

# Balkans may boil over

**I**t's hardly news that the media can beat some stories to death while completely overlooking others. This week has been no exception, between all the media hoopla over George Bush's drug crusade and its fascination with the most trivial events in South Africa.

I don't think a night has gone by lately when we haven't seen South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu on TV wagging his finger and preaching in a squeaky voice about the evils of apartheid. To me, Tutu looks like he belongs in the cast of the old *Saturday Night Live* with Father Guido Sarducci.

Meanwhile, a massive violation of human rights has been taking place in Bulgaria — almost unnoticed by the electronic media. In recent months, 310,000 Moslems have been forced out or have fled from their homes in Bulgaria into neighboring Turkey. This is the largest displacement of population in Europe since the end of World War II.

Bulgaria's persecution of its Moslem minority is not new. This column raised the question two years ago when it became known that the Bulgarian government was attempting to eradicate both Islam and any vestiges of Turkish culture. Nonsense, the Bulgarians wrote me, we are just trying to make everyone good citizens.

Moslems make up about 11% of Bulgaria's nine million people. They have been persecuted, mosques have been closed and Moslems have been forced to change their names. There have been numerous reports of rioting, imprisonment and deaths suffered by Bulgarian Moslems.

The 310,000 who have fled across the border are creating a huge headache for Turkey. The Turks don't have the money to feed and house this army of refugees, nor the jobs to give them if they settle in Turkey. Right-wing parties in Turkey are demanding that the mighty Turkish Army be sent to scourge the Bulgars.

Listen hard enough, and you can almost hear the

**ERIC MARGOLIS**



distant rumble of the great kettledrums that heralded the coming of the sultan's army.

Bulgaria deserves worldwide condemnation for its medieval behavior, which combines the worst aspects of Balkan tribalism with racism and religious fanaticism. Canada, too busy nagging South Africa, has so far had nothing to say about the violation of human rights in Bulgaria.

Sadly for Bulgarian Moslems, they have not received much international support because of Turkey's rough treatment of its own Kurdish minority. The European press has noted that Bulgaria's mistreatment of its Moslems in some ways parallels what Turkey has done to its rebellious Kurds. This is only partly true. Kurds in Turkey have been agitating for a separate state, and are thus a major security threat. Bulgarian Moslems have posed no threat whatsoever to the government. Even so, both they and the Turks have failed to gain sympathy abroad because of the Kurdish question.

Even more dreary has been the response of the Moslem world. Turkey aside, almost no other Moslem nation has come forth to defend Bulgaria's Moslems. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, both self-proclaimed defenders of the faith, have done nothing, so far, to defend it.

The Moslem world's response has been shameful, to say the least. If Jews, rather than Moslems, were being persecuted by Bulgaria — or expelled — one may be certain that a massive international storm of protest and financial pressure would have hit the Bulgarian government right between the eyes. Muslims have a great deal to learn from the Jewish community. In spite of all their Islamic summits and hot air about Moslem unity, when trouble arises, it's every Moslem for himself.

Even the loud-mouthed Iranians have remained mute over events in Bulgaria while still fulminating about Salman Rushdie. Pitiful.

Meanwhile, the Turks are getting angrier by the day. Beware angry Turks. Since we're dealing with the pepperpot Balkans, there's always the chance of war between its always bad neighbors.

For example, one might even imagine a Turkish punitive expedition into Bulgaria, or some bombing raids. Bulgaria is a member of the Warsaw Pact. Theoretically, a Turkish attack on the Bulgars would trigger intervention by the pact, including the Soviets.

More probable, the Greeks, who passionately hate both the Turks and Bulgars, could jump in. Grab a slice of Turkish Thrace, the Greeks might reason, and we'll trade it back for a Turkish withdrawal from Cyprus.

Anyone who thinks all this is pure fantasy should have a good read about the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. In that part of the world, the golden rule is: Thou shalt stab thy neighbor in the back.

