

## Rebel with a cause



One wonders why a man who is responsible for articulating the economic rationale for Bangladesh's independence movement, who played an active international role for the provisional government, who shaped the reconstruction and development policy of post-independence Bangladesh, who with his research and policy works has systematically tried to create a self-reliant national economy, who for four decades has stuck to his guns in adverse conditions and has contributed in creating an independent civil society in Bangladesh -- was never honoured with national recognition. On second thoughts, it does not come as a surprise, Professor Sobhan had always been on the other side of the barricade -- fighting against the establishment for the development rights of the poor and the marginalized. He was always a rebel with a cause.



DEBAPRIYA BHATTACHARYA

On an occasion when one is confronted with the life-time popular works of such an outstanding scholar as Professor Sobhan, one is seized by an urge for introspection. One

feels inclined to take a step back and assess the context, concerns, and challenges confronting his life and time.

I reckon his family circumstances played a big role in shaping Rehman Sobhan's values and attitudes in life. While his mother was an enlightened member of the

Nawab family of Dhaka, his father, who took retirement from the colonial Indian Police Service, opted for Pakistan, went on to become the political secretary to the prime minister, and subsequently served as an ambassador.

Indeed, his father belongs to the first generation of post-Pakistan

entrepreneurs, and established one of the first tanneries in Dhaka. Born in 1935 in Kolkata, Rehman Sobhan grew up at a time when the anti-colonial movement was gaining momentum in the sub-continent; he witnessed the decadence of the feudal structure, noted the limits of growth of the new Muslim middle class and observed the constrained prospect of the emerging entrepreneurial class in the then East Pakistan.

An excellent academic environment nurtured and cultivated his natural ability to critically observe and assess his surroundings. He associated himself with the marginalized social groups on the one hand and the forces of promise and hope on the other.

Rehman Sobhan's alma maters included St. Paul's School in Darjeeling, Aitchison College, Lahore and Cambridge University. His subsequent academic pursuits took him to such institutions as Oxford and Harvard Universities and many of the reputed centres of excellence in the academic world.

Fifty years back, in 1957, Rehman Sobhan started his professional career in the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka -- where he taught till the beginning of the War of Independence in 1971. For many, Rehman Sobhan, first of all, is a teacher who still pursues his engaging augmentative style with great erudition while establishing his heterodox viewpoints.

I do not know whether through his teaching Professor Sobhan has affected eternity or not, but he has definitely influenced a number of generations of students, imbuing them with academic excellence, nationalistic feelings and, often, with a sense of purpose in life.

For many of us Rehman Sobhan is a "liberation economist" (as there are liberation theologians). He is an

economist who devoted his talent to the search for a socio-economic paradigm, which could liberate the people of this country from the threats of ignorance, poverty, and insecurity. Some have complained that Rehman Sobhan was biased in his intellectual pursuit.

Yes, biased he was! He was biased towards the marginalized and the deprived, the voiceless and the disenfranchised people of this country. The storyline of all his works were underpinned by his quest for social justice, equity, and equal opportunities for all.

He emerged as possibly one of the most effective economists in Bangladesh to date, whose political economic analysis and perspectives will generate confidence and enthusiasm for future generations who will seek to empower the citizens with their effective rights.

Rehman Sobhan's bibliography not only reveals the odyssey of a Bangladeshi economist creating the milestones to independence, engaging in defining the development prospect of a newly born country, but also reflects the country's subsequent struggle for socio-economic development. His seminal contribution in formulating the economic premises for the independence of Bangladesh, better known as the "Two Economies Theory," is an achievement that would have been enough for a life-time.

But he never slowed down. His writings are a true reflection of the developmental debate, discourse and experience that Bangladesh has undergone over the past years. Thus, we see that major themes of his works have sequentially covered such areas as political implications of the Food for Work Program of Ayub Khan, role of public enterprise in an intermediate economy, crisis of external dependence, debt default, agrarian reform, critique of adjustment

policies reforms, anatomy of mal-governance and, finally, strategies for eradication of poverty. He was always the first to address the idea whose time has come.

He taught us to blend academic rigour with civic courage. An example of this was publication of the monograph "A Decade of Stagnation" during the heydays of the anti-autocracy movement, a time when he was the head of a semi-government organization, BIDS. We later smuggled the monograph to the donor community's annual aid group meeting held in October 1990. In fact, he was only 25 when his article on economy of East Pakistan was withdrawn by the Pakistan government because it was found to be politically unacceptable.

In this connection we cannot but mention Professor Rehman Sobhan's role as a freedom fighter. He crossed over to India during the early months of the Liberation War in 1971, and was appointed "Envoy Extraordinary" in charge of economic affairs for the provisional Bangladesh government in exile.

In this capacity, he was the first representative of the provisional government to reach US in the month of May 1971. He was the first to address the leading US senators to apprise them about the cause of Bangladesh. At that time, he had the unique distinction of addressing the National Press Club of Washington D.C., an honour, which is sometimes accorded to the heads of states. Rehman Sobhan continued to mobilize international opinion till the victory day.

While appreciating the role of individuals, Rehman Sobhan has always demonstrated his belief in collective actions. Thus, he remains one of the successful institution builders in the country. The launch of the post-independence Bangladesh

Planning Commission, rejuvenation of BIDS in mid-1980s, and founding of the CPD in mid-1990s bear testimony to his organizational capacity and leadership qualities. As a leader, he has always strived to create and promote people with conviction, and the will to carry on the task of nation building.

Many of you are possibly not fully aware that Rehman Sobhan has been, and remains, a distinguished personality in the international development community. He was a member of the United Nations Secretary General's Committee for Development Planning, member of the Executive Committee of the International Economics Association, member of the Commission for New Asia, member of the boards of UNRISD and the UN University.

He was a member of the Group of Eminent Persons set up by Saarc heads of states, and also of the high level panel for the LDCs set up by UN-Escap. His forceful interventions in various forums are often respectfully recalled by those who did not necessarily agree with his propositions.

He resigned from the famous Volker Commission, which was headed by the former head of the US Federal Reserve, when he disagreed with him on his approach towards restructuring of multilateral financial systems, arguing for better resource flow to low income countries.

At the end of the day, what always impress us are his human qualities -- his noble values and good manners, his care for his low-paid colleagues, inconspicuous public charity, active interest in diverse issues in life, and the strength to suffer personal tragedies gracefully.

Indeed, he has a deep and real inner life, which allows him to deal with the irritating details of the mundane. He finds time to pick the latest blockbuster from the DVD store, and also to pen a long review after reading Vikram Seth's "A Suitable Boy." Many of us who have learnt our trade at his feet received a bonus in the form of appreciation for pursuing high thoughts with passionate human interests.

One wonders why a man who is responsible for articulating the economic rationale for Bangladesh's independence movement, who played an active international role for the provisional government, who shaped the reconstruction and development policy of post-independence Bangladesh, who with his research and policy works has systematically tried to create a self-reliant national economy, who for four decades has stuck to his guns in adverse conditions and has contributed in creating an independent civil society in Bangladesh -- was never honoured with national recognition.

On second thoughts, it does not come as a surprise, Professor Sobhan had always been on the other side of the barricade -- fighting against the establishment for the development rights of the poor and the marginalized. He was a rebel with a cause. Thus, his real recognition emanates from the affection and respect of his students, colleagues and conscious citizens at large. To quote Voltaire, "It is to him who masters our mind by the force of truth, not to those who enslave them by violence (and may I add, money), that we owe our reverence."

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## Protect our small farmers from bird flu



However, if that is the government's decision, it should be implemented strictly in all outbreaks. If the culling policy is to be less conservative, establishment of a 10 km no-movement zone becomes even more critical. These zones must immediately be established whenever and wherever there is a new outbreak.

SM ABDUR RAHMAN

THE problem: Bird flu has now spread from Biman's farm in Savar to seven districts. If the spread of this virus is not stopped, it will eventually wipe out all the small poultry farmers in Bangladesh. Small farms are owned by rural families, and have been set up with minimal investment. They are extremely vulnerable to bird flu infection for the following reasons:

• Small farms have open sheds, which are easily infected (because wild birds can easily enter

the sheds).

• They sell their eggs and broiler chickens to traders. Traders' vehicles visit many farms everyday, and manure sticks to their wheels. As manure from infected farms carries the bird flu virus, the movement of traders' vehicles can spread bird flu very quickly from one farm to another.

Large poultry farms are far better protected against bird flu infection because they have invested in bio-security facilities (facilities into which bacteria and viruses cannot easily enter).

• Large farms have closed tunnel-

ventilated sheds. Closed sheds are unlikely to become infected by wild birds.

• Large farms own their own vehicles, whose wheels are washed and disinfected before they enter the farm. So large farms are less likely to be infected by vehicle movement.

Of course, the outbreak at Biman's farm proves that a large farm that is poorly managed (i.e. which has not implemented the above bio-security measures) can still become infected.

The initial outbreak at Biman was probably caused by a combination of two factors: poor bio-

security (open poultry sheds) and the presence of large numbers of migratory waterfowl (which can carry the bird flu virus) on the nearby Jahangirnagar University campus.

The solution: To protect the livelihoods of small farmers, the spread of bird flu must be stopped. This can be accomplished by implementing the National Avian Influenza Plan (prepared last year with FAO/WHO assistance).

The plan requires the government to take strong action whenever there is a bird flu outbreak on any farm.

1. A no-movement zone must be established within a 10 km radius of the outbreak. No chickens, eggs or chicks can be allowed to leave this no-movement zone.

2. All chickens (backyard and farm) within a 3 km radius of the outbreak must be culled (killed). Even if these chickens appear

healthy, it is likely that they are already infected. Culling them is necessary to stop the spread of the virus.

3. Farmers whose chickens are culled must be compensated, or they will not cooperate with the culling program.

Unfortunately, the plan has not been fully implemented in handling any of the outbreaks to date.

• Culling of poultry was carried out within 1 km of the Biman outbreak. This is less than the 3 km radius suggested by the plan.

• A 10km no-movement zone was not immediately established. This is why the disease has spread to so many districts after the original Biman outbreak.

• Subsequent outbreaks in

Tangail, Jamalpur, Narayanganj and Jessor were handled even more poorly. Poultry present within 1 km of infected farms were not culled,

and a 10 km no-movement zone was not effectively established.

Necessary steps: The government is apparently not implementing the National Avian Influenza Plan because shortage of funds is making it difficult to compensate farmers. Without compensation, the culling policy cannot be implemented, and the spread of bird flu cannot be stopped. Funds must be requested from donors so that farmers can be compensated.

However, if that is the government's decision, it should be implemented strictly in all outbreaks. If the culling policy is to be less conservative, establishment of a 10 km no-movement zone becomes even more critical. These zones must immediately be established whenever and wherever there is a new outbreak.

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## Reign of the 'melted ones'

MAZIAR BAHARI

NO one in Western intelligence is quite sure who made the final decision to release the British captives this week. But the Iranians themselves have a fair idea, and the nation's fiery president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, seemed to leave little doubt about it. "The pardon of the British sailors signified the Supreme Leader's kindness," Ahmadinejad told a meeting of Iranian officials in Tehran on Friday. The president was referring to the black-turbaned cleric who presided over the gathering: Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Khamenei, a 68-year-old whose right hand was paralysed in a 1981 assassination attempt, has a tough job. He is the constitutionally designated leader of a modern state ruled by religious laws devised 1,400 years ago. And he must placate both the modern and the medieval sides of the schizoid Iranian state -- a task that has grown increasingly complex in the 28 years since the Islamist revolution toppled the Shah of Iran.

Despite Khamenei's association with conservative factions within the Iranian government, he is known to be a pragmatic man who is much more in touch with the society than people give him credit for.

People close to him say that he believes in allowing Iranians more freedom in their daily lives in terms of clothing and public life. For the past 27 years, he has been a member of Iran's Council of Revolution, its president and, since 1990, the nation's designated Supreme Leader, the official successor to



AYATOLLAH Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic state. But Khamenei understands that the majority of Iranians, who were born after the 1979 revolution, don't necessarily share the ideals of their radical fathers. "If it were up to him he would allow much more freedom in the country than we have now," says a Khamenei associate who, like all Iranians asked to comment on the Supreme Leader, would speak only anonymously.

But whatever Khamenei may wish for, he has to justify his position as Iran's supreme religious authority by keeping his core conservative constituency happy. These include the diehard religious fanatics who refer to themselves in Farsi as zohab dar velayat ("those who are melted in the leadership") meaning that their lives are dedi-



cated to Khamenei. The ayatollah knows that it is this political base -- the "melted ones" -- who will defend him if either he or the nation is ever threatened.

Ahmadinejad himself, a former radical student leader that seized the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979 (though his personal involvement with that hostage crisis remains unclear), is considered one of the melted ones. But now the perception inside Tehran's political elite is that Ahmadinejad is damaging Iran's economy and foreign policy through mismanagement.

As a result, Khamenei is seeking the advice of reformists within the system who believe in change and engagement with the international community but who want to keep the clerical structure of the state intact.

argument if he took part in the Security Council session," said a Khamenei associate. "Since the local elections the Supreme Leader has become much closer to Mr. Hashemi and Mr. Khatami, but at the same time he cannot stop supporting Ahmadinejad," says the associate. Ahmadinejad "still enjoys a great deal of support and is still the president of Iran."

So until people like Khatami and Rafsanjani devise a clever way to reform the system while keeping Khamenei's leadership intact, the melted ones will be given almost free reign to protect the system. And in the estimate of many Western analysts, Iran's diplomatic and economic isolation over its nuclear program is only helping to perpetuate this reign, keeping the Khamenei supporters atop the power structure.

In a recent speech, Khamenei called the current Iranian year "the Year of National Unity and Islamic Solidarity." And several Iranian officials and pundits, in anonymous interviews, all agreed that Khamenei has called for an urgent unity mainly because of Washington's harsh rhetoric against the regime and the presence of some 170,000 American troops in two of Iran's neighboring countries, Iraq and Afghanistan. One pundit says: "National unity means that all different factions should listen to Mr. Khamenei as Iran's head of the state, and Islamic unity means that everyone should agree that he is the highest religious authority in the country and the Muslim world." Another commentator adds: "He is consolidating his power in the name of foreign threats and national security. And national security really

means the survival of the regime."

Most of the melted ones either fought in the Iran-Iraq War in the '80s or lament that they were not old enough to have taken part in that conflict. Their views of the world are limited to the propaganda on Iranian state-run television, and they have a xenophobic view of the West -- particularly the United States.

While foreign threats are mentioned as the main source of danger to the survival of the regime, the hard-line followers of Khamenei regard homegrown dissidents as the fifth column of the enemy who has to be treated with the same severity as foreign soldiers.

Recently, for example, it began an all out assault against women and civil rights activists. Many feminist activists campaigning against unjust laws curtailing women's rights have been arrested and incarcerated in the past month.

According to some who have been released, their interrogators questioned them about their contacts with foreign countries and organizations such as George Soros's Open Society Institute, which was established to promote democracy in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. "The [interrogators] main question was whether we want to stage an orange revolution [like Ukraine]," said one former detainee who spoke on condition of anonymity. The capture and release of the 15 British sailors and Marines will only help Khamenei consolidate his control -- and it is regarded as a great victory for the melted ones.

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poor display. This was not Guyana. Full credit goes to Sajid Mahmood and co., who exploited the conditions well and bowled with some verve.

That the Tigers were dispatched in 37.2 overs was a failure that would cause them consternation. You must go the distance. A few more of the batsmen needed to approach the situation in the same manner as Saqibul whose 57 not out showed real responsibility.

"Just 50 more," I jotted down as I watched England's reply. "Just 50 more." I think if Bangladesh had managed to take their score closer to 200 -- that is all it would have taken to win this one, so unconvincing were England with the bat.

All credit to the Bangladesh bowlers for the way they went about defending their small total. As they did against South Africa a few days earlier the left-armers took control of the middle overs, stifled the batsmen and choked up the run rate. England's weakness against spin was there for all to see, and how they creaked under the pressure.

At one stage England went almost four overs without scoring -- when they finally did, a bitter cheer erupted from the Barmy Army who were not best pleased. For much of the afternoon they had been silenced. Our team was making hard work of what they should have been an easy task.

So, in the end, a relieved England carry on towards the semi-finals of this World Cup and now face South Africa. Unless they pick up their game considerably, that match will hastily consign them to the also-rans.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, can carry their heads high as they continue to put life into the Super Eights, and provide this English cricket fan with a reason to smile. I cheer for cricket, Mr. Tebbit. I cheer for cricket.