

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

# Aren't ordinary people extra-ordinary?



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

**D**EVELOPMENT in Bangladesh is both an enigma and a miracle. The more you

think, the more you marvel at it. We have graduated to 6% plus GDP growth rate since 2005. When the population was 70 million at independence the growth was 2% per annum. Now with 160 million people we are having a sustained growth rate of above 6%.

Relative to growth of population, the rate of increase in GDP may not look spectacular. But it is substantial given the challenges we have been through all these years.

We are capable of meeting 95% of our food grain requirements; from 80% aid-dependency we have become self-reliant up to at least 70% in terms of self-financing; and from an aid-dependent country we have transformed into a trade-dependent nation. The per capita income has increased by over four times the pre-independence level.

Seen through the lens of political economy, we made an important choice between alternatives rather early in the day. From premature nationalisation without inventorying and necessary preparedness including ready availability of management resource we moved over to a mixed economy and then on to a private sector-led growth stratagem. Consequently, private enterprise has grown.

So far as the science part of political economy, which entails making the right choice between alternatives goes, we have done the job well. But in the art part of political economy we have failed to give a human face to development. Severe income inequality, regional disparities and concentration of wealth in few hands provide examples of this.

The corporate hold on the US, British and Indian economies and administrations is not only confined to those countries; the corporate lobby is peddling influence in policy and decision making areas in Bangladesh as well. This may be the other side of the coin of the business class's predominance in the composition of parliament. All this leads to tribalism

and syndication.

Thus the growth rate is astounding; for, it has happened in spite of a litany of failures in state management, politics and administration together with a series of natural calamities.

We have had 14-15 years of autocratic-cum-presidential rule through subversion of democracy. Large part of the remainder 25 years of the four decades since independence saw elected gov-

Political corruption, abuse of power and financial corruption conspired to undercut growth. But the tide for it wouldn't be deterred by the odds.

How the growth trend held its own is clearly demonstrated by the awesome data on hartals. A Chittagong University journal of social sciences in a study revealed: 5 days of hartal during 1972-75 Awami League government; 59 days during 1981-87

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ernments, parliamentary only in form. This phase was interspersed with less than three years of caretaker rule reflective of the major political parties not trusting each other with an interim role prior to an emerging national election, a standard practice everywhere in the democratic world. Hardly an inspiring legacy that.

Actually, politics has been more of a liability than an instrument for development and growth.

Ershad regime; 266 days during 1991-96 BNP regime; and 215 days during 1996-2001 Awami League regime.

Then at the law and policy-making, transparency and oversight levels, the opposition parties in the parliament had boycotted nearly half of the total number of sittings in the last three parliaments. Add the recurrent quorum crises to the one-sided parliament, the dysfunctionality cycle is

completed. Half way through the present parliament the opposition boycott is shaping into a replay of the past.

All praise to the human material of the ordinary men and women in Bangladesh. Their ingenuity, entrepreneurial drive, self-development motivations, spirit of adventure and basic intelligence have turned them into gifted workers. They are not even conscious of their worth; unsung and unrecognised, they are doing patriotic service to the country making up for what we as educated people are failing to do. Our growth is the handmaiden of the ordinary men and women working overseas and especially women in the garment sector who altogether garner for the country around \$20 billion every year.

What is jelling here, despite the country being politically divided in the middle and politics ignoring the primacy of the economy? The NGO impetus is part of the story, but in large part it is the human material of ordinary folks that is making the difference.

Without any meaningful effort for human resource development we have had 2.5 million workers, mostly women, in the RMG sec-

tor; and 7 million Bangladeshi expatriate wage earners at any given point of time all over the world keeping the national economy rolling.

But even this is only part of the 160 million pairs of hands, of which half are women. So, the remainder, especially the 15-25 year olds constituting 40 percent of the population and generations senior to them are just waiting to be turned into manpower. For this to happen, we will have to effect the much-needed switch over from the two items centered export to a more diversified economy.

In a way we are already getting a demographic dividend without even trying; imagine, how much more we can derive from the population if we have the right mix of plans and policies to engage them in pursuits linking them to regional and global economies?

The way to jump start the economy to a leapfrogging state lies in associating the people in a participatory role from the grassroots upwards. This is only possible through making the entire local government system elective, powerful and decisive, divorced from over-centralised state of affairs.

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# Lt. Col. Quazi Nooruzaman: Citizen soldier

A. QAYYUM KHAN

**C**OLONEL Quazi Nooruzaman in many ways can be considered as one of the true embodiments of the spirit of our liberation war. For the past forty years he lived in such a manner that his actions and deeds upheld the spirit of the liberation war in every sense of the term.

In March 1971, Colonel Zaman was a retired army officer of the Pakistan army. Although he was politically conscious he was not a political activist. For Colonel Zaman, the choice was clear. He was a trained soldier and his country required him to fight in the trenches in its hour of need, and that's what he was going to do -- be it as a commander or a private.

For his part in the liberation war, Colonel Zaman was awarded the

cance of this struggle.

Second, during the liberation war, there were innumerable instances of utmost courage and dedication shown by ordinary people who fought against the professional Pakistani army with very little in terms of weaponry and equipment. These sons of the soil willingly and selflessly gave their lives for their people and country. They did not receive any gallantry award for their courage or sacrifice.

Consider the case of the early volunteers of the Mukti Bahini. By the end of April 1971, organised resistance by Bengali soldiers against the crackdown had ended and the Mukti Bahini was pushed across the borders. At that time it was important to keep up the struggle and raise the morale of the population.

army. Often, he would find himself in situations where he was subjected to racial epithets, including personal insults. Colonel Zaman never accepted such insults lying down even if that meant getting on the wrong side of the President of Pakistan, General Ayub Khan. He was a man of strong conviction and quiet dignity. He was not known to raise his voice or get involved in arguments. If he disagreed with a point of view he would clearly say so and articulate his position lucidly.

In the past forty years, he has written extensively on the problems of Bangladesh. He is the author of several books and wrote regularly in newspapers. In all his writings, we see the essence of the spirit of the liberation war, which was the dignity of a citizen in an independent

sued him to take over the helm of the Muktiyodha Sangsad, he only agreed to do so if he was elected as chairman. It is now a matter of historical record that the Muktiyodha Sangsad has had only one open and fair election in its forty years of existence, and it was the one in which Colonel Zaman was elected as chairman.

In 1981, when the Sattar government under the directives of General Ershad was persecuting freedom fighters in the army and going through the mockery of a trial by holding a Court Martial in camera in Chittagong jail, Colonel Zaman's was the lone voice that protested against this charade.

He continued his protest for days and months and even went on a hunger strike. Neither intimidation nor inducement could silence him.

tion struggle straightaway, even before making any arrangements for the safety of his family. He left it to his friends and relatives to look after his family. Eventually, the entire family crossed over to India.

When his 15-year old son, Nadeem, expressed his desire to fight, Colonel Zaman assigned him the duties of a rifleman in Captain Jahangir's sub-sector. He wasn't given any special consideration. His wife, Dr. Sultana Zaman, on her own arranged equipment and supplies for a field hospital from the government of West Bengal. She found a Bengali surgeon, Dr. Moazzem, who agreed to work with her. She set up the field hospital in Mohidipur sub-sector of Sector 7, where her daughters Naila and Lubna along with other medical students worked tirelessly to bring comfort to the wounded and sick freedom fighters.

I first met Colonel Zaman sometime in May 1971 at the Raiganj Mukti Bahini Camp in West Dinajpur. He was head of the selection team that interviewed prospective officer candidates for the liberation army. Only two candidates were selected from that entire region. One was Kaiser Haq and the other was me. Little did we know that both of us would be assigned to Sector 7 after the completion of our training, where Colonel Zaman was the sector commander.

As sector commander, Colonel Zaman was methodical and devoted his attention to those areas where he felt he would have the most impact. He personally spoke to as many freedom fighters as he could, especially when they were being sent into the hinterland. Whenever freedom fighters from the interior came back to base camp to pick up supplies or ammunition, Colonel Zaman would talk with as many of them as he could. He listened to their problems with empathy, discussed operational issues and

always impressed upon them not to be overwhelmed with problems.

He was firm and assertive but never disrespectful to anyone. His approach was to encourage innovation and improvisation to make up for what we lacked in weaponry and ammunition. Colonel Zaman did not have any time for those freedom fighters that were reluctant to fight; he left them alone and did not even visit them.

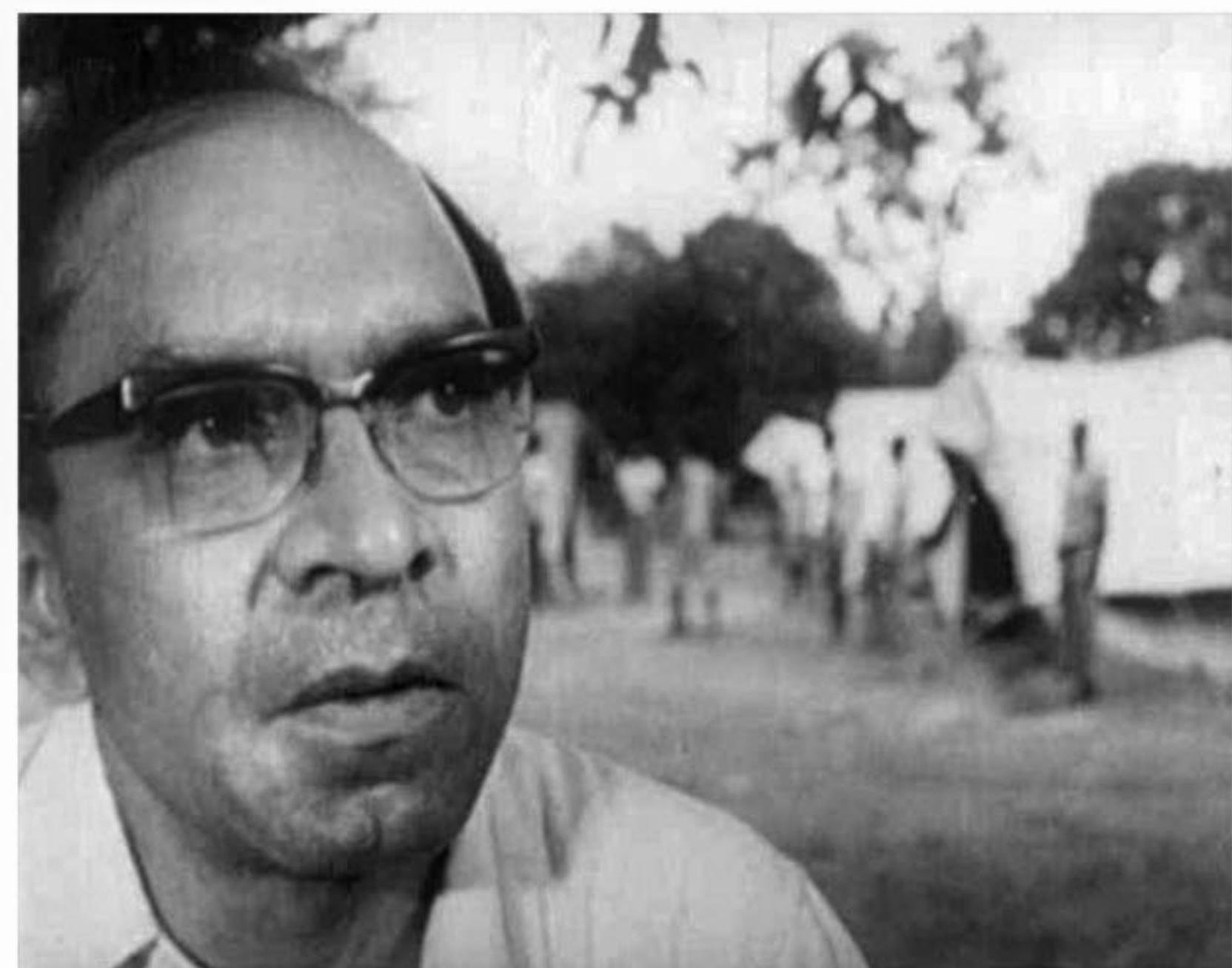
Colonel Zaman worked closely with his sub-sector commanders in almost every operation. When the Indian army agreed to support his sector operations with artillery but would not be able to provide any forward observation officer Colonel Zaman, being an artillery officer, decided to take that task upon himself. This meant that even as a sector commander he had to be with his frontline troops for all major operations to direct the artillery bombardment. As far as I know, he is the only sector commander who had done this.

His leadership style was pragmatic and he did what was needed to be done without any fuss. He was confident of his abilities and the abilities of his men, but he wasn't foolhardy; he took calculated risks but never gambled.

He instilled in his men a code of conduct consistent with the Geneva Convention. After victory, when many freedom fighters sought retribution against collaborators, Colonel Zaman insisted that no one should take the law in their own hands. Instead, he ordered the arrest of collaborators so that all those who were guilty of crimes against humanity could be brought under the due process of law.

For the past several months Colonel Zaman has been gravely ill and his condition continues to deteriorate. He is receiving medical care at Square hospital. He did not seek and nor did he receive any assistance from the government in dealing with his medical condition. When family members tried to convince him to go abroad for medical treatment he steadfastly refused. His reason was simple -- how many citizens of Bangladesh can go abroad for medical treatment? Even in his last days, Colonel Zaman remains what he has always aspired to be -- a citizen of Bangladesh living in dignity!

The writer, a retired army officer and now a businessman, served under Col. Zaman in the Liberation War.



LT. COLONEL QUAZI NOORUZAMAN

gallantry award Bir Uttam, but he has steadfastly refused it. He neither attended any ceremony to accept this award nor has he ever used it as a part of his credentials. His reasons for not accepting the award are simple.

First, gallantry awards are for professional soldiers and not for soldiers of a liberation army who fight for their independence. Normally, a professional army fights the enemy and protects its civilian population. In our liberation war, the entire population (barring collaborators) fought against the enemy. The reward for the struggle was independence itself and gallantry awards diminish the significance

During April to June 1971, hundreds of Mukti Bahini volunteers, mostly peasants and village people, were trained for one to two weeks and organised in small groups and armed with only grenades and one pistol per group were sent to fight the Pakistan army. Like sacrificial lambs, they were all killed. Most of their names are not even in the records of the liberation war and the tales of their sacrifice are now lost. They were the bravest sons of this soil and if they did not receive any gallantry award, Colonel Zaman felt he could not accept one for his role in the liberation war.

He suffered the indignation of being a Bengali in the Pakistan

country. He wanted nothing more or anything less for himself other than what was due to him as an ordinary citizen.

He felt strongly that there could be no disagreement on the spirit of the liberation war, which he saw as the struggle for the protection of individual rights and dignity of ordinary citizens so that they achieve economic and social emancipation. He always stood against privilege and nepotism.

Immediately after our victory on December 16, 1971, Colonel Zaman returned to civilian life. He did not accept any inducement of high office in return for his political support. When freedom fighters per-

Ershad arrested him under martial law regulations and kept him in jail for several months. Immediately after his release, Colonel Zaman published an article on the evils of martial law when the country was under Ershad's martial law.

Colonel Zaman was the founding convener of the Ekkaturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee. He continued to play an important role in this Committee, and when he felt that it was straying from its original intent he stepped aside.

Colonel Zaman joined the liberation war immediately after the crackdown of March 25, 1971. He understood the severity of the situation and decided to join the libera-