

Sex Workers in Bangladesh Rehabilitation or Empowerment?

by Lena Hasle

Department of Social Services, in partnership with NGOs, will have developed an operational strategy for how the Government of Bangladesh can effectively promote the empowerment of women and children living in brothel communities, including strategies to involve local communities in the protection and promotion of their human and constitutional rights.

THE recent eviction of sex workers in Tanbazar and Nimtoli has caused a public debate on how to best protect and promote the human and constitutional rights of sex workers and their children. Alongside the reports of actual events in Narayanganj, there have been several reports both from the Government and non-governmental organisations, including organisations representing the sex workers themselves, clarifying the issues at stake from their respective perspectives. Several of these reports have made reference to a UNDP assisted project which was designed to build the capacity of the government, particularly the Department of Social Services (DSS) to more effectively address the development needs of sex workers and their children.

The project formulation was initiated in 1997 by the Ministry of Finance, as a part of UNDP's Community Empowerment Programme. According to the Country Cooperation Framework (CCF) agreed between UNDP and the Government of Bangladesh, UNDP co-operation at the community level is directed to the most disadvantaged communities in specific locations and to specific deprived groups. With respect to specific deprived groups, the government requested assistance from UNDP to initiate the formulation of projects for street children, garment workers and socially disadvantaged women (sex workers). The Department of Social Services (Ministry of Social Welfare) was identified as the partner government institution for the sex worker project.

The project document resulted from a number of consultative workshops, using participatory methods (PRA), involving sex workers, other brothel representatives, NGOs, government representatives, UNDP staff and independent experts. The problems which the project is designed to address, were identified by sex workers themselves through a series of focus group interviews and life histories of women and children living in brothel communities. Separate consultations were held with the respective stakeholders in the brothels, as well as with representatives from the local administration, police, mastans etc. Since its approval, in June 1998, the project office has been established in Dhanmondi, House 363/1, Road 27, and the respective coordinators have taken up their work in each of the four project sites. As a first step towards implementation, local committees have been set up, with members from the local administration and the sex workers themselves. The project has also initiated a baseline study of each of the brothels, which is available from the project office.

The project is designed to protect and promote the welfare and rights of the sex workers and their children, taking a community approach in four brothel communities -- in Tanbazar (and Nimtoli), Jesso-

sore, Mymensingh and Daulotdia. The project aims to build the capacity of the DSS to take a more active role in addressing the development needs of sex workers and their children, drawing on available best practices from previous and ongoing projects. Recognising the considerable NGO experience in promoting the rights and welfare of sex workers, the DSS will directly contract NGOs already working in the sector to carry out the brothel-based ac-

tionment of the agreed activities, as well as represented in both national, project and local level committees. Services to be considered are:

- access to alternative livelihoods opportunities, including necessary education and skills training for both self-employment and employment in private/public sector agencies;
- access to secure financial services including saving schemes and access to credit for

implementation of activities, the project is expected to achieve the following results:

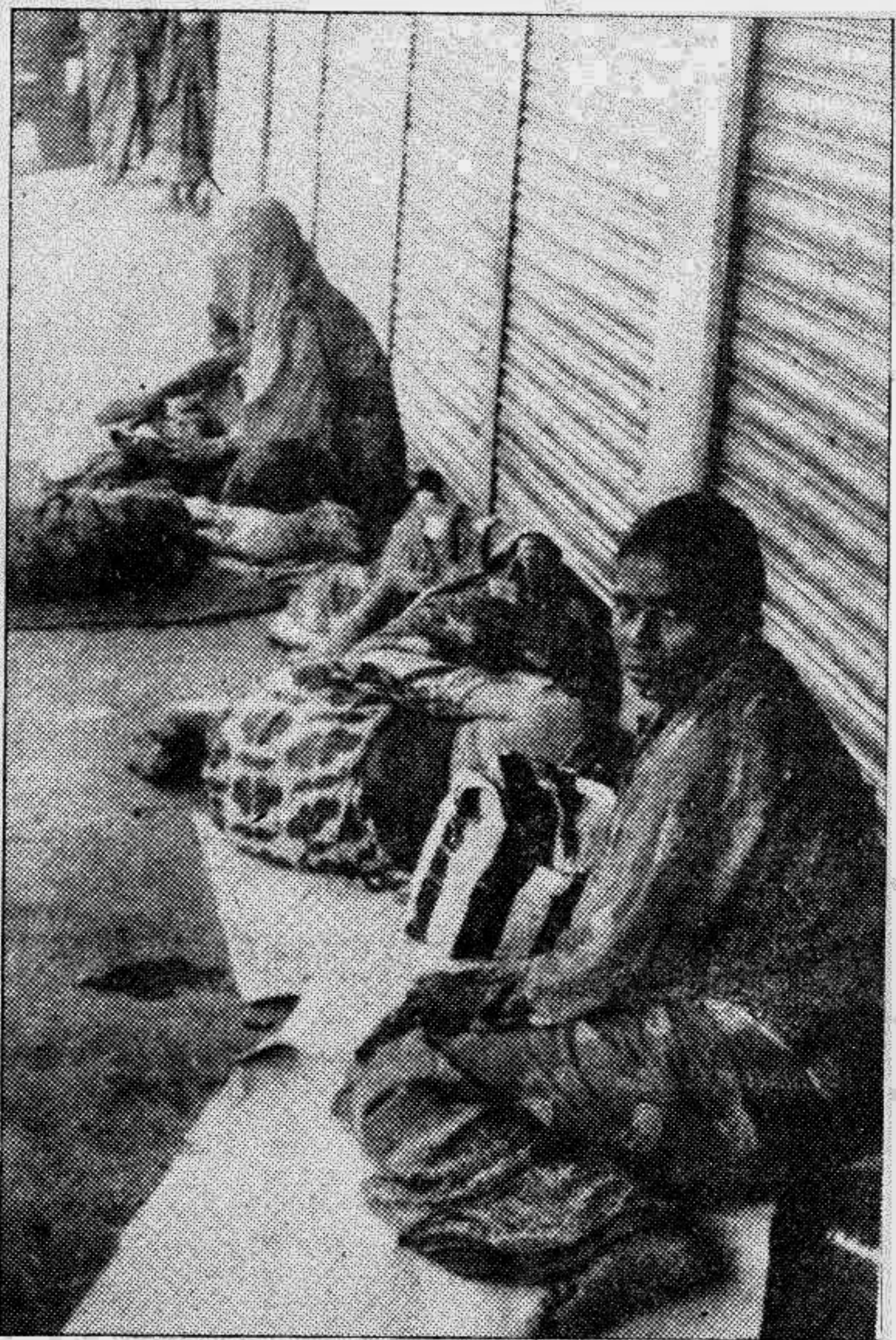
- Department of Social Services, in partnership with NGOs, will have developed an operational strategy for how the Government of Bangladesh can effectively promote the empowerment of women and children living in brothel communities, including strategies to involve local communities in the protection and promotion of their human and constitutional rights.

Through the project activities, women and children living or working in the selected brothel communities, will have been given an opportunity to consider alternative livelihoods, including access to alternative living arrangements, savings and credit facilities, basic education and skills training, as per the needs and priorities of the sex workers themselves.

Through community interventions, group discussions, interaction with local power structures, police and local government, the project should also have initiated a process to ensure the social rights of these women and children, facilitating their ability to assert their constitutional rights on an equal footing with other members of the society. The project will directly address the issue of security and access to legal services. Thus, it is expected that women and children covered by the project will be less vulnerable to violence and exploitation, including being trafficked to other countries in the region.

The project will facilitate the prevention of spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases by providing necessary information and services related to reproductive and sexual health issues, including promotion of condom use, peer education and peer pressure, and behavioural change communication, creating an enabling environment for implementing 100 per cent condom use. This will improve the health status of the sex workers themselves, as well as their clients and other people who have sexual relations with the clients.

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Evicted sex workers of Narayanganj brothels.

—Star photo

activities. The selected NGOs will carry the main responsibility for coordinating the project activities, including taking the roles as Chair of the local Project Implementation Committees.

The project has three main components focusing on: welfare of the children; education and training; legal and social support.

To further define and operationalise appropriate activities for each of these components, the project will facilitate the formulation of a local strategy plan, to be developed through extensive dialogue and consultation with the women, children, NGOs, brothel owners, sardarnis, mastans, police, representatives from the local administration etc. Beyond the participation of stakeholders in the identification and planning stage, the sex workers would also be directly involved in the management and imple-

ment in alternative livelihoods:

- access to alternative living arrangements for sex workers and/or their children, including crèche facilities and basic education for children;
- prevention of STDs/HIV/AIDS and other reproductive and sexual health related issues;
- provision of legal services and capacity building of organisations working for the rights of sex workers.

The project is also designed to facilitate the necessary changes in public attitudes through continuous involvement and sensitisation of members of the public, targeting community leaders, schools, politicians, religious leaders etc through informal discussion, public meetings, workshops and other community based initiatives. Depending on the successful identification, planning and

LETTER FROM AMERICA

America is Humming Latin Tunes; Why Not Subcontinental Melodies?

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

THE history of evolution of the western popular music is replete with defining moments. One such moment occurred at the Paramount Theatre in New York City in 1944. As a young Frank Sinatra belted out his hit, "All or nothing at all," female fans went hysterical. Girls screaming their heads off in public was so unusual that psychologists were brought in for an explanation. Sinatra's hypnotic voice so mesmerized the girls that they were unaware of making fools of themselves, was one explanation. The women missed their husbands and boy friends fighting overseas, and were loving them vicariously through Frank's romantic ballads, was another.

Of course, no body bothered to ask the girls. What made the bobby-soxers swoon was those sex appeal-laden sweet ballads that Sinatra crooned. With a resilience reminiscent of Lata Mangeshkar, Frank Sinatra dished out hits for the next six decades: "The lady is a tramp," "I get a kick out of you," "It was a very good year," "Three coins in a fountain," "Strangers in the night," "Chicago," "New York, New York" and "My Way" among others. Sinatra died last year.

In 1956, a 20-year old truck driver from Memphis, Tennessee, Elvis Aaron Presley, had America all shook up. Not necessarily for the right reasons. Elvis would slip into the black section of Memphis under the cover of night to listen to black music. Eagerly learning from Little Richard, Fats Domino and Chuck Berry, Elvis synthesized black rhythm and blues with white country music, and called it Rock and Roll. America had dual fear of Elvis: he was popularizing "Negro" music, and "corrupting" America's youth by gyrating his lower body, which made girls go crazy!

Therefore, when Elvis appeared on the immensely popular Ed Sullivan television variety show in September, 1956, the cameramen had strict instructions to show Elvis only waist up. It did not matter, Elvis sang "Heartbreak Hotel," "You

ain't nothin' but a hound dog," and "Love me tender," and altered America's musical landscape for ever.

Eight years later, four mop-haired lads from Liverpool, England, invaded America. They too appeared on the Ed Sullivan show in February, 1964. Ed Sullivan introduced them: "Ladies and gentlemen, here is John, Paul, George and Ringo!" Also known as the Beatles, all the lads did was sing, "She loves you Yeah, Yeah, Yeah," and "I want to hold your hand," and this time the girls fainted! The British control of American popular music was complete.

Fast forward to 1983. National television was celebrating the 25th anniversary of Motown Records, which had presented the world with such astonishing black musical talents as Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross and the Jackson Five. Michael Jackson sang old Jackson Five hits with his brothers and then said, "I love performing old songs with my brothers, but I like my new songs even better." Right in front of America's television viewers, Michael went solo. Accompanied by typical Michael Jackson repertoire of moon-walking and tap dancing, Michael Jackson performed, "Billie Jean is not my lover," "Beat it," and "Thriller," and once again changed the complexion of American music. Jackson became the first truly crossover artist — an African-American who appealed equally to the whites. Jackson would surpass the success of his mega hit album, "Thriller" with "Bad" a few years later. Michael Jackson won eight Grammys (annual music awards) for "Thriller" in 1984.

On the women's side, with smash hits such as, "Like a Virgin," Madonna, too, was making erotic sounds in the early 1980s. Experts had predicted that it was going to be Cindy Lauper, not Madonna, who would revolutionize women's music. Didn't quite happen that way. One may not agree with Madonna's life style (she had a baby with her personal trainer; many have called her a "slut")

or her nearly X-rated music videos, but her brand of music is truly unique and original, and can be quite pleasing.

In February of this year, the television broadcast of the Grammys was turning out to be extremely boring. Then a relatively unknown 27-year performer from Puerto Rico, with a very un-Hispanic name, Ricky Martin, started singing, and Elvis-like pelvic-swivelling: "La Copa de la Vida," the football anthem of the 1998 World Cup. Then came the mega, mega hit: Although the song is in English, the first line is mostly Spanish: "Livin' on La Vida Loca." (My elder son who learns Spanish at school translated: "Living the crazy life.") Suddenly the Grammys caught fire. So did America! Ever since, American children of all ages have been dancing to the Latin beat of congas, horns and timbales accompanying "Livin' on La Vida Loca." Now, Madonna wants to sing a duet with Ricky Martin. For those old enough to recall, this is reminiscent of Hemant Mukherjee's snake-charmer's music from the 1956 film "Nagin," and his super hit "Hai Apna Dil" from the film "Solva Saal" a few years later, both of which took the subcontinent by storm.

According to TIME magazine, Ricky Martin, along with two other fellow Hispanics — vocalist Marc Anthony and actress turned pop diva Jennifer Lopez — are fusing English with Latin rhythms to create a fresh, seductive form of music that transcends race and crosses generations. Or in other words, their music is "a cross between rice, beans and hamburgers."

Latin pop — salsa, rumba, mumbo — was not exactly unknown to mainstream America; singers like Ritchie Valens and Cuban-born Gloria Estefan have been scoring hits for decades. The difference is that the new breed is singing in English to Latin beat. Latin pop is hot because it combines the "street edge of hip-hop and the bouncy 'joy of dance-pop.' It is the hot new sound in music; the only caveat is that so far all the

crossover Latino artists are Anglo-like fair-skinned. With the Hispanics expected to overtake the African-Americans as America's largest minority by 2005, Latin music could be the sound of America's future.

The criteria for success for a pop artist is different in the West. A song's appeal is critical: voice is one of the several important components. Successful artists come up with different songs that appeal at different times. Those who cannot, are one-hit wonders. Most of the successful singers compose their own songs. John Lennon and Paul McCartney composed all the Beatles songs, as did Paul Simon for Simon and Garfunkel; Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson and Bruce Springsteen wrote their own songs. Although hugely successful artists such as Frank Sinatra and Barbara Streisand, both of whom possessed excellent voices, did not compose their own songs, good song writers queued up to have them sing their compositions.

In our part of the world, good singing is synonymous with an excellent voice. And for most part, singers do not compose their own songs. The concept of playback singing in absent in the West; singers perform their own songs in films.

Very sophisticated Americans do enjoy classical Indian music — both instrumental (for instance, Ravi Shanker's sitar) and vocal (Kheyyali variety). The popular music form originating from the subcontinent remains a mystery to the American masses. Instead of developing our unique style and heritage further and exporting it, the current tendency in the subcontinent is to abandon it in favour of cheap imitation of western music. Such a pity!

There is hardly a singer in the West who can match the vocal virtuosity of Lata Mangeshkar, Mehdi Hassan or Runa Laila at their best. Yet, our cultural heroes and heroines remain completely unknown in America. Surely, someone can attempt to package and market the enormous talents of these subcontinental treasures.

Not Without My Gun: America Yet to Find Urgency in Gun Control

by Syed Maqsood Jamil

IT was perhaps 1967. The place was Austin, the state capital of Texas, USA. A university student bearing a family name similar to that of famed American poet Walt Whitman, climbed to the bell tower of the University of Texas. Before that, Charles Whitman had killed his mother, wife and his little child. He was carrying highly lethal firearms. From the vantage position, he randomly sprayed bullets all around. The federal police went into action and shot him down. When the mayhem was over, 14 were killed.

More than thirty years later, he readily comes to my mind, whenever someone mentions the place. Many such acts of mindless violence have traumatized America since then. The most recent being "Barton gone berserk in Atlanta".

Mark Barton's fatal fury is much similar to that of Whitman. Not long ago, it was the Columbine High School tragedy that devastated the small town of Littleton, Colorado. Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, students of the school, indiscriminately killed 13 of their classmates and a teacher. Finally they fired the last bullets to kill themselves. It rocked America. The President expressed his grief. Al Gore and his wife Tipper were at the funeral service. It is the paralysis of America against Gun Control, which found expression in Gore's words when he asked, "What say we to the open muzzle of this tragedy, cocked and aimed at our hearts?"

America is caught in a fundamental problem of fearful proportion. Gun Control was an issue and will continue to remain an issue. Sadly though, America has seen little action on it. Soon, the sadness fades away, the grief is forgotten. The kinds of Klebolds and Harris will keep reappearing in American society.

Just a year back, the Jonesboro killings took place. The gun toting boys were even smaller in age, Mitchell Johnson, 13, and the firearms expert Andrew Golden, 11. They killed five including their teacher and wounded 13 in the Westside High School of Jonesboro, Arkansas. A year later, the Littleton massacre was to prove that American democracy has little room for effective Gun Control and blocks the path of de-arming America. Americans value their constitutional right to buy, keep and carry firearms. The right is enshrined in the second amendment of the Bill of Rights of America. It speaks of a well-regulated militia and upholds the right to carry arms. This is a part of American heritage. About half of the American homes have at least one gun. Many of them have arsenals.

The arming of America is a fact of life. Even strong gun control advocates understand, it is unwinnable. It is up against the daunting realities of constitutional rights and the practicalities of American heritage. Gun ownership is looked on as an inalienable right guaranteed by the second amendment which states, "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of free State, the right of the people of keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." It was adopted by the first congress of America in 1787, as a part of the ten amendments that is known as the Bill of Rights. It was the frontiersmen, using gun to great success, who expanded America to the Pacific coast. Over the next 200 years it became an important part of American heritage. Obviously the Americans recoil from the irreverence of reversing or emasculating the enactment of their founding fathers.

The NRA or National Rifle Association zealously guards the inviolability of the second amendment of carrying arms. Their President is no less a person than "Ben Hur" famed actor Charlton Heston. He is now the high priest of gun cult. In the beginning of the 90's his membership was well over three million. The figure is higher today.

Fundamentally, Gun Control is looked on as a measure which will infringe and erode

rights of American citizens. It is, understandably, a delicate issue when the advocates of heritage oppose it strongly and find it contrary to the spirit of the American constitution. Gun Control has therefore not found its place as a social agenda of America. The stand does not waver in spite of the brutal massacres and killings taking place in America over the years. Four Presidents were assassinated, from Lincoln to Kennedy. One Presidential hopeful Bob Kennedy was shot dead. Civil Rights leader Martin Luther died by assassin's bullets. Ronald Reagan was injured in an assassination attempt. Even racial politician, the former Alabama Governor late George Wallace was shot and paralysed for the rest of his life. American history is periodically visited by assassin's bullets hitting and killing high profile public leaders.

This is to say that the guns take toll from all sections of the American society. Most American leaders isolate these killings as cases of personal problem. They hold that the problems have different origin and the killers are driven by unsound state of mind. Even without the firearm, the troubled mind could resort to violence. The opinion is echoed in the statements and actions of the public leaders. Robert Hinckley, a rich family son fired at Ronald Reagan. He was blithe enough to say to Nancy "Honey, I forgot to duck", and steadfastly stuck to his anti-gun control stand. His Assistant James Brady was paralysed for the rest of his life. It occurred in 1981, the beginning of the Republican's 12-year hold on the Presidency. The incident was not to drive Reagan and Bush to adjust to a stand, preferring even a lighter form of gun control.

George Bush, a life member of NRA kept to what he believed "free men and women

have the right to own a gun to protect their home." Neither did the Kennedy's feel the need of pursuing gun control, in spite of a compelling ground of loss of two bright sons of the family.

Gun lobby is strong in America. There is however no reason either to think that the gun control supporters are weaker or to believe that they want to go to the last on the issue. Not to speak of Al Gore, even Republican senator John McCain favours some form of gun control. With Clinton, however flawed, at the top, they certainly can go far on the issue. The scepticism, however remains. Do they really have the commitment which can put the focus on the issue. The picture of American society and its politics does not hold out the hope of remarkable movement on the issue. It will continue to be low key and diffident in nature.

A look at the American gun shops will reveal America's love with guns. Assault weapons of a wide range are available over the counter throughout America. The Soviet AK-47 is the most popular firearm. Chinese version AKS is also popular. Closely following is the AR-15, the local cheaper version of American Army semi-automatic M-16. MAC-10 is also rising in sales. The Israeli compact Uzi is also much in demand. One can build an ammunition factory, as Dylan Klebold was doing in the garage of his house. It is just not teenagers whose imagination is obsessed with guns and bombs. The teenage murders awaken the Americans to ponder over the danger of violence taking hold of its next generation. When the grown ups go wild, they strike terror, the violence can be even more devastating. David Koresh of Waco, Timothy McVeigh of the Oklahoma bomber, and Ted Kaczynski of Texas are chilling practitioners of death cult. It puts one to think that in America the

troubled minds succumb easily to violence because the tools of death are so easily available. The spectre of macabre violence will continue to haunt America. It can not suddenly rid itself of the troubled minds. They will have pathological plans, and the over the counter firearms will be deadly tools of carrying them out.

America has identified many other factors behind their love and preference for firearms. The macho image exalted to an irrational height by the entertainment industry, website, internet, and video games is driving Americans to embrace violence as a cult. It can have devastating effect on the teenagers. A great majority of Americans are holding violence as culture responsible for the Littleton and Jonesboro massacres.

Even women are finding it convenient to carry firearms. They find it handy in warding off assaults. They household and homestead owners are pointing out that firearms in the house are effective deterrent against burglary attempts. So, they hold on to their guns at all cost. But police report informs that use of firearms by the house owners can be the cause of fatal deaths, because it is inevitable that the burglars carry arms and use them better.

Should we then believe that America is doomed to the cauldron of periodic tragedies of brutal murders, because its citizens are much too in love with their rights of owning guns. There are however many redeeming elements of the American society which do not allow doomsday thinking to grow stronger. Some gun control laws are already in force — the waiting period to carry out checkout of the purchaser's background, for example.

Most of all, great people like Dave Sanders and Shane Waite, the teachers who died protecting their students at Columbine and Westside, Littleton, are the people America needs. They can be an effective force in putting the moral urgency of carrying forward issue of gun control. Otherwise, American will see more of these great people falling victims to more of Columbine and Littleton.

Calcuttans Fight Over a Name

Krittivas Mukherjee writes from Calcutta

EVEN as the state cabinet has formally decided to change the name of this metropolitan city to the more ethnic "Kolkata", eminent citizens are spilling vitriol in the pages of local newspapers arguing for and against the new nomenclature. Leading Bengali novelist Sunil Gangopadhyay, who led the campaign for changing the name of the city, has referred to those who oppose the change as "brown sahibs". Leading journalist Suman Chattopadhyay, executive editor of the Ananda Bazar Patrika, the Bengali paper with the largest circulation, and others who oppose the change have called it a "pre-poll gimmick", saying the state has more serious matters on hand to deal with and a referendum could be taken after the impending parliamentary election to settle the issue. Letters containing divergent opinions on the renaming episode are flooding the readers' columns of Bengali newspapers which have also taken diametrically opposite stands on the issue. While the English dailies and the Ananda Bazar Patrika are strongly in favour of retaining the old name almost all the

other vernacular dailies support the demand for the change. The signature campaigns being run by various newspapers also clearly show a sharp polarisation among the intellectuals of the state. Many pointed out in their letters to newspapers that the word 'Bangla' and 'Kolkata' was in coinage in daily use anyway and the whole issue was much ado about nothing. Anindita Guha, writing to the Telegraph, perceived Stalinist and Hitlerian strains in the convictions of those who supported the name change. She felt the whole issue smacked of regional chauvinism. Well known writer Subash Mukhopadhyay cautioned that changing names was very easy but implementing it in official, non-official, law and educational fields was more difficult. The state government's decision to rename Calcutta has been intimated to the federal home ministry. Approval for the change in name is only a formality though the change in name of the state from West Bengal to Paschim Banga will require a Parliamentary ratification. The change in the names of the capital city and the state comes after a unani-

mous resolution was passed by the state Assembly recently. The Congress, which supported the change initially, and the Trinamool Congress now say that the change is an election gimmick. State Home Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya asserts that a large majority of the people wanted the colonial legacy to go. West Bengal and Calcutta are names given by the British. He hinted that other original names of places subsequently distorted by the British would also be gradually restored. He, however, claimed that nothing was being done to pamper Bengali chauvinism since 57 per cent of Calcutta's population was now non-Bengali. Bhattacharya also ruled out changing of Muslim names as demanded by the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) saying the Mughal period, during which many other names of towns were changed, was very much a part Indian history. The RSS and the BJP state units have decided to move court saying that the renaming has been a unilateral decision taken with an eye on the coming Parliamentary elections.

—India Abroad News Service

Garfield



by Jim Davis

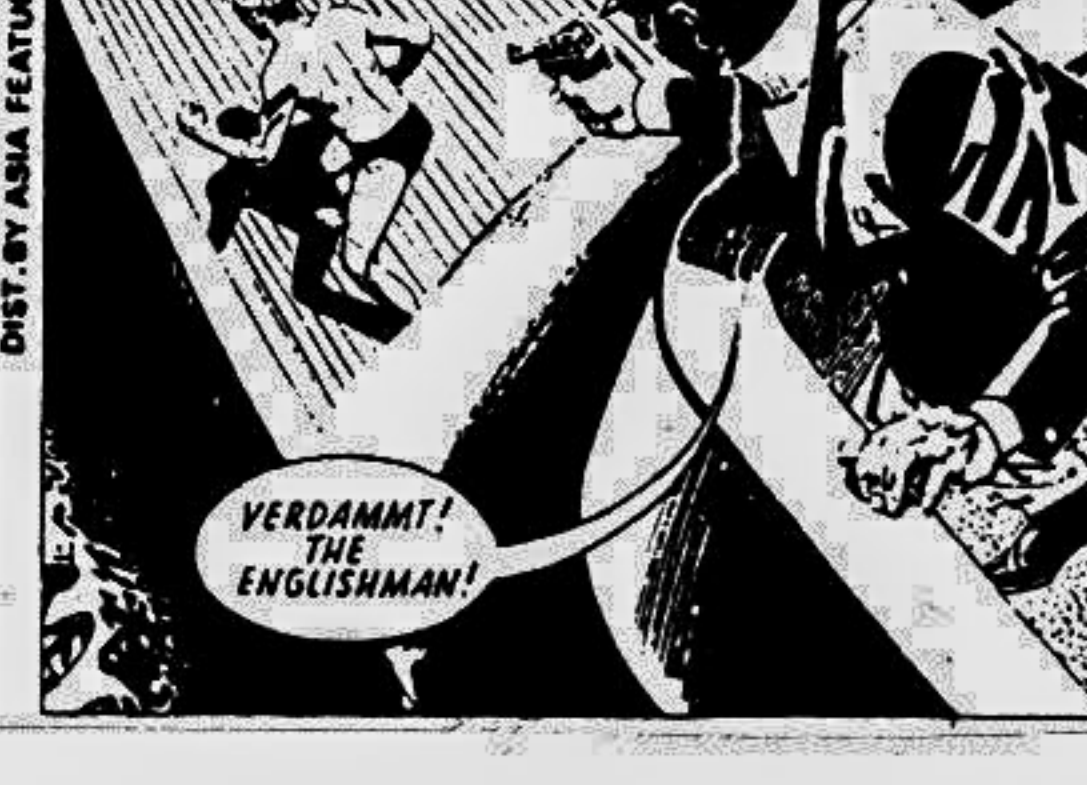
James Bond

BY JIM FLEMING
DRAWING BY HORAK



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VERDAMMT! THE ENGLISHMAN!



BEFORE OOT CAN REACH THE SIDE - THE CAPTAIN'S GUN SPITS FIRE IN THE DARKNESS!

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