

Dr. Anwar Hossain: Chairman Shaheb

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C.S. KARIM

CHAIRMAN Shaheb -- that's how he was known in the office (Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission) that he had left some 20 years ago. All of his seven successors, including me, used to address him by our favorite name for him, Chairman Shaheb. The moment his car entered the gate of 4, Mymensingh Road, everybody became alert as if the real and the only chairman was back to his office and anybody he encountered expected to be asked the question: "How is the work going?"

Dr. Anwar Hossain, who finally left us all on September 23 will definitely live in the memory of all his colleagues, officers and staff. I am in fair amount of doubt how many bosses now have that privilege, especially when, in many places, colleagues wait how soon the incumbent would retire to vacate the last rung of the ladder. Dr. Anwar Hossain had earned that privilege because of his outstanding qualities as a scientist, a natural leader, a human being of rare qualities, a person who could motivate, train, and help others in dreaming about a future and as a dedicated patriot.

Dr. Anwar Hossain knew how to lead others while keeping him above kinship, favoritism and nepotism. To him a decision was something that qualified the one making it good for a cause, for the country and the organisation he belongs to. He used to tell me: "Sajjad, if something appears just, go for it. There is no point in sitting on a decision; time hardly helps in improving the quality of a decision. If others give you different opinions, just go back to your own logic and resolve the issue."

That is how he used to approach problems, be it scientific or administrative. Not many of us have that incisive capacity or capability. His seemingly natural leadership qualities were acquired from his background, education and a keen analytical approach. He said he always preferred quality to quantity. That is how he still remains so dear to all in his office.

The first time I met Chairman Shaheb was in May 1977. I had just joined the Atomic Energy Commission. In those days the chairman used to meet new recruits to tell them exactly what was expected of them. I was waiting to see him along with two other new recruits. Before our turn came, he summoned me. The encounter, I remember, was brief. His only words were: "We hired you for the Rooppur Nuclear Power Project and expect that you will meet our expectations. No time to settling down. Please start working right from this moment. Tomorrow you have to accompany Mr. Nurul Islam (my immediate boss) to the meeting at the ERD and get the clearance for the financing for its feasibility studies."

ERD, etc. were words not understood by me at that initiation. I

walked up to Mr. Nurul Islam with a gaping mouth only to receive a copy of the notice and the draft agreement. He told me: "Read it, especially the sections on TOR and the schedule of payment. Better be careful. Chairman Shaheb won't accept anything but total success."

He went back to his file, preparing himself for the meeting. Mr. Nurul Islam was well prepared and I had hardly anything to say in the meeting. From that day onwards Chairman Shaheb and Mr. Nurul Islam, another excellent professional, were closely associated in nurturing my career. When Mr. Islam soon left for a three month assignment abroad, Chairman Shaheb told me that I was on my own and would have to take care of the work, including the feasibility study conducted by expatriate firms. That was Chairman Shaheb's way: "Give responsibility and see how one meets the challenges." Looking back I have a feeling that one should be groomed to take responsibilities and sheer seniority, though it has its own advantages, can't be the only consideration in assigning tasks.

I was luckier than most of my colleagues in that I possibly had more opportunities than others to benefit from association with Dr. Anwar Hossain. Later in my career, when Mr. Nurul Islam had left our organisation to work at the International Atomic Energy Commission, I was summoned to his room every morning as soon as he had arrived. This was an exclusive time for debriefing and briefing. I had the luxury of occupying a chair opposite to him, sometimes for hours, and go over the development of ongoing and planned activities. This happened almost every working day. At a point in time, he was holding the dual responsibility of the Atomic Energy Commission and SPARSSO. For some reason he took a fancy to SPARSSO, which was a source of frustration for the men at BAEC. He used to call me over to the SPARSSO office and discuss Rooppur Project quite often. He told me: "I am devoting more time to SPARSSO for the time being, because it's new. We have to take advantage of the opportunities offered by remote sensing technologies. This would help us assessing our resources more effectively." Sometimes, I had to meet him at his Gulshan residence to get his instructions.

I have never seen a person more focused than Chairman Shaheb on different issues of importance. Rooppur always topped the list. He was an avid enthusiast. He was a firm believer in peaceful applications of atomic energy, more so for power production. He fought almost single handedly, at least in the beginning, to convince the government to sign the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). This was dictated more by his commitment to non-proliferation than any thing else. He was also instrumental in signing the Bilateral Agreement with the US on Nuclear Cooperation

and a similar agreement with France.

On both the occasions he was so happy. I remember he told me: "Sajjad, one of these [agreements] will help us in acquiring a research reactor from the US. Possibly the other would help us acquiring nuclear power technology." The first prognosis was proved correct instantaneously, while we still wait eagerly for materialisation of his cherished dream -- namely the Rooppur Project. Later on, I found him so happy when the government had signed the Bilateral Agreement on Safeguards, the Protocol Additional to Safeguards and finally the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). He was elated to note that Bangladesh was included in the exclusive list of thirty-some countries, whose accession to CTBT was mandatory in making it operational. His comment was: "See, the world recognises our capabilities. We have signed it voluntarily, thereby announcing to the world that our track record in nuclear regulation and verification regimes was impeccable and our commitment firm and voluntary."

To many of us in the scientific community of Bangladesh, especially those who work in various disciplines of nuclear science and technology, he was a source of inspiration -- a beacon that would lead us to success even through bumpy and dusty roads. Whenever I felt frustrated, I looked to him to get out of the quandary. To him, frustration was by, and large, an unknown quantity and a temporary phenomenon, soon to be overcome by new hopes. In this respect, he was an optimist of extraordinary proportions and matched by very few people that I know.

Dr. Anwar Hossain was a scholar of a very high calibre, a fact known to many at home in Bangladesh, and abroad. From 1997 onwards, I used to be at the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), an annual event, and very often I found strangers walking up to me and enquiring: "How is Anwar?" These inquirers ranged from eminent scientists, who either knew him as an ex-colleague or an ex-coworker, members of the delegations of other countries, or simply someone charmed by discussions with him or had chanced upon one of his illuminating speeches or presentations.

Wherever he went, he left scores of admirers in his wake. I remember, being once asked by Dr. Hans Blix, ex-director general of IAEA: "Has Dr. Anwar Hossain retired from his work? I reckon not. With his kind of enthusiasm and intense interest people do not simply retire." I met Dr. Shireen (once US representative to the UN) and her brother Dr. Siddique (who was teaching in Hawaii) when I was working on a project at the Sandia National Laboratory, New Mexico. The first question they asked was: "How is Dr. Anwar Hossain? We



have the fondest memories of him as a close friend of our father Dr. Siddique, a professor at the University of Islamabad. He was so inspiring." They had probably last met Dr. Anwar Hossain not less than three decades earlier. Yes, he could inspire others and leave behind indelible impressions in their minds. I am proud to be one of those.

Chairman Shaheb was a voracious reader and very quick to find the weaknesses and strengths of any document. He read almost vertically and his response was instantaneous. He sometimes used to say: "I like the way you present things. It usually has logical sequences, articulation is alright." I consider such things said by Dr. Anwar Hossain to be words of encouragement and recognition of my efforts. Only great personalities like our Chairman Shaheb can utter such words of encouragement, though I still believe that the words were more a manifestation of his liking for me and not necessarily of my capabilities.

I remember he would instruct me to write something and demand that the report should be produced soon (I knew his soon was no longer than hours, or at the most a day or two). In those days of typewriters, it was not always easy to produce a quality write-up quickly, especially as any change/modification would require hours for retyping. Sometimes there was hardly any time to modify or correct, as retyping would be difficult, time consuming and new mistakes could occur. The trick was to ignore minor corrections, and to look to heaven and pray that possibly the mistake would escape his scrutiny. This was never to happen. He would without exception find the mistake in a minute. He would make one or two corrections, put some arrow marks on moving one or two sentences within the same page (possibly he was mindful that he shouldn't force the typist to redo). Invariably with his mastery over the language the whole quality of the document was changed. This

was true both for English and Bangla.

Dr. Anwar Hossain was a great organiser. When I had met his ex-boss Dr. I. H. Usmani, retired chairman of Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission at our Dhaka office, Dr. Usmani told me that once he had proposed that Dr. Anwar Hossain should move over to Dhaka. Dr. Anwar Hossain's conditions were: (a) Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission would establish a centre in Dhaka; (b) the center will be provided with a particle accelerator, and (c) the first digital computer of Pakistan has to be installed in Dhaka.

Dr. Usmani told me: "The demands were so forceful and logical that I had no alternative but to accept them." He had all his three wishes materialised. In those days a particle accelerator meant a major and state-of-the-art facility for any research institution anywhere in the world. Dr. Hossain promptly arranged an international seminar on low energy physics, in which many of the stalwarts of nuclear physics participated.

From that day Atomic Energy Centre, Dhaka found its place on the map of nuclear physics. His cherished dream was to turn this into a centre of excellence. Even after his retirement, he used to visit his favorite centre whenever he could. Almost any place within this centre still bears the memory of his magical touch. The Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Savar was his creation. He had carefully developed the concept and wanted to turn this into something similar to Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell, UK. He dreamed that AERE would cater to the needs of all branches of nuclear science and technology. He always wanted that all the research and development activities of BAEC would be responsive to national needs and priority areas of national development. I hope that his vision is materialised and the BAEC activities would indeed excel in future. It's the responsibility of successive generation of BAEC scientists to help materialising his visions.

Possibly not many knew much about the other sides of Chairman Shaheb. He had secured a high position in the merit list of the matriculation examination from Gaibandha (under Calcutta University). He possibly scored the highest marks in more than one subject and Bangla was one of them. Reading his drafts in English was a pleasure and in Bangla his capabilities were excellent. He hardly needed any preparation before giving a speech and it usually contained many bits and pieces of information within the little time allotted.

These were masterpieces and contained something for any and all in the audience. But on serious technical matters, he used to rehearse very minutely. He would go over all the viewpoints time and again. Sometimes he called me and others over to his home or office to make a full presentation or a speech. Each time he used to pose questions and ask for additional information, as if he was going to face an examination board. He would take notes, which sometimes ran larger than the presentation itself. I had the opportunity of accompanying him to many of these presentations and I never found him fumbling for a reply or additional information.

Most of the materials were on Rooppur and he told me, when I inquired about the reason for the seriousness: "I don't want the Rooppur Project to suffer because of any fault of mine." Rooppur was his passion and possibly nothing beyond his family was closer to him. It requires tremendous concentration for a person to remain so focused for so long. I wish he could stay longer to motivate others!

Chairman Shaheb was a firm believer in social justice. He was fond of music. He was a voracious reader and fond of reading both scientific articles and literature both in Bangla and English. He used to keep abreast of happening both at home and abroad. He was a highly articulate person and always and automatically took the centre stage at any forum.

He loved to travel, be it within Bangladesh and abroad. I remember while traveling within the country he didn't care about protocol and would stop by any village tea stall to take a cup of tea, eat a dal puri or a singara and talk to the villagers who happened to be present there. I had the occasion to visit his ancestral home at Nallapara, in Deldwar of Tangail. After sunset the villagers would invariably come to meet him and he happened to know almost all of them by name including their relatives. He loved to discuss problems faced by them and tried his best to solve through his acquaintances in Dhaka.

Wherever he went, he was close to the hearts of the common men. He never looked back to his official position. An amazing person with so many virtues! He once told me that soon after coming out of the university he took a job teaching at a college at an obscure village in Chittagong -- possibly a college called Sir Asutosh College. He enjoyed being there in spite of being a young, fashionable graduate with outstanding results from Dhaka University. He worked as the first director general of Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology in Islamabad. Even 30 years after he had left that place I found many of his ex-colleagues still remembering him as they enquired about him when I happened to be there in 1998. Chairman Shaheb was extremely modest, a disciplined individual and never pretended. He knew how one can be graceful in saying sorry. He was my real mentor who always encouraged me to excel in anything I did.

His passion for energy as a whole was increased as he proceeded with his struggle for nuclear power. One day he called me over to his office and told me: "Let's start dealing with alternate sources of energy as well. This will strengthen justification as the information available would help in a more objective appraisal of the alternatives."

That's how we started dealing

with solar photovoltaic technology. First we had identified solar photovoltaic for pumping. This was imported and installed. The experience was, unfortunately, not very encouraging. We then promptly decided to switch over to lighting. One morning, he told me: "Could you design something like a central battery charging station? The users would come to the station and exchange their used-up battery for another charged with solar energy at the central charging station."

He had subsequently developed the management concept. The pilot project was established at Nallapara of Deldwar Upazilla. This was indeed the basis for the REB solar project at Narsingdi. He deserves full credit for this concept. Once a team comprising representatives from the East West Center, Hawaii, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, ICIMOD, Katmandu, ESCAP and FAO visited Chairman Shaheb's office and requested us to take up a project on Rural Energy Planning based on the concept of participatory action. He joined our team as its adviser. I personally found lot of interest and used to pass a fair amount of time in the three villages in Pabna. He accompanied me a number of times to those obscure villages -- sometimes we had to walk for miles or take a raft made from banana trunks to reach those places. He was never tired and always encouraged me and my colleagues and jumped in with very useful guidance.

We later on started preparing the National Energy Policy and, in fact, between the two of us prepared the first Background Paper for it. By that time he had bought me the first PC. He made a substantial contribution and we had days of discussions on the issues and options. The information was incorporated into the final policy document. I still wonder how he could devote so much effort into whatever he did and the ideas that he offered. It's possibly patriotism at its best that had motivated him to get into so many issues even when most of his generation was possibly enjoying the pleasant days of retirement.

As Dr. Hans Blix had once said, Dr. Anwar Hossain would retire from service but nobody could force him to retire from work. In fact, he continued working right through to the end of his life. As I was standing by his grave listening to "from dust to dust" I thought that this was indeed the end of an institution -- a loss that is irreparable, a soul that can't be replaced, a beacon flashing the end, but a spirit and an embodiment of hope and inspiration that will survive all else.

I felt abandoned like a broken disciple of a fallen mentor. I salute you my dear Chairman Shaheb. In death possibly you have a break from the long journey along the dusty road of fighting for a cause. We all hope your dream will come true. One day, someday, somebody in a lonely hamlet will definitely raise his children, see them studying under a light energised by a nuclear power plant and look to the heavens and murmur a prayer for my dear Chairman Shaheb. That will be our real tribute to our dear Dr. Anwar Hossain -- our Chairman Shaheb.

The writer is an Adviser, Caretaker Government of Bangladesh.

Global access through the global language

English has become the medium of global communication. About 80 per cent of internet content is in English; 75 per cent of mail sent around the world is in English; and 60 per cent of the world's publications are in English. But two out of every three English speakers are non-native speakers.

CHRIS AUSTIN

THERE was a pile of documents to read as I prepared to take up my new position in Bangladesh. Two in particular caught my eye: "Unlocking the potential, Bangladesh's poverty reduction strategy," and a long-term education plan called "Learning for change."

I was attracted by their enthusiasm for the potential for growth and development in Bangladesh. This reflects the same enthusiasm and excitement evident in every primary school I have been to, in Bangladesh and elsewhere. And in the entrepreneurial endeavour visible in shops and on roadsides across the country.

One of the key roles of government is to help the country realise its potential. The principal aim of development

agencies and donors is to support these. I believe that Bangladesh can grow faster if more of her people have a greater command of English. There is evidence of such growth.

In countries like Thailand and Malaysia, English skills fostered growth in industry and businesses, and opened new grounds for entrepreneurship as well. Learning from their experiences, countries like China and South Africa are investing a lot in teaching English to their present and future workforce.

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But two out of every three English speakers are non-native speakers. That means they learned the language not as their mother

tongue, but as a second or foreign language. In many ways, it is like learning a new skill to help you do your job better. Some of us have family and friends in the UK, and they are the best examples of people who have learnt English for jobs and social communication.

What is the best way of learning English so that you can communicate with the worlds of commerce and knowledge? Language experts say that the best way to learn a new language is through practice, and that learning opportunities should enable learners to practice the four major skills of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Do these opportunities exist in Bangladesh? They certainly do, but only for a small number of people -- and even then at considerable cost. When I visited some primary schools near Dhaka recently, I saw about sixty young children



crammed in a classroom reading aloud from a book.

Sadly, they were not practicing the language with each other or with the teacher. Learning English in that way will not help learners to speak

or to read or to write the language, though they may be able to reproduce some English for their exams. I also heard that most students who couldn't pass in the recent Higher Secondary Examinations were not

successful in English.

The best way to create an enabling environment for practicing English language skills is to use mass media and digital technology. The UK is planning to support an

English language-teaching program that will use radio, television, the internet and mobile phones.

These media are being used more and more in Bangladesh, and are an ideal means by which to reach more than 25 million people over the program's nine years.

Interactive radio instructions will bring the world's best language activities within the reach of all students -- in their classrooms. This will give teachers effective additional help in teaching English by practicing the four language skills I have mentioned.

This method of teaching English has already proved highly successful in South Africa, in Sudan and in Kenya. In future, we hope that it will also help in the teaching of othersubjects.

Television dramas, debates, quizzes and talk shows -- all set in Bangladesh -- will promote the use of English in social settings. Television will also broadcast special language learning programs aimed at a wider audience of professionals and learners who are no longer in classrooms.

Specially designed instructions will enable mobile phones to be

used for practicing listening and speaking skills. Users can download lessons on speaking, listening or vocabulary linked to television programs. That will give them a further opportunity to practice what they have seen on television. I know that China, for example, has succeeded in rapidly increasing the number of its English language speakers in this way.

The program will also train teachers to improve their own language skills. It will train people to become effective trainers -- they, in turn, will train teachers from both primary and secondary schools.

I am delighted that the UK, through DFID funding, is involved with an innovative program that is cheap, and will also reach a broad range of learners. It will take advantage of rapidly advancing communication technology to deliver English language skills. And, I hope, it will help unlock the tremendous potential of the Bangladesh workforce and give more people the chance to earn a better living and quality of life for themselves.

Chris Austin is Country Representative, DFID Bangladesh.