

## In memory of Tajuddin Ahmed



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MUHAMMED ABDUL HAI

**T**HE first prime minister of free Bangladesh -- a phrase, associated with great honour and dignity. Yes, Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed, who happened to be the first prime minister of free Bangladesh rightly deserved the honour and dignity as stated above. He was a leader of great ability and farsightedness.

Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed was born on July 23, 1925 in the village of Dardaria near Kapashia. He had a religious upbringing as his parents were conservative Muslims. His talent was noticed in the early days of his school life. His admission to Saint Gregory High was an important step in his life. In 1944, he secured the 12th position in the matriculation examination. In 1948, he got the 4th position in the Higher Secondary Certificate Exam. He obtained B.A. (Hons.) in Economics from Dhaka University.

Tajuddin was involved in politics and social

welfare activities from his school life. In 1954, as a candidate of Jukta Front, he defeated the then general secretary of Muslim League by a big margin. While in jail, Tajuddin took part in the law exam and achieved B.A. degree in law.

The deaths of so many people during the disastrous famine in 1350 (Bangla year) moved him very much, and he established a grain store to help the villagers in case of food shortage.

Tajuddin Ahmed was actively associated with the politics for the emancipation of our people. In 1943, he became a member of the progressive Muslim League. The East Pakistan Student's League was formed on January 4, 1948. As a founder member, he shouldered very vital responsibilities.

Between 1953 and 1957, he was the general secretary of Dhaka District Awami League. In 1955, Tajuddin was the social welfare and cultural secretary. In 1964, he played a very important role in reviving and bolstering Awami

League, and in the same year he added new blood to the party by becoming the organising secretary.

Tajuddin joined the Lahore Conference of the opposition parties with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1966, and declared the six-point demand in that gathering. He was one of Sheikh Mujib's close associates in the preparing historical six-points. He was arrested on May 8, 1966 for propagating the six-points. He was released on February 12, 1969. In the general election of 1970, Tajuddin was elected a member of the Pakistan National Assembly.

The Pakistani government refused to accept the people's verdict, and conspired with the army to destroy what the people of the then East Pakistan achieved through the election. In 1971, General Yahya abruptly declared suspension of the general assembly meeting. Immediately, the non-cooperation movement started under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

During this struggle, Tajuddin Ahmed demonstrated his uncanny skill in organising and carrying forward the movement against the Pakistani tyrants. He extended extremely valuable assistance when Sheikh Mujib met the generals to bring home the demands of the people of this part of Pakistan.

On March 25, 1971, Pakistani defence forces indulged in systematic killing of our people. They

arrested our great leader, Sheikh Mujib, and took him prisoner in Pakistan. The Bengalis started an armed struggle and, in the absence of Bangabandhu, Tajuddin took over the responsibility.

On the historic April 10, 1971, Tajuddin was unanimously elected the prime minister. April 17 of the same year witnessed the official oath-taking of the government in Mujibnagar. The office of the prime minister was established on No. 8 Theatre Road in Calcutta. He devoted all his mind and energy to the service of the government.

He was a man of strong principles. He was never an opportunist, and was never ready to accept anything less than complete freedom of Bangladesh. As the prime minister, he had to take some harsh decisions for the benefit of Bangladesh, and even in those decisions he showed remarkable wisdom.

Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed possessed the rare quality of being neutral and precise in evaluating a situation. He could rise above personal emotion and put the right person in the right place at the appropriate time. He divided Bangladesh into eleven political zones. The zonal administrators were very carefully selected, and they were particularly instructed to make sure that no breach showed up among the freedom fighters. His fair dealing won their respect.

Tajuddin thought that the votes of the Indian Urdu speaking Muslims were vital for the Congress, and if they misunderstood the real situation which forced the Bangladeshis to take arms against the Pakistani army they might be a headache for the Congress Party, which was in power then.

He advised Advocate Mohammad Nurul Quader to meet the influential Muslim leaders and editors of Urdu newspapers for a threadbare discussion about the cause of our struggle. It was a very important diplomatic move, which had to be made in total secrecy. Tajuddin's wise guidance finally made it a success.

Mr. Tajuddin continued to be the PM until Sheikh Mujib returned to Bangladesh on January 10, 1972. He took the charge of the ministry of finance and planning. He resigned on October 26, 1974. And then, in the dark night of August 15, 1975, Sheikh Mujib was assassinated along with his family. Tajuddin was put under house-arrest and later sent to the Dhaka Central Jail, where he was brutally murdered with three other leaders of the Mujibnagar government.

Tajuddin, the first prime minister of Bangladesh, will remain alive in our hearts for ever. The killers, the supporters and the beneficiaries are all guilty of homicide. Divine justice is

## Our tragic hero

Tajuddin Ahmed had all the qualities of a perfect politician. Loving the people was his religion. He was sober, thoughtful and courageous. He was very learned, very amiable and simple. His patriotism and his superior administrative skills were incomparable. He was honest and just, never encouraged sycophants and never betrayed his country or people.

JUNAIDUL HAQUE

**A**FTER Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman it is perhaps Tajuddin Ahmed, his closest aide, who can be termed my favourite Bangladeshi politician. His intelligent and thoughtful role all through March 1971 turned him into my favourite hero.

During the turbulent days of 1971 Tajuddin Ahmed, like all great men in history, had a few enemies. But Syed Nazrul Islam, the acting president, stood beside him like a rock and gave his prime minister full support in all his pro-people deeds. Islam's vision, wisdom and sincerity allowed the workaholic Tajuddin Ahmed to function freely. Together they shaped our destiny in 1971 in the temporary absence of their great leader.

Tajuddin Ahmed was one of the noblest leaders to be born in this part of the world. He remains a great tragic character in Bangladesh's politics. Millions of Bangladeshis like me know him and admire this martyred leader from the core of their heart.

Unfortunately the country went through dictatorial rule for a long time. Our youngsters were then not encouraged to think about such things as our liberation war and its heroes. No wonder a lot more people know about General Zia or General Ershad than about Tajuddin Ahmed. This is another cruel joke of history.

However it was only natural that history would thrust upon the capable shoulders of Tajuddin Ahmed the great task of leading our people during our war of independence in the absence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Tajuddin Ahmed was totally successful and brought us freedom. He did not fail either his leader or his people.

Our great war of liberation of 1971! Bangabandhu had to fight democratically for twenty-four long years to bring the nation to its threshold. Nothing greater in significance ever happened to our land and our people. We must gratefully preserve our 1971 memories, honour

our millions of martyrs and our valiant freedom fighters and evaluate the great leaders of the war.

Tajuddin Ahmed had a pivotal role during our noblest crisis. He was the great patriot who loved his country and its poor, suffering millions. The enlightened people of Bangladesh will never forget him and his exemplary honesty, dedication, hard work, erudition and sincerity.

Today is July 23, Tajuddin Ahmed's 85th birth anniversary. He was born five days and seven years after Nelson Mandela. Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam were both born in May. I find the fact significant.

Similarly significant to me is the fact that Mandela and Tajuddin were born in July. The two great men had so many qualities in common. Wisdom, love for their people, sacrifice and suffering, and great commitment to their motherland. They had strong beliefs, logical minds and respect for the opinion of others. They don't make men like them these days!

Tajuddin Ahmed's forefathers migrated from Gaffargaon in Mymensingh to Kapasia in Dhaka. He was born in Dardaria of middle class parents. After changing a few schools he landed at St. Gregory's High School, from where he stood 12th in the Dhaka Board, in the SSC exams. He became fourth in the HSC exams. He was a scout and was in politics as a student.

He became a Jukta Front MLA in 1954 even before passing his MA. He defeated a very senior Muslim League leader by a huge margin. He was in jail when he got his Bachelor of Law degree. The 1943 famine shook him to his roots and turned him into a devoted social worker. He was always with the sufferers. He belonged to the progressive section of the Muslim League in his early youth.

Later he was one of the founders of the Chhatra League. He actively participated in the Language Movement. He was one of the founding members of Awami League on June 23, 1949. At 28, he was the general secretary of



Dhaka District Awami League. At 30, he was the party's cultural and social welfare secretary. He was the joint secretary in 1964.

He was in the forefront in the turbulent 1960s -- leading the democratic movement, going to jail and helping his party to sweep the 1970 elections. In 1971, he led the nation with great wisdom and selflessness. He was a sad and misunderstood man later in independent Bangladesh, and had to live a retired life for a few months till his tragic martyrdom in Dhaka Central Jail on November 3, 1975.

What a reward for the man synonymous with the birth of Bangladesh! What a reward for one of our greatest patriots! Born seven years after Mandela and dead at only fifty! My heart bled silently and profusely for Bangabandhu and his close aides. No true Bangalee could forgive their tragic death.

Tajuddin Ahmed had all the qualities of a perfect politician. Loving the people was his

religion. He was sober, thoughtful and courageous. He was very learned, very amiable and simple. His patriotism and his superior administrative skills were incomparable. He was honest and just, never encouraged sycophants and never betrayed his country or people.

He was not fond of the World Bank, but its then chief considered him a brilliant finance minister. He was a great optimist and would gain strength by reading books during a crisis. He had a great analytical mind, which impressed Prof. Nurul Islam, the gifted economist, who worked with him. He was very patient and very tolerant. He was self-effacing and modest. His forgiving nature and his fairness of mind impressed everyone.

As a humble literary man I always dreamt of an independent Bangladesh where both Bangabandhu and his loyal associate Tajuddin Ahmed lived long like Nelson Mandela and served their Sonar Bangla and her people. Just

## A people's man

Prime Minister Tajuddin along with his cabinet colleagues reached free Bangladesh on December 22, and started rebuilding the war-torn new-born country before Bangabandhu returned from Pakistani jail. When Bangabandhu was undecided about the form of government; Tajuddin unambiguously took the stand for the parliamentary form, and the supreme leader was convinced.

M.A.S. MOLLA

**T**AJUDDIN Ahmad -- the first prime minister of Bangladesh was born on July 23, 1925 in Kapasia under Gazipur District (then Dhaka). Today is the 85th birthday of this great man, who is termed by many an "unsung hero." Maybe he was not totally unsung, but the song is almost always sung in a low voice, with much less volume than it deserves. I greatly admire this man as the executant of our national liberation, while I regard Bangabandhu as the organiser (1966-1970) and Moulana Bhasani as the dreamer (1957) of the liberation.

It is said "morning shows the day." Tajuddin's greatness was expressed in his very boyhood. He was the "key boy" in building a bridge over a local canal that they needed to cross to attend school. He didn't wait to have done this by elders, nor did he ask the local administration to do it.

He fearlessly served the rural people attacked by small pox, while even members of the patients' families tried to avoid disease to save themselves from being attacked by the deadly disease. There are many incidents in his boyhood, adolescence and adult life that we can admire and learn much from.

He was well ahead of his time, and that is why he was a misplaced lonely hero. He had initiative, wisdom, firmness, frankness, truthfulness, honesty, and dedication. Many of the ordinary folk might have certain virtues but not so many together in a single person.

He sacrificed studentship of Dhaka University, thus forfeiting the Masters in Economics degree. His greater mission was to work for the people. His greatness reached sky-high stature during the war of liberation, when he worked over 20 hours daily.

Many raise the issue: who declared independence of Bangladesh? True, Bangabandhu himself organised the nation prior to March 25, 1971 and his historic March 7th speech was a clarion call to fight against the occupation forces; however, that was not a formal declaration.

Both Mr. Hannan (a Chittagong Awami League leader) and Major (then) Ziaur Rahman announced the declaration of independence. But such a declaration could produce nothing if there was no formal declaration from Tajuddin's government on April 17.

With Tajuddin at the helm of all affairs during the war, feuding among leaders could be minimised (since he formed an all-party advisory committee headed by Bhasani); his intelligence and wisdom could identify and contain the conspiracy inside the government (the Mustaque-Thakur case).

Prime Minister Tajuddin along with his cabinet colleagues reached free Bangladesh on December 22, and started rebuilding the war-torn new-born country before Bangabandhu returned from Pakistani jail. When Bangabandhu was undecided about the form of government -- presidential or parliamentary -- Tajuddin unambiguously took the stand for the parliamentary form, and the supreme leader was convinced.

However, the irony was that Bangabandhu as the new premier never listened to his predecessor about how he led the war from exile. The conspirators who were defeated in exile by Tajuddin's intelligence were found to be around Bangabandhu both during his premiership and presidency. Gradually, Tajuddin became detached from Bangabandhu. Still he ran his ministry with frankness, wisdom and conviction.

On April 3, 1974, a lecture on Bangladesh agriculture was organised jointly by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the government of Bangladesh. There, Tajuddin delivered an apolitical professional speech. He dwelt on a number of issues like population problem, agricultural development and the people's food habit.

He said that nowhere did people eat more than 25% cereal, except in Bangladesh. He humorously told the audience that, in that sense, Bangladesh could have a surplus of cereals if grown in smaller pieces of land. His witty talk made the audience break into laughter.

In late 1974, Bangabandhu was preparing to form one party Bangladesh Krishak Samik Awami League (Baksal). Having strong belief in the parliamentary form of government, Tajuddin could not agree to this anti-democratic structure. But he could not talk to Bangabandhu face-to-face because Bangabandhu was often surrounded by Mustaque's group.

In September 1974, Tajuddin had a talk with Bangabandhu. Tajuddin said: "By taking this step you are closing all the doors to your peaceful removal from your position. Mujib Bhai, the most unfortunate event will be that the bullet will not hit you alone. We shall also be killed and the nation will plunge into danger."

Tajuddin's prophetic statement came (sadly) true in a year, and the nation was really plunged into abysmal danger. Because we lost competent and dedicated