

The book with no end: A tribute to Dr AR Mallick

I suppose there are a couple of reasons why it took me this long to open the pages of his memoirs. On the one hand, it seems to remind me of the unbridgeable emotional void with every page I turn. On the other, every line I read seems like ones I have read a hundred times before, memories burned into my mind from countless stories I heard him tell me on so many occasions. I don't think I'll ever finish reading the book like most people do. To me, these memoirs will always be like ones that have no beginning and no end, an epic novel that will live and grow with every breath I take.

AZIZ MALLICK writes from London

It was nearly ten years since I relived the stories. I was flipping through my grandfather's memoirs on the flight back to London, and dramatic events that had shaped our country over a period of fifty years flashed before my eyes.

Even though my Dadabhai, Dr Azizur Rahman Mallick had served the country in various pioneering roles such as the founder vice-chancellor of Chittagong University, the first education secretary, the first high commissioner to India, the first technocrat finance minister, chairman of ADB, the one identity he always preferred was that of an academician.

As I leafed through the pages I still couldn't fathom which period of his life I found more fascinating.

In 1953, at a time when the British influence was still strong in this region, he completed his PhD in London, factually denouncing the crippling British policies in the region.

He had completed his degree in a record time of just under 21 months. Nearly 50 years later, when I came to study in the UK, I travelled from Oxford to London just to have a look at the original thesis that was still on display.

I still remember the day and it felt like I had come full circle.

After returning to Rajshahi University to resume his role as head of the history department, Dadabhai was requested by the erstwhile government to set up Chittagong University.

Dadabhai was faced with an impossible timetable. Never to back away from a challenge, he took charge, literally razed mountains to clear the terrain and built the university from the ground up much before the scheduled time.

He had a fiery temper on the outside, but during political upheavals when students were thrown in jail, it was Dadabhai who personally put up bail. And when Eid came around, it was his house that played host to the students.

In the 4-5 years as vice-chancellor, there was hardly any untoward incidence in the campus. He loved the university with his whole being but when the country-wide atrocities began in March 1971, he did not wait a moment to resign and turn his focus on building resistance. To him country always came first.

In fact, his patriotism is something that had drawn him back to the country on numerous occasions. In the 1960s he was a full professor at

the University of Pennsylvania, one of the eminent Ivy League universities.

Even though he had helped set up the department of South Asian regional studies and was looking at a dream career, he turned his back and returned to his beloved country.

During the Liberation War, he addressed at the UN, and toured 36 universities in the US and Europe as president of the Liberation Council of Intelligentsia to raise support for our cause.

After the war, he was made special envoy and represented Bangladesh in key bi-lateral dialogues to win international recognition for our newly liberated country.

He was appointed the country's first high commissioner to India and concurrently ambassador to Nepal and Bhutan. In his new role, he negotiated the repatriation of the refugees from Afghanistan.

I remember how proud he looked in the photograph as he stood next to King Zaheer Shah the day the final agreements were signed. It's all the more special to me, as many years ago he gifted me the suit he had worn that day.

Though it fits me perfectly, I haven't had the courage to walk in that suit, lest I do damage to the memory. Given his far-flung responsibilities,

travel was always a challenge. There were times when he had to take a helicopter to his office in Bhutan!

Pictures of him leading meetings with President V V Giri, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and other world leaders always appealed to me as a child, and they still do.

It was at this time when he was asked once more to return to Bangladesh and take on the difficult role of a technocrat finance minister.

People close to him remember walking into his study in Delhi to see that he hadn't slept, the ashtray overflowing with cigarettes he had smoked throughout the night.

He was a personal friend to Tajuddin Ahmed, and he was being asked to replace him. Though he was never a politician, Dadabhai felt the request was forcibly thrusting him into a sensitive role. He asked for time until he had spoken to Tajuddin himself.

When he met Tajuddin, Dadabhai was taken by surprise. Tajuddin embraced him emotionally, and is quoted to have said: "The country needs a non-political personality to take this challenge and I cannot think of anyone other than you."

Such was the charisma of Tajuddin that Dadabhai found it impossible to say no to either his country or his dear friend.

As finance minister, his budget was the one time in the country's history that taxes were not raised. Also, one of the rare occasions when the 100-taka note was de-monitised to check the inflow of black money.

I remember Dadabhai narrating stories of how Bangobondhu had wanted the decision to be discussed at a cabinet meeting. Dadabhai disagreed for the sake of maintaining



secrecy, and suggested that the discussion be limited to the head of the government, finance minister and the Central Bank governor, as was done in other countries.

Tajuddin's foresight in requesting Dadabhai to step into this role was evident. Dadabhai's political non-affiliation actually gave him tremendous leverage when working with his peers, and like that day in the cabinet, Dadabhai's will prevailed.

The day Dadabhai was to announce the de-monitisation, he requested a few top ministers and other high officials to remain in the conference room until the announcement was made.

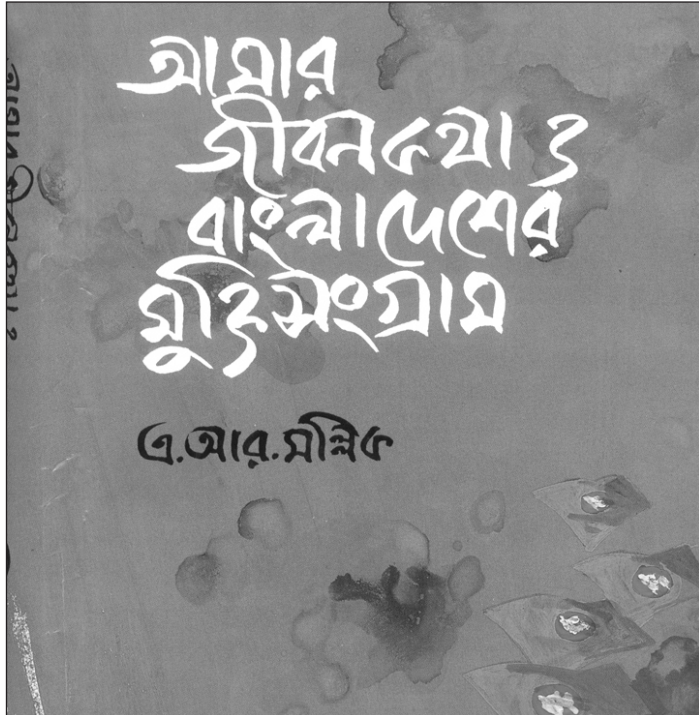
He had the operator switch off the telephone to that room and along

with Finance Secretary Kafiluddin Mahmood went to various parts of the city to check for rumours of the impending announcement. The final operation was a tremendous success.

There was the expected uproar from people whose illegal fortunes were now worthless, and there were even people who burnt sacks of now-useless 100-taka notes near the border areas and in front of the Deputy High Commission office in Kolkata.

Such instances and countless more, always seemed to me reflective of Dadabhai's iron will, charisma and his inherent desire to be true to himself and his country.

Dadabhai now lies peacefully at



the Shaheed Buddhijibi Graveyard in Mirpur, side by side with his compatriots, scholars and intellectuals who together had shaped a nation.

Dadabhai's presence was so pervasive in my life that I hadn't realised it had been ten years since I lost him. Next to where he lies, it was only the small sign that said February 4, 1997, that made me realise a decade had passed since that night at the hospital.

I suppose there are a couple of reasons why it took me this long to open the pages of his memoirs. On the one hand, it seems to remind me of the unbridgeable emotional void with every page I turn.

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dred times before, memories burned into my mind from countless stories I heard him tell me on so many occasions. I don't think I'll ever finish reading the book like most people do.

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Culture of corruption: How to break it? Gates is different

Punishment of the criminal must go hand in hand with recovery of the looted wealth and property. The recovered wealth must be spent on such important projects as housing, building new schools and hospitals for the poor. As the unauthorized land is recovered from the slum-dwellers, they should be rehabilitated in new housing colonies where cash from Falu and his fellow criminals will be quite handy.

HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

SEVERAL years ago upon reading my paper titled "How to Think About Corruption in Bangladesh?" for Bengal Studies Conference, Professor Syed Hussein Alatas, a leading sociologist in corruption studies told me to look more into the empirical issues of corruption in Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi media is rife with stories of corruption, especially committed by the BNP-led government that ruled Bangladesh from 2001 to 2006.

Sadly, the pioneer in corruption studies, who recently passed away in his Kuala Lumpur home, will miss this rich data.

Some commentators often say that corruption has always been around and it exists everywhere, even in America. To this my reply is: if you treat corruption as a social disease - a crime - then it is not the existence of corruption but the absence of concrete steps against corruption that makes Bangladesh unique.

To those who say there is corruption in America, look at Enron, I would reply: but where is Enron now? A multi-billion dollar company, the seventh largest corporation in America has vanished and with it the accounting firm Anderson.

The culprits of Enron are in jail and the company vice-chairman committed suicide, apparently to protect his honour.

Another point that corruption in Bangladesh has existed since the

country's birth is also unhelpful because it ignores the scale of corruption. The striking difference between BNP rule of 1991-1996 and 2001-2006 is a case in point.

Another defeatist view is that of cultural relativism: corruption is an integral part of certain cultures. Professor Alatas disputed that claim as a mere excuse. One has to separate the culture of gift from extortion and plunder.

Professor Alatas once told me that corruption is a crime and should be treated as such. It is possible to see a society move from high level of tolerance for corruption to zero-tolerance of corruption.

Singapore provides a very good example. In the Transparency International Report, Singapore is one of the least corrupt countries in the world alongside New Zealand, Denmark and Finland.

Between 1986 and 1996 Singapore had two important cases of corruption. One involving the minister for housing who was accused of malpractices. As he was about to be investigated, he committed suicide.

In the second case, a ministry of defence official's name surfaced in the Bofors scandal. He was summarily dismissed, tried and sent to jail. The sequence of crime and punishment warns potential perpetrators of crime.

One has to be made aware of the certainty of the delivery of punishment and the cost of crime. The cost of crime must be higher than the benefits.

In a recent case, when a

Singapore Airlines crew was caught for ill-begotten property, he was punished and his property auctioned off and the money was returned to the airlines.

Can there be VIP corruption suspects? Why not? Here VIP does not mean "Very Important Person" rather it means Very Important Plunderer or Very Important Pillager.

Pillage or plunder are surely better descriptions of what happened in Bangladesh in recent years. As a victim of crime, the house where we grew up in Bagerhat was plundered by Silver Salim, the BNP law-breaker (surely, not law-maker). I don't need additional proof of the rampage of plunder.

The Daily Star of February 1 provides rich data on corruption stories of Mossadeq Ali Falu, who among other things also stole a by-election in Dhaka.

The meteoric growth of Falu's wealth - assuming that he is not a magician - was the result of corruption. This was public knowledge. Yet, sadly, a group of doctors in Bangladesh gave Falu a reception following his fraudulent electoral "victory."

If we are serious about fighting the culture of corruption, we need to identify those doctors and their leaders and invite them to face the media to explain their conduct.

If they fail, exemplary punishment should be given to them to restore dignity in the medical profession.

Following the Danish embassy

accusation of corruption, rather than punishing the offender, the BNP government not only defended the corrupt minister, it made the diplomat apologize.

When a certain gas-meter reader was caught in Dhaka airport as he was on his way to Singapore for holiday with his family, the minister rather than starting legal action against the criminal meter reader/businessman, defended him by saying he only makes a little money by reading meters and accused the journalists of jealousy.

Now before punishing the meter reader the concerned minister should be punished for protecting and encouraging crime.

Punishment of the criminal must go hand in hand with recovery of the looted wealth and property. The recovered wealth must be spent on such important projects as housing, building new schools and hospitals for the poor.

As the unauthorized land is recovered from the slum-dwellers, they should be rehabilitated in new housing colonies where cash from Falu and his fellow criminals will be quite handy.

Spend part of the recovered wealth as compensation to the cheated migrant labourers who have been defrauded by criminal manpower agents like Silver Salim.

Corruption erodes development, now is time to plough back money recovered from the corrupt politicians and businessmen back into development and welfare of Bangladesh.

The author is a sociologist whose paper "Sociology of Corruption and the Corruption of Sociology" appeared in Current Sociology, 54 (1), 2006.

IMRAN KHALID

It certainly takes more than personal conviction for any 63-year-old to say yes to a job which inherits two thorny, protracted, military campaigns that have already engulfed his predecessor and, apparently, have no practicable solution in sight, at least for the time he is supposed to remain in control of the affairs.

Robert Gates, the new US defense secretary, is the one who had the heart to join President Bush at a time when the winds of change have completely enveloped US politics - and his predecessor's Iraq policy had eventually led to drubbing by the Democrats in the mid-term elections that stripped the Republicans of control of the Congress.

What prompted Robert Gates to accept the most unwanted job in the world - that too for the last quarter of President Bush's long stint in the Oval Office - is still shrouded in mystery. But one thing is certain, that is that he is quite different from Donald Rumsfeld, who, owing to a basket-full of misadventures in the global arena and unnecessary tongue-wagging, earned the reputation of being a highly emotional, hawkish and seriously-myopic politician.

Naturally, the soft-spoken and mild-mannered public persona of Robert Gates is being increasingly compared with the mercurial and bullish personality of Rumsfeld - with high expectations of a relatively less assertive role of Mr. Gates in handling the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. But even during the honeymoon period of his new assignment, Gates has proven to be tougher and more resolute than

Rumsfeld.

He has approved an increase in the size of the US army and Marine Corps, wholeheartedly supported President Bush's new Iraq strategy that involves sending 21,500 more US troops to war-torn Iraq, and now he is vehemently favouring a surge in US troops in Afghanistan.

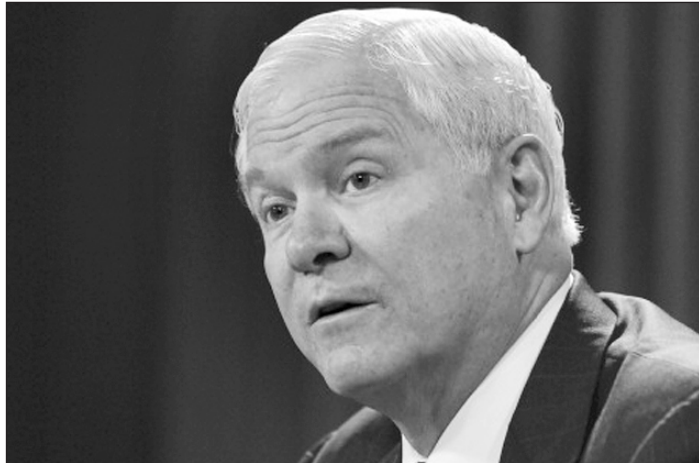
All these early decisions are indicative of a difference that had not been predicted by the political analysts who were pointing towards a gradual mollification of the military stance on Iraq under the former CIA chief.

Apart from backing President Bush's belligerent policy in global affairs, Gates has demonstrated tremendous dynamism and energy in the initial period by making very hectic visits to both the hot spots -- Iraq and Afghanistan -- and other capitals. Within days after taking over charge from Rumsfeld, Gates was in Baghdad on a fact-finding mission, and had detailed sessions with the military command there as well as the Iraqi government.

It was after meeting with the US troops in Iraq that Gates further hardened his stance for sending more troops there. Within weeks again, he re-embarked upon a 5-day tour that took him to London, Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and the Nato headquarters in Brussels.

It is certainly "too taxing" for a person of his age to undertake such a blitz of diplomatic traveling, with very short intervals in between. "I am too old to do seven countries in 5 1/2 days," he admitted after returning from his swift tour of the region.

The unprecedented diplomatic blitzkrieg by Robert Gates is



certainly a new phenomenon that has its own merits. Without going into the ethical aspects of President Bush's foreign policy and Gates' unequivocal support for it, one thing that is clear is that he is desperate to leave his mark as an "energetic and dynamic" defense secretary.

To achieve this objective, he is trying hard to establish a "differentiation" between him and his immediate predecessor through his incessant diplomatic forays. In fact, in the last two months, he has definitely overshadowed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in the realm of offensive diplomacy. Apparently, he is stepping into Rice's domain - obviously a disturbing development for Rice who might soon re-demarcate his territory of operations.

While giving the impression of being a genial newcomer who is still in the learning phase, Gates has been shrewdly pursuing Bush's belligerent agenda and even going beyond the hawkish tendencies of Rumsfeld. One of his favourite quotes is: "Negotia-

tions without arms are like notes without instruments."

Unlike Rumsfeld who, because of his overwhelming interest in safeguarding the corporate interests of his Texas-fellows in Iraq, kept a relatively low tone on Afghanistan, Robert Gates is showing more concern over the Afghan affairs.

"If the people who are leading the struggle out here believe that there is need for some additional help to sustain the success that we've had, I am going to be very sympathetic to that kind of request," is how he responded to the question regarding the increased presence of US troops in Afghanistan. Being a former spy chief, Gates knows well the art of obdurately implementing his own game plan without giving the feel of obstinacy. Seen from President Bush's perspective, he has so far proven to be a good player.

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Elections: Better late than quick and dirty

Cleansing the political parties of corruption, criminals, black money and dynastical rule is the most important prerequisite for elections, and this task will undoubtedly take a much longer time than doing the other laundry list of election preparations such as correction of voter rolls, etc.

MATIUR RAHMAN

MANY among the media and our intelligentsia have started to say quite assertively that our postponed elections be held sooner than later. While their well-intentioned anxiety over unjustifiable delay of national polls deserves full consideration by the appropriate authority, no one needs to be unnecessarily too impatient about it either.

The reason why some citizens want to see a quick election and an end to the current state of emergency is that, some people are concerned that the military was presumably behind the declaration of emergency and is presently calling the shots under the cover of the civilian admin-

istration run by the new CTG headed by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed.

However, there is no doubt that the imposed emergency, be it by military or civil administration, has saved the nation from impending bloodshed of unimaginable proportions, thanks to God.

One also has to realize that the pre-emergency dire situation was created by our politicians, without the armed forces having to do anything with that. On the other hand, our patriotic armed forces, at times of many national crises came to the rescue of the nation this time.

It is the total failure of our bankrupt political parties that necessitated the declaration of emergency which may be viewed by some critics as a dent to

our democracy. However, sometimes it is necessary to take a step backward in order to take a better and mightier step forward. With respect to our democracy, this has been the case now.

It is quite ironic to notice that while the two rival political groups had many do-or-die and never ending demands against each other on the eve of the new CTG taking the office, they have now joined hands and voices together to demand that the interim government announce the election date "as early as possible."

The anxiousness of our two major political camps for holding of elections soon can be easily understood - they want political power again. These gangsters cannot

survive without political power and plundering of national wealth, just like the termites cannot survive too long without digging and destroying through the wooden structures.

So, it is no wonder that the leaders of these two parties waged simultaneous verbal attacks against Nobel laureate Dr Yunus for his statements regarding the notorious corruption by our politicians.

Their denial of widespread corruption in our political arena simply meant that they were defending themselves and their cronies in corruption. The whole world, not just the people of Bangladesh, knows that the leaders and activists of both of our major political parties are equally culpable for the criminal actions and political corruptions. Is it believable that they had not heard and seen everyone talking and writing volumes about their corruptions, grafts and political misdeeds, before Dr Yunus publicly spoke about it?

Both rival parties are also saying in

unison that "holding the election early is in the interest of democracy." Their cry for democracy is nothing more than the crocodile tears, because it is they who have always made the democracy dead or disabled the day after they win the elections.

Both major political camps ruled the country for a total of fifteen years since 1991, but during their reign did they ever show any accountability to their electors as required by the very basic principle of democracy, or did they even fulfill any of their important election pledges made to the people?

So, what caused them to become the lovers of democracy overnight and thus raise these slogans for democracy? The answer is obvious again - they just want to ascend to power in a hurry using democracy as a vehicle, before their cheap popularity vanishes just like the nightly fog disappears at the morning sunshine.

Nothing at this moment scares our corrupt politicians more than the ray of hope and relief that our people have begun to find under the rule of

the new CTG, and this is the reason for their rush to elections.

During the period of national crisis before the declaration of emergency, most of the elites in our society as well as the foreigners were crying for creating a "level playing field" for holding a "free and fair election." The list of their primary demands included corrected voter rolls, reconstitution of the EC, appointment of neutral field level polling officers, adoption of voter identity cards, and arrangement of transparent ballot boxes.

While the above list of work is important for an election, simply doing these routine preparations would not have created a level playing field and definitely would not have helped the cause of democracy and good politics a bit, unless and until the players themselves - our politicians - were corrected or ejected out of the political field.

The corrupt and worthless people in our politics are the most obnoxious pests in the society, and they must be dealt with first before any meaningful elections are held.

Otherwise, simply transferring

power from one set of criminals to another set of desperate thugs does not at all serve the purpose of democracy or the well-being of the nation.

Another evil omen that is looming on the horizon is the dynastical nature of our politics, especially originating from the two leading ladies in our political circle. Unless this problem is addressed right now, our system of government will be nothing but a monarchy legitimized by elections and the leadership alternating between two families only.

Therefore, cleansing the political parties of corruption, criminals, black money and dynastical rule is the most important prerequisite for elections, and this task will undoubtedly take a much longer time than doing the other laundry list of election preparations such as correction of voter rolls, etc.

But this is the most important job for the CTG, without which holding elections in the current state of filthy political environment will simply transfer power back to the corrupt people again and create a mockery of

democracy in a political dynasty.

It may take a long time, maybe one year or even longer, for the CTG to cleanse the political mess and fix the moral depravity created by our two major parties.

The nation is counting on the present administration headed by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed for creating a clean playing field - not just a level playing field - for a fair game so that the good and honest people can come out victorious to lead the nation.

It is better for us to have a clean and delayed election participated in by the honest, deserving and capable candidates than a quick and dirty one engineered by the corrupt political gangsters. So, the CTG and the citizens have to maintain patience and proceed wisely and resolutely, because this time we cannot afford to fail.

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