

Politics gave him little chance to live a family life.



Syed Nazrul Islam, Bangabandhu and Tajuddin Ahmad.

and how we use it during the time of peace. As we eliminate our enemies in the battlefield, we have to pledge to build a society that befits the blood of our martyrs."

After the nation gained its independence, when Tajuddin returned to the newly formed Bangladesh on December 22, the country was in a devastating state. Downtrodden, dispirited people were coming back home from refugee camps, and the rest of the nation was struggling to stand on its feet. From December 22 to January 10, the socialist in him emerged in every speech he made in public, as he emphasised on the need for secularism, socialism and democracy to build a new nation. He believed that these could be the key pillars in the transformation of the society. Tajuddin made a plan to build a militia force with the freedom fighters. He was against the withdrawal of weapons from the fighters, as he believed that the people who fought for the country could build a better nation. However, this proposal was not accepted by Bangabandhu's cabinet.

As a minister of finance, Tajuddin demonstrated tremendous courage. At that time, the government treasury was empty. All foreign exchanges were emptied by the Pakistani government. Import of essential goods and industrial raw materials had to be resumed without delay before acute shortage developed and local industries were forced to shut down. But he fought against all odds, and by September 1972, Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserve had soared to around US$ 400 million.

It was considered a princely sum and a comfortable foreign reserve. And that is why, M Matiul Islam, the then Finance Secretary wrote, "We were, therefore, debating whether to accept the IMF's offer of extending to Bangladesh its short-fall adjustment credit (or perhaps it had a different name) routinely given to a newly emerging developing country to tide over the initial shortfall in its export earnings. Tajuddin quickly ended the debate by deciding to accept the IMF offer which had no strings attached."

***

Unfortunately after the independence, the difference between the two great leaders of our nation grew wider. In the absence of Bangabandhu, Tajuddin who fought and led the country to victory resigned from the cabinet in 1974. However, he remained loyal to Banglabandhu till his death. According to Barrister Amir-ul Islam, "What hurt Tajuddin Ahmad most, I think, was that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was taking the advice of men like Khondokar Moshtaque instead of consulting with him."

During those difficult days of post-war Bangladesh, Tajuddin had to follow a strict line to build a better nation since he believed it was possible to get an independent land through an armed struggle but in order to complete the true revolution we still had to travel a long way.

Bangladesh was the only country in the world that successfully got its freedom by winning a liberation war, in between 1945-1971. Our history would have been much different if the two great leaders of our country worked together to take the nation forward. ■

PHOTOS COURTESY: SIMIN HOSSAIN RIMI