

Those Jems of Men I Remember Today

by Tawfiq Aziz Khan

COMES again the sad day — the day the jems of the society feel victims to the occupation army and their local lackeys. Not all of them were murdered on the same day but 14th of December is solemnly observed in memory of the brilliant sons and daughters of this country every year. Hundreds of such innocent men and women — doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, journalists and other professional leaders were massacred just before the country's liberation. The primary objective of the enemy was to make the emerging nation a body without brain, without intellect, without conscience. And in this abhorring act of appalling brutality the connivance of the occupation forces with the 'local guards' was alleged by many who lost their dear and near ones. One example is the disappearance of Zahir Raihan on 30 January 1972.

Among the martyred were some very near to my heart and had a profound influence on me. I am lucky to have lived in their company for a considerable period of time. I owe them my gratitude. I owe them a piece of my heart.

Many of us knew Munier Choudhury by name before we enrolled ourselves at the Dhaka University. In those days he was known for his brilliant character as a student and a teacher and for his pleasing personality. Equally proficient in Bangla and English literature Munier Choudhury's involvement in the language movement of 1952 is still recalled by his contemporaries. He was jailed for his part in the movement. He came out with a one-act play written inside the jail that became a part of his legacy to the Bangladeshi nation. 'Kabor' might not be the high point of his versatile career, but it was certainly the reflection of the ethos of a nation in grief. As a fresher in the university I was privileged to have been selected in the role of the Guard of Kabor staged by the Central Students Union in 1956 at the Curzon Hall stage. Like me, many of my friends came in contact with Munier Bhai. He was a soft-spoken, unassuming personality with a strong sense of humour. His love for dramatics was very distinct. He would not only direct plays but act as a prompter during rehearsals, such was the intensity of his love for and commitment to this form of performing art.

He had always been a connoisseur of good things in life. Knew how to appreciate others

for their particular qualities and always was a good listener — a great quality that could not be found in plenty today. Munier Bhai believed in plain living and high thinking without being too ambitious.

As a teacher he was superb and though he did his masters



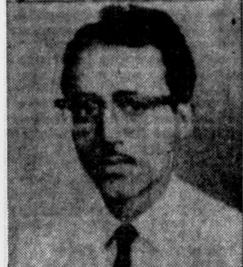
Munier Choudhury

in Bangla after he had done it in English literature. Munier Bhai had special fascination for teaching his mother tongue at the university. His translations and adaptations from GBS and Galsworthy were pure jems of Bangla literature. Had he been alive today society, literature and the profession of teaching would have been so much the richer.

Serajuddin Hossain was one of the top journalists of his time. From a modest beginning in journalism Seraj Bhai traversed a long way to reach the top of the ladder as the News Editor of the prestigious and powerful *The Dainik Ittefaq*. As members of the Press Club we used to bump into each other fairly regularly. Seraj Bhai, unlike myself, was not a member of the Club. Hence he spent most of his time downstairs sipping a cup of tea and enjoying himself in the company of professional friends and colleagues.

In the early sixties we had five major newspapers in Dhaka, three of them — *Ittefaq*, *Sangbad* and *Azad* in Bangla and *Pakistan Observer* and *Morning News* in English. Press Club being a professional club for journalists only had a small number of members. Those who were social types came to the club almost everyday and Seraj Bhai was one of them. Thin but not sickly, he used a pair of glasses and always had that smile at the corner of his lips. Usually soft-spoken, he would

not hesitate to raise his voice when necessary. Specially with Ehtesham Haider Choudhury, M R Akhter Mukul and K A Taleb — his colleagues at *Ittefaq*. A lovable character, Seraj Bhai always appreciated good things of life, lived a clean life. Always happy and smiling he



Serajuddin Hossain

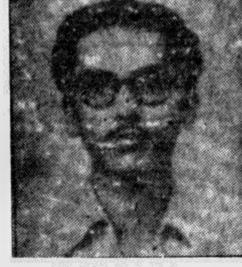
had a tremendous reputation as a brilliant translator and towering news editor of the most influential daily.

I remember an occasion when Seraj Bhai took me aside and confided that Bhabi was in the family way. He was craving for a daughter after six sons. But God disposed otherwise. It pained me a lot when I saw his family evicted from their house in New Eskaton Road in the mid 80's. Had this powerful journalist been alive, the profession would have been richer because he had much to offer. He was called out from his house on the night of December 10, only six days before the country was to be fully liberated. And he did not return neither his body could be recovered, till today.

It was during early sixties that Zahir Raihan released the first Cinemascope movie of Pakistan. The film titled *Bahana* was featuring Kobori. Zahir was always bubbling with ideas and quest for something new, something extraordinary was the main driving force behind this talented film-maker. Before the release of *Bahana*, a preview was arranged for guests and newspapers at a local theatre in the old town. I attended on behalf of *The Pakistan Observer*.

At the theatre I saw a medium-built (by our standards), gentleman, smartly dressed, wearing a pair of stylish glasses, sporting an intelligent smile, sitting a couple of seats away from me in the same row at the first floor. As the projection started the gen-

tleman straightened up in his seat and focused himself intensely on the screen. In the darkness of the theatre I could see his bright eyes through the lenses of my glasses as I occasionally looked askance at him. He was thoroughly enjoying himself and did not hide his



Shahidullah Kaiser

enthusiasm and appreciation for certain scenes and dialogues. At the interval we met at the lobby and he was kind enough to introduce himself as Shahidullah Kaiser, an assistant editor of *The Sangbad* and more importantly (at least for me), the elder brother of the maker of the film, Zahir Raihan.

From that day till the turbulent times of '71, I had the opportunity to socialise with Kaiser Bhai on a number of occasions. He was not my friend actually but not an acquaintance either. By virtue of his seniority in every respect of the term Kaiser Bhai maintained a relation that was proper but at the same time warm and hospitable. He was a great table-tennis addict and used to play against Khatib Bhai, Nooruddin Bhai and his contemporaries at the ground floor of the old Press Club building. We could hear his voice as he appreciated a good shot of his opponent. He was always laughing, talking. He was so full of life, so sprightly, so buoyant. There was hardly any dull moment in his company. He was a leftist, a believer in equality of all human beings — rich and poor, men and women. Yet he was far removed from the common man's idea of a leftist. Kaiser Bhai knew how to appreciate a good thing, a good quality in a person and was always eager to lend his helping hand for a good cause. Men of such mirth and vigour, warmth and passion are a vanishing breed these days. Society is poorer in his absence.

Pabna-2 By-election Imposed Peace, Exposed Irregularities

by Nurul Kabir

The ruling party candidate would have won the polls, may be by a lesser margin, even if there was no irregularities... But what is more important for the nation is to do away with the loopholes surfaced once again in the by-elections.

NO arrest, no clash between rival parties, no postponement of voting at any centre. Given the country's political culture, one could not have expected a more peaceful election.

But the election-day peace at the Pabna-2 constituency of the Jatiya Sangsad did not stem from a rational understanding of democratic elections by the political parties concerned; it was rather imposed by the Election Commission.

Thirty policemen — 20 of them armed and eight with batons — at each centre and forty mobile units of armed police and border guards were deployed across the constituency, while two companies — each 157-member strong — of army were stationed at two thana headquarters — Sujanagar and Bera. Besides, 130 magistrates including 81 at all the 81 centres, 81 presiding officers, 402 assistant presiding officers and 804 polling officers were there to conduct polling.

With such a huge deployment of law keepers, judicial officers and election officials in a constituency, it is only natural that trouble-makers would not dare to break law. And if it is so, the EC might need to think about holding the next general elections in a staggered manner, considering the size of the law enforcing agencies needed to 'impose' peace in an area dominated by a typical undemocratic political culture.

Peace was there indeed. But an important question for us, a nation striving to devise a leak-proof electoral system, also remains — whether the election was free and fair.

To get the answer one has to see whether certain universally required components of a free and fair election were present at different stages of the polls in

question. There is no scope for taking an isolated look at the election day incidents and say that the polling was fair or unfair.

No democratic mind of the world would call an election fair, if influence of money — black or white — is there in the polling process. In our case, even Chief Election Commissioner Abu Hena believes that the candidates do not keep their election expenses within the legally imposed ceiling of Tk 3,00,000 interview with the Daily Star, published on December 7). The major contenders in the present phase were not exceptions. Clear signs were there that both the Awami League and BNP have spent 10 to 15 times the legally fixed amount. Both of them have even distributed among the voters money and other goods worth much more than the amount legally fixed for polling expenditures.

Neutrality of the administration is a crucial component of fair election. But this was absent in the Pabna-2 by-elections. On an investigation, the EC found the Deputy Commissioner, in other words the Returning Officer for the by-elections, biased towards the governing party. He was replaced by the Additional District Magistrate, an officer sub-ordinate to the DC, only a couple of days before the polls.

Change of Returning officer is a good example of the EC's sincerity to ensure neutral polling. But who would repair, and how, the damages already done to the interests of the opposition candidates over the largest part of the electioneering process since announcement of polling schedule? Besides, one could have no reason to believe that the ADM would dare to go against the DC's de-

sire, especially when the DC was still in charge of the district administration. While discharging his responsibilities as returning officer, it is very difficult for the ADM to forget that the DC will write his ACR (Annual Confidential Report). It is perhaps time that the EC reviewed the electoral rules concerned.

The EC's concern over the ministers' active involvement in the electoral campaign also proved genuine in the Pabna-2 by-elections. Contrary to claims made in public, they have substantially used the ministerial powers to influence the elections. Tapes of the public speeches show that the ministers have repeatedly told the people that the government would provide adequate development projects and civic amenities to the constituency, provided they vote for the ruling party candidate. If not black-mailing, this is a clear case of influencing voters by using their executive power. This is a gross violation of the country's electoral laws, rules and code of conduct, while such ministerial gestures are bound to stand in the way of free and fair elections.

Replying to the EC's contention over the ministers' active involvement in the polls, one of them told the press that as a politician, he must be allowed to discharge his organisational responsibility in the polls. All right, but what about his constitutional obligation to run the affairs of the government as a minister. For the elections, the minister concerned was absent from his office for more than three weeks.

The ministers' claim that they have been campaigning in the polls as private individuals was not a full truth. It is true that most of the time they used

their personal cars, but evidence show, they did not fail to manage government transports for those managing elections on behalf of the ruling party candidate. This is clear discrimination against the opposition candidates.

Obstructing voters to enter polling centres is a clearly defined violation of electoral rules. But the violation was very much there in a few centres of Sujanagar thana. It was the ruling party activists who physically obstructed the opposition supporters to enter the polling stations, while the law-keepers posted in and around the centres remained inactive.

Given the number of voters registered with the centres, it would not have changed the polling results had there been no such intimidation. But is this a testimony of free and fair polling?

The addition of 19,267 voters in the electoral roll is another riddle yet to be solved. It is only natural for us that the number of voters would increase while updating the voters list. But more than 19 thousand new voters in a constituency in less than three years time?

If we are not wrong, the experience of our extensive visits across the constituency gives us impression that the ruling party candidate would have won the polls, may be by a lesser margin, even if there was no irregularities stated above. But what is more important for the nation is to do away with the loopholes surfaced once again in the by-elections. It is necessary for a leak-proof electoral system.

The writer is a senior reporter of *The Daily Star* who covered the parliamentary by-elections in the Pabna-2 constituency.

Murdoch — the Making of a Digital Dictator?

In the past decade Rupert Murdoch has emerged as one of the world's most powerful multimedia barons and his power is only likely to grow with the launch of digital television. Gemini News Service examines the empire that Rupert built. **Daya Kishan Thussu** writes from London

THE onset of the much-touted digital media age brings its own paradox: the promise of broadcasting choice, with a multiplicity of TV channels and much improved picture and sound quality, co-exists with an alarming trend towards media monopoly.

So who holds the power to control and deliver digital programming? At the top of the list is someone who is already one of the world's most powerful media gatekeepers, the Australian-born media tycoon Rupert Murdoch.

It was Murdoch's British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB) that launched the so-called digital revolution in Britain in early November with Sky Digital — a multiple-channel subscription service. Early indications show that in the ensuing battle for supremacy in the lucrative digital market, Sky has an edge over its rival OnDigital, a consortium of British television companies such as Carlton and British and Japanese commercial banks.

Murdoch's domination of the potentially huge digital market has generated unease among media analysts, who fear that the new technology will enhance his already considerable clout in Britain, where he also owns the prestigious *Times* newspaper and the *Sun*, the scandal tabloid that is Britain's largest selling daily paper.

This was reinforced in late November when Murdoch announced that he was expanding his media empire into continental Europe by creating a European subsidiary of News Corporation, the global media group that he controls. News Corp Europe would be run from Milan by Letizia Moratti, the former chairperson of Italian state broadcasting group RAI.

The choice of Milan as headquarters is interesting, as Murdoch realises that a soccer-crazy country would be a good springboard to consolidate his interests in the growing television market in Europe. His BSkyB — now Europe's most profitable broadcaster — made much of its money by cornering the rights to telecast top football matches live.

In previous unsuccessful attempts to expand into the pay-television market in Europe, he tried to acquire Mediaset from Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian media tycoon who used his television channels to get elected as Prime Minister of Italy before being prosecuted on corruption charges.

There are two great markets in the world — one is North America and the other is Europe. Murdoch told the *Financial Times*. "They are almost equal in size and you cannot globalise a company without having some major activities in Europe."

For News Corp, the US remains the prime market, accounting for more than 70 per cent of the firm's earnings. And television is central to Murdoch's media interests, with News Corp earning 35 per cent of its income from television, followed by 25 per cent in newspapers and 22 per cent in magazines. In the US, his Fox network is already well-established, producing such international television hits as the *X-Files* and *The Simpsons*, and giving the three traditional networks — CBS, NBC and ABC — a run for their money.

In Latin America, Murdoch's Sky network has agreements with Televisa, the Mexican television giant. And his STAR (Satellite Television Asian Region) network spans across the world's most populous continent, having a prominent posi-



US: Fox television network, 22 cable stations, film studio 20th Century Fox, New York Post, Harper-Collins publishers, TV Guide magazine
ASIA: Star TV, Star Sports (4 Asian channels), Channel V (4 Asian music channels) Star Movies (9 Asian channels), Japan Sky Broadcasting, stake in India's Zee network and China's Phoenix channel
LATIN AMERICA: TV channels El Canal Fox and Fox Sport Noticias, stake in Latin Sky Broadcasting
EUROPE: The Times, British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB), stake in Germany's Vox channel
AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND: Newspapers and TV channels, FoxTel, stake in New Zealand's Natural History Unit

tion in China where he has stakes in Phoenix, the Mandarin-language channel, and in India, where he partly owns Zee TV, the country's most popular Hindi-language private channel. Sundeep Singh Gill, the former head of India's television advisory board, calls Rupert Murdoch in "international buccaner."

All of this makes News Corp one of the world's largest media empires, truly global in its reach and influence. But what distinguishes it from its rivals such as Time-Warner and Disney Corporation, is the fact that it is the only one created, built and dominated by one man — Murdoch, the 67-year old chairman and chief executive officer of News Corp.

Murdoch has shown a staggeringly sure touch in dealing with the media and entertainment business. His risk-taking attitude combined with a deep knowledge of the media industries and an uncanny ability to feel the popular pulse, accounts for this extraordinary success.

In the US, he shocked the television world by acquiring NFL broadcast rights for \$1.6 billion in 1993 and in 1998 he bid just over \$1 billion for Manchester United, Britain's most popular and profitable football club. By acquiring a foothold in European soccer, he will strengthen his position to bid for broadcasting rights on live matches. His business acumen has obviously shown success, with News Corp's revenues growing steadily from \$8 billion in 1993 to nearly \$13 billion in 1998.

Murdoch's press solidly backed Margaret Thatcher, supporting her efforts to destroy trade unions, and his popular newspapers, such as the *Sun* and the *News of the World*, redefined the boundaries of taste. Sky TV let to the tabloidisation of what used to be one of the world's best television systems. The profits that he earned from this venture helped him subsidise his newspapers after he began a vicious newspaper price war, threatening the diversity of the press in Britain.

So important is Murdoch's support perceived as that Prime Minister Tony Blair has to keep him in good humour — the Sun's support for Blair, some say, was critical in Labour's 1997 election victory. In fact, a recent survey deemed Murdoch the second-most powerful man in Britain, second only to Blair.

His growing political influence as a multi-media mogul and is extensive control of both information and software (programme contents) and hardware (satellite and other delivery systems) makes Murdoch a hugely powerful global actor. And since he is one of the first to realise the commercial importance of digital television, investing a great deal of money to get it off the ground, his media empire is most likely to dominate the digital globe.

So much power in one individual cannot be dangerous. He can dictate the global media agenda, driven by profit motives. Who will contest this 'Murdochism' of the media? What will happen to the public service role of the media? Murdoch's business rival Summer Redstone of Viacom, once remarked: "Rupert wants to rule the world, and he seems to be doing it." Will the digital revolution facilitate further expansion and consolidation of the empire that Rupert built? The writer teaches journalism and international communication at Britain's Coventry University.

Upgradation of National Productivity Strategy for Technological Progress

by A B M S Zahur

The development of science and technology is an across-the-board task. It is also a serious, long term and painstaking job. Along the way there will be obstacles. Nevertheless it may confidently be assumed that with the well concerted and coordinated efforts of government, academic institutions and the private sector, attainment of remarkable technological progress is possible.

PRODUCTIVITY is generally defined in terms of the efficiency with which inputs are transformed into useful outputs within the production process. It has become a major issue in recent years. It is becoming widely recognised that productivity is a major factor in many of the problems of current public concern, such as economic growth, unemployment, inflation, the distribution of income and international competitiveness.

We do not have any clear picture about the steps taken by the government since independence 27 years back, though we have an organisation and at times we hear about seminars particularly sponsored jointly with government by the Asian Productivity Organisation. One thing about which we are clear is that Bangladesh has one of the lowest productivity rate in the world. Thus it may be considered as important by the government if it aspires for a rapid economic growth. This rapid economic growth, the nation of productivity among our people and the commercial and industrial enterprises. Its urgency has increased because without a substantial improvement in productivity Bangladesh will not be able to attain higher economic growth.

It has now generally been accepted that technological progress is the most important source of future economic vitality and social progress for developing countries. The term 'technological progress' encompasses a number of interrelated activities including basic research, applied research, development of commercial feasibility, innovation and diffusion of innovation. Technological progress enables the economy to produce new or improved commodities and services, and more of previously produced commodities and services using existing productive resources. New technology has been an important source to rising living standards of the people. A vast number of products or production processes in general use today were not available a century ago e.g. television, antibiotics, jet engines, computers etc.

Since 1990 technological change has been the primary source of the rising standard of the people. Many studies attribute between one third and one half of the growth of real per capita income to technological change. Only the improved quality of labour force is responsible for a large part of economic growth.

Technological progress also emerges as people work with and improve the best existing technology. An engineer examining blueprints may perceive a more efficient way to link two processes. A worker who operates a complex industrial machine may make suggestions to improve the next generation of such machines. The history of ship building is a classic example of such learning by doing.

Technological progress may be divided into five phases — basic research, fundamental research, testing and refinement stage, pioneer plant stage and diffusion of technology stage. Basic research includes studies of the fundamental elements and processes of the universe. At the second stage the researchers and engineers strive to apply basic knowledge to the solution of some particular problem or need. Once an applicable idea is proven in a laboratory setting, it still must go through testing and refinement in the third stage. The combination of these three phases is popularly labeled R&D (research and development).

Realising the fruits of innovation requires a fourth phase — full scale producing plant. This pioneer plant must be supported by capital investment, access to raw materials, labour, power, marketing facilities and of course consumer demand for the output. The sumtotal of these actions is known as innovation.

The fifth phase is the diffusion of the innovation throughout the economy. This stage consists of replicating in a succession of other plants and firms the products and processes that have proved successful in a pioneer plant.

An increased rate of technological progress in industry is essential to achieving a nation's economic and social objectives. While technological innovation can contribute broadly to future economic strength, business confidence in the future of the economy is a prerequisite for an adequate level of private investment in the longer term, high risk ventures that lead to innovation and its diffusion throughout the economy.

High and uncertain rates of inflation have severely constrained the nation's real economic growth. Productivity can be significantly increased through more rapid application of advanced technology in industrial processes. In fact higher investment in the economy's productive base may result in rapid technological progress.

considered for its science and technology programme.

Strengthen the leadership of the government in the development of science and technology, formulate integrated long term development plans in crucial areas, provide adequate funds for research and development by the government and industry, and effect close cooperation among government agencies, academic institutions and industry.

- Improve science and technology education, reinforce manpower resources, and assure their effective use;
- Improve the environment of R&D in science and technology;
- Strengthen the interdisciplinary integration and protect management of R&D in science and technology;
- Systematically import relevant new technologies and effectively transplant for future development;
- Promote international technical cooperation and encourage joint research programme.

Achieve improved public awareness of the importance of developing science and technology. The existing BCSIR (Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research) does not appear to be making any significant contribution to the industrial advancement of Bangladesh. In fact the present role of the organisation is an example of wastage of highly

skilled manpower, material and money. To make its existence more meaningful and useful for a poor and underdeveloped country like Bangladesh the organisation may be up-graded into an industrial technology research institute. At the initial stage it may have the following objectives:

- (a) To promote R&D in both public and private industries, i.e., to enhance the competitive power of existing industries by improving and developing products and strengthening their own R&D capabilities through industrial services and joint research projects;
- (b) To develop and acquire new technologies;
- (c) To develop natural resources i.e., to explore mineral resources and to develop non-conventional energy resources;
- (d) To assist in solving major industrial technological problems confronting the government, and to assist in solving technological problems faced by industry.

The development of science and technology is an across-the-board task. It is also a serious, long term and painstaking job. Along the way there will be obstacles. Nevertheless it may confidently be assumed that with the well concerted and coordinated efforts of government, academic institutions and the private sector, attainment of remarkable technological progress is possible.

The author is a retired Joint Secretary (Retd).

The United Nations Bans Use of Child Soldiers

by M. A. Obaydullah

SOME time ago, the United Nations has announced a new policy establishing eighteen as the minimum age for UN peacekeepers. The change has been hailed by human rights organisations across the world. They have described the change as a significant step towards a new international consensus to end the use of child soldiers. No one under the age of eighteen should take part in war, whether as part of a national army, an armed opposition group, or a member of a UN peacekeeping mission.

Existing international standards to keep children out of armed conflict are completely inadequate. This new policy is a major step forward. Announcing the new policy adopted at the 4th Committee of the General Assembly, Mr Bernard Miyet, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, stated that contributing gov-

ernments were asked not to send military observers and civilian police younger than twenty-five years of age, and that other peacekeeping troops should preferably be at least twenty-one, and definitely not younger than eighteen. Human rights organisations have urged the national governments to reflect the new UN policy in their domestic legislation. The use of child combatants has become one of the most devastating aspects of contemporary warfare.

National governments should be doing everything possible to stop this horrible practice. Raising their enlistment age to eighteen is one important move. The latest research on child soldiers estimates that more than three lakh children under 18 years of age are fighting in armed conflicts around

the world. Although existing international law allows the recruitment of children as young as fifteen, there is a growing demand to raise the minimum age to eighteen.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, now ratified by nearly every country in the world, defines a child as anyone who is under eighteen years of age and entitled to special care and protection. In June this year, leading human rights organisations and international NGOs launched a new Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers that seeks to raise the minimum age for military recruitment and participation in armed conflict from fifteen to eighteen, through an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A UN working group man-

dated to draft such an optional protocol so far has failed to reach agreement on a text, despite four years of negotiations. The United States, supported by a small number of other states, has vigorously opposed an eighteen-year minimum for either military recruitment or participation in armed conflict, despite the fact that as one of the only two countries that has failed to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it would not even be eligible to join the optional protocol.

On June 29, following a special UN Security Council debate, the Council issued a presidential statement condemning the targeting of children in armed conflict. A treaty establishing an International Criminal Court (ICC) gave the court the authority to prosecute the conscription and use of children under the age of fifteen in hostilities as a war crime.