

# Rise and fall of the Osman family



SHAKHAWAT LITON

THE story of the Osman family in Narayanganj is intriguing indeed. Once a well-reputed family, in later years its image has been tainted by members of the family for their rowdiness and various wrongdoings.

The latest addition to the saga of notoriety is the mayhem that we saw in Narayanganj city on Tuesday as supporters of Awami League MP Shamim Osman allegedly attacked city mayor Selina Hayat Ivy and her followers. This irked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and caused ample embarrassment for her party too.

This is not an isolated incident. Osman and his followers have been engaged in numerous unlawful and controversial activities over the years.

His brother, Jatiya Party MP Salim Osman, has also contributed to the further blemishing of Osman family's image. He was a much talked-about Osman family member in 2016 as he was found to be the mastermind behind all the unwholesome incidents centring on a school teacher in Narayanganj. On May 13, 2016 Shyamal Kanti Bhakta, a headmaster, was punished in the most humiliating and inhuman manner in the presence of Salim. The public shaming of the school teacher triggered nationwide outrage and further tainted the family's image.

But the incident took an uglier turn as religious bigots were brought into the scene to defend Salim Osman and to counter the overwhelming public protest against him. The religious forces—Hefazat-e-Islam and Khatme Nubuwwat—took to the streets demanding capital punishment of the school teacher, accusing him of making derogatory remarks about Islam.

The allegation against the teacher was proved false in an investigation carried out by a committee of the education ministry and the teacher was reinstated in his post. But the religious fanatics continued their agitation in support of Salim Osman and with the demand of punishing the school teacher and removal of the education minister.

Salim Osman's actions against the school teacher and instigation of religious groups to take to the streets in his defence were against communal harmony and in contradiction to the core values of his grandfather Osman Ali who had worked hard to maintain communal harmony in the days of political turbulence in the 1940s.

**The rise**  
Salim and Shamim's grandfather M Osman Ali established the Osman family in Narayanganj. Osman Ali, who migrated to Narayanganj from Comilla in the 1920s, had emerged as a distinguished personality for his good work in politics, business, culture and social welfare, according to Banglapedia.

In recognition of his philanthropic works, the



Until Shamim Osman's election as MP in 1996 and subsequent emergence as the most-feared politician in Narayanganj, the fall of the Osman family in terms of reputation was not in the cards. FILE PHOTO

British government had conferred upon him the title of "Khan Sahib". But he disowned the title in 1944 in protest of a repressive policy of the then British government. His courageous rejection of the title was widely admired.

With the beginning of the Pakistan Movement based on the Lahore Resolution of 1940, he organised the movement in Narayanganj and tried to maintain communal harmony with the cooperation of the leftist and other local leaders. He had been able to pacify the communal tension between the Hindus and Muslims in Narayanganj in 1946 on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Jhulan Jatra.

Senior Osman's activities drew people's attention and earned their respect and love. In the general election of 1946, he was elected a member of Bengal Provincial Assembly by defeating Khwaja Habibullah, the Nawab of Dhaka. He propagated progressive thoughts. He was then the president of Narayanganj City Muslim League and vice president of Dhaka District Muslim League. He had been the president of Narayanganj City Muslim League from 1942 to 1947. After the partition of India in 1947, controversies arose in Dhaka district unit of Muslim League—the Nawabs of Dhaka were on one side and the progressive group on the other. Osman supported the latter and gave a public reception to Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy in Narayanganj.

Osman Ali was the founding member of Awami Muslim League—the first opposition party in Pakistan floated on June 23, 1949. He was held

in high regard by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other politicians of the day. He played a vital role in the Language Movement of 1952 and was imprisoned for taking part in the movement. Osman Ali actively participated in the constitutional movement of 1962, Six-Point Movement and Mass Upsurge of 1969 (Banglapedia).

Osman Ali, according to Banglapedia, was devoted to literature and culture. In the 1930s, a literary magazine styled *Shabuj Bangla* was published from Narayanganj. He was its editor. Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Abanindra Nath Tagore, Mohitlal Majumdar, Jasimuddin, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Professor Monsuruddin, Bande Ali Miah, Kazi Abdul Wadud, and Mahmuda Khatun Siddiqua used to contribute to this magazine. Osman Ali died on March 19, 1971.

Following his father's footsteps, AKM Shamsuzzoha, Osman Ali's eldest son, joined politics and was elected to the Provincial Assembly; he took a front row in politics. He was elected MP after independence in 1973. He was also one of the founders of Bangladesh Awami League and a close associate of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He was awarded posthumously Swadhinata Padak, according to a news report run by BSS, the government official news agency, on the occasion of his 29th death anniversary on February 20, 2016.

## The fall

While Shamsuzzoha was alive, his eldest son Nasim Osman joined Jatiya Party led by military

dictator Gen Ershad. He became an MP in the 1986 election marred by widespread electoral irregularities. Later he was elected MP in the elections of 1988, 2008 and 2014 on Jatiya Party's ticket.

Nasim's sudden death in April 2014 opened up the window for Salim Osman to get elected as MP in a by-election. He is a businessman in Narayanganj and allegedly controls all the trade, business, imports and exports of Narayanganj. He did not need to be an MP earlier though to use political clout to control all the local business thanks to his elder and younger brothers, Nasim Osman and Shamim Osman.

But until the youngest brother Shamim Osman's election as MP in 1996 and subsequent emergence as the most-feared politician in Narayanganj, the fall of the Osman family (in terms of reputation) was not in the cards. When he was MP between 1991 and 2001, Shamim Osman was in total control of Narayanganj. The local administration was forced to side with him. The entire Narayanganj was held hostage to him and his cadres. People did not dare oppose him. Shamim Osman earned the name of the godfather of local criminals. After his party's polls debacle in 2001, Shamim fled first to India and then to Canada.

He returned in December 2006 but left again the day before the 1/11 changeover in 2007. After around eight years in self-exile, he came back to Narayanganj in April 2009 when his party AL returned to power. He had the ruling AL's backing in Narayanganj mayoral polls in 2011. The party had refused to support Selina Hayat Ivy, who defeated Shamim by a huge margin. But Ivy had to face enormous difficulties to run the city corporation in her first term due to Shamim's opposition to her.

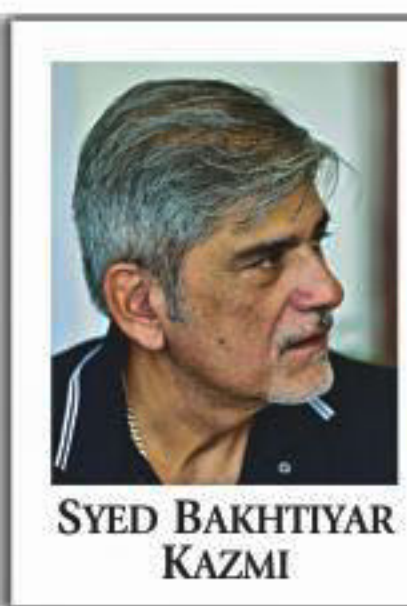
The ruling AL picked Shamim Osman to contest for Narayanganj-4 constituency in the 2014 parliamentary election, dropping lawmaker and film actress Sarah Begum Kabori. His election as an MP in the one-sided polls helped him consolidate his base in Narayanganj.

In recent years, the Osman family drew flak on many occasions as their names came up in several incidents including the killing of schoolboy Taqi and the sensational seven-murder case of Narayanganj. But nobody in Narayanganj dares to speak in public against Shamim Osman or his family.

The image of the Osman family has been tainted by none other than its own members. The saga of the Osman family reminds us of a basic universal rule: No one can undermine you until you undermine yourself. And thus, the controversial activities of the Osman brothers have continued to bring the family ill repute. It has now become a glaring example of how the good name of ancestors can be soiled by the later generations.

Shakhawat Liton is Special Correspondent at The Daily Star.

# Raising doubts



SYED BAKHTIYAR KAZMI

REMARKABLE as it may sound, they have made a science out of fooling people. No wonder as time passes, idiots are becoming, more and more, the superior race, in Herbert Spencer's "survival of the fittest".

I, for a very long while, have been stumped by rational peoples' stubbornness to change their views in the face of hard facts—until now when I came across agnotology defined as "a branch of science which looks at the ways in which doubt or ignorance about certain subjects is created. A very good example of how this happens is the publication of scientific studies that rely on data that is inaccurate or misleading. More generally, the term also highlights the increasingly common condition where more knowledge of a subject leaves one more uncertain than before."

Apparently, Donald Trump cannot claim credit for agnotology's origin which, on a personal level, is even more sinister. In the face of indisputable facts from

unquestionable sources relating to the harmful effects of smoking, way back in the 1960s, there were predictions that the day of reckoning was around the corner for the tobacco industry. Almost 60 years later, they still make bundles of money.

The strategy is well explained in an internal memo of a tobacco company from 1969: "Doubt is our product since it is the best means of competing with the 'body of fact' that exists in the mind of the general public. It is also the means of establishing a controversy."

Apparently, there are a bunch of strategies which verge from clever and complex to downright simple when applying agnotology. In the first instance, the strategy is to promise to look into the issue in depth and allocating all resources to uncover the truth.

The second stage is where you raise doubts, complicate the question, ask more questions which are generally irrelevant, and find other alternatives to lay blame on.

Next is when you start questioning the original information—where is the evidence, the experts are conflicted, the evidence is circumstantial—and ultimately the entire exposé is irrelevant. And once enough time has passed, and the issue crops up again, you



DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION BY GRÉGOIRE A MEYER

retort, don't you have anything better to do than pull skeletons out of the closet?

When you now, after reading this, think back on how our leadership, political and otherwise, has been responding to scandals over the past many years, you suddenly realise that they seem to have the tobacco

industry's agnotology playbook. Come what may, do not agree, nor disagree, keep the controversy alive, keep going around in circles until it is stale news. Rather simplistic is it not when presented in this manner; but you wonder why it works. Is the man on the street really that stupid?

Apparently, there are reasons why the common man gets duped. First of all, half truths or untruths are very simple statements while facts are complicated. For instance, if I believe that the stock market is not a barometer of a country's economy, the proof requires a detailed analysis spread over many decades to identify the absence of causation and correlation between the stock market and the real economy. On the other hand, since the barometer argument is simpler, it sticks to everybody's mind, everyone believes it!

Facts are also boring. The statement that the economy is doing well since the GDP growth rate has improved considerably is simple, exciting and generates positivity; irrespective of the fact that except for the very few, most don't even understand what is GDP and how it is calculated.

Contrarily, trying to prove that all the underlying debt contracted to sustain this growth will have an adverse impact on the

country's resources requires detailed mathematical workings based on complicated assumptions which nobody even wants to understand. In fact, I am sure that the takeaway from this paragraph for most readers was that GDP is growing, which is good!

Finally, all of us hate to be wrong. Quoting from an article by Tim Harford, "When we hear facts that challenge us, we selectively amplify what suits us, ignore what does not, and reinterpret whatever we can." French dramatist Molière once wrote, "A learned fool is more foolish than an ignorant one." In the end, motivated reasoning gets you; if you believe the economy is doing great, the "feel good" will carry the day, irrespective of all boring data to the contrary.

Well, I for one have my answer, thanks to science. Unfortunately, the net conclusion is that facts just can't win. Apparently, the only solution to winning an argument is to make up an untruth even more fantastic, but simple, than the untruth you weren't to dispel. Science finally has proven that ignorance is bliss!

Syed Bakhtiyar Kazmi is a chartered accountant. Email: syed.bakhtiyarkazmi@gmail.com  
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A WORD

A DAY

A

FFLATUS

NOUN

A divine creative impulse or inspiration.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Cupid's missile

6 Perspire

11 Capital on the Nile

12 Nametag word

13 Winter sleep

15 Print units

16 Feeling down

17 Look upon

18 Train stop

20 Burger topper

23 Pines for

27 Whole range

28 TV's warrior princess

29 Stares stupidly

31 Song

32 Influences

34 "That's it!"

37 Roadhouse

38 Question of identity

41 Computer control of machines

44 Exemplary

45 Mexican mother

46 Shoulder muscles, for short

47 Starts business

DOWN

1 Massage target

2 Monsoon weather

3 Makes fun of

4 Mine rock

5 Deteriorate

6 Sundial reading

7 Dripping

8 Yale students

9 Lotion additive

10 Muscle quality

14 Carpet feature

18 Naps

19 Fare carriers

20 Chips buy

21 – loss

22 Police officer

24 Tennis need

25 Blasting stuff

26 Put into words

30 Eddie

31 Energetic person

33 Curry on TV

34 Litmus reddener

35 Jekyll's alter ego

36 Cain's brother

38 Broad

39 Rhino feature

40 Folding money

42 Have dinner

43 Spigot

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT