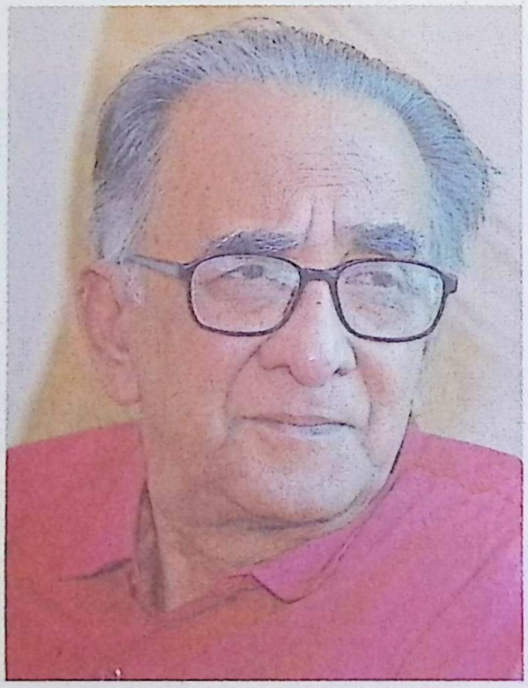
Our Nation's Conscience

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman is one of the polymaths of our country who has guided our nation throughout his life with his knowledge. He is one of the great scholars whose contributions in every field were vital for the emergence of this nation. From his early life he was involved in every phase of the movement for independent Bangladesh. And till the very end he has always tried to guide our troubled country with his wise words. He was a prolific writer, a remarkable historian, a talented lawyer, a former chief justice and also an able administrator. Such a man of excellence and virtue will always be remembered by this nation.



Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman

The Pattern of Patriotism

Muhammad Habibur Rahman was born on December 3, 1928. He spent his childhood in the Jungipur village of Murshidabad district, West Bengal. His father Moulovi Jahiruddin Biswas was a lawyer and a devoted activist of the anti- British movement. Jahiruddin was also sent to prison for his activities. So alone, under the care of his housewife mother Gul Habiba, Habib got first hand lessons in patriotism and honesty from early childhood. After the division of India, Habib's family moved to Rajshahi and settled in the new country.

Habib's brilliant and colourful student life built the foundation of altruism that we have seen in his later life. He completed his graduation from the history department of Dhaka University in 1949 and completed his masters on 1951. He then pursued another graduation and post graduation degree in modern history from the prestigious Worcester College of Oxford University. At that time he also earned his professional degree of Barrister at Law from the Lincoln's Inn, London.

During his studies abroad, he deeply studied the practices of neo liberalism in the rapid growth of the post war Europe and felt its relevance for the newly formed country of ours, the then East Pakistan. But the discrimination he saw in reality took him to the streets where he, along with his comrade demanded the basic right to be Bengali.

The Language Movement

In 1952 when Nazimuddin declared that Urdu would be the only state language of Pakistan, Habib was one of the first persons to protest it. As a student of Dhaka University he participated in the language movement and he was one of the first persons to break the section 144 and lead the procession forward. In one of his articles named "*Ekusher Smriticharon* (Memories of 21)" he said, "At that time Bengali Muslim students had no past experience of breaking the section 144. But as I had some experiences of participating at a rally in Calcutta breaking section 144, I felt that I had something to do." During the movement he was arrested with his comrades. To the court he bravely said, "Section 144 was imposed illegally, so we have broken it."

Advocating for the Nation

At first Habibur Rahman joined as a teacher of Dhaka University, but since he was deeply involved with the language movement he found himself in the black books of the university authority. Soon he left Dhaka University and joined Rajshahi University. In 1964 he finally quit teaching and joined the high court bar as a lawyer. On May 8, 1976 he became the judge of the High Court division. After serving as the judge of the appellate division from 1985, he assumed the prestigious position of the chief justice on 1995. During his life as a judge, he solved many significant cases which have turned the history of Bangladesh. Among his judgments, verdicts of the cases of 8th amendment of the constitution, Kader