

# The trial of Amanda Knox

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FOUR long years have dragged on since the trial of Amanda Knox began, and it seems that the circumstances surrounding this case are as clouded and confusing as they were in the very beginning. The more we know, the less we seem to understand!

A little backdrop: Amanda Knox is a 24 year old American student who went in 2007 for a semester to Perugia, Italy to study. During her time in Italy, her roommate, British student Meredith Kercher, was murdered. Amanda Knox and her friend Raffael Sollecito became suspects and were charged and convicted for the murder, Knox being sentenced to 26 years in prison and Sollecito sentenced to 25 years. Why the latter was sentenced to a year less was never clearly explained, amongst all the other confusing events surrounding this case.

So, if Knox was convicted of murder, why is this trial still dragging on is the obvious question to ask. The reason is that she and her defence team have disputed the charges. To add to the mayhem and confusion involving this case, it is said by the Italian police that Amanda Knox admitted to the crime on the day that she was arrested. However, shortly afterwards, she claimed that she was coerced by the Italian police to confess and that her Italian was not good enough. Why there was no interpreter for a murder charge is highly unclear.

This is obviously strongly contested by the police who stand by their version of the story, to the extent

that Knox and her family were sued by her interrogators for slander. Whatever the truth is, the Italian Supreme Court ruled that Knox's rights were violated during the questioning and therefore allowed her and her defence team to be heard once again.

Add to the drama a third murder suspect, a parallel story, an Ivorian man called Rudy Guede, who has also been convicted and is now serving a 30 year murder sentence. Guede's DNA samples were found at the scene of the crime and he was tried completely separately from the others. He also changed his testimony during the trial.

Sollecito and Knox have also changed their own testimonies and given statements such as "I can't remember" about their accounts of the events on the night of the murder. Forensic reports also indicate that two knives must have been used for the murder but only one has been found.

If all this is not mind boggling enough, it is perhaps the fact that for most, the Italian justice system is unfamiliar territory. Perhaps the long delays based on testimonies which were later changed due to a failure of memory on the part of the accused and the lack of all items of murder weapons being found have hampered a logical investigation and due legal process. Furthermore, there were no witnesses, only those who

have been accused.

In a criminal case, we as the public are conditioned to have some opinion, a gut feeling, a liking for one suspect or an immediate suspicion and dislike for another. However, I for one have never been able to get a grasp on this case, despite the tremendous media coverage it has received, a point which will be

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these three in order to deliver some accountability for this hideous crime to society?

Let us not forget that this is a saga which involves several nationalities. Should the murderer(s) actually be someone else with no ties to the three accused, it would shed a very negative and incompetent light on the Italian police force and justice system. Could this

also possibly have a bearing on why this case has dragged on and on for four long years based on what can be considered as perhaps circumstantial evidence and shaky testimonies?

Between Knox, Sollecito and Guede we have heard several accounts of "he/she was at the house at the time of the crime," "only he was in the house, she was outside," "I was watching a movie at the time the crime occurred," "I can't remember if I was watching a movie or who I was with....." Yes, all bizarre accounts which have, in the view of this writer at least, not shed any light whatsoever on why an innocent woman lost her life on this infamous night.

Referring to the extensive media coverage of this case, without a doubt that hampers the sound and unbiased decision making on the part of any judge or jury. Would it not have been more sensible for the judge to issue a gag order in order for this trial to proceed in the most unbiased way possible?

Knox and Sollecito are making their final pleas before the jury to overturn their convictions as I write this, so the decision of the jury is not yet known. However, that hardly alters the fact that this case has been hazy from day one and an innocent or guilty plea will not reveal the truth about this murder, why it happened and by whom. It may very well be that innocent people have paid for the crime or that the guilty will walk away free. In any case, all sympathies go out to the victim and her family.

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## Preparing for an elderly population

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THE United Nations (UN) International Day of Older Persons is celebrated on October 1 each year as a special day for the older persons worldwide. Like many other countries, Bangladesh also observed the day with different programmes and activities. Although, there is no internationally accepted age bracket for defining the elderly population, people aged 60 years or above are considered as elderly in most gerontological literature. Elderly population in the context of Bangladesh has been defined as those who have reached 60 years of age.

Population ageing in Bangladesh is gradually emerging as an issue not separate from social integration, gender advancement, economic stability or poverty. The older section of the population is increasing much faster than the total population. In Bangladesh, 6.9% of the population was classified as elderly in 1950, and is projected to increase to 8% in 2020 and 17% by 2050.

The median age of Bangladeshi population was nearly 20 years in 2000 and is projected to increase by nearly 15 years over the next half century. The ageing index, i.e. the ratio of the people aged 60 years or over to the children less than 15 years of age, might be about 5.7 times higher over the next half century due to the growing number of older persons and reduction of young population. Also, the old-age dependency ratio would be almost triple between 2000 and 2050 (WPP, 2008). Considering all these measuring indicators, the ageing of population is becoming a grave concern.

Population ageing is already having major consequences and implications in all areas of life, and will continue to do so. In the economic area, population ageing will affect economic growth, savings, investment and consumption, labour markets, pensions, taxation and the transfer of wealth, property and care from one generation to another.

Furthermore, most of them are seriously suffering from some basic human needs-related challenges, viz. lack of minimum income and employment opportunities, extreme poverty, illness accompanied by absence of proper health/medical care, food and nutrition, living arrangements, isolation, exclusion, loneliness, negligence, psychosocial and cultural complexities, etc.

Family is the basic source of care for the elderly population. In the traditional joint family system, elderly people used to enjoy respectable and honourable life in the past. But, the scenario today is almost totally different from that. The process of ageing is taking place when this family pattern is breaking down due to urbanisation, migration, economic hardship, declining social values, self-interest, quarrels, maladjustment and so on. This changing situation and impact of other disadvantageous socio-economic conditions are causing problems and unhappiness for many elderly people, especially for those from the poor families.

The elderly people are becoming isolated or alienated from their kindred and, as a result, they live alone and face the problems on their own. After all, the declining health and physical status of the older people, together with a competitive employment market that discrimi-

nates on age, reduces the chances of older people finding well-paying jobs. There is also a mistaken presumption that elderly people are physically inactive, not open to new ideas and unable to participate effectively in economic activities. Under these circumstances, and also the downturn of the economy, soaring price of essential commodities and high inflation, the elderly population, particularly the poor, face social, health and economic insecurity.

Elderly population needs economic support including food, clothing, medical care, and housing as well as cultural support. In view of the size of the population, scarcity of resources, poverty, insufficient health facilities and absence of strong social security, ageing is going to be a major problem for Bangladesh.



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measures are yet to be undertaken. Under these circumstances, more budgetary allocation regarding elderly population is needed. Besides, the number of beneficiaries should be increased.

There are many lessons that can be learnt from the experience of industrial societies that are facing the problems associated with an increase in their ageing population. Careful planning should make it possible for Bangladesh to take the best from the developed world's experience while avoiding negative features. Therefore, the government, with local and international organizations, should be more innovative in promoting and implementing policies and programmes to face the challenges and make the best of the opportunities that population ageing brings. If we want to live in peace and harmony at the age of 60 years and above, the nation should come forward for the well being of our respected senior citizens from now.

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## LEST WE FORGET

## Gholam Kibria

ASIF ALI

IT was heartbreaking to learn of the death of Gholam Kibria on August 10 after prolonged illness. He was 80. I was shocked because of the death, not of an individual but of an institution. Late Gholam Kibria was an example of enlightened mind and an amazing personality. A former finance secretary and ex-comptroller and auditor general, he had the rare qualities of wisdom and scholasticism.

Late Gholam Kibria did his B.Sc in Science from Dhaka University in 1955 and joined erstwhile Pakistan Audit and Accounts Service (PAAS) the next year. The reason was to avoid posting in the outlying areas. After independence, he served in Moscow and then was made additional secretary, Ministry of Finance, and became finance secretary in 1980. He joined the World Bank, Washington, on deputation as alternate executive director in 1982. After his return from deputation he again became finance secretary in 1987 and retired the following year. He was comptroller and auditor general (CAG), from 1989 to 1991. After retirement, Gholam Kibria acted as IMF Budget Adviser, Ministry of Finance, Government of Mongolia, and Advisor to the Ministry of Finance, Government of Uzbekistan.

His wisdom and patriotism could hardly be surpassed. As CAG he declined to attend a meeting in Vienna since spending public money for the purpose appeared to him unethical in view of the losses that our country had incurred in terms of lives, materials and money due to a devastating natural calamity at that time.

He became a frequent visitor to the Audit and Accounts Training Academy, later Financial Management Academy (FIMA), to use its library while I was its DG. Always conscious of my limitations, a barrier of formality haunted me, not allowing me to open up. Trying to assure me of my total accessibility to him he once said: "In mutual relationships both ends are equals." He was careful that I did not always say "Yes" without being fully convinced. He stressed on combining temporal knowledge with self-realisation.

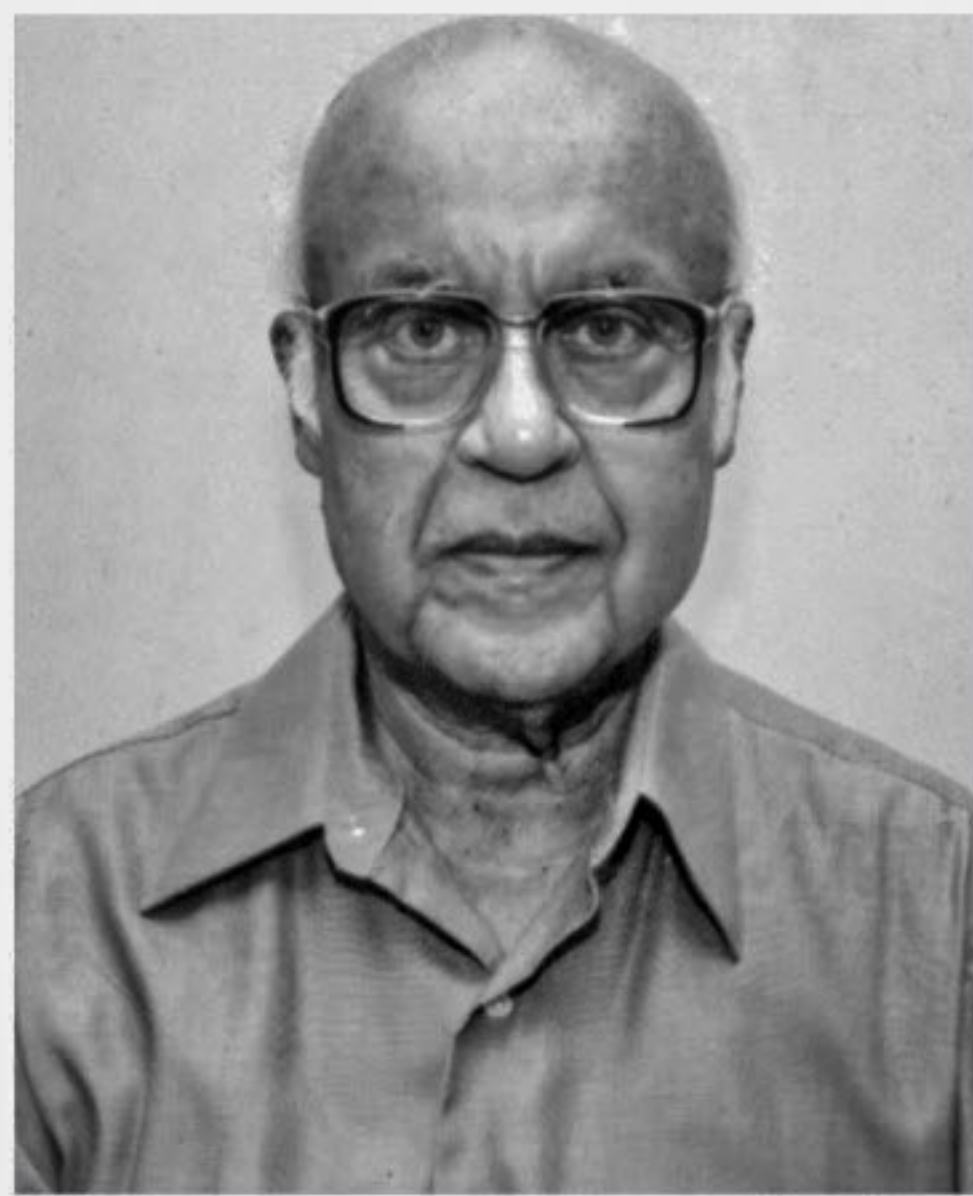
He contributed a write-up for the Government Audit Journal, 1996 captioned, "Lifetime Learning: Synoptic suggestions for its adaptation to our purpose." He suggested learning of skills in financial English for international application and certain skills in handling quantitative data with and without paper, calculators and computers that could be summarised as modern literacy and numeracy skills crucial for both government as well as private sector managements. What could be more appropriate in our context to-day?

On occasions, I used to meet the Indian CAG V. N. Kaul. He would invariably ask me about two Kibrias of Bangladesh. One was late Gholam Kibria with whom he got acquainted when he was working at the Indian High Commission in Dhaka. The other gentleman was late S. A. M. S. Kibria, former finance minister, with whom Kaul worked at Escap when he was its executive director.

Late Gholam Kibria never allowed himself to be swayed by divergent views not consistent with what he believed. While engaged in a discussion on the "Kashf Al-Mahjub," the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism written by a great saint of the sub-continent, Ali B. Uthman Al Jullabi Al Hujwiri, popularly known as Data Ganj Bux of Lahore, and translated in English by Reynold A. Nicholson, late Gholam Kibria fully subscribed to the views of the author that no Sufis, not even those who have attained the highest degree of holiness, are exempt from the obligation of obeying religious laws.

He left behind wife, one daughter and two sons. His wife Nadara Begum, an educationist, earned fame as a valiant language movement activist of 1952. Late Gholam Kibria's austere living and amiable disposition made him respectable to all. It is very difficult to forget his ever smiling face reminding us of the great saying: "To smile is a charity." May late Gholam Kibria's soul rest in peace.

The writer is a former Comptroller and Auditor General.



Gholam Kibria