

OBITUARY

Dr Saadat Husain: a fearless, upright civil servant

SYED NAQUIB MUSLIM

DR Saadat Husain, a career civil servant of Bangladesh, passed away on April 22 at United Hospital after suffering from meningitis and renal complications. Born in 1946 in Noakhali, he earned a Master's degree in Economics from the University of Dhaka before joining the Civil Service of Pakistan in 1970.

While working as a probationary officer in the former Narail subdivision, he joined the Liberation War in 1971 and directly contributed to wartime efforts. His book *Muktijoddhader Din-Dinanto* is an authentic chronicle of the events of 1971 and about the contributions made by freedom fighters in that region.

Dr Saadat assumed the prestigious office of Cabinet Secretary from 2002 to 2005. In this capacity, he took up the task of reorganising and rationalising the division of work and formulating a fresh manual of officers' job descriptions, all of which were in shambles before he took up the task of rectifying this. Later, he was appointed the ninth Chairman of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC), a constitutional body that he turned into a highly professional recruiting agency of the government; and most

importantly, he made it corruption-free.

He was elementally a reformer; wherever he worked, he acted as an agent of change, bringing constructive changes in the public interest. Starting from his position as Registrar at the Department of Co-operatives up to Chairman of the PSC, he succeeded in making positive transformations from within and turning these institutions into dynamic, credible, and people-friendly ones.

After his retirement from the civil service, he was elected President of the Bangladesh Society for Training and Development (BSTD), which was created in 1980. He succeeded Sheikh Maqsood Ali, who was the founder-president of this society, and turned it into a seat of synergic union and collaboration between government organisations and NGOs for training officials and developing professionalism in their respective fields. Dr Saadat was noted for recruiting people for education and training purposes irrespective of caste, creed and political affiliation as President of BSTD, where he worked with zeal and commitment. He elevated this passive entity into a dynamic and popular human resources development centre, and under his enterprising and inspiring leadership, BSTD has



PHOTO: COLLECTED

been able to set up wide networks at the regional and global levels. He also headed two major public sector training institutes—the BCS (Admin) Academy and BARD, Comilla.

Dr Saadat was a vigilant and decisive supervisor, and at the same time, he was very supportive, friendly and protective of his junior colleagues, and he took his responsibility of instructing them with on-the-job training very seriously. As Cabinet Secretary, he intensively monitored the punctuality of the Deputy Commissioners (DC) of all 64 districts. When I was working as DC in Dhaka, he once phoned me at 8:55 am to check whether I was at

office and was very pleased to hear my voice; he believed in following the rules and doing the right thing—it was a way of life for him.

A committed educator and trainer, he believed every public servant must be ready to be a life-long learner and to share that learning with others to assume future leadership positions in the civil service. Wherever he worked, he displayed genuine professionalism as a leader and never practiced nepotism in inducting employees and trainees. As a guardian to junior colleagues, he used to provide unwavering support to those who faced undue harassment from disgruntled politicians. He was a fearless administrator, his courage blended with compassion, and it is a huge pity that some heads of public sector human resources centres showed a planned indifference towards him due to this perceived risk.

"Publish or perish" was his principle. In the civil service, there are many talkers but significantly few writers. Dr Saadat was one of these significant few. He was a prolific writer who produced a number of books and wrote many articles for newspapers, including *The Daily Star*, and regularly contributed columns in Kaler Kantho, a Bangla daily. His most recent publication

(2019) was *Nichu Shorey Uchu Kotha*, an anthology of 130 articles based on his own experiences. As an expert opinion frequently heard in the media, he earned a reputation as a straightforward and honest civil servant who was a spokesperson of the conscious, enlightened citizenry.

Father of one son and two daughters, he was very affectionate to his family members. A God-fearing person, he never used to miss his prayers five times a day, despite how much he worked. He was definitely a workaholic, and Dr Saadat was not careful about his own health. He did not enjoy respite for a single day after retirement from public service. He died in peace, without ever having been a source of pain to anyone. I'm reminded of the words of Elizabeth Kobler-Ross—"watching a peaceful death of a human being reminds us of a falling star; one of a million lights in a vast sky that flares up for a brief moment only to disappear into the endless night for ever."

He is no more among us, but his values and works will continue to inspire the present and future generations, and through this legacy, he will be remembered forever.

Dr Syed Naquib Muslim, PhD is a freelancer and retired Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh.

Of panic and pandemic

The devastating psychology at play



IQRA L QAMARI

REMEMBER that cruel, old joke about the bear and the two men—the one where upon being attacked, one of them, panicky, starts hurrying with the intention of outrunning the grizzly carnivore, while the other, appearing more relaxed, says to the other, "I don't have to outrun the bear, just you"? This year we saw this twisted, insensitive joke play out in real life. Pictures of rows of empty supermarket shelves and gallows humour filled the internet because people were hoarding non-perishable essentials at the cost of denying others a chance, and that too at the onset of a pandemic.

Panic-buying has been quite a recurring phenomenon throughout the history of pandemics—during the 1918 Spanish Flu, sales of Vicks VapoRub soared from 900,000 to almost 3 million within just a year and this time, curiously, it was toilet rolls. This bizarre reaction has (unfortunately) been deemed to be quite "human" by psychologists. When the illusion of control, otherwise maintained by our brain, shatters in a crisis mode, we do everything in our power to feel in charge again—stockpiling for instance. Other experts believe this behaviour to be a derivative of fear itself.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The threat of such an aggressive outbreak can fall really heavy on the collective psyche of the entire human race. It can push the mind of the average person reeling towards a state of crippling anxiety, existential stress, depression and even suicidal tendencies—as attested by several grim reports showing a 30 percent increase in suicides among the elderly during the 2003 SARS epidemic. This time, tens of thousands of lives have already been lost, economies are kneecapped and so much more is at stake that the

contagion is being labelled as divine retribution. It is not only our immune systems the virus has permeated and jeopardised, but also our jobs, communal life, education, dreams—you name it. It has compelled societies to adopt new ways of operating as a trial run. Even before the pandemic, the world was inching towards digitisation but now after the outbreak, the process is almost getting cemented. There might be a shift in our working structures and that in itself is cause for more career anxiety among many.

The global arrangement of things, be it world politics or the interconnected web of trade and transnationalism,

their shoes next.

The only means of containing this outbreak or to "flatten the curve" for now is via mass lockdown, which, in turn, has sharpened the curves of unemployment, recession and homelessness. Since mass starvation is no longer a distant reality, it won't be long before we witness a rampant increase in theft and robbery. The only chance at respite from such horrors—being close to friends and loved ones—has also been lost for many. According to Anna Freud's famous study during World War II, the breakdown of relationships during a crisis is often the most jarring part. The increased

translational responsibilities—when Italy, the then hotbed of the virus, pleaded for medical assistance via the Emergency Response Coordination Centre from the other EU members, not a single country came forward, leaving Italy to its fate; two completely different scenarios of moral failure and yet a caricature of one another.

As the contagion rages on, another of its ugly manifestations is becoming more visible: a flaring xenophobia. It has been found that escalated fear during a pandemic distorts social attitude towards immigration as people become more tribalistic and conservative in nature. Studies surrounding the "Behavioural Immune System"—the psychological process of detecting an infected subject and preventing contact with it—show this is a "better safe than sorry" approach. Another interesting notion known as the "Parasite-stress Theory"—which explores how infectious diseases influence the psychology and sociology of humans—indicate the idea that foreigners who look different could have a different immune system and thus could be carriers of unfamiliar diseases. Or this racial discrimination could simply stem from sheer ignorance and deep-seated broad generalisations. The very name Covid-19 was chosen in a manner avoiding any sort of associations with geographical locations like in previous times—Ebola, Spanish flu (a misnomer in itself), or the Zika virus—to avoid social stigma. The need for WHO guidelines to remind us not to "attach the disease to any particular ethnicity or nationality" or to "be empathetic to all those who are affected, in and from any country" are a crude reminder that unlike the coronavirus which does not discriminate—based on ethnicity, skin colour, gender or economic status—we do.

The pandemic in a digital world is causing a different kind of psychological war. People's attentional capacity is dominated by a deluge of news and misinformation related to the coronavirus, leaving them dissonant

and traumatised. They get mentally exhausted despite not even getting much work done, which causes many to be laden with guilt for not achieving some sort of heroic quarantine productivity. Perhaps the situation has been best described by this woman in Pennsylvania—"I think of it like having a few large apps on my phone that are running and draining the battery, even when I'm not using them". We are repeatedly being forewarned by behavioural scientists about an unimaginable scale of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) cases that will result after the storm passes. And even though the world is holding its breath for a miraculous vaccine, its discovery is poised to be threatened by vaccine hesitancy. Our battle, it seems, has just begun.

This, however, is not about to end on a grave note because even though an semblance of normalcy is far-fetched and even if we are trapped, we are not powerless. According to Dr Steven Taylor, author of *The Psychology of Pandemics*, we will witness a rise of altruism and so far, he has been correct. Countless are responding with generous acts, humans and establishments alike—debt standstills are being implemented all over, millions of donations are being made, people are checking up on loved ones and the appreciation for frontline workers has reached a never-before-seen zenith. Never has there been such separation among humans which has prompted such solidarity. Never has there been such a synchronous global collaboration of the medical and scientific community for the salvation of humanity. One can only hope that the world leaders too will follow suit, that governments and citizens will unite and face this common, "biblical" enemy, head on and together. Despite this cataclysm we are going through right now, there is hope and we must outrageously hold onto that.

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PHOTO: COLLECTED

has all been brought to a staggering halt, blow after blow. The contagion has ruthlessly laid bare the flaws in some of the alleged best healthcare systems. When the number of beds and ventilators available is outnumbered by the number of infected cases by a frightening margin, then fear and distrust of the government spreads faster than the virus itself. Thousands have not been able to give their loved ones a proper burial—the tremendous grief and sense of loss their minds are having to process might be difficult for others to register, and yet it hits so close to home because anyone could be in

social isolation, economic downturn and uncertainty about the future are the perfect mixture to successfully brew a rise in alcohol consumption and drug abuse. The air is filled with not just traces of the virus, but a palpable frustration that is already wreaking havoc on relationships—reports of domestic violence are soaring amid this lockdown. In our very little country, there have been harrowing accounts of families cutting off one of their own, suspecting him/her to be carriers, and just leaving them in the throes of death. Even nations, married in union, have shamefully failed to uphold their

QUOTABLE Quote

ALDOUS HUXLEY
(1894-1963)
British author

The most valuable of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it has to be done, whether you like it or not.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Lasagna or linguine
- 6 High-muck-a-muck
- 11 Rocker John
- 12 Dwelling
- 13 Isolated
- 14 Raised to the third power
- 15 Dragon fighter
- 17 Flower visitor
- 19 Status --
- 20 Notice
- 23 Skyliit court
- 25 Small fastener
- 26 Hamlet's creator
- 28 Paella base
- 29 Jeer from the stands
- 30 Tennis feat
- 31 Sinking signal
- 32 Twisty turn
- 33 Car quartet
- 35 Fragrant wood
- 38 Confiscates
- 41 Martini garnish
- 42 Acid type
- 43 Human, for one
- 44 Yellow-gray

DOWN

- 1 Soup sphere
- 2 The Matter-horn, for one
- 3 Belmont, e.g.
- 4 Of two minds
- 5 Collector's buy
- 6 Chip choice
- 7 Touch on
- 8 Move up and down
- 9 Shelley work
- 10 Nap site
- 16 Shamus
- 17 Iraqi port
- 18 Moral code
- 20 Leather type
- 21 Some nobles
- 22 Fencing swords
- 24 Mammie's husband
- 25 Brief time
- 27 Old Spanish money
- 31 Tatter
- 33 Surfer's ride
- 34 Tibetan monk
- 35 Potential pipe
- 36 New Haven student
- 37 Party staple
- 39 Stop
- 40 Tofu base

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

D	A	M	O	N	H	I	S
E	R	O	D	E	T	O	S
C	A	L	E	B	E	L	L
I	B	I	S	P	A	T	E
D	I	E	T	O	P	S	E
E	A	R	T	H	D	A	Y
N	E	A	R	R	E	A	R
G	A	S	L	A	V	I	E
U	N	H	O	L	I	M	A
S	N	A	R	E	R	O	S
T	I	M	E	R	A	G	E
S	E	E	S	F	O	R	T

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT