AKN Ahmed

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TRIBUTE TO AKN AHMED

A lighthouse has gone dark and silent

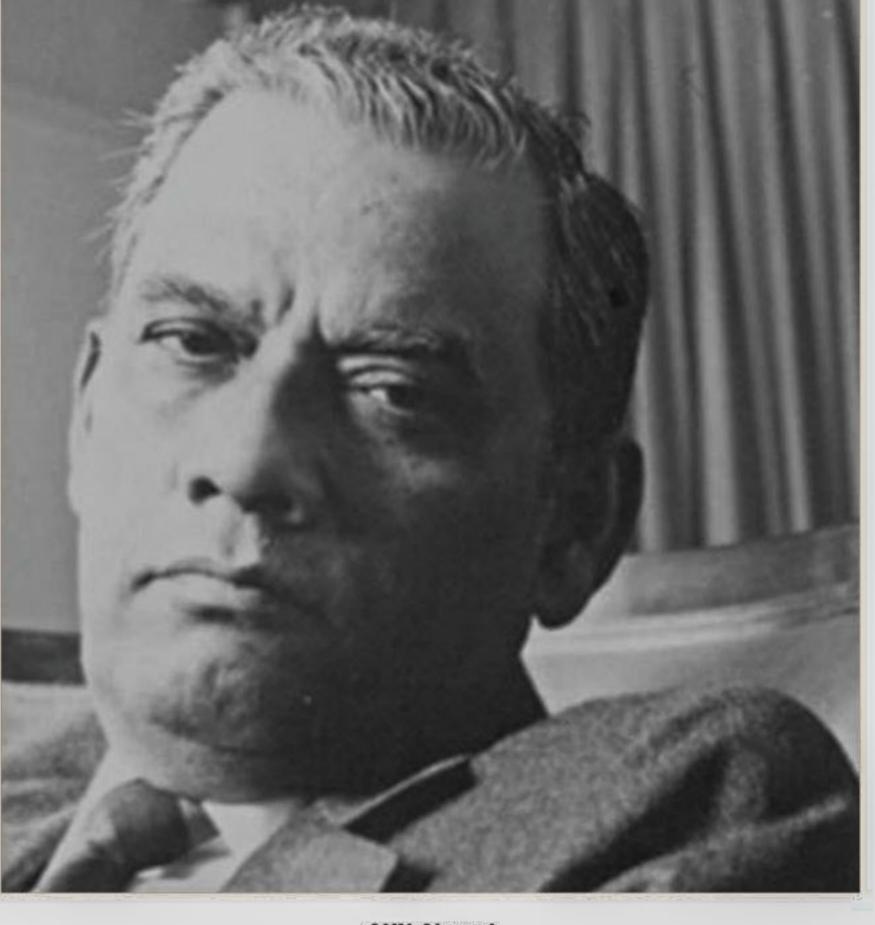
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

owe him my first job, the memowriting skills, the vast concourse of discourses on virtually everything on earth, and roughly half the books in my collection. And when AKN Ahmed died of a stroke on February 24 in a Washington DC hospital, this entire inventory wobbled like a miserable prop bereft of its support. Death took more than a man last Wednesday. I personally lost a bulwark against this mad, mad world.

Except for the first six years when I studied in Washington DC, ours was a long distance relationship, spanning more than 35 years. Every time we met, our conversations quickly veered towards serious discussions. AKN Ahmed was the most avid reader of books I have known, switching from one book to another in one conversation faster than some of us could turn pages in a book. During the visits, whether he was in Dhaka or I was in Washington, he gave me at least a dozen books every year, and if you multiply it by the number of years we knew each other, that many books I have received from him over the years.

second governor of Bangladesh Bank in 1976, he had almost half of his life left ahead of him. He told me when I met him last August in his Watergate apartment that he was pushing 92. Before I left, he hugged me and told me it could be the last time we were seeing each other. He walked with me to the corner of the Watergate complex and stood there until I crossed the road to

When Mr. Ahmed retired as the



AKN Ahmed

The George Washington University campus on the other side.

His son Ruben Ahmed introduced me to AKN Ahmed in 1981. By that time Mr. Ahmed had moved from London to Washington as the chief economist of the Bank of Credit and Commerce

International with his imposing office in the US capital. In the early 1950s, he worked in The World Bank, and in the mid-1970s, he served the International Monetary Fund as an advisor. He was simultaneously the Bangladesh ambassador to Japan and

Korea in the mid-1980s.

Three to four years ago, Mr. Ahmed amusingly told me that he had decided to move from Dhaka to London because all his friends were there. Afterwards, he decided to move again because he had realised that most of his living friends were settled in the United States. Then he said he was ready to move again because all his friends had migrated to a new country, and bobbed his index finger up and down in the air pointing at AKN Ahmed was the only person I

have known who lived to think but didn't have to think to live, because, as he told me once, an invisible hand always pushed him to the next slot. He believed in the grand design of things and success to him depended not on attainments but on attempts. Mr. Ahmed fathered a number of organisations in his lifetime, but he resented that most of them died and the surviving ones were deformed. His latest disappointment was BASIC Bank, which was his brainchild and of which he was the first chairman. I quipped that in his days the chair made the man, but now the man makes the chair. He had spent almost one year in

captivity in Pakistan between 1971 and 1972, but he wasn't as stricken as he was during each one of the three crises in his life. First was when he decided to resign as the governor of Bangladesh Bank in 1976. It was around this time that he had suffered a heart attack that required him to undergo a cardiac bypass surgery.

The second agonising crisis was when the Bank of Credit and Commerce International collapsed in 1991. He was

subjected to an FBI investigation, which eventually couldn't link him to any wrongdoing. He told me he never feared that he was going to be implicated, but the sheer irritation of being under the scanner tested his patience.

The third crisis left him reeling for the remaining days of his life. His daughter Ramina's untimely death sucked the life out of him, after which he lost the zest for life. The man who analysed everything and left nothing to chance was confronted with a void that couldn't tell him why he deserved such a cruel hand of fate.

Even then, he was like a lighthouse until his last breath, beaming across the sea on stormy nights. He never stopped reading books and sharing his erudition to help others organise their thoughts. He wrote a number of books and articles, forever keen to dispel confusion in other minds. His mastery of subjects and the clarity of his thoughts were impressive. He could explain even the most complicated things in simple words. He was my rescuer every time I felt lost.

Last time I talked to AKN Ahmed was about three weeks before he died. I promised to call back after he returned from his trip to Florida where Ramina's daughter had given birth to her first child. The trip must have brought him some kind of a closure, after which he couldn't care if he lived or died. The eternity has lost a speck of dust, the world a headcount, the country a worthy son, but I have lost a lodestar in the sky.

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Innovate, take risks to reach out-of-school children

GWANG-JO KIM, KARIN HULSHOF

HERE are 16.7 million out-ofschool children in the Asia-Pacific region and they come from some of the region's - and the world's - most marginalised communities.

They are girls living in parts of the region where gender disparities are rife, such as in South and West Asia where 80 percent of out-of-school girls are unlikely to ever attend school. They are children with disabilities and those who are HIVinfected. They live in remote, impoverished areas where school is a long, dangerous journey away or is simply not available. They are migrants, nomadic people and racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities.

They are a disparate group who despite numbering in the millions are too often without a voice. Debates over how to change this and how best to address their needs have been going on for decades – the 1960 Karachi Plan, for example, was focused on extending education's reach in Asia, for example.

The Education for All era of 2000-2015 represented the most unified global push to date to extend the benefits of learning to all people, and tremendous progress was made, such as a surge in universal primary education in this region.

However, we cannot deny that for millions in this region, quality education remains as elusive now as it did 50 years ago. We are left with unfinished business and the realisation that we cannot continue as we have in the past.

How do we move forward when it seems that our systems are stuck in perpetual stasis?

The answer is we take risks. We innovate, we include and we have the potential to impact the lives of millions of learners in the Asia-Pacific region.

Last year's adoption of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, and particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education, and the regional Incheon Declaration on Education 2030, means that we have the regional and international commitments we

can seize on that momentum. More than 560 development

workers, government officials, education practitioners, and private sector representatives from throughout the continent gathered for the summit. Their approaches varied but they were united in their belief that successes in addressing the needs of out-of-school children will

approaches to education that are open in terms of admission and age requirements, mode, duration, pace and place, and we need to scale up models that have proven effective. Moreover, we need to ensure that for those currently out of school, second chance education does not mean second class education.

Innovations discussed at the



need to make this happen. The momentum is on our side and

the opportunity to innovate to empower our region's out-of-school children is within our reach.

This past week, the Asia Education Summit on Flexible Strategies for Out-Of-School Children was held in Bangkok to spotlight innovative, flexible approaches to education that

not come out of the torpor of where we have been, but from the dynamic possibilities of where we can go if we take fresh approaches.

Flexibility in education means learning that is adaptable to the needs of the student. Key in this is abandoning the notion that our outof-school children can be served just by formal schooling systems. We need

summit spanned multiple fields, from innovative approaches to financing education, through changes to taxation systems to ICT-based approaches that use technology to bring in a wealth of online educational resources to areas out of traditional education's reach.

The importance of mother tonguebased multilingual education in a

child's early years of schooling was also stressed at the summit. A study released last week by UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report shows that 40 percent of people worldwide do not have access to education in a language they understand, a situation that only compounds the challenges facing minority language learners in our region. Better data on the backgrounds

and barriers facing out-of-school children is essential and to that end, UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) have partnered in the Global Out-of-School Children initiative.

The need to reach out-of-school children is not merely a moral or humanitarian imperative. The fact is that educating our children is the best possible investment we can make in our region's future - and what might seem like a well-trod cliché is, in fact, borne out by hard numbers.

As a recent study noted, if primary enrolment patterns in Southeast Asia do not change, the unskilled workforce that emerges will cost countries billions of dollars. The socioeconomic implications of this in terms of higher levels of poverty and disease and increased risk of conflict cannot be contained within any one country's borders. In an age of increased mobility between countries and regions, the need to provide quality education to out-of-school children is a transnational priority.

Our focus now is not on the years that have passed but on how we can invest more in education for out-ofschool children, take risks to get children to re-enter schools and introduce innovative learning methods. Action now can positively transform the lives of our children and the future of our societies.

The writers are the Director of UNESCO Bangkok, and Regional Director of UNICEF, South Asia.

The need to reach out-ofschool children is not merely a moral or humanitarian imperative. The fact is that educating our children is the best possible investment we can make in our region's future.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

DOWN

2 Source

4 Programs

5 Persnickety

6 Pub pints

9 Is bold

11 Run up

1 Without help

3 Humorist Barry

7 Rank indicator

Independence

15 Fare carrier

21 VCR insert

26 "Forget it!"

27 Right away

39 Shark's place

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25 Sender's need

19 Citi Field's forerunner

ACROSS

10 Extreme

16 "-- Believer"

1 Bar mixer 5 Extreme diet 9 Hip-hop headgear

12 Full of verve 13 Blood part 14 University officers

17 Yale rooter 18 Rejuvenation sites 20 Language rules

22 Coop group 23 Digression 25 Small fastener 28 Glides

32 Carryall 34 Bunion spot 35 Brouhaha

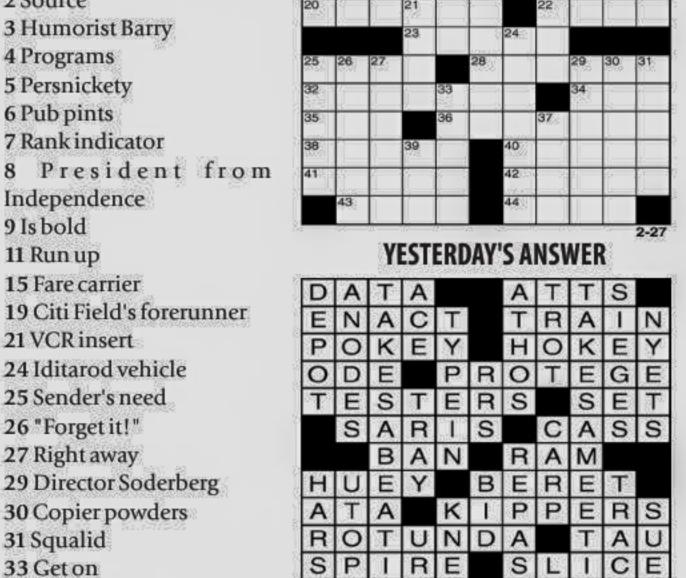
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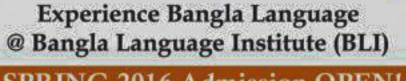
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