

WORKERS' RIGHTS

"I cannot bear it anymore. I had to stay in the open street for ten days to take part in the protest. With meagre food, no sleep and no security I was feeling absolutely helpless. Today, I heard my two-year-old son crying over phone. He told me, 'Mom come back, you do not need any job.' I felt like my heart was torn apart. How could I make him understand that I had to wait 10 years for this job and only with an unjust decision all my dreams got shattered? Without this job, how could I feed my son?" says Hena Khanam, a nurse from Panchagarh, who came to Dhaka from the northern end of Bangladesh to take part in the protest.



Hena, after being severely injured by indiscriminate baton charge, is now lying on the floor of the Dhaka Medical College, groaning in agonising pain. However, some of her colleagues faced the worst consequences when police, with the aid of ruling party workers from Chhatra League and Shwechha Shebok League, descended on them with batons and boiling water from the water cannon.

THE STORY OF PLEA AND PROTEST

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

PHOTOS: STAR FILE

According to Rina Akter, President of the Unemployed Nurses' Association, Salma, a protestor who was three months pregnant, was kicked on her abdomen and she started to bleed. Eventually, she had a miscarriage. Two of the protesting nurses were also arrested and a case has been filed against '1400 unidentified nurses' - demonstrators for 'preventing the law enforcers from carrying out their duties.' The five-month-long movement of the nurses, to ensure their jobs, was

brutally subdued without paying any heed to their demands.

Agitation among the nurses started to grow when Public Service Commission (PSC) decided to take competitive exams to recruit 3,728 nurses for government hospitals. Earlier, nurses were recruited according to their year of graduation, merit and work experience. "I and many of my colleagues have been waiting for years to reach the seniority level with the experience and quality required by government hospitals. All our efforts went in vain with this decision," says Nahida Akhter, secretary general of Bangladesh Basic Graduate Nurses Society.

"Now, we have to sit for the exams with the nurses who graduated just a year earlier. This will create immense competition for the positions which should be rightfully ours," she adds in desperation.

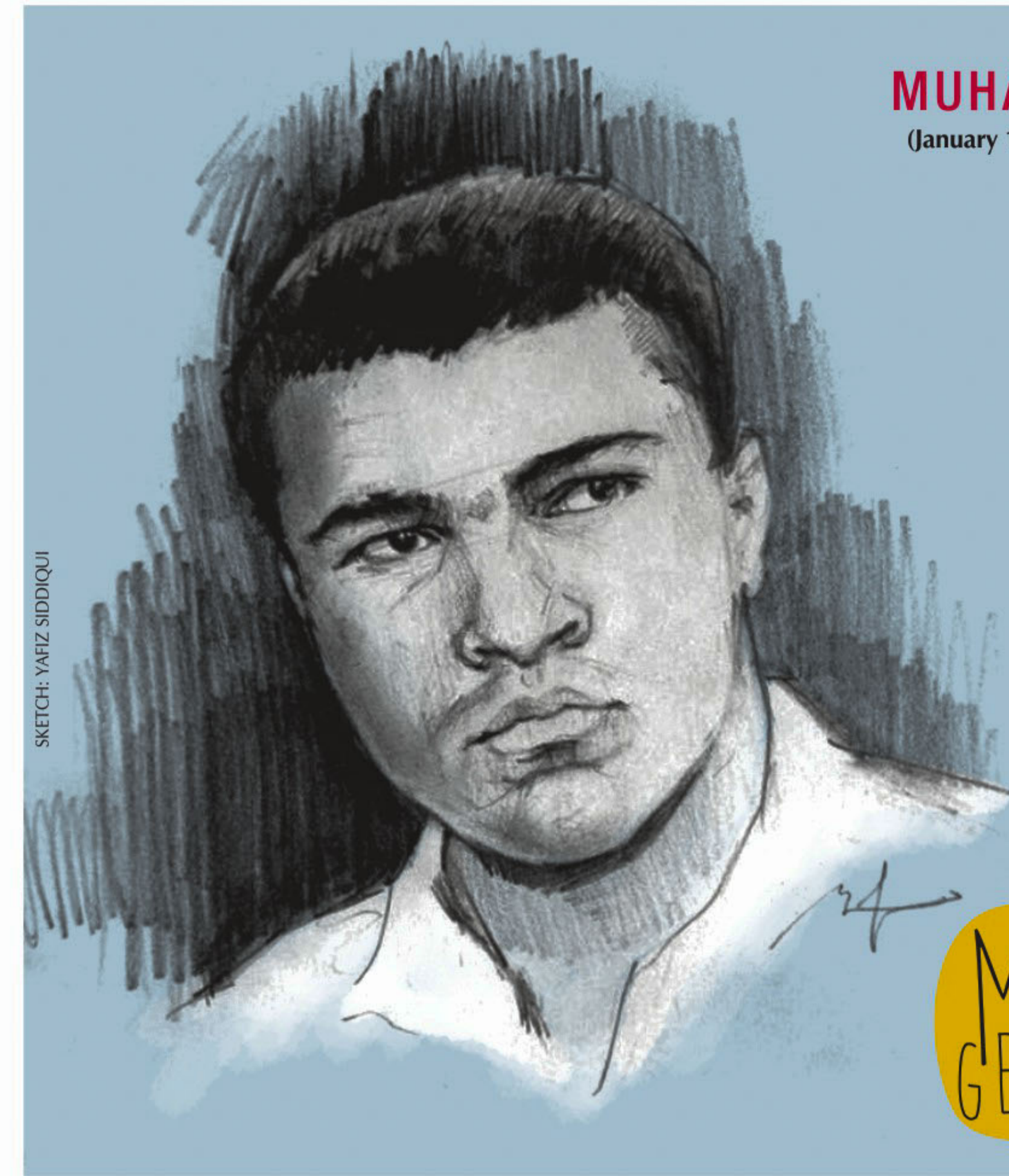
Intellectuals and human rights activists also expressed their sympathy to the protest. When the nurses first started their sit-in in front of the National Press Club, Syed Abul Maksud, a human rights activist and leader, visited the protest and expressed his unity with the demonstration. He said, "Healthcare cannot be ensured with only medicine and doctors. Service of qualified nurses is essential in this regard."

"It is a shame that these well trained nurses have taken to the streets in thousands for a simple job when there is a severe crisis of well trained nurses in the government hospitals," he adds. In fact, at present 13,728 posts for the 'senior nurse' are vacant in government hospitals. And,

around 21,000 jobless nurses have been protesting for almost six months to get employed according to seniority, merit and experience.

At one point during the movement, agitated nurses blocked Shahbagh intersection of the capital, from where police evicted them by headlong assault with tear gas, sound grenades along with baton charge and water cannon. On May 25, the desperate nurses organised a road march to the Prime Minister's Office to convey their demand, however, police again foiled their procession. Although Health Minister Mohammad Nasim promised the nurses that their demands would be accepted, he took a u-turn later saying, "PSC is not under the health ministry. I can do nothing in this regard."

At present, the fate of thousands of jobless nurses is still hanging on a thread. Showing utter indifference, the government is neither taking any exam nor has it assured any provision for these jobless senior nurses, resulting in dilapidated healthcare condition in the government hospitals. The Government must take immediate steps to ensure jobs for these protesting nurses and make a comprehensive plan for their recruitment without depriving any of them of their right to serve the nation. ■



MUHAMMAD ALI
(January 17, 1942 – June 3, 2016)

After a 32-year battle with Parkinson's disease, the death of Muhammad Ali, the silver-tongued boxer and civil rights champion, shook the world and left his fans devastated. Ali who famously proclaimed himself "The Greatest" remains the only three-time lineal world heavyweight champion; he won the title in 1964, 1974, and 1978. Ali was known for being an inspiring, controversial and polarising figure both inside and outside the boxing ring.

"I've made my share of mistakes along the way, but if I have changed even one life for the better, I haven't lived in vain.

Only a man who knows what it is like to be defeated can reach down to the bottom of his soul and come up with the extra ounce of power it takes to win when the match is even.

People don't realise what they had till it's gone. Like President Kennedy, there was no one like him, the Beatles, and my man Elvis Presley. I was the Elvis of boxing.

I know where I'm going and I know the truth, and I don't have to be what you want me to be. I'm free to be what I want.

Age is whatever you think it is. You are as old as you think you are.

Ali's got a left, Ali's got a right - when he knocks you down, you'll sleep for the night; and when you lie on the floor and the ref counts to ten, hope and pray that you never meet me again."

STARDIARY

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE RELIGIOUS?

I know this woman, who prays five times a day and gives people knowledge about religion all day. But she is also a very cheap minded woman, she talks nasty about others (in a very vulgar language, I might add), and has also attempted to destroy other peoples' lives by spreading rumours about them (mainly other women, which is a shock). Since Ramadan is approaching, I heard her talk about the many people who will start praying and reciting the Holy Quran now, and how she thinks it's 'fake'. I had no option but to say something at that point. So I looked dead straight in her eyes and I said, "Even if it's for a month, I can guarantee they can be better Muslims than you. You hurt people, which is not allowed in our religion, you talk behind peoples' backs, which is not allowed in our religion, you look down on others, which is not allowed in our religion. So before you go ahead and judge others, please try to fix yourself. You're not as self-righteous as you believe yourself to be." I then let out a long breath, got up and left. People like that don't deserve my respect or my time.
Sanjida Hasnain
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME

I think I bought this poster of Muhammed Ali almost a year ago and had it hidden away forgotten in some corner of my room. Putting it up is the very least I can do for a man who has been my hero since the very first times my mom would regale me tales of his feats. Having met him is probably my closest claim to fame, and is one of the most cherished memories I have. My mother and I ran into him in an elevator in Los Angeles. He picked me up, and due to his Parkinsons his arms were shaking. Four year old me was quite overwhelmed and I barely managed to stammer out to my mom "I'm too heavy." He laughed and told her that Bangladeshis are his biggest fans. Considering my mom's childhood stories of the whole neighbourhood gathering around the one and only television set praying for him before the match, cheering with every punch, and crying with the seldom hits he received, has me safely saying that Muhammed was right. He was an inspiration to me and millions of other people in life and in death he will continue inspire millions in the generations to come.
Adib Hasnat
West Covina, California



PHOTO: COURTESY