

IN MEMORIAM

Kibria's tragic death a grievous blow to political sanity

M.M.REZAUL KARIM

MY friend, fellow diplomat and political adversary, SAMS Kibria is no more. He laid his life and became a cruel victim to the machinations of those engaged in the nefarious design of destroying peace, stability and the democratic fabric of the nation. The splinters of the grenades that killed an internationally recognised diplomat, a renowned economist and an astute politician with his comrades caused far more damage than merely killing those mortals. Perhaps that was what had been intended by the perpetrators of this heinous crime. The authorities, as committed, must find the motives and seek the beneficiaries of such recurrent attacks, and proceed, with redoubled efforts, to promptly investigate and punish the culprits. Repeated pledges of both the BNP and the Awami League governments to unfurl all such crimes committed in the past, except for the Udichi massacres, have come to naught. This is most disconcerting, to say the least.

I knew Kibria half a century ago in the fifties during the University days. But the relations blossomed into friendship when we both were

assigned in New York in early sixties. He was a Second Secretary and I was a Third Secretary. Our two families lived in two adjacent buildings and we often spent time in each other's apartment, playing bridge, listening to music or simply chatting. One evening Mrs Kibria retired around 11 PM leaving us playing bridge in her apartment. She came back next morning only to see us play there still. It startled her so much that we had to concoct a story saying that we had just come back and resumed our game in the morning. She, an epitome of innocence and affection, believed us or that is what we believed she did. On many occasions the two families used to go out fishing in the seven lakes area and to pluck apples from orchards near the White Mountains. The little Nazli Kibria, who is now a Ph.D, had to be consoled and helped every time she failed to reach the branches laden with apples. In the fateful evening when I telephoned Mrs Kibria to enquire about her husband's injury, she appeared to have been still ignorant it was fatal. She only expressed her bitterness and total dismay at good people being in politics.

Kibria was a brilliant student all throughout his life and we were

proud of him. He was senior to me in diplomatic service by several years, yet somehow he respected my views and counsel. I succeeded him as Director General in the Foreign Ministry, while he was promoted as Secretary. He was Foreign Secretary of President Ziaur Rahman and played due role in shaping his concept of the SAARC. Zia rewarded him by nominating him to the post of UN Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the ESCAP instead of the hot-runner, former Chief Secretary and Presidential Adviser the late Shafiqul Azam, who also stood first in the Pakistan Superior Services Examination, though much earlier in the first batch of 1949.

In Bangladesh Kibria's entry into politics, especially his joining the Awami League, was a historical accident. Those who know it realise the strange nature of fate, which is pre-determined. He loyally and vigorously served his Party and was a beacon of logic, moderation and patriotism among his fellow party-men. The sense of patriotism grew intense with some of us, who had severed connection with the then government of Pakistan in 1971 and joined the liberation movement of Bangladesh.



Why we migrate?

BADAL HASIB

LEAVING our loved ones and our own motherland we tend to migrate. We migrate with the hope of achieving some sort of luxury at the cost of our relationship with our motherland, our family and our loved ones. We want to secure the lives of our next generation. We sacrifice so much and it is indeed a telling task. Once you live abroad you do tend to feel what your motherland means to you.

In Bangladesh, Sylhet is a place where you will probably find at least one person from every family staying abroad and earning his living. And probably there is a reason behind it. Every time you say to someone that you are from Sylhet the next thing you hear is 'You must be from England'.

I heard from my father that people from Sylhet started to seek their fortune in the UK since long as the soil of Sylhet remains under water for some part of the year and therefore it is quite difficult to earn your living through old pursuits in such adverse condition. As a result people started to travel abroad. So it has become a trend to go to the UK to earn a living. People did manage to earn a lot of money and build assets and make their fortune without being much educated, which literally hampered the education system in some areas of Sylhet tremendously.

These days law is changing frequently and you do not get the same facilities in the UK as you were used to getting. The recent law does not allow any child born in the UK the right of having a British passport unless either of the parents is British. If you are British through your parents and you have a child born in Bangladesh, he/she cannot have the right to have British passport. Under the rule you can transfer your right only to one generation and the British immigration law calls it British citizenship by descent.

Under another rule if you go to the UK with British student or visit visa and get married with a British citizen it does not give you the authority to have a British citizenship right away. You have to wait a lot (approximately 5 years). First you will get a settlement visa and then it continues to other formalities.

On the other hand, life is very tough in the UK and a respected employment is a far cry unless you are very qualified. If you are not very qualified or skilled you end up your life working day in day out in some odd jobs which you may define as barely surviving. There are some teachers as well as lecturers who were so desperate to go to the UK are now working in restaurants as waiters (with due respect to all). I have some relatives who made this blunder and now it is too late to come back and make a name here again.

The reason of this write up is to create awareness among those who intend to make a fortune in the UK, being a Sylhetti I have seen how my relatives ruined their lives. They did manage to go to the UK and did manage to earn a British passport but alas! They do not have a good family or personal life. They cannot converse with their own children, cannot support them in their schoolwork. The children (born in the UK) find it very difficult to cope up with their parents which lead to forced marriages, confinement and so on. Parents tend to bring their children back in the country and try to make them Bangladeshi and force them to act according to the parents which the UK law doesn't support as a result they become rebellious and with the support of the law they become separated from their parents.

There are some people so afraid of the UK lifestyle that they prefer to raise their children in Bangladesh and there were some I have seen who find it difficult to speak English. These days the hoteliers in the UK find it very difficult to transfer the business to their next generation; because they are quite reluctant to be in the shoes of their parents. They want to educate themselves and find a better profession, which is very important for them. A large number

of people are sending their children to colleges because they know the pain of being illiterate.

For the people who are trying to go abroad without preparing themselves for the relentless future I have a little advice. I would like to tell them that I still believe our country still has a lot to offer. Look around, educate yourself and there will be lot of options waiting for you. Don't haste because that might lead to destruction. Because your predecessors have rectified their mistakes and things were not that difficult even couple of years back. Your single mistake can make your next generation suffer. Life abroad is very difficult now. Educate yourself. Without education you don't have any second option. There is no harm in making your fortune abroad but you must be careful that you don't end up doing odd jobs and make sure you have sufficient education, which can be a life saviour.

Badal Hasib is a lecturer in English and French languages and also works in a Commonwealth office.

Later, the volatile political movements since 1992 did not deter us, despite belonging to the opposing political parties, from continuing our interaction and also playing golf together regularly. Though we did not mix politics with personal relationship, on several occasions we hardly could help express utter disappointment at the prevailing situation, albeit privately. Once we prepared a formula of compromise on a serious political issue on the golf course and submitted it to our respective political Chiefs only to be rebuffed strongly. Later, we became instrumental in invoking the good offices of the Commonwealth at the behest of its Secretary General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, a personal friend of mine for over three

decades, who sent a facilitator, Sir Ninian Stevens, in 1994 to resolve differences between the Awami League and the ruling BNP. This endeavour also failed and met the same fate of our golf diplomacy.

Only once he hurt me, emotionally, when shortly after his becoming Finance Minister he terminated my services as Chairman of the PKSIF (the apex micro-credit financing body of the country). My despair was not for dismissing me, but to do so even before deciding upon who would replace me. I realised that the action was taken pursuant to a decision of his Party high command. However, I never allowed myself to give vent to my feelings and we continued to play our games as

if nothing untoward had happened.

Mr Kibria was also not without his faults. The one I was not happy about was his overt reluctance to give away position and money, even in games. Whenever he lost a hole in golf, he would review the position several times before conceding defeat and parting with a Ten Taka note. Perhaps it was imbedded in the nature of the man, who had never stood second in his life, not to concede easily and for a conscientious former Finance Minister not to part with even a paltry sum of money without verification. May Almighty Allah rest my friend's soul in peace in Paradise.

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