

TRIBUTE

MINTU BHAI

As I knew him



STRANGER THAN FICTION
TAJ HASHMI

TIME flies. This November 10th was the tenth death anniversary of Enayetullah Khan ("Mintu Bhai" to his younger friends and admirers), the founding editor of weekly Holiday and daily New Age. I knew Mintu Bhai quite well, even before I met him face to face about a decade after my first exposure to his powerful writing in the mid-1960s. I am from that generation, who as teenagers used to admire good prose and poetry, movies and fiction in the turbulent 1960s. I came to Dhaka College from Sirajganj, a sleepy North Bengal town. As I did relish reading Mintu Bhai's editorials and articles in his weekly Holiday in the Common Room of the South Hostel (of Dhaka College), so did several other friends.

What I personally liked about his writing most was his style, his lucid prose albeit (quite often) garnished with "unheard of" English words. I personally learnt some new expressions from his editorials. Now, fifty years after my first exposure to his writing, I realise he was a post-modern man, a unique blend of boldness and courage, uncompromising attitude and integrity. He questioned every move and challenged every assertion made by some of the most powerful men in the world, from the American President to his Pakistani counterpart, Ayub Khan.

To be honest, I mostly disliked his stand against America and Ayub Khan, because I admired both Johnson and the "tall and handsome" Field Marshal of Pakistan. I also did not like Mintu Bhai's love and devotion for Maulana Bhashani and Leftism. Nevertheless, I admired his courage, loved his prose, and envied his style of writing.

However, I re-discovered Mintu Bhai as a great man after reading one of his best editorials that he wrote in 1972, not long after the Liberation of Bangladesh. He boldly defended our renowned radio-TV artists (singers and actors) who had to sing and act for the Pakistani military controlled media during the Liberation War. His famous editorial, "Sixty-five Million Collaborators", was simply a slap in the face of all those hyper-and ultra-patriotic politicians, officials, and artists, who crossed the border and stayed in India during the Pakistani occupation period. Since around ten million Bangladeshi out of the total population of 75 million fled to India after 25 March 1971 - and most became "freedom fighters" by default - Mintu Bhai's editorial was very sarcastic and convincing, at the same time. As if there were only ten million patriots and the rest 65 millions were nothing but Pakistani collaborators and traitors to Bangladesh!

I first saw him (can't say "met him") at a rally at the open space in front of the South Gate of the Baitul Mukarram (which dictator Ershad fenced up for the "obvious reason") in 1974. I was then a young lecturer at Dhaka University, and was a big fan and admirer of the late Professor Ahmed Sharif, Professors Serajul Islam Chowdhury, Muniruzzaman Miah and other left-leaning colleagues at the University. During the 1974 Famine, progressive writers, academics, journalists and intellectuals and students organised a protest rally in front of Baitul Mukarram. They were protesting the mismanagement, corruption and failure of the Government to give adequate support to the famine-stricken millions. Tens of thousands of hungry and malnourished men, women and children came to Dhaka from the interior of Bangladesh, and hundreds of them were dying everyday around Baitul Mukarram, Dhaka Stadium, Gulistan, Motijheel and Kamalapur Railway Station.

I remember, among others Ahmed Sharif, Poet Sikandar Abu Zafar, and (possibly) Badruddin Umar besides Mintu Bhai who addressed the rally. I saw Mintu Bhai for the first time in front of Baitul Mukarram on a hot and humid afternoon in 1974. My first and lasting impression about him was that he was extremely good looking, and a brilliant speaker. His Bengali was as good as his English. He was simply enchanting. I still remember him saying: "I wish I could convert the words I write in my paper into bullets and missiles!" A fiery speech indeed!

Meanwhile, I continued reading Holiday - his articles and editorials remained the main attractions. Soon after watching him speak very sensible things, with the zeal of a high school debater, eloquence of a literature or history professor, and confidence of a popular leader, I started admiring him as one of my heroes. He still is a hero to me. I miss the bold and brave, outspoken and witty, intelligent and well-read, humorous and sincere, helpful and humble Mintu Bhai. Soon afterwards, Mintu Bhai was in the forefront of the Anti-Farakka Dam Long March, under the leadership of the Great Maulana Bhashani. Some of his best articles and editorials were on the evil effects of the Farakka Dam on Bangladesh's ecology, economy and agriculture. I personally learnt a lot from Mintu Bhai about India's vicious hegemonic policy towards Bangladesh and its other smaller neighbours in the Subcontinent.

I first met him in 1995. I was visiting Dhaka from Singapore, where I was a teacher at the National University. My very good friend Lutfur Rahman Choudhury took me to Dhaka Club, and introduced me to Mintu Bhai. Since I used to write op-eds for the Straits Times (Singapore daily), Mintu Bhai asked me within five minutes of our first meeting: "Why don't you write for Holiday"? And the rest is history. He never ever edited a single expression or title of my articles, and never declined to publish whatever I used to send him almost on a regular basis. While others were hesitant to publish my critique of the Grameen Bank, in early 1997, Mintu Bhai published it in his weekly. He was one who would disagree with you, and would be still friends with you. Despite our age difference, he was always very respectful to me, and to others too. He was simply an exceptionally civil, urbane and tolerant person.

I was fortunate enough to be in Toronto while Mintu Bhai was there during the last year of his life. Despite his suffering, he always looked cheerful, and never ever complained about his pain and suffering. Whenever we met socially in Toronto at Shuchi-Arshad's (his daughter and son-in-law) house or elsewhere, Mintu Bhai would always talk about Bangladesh politics, society, corruption/plunder, misrule and most of the time he would be optimistic. He would always say, the next generation of leaders would be very different, in the positive sense of the expression.

Now, I believe Bangladesh needs scores of bold and brave, honest and patriotic people like Mintu Bhai. One renowned editor of an English daily in Bangladesh aptly said after his passing: "He was the best among us". I could not agree more with the assertion. Had he lived for another ten years - one of the worst periods in the history of modern Bangladesh - I know how he would have reacted to the bizarre, brutal, and barbaric things that have taken place since 2006. His editorials and bold statements in favour of democracy, the rule of law and accountability would have emboldened many others to speak the truth. I can visualise what would have been his reaction to the ridiculous role the BNP-Jamaat Government played during 2006 and 2007, and the illegitimate takeover of the country by the Muinuddin-Fakhruddin gang in 2007.

I, however, cannot visualize as to how he would have reacted to the 2008 Elections; the brutal BDR Massacre of February 2009; total unaccountability, stupid and partisan behaviour of responsible people; the Padma-Bridge Scandal; Hallmark, mega share scams, land grabbing, and systematic plunder of banks by politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats; the Rana Plaza tragedy; the hasty amendments of the Constitution; mass arrests of politicians, journalists and intellectuals; mass "disappearances" of people; the farcical elections of January 2014; and last but not least, the ongoing mysterious killing of ordinary people and freethinking bloggers and writers.

The overpowering and unprecedented state of terror and anarchy by both state and non-state actors would have simply turned Mintu Bhai mad. He would have possibly become religious for the first time in his adult life, and would have possibly asked God Almighty to end his life! May God give him eternal bliss, which he deserves most for his extra-ordinary service to his nation!

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Global Goals and Persons with Disabilities

REZAUL HAQUE

Estimated one billion people with disabilities that constitute 15 percent of the world's population may have something to be hopeful about with the launching of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN assembly recently. The SDGs chalk out the issues of development and rights of the persons with disabilities more elaborately than any other global development framework, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The issue of including 'disability' into the mainstream development agenda is finally gathering momentum.

The international community's efforts to bring disability to the global development landscape has been impressive: The International Year of Disabled Persons by the United Nations (1981), the World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Persons in 1982 by the UN General Assembly followed by proclamation of 1983-1992 the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and the UN proclamation of December 3 to be the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. However, the most comprehensive and promising legal framework for protection and promotion of the rights of the persons with disabilities came in the form of an international human rights treaty under the auspices of the United Nations - UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). UNCRPD was adopted in 2006, but came into force in 2008 after ratification by 20 UN Member States.

Unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs have touched upon the issues related to the rights and development of the persons with disabilities in a number of Goals and Targets, especially Goals 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17. Goal 4 deals with inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities for all, including the persons with disabilities. Goal 8 seeks to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all including persons with disabilities. Closely connected to Goal 8 is Goal 10 which aims to promote social, economic and political inclusion of persons with disabilities. While Goal 11 calls for providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for persons with disabilities, Goal 17 urges the Member States to ensure high-quality, timely and reliable data that is also disaggregated by disability.

It would be too optimistic to assume that the relevant parts of the SDGs that concern the persons with disabilities would be automatically achieved. The monitoring mechanisms devised to measure the achievement of the Goals and Targets need to include special tools to extract disability-segregated data, and engage experts who are also persons with disabilities. It is critical that the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have a monitoring and oversight role during the implementation of the concerned SDGs.

The disability inclusive Global Goals have much relevance for Bangladesh which has nearly 16 million people with disabilities. This number is larger than the combined population of Sweden and Denmark. Bangladesh needs to take advantage of the positive aura that has been created about the inclusion of disability in the SDGs, and translate that into concrete actions for advancement of its citizens with disabilities. A comprehensive, right-based instead of welfare-based, strategy is warranted to ensure that those parts of SDGs including their targets that are concerned with the persons with disabilities are achieved in time. This strategy should be aligned with the national strategy for implementing the SDGs. Some of the important features of this strategy are:

-The Government Ministries/Departments that deal with the programs concerning the persons with disabilities need to be represented in the national level body/entity that will be responsible for implementing the SDGs.

-Disability-related SDGs and their Targets must be included in the country's short-term and long-term development plans (annual, 5-year etc.).

-Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), especially organisations of

and for the persons with disabilities must participate in any and all consultative and decision-making processes with regard to implementation of SDGs.

-Umbrella forums/networks of non-governmental organisations dealing with disability like, the National Forum of Organisations Working for the Disabled (NFWOD) and others should conduct periodic consultations and advocacy with relevant government departments and donor agencies for proper implementation of the disability-related SDGs.

-NGOs and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) should align their respective strategies and programs with the SDGs.

-National and local media including Community Radio should



conduct public awareness programs highlighting the SDGs vis-à-vis Disability.

Thanks to the inclusion of disability in SDGs, the world will probably see an improvement in the quality of life of the persons with disability by 2030. But, what is even more important is that the causes of disability are prevented by taking a holistic approach for complete success of the SDGs in their entirety and for achievement of the associated targets.

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	DOWN
1 Is furious	1 Weaver's creation
6 Prepare for surgery	2 Tad's dad
11 German sub	3 Fails
12 Panda's home	4 Naturalness
13 Gaggle members	5 Traveling trunk
14 Dangerous gas	6 Propeller type
15 Closed tight	7 Niger neighbor
17 Winter bug	8 Free (of)
19 Kitten cry	9 First numero
20 Reservoir maker	10 Outlaw
23 Freed of suds	11 Account books
25 Singer Hendryx	12 Produce section
26 Forest shrubs	18 Singer Ronstadt
28 Inkling	20 Australia
29 Bread-winner	21 Pays to play
30 Old salt	22 Skier Phil
31 Louvre fill	24 Salt source
32 Exploit	25 Negative link
33 Music's Bieber	27 Seedy building
35 Caruso, for one	31 Luminous glows
38 Circle spokes	33 Sports lover
41 City on the Mohawk	34 "Othello" villain
42 Deal maker	35 Ricketty boat
43 Pitcher's no-nos	36 Greek vowel
44 Harbor cities	37 Goose egg
	39 Acct. addition
	40 " been real!"



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