

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Milu at Shomeshwari River

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Larger Than Life

First met Dr. Mahmud Husain (Milu) five years ago at a dinner party. Today I wish I had met him sooner, for Milu was a figure larger than life, and time spent with him was always memorable.

Not that I spent much time with him: two weekend trips inside Bangladesh, a few walks along Baridhara Lake, and several social get-togethers. But his passion for life, his intellectual curiosity, and his love of adventure was so infectious that being around him for even a short time could affect one's view of life.

Milu loved Bangladesh, in particular, its people, places and history. He enjoyed driving his jeep to remote regions of the country. In 2009, I joined him and other friends on a trip to Birisiri, Netrakona. It was there that I first noticed Milu's unconventional style. For example, he had an uncanny ability to establish quick rapport with local people. When we reached the Shomeshwari river, instead of exploring the new place, Milu became engrossed in a conversation with a senior boatman. Next day, this man provided us a boat for plying up and down the picturesque river. At one point, we left the boat and trekked to the emerald lakes set among some small hills. When we reached the hills, Milu charged to the top ahead of everyone else.

This was unnerving, because we all knew Milu was a heart patient. But this slowed him down not one bit.

In November 2009, we set out for northern Bangladesh, stopping at Dinajpur for the night where Milu regaled us with tales of the region's

aristocratic history. The next day we visited Kantajir Temple. A Mela was in progress, and soon Milu was in his element, striking up friendships with locals while drinking tea at a Jhupri stall.

Milu's knowledge of Bangladeshi history was encyclopaedic. Touring a new place with him was like walking with a history book.

At Birisiri, Milu waxed eloquent about the great leader Moni Singh (who hailed from that region) and his role leading the Hajong people of that area. While we were exploring Mahasthangarh in Bogra, he discussed the ancient civilization around Pundrabardhan. His words reflected a deep love and respect for the hard-working people of Bengal over centuries.

Milu's actions also reflected this love. He established an urban health NGO through which he and other doctors dispensed free medical services. He also educated several students from his home Hatia on scholarship.

Once I bemoaned the failure of Bangladesh to attract foreign tourists. Milu's unexpected reply: "Why bother? See how beautiful it is? Influx of tourists will mess it up. Let Bangladeshis enjoy Bangladesh."

My last conversation with Milu was three weeks ago. Naturally, we planned another outing in his favourite country.

But that trip will never happen, for Milu passed away on February 20, 2011, ending a short but richly lived life. May his soul rest in peace.

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ihtishamkabar@yahoo.com

Govt blamed for removal of Dr Yunus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several NGO executives in a joint statement yesterday expressed deep concern over the termination of Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus from the post of Grameen Bank managing director in a "disgraceful and abnormal" manner by the government.

They also criticised the government for not giving Dr Yunus the opportunity of self-defence.

Moreover a section of people are spreading propaganda against Dr Yunus following a Norwegian television documentary, though it was resolved by the Norwegian government many years ago, said the statement.

Government decision coupled with such propaganda will tarnish image of the country in international arena. The faith of 83 lakh Grameen Bank members and three crore micro-credit borrowers in Bangladesh as well as several crores across the globe will be lost, they said.

Bangladesh Environment Lawyers' Association Executive Chief Syeda Rizwana Hassan, Credit Development Forum Executive Director Abdul Awal, NGO Federation Director M Tajul Islam, International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions Executive Director Atikunnabi and Bangladesh Shishu Odhikar Forum Executive Director Kafiluddin Ahmed signed the statement.

If the reshuffle in the bank management was done in a positive way, it would help maintain the bank's stability and uphold the country's image.

They also urged the committee, formed to scrutinise the bank's activities, to take necessary steps to end misunderstandings, if any, between the govt and the bank management.

Meanwhile, two organisations yesterday condemned the removal of Dr Yunus from Grameen Bank and demanded review of the decision.

"The decision of removing Dr Muhammad Yunus from Grameen Bank is not only illegal but a testimony to colonial mindset," said Mukto Rajnaitik Andolon.

"The decision is an attempt to destroy the revolutionary steps of micro-credit, changing the lives of eight million destitute women, with the touch of a pen," it said, urging all to resist the government decision.

Another organisation, We Love Dr Yunus, in a statement, demanded review of the decision considering its probable disastrous effects on Grameen Bank.

"Grameen Bank and Dr Yunus are our pride and he should be treated in such a manner," it said.

GRAMEEN BANK Former staff demand probe into 'irregularities'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of former employees of Grameen Bank, who claimed to have either been terminated or forced into retirement, yesterday demanded reinstatement of their jobs and probe into Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus' "irregularities".

They made the call at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity in city yesterday, just two days after Prof Yunus was removed from Grameen Bank.

Under the banner of Grameen Bank Nirjatito Karmi Parishad (forum of repressed employees), they also demanded that all the activities of the bank be made public.

Confused and failed to answer properly some questions by the journalists, the bank's former employees said no one was behind them or persuaded them to hold the press conference.

Masum Sarkar, convener of the parishad, claimed that Prof Yunus misusing his power as the managing director terminated or gave temporary and force retirement to hundreds of employees of the bank.

Masum, also the former assistant general manager of the bank, however, said, "Prof Yunus did not embezzle money, but spent huge money wantonly."

The parishad leaders claimed that some 8,000 employees had faced termination or retirement, of whom some were fired several years ago and some recently.

Asked about the formation of their organisation, Masum said they formed it a month back but not all the 8,000 employees are the members of the organisation.

When asked if he sought help from labour court or conventional court, he did not reply properly. But the parishad leaders claimed some of the members, present at the programme, sought court's help.

Asked why they were holding the conference now, the convener could not specify and rather said they took some time to mobilise the 'ill-fated' employees. "Besides, the terminated employees are also persuading us to do something," said Masum.

SYLHET DOUBLE MURDER Suspect confesses crime

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Police yesterday arrested a suspect, who confessed in police custody of murdering a woman and her housemaid in the city last week, and sent him to jail.

Police found the partially burnt and decomposing bodies of Shaheda Akhtar Mili, vice-president of Jalalabad Rotaract Club and activist of Sujon, and her housemaid Momota after breaking into their residence on February 28.

The arrestee Abdul Maleque, 30, a vegetable vendor of the area, gave his confessional statement at Chief Judicial Magistrate Court.

Maleque took a Tk 30,000 loan from Milli around two and a half months ago on condition of giving her a share of the profit, said OC Khondaker Naoroj Ahmed of Kotwali Police Station, quoting the statement.

When Maleque could not pay back and Milli threatened to file a case, Maleque strangled them and tried to burn the bodies to remove evidence, the OC added.

UGC chair criticises pvt universities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Prof Nazrul Islam yesterday criticised private university authorities for not following the law of preserving three percent quota for the children of freedom fighters.

He also stressed the need for arrangement of free education and other facilities as per the UGC law.

Prof Nazrul was speaking at a seminar titled 'Paribarik Shikkhar Gurutta' (importance of family education) organised by Bangladesh Shikkha Parjabekkhak Society (BSPS) on the Independence Day at the National Press Club in the city.

Speaking as the chief guest DU Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique urged the head of families to teach their children ethical education.

BSPS Chairman Shariful Islam was present at the seminar.

4 arrested

UNB, Brahmanbaria

Members of Narcotics Control Department (NCD) arrested four alleged drug peddlers with drugs from Azampur village of frontier Akhaura upazila yesterday.



Encroachers have filled up a portion of Turag River with sand. The photo was taken from Amin Bazar point yesterday.

PHOTO: BAPA

Encroachers gobble up Atir Khal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An NGO team in a visit yesterday found grabbers have been filling the whole Atir Khal (canal) and its adjoining vast wetlands in Basila of the city.

The team of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) also found Dumini canal in Khilkhet is being filled and narrowed at many points for different housing projects.

Bapa general secretary Abdul Matin led the team during its visit to the two canals and the river

Turag from 10:00am to 2:00pm to inspect the water bodies' present condition.

The team discovered Atir Khal is almost dead due to unabated earth filling that has been going on in violation of wetland and open space protection act 2000.

Bapa team later inspected the Turag river from Amin Bazar to Tongi Bridge and found a vast portions of the river in Amin Bazar have been encroached by sand traders.

The bridges from Amin Bazar to Tongi except Amin Bazar Bridge

were also found too low, which will hinder movement of water transports in the circular waterway.

The encroachment as well as dumping industrial waste was going on at different points of the Turag narrowing the river and polluted it severely, according to Bapa.

Bapa team's visit to Dumini canal disclosed that the canal has been as narrow as a drain at different points, as it was filled with earth for different housing projects unceasingly.

Upon the visits, Bapa yesterday held a news conference at Civil

Engineering Building in the city to demand protecting of the three water bodies against land grabbers.

The environment organisation also demanded that the height of the bridges from Amin Bazar to Tongi on the Turag River be raised for smooth movement of water transports.

The Bapa team was constituted of its joint secretaries JK Boral, Sharif Jamil, and Alamgir Kabir, Prof Shahidul Islam of Dhaka University, and Ifma Hossain of Piece.

NEWS IN brief

PM goes to Khulna today

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will visit Khulna today.

During her visit, she will formally commission two naval ships BNS Bijoy and BNS Dhaleshwari at a function at Mongla seaport.

The prime minister will also officially inaugurate 'Steel Cutting Ceremony' and 'School of Logistics and Management' at Khulna Shipyard to build five patrol crafts at the Shipyard.

She will also address a rally to be organised by local Awami League at Khalishpur Provati School ground.

Stalker jailed in Lalmonirhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A mobile court here in Patgram upazila on Thursday evening sentenced a youth to one month in prison for stalking a class VII student.

The convicted is Zinnat Hossain, 25, son of Rafiqul Islam of Rahmanpur Melabari village in the upazila. Police said Rafiqul stalked the class VII student of Dhabolsuti High School when the girl was returning home from school.

Locals caught Rafiqul and informed police. Patgram UNO Harunur Rashid who headed the mobile court sentenced him the imprisonment in presence of locals.

People's Jute Mill renamed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Peoples Jute Mill in Khulna will be officially renamed as Khalishpur Jute Mill today.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will formally inaugurate the name today at noon, said Khulna District Administration sources.

The mill workers forwarded the renaming proposal to Jute Minister Abdul Latif Siddique at a meeting on February 25. The minister placed it before the prime minister who later accepted, said the mill's Project Director Molla Alamgir.

Constitution's reprint tarnishes image of JS, SC

Says Moudud

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Standing Committee Member Moudud Ahmed yesterday said the government tarnished the image of the parliament as well as the Supreme Court by reprinting the constitution.

He said, "The government reprinted the constitution bypassing the parliament, staining the image of the house."

"The government brought around 50 corrections in the reprinted constitution. Doing so, it disobeyed Supreme Court on its verdict on the fifth amendment that stated to include eight articles."

He was speaking as the chief guest at a discussion on "Constitutional Amendment: Parliament, democracy and Bangladesh" organised by Bangladesh Youth Forum, a pro-BNP-Jamaat youth organisation, at the Jatiya Press Club in the city.

Moudud urged the parliamentary standing committee on law to launch an investigation on how the law ministry brought so many corrections bypassing the parliament.

Even ministers and top leaders of the ruling party are divided regarding the amendment and reprint of the constitution, he added.

"Debate on constitutional amendment has turned into a chaotic situation. It proves how incapable, inexperienced and weak the government is."

Former deputy ministry and BNP leader Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu, Senior Vice Chairman of Islami Oikya Jote Abdur Rakib and Bangladesh Jatiya Party Secretary General Abu Naser Muhammad Rahmatullah also spoke.



Meeting

Rotary Club of Dhaka Central will hold a meeting. Venue: Dhaka Club, Time: 1:30pm.

Youth leadership summit

Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center will arrange a youth leadership summit. Venue: Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, Time: 6:15pm.

Award giving ceremony

National Crafts Council of Bangladesh will arrange an award giving ceremony. Venue: Brac Centre Inn auditorium, Time: 5:00pm.

Dialogue

International Chamber of Commerce will organise a dialogue. Venue: Suvastu Tower, 69/1, Panthapath, Time: 11:00am.

Seminar

Communist Party of Bangladesh will hold a seminar. Venue: 2, Purana Paltan, Time: 10:00am.

Rally

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon will arrange a rally. Venue: In front of National Press Club, Time: 10:00am.

Mime exhibition

Oxfam will hold a mime exhibition. Venue: Central Shaheed Minar, Time: 11:00am.

Human chain

Jatiya Nagorik Samaj will form a human chain. Venue: In front of National Press Club, Time: 10:30am.

Seminar

Bangladesh Institute of Juche Idea will organise a seminar. Venue: Engineers Institute auditorium, Time: 10:00am.