

Looking Back at

March 26 : Moments, Music and Movements

I WAS around mid morning of the 26th March, 1971. Deputy Minister Hans Buhler called me from Palus Federal to enquire about the situation in Dhaka. Without being able to give him specific news, I only provided him with a brief background on the events of the past few days in Dhaka and told him about the national hook up radio broadcast of President Yahya Khan the same afternoon. Not knowing in advance the text of the broadcast, I could only hope that the Pakistan president would perhaps would seriously try to hand over power to the leader of the majority party — Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

time trying to solve my mind throughout the turbulent period in the then East Pakistan and asking myself what I could do in my humble way for my country and its people. The balcony of my first floor room was my occasional escape, as it were, from the daily headload of anxieties about the latest in East Pakistan. It was almost my 'magic casement' — yet not so!

March 26 was no exception. The Golden Bengal of history, of Chinese traveller Ma Huan and the Golden Bengal of Issa Khan impacted on my conscience. Could we survive as a nation? Could we continue in this way for long? I was remembering my days in Jakarta in Indonesia, and the tumultuous development following the Agartala conspiracy case. I myself and the political counsellor S A M S Kibria, sometimes joined by Nawabzada General Sher Ali Khan, and his wife Silvia, used to read voraciously stories filed by Peter Hazelhurst of the London Times. Sher Ali who was not known for his love for General Ayub and his cohorts, very often used to chortle. "They will one day destroy Pakistan", Sher Ali was superseded by Ayub and later on, he was eased out as Pakistan's Ambassador to Belgrade, Kuala Lumpur and then with us in Indonesia. Mr & Mrs Kibria and myself and my wife used to sit together and ponder over the future of the country, and what role we could possibly play as its conscientious citizens. After Kibria's departure, we were joined by Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, but our routine remained unchanged. Meanwhile, Kibria went to Islamabad, and I was transferred to Switzerland at practically 15 days' notice to help the embassy clear-up some scandals! By then, the Agartala Conspiracy case was withdrawn and Bangabandhu was released in

was waiting for me. I had entered his room just in time to hear the groggy voice of General Yahya's Asalam Alaikum, my countrymen, etc! I quickly sat down without waiting to be told by Ambassador Afzal Iqbal and trained my ears to the radio. Myself and Afzal Iqbal — with the radio in between us! At the end of the speech, the short span of distance between us took wings and expanded into unbridgeable oceans! Even a rather boisterous Afzal Iqbal looked stunned! Quite unknowingly, I found myself leaving the Ambassador and slowly stepped upwards to my room. I screeched open my door and went straight to the balcony overlooking the dark forest of the Tierpark and the murmuring Aar.

"Pakistan is not a nation and hardly a state", said Hans Morgantheu in his book *The New Republic* exactly fifteen years ago to the day. Morgantheu was amused at the creation of Pakistan. For him, it was something like Louisiana and Maryland forming a state with their capital in Baton Rouge, following the Civil War. Added to this crowded mind of mine were those Harvard papers on Bangladesh and Panepnek's study of the Center for International Affairs. Didn't President Ayub also say in *Friends not Masters*, "East Bengalees have all the inhibitions of downtrodden races and have not yet found it possible to adjust psychologically to the requirements of the new-born freedom"? And what did Malik Feroza Khan Noon say...?

I was pulled up short with the weight of history and hurried to my chair... I mused... opposition to this bankrupt dictatorial regime was the moral equivalence of obedience to God....

The writer was Second Secretary in Pakistan Embassy in Bern in March 1971. He later served as Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy, Switzerland and Tunisia, and Additional Foreign Secretary.

he is well known for his association with the phrase, "Nero fiddled while Rome burned." One of the many disillusionments of history seems to be that this is a myth because the fiddle or violin had not been invented at that time! However, Nero did play the lyre so the stubborn amongst us need not lose heart altogether and may continue to take pleasure from the phrase, with minor adjustments! Apart from such linguistic souvenirs of Nero, one of his important surviving monuments is his palace, the Domus Aurea or Golden house on the Palatine hills in Rome. He is also responsible, indirectly, for the name given to the symbol of Rome, the Flavian Amphitheatre, which we know as the Colosseum. On the original site, Nero had a giant statue of himself which was called the Colossus and even after this was pulled down the subsequent structure took on its name.

RUMINATIONS FROM ROME

Down the History Line

by Neeman A Sobhan



THE history of Classical Rome is the history of its many Emperors. As a city, Rome is rampant with the remains of the elegant structures and monuments that they created and that are still extant, though not in their original form. Of the many Emperors who have left their imperial stamp on Rome, my personal favorites are Hadrian and his uncle Trajan whom Hadrian succeeded and surpassed.

Having always been a sort of aficionado of Roman History and not really a serious student of it, I, early on in my affair with Rome, made a private list of its royal antecedents and acquired at least, a nodding acquaintance with some of the Emperors of the Roman Empire. My personal collection of historical high society includes, apart from Hadrian and Trajan, Vespasian, Diocletian, Titus, Marcus, Aurelius, Claudius, Septimius Severus, the illustrious Augustus and Constantine, the degenerate Caracalla, and, of course, the inimitable Nero! This, then, is my mixed grill of Regals.

Between 509 B C and 27 B C, the Republican era of Rome was played out and the curtains came down on it with the familiar and melodramatic scene of Julius Caesar collapsing at the foot of Pompey's statue with twenty wounds gurgling, "Et tu Brute?" etc. Then came Augustus who founded the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

With Nero the Julio-Claudian line ended and the Flavian line started.

ANTONIUS PIUS (138-161) A nondescript emperor whose temple, however, still stands in the Forum.

MARCUS AURELIUS (161-180) A noble and intelligent emperor who wrote a philosophical treatise called "Meditations". Still, in spite of his intellect, he committed the folly of hereditary succession and let his inept and corrupt son inherit the crown. He is better known for the giant equestrian statue of himself that adorn the Campidoglio in Rome.

AURELIAN (270-275) To him is attributed the building of the famed Aurelian Walls of Rome. Built for the protection of the city, these walls underscore the point that the empire was under threat and

much weakened during Aurelian's weak reign.

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

Sweetest Song — Saddest Thought

by Tahmina Zaman

I am told that, when reminiscing people tend to recollect only happy memories. Perhaps this is not always true. Otherwise, in trying to recollect some memories of those fateful days in 1971, why am I driven to occurrences I wish would have never taken place? Indeed, "our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought!"

I had heard those rumors too! But I showed no reaction. I could not afford to! I was in hiding. I didn't want anybody to recognize me. Except for my wrist watch, which had been given to me by my husband at our wedding, I had nothing on me to betray my identity. A very common printed cotton saree, a neckab on my face, a pair of sponge sandals on my feet, — that's all I had! I was in disguise, and I knew I would not be recognized.

— "Don't mind. Do you teach at the College of Home Economics, Dhaka?"

her that her guess was right! I was the one she had in mind.

kind to occupy the imperial throne. He proved to be one of the finest rulers of Rome and has left some wonderful monuments that deserve a more detailed account than this present article can provide. For the moment, two of these monuments may be mentioned: Trajan's Column and Trajan's Market. Any student of literature or history who has read Pliny's "Letters" will already have a fulsome picture of the life and times of this illustrious Emperor.

HADRIAN (117-138) Nephew of Trajan and adopted by him, Hadrian's place in Roman history is secured not just because he was the first bearded Roman Emperor but also because of his extraordinary ability as ruler, and his talents and versatility in many fields. He was fond of art, architecture, poetry, and his personality and sensibility were enlivened by an intellectual curiosity and love of travel. His reign was peaceful and he ameliorated the life of the general populace. Hadrian is

known in Britain for the wall he built there which carries his name, and in Rome there are many great monuments attributed to him. The most famous of these are the Pantheon, Castel San Angelo and the unique villa he made for himself outside Rome known simply as Villa Adriana or Hadrian's Villa. (These will be the subject of my forthcoming articles).

decided to celebrate again the third day of the third month in the Chinese lunar calendar, the wedding anniversary of the Emperor of the Underworld and his consort.

asian diary BY ARJUNA The Way to Hell

lead visitors to tiptoe through town, so as not to offend the invisible pedestrians.

became the "City of Ghosts," the entrance to the "Nether World."

Every year the towns people choose an Empress of the underworld. For seven successive years that infernal honour has gone to Ao Chunhua, a former worker in a chemical plant. She now serves as a tour guide in the Magic Mansion of Ghosts, a recent addition to the city's underworld attractions. Ms Ao has by now become quite familiar with her realm, and is glad to show visitors the underground palaces she claims as Empress.