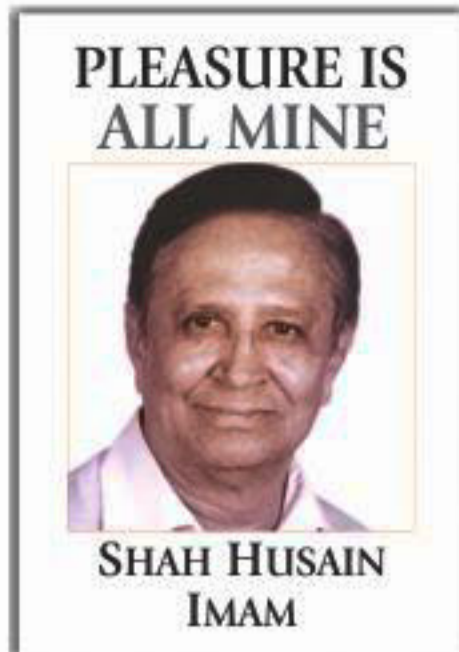


Honing social skills

As behavioural changes sweep over our society, is there anything we can do about it?



PLEASURE IS ALL MINE
SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

OUR social skills have somewhat blunted over time. Virtues that we had taken for granted in the past almost sound like pipe dreams today.

Tolerance, live-and-let-live, mutual, professional respect between men and women, consideration for the elderly, civility, courtesy, compassion, and hospitality—once the markers of social behaviour—have turned utopian, unattainable!

These have been replaced by one-upmanship, self-promotion, ladder-climbing by dash and push, success without ethics, heart-burning at other's excelling but legitimate attainment, insatiable greed ("The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed" -- Mahatma Gandhi).



Actually, a social revolution, quiet in some respects but loud in most others, has taken place in the country without an acknowledgement. Politics, economics and sociology have each played its part—in that order—to bring about a metamorphosis of social values, for good or evil. This has been conveniently called "a new normal."

Society has become consumerist, abjectly acquisitive, grabbing and exploitative. Long-drawn usurpation of power by extra-constitutional means and spoil system of legitimisation of power had treated popular will disdainfully as a doormat, so to speak. Strange political bedfellows of alignments were forged, sometime successfully, at times

floundering as ragtags. People lost some of their interest in national politics, though not in a passionately partisan sense. It never came to alienation. And, their interest in elections that were democratically held remained undiminished—in fact with a festive flair.

In the meantime, a change came over the traditional role of the burgeoning middle class. It has expanded over time with the growing size of the economy but its character has changed, rather perceptively, according to researchers and publicists. The middle class, once perceived as a change agent, has gone through a "culture" shift—towards an acquisitive and money-centric disposition. As a

result, their potential as a change agent may have now been compromised taking on a greater economic flavour.

Add to this bank scams, whopping capital flights, default loans and incidence of corruption, you have an issue with governance.

Knowing that it is not proper to have an overly negative view of aspects of society, we can't but turn to a dangerous trend in social behaviour. On numerous occasions we have noticed that when rowdies carry out acts of brutality, young men with mobile sets get immersed in recording the acts of violence and posting them. They just show a perverse interest in the incident with scant regard for the life of the

victim. Whereas they should have mustered the courage to resist and turn over the culprits to the police, they not only become mute spectators but also abettors to the crime.

Social skills are tools that enable people to communicate, learn, ask for help, and get needs met in appropriate ways. "Building good relationship with other people can greatly reduce stress and anxiety in your life, in fact improving your social support link to better mental health."

The process must begin with the children and at the primary school in a context where parental authority has weakened and generation gaps have blurred.

Skills for successful behaviour include four methods: (i) Enhance verbal communication with a note of caution about volume and tone of your voice; (ii) Learn the right manners in which to initiate a conversation; (iii) Find ways to expand conversations; and (iv) Steer clear of inflammatory topics.

We have a "self-confident manual" which may be used for years to come as a self-training material prepared by Mark Tyrrell, an expert in the field. He outlines six features: the ability to stay calm in social situations; listening skills (the art of connection); empathy with, and interest in, others' situation; knowing how to build rapport; knowing how, when and how much to talk about yourself (self-disclosure); and last but not least, looking into the eye and smiling.

Not some pep talk, really.

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LEST WE FORGET Tribute to a visionary leader

SYED ASHRAF ALI

TODAY, February 24, marks the second death anniversary of the iconic central banker AKN Ahmed who presided over the Bangladesh banking sector in the turbulent days of the 70s. His towering presence at the defining moments in the country's history reminds us of his inspirational leadership to resuscitate the country's seriously ailing banking industry.

Although Mr Ahmed left the Bangladesh banking arena several decades ago, he left behind a rich legacy that could serve us in good stead at this chaotic hour in the financial sector. Our reminiscence of the legendary banker this year carries special significance in the backdrop of the recent pandemonium in the banking industry characterised by poor management, large-scale loan defaults and plunder of bank money by fly-by-night shady characters masquerading as businesspeople.

The nine-month-long war with Pakistan had inevitably left a long trail of destruction in the country's infrastructures and economic lifelines. The banking industry was also equally in shambles. Dismayed by the failure of the leadership in the central bank to restore normalcy in this crucial sector, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman hand-picked AKN Ahmed in 1974 to head the bank to turn the situation around.

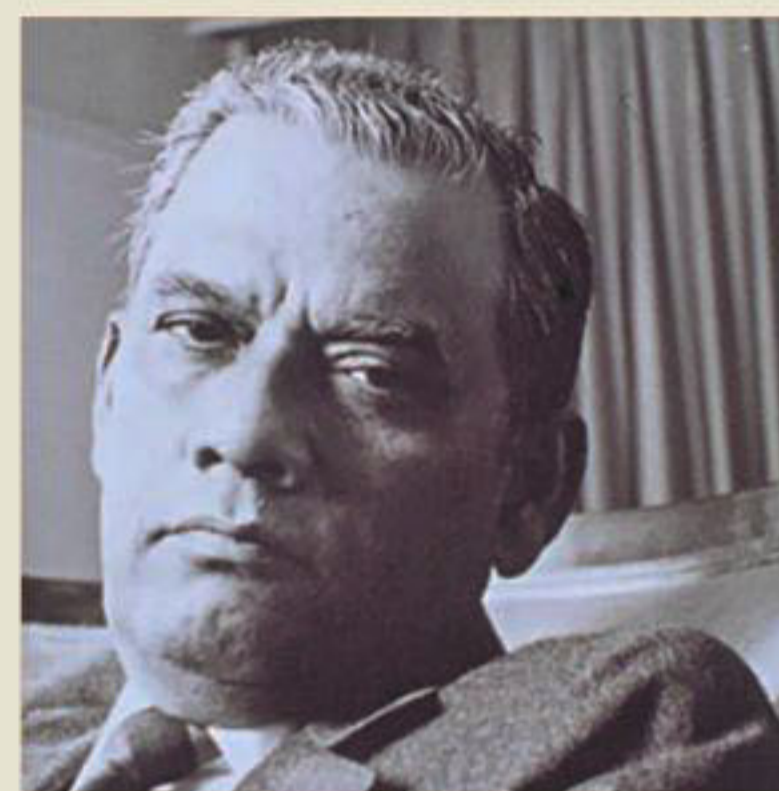
The governor wasted no time to start rebuilding the country's fragile financial structure literally from scratch. He initiated crucial measures to revamp the banking and financial sector. Among his notable deeds were strengthening supervision of banks, rationalisation of exchange rate structure of taka and demonetisation of higher denomination notes to flush out black money and fake notes. He orchestrated the demonetisation process so adroitly that it did not trigger chaos of the kind witnessed in the neighbour-

ing country a little more than a year ago.

A former renowned governor of Reserve Bank of India, Dr C Rangarajan in his lecture under the programme entitled "AKN Ahmed Memorial Lecture" arranged by the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management last month paid rich tributes to Mr Ahmed for his skilful management "to restore stability in the financial sector."

An avid disciplinarian, Governor Ahmed had the admirable quality of leadership to organise people to

The failure of the banking system to build adequate safeguards in their ATMs that led to a spate of frauds and forgeries in recent years, followed by leakage of a sizable chunk of the central bank's foreign exchange reserve, demonstrates how prophetic he had been in seeing these catastrophes coming.



AKN Ahmed

achieve difficult goals with consummate ease. He left his distinct footprints wherever he worked during the course of his long professional career in the central banks in Pakistan and Bangladesh and other organisations including the World Bank. He even ventured into the world of diplomacy as Bangladesh ambassador to Japan and South Korea.

The late governor is particularly remembered for his courage of conviction to swim against conventional thoughts, especially on complex economic

phenomena. He never hesitated to candidly express his thoughts in his own inimitable ways—without caring for their bitter fallout. His frank opinions often earned the inevitable wrath of his detractors walking in the corridors of power. After the August tragedy in 1975, they wasted no time to see him off from his favourite milieu of banking.

It was not the first time that he fell out with the powers that be. In 1971 he was interrogated at the military camp for days to close ranks with the junta

prodigious amount of articles and books on diverse topics ranging from central banking to world economic and political order, environment and technological changes. He demonstrated his versatility in penmanship by writing a book on Japanese culture and society. It earned him Alexander the Great gold medal from the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, Soka Geiki University, Tokyo. Late in his life he even ventured into the world of philosophy and spiritualism and penned a number of poems dealing especially with the traumas he experienced at different stages of his life.

Mr Ahmed launched a lifelong campaign for strengthening ethics in banking and contributed money and support to set up an annual lecture programme at the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management. Unfortunately, his pleadings seem to have fallen on deaf ears as demonstrated by falling ethical standards.

Mr Ahmed, being the visionary that he was, could foresee the dire consequences awaiting the banking sector for too much reliance on developing software without erecting a strong platform for developing hardware. The failure of the banking system to build adequate safeguards in their ATMs that led to a spate of frauds and forgeries in recent years, followed by leakage of a sizable chunk of the central bank's foreign exchange reserve, demonstrates how prophetic he had been in seeing these catastrophes coming.

While paying tribute to the late Mr Ahmed on the occasion of his second death anniversary, we join his widow, Mrs Nilufer Ahmed, who has come to Dhaka from Washington to join his relations and well-wishers to observe the death anniversary of her beloved consort, and pray for the salvation of his soul.

Syed Ashraf Ali is a retired executive director of Bangladesh Bank.

A WORD A DAY

[D]ILETTANTE
NOUN

A person who cultivates an area of interest, such as the arts, without real commitment or knowledge.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Plays the ponies
- 5 Greek cheese
- 9 Peer
- 11 In – (hurried)
- 13 Sudden swell
- 14 Greek sorcerer
- 15 Shoe colour
- 16 More inexperienced
- 18 Cruise worker
- 20 Break off
- 21 Works copy
- 22 Casino figure
- 23 Due follower
- 24 Diamond club
- 25 Dull pain
- 27 Fluttery insects
- 29 Caustic stuff
- 30 Blonde
- 32 Put in danger
- 34 Cal. Abbr.
- 35 Ease up
- 36 Writer Jong
- 38 Long stories
- 39 Contract add-on
- 40 Minus
- 41 Base meal

DOWN

- 1 Outdoes
- 2 Consider the same
- 3 Made a fresh start
- 4 Slump
- 5 Stood up to
- 6 Pennsylvania port
- 7 Changed defeat
- 8 Climb
- 10 Papal envoy
- 12 Grazing groups
- 17 Reading and others: Abbr.
- 19 Marionette mover
- 22 Solemn promise
- 24 Hat type
- 25 Rap sheet info
- 26 Orchestra clasher
- 27 Me, to Michel
- 28 Bechamel and béarnaise
- 30 Lock
- 31 Sweethearts
- 33 Cockpit guesses
- 37 Crater part

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

I DON'T LIKE ANGRY POLITICIANS WHO YELL AT YOU

I THINK THEY SHOULD HAVE GOOD IDEAS WE COULD DISCUSS

STUPID POLITICIANS WON'T DISCUSS IDEAS!

GREG + MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

DO THEY HAVE TO GASP! TRICK-OR-TREAT! PANT! PANT! AT TOP SPEED?

TIME TO GASP! IS CANDY, WANDA!