

BOTTOM LINE

Ramu violence: International implications



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

BANGLADESH is a secular, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual state, and it has an impressive record of communal harmony admired by Asian and Western countries. His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran of the Holy See visited Bangladesh in April of this year and, at a press conference, spoke highly of the communal harmony found in Bangladesh and wondered how Bangladesh achieved it.

He believed that it was history and the political, cultural and social commitment of the people, civil society and political leaders to create an environment in which the people were tolerant of all faiths and lived peacefully alongside each other. Such was the perception of a foreign visitor of the extraordinary communal harmony and respect for each other's faiths in the country. The ambassador of the Holy See in Dhaka travels regularly to different districts and meets people of all faiths and sees communal harmony among them. He appreciates the harmony and has been deeply impressed.

The US ambassador in Bangladesh highly praised and admired the communal harmony in the country, and said Bangladesh is strategically important to the US because it is a secular, tolerant Muslim-majority country with multi-party democracy.

Bangladesh is the only the Muslim majority country whose neighbours are non-Muslim majority countries. Bangladesh's interaction with them has been excellent politically and culturally. But, after the revolting incident in Ramu, Bangladesh's record is likely to be questioned.

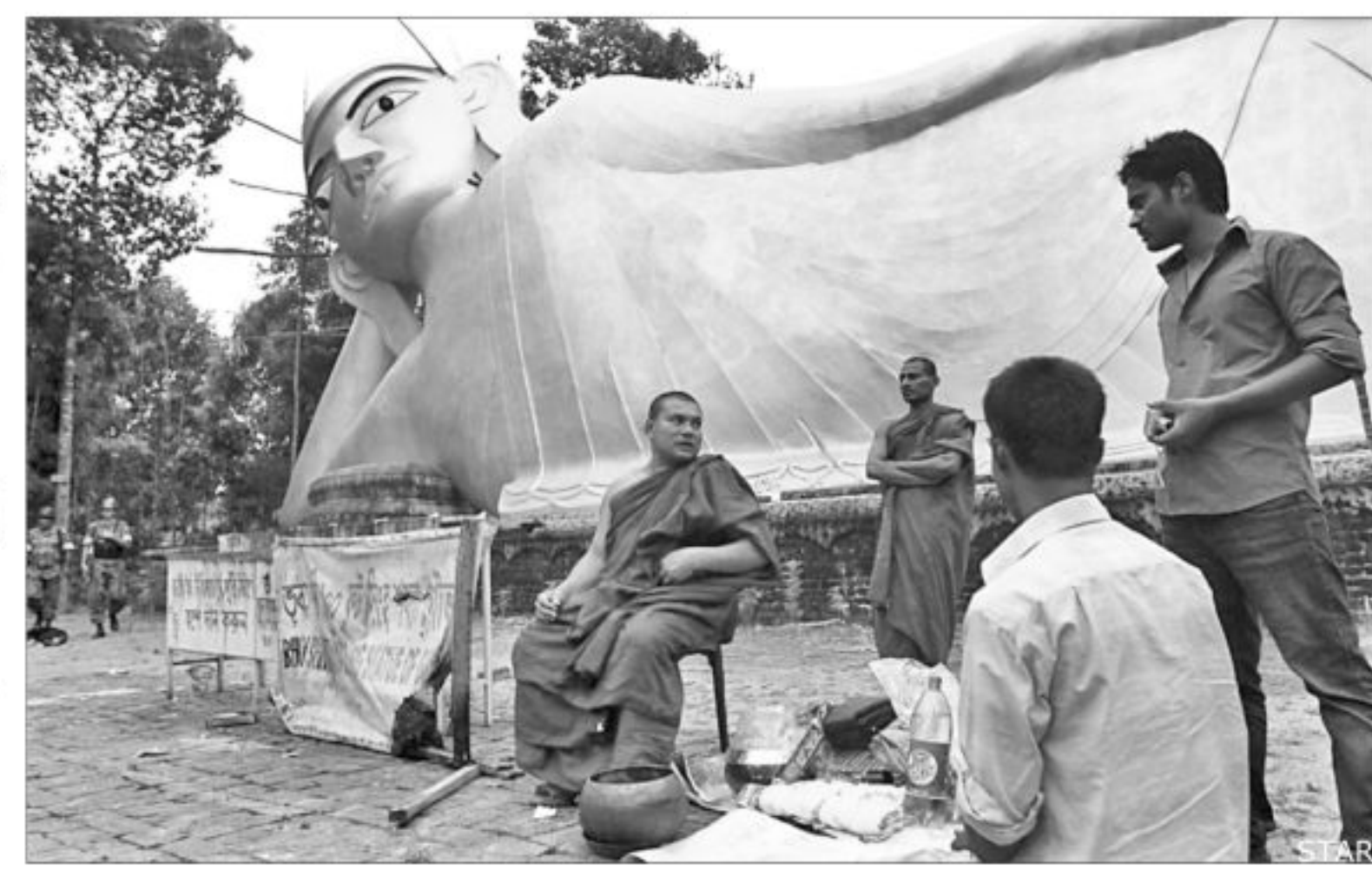
Bangladesh was ruled by Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim kings before the British colonised and ruled this terri-

tory (East Bengal). Therefore, an ingrained culture runs in the blood of the people in the country like a golden thread. The people, including children and the young, meet socially, join and enjoy the festivities of all faiths.

At the UN and in other multi-lateral forums, we can proudly announce that Bangladesh has been an ideal example of communal harmony.

Such a remarkable record has been severely tainted and destroyed by the Ramu arson of Buddhist temples and houses by fanatic Muslims who were reportedly angry because of the Facebook posting of a young

The attackers were enraged, and were looking for an opportunity to take revenge. Should not the law enforcers have been more vigilant and realised that something was cooking and may spread to the minority community?



Buddhist, which was tagged by a group called "Insult Islam" desecrating the Holy Qu'ran. The picture then passed on to mobile phones through Bluetooth to thousands of people. In the evening there was a procession by local Muslims and the local police authorities reportedly assured the Buddhist community that they would provide security. But regrettably the assurance was not kept. The disaster happened.

The attackers behaved like the Taliban who destroyed the statue of Lord Buddha at Bamian in

Afghanistan. The destruction was condemned by the international community.

NHRC Chairman Dr. Rahman, after visiting the area, reportedly spelt out three factors: (a) the Ramu incident was pre-planned, (b) it was the inefficiency of intelligence agencies which failed to inform the government beforehand, (c) police failed miserably and the responsible policemen should be arrested and investigated.

The intelligence agencies knew that a video insulting the Prophet, made by an Egyptian-born American Jewish citizen (now in jail), had prompted processions

against the US Embassy. The attackers were enraged, and were looking for an opportunity to take revenge. Should not the law enforcers have been more vigilant and realised that something was cooking and may spread to the minority community?

Building a positive image or reputation takes years, but it can be destroyed by one incident and cannot be restored easily. It will take years to regain the trust of the Buddhist community. Minorities such as Hindus and Christians are probably worried about their per-

sonal safety and places of worship.

To regain the trust of the minorities, some positive actions by the majority community need to be taken: (a) one or two minute silence to be observed by all citizens to show repentance and solidarity with the Buddhist community, (b) a parliamentary delegation consisting of minority MPs may visit the area, and (c) assurances of rebuilding the burnt houses and restoration of the statue of Lord Buddha at the expenses of the government be given.

It is good to note that the prime minister met a Buddhist delegation on October 7 and visited the area and met with the victims the next day. Some critics say that she should have gone much earlier given the international concern for the safety of the minority community.

The international implication is huge for Bangladesh. Once it was an example of communal harmony but, because of this incident Bangladesh may have lost face. The consequences of the hate attacks are being felt at the UN, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. The Buddhist community protested robustly in front of the Bangladesh missions in those places. Furthermore, all major Buddhist countries have been appalled.

Finally, we sincerely apologise to the Buddhist community, and please forgive us. Forgiveness does not come automatically, and to deserve forgiveness we have to tell them that no such hate attacks will ever occur again, and punish the perpetrators through the courts of law.

The government is naturally concerned at the incident and will take appropriate steps to restore our image in the international community. For this I may suggest that a delegation comprising people of all faiths may soon visit the UN, and other concerned key countries to explain our position.

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

Sound mind in sound body

MD AZIZUL ISLAM

OCTOBER 10 is World Mental Health Day. Before saying anything about mental health let us define health.

According to World Health Organization (WHO), health is the complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely absence of disease or infirmity. So, health has three components -- physical, mental and social. We do exercises to improve our physical health, but the other components of health are neglected, underestimated and undermined.

When the question of mental health comes we knowingly or unknowingly avoid, suppress, dampen or ignore it due to lack of knowledge or social stigma. But mental health is an integral part of our wellbeing. Good health is not possible without mental health. Mental health includes the state of mind, thought, emotion, volition, behaviour etc. Without all these human life is impossible. Our drive and action, sorrow and pleasure, speech and thought all depend on intact and sound mental health. We can very well imagine that without mental health all our abilities, performance and productivity will be meaningless. So, there is no alternative except to develop sound mind and sound health.

The extent of mental health and illness is surprisingly wide and complex. In a recent survey by WHO and Institute of Mental Health, Bangladesh, it was seen that 16.01% of population above the age of 18 are suffering from some sorts of mental disorder, be it major or minor. This rate among children and adolescents is much higher (18.4%). That is, 1/6 of the total population has mental disorder. About 1.1% of the population is suffering from major mental disorder. The rate of drug addiction is about 0.6% to 1%.

The theme of World Mental Health Day of this year is "Depression: A Global Crisis" -- an important global issue. In Europe and USA the rate of depressive disorder is 5%-10%. In Bangladesh 4.6% of total population suffer from it. Depressive disorder is the 3rd highest ranking morbidity throughout the world and it is assumed that it will be number one by 2030. About 350 million people throughout the world are suffering from depressive disorder. Depressive disorder is an illness of the mind, and is characterised by inability to feel enjoyment and pleasure, depressed

mood, low drive and initiative, despair, helplessness, hopelessness, sleep disturbances etc. All these lead to less productivity and functional impairment. Individuals suffering from depression see the world as negative in every sphere. They are pessimistic and negativistic. Often, these thoughts lead to suicide, and that is the dangerous part of depressive disorder.

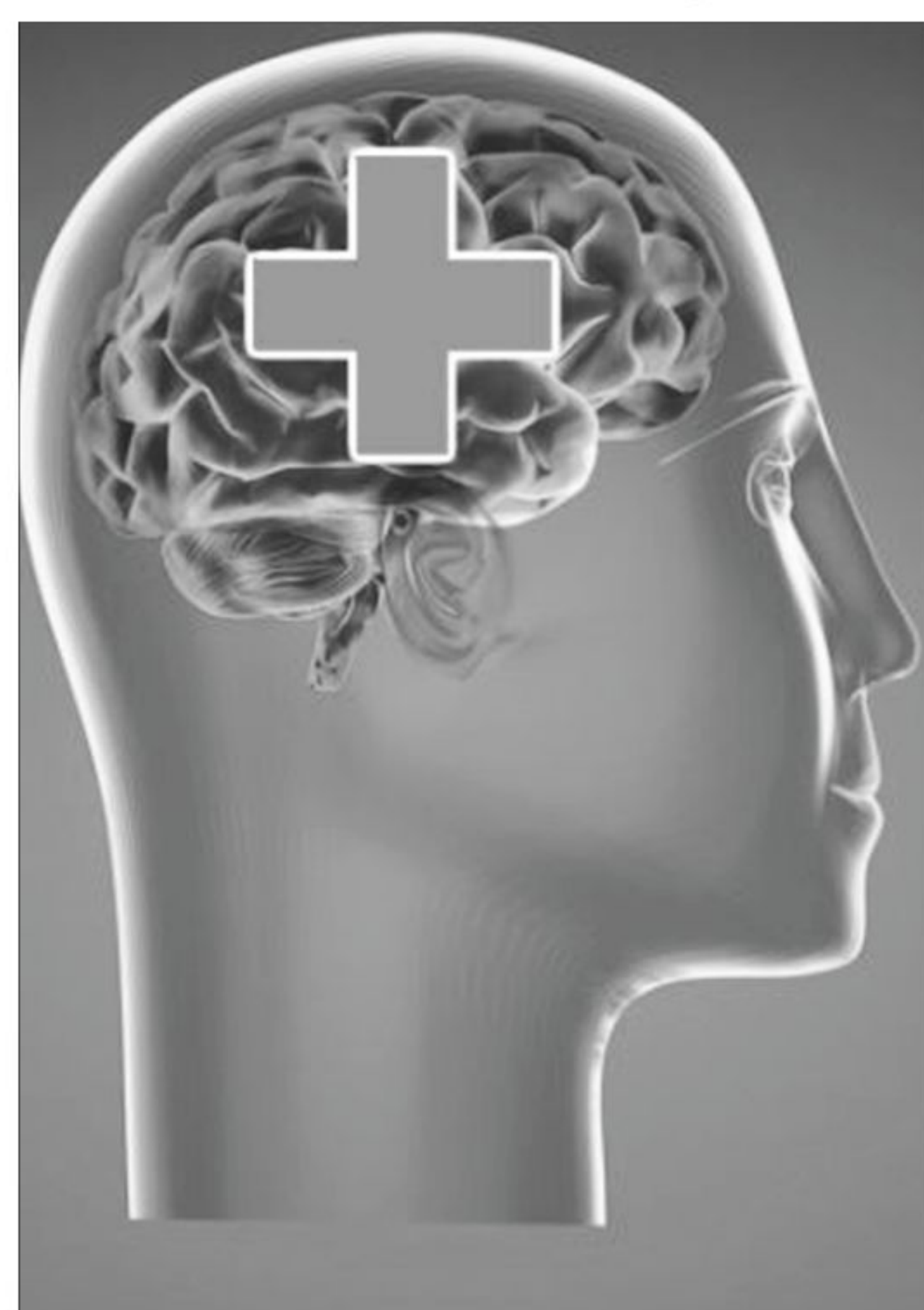
The hope and positive side of mental disorder is that, like all other illnesses in medical science, the causes (etiology), course and prognosis of this illness are known. Mental disorder can be explained in a scientific way. The causes of mental disorder can be broadly based as biological, psychological and social. Almost all mental disorders are caused due to increase/decrease/derangement of a chemical in the brain called neurotransmitter. So, mental disorder is not caused by "ghosts," "jins," "poris," evil spirits, etc., nor by *Shaitan*. Mental disorder can be treated successfully by medical science as the causes are known to us.

Unfortunately, due to our ignorance, social stigma, lack of facilities and expert manpower, people with mental disorder are deprived of proper health care service. They are inhumanely chained, mercilessly tortured and occasionally beaten. Sometimes they are treated by *jar-fhukur, kabiraj, ojha, baidhya*. They are forced to live a homeless, loveless life. They are called "mad" even by close relatives, which worsen the mental disease.

Despair about mental health is endless. For the whole country of 16 crore population there are only 200 psychiatrist and 2,000 hospital beds (govt. and civil) only for mental patients. About 0.44% of total health budget is spent for mental health. There is no hospital bed or even psychiatric out-patient department in the big/elite private hospitals.

Now is the time to understand the scientific basis of mental disorder. It is of paramount importance to bring the unfortunate mentally ill people to health care service. Creation of awareness among the people is an important factor in helping them. The media can play a vital role in building the awareness. Personal, familial, institutional and political commitment can bring positive change in this neglected sector, and can help build a healthy nation with sound mind.

The writer is Senior Psychiatrist, CMH Dhaka.



Now is the time to understand the scientific basis of mental disorder. It is of paramount importance to bring the unfortunate mentally ill people to health care service. Creation of awareness among the people is an important factor in helping them.

TRIBUTE

Memories un-faded and unforgettable

KAZI LIAKAT HOSSAIN

THE nation is going to observe the 18th death anniversary of a noted genius, world reputed artist S.M. Sultan. I had the opportunity to meet and take interviews of many luminaries of Bangladesh, and S.M. Sultan was one of them.

I first met this legendary personality in his village home Masimdia, which is situated near the river Chitra. I, along with one of my friends who was also friend of the then D.C. Ali Hossain, went to S.M. Sultan's residence. He welcomed us very warmly. He was very modest and hospitable, which charmed me very much. Though he was a world reputed artist he had no vanity in him. His pet animals were all around him. His adopted daughter Nihar Bala looked after him till his death. He loved her like his own daughter. He was lifelong bachelor.

Ali Hossain helped him to establish S.M. Sultan Shishu Charu-o-Karukala Foundation. A big boat called "*Shishu Shargo*" was built at a cost of Tk. 10/12 lac for the children to take art lessons on while plying around the Chitra river. The children were taught how to paint the scenic beauty of nature practically. But alas! It is an irony of fate that after his death the boat has been lying uncared for.

He was tall, lean and thin, with long hair which reached down to his neck. He wore powerful glasses, and really looked like an artist. Sultan was popularly known to his village people as Lal Mian. During his boyhood he went to Calcutta and came in contact with Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Haq. Having seen his talent in painting, Sher-e-Bangla had him admitted in an art school.

I last saw him in 1992. Sultan was invited to attend a state cultural function at Osmani Memorial Hall. I saw him along with his adopted daughter Nihar Bala near the main gate outside the Hall. He was wearing his traditional attire -- white *pyjama* and *panjabi*. I approached him and asked him why he was standing there. He replied that he was too late to reach Dhaka and the main gate was closed by law enforcing agencies. Hearing this, I asked a policeman: "Don't you know him (S.M. Sultan)? He is a famous artist, he our pride." The police officer received him cordially and led

him into the Hall. This was the last meeting of mine with him. Tears roll down from my eyes whenever his face flashes in my mind's eye.

One of the noted story writers and litterateur Hasanat Abul Hye wrote a book on S.M. Sultan when he was alive. He (Hasanat A. Hye) went to Narail several times to collect his (Sultan's) real life stories and his works.

Recently, S.M. Sultan's 88th birth anniversary was held in Narail. Jointly organised by the S. M. Sultan Shishu Charukala-o-Karukala Foundation, Bengal Foundation and Sultan Foundation, the event was sponsored by Bangla Link. Many distinguished guests were present in the four day function. On the concluding day, a traditional boat race on river Chitar was inaugurated by chief guest Abdul Jalil, Divisional Commissioner of Khulna.

The legendary artist S.M. Sultan is the only artist of Bangladesh whose paintings have been exhibited alongside masters in the world of painting, such as Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, George Braque, Paul Klee and others. He also traveled to many countries of the world.

He was awarded the Ekushe Padak (1982) for his outstanding contributions to the cultural movement, and Independence Award (1993) by the Bangladesh government. According to art critics, Sultan was perhaps the most enigmatic artist of the country in contemporary times. His warm smile I will remember as long as I live.

S.M. Sultan was born on August 10, 1924 in his village home Masimdia in the district of Narail near Chitra river. This genius icon of all time breathed his last on October 10, 1994 in Jessore Army Medical Hospital.

May Allah rest his soul in peace. Finally, I recall the words of famous English poet John Milton: "*Death is the golden key that opens the palace of eternity.*"

The writer is a senior journalist.



S.M. Sultan