

# Hiroshima of hatred

When someone is throwing acid he is actually hurling his rage at the target of his hatred. When that rage comes in the shape of a bullet or a bomb, it means one wants to kill his enemy to avenge his hatred. But acid is thrown when one wants to damage his target and then rejoice in the lingering agony of an unfinished enemy. It is basically perversion, the crowning impulse of a sadistic mind that wants to chew the cut of its own atrocious act, writes **Mohammad Badrul Ahsan**

NEW Zealand-born short-story writer Kathleen Mansfield fretted in a letter written to John Middleton Murry in 1913. "I hate the sort of licence that English people give themselves to spread over and flop and roll about. I feel as fastidious as though I wrote with acid." One wonders how she would have reacted to the sort of licence that Bangladeshi men give themselves to throw acid on their fellow human beings and what she would have written to express her fastidious feelings for the extreme brutality perpetrated with this corrosive thing.

In Narayanongi, a frustrated young man threw acid on a girl who was sharing the same bed with her two sisters at night. The acid burned all three of them for the mistake of one. And what mistake was it? The girl didn't respond to the advances of a depraved man who wanted to get fresh with her. In another incident, the rival group threw acid on a man over a property spat. Even worse, a husband poured acid into the female organ of his wife and charred the inner walls of her body. It seems that the acid-throwers have adopted the "scorched earth" policy like the Pakistan army of 1971. They want to utterly destroy what cannot be possessed. If a young girl cannot be won over, she must be disfigured so that no man will covet her. If a rival cannot be defeated, he must be disgraced so that he will not be fit for another contention.

But what the perpetrators of this heinous crime hardly realise is how they condemn their victims to a lifelong anguish within the wreckage of their melted bodies. What would a man or a woman do with a life trapped within the embarrassment of a bizarre body? In the 17th century, Londoners sometimes spent their Sunday afternoons at Bedlam mocking the crippled and demented. Mankind seldom accepts its

own freaks, but often makes spectator sports out of their deformities. Who amongst us would want to sit face to face with an acid victim and spend an evening looking at her roasted face? While the horror of this cruelty shatters the victim, the humiliation of its devastation shuts off the world around her.

As a matter of fact, like a coward dies many times before his death, an acid victim burns many times after the burns are within the coils of their muted grief, their spirit gutted by the deadly fire of male hatred. Mary Leapor, the English poet and sometime cook-maid, resented in *An Essay on Woman* that "Woman, a pleasing but a short-lived flower, / Too soft for business and too weak for power." A wife in bondage, or neglected maid, / Despised, if ugly, if she's fair, betrayed."

Imagine the plight of a girl who is reduced to the likeness of a dollop of ice cream in the heat, whose face is dissolved to resemble the crumpled mess of torched polythene. What happens to a girl like that whose comely look is scraped by the erosive effects of a lethal liquid that throws her into a grotesque world of jeers and taunts instead of being adored and cherished?

Recently, UNICEF has set up the Acid Survivors Foundation for the support and treatment of acid victims, which only shows that acid throwing has escalated to a national problem of international concern. A hospital in Spain has offered plastic surgery free of cost of a certain number of acid victims from Bangladesh every year. The Cabinet has recently approved amendments to make any attempt of throwing corrosive materials at a human target punishable by death penalty or life-imprisonment. But the

question is whether all of these will stay the growing tide of acid brutality?

American educationist Horace Mann aptly said, "The object of punishment is, prevention from evil; it never can be made impulsive to good." Will institution, compassion and legislation together succeed to seek concession from the evil, which comes in a splash of liquid conflagration?

Experience tells that law is to moral crisis what Band-Aid is to a wound; it cures, but does not prevent. Has the existence of capital punishment prevented the increasing number of murder and mayhem in this country? Has the creation of special legislation stopped the circulation of illegal arms amongst the miscreants? The records show that the imprisonment of more than four thousand people in the past five years hasn't put a curb on illegal electric connections in this country. In most countries of the world, crime hardly erases while criminals cram the calabosoes.

Indeed, when someone is throwing acid he is actually hurling his rage at the target of his hatred. When that rage comes in the shape of a bullet or a bomb, it means one wants to kill his enemy to avenge his hatred. But acid is thrown when one wants to damage his target and then rejoice in the lingering agony of an unfinished enemy. It is basically perversion, the crowning impulse of a sadistic mind that wants to chew the cut of its own atrocious act.

Jeffrey Dahmer, the carnivorous UK killer, melted the remains of his victims in acid to dilute the evidence of his misdeed. The acid-thrower does the opposite thing. He uses acid to create his victim and then wants to show that victim to rest of the world as a monument of his pernicous hatred.

One of the lingering

tragedies of criminal propensity is that it is whetted most when warned like the power of homeopathic dosage, which increases each time shaken. The increased awareness of the acid problem has only brought its wider application as mischievous minds master the madness of maximum revenge.

The weekend magazine of *The Daily Star* recently did a cover story on acid victims where one learns about Namita who was doused with acid by a family friend to avenge a long-drawn feud. As the deadly liquid rolled down her head, she thought it had started to rain. Then she saw her wristwatch melt down and fall on the ground, the flesh of her hand giving in next. Namita lost her eyes and was plunged in the darkness of a sightless world where she lives today, while the man who threw acid on her serves life-term in a prison.

The description of Namita's melting in the "acid rain" reminds one of victims of Hiroshima on that fateful day of World War II when men had taken "the power of the sun" in his hand and unleashed it upon this quiet city of Japan. The tremendous heat generated by the explosion of the atom bomb had sucked away the air in the atmosphere and sent people gasping for breath. As the citizens ran for cover in panic, their skins stripped from their scorched bodies and eyes melted down.

Likewise, there is a deadly bomb, which goes off inside the acid-thrower at the time he takes the power of that corrosive liquid in his hand and hurls it at the target of his hatred. The biggest challenge for the society is to delude that bomb. After all, hatred is more corrosive than acid. If that is not diluted, we will see private Hiroshimas every day.

The writer is a banker.

# Challenge of climate change

CLIMATOLOGISTS have forecast a steady rise in emissions around the world, with developed countries contributing to an 18 per cent increase above 1990 levels by around 2010, unless effective action is taken. A mutual plan for such steps is set out in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which would commit developed countries to individual emissions targets for the period 2008-2012. The overall result would be a decline of over five per cent in developed country emissions compared to 1990 levels, scientists forecast.

Developed countries are deeply concerned about the economic implications of this transition to a lower-emissions economy, including the potential impact on trade competitiveness, both among themselves and vis-à-vis those developing countries that are now industrialising. The Kyoto Protocol will only enter into force and become legally binding when at least 55 countries, including developed countries, accounting for at least 55 per cent of developed country emissions have ratified. So far, only 14 countries — all from the developing world — have ratified the Protocol.

The on-going negotiations will define the rules by which developed countries could lower the costs of meeting their targets by reducing emissions in other countries through the so-called flexibility mechanisms. A related issue will be determining the consequences for a country of failing to comply with the Protocol targets. The talks may also open the way for key developing countries to become more involved in addressing climate change in the future.

The negotiations are scheduled to conclude at the next major conference, to be held in The Hague, possibly in November 2000. "The crunch will come in The Hague," said Michael Zammit Cutajar, Executive Secretary of the Convention. "The final results will have to satisfy the major industrial countries, trigger their ratification of the Protocol, and offer incentives to developing countries to take further action in the future. The Bonn conference must strengthen confidence in influ-

Some 5,000 participants from 150 countries will assemble in Bonn, Germany, for the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP5) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Will the Bonn Conference, scheduled to be held from October 25 to November 5, reach a consensus for a post-2000 action plan on climatic change, wonders **Quamrul Islam Chowdhury** as he writes on the challenges that lie ahead

encing a successful outcome at The Hague by adopting important technical decisions, sending positive signals to business and industry, and engaging Ministers fully in the task of focusing and speeding up the negotiations.

The Protocol's three flexibility mechanisms still need to be made fully operational. Priority will be given to finalising the clean development mechanism (CDM). The CDM will promote sustainable development by encouraging developing-country projects that avoid emissions or strengthen adaptation to climate change impacts; developed countries will receive credit against their targets for financing these projects.

The developed countries have been pursuing a joint implementation (JI) programme, which the proponents say, will offer credits for contributing to projects in other developed countries (including the countries of Central/Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union). This school of thought argues that an international emissions trading regime will allow developed countries to buy and sell emissions credits amongst themselves.

They say, parties must elaborate the nature and scope of these mechanisms, the criteria for project eligibility, baselines for measuring a project's contribution to reducing emissions, the roles of various insti-

tutions, and an accounting system for allocating credits. The environmental credibility of the Protocol will be strongly influenced by these details.

Moreover, credibility demands that there be procedures regarding compliance with the emissions targets; this is a difficult issue and, in the case of legally-binding consequences for non-compliance, would eventually require an amendment to the Protocol.

Also essential is an agreement on how to measure and account for emissions cuts. There is a need for more rigorous criteria and national systems for estimating net emissions and for reporting and reviewing progress. Of particular importance is the technically complex and politically sensitive question of how to estimate the removal and storage of carbon from the atmosphere by forests and other natural "sinks". By clearly defining what counts as a sink, and thus how much sink enhancement can contribute to meeting a country's emissions target, these discussions, too, could have an important impact on the costs of meeting the targets.

True, strengthening the contribution of developing countries to addressing climate change will require agreement on a number of outstanding financial and technology issues. Under the Convention, developing countries are to gather and analyse national data, incorpo-

rate climate change concerns into national planning, and submit information about all this activity for consideration by the international community.

And to do this they need assistance from developed countries in the form of financial support, capacity building, and access to and transfer of technology. Because a long-term solution to climate change will require the increasing involvement of developing countries, this co-operative relationship needs to be made more effective.

The Bonn conference is known formally as the Fifth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP5) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The COP, which will be chaired by Jan Szyszko, Minister of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources and Forestry of Poland, will open on October 25 and then resume on November 2. The interim days of the conference will be taken up by the 11th meetings of the Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and its Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI).

The 48-hour high-level segment for Ministers and heads of delegation will take place from November 2-4. But, can they reach a global consensus? Can ministers from the developing countries be successful in enforcing the ministers of the emission-prone developed countries to fulfil their commitments? From Kyoto to Bonn, the experiences of developing countries, little involved in carbon emissions, are not a pleasant one. Bangladesh along with least carbon-consuming countries should sharpen its negotiation skills and take a common platform on major issues for enforcing the developed countries to enter into the Kyoto Protocol.

The writer is chairman of the Commonwealth Environmental Journalists Association, secretary-general of the Asia-Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists and chairman of the Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh.

# Turning the tide of history

However we may celebrate the millennium, it will mean little unless our resolution for the future is to take stock of the damage human activity has done to our planet and take action to ensure that destructive processes are reversed. It is an historic opportunity for change that will finally protect and sustain the environment we all depend on, writes **Claude Martin**

THE Christian calendar means nothing at all to the Earth itself. For the jaguar in the heart of the Amazon jungle and, indeed, for the majority of the world's six billion human population, 1 January 2000 will be no different from any other day. Yet as arbitrary as that date might be, at least it provides us with an opportunity to look back over what has indisputably been the most destructive century in human history.

The destruction has taken many forms, but for me one of the most striking is that in the last 25 years alone — the timescale of a single generation — the Earth has lost one-third of its natural wealth, according to the Living Planet Report prepared by the international conservation organisation WWF. At the end of the century, the Earth's forests, wetlands, seas and coasts in a catastrophically worse state than they were when it began.

During those hundred years, what was once unthinkable has become an annual debacle. Forests burn over many thousands of square kilometres in the tropics and in the Siberian taiga, the result of land use that has run out of control and of longer dry seasons caused by climatic changes. The Hadley Centre for Climate Change in England has calculated that the fires of 1998 turned the Earth's forests into a net producer of carbon dioxide. This means that the forests, which would normally help to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> and stabilise the climate, could in fact become a part of the problem that is killing them.

A year ago another new and destructive consequence of the increase of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere became apparent in nearly all the Earth's oceans.

Rising water temperatures as a result of global warming are thought to be causing the mass destruction of corals. Nearly all the coral reefs in the Indian Ocean have been affected, while the corals in the particularly warm, shallow Arabian Gulf have suffered the highest levels of damage — up to 95 per cent.

There is no longer any doubt: today, on the threshold of a new century and a new millennium, we are facing overwhelming global environmental problems. Just seven years have passed since the memorable Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, yet during that period the global population has risen by a further 570 million. That is more than the entire population of the USA and Russia combined, or of the European Union. It is clear that swift action is required not only in the social and economic spheres, but also in order to protect nature and the environment. We cannot hope to support what will soon be ten billion people living on the Earth with or traditional economic structures and systems — and certainly not in the western lifestyle that is generally aspired to — without paying for it in both an enormous loss of biodiversity

and increasing social conflict. As globalisation progresses, state influence is steadily diminishing while the influence of the commercial sector grows apace. This confronts us with the dangers of the misuse of power in individual regions and resource sectors. However, many companies have recognised that proactive environmental protection and the sustainable use of resources also make economic sense, as well as having a positive impact in the marketplace. If we paid real costs in private transport, for example, and realistic pricing systems incorporating the actual use of resources, then we would be a great deal nearer to sustainability.

Another important step forward would be the phasing out of economically senseless and environmentally harmful subsidies — some US\$25 billion for the fishing industry, for example, use to maintain over-sized fleets in a business that is currently destroying the very resource on which it depends. Globally, subsidies worth at least US\$650 billion are paid in support of timber production, mining, oil production, agriculture and fishing, energy production and private transport.

In virtually all cases these subsidies are supporting non-sustainability.

If, in addition, we were to move towards taxing environmental pollution on the "polluter pays" principle, rather than taxing labour, this would largely solve the problem of how to finance sustainability.

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Such changes will have to be widely introduced early in the next century. They will become unavoidable because the fact that human economic activity is dependent on the environment will be increasingly obvious. We at WWF know that economic restructuring is absolutely necessary, and we will be adamant in demanding that change be brought about.

The challenges for global nature and environmental protection in the next century are gigantic — so huge that it is no longer sufficient to rely on environmental activists or specialist agencies; so huge that differences between fundamentalist and realist approaches to conservation pale into insignificance. The earth's biodiversity is not something that happens elsewhere, as some kind of backdrop to the increasing stress and aggression of human commercial activity. No, in the 21st century we will have to take account of the limitations of the biosphere, which compares to the skin of a tomato in terms of its thickness and sensitivity.

Moving towards sustainability will affect all aspects of human activity and it will require enormous effort. But human progress has always been a matter of struggle, and acceptance of environmental reality can make it more positive in the future than perhaps it has ever been in the past.

— WWF Feature  
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# Military giant 'can blunt reforms'

China's recent no-holds-barred display at its National Day parade showcased its growing military prowess. But some Western analysts worry about overspending on defence, **Chen Hui** writes from Beijing

FIFTY years ago, China paraded 16,400 soldiers armed with Japanese 38-rifles and American Tommy Guns — all captured from the enemies — at its first National Day military review at Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

At this year's National Day review, held on 1 October, China's infantry carried 95 automatic rifles and paraded in a military review that included Chinese high-tech jet fighters, tanks and nuclear missiles.

China staged the grand military spectacle featuring 24,000 military personnel and an array of its arsenal in Beijing to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. It was the 13th military parade in independent China's 50-year history, and the latest since 1984.

There's no doubt about what China's trying to do: it is signalling to Taiwan and the world its military preparedness, says Pal Beaver, spokesman for military experts Jane's Information Group. "They basically were showing us everything they've got."

That included more than 500 sets of heavy equipment, 132 airplanes and over 1,000 vehicles. The procession took some 40 minutes to pass through the centre of Beijing. Parading through — and above — Tiananmen Square were 17 infantry squares, 25 vehicle squares and 10 groups of aircraft.

The parade, say organisers, was designed to display China's national defence force and exhibit its capability of maintaining national sovereignty and world peace. "Jane's sees the display as a show of strength to the world, especially China's military rivals Taiwan and India."

This parade is confirmation that the People's Liberation Army is well under way to completing its transformation from being a guerrilla army to being a professional army, but it is still at least 10 to 15 years to being equivalent to a NATO force, Beaver said in reference to the

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, a defence umbrella for North American and European countries.

While previous parades have been large in terms of manpower, this year's ceremony was by far the most heavily-armed — both in quantity and quality. It opened many pages in the catalogue of the nation's increasingly sophisticated arsenal.

President Jiang Zemin inspected the forces, while Beijing's Military Region's commander Gen. Li Xingliang was general director of the review. Foreign defence attaches were able to see many pieces of Chinese military hardware for the first time, although China's inventory is nothing new to international security experts.

The parade included every component of China's arm services, including its army, navy, air force, marine corps, artillery, armed police and reserve troops.

Of the 42 types of large equipment displayed, only two were shown in the last military review in 1984, marking the 35th National Day. Most of the rest were domestically-made — only one class of ground-to-air missile and one airplane originated outside China.

"This 50th anniversary review showed more missiles than any of the previous ones," said Gen. Kuai Wanzeng, deputy director of the (missile) velocity square.

The review revealed missiles from the Chinese army, navy and air force. On parade were ground-to-air missiles, ship-to-ship missiles, anti-tank missiles, conventional missiles, combat tactical missiles, strategic nuclear missiles and intercontinental strategic missiles.

This was the first time China's strategic nuclear missiles were inspected at Tiananmen Square. Back in 1984, they were reviewed, but without nuclear warheads. Making only their second appearance in a National Day

# China's military power

Military hardware displayed at China's 50th anniversary parade shows that China now has the offensive power to match its defensive capability



China showed off its latest nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile. The Dongfeng-31 can hit targets in the United States

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies

Also parading on Tiananmen Square this year were infantry, motorised infantry, armoured infantry, artillery, armoured troops, missile troops, ceremonial troops and an air unit. On display were new high-angle guns and infantry vehicles carrying surface-to-air and anti-tank missiles.

Dr Xu Chengang of the London School of Economics sees China's National Day parade as a "purely political" exercise. But, he says, China's steady move toward a more market-style economy could suffer if the country continues to focus on increasing its military strength.

China's economic reforms, initiated in 1978, came with a push to reduce military spending. Official figures show China spends about \$12.6 billion a year on the military, although many Western analysts believe real spending on defence is several times higher because some significant items are funded elsewhere.

The author writes for the state-owned 'China features'.

# Garfield



James Bond BY IAN FLEMING DRAWING BY MORAK. WE DID FIND THIS PAPER IN THE DEAD MAN'S WALLET, SIR. WHAT YOU APPEAR TO BE CROAKING, TANKS, IS THAT WE FACE A POSSIBLE DISASTER — WITHOUT A CLUE TO GO ON! Christiano 868-417, Paris 273-520, Vasco 344-932, Antigonue 568-599. WELL, DAMMIT — WHAT DO YOU CIPHER ANALYSTS SAY? THEY'RE WORKING ON IT, SIR. NOT VERY HOPEFULLY — JUST TRY TO GO ON.

by Jim Davis