

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATAHUL ALAM

THE Saturday issue of this paper carried the photograph of a heart-rending scene on its third page. The caption of the picture did not provide any details of the two minor children on a rickshaw surrounded by a furious-looking mob. Though it was a still photograph, one could still sense the direction all those hands were moving and that was to hit the children. Why was the mob so cruel towards those children? What could be gathered from the caption was that the children committed the "grave sin" of "stealing food to satisfy their hunger."

And that has infuriated the mob. They appeared to be too outraged at the "crime" those two hapless, hungry minors had committed! The human beings that comprised the mindless mob had as if never come across any adult member of society so low as to steal other people's money or make off with any other kind of valuables! Have they never seen a purported custodian appropriating something belonging to others he or she is supposed to protect? Or didn't they ever experience in their own lives or seen their relations or acquaintances being made to suffer the misfortune that the powerful are grabbing their assets and they are unable to protect their possessions!

We have no knowledge if ever any angry mob as the one in the picture dared to lift their hands to hit such powerful member of society. We have never even heard of any such crowd giving the corrupt people,

who are stealing public properties day in, day out, a good beating like they are doing in the case of the two helpless minors.

What kind of offence those two children were capable of committing? They certainly were not able to commit any big crime that needs the physical strength and brain of an adult person to materialise. An act of burglary, for instance, requires the intelligence of an adult person to think it up ahead and then have all other paraphernalia to put the scheme into action.

So, what was the damage? Well, these two minors had taken away

parents? Most of those in the mob have probably had such experience in their childhood, and perhaps, they take a kind of nostalgic pleasure in telling those childhood exploits to their progeny. And some would even go further to narrate with a kind of self-indulging delight how they stole their neighbour's chicken under cover of darkness or even their livestock from the goat-shed and had a feast over those animals. But they would like to stress at the same time that those instances were part of their juvenile delinquency and they did not really mean to steal, but they did steal all the same, not out of any

fill their two small bellies?

Did these questions ever cross their mind?

No. The adult members of society have no time to think about such abandoned children fending for themselves on the street. On the contrary, they are apt at being so harsh and unforgiving towards those weak and unfed ones.

We have no qualm about wasting so much foods and drink at the social occasions taking place everyday, but our heart sinks when some hungry child knocks at their door for a morsel of food. Our children have plenty to consume and waste. But the children on the street have to go hungry day after day or even have to jostle with the dog or the crow for any leftovers in the garbage heap on the roadside.

In such a society where there are children like Piya and Sumon, who have no roof over their heads, where their days pass like animals only in search of some food, where they have no guardian to give them the warmth of love and care, what right do we have to punish them for stealing some food? On the other hand, those who were so angry at them and were slapping and punching the two children without mercy were the real offenders and what were committing was nothing short of the worst kind of outrage!

It is not those two poor hungry kids, trying to protect themselves with their raised arms from the bel-ligerent mob, who should be ashamed of their conduct. On the contrary, it is those infuriated barbarians in the so-called civilised citizens' garb, who are a crying shame on our whole society!

The writer is Editor, Science&Life, The Daily Star.

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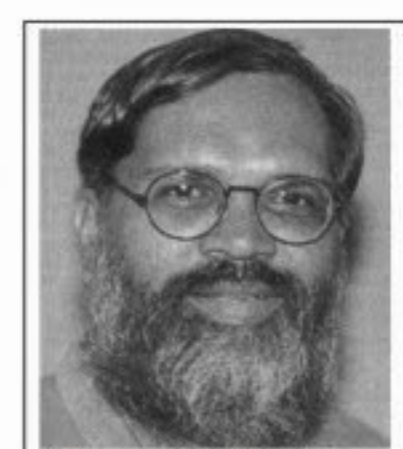
some edibles from a shop or any other place without the permission of the owner only to satisfy their hunger. Why they had to adopt such means, no one in the crowd cared to ask. What they were doing is unleashing the barbarity hidden in them, under their civilised-looking garments, on those two small children. The way they were treating those two helpless children, it was hard to believe they had ever been children themselves.

Who among that enraged group of people have not had any experience of ripping off sweetmeats or pickles from the kitchen unbeknown to their

real logic, but for pure fun. Oh what a cogent logic for stealing!

But alas! The two children as shown in the picture were too hungry to afford any fun. To all probabilities, they had none to look after them. But the people in the crowd had no time to tarry a moment and ask themselves: Why had those minors none to feed them? Had they not any parents? Did they ask these children before assaulting them why were they stealing food? Why were they taking such a risk without going for scrounging for food, say, from some kind person, or did they not have any other alternative means to

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

WIKILEAKS disclosures have hit India. The Hindu newspaper has accessed and summarised classified cables from

the US Embassy in New Delhi to Washington -- and produced a political furor.

The most sensational disclosure pertaining to India is about the July 2008 cash-for-votes scandal, when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh staked the United Progressive Alliance government's survival on the India-US nuclear cooperation deal.

The Left parties had withdrawn their backing to the minority government, necessitating a confidence vote. The Congress bribed other parties to support it.

A TV channel's sting operation widely publicised all this in 2008, mainly indicting the Samajwadi Party. It now emerges that Gandhi family confidant Captain Satish Sharma got an aide to bribe the Rashtriya Lok Dal's Ajit Singh too.

However, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that "the veracity, contents and even the existence" of the cables sent by the US embassy in India couldn't be confirmed and that he had not "authorised anyone to purchase any votes."

Despite denials, the WikiLeaks disclosure constitutes a strong prima facie case that the UPA bought MPs to win the confidence vote. The government must let the Central Bureau of Investigation probe the scandal under Supreme Court supervision. Failure to do this will further damage the government's scam-tainted image.

The Bharatiya Janata Party too stands indicted. While it publicly criticised the nuclear deal, its national executive members told the Americans "not to read much into the [party's] foreign policy resolutions."

Loh Purush L.K. Advani, no less, assured them that when in power, the BJP would "behave very differently."

The BJP opposed the US-India deal to affirm India's "sovereign" right to determine its nuclear policy. But it follows a Right-wing foreign and security policy and has been pro-US since the Cold War. This makes it practise double standards -- destroy

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More important than scandals, the WikiLeaks disclosures show the direction that India's foreign policy has recently taken, and how the world, in particular the US, views India's domestic situation and its response to regional and international events.

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Cables are routinely used by diplomats to convey information and assessments of the host country's positions. The present cables highlight divergence between the then President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Ms. Sonia Gandhi over the execution of the death sentence for Afzal Guru.

They quote J&K Liberation Front leader Yaseen Malik as saying that hanging Guru would have an adverse impact in the Valley because the punishment is grossly disproportionate to

the charge -- of helping organise transport for the Parliament House attacks.

The disclosures highlight differences between Dr. Singh and former National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan over resuming talks with Pakistan. Dr. Singh had said India and Pakistan "have a shared destiny." Mr. Narayanan bluntly told him: "Your destiny is shared. Ours is not." It was highly improper for Mr. Narayanan to say this to his boss. Even more deplorably, he narrated this to a US diplomat.

On foreign policy, India comes across as an emerging but diffident giant, who often capitulates to Washington's pressure, sometimes without much resistance.

This is especially so on Iran, over which the US arm-twisted India. India voted three times against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency, thus enabling the Security Council to impose sanctions.

India's votes were against its Ministry of External Affairs' own conclusion that Iran isn't in substantive breach of its obligations under the IAEA charter or the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The US made the nuclear deal conditional upon India dropping the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline and helping isolate Iran.

The US doesn't countenance even a peaceful nuclear programme for Iran, to which Iran has a right. Barring some disclosure infringements, Teheran has cooperated with the IAEA. India sounds doubly hypocritical on Iran because it acquired its own nuclear weapons by abusing the civilian route.

India's stance is at odds with friendly relations with Iran, which it for decades partnered in Afghanistan against the mujahedeen and Taliban. Afghanistan is vital to this region's future. And India-Iran relations are crucial to Afghanistan's future.

The WikiLeaks cables show that New Delhi was so frightened of US annoyance at the April 2008 India

visit of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that it notified the US embassy before informing its own agencies.

Recently, the MEA ordered its diplomats to do extraordinary things to please the US. Days after Hardeep Puri was appointed India's ambassador to the UN, he assured the US embassy in New Delhi that his "specific brief" was to seek a "higher degree of convergence" with the US even in South Asia, including Nepal and Sri Lanka.

In another bizarre development, the MEA asked its deputy ambassador to the UN Ajai Malhotra to undercut his own boss Nirupam Sen, whom he accused of taking "a confrontational approach to the US." In dispute was the secretary general's selection. The Non-Aligned Movement demanded he should be from Asia. Mr. Malhotra offered to help the US promote its candidate in case the NAM proposal didn't find wider support.

That someone of Mr. Sen's impeccable credentials should be overridden in such a slimy way speaks of the MEA's lack of professionalism and its craven pro-US bias. This is wholly unbecoming of a nation with a vision of global leadership.

The cables show the light-years' distance India has travelled from the Nehru-Indira Gandhi legacy of Non-Alignment and opposition to US hegemonism. After the Soviet Union collapsed, India was the last major nation with an independent foreign policy focussed on demanding a more balanced world.

The US has prised India from its independent policy moorings through inducements like the nuclear deal, and wants it to become an obedient ally. The WikiLeaks disclosures should make the public aware of this and provoke a strong response in favour of a fiercely autonomous foreign policy.

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Women's policy detractors

Don't use religion for party politics

WE are saddened and worried that in the name of Islam some people have been trying to create confusion around the issue of the proposed national policy on women. In many ways, it is a repeat of what these very elements tried doing recently about the education policy, a move that created some unnecessary confusion. Now when a progressive step is being taken to ensure that Bangladesh's women enjoy equal rights with men politically, economically and socially, these extreme elements are busy spreading the false notion that the proposed policy goes against the Quran and Sunnah. It does nothing of the sort. Indeed, we are outraged that where Islam once caused a positive transformation in people's thoughts and even now symbolizes equality and self-esteem for all men and women, some quarters are happy to convey the impression that Islam stands against granting equal rights to women. Nothing could be further from the truth.

A section of people, who base their politics on misinterpretation of religion, have called for a hartal today. We wonder if they and their followers went through the entirety of the proposed policy before raising the bogey of Islam and the Quran being in danger should rights be accorded to Bangladesh's women. Nowhere in the policy is there any mention or even a suggestion of its being in contravention of the Quran and Sunnah. The truth is that the policy simply means to ensure a more pro-active role for women in the various sectors of national life and thus make it possible for them to pursue life in dignity and freedom. Those are principles which are enshrined in the Quran as well. The ignorance of those behind the current ruckus is therefore inexcusable.

The women's policy is surely a necessary one and a good one. It ought to be a step forward not just for women but for the whole nation as well. We ask those agitating against it to desist from denigrating Islam by using it as a weapon for political propaganda.

Congratulations to India

A befitting end to a captivating event

WITH Dhoni's six, which was the last of the tournament, and one that helped India surpass Sri Lanka's total in the final, the curtains came down on what must surely rate as one of the brightest extravaganza of any sport, let alone cricket.

This is for the first time that the final was contested by two teams from South Asia, and for the first time too that a team won the trophy on home soil. Two best teams had reached the finals and the team playing better won. Congratulations to India for winning the cup, and for the second time, after 28 years. At the end of the day it was a victory for the game of cricket.

Sri Lanka deserve kudos, too as a fighting side offering stiff competition to the winner.

We should also spare moment for introspection. Firstly, the performance of the Bangladesh team should be analysed objectively. Our performance was patchy but we can take comfort in the fact that we had defeated England in the preliminary round. There is also the need to consider increasing the capacity of our cricket stadiums vastly, given the great following of the game and the 20/20 Cup to be hosted by Bangladesh in 2014, or move major cricket tournaments to larger stadiums. We also feel that the fans can be spared the hassles that they had to go through in procuring tickets.

We feel that everything has ended well having gotten the event off with a flying start in Dhaka, and the organisers, the ICC and the BCCB and all those that were associated with the event in Bangladesh, deserve our fullest appreciation for pulling it off without the slightest hitch.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 4

1967

Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence" speech in New York City's Riverside Church.

1968

Martin Luther King shot dead. The American black civil rights leader, Dr Martin Luther King, is assassinated.

1971

Tajuddin Ahmed travels to New Delhi from Calcutta and meets Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. He asks her to recognise Bangladesh as an independent state. He is accompanied by Barrister Amirul Islam.

Bengali military officers, namely, Major Shafiullah, Major Ziaur Rahman, Major Khaled Mosharraf and others meet in India and request Colonel M.A.G. Osmani to form the Mukti Bahini and take command of it.

1972

The United States recognizes Bangladesh as an independent state. Earlier in 1971, the Nixon administration had adopted a pro-Pakistan stance.

1975

Vietnam War: Operation Baby Lift A United States Air Force C-5A Galaxy crashes near Saigon, South Vietnam shortly after takeoff, transporting orphans 172 die.

1979

Deposed Pakistani PM is executed. Pakistan's former Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, is hanged in spite of international calls for clemency.