

Roads Must be Free

Roads of the capital city, as indeed of the whole country, must be free from blockages of all kinds and at all times. BNP has the right and may have had even very good reasons to disagree with the venues earmarked by the DCC for public meetings and demonstrations, but it cannot, without naming its own choices, go on holding public meetings etc. on roads. Since BNP spokesman Sadeq Hossain Khoka conveyed objections to five of the seven venues selected by Mayor Hanif on apparently good grounds it would have been logical for the party to harp on the line rather than straight-away go for the roads. Besides, from the BNP days a consensus has evolved on the need for avoiding public thoroughfares in staging party rallies.

Having said that, let's turn to a kind of tentativeness in the Mayor's original pronouncement banning meetings and assemblies on public roads. It was made without having consulted the opposition, so it seems.

Enforcing the ban by brute force is helping the real issue to be clouded. It BNP does not accept the Hanif venues they must tell Hanif and the government as much and clearly spell out their own choices. All the BNP is saying is that it is unhappy with the way the ban was decided upon, promulgated and is being now enforced. There is thus a world of scope to de-escalate the tension.

Both the government and BNP must disengage at this point like they do inside the boxing ring. Both parties are stuck up in a no-win position. BNP cannot hope to make true gain by politicising something of very urgent public concern and the government can only lose face by continued resort to the baton. Whoever takes a step back will help the nation. Roads must be free. The party or persons hurting this goal will hurt themselves in the end.

A Reminder in Any Case

Although medical report has not reportedly backed the charge of rape brought by a teenage girl against an officer of a police station in Barisal and mystery over her real identity remains unravelled, some questions nonetheless come up.

Reports say Saraswati alias Rokhsana was allegedly raped in the launch in which she was being brought to Dhaka from Barisal. The escorting police officer, the girl alleged, raped her in the launch cabin at night. Our question is why she was not put under the escort of a female police officer when that police station reportedly had an option like that. What is the guarantee that the travel was not meticulously planned for sensual gratification at the cost of the situational helplessness of a person?

Police of late, has shown a growing and alarming trend of being involved in cases of women's repression. This is mostly happening with the poor, helpless and the downtrodden members of the society and almost unfailingly there have been attempts to establish one kind of moral justification by labelling them as prostitutes.

Problem with 'police injustice' is that it is so difficult to prove. Being a vast and powerful institution the wayward in it may have the guile to manipulate all evidences. Proper investigation is needed to ensure justice. The recent acquittal of the policemen accused in the Seema rape and murder case is too freshly etched in public memory to stop us from smelling rat in this case.

We feel all this boils down to lack of modern and methodical training- training that would have helped the members of the law enforcing agency to think and act professionally. Most policemen in our country do not seem to have any idea about what its role should be in the civil society.

Apart from publishing various articles we have been editorially counselling the government to treat this issue with urgency and sincerity consistently. It has to act decisively and effectively from the understanding that unless police is reformed in a manner so that it buries its present terrifying image of tormentors to fit into the desired role of protectors of the citizenry, efforts of establishing social justice will hang in the air only as mere slogans.

Long Way to Go

World Bank's chief economist for this region John Williamson has said, "South Asia has an awful lot to do before it could catch up with its more vibrant neighbours in East Asia". If he had made this not-quite-so-extraordinary comment at a bleak moment for South Asia, none would have perhaps read much into it. But because his observation is set against the backdrop of a stable economic outlook projected in a WB report for the region till 2006 it no doubt acquires special import.

South Asia's annual economic growth rate at close to 6 per cent per annum during the coming decade is likely to raise the level of individual incomes and, to that extent, poverty will be reduced. On the present level of economic dynamics, a rather sustained but modest growth pattern has been predicted. If the dynamics in South Asia region change radically through policy readjustments and there is robust collective political will to implement them, then of course, the pace of economic growth could be accelerated beyond the six per cent per annum rate — at least in the second half of the coming decade.

To create an enabling environment for higher growth rates in South Asia the SAARC leaders need to adopt a tripodal strategy: increased intra-regional trade under SAPTA and SAFTA, integration into the world economy via an equitable and reciprocal lowering of tariff and non-tariff barriers, financial market adjustments and, above all, a drastic cutback on military expenditure across the board.

The Soldiering and its Problems

When we were inducted in the military almost four decades ago we came across things which would, on the face of them, appear grotesque. The life was at the best archaic.

SMELLING powder in the field has always been the dream of a soldier. Because ultimately that is what gives him a sense of pride and fulfillment in the profession. In our generation in the armed forces, twice in quick succession, we were provided with that exciting experience — first in 1965 and then in 1971. But there are armies where a full generation or even several generations of enlisted men do not get a similar chance. Yet they are required to be kept constantly ready to undergo the battlefield conditions apart from developing their skill to fight the enemy. This preparatory phase of the soldiers' career is rather challenging but uplifting. Only the spartan upbringing of a soldier as well as his careful grooming can, to an extent, reflect how well he is performing when the chips are down.

When we were inducted in the military almost four decades ago we came across things which would, on the face of them, appear grotesque. The life was at the best archaic. All that we were required to undergo in the name of training or grooming seemed outright torture. Many of the routines and rituals made little sense. While the working ambience was inhospitable its schedules were exceedingly cramped bringing one almost to a breaking point. And life within the precinct of a set of dos and don'ts was indeed exasperating. The seniors and the writs they exercised were harsh and imperious. Worse yet, one could not reason why. The blind compliance was the only acceptable norm. It is still perhaps the way the armed forces are run the world over.

The regimental soldiering had been an ordeal. In the rush of every day programme one was driven from pillar to post. When a junior officer like us looked for a place in the outfit he served, he would first be snubbed and then seditiously shown the sun burnt training sheds in scorching summer or a wind swept maintenance area during the freezing winter. He had no business to be in a cosy office room. One had to be constantly on his toes to be any-

where at anytime to respond to the call of duty. He could be awakened from his midnight sleep and packed off to operational area or any other odd destination. Such was the state of alert expected out of a regiment's rank and file. The personal comforts were the matters of least priority and one's compassion totally ignored. That is how we were baptised to soldiering at the dawn of our professional career. And the approach is uniform all over the world.

Today in hindsight it is found how surprisingly not only we got used to it but also lovingly started loving it. We loved its adventure, rich traditions, its esprit-de-corps and an old-world charm of its somnolent garrison life. Many things we thought redundant started making sense. It was unique in many ways with its enormous romances. We realised that ours was not merely a profession — it was a way of life to be savoured with a particular frame of mind and an attitude to be developed. Soldiering is a sacred covenant between an individual and his country the sanctity of which is to be preserved at all cost. There is something metaphysical in its content which cannot be measured in terms of mundane gains in an occupational sense. Here is a covenant based entirely on the spirit of sacrifice making an individual honour-bound to put even his life in peril to uphold it. One gets intoxicated by its superb values and that is how one can fight taking immeasurable risks.

Problems arise when those values are compromised and a soldier is deflected from his set pattern of upbringing. However, the time has now changed and so have the individual's proclivities and preferences. In an age of increasing automation life has become easy, dependent and indolent. The adventure is no more attractive and the preferred way is one with the least resistance. When a measure of affluence is combined with this phenomenon, it proves damp-

ening to one's fighting spirit. On the other hand fighting is still as primitive and brutal as it was thousands of years ago requiring an individual's raw courage and rugged physical standard. At present time, this apparent contradictions have caused manifold dilemmas for soldiering even in the militaries of the powerful nations.

Eyebrows were raised when a new generation of Americans now shorn of its aggressive claws and awash in unflattering affluence suffered humiliating setback in Korean war and later in Vietnam. The nation emerged invincible from the second world war, and within years, it had a bloody nose from the ragtag peoples' Army of China in Korea. Till date, the Americans have sel-

ished this proverbial army tea both during peace and war. We now prefer coffee to be served with assorted delicacies in a monogrammed ceramic ware. One becomes a slave to costly preferences difficult to be met under all conditions. The same way American GIs made their life complex and fighting difficult by demanding regular supply of Coca Cola and chewing gum even in their bunkers during Vietnam war.

In our time, we either walked or used a bicycle to reach the regiment to be on parade. Even the Commanding Officer cycled to his office. In Rawalpindi during late '50s, I saw red-taped military brass cycling in streams to the GHQ in the morning hour. The generals living around the GHQ smartly walked into its huge complex. Now even the junior officers feel shy of walking or cycling. They try to link their status and prestige to the use of mechanical transport, either private or official. Implicit in the trend is tendency to live a soft life. The soldiers once took pride in famous maxim: the infantry marches on its belly. Now they feel that the time has changed making such adage irrelevant. But nothing has really changed about the savagery involved in a battle and only the toughs not the softies can face it.



PERSPECTIVES by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

dom overcome the trauma either of Korea or Vietnam and are haunted by their failed marine landing of '80s in Lebanon and beating in the hands of tribal chieftains in Somalia, notwithstanding their spectacular success in a mechanised high-tech war in the Gulf. When the conflict boils down to holding one's vital ground physically through a savage close quarter battle, invariably the quality of peace-time soldiering of the contenders comes into play.

In this context, it would be pertinent to have a look at how we have armed forces been shaped up. How are our men adapted to soldiering in classical sense? The military in Bangladesh has a unique distinction of being born in the thick of the battles. Despite many predicaments during our War of Independence, it gave a glorious account of its battle worthiness. After independence

nior field officer starts sitting in an airconditioned office and a mid-ranking officer fixes one or two of those machines in his house in our temperate climate, it points to a measure of affluence and the individual's reluctance to accept hardship. But what is hardship anyway? For an individual used to the luxury of airconditioned living anything other than that is hardship. In our time, we saw only the Brigade Commanders and up, who would never fight in the front, enjoying a Khas Khas — a locally improvised crude cooling — system — in a much more extreme climate.

In olden days, the life in the forces was deliberately kept simple by developing similar tradition. It used to be a great treat to be served with hot tea full to the brim of an enamelled mug with a few pieces of 'pakow' — easy to procure anywhere under any conditions. Even the generals rel-

cal to forces, secrecy and interests grow out of such facilities. True, there is a communication revolutions bringing closer the people and ideas these days, but for the armed forces in peacetime the benefits outweigh its risks.

Traditionally, the soldiers live light shunning heavy personal belongings. Because it proves to be a disincentive for a fighting man. He lives modest but with dignity. Our seniors always discouraged us to think in terms of big property and bank balance. These make a soldier look back even in the battle field. In a professional battle field, the authority itself takes care of soldiers' welfare. One observes with anguish that such traditions are fast withering away. It is painful to see even senior officers turning into owners of real estate or money exchange shop instead of constituting the pool of experts for advancing the cause of our nation state-building.

One also worries at the lopsided prioritisation in our armed forces. It is indeed difficult to find out any overwhelming rationale behind building a 'Sena Kunjo' plaza. If that much of money which went into its construction was available a professional army would have held a countrywide field manoeuvre in line with India's 'brastack' or Pakistan's 'Mard-e-Momin'. It is a pity that we gave more priority to a wedding venue. Similarly, a professional army would perhaps phase out its ageing weapon and equipment instead of building family apartments or condominium beyond certain percentage.

Soldiering is a full-time commitment to give the best of one's life to the nation. That is how he has much shorter span of service life as compared to this civilian counterpart. If he fulfils his commitment, he gets in return a life considered above the board. True, the time has changed but soldiering has not. Whatever may be the temptation of a changed time we must be able to strike a delicate balance between an unbridled passion for it and the imperatives of an unadulterated soldiering.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

The Fairy Tale Ends for the "People's Princess" Diana

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Diana and Mother Teresa liked each other. Only a few months back, both of them were here in New York, comforting the homeless. Mother Teresa was gratified to see someone of privilege with so much feeling for the poor.

craved privacy. Moreover, billionaire al-Fayed could do for Diana what Aristotle Onassis did for Jackie Kennedy. If Diana wanted a vacation she could go to one of their eleven villas spread throughout the world, on their own jets. If she wanted yachting, their yachts were available to cruise her favourite seas. If she wanted to stay in a hotel, they owned hotels like the top of the line Ritz of Paris. If she wanted to shop, what better place to go than the Harrods of London, also owned by the al-Fayeds. Because the al-Fayeds provided Diana the privacy of a cocoon, the paparazzi chase became more dangerous.

Emad and Diana had known each other for at least ten years. Lord Spencer, Diana's dad, and the senior al-Fayed were friends. Emad and Charles played polo on opposing teams. However, even in death, to his detractors Emad was just a "playboy" and a "consort". To others he was an intelligent, caring human being, who brought happiness to a tormented Princess, helped his father manage his billion dollar business empire, produced Oscar-winning films like The Chariots of Fire, and is as much worth mourning as his beloved Princess Diana.

Princess Diana would have been the first western royalty to have married a Muslim commoner in recent times. History is replete with Muslim royalty marrying western women. Prince Ali Aga Khan had married American actress Rita Hayworth. In 1978, King Hussein of Jordan married Princeton graduate Lisa Hallaby, making her Queen Nur.

It all began for Lady Diana Spencer, then 19, in 1980. She was a primary school teacher and a baby sitter for the son of an American couple, earning five pounds a day. One day, as she came to work, the American couple noticed that hordes of photographers were following her. "I spent the weekend at Sandringham Palace", she explained. The American couple, who now lives in Morristown, New Jersey, had no idea that Diana belonged to the Royalty and was being courted by Prince Charles. Such was Diana, the "Shy Di". Diana invited the couple to their wedding in July, 1981 and had them seated pretty close to the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Recently, Buckingham Palace invited them back for Diana's funeral.

The British Royal family was well-known for making monumental royal matrimonial mistakes. Princess Margaret, the Queen's younger sister, was madly in love with Pete Townsend, a dashing World War II hero. Since Townsend was a commoner, the Queen vetoed their love and had Margaret wedded to a photographer, Anthony Armstrong-Jones. Predictably, the marriage ended in divorce.

In the mid-'70s, Prince Charles fell in love with a woman named Devina



Sheffield. The romance was destroyed when Devina's former boyfriend ungalantly told the press that they had been lovers. The woman Charles really wanted as her lifelong companion, Camilla Parker-Bowles, he could not have. She was married to someone else. Lady Diana Spencer was the best compromise. She was royal material, yet too young to have any history.

Unfortunately, Diana received scant education and was hopelessly unprepared for the fame that awaited her. Her mother went off with another man when she was six, abandoning the family. Lord Spencer, her father, was too unwell to groom her daughter. Some years ago, speaking to a charity for children, Diana said that these days children are less likely to experience the death of their parent — but more likely to suffer the trauma of divorce. She could not have been more prophetic — her own two children suffered both.

"Here is the stuff of which fairy tales are made", is how the Archbishop of Canterbury described Prince Charles and Lady Diana's wedding 16 years ago. It was no such thing. The marriage was doomed from the beginning; Charles and Diana were totally incompatible. They had nothing to give each other. Believing, like many women do, that children will improve their marriage, Diana dutifully bore the royal family two heirs to the throne, William and Harry — "a heir and a

spare", as the British like to say. Soon after marriage, Diana realised that she was sharing Charles with Camilla Parker-Bowles. Charles, too, resented being eclipsed by Diana in public. After William's birth in 1982, Diana suffered postpartum blues and bulimia. Although both kept smiling for the cameras, the marital strains were obvious as early as 1985, becoming public in 1990. In 1992, Andrew Morton revealed in a best seller, Diana: Her True Story with input from Diana herself, that the Princess attempted suicide when she learned of Charles' liaison with Camilla. The Royals were furious. They labeled "Shy Di" the "Sly Di", and the sniping began in earnest. In 1990 the couples separated, six years later they were divorced.

Charles and Diana were as different as night and day. Charles was a throw back to the ancient ways of the monarchy — he loved the countryside, loved hunting, played polo. Diana the "People's Princess" hated hunting and countryside, was more in tune with popular culture, and loved the cities. Elton John, George Michael and Luciano Pavarotti were her friends. Only two months ago, Diana could be seen comforting Elton John as he sang at the funeral of their common friend, fashion designer Gianni Versace in Milan. Cambridge-educated Charles, whose coronation as the future king took place way back in 1969 while he still was at Cambridge, is an

intellectual. Diana's interests struck him as juvenile. Never hugged by his mother, the Queen, as a baby, showing emotions in public is something he was never taught. Something Diana excelled at. It is fair to say that in going overboard in praise of Diana, the world has been a little unfair to Charles.

Diana too made grave mistakes. Trying to get even with Charles for his cheating, she too committed adultery with her riding instructor Captain James Hewitt. In a tell-all expose that Hewitt sold to the highest bidder, the scoundrel gave vivid details of the affair to the Press, devastating Diana. Betrayed twice by two British men, Diana looked elsewhere for love.

Just as the world was coming to grips with the loss of Diana, came another devastating news from Calcutta — that Mother Teresa had passed away. Diana and Mother Teresa liked each other. Only a few months back, both of them were here in New York, comforting the homeless. Mother Teresa was gratified to see someone of privilege with so much feeling for the poor.

Diana was carefully chosen for the role of the princess. The royal selection process was as cold and prosaic any thoroughbred auction. At 20, she had the lineage, the upbringing and docility to appear to meet the requirements for a future Queen of England. But the battery of tests missed something. She turned out to be an aristocrat with a populist heart. She was more shaped by popular culture than by her insular upper class upbringing. Her diet included romance novels, movie magazines and music videos. She craved for things royalty was supposed to forgo or overcome — pleasure, passion and true love.

Diana's inability to accept the part of the noblesse clause in her contract cost her a marriage and earned her the displeasure of the Windsors. However, it was her battle with the royal family, played out so publicly that gave her such lasting appeal. The sympathetic public watched her grow, suffer and finally rebel. Millions looked on, as the real-life princess dealt with rejection, infidelity, depression, eating disorders and divorce. They witnessed her recovery and applauded lustily as she sought revenge.

In death, Diana brought the royal family to its knees. The startling response of the British public to Diana's death stunned the royals. The millions of mourners, who signed condolence books, placed one million bouquets outside Diana's Kensington Palace home and who applauded spontaneously, Earl Spencer dug into the press and the Royals for their mistreatment of Diana, told the Royals in an unmistakable voice that the public disapproved of the Royals' treatment of Diana during her lifetime, and their studied aloofness in her death.

Scrambling to catch up, the Queen came to London from Scotland and gave an unprece-

dent live television speech from the balcony of the Buckingham Palace. She praised Diana for her "capacity to inspire others with her warmth and kindness". She "admired and respected" Diana, the Queen said. The Queen could not bring herself to say that she loved Diana. Princess Diana's burial ended one of those weeks when the British people seemed to rise up as one and deliver an emotional verdict that confounded expectations. Perhaps Churchill's electoral defeat after World War II was the last such occasion. Not the Queen nor Prince Charles but Prince William, who embodies Diana's features and smile, remains the best hope for the survival of the tarnished Royal family.

Diana's funeral was attended by among others, by Prime Minister Tony Blair, Hillary Clinton and Mohamed Al Fayed, Dodi's father. Blair revealed later on David Frost's morning talk show that he had talked to Diana about making her an official goodwill Ambassador for Britain, something Diana herself wanted. Pavarotti was there, too overcome with grief to sing Elton John did — altering his *Candle in the Wind* lyrics for Marilyn Monroe to suit Diana, bringing tears to the eyes of Williams ("Will" Diana called him) and Harry. Earl Spencer promised the two kids that Diana's "blood family" will make sure they are brought up in the populist way Diana wanted. Among the Royals, only Prince Charles was invited to Diana's burial at the family estate in Althorp. Elton John, George Michael and Pavarotti will cut an album for Christmas, donating the proceeds to Diana's charity. "Candle in the Wind" will be released this week and will also benefit Diana's charities.

Diana dragged the unprepared stodgy royal family into the television age. A mesmerising beauty, equally popular on both sides of the Atlantic, her arena was one of images and symbolism. With evident compassion, she embraced several good causes, from hugging AIDS patients to giving support to Bosnian refugees to clearing land mines in Somalia. However, she did not initiate these causes — all she did was to publicise the good work of others in these areas.

In death Diana will loom large in our life because of the circumstances of her death. At the exact spot where she died, someone scroled, "Paparazzi Assassins". I have coined a new word to describe these over-aggressive photographers — "Papanazis". But the fact remains that the speeding car was not being chased by terrorists, but by men with cameras. They were pests, not threats. The speed of their motorcycles (90 miles per hour in a 30 miles per hour zone) was determined by the speed of the Mercedes, driven by a drunk in the ultimate of things, does any of this truly matter?

Irate British MPs were saying that had Princess Diana not refused Royal protection, "she would be alive today!" Really? There is another way to look at it. Diana and Dodi's time had come. No amount of second guessing was going to alter God's decree.