

# COMMEMORATING BANGABANDHU'S BIRTHDAY

## An album on the poet of politics

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

**M**y first impression of Bangabandhu dates back to around the mid-sixties. A helicopter service had been in operation between Dhaka and Faridpur for a couple of years by then. A corner of the Tejgaon Airport was designated as a heliport. I had just disembarked from a helicopter arriving at Dhaka from Faridpur. As I was approaching the small terminal building, and still some distance away from it, my eyes swung on to Bangabandhu seated majestically with what felt like an air of defiance.

The majestic aura was the signature of his leadership stature attained through sacrifices and frequent imprisonments. The defiant mode he reflected was an indignant response to the manner in which the authority had stalked his footsteps.

He was waiting to take the flight to Faridpur on his way to Gopalganj, his birth place on one of his rare respites between periods of incarceration. My eyes remained transfixed on him till he ambled across to the helicopter with a spring on his feet. For soon he would be back into the pure charm of his first home, evocative of tree-lined ponds he had bathed in, in his childhood days. He would, I reckoned, reminisce about it, all soaking up fresh energy to attend to his wider call of political duty. His long walks through villages and the big rallies he inspired since his adolescent days right up to the defining 1970 elections were simply legendary.

One of his hallmark grassroot connections was the amazing intimacy with which he nurtured and sustained rapport with masses. He knew by name the presidents, general secretaries and other office bearers of Awami League

Thana committees. And could recite them when he needed. You have to passionately love people and care about their personal welfare to remember them with such ease. Actually, such a trait would have effectively meant keeping track of thousands of names all over the country. He did it as a true a leader of the people.

Another image of his etched on my mind can be traced to 1973. In the inner lawn of the old Jatiya Sangsad at Tejgaon - not before the eighties would the Parliament Bhaban as we know it today be ready for use - I saw him seated upright making points to a group of people prizing every moment of the experience.

Speaking of his charisma, a retired secretary recalls an incident in Bangabhaban, seemingly flustered now as he was then by it in real-time. Along with a senior colleague who worked at the president's office he was walking inside the Bangabhaban. Suddenly, they noticed that Bangabandhu accompanied by the then president Abu Syeed Chowdhury was coming in their direction. And as the two VVIPs were passing them by, they summoned enough courage to greet them with customary courtesy. Bangabandhu reciprocated it with his baritone, leaving the ex-secretary and his senior colleague experiencing as though 'a current had just pulsed through them'.

A relative of mine studying at Mymensingh Agriculture University immediately following the birth of Bangladesh would share his experience of discovering 'something special' in him. As Bangabandhu was being given a tour of the campus, by the university authority, my cousin, glued to the proceedings, would marvel at the flashes of his inspiring finding.

I remember having tuned into Akashbani and heard the news reader breaking the news of his assassination with the closing words: "Unki ek sammohini shakti thi (He had a hypnotic power)."



He was a humanist and large hearted. When some Bangladeshi politicians who had collaborated with Pakistan occupation forces were put in jail, Bangabandhu would send succor to their families.

Politically, he was so principled about the course East Pakistan should be taking that he spurned the notion of

the so-called two-unit system indicating 'parity' between the two wings. He could see through the bluff intended to deter the movement against disparities. It was then about to heave into a struggle for autonomy.

Admittedly, however, he drew criticism for having switched over to one-party rule in a break with AL's

consistent legacy of working in a multi-party democracy and upholding it. Future historians will judge him on that but I can add two points to share with the readers as to how my mind works on the issue.

Let me put on record a fact I came to know as an officer of the Bangladesh Bank: the Annual Report of the central bank for fiscal 1974-75 had come to the conclusion that the economy was evidently on an upswing based on positive indicators on major macro-economic parameters. But after the heinous assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with most members of his family, the coup leaders issued a white paper claiming the exact opposite of what the Bangladesh Bank Annual Report mirrored as a positive state of the economy. I had already distributed the annual report to listed addresses including the Bank of England. So, the authentic word had got around.

The Father of the Nation wanted to put smiles on the faces of *Dukhi Manush*, which is difficult to translate aptly into English except to say the phrase referred to people in distress or the disadvantaged ones. In fact, it was a part of his mission to create Sonar Bangla. But his life was cut short, allowing him less than three years to pursue his mission.

The national economy is firmly set on a growth trajectory and the country's prospects as one of the select group of the next genre of emerging economies are widely talked about. Now Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina has the precious opportunity to fulfill her father's dreams.

A final word. Whatever his critics may say, one thing is for certain: Bangabandhu's creation is Bangladesh, and as long as we live and breathe in it, we must be grateful to him and keep him above controversy.

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## An outbreak, an island and the compassionate leadership of Bangabandhu

M A WAHED and CATHERINE SPENCER

**I**n a post liberation war period, an epidemic of severe dysentery emerged in a small island in the northeastern part of the Bay of Bengal named St. Martin's island. It is about 9 km south of the tip of the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf peninsula, and is the only coral island of the country.

Back in 1973, St. Martin's had a population of 1,318 people, of which 434 people were affected with severe dysentery, caused by a strain of *Shigella Dysenteriae* type 1 bacteria. Within a three-month period, 28 people died - they were mostly young children and elderly. It was amidst the monsoon season when the island was isolated from the mainland. Every year, between May-June to August-September, the island used to be almost cut off from the mainland due to bad weather and high tide. Islanders stockpiled their supplies for the whole season, and contact with mainland was infrequent.

The outbreak started in the middle of April 1973. Rumours of a mysterious killer disease spread. The disease appeared in the form of diarrhoea with blood and mucus, abdominal and cramping rectal pain. National newspaper also reported the news.

On the occasion of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's birthday tomorrow, we want to share a lesser known (but nonetheless important) incident of the visionary leader's role to combat this crisis, and how the icddr,b

played a part in it.

Formerly known as the Cholera Research Laboratory (CRL), icddr,b's scientists and staff from that period still reminiscence the memory of St. Martin's outbreak, and remember fondly the dynamic leadership of the Father of the Nation.

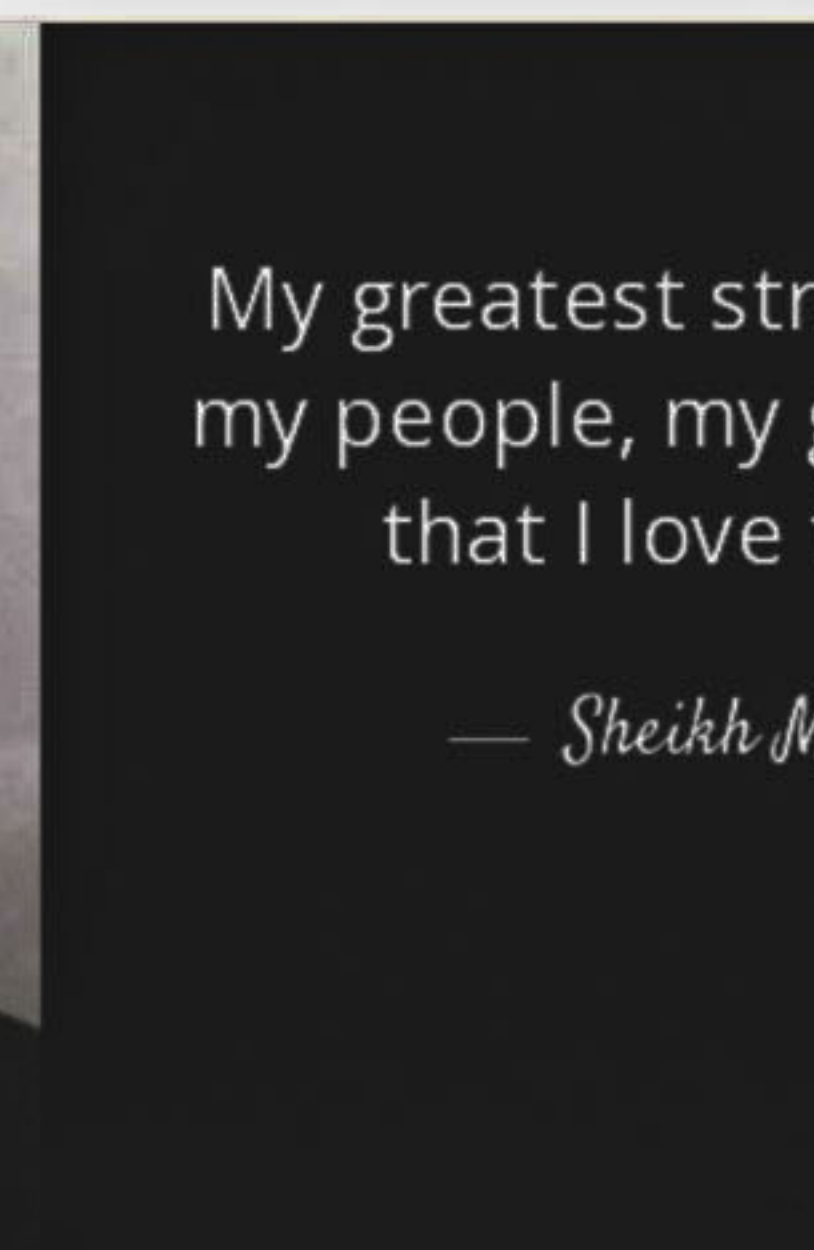


My greatest strength is the love for my people, my greatest weakness is that I love them too much.

— Sheikh Mujibur Rahman —

When he heard the news, he instantly ordered the then Cholera Research Laboratory to investigate the rumour and provide immediate medical assistance. In a war-torn country, reaching out to the most distant part during the monsoon season is a near impossible task.

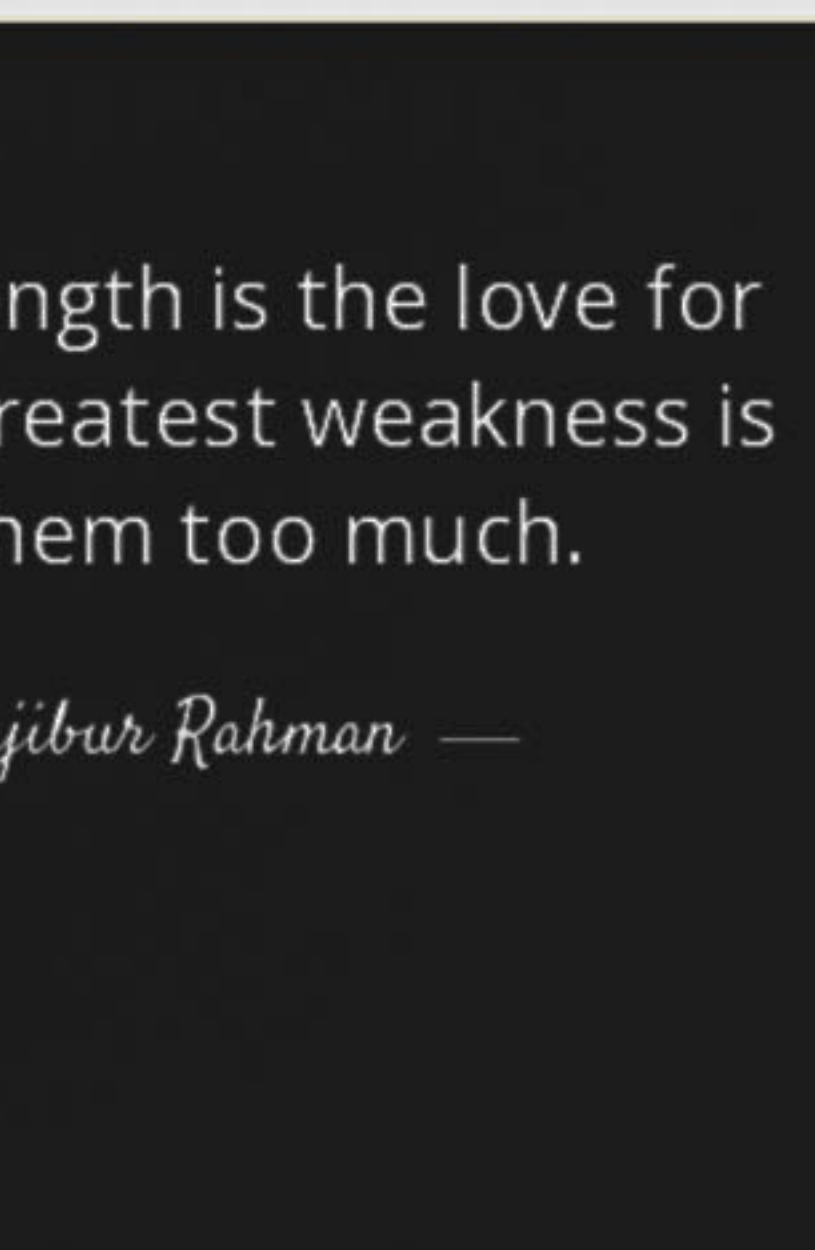
Realising the challenges, Bangabandhu asked then the rehabilitation team of the then Soviet Union (now Russia) to lend a helicopter for the transportation of scientists and supplies to St. Martin's island. During that time, the Soviet Union was providing post-war rehabilitation support to the country



and had few helicopters with them. Between July 12 and 25, 1973, a team of CRL scientists made three visits to St. Martin's on helicopter. The first visit was made to investigate the outbreak; they examined and collected samples from 12 patients with a history of 2 to 12 days of diarrhoea and aged

between 4 months to 16 years.

The team was comprised of the legendary Dr M Mujibur Rahman, Dr M Moslemuddin Khan, Dr KMS Aziz and AKM Golam Kibria. The second visit was made by a team of public health scientists to chlorinate drinking water and distribute medications. The third



visit was made by a team of scientists and doctors to provide medical assistance and do detailed investigation of the outbreak.

A census was taken, and families were interviewed regarding migration, death and dysentery, as well as their symptoms in the past three months.

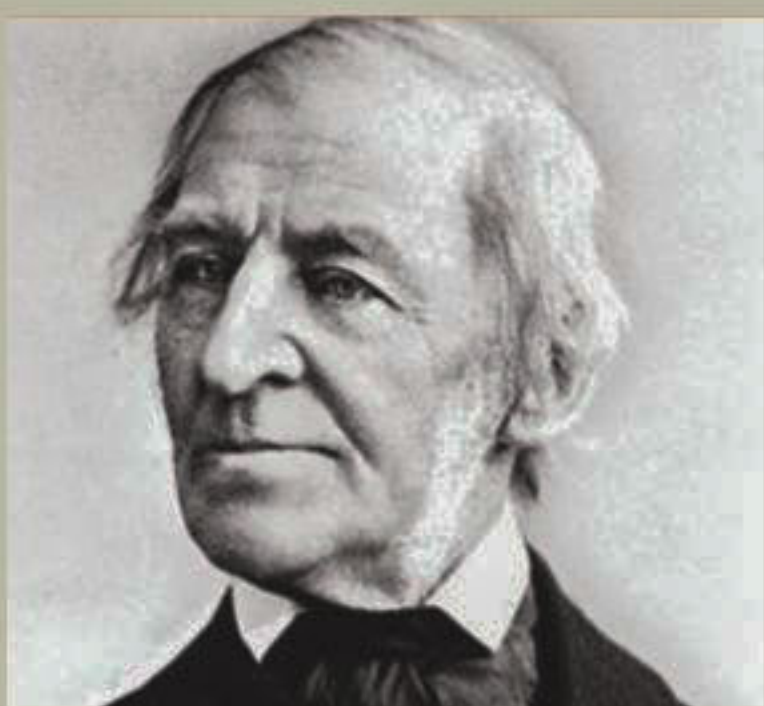
Information of the deceased was obtained from their mother or the surviving head of the family. Information on sources of drinking water and food and facilities for disposal of excreta were collected. Those who were ill at the time of the interview were examined. Rectal swabs were obtained for bacteriological culture. Fresh stool samples were also examined microscopically. Water samples were collected in sterile containers and cultured within five hours for the detection of *Shigella* and for presumptive coliform counts. It was a great surprise to learn that the bacteria were resistant to almost all common antibiotics available at that time. For which CRL established a research centre in Teknaf the following year.

There was a dramatic drop in the reporting of new cases from early August and a complete cessation of the epidemic in the following week. This was further confirmed by another visit during September 17-20. It was found that besides the strain of *Shigella dysenteriae* type 1, no other organism was implicated in the outbreak. And the disease disappeared from the island after the institution of chlorination to the sources of drinking water and effective treatment of patients.

The writers are President, icddr,b Alumni Association, and Principal Communications Lead at icddr,b, respectively.

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### QUOTABLE Quote



RALPH WALDO EMERSON

*Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be.*

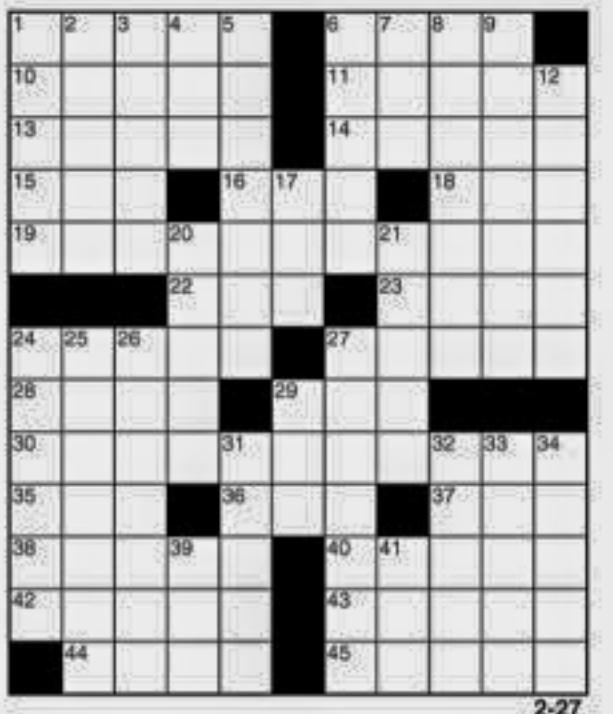
### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Showy parrot
- 6 Jumbles of noise
- 10 Conductor Seiji
- 11 Boise's state
- 13 Less polite
- 14 Street urchin
- 15 Before, to bards
- 16 Enjoy Aspen
- 18 Tax agcy.
- 19 Do a pre-meal chore
- 22 Equip
- 23 Slimming plan
- 24 Locker poster
- 27 Horse-drawn carriages
- 28 Writer Oz
- 29 Couple
- 30 Describe a situation
- 35 Bounder

DOWN

- 1 Societal norms
- 2 Sky color
- 3 West Point student
- 4 Stunned wonder
- 5 Destroyer, for example
- 6 Number unit
- 7 Lupino of films
- 8 Neighbor of South
- 9 Laverne's pal
- 12 Starts
- 17 Gunpowder holder
- 20 Reliance
- 21 Kind of committee
- 24 Philosopher Blaise
- 25 Parent's warning
- 26 Contrary to good manners
- 27 Whodunit character
- 29 -- Moines
- 31 Obeys
- 32 Musical set in Argentina
- 33 More polite
- 34 Doorway
- 39 Cub's cave
- 41 Expected



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



### BEETLE BAILEY



### BY MORT WALKER



### BABY BLUES



### BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

