerged an effective relief management.

And for God's sake do not abuse relief by making it look like some top person is giving it as *khairat* or alms to a band of beggars.

Of Colleges & Universities

The students of Comilla Victoria College forced a four-hour stoppage of train movement through that city. As such the Dhaka-Chittagong rail link, the main economic artery of Bangladesh, remained suspended for a damaging length of time. The students will not stop here. To realise their demand of raising the college to the university status they would impose similar programmes on the society. The outlook looks real bad.

When Jagannath College has been declared a university, had the authorities in their mind the idea that other university colleges would similarly be made into universities? Brojomohon and Carmichael, Anandamohon and Victoria are perfect cases to become universities if Jagannath becomes one. The students have been given a good handle indeed.

In fact, no one was prepared for the Jagannath College declaration — ah, if only a declaration could make a university! The mechanism to convert a college into a university must be so devised as would ensure national and world standards. A university is not an inflated college as much as a jackfruit is not an obese lichi. Jagannath College is going to be stuck up for long with this and should serve as a warning for other candidates.

The students are on the wrong track. They must not lay hand on the utilities. Their logical demand will make its weight felt even if they agitate within their campuses.

House of Windsor: Annus Mirabilis

The burden of the interview of the Princess was that the Rules of the Monarchy were too rigid for her. Perhaps the Rules are Victorian — they try to follow the tradition of the stiff upper-lip: everything is prin and proper but in reality life behind the scene is as complex and convoluted as the outside

carry the heavy burden of responsibility and discharge my duties as king, as I would wish to do, without the help and support of the woman I love.

Thus the Duke of Windsor married Mrs Simpson in 1937 and abdicated the British throne. Princess Margaret, then number 4 in line of accession, was refused permission to marry Peter Townsend — the man she loved. The Princess abided by the Palace Rule, but her self-abnegation won her the hearts of millions of her admirers. Audrey Hepburn immortalised the untold suffering of a woman through *The Roman Holiday* — a movie still considered a classic.

Queen consort of Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, Mother of Elizabeth I, was condemned to death in 1537 for alleged act of adultery, and executed. Henry's first marriage to Catherine of Aragon was declared invalid. Anne Boleyn last favour with the king in only thousand days because of the birth of a daughter (future Queen Elizabeth I) a miscarriage and a still-born son. Mary Queen of Scots, married to the Dauphin of France, widowed less than two years later, was condemned by the firebrand Calvinist John Knox. Standing in front of the judges, before her execution on February 8, 1587, the Dauphiness said: "Remember that the theatre of the world is wider than the realm of England". Add to

this the Wars of the Roses between the Lancastrians and the Yorkists.

The year 1666 was the year of the plague and fire of London — it was the year of the Dutch War. Dryden called this also the 'Year of Wonders' — Annus Mirabilis!

True, Princess Diana's BBC interview was not so conventional, but she unwittingly told the Establishment that the theatre of the world is

appearance of Comilla Parker — Bowles in their life was too much for her to accept — it was the proverbial last straw on the camel's back.

She has come out of the interview as candid and humane. Circumstances forced her to suggest that a king might not, necessarily be 'history's slave'. She actually, combines in her the qualities of both Talleyrand and Lord Palmerston — confuse your

gendary. The dignity and magnificence she has demonstrated, makes her a fit sovereign to be included in the history of Geoffrey of Monmouth.

It is ironic to see how the royal family has today become the subject of such undignified references almost verging on banter. When the sun did not set on the British Empire, with India as the Jewel in the Crown, the royal family was revered by the subjects. Today her subjects will not pay for the reconstruction of the Windsor Palace! It does show a particular trait of the subjects, perhaps.

Strangely enough many European countries, after having destroyed their own royalities, are nostalgic about those beautiful, magnificent days, harkening the heraldy and pageantry of the days of the yore. The French, of all the peoples, miss it most. Princess Diana, has therefore, done a service to the British Monarchy in the changed circumstances. They will do well to become more matter of fact — more close to people. Though they should not go to the extent of bicycling, they have to maintain the balance — an exacting job but the royals are after all trained for that.

The Prince of Wales is in an abind. He is the prince heritier but not the king. He will become the king but not before his mother — the Queen — is dead. He is a

modern Prince but a slave of history. His passionate love of architecture is therefore as necessary as a ballast to a ship. Princess Anne's deep involvement with 'sake the childrens Fund' can only be matched with her equestrian passion.

Not only that the Queen has to defray the restorian cost of Windsor Palace. The ongoing difficulty of the British Monarchy may have also claimed its first victim across the Atlantic! According to Harold Brookes — Barks, the director of Burke's Peerage, the British genealogical authority, the retired US General Colin Powell is a direct descendent of the warrior king Edward I of England, and a distant cousin of both Queen Elizabeth II and Princess Diana. General Powell, was the only potential candidate till now, who could have beaten according to the same authority, President Bill Clinton hands down, in the 1996 presidential election, withdrew from the race on family grounds. The real cause of his withdrawal though is not known to us. According to Brooks-Baker, in addition to British ties, Powell could claim kinship with presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and George Bush.

But Walter Bagehot had, perhaps, the last word on Monarchy and to paraphrase — "the characteristic of the English Monarchy is that it retains the feelings by which their heroic kings governed their rude age, and has added the feelings by which the constitutions of later Greece ruled in more refined ages.....So cheer on friends..... and long live the Queen and the King.

ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman



wider than the realm of England. This interview could as well become a catalyst for change — a change that will help the House of Windsor to survive well into the next millennium.

The burden of the interview of the Princess was that the Rules of the Monarchy were too rigid for her. Perhaps the Rules are Victorian — they try to follow the tradition of the stiff upper-lip: everything is prin and proper but in reality life behind the scene is as complex and convoluted as the outside. Brought up in the aristocratic ambience of the Spencers, of which Barbara Cartland was a noted member, the Princess tried her best in following the royal etiquette: but the

enemies and isolate them — you only have permanent interests to protect — the hallmark of a true diplomat. And Princess Diana does the exacting job of a goodwill Ambassador better than most.

Queen Elizabeth II and her consort Prince Philip are not strangers to this country. They visited Dhaka twice, the last time being in 1985, following the Urrichar cyclone. The Queen ably represents the values of the House of Windsor; her anxious queries about the devastation of Urrichar, made to me, are still vivid: As the co-ordinator of the relief operation of the time, I toted out the facts and figures without much difficulty. The Royalty, as mirrored by the Queen, is le-

The People the Cameras did Not Show

Barry Chamish writes from Tel Aviv

Not all Israelis joined in the eulogies for slain leader Yitzhak Rabin. Some — like the assassin himself — saw him as responsible for selling out the country's security. A Gemini News Service correspondent puts the view of the Rabin-haters.



Shimon Peres: Taking over as Prime Minister

his ruling coalition walked out of the alliance, Rabin reneged on his promise of carrying on the peace process only with a Zionist majority and depended on four Arab votes to keep his government alive.

Most people in Israel never supported the peace process. On the morning of the Knesset vote to ratify the Oslo accords, the newspaper *Maariv* published an opinion poll which showed that only 44.7 per cent of respondents supported the agreement with the PLO.

Last August, *Maariv* published a poll suggesting that almost 80 per cent of the public wanted the peace process stopped until a national referendum decided whether to continue. Only 18 per cent

of Israelis trusted Rabin to orchestrate its future without a public mandate.

But Rabin did not listen. By the summer, Rabin could not make a public appearance without being heckled. His most humiliating moment came at a soccer game when 40,000 people booed him in unison.

I was at a gathering of English-speaking Israelis in October at which Rabin could not get a word in for all the jeering. When he finally tried, it was not a word of reconciliation or understanding. He called the crowd racist and told them to go back where they came from.

Most of the public supported autonomy for the Palestinians an idea introduced by the opposition Likud group. That is how Rabin originally sold his peace process. But that is not what the public got. Instead, they were given a fully-armed PLO army on the borders of their cities.

Rabin initially told the country that the PLO would be allowed 900 policemen to protect PLO leader Yasser Arafat and wipe out anti-Israeli terrorism. Within two years, 25,000 "policemen" were roaming the streets of the Gaza Strip. Many were fully trained terrorists imported from North Africa, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.

Both *Yediot Achronot* and Israeli television news claimed that the car bombs were assembled in front of the PLO's border policemen and were ordered to pass through their checkpoints.

In the three years since Rabin began his peace process in November 1992 more than 4000 Jews have been murdered by Arabs in Israel and abroad. Rabin's attitude

to the slaughter of his people was callous.

When Jews died near Hebron, he blamed them for living there. Even the massacre of 130 Jews in Buenos Aires did not move Rabin enough to track down the killers. Many believe it was because Syria was the likely culprit, and he did not want to endanger his peace process with President Assad.

Rabin's shock answer to the continuing slaughter of his people was that the PLO was not responsible. When Yasser Arafat made speeches in Johannesburg and Gaza calling for a continued *jihad* (holy war) against the Zionists, Rabin replied that he didn't really mean it.

The carnage carried on. No Israeli was safe from sudden, violent death. By early

1995 political opposition, which had turned into political protest, turned into a wave of demonstrations and civil disobedience. Rabin's answer was to order his police to put down opposition with force. Thousands of Israelis were badly beaten, including at least two old women.

Illegal surveillance and covert actions were carried out against thousands of people, especially against journalists.

When I investigated allegations that the peace process was being directed from the United States, my mail, including that sent by registered post, stopped arriving. In September this year, my passport "disappeared" in the mail for 57 days just before I was due to leave on a speak-

ing tour of England.

As fear and hatred grew amid mounting opposition, the Labour Party and its left-wing allies organised a rally in Tel Aviv in a last-ditch effort to consolidate support.

Those attending were almost all secular and mostly Ashkenazi (of Polish and German origin); the 40 per cent of Israel that is religious and the Sephardic (of Spanish of Portuguese descent) majority were a minority of the throng. Nothing could have so exemplified the split in the national fabric as the gathering that night.

One religious Sephardi attending the ceremony was a third-year law student, driven mad by hatred. He pumped bullets into Rabin. The hatred the leader had sown — a hatred that may infect Israeli society for years to come — led finally to his doom.

BARRY CHAMISH is the editor of *Inside Israel*, a monthly intelligence newsletter.

Lingering Impasse: Urgent Solution Needed

by Ranesh Maitra

It is perhaps true that we all are concerned. Extremely concerned indeed. We do not really know what is exactly happening in Bangladesh or what is going to happen. And with this unfortunate reality, we all are passing our days in agonies.

This is the situation we have been thrown into, although it was quite avoidable. We, the majority people, are sincere, peace-loving and fond of democracy. And it is we, the common people, who fought for our language and autonomy, for the liberation of our country and lastly again in the late eighties took to the streets for restoring democracy — for achieving our sovereign rights as has been enshrined in clear and unambiguous terms in our constitution.

During all these struggles which continued for almost half a century, following the end of the colonial British rule, we, the people of this tiny part of the globe, followed whatever directives given to us by our great leaders — Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haque, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, Husain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman... Today we feel pains at the core of our hearts due to the absence of a leader of that stature among us at this critical juncture.

However, we did not stop with the departure of those great leaders. We again built up the struggle against autocracy under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia as they promised that true and unfettered democracy would be restored with the fall of autocracy and the sovereignty of the people would be truly recognised. Thus we followed them and

acted upon their instructions defying all odds and braving all atrocities. Under their leadership we again sacrificed our blood and lives without hesitation. The two leaders would not perhaps hesitate to recognise the role of the people that was up to the last historic general elections of 1991.

The question of our sovereign right has not only been enshrined in the 1972 constitution but also written on the pages of the historic joint declaration of the Three Alliances that conducted a grim battle for long nine years. I refer to the Declaration widely known as "Teen Joter Ruprekha".

So, it is a holy pledge that was given to us by both the leaders (now in two opposing camps) and we still are respectful to them as they are pledge-bound to fulfil the contents of the Declaration in letter and spirit.

So, today, when we find ourselves (what agonising misfortune it is for us and for the whole nation!) as helpless captives due to the uncompromising role of the two leaders complicating the whole political situation, we feel gravely concerned at the unwanted developments in the political horizon and none of us — be he a political worker, a journalist, a lawyer, a writer, a poet, an engineer, a businessman or a worker or a peasant — is free from anxiety in this suffocating political environment.

Are we really going to overcome the situation or fall a wilful prey to the further deepening of this political impasse that is being most vexatiously being dragged to

an unknown (or fore-known to the 'draggers') destination?

We waited long with the belief that good will would prevail ultimately and all hurdles on the way to a meaningful general election would be cleared on the basis of a national consensus through a meaningful dialogue since there was no more time to waste.

But we note with pains that all honest efforts made by different quarters have failed. Their efforts towards narrowing the gap and bringing the two leaders on the negotiation table could make a considerable headway also in halting anarchy and restoring transparency in the political arena.

So, unwittingly though, and being compelled by the beating of conscience and sense of patriotism, we call upon the saner sections of our people to unite in a convention — and heartily inviting the national political leadership — and invoke the relevant provisions of the constitution relating to the sovereignty of the people and call upon all to rise to the occasion without any further loss of time, and take an appropriate national decision on the basis of consensus. In case, however, the leadership fails to act properly.

Decision may be taken in such a proposed national convention to select some representatives to run an interim government and hold a peaceful and fair general election, free from the fear of any coercion whatsoever.

The Supreme Court, the guardian of the constitution, may also come to the rescue and pave the way to the national political salvation.

Whither Muslim brotherhood?

Sir, Our Pakistani brethren are having some internal problems with the Urdu speaking so-called Mohajirs in Karachi. Suddenly they seem to be having (or creating?) problem with 'Bangla speaking Muslims'.

The hot-headedness of the Pakistani brethren in so many years have only helped to increase their internal problems one after the other. And now they are against the so-called Bangali speaking populace who have been living in Pakistan for more than four decades, most of them probably knowing nothing but Urdu, the national language of Pakistan.

It is about time that the leaders of Pakistan came to their senses and once and for all accepted reality and recognised their weaknesses so as to put their internal

turmoil to a peaceful settlement.

Nahtasha Kamal
Wari, Dhaka

Whom do you call Tokais?

Sir, Tokais were so long synonymous with street urchins of slum areas who were not cared for by their parents mainly because of poverty; the Tokais roam around their neighbourhood, play and fight in the streets and in consequence create nuisance to civic life. One would normally think that such conditions obtain only in poor or less well-to-do areas.

But as a surprise to many, in posh areas (Banani-Gulshan-Bardhara), they also exist in quite a substantial number. Their playmates are the drivers, cooks, gardeners, ayas etc., who also either live or serve in those houses.

These children are also as uncared for as their counterparts in poorer areas as the parents of these households are busy with their own lives and remain away most of the time of day and night. The consequences in both the cases are the same but in the latter case more frightening because of easy access of these children to money, car and other cushy things of life.

These street children damage themselves and the environment by their actions often influenced by their playmates i.e. household helps and even emerge as anti-social characters including drug-takers. Parents of such children may be oblivious to what has been happening. But I think they should take note and do something about it. The proliferation can perhaps be checked if the parents who are mostly well-educated mean business.

An Observer