**Professional grace**

B Y F.S. AIJAZUD D IN | 10/24/2019

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| KING Farouk of Egypt once said, during a game of whist, that in the end there would be only five kings left the four kings in a deck of cards, and the king of England.If ever affirmation was needed of his prescience, it was provided by the recent visit to Pakistan of the present Queen`s grandson William, Duke of Cambridge and his wife Catherine. As the eldest son of the Prince of Wales, William is next in line after his father Prince Charles. He stands literally two heartbeats away from the British throne.He and his wife came to Pakistan ostensibly at the request of the British Foreign & Commonwealth Relations Office. At that level, the visit was a refrain of earlier official visits by children and grandchildren of the monarch from the days of Queen Victoria.Before 1947, they were sent to be introduced to parts of the British Empire they would in time inherit. Prince Albert Edward (later Edward VII) came in 1876, his son Prince Albert Victor in 1896, his brother later King George V visited twice first as the Prince of Wales in 1905 and again in 1911 as king-emperor of India.Edward VIII (the monarch who abdicated the throne) was introduced to India while still Prince of Wales.After Pakistan`s independence, Queen Elizabeth II as head of the Commonwealth made two trips to Pakistan, in 1961 and in 1997. Her son Charles and his wife Camilla visited Pakistan in 2006 and after a gap of 13 years, his son William accompanied by his wife Catherine the next generation of royalty spent five days learning about a country that had such a hold over William`s mother the late Diana, Princess of Wales.Visits by royalty are very carefully orchestrated. Every detail of the places they will visit, the people they should meet, the logistics of travel, the choices of colours the prime royal female will wear all are predetermined with precise aforethought. A shoal of palace staff and security details from Scotland Yard come well in advance to reconnoitre and to interact with local officials.Once the programme is crystallised, everyone responsible for its smooth implementation knows what is be done and who is to do it. Little is left to chance, except the weather as the Cambridges discovered when their plane could not land in Islamabad owing to a thunderstorm. It returned to Lahore where overnight accommodation for an 80-strong entourage (including the press) had to be hurriedly arranged by the British High Commission at a local hotel.The patience that the royal couple displayed throughout their trip could have been an example to those to whom bad manners have become an art-form. Ministersand bureaucrats egged on by their spouses jostled for invitations. Invitees complained that they were not introduced to the royal couple individually. Tardy ones who arrived late cavilled at being refused entry. An over-perfumed imam dressed in white flowing robes Lawrence of Arabia would have envied insisted on explaining the history of the Badshahi mosque as if it was his family`s chronicle. Who better to see through hereditary pretensions than a hereditary monarch-to-be? The only persons who did not behave as if they should have been the centre of attention were the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge themselves. Their smiles were infectious, their good humour untiring, their graciousness disarming. They followed their official programme with a practised expertise, whether it involved alighting from a decorated tuk-tuk rickshaw at Shakarparian, dancing with the Kalash in Chitral, participating in an interfaith dia-logue, playing cricket at the Pakistan Cricket Board, or sharing a birthday cake with an orphan in the SOS village.Unseen by the public was the second visit the royals made (at the duchess`s request) to the SOS Village inLahore. She wanted to spend time with the children alone, sans press, sans formality.The couple had left their own three young children at home in Kensington Palace. For that brief private time at the SOS, they became proxy parents to orphans who never had any.At a less official level, the duke felt impelled to share with his wife sights that had captivated his mother Diana. They followed her footprints in Islamabad, Chitral and Lahore. They would have continued to Peshawar and the Khyber Pass, had bad weather not shortened their last day.Even royalty needs feedback about their performance. Courtiers convey compliments; the public fodders truth. Someone was overheard telling the royal couple that if one word could describe their visit, it would be `joy`. `You have spread so much joy on this visit.` The duke gave an unrehearsed reply: `We are very happy people`.The Cambridges demonstrated that it takes generations to perfect such professional grace.  The writer is an author and historian.www.fsaijazuddin.pk |  |