

## Lingering BUET crisis

*We reiterate our demand for VC's resignation*

THE standoff between the VC and the agitating teachers has gone on for too long, something that is not acceptable for any reputed institute, even less for an institution of longstanding like the BUET.

We note with satisfaction that the teachers have put off their plans to resign en masse, till 30 July only though. We feel that it was perhaps an erroneous position for the teachers to have taken in the first place to issue an ultimatum when seeking a solution through dialogue. Resignation is a handy tool which should be used as a last resort only; and the option is always there to be exercised without expressing it in a dialogue for a problem resolution, ab initio. And that was perhaps a reason why the education minister was so held back on the matter.

This latest statement of the teachers is, we feel, a shifting of stance and indeed softening of position, and the trust in the government they have expressed should not be seen as a capitulation but as offering both time and space for a resolution. And this must be judiciously used by the authorities, including the education minister, to break the impasse.

However, in this regard we once again question the justification of the VC continuing in his position. The stand of the agitating teachers has been compelled, according to them, by the VC's unlawful and opaque activities, which can only be proved or disproved through an impartial inquiry. And an inquiry that must to go into allegations against the head of an institute cannot be fully transparent with the head continuing to be in his position. And for a VC who has lost the trust and confidence of more than fifty percent of his colleagues loses all moral grounds to hold on to his post. The best thing for him, as we have said in the past, is to go.

## Railway minister's surprise visits

*Correct the institutional flaws*

WE are heartened by the news that communications and railways minister on Saturday paid a surprise visit to the Chittagong railway station. His sudden visit revealed a nexus among the security staff and commercial departments of the station and ticket scalpers whereupon six security personnel and all of the station's 14 booking clerks were transferred to remote, less important stations. He also paid an abrupt visit to the Oxygen-Hathazari and Bhatiari-Borodighir Paar roads in the port city, which resulted in issuing show-cause notices to three Roads and Highways Department engineers for their alleged negligence in repairing the rundown roads.

Such surprise and sudden visits are something that the minister has been undertaking since he assumed the post. This is a clear manifestation of the minister's pro-active role in taking corrective measures, which we find laudable indeed. But this also brings to light that the railway and the RHD are riddled with corruption, poor maintenance and negligence of duty of the concerned officials and staff.

We fail to understand how, in spite of frequent media reports on ticket scalping, a section of unscrupulous railway officials manage to collude with the scalpers and sell tickets at a highly increased rate. Although transfer of those officials can bring about a temporary change in the practice, what is really needed is a systemic change by strengthening regular monitoring of the officials' activities and also by digitizing the whole system as much as possible to ward off the scalpers.

We believe these long-lingering problems emanate mainly from systemic flaws. Therefore, the instant corrective measures can only be short term palliative, merely a stopgap solution. In order for a long-term solution, the minister should focus on correcting the systemic flaws and plugging the institutional loopholes.

However, there is also the need for oversight of the high-ups including the minister on a regular basis, a practice which perhaps has been missing since long. But alongside this, immediate attention should be paid to remove the lacunae that have made the two biggest ser-

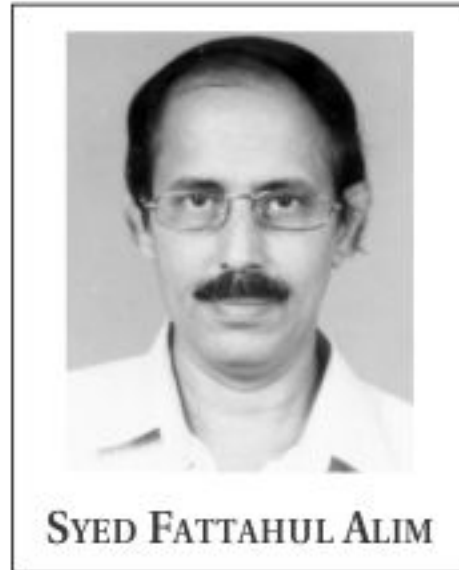
## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 23

- 1908**  
The Second Constitution accepted by the Ottomans.
- 1952**  
General Muhammad Naguib leads the Free Officers Movement (formed by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the real power behind the coup) in overthrowing King Farouk of Egypt.
- 1970**  
Qaboos ibn Sa'id becomes Sultan of Oman after overthrowing his father, Sa'id ibn Taimur initiating massive reforms; modernisation programs and end to a decade long civil war.
- 1983**  
The Sri Lankan Civil War begins with the killing of 13 Sri Lanka Army soldiers by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Terrorist group.
- 1988**  
General Ne Win, effective ruler of Burma since 1962, resigns after pro-democracy protests.
- 1999**  
Crown Prince Mohammed Ben Al-Hassan is crowned King Mohammed VI of Morocco on the death of his father.

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## KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

HUMAYUN Ahmed was an outsider who took the literary world of post-independence Bangladesh by storm. Outsider, because he was conspicuous not by his presence in the literary movements of the 1960s that acted as the intellectual wellspring for the new crop of poets, novelists, short story writers and playwrights of the post-independence genre.

Humayun Ahmed appeared as it were from nowhere and then, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, held young generations for about four decades under the spell of his magical storytelling. His first novel *Nondito Noroke* published in 1974 was an instant success. Among many of his popular novels are the ones on Himu, such as *Mayurakkhi*, *Darojar Opashe*, *Himu*, etc. His novels on another interesting character Misir Ali include, among others *Devi*, *Nishithini*, *Nishad*, *Onno Bhuban*, etc.

Himu has eccentric manners with flashes of supernatural abilities that defy common sense and rationality. Misir Ali, on the other hand, is very rational and analytic and debunks many mysterious happenings. This contrast between the rational and the irrational in the characters he created was the stuff of Humayun's stories. But was it not rather strange that being a student of science, he had this bent for the paranormal in his stories? On the contrary, it is exactly because of his scientific background that he could play with the rational, the irrational and the paranormal with equal ease.

The old classical model of commonsense and rationality had broken down within the first two

# Pied Piper of Bangla literature

decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the emergence of theories of relativity to describe macro-level phenomena and quantum mechanics to deal with the micro world of the subatomic. Little wonder Humayun could so effortlessly transcend the limits of the real and return with equal ease. This style of his writing can well be attributed to the genre of magical realism, but whether he chose to be an adherent of this style of literary narrative consciously remains an open question.

Humayun Ahmed was the Wonder Boy of our literary world. He traversed

*Humayun Ahmed appeared as it were from nowhere and then, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, held young generations for about four decades under the spell of his magical storytelling.*

all the branches of fiction with equal ease. Had he not chosen to write novels on social life, especially about the joys and sorrows of the urban and the semi-urban middle class, he could well be our best science fiction writer. *Fiha Shomikoron*, *Tomader Jonyo Bhalobasha*, *Tara Tin Jon*, *Shunno*, *Omega Point* and so on were proof of his masterly strokes of pen as a science fiction writer. The TV serials on Bangladesh television were never so popular before *Ai Shob Din Ratri*, *Bohubrihi*, *Oyomoy*, *Kothao Keo Nei*, etc. The main character of the last serial, a local bully Baker Bhai, became so popular that at the finale of the drama when Baker Bhai was sentenced to death, there were protest demonstrations in different parts of the country by his fans in real life.

His pen was equally adept at writing children's novels and the books *Shurjer Din*, *Botol Bhut*, *Putul*, etc. bore the marks of his genius. Gradually, he began to tread the realm

of film making. But again the god of success was with him. Films like *Aguner Poroshmoni*, *Shyamol Chhaya*, *Srabon Megher Din* and others directed by him were able to draw film lovers belonging to the middle class again to the cinema.

What was the secret of Humayun Ahmed? What was special in his novels, screenplays and films that his contemporaries missed? Perhaps the strength of his pen lay in the fact that he was not influenced by the literary movements of the 1960s, the decade that was overburdened either with

its belief system.

The kind of literary narratives that pandered to the small circle of elitist urban literati could never touch the heart of the general readers, who still longed for the novels of Bimal Mitra, Jarasandha, Banaful, Ashapurna Devi, Bibhuti Bhusan Bandopadhyaya, Manik Bandyopadhyaya or modern-day Sunil Gangopadhyaya and so on from West Bengal. We may also recall how enthralled our older generation was by Sarat Chandra and Bankim Chandra until the fifties of the last century. So, Humayun's secret was he could fill this void in Bangladesh literature after the 1970s.

This is not to say that other novelists, playwrights and poets of the 1950s, '60s and '70s were lesser by any measure than Humayun Ahmed. When measured in the yardstick of literary excellence there were many bright stars in our Dhaka-centred intellectual firmament. Syed Waliullah, Akhteruzzaman Elias, Shawkat Osman and Syed Shamsul Huq are no doubt among the literary stars of the pre and post-independence period. But what is at issue here is the level of popularity among common readers, and Humayun Ahmed was far above them in that respect. In fact, Humayun Ahmed was instrumental in developing the habit of reading and buying books among our run-of-the-mill readers of Bangladesh.

Suffering terminally from cancer, he made sure his pen did not stop. He loved life and was optimistic that he would recover and return home to finish his unfinished works.

But at 64, death has suddenly cast a pall over his future dreams and possibilities. But his place among the young and the old, who loved his writings and films, will forever remain etched in their hearts.

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## TRIBUTE

# Tajuddin Ahmed: Thinker and statesman

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THERE was a seer in Tajuddin Ahmed. His was the voice and the resolve which eventually carried us through the War of Liberation in 1971. Had it not been for him -- and remember that Bangabandhu had been taken prisoner by the Pakistan army -- the question of liberty for the seventy five million people of Bangladesh would easily have run into a wall. Or into a quagmire. In the minutes before the Pakistanis cracked down on unsuspecting, unarmed Bengalis on March 25, 1971, Tajuddin Ahmed tried persuading Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to leave the city. That, thought Tajuddin, would make it easier for Bengalis to go into a war of national liberation. Bangabandhu had his own and very credible reasons, of course, not to leave the scene despite the attendant risks. The elected leader of a majority party in parliament does not run.

Bangabandhu chose to stay and confront the world on his terms. For his part, Tajuddin chose his own path. He would give shape to a government, the very first in Bengali history, and win a war against a formidable military machine.

A remembrance of Tajuddin Ahmed is surely the role he played in crafting the Mujibnagar government into shape in April 1971. He it was who undertook the task of locating all the senior leaders of the Awami League then making their way across the

frontier into India in the face of all-round genocide and bringing them together as a wartime administration. There were those who clearly felt uneasy about Tajuddin's playing the foremost role in organising the war; and they went overboard in trying to push him aside. Lawmakers elected on the Awami League ticket at the December 1970 elections were made to gather, the sole objective being a removal of Tajuddin from the leadership of the movement. Tajuddin did not waver in his overriding goal of seeing the nation through to victory. He survived, to wage war in Bangabandhu's name. On December 16, 1971, Tajuddin Ahmed's place in history was firmly etched in the human consciousness.

There was, in Tajuddin, a proper man of principles. His diaries, dating from the late 1940s, are but a window to the thought processes working in him even at that young age. Move on, to the early 1970s. As Bangladesh's first finance minister, Tajuddin's understanding of the priorities before the nation was without ambiguity. Alone in the cabinet, he believed that Bangladesh's future lay in its use of its human resources. A nation which had gone to war and come back home in triumph could achieve greater wonders. Hence there was little need for the World Bank, for the IMF, indeed for aid from the capitalistic West. He felt it was pointless to speak to Robert McNamara in Delhi in February 1972. And yet, in October 1974 when he did see McNamara in Washington, he must have felt the irony of it all. The

government he was part of had changed gear, toward the West. He had not. Disillusion had taken over. Only weeks later, he would be out of government.

The extent to which Tajuddin Ahmed mattered in Bengali politics was made obvious to a group of young economists cheerfully explaining the details of a proposed Six Point plan of regional autonomy to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1965. The venue was a boat on the Sitalakhya, away from the prying eyes of Ayub Khan's intelligence. Bangabandhu was satisfied with the economists' analysis of the Six Points. And then Tajuddin took over, with question after question. The young economists, until then focused on Mujib, knew at that point that the Awami League had a formidable presence in Tajuddin's intellectual persona. Tajuddin's political and intellectual brilliance was a matter of worry for Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. When, soon after the elections in 1970, President Yahya Khan prepared to visit Dhaka, Bhutto told him to watch out for Tajuddin, for Tajuddin asked the questions and demanded the answers. After all, Bhutto had reason to know. In early 1966, when as Ayub Khan's foreign minister he had challenged Mujib to a debate over the Six Points at the Paltan Maidan, it was Tajuddin who chose to accept the challenge on behalf of his leader. In the event, Bhutto did not turn up.

Tajuddin Ahmed brooked no nonsense. He tolerated no sycophancy. And he was not squeamish about

making his thoughts on politics public, loud enough for everyone to hear. In spring 1974, he warned of looming danger: those who argued that Bangabandhu ought to have more powers were only planning to isolate him from the masses. An isolated man, he told his party men, was a lonely man. And a lonely man could easily be pushed aside. That was Tajuddin, nine months before January 1975.

Tajuddin's belief in socialism never wavered. But socialism, he made it clear to people impatient for results, was a matter of dedication. It was a plant which needed ceaseless nurturing. Socialism was much more than an idea. It was, he repeated over and over again, underpinned by faith. Hypocrisy had no place in the socialist's concept of the world.

In August 1975, as he made his way out of his home and to prison, he knew he would never return alive. On November 3, when the assassins brought him and his three colleagues together at Dhaka central jail, he had little illusion that those men were there to kill. And kill they did.

Bangladesh was laid low on the day Bangabandhu died. It was paralysed when Tajuddin Ahmed was gunned down with his Mujibnagar colleagues three months later.

(Tajuddin Ahmed, prime minister in Bangladesh's government-in-exile in 1971, was born on July 23, 1925. He was assassinated on November 3, 1975).

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