

Fortress Delhi



by Avtar Singh

I was halfway through finishing a round of golf at a particular colonial-era institution this past fortnight. Progressing from preceding green to following tee, I was edified by the sight of camouflaged commandoes sheltering inside the temporary shack normally occupied by the caddymaster. That worthy soaked up the rain like the course's peacocks and others not wearing weapons. I mentioned to my partners that a bunch of cops scared of a little water wasn't a particularly inspiring sight. Perhaps the desperadoes they're guarding their master from don't like the rain either, came the reply. Who are they with?

Some shit.

The rain freshened as the round wore on, accompanied now by lightning. Naturally, the round was called off till the storm abated. We found ourselves back at the club, where it was revealed that the man the uniforms and the safari suits were guarding was in fact a well-liked and distinguished man in a ceremonial position in the Indian Republic. Why, he's not a shit at all, thought the group. It's not his fault he has to travel with a gun-toting circus which occupies the

shacks and other small comforts of the lesser-armed. Category Z and all that. But, we reassured ourselves, he's probably as uncomfortable with the guns as we are.

Five minutes later, the all-clear sounded and we went off again. The merits and demerits of various members who had and didn't deserve security were discussed. On the way back, we passed a sight that's common in the hotels of Delhi but less so in our little enclave. A convoy of SUVs screamed to a halt in a place conspicuously marked "No Stopping". In the back of said SUVs lurked a full complement of uniforms, looking unhappily at the shack that was already occupied by the other armed men. Out stepped a vision in silk and heels, her hair teetering on top of her head in a hair-sprayed orange flame. Out came a pair of matched bejewelled gents in monsoon-unfriendly white linen, each clutching half a dozen phones. A man scurried behind carrying a further selection. Various bedraggled members watched the well-perfumed cavalcade pass. Kiskey guest hain, enquired one of a passing waiter, not even bothering to lower his voice. Another member shook his head.

Who're they?

Shits.

Clearly. But still. To one side, a gentleman who plays golf, occupant of a post dizzyingly high in the Order of Precedence, recognisable for all the right reasons. To the other, a gaggle of self-conscious arrivistes, glittering, gawky and, at least in that milieu, setting the teeth of those around them on edge. What they share is a security profile that requires armed attention. So why did we excuse the one and excoriate the other?

On one side is "old" India, a place where accents were as important as attainment. To the other, a newer, more grasping entity that the ageing membership of at least this club professes to know little, never mind the S-Classes and Cayennes in the parking lot. Clearly these were interlopers, "not like us". Their need for security was inexcusable.

People earn their notoriety, was the assumption. If you must be venal and corrupt and make enemies while enriching yourself (in essence, being a bit of a shit), well, do it on your own time. Why must you inflict your worries on the rest? If there are members of society who threaten you, don't go out in society. I happen to believe this. But must it be subjectively (even aesthetically) applied?

Put it another way. If a public figure has reason to fear the public, then is he or she entitled to a public life? If you can't go out in the public you claim to serve without inconveniencing it, then surely it's better if you just stayed home? No matter how you sound or dress or use a fork.

We've come a long way from the dark days of the '80s and '90s, when roads would be closed for hours because a minister wanted an ice-cream. Public outrage played its part. In time, I hope the new elite of this city will learn that a security detail isn't the calling card they thought it was. But it's the old elite, the ones who profess to know better, that need to realise their own perceptions and preconceptions have got to change.

Public service is a choice. No matter how noble it is. If your choices decree you need a fort, then find or build one and hunker down in it. Don't take it with you. There's a wet caddymaster somewhere who'll thank you for leaving the guns at home.

METROPOLIS

Strange tales from our international brethren

Red suckers



The latest issue of *Time Out* has red splattered all over as we covered the first-ever tomato food fight in New York City. Playing with food is generally considered bad manners, but at the New York Tomato Battle – all hell broke loose. It's presently tomato season in the Big Apple, which means farmer's markets are stocked with all manner of colourful, vine-ripened heirloom fruits. And it was not just the gourmands and chefs going crazy, more than 5,000 participants gathered over the weekend to pummel each other with the juicy red suckers.

For art's sake



There are many ways to engage readers, and *Time Out Kuala Lumpur*

decided to do it through a social project. "Projek Rumah Ibadat Kita" is community-based and aims to promote better understanding of different religions through the medium of art. It's youth-centric, involving ten to 20 students aged 18 to 28 years old, 30 volunteers, five artists as well as the community of Brickfields at large. You will not be short of things to do; everyone gathers to exchange interesting stories, photographs and videos of the religious institutions they have visited. This way, one not only gets to hone one's artistic skills, but also get a chance to showcase one's work.

Life of Lee



Here's an exhibition that honours martial arts expert Bruce Lee and his

otherworldly skills. The exhibition uncovers some of the lesser-known aspects of Lee's short but action packed life. According to his family, the visitors to the museum will be greeted by a trove of memorabilia of more than 600 personal objects, including his iconic yellow tracksuit, family photographs, pages of English poetry and sketches outlining the breathtaking martial arts moves he pioneered before his untimely death at the age of 32.