

IN MEMORY OF

Zaglul, my friend

SHAWKAT HUSSAIN

It would have been easier to write about Zaglul Ahmed if I had worked with him as a professional journalist. I could write about his expertise on diplomatic issues, his interest in the politics of the nation, his knowledge about South Asian issues and so on. Others can, and will, write more competently about these matters.

I was just a friend of his, just one of many friends he had, but still a special friend, I like to think. And I am sure that hundreds of others who were friends of Zaglul think of themselves as special friends of his. That was his special quality: the ability to lavish friendship on whoever he came in contact with. I don't know if he ever read Dale Carnegie but he was Dale Carnegie incarnate; he had the gift of making friends effortlessly, without ever trying to influence them. The last time I met Zaglul was at a wedding reception on November 21, about a week before he died. With a smile on his face, he was flitting from table to table, hugging a friend here, shaking hands with another, always on the move, always smiling. I don't know if he ever had the time to eat on such occasions.

When I finally managed to say hello to him, he smiled, patted me on the shoulder in that characteristic way that was typically Zaglul's, and said he had just spent a month with his daughter Antara (*tomader meye*) in the US and was back with his wife (*tomar bone*). His wife Tazeen was a year junior to me in the English Department of Dhaka University, and his daughter Antara was a student of mine in the same department and had graduated some years back. I myself have known Zaglul for 47 years since 1967 when we were university students, more intimately during the last twenty years when common circles of friends began to coalesce and new bonds and associations were forged.

Many of his friends expected to see him again on November 29, on the night he died so suddenly, so tragically, so gruesomely. We were at

Mujahidul Islam Selim's son's wedding reception and many of us were waiting for him to turn up. He was planning to finish a talk show and then come to the reception. But he had a rendezvous with death and we never saw him and will never see him again. Around 10pm that night, when I returned from the reception, a friend called and simply said that Zaglul had died in an accident. At 11pm I went to the morgue and met other friends of his who were with him earlier in the evening, now speechless with shock. We didn't want to see his dead body. We simply wanted to remember his smile, his bonhomie, his kindness and generosity, his infectious sense of camaraderie and his humour.

I have seen many posts on social media and heard people on talk shows wondering about how and why such a senior journalist like Zaglul would be riding a bus. Most people of his personal, social and professional stature would not, literally, be caught dead riding a bus. Zaglul did, and died riding a bus. But this I think points to another special gift that he possessed: the gift of humility. While he always praised others for whatever qualities they might, or might not, possess, he himself remained modest and self-effacing. That gift of humility, where the personal ego is almost negated, I think made it possible for him to move up and down the very fluid social and political ladder of Bangladesh with the utmost ease and comfort. He knew presidents and prime ministers, he knew all former ministers and current ones, he knew all politicians of all parties, businessmen, he knew most VIPs -- and he knew ordinary people as well who were his friends. He could hop on to a bus with the same ease as he could step inside a minister's Pajero.

I remember once asking Zaglul about the identity of an occasional columnist of this newspaper who wrote under a pseudonym. I was sure Zaglul knew because he knew everyone. I admired his columns and wanted to know who

he was. Zaglul smiled and would not answer, as did the editor of the newspaper. I respected their circumspection and did not insist. A few months later, at a reception, he introduced me to a former ambassador and said: "Shawkat, this is the Megasthenes you wanted to know about." I remain grateful to Zaglul for the introduction as I remain grateful to him for the hundreds of little kindnesses that I remember. When I met Megasthenes at Zaglul's *janaza* last Monday, we hugged for we knew that both of us, and hundreds more, had lost a great friend. Megasthenes said that I should write about him, and I told him that he should too.



About two years back Zaglul and I had made a deal in the company of a few friends, half-seriously, but I was deadly serious. The deal was that I would write about him if he were to die first, and he would write about me if I passed away earlier. The commitment was made and I was guaranteed an obituary. I was sure that he would have hundreds to write about him.

I have kept my part of the bargain my friend, however inadequate it is. Wherever you are Zaglul (rest in peace), and know that your friends will always remember your laughter, your kindness, your humour and your friendship for as long as they live.

The writer teaches English Literature at the University of Asia Pacific.

The waiting can stop

SHAMSHER M. CHOWDHURY

It was a subconscious wait at the Officers Club in Dhaka on November 29. The occasion was the *Walima* of the son of our friend Mujahidul Islam Selim. Shahidullah Khan Badal was already there by the time I reached. Soon Abul Fazal Mohammad Jamaluddin and Shawkat Hussain arrived with their wives. Sippi, who was visiting from the US, was also expected to join. Someone said Zaglul would also come, even if for a short while. We waited. At one stage Badal said Zaglul's wife was in bad health, in fact her condition had deteriorated. "Maybe we should check with Zaglul and visit them" he said. The absence of Alamgir Jafar, Shomu to most of us, hung heavy in the air. He had died of a massive heart attack a few days back. We all missed him. Somehow, everyone was waiting for Zaglul to join us.

The common thread between those of us who were there that evening and Zaglul and Shomu was that we all completed our SSC examination in 1965 and in the same year joined either Notre Dame or Dhaka College, the two premier colleges of Dhaka at that time. It was during that period that our friendship started to grow. Shomu was my friend from school days. He was very close to all of us and his sudden death was a major shock, it left a big void.

Jamal's wife Shyamoli, as if in admonishment, said: "You friends were so close at one time and still you don't spare time for each other any more. Poor Shomu bhai died virtually alone, none of you gave him enough time." Her words were loaded, almost a premonition of what was to come.

I had gotten to know Zaglul during our college years through my cousin Dileer and some common friends, though we were not in the same college. We did not even share the same school. But as we got to know each other, we spent more time together. Ours was a time when chat sessions meant spending quality time together after classes at a tea stall in New Market or around the Gulistan area. Going to the movies at bargain prices either in Balaka or Gulistan or Naz was a favourite past time, as was watching football and cricket matches at the Dhaka Stadium. It was a time when there were no cell phones, text messages, emails or Facebook chats. Communicating meant not speed but endurance; it had a personal touch, a human face.

The thing that struck me most about Zaglul was his warm and affable personality. Getting along with him did not need much effort. He laughed heartily and mixed easily, would do everything to hold on to his friends. His friendship was unadul-

terated; there were no strings attached to it. Zaglul believed in enjoying life to the full and would take stress in stride. He would always go the extra mile for a friend. Zaglul would never let personal beliefs come in the way of friendship.

Our paths went separate ways when I left to join the Army towards the end of 1967. We did however manage to catch up whenever I came to Dhaka on breaks.

It was in post independent Bangladesh that Zaglul and I got much closer. We cherished each other's company and almost made it a point to spend as much time as we could together. It was after I joined the Foreign Service in 1974 and left assignments abroad that our contacts had become infrequent and were limited to my holidays in Dhaka. But Zaglul being what he was, made sure that I was signed up at the Dhaka Club as his guest for the entire duration of my holiday as I had not yet become a member. The Club was already a major meeting point for friends.

Back to the evening of the 29th, I left the *Walima* a little after nine thirty. Sippi and his wife, accompanied by their daughter had arrived by then. Zaglul had still not shown up. They were still waiting for him. As I got close to home, Mahfuzullah, yet another close friend and a year mate, called me on my cell phone to give the heart breaking news of Zaglul's death a few moments ago. The circumstances of his death were still not clear as the TV news scroll only talked of a road accident near Karwan Bazar. I had just passed the place on the way home, not knowing that my dear friend's life had been snuffed out at that spot, yet another victim of a reckless killer bus driver. I called up Jamal at the Officers Club to tell him, and others who were still waiting for him, Zaglul would never come. The waiting can stop. Jamal's silence was deafening. Like the rest of us, he too was speechless. I then shared the sad news with Ali Anwar.

For me a sleepless night ended with me sending an email to Ahrar, who now lives in the US. Ahrar's shocked response was: "Oh my God. What is happening! First it was Tarique Shams, then Tarek Ahsan, then Shabbir Yusuf, then Shomu, and now Zaglul. Where will this list end?" I could not pick up the courage to tell Ahrar the list had just begun, and Zaglul was only the latest addition.

As the sun set on a dust-laden traffic clogged Dhaka city on December 1, Zaglul was laid to rest in Azimpur. It was now his turn to wait for us at the other half of eternity.

The writer is a Bir Bikram and a former Foreign Secretary.

Time to change script

By contrast, how many ministers in Bangladesh have apologised for their abusive remarks, including Latif Siddique for that matter? Remorse and regret are unknown in our politics.



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

curious readers - was what Union Minister of State for Food Processing Industries Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti said in Hindi which translated into something like this in English: "You have to decide if you want a government in Delhi to be led by children of Lord Ram or illegitimate children."

Result: She had to tender apologies before both Houses of Parliament with identical wordings. Even though she had made those remarks at a public rally and not in the parliament, she could take the plea of "a slip of tongue." But then she had to live up to parliamentary norms as an MP. What's particularly noteworthy is that she was directed to apologise before parliament by no less a person than Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself. Still the opposition didn't cool it demanding her removal from state ministership.

It just did not raise a hue and cry over the state minister's abusive remark, it put across the floor of the House a 15-point list of BJP promises that the ruling party had 'reneged on.' Rahul Gandhi gave a lead to it.

By contrast, how many ministers in Bangladesh

FOCUS on a recent set of incidents in Indian politics. You discern a certain vibrancy in the relationship between the opposition and the government in Lok Sabha. And note that BJP's overwhelming mandate has made little difference in its equations with the other side which hasn't been orphaned at all.

What proved quite uproarious in Lok and Rajya Sabhas - for the



have apologised for their abusive remarks, including Latif Siddique for that matter? Remorse and regret are unknown in our politics.

The potential opposition conglomerate is not to be trifled with, and this for two reasons: One, with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) having 336 seats, the remainder 207 seats present a significant opposition voice. Two, in the skewed electoral system -- first past the post -- BJP won 31% percent of all votes, conjuring up a large percentage of ballots cast for other camps.

What British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli said in 1868 holds good even to this day as a testament of democracy: "No government can be long

secure without a formidable opposition." Conversely, no government is safe without a formidable opposition. This is a very significant definition of ruling party-opposition co-existence per se in the absence of which a third element could step in to disrupt order or usurp power.

This brings into sharp focus our loyal opposition that the government seems so enamoured of. The prime minister makes no bones about her feeling that this is the opposition that keeps her untroubled.

On the other hand, BNP, the traditional opposition to the government, is literally considered as an implacable foe which has to be kept on a leash, a very retrograde concept which does not fit into democratic ethos.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina leaves BNP and its allies under no illusion that she might hold general election before her term ends in 2019. She has also been dismissive of any suggestion for dialogue with her political opponents.

Why should she see any need for a mid-term election when she is securely saddled in power? That's what she obviously thinks in light of popular rejection of hartal and violence. But can she stretch the argument too far when there is a cost to a continuing denial of space to the BNP and its allies?

Pragmatically, just to defuse tension some form of political engagement between the AL and the BNP is necessary, even if the timeline for election be 2019.

A former British prime minister's words should resonate with all hardcore politicians. He said he was ready to negotiate with people having 'blood on their hands,' pointing to the then IRA. US President Barack Obama didn't spurn the idea of talking to the Taliban.

If we keep faith with the history of our democratic evolution as part of a continuum rather than an accident, then we must prove true to it -- live by democratic practices that are inherently sustainable.

Speaking of the need for good sense prevailing, here is an aside: AL General Secretary and cabinet minister Syed Ashraf used such soubriquet against US Assistant Foreign Secretary Nisha Desai and US Ambassador Mozena that went instantly viral. In the draft media policy, bringing relations with a foreign country to disrepute would be tantamount to an offence. Why a political leader of good standing would be immune to such an interpretation -- something to ponder really!

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QUOTABLE Quote

Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve.

Napoleon Hill

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- Pretzel topping
 - Tent cities
 - Cornered
 - Dizzying designs
 - Sluggish Maris
 - Less strict
 - Thurman of "Kill Bill"
 - Greed
 - III will
 - Kitten cry
 - Sharpen
 - Good times
 - Downfall
 - Party giver
 - 26 Heir, at times
 - District
 - Bind up
 - Exec's place
 - Building
 - Smoked salmon
 - 39 Empire baddy
 - Herd cattle
 - 43 Make blank
 - 44 Cut off
 - 45 High homes
 - 46 Car scar
- DOWN**
- Play, as a banjo
 - Kitchen come-on
 - Sanctioned
 - Course start
 - Fizzy drink
 - 6 On -- with (equivalent)
 - "Gladiator" hero
 - 8 Rule of conduct
 - Scatters
 - 11 Greek coin
 - 17 Neckline shape
 - 19 -- Jima
 - 22 Gangsters' foes
 - 24 "Is it worth the chance?"
 - 25 Mohawk Valley tribe
 - 27 Clumsy fellow
 - 28 Director Soderberg
 - 30 Bird of myth
 - 33 "-- a Parade"
 - 34 Witch group
 - 35 Put to use
 - 37 Celebration suffix
 - 38 Ticks off
 - 42 Warning color

Yesterday's answer

P	A	D	D	E	D	A	C	H	E
G	R	I	E	V	E	P	O	O	R
A	M	E	L	I	A	P	L	E	A
A L L I E D									
A	S	H	Y	M	A	L	E	S	
F	L	O	I	N	P	R	I	N	T
O	I	L	C	H	E	G	N	U	
O	D	D	B	A	L	L	H	U	B
T	E	T	O	N	O	T	I	S	
I N T E R N									
R	I	G	G	V	I	T	A	L	S
E	C	H	O	E	L	A	T	E	S
B	E	T	S	R	E	P	E	N	T

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

WHY ARE YOU WEARING SUNGLASSES?
SO BEETLE CAN'T TELL IF I'M WATCHING HIM.

WHY IS BEETLE WEARING THEM?
SO I CAN'T TELL IF HE'S SLEEPING.

HENRY by Don Trachte

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

CRYPTOQUOTE 10-13

SVDA BXY VMED XAOB USX TDAARDC
ODQU RA LUVD SXHOJ, NYB M OXMQ XQ
NHDMM SRUV XAD, MAJ M OROB SRUV
LUV XUVDH. -- ZVRADC THXEDHN

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:
OUR CHIEF WANT IS SOMEONE WHO WILL INSPIRE US TO BE WHAT WE KNOW WE COULD BE.
-- RALPH WALDO EMERSON