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Democratic Diplomacy: How Far Feasible?

Every system of government has its peculiar virtues and its peculiar faults. One of the great achievements of democratic diplomacy is to have abolished the pernicious system of secret treaties. At the same time it has introduced other complications which not only hamper the art of negotiation but also the amity and stability of international relations.

by ABMS Zahur

theories of president Wilson and his actions. Wilson was the prophet of 'open diplomacy'. In 1918 he declared that in future there should be 'open covenants of peace openly arrived at, after which there should be 'no private international understanding of any kind'. Within a year after this announcement Wilson himself was called upon to negotiate one of the most important covenants, namely the Treaty of Versailles. This treaty was an open covenant yet it was not 'openly arrived at.' Germany, her allies, all minor powers and press were kept in the dark about the negotiations. President Wilson shut himself in his own study with Lloyd George and Clemenceau and an American marine with fixed bayonet marched up and down to prevent the intrusion of all experts, diplomats or plenipotentiaries. This proved that the strongest advocate of 'open diplomacy' found that the open negotiation was totally unworkable.

Until 1914 it was not generally realised that the control of foreign policy was not really vested in the elected representatives of the people. The terms of the Franco-Russian alliance were not known either to the Russian or the French people.

On realising that they had in this manner been committed without their consent, the democracies of the world determined

that this should not happen again. Two essential steps were taken to prevent a recurrence of such situation. The first measure was a provision inserted as article 18 in the covenant of the League of Nations ('every treaty or international engagement entered into hereafter by any member of the League shall be forthwith registered with the secretariat and shall as soon as possible be published by it. No such treaty or international engagement shall be binding until so registered?'). The second was definite alteration of the former theory and practice of 'ratification'.

Although these provisions do in fact constitute a tremendous safeguard against secret treaties of policies and although they represent the veritable buttress of democratic control, the present system cannot in any sense be regarded as a final solution. It is in fact highly inconvenient and inefficient. It is clear that the whole process of negotiation will be much encumbered if the negotiator on each side is totally unable to guarantee that what he gives or takes will be accepted by the sovereign authority in his own country. The art of negotiation is severely hampered when one powerful negotiator demands concessions from his fellow negotiators without being in a position to guarantee that his own promises will similarly be fulfilled.

Every system of government has its peculiar virtues and its peculiar faults. One of the great achievements of democratic diplomacy is to have abolished the pernicious system of secret treaties. At the same time it has introduced other complications which not only hamper the art of negotiation but also the amity and stability of international relations.

The most potent source of danger in democratic diplomacy is the irresponsibility of the sovereign people who are not conscious of their sovereignty and are, therefore, unaware that it is they themselves who have caused these treaties to be signed. The irresponsibility is encouraged often by certain popular newspapers, which are apt to advocate the repudiation of pledges without even mentioning that such pledges have been made by a duly elected government. If the practice of democracies to disavow the decisions which have been endorsed by their representatives is established then clearly the whole basis of international contract would be destroyed, anarchy would follow. The second great danger of democratic diplomacy is ignorance. Even educated electors are almost totally unaware what are today the treaties by which their countries are bound through these treaties

have been published, debated in parliament and discussed in the press. The ordinary elector is not merely ignorant, lazy and forgetful regarding the international commitments for which he has himself assumed responsibility, but he does not apply to the general theory of foreign affairs that thought and intelligence which he devotes to domestic matters. More dangerous even than popular ignorance are certain form of popular knowledge. The professional diplomatist is very chary of basing generalisations upon hastily observed phenomena. The elector shows no such hesitation. The third danger is the danger of delay. The democratic decision is generally more sensible and more stable than the somnambulist certainties of a dictator. Inordinate delay, however, made in ascertaining public opinion is often fatal to efficient policy or negotiation. The fourth danger is the danger of imprecision. The vagueness and fluidity of democratic policy is one of the most salient vices. It often occurs that democratic governments by couching their statements of policy in vague or ambiguous language invite the very dangers which they wish to prevent.

New problems have also arisen in regard to diplomatic practice. The first problem is publicity. In the dictatorial states the con-

trolled press is used as a vehicle of propaganda. In democratic countries the aim is to employ it for purpose of information and education. Yet a satisfactory adjustment between the needs and rights of a popular press and the requirements of discretion has yet to be found. However, the advantages of a free press are immeasurably greater than its disadvantages. A more dangerous innovation in diplomatic practice is the tendency of democratic countries to allow their politicians to take a personal part in negotiation. It is true that there are moments when it is essential that the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister should attend important conferences. Yet repeated personal visits often lead to misunderstandings, and create confusion.

Throughout the world some of the main problems remain in theory and practice which diplomacy under a democratic system has yet to solve. It is only by long processes of trial and error that we can hope to come to some universally acceptable principle. However, there are certain principles of adjustment which may be well to bear in mind. Such principles as (a) to make the electorate to understand the difference between policy and negotiation, (b) to fortify the professional side of diplomacy and to enlarge its basis, and (c) to educate the public in regard to those principles of good sense and experience have been evolved by generations of gifted and reasonable persons.

The author is a retired Joint Secretary



Dr. Rubaiul Murshed

All health information to keep you up to date

We hope that you and your family never face any medical crisis. However, it is important that you know what to do when crisis comes. We hope our health tips will provide some assistance to you.

Always children first

No self-medication of babies with antibiotics, please!

There has been unnecessary use of antibiotics in recent years. The advancement in the knowledge and use of fluid and electrolyte therapy has improved the prognosis of diarrhoea cases in general. The importance of breast feeding which was known for the prevention of diarrhoea, has now been affirmed on scientific grounds. Most cases of diarrhoea are due to viruses and antibiotics are not required. Many mothers like to self-medicate their small babies with medicines containing antibiotics. Antibiotics should only be given on the advice of your doctor.

Around the world

Dengue

The global prevalence of dengue has grown dramatically in recent decades. South East Asia and the Western Pacific are most seriously affected. Before 1970 only nine countries had experienced Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever (DHF) epidemics, a number which had increased more than four-fold by 1995. WHO currently estimates there may be 50 million cases of dengue infection worldwide every year.

Few statistics:

- * During epidemics of dengue, attack rates among susceptible are often 20-25 per cent, but may reach 80-90 per cent.
- * An estimated 500,000 cases of DHF require hospitalisation each year, of whom a very large proportion are children and roughly 5 per cent die.
- * Without proper treatment, DHF case fatality rates can exceed 20 per cent. With modern intensive supportive therapy, the mortality can be reduced to less than 1 per cent.

Natural healing

Common cold

To take the chills out of your cold, fix yourself a traditional herbal remedy. Combine 30 gms of sliced fresh ginger, 1 broken-up cinnamon stick, 1 teaspoon coriander seeds, 3 whole cloves, 1 lemon slice and half a litre water. Simmer for 15 minutes and strain. Then drink a hot cupful every two hours.

High cholesterol

All those who are on long-term treatment with cholesterol lowering drugs need to take vitamin supplements daily. This is because these drugs inhibit the absorption of vitamins. Studies have shown that drugs which act on the liver to prevent cholesterol formation, e.g. Clofibrate, may increase the risk of gall-stone formation. Therefore, a yearly sonography of the gall bladder will be helpful.

Tomorrow: Caring for your blood pressure, and other tips.

Responding to HIV/AIDS and STD Threat

Will Current Strategies Succeed?

by Dr M A Mabud

India. Heterosexual transmission of HIV is reported to be the dominant cause of AIDS. Bangladesh being at the crossroads is not quite immune from this disease as the people are in frequent contact with the people of several HIV/AIDS affected countries for

business, education, tourism and cultural exchanges.

Situation in Bangladesh: Identification of HIV/AIDS and STD in Bangladesh is a recent phenomenon. However, its incidence is still reportedly rare. A study conducted by the UNAIDS (1998) reveals that among the drug users (N=402), the prevalence of HIV/AIDS was as high as 2.5 per cent and among those in other categories such as brothel-based sex workers (N=659), the prevalence rate was 0.6 per cent; among the truck drivers (N=404), the rate was 0; while among the male homosexuals, prevalence rate was 0.2 per cent. So far, 102 HIV/AIDS cases have been detected in Bangladesh out of which ten developed AIDS and three of them died. Based on indirect assessment, the WHO regional office estimated that Bangladesh might have 21,000 HIV/AIDS positive cases. This estimate is not based on any verifiable facts owing to lack of empirical evidence, but nevertheless, it cannot be underestimated either. In view of the loose social control on widespread sexual behaviour, problem of HIV/AIDS and STD is looming large and can be of epidemic proportion. Bangladesh is located between the two HIV/AIDS affected countries, namely, India and Thailand. Bangladeshi citizens are constantly in contact with the people of these countries for variety of reasons business, education and tourism, to cite a few. Apart from this, movement of labour force to and from Middle East and other countries and their long stay away from families is likely to influence their sex behaviour which, in turn, may result in considerable prevalence of HIV/AIDS and STD. Due to globalisation process, display of obscene movies in electronic media and fast deteriorating social and religious values, Bangladesh is first becoming vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and STD. In order to reduce this vulnerability and prevent the recurrence of these diseases, several strategic approaches may be considered, such as (i) inter and multi-sectoral approach; (ii) religious and moral education in formal institutions and informal settings; (iii) safe practices of medical providers for treating the patients; and (iv) social action programmes.

Multi-sectoral Approach: Realising the implications of this deadly disease, the MOHFW formed National Advisory Committee for the eradication of HIV/AIDS and STD with the incumbent minister as its chairman and high level representation from various ministries, NGOs and international agencies. Thus, a multi-sectoral approach to combat the problem has been established at the national level. The MOHFW is currently administering essential service package (ESP) through Directorates of Family Planning

and Health. The field workers of both the Directorates are being trained in detecting HIV/AIDS and STD cases. The WHO has also trained quite a large number of doctors. But all these measures are, by no means, exhaustive, because far more serious preventive measures need to be taken to combat this problem at all levels. Various sources indicate that sex business is flourishing under the patronisation of hundreds of hotels, and guest houses in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and other urban areas. It is quite likely that HIV/AIDS and STD will spread rapidly. Therefore, a multi-sectoral approach at various levels and across various sectors of economy is necessary for awareness creation and enlisting the public support for social actions to prevent these diseases. Unfortunately, efforts to involve inter agencies at the district and upazila level are still lacking.

Religious and Moral Education: Many people in this country and other cultures display a deviant behaviour in matter of sex, a behaviour not recognised by the society and religion. Religious values are being eroded through acculturation process and lack of absence of religious education in schools and higher seats of learning. Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim country. Almost ninety per cent of the people are Muslims. Multiple sex practices are forbidden in Islam and subject to punishment in this world and the world hereafter. It is, therefore, important that the people should be exposed to the relevant teachings of Islam through the Imams of the mosques as well as teachers of madrasahs, schools and colleges and through the sectoral institutions designed to impart in-service and pre-service training as well as the vocational training institutes. Thus, there is an immense opportunity to reach the people with appropriate preventive deterrents and educational inputs. Unfortunately, efforts in this direction are still lacking. The WHO, UNAIDS and several bilateral agencies as well as their native counterparts have been stressing only on 'safe sex' rather than saying 'No' to the multiple sex practices. The present strategy is somewhat indirect affirmative rather than categorical. If the sponsors are really serious to prevent this disease, it is better to utilise religious and moral institutions and motivate the people in the spirit of religion.

Safe Practices of the Health Providers: Many innocent persons can be victims to HIV/AIDS and STD for the ignorance, deliberate apathy or inapplication of the health providers' training and education. For example, a doctor, specially who is engaged in dental profession can do a great harm, if syringe is not properly sterilised or disposable syringe and the hand glove are not used. These basic things are not strictly

observed in many instances. Safe blood bank could be unsafe owing to negligence or loose application of one's professional skills. The danger of transmission of infection through contaminated blood and blood products and through contaminated syringes in case of intravenous drug users also need to be borne in mind. Women and children in Bangladesh have limited access to health services. They do not know that they are prone to HIV/AIDS and STD, when they seek MCH care. It may be necessary to carefully review the routine procedures adopted by the MCH services both institutional and domiciliary to prevent the accidental spread of HIV infection. These are the matters that apparently look simple, but very crucial for tackling the HIV/AIDS and STD problems. Some regulatory measures are essential to ensure safe practices.

Social Action Programmes: There should be some social action programmes for those women who are engaged in sex work. Many of these women are victims of poverty-driven situation which relates to larger issues of inequalities in the society where women are often placed in a subordinate position suffer class exploitation and marginalisation in work, education and skill training and so on. The fruits of development have not reached them at all. Given an opportunity and access to development benefits in term of education, skill training for alternative vocation, credit, some settlement allowances for couple of years or at least some entitlement to food security under the VGD card system of the Ministry of Women Affairs and safe shelter, they might be inclined to lead a normal life. Since these women live a wretched life in brothel homes and are potential sources of HIV/AIDS and STD, some comprehensive social action programmes need to be taken for their sheer social and economic survival and moral emancipation. Most of the women who are engaged in sex work come from economically depressed families either of petty agricultural or non-agricultural labour households or from families engaged in menial jobs.

Various studies show that apart from those who are born to prostitute mothers and also, those who have joined this profession on their own choice, background compulsions of many are acute poverty with no other options, husband's torture, allurements by middleman in the name of giving jobs etc. In fact, these women, as various studies show, are desperately looking out for an alternative vocation to stage a comeback to normal life. They are the ones to which social action programmes should respond. So far only one social action programme has been taken by the Ministry of Social Welfare with the UNDP assistance. But such assistance, if

meaningfully utilised, can only benefit 3-4 thousand disadvantaged women which roughly represents four per cent of the total in Bangladesh.

Since so much drum-beating has been going on by both the GOB and donor circles for the prevention of HIV/AIDS and STD, why are they not coming up with a large investment that is actually needed to implement a large scale comprehensive social action programme for the disadvantaged women of lower strata of the society? Simply by advocating 'safe sex' philosophy, they will not achieve the ultimate goals without undertaking a large scale comprehensive social action programme and utilising the religious institutions. In Bangladesh context, existing strategies for HIV/AIDS and STD prevention need to be reviewed to take into account the broader issues raised above.

The author is the president, Organisation for Population and Poverty Alleviation and Consultant to the DSS.

Up the Social Ladder with the Cell-phone Set

Everyday items and modern gadgetry are giving West Africans the opportunity to enrich the English language. There are national variations of course. A Gemini News Service correspondent reports that cell-phones might bring Ghana's young lovers together quicker, but many Nigerians find them a liability in their newly rich lives.

by Cameron Duodu

ENGLISH-SPEAKING West Africa is notorious for seizing hold of the language that is Britain's gift to the world and spicing it with a regional flavour.

Where else but in Nigeria could a traffic jam be named a 'go-slow'?

Or a hold-all-all bag be called 'Ghana-must go' perhaps as an unkind reminder of the expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria in 1982.

Most recent imports of Mercedes Benz cars are not called either a 200 or 300 series, as is done elsewhere, but a 'V-boot' to denote the shape of its rear.

Ghana itself is not far behind. There, some Mercedes models are known as the 'Smiling Benz'. And the more modest models are called the 'Baby Benz'.

This is kinder by far than the name given to another German import much favoured by young civil servants promoted to senior grades in the late 1950s and early '60s the ubiquitous Volkswagen Beetle. Because the Beetle was a rear-engine model with a fragile front that made the driver vulnerable in accidents, Ghanaian tongues, sure enough, gave it their own somewhat dubious name: the 'Slayer-of-young-men'.

Of late, the instrument that has come in for much mirth-making among Ghanaians is the mobile telephone, a favourite

among the nouveaux-riches.

A young Ghanaian man out wooing a young lady would telephone her home and say casually, "I'll be seeing you soon, okay?" And the object of his ardour would start preparing for her visitor. But within the twinkling of an eye, there would be a knock on the door.

There, standing in excitement-primed mode, would be her grinning paramour.

"So sorry," he would say, "I called you when I was already on the way."

That is precisely what a mobile phone is called in Ghana 'I'm-on-the-way'.

In Nigeria, cell-phones are more of a problem than a social asset. The demand for them is so great that the few who own them and who pay a huge price for them find them a great nuisance.

Almost every attempt to dial a number meets with the standard recorded response: "The number dialled is busy; please try again."

Some desperate users have tried dialling their own cell-phone number from a landline, only to come up with the same message.

For variation, the Nigerian cell-phone industry trots out another pre-recorded announcement: "The mobile number you have called is switched off. Please try later."

Users suspect fabrication. Some say it has to do with govern-

ment attempts to open up the mobile phone industry. Nite!, the state telecommunications corporation, they say, is resisting by making it difficult to connect cell-phones to local landlines, over which it has the monopoly. In any case, Nite!'s equipment is so old and badly-maintained that it unintentionally sabotages connections.

The advent of electronic mail could have been a godsend to those who can afford a computer, modem and Internet connection. But even here, West African state telephone companies use their monopoly power to charge Internet servers extraordinarily high prices, which the servers in turn pass on to their customers.

As a result, owning an e-mail address has become a status symbol for the nouveaux-riches. The following conversation was heard outside a nightclub in Accra:

"I am relying on you to relay the information to me as soon as you get it, okay?"

"Oh, you don't worry! As soon as I get it, I shall dot.com you!" (that is, send you an email).

All that is needed now is for cell-phones to come to Ghana equipped with e-mail ability. Then, perhaps friend will tell friend: "I shall dot.com you with my on-the-way."

And it will not sound a tiny bit odd.

Lest We Forget
Rukanuzzaman Khan: Pioneer of Children's Organisation

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

YESTERDAY (3 December) was the first death anniversary of Rukanuzzaman Khan who was popularly known as Dada Bhai. We recall with due appreciation the contributions he made for the establishment of rights of the children and institutionalising the Juvenile children organisation's Kachi-Kanchan Mela, which is the biggest and oldest national children's organization in the country.

Rukanuzzaman Khan, who began his journalistic career in 1948 in the Littehad, Calcutta under the able guidance of journalist-writer-cum-politician Abul Mansoor Ahmad, was made editor of the children's page Kachi-Kanchan Asar in the Daily Ittefaq in 1955. Daily Ittefaq, as a mark of respect to Rukanuzzaman Khan mentioned his name as the founder-director of the page after his death.

Born in an enlightened family Rukanuzzaman lived with another enlightened family, and that of Mohammad Nasiruddin, a pioneer who brought out a weekly journal in 1918 to help build scores of writers, both male and female, particularly bringing forward female writers from behind the purdah.

Rukanuzzaman married his only daughter Nurjahan Begum, editor of women's magazine Begum. Mohammad Nasiruddin died at 107 in 1994.

From the children's page Rukanuzzaman Khan chose to organise a children's organization with a view to imbuing in the children a sense of dedication towards the society and patriotism for the country.

His dedication, commitment and sincerity purpose for organ-

ising this children organization in October 1956 with a handful of young boys is a rare example in the sphere of the cause of the children in this part of the underdeveloped world where the society is beset with selfish and narrow-minded interest, unbending corruption and nepotism. In fact Rukanuzzaman Khan was the forerunner of children's organization in erstwhile Pakistan. His organisation earned reputation at home and abroad. No other children's organization could match the way Kachi-Kanchan Mela spread its branches all over the country within a short span of time. It was equally enviable to note that this children's organization had crossed 44 years of its existence during the lifetime of Rukanuzzaman Khan in spite of odds.

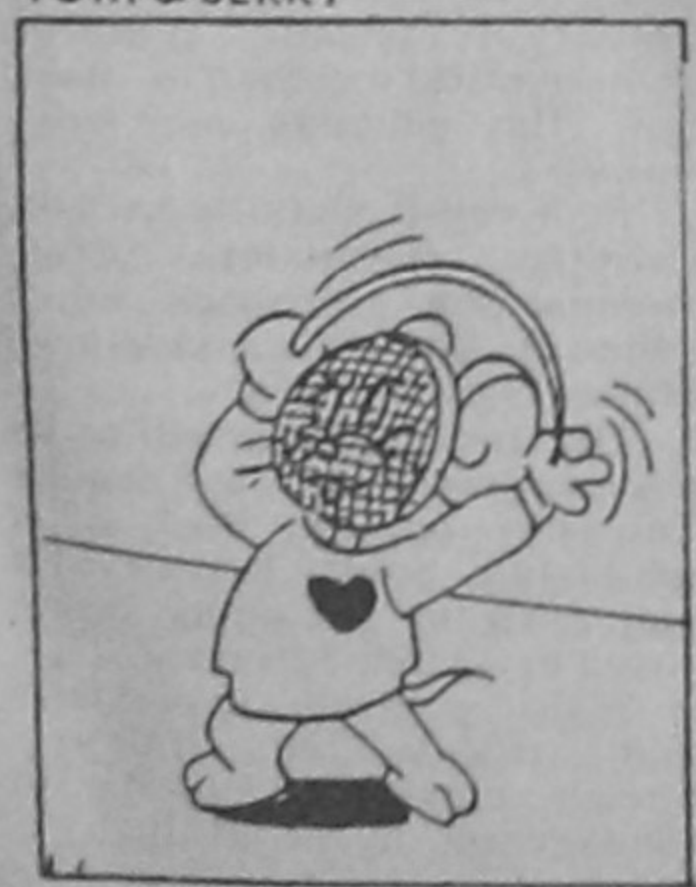
That he was successful in his mission had amply been demonstrated during the war of liberation in 1971 when a large number of boys and girls from Kachi-Kanchan Mela participated directly in the war of liberation. Many lost their lives for the cause of the country they loved.

Kachi-Kanchan Mela has been emphasising the need for the rights of the children and their free movement for participation in non-formal education in particular since 1956 whereas the world community adopted convention on the rights of the child on 20 November 1989. Kachi-Kanchan Mela today is the proud product of Rukanuzzaman Khan with scores of dedicated workers who aim at the well-being of the children.

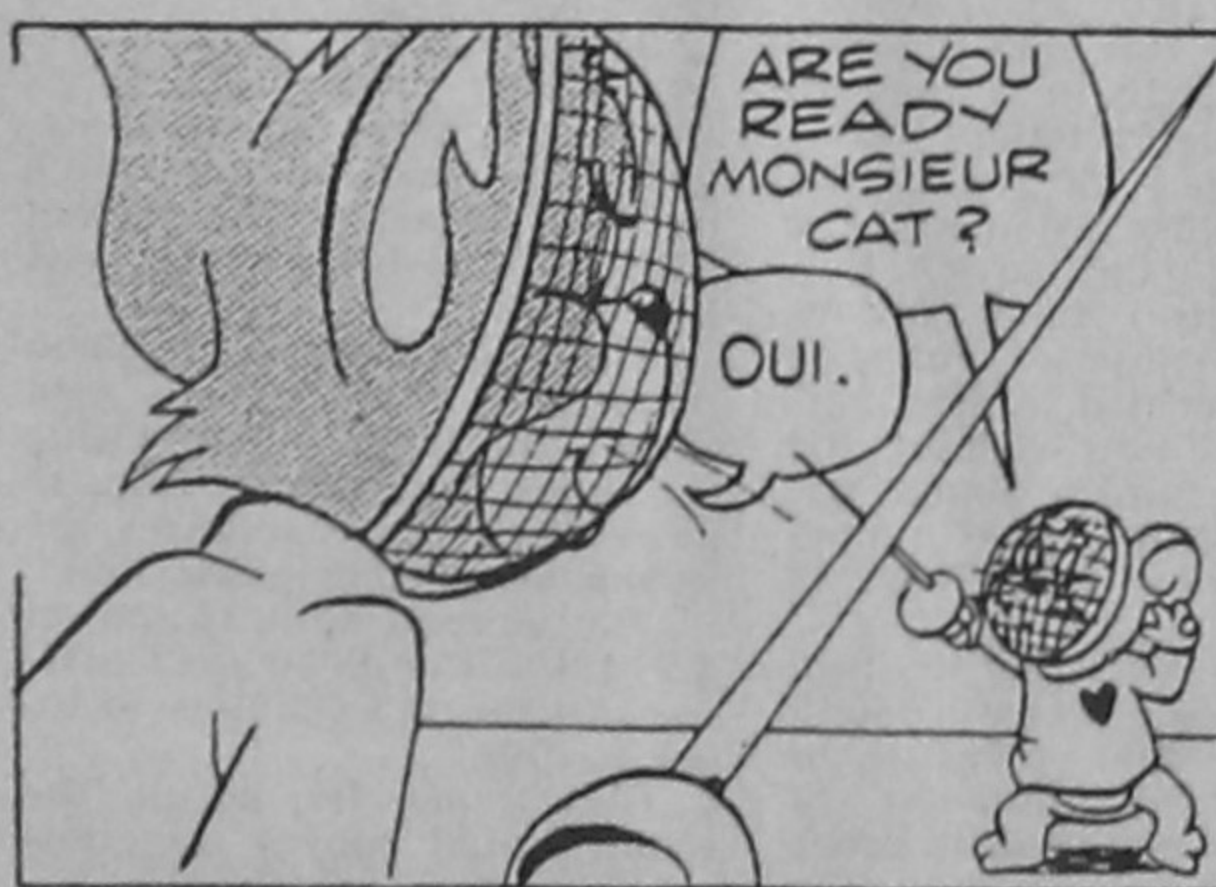
May Allah rest his soul in peace.



TOM & JERRY



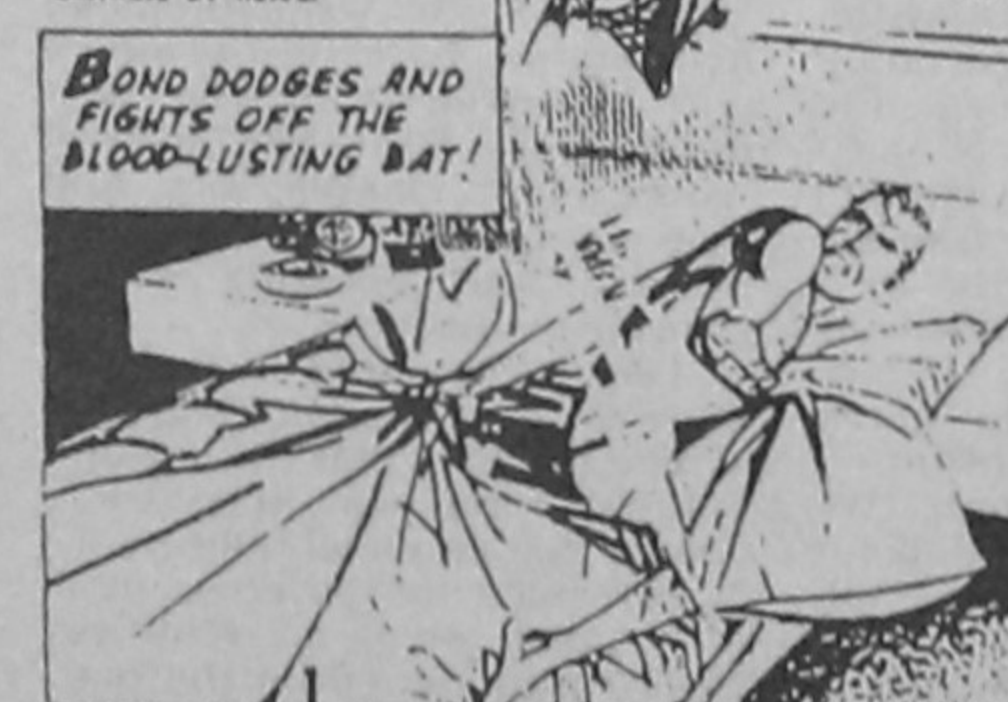
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