

## ERIC MARGOLIS



# Best of worst

It's time for my year-end awards for significant achievements in international relations:

**MOST ORIGINAL LAW:** Zimbabwe, which used to be Rhodesia in happier times, is much admired by liberals as a shining example of African democracy. But it has a new problem. Zimbabwe's president is named Canaan Banana. It seems that all too many jokes are being made about his name. So now, a new law has been passed: Up to three years in jail for making banana jokes. Next time you are in freedom-loving Zimbabwe, be sure not to whistle "Yes, We Have No Bananas."

**BEST BUSINESS DEAL:** Israel keeps beating Egypt in wars and has consequently acquired hundreds of Egyptian tanks. Israel recently sold 200 to Romania. Egypt then bought them back from Romania. Why don't the Israelis simply lease the tanks to the Egyptians and repossess them whenever there is a war?

**BEST WAY TO GET RID OF THE OPPOSITION:** It has been revealed that former Emperor Bokasa I of the former Central African Empire apparently had a goodly number of his more pesky political opponents fricasseed and served up at state banquets.

**BIGGEST DIPLOMATIC BOOBOO:** Trying to negotiate the Syrians out of Lebanon, Washington somehow neglected to include the matter of Syria's Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Even though this piece of real estate is the key to the whole Lebanese mess, a member of the Reagan administration admitted, "we just forgot about it." Back to your maps, boys.

**NEWEST WRINKLE IN WOMEN'S RIGHTS:** India has been trying to ban the time-honored custom of suttee, wherein grieving widows throw themselves on the flaming pyres of their deceased husbands. Now, a new Indian women's movement is demanding that this practice be continued. Will this spread to Ontario?

**WORST PUBLIC RELATIONS:** Russia, for shooting down a Korean airliner and then reacting with all the churlishness of a drunken Siberian woodchopper. Honorable mention for 200 submarine intrusions into Norwegian and Swedish waters just when Scandinavian liberals were trying to convince everyone that poor Russia was being picked on by the nasty Americans.

**Runner-up:** Peking, China, for ordering the massacre of 280,000 dogs, identified as "anti-state elements." John Wayne was right about the Reds.

**MOST SIGNIFICANT NEW ALLIANCE:** A major shift in the world power balance. Upper Volta, tied with Chad as Africa's poorest and most remote country, has just signed a new alliance with Albania, Europe's poorest and most remote spot. This new axis is aimed at "crushing imperialism." Tremble ye Pentagon warmongers and ye "social fascists" in Moscow before the irresistible march of the united, heroic Upper Voltaic and Albanian peoples.

**THE SHEEP THAT ROARED:** PM Trudeau's much ballyhooed "peace offensive" that deeply moved our simple-minded churchmen and gave the Canadian press something to write about besides Lebanon. It was received abroad with contempt or polite sneers.

**Runner-up:** The forthcoming Joe Clark peace mission. Can the world stand another Canadian ambassador of cheery goodwill?

**CURE OF THE YEAR:** Last May, Moscow TV announcer Vladimir Danchev called the Russian occupying army in Afghanistan, "invaders." Now, we all know that the Soviets are there to merely help their Afghan friends against bandits, so Danchev was packed off to a psychiatric hospital. Moscow has just reported that he is "completely cured" of his temporary dementia, and back at work. Wouldn't Ottawa love to see the whole Sun staff shipped off to the Clarke Institute for "re-orientation?"

**Runner-up:** Toronto's CFTO-TV for firing one of its reporters who had the temerity to call Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir a "terrorist." Freedom of speech and the press is okay, but watch those sacred cows, they can be deadly.

**BEST SPORTS STORY:** Nigerian soccer team halts game and refuses to play, claiming that opponents have put "bad juju" on their goal. Ghanaian team also refuses to play, asserting that they had been hexed by witchcraft. Hear that, Argos?

**NICEST GESTURE:** Our Liberal government does not want to prosecute Russian spies lest their "dialogue" with Moscow be hurt. About the only way that the swarms of Soviet agents in Canada could be prosecuted, it now seems, is if they drive without their seatbelts, fail to use metric in their secret reports, or engage in naughty sex.

**MOST EFFECTIVE PENOLOGY:** In Turkey and Iran, authorities sometimes lock up the families of wanted felons, holding them until the guilt-ridden malefactors turn themselves in. If this sensible practice were adopted in Canada, who knows how many people would turn to crime, knowing that their nagging loved ones or horrid in-laws might end up behind bars.

**JUICIEST SCANDAL OF THE YEAR:** Bravo Italia. Nobody does a real scandal like the Italians. The collapse of Banco Ambrosiano, in which the Vatican had a major interest; the murder or suicide of its president, Roberto Calvi, found hanging in monk's garb under London's Blackfriars Bridge; financial hanky panky by the Vatican Bank; murdered witnesses and the wonderful imbroglio of the Masonic P2 lodge that was apparently trying to take over the Italian government — an incredible tale about which we are likely to hear much more. Only God knows all the fascinating details.

**BEST CHRISTMAS IDEA:** A British record store chain declared its outlets "Christmas-free zones." No trees and tinsel, no fa-la-la, no hype. On its store windows were round pictures of Santa with a large, red bar drawn diagonally across.

(Eric Margolis is a member of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies)