

# A business leader of incorruptible integrity

MAMUN RASHID

I received a short message on my phone just before noon on July 1 but could not notice it properly due to office work. The message was from Shehzi Huq that read, "My Abbu is with his dotting Shazneen and Chotoo now, Rabbir Hum Huma Kama Rabbayani Sageera." Later, one of my colleagues informed me that Mr Shamim Latifur Rahman passed away in his sleep in the late morning. I was devastated to hear the news about a person who was probably the most respected name in Bangladesh's business community for his high ethical and moral standards.

As I started to write this piece, past memories came rushing back to me. Shamim bhai was not only a good businessman but also a good soul, a well-educated and self-educated person. I had known him for more than three decades, since 1987. Transcom's office was located at 52 Motijheel, almost next to our ANZ Grindlays Bank. I had been closely associated with his businesses in many ways. We were associated in the process of acquisition of Philips, Pepsi, partial stake taking in Nestlé and Holcim, the opening of the LC for the first consignment of machines and papers for *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*. It feels just like the other day. His leadership as president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), the many meetings at my home, at his home, in his car, in hotel lobbies, at the residences of ambassadors, on planes and even outside the country—there are so many memories. We had meetings in Mumbai, Delhi, and in our Hong Kong and London offices.

All my seniors in the corporate sector used

to hold him in high regard. I have personally observed the level of admiration and respect he used to command from global corporate leaders like Indra Nooyi, former CEO of PepsiCo Global, Sanjeev Mehta, Unilever's South Asia Head, and Ajaypal Banga, Global CEO of MasterCard, who was formerly East India Sales Head of Nestlé and Pepsi and later my reporting senior at Citibank NA. Even PwC global Chairman Bob Moritz in November last year was enquiring about his friend Latifur Rahman from the ICC global committee, where Mr Moritz was the president.

I took him to my classes at North South University, IBA and BRAC Business Schools to deliver lectures on "business ethics". One of his lectures at Standard Chartered Bank was on "What do we expect from a global bank?"

He was shaken by the death of his youngest daughter Shazneen Rahman, and then again by the death of his grandson, the young and brave Faraaz. But he was not broken; he was composed and dignified. He had been suffering from asthma for some time. So, he used to live in his village home surrounded by greenery.

Shamim bhai loved this country very much. Whenever we met somewhere, he used to ask me to send my car back and offered to drop me home so that he could talk on our way back. We used to have discussions on issues such as good business practices and governance in the country. He was genuinely concerned about the high number of non-performing loans and reckless lending by banks. He was a strong critic of repeated rescheduling of non-performing loans. He used to tell us that MCCI should always oppose the opportunity extended for



Latifur Rahman (1945-2020).

PHOTO: STAR

whitening black money. He felt that such a chance is an injustice to honest businessmen who pay taxes regularly.

Just a few days ago, I sent him a short message inquiring about his wellbeing. I was thinking of paying a sudden visit to his home at Chaudagram to see him. But that was not to happen!

My last travel with him was to Mumbai, where we spent two days together at the Taj Lands End. He was voted the best businessman in the region. Mahbubur Rahman from HSBC, Shams Zaman from Citibank NA and I accompanied him from Bangladesh. We saw how much respect he

commanded from the renowned businessmen of India. Our good friend Sanjeev Mehta of Unilever almost touched his feet to pay his respect to him. Shamim bhai delivered an excellent speech on his vision and ethics in business. After returning to Bangladesh, we arranged a reception to honour and celebrate his achievement. In 2012, he became the first Bangladeshi businessperson to receive the prestigious Oslo Business for Peace Award.

I met him for the last time at his house during the farewell dinner of the US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat. He was coughing a lot and taking deep breath while talking. His European friends advised him to

buy a country house somewhere in France or England and live in a pollution-free environment. I told him, "What's the harm? It will be good for your health." He was unhappy to hear that and said, "I will stay at my village home, that is no less."

Shamim bhai used to say that businessmen should not get involved in politics. If they put sincere efforts into business, more people will get jobs and the country will move forward. Those who have worked with him would know that he trusted each of them a lot and allowed them to work independently and gave them the opportunity to lead. By virtue of his work, dedication and faithfulness, he became an iconic businessman who was well known in the international arena. He kept close contact with each and every good employee of the different companies of his group. He used to motivate and encourage them regularly.

I have never seen him compromise on the question of ethics and morality. He was also a person who implanted family values within his family. He loved his wife, children and grandchildren very dearly. He used to tell his grandchildren, "Wherever you go for higher studies, you have to come back to the country and work here. Bangladesh is your final address." My respect is also for his children and grandchildren as they are also among the finest people I have met.

The departure of such a good soul is painful. But the Almighty has a better plan for each one of us, especially a person like him. May Shamim bhai rest in peace.

Mamun Rashid is former CEO of Citibank NA, Corporate and Institutional Banking Head at Standard Chartered Bank and Commercial Banking Head at ANZ Grindlays Bank Bangladesh, and currently Country Managing Partner at PwC Bangladesh.

## A hitchhiker's guide to our educational galaxy



SHAMSAD MORTUZA

LET'S admit it: our education today is in crisis. And it was in crisis even before the pandemic was here. The pandemic has exposed the skeletons we have been hiding in the open for a long time. As we begin the centenary celebration of the oldest university

in the country, Dhaka University, we need to reflect on the "splendid imperial concession" that had made the establishment of the university possible. The birth of Dhaka University is tinged with a colonial legacy. And the university came of age when students voiced a resounding "no" to the introduction of Urdu as the state language of Pakistan. That collective "no" became the voice of the nation and eventually paved the way for the country's political freedom. The middle-class students managed to excite the imagination of the masses to pursue their freedom; it is no coincidence that the centennial celebration coincides with that of the Father of the Nation who came to political prominence during his days in Dhaka University. It is the shining star of our educational galaxy.

Then again, Dhaka University epitomises the paradoxes of our education system: it airs the fresh breath of freedom, yet it has not been able to break away from the shackles of colonial pedagogy.

The university has failed to take leadership in the academic field, update its curricula keeping pace with the best practices of the world, and form a national consciousness on knowledge development highlighting the needs for indigenisation and decolonisation. The university has simply managed to promote a fallacy that you learn more simply by loitering in the corridors of the university and pursue success by queuing up for a seat in the library at the break of dawn to sit with your BCS guidebooks. The university results have become secondary to those in competitive exams. This is symptomatic of a weak system that has stopped instilling hope in its students. Students are left to their own devices where they learn (read, memorise) on their own to become civil servants. Then there are the other groups who try to expose them to the corporate culture and eventually become grasshoppers in the service sector. These business-minded students try to blend in a corporate ecology only for a while and

sail away whenever the wind is right. We have two kinds of outputs: one group simply adds to the ring of a deeply rooted, ageing tree of bureaucracy, and the other drifts away like a dandelion with no roots of its own. If ends justify the means, surely there is something wrong with the means.

You must be thinking that with 150-plus universities in the block, why flog the old horse which is one hundred years old? It is because Dhaka University is the corpse of the century that contains "the ancient pulse of germ and breath... shrunken hard and dry" (*The Darkling Thrush* by Thomas Hardy), and we must resuscitate it not only to revive one institution but also our entire education system. Dhaka University must set the standard for others. In the absence of a local heritage, we are becoming mimic

indigenous knowledge systems and making them evident to transform spaces, places, and hearts" (Antoine et al. *Curriculum Developers*). This process demands a blend of indigenous approaches and Western ones. Decolonisation, on the other hand, challenges and defies the privileged positioning of colonial ideologies and Western thoughts and approaches.

The supremacy of the west is best detected in Rudyard Kipling's "*The Ballad of East and West*". The opening line of the poem claims, "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." Tagore in his essay "Creative Unity" responded to such a proposition by saying that West views the East as nothing more than a machine to run its empire. It misses to identify the human elements in us. Hence Tagore rephrased



Dhaka University is the corpse of the century that contains "the ancient pulse of germ and breath... shrunken hard and dry."

STAR FILE PHOTO

men, constantly looking for overseas benchmarks and success stories. More and more, institutions are pursuing the golden deer of world rankings and international markers. Unless our students are made proud of their heritage, they will be deceived by the corporate instruments of rankings that privilege cash investment above everything else.

I am not asking for any largescale rejection of western parameters. Any two of the terms I broached earlier would help you understand my position. Indigenisation, for instance, "is a process of naturalising

the line, saying, "Man is man, machine is machine, and never the twain shall wed."

Similarly, our educators too must remind ourselves of the human elements that form the basis of our indigenous pedagogy. Historically, we had a rich tradition of imparting knowledge that involved the *gurukul* (a mentor-mentee system). Then of course, from the 5th to the 12th centuries, the Buddhist monasteries had a serious impact on our education. Nalanda (in present-day Bihar) is a UNESCO heritage site that is dubbed the oldest university-system of education in the world. The architectural

remains of Paharpur resembling Nalanda suggest that we too have the shared legacy of education. It was a time when education was considered to be a higher virtue practiced by the monks and the novices on the order of teaching. With the advent of Islam, *madrasas* and *maktabs* were established to teach grammar, philosophy, mathematics, and law influenced by the Greek traditions inherited by Persia and the Middle East. This traditional Islamic education emphasised the importance of a connection between science and humanities. When the British came in, they deemed new applications of local education. The East India Company wanted some educated Indians to assist them in the administration of the land. They needed some local educated agents who would help them understand the local customs and laws. The establishments of the Calcutta Madrasa by Warren Hastings in 1781 for the teaching of Muslim law and a Sanskrit College in Varanasi by Jonathan Duncan in 1791 for the study of Hindu philosophy and laws are cases in point.

Conversely, the missionaries facilitated the spread of Western education in India primarily for Christianising (which they deemed equivalent to "civilising") the natives. The British government was thus divided in their views on what kind of education was to be offered to the Indians. While the orientalist preferred Indians to be given traditional Indian education, the other groups wanted a western style of education with western subjects being taught to the locals. (Our three-track education system today continues to ring the same division bells).

In 1835, Lord William Bentinck's government decided that western sciences and literature would be imparted to Indians through the medium of English. Bentinck appointed Thomas Babington Macaulay, an ardent anglicist who had absolute contempt for Indian learning, as the Chairman of the General Committee of Public Instruction. Macaulay Minutes on Education 1835 became definitive for the education that we have inherited. In his proposal of education for the Indians, Macaulay considered the oriental culture to be "defective" and "unholy". He proposed English education in place of traditional Indian learning and offering of education to a few upper and middle-class students. His infiltration theory involved the idea that in the course of time, education would trickle down to the masses. He wanted to create "brown coconut" like *sahibs* who would be brown outside, but

"white" inside. In short, Macaulayism is the policy of eliminating indigenous culture through a planned substitution with the alien culture of a colonising power via the education system.

In 1854, this changed slightly when there was an attempt to spread education by Sir Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control of the company. Wood sent a dispatch to the then Governor-General of India, Lord Dalhousie. This "Wood's Dispatch" is often called the "Magna Carta of English education in India" as it recommended, among others, the reformation of education system from the primary to the university levels, education in both English and native languages, creation of educational institutes in all provinces, establishment of at least one government school in every district, aids for affiliated private schools, and offering education to women. The inception of Universities of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay were done by 1857. This dispatch asked the government to take up the responsibility of education of the people.

Dhaka University was established in 1921 as an imperial concession for the annulment of Partition of Bengal in 1911. Soon after the annulment, Bengali Muslim elites approached the Viceroy and explained how the partition of Bengal would affect the educational progress of the Muslim community. Viceroy Lord Hardinge was instrumental in the formation of the Nathan Commission which eventually recommended the establishment of a university in Dhaka. In its first convocation, Lord Lytton said, "this University is Dhaka's greatest possession, and will do more than anything else to increase and spread the fame of Dhaka beyond the limits of Bengal or even of India itself."

Lord Lytton is partly right. Indeed, the university is famed for its involvement in various national and cultural events related to our national consciousness. But somehow, if I may suborn, the university has failed to lead from the front, especially in recent years. My position in the totem pole does not allow me to point out the evil spirits that plague the system, but as a member of this institution I look forward to the day when this university is famed for its visionary leadership that engages with its colonial past, negotiates with the machine-making pedagogy of the present, and aims for a future that frees the mind from any forms of rigidity.

Shamsad Mortuza is a professor of English at the University of Dhaka (now on leave). Currently, he is Pro-Vice-Chancellor of ULAB. Email: shamsad71@hotmail.com

### QUOTABLE Quote



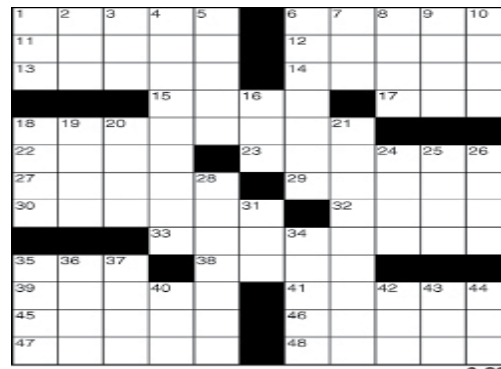
VIVEKANANDA (1863-1902)

Hindu spiritual leader and reformer.

*The whole secret of existence is to have no fear. Never fear what will become of you, depend on no one. Only the moment you reject all help are you freed.*

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

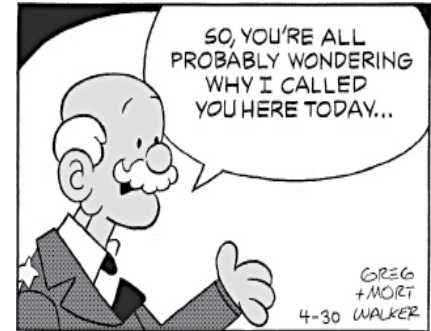
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  - 12 "Carmen," for one
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  - 15 Pekoe and oolong
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  - 18 Creative
  - 22 Notorious emperor
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  - 30 Rice and Bernstein
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- DOWN**
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  - 5 Leg joints
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  - 9 Serving aid
  - 10 Rational
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  - 18 Poker payment
  - 19 Authentic
  - 20 Quick cut
  - 21 Warned
  - 24 Golf pegs
  - 25 Writer Ferber
  - 26 Turn down
  - 28 Highway cop
  - 31 - Francisco
  - 34 Purloined
  - 35 Told tales
  - 36 Land measure
  - 37 Trounce
  - 40 Try out
  - 42 Droop
  - 43 December 31, for one
  - 44 Sluggish Williams



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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 E M B L E M R A W  
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 A B B O T A N G E L  
 P I A N O I N A N E  
 S A T A N N A S T Y

### BETLE BAILEY



### BY MORT WALKER



### BABY BLUES



### BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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