

MARTYRED INTELLECTUALS DAY

Remembering Dr Shamsuddin: A man of immense courage

MALEKA ZAFREEN AHMED

Dr Shamsuddin Ahmed, FRCS, was the head of the department of surgery at Sylhet Medical College in March, 1971. When the genocide against our people started on March 25, he was not surprised or taken aback. He was fully aware of the exploitation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) by West Pakistan. As General Yahya Khan postponed the opening of parliament after the Awami League's landslide victory, he knew something bad was going to happen, and that he had to be prepared.

In early March 1971, he created an emergency medical squad and extra blood bank, and organised planning meetings with students and fellow physicians to get everyone on board. Even though some of them were not prepared to believe what was going to happen, Shamsuddin had long distrusted the Pakistani regime. However, his activism and anti-authoritarian stance had begun long before the oppression of Pakistan.

Dr Shamsuddin, my father, was born in Badarpur of Karimganj subdivision of Sylhet, in British India, on October 1, 1920—the only son of his parents, Iman Uddin Ahmed and Khurshidun Nessa. He attended school and college in Sylhet. He showed good leadership at an early age—he was a scout leader, dormitory captain and volunteer at Hajj camps during his school days. During college, he was the vice president of the all Assam student Muslim Student's Federation. He volunteered during the devastating Assam floods along with Maulana Bhashani.

He attended Kolkata Medical College and graduated in 1946. As a medical student, he was actively

involved in the anti-British movement across all political parties and during the Hindu-Muslim riots in Kolkata, he worked diligently to rescue and treat injured people.

On April 4, 1947, he married Hosn Ara Ahmed, a master's student in Kolkata university. Later, she became principal of Sylhet Women's College and a prominent educator and social leader for 35 years in Sylhet. They moved to Sylhet after the partition of British India in 1947, with the hope of building the nation of their dreams.

He started his career as chief medical officer in Comilla and Narayanganj and Mitford medical school, and finally came to Dhaka as a lecturer and resident surgeon in Dhaka Medical College. He was always interested to organise the medical profession and became the founding secretary of the Pakistan Medical Association, East Pakistan chapter. He also established the Pakistan Ambulance Core, the first medical relief organisation in East Pakistan. He was given full authority to run the relief activities during the great flood of 1954.

During his term in PMA, he could clearly see the disparity between east and west Pakistan. He kept giving suggestions to the government to minimise the gap in healthcare and medical education in East Pakistan. By that time, it was obvious that discrimination was rampant in all sectors against East Pakistan.

One of the issues was the Commonwealth Scholarship for higher medical education. All 50 scholarships would go to West Pakistan, even if there were abundant qualified Bengali candidates. He was one of the victims of that discrimination.

From 1957 to 1962, he studied in England for the FRCS with a Burma-



Dr Shamsuddin Ahmed (October 1, 1920–April 9, 1971).

Shell Scholarship. He joined Rajshahi Medical college as associate professor of surgery on his return, while his wife was in Sylhet, actively developing the Sylhet Women's College. It was privatised after independence with only five students and she transformed it to a college on 12 bigha land with a few thousand students by the time she retired in 1984. The family had to stay divided and could get together only during holidays. However, he was incredibly supportive of his wife's leadership in women's education and actively supported her in her endeavours. In fact, he took the posting as the civil surgeon in Sylhet in 1965, only to be near his family.

During this period, he founded Jalalabad Blind Welfare Organisation and organised the nation's first month long Blind Camp. The camp was held during the month of Ramadan for free cataract surgery. This programme was well received throughout the country

and was replicated in different places. He also converted the small TB clinic in Sylhet to a TB hospital using the donation of expatriate Sylhetis.

In 1969, he was transferred back to Rajshahi medical college. Political unrest in the country was at its peak. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was imprisoned for the Agartala Conspiracy Case. However, Ayyub Khan's presidency was on the verge of collapse. His demise was hastened by an incident in Rajshahi. A young professor, Dr Shamsuz Zoha, was shot and killed by the Pakistani Army. He was trying to stop a skirmish between demonstrating students and the army.

Dr Shamsuddin operated on Dr Shamsuz Zoha but could not save him. Despite the pressure from the military not to publicise the autopsy report, he organised the first protest meeting in Rajshahi Medical College, condemning the killing of Dr Zoha. The protest movement grew throughout the country and eventually Ayyub Khan had to step down. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was released and was named Bangabandhu. Dr Shamsuddin was transferred to Sylhet as professor and head of surgery.

The Pakistani regime did not accept the landslide victory of Awami League in the 1970 election and the genocide in East Pakistan started on March 25, 1971.

At the time, Sylhet Medical College Hospital was full of wounded people. Dr Shamsuddin kept operating on his patients day and night. On April 4, freedom fighters from the 2nd East Bengal Regiment attacked Sylhet and the Pakistan army retreated to Salutikor Airport, north of town. Sylhet city had by now become a battlefield. Everyone who could, fled the town.

The head of surgery at the time, Dr

Shamsuddin, decided to move in and stay at the hospital. He did not want to abandon his patients. He was strongly advised by his friends and family to leave the town, but he did not. His clinical assistant Dr Shyamol Kanti Lala was ready to leave too. However, he said, "sir, I will stay with you till the end."

On April 9, the Pakistan army regained control of the city and attacked the hospital. They called him out of the Operating Theatre, rounded up everyone who were working with him and shot and killed them in the hospital campus. The victims were professor Shamsuddin Ahmed, Dr Shyamol Kanti Lala, male nurse Mahmudur Rahman, ambulance driver Korban Ali and a few unnamed patients and their relatives.

While a curfew was imposed for the next three days, the news spread like wildfire. Their decomposing bodies were found stacked up against a shed. He was identified by his uncle and was buried during a short break of the curfew. His companions were also buried in two different graves nearby.

Today, their graveyard is known as the Martyred Intellectual's Complex in Sylhet. Dr Shamsuddin spent his whole life working for the cause of humanity. His ultimate sacrifice was giving his life inside his hospital and taking care of his patients, knowing full well the risks he was facing. Dr Shamsuddin's father, a British Railway Guard, was immensely proud of his son. He used to say that his son was his best asset.

Dr Shamsuddin did live up to his father's dream. His own advice to his children was, "be a good human being, always show empathy, be kind and don't be afraid to do what is right."

Maleka Zafreen Ahmed is the daughter of Dr Shamsuddin Ahmed.

EU's new human rights regime ushers new hope



KAMAL AHMED

In a rare admission of the suffering caused by the targeted sanctions imposed by the United States, Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, told the media that she had lost all banking services and had to transact solely in cash. Defying the US sanction by any commercial bank, even if that was wholly owned by Hong Kong nationals, would have meant the end of their global business. The abovementioned sanction which Ms Lam has been subjected to is known as the Magnitsky Act. It allows for the imposition of sanctions against individuals and entities accused of serious human rights violations and corruptions. The outgoing Trump administration has already used this act to slap sanctions, including travel ban and freezing of assets in the US, on over 500 individuals and companies from across the world. The majority of those on the list are from within the American continent, or from Russia and China.

The apparent success of this smart sanctions tool seems to be a preferred choice for western democracies. Human rights groups like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and a few others have long been advocating for the imposition of targeted penalties against individuals and institutions engaged in serious violations of peoples' rights. The European Union is the latest to join in

the campaign, following Canada and the United Kingdom. The EU Council of ministers on December 7 adopted its own version of the Magnitsky Act. The council agreed to establish a global human rights sanctions regime that allows the EU to freeze the assets of, ban entry to, and prohibit dealings with human rights abusers, wherever they may be located.

The EU human rights sanctions regime has a special significance, since it combines 27 European nations with a better record among other western democracies in defending human rights globally. If implemented and enforced consistently and in coordination with the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, it has the potential to make an even wider impact in the global fight against human rights abuse.

Human rights defenders hailed the Magnitsky Act as a much needed "smart tool" to counter autocratic regimes, because it allows western governments to target perpetrators without punishing the mass people of a country. The US Congress in 2012 first enacted the Act and named it after Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian auditor, allegedly tortured to death in a Moscow jail in 2009 following his revelation of a USD 230 million dollar fraud by Russian tax officials in the UK. The UK government enacted the British Magnitsky Act last July and imposed targeted sanctions against 49 people and organisations and among them 25 were Russians.

On December 10, Britain announced fresh sanctions on 10 politicians and officials accused of human rights breaches in Russia, Venezuela, The Gambia and Pakistan. The list includes

a former president and his wife as well as a lower level police officer. The Gambia's former president Yahya Jammeh, whose election defeat in December 2016 forced him to flee, was one of three from the West African nation. His wife Zineb and the former

However, the inclusion of a former police super of Pakistan in the sanctions' list is a sign that it is being broadened to other countries to locate serious abusers. The Pakistani police official named by the British government is a former senior



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PHOTO: AFP

director-general of the country's National Intelligence Agency, Yankuba Badjie, are also subject to asset freezes and a UK travel ban. Allegations against Jammeh include extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, torture, rape, as well as wider human rights violations. Both the ex-president and his wife are already under similar sanctions from the United States.

superintendent of police in Malir District, Ahmad Anwar Khan, who is known to be an "encounter specialist", suspected of being responsible for more than 190 "hits" that led to more than 400 deaths.

In a sign of coordination in taking actions against the worst abusers, the outgoing US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, in a statement issued to mark International Human Rights Day said:

"We stand beside our partners in the UK who similarly took action against those seeking to rob individuals of their rights. We congratulate the UK on the actions it took today under its Global Human Rights sanctions programme." Mr Pompeo noted that in the past 48 hours the US and the UK together took action against 37 actors in total, in connection with corruption or serious human rights abuse. Welcoming the EU's Global Human Rights Sanctions framework, he said together along with other international partners we will ensure corrupt actors and human rights abusers will have no refuge within our jurisdictions.

The EU sanctions regime, however, is not a replication of the US or UK legislations. The EU legislation does not include persons accused of corruption and has been criticised by some activists. They argue that autocratic regimes want to silence their critics to suppress their own corruption. Despite this shortcoming, it is expected that the EU's regime would be a powerful tool to fight against human rights abusers as Europe remains an attractive destination to transfer assets.

Electoral successes of the Democratic Party nominee Joe Biden in the US is seen as an opportunity in the global fight against human rights abuse as he has pledged to make democracy and human rights the core principles of his foreign policy. Rights groups now hope that increased coordination across the Atlantic will be bring about positive changes in the protection of human rights all over the world.

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QUOTABLE Quote



WILLIAM FAULKNER (1897-1962) American author.

You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

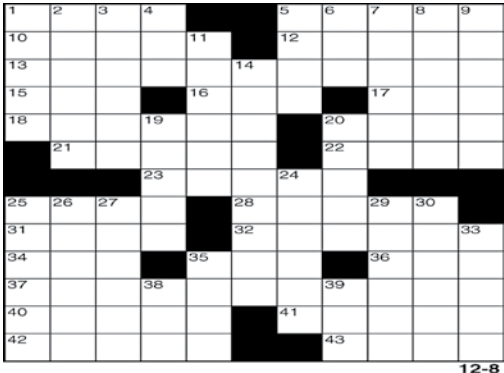
- 1 Gorillas and gibbons
- 5 Degrade
- 10 Casual eatery
- 12 Road work markers
- 13 Very quickly
- 15 Wilder's "—Town"
- 16 Golf peg
- 17 Cool — cucumber
- 18 Athens rival
- 20 Waiter's aid
- 21 Some agents
- 22 Turns left
- 23 "Tomorrow" musical
- 25 Group of actors

- 28 Paid for a hand
- 31 China setting
- 32 Rascals
- 34 Shark feature
- 35 Brewed beverage
- 36 One — kind
- 37 Betting limit
- 40 Once more
- 41 Makes smooth
- 42 Network points
- 43 Whirlpool

DOWN

- 1 Spanish farewell
- 2 Locker art
- 3 Snare
- 4 Put in stitches
- 5 Dull pain
- 6 Big snake

- 7 Turkey's capital
- 8 Playground sight
- 9 Emerson works
- 11 Corrupt
- 14 Eel lookalikes
- 19 Rancher's rope
- 20 Letter before iota
- 24 Deep-seated
- 25 Beach robe
- 26 Crumbly Italian cheese
- 27 Fabled sailor
- 29 Conjured up
- 30 Protect
- 33 Impudent
- 35 Addition column
- 38 Tell tales
- 39 Broad st.



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.