

# A tribute to Mustafa Nur-Ul Islam

SYED MANZOORUL ISLAM

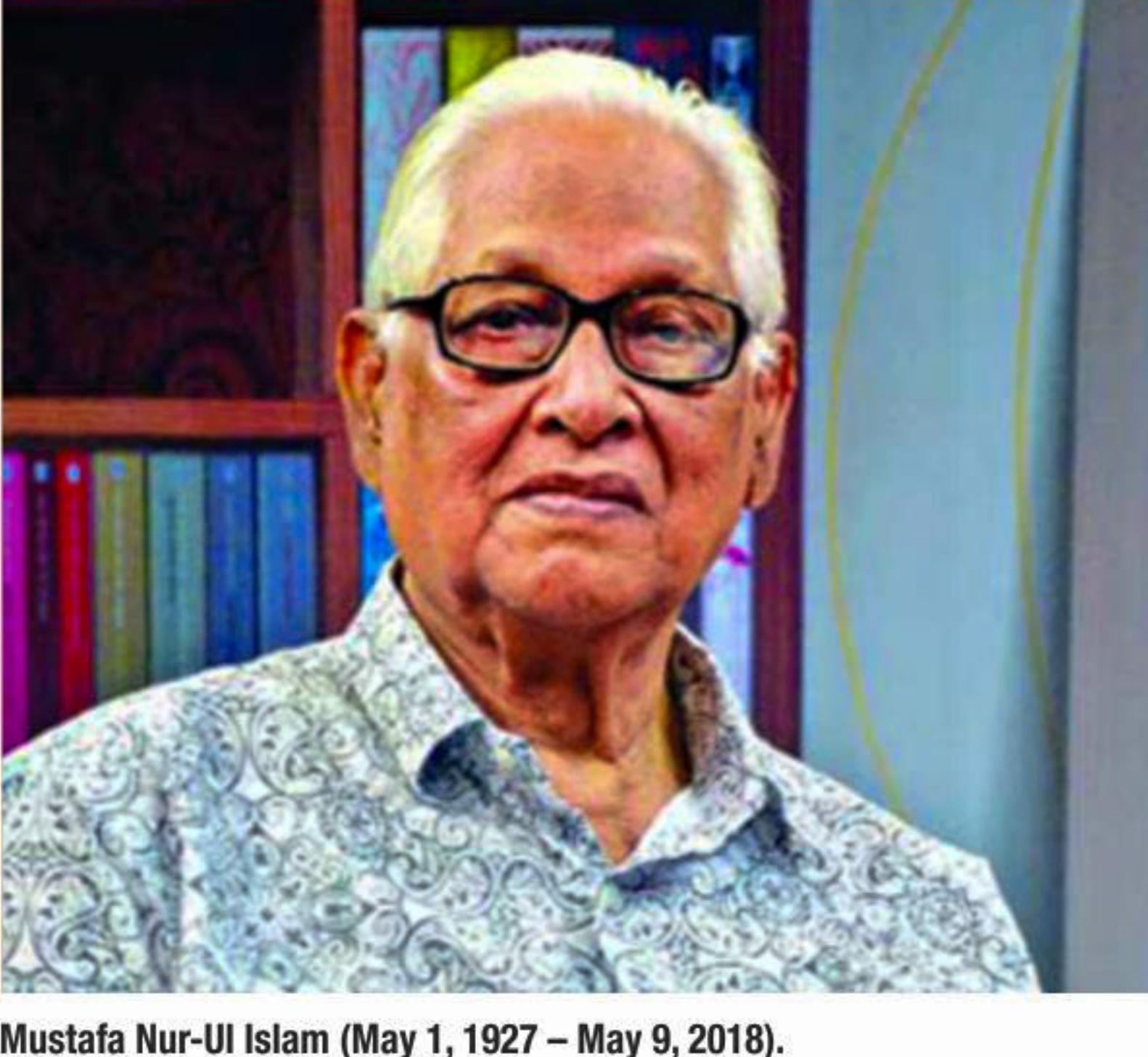
FOR most people who live to be 90, life is usually one long, painful journey troubled by debilitating illnesses or loss of mobility or memory, or both; they have to depend on others for the simplest of tasks like pouring a glass of water or turning in bed. National Professor Dr Mustafa Nur-Ul Islam, who died on May 9 at the age of 91, was an exception however. Barring the last six months or so, he lived quite an active life, doing things he loved to do—reading, writing and anchoring a popular discussion programme on television. He couldn't climb stairs and needed help to reach the third-floor studio of ATN Bangla, which aired his weekly *Kothamala*, a remake of the hugely popular *Muktadvara* on Bangladesh Television (BTV) of the 1980s which ran for ages. A wheel chair was on hand, pushed gently by a kind and youthful attendant, whenever he needed it. He used it with a bit of embarrassment though, as if he was not being true to his energetic and vibrant self.

It was in ATN Bangla that I saw him for the last time, six or seven months ago. Despite the fatigued look on his face and puffiness under his eyes, he exuded his usual charm. He had an incredible memory and could recount events from the 1940s or 50s as if they had taken place just the other day. He was an eloquent speaker and could start a meaningful conversation on any topic that happened to suggest itself, from the *Charyapad* to Charlie Chaplin's silent movies to his relationship with Bangabandhu whom he called Mujib Bhai. He talked in a clean, crisp and powerful Bangla that

showed his sophistication and verbal flair. He also had a great sense of humour and a ready stock of anecdotes to enliven any conversation. The last *Kothamala* episode I took part in was on the power of silence. His choice of free-standing topics such as this was a challenge to the speakers, who tried hard to come up with talking points. Dr Islam didn't much help, except providing some clues on which to build their discourse. Whether one was up to the mark, he looked on with a benign smile, silently encouraging the speaker to go on. He clearly knew how to bring the best out of people, even those who were not comfortable speaking in front of a camera. No wonder he was an admired teacher with an outstanding track record.

It was in the early 1980s—about the time he launched his *Muktadvara* on BTV—that I got acquainted with him. I had gone to attend a seminar organised by the department of Theatre in Jahangirnagar University. Dr Islam, who taught in the department of Bangla which he had helped set up, was the chair of a session where I spoke on Bertolt Brecht and a little-known play of his, *The Exception and the Rule*. After the session was over, he took me aside and asked me if I could lend him the book which I was carrying. I was flattered. He was already a celebrity for his scholarship and eloquence, and I believe also for his good looks and his nearly six feet height. As we drank tea and munched on crunchy *samosas*, he told me his ideas about a literary magazine that would set a standard of critical discourse in our country.

The magazine was *Sundaram* which he worked hard to bring out



Mustafa Nur-Ul Islam (May 1, 1927 – May 9, 2018).

quite regularly despite heavy odds for more than two decades. It indeed became a model for many such magazines that followed. It was his friendly charm that made distinguished writers and scholars and young researchers alike to contribute on topics he would choose carefully and well in advance. Over the years, I wrote nearly half a dozen articles and twice the number of book reviews for *Sundaram*—all because I couldn't say no to him, and because of the challenge of writing for him, who was an astute editor and a discerning reader.

It is hard to believe that the man who was such a vital presence in the

country's educational and cultural scene for the last seven decades is no more. He was there in all the key moments of our country's history, either as an active participant or a facilitator. Dr Islam was there when the language movement of 1952 first proclaimed our cultural independence from Pakistani neo-colonialists. He was a participant of the famous "Kagmari Sommelan", a hugely successful political event which also had a cultural event on the sidelines, spearheaded by the revered Maulana Bhashani in 1957; he was there when the youth began their decade-long struggle to oust the Pakistani regime in the early 1960s, articulated by the

back-to-back movements against the ban imposed on Rabindranath Tagore's songs on the radio and the blatantly discriminatory educational policy of Ayub Khan. He was an ardent supporter of the six-point programme launched by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1966, and the subsequent political movements that were considered launching pads of our war of liberation.

In 1971, when Dr Islam was in the UK, doing his doctoral studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, he helped raise funds for the war and mould world opinion in our favour. He collected newspaper clippings of the coverage of the war by the frontline newspapers of the UK in 1971 which eventually became a small archive. He later gave the archive to Bangladesh National Museum of which he was a trustee board member and chair for some time. After his return from the UK, he began perhaps his most fruitful career as a teacher and a scholar who wrote and spoke on literary, cultural and political issues untiringly until his death. I was amazed to see a post-editorial written by him in daily *Jugantor* only a few weeks ago. I was told that he wrote a page of a post-editorial even on the day he was taken to the hospital. I was not surprised. This dedication to the task in hand is what made him so admired and trusted.

Dr Islam taught in Karachi University (where he helped establish the Bangla department), worked as a journalist in daily *Sangbad*, served Bangla Academy and Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy as director (that was the post of the chief executive of both the organisations then). As I am

writing from memory without the help of a detailed CV of his, I might be missing a few of his public engagements, but making a list of institutions which he served or the books he wrote or the prizes he received (he was awarded both the top honours of the country—the Ekshey and the Swadhinata Padaks) is redundant considering how as a person of vision, foresight and integrity, he stood taller than all his achievements. He was a good friend to his peers, a trusted mentor to his students and a sought-after companion for all those who ever knew him. He was a loving family man and was proud of his children. He spoke with love and respect about his wife who left him a few years ago. He was sharply critical of those who distorted the history of our liberation war and those who fanned communalism in the country. But I never saw any malice in his voice. It was the principle that mattered to him, not individuals.

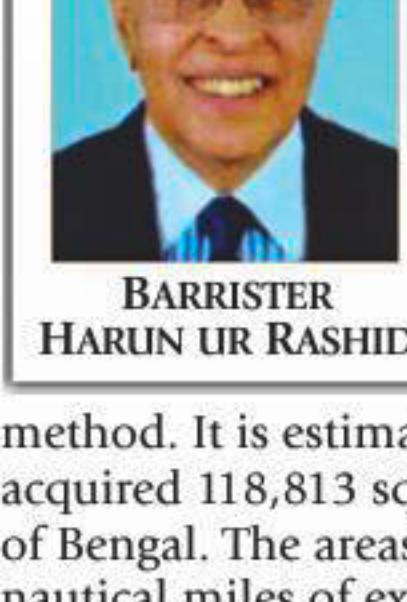
It's a commonplace to say about a dearly departed that the vacuum left by him or her would never be filled up. Looking back at the illustrious life of Dr Mustafa Nur-Ul Islam, I see how some common expressions still have their weight; I too believe that his absence will be forever felt. The examples of dedication and duty, of compassion and understanding, of active engagement in issues that directly affect us will inspire those who knew him to follow him and set their own standards of excellence.

Syed Manzoorul Islam, a retired professor of Dhaka University, currently teaches at ULAB and is a member of the board of trustees of Transparency International Bangladesh.

## BLUE ECONOMY Are we ready for it?



A view of Bay of Bengal from Sandwip, Chittagong.



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

BLUE economy means extraction of the resources of sea for the growth of an economy. Bangladesh has settled maritime boundary disputes with Myanmar in 2012 and with India in 2014 through an arbitral

method. It is estimated that Bangladesh has acquired 118,813 square kilometres of the Bay of Bengal. The areas of resources include 200 nautical miles of exclusive economic zone and over 354 nautical miles of resources on seabed (continental shelf). It is estimated that the resources from the sea of Bangladesh constitute 81 percent of the resources existing in its land territory.

Within the jurisdiction of Bangladesh, the sea is endowed with immense and precious natural resources, living and non-living.

Experts say that fish alone has 500 varieties besides snails, shell-fish, crabs, sharks, octopuses and other animals. Bangladesh is estimated to catch only 0.70 million tons of fish every year out of the total 8 million tons of fish available in the Bay of Bengal.

Besides fish and other living animals,

Bangladesh could also have gas fields as it is reported that Myanmar has discovered a large gas field in its area of the sea. Experts are of the view that Bangladesh would be able to extract resources worth about Tk 12,000 crore (1.2 billion dollar).

According to experts, the silt on the adjacent sea area in Bangladesh contains valuable minerals such as uranium and thorium besides a large number of "clay" which constitutes raw materials of cement.

Experts believe that there exist 13 heavy mineral-rich silts in the adjacent sea areas of Bangladesh, such as ilmenite, garnet, colemanite, zircon, rutile, and magnetite which, according to them, are more valuable than gold. The sale of these minerals could earn billions of dollars for Bangladesh. It is

reported that the country has 75 outer-islands which could be utilised for tourists both local and foreign. If Bangladesh can explore and exploit these resources through the use of appropriate technology, the economy of Bangladesh can grow rapidly into an advanced one. Although the government of Bangladesh has leased out some areas of Bay of Bengal to foreign companies, it is believed that they are not using expensive modern machinery to extract the resources.

There is one important factor to consider for Bangladesh: that is, with the increase of the population of the country, it would be gradually more dependable on sea resources than those in the landmass. The resources include endless renewable reserves in wind and solar energy.

It is significant to note that Bangladesh's

It is worthwhile to mention that 15 percent of the protein is provided from sea resources for the people across the world. Natural gas and oil constitute 30 percent of the sea resources and over 50 percent of magnesium is extracted globally from the seas. Even life-saving medicines could also be obtainable from these resources.

Given the possibility of acquisition of wealth from sea, Bangladesh is required to develop policies and laws to strengthen national institutions which could deliver solutions to implement its Sustainable Development Goals, i.e. evaluation of goals must go beyond measurement, to consider whether progress is equitable, relevant and sustainable.

In 2015, a resolution proposed by Bangladesh was adopted by the General Assembly of the UN for sustainable development, and its purpose was directed at achieving 17-point economic growth by 2030, of which 14 points were contemplated

from the perspective of blue economy. During the last few years, blue economy was the central topic of many international conferences. The Rio+20 Conference on the seas, and the conference at Bali (Indonesia) for the food security and growth of blue economy could be cited as examples. The strategy of the international organisations such as the World Bank and the UN Environmental Organisation is acquisition of sea resources.

Sea resources offer a new window of opportunity for Bangladesh. An increasing knowledge of the seas including the impact of wind, waves, high tide and ebb tide, change of temperature of the living organisms, and increase of salinity on the surface of seas could lead to sources of renewable energy. Every year, the use of wind from the seas is increasing by 40 percent and Bangladesh could use wind power for various purposes to strengthen its economy.

To feed the people from the sea resources, Bangladesh is required to push policies in cooperation with other countries to protect the ocean from the effects of climate change, pollution and over-fishing. We need to preserve the ecosystems of the seas which are reportedly being degraded at an unprecedented rate, and this is not an issue only for Bangladesh. It should be addressed in cooperation with other countries.

Many experts suggest that the government of Bangladesh should create an organisation to acquire the resources of the sea as quickly as possible as there is an unlimited scope of opportunity to extract these resources. Bangladesh can get inspiration from the fact that at present, the economy of the world is estimated to be USD 88 trillion, of which USD 24 trillion is acquired from sea resources. By 2050, it is estimated that the population of the world would be 900 crores (9 billion) and they would be fed largely from sea resources.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladeshi ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



The Soviet delegation during the Warsaw conference for securing peace and security in Europe.

May 14, 1955

The Warsaw Pact is established

Eight communist bloc countries signed the mutual defence treaty, which played an important role during the Cold War as an antagonist of NATO.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

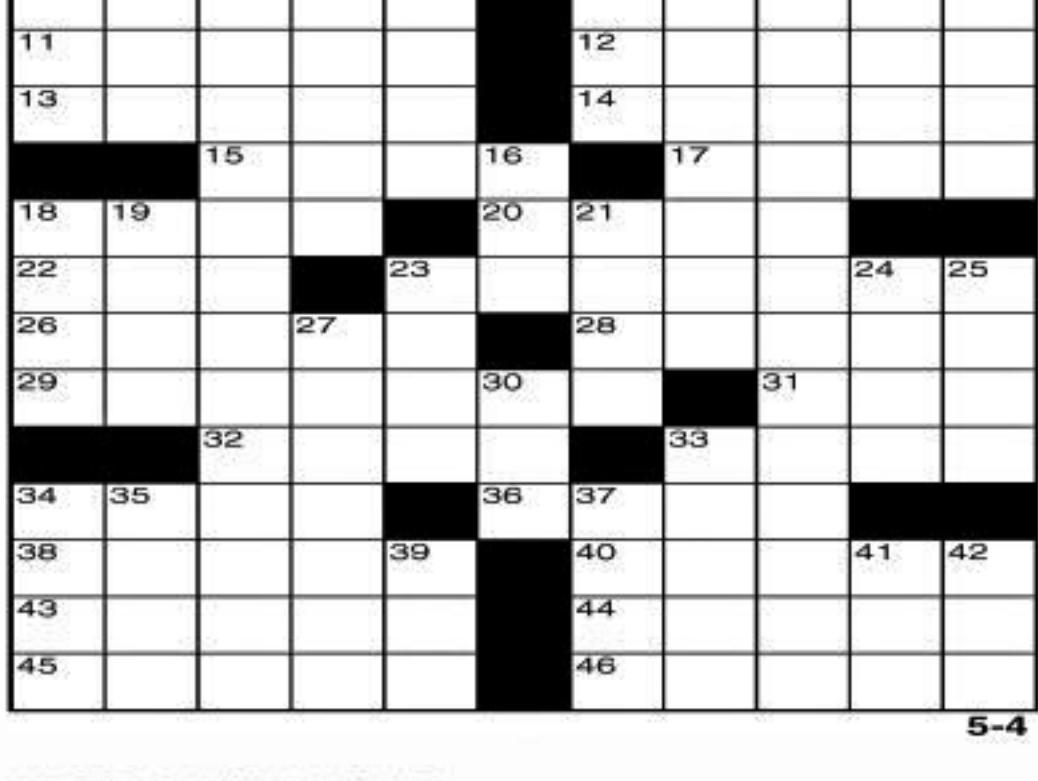
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- 40 Strand unit
- 11 Soothe
- 43 Visitor from afar
- 12 Clarifying phrase
- 44 Tea variety
- 13 Smoothing tool
- 45 Run-down
- 14 Chain of hills
- 46 Used up
- 15 Hand over
- 47 Declare
- 18 Sets the price at 1 Upper limit
- 20 Lounging attire
- 22 Umbrella part
- 23 Bakery buy
- 26 Perfect
- 28 Skit show
- 29 Bowlers
- 31 Important time
- 32 Emulates Drake
- 33 Word on an octagon
- 34 Ottoman rulers

**DOWN**

- 10 Fresh
- 16 Screw up
- 18 Parched
- 19 Team
- 21 For us
- 23 Brisk pace
- 24 Mark's replacement
- 25 Harvest
- 27 Sheepish
- 30 Id--
- 33 Be out
- 34 Cote cries
- 35 Model
- 36 Machpherson
- 37 Phone
- 38 Downloads
- 39 One or more
- 40 Harry's friend
- 41 Othello's betrayer
- 42 Rent out

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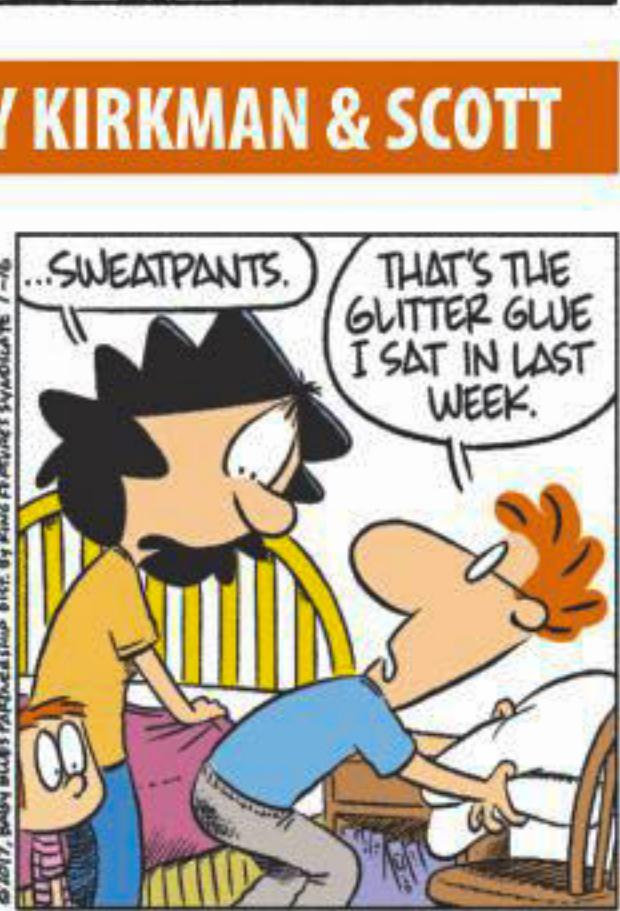
YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



### BEETLE BAILEY



### BY MORT WALKER



### BABY BLUES

