

COMMENTARY

ROYAL SPEECHES



Speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to Sheikhs and Dignitaries of Dhofar at the conclusion of His Majesty's Meet-the-People Tour of the country

31/1/1995

phenomenon, which is not in the best interests of anyone.

To be concluded

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

OTHER facts are that, among the half-a-million strong expatriate work-force, less than half have known addresses and work with known companies and establishments and the nature of their jobs are also known. However, the rest are just casual workers without any known addresses or employers. They work under the sponsorships of individuals. When we look at these figures, what conclusion do we reach?

We hear talk about unemployment and lack of job opportunities. Such talk has no basis at all.

We can say that for the next twenty years, this fact will remain as it is. Therefore, we have to study and think about it and this phenomenon, which is not in the best interests of anyone.

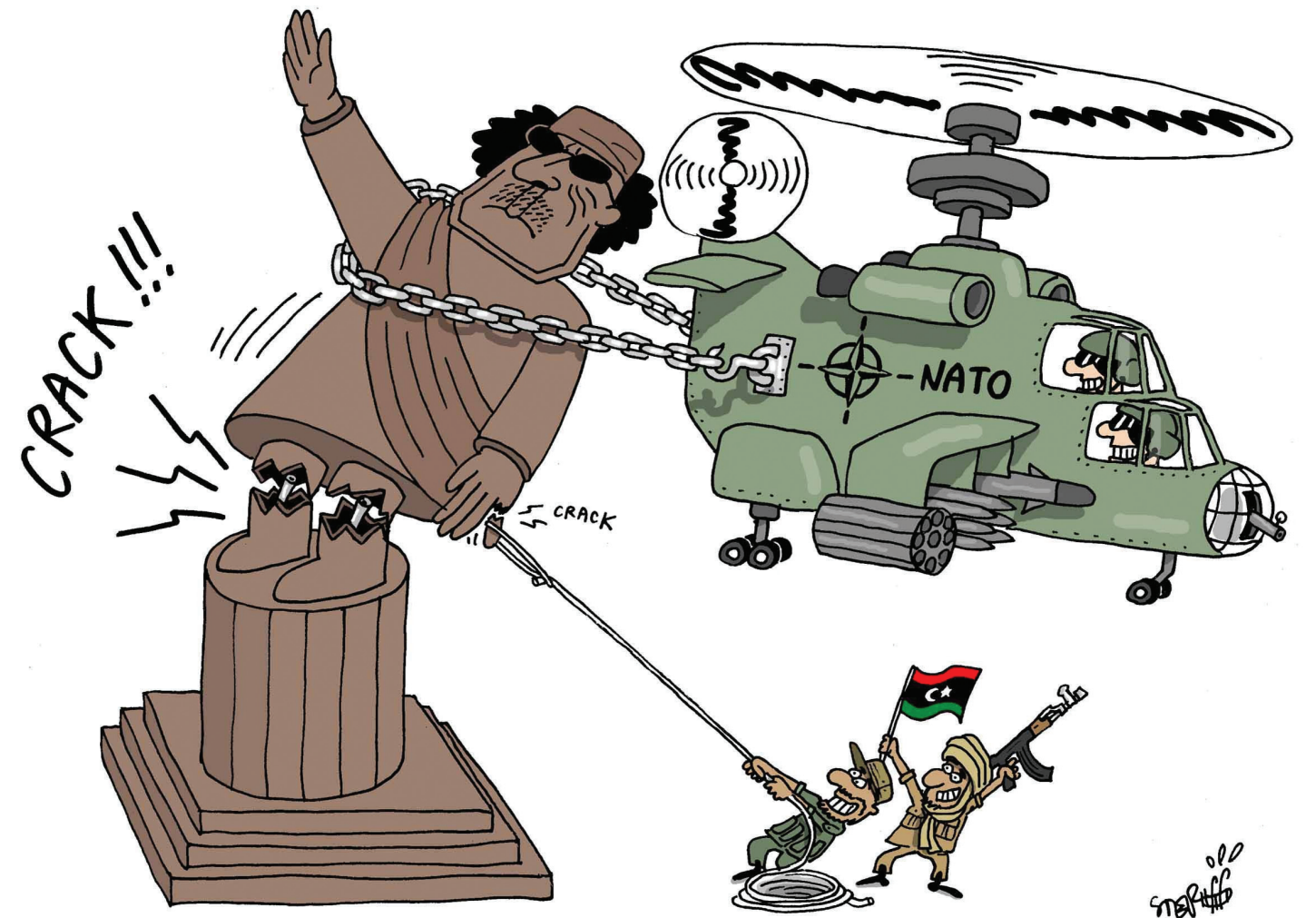
IS THE END GAME IN LIBYA AT HAND?

AS of Sunday-Monday night, it was unclear whether the regime of Muammar Gaddafi was in its last days if not hours. But it did seem that, for the first time in the six-month conflict, the endgame was finally at hand. Opposition forces were advancing on the capital from three sides and, while reports of clashes in Tripoli itself appeared to be premature, the central question was no longer whether the Gaddafi clan would be overthrown, but when and how – and then what would happen next. The “when” depends on the real balance of forces and on the regime’s readiness to fight.

The “how” is equally hard to gauge. There were reports over the weekend of more high-level defections from the Gaddafi camp, but also of support still holding up in Tripoli. This is not a regime that has so far shown any signs of being ready to give up power. There was a street-by-street battle for Zawiya on the western approaches to Tripoli. In the east, the oil city of Brega has changed hands several times since the start of hostilities. If the opposition has to fight for the capital, a protracted bloodbath could be the result.

This in turn could precipitate more overt Nato intervention, on the same pretext that justified the original air strikes near Benghazi: the need to protect the civilian population. Thus far, the opposition can just about claim that it has achieved its victories by itself. Nato may have advisers on the ground, and individual member countries may have special forces deployed in ways, and places, that can be technically distinguished from UN-authorized Nato operations. But it is in everyone’s interest – that of the Libyan opposition and the western alliance – that the home forces should be able to win power and keep it by themselves. Anything less, and the authority of the opposition if and when it enters Tripoli will be compromised rather than a legitimate ruler in its own right.

The population’s perception of the opposition’s strength will be a key to what happens next. And this will depend to a large extent on how far the leaders of its National Transitional Council can present a united front and a coherent vision for Libya’s future. Regrettably, their performance so far has not given grounds for confidence. Not only have there been open political differences almost from the start, but the murder last month of the military commander, Major-General Abdel Fatah Younes – allegedly for talking to representatives of Gaddafi – suggested serious, and continuing, differences in approach. With the forces converging on the capital under separate commands and with distinct regional identities, there is a real risk of further fighting over the spoils. As the endgame proceeds, those who wish Libya well should hope for the best, while preparing, in hard-headed fashion, for the worst. - The Independent



Democracy and ‘mobocracy’

MEHRE ALAM



“The real problem, however, is long-term impact to the type of democracy we practise in India. No one claims this is a perfect model. But this is a functioning democracy with all its plusses and minuses

FIRST things first. Nobody in his right senses would deny that a stronger Lokpal would go a long way in fighting the deep-rooted and well entrenched malaise of corruption in India.

For far too long the political class has been playing Footsie with the Lokpal Bill, shamelessly hiding under the garb of procedural nuances.

It has been more or less a similar story with the Women’s Reservation Bill as well, and the nation has watched with utter horror how some politicians have stooped to abysmal levels of parliamentary decorum, with the sole objective of deferring the legislation to some other time and session, which they know pretty well, would never fructify if they continued having their way.

The other plain truth about Gandhian social activist Anna Hazare’s anti-corruption movement is the brutal way the establishment tried to first muzzle it, and the way it packed him off to Tihar jail, where, ironically, he was made to share the same premises where Commonwealth Games scam accused Suresh Kalmadi has been put up!

India has earned its democracy the hard way and there is no way the police or some other state apparatus should be allowed to take the final call as to whether a peaceful dharna, or fast, by a satyagrahi were to be given the nod or not; and if allowed, at which venue; or for how long; and with how many conditions attached? How can one be denied the basic right to fast or protest in a democracy?

But all that is passé now and Anna is firmly in control of what he says, an “unprecedented revolution” unfolding. Emboldened by the huge nationwide support to his cause, the Gandhian activist is reported to have asserted that if his version of the Lokpal Bill is not passed by August 30, then the government should (read would have to) quit. “Either get the Bill passed or go,” he has thundered clear.

The problem, however, is that while Anna’s objective is altruistic, his means towards achieving this objective have increasingly veered away from the essence of democratic mores.

The civil society, much like pressure groups, is supposed to act as conscience-keeper. But dictating terms? Surely not! Giving ultimatum to an elected legislature that it better give in to its demands, however genuine, has never comprised the norms of democracy.

Whether one likes it or not, what one is witnessing right now is more of ‘mobocracy’, than democracy!

For, hidden is a fundamental assumption that the dispensation would have to give in, in the face such a big churning of the masses.

What about Anna’s version of the bill being debated threadbare by all political parties? And, what about the need for a broad national consensus?

Okay, the mobs have lost patience with the political class. But this political class is not *sui generis*; it has not pitch-forked its identity on its own; it’s there because the same mobs have exercised their suffrage earlier and sent them to the legislature.

The real problem, however, is long-term impact to the type of democracy we practise in India. No one claims this is a perfect model. But this is a functioning democracy with all its plusses and minuses. Today, there is an Anna rooting to root out corruption. Absolutely fine. What, if tomorrow, the same mobs are steered by someone else with vested interests? Should the elected legislature still pave the way for them, just because they look formidable on the smaller screens, and are backed by an ever-more aggressive media?

As it is, there seems to be a fundamental flaw in the modalities. One only has to listen to the random sound bites of some of those on the streets. They sound confident that once the Lokpal Bill is passed, all their woes would be a thing of the past. They believe corruption in India may be in last leg right now and it’s just a matter of a few days when Anna gets us all rid of this decades-old malaise. Too simplistic?

Well, this might be a typical middle class assumption. Ever since the process of liberalization started in the early 90s, we have seen the gap between the rich and poor widening. Yes, the middle class has burgeoned too, but the poorest stratum has been hit the hardest.

The condition of the tribals and landless is more appalling than at any time in independent India and the urban poor have only had the hint of the ‘trickle down benefits’ that were supposed to accrue out of corporate profits, coming their way. That the benefits of development would continue to remain a pipe dream for them is a forgone conclusion.

So, in the midst of all this hullabaloo, is that little boy who calls the pavement his home, gaining? One would probably have to make use of loads and loads of candles to find out how many of these deprived souls are walking side by side with those churning out fluent and chaste English, saying ‘I am Anna’, or ‘India is Anna’!



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Parents of drug addicts suffer in silence

This refers to the story, *Parents seek more help for drug addicts* (August 22). I take this opportunity to thank *Times of Oman* for taking up the issue and giving the matter the prominence it indeed deserves. It is needless to mention that drug addiction, both narcotics and over-the-counter, is a malady that corrodes a society from within. The addicts are not the sole sufferers of the malady. Their families suffer untold miseries and agonies as well. And often, they have to suffer silently. I have seen mothers suffering silently and their tears often going unnoticed. As a mother myself, I can feel their pain and anguish to see their children dying a slow death. Unfortunately, the addicts themselves never realise how insensitively they inflict unbearable miseries and pains on their parents and other loved ones. I take this opportunity to join every unfortunate parent in their appeal to the government for extension of more help so that children are able to stub out their addiction and they can stay healthy like others.

Anu Shaikh
Wadi Kabir

Oman needs more drug rehabilitation centres

This refers to the news, *Parents seek more help for drug addicts* (August 22). The tale of sufferings of drug addicts and their families is indeed distressing. The authorities must do everything possible to address this menace by increasing the number of detoxification centres and rehabilitation centres, undertake more awareness programmes, and trace the sources of supply of drugs so that the peddlers are arrested.

Usha Devi Suddapalli
Ruwi

Parents sharply divided on school vacation dates

After having read with interest the letters expressing divergent opinion about the rescheduling of summer vacation in Indian schools in Oman, I feel that there will never be any consensus on the issue. Parents of students are highly polarized on the issue of when the Indian schools should close for summer vacation. While some people prefer the months of June and July, others feel that it should be the months of July and August. As for July and

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If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail

ABRAHAM MASLOW

August, some feel they are the hottest months in Oman and they also feel that if the summer vacation is rescheduled, it would help all those who would be fasting in Ramadan. But there are several important issues, other than this. If the vacation is rescheduled, it may create serious

problem for many parents to get their annual leave during July and August. I feel it will be wise if the Indian school board in Oman takes written opinion from all parents before taking any decision.

B. Jagdish
Rustaq

It's Dravid who is the real 'Atlas' of Team India

Sachin Tendulkar has scored almost 80 per cent of his runs in ODIs as an opener and yet he does not open the innings in Test matches. Rahul Dravid is not a regular opener, but he has to play the role of an opener. Is the Indian think tank and captain trying to protect the Little Master of Indian cricket? If they are doing so, shame on them and shame on Tendulkar as well. As I write this, India have been asked to follow on in the fourth Test and Dravid is back as the opener, after spending four days on the field and carrying his bat through in the first innings. Dravid is not just the ‘Wall’, but also the ‘Atlas’ of Indian Test team, as he seems to be shouldering the entire responsibility of batting, fielding and even keeping the wickets. The real superhero of Team India is Dravid and not Sachin!

Unni Kizhake
Muscat

Team India now looks as dilapidated as Congress

In ways more than one, the Test team of India resembles the Con-

gress party. Thoroughly discredited, none seems to have even a bit of faith on the team, which is in total disarray, confused and at its wit's end. I am sure even the players of the team have lost all faith in themselves and they, too, do not believe they are capable of salvaging their faces, even in the ODI series. Successive and ignominious defeats against the English team have crushed their morale. And if that has truly happened, the players cannot be blamed for losing their confidence. In any sport, defeats are as normal as victories. Fans, managers, sponsors and even players know and understand that. But the successive defeats of Team India and the manner of the their defeats is too inglorious. And if the team isn't revamped at the earliest, and the captain not replaced, we can brace ourselves for darker days ahead for Indian cricket. The team certainly needs a change. Even in the lives of legends a time comes when they have to face the reality and tell themselves “thus far and no further”. It is time for Sachin Tendulkar to stop being greedy. He should call it a day now.

Ravi Kumar
Muttrah