

## Requiem for Nitun Kundu : A token of remembrance

**We who had the privilege of working with him will always cherish the most loving memories of the man who was as great as his wise counsel. A truly self-made man. All his life he lived a life of unfeigned simplicity. His innate humility was not only impressive but was also very inspiring to all around him. He had a wonderful ability (a rare quality, these days) to rejoice at the success of others in the profession.**

FIDA KAMAL

**H**UMAN beings do not appear to be the most majestic of creatures. Tigers and lions naturally look majestic, magnificent, stately, splendid and grand. Quite often appearances are unreliable and misleading. However, it needs to be pointed that human beings have one faculty which no living creature possesses. Human beings are creative beings. Animals leave traces of what they were -- carcasses and things. Humans, on the other hand, leave traces of what they have created, such as paintings, literature and monuments. Some of these are really magnificent. That faculty alone is what makes humans splendid.

Originally named Nitya Gopal Kundu, he later adopted Nitun Kundu as his name. For me, however, he was just "Nitun Dada" or simply "Dada." That is the Bangla equivalent word for "elder brother" -- an affectionate address of respect. I cannot say for sure when Nitya Gopal Kundu became Nitun Kundu. But I remember Dada once told me that his loving mother used to affectionately call him Nitun. In other words Nitun was his nickname. Dada's love and devotion for his dear mother, perhaps, made him adopt Nitun as his first name.

Nitun Kundu was a grand man. Not in the least ostentatious in his life style. As a matter of fact, he was a very simple man with simple habits -- coming from the most ordinary background from the backwaters of Dinajpur in northern Bangladesh. He lived and looked like an ordinary man. However, what he has left behind -- his paintings and works -- are really remarkable and outstanding, magnificent and imposing, impressive and splendid, and grand and majestic. That makes him a magnificent and impressive person. His creative mind made him majestic.

So many small incidents rush into my mind -- recalling Nitun Dada. I came in contact with Nitun Kundu for the first time in the latter part of 1970, when we were colleagues at Bitopi Advertising -- an advertising agency. He was in the Art Department and I was an Account Executive. We worked together. I had the privilege of observing him working from close quarters. From the beginning, he was the most affectionate, caring and loving person. In many ways, he was a delicate person. Yet, he was also very strong willed --

although this was not very apparent. He had an inner strength, which was his driving force.

He often re-called his humble origins. The pain and sufferings he had to endure during his early days in Dhaka. That was in the fifties of the last century, when he had just arrived from distant Dinajpur. He had one overpowering desire, to be a successful man. He came to Dhaka in pursuit of his passion to become a painter. To defray his expenses in those days, he used to be a commercial painter of cinema bill-boards. He did complete his

graduation from the then Art College (now the Institute of Fine Arts of the Dhaka University), securing the first position in his class. He often lamented the fact that he could not become a teacher in the Art College, despite his academic accomplishments. He so much wanted to be a teacher in his alma mater. This was one dream which remained unfulfilled.

During the time I was reading law in London, in the mid seventies, about the time when Otobi was being set up in Dhaka, Nitun Dada visited London. It was my privilege and pleasure to accompany him to the many museums, art galleries and theatres in London.

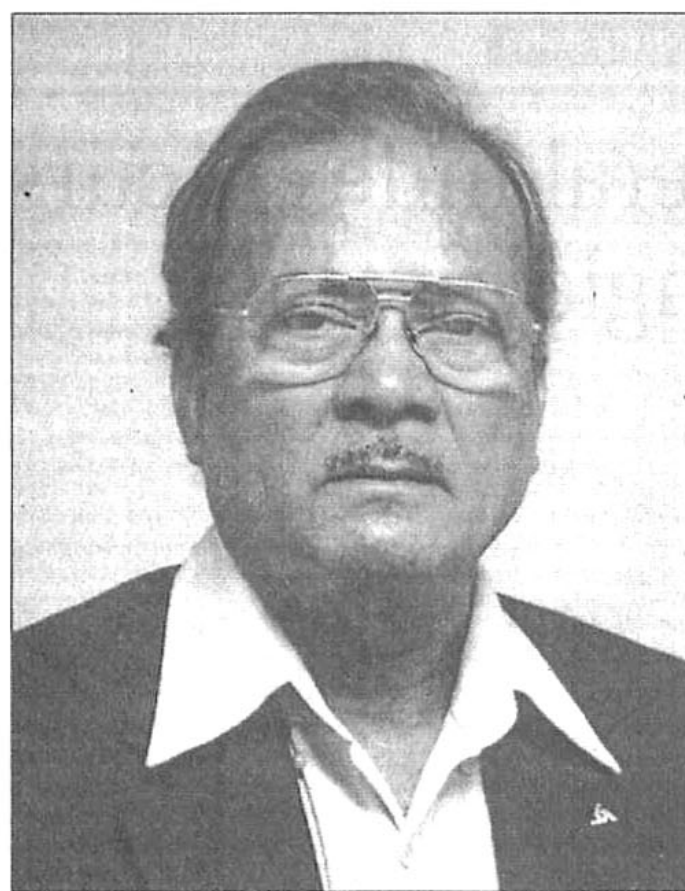
In many ways, Nitun Dada was like a Renaissance man. He distinguished himself in many fields of activity. He was a painter by training. He designed and sculpted many monuments. He designed

and produced many mementos and souvenirs. Later, he became an industrialist by dint of his merit and hard work. He was a leader in all that he did. All his life, he had worked always innovatively and with ingenuity. Moulder of his own environment and his future, his life and works had been an "undertaking." For all that he had accomplished during his lifetime he has always appeared larger than life. Looking at his works is always a wonderfully exhilarating experience.

On the basis of sheer hard work and physical vigour Nitun Dada set up Otobi, initially as a very humble enterprise in 1975. From Sukrabad to Topkhana Road and then to Mirpur, Shyampur and Gulshan, I am witness to Nitun Dada's unflagging devotion, superior intellect and unbounded creativity in the establishment of Otobi as a centre of excellence in modern living. In the formative stages and thereafter, he really looked after, as also carefully tended to, the growth of the organisation with loving care and attention. Otobi grew over the years under his tender loving care.

He was as careful towards Otobi as he was with his children Amity and Animesh. It is said that Otobi was as much his child as his other children, namely, Amity and Animesh. It may be noticed that all of them have the first alphabet of the Bangla language as the initial letter of their respective names when spelt in Bangla. It may sound strange, but a similar sounding word in English, "awe," evokes a feeling of reverential respect mixed with wonder. One is truly awed with the diverse talents of this gifted man of extra-ordinary abilities as he traversed his personal journey through the trials and tribulations of his life to the high points of his achievements and accomplishments.

He has ascended by discovering the fullness of his gifts, his talents and faculties. What he has created on the way are monuments to the stages of his understanding of nature and of his own self -- what poet W.B. Yeats called "monuments of un-aging intellect." It is always an exciting and rewarding experience to contemplate on the life and times of Nitun Dada. Such contemplation enables us to reflect, and learn lessons from the luminous



light it throws on our own nature as human beings -- from the primordial infant from which the whole exciting and rewarding adventure of man began.

He was a man with a straight and strong spine. This was a result of his self-reliance all along -- from the lowest rung of the ladder where he stood many years ago, to the highest, which he occupied by his accomplishments at the time when he passed away a little more than a year ago. By dint of merit, distilled from the midnight burning oil, he has climbed the spiral stairway of success. As he had desired, he availed himself in more than one direction. He trusted his own right arm, however, more than the Alladin's lamp of magic.

Sturdy independence of opinion and idealism had been the chief characteristic of Nitun Dada's character. He could never bend his knees "before insolent might." He gave you, when you first saw him, the impression of a sun-kissed palm tree, the very apex of uprightness. His toil -- he believed in the logic of living laborious days -- is touched with tense tranquillity, as his temper. But his inherent sense

of humour, though restrained, serves as a searchlight and reveals his wholesome humanity. His capacity to face life like a wrestler or a warrior, come what may, leads one to think that he had a secret source of strength, though he may not have been aware of it. His humanity and helpfulness are next of kin to divinity.

Artist in the Bangla language is "shilpi." Closely related word is the Bangla word "shilpo," which also means "industry." Nitun Dada fused in himself the artist in him with the industrialist in him. What a wonderful and amazing fusion! By training he was a painter. He was truly an artist. In establishing Otobi -- the mammoth industrial undertaking he never failed to remember, or forgot, that he was an artist in his heart. In his designs and works of diverse nature, he had always succeeded brilliantly to make a happy fusion of the two aspects -- in the way he had lived and the way he had worked and created. He had a fairly long walk on the earth. He walked tall and with an impressive sense of dignity and honour.

He has fused art and industry and created "Otobi," hopefully to

be endured, sustained and carried forward to its next logical development -- with regard to which I have no doubt in my mind of its success under the guidance and able hands of his other two children.

We who had the privilege of working with him will always cherish the most loving memories of the man who was as great as his wise counsel. A truly self-made man. All his life he lived a life of unfeigned simplicity. His innate humility was not only impressive but was also very inspiring to all around him. He had a wonderful ability (a rare quality, these days) to rejoice at the success of others in the profession. His overall humanity makes one feel that it was indeed an honour and a privilege to have known the man -- a pleasure to treasure his memory. This thought makes me recall what I had read a long time ago: "If I have the privilege to meet you for a while, it will be to treasure a memory which will make me a little more richer than I am." The enrichment is abundant. And the rewards are plentiful.

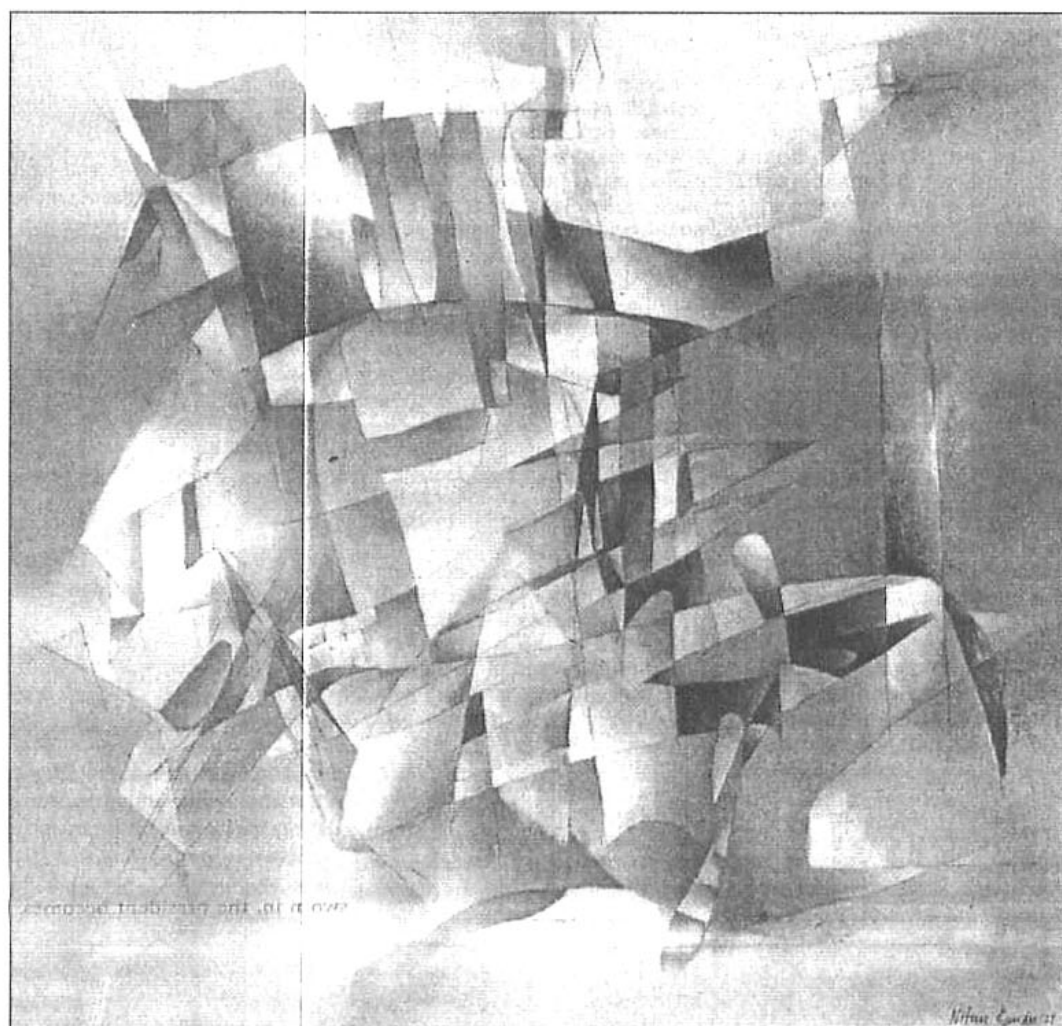
On his passing away, his colleagues and friends have lost a very dear person, whom we all had learned to love and esteem; the world of fine arts and culture has lost an icon; the industrial and entrepreneurial arena has lost a fine industrialist and the country has lost an eminent Bangladeshi. He has done us proud. We are all privileged to have known him, seen him work. What a shining and noble person. May his soul blissfully rest in eternal peace.

Before I conclude, I would most humbly and most respectfully request all concerned to kindly consider setting up a "Lectureship" at his Alma Mater to honour Nitun Dada's memory -- by dedicating a certain sum of money, by way of establishing a Foundation which will organise a yearly "Lecture" on a suitably selected subject.

Rarely is it given to a person to attain such eminence in so many fields, and to render such public service for so many years. I wish we had more of such persons. What a difference he has made in our lives.

This is my humble homage to my Nitun Dada.

Fida Kamal is Attorney General, Government of Bangladesh.



Dance of colour -- an oil painting by Nitun Kundu

## Sidr and beyond

**It is now getting clearer every day that the natural calamities like flood, cyclone and tidal bore, that Bangladesh is frequently attacked with are not all natural. They have a definite relation with the much talked about global warming caused by greenhouse emission of the industrialised and developed countries.**

HUSAIN IMAM

**S**IDR, a tropical revolving storm (TRS), commonly known as cyclone in this part of the world, that hit the country on the night of November 15 with a wind speed of more than 230 kph will probably be remembered for quite some time as one of the fiercest cyclones the country has ever faced.

Although, in terms of loss of human lives, Sidr, with 10,000 to 15,000 dead according to unofficial estimates, may not be considered as deadly as the cyclones of 1970 (500,000 dead) or of 1991 (138,000 dead) in terms of loss to the national economy, it might appear to be the worst of its kind. The hurricane scale wind, with 15 to 20 feet high tidal wave that swept across the coastal districts and ripped through the heart of the country from south-west to north-east, affected almost one third of the country's population, nearly six million people, directly.

The loss and suffering to the people of the south-western coastal districts have been colossal to say the least. Dwelling houses have been blown off, trees razed to the ground, standing crops demolished, roads, bridges and culverts destroyed, and livestock washed off. More than 4000 educational institutes have been fully or partially damaged. Almost one-third of the Sunderbans, a world heritage, has been totally demolished.

A large number of people of the coastal belt, for obvious reasons, earn their livelihood by engaging in fishing or fish related business. Sidr has literally made them paupers. The fishermen

have lost their boats and nets, the shrimp cultivators their stock of shrimp, and the fish traders their business.

Estimates of loss to the national economy, as usual, vary widely in range. Some estimates suggest Tk 5,000-10,000 crore, others Tk 20,000 crore or more. What is most alarming is the loss of the standing crop. Almost half of the aman crop, the only crop for a year in this part of the coun-

try, which was about to be harvested, has been totally lost.

As a result, the country's annual food deficit, already running between 20-25 lac tons over the years, is likely to shoot up to 40-45 lac tons this year due to two consecutive floods in the recent months and now the devastating cyclone, necessitating procurement of at least 10 lac tons of food grains on emergency basis from outside sources in the next 3-4 months.

The country's economy is certainly passing through the most critical and challenging period since independence, as every strata of the society, have made the economy critically vulnerable.

No wonder, Ms Hua Du said in the conference: "I have been here for 5 and a half years, and have studied about Bangladesh for several decades since independence, but I have never sensed such difficulties as the country is going to face this year (Daily Star November 27)."

It is heartening to see the spontaneous response of the world community at large, the donor countries and the donor agencies in particular, to help us in this particular period of

national crisis. They have come forward with every kind of assistance -- in both cash and kind -- in the relief and rehabilitation program for the cyclone affected people. We are grateful to them.

I am confident that, given the resilience the people of this country have and the response we are receiving from the people at home and abroad, we will overcome the crisis as we did on so many occasions in the past.

It may not be, however, out of context for Bangladesh, as a country among the ones to be worst affected by climate change, to draw the attention of our development partners to the latest Human Development Report released in the city on November 27, and request them to go beyond what they are doing in mitigating the sufferings of the people struck by natural calamities, which are not necessarily all natural.

The report says: "Those who largely caused the problem -- the rich countries -- are not going to be those who suffer most in the short term. It is the poorest, who did not, and are not contributing to greenhouse emission who are the most vulnerable."

It is now getting clearer every day that the natural calamities like flood, cyclone and tidal bore, that Bangladesh is frequently attacked with are not all natural. They have a definite relation with the much talked about global warming caused by greenhouse emission of the industrialised and developed countries.

The warning that almost a third of Bangladesh will go under the sea in the next quarter of a century, if the global warming and the climate change continues as it is, can no longer be taken lightly. It is high time the matter is taken up in the international forum with the loudest possible voice.

Capt. Hussain Imam is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

## Forming truth commission

**It is immoral of this government, nay of any good government to show the carrot to some people and the stick to others for having committed the same crime. If there is to be a truth commission for a particular crime or a set of crimes, its door must be kept open to all who have committed the same crime or crimes. An individual can have double standards. But a government and a state cannot.**

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

**T**HERE is a debate raging now over the government move to form a truth commission for businessmen charged with corruption. It sounds bizarre to me. A truth commission for a pervasive and endemic crime like corruption, and that too for a particular segment of the population. Why?

True, there are precedents of truth commissions in many countries. Most notable is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa formed by the Nelson Mandela government for crimes like human rights violations committed by the white minority racist government agencies in pursuit of their policy of apartheid. It was welcomed the world over because it succeeded largely in healing the wounds of apartheid and in integrating the erstwhile ruling white minority race with the overwhelming black majority people of South Africa.

But there is hardly any country, other than Pakistan, which seeks reconciliation with people charged with corruption. And in Pakistan too, the offer of reconciliation is not restricted to any particular segment of corrupt people, as is being contemplated in Bangladesh.

If what the Law Advisor Barrister Mainul Hossain has said is correct, this interim government's intention to have the proposed truth commission is guided by the belief that given an option of plea bargaining, most of our corrupt businessmen, who

have already been apprehended and who have gone into hiding within the country and outside, would prefer to confess their guilt in return for a mitigated punishment, which, in turn, will give impetus to the business and economy of the country.

Supposing that many of the notoriously corrupt businessmen do surrender to the law enforcement agencies and ultimately get away with a light punishment, how does this deal contribute to promoting the interest of the state? After all, in the final analysis, it is the larger interest of the state, which ought to determine what we should do and what we should not.

Will the state get back a big chunk of the ill-gotten money from these people? Will these people return to the mainstream of our national efforts to boost trade and commerce with the sincerity and honesty that we expect from them? Most importantly, as a nation, do we need reconciliation with people who, in collaboration with dishonest politicians, have looted and plundered our state exchequer in the name of business? These questions do need to be answered in the affirmative.

It may be argued that the setting up of the proposed truth commission and the introduction of plea bargaining will ease the piling up of cases awaiting trial in our courts of law, reducing considerably the litigation costs and time. Most importantly, it may result in achieving national unity and cohesion because a

very large number of the population -- the business community indicted for corruption -- are likely to take advantage of the leniency offered under the truth commission system and, in all likelihood, will opt to return to the mainstream of our national efforts to boost trade and commerce and give fillip to our dwindling production and economy.

While there is no doubt that the load of corruption cases piling up in our courts of justice across the country will ease up to a large extent, allowing the courts and the prosecutors more time and energy to focus on cases on other crimes and offences, doubts will continue to crowd our minds as to whether corruption is the crime that we should seek to combat and eliminate through truth commission and plea bargaining. To say that Pakistan has done it does not necessarily mean that we should replicate that in Bangladesh. I am afraid, politically speaking, Pakistan is the wrong model to follow.

Corruption has spread far and wide in this country with political and state patronisation since the dark days of the autocratic rule of Lt. Gen Hussain Mohammad Ershad. It reached an all time high during the immediate past BNP-Jamat-e-Islam alliance government headed by Khaleida Zia.

As of now, fighting corruption is high on the agenda of this government. Corruption is a cancerous growth, which cannot be treated with palliatives. You have to be ruthless to fight it. Before it

spreads further and eats into the vitals of this otherwise politically and economically disadvantaged nation, it must be removed root and branch from the body politic of this country.

Surely, it cannot be achieved through truth commission and plea-bargaining. Should the government go ahead with the proposed legislation, it may erode the credibility of the government in the eyes of the people.

It is immoral of this government, nay of any good government to show the carrot to some people and the stick to others for having committed the same crime. If there is to be a truth commission for a particular crime or a set of crimes, its door must be kept open to all who have committed the same crime or crimes. An individual can have double standards. But a government and a state cannot.

At the same time, it may also egg on corruption and crime if the government decides to expand the scope of the truth commission and plea-bargaining to include those who masqueraded as our political leaders and looted and pillaged our state wealth and property all these years.

Besides, there is also no guarantee that the corrupt businessmen, having been dealt with leniently under the truth commission, will cough out their ill-gotten money and engage in honest business as law-abiding citizens in a spirit of penitence and patriotism. It is hard to believe that this government, with no political axe to grind, will risk losing the confidence and support of the people by soft-pedaling on a heinous crime like corruption.

Brig. Gen. Shamsuddin Ahmed is a freedom fighter and former Military Secretary to the President of Bangladesh.