

TRIBUTE

Guevara and his dreams

FAZLUL HALIM RANA

THE news is not true. Isn't it? Che can't die. Can he?" A nineteen-year-old girl student asked Professor John Jersee when he entered his class at the State College of San Francisco in USA on October 9, 1967. The teacher, editor of Che's Selected Write-ups and an expert on Ernesto Che Guevara, could not believe the news of Che's death like his student. He also did not deliver his pre-scheduled lecture on "Nationalism in Third World and Revolution."

According to him, "It was really surprising that none of us could believe the news of Che's demise right at that moment." The news of Che's death shocked not only Professor Jersee and his class, but also many people all over the world, except some capitalists. It was really tough to accept the news of the sudden demise of the great warrior of the socialist world. Today, on the 44th death anniversary of Che, who spread the waves of socialism in the world of capitalism, I pay my utmost homage to the great soldier of Latin America.

Ernesto Che Guevara was born in Rosario City, Argentina on June 10, 1928. His father Senior Ernesto was a romance-loving person while his mother, who accepted Marxism late in her life, was a daughter of an aristocrat family. Although the philosophy of her last days was not reflected in Che Guevara's early life, it shone brightly in his youth.

He saw and felt the struggles of the proletariat class of society and of his own life as well. He sometimes worked in grape gardens, sometimes as restaurant waiter, or as photographer in the streets of Spain. Che travelled around Latin America on a bicycle. He was a medical student in the Buenos Aires Medical University in Argentina.

The great hero of the socialist movement had an outstanding understanding of philosophy, social studies, technology, science and other fields of knowledge. He learnt

French from his mother only to read Sigmund Freud. He was a devoted reader of Pablo Neruda's poems. The poetry of Pablo Neruda on the civil war of Spain attracted him deeply. Neruda's poems encouraged Che to enter into the world of literature as a writer and to the path of revolution. He was a multi-faceted, multidimensional and colourful personality.

Che was never a hypothetical daydreamer of Marxism. He explained Marxism in a detailed way. The urban-centric labour-

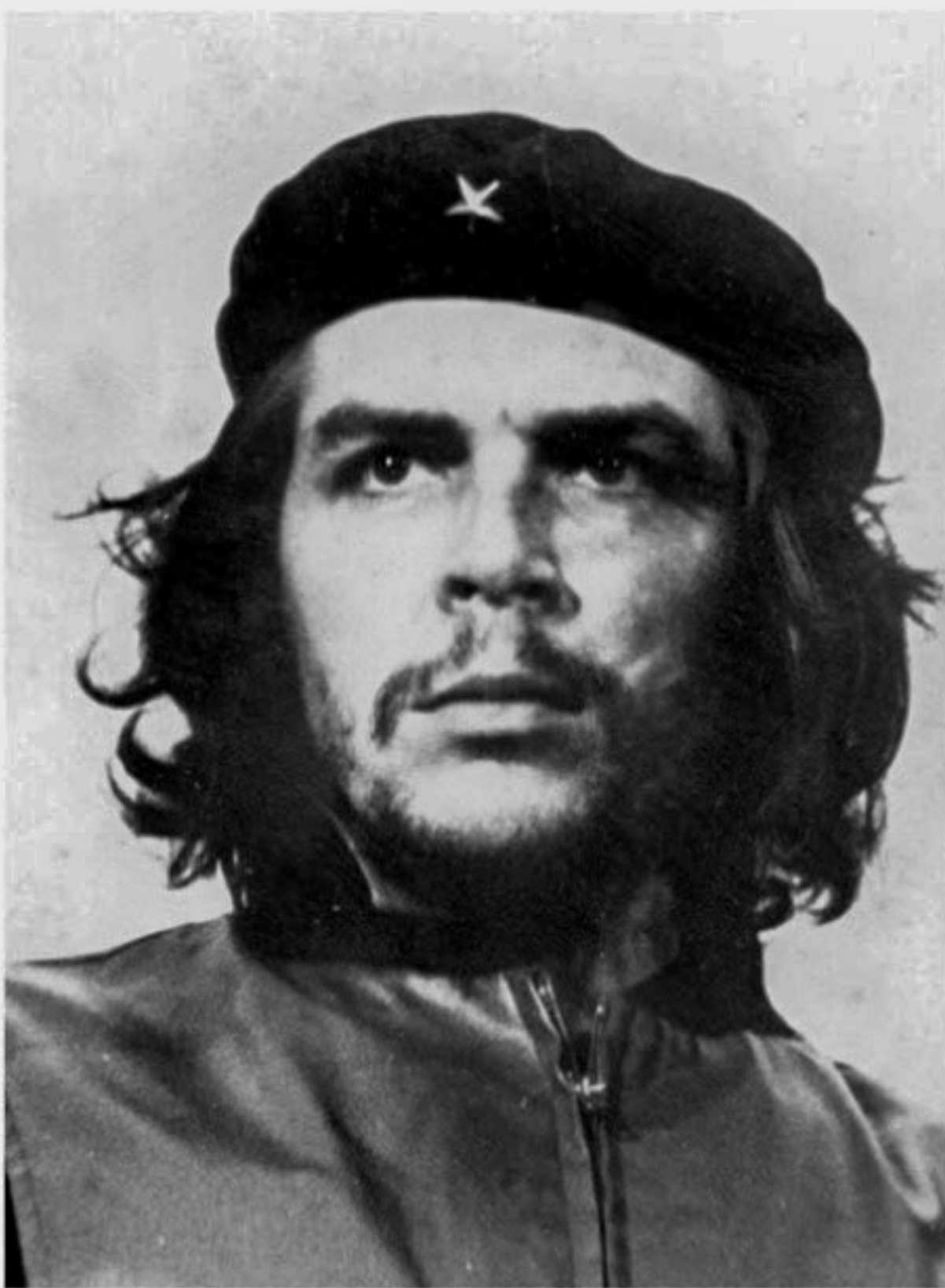


Photo taken by Alberto Korda on 5 March 1960.

based ideal model of revolution is not imitable in the farming or farmer-based underdeveloped countries. Mao-Tse-Tung proved that through the laborious experience of conducting the Chinese Revolution. Later on, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam and Fidel Castro and Che in Cuba were the true followers. This path is the path of rural-oriented, agro-based revolutionary movement.

Steadfast dedication, long-preparation, hard work and strong determination are the

pillars of this movement. But, it should be kept in mind too that Che took the path of revolution, policy and theory that differed from the policy, theory and path directed by Mao-Tse-Tung and even Lenin. Indeed, the rebellious life and revolutionary theory of Che comes from the tested struggle and experience of his life.

Today, there is no denying the fact that Che led the protest against the ongoing racism and repression on the poor in the pro-US countries across Latin America. After his success in the Cuban revolution, Che was encouraged to revolt for the freedom of all of Latin America. He left Cuba and settled in Africa's Congo to conduct an open battle in countries outside the Cuba in April 1965. But, he could not become as successful in other Latin countries, including Bolivia, as he was in Cuba.

Che roamed around every nook and corner of the world, crossing the boundaries of Latin America, because of his passion for revolution. Finally, he reached Bolivia again in 1967 and was wounded while leading a guerilla attack against the then autocratic ruler in Bolivia. Later, on October 8, 1967, Ernesto Che Guevara was arrested by the special US-trained Bolivian army. He was brutally killed the next day, October 9, 1967. The bullets killed the warrior of freedom but failed to kill his ideology, hopes and dreams.

In the history of world politics those who, from frustration and angst, killed revolutionaries like Emeliano Zapata, Roza Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky and Ernesto Che Guevara, could not eliminate their ideologies and beliefs, which have survived for long. The legacy of Che still inspires hundreds of thousands of oppressed and exploited people from Patagonia to Rio Grande.

In the end, I will conclude with a famous quote of Ernesto Che Guevara: "Let me say at the risk of seeming ridiculous that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love."

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SHIFTING IMAGES

The passage of seasons



MILIA ALI

WHILE taking my usual neighbourhood walk on a crisp September afternoon, a rare pristine moment came: a solitary leaf fell on my path and it suddenly dawned upon me that another summer was on its way out. The earthy smell of Fall was in the air. Many years ago, when I first arrived in the United States, one of

my American friends had explained to me that, in the United States, autumn was referred to as "Fall" because of the falling leaves. But, today I realised that there is more to Fall than just falling leaves. It comes imperceptibly announcing the departure of summer. In fact, Fall has a tinge of sadness about it the overriding emotion is bidding farewell to summer ... even the year ... rather than welcoming winter. It's like parting with a friend and reminiscing about old times!

Even before Fall descends on us there are signs of its arrival, if only we take time to observe them the most prominent being the first hint of rust and brown on the trees. There is also a stillness in the atmosphere accentuated by the absence of twittering birds and frolicking children. The sounds of swishing basketballs and clicking roller blades can no longer be heard in the neighbourhood playgrounds on weekdays, since school starts in early September.

Walking through the tree-lined path, I noticed that the ochre sun had already cast its long shadows, although it was only late afternoon. Curtains were drawn and faint lights appeared in most homes. I could discern silhouettes of parents sitting around the kitchen table with children who had returned from school. I smiled as I remembered, from my own past experience as a mom, what the flow of conversation might be like. Anxious parents presumably asking: "So, how was school?" and disinterested children responding: "Okay," or in monosyllables!

As I turned to head home I noticed my neighbour Caroline walking in my direction. For the past three years I have watched her taking leisurely strolls with her granddaughter. Today, it felt rather strange to see her by herself. As we approached each other, I inquired about her grand-

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child. "Oh! She has started going to school and rarely has time to come over. Her mom puts her to bed early," Caroline said. Suddenly I was overcome by a sense of empathy for her. She had lost her husband a few years ago and had immersed herself in tending and caring for her granddaughter. But now that the little girl was on her way to starting her own life, Caroline's life had once again taken a reverse, solitary turn.

Caroline is not alone in this cyclical journey. Many of my friends have been through this difficult three-phase transition: at first the excitement, when grand-motherhood is gifted to them; then the nurturing of the baby which becomes a self-imposed responsibility cum pleasure, connecting them to their parenting past; and finally when the young ones graduate into an independent lifestyle, letting them go, as they had to let go of their children!

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Walking back home, I reflected on the difficult transition Caroline would need to make this winter. She would probably fill her empty hours playing bridge at the Community Center or volunteering for Church fund-raising events, or reading a book sitting by her fireplace. In the meantime the leaves would fall, the trees would be denuded, days would become colder and shorter, and winter would settle in. Ultimately, spring would arrive, recharging the earth, bringing new optimism. When schools close for summer next year, Caroline would hold her granddaughter's little fingers in her firm grip and take her for long walks once again, showing her squirrels or sparrows, or teaching her names of wild flowers ... And life would move on, as it always does ...

Once home from my walk, on an impulse, I delved into my CD collection and pulled out Vivaldi's "Four Seasons." For the rest of the evening I lost myself in its beautiful musical portrayal of the passage of the seasons!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

LEST WE FORGET

Kaiser Bhaiya: A family icon

ZAIIDI SATTAR

TO the world at large, he was popularly known as Kaiser. To the younger brothers and sisters in the family, he was Kaiser Bhaiya, at once loved, revered, and even feared in our younger days. But, as the years went by, he grew more caring and affectionate, bridging the chasm of difference in age, with grace and fondness.

October 9, 2010 saw the end of a long journey for this family icon. His chequered career, his long legacy of public service, his multi-dimensional talents, will be tough to match. He was passionate in what he believed, a master politician, a born leader. When he came into a room, he was instantly the centre of attraction. He was always full of insights. When he spoke, we listened, most often with rapt attention, even when we were not in full agreement. He was simply hard to ignore, at home and outside. His conviction was unwavering; his faith in the Almighty unshaken till his last breath. He lived and died a proud man. He stood tall, dark and handsome in life, and in death.

Those early years are still fresh in my memory. I was easily awe struck by his grace, style, and imposing demeanour. He always dressed impeccably, in the most stylish of clothes.

History is replete with instances where Chittagong led a national uprising, be it against the British or the Pakistanis. So it was in 1970-71. Without the least hesitation he gave leadership to the mobilisation efforts in Chittagong leading up to the military crackdown. In the aftermath of March

25, 1971, he gave up the luxury of a comfortable life in Bangshal Bari and departed with Nilu Bhabi and baby daughter, Sanya, wandering from village to village in remote areas on the borders of Chittagong and Myanmar. During this period he was instrumental in assembling a massive liberation force of young cadres who fought valiantly within the Mukti Bahini. It was not surprising that he always had a huge following among the up and coming young cadres of politicians in the AL fold. At his funeral, they came in droves, by the thousands.

He was close to Bangabandhu and to his daughter, the current prime minister. He rose high in the political hierarchy by dint of his sincere commitment to the party agenda from which he would never deviate. Politics and public service was what motivated him always, not pecuniary gain. As a senior member of the AL Presidium, he was well respected for his selfless devotion to the party. During the two-year interregnum of the caretaker government, he was among those who displayed unflinching faith in the democratic process and never wilted in his support for his leader, Sheikh Hasina. It surprised me, but he was one who believed his party could do no wrong. So he was occasionally frustrated when things did not go his way. As I observed him from close quarters, I had to respect his courage of conviction. He could have enriched himself enormously, but he didn't. He could have lobbied for all kinds of position of gain, but he didn't. His only stint with the government was his tenure as Bangladesh Ambassador in Moscow and Seoul.

I knew how much he valued friendship. I reckon there was no other pastime that he

enjoyed more than a cheerful adda. He was always warm, and accessible to his friends. He would go out of his way to put in a good word for a friend.

The sad demise of Nilu Bhabi only a year ago was a blow he had not recovered from. The few times I met him since, I realised he was not his old self. I found him pensive and even reclusive. During his last days, I had the privilege of spending as much time with him as I could take out of my heavy commitments. Somehow, I had a premonition that the end was near. As he lay in bed at the Apollo Hospital, following his return from surgery in Bangkok, I found him feeling so helpless. He was recovering from the wounds he sustained in a car accident while en route to attend the funeral of a party colleague in Cox's Bazaar. For a man of thought and action, I found this state of inactivity, of convalescence, far too restraining. For a lifelong warrior, this was no state to be in. I could sense that in every little movement of his. To cheer him up I dialed the numbers of many of his friends he was eager to speak to.

In those last days, as he lay in his hospital bed, he would repeatedly say "I would like to go and die in Chittagong." That was not in jest. He meant what he said, like always.

The writer is Chairman, Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

