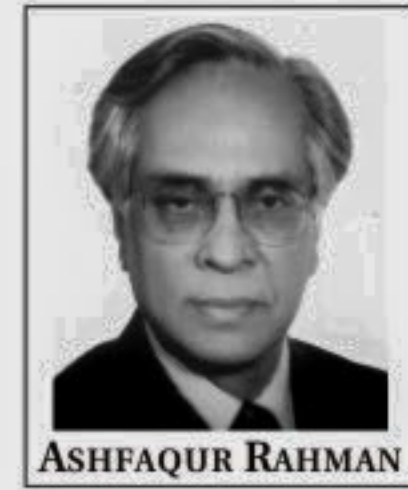


SUNDAY POUCH

A royal wedding is arranged



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

ON the morning of April 29, Prince William, the eldest son of Prince Charles and late Princess Diana Spencer of

Britain will marry a commoner. The bride is Kate Middleton, a class friend of Prince William, who has waited eight years to be married to this young prince. She is the first commoner in so close proximity to the throne since 1660 to marry a British prince.

About 2 billion people around the world are likely to watch on television this royal extravaganza. About 7,000 pressmen will descend on London, where the wedding will take place, to cover the events. 65 camera crews from around the world will line the wedding route. CNN alone will be fielding 125 correspondents to cover news and views on the set of ceremonies.

There will be over 2,000 street parties to celebrate the occasion. More than 856 street closures have therefore been requested to the local authorities in London and elsewhere in Britain.

The British tax-payer will dole out \$48 million to meet the expenses connected with the wedding of their prince. April 29, the day of the wedding, has been declared a public holiday. The loss to the British economy for not working will be another \$9.6 billion.

Prince William is second in line to the British throne after his father Prince Charles. A 28 year old handsome man with a receding hairline, he is very much a blue blood descendant of the House of Windsor.

But the present British royal family originally comes from Germany. In 1840 Queen Victoria of Britain married her cousin Prince Albert of the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha of Germany.

However, in the First World War

the British were fighting the Germans and Germans bombers called "Gotha" were raiding London. The British royal family thought it prudent then to change the family name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor. This was to bring back "Englishness" to the royal family which ruled Britain.

There is no doubt that this royal wedding might be the high-water mark for Britons as their economy is now passing through difficult times.

All the media attention on this wedding has also brought to the fore the relevance of the British monarchy today. The biggest complaint is that the royals "do not do enough to share their space and their inheritance within Britain."

Since the days of Prime Minister Thatcher, this conservative led government for the first time has made dramatic cutbacks in the public sector. Organised labour is promising serious retaliation.

Moreover, British exports are sluggish, consumer confidence is low, there is student unrest over education reform, immigration policy has failed and unemployment rate is high and rising. Britain is also going through a king-sized budget deficit with the British pound 25% lower in value than other major trading currencies.

The British have always turned to their monarchy in times of crises. This time too the royal wedding is expected to lift their spirits and lead to better management of their economy.

So, how many are invited to the wedding ceremonies? About 1,900 guests have been invited to the church services at Westminster Abbey in the morning. 650 invitees are going to the lunchtime reception at the Buckingham Palace hosted by Queen Elizabeth. Only 300 people are attending the evening dinner again at the Buckingham Palace given by Prince

William's father, Prince Charles.

Over 1,000 of those attending are either family or friends of Prince William or Miss Middleton. We wonder whether the Bangladesh High Commissioner in UK will be a guest too?

The couple has decided not to accept any wedding gifts. They have selected twenty-six world wide charities where all gifts can be sent and the monies will be used for their good causes. One of the charities

that are likely to benefit is for the protection and conservation of our Royal Bengal Tiger in the Sundarbans.

Now, who is this 29 year old bride-to-be Kate Middleton? She was a student with Prince William in Saint Andrews University.

Kate's mother Carole Middleton is a former airline stewardess. The Middleton family lives in the small village of Bucklebury in Berkshire. The family runs an internet based business selling children's party items, called "Party Pieces." Essentially a mail order business it was founded by Kate's mother and father Michael in 1987. Today, they are millionaires after making profits from this business.

The marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton and all the festivities brings back into focus the future of British monarchy. The wedding is taking place in the 21st century "on the heels of a whole generation of royal marital failures." Three of Queen Elizabeth's four children's, and her own sister's, marriage have all ended in divorce.

Prince William's marriage perforce is now in the public eye just as his mother Princess Diana's wed-

ding was under deep public scrutiny. The British monarchy could be irreparably damaged if this royal marriage fails.

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The official cost of maintaining the British monarchy is about \$60 million each year. With Britain having a population of 60 million it costs \$1 per person per year. This amount does not include cost of protecting the royal family, nor the ceremonial duties the British armed forces fulfill during royal occasions. To many the financial burden is irksome and not necessary. The return to the public to maintain the system is not worth the cost.

Yet, the monarchy thrives well. This is because Queen Elizabeth still enjoys 80% popularity rating in the UK. She has been the Head of the British state for almost 60 years. She has seen 10 British prime ministers come and go and has known every US president since Harry Truman.

It is only after the Queen leaves the scene that things may really start to unravel. Unless Prince Charles, who succeeds her, changes things by curtailing the royal opulence, the British people might not accept this lavish life-style. There are strong republican rumblings.

So in the end, it seems to devolve on Prince William and Kate Middleton to work hard to make the British monarchy relevant. But do they have the gumption to do it?

But we need not worry so much about that distant future. Let all of us in Bangladesh wish this beautiful young couple our best wishes for a happy conjugal life. *Amader antorik subechha!*

The writer is a former Ambassador and Chairman of the Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies. E-mail: ashfaq303@hotmail.com

Risks from illegal billboards

Rajuk failure is unpardonable

ILLEGAL hoardings and billboards atop buildings and on roads in the capital remain a clear danger to citizens. The danger rises now that the season of storms is upon us. The first manifestation of it came last Wednesday when a huge billboard collapsed at Mirpur Road during a storm. While storms are a regular climatic happening in Bangladesh, what should not be regular is a deliberate flouting of judicial pronouncements on such matters as a removal of unauthorized billboards. Despite a specific High Court order on Rajuk in April last year that all such hoardings and billboards be removed, hardly anything has been done to comply with the order. The chairman of Rajuk now informs us that a lack of manpower has prevented an implementation of the HC directive. That begs the question: how is it that in an entire year Rajuk has not had the capacity to remove the billboards? Besides, why has it not come forth with any explanations about its failure until now?

It is extremely unfortunate that despite specific judicial directives, Rajuk has not moved towards pulling down the illegal billboards. It should have been its responsibility, when the HC revoked a stay order on the removal of the billboards in April 2010, to take swift action against those behind the erection of the billboards. That it did not has not only demonstrated a huge degree of callousness on its part but also, and more importantly, meant a heightened level of danger to citizens. The point here is not just that there is a risk to people from billboards during a storm. It is also the dark possibility of these billboards falling on the roads and on passersby at any given moment. That said, there is the obvious wrong the firms whose billboards have been put up have committed by not taking such factors into consideration. Where the standard rule around the world is for such hoardings to be placed at points where people are not vulnerable, it is highly mystifying that in Bangladesh no such precautions are taken.

We demand that Rajuk get moving by removing the billboards immediately. We also ask that the firms behind the billboards be roped into the job. They must not escape their responsibility.

Unsettled hill people

They need roofs to live under

SINCE last week's violent clashes between the Bengali settlers and the indigenous people in Ramgarh some of the latter have become homeless as reports suggest. More than fifty eight families were affected. Many of these people are now reportedly starving and living in open due to loss of abodes and belongings.

The foremost task of the administration is to settle these affected people. Why must the processes of rehabilitation face delay because the district administration is yet to prepare the list of affected families? We understand the authorities received varying figures of victimization, casualty and demands for compensation from different local union parishads. The authorities must independently verify the status of the affected families and individuals without being influenced by any quarter.

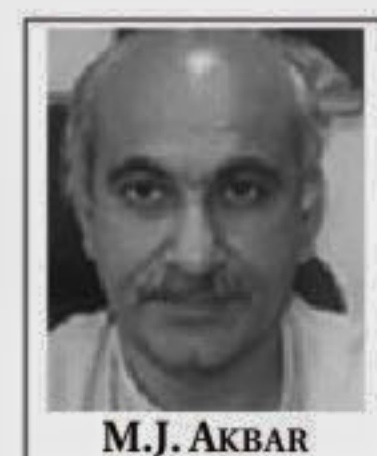
After what happened in Khagrachari should be a sufficient eye-opener to come to grips with the land disputes as early as possible in order to remove the portents of conflicts between the plainland settlers and the indigenous population.

How well the minorities are treated is increasingly becoming a test of good governance. It is the responsibility of the government and the hill tracts administration to find a durable solution to this social friction rooted in disputes over land. Resolution of the problems is a necessary precondition to all round development in the resourceful CHT region.

The CHT Land Commission should immediately devise ways and means to settle the land disputes on mutually acceptable basis. Overall, an inclusive, transparent and fair minded policy should be adopted so that the indigenous communities' rights to landownership and pursuit of happi-

BYLINE

Smile of the banyan



M.J. AKBAR

DOES one have to be as old as Anna Hazare to remember India's freedom struggle? We were sitting in the shade of a

magnificent banyan, a marvel that dominated the single-storey brick structures and temple that constitute his work complex in the village Ralengansiddhi, some 90 minutes by car from Pune. So often during our conversation he addressed this question, sometimes to me and sometimes it seemed to himself: what was that marathon, non-violent war against the British all about? Had all we managed to do was replace white colonists with those of a darker hue?

We ate a simple lunch of local corn, yoghurt and roti, brought by an enthusiastic well-wisher, in a small slap-up building consisting of a claustrophobic living room stuffed with sofas, a dining room barely larger than the dining table, and a comparatively spacious washroom, a few minutes drive away. This was not built by the Anna trust, but by the Maharashtra government.

The amenities were not meant for Anna, but for His Excellent Excellency the Governor, who had decided to bestow personal benediction upon Maharashtra's most famous village. Apparently, His Majesty the Governor's office decided that a plastic chair, or a charpoy, would be too uncomfortable for the Governor's buttocks, and so put up this house for the two

hours that His Notably Notable Honour would spend in the village.

The shock at waste lingers in Anna's voice as he repeats this anecdote. When he asked officials why they were wasting people's money, they offered protocol as the excuse. Such protocol, said Anna, might have been considered necessary during British rule, but why was it still in place in free India?

There was a moment when he was young, said Anna, when he

Why should we destroy the great edifice of our Constitution merely because those in power have lost their respect for it? Throw out the mucky bathwater, Anna, but please hold on to the baby.

seriously contemplated suicide because he could not find a purpose to life. Then he chanced upon a book by Swami Vivekanand at a railway bookstall, and found his raison d'etre: service.

Quaint? Naive? A bit too pious for a world consumed in the terrifying struggle for the next promotion, the next holiday, the next slippery road to some extra income (source irrelevant)?

His smile is the antidote of cynicism, which is probably why Delhiwhere most smiles are dipped in grease dismisses him as either a sanctimonious humbug or, at best, "simple." The second is the verdict of friends. Simplicity, it needs to be noted, is not a compliment in power-obsessed Delhi. In Ralengansiddhi, where emotions are

untouched by mercenary need, Anna is loved precisely because he is without guile. His first name is not "Anna." This appellation, meaning elder brother, is an amalgam of the respect and affection that captures the essence of his character.

This essence sparked some long-awaited fire in the young of urban India when Anna went on a fast because they understood, instinctively and instantly, that Anna's reward lay in what he could give,

not in what he could take away.

The band on his wagon is of course another story. There is no point in translating the Hindi phrase "Shivji's baraat" as "Lord Shiva's wedding" because the cultural chasm between the two is simply too wide. Suffice it to say that, along with the sincere, caring and honest, every hustler is also out with his trumpet, and every peacock and peahen has arrived to join the dance.

One senses that Hazare is possibly less dangerous to the government than to the NGO industry, because so many do-gooders turn up with excess baggage, much of it slipped through the rules. When the rules fight back, such guardians of morality use the classic weapon of a hustle: drown out the alternative

narrative by screaming at the top of your voice.

Politicians have the merit of being predictable. If there are votes on the bandwagon they will ride it at high speed, always wearing a safety belt of course. They prefer not to die, or even risk injury, in any impending crash. The hospital of politics can be very inhospitable.

There will be a crash or two in the journey towards the creation of a national ombudsman for honesty, armed with effective powers that can slice through the comfort zone of wealth and authority. Some cuts to the draft of the proposed Lokpal bill might even be necessary for its arrival: I was aghast at the thought that the august Lokpal would be elected by a self-appointed club of worthies including Nobel Prize winners of Indian origin. V.S. Naipaul, where are you when we need you? The India you find despicable, your area of darkness, cries out for you!

The most important question was raised by Mayawati, even if she could not resist the temptation to politicise her question. Is the Indian Constitution corrupt? Why should we destroy the great edifice of our Constitution merely because those in power have lost their respect for it? Throw out the mucky bathwater, Anna, but please hold on to the baby.

The columnist is Editor, *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, *India on Sunday*, published from London and Editorial Director, *India Today* and *Headlines Today*.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 24

1877
Russo-Turkish War: Russian Empire declares war on Ottoman Empire.

1926
The Treaty of Berlin is signed. Germany and the Soviet Union each pledge neutrality in the event of an attack on the other by a third party for the next five years.

1953
Winston Churchill is knighted by Queen Elizabeth II.

1957
Suez Crisis: The Suez Canal is reopened following the introduction of UNEF peacekeepers to the region.

1967
Vietnam War: American General William Westmoreland says in a news conference that the enemy had "gained support in the United States that gives him hope that he can win politically that which he cannot win militarily."

1975
Baader-Meinhof blow up embassy. A tense stand-off at the West German embassy in Stockholm ends in violence.

2005
Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger is inaugurated as the 265th Pope of the Roman Catholic Church taking the name Pope Benedict XVI.

2006
King Gyanendra of Nepal gives into the demands of protesters and restores the parliament that he dissolved in 2002.