

## Mohammed Ali of Bogra

SYED HAMDE ALI

**N**AWABZADA Altaf Ali, eldest son of Nawab Bahadur Sir Nawab Ali Choudhury (a founder of Dhaka University, for whom the Senate Bhaban is named) was an Honorary Magistrate and Justice of the Peace, in Barisal of British India in his twenties. On October 19, 1909 his eldest son, Mohammed Ali, was born — later known as Mohammed Ali of Bogra.

Nawabzada Altaf Ali's sons were largely raised by their paternal grandfather, the Nawab, who maintained homes in Dhanbari, Bogra, where he married. Mr. Mohammed Ali did his early schooling at Hastings House in Calcutta, went on to Calcutta madrassah, and then to Presidency College of Calcutta University.

He lived in Bogra and during his early life became the chairman of the Bogra municipality, and later chairman of the District Board. He was a member of the Waqf Board in Calcutta. He was awarded the title of Khan Bahadur by the British but later relinquished that title as a protest against the British rule.

In the first elections held in Bengal under the British Raj in 1937, he was elected to the legislature of undivided Bengal in Calcutta from the Muslim League. He was 28 years old at that time. His father stood for the same election but to the upper house of the parliament and was elected under the banner of Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq's Krishak Proja Party. Sher-e-Bangla himself was in the Lower House, along with the likes of Hussian Shaheed Suhrawardy and Sir Khwaja Nazimuddin. Mr. A.K. Fazlul Huq became the Chief Minister.

In 1943, after a shift in government, Sir Nazimuddin became chief minister and Mr. Mohammed Ali became parliamentary secretary to the chief minister.

In 1945 Mr. Suhrawardy became the chief minister of Bengal, and included Mr. Mohammed Ali in his cabinet as



Mohammed Ali of Bogra with Nehru.

minister of health. As minister with this portfolio he established the Dhaka Medical College in 1946 and the Lake Medical College Hospital in Calcutta. He was subsequently also made minister of finance and minister of local self-government.

In 1947, a truncated Pakistan was born, and he was elected to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan from Bogra. In 1948, Mr. Mohammed Ali Jinnah visited Dhaka and made the now-famous speech at Curzon Hall where he insisted that Urdu was to be the state language of Pakistan. Prior to that speech, Mr. Mohammed Ali heard that such a statement was going to be made, and he advised strongly to Mr. Nazimuddin, who was the chief minister of East Pakistan, that he should restrain Mr. Jinnah from making this declaration. The hall, where a young Bangabandhu also roared his protest, exploded and this was the beginning of the end of the concept of East Pakistan, only a year after the nation was born.

Mr. Jinnah was not amused. Stung by the rebuke, he flared back at Mr.

Mohammed Ali and ordered him to accept a diplomatic assignment. Although he was supposed to be the figurehead governor-general, there was no way but to accede.

Assigned to Egypt, Mr. Mohammed Ali instead took Burma, because he wanted to remain close to his power base and be in touch with his constituents and his estate in Bogra. He left for Burma in May 1948, and his tenure there was just one year. During that year two important things happened, Mr. Jinnah succumbed to cancer and was replaced by Sir Nazimuddin. Secondly Mr. Mohammed Ali suffered the first of his several heart attacks, at the age of 39. The new governor-general sympathetically re-assigned him to a comfortable posting, where good medical treatment was readily available, and he became the first high commissioner of Pakistan in Canada in July 1949.

On October 16, 1951, Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan, who was the prime minister of Pakistan, was assassinated as a result of a complicated conspiracy, the roots of which, while known, have never been

revealed. Sir Nazimuddin stepped down from the governor-general's post and took power as the prime minister. A well-known Indian civil service officer, an economist, Mr. Ghulam Muhammad, became the Governor-General.

Supported by his cohorts in the Punjab, he decided to wield power in the manner of Mr. Jinnah, and reduce the prime minister to the sidelines. On February 21, 1952, a riot took place around Dhaka University, on the Bangla language issue, and police firing on instructions from Karachi, took the lives of a number of students who have since been enshrined in our hearts as the Language Martyrs. At the same time, Mr. Nazimuddin decided to shift Mr. Mohammed Ali to an important posting, and the latter became ambassador to the United States.

Governor-general Ghulam Mohammed wanted to increase his stranglehold on power, which he was not effectively being able to do. He hatched a plan to install a puppet prime minister to do his bidding and settled on Mr. Mohammed Ali for this job. He recalled him to Karachi, which was then the capital city of Pakistan, and literally forced him to accept although he was reluctant, as he was not known nationally, and his health condition would be compromised by such an arduous job. He was installed as prime minister in April 1953 as Mr. Nazimuddin departed the scene.

Whether a governor-general could sack a prime minister was a moot point, one that would resurface in Australia many years later, but the appointment remained and the Muslim League unanimously elected him the president of the party to put a legal stamp on the situation.

However, it was apparent that the puppet had a mind of its own. He started out immediately by trying to resolve the Kashmir issue. He met the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in London

while both were attending the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Later in August 1953, he made a State visit to India and was grandly received.

Soon the governor-general and Mr. Ghulam Muhammad dissolved parliament and called fresh elections. The elections took place and Mr. Mohammed Ali was re-elected although the Muslim League got trounced in East Pakistan provincial elections by the Jukto Front of Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq.

By August of 1955, the ailing Governor-General Ghulam Mohammad was losing his mental faculties and was soon replaced by Maj. General Iskander Mirza. The conspiracies were on in full swing, and Mr. Mohammed Ali resigned and was replaced by Chaudhuri Mohammad Ali. It was because of this similarity in names that Mr. Mohammed Ali thereafter was known as Mohammed Ali Bogra, to differentiate the two prime ministers, alluding to his ancestral origins and the Nawab patrimony.

Mohammed Ali was next offered the ambassadorship to France or Japan, and, although the Japanese economy had not yet grown to its present giant status, he realised the potential and elected to go to Tokyo, where he remained for three years. There he became a member of U.N.C.U.R.K., the United Nations Committee for the Re-unification and Rehabilitation of Korea and even chaired the committee for year.

In 1962, President Ayub Khan promulgated a new constitution and declared for elections to be held. He immediately decided to contest the elections in opposition to the Muslim League government. He returned to his ancestral home in Bogra and in a series of scathing meetings he galvanised the opposition leaders behind him although he stood as an independent. He was elected by a landslide and preceded to Islamabad. While all his friends in the opposition were rallying around him he did not confide in

them the state of his health.

He was going at full swing although doctors had advised him to retire altogether. He had realised during the grueling elections that he did not have time. He chose to accept President Ayub Khan's offer to become the foreign minister, but with two conditions. Under the 1962 constitution, any one joining the Presidential Cabinet had to surrender his seat in the Assembly. He refused to do this and the president agreed to change the constitution (he was, after all, a dictator).

Secondly, all matters pertaining to East Pakistan had to go through him and with his approval. This was agreed to as well. He accepted and became the de facto chief minister of East Pakistan and was also the leader of the house in the national assembly, as well as the minister for external affairs and commonwealth relations.

In January 1963 he collapsed with severe cardiac problems, and eventually succumbed to his chronic heart problems at the age of 53. Mohammed Ali was succeeded as foreign minister by Mr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who went on to undo the good work and eventually succeeded in destroying Pakistan in 1971.

When Mohammed Ali died, his first wife, Begum Hamida Mohammed Ali chose to stand for his seat in the national assembly of Pakistan. At the time the opposition were preparing for the next elections and three of the top leaders visited Bogra and were accosted by journalists. The reporters asked, "Begum Mohammed Ali is going to stand for her husband's seat, are you going to field a candidate against her?" One of the leaders responded, "If Begum Mohammed Ali asks me to speak on her behalf at meetings, I shall do so." Such was the nature and the honour of politicians at that time. My mother was elected unopposed to the national assembly of Pakistan.

Syed Hamde Ali is the son of Mohammed Ali Bogra.

## Asia's emerging giants.

Asian giants are ready to reciprocate any consideration by the West to eschew the misgiving that kept them apart. Let us hope the dwindling West will come forward to work in unison with the emerging stakeholders of Asian power.

Z.A. KHAN

cheaper generic AIDS drugs.

In consequence, the world had to choose between the war affirming rhetoric of the Democrats and war mongering declaration of the neo-conservative Republicans. This is probably why Gore Vidal remarked, "America is ruled by one oligarchy with two names, Republican and Democrat."

The other partners of the alliance led by United States did not lag behind in eulogising the "wisdom" of the American leadership for about ten decades since the first quarter of the twentieth century. Thanks to Uncle Sam for doling out dollars to help Europe resurrect its war ravaged economy. Isolated by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, America had to link up with Europe more for economic reasons than for security.

Once the European economy got a push from the US, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) was formed to protect the new-found affluence. Although Nato includes countries that ruled the seven seas and have abundant resources, they could hardly exert influence unless approved by the US as they depended on America for utilising their resources.

Some allege that ethical affinity also acted as a bonding factor. One now finds justification of the critics' assumption that they got together to thwart "Islamic resurgence" (militancy in their parlance) by declaring a crusade. The strategic game played by the European Alliance since the end of 1st World War to split Arab world by founding a grateful Jewish state sowed the seeds of the apple of discord.

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It is surprising to note how Democrats approved of the Republicans' hawkish agenda that promoted its neo-conservative notion of absolute American supremacy and dominance. They did not even oppose Bush's policy of "preemptive strike" or "regime change."

It was Bill Clinton who first subverted the negotiation of the Kyoto Treaty on climate change, refused to sign the Land Mine Treaty, refused to support the International Court for Human Rights, supported Russia in its brutal war against Chechnya and threatened sanctions against South Africa if it did not abandon

the West.

The West conspired to pit most of the oil rich tribal Bedouins in a fratricidal war by

running with the hare and hunting with the hound. Thus they continued to maintain control over the sea-lanes that linked the Arab nations with the West. All attempts by the Arab nations to assert their freedom were subverted either by waging war or by toppling the "detectors" through coups-de-tat. Iraq, Egypt, Syria are a few examples.

Getting wind of the psyche of the victim nations, the West cajoled the power hungry leaders having middle class pedigree. Countries that have been marginalised as a power do not blame their leaders as they think that they are pawns in the hands of the powers in the northern hemisphere. But why?

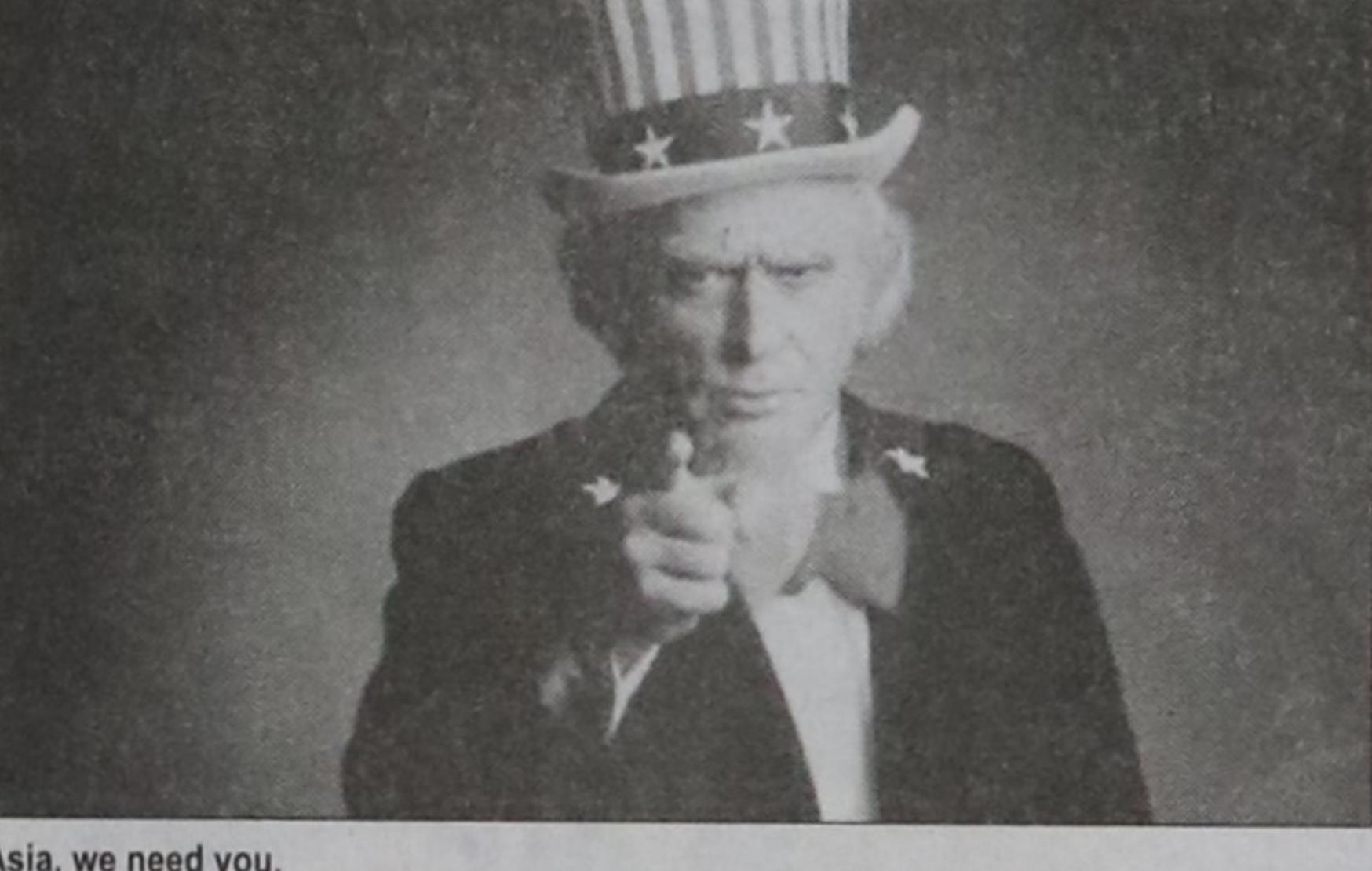
General opinion blames US for the rising militancy. Present day American leadership seems to have forgotten President George Washington's advice to "avoid foreign entanglement," and follows the policy of using force "if necessary to oppose injustice and to protect freedom."

The West has intervened in Iraq and Afghanistan in the defense of justice out there. Alliance partners had to release billions of dollars to foot the war expenditure. Thus, not only is the American economy feeling the strain, it is also facing the wrath of the economically disadvantaged nations.

People in Afghanistan are imploring the Alliance forces, who are "killing hundreds for one dead" to "punish the guilty and not the innocent women and children."

I think it is the right time for the West to rethink their conduct "in defence of freedom overseas." There are numerous global hotspots where the policy of the West is controversial enough to feed the kind of rage that found vengeful expression at different times. One may ask how the policy of "preemptive first strike" corresponds to the values of democracy, or whether they practice what they preach. Are these actions a harbinger of the West's decline? Maybe the fall of oil price is an early indicator.

Not many across the world think these



Asia, we need you.

days as did Beldrich Moldan, a Czech minister, who said: "As a European you may like US or may not like US but you know it is the future." From this one can assume that the West largely depends on its "guardian" partner. Is it not ironical for Americans note that "a strong correlation between US involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist activities against US" exists while Europe sits pretty as it is rarely targeted by "hostile elements."

The ubiquity of the West's economic power is sliding which is eroding their political power.

One can now predict that if an alliance can be formed in the Southern Hemisphere the West's economy may find its glaze receding. If Asian countries threaten to withdraw investments the West may lose its grip on its economy, which feeds on Asian financial support.

Jagdish Bhagat, an eminent Professor of Columbia University, said that Western, particularly the American, reaction to the rise of Asia had been petulant, degenerating into protectionism and panic.

Japan bashing in the 1980's was

succeeded by India bashing over outsourcing in the 1990's, and now we have the China bashing. He says the West must recognise the reality of the Asian economic upsurge.

Zbigniew Brezinski thinks that an incisive analysis of the long-term implication of the ongoing shift in the global centre of gravity is necessary. Kishore Mahbubani feels that "for two centuries the Asians from Tehran to Tokyo and from Mumbai to Shanghai, have been bystanders in world history, reacting defenselessly to the surges in Western commerce, thought and power." That era, he thinks, is over.

Asia is returning to the centre stage it occupied for eighteen centuries before the rise of the West. He further says that Asians have absorbed and understood Western best practices in many areas from free market economy to the embrace of innovative science and technology, meritocracy and the rule of law.

I think the West must come to terms with emerging reality by recognising the incremental Asian capability to dash the western desire to maintain its preponder-

ance in world economy and its hold on technological innovations. Asian nations have successfully developed technology to enrich uranium, utilise fossil fuels and also to overcome environmental vagaries. Poor men's economy (micro-credit), disaster management and incredible development in outsourcing microchip expertise and technology are the outstanding sinews of Asia's rise to the current height.

Any endeavour by the West to resist the rise of Asia will be disastrous. The West must find ways to work hand-in-glove with Asia. While Asian nations should realise that the West will soon lose its prowess, and that is why they should close ranks with their neighbours for mutual benefit. The Arab world should serve the nations with its overspill funds and treat them as most favoured nations.

Leaders of Asia should leave no stone unturned to do matchmaking between warring factions in the Middle East. The Middle East should look to the East for political support to end the fratricidal wars that they have been thrown into by the West to pursue the divide and rule policy since the invasion by T.E. Lawrence, who became a hero by dint of Western publicity.

The West should rest assured because of the analysis of Mahbubani that Asia does not dominate but replicate. He suggests that the West should share power with Asia by giving up automatic domination of global institutions like IMF and World Bank. Let G7 and UNSC not be dominated by the declining West through curbing its role as the world's arbiter.

Asian giants like Japan, China and India are ready to reciprocate any consideration by the West to eschew the misgiving that kept them apart. Let us hope the dwindling West will break the emotional barrier of being the world leader and come forward to work in unison with the emerging stakeholders of Asian power.

Z.A. Khan is a former Director General of Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

## We're all poets now



WRITER Joseph Epstein wrote an essay called Who Killed Poetry? Novelist Martin Amis made a speech about the disappearance of this art. Newsweek published an article headlined: "Poetry is dead. Does anyone really care?"

Here's news for you guys. Poetry is creeping back to life. Poems are aspects of human experience distilled into small strings of words, right? Thanks to SMS phone texts (160 characters), Twitter messages (140 characters) and Facebook status lines (one short paragraph), millions of people all over the world have started writing poetry.

Most are awful, but some aren't bad.

An artist called An Xiao writes fragmentary glimpses of her life on the Internet: "Insomnia. Late night tap-tappings at the computer."

On a friend's Facebook page I saw this:

"Mark Malby is sitting out in the garden in the night wind, looking across all the

years."

Adriaan Jacobsz published this on a Twitter message last week: "Dark clouds silent trees reach out into the noise."

But of course people who write poetry lay themselves open to being teased.

Sam Cutler wrote this on his Facebook status line: "Last night I walked in the fields and told the Gods of our love whilst the stones cried." Reader Wendy Peterson commented: "So sad, so beautiful." But reader Simon Ford drew a more pragmatic conclusion: "Told you those magic mushroom were good."

Perhaps the prize for the most cringingly emotional Facebook status line goes to Atiq Anan, who wrote: "Atiq Anan doesn't

want to say anything, he just wants to feel."

Atiq, let me just take you aside for a quick word. You're a guy. Guys just don't say that sort of thing. You're letting the side down.

Of course, one can use these opportunities to write short epigrams, which are funny rather than lyrical. Here are three:

1) "Name here" bought ten meals at McDonalds and got a big fat bottom absolutely free.

2) "Name here" plans to merge MySpace, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter and call it MyFaceYouTwit.

3) And this one is from this columnist's Facebook page:

"Name here" realised long ago that he could never be a good example to young

people, so he decided instead to be a horrible bawling.

Talking points:

Reader Peter Bentley commented on a recent column on bottled water. "We once did some tests in Beijing on bottled water and Beijing tap water: they were exactly the same thing! Yes, water bottling companies were just pouring in normal Beijing tap water." He reckons the same thing happens in many Asian cities, and I'm sure he's right.

A reader named Mike said that people who paid for bottled water were just paying a tax on stupidity."