

## Liquor Poisoning Menace

THE intake of poisonous liquor is taking an indiscriminate toll of lives. Whereas in Gaibandha or Narsingdi modest income group people died in droves from ingestion of low-priced country brew we now have two perfectly solvent people, who could afford premium brands, dying from liquor poisoning anyway.

This makes us sit up and take note of the extremely worrying possibility that dangerous cocktails are being poured into bottles with foreign labels on them and marketed to an unsuspecting clientele of well-to-do people. It is, of course, a matter of expert investigation as to whether film director Awlad Hossain or the owner of the Chinese restaurant 'Magdonals' died from excessive drinking or the deadly impurities in the drinks or both; but the nature of the after-effect sounded like pointing the finger at the latter possibility. As for the poisonous content a lab test could easily reveal its actual chemical properties. The asking prices of the same brand of foreign alcohol differ from place to place, it is learnt, thereby raising doubts about the genuineness of its content, especially when it is sold on the cheap. We want these aspects probed thoroughly for the sake of undertaking properly educative public awareness building exercise against the brews on sale.

At the ground level, surveillance ought to be mounted over the licensed and the numerously unlicensed liquor sale outlets located all over the country. What they are mixing maybe even more dangerous than the use of methylated spirit and rectified spirit. Who knows?

The magnitude of alcohol consumption in the country will have to be faced as a fact and not bypassed as a taboo subject of sorts. There must be a clear identification of all the sources of alcoholic drink supplies, both external and internal, with a regulatory control mounted on the black-market just as in the case of drugs trafficking. Whatever licensed local breweries we have need to be checked on other products.

Above all, the designated authority over all these matters, namely, the Drug Control and Narcotic Department, is an unequipped, toothless organisation. Its capacity for surveillance and power of enforcement need to be enhanced manifold.

## Upaban Robbery

MIDNIGHT robbery on board the Upaban Express near Magurechhara, third in six months on the Dhaka-Sylhet track, has put a big question-mark on the security of railway travelling. Over the years, train has been regarded as the safest mode of transport, against the backdrop of an increasing incidence of robbery on the road and the waterways. However, it seems, the scenario has started to change for the worse, and authorities should not fail to take note of it.

The Upaban robbery has exposed certain loopholes in the railway security system. Although timely intervention by the railway police did lead to the killing of three of the perpetrators and arrest of one may suggest otherwise, there is, nonetheless, a general dearth of on-board vigil. With their outdated weapons and dishevelled appearance, the GRP personnel inspire anything but confidence among passengers. Moreover, 'routine patrol' seems to have become an antiquated terminology with them. Passengers hardly feel their presence, let alone see them. Immediate attention should be paid to the GRP's need to be strengthened with modern weapons and rigorous training.

Frequent unscheduled stoppages have also become a regular feature of railway journeys these days. These are often engineered by ticketless passengers in collusion with the attendants for smooth passage in and out of the train. The trend has to stop because it makes the passengers vulnerable to robbery.

There seem to be a number of places where train robbery has been frequent. The law-enforcers should identify the trouble zones and deploy more personnel there for tighter vigilance. The Upaban incident indicates that a lot needs to be done on railway security. The authorities will do the passengers a favour if they take it on that note.

## Justice Delayed Justice Denied

SOME fifty cases of sensational murders and repression on women during the last eight years are still pending in the courts of law in the country, according to reports in an influential local daily on Sunday.

The main reasons cited for delay in completing the formalities are slow and traditional process of investigation, lack of witnesses, overcrowding of courts with cases and delay in pronouncement of judgments. Some of the cases that had raised considerable public outcry were transferred to CID or DB for investigation but it has been observed that these agencies did not approach their task in earnest. Many of the investigation reports sent back by the courts for reinvestigation for poor quality have not come back to the courts either. Through the loopholes in investigation many criminals just got away.

Except four cases including those relating to Yasmin murder and rape, and murder of Rubel in DB custody, the rest are proceeding in slow motion. Even with an understanding of the problems faced by the investigating agencies due to lack of manpower and logistics, and the limitations of the trial courts due to various factors that include lack of evidence, absence of witnesses and prayers of lawyers for longer dates, one has to ask the concerned parties, specially the investigation agencies, to speed up their process in the interest of the aggrieved people seeking justice. Try to feel the sorrow and suffering of the people who have lost their near and dear ones, and the consequent miseries that have been brought on their families. They have no place to go except the court of law for justice and fairplay, and once it is delayed it is as good as denied.

# The Taming of the Press in Pakistan

*The Sharif government's latest assault on the freedom of the Press — the arrest and detention of Nazam Sethi, the editor of the Friday Times has created unprecedented furore both at home and abroad. The Pakistani Press has come a long way in asserting its role and can hardly be browbeaten.*

Bhutto, a populist leader had been, in addition, aloof and arrogant. Mr Nawaz Sharif, the incumbent prime minister, came to the office with an overwhelming mandate. Even then, in a bizarre attempt he also wanted to centralize power. Sharif has already consolidated his control over all state institutions including the Presidency, Judiciary and the Armed Forces making himself the most powerful elected leader of the country.

After forcing the Judiciary into compliance, placing his own trusted man in the Presidency and removing an apparently nonconformist Jehangir Karamat from the military takeover of 1958. Ayub Khan, who seized power from Mirza ruled with a iron fist and obviously allowed no dissent. Given the military-bureaucratic background of these rulers and their little exposure to any democratic-nationalist movements the behaviour pattern they displayed in politics was an expected phenomenon, if not desirable.

But it was a total disappointment both for the Pakistanis as well as outsiders when the democratically elected rulers of the country upheld the same legacy. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, a leader of stature, also succumbed to the temptation of concentrating power and had been out and out an authoritarian. His daughter, Benazir

criticism of the government's disastrous economic policies, corruption at the high places and the prime minister's authoritarian trends. Nawaz Sharif has been repeatedly lashing out at the press in the public meetings and has accused it of trying to destabilise the government and being unpatriotic. The government dangled carrot and sticks before the journalists in persuading them to the official line. It is alleged

belonging to the group to submit to the government demand of sacking the journalists blacklisted by it. Maleeha Lodhi, the high profile editor of *The News* was among them. 'Jang' being the largest publication group may have been the main target of the assault but others also were victimised.

The famous 'Newsline' was also served with a tax notice when it ran an investigative story on Sharif family's Rai-

power of the parliament and weakened the federation. His failure to get the controversial 15th Amendment to enforce Shariat Law passed by the Senate has infuriated his government which, in desperation, is now trying to stifle the press — a convenient scapegoat. Most of the press did not, of course, support the Shariat Law. Sharif's close aides see now the independent press as the last obstruction in the way of an autocratic rule. But the confrontation with the press has already caused a serious setback to the regime as the issue has provided a rallying point for the opposition parties to mobilise anti-government sentiments.

Whenever the trouble mounted — as during its tussle with the former president Farooq Leghari, or with the Judiciary or when the Army chief of staff demanded a formal role for the military in the power structure — the frequency of the government restriction, censors and 'advice' accelerated for the press. When such steps were resisted it only reinforced official antipathy towards the press. Maleeha Lodhi of *The News* was targeted for removal from *Jang* group for her alleged penchant for creating a crisis syndrome her paper's front page. The newspaper's resistance to publishing 'motivated' official stories had been particularly the source of min-

isterial displeasure. The independent minded journalists came under surveillance and increasing official intimidation. As per the Sharif government's perception of democracy the checks and balances are impediments in the way of speedy implementation of policies. The debate and dissents in a democratic polity are considered by it as the causes for chaos and confusion. It is equation of government's interests with those of the state translated into an official culture of intolerance also explains a lot about the administration's obsession with the straight reporting by an emerging breed of journalists committed to the defence of civil society. The government's refusal to admit that its mounting difficulties of governance were not the results of an adverse media coverage remains another serious problem of the Sharif government with regards to its relations with the press.

The Sharif government's latest assault on the freedom of the Press — the arrest and detention of Nazam Sethi, the editor of the *Friday Times* has created unprecedented furore both at home and abroad. The Pakistani Press has come a long way in asserting its role and can hardly be browbeaten. A pitched battle, as one that is raging now between the government and the press may prove politically costly for the Sharif government. Mr Sharif has so far been lucky to win all the battles he fought, but the present one — between him and the press — may as well become his Waterloo.



## PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

that public funds were copiously made available for buying their loyalty and patronising pliant publications.

The Sharif government's showdown with the press came almost a year ago in the wake of its tussle with *Jang* group of publications. The trouble ostensibly started on a tax dispute and resulted in the withholding of the supply of newsprint to the *Jang* group. But it was viewed more as a pressure tactics to bring the publication's policies in line with those of the government. It is alleged that the tax notices were served as a tool to blackmail the newspapers

wind farm and the use of public fund to develop the property. The Special Branch of police swooped on its office when it reported that Senator Saifur Rahman, the head of the Ehtesab Bureau did not pay any income tax. The tax notices were served and personnel from Intelligence Bureau and Special Bureau sent also to other newspapers and magazines which published stories of corruption and tax evasion involving the Sharif family and other top government leaders.

The concentration of power in Sharif's hand has already seriously undermined the

# To be or Not to be without Sonia Gandhi

*The development in the Congress has come at a very critical time as it was hoping to return to power after a long gap... Sonia's alleged role in the "Bofors arms scandal" when Rajiv Gandhi was the prime minister and the involvement of an Italian in the shady deal will also come in the electioneering although the allegations have not been proved until now. This and the "foreign origin issue" will play a part in the coming polls.*

his son Jawaharlal Nehru was the first prime minister of independent India and continued in that position till death in 1964. His daughter Indira Gandhi also became the Congress president and the prime minister in 1966. She was the head of the party and the government before being killed by a Sikh body guard in 1984. Indira was out of power and also from top party positions but she bounced back. She had groomed younger son Sanjay as political heir but his death in 1980 in a stunt plane crash brought the elder, Rajiv, a commercial airline pilot, to the forefront, and he eventually became the prime minister. He too was killed in a bomb blast on May 21, 1991, in southern Tamil Nadu state by Sri Lanka's separatist Tamils while on an election campaign as the opposition leader. Rajiv's death almost snapped the bond between the Nehrus with the Congress and Indian politics as his daughter Priyanka and son Rahul were still young to step into their father's shoes while Sonia was a foreigner who was then not much favourably disposed to politics.

The Congress, shocked at Rajiv's sudden death, exhorted Sonia to join politics but she politely declined. The Congress, mainly riding the crest of sympathy caused by Rajiv's assassination, won the elections and remained in power for five years. Meanwhile, Sonia remained a political and social recluse although many senior Congress leaders maintained contacts with her. The party was not in a good shape under Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao. Towards the end of Mr.

Rao's tenure, Sonia started taking interest in politics and finally joined the Congress. When she decided to campaign for the organisation in the 1996 elections, many Congress leaders were relieved to find their cherished Nehru linkage restored. Now her resignation has certainly pushed the party to the precipice of another crisis. The Congress has gone through similar crises before. During the days of Indira Gandhi, Morarji Desai, Sanjiva Reddy and S. Nijalingappa also broke away and

the backbone of the organisation no matter how many leave the party or side with the rebels.

Whether Mrs. Gandhi withdraws the resignation or not, she will indeed remain the main attraction. However, she is likely to take back the resignation letter as the All India Congress Committee (AICC), the larger body of the party, is expected to make an appeal to her formally and ratify the expulsion of the three leaders done by the working committee. With the national polls

not allowed to run for a municipal election in Italy because she is not an Italian by birth and wondered how could Sonia become prime minister of India. Sonia and her children Priyanka and Rahul are visibly upset by such views. They said Sonia remains a part of the family that ruled India for many years but has she ever betrayed on any national issue?

These issues are divisive in nature and it remains to be seen how they affect the minds of the Indian electorate in the coming polls. True, Sonia's foreign origin could be a factor in the ballot because her case is different from rest of the members of the Nehru family. She may have to bear this burden of being not a natural-Indian till daughter Priyanka or son Rahul joins politics although she enjoys tremendous support by virtue of being widow of Rajiv Gandhi. She is trying her best to acclimatise with Indian traditions and language but this may not be enough when she is seen as future prime minister of the country. It is possible that a section of the Congress may not like the 'family dynasty' since there is no shortage of dedicated and experienced leader in the party. Few would dare to speak against it openly, though. Going against it may be suicidal although many disapprove it from ethical point of view. Even the leftists disapprove such traditions in politics. Then once again, family links are too strong for an organisation. Mr. Sharad Pawar is a popular politician with strong base in western Maharashtra state but still he may find the going very tough. Pranab Mukherjee and Arjun Singh

can seldom win an election but they seek to flourish by identifying with the family links.

The manner in which the three leaders were expelled from the party came under criticisms from the Indian press as an 'extreme act of sycophancy' in a democratic organisation. Some leaders in the Congress are trying to use the 'Nehru cult' for their advantage. Sonia Gandhi, despite being a foreigner, has shown remarkable understanding of the Indian society and she also justifies her position that it is because of the Congress leaders and workers she had joined politics and taken up party leadership. But overdoing by the over-zealous party leaders may not bring dividends for the organisation. Mr. Pawar will obviously attempt to take the advantage from the issue of 'natural-Indian' and Sonia's failure to form a government or even support a 'third front' government led by West Bengal's veteran chief minister Jyoti Basu when the Vaipavee government had collapsed last month. But he and his supporters are unlikely to go far either in the form of a new party or rebellion against the current leadership.

The development in the Congress has come at a very critical time as it was hoping to return to power after a long gap. For the party which ruled most period of independent India has certainly suffered a setback in the form of the recent developments. Sonia's alleged role in the 'Bofors arms scandal' when Rajiv Gandhi was the prime minister and the involvement of an Italian in the shady deal will also come in the electioneering although the allegations have not been proved until now. This and the 'foreign origin issue' will play a part in the coming polls. It remains to be seen how the Congress succeeds in coping with the challenges.



## MATTERS AROUND US

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

formed Congress (O) but the Congress with links with the Nehru family survived and remained as the mainstream party. Many senior leaders including today's 'Sonia loyalists' Pranab Mukherjee and Arjun Singh had also left the party but later returned. The organisation has had problems but has always overcome adverse conditions. Pranab was close to Indira and rated in the government as the senior most minister after her but he was under cloud during Rajiv when he was ignored for prime ministership and son Rajiv took over. Arjun was sidelined during Mr. Rao's prime ministership. They all are now close to Sonia. There were other desertions but party remained strong. This time too, the Congress with 'Sonia loyalists' will undoubtedly be

knocking at the door, the organisation can not afford to be without her. In the extreme case, she may defer the withdrawal of resignation if Sonia nurtures the indignation and insult meted out by three leaders and makes an alternative arrangement. If she returns, her Italian origin will continue to dog the Congress. Opponents like the BJP will certainly seek to take advantage from Sonia's foreign origin and has already floated slogans like 'Rome or Rama', an allusion for Sonia's country of origin Italy or India. Other parties like the Akali Dal, which is an ally of the BJP, went to the extent of saying that India is a nuclear power and it will not be wise to leave the 'sensitive' issues of the nation with a prime minister of 'foreign origin'. Even Mr. Pawar said that an Indian Sonali Dasgupta was

# Saying No to Drugs

*Obviously ANF has turned things around but there is no room for complacency. Karachi is in fact at the cutting edge of the fight against drugs because it is through this port city that maximum drugs used to be smuggled out.*

account the fact that many other nations have the same problems in varying degrees, many times more acute than our problems, but they do not indulge in chest-beating in public about it.

We love self-flagellation at the slightest pretext, forgetting to even count, what to talk, of our successes. Our war against drugs is an amazing real-life success story and the men of the Pakistan Army who made it happen deserve public plaudits, not only are they unsung heroes continuing to serve selflessly, but they have done the Army, of which they wear the uniform, truly proud. The officers and men deputised by the Pakistan Army to the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) have done a magnificent job.

The ANF started as the Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) in 1993 as a replacement of the Pakistan Narcotics Control Board (PNCB). The PNCB was mostly officered by men from the Police, FIA and Customs, they were singularly unsuccessful, being infiltrated at will by the drug barons, who from time to time sent a bone of appeasement in the form of small seizures their way to keep everyone comfortable and satisfied. A stage came where Pakistan was rapidly becoming the No. 1 drug producing and supplier country, with drug money corrupting leadership at every level in all the sectors.

Faced with a situation where not only the US but other western countries would abandon Pakistan as drug infested without hope of redemption, the then government opted to turn to the only remaining credible institution left in the country, the Pakistan Army. Maj Gen (now Lt Gen) Salahuddin Tirmizi, then Director General, Armoured Corps GHQ, was selected as the man who would be able to turn the tide. Having inherited the muck in PNCB, with

who took over in 1998 and in a short span of time energised the ANF making it a more kinetic and positive force. The stakes are high; the temptations are always enormous in the drug business.

What have these men of the Army achieved? In 1997, Pakistan was producing 800 MT of heroin, in 1998 it had come down to 5 MT. Since 600 MT is required legally for the pharmaceutical industry, from a net manufacturer and exporter,

'demand reduction' and the ANF is showing its potential in a new sophisticated approach e.g. by organising art competition among students condemning drug use.

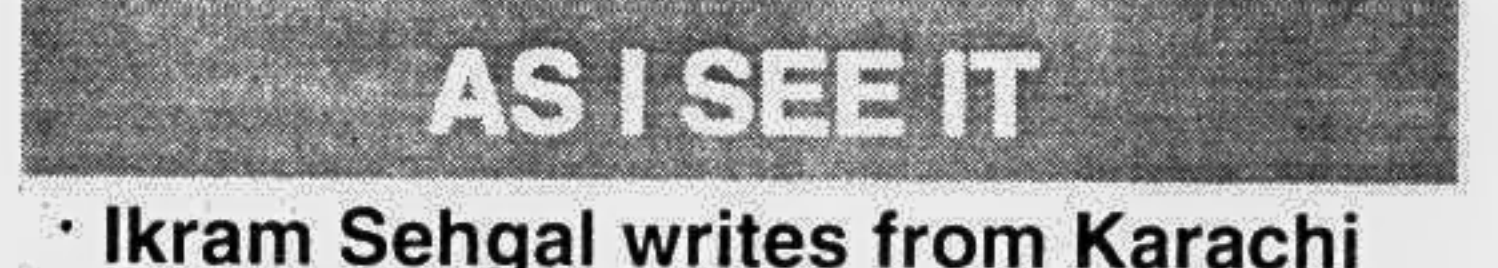
Demand reduction projects include painting exhibitions 'The Crusade against Narcotics', debates and declamations at school and college level, moving addicts to Rehabilitation Centers and publicity through the electronic and print media. A recent competition was organised in Karachi by the Regional Director ANF, Sindh. This was graced by Mr. Pino Arlacchi, Head of the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP). Mr. Arlacchi, who has the status of Under-Secretary in the UN, was eloquent about Pakistan's transformation from an almost impossible situation, he very vocally confirmed the ANF success story.

Just look at the list of drug bigwigs arrested: In 1997 — Muhammad Ali Baloch, Hussain Mahmood Haravi, Haji Saleem Memon, Ahmad Chartrawala, Haji Marjan and ex-DSP Mujtaba Ahmad Khan. In 1998 — Dawood Khan Pathan, Raees Ahmad, Saadullah Afridi, Sher Khan Samejo, Asst Director (Rtd) FIA Abdul Qayyum, SPO Customs Aslam Saroya, Customs Appraiser Soomro and Customs Examiner Abdul Jabbar Khan, Mahboob Rahman, etc. In 1999 —

Karana (Kenyan national), Jamal Khan Afridi, Sander John Bernard (British), Syed Asif Ali, Saheb alais Soorva, etc. And the seizures, 734 kgs heroin, 10280 kgs charas, 447 kgs opium, etc. In 1997. In 1998 175 kgs heroin, 17390 kgs charas and 20 kgs opium etc. Till date in 1999 137 kgs heroin, 839 kgs charas and 10 kgs opium — statistics speak for themselves (figures are updated till 15 May 99). More important, is the formation of the Assets Investigation Branch by the Government of Pakistan (GOP) which hunts out assets of drug barons acquired through drug money. With the establishment of the CNS Act, ANF Karachi has seized property worth Rs.2002.84 million, which has been frozen.

Obviously ANF has turned things around but there is no room for complacency. Karachi is in fact at the cutting edge of the fight against drugs because it is through this port city that maximum drugs used to be smuggled out. Brig Mukhtar Ahmed and his men live a dangerous existence but with aplomb and dedication they have achieved the impossible.

While Karachi is not drug free, it has certainly stopped being the principal conduit in this part of Asia. We are quick to criticise, let us take some time out to salute success of the brave men of the ANF who have successfully taken on the white powder trade, its tremendous power and influence, and has virtually destroyed it in Pakistan.



## AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

only a smattering of manpower from the Army to start with, he faced enormous problems. However with active help from the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Tirmizi did total house cleaning.

The PNCB was like a sieve, leaking information, virtually a unit of the drug barons who operated with impunity. By 1994, ANTF (now ANF) had been cleansed and transformed into the ANF. The nation owes a debt of gratitude to people like Tirmizi and his successors Maj Gen Mushtaq, who followed him in 1996 and the present incumbent Maj Gen Zafar Abbas,

Pakistan has become a net importer; instead of being a supply source, it has become a target of drug barons. The statistics of addiction are bad: from 3 million heroin addicts in 1993/94 we had reached 4 million in 1998, a growth rate of more than 7 per cent per annum. As such while we have been successful in interdicting the supply and eradicating manufacture to a near zero, we have yet to control its use.

The social problems include related law and order, unequal wealth through easy money and a breakdown of traditional values. The effort has now to be for