

Remembering a trailblazer for women's empowerment

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

WHEN many prominent leaders of Awami League were imprisoned, including Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, by the West Pakistani regime after the East Bengal Legislative Election of 1954 (where Awami-backed United Front won almost half of the seats—143 out of 309), a courageous woman defied section-144 and took out a protest march against this injustice for which she was arrested and jailed for a month. This pioneering female political leader was Professor Begum Budrunnesa Ahmad.

She was one of those few women who contested the 1954 elections and achieved victory, creating ripples in the overly male-dominated political culture of the then Pakistan regime. She was elected thrice as a Member of Parliament and became one of the first female ministers of independent Bangladesh. Besides having a very eventful political career, she was also a renowned academician and women's rights activist. Today is this great personality's 44th death anniversary.

In 1952, when women were hardly allowed to leave the house without a male companion, Begum Budrunnesa joined the demonstration in Sylhet city for the demand to declare Bengali as the state language of Pakistan. Her active role in organising the language movement in Sylhet did not go unnoticed by the politically conscious citizens. Being encouraged by all quarters, she met Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. With their blessings and support, she participated in the East Bengal Legislative Election of 1954 under the banner of the United Front. Begum Budrunnesa openly contested



Begum Budrunnesa Ahmad taking oath as the state minister for education, culture and sports in independent Bangladesh.

in the election from Kushtia, Jessore, Khulna and Faridpur constituencies and defeated her Muslim League opponent by a wide margin.

In 1960, Budrunnesa started her teaching career at Muslim Girls' High School. Alongside her teaching career and political activities, she completed her Master of Education degree from the University of Dhaka in 1961. She also completed another Master's course in political science from the University of Dhaka in 1963. Thus, unlike Bangladeshi political leaders today,

Budrunnesa continued her higher education alongside her political and social engagements. In 1960, she joined as Vice Principal at Lalmatia Mohila College, where she served for 13 years till her retirement in 1973 as its Principal and as a founder member of its governing body.

Budrunnesa's political activism reached new heights when Awami League (AL), led by Bangabandhu, began its Six-Point Movement in 1966. To accelerate the movement and ensure the participation of women, Begum

Budrunnesa founded the women's wing of AL upon direction from Bangabandhu and became its founder chairperson. In the 1970's general election, Begum Budrunnesa was elected as MP under Awami League's ticket. This time, Pakistan's military regime led by General Yahya Khan refused to hand over the government to Bengalis, which ultimately culminated in the Liberation War of 1971.

During the war, she worked with Sarada Seva Sangha and Ramakrishna Mission to distribute essential food

and medicine among the refugees. She frequently visited different refugee camps and submitted reports to Tajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister of the Bangladesh Government in exile. After liberation, Budrunnesa established the Bangladesh Women's Rehabilitation and Welfare Centre to shelter, train and help rehabilitate women affected by the war and Birangonas in particular. In 1973, she was re-elected as MP and served as the State Minister for Women, Education, Sports and Cultural Affairs.

Begum Budrunnesa died of cancer on May 25, 1974, at the age of only 50. After her demise, Sheikh Mujib called her "one of the most heroic personalities of Bangladesh's struggle for liberation" and changed the name of Bakshibazar Government Women's College to Begum Budrunnesa Government Women's College. She was awarded the Independence Day Award posthumously in 1999.

During her short life, Begum Budrunnesa Ahmad contributed tremendously to the political, social and cultural emancipation of Bangladeshi men and women. However, it is unfortunate that she did not have enough time in this world to write any personal account or book for the next generation. Many of her efforts have already been forgotten in the midst of the country's partisan politics. It is our duty to preserve the contributions of this historically significant personality whose brief life was so closely entwined with the history of our nation's liberation.

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN is a feature writer for Star Weekend magazine, The Daily Star. Email: shahnawaz.khan@thedailystar.net

This is an abridged version of an article published in the Star Weekend in November 2017.

When Eddie Met Wallie

"The royal wedding, all said and done, captures the imagination of the world. We want to just subliminally forget Iraq, Palestine... to be immersed in the simplicity of: "Once upon a time, there was a prince and a princess..."



NAVEED MAHBUB

HUMOROUSLY YOURS
THERE is no reason for Queen Elizabeth II to have any apprehensions about Prince Harry marrying Meghan Markle, an American, a divorcee with a living former spouse (not that he would come and claim a royal

alimony or just plain royalty). In fact, she is counting her blessings that the monarchy, the church, the government and the taxpaying (and taxed) general British plebeians are totally cool with the idea.

Glad the establishment has come a long way, considering a similar situation in 1936, at that time called a predicament, faced by Harry's great grandfather. Otherwise, this matrimony would be a prepaid mobile phone for Harry to abdicate in the future, when and if his time comes to be king, from being the fifth in line to the throne (might as well be in the line at Mirpur 10 to get into the Mirpur Stadium with a standby ticket).

Now, this great grandfather is really the bro (no, not the "yo what's up" type) of Harry's direct great grandfather, the father of Queen Elizabeth II, King George VI. Grandma remembers the turning of fate very well. For, it is a mere chance that King George VI's brother Edward VIII, the king prior to him, is very much alive and kicking when passing on the buck, er, crown to George VI, for Eddie boy doesn't have a boy or a girl (that he knows of) to pass the monarchy on to when he decides to follow his heart rather



Prince Harry and Meghan Markle leave St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle after their wedding.

PHOTO: REUTERS

than what Prince Charles has been waiting for since propeller aircrafts.

It is at a party that King Edward VIII meets the charming American socialite Wallis Simpson. Love knows no bounds and in this case, no ponds, and the love from across the pond is as strong as the Rock of Gibraltar. But so are the convictions of the Church of England about a divorcee (second time around) with a living husband marrying the king. The government threatens to quit and King Edward VIII abdicates.

Surely a windfall for George VI. It's a win-

win—love, no Game of Thrones and voila, "Oi chhuree tor biyey!", putting Elizabeth II directly next in line to the throne. So, When Harry Met Meghan, Queen Elizabeth II is just fine. And if anyone dares bring up "oh, she's a foreigner", think again. For Prince Philip is no pure-bred, mash potato and Yorkshire pudding eating Englishman, or a Welsh, or a Scot. He is scot in the middle of being Greek and Danish. His love for Liz II prompts him to gladly change his name to Philip Mountbatten which otherwise would have remained Philip Schleswig-Holstein-

Sonderburg-Glücksburg. So glad the trend doesn't take on, otherwise we would see Brad Jolie, Michael Zeta Jones, Will Pinkett, William Jefferson Rodham, President Donald Knavs, Saif Ali Kapoor, Asif Bhutto, Shakib Biswas and of course, Naveed Chowdhury.

Oh, there may be one final point of contention with When Harry Met Meghan that is not in the case of When Eddie (Edward VIII) Met Wallie (Wallis Simpson). Meghan is African American. So? It's a minor karma at best and let's just move on. Ok, karma in the sense that now Buckingham Palace, after centuries of ruling Africa and America, will now know what it is like to be ruled by Africa and America.

Are we done now with the matrimonial balance sheet? Yes? Good! May we now focus on the USD 43 million wedding? Oh by the way, 94 percent of that budget goes into security. Makes sense—it's no easy task to ward off individual, even worse, collective strikes by Prince Harry's seventeen former girlfriends, all fueled by lost opportunities.

It is a beautiful wedding. While many fashion police women and men comment on the simplicity of her get-up, nobody misses the 16 feet of trailing white, something that in Bangladeshi weddings is called a shamiana. What is not readily noticeable are the 53 hand-stitched flowers representing the 53 members of the Commonwealth, the flowers bought under an offer you can't refuse—buy (just take) 53 and get 1 Kohinoor free.

Bangladesh does have a presence there—one of the 53 flowers on Meghan's dress. Neighbouring India has more than a stitched flower as Meghan hitches her friend, the other flower, Priyanka Chopra to the

royal wedding, who, immediately after the wedding, comes straight to Dhaka from London. Can't blame her, she craves for something that was not on the royal menu, thanks to the budget being swallowed up by security—Fakhruddin's kachchee biriyani! And not only that, she makes a beeline for Cox's Bazaar to see the Rohingya crisis firsthand, which puts many Bangladeshis to shame for not having trekked the mere 45-minute flight to see for ourselves the misery of so many. And it is perhaps the presence of this star in the area that gets Aung San Suu Kyi to soften up on her tough stance on the Rohingyas. After all, the lure is for ASSK to come to Cox's Bazaar and be allowed to take a selfie with Priyanka.

The royal wedding, all said and done, captures the imagination of the world. We want to just subliminally forget Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, Syria, ISIS, Donald Trump, Kim Jong Un, Vladimir Putin, global warming, recession, racism, the arms race, cancer, suicide attacks, Guantanamo, hunger, disease, drugs, murder, school shootings, domestic violence, sexual harassment... to be immersed in the simplicity of:

"Once upon a time, there was a prince and a princess. There was a h-u-g-e (Donald Trump tone) pond between them. He flew choppers and she flew the ranks in Hollywood. They flew to Botswana, fell in love, got married without inviting Donald Trump and then they lived happily ever after."

Naveed Mahbub is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ATN Bangla's The Naveed Mahbub Show and ABC Radio's Good Morning Bangladesh, the founder of Naveed's Comedy Club. E-mail: Naveed@NaveedMahbub.com

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 25, 2000
LIBERATION DAY OF LEBANON

Israeli troops open the gates on the northern border for a tank during the IDF's 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon.

Israel withdraws its army from most of the Lebanese territory after 22 years of its first invasion in 1978.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 London area
- 5 Hold tightly
- 10 Healer Barton
- 12 Sold for
- 13 Rafter's place
- 14 Prologue
- 15 Blvd.'s kin
- 16 Cooling ingredient
- 18 Wise teacher
- 20 Mamie's mate
- 21 Mecca native
- 23 Set the pace
- 24 Traffic marker
- 26 Hogwarts messengers
- 28 Sawbones
- 29 Noted surrealist
- 31 H look-alike

DOWN

- 1 "Beat it!"
- 2 Uniform color
- 3 Safe spot
- 4 Vein yield
- 5 Amused look
- 6 Crazy talk
- 7 Active spot
- 8 Cox-swain's count
- 9 Combined
- 11 Like tanks
- 17 Geologic period
- 19 Leather color
- 22 Spanish dances
- 24 Clique
- 25 Ottawa anthem
- 27 Take the title
- 28 Humiliate
- 30 "I -- Rock"
- 33 Acid type
- 34 "Be quiet!"
- 35 Suits
- 37 Manipulative sort
- 38 Nap sacks
- 42 Cacao holder

Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dsopinion@gmail.com.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

DON'T YOU EVER HAVE TO SHAVE, FUZZ?

I DID ONCE, CUT MYSELF AND FAINTED

GREG! MORT WALKER

NOW MY BEARD IS AFRAID TO GROW

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

OKAY, WHAT'S GOING ON?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I MEAN, YOU GUYS ARE BEHAVING... PERFECTLY!

SO WE'RE GETTING IN TROUBLE FOR NOT GETTING IN TROUBLE?

WOW! THAT'S A RECORD, EVEN FOR US!