

# National Professor M.R. Khan: Mission of a visionary

## BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

eliminate malnutrition, and offers treatment to suffering children and women of reproductive age through preventive and curative programmes.

At 85 (on August 1 this year), Prof. M.R. Khan is agile and indefatigable. His involvement with life and society is total and he still retains the enthusiasm of youth as he pursues his dreams. He is a tireless worker. A visit to the Shishu Sasthya Foundation or Central Hospital or Nibedita Children Hospital, or the Women's Medical College and Hospital reveals the man, the architect behind all these mammoth projects for helping ailing people and children.

SSFB, founded in January 1983, with National Professor M.R. Khan as its chairman and guiding spirit, has been working for almost 0.5 million target population of mothers and children. It has opened health, nutrition, education, environmental pollution control, and even micro-credit facilities through its 12 programme areas in Tangail, Jessore and Satkhira. The programme includes a myriad of activities

aimed at reduction of morbidity and mortality of mothers and children.

Prof. M.R. Khan committed himself to the difficult task of ensuring physical and mental wellbeing of this most vulnerable group of the society through the aegis of SSFB, with its programme of activities gradually expanding over the whole country. Through these centres, non-formal education is provided to the under-privileged and disadvantaged children in the evening hours without hampering their economic contribution to the family.

The Foundation that started its mission in January 1983 as a nursery of infant care with 26 staff members now has 250 staff members including 75 doctors, a good number of trained nurses and administrative staff caring for about 200 indoor patients and 600 out-patients daily at the Mirpur complex. The Institute of Child Health (Shishu Hospital) and SSFB, now housed in two complexes -- one 6-storied and another 7-storied -- have provisions for diagnostic treatment of children's diseases, apart from teaching, training and research.

The Institute of Child Health -- set up by the Foundation at Tangail, Jessore, Satkhira, and Alamdanga (Jessore) -- is a unique national level training and treatment centre for health and nutrition of children and mothers. For setting up Shishu Hospital and Rasulpur Secondary School in his birthplace (Satkhira), Prof. Khan donated the paternal land he owned as well as the pension and gratuity money he got after retirement from service.

The Institute at Mirpur has launched a Diploma in Child Health (DCH) course for MBBS doctors. Anwara Trust Fund

instituted with his pension and gratuity fund offers assistance to schools, mosques and destitute women and children. This Trust Fund awards gold medals to individuals in recognition of their outstanding contribution to social and economic development of the country. Notable recipients are Nobel Laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus and Sir Abed of Brac Foundation.

Prompted by sheer urge to come to the aid of sick children, Professor M.R. Khan moves from one hospital to another from morning to evening in Dhaka city looking after patients, teaching students, and providing training to graduate doctors. He made strenuous efforts in setting up Uttara Women's Medical College and Hospital, Central Hospital and Nivedita Hospital for Children. As honorary visiting professor, Prof. M.R. Khan is associated with Uttara Women's Medical College and Hospital, ICDDRDB and Shishu Hospital.

The death of his wife Anwara Khan last year, who stood by him through thick and thin in his arduous journey to fame and eminence, has caused him enormous pain in his twilight hours, but he still continues his battle to serve the distressed humanity with passionate zeal.

Here is a doctor and a social worker who has won numerous laurels, including 15 gold medals, and numerous awards including the prestigious Ekushey Padak. Even in the mellow years of his life, he is an agile and tireless worker, and he still thinks he has miles to go. For his outstanding contribution in the field of child health, his biography has been included in the International "Who's Who" of intellectuals by IBC, Cambridge, UK since 1987.

Because of the vast mass linkage he developed in just two years of his medical practice at Satkhira as the lone MBBS doctor, he won the hearts of the people. He could not ignore public pressure and contested for the post of Chairman in the Pouroshava election in 1955. Despite the fact that Prof. Khan won the election, the ballot box was burnt immediately after counting of votes and his opponent candidate was declared winner. Deeply aggrieved, Dr. Khan filed a case with the election tribunal at Khulna challenging the election verdict. The tribunal headed by the District Magistrate, Khulna, asked S.D.O., Satkhira, to produce the ballot box along with ballots.

The S.D.O. approached Dr. Khan's father, a very respectable and influential person at Satkhira at that time, to persuade his son to withdraw the case. His father, maybe, for fear of counter-offensive from the administration, asked his son to withdraw the case, which Prof. Khan complied with. But this noble gesture did not keep him out of the woods. With 92-ka rule imposed after the fall of Abu Hossain Sarkar cabinet, he was arrested on false charges of being the president of a certain political party in Satkhira. Immediately after his arrest, he was transferred to Khulna district jail.

He remained behind bars for one month without bail. He was released on bail with the help of a potential political leader in Khulna at that time. Completely broken and mentally devastated, Prof. Khan decided to quit Satkhira for good. Although he was in dire financial straits after all these tumultuous incidents, but still with determination to make a fresh start, he went to Khulna with his wife and daughter, rented a house and started medical practice there. It is from Khulna that he availed a scholarship in 1957 for DTM & H course in England and subsequently earned DCH and MRCP degree from London and Edinburgh. He returned to Dhaka in 1963.

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# Egypt: Where political wisdom is a far cry

SULTAN MOHAMMED ZAKARIA

THE recent unfolding of bloody violent events in Egypt is more than shocking for people who appreciated Arab Spring. So far, hundreds of protesters have been killed and thousands more injured. There is no sign of restraint. Instead, the defiance of confronting parties, the continuing acts of violence, and unwillingness to compromise could mire Egypt in a deep, prolonged crisis. The recent upheaval in Egypt, however, is not a one-off event, rather a consequence of a series of politically immature actions from both sides.

Mohammad Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood veteran, was surely not the best of choices for the Egyptian people. But he was definitely voted to power, albeit marginally. Following its electoral triumph, Muslim Brotherhood nonetheless left no stone unturned to repeat all the mistakes that most new democracies make. There are certainly structural deficiencies of the state and inability of political parties to fully realise democratic potentials. Adequate actions from parties were also absent to fulfill the minimum conditions of a new democracy and pave the way for its consolidation.

As the ruling party, the Muslim Brotherhood completely ignored the fact that they were bestowed power in a society that is vertically divided. The tensions between liberals and Islamists in Egyptian society surrounding identity issues are significant. Mohammad Morsi also overestimated his stretch of power and the sources of his strength, and disregarded the dangers lurking ahead. Both Morsi and his party ironically failed to apprehend the gravity of divisive politics within the society and never attempted to reach out to the liberal opposition, let alone address their concerns.

The series of failures of the Muslim Brotherhood government in the economic and political fronts, which many opportunists also call a failure of political Islam, had certainly created a political impasse in Egypt for months and needed to be dealt with wisely. Unfortunately this was not the case.

On the one hand, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood wrongly interpreted their democratic mandate believing that they were voted to do anything they wished, including carrying forward their controversial Islamic agenda even if that unsettled the balance of power within the society and irked half of the population. Their perception of democracy only manifests the minimalist conception of democracy that champions nothing but an election (many a times flawed). They also miserably failed to manage the country and provide citizens with basics. Although Morsi stayed in power merely a year, the liberals became furious at his party's Islamic agenda, especially when it unilaterally orchestrated the new constitution.

On the other hand, the liberals also displayed political immaturity, became impatient too early, and failed to adhere to the basic rules of the game of democracy (albeit minimal) that an elected government should only be removed from office through another election. Their romanticism about military being the vanguard of democracy

and their apparent success in forcefully ousting Islamists from power may dry up soon and could well backfire. More strikingly, it sets a dangerous precedent for any future democratic regime in Egypt, even if they are liberals, that their luck could hinge on the military's mercy.

The developing events following Morsi's ouster are painful. It was certainly a coup d'état, no matter how much the military tries to give it a civilian disguise. From the Muslim Brotherhood's perspective, it was very hard to swallow. Accepting the humiliation and calling for strategic retreat needed the highest level of political wisdom that Muslim Brotherhood leaders failed to demonstrate. While it was frustrating to see a legitimate government being deposed illegitimately, devising the right strategy in such a complex political setting would mean that Muslim Brotherhood accept the change for the time being by limiting their protests to Morsi's early release, and then join the 'return-to-democracy' movement to stay in mainstream politics.

That kind of political wisdom was desirable given the fact that military has intervened in poli-

The Egyptian episode of transitional democratic crisis has stirred some basic debates in the democratic world. The Western countries, who have long advocated for democracy, have been facing a real test here. They have so far failed to label the Egyptian event a coup d'état, let alone condemn it. More pertinently, they showed sheer indifference in effectively criticising the excessive use of force by the military against the angry pro-Morsi protesters and for indiscriminately shooting and killing them.

The way the military handled the pro-Morsi protests -- with live ammunition -- should have drawn stern criticism from all sides. Unfortunately, the Western countries fell well short of harshly criticising the brutal crackdown. When the death toll is mounting every day, we are not hearing words of condemnation from the 'free world' -- the champion of advocating democratic tolerance, right to protest, etc. This double-standard will frustrate the Islamists across the region, who have democratic aspirations, and could drive them to resort to more violent means to pursue their goals.



tics involuntarily in response to millions of Egyptians who took to the street, occupied the centre of the capital for days, and called on them to intervene. The military has taken a side only when the options were very limited.

Now fighting with the military, backed by at least half of the population, would amount to madness and the worst kind of political maneuvering. Ironically and apparently, Muslim Brotherhood has chosen that bloody path that will only shed blood of hundreds, if not thousands. That path could dangerously escalate the violent situation and lead to an armed civil conflict -- neither bodes well for Egyptian people and society.

At the same time, the wishful thinking is that the liberals should be able to contain any hidden agenda of the military, pressurise it not to use excessive force against pro-Morsi protesters, and try to reach out to the Muslim Brotherhood leaders and supporters to persuade them that they are a part of the political process and of the future Egypt. But for that, too, the Islamists have to promise that they accept the dynamics and liberal nature of Egyptian society.

The differentiation of events in Egypt and Syria with regard to treatment of protesters could leave the entire Arab democratisation effort in peril. Islamists could feel very much victimised and isolated. Their mistrust of the West -- that its democratic agenda does not include Islamists -- would also be substantiated. Already, Syrian Islamist rebels fighting against the regime have criticised the West for its double-standard in Egypt and vowed to fight for establishing a 'Sharia' regime forcefully (not democratically).

The situation in Egypt is very testing for everyone involved in the crisis and could also be inadvertently exposing. Therefore, it requires restrained and cautious moves from all sides. Egypt may become quiet today or tomorrow, but the actions and reactions -- from local and global stakeholders -- at this critical moment of history may leave a reprehensible and regrettable precedent for the future.

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# Should all species be equal?



Nury Vittachi

ONE of the joys of living in Asia is that life is "delightfully unpredictable," which was the exact phrase used when a few of us learned, while enjoying lunch at a Guangdong open air café, that 100 crocodiles had escaped from the local reptile farm.

"Relax," said one of my dining companions. "If they get anywhere near downtown, they'll be snapped up by people who make handbags."

His answer infuriated the vegetarian in our party, who accused him of "speciesism." I rebutted this on his behalf by pointing out that: (a) there was no such word, and (b) even if there was, it would be totally impossible to say after two glasses of wine. (Try it.)

She did a Google search on her phone and proved me spectacularly wrong by finding 374,000 references to speciesism, apparently a hot new trend in the West.

Speciesism, a follow-up to sexism and racism, is a new Western rule of political correctness which requires that all species must be accepted as equal in every way. So when Shakespeare says "thou foulest cur," the actor speaking the line would have to add "not that there's anything wrong with being a cur."

If species equality catches on, making a crocodile into a handbag will be a crime as bad as making a politician into a handbag, despite the fact that doing the second would clearly be a public service.

But I had a question: "If all species are equal, what would we eat?" The vegetarian said that the anti-speciesism movement had decided that vegetables, although technically living species, could be eaten as they did not have feelings.

This interesting concession implies that we could also feel free to chow down on a delicious meal of corn-fed stockbrokers, pet shop owners, direct mail gurus, etc.

A day later, a reader sent me a link to a Times of India story about a leopard stuck in a well who was saved after a rescue cage filled with live chickens was lowered into the hole. This incident, which happened near Ooty at the end of last month, read like a feel-good story. But under the new species equality rules, it now becomes a vicious tale of deliberate multiple chicken-murder.

The next item in the inbox, about a lizard, reminded me about a phone conversation I once reported between a Western expatriate and a police officer.

CALLER: "There's a lizard in my house." COP: "This is normal in Asia, Madam. Ignore it."

Ten minutes later she called again. CALLER: "Can't you please come and get rid of it for me?"

COP: "No! Just ignore it." CALLER: "I'm trying to, but it just knocked over the coffee table."

Police raced to the house and discovered that a giant iguana or small tyrannosaur was terrorising her. Well, a similar incident happened again last week, but this time the monster reptile was in an apartment in Leshan, Sichuan, China.

Once the rules of species equality get a grip, the cops would be unable to eject such interlopers, but would have to read them their Miranda rights and ask them politely to leave.

Anyway, the next time the vegetarian calls me a worm, I'll make sure she adds: "Not that there's anything wrong with worms."

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## QUOTABLE Quotes

"To lodge all power in one party and keep it there is to insure bad government and the sure and gradual deterioration of the public morals."

Mark Twain

## BEETLE BAILY

by Mort Walker



## HENRY

by Don Trachte

