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Waiting for

DELHI-NAMA



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Perhaps, both sides should go to Goa for their next round of talks. It's already raining there, we hear. The sight and sound of a fresh raindrop, singeing the earth with the promise of life

MARLON BRANDO DIED IN FARAWAY America the other day, of lung failure they said. Back in Delhi, as we waited and waited for the rains to temper the sweltering earth, we watched him on the screen on fire in snippets from movies from another time. Oh Charlie, Oh Charlie, Brando tells his brother in 'On the Waterfront'

played by the actor Rod Steiger, you don't understand, I could have had class. I could have been a contender. I could have been a somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am...

Seems Brando, according to a clutch of Brando friends Larry King had collected to remember the gentle giant on CNN, would evidently call a close friend in the middle of the night and recite Shakespeare. '...The tale of an idiot/full of sound and fury/signifying nothing,' was a favourite. There were others too, the friend said, but he didn't remember the lines. It didn't really matter. Here was Brando, always irreverent, always larger than life, but never bigger than the character in the story he played.

Meanwhile, as I scanned the horizon for the beginnings of a lonely cumulonimbus, I wondered if he'd had a view on Saddam Hussein — the actor on CNN the other night, transfixing the judge and millions of viewers worldwide as he jabbed his finger into the face of an unsuspecting judge, not the pre-invasion dictator of Iraq — or even the B-grade India-Pakistan footage played out in real life only a week ago. Of course, it didn't really matter.

What mattered — matters — is the fact that the rains have refused to keep their date with Delhi. The meteorological office in the capital, with its rooms full of Indian weather equipment connected to the indigenously-constructed and launched satellites in the sky, first announced with some self-importance and considerable cunning that the monsoons would arrive on June 29.

Before mere mortals like us could dare to ask whether the Met had a hotline to the rain gods,

or the rains

they announced, once again, that after detailed discussions with the American Meteorological Association — whose maps were leavened with an abundance of isobars in Kargil and an absence of isotherms in Skardu, or whatever — the rains would definitely arrive on the second of July. The CIA threw the weight of discoveries like the El Niño and the rapidly thinning ozone player and perhaps even the great meltdown of the glaciers from Siachen to Nepal and Tibet, behind its Indian prediction. Now who could challenge the weather hyperpower?

Just like the Iraqis who have decided that Iraq is 'their' country and therefore they're entitled to rule it — no matter what the colonial representatives of Cheney & Co. say — the monsoons, too, seemed to have decided to fly in the face of these global warnings. The earth is so hot, you could bake a chapatti on it. The air hangs heavy with a million sighs and countless lips murmur with propitiation mantras. The skies, such a winsome blue, seem completely oblivious of the need for a raincheck. The thunder rumbles in your mind, assuaging the split-second umbrage that rises against the ten thousand rupee-bribes that directors of mental asylums happily take to declare sundry wives unfit for marriage.

Beyond reasonable doubt, says the lightning in my mind, as it crashes into Rashtrapati Bhawan. Abdul Kalam has just written back to a student in faraway Siliguri, promising help and support with getting teachers back into the school they're supposed to teach students like him...

The rain gods seem so far away, though, they hardly seem to listen. Perhaps they are in

America, saying goodbye to Marlon Brando.

Kalam is both president and a Muslim, while the boy who wrote him the e-mail complaint is a student and Hindu. But the backwaters of Bengal don't matter to the occupants of Aitwan-e-Sadr. All they're obsessed with is Kashmir. The Partition of India along communal lines left more Muslims in India than those who set off seeking both ideology and fortune in the new country. Today's rulers in Islamabad — and it was quite evident in the foreign secretary-level talks in Delhi the other day — are obsessed with logically concluding the unfinished agenda of Partition as it only pertains to Kashmir, nothing else. Give us Kashmir and everything else will be fine, goes the unspoken message.

Tough. New Delhi could point out what you didn't lose — or win — in war, cannot be negotiated away on the talks table. On the other hand, anything that's short of another partition of India — and let's talk.

Perhaps, both sides should go to Goa for their next round of talks. It's already raining there, we hear. The sight and sound of a fresh raindrop, singing the earth with the promise of life, the earth hissing with relief and ejaculating a perfume that's like no other in the entire world. And in the background, the SD Burman song, 'Allah megh de, paani de, chaaya de....'

Just like Brando, that's sure to set the scene on fire.

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