

144TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF KHANBAHADUR AHSANULLAH

# A pioneer of Muslim education in British-India

MD MONIRUL ISLAM

DECEMBER 27 is the 144th birth anniversary of Khanbahadur Ahsanullah, the renowned academician, educator and social reformer, a reputed philanthropist, a famed literary figure and Sufi thinker of the sub-continent. He was the pride of the Muslims in Bengal and one of the most enlightened personalities of his time. He was one of the remarkable pioneers of Muslim renaissance in Bengal. Popularly known as the founder of Ahsania Mission, Ahsanullah is considered a great Sufi thinker. His contributions to society were multi-dimensional, but the aim of this article is to remember and acknowledge his contributions to education.

Khanbahadur Ahsanullah was an educationist, an educational reformer and education scientist. He was an Assistant Director of the Department of Education in undivided Bengal and Assam. For some time, he also held the position of Director of the Department of Education. In undivided Bengal, no Indian had hitherto been appointed as the Assistant Director. Amongst the Hindus and Muslims, he was the first person of Bengal to join the Indian Education Service (IES).

Before speaking of his contribution, it is necessary to understand the then conditions of the Indian education system. Initially, the East India Company did not evince any particular interest in matters of education. In 1757, the British had captured Bengal and after a couple of decades, in 1781, Warren Hastings established a Madrasa in Calcutta to encourage the study of Muslim laws as well as Arabic and Persian languages. In 1791, a Sanskrit College was established by Jonathan Duncan to promote the study of Hindu laws and

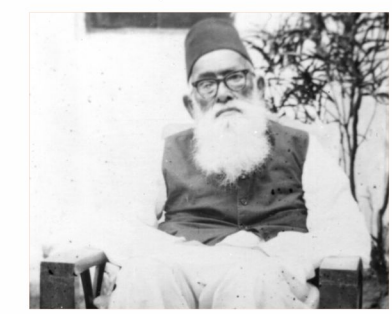
philosophy in Benares. Therefore it must be contended that during the first three decades of the 19th century, the development of education in India took place only through traditional institutions. Then the East India Company began to adopt a dual policy in the sphere of education. It discouraged the prevalent system of oriental education and gave importance to western education and the English language. The Charter Act of 1813 adopted a provision to spend one lakh rupees per annum for the spread of education in India. But Muslims were not interested in this education, whereas the Hindus readily adopted the British system. As a result the entire Muslim community was detached from this modern education stream. Here, Ahsanullah began a movement to elicit interest from the Muslim community in modern education.

Khanbahadur Ahsanullah was born in a respectable Muslim family of the Village of Nala Sharif under Sakthia district on December 27, 1873. He obtained his BA in 1894 and an MA degree in philosophy from the Presidency College under the University of Kolkata in 1895. After getting his master's degree, he joined as a supernumerary teacher at the Rajshahi Collegiate School under the education department of the government of Bengal in 1896. He was appointed as the first Muslim headmaster of the Rajshahi Collegiate School in 1904. In 1924 he was promoted to the post of Assistant Director of the Education Department of undivided Bengal and Assam.

Khanbahadur Ahsanullah's unparalleled contribution for the development and reformation of education as well as his philosophy of education are remarkable milestones in the Indian subcontinent's educational

history. The entire service life of Ahsanullah was spent in the Department of Education. During his career, spanning 34 years, he not only served the government dutifully but also was devoted to the welfare of the neglected and backward people of his community. He undertook various reforms for their educational development. By reforming the secondary and higher madrasa curriculum and syllabus, he enabled students who passed

In his lifetime, Khanbahadur Ahsanullah wrote more than a hundred books. Many of his books, specifically, *Shibkha Kherte Bangia Musliman*, *Teacher's Manual and Calculus University Commission Report 1917-1919*, exposing on his philosophy of education. Ahsanullah believed that education is a basic objective of the state and enlightened human beings. He also put great emphasis on women's education.



Khanbahadur Ahsanullah (1873-1965)

madrasa examinations to go to university. He played an active role in creating the post of Maulvi, (equivalent to the post of Pundit), in schools and colleges. He also contributed to the creation of the New Scheme Madrasa. In schools and colleges, he readjusted the ratio of students for the Muslim students and made provisions so that an increasing number of poor but meritorious students could study free of cost.

Ahsanullah established many educational institutions during his life-time in different areas in British India. *Islamia College* (Moulana Azad College), where Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman studied, was established by his contribution. Ahsanullah made valuable contribution to the establishment of Baker Hostel, which was also political with Sheikh Mujib's education and political emergence. He played a major role in establishing

many other student hostels in and outside Calcutta including the Taylor Hostel, Carmichael Hostel, Muller Institute of Kolkata and the Fuller Hostel in Rajshahi.

Ahsanullah was a prominent decision maker in almost every committee related to education. He was elected member of the senate and the syndicate of Kolkata University. He was a member of the Horrell Committee and a member of the special committee to establish the University of Dhaka. He was the Court Member (senate) of the University of Dhaka as well. For his numerous contributions in the sector of education and social reformation, Ahsanullah was conferred the title of Khanbahadur by the British government in 1911. He was also elected a member of Royal Society of London in the same year. Ahsanullah was an official member of the Muhammad Educational Advisory Committee.

Khanbahadur Ahsanullah had a significant contribution in the establishment of the University of Dhaka (1921). When the British government showed interest in establishing a separate university in Dhaka, many Hindu leaders were not happy with the government's intention. Though, the Nathan committee was formed to establish the university, during the period of World War I, the committee remained mostly inactive. In 1914, the Horrell Committee (special committee to establish Dhaka University) was formed with Khanbahadur Ahsanullah as a member. As a member of the committee, Ahsanullah was able to convince the commission of its importance, eventually leading to the setting up of the University of Dhaka. On November 1, 1919 a nine-member senate special committee was formed (Khanbahadur Ahsanullah was a member of the committee) which

submitted its report along with a note of dissent from Khanbahadur Ahsanullah. In the note, Ahsanullah reiterated the reasons for the establishment of the university. Most of the suggestions from Khanbahadur Ahsanullah were adopted in the Dhaka University Act 1920.

During his time, there was a practice of writing the names of students in examination papers. Many people believed that this open identity went against the interests of a section of the students. For this reason, Ahsanullah went all out to introduce the system of writing the roll numbers of students instead of their names. This was first applied in the honours and MA examinations and later adopted in the IA and RA examinations of the time.

Khanbahadur Ahsanullah was blessed with a long life which he dedicated for the advancement of a largely backward Muslim population. He played a pioneering role in consolidating the social status of Muslims of British-governed India by rejuvenating their thoughts and values and by lifting them from an all-consuming process of social degeneration. The goal of bringing a positive change both in the lives and the psyche of the Muslims had to be set for himself, to be fully accomplished through his works and deeds. As a result, Khanbahadur Ahsanullah became an institution in himself. The name of this vast, prodigious personality, who lived long enough to dredge himself in the sunlight of an entire millennium, will be remembered again and again for generations. Although his life and activities are now a part of history, this nation and its people will continue to be indebted to him in many ways.

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# Trump's unilateralism over Jerusalem isolates America

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

March 2016 to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), he declared amid cheers, "We will move the American embassy to the eternal capital of the Jewish people Jerusalem."

Then when Benjamin Netanyahu visited the White House soon after Trump's inauguration, Trump did not for once support the two-state solution at the press conference on February 15, 2017. There are other clues—Trump's repeated anti-Muslim tweets and the Muslim-ban; choice of David Friedman, and staunch supporter of Israel, as US ambassador to Israel; when Trump visited Israel in May 2017, he broke with tradition to be the first US president to visit the Old City and the Holy Land (Jerusalem and Wall of Tears, and prayer site for Jews). However, he did not make the Jerusalem announcement early in his presidency, although the conspiracy was cooking ever since he walked into the Oval Office. Clearly, Trump's preposterous decision came in connivance with Netanyahu.

Finally, one must give credit to Trump for finally taking off the mask of "honest broker". He has come out clean on "Washington's ultimate aim on Palestine. Over the past decades under both Democratic and Republican presidents, America has played

the game of duplicity—as the Israelis and Palestinians and—arming the assault and conducting every ill-gal act. There are now fears that Trump may go a step further, and legitimise all illegal Jewish settlements built in occupied Palestine. The Oslo Accords (1995) is now dead along with the two-state solution. Palestinians and the world are now relieved of American diplomacy.

Two important diplomatic demarches were activated following Trump's declaration. First, was the OIC Extraordinary Summit in Istanbul on December 13 called by OIC Chair, Turkish President Erdogan. Second, were the UN Security Council and General Assembly meetings, which were held on December 18 and 21 respectively.

The OIC summit was attended by all 57 members of the organisation at the highest level. Rejecting Trump's move the Islamic world in the Final Declaration titled "Freedom for Al Quds" condemned the "US administrations unlawful statement regarding the status of Al Quds" and stated, "we recognise the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. We invite the whole world to recognise East Jerusalem as the occupied capital of the State of Palestine." What is noteworthy despite political differences among members was that the Final Declaration was adopted unanimously.

The UN Security Council meeting came when non-permanent member Egypt moved a draft resolution on Jerusalem on December 18. The resolution did not mention the US specifically, but expressed "deep regret at recent decisions concerning the status of Jerusalem." The resolution called on all states to refrain from establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem. It was a stunning

rebuke to Trump's decision as it went against established international consensus as also international law. All 15 members, except US, voted for the resolution. US Ambassador Nikki Haley vetoed the resolution and threatened other members of the Security Council saying that the resolution was "an insult" and that would be forgotten.

When US vetoed the UNSC resolution,



US Ambassador to UN Nikki Haley is the only one to raise her hand, voting against a Security Council resolution on Jerusalem, December 18, 2017.

to block the resolution but were totally isolated. Sensing defeat Ambassador Haley issued blatant threats that she would "take names" and that President Trump will be watching this vote carefully. Fuming, Haley went on to say that those voting against would face retaliation and cuts in US aids.

The resolution was adopted by an overwhelming 128 votes in the House of 128



US Ambassador to UN Nikki Haley is the only one to raise her hand, voting against a Security Council resolution on Jerusalem, December 18, 2017.

countries proved that Trump nations but supporting the Muslim that these nations but upholding international law against its status. Angry Netanyahu heeded the resolution calling the UN a "house of lies". Palestinian President Abbas described the resolution as a "victory for Palestine".

Palestinians no longer have any illusion of a two-state solution. Unfortunately, they remain badly divided. Sadly, Yasser Arafat is not around to unify opposing factions and lead the peace process. Keeping the PA divided has been a conspiracy of both America and Israel. As long as Fatah and Hamas are enemies—the PA remains weak, unable to mount an infitah, which is to the advantage of Israel. The worry is that the conflict is likely to take a new shape as there will be no realignment of forces.

Unilateralism is Trump's default Middle East peace policy has made America terribly isolated. The Trump-Netanyahu one-state solution will not succeed as two opposing nationalism cannot exist in a small state. "Can two snakes share a proverb."

Clashes with Israeli forces have killed 14 Christmas festivities in Bethlehem on December 25 for fear of violence. Pope Francis in his Christmas message said that the Middle East needs two states to end the conflict. Palestine has given lots of blood for their state over the past seven decades. They seem destined to pay more in order to establish an independent State of Palestine.

Mahmood Hasan is government ambassador and secretary of the Bangladesh former ambassador

## A WORD

## A DAY

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

### ACROSS

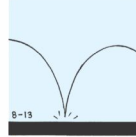
- 1 Take back
- 7 Dance move
- 11 Pencil end
- 12 Gambler's giveaway
- 13 "Raging Bull" star
- 14 Paris airport
- 15 E-tail business
- 17 Canary's home
- 20 Sprightly
- 23 Clumsy guy
- 24 Swindled
- 26 Remote
- 27 Have debts
- 28 In addition
- 29 Whistle weasels
- 31 Kickoff
- 32 Police trap

### DOWN

- 33 Flex
- 34 Bahamian port
- 37 Use one's incisors
- 39 Wear down
- 43 Greek vowel
- 44 Iran, once
- 45 Dreary shade
- 46 "Dracula" author
- 21 Sheet material
- 22 Finished
- 24 Salad servers
- 25 Stunned wonder
- 26 Spectrum
- 29 Before, to ends
- 33 Pack animal
- 35 Easy targets
- 36 Aid in crime
- 37 Jazz job
- 38 Negating link
- 40 Inquire
- 41 Conk out
- 42 Lobe spot

## BEETLE BAILEY

## BY MORT WALKER



STOP! CAN I GET OUT UNTIL YOUR HICUPS ARE OVER!

© 1983

## BABY BLUES

## BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



AWHH! I LOVE IT WHEN THE KIDS FINALLY GET TO BED AND WE CAN RELAX.

## YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



## TODAY'S ANSWER



## FETIAL

## ADJECTIVE

## Concerned with declarations of war and treaties of peace