

SUHWARDY'S 123RD BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

THE PIONEER OF DEMOCRACY

SYED ABUL MAKSUD

HUSEYN Shaheed Suhrawardy has a special place in history. One of the greatest political figures of the 20th century, Suhrawardy earned himself both ardent admirers as well as enemies. His achievements were by no means smaller than that any of his contemporaries.

Shaheed Suhrawardy was born on September 8, 1892 to an illustrious family from Midnapore, West Bengal. His family produced many an administrator and scholar. His father, Zahid Suhrawardy, was a Barrister-at-Law from Lincoln's Inn and a judge of the Kolkata High Court. Later, he resigned from the Bench and became a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly. His mother, Begum Khozesta Akhter Banu, was a scholar of Persian language and also the only Indian lady of her time to be the examiner of Urdu literature at the University of Kolkata. A social worker, she was a great advocate of women's education, as evidenced by her book Aina-e-Ebrat. Suhrawardy's was a brilliant academic career. An MA in Arabic literature from Kolkata University, he graduated in science with Honours from Oxford. He also had a BCL degree from that university. He was called to the Bar from Grey's Inn in 1918.

After his return from London, Suhrawardy came in close association with eminent Indian leaders during the non-cooperation and Khelafat movement in 1920. He was elected a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1921 from Khidirpore industrial area. In 1923, he joined the Swarjya Party and CR Das made him his deputy, who was the deputy mayor of Kolkata City Corporation.

In 1937, Suhrawardy was made the commerce and rural development minister in the cabinet of Chief Minister AK Fazlul Haq. He became the food and civil supply minister in the cabinet of Sir Khawaja Nazimuddin in 1943 and was appointed the Chief Minister of undivided Bengal from April 24, 1946 to August 13, 1947.

Suhrawardy was one of the main architects of Pakistan. Despite being the Chief Minister of United Bengal from 1946-47, he was denied the opportunity to become the chief minister of East Pakistan. He was also deprived of his membership of the first constituent assembly.

After the independence of Pakistan, he stayed

on in India, because he felt passionately for the Indian Muslims. He worked with the Peace Mission of Mahatma Gandhi to ensure peace for the minority Muslims. He later moved to Pakistan in 1948.

The 1954 elections were a landmark in the history of Pakistan. Suhrawardy was one of the architects of the United Front led by Fazlul Haq, Maulana Bhasani and himself, which routed the Muslim League in the elections, enabling Awami League to emerge as a major political force in East Bengal.

Suhrawardy was the leader of the opposition in

conferred with Ataur Rahman Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others at the residence of Ataur Rahman. They decided to launch a movement against the one-man military rule in order to restore democracy in the country. On January 30, he flew back to Karachi and was arrested under the Safety of Pakistan Act "in the larger interest of the country."

Suhrawardy's political views were clear. He believed in secular democratic concepts. He wrote, "The Jamaat-e-Islami was all out for an Islamic constitution of its own conception...[it] was a

Disparity between East and West Pakistan and exploitation of the East by the centre pained him, as he wrote in his memoirs, "There had been phenomenal growth of industrial concerns in West Pakistan which had been assisted by liberal allowances for depreciation and tax holidays."

Suhrawardy was an advocate of the two-economy theory. He further writes: "Unhappily, the industrialists and importers of East Pakistan were not as well treated and licenses were refused on the slightest pretext. The government operated on the theory that Pakistan, although divided, had only one economy."

During his stint as prime minister for only 13 months, he tried to rectify the discrimination to some extent even though he was "vehemently opposed by the bureaucratic elements in the centre."

Inspired by Suhrawardy, eminent economist Rehman Sobhan in a paper in 1961 suggested that instead of having one economy for East and West Pakistan, it should be split up functionally into separate economies. The policy of separate economies should be implemented within the framework of regional autonomy giving each wing full control over its resource. "All incomes from region and foreign exchange should be under the control of regional administration," he suggested.

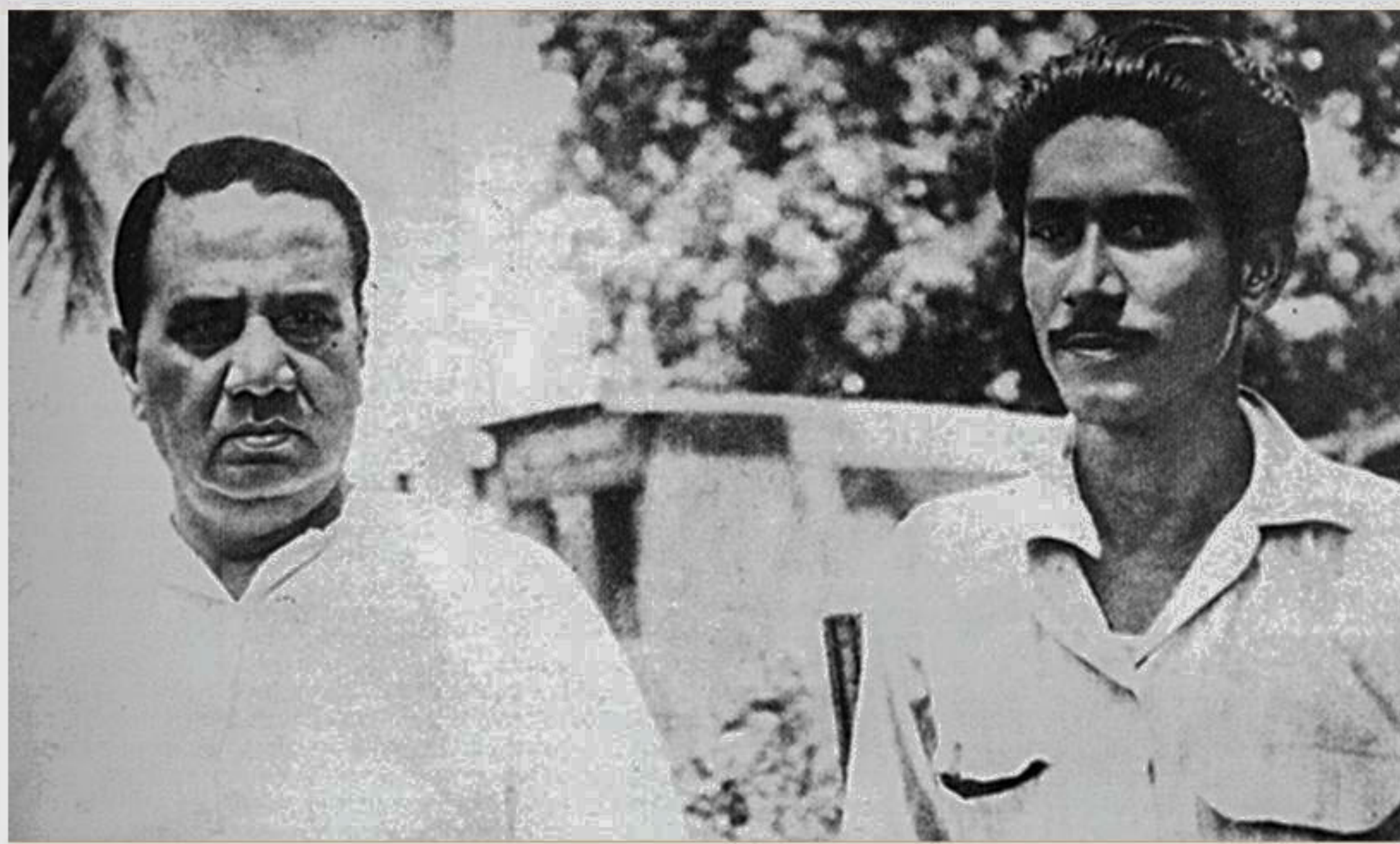
Suhrawardy believed that it was impossible to conceive a democracy without an effective opposition. One of the biggest contributions to democracy in Pakistan was made by Suhrawardy as he set up the first organised opposition in the National Assembly.

As a lawyer, he earned a lot, but at the end, he died a pauper. He was never found lacking in helping workers of his party and friends. He was a man of character and great intellect. He was always ready to listen to his opponents but would never compromise on principles. He always remained above party interests.

He was one of the most liberal democrats of his time. As a statesman, he was second to none in Pakistan. He died in the quest of justice and rule of law, and to undo the wrongs done by the autocratic rulers and opportunist politicians in connivance with the civil and military bureaucrats in Pakistan.

Suhrawardy had profound faith in the ability of people to control their destiny. His sudden death in Beirut on December 5, 1963 was a blow to the democratic movement against the military rule in Pakistan.

The writer is a noted author, researcher and social activist.



Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1949

the second Constituent Assembly in 1955-56. In drafting the first democratic constitution of 1956, he played a pivotal role. Known as the "brainchild of democracy", the key note of his politics was total commitment to democracy. He was the prime minister of the Awami-Republican coalition government from 1956-57.

After the promulgation of Martial Law in October 1958, political activities were banned in united Pakistan. A large number of Bengali leaders were arrested. In January 1962, Suhrawardy came to Dhaka from Karachi. On January 24, he

well-knit, disciplined party, its appeal was limited to rather fanatical circles." As the central leader of the Pakistan Awami League, Suhrawardy spelt out the policy of the party, "The Awami League suggested the concept of a Pakistani nation, non-communal in outlook and based on joint electorate."

He advocated keeping religion out of politics, as he said, "To my mind, Islam should have been kept above the conflict of political party as a sacred trust to which all Muslims, to whichever party they belonged, were wedded," he observed.

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY 2015

"The number of illiterate people in Bangladesh is larger than entire populations of some European countries"

Rasheda K. Choudhury, Executive Director of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), a network of more than a thousand NGOs and educator groups working in the basic education sub-sector in Bangladesh, speaks to Nahela Nowshin of The Daily Star and sheds light on the conditions and challenges of literacy in Bangladesh.

How is literacy measured in Bangladesh?

There was a time when a person was considered literate if he or she was able to sign his or her name, which you could say was more or less imitation. But now, as far as I know, the government follows UNESCO's definition of literacy according to which a person would be considered literate if he or she is able to read, write and understand a letter and is able to do basic arithmetic. This is the basis on which literacy is supposed to be measured.

But a lot of the time, we inevitably see some variations between government research and independent research due to the assessment instruments, especially with regard to self-assessment (most widely used). An example of this would be asking a person whether he or she knows how to read and write to which he or she would simply answer with a yes or no, and that's how you would measure that person's literacy without actually testing his or her reading, writing, and arithmetic abilities. This method is also used in the census. In contrast, independent researchers do not rely on self-assessment and this is where the variation between government and independent research comes in.

As of now, government research results show that literacy rate in Bangladesh stands

at 61 percent in accordance with UNESCO's definition of literacy.

How would you evaluate this literacy rate of 61 percent?

Around 40 percent of the population has no education opportunities. However, what is more important than the percentage of 60-40 is the absolute number of illiterate people. 40 percent in absolute numbers amounts to hundreds of thousands of illiterate people in the 15+ age group. This is not a negligible number. This should be the biggest takeaway from these figures. The number of illiterate people in Bangladesh is larger than entire populations of some European countries.

What are some obstacles in the way of achieving universal literacy status?

Let me first point out that since the country reverted to democracy in 1991, literacy rate has gone up. Whereas in the early 1980s, the literacy rate was somewhere in the 20s, today it is in the 60s. So we've come pretty far. But most of the contribution to boosting the literacy rate has come from mainstream primary education which is an area of huge achievement for us. The dropout rate has fallen to 20 percent from 40 percent five years ago. So more children are going to school, staying in school and literacy rate is going up as a result.



Rasheda K. Choudhury

But there are no programmes dedicated to those who do not have opportunities for education and are dropping out. There is no system or provision designed for those belonging to the 15+ age group who are not in school. If these opportunities are not created, how are you going to get them

enrolled? You will not find in the entire budget funds allocated for adult literacy. This is the first obstacle.

The second stumbling block is this: for this age group, mere literacy does not mean anything to them. What they need is literacy with skills for livelihood. These people are reluctant to come to literacy centres; they have bigger challenges to face related to their livelihood and they don't have the time. There is a gender dimension to this as well and is much truer for women. In Bangladesh we now have three crops a year. Out of 21 tasks related to crop production, 17 are performed by women. These women -- after an entire day of hard manual labour -- simply do not have the time to go to literacy centres when they're asked to. So there is an urgent need for literacy-related programmes along with skills training as per demand. For instance, programmes designed for Rajshahi will be different from those of a haor in Sylhet because of demand. Programmes must be set up in a way so they meet the specific needs of different illiterate populations in various localities. This is something we tend to overlook. One-size-fits-all policies don't work for literacy because different groups have different types of challenges.

The sad thing is that the existing few

literacy-based programmes are extremely projectised. After a project is undertaken and one phase of the project is over, it takes about one to two years for the next phase to be implemented because of bureaucratic reasons. When this phase eventually starts, participants tend to forget everything that they have learnt in the meantime and we are back to square one.

What would be your recommendations to overcome these challenges?

In short, I would say that we need strong political commitment combined with appropriate strategies, investment and monitoring. The role of one stakeholder is extremely important and that is the local government. You cannot have a literacy movement with a central, administrative government. You need to have public representatives at the local level. For example, the three women members in the Union Parishad have more of an idea about literacy needs in the various types of households in comparison to members of the central government. So in this regard, the role of the local government needs to be strengthened. Also, at the end of the day, there has to be a social movement with sincere political commitment to attain better literacy rates.

A WORD A DAY

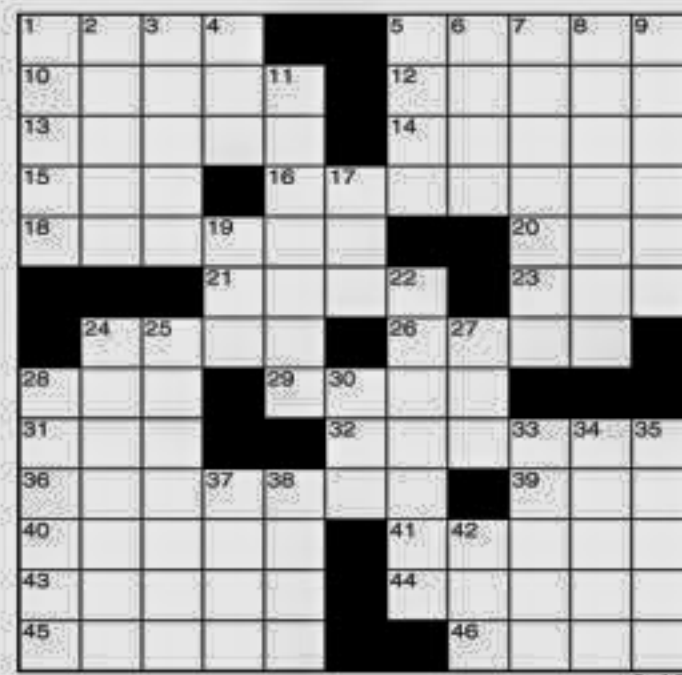


LAMPROPHONY [lam-prof-uh-nee]

loudness and clarity of voice

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS: 1 Rigging support, 5 "Aladdin" villain, 10 Cocoa alternative, 12 Full of verve, 13 Battery part, 14 Sandy hills, 15 "-- Miserables", 16 Tin or titanium, 18 Chooses, 20 Candle count, 21 "M*A*S*H" star, 23 Wine choice, 24 Fill completely, 26 Night fliers, 28 Capitol Bldg. figure, 29 Rotisserie part, 31 Yoga need, 32 Football team, 36 Raise, 39 "-- had it!", 40 Like some jackets, 41 Conumerist Ralph, 43 Muscularly fit, 44 Correct, as text, 45 Loses it, 46 Cook's needs. DOWN: 1 Dell counter sight, 2 Seminar group, 3 Stood, 4 Piston connector, 5 Green stone, 6 Home-coming guest, 7 Connoisseur's concern, 8 Gets satisfaction for, 9 Took a breather, 11 Entomology topic, 17 Acid, 19 Purr producer, 22 Chisholm Trail end, 24 Marine mammal, 25 Reception aid, 27 Had lunch, 28 Does refinery work, 30 Sulky state, 33 Musical mini-movie, 34 Happening, 35 Uncool group, 37 Julia Louis-Dreyfus show, 38 Throws in, 42 Band blaster



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

HOARSE SPAT UNLOAD LINE BELONG ANTE FEEDBLE BANS LOCKS ADO SPUMONI YES CAN NAVE ELEGANT EVE DECAL USES OLD MAN OXEN SNIPER MESA SALTER

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

