

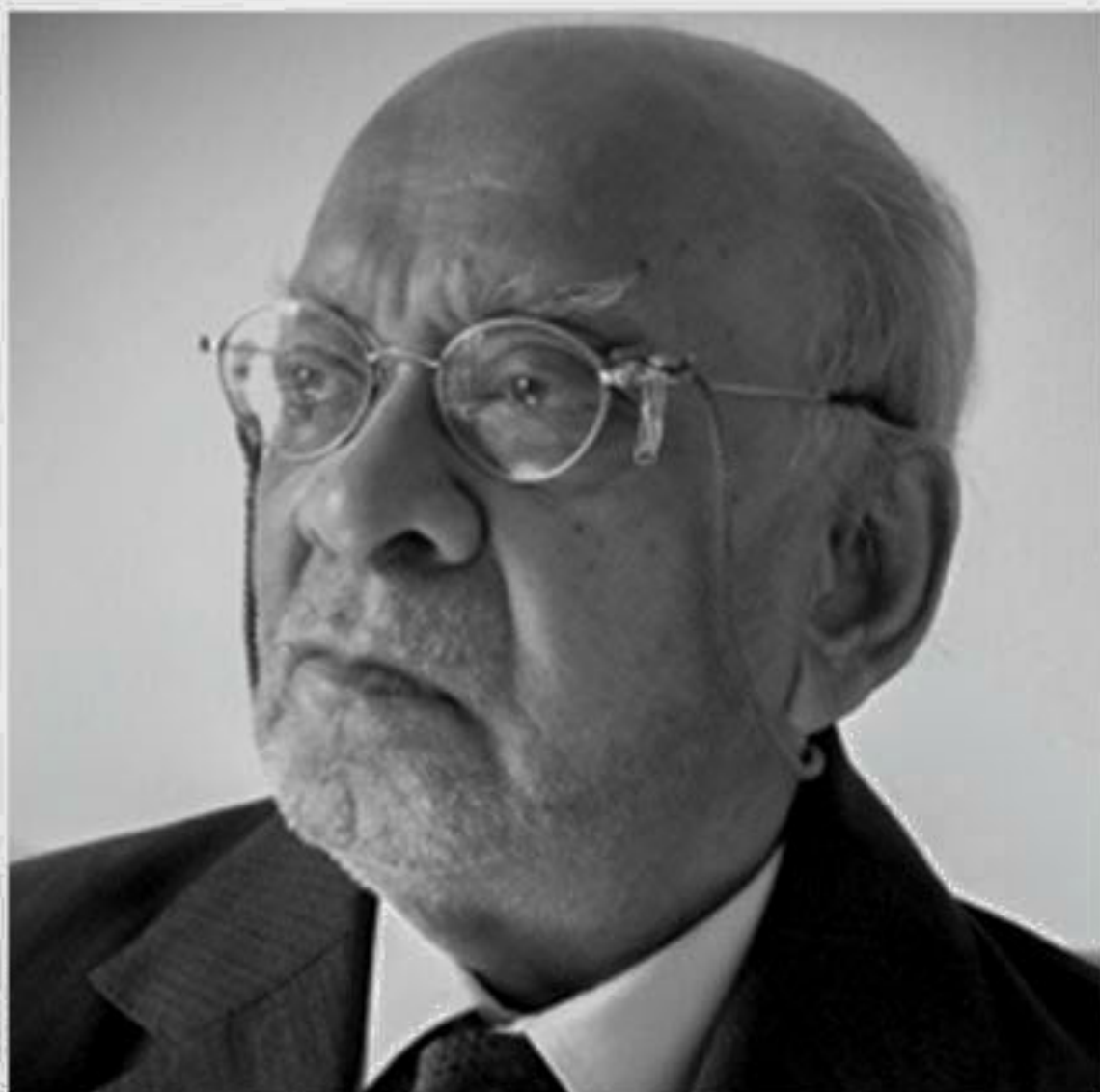
Lieutenant Colonel Quazi Nuruzzaman: A remembrance

A. QAYYUM KHAN

A year has gone by since we lost Colonel Quazi Nuruzzaman B.U. to posterity. For those of us who had the opportunity to work with and serve under him during the Liberation War his memories remain vivid. He was a soft-spoken man with gentlemanly manners. He could easily be mistaken for a university professor, yet, he never lectured his audience. He was a good listener who could ask poignant questions. The men who served under him during the Liberation War loved and respected him.

He had first-hand experience of being a victim of discrimination as a Bengali in the Pakistan army. When General Ayub Khan declared Martial Law in Pakistan in October 1958, Colonel Zaman was attending Staff College in Quetta. Immediately after martial law, all student officers in the Staff College had to sign a document of allegiance pledging loyalty to the President of Pakistan, General Ayub Khan. Only two officers refused to sign such a document; both were Bengalis, one was Colonel Zaman and the other was his life-long friend, Major Salauddin Amin of the East Bengal Regiment. Their reason for not signing was simple -- they had pledged allegiance to the constitution and the people of Pakistan and there was no reason to pledge allegiance to a president who had usurped the state government through a coup. Col. Zaman was a man of strong conviction and quiet dignity.

He was politically conscious although he wasn't a political activist. He sought social and economic justice for the most vulnerable people of his country and was supportive of the leftist ideas of an egalitarian society where no class would be privileged. After the liberation of Bangladesh and till his death, Col. Zaman wrote extensively on contemporary issues. Two themes were clear in his writings,



Lt. Col. Quazi Nuruzzaman

one was the quest for the truth and the other was the protection of the dignity and rights of the common man.

Unlike other Sector Commanders of the Liberation War, Col. Zaman was not a serving officer of the Pakistan army. He was leading a quiet civilian life when the War started. He joined the Second East Bengal Regiment commanded by Major Safiullah, a former cadet of his in the early fifties. Because he was a retired army officer and older than most of the commanders of the Mukti Bahini, he should have chosen a desk job in the Bangladesh Forces Headquarters, but he would have none of that. He was trained soldier and he was going to fight in the trenches, it did not matter to him in which capacity.

After he took over the command of Sector 7, he organised his sector with the resources given to him. Sector 7 covered a huge area, from the northern tip of Bangladesh to the Padma river on the

south. He understood the importance of the commander's presence in boosting the morale of the Mukti Bahini volunteers and preparing them for battle. He would drive to his operational sub-sectors at night and sleep in his vehicle so that he could be with his troops during the day. Whenever he visited a sub-sector, he spent considerable time talking to his men so that he understood their problems. He was the forward observation officer for all his sector operations, and brought in and directed artillery fire. When his sector troops got rifle-launched anti-tank grenade launchers, Col. Zaman was the first person who taught his troops how to use them.

Immediately after liberation, I was appointed as the Sector Adjutant. In that capacity I accompanied him to all the Mukti Bahini camps in our sector. Everywhere he went; he spoke to his men and heard their problems with empathy. He reminded them of the task of rebuilding the war-ravaged country. The government wanted to rebuild the country with the freedom fighter volunteers. Col. Zaman endorsed the idea enthusiastically. So, when the government changed its view and decided to demobilise the freedom fighters after paying them a paltry sum of Tk.50, he was devastated and returned to civilian life.

In independent Bangladesh, Colonel Zaman remained a private citizen. He never accepted a government position although he played important leadership roles in Muktijoddha Sangsad and Ghattak Dalal Nirmul Committee. When his health failed and his condition was deteriorating fast, he would often lament that the objectives of the Liberation War were yet to be achieved, and hoped that a new generation of Bengalis would take up the task in earnest.

The writer is a retired Army officer.

SHIFTING IMAGES

'Battle of the bulge'



MILIA ALI

EVEN twenty years ago Dhaka was a pedestrian-friendly city, with leafy streets, lush green parks and wide sidewalks. You could actually walk in a residential neighbourhood without the nuisance of bleating cars, piled up construction material, and make-shift kiosks. I can distinctly recall

neighbours starting the day with a leisurely stroll, occasionally interrupted by greeting passers-by. In fact, these morning walks helped the community to stay connected and provided opportunities for exchange of professional views as well as domestic tit-bits. Regrettably, those idyllic days are a matter of the past -- a tragic casualty to rapid urbanisation!

My move to the United States in the '80s coincided with the ascendancy of the gym culture and jogging craze. Each morning I would watch men and women clad in fancy jogging gear, whisk past my home with an intensity that surprised me. What I had hitherto considered to be a pleasurable activity, acquired a degree of seriousness and professionalism that was for me very new!

The fact is that, over the last two decades, there has been a substantive change in the way exercise is viewed by common folks. Rigorous workouts, previously reserved for sportsmen, have become part of daily fitness routines for any willing participant. The American Heart Association's pronouncement linking obesity to heart attacks initially triggered the heightened awareness about the benefits of exercise. Medical practitioners got onto the bandwagon and began aggressively advising patients to exercise and lose weight or face the possibility of a range of ailments.

This set the stage for entrepreneurs to turn the battle against obesity into a commercial enterprise. Gym marketers recruited gorgeous looking women and men, even celebrities, to create the illusion that participation in a fitness programme was the panacea for all health problems. Consequently, health clubs and gyms mushroomed and their memberships skyrocketed. (Currently there are about 29,000 gyms in the US alone!)

As a result of this trend, laggards like me are subjected to enormous peer pressure from exercise freaks who rarely miss an opportunity to ask: "Which gym do you visit?" or "Are you into yoga or aerobics?" or

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"What diet plan do you follow?" People resisting induction into fitness regimes are made to feel that their bodies are unhealthy time bombs ready to explode any moment!

Before you get the wrong impression, let me clarify that I, too, believe that exercise is therapeutic for the body and the mind. The awareness among common folks that physical fitness is an integral part of healthy living, is definitely encouraging. It is also pleasing to the eye to see people maintaining their physique and paying more attention to their external appearance.

Nevertheless, I do have reservations about certain aspects of the gym ethos. The environment in most gyms is too regimented for my taste -- rows and rows of machines set up like an assembly line. Fitness clubs seem to promote a culture of aloofness, where individuals work at machines with eyes glued to TV screens and ears plugged into I-Pods/Mp3s. Besides, the artificial white lights and mirrors may be desirable for the "regulars" with their toned muscles and trim figures, but, for those who are not so well endowed, these tend to be a rude reminder of how all is not fair in God's distribution of physical attributes!

In addition, I am particularly discouraged when I spot an exercise buff with layers of undesirable fat, struggling with heavy weights and rigorous calorie-burning routines. Trainers explain the lack of success to the intangible variable termed as "metabolic rate." The truth is, there is no "one size fits all" exercise solution. For some it's the law of diminishing returns while for others it's a linear equation -- the greater the punishment the more the calorie burnout!

Having gone through a full cycle of introspection, I have elected to follow the age-old advice of balance and moderation. For me, the best forms of exercise are daily household chores and brisk walks in a natural and invigorating environment, with the probability of meeting a friend or a neighbour and exchanging some pleasantries.

But then, don't pay any attention to my opinion -- I am, after all, not an authority.

Frankly, I am also the kind of person who, given the choice, would much rather sit in my recliner and watch a Jane Fonda movie than work out with a Jane Fonda aerobics video!

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BITTER TRUTH

Chaos mounts, pessimism grips



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

the opposition-set deadline. With disappearance issues featuring as headlines in the national dailies for the last few months, Ilias Ali's has heightened the crisis in our confrontational politics.

The *hartal*, and the consequent violence, took five innocent lives and inflicted colossal damage to property and business. Although *hartal* is often used as a means to challenge the government of the day, people now feel that it is being overtly used to damage the economy rather than destabilise the government. People are convinced that *hartals* these days are not a means to register protest but violation of individual rights, most importantly, the right to earn a living. On the other hand, the ruling party must allow the opposition to express its views freely and openly and efforts must be taken to dissolve the conflicting points through discussion.

Hartal can be eliminated only when the dissenting parties are willing to settle scores for the greater good of the country. But this is hardly possible where intolerance has closed all doors of negotiation, discussion and mediation. BNP and its allies knew for certain that *hartal* couldn't bring Ilias back, but still they resorted to *hartal* for days.

With the disappearance of Ilias and 22 more persons in the last four months, public resentment, panic and frustration continue to mount, and there is apprehension of more horrific incidents in the days to come. Unfortunately, the utterances and assurances of the high-ups in the government machinery do not go beyond the motions of governance. Unquestionably, it is the government's prerogative to ensure the security of the people. Even after some cosmetic changes in the police administration, there has hardly been any significant improvement in the law and order situation. When people belonging to all segments of the society feel that it is only the instruments of the government that violate individual rights, it is better to cure the disease rather than its symptoms.

The ruling party talks in the parliament and in the media of the good work done by the law enforcers, but the multi-pronged strategy launched to combat crime draws only jeers from the unconvinced citi-

zens. The ruling alliance government tried to absolve itself of all blame, saying that it had inherited a shattered economy and a mafia infested country. But the mafia infested regime has obviously continued to flourish, and this puts normal living, business activities and investment climate in jeopardy. Leaders of the political parties as well as the administration seem to be blind to the cataclysmic situation developing around us, which may ultimately throttle everything.

The dissonance that is evident in the national politics today must not be lost sight of. When one tries to delve deep into it, one is likely to be haunted by the fall of an earlier charismatic leader, Sir Winston Churchill, who was cast aside by his people when the guns fell silent.

The people have awakened from the euphoria of the much-talked about economic miracle to discover that things are as bad as ever, particularly corruption and inefficiency. One is led to conclude that the country is coming apart at the seams, not because of the financial constraints and lack of initiative of the

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people, as was once thought, but because of follies, foibles, and bureaucratic snags. Reports appearing in the press about the everyday struggles of the people, in particular to get gas, electricity and water connections in their houses and business premises, tax payments and the like, suggest that we are on the terrain of bureaucratic sadism.

Admission to government-run hospitals seems to be a fierce fight, forcing a patient to wait for months. Even when a patient is admitted and an urgent operation has to be done, it is certain that medicines and other appliances have to be supplied from outside. In getting a file for private or public work move from one table to another, in any office, only a pay-off helps quick movement. In a word, the entrenched system of bribery has flourished to an epic proportion.

The situation today calls for pragmatism and sensibility. Is it that by our frivolous activities the saner world will be lost to insanity? Do we realise that the miseries and sufferings of the people living in the farthest corners of the country are the worst because

we have hardly any time to look beyond the capital city?

It is worth recalling that Rabindranath Tagore called this land *Sonar Bangla*. In those days, this country would have qualified for Tagore's exuberant characterisation. The optimism of the poets, and men of letters, and leaders seemed boundless. Because this country had vast paddy fields, lush green forests, and waterbodies abounding with fish, its economic future appeared assured.

It was believed that the new generation would engender benevolent national policies, elicit enthusiastic public participation in nation building and convince the industrialised countries of the west to provide aid, technology and technical expertise to a country yearning to develop itself. The visions of hope and glory are clouded by widespread despair and disillusionment. *Sonar Bangla* has now turned into a sad, bitter region marked by hatred, bloodshed, rivalry, and most ominously religious bigotry. The present leaders must contend with a terrible truth: social and economic signals point to a cataclysmic future for a land that once burst with promise.

During the last one year, things have taken a pretty bad turn, and a return to crisis management in recent times after some stability has raised questions of confidence in the nation's leadership. We, however, must not forget that this country brings out its best at times of uncertainty and difficulty.

The people are worried because of the ever-increasing threat to their lives, and the growing menace of terrorism, abduction, extortion, murder, campus terrorism, and a host of other social ills. But shockingly, this has never crossed the minds of our political parties. Ironically, political parties behave as if they are only fighting for policies and power and not for anything related to people's sufferings and woes. The people can choose only between the devil and deep blue sea.

When the country is facing disaster and crisis one after another, it is most shocking and outrageous that it is being held to ransom by a handful of hoodlums who are out on the streets backed by the blessings of some unscrupulous politicians to protect the rights of the people! If that was the avowed desire then this vast cohort of people would not have been languishing in poverty and destitution even after 40 years of liberation. It is time to ponder if the political parties can choose alternative means and weapons to make their voice heard.

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