

91ST BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF TAJUDDIN AHMAD PORTRAIT OF A LEADER

ANANTA YUSUF

TAJUDDIN Ahmad – the name is synonymous with courageous leadership. Under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Tajuddin helmed the Liberation War, guiding the war operations in the absence of the Father of the Nation.

Tajuddin Ahmad was born on July 23, 1925, to a traditional conservative family in the village of Dordoria, which sits 82 km north of Dhaka. He was a star pupil, the centre of attention since his childhood. He served as an inspiration for his friends and compatriots with his dedication to the ideals of freedom and secularism. Even as a young boy, he understood that he could achieve the most good for the people of his nation through politics. And thus, as a teen, he would visit the Muslim League office at Kolta Bazar, where, eventually, even the senior members began to regard him with respect and deference. During one such visit, he declared that Pakistan could never remain united as per Jinnah's expectations. This prophecy made by a school boy was the core political vibe of Awami League in the early seventies.

As he grew into an adult, Tajuddin found himself more and more engrossed with politics, shaping his own political ideology along the way. He studied Economics at the University of Dhaka, a department that was a hotbed of politics. He helped set up a student party - the Pakistan Chhatra League - on January 4, 1948. A year later, when the Awami Muslim League was formed, Tajuddin joined the party, and became an integral part of our nation's history.

At 29, Tajuddin became a member of the Parliament by defeating his heavyweight opponent Fakir Abdul Mannan, then General Secretary of the East Pakistan Muslim League. In the meantime, his personal life was also changing. He got married to Sayeda Zohra Khatun in 1959, but politics gave him little chance to live a family life.

After the death of Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy in 1963, and under the leadership of Bangabandhu, Tajuddin Ahmad worked to reorganise the Awami League. It was a time when Awami League had lost much of its charm and political ground at the grassroots level. Thus, it was



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of utmost importance to revive the party once again. The Six-point Programme was formulated during this time, and Tajuddin played a crucial role in formulating the historic demand.

After Bangabandhu's historic speech of March 7, 1971, he became the most popular leader of East Pakistan. Under his guidance, all the administrative directives were issued by Tajuddin Ahmad during the non-cooperation movement from March 7 to 25.

On the terrible night of March 25, 1971, when the Pakistani military went on a killing rampage in Dhaka, Tajuddin Ahmad left for the hideout with Barrister Amirul Islam. Dressed in a lungi, Tajuddin carried only a shirt and a gun with him. On their way to India, they were surprised to see that people from all walks of life were ready and

willing to fight for the emancipation of Bangladesh.

Before leaving Dhaka, Tajuddin left a small note to his family, which read, "Bangladesh's war of independence has begun. Join the masses. We will meet again, if we win." Even at this daunting hour, Tajuddin didn't lose his nerve, as he was willing to leave behind his family in the dark, confident that they could fend for themselves, and was ready to sacrifice his life if it meant freedom for his people.

Tajuddin was wise enough to understand, even at that early stage of war, the need for international assistance in an armed struggle to free his country. After his meeting with Indira Gandhi, Tajuddin immediately decided to form a government with the elected members of Parliament. He

realised that forming a government was the only way to fight the occupation power and gain international support. The whereabouts of his colleagues were unknown. But he was able to confront the situation by announcing the formation of a government on April 17, 1971. After the new government had taken oath, Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad said in a press statement, "We do not aspire to join any bloc or pact but will seek assistance from those who give it in a spirit of goodwill free from any desire to control our destinies."

In his first meeting with Indira Gandhi, he clearly stated that this war was being fought to free Bangladesh from oppression. "This is our war and we want to fight it on our own. We do not expect any interference from the Indian army. But we need training, arms

and help for the refugees who have taken shelter in West Bengal," he said.

After the nation gained its independence, when Tajuddin Ahmad returned to the newly free Bangladesh on December 22, the country was in a devastated state. From December 22 to January 10, the socialist in him emerged in every speech he made in public, as he emphasised on the need for secularism, socialism and democracy to build this new nation. He believed that these could be the key pillars in the transformation of the ailing country.

As a Minister of Finance, Tajuddin demonstrated tremendous courage. The government treasury was more or less empty at that time. The foreign exchange reserve was drained by the Pakistani government. Import of essential goods and industrial raw materials had to be resumed without delay before acute shortage developed and local industries were forced to shut down. But he fought against all odds, and by September 1972, Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserve had soared to around US\$ 400 million.

It was considered a princely sum and a comfortable foreign reserve. And that is why M Matiul Islam, the then Finance Secretary wrote, "We were, therefore, debating whether to accept the IMF's offer of extending to Bangladesh its short-fall adjustment credit routinely given to a newly emerging developing country to tide over the initial shortfall in its export earnings. Tajuddin quickly ended the debate by deciding to accept the IMF offer which had no strings attached."

"Tajuddin came much before his time and we are not yet ready to understand him properly." Professor Sardar Fazlul Karim's famous words aptly describe the leading figure of Bangladesh's liberation war. In the physical absence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Tajuddin Ahmad was the key leader, who directed the war with remarkable élan to achieve freedom from the Pakistani colonial occupation. When he was assassinated in prison on November 3, 1975, just a few months after the brutal killing of Bangabandhu and most of his family members, the whole nation mourned the loss of a leader who had so much more to offer, so much left to do for the country that he helped build.

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Health impacts of coal-fired power plants

ZAKARIA KHONDKER

WHAT is the most important resource for a nation? Not natural resource. If that was the case, Nigeria, Angola, and Iraq would be developed nations by now. On the other hand, look at the most developed nations in Asia like Japan, Korea, and Singapore. They have one common factor: lack of natural resources. This shortage forced them to develop the best resource on earth - humans. Many envy their rapid development. Can this be replicated in other nations? The answer is yes, the replication is underway in countries like Bangladesh.

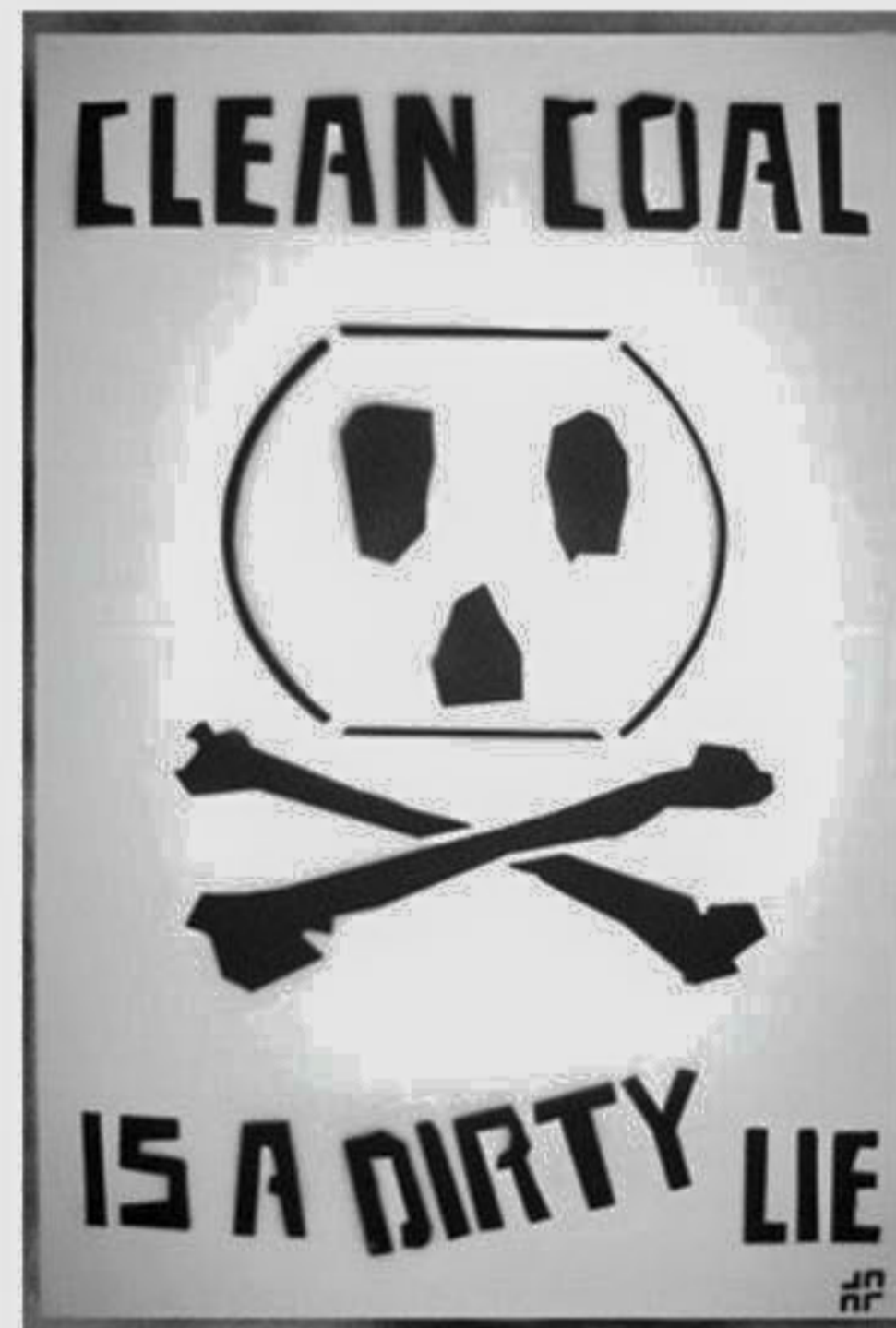
Dominique Lapiere, in his famous book City of Joy, described East Bengal, now Bangladesh, as a dejected wetland, devoid of any hope without the city of Kolkata. Notorious warmonger Henry Kissinger termed it a basket case as Bangladesh emerged from 215 years of systematic resource diversion and negligence by British and Pakistani rulers. In only four decades, the country has defied the naysayers, emerging as a miracle economy and a development role model that many nations envy today. The same theme that helped develop Japan, Korea, and Singapore, is in play - human potential. Proper appreciation and nurturing of this human potential has serious development consequences for aspiring nations like Bangladesh.

Rapid development brings its own challenges. Rising power demands that out-paced prediction is one of them. Policymakers have been scrambling to

meet the exponentially rising electricity demand. This can lead to a dangerous path - too much focus on short-term needs that leads to the kind of planning that could handicap long-term growth. One such handicap is the destruction of public health through pollution from haphazard planning, leading to costly healthcare and lost productivity in the long run. I am talking in particular about advocating coal-based power plants for short term cost savings, which is too expensive for public health in the long run. When developed nations, like the United States, set up their coal based power plants, they did not have data on long term public health consequences. Fortunately, we do. From their data, we can predict the long term public health and economic costs for a densely populated country like Bangladesh.

Coal-fired power plants pose the greatest public health risk among all industrial sources of air pollution. Their emissions contribute to global warming, ozone smog, acid rain, regional haze, and, the most consequential of all, fine particle pollution. Trans-border pollution will also have serious public health consequences for northeast Indian states. While human movements can be checked through barbed wires, there is no cost-effective way to tame migration of pollutants across national borders. It's imprudent of India to help set up a series of coal-fired power plants inside the borders of its nearest neighbour.

Coal pollution has multiple dimensions that can have multiplier effects on each other. Irreversible chronic harm is caused by air



pollutants like sulfur dioxide, particulate matter and nitrogen oxides. Sulfur and nitrogen oxides further react in ambient air, forming secondary fine particulates, while nitrogen oxides are also a precursor for ozone. Inhalation of particulate matters can adversely affect the brain, respiratory system, cardiovascular system, and blood. Coal plants also emit heavy metals and organic pollutants like mercury, lead, arsenic, beryllium, chromium and dioxin. These can damage the

developing nervous system of children in addition to causing cancer, hypertension, anemia or other cardiovascular diseases. These pollutants affect almost every system of the body, potentially wrecking havoc on public health. The harm will be more pronounced in people who get lifetime exposure from birth.

Heal and Environment Alliance estimates the public health cost of coal pollution in the European Union to be as high as 53 billion Euros per year, even without counting the lost working days. The estimates include 18,200 premature deaths, 2,100,000 days of medication, 4,100,000 lost working days, 28,600,000 cases of lower respiratory symptoms. Clean Energy Taskforce estimates the public health cost of coal plants to be more than \$100 billion in the United States. The public health toll can be a lot higher, in terms of incidence for a densely populated country like Bangladesh. Population density in Bangladesh means a larger number of people will be affected by each plant, compared to Europe or the United States.

Coal companies are facing what cigarette companies faced before; increased pressure to cut down pollution. Peabody Energy, the largest coal energy company in the US, has recently declared bankruptcy due to rising public awareness and resulting regulatory burden. These coal companies are deploying the same arsenal as cigarette companies; pushing harder into the developing world. They are using marketing gimmicks like "clean coal", "CCS technologies" or "high

efficiency coal". These are buzzwords devoid of substance, like "healthy cigarettes".


Nothing is more important for the long term growth of a country than a healthy productive workforce. The recent debate on coal based power plants has largely missed this point - the long-term public health consequence of coal based power plants. India is targeting 100 GW in solar generated power by 2022, which is 10 times the current demand of entire Bangladesh. Their plan includes 40 GW for rooftop solar power systems, which is four times our national demand. Bangladesh can take cues from these plans and follow suit.

These coal plants will pollute the environment for many generations to come. Children born under the coal polluted environment will face developmental challenges and lifetime health issues. They will have to bear additional sufferings, high health costs and substantially reduced earnings. Recent debates on coal power have focused on saving the mangrove forest, global warming and environment. However, it ignored the elephant in the room - multi generational public health costs.

Future generations will bear the burden of pollution caused by short-sighted planning. Policymakers and concerned citizens need to have a hard look at the burden we pass on to our children, grandchildren and their children with the setting up of coal-based power plants.

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QUOTABLE Quote



IBN BATTUTA
Traveling—it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Rome raiders
- 6 Provide food for
- 11 Parts of hearts
- 12 Pianist Claudio
- 13 Increase
- 14 Prison problems
- 15 Cut off
- 16 Fugitive
- 18 Peyton's bother
- 19 Couple
- 20 Auditor's org.
- 21 Splinter group
- 23 Drew in books
- 25 Pendulum path
- 27 Pot brew
- 28 "Cats" poet
- 30 Early workmaker
- 33 Pole worker
- 34 Unruly group
- 36 Fall mo.
- 37 Coastal bass
- 39 Old salt
- 40 "The March King"
- 41 Love, to Luigi
- 43 Great Lakes tribe

DOWN

- 44 Bellini opera
- 45 Staff symbols
- 46 Like the Capitol
- 1 Roof features
- 2 "Becket" actor
- 3 Papayas and mangoes
- 4 Towel word
- 5 Quite full
- 6 Hip-length jacket
- 7 Diva's piece
- 8 Hurricane's cousin
- 9 Diner
- 10 Tricks
- 17 Day warmer
- 22 Numerical prefix
- 24 Role for Keanu
- 26 Scout's tool
- 28 Corrida critter
- 29 Water tester
- 31 "Heavens!"
- 32 Ranch
- 33 German steel city
- 35 Stock symbol
- 38 "Got it"
- 42 Cattle call

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott