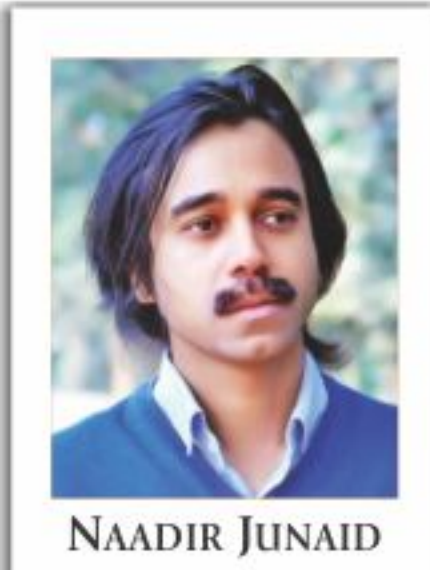


SAVE OUR HEROES FROM OBLIVION



MAJOR (retd) Ali Haider Ziauddin, a valiant freedom fighter, passed away recently. In 1971, he was a Second Lieutenant in the Pakistan army. He was on leave in his hometown Pirojpur when the Liberation War began. The young

artillery officer joined the Mukti Bahini and fought bravely against the Pakistani forces in Sector 9. He was appointed Sub-Sector Commander of the Sundarbans, Pirojpur and Bagerhat areas.

When I was reading the online reports informing of his expiry, I observed unhappily that a few newspapers wrote that in 1971 he was the Commanding Officer of First East Bengal Regiment. It was also stated that First East Bengal Regiment was a unit operating in Sector 9. I also noticed that the full name of this freedom fighter was not mentioned in the obituaries published in online and print versions of our newspapers.

As a Second Lieutenant, AH Ziauddin could not be the Commanding Officer of First East Bengal Regiment. In 1971, this military unit operated in various parts of Sylhet. But AH Ziauddin took part in battle in the Sundarbans and Pirojpur. The Commanding Officer of First East Bengal from August to December 1971 was then Major M Ziauddin, Bir Uttam. Unlike AH Ziauddin, M Ziauddin BU defected from the Pakistan army in August 1971 and fled to India along with then Majors Abul Manzoor and Abu Taher and then Captain Patwari. Soon they arrived in Bangladesh and joined the Liberation War. M Ziauddin is still alive. It is very disappointing that a few of our newspapers mistook AH Ziauddin for M Ziauddin only because their names are similar. And it was a regrettable mistake to write that First Bengal Regiment belonged to Sector 9. Sector 9 did not have regular military units. Various guerrilla groups comprised of the army and police members and civilians constituted this Sector. The factual errors in the newspapers revealed the journalists' lack of knowledge about freedom fighters as well as the history of our Liberation War.



Painting by Aminul Islam

I was displeased to see such inaccuracies in the news stories but I was not surprised. For quite some time now, I have been observing an abysmal lack of knowledge, especially among young people, about our freedom fighters. In my classes at Dhaka University and in my interactions with young people outside the classroom, I often tend to discuss freedom fighters and various events of our Liberation War. To my great disappointment, most of the time I found that their knowledge about our freedom fighters was scanty. After noticing the serious mistakes in the obituaries, I became curious to know if my current students were aware of the correct information about a freedom fighter like Ali Haider Ziauddin. In one of my classes of the undergraduate-level course "Political Processes and Institutions," I asked the students about him. Only three students out of nearly 60 could say that he was a Sub-Sector Commander of Sector 9. The rest of the students had never heard of him, and

they did not even read his obituaries in the newspapers.

For me, seeing these young people demonstrate ignorance about our freedom fighters has been a regular phenomenon. My current students' unfamiliarity with Major Ziauddin only shows that the unwillingness of our young people to know about the heroes of 1971 persists. In this situation, would it be absurd to surmise that the incorrect information in the newspaper obituaries is indicative of a general apathy towards our freedom fighters and Liberation War history?

In a consumerist culture, emphasis is placed on entertainers rather than real heroes who rebelled against unjust circumstances to bring social transformation. Heroic and noble deeds are of little value in a society where life is ruled by the pursuit of material benefits. Real heroes distinguished by their rare accomplishments hardly receive media attention in a consumer society. On the

contrary, modern mass media tend to bring certain individuals—who are able to carry off a performance with panache—in the limelight. Their alluring appeal and glamorous performances are celebrated in today's mass media world because such attributes serve to intensify consumer lust, thereby aiding the market.

Media theorist Daniel J Boorstin draws a distinction between a hero and a celebrity. For him, the hero created himself, whereas the celebrity is constructed by the media. As he puts it, "the hero is made by folklore, sacred texts, and history books, but the celebrity is the creature of gossip, of public opinion, of magazines, newspapers, and the ephemeral images of movie and television screen. The celebrity is born in the daily papers and never loses the mark of his fleeting origin."

In a society marked by its enormous craving for capitalistic values, people of glorious deeds have been constantly overshadowed by mass-

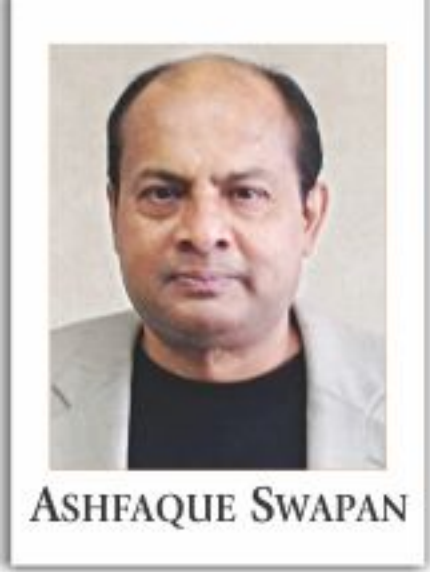
produced pseudo-heroes who are regarded by Boorstin as "marketable human models." Marxist writer Christopher Caudwell says that instead of revering heroes, the consumer society tends to worship "charlatans" who "have power over men but not over matter." For the Marxists, acts of heroes have a social significance. Our freedom fighters rose up against an oppressive regime. By risking their lives they fought for a new social order which would bring freedom from colonial domination. Is it enough to publish newspaper supplements and to televise special programmes depicting their heroic tales of courage and sacrifice only on March 26 and December 16? How can we expect our young people to gain substantial knowledge about Ziauddin and his military comrades, Shafi Imam Rumi and his fellow guerrillas and rural freedom fighters, if media exposure is constantly given to those individuals possessing glamour and market appeal? In contemporary society, do the families, teachers, media and political parties try to make young people aware of the necessity to attain sufficient knowledge about our War of Liberation? Do we make people understand that contemporary electronic heroes should not be confused with the real heroes of our country?

Our society will be deprived of true exemplars if mere entertainers are continually projected as public figures by the mass media. Various issues attract our attention these days, but the worrying signs of societal apathy towards our own history do not seem to perturb us. Our society is already feeling the reverberations of some of our young people having turned into religious fanatics. Can we then say that we have been successful in inspiring the new generation to embrace the spirit of 1971 which is antithetical to religious intolerance, political oppression and social discrimination?

If the heroes of 1971 are relegated to oblivion in the country they had liberated, that would be a tremendous shame. Apathy and indifference to our freedom fighters will make our society devoid of historical consciousness which may have far-reaching consequences for Bangladesh in the years to come.

Naadir Junaid is a professor in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at University of Dhaka.

The Republicans' healthcare debacle



FORMER US President Barack Obama is gone, but his historic achievement Obamacare lives on. The

Republican Party is in complete control today—it has a majority in both the US Senate and House and has a Republican president, yet it fell flat on its face in its effort to repeal Obama's ambitious attempt to make healthcare accessible to most US citizens.

The US House had already passed a law to repeal and replace Obama's healthcare law, which Republicans have been promising to dump for seven long years. Republicans rode on public rage to win elections, but when push came to shove, they could not cross the finish line.

The US healthcare is devilishly complicated, so it's impossible to give a succinct summary of how it works. Pre-Obama, US healthcare was a scandal. The United States is the only industrialised nation which doesn't offer healthcare to all its citizens. If somehow you lost insurance, and had a longstanding disease like blood pressure or diabetes, you had what health insurers called a "pre-existing condition." Your new health insurance would cost an arm and a leg, or companies would refuse to insure you at all. Medical bankruptcy—going bankrupt because of medical bills—is one of the most

common reasons for people going bankrupt. Healthcare costs continued to grow.

Obamacare was a serious attempt to address this crisis. A simple way to look at Obamacare is to think of it as a three-legged stool. The first condition was that everybody would be guaranteed access to insurance. However, this would raise costs for insurers. So Obamacare made it compulsory for everybody to buy insurance, the so-called individual mandate. This would create an enormous pool of people to share costs.

But what about people of limited means? Insurance would just be too expensive. So Obamacare offered generous subsidies.

The system has been far from perfect, but thanks to Obamacare, tens of millions of Americans have gained health insurance.

Republicans fought the law tooth and nail from day one. They predicted its collapse. But to

Republicans failed to pass the very law that they had passed before when Obama was president, when they could posture to their hearts' content, secure in the knowledge that Obama would veto the law.



Arizona Senator John McCain's decisive "no" vote on the "skinny repeal" of Obamacare was a dramatic moment to witness on the Senate floor. McCain's vote killed the bill which the GOP had been railing against for seven years.

paraphrase Mark Twain: "Reports of its demise have been greatly exaggerated."

Last year, with the victory of US President Donald Trump, Republicans were giddy with joy. There was talk about repealing Obamacare by January.

Yet a funny thing happened. It turned out that while Obama's healthcare law had always struggled in polls, once people learned it might be yanked off, Americans began to realise its value. Constituents stormed lawmakers' constituency meetings across the country, putting the fear of God in lawmakers.

How was a law that people were ambivalent about before so popular now? Psychologists call it "loss aversion." Democrats faced it when they tried to introduce Obamacare. Fear of losing a benefit trumps possible gains for many Americans. Democrats paid a terrible price in elections for introducing a law that they were confident would help people, because voters worried about how it might hurt them. Republicans were only too happy to fan those fears.

After seven years, in a delicious irony, when Republicans tried to dump Obamacare, it was their turn to face the wrath of the loss-averse public. And Republicans did not

cover themselves in glory with the plans they came up with. The non-partisan scorekeeper, the Congressional Budget Office, gave devastating estimates of Republican proposals, warning that tens of millions would lose health insurance if their proposals became law.

And then there was Trump. What a stark contrast with Obama, who had made a sustained, passionate, reasoned case for his healthcare law throughout the long painstaking process of the law's passage. Trump, it became abundantly clear, had no idea what the healthcare plan was. It's not an accident that he is the tweeter-in-chief—124 characters appear to be

just about the length he can hold a thought. His contradictory and sometimes absurd remarks on the healthcare battle remind me of media expert Ben Bagdikian's tongue-in-cheek dismissal of a national newspaper: "It gives new depth to the word 'shallow'."

By the time the Republican attempt to slay Obamacare collapsed in the US Senate, it had become a bizarre mixture of soap opera and a theatre of the absurd. Arizona Senator John McCain, recovering from a recent diagnosis of cancer, flew down for a vote where he delivered the *coup de grace*. Despite a majority in Senate, Republican members failed.

It left behind a trail that reeked of hypocrisy. Republicans failed to pass the very law that they had passed before when Obama was president, when they could posture to their hearts' content, secure in the knowledge that Obama would veto the law. This time around, as there were real consequences, they failed to walk the walk.

So in the end, the fiery seven-year-long Republican attempt to slay Obamacare became, to quote from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, "but a walking shadow, a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/And then is heard no more. It is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/Signifying nothing."

And thank goodness for that. Tens of millions of Americans will continue to have healthcare.

Ashfaq Swapan is a contributing editor for *Siliconer*, a monthly periodical for South Asians in the United States.

A WORD A DAY



METANOIA
noun

Change in one's way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Icy looks
 - 7 Complain
 - 11 Swordmaking city
 - 12 Finished
 - 13 Drive
 - 14 Places
 - 15 Be in accord
 - 16 Like some carrots
 - 17 Factual info
 - 18 Deceptive front
 - 19 Cherished
 - 21 —Plaines
 - 22 Some blood suckers
 - 15 A pop
 - 26 Radius partner
 - 27 Vowel topper
 - 29 Glass section
- DOWN**
- 33 Film units
 - 34 "Last Supper" setting
 - 35 Small setback
 - 36 "Calm down!"
 - 37 Sicilian peak
 - 38 Recess
 - 39 Romantic bloom
 - 40 Whisk's kin
 - 8 Guacamole base
 - 9 Wanes
 - 10 Lion groups
 - 16 "Splish Splash" singer
 - 18 Quake locale
 - 20 Tony-winning play of 1975
 - 22 Keepsake
 - 23 Site of Joan of Arc's victory
 - 24 Pudding choice
 - 25 Cruise treasurer
 - 28 Pond growth
 - 30 Dole out
 - 31 Unsophisticated
 - 32 Door sign
 - 34 Lawn burrower
 - 36 Truck part

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

B	E	T	T	E	P	E	T	A	L
E	Q	U	A	L	A	R	U	B	A
S	U	R	G	E	T	A	R	O	T
T	I	N	C	C	I	N	U	T	
O	N	E	T	O	O	E	N	E	
W	E	D	D	E	D	A	D	S	
T	I	D	I	E	S	T			
A	C	H	E	C	A	S	H	E	W
R	O	E	G	I	S	E	L	I	
A	S	P	A	L	T	T	A	P	
M	I	A	M	I	E	L	I	T	E
I	N	G	O	T	R	I	D	E	R
S	E	E	P	S	N	E	E	D	S

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

WITH THE INCREASED USE OF DRONES AND ROBOTS, DO YOU THINK SOLDIERS WILL BECOME OBSOLETE?

SOME ALREADY ARE

Z

GREG+MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

A PARTY INVITATION.

WHAT IS "R.S.V.P."?

IT'S FRENCH.

IT TRANSLATES TO "WARN US IF HAMMIE IS COMING."

I'M A MULTINATIONAL PEST.