

# In memory of Imtiaz Habib

AHRAR AHMAD, QUAMRUL HAIDER,  
ASHRAFUL HUQ and ZULFIQUAR RAHMAN

**I**t is with profound sorrow we write this piece about our dear friend Imtiaz Hasan Habib (1949-2018), who died peacefully while asleep in the early morning hours of August 27 at his home in Norfolk, Virginia. As much as the tragic and unexpected news of his death overwhelmed us, it is hard to overstate what a shocking and terrible loss this is to his wife Rosie, son Amit, daughter Reema, two granddaughters and to his friends and colleagues in the academic community and beyond.

As part of a close-knit group of friends, we have known Imtiaz since our teen years. We grew up together, played together, laughed together, cried together, shared our joys and sorrows together, pulled pranks on others together, aimlessly drove through the streets of Dhaka together and drank tea together during our late afternoon *adda* sessions at the Flamingo restaurant in Purana Paltan.

We could write volumes about Imtiaz's turbulent life filled with adventures and misadventures, about his hopes and despairs, his sense of humour, his egregious bids in games of contract bridge, and many fads and foibles that defined him, and made

**Imtiaz was an eminent scholar specialising not on typical "local" writers and "native" cultural products but on Shakespeare and excelling in that field. He is recognised as one of the world's leading scholars in anti-colonial empirical race studies of Shakespeare's England.**

him both distinctive and adorable. Instead, in this piece, we choose to celebrate a gifted life tragically cut short by destiny.

Imtiaz was a warm, gracious and insightful person, a proud man of deep conviction and rectitude. He was a restless intellect with varied and eclectic interests, and a brilliant, fluid thinker capable of finding influences and connections which would elude lesser scholars. Like many deeply sensitive people, he was also a tormented soul, struggling with his inner self, and chafing at the injustices that he saw in the world. What drove him were his uncompromising commitment to principles as they related to human dignity and fairness, his sincere compassion for others, particularly those less fortunate, and his fervent belief in education and its ability to transform people and the world.

He was passionate about his opinions and worked hard to promote, or defend, what he thought was right. While he did not suffer fools gladly, he always tried to be as understanding as possible, and even when discussions became vigorous, and disagreements intense, he never sought to belittle others, or tried to impose his will on them. He was particular about friendships, and his loyalty to friends was unfailing and spontaneous.

Imtiaz had enviable credentials—B.A. (Honours) and M.A. in English Literature from New College at Oxford, UK. After a brief teaching stint at Dhaka University, he went to the USA and earned his doctorate from Indiana University in Bloomington in 1984. In the United States, he first taught at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas till 1997, then moved to, and remained at the Old Dominion University in Norfolk as Professor of English Literature, until his death.

Imtiaz was an eminent scholar specialising not on typical "local" writers and "native" cultural products but on Shakespeare and excelling in that field.



Professor Imtiaz Hasan Habib with students and colleagues.

He is recognised as one of the world's leading scholars in anti-colonial empirical race studies of Shakespeare's England.

His legacy as an effective teacher will endure in the academic excellence he always demanded from his students. That's why he would often describe his courses on Shakespeare as "This ain't your granddaddy's Shakespeare." It should be pointed out that he was as rigorous on himself, as he was on his students.

His impressive record of scholarship and quality of his work can be found in several books written by him. Most notable ones are *Shakespeare's Pluralistic Concepts of Character: A Study in Dramatic Anamorphism* (1993), *Shakespeare and Race: Postcolonial Praxis in the Early Modern Period* (2000) and *Black Lives in the English Archives 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (2008).

Imtiaz published numerous scholarly essays too, mainly on colonialism

and race in the early modern period. His works have been featured in the British Library's Exhibition on history of London. He has been interviewed by the Folger Shakespeare Institute in Washington, DC and by BBC for a documentary on "In Search of Shakespeare." His opinion on Africans in Shakespeare's London was published in several American media outlets. Recently, *The New York Times* cited his work on the "dark lady" in Shakespeare's Sonnets.

Besides his academic specialisation, Imtiaz had other esoteric interests as well, including being an avid student of military history with special interest in naval warfare. As he lived in Norfolk, home to the largest US naval base, he delighted in conducting his friends through the visitor's areas of the sprawling facility, eagerly and knowledgeably pointing out the capabilities of the aircraft carriers and submarines moored at the quay.

These are really moments when both words and feelings remain jumbled and stricken. At the end, all we can say is, good-bye *dosto*. Your sleep did not have to be so final you bloody Shakespeare-wallah. Rest in peace dear friend, while we continue to wrestle with our petty nightmares. And forgive us for not being able to hug you closer to our chest before your departure for "the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns."

As your favourite tragic hero Hamlet said to himself,

"To die, to sleep -  
To sleep, perchance to dream -  
Ay, there's the rub,  
For in this sleep of death what dreams  
may come."

Ahrar Ahmad is the Director-General of Gyantapas Ashraff Foundation, Quamrul Haider is a Professor of Physics at Fordham University in New York, Ashraf Huj is the former Chief Executive of the Asian Cricket Council in Kuala Lumpur and Zulfiqar Rahman is an entrepreneur.

# In pursuit of 'Naya Pakistan'

**I**MRAN Khan's first speech to the nation after taking office as Pakistan's prime minister was impressive in its range of reforming ambition. Government spending would be cut but an Islamic welfare state with Scandinavian

Pakhtunkhwa was suggested for the Punjab. Almost immediately sceptical press comment pointed to a more sombre reality. Was a new Pakistan really feasible, particularly in a four-year mandate and without even a solid majority?

The PPP and PML-N are at loggerheads and therefore not likely to unite against the new government. Bilawal Bhutto is young and inexperienced as a PPP leader and the Sharif brothers, leaders of the PML-N, are shackled by corruption charges. Nevertheless, the PPP still dominates in Sindh and the PML-N in Punjab. The PTI's own Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in the north-west cannot compete with those core centres of Pakistan's wealth and population.

Apart from the limitations of this political scenario, how far can determined and sincere

leadership make headway against the massive vested interests defending the status quo? The security services and large army have long constituted almost a parallel government. In General Bajwa they have a commander quite prepared to make his views powerfully known and many believe that Imran Khan could not have won the election without army support. Generally, Pakistan's society is marked by extreme inequality of wealth and power. It is dominated by sophisticated elites, many with great land holdings and with almost feudal local power. Elite intellectuals realise the need for substantial changes, but many more will resist any reforms which challenge their position.

Even if he can find and appoint dedicated heads of leading ministries and institutions, including the police, reforming the

bureaucracy and eradicating corruption will be a near insuperable task. Imran spoke of recreating lost 1960 administration standards of civil service morale, service and efficiency!

The great mass of the population is poor, young and either poorly educated or illiterate. They have the most to gain from social reform. Yet many are socially conservative and suspicious of modernising change seen as aping western values. Violent Islamist extremism also remains a threat, despite big army drives against it in recent years.

Even as the government takes office, it immediately faces the very urgent pressure of Pakistan's economic and financial crisis. Even with aid offered by the Islamic Development Bank, the seeming impossibility of meeting Pakistan's urgent financial needs leaves Imran with no obvious alternative but, like many previous Pakistan governments, having recourse to the IMF. Yet this would bring the political risk of alienating many of the new government's supporters. An IMF directed programme would include drastic spending cuts and politically painful reforms.

The economy has recently grown by 5.4 percent, which sounds impressive, but only at the cost of sharp and unsustainable debt. Pakistan's current account deficit has risen by 40 percent in just one year and now amounts to 6 percent of total GDP. Foreign exchange reserves have shrunk dangerously and cannot meet debt repayments. It does not help that President Trump has cancelled USD 300 million coalition supply funds to Pakistan and threatens to suspend military aid.

Exports have fallen well behind sharply rising imports, especially from capital equipment and coal for 21 power projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Cooperation (CPEC). These, funded by a

mixture of debt and equity, are guaranteed by government but are not included in the official external debt of more than USD 90 billion. More electrical power and infrastructure is certainly needed and only China seems ready to supply the capital required. There is however concern that financial details of the Chinese CPEC commitment of USD 35 billion (with talk of extension to USD 50 billion) are not revealed. Projects are primarily funded by loans, often at high rates of interest, with only minor elements of grant aid.

Meager foreign direct investment and reliance on Chinese and IMF loans has fed a habit of low industrial risk investment by Pakistan's corporate sector. Many enjoy tax exemptions and profits are often effectively guaranteed by government, regardless of performance. No wonder competitiveness and export performance have remained weak.

This is a daunting financial immediate crisis, even before the challenge of creating "Naya Pakistan" and the tangled relations with Pakistan's neighbours. It is at least encouraging that both Imran Khan and General Bajwa say they should improve.

Much now depends on the prime minister's key appointments. How far can he avoid being forced into political deals? How well can he and a new team communicate a sustained sincere effort and begin to demonstrate enough partial success to sustain hope and support? Pakistan is in a mess, but it has great patriotism and human potential. Also, can China afford to allow Pakistan to fail?

We should wish Imran Khan well. Pakistan needs a fresh effort. Our whole region could benefit from its progress.

Selina Mohsin is a former ambassador.



PHOTO: AFP

## QUOTEABLE Quote



**SØREN KIERKEGAARD**

Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, and social critic

Once you label me you negate me.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- 1 Some coasters
- 31 Hosp. parts
- 6 Idiots
- 11 Capital on the Songka
- 12 Directional sign
- 13 Mink's cousin
- 14 Keyed up
- 15 Deteriorate
- 17 Consumed
- 18 Look over
- 19 Like some flights
- 22 Singer Carly – Jepsen
- 23 Hot
- 24 Clamorous
- 25 Position
- 27 Squeezing snake
- 30 React to a punch
- 32 Snapshot
- 33 Wave or wink
- 35 Bouquet
- 38 Time being
- 39 Bit of gossip
- 40 Cunning
- 41 Punish, in a way
- 42 Exorbitant
- 8 Decorative
- 9 Celtics' home
- 10 Win all games
- 16 Perceives
- 20 Punk accessories
- 21 Crafty
- 24 Pester
- 25 Agitate
- 26 City near Mt. Rainier
- 27 Clyde's partner
- 28 Source of answers
- 29 Dozing
- 30 Prepares for a fight
- 34 Foot ailment
- 36 Work wk. start
- 37 Bible boat

**DOWN**

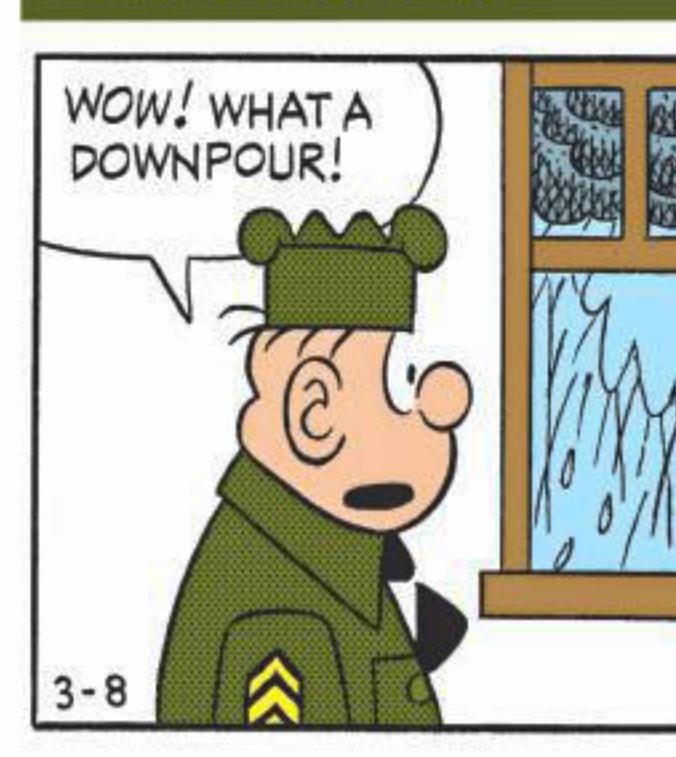
- 1 Bridal party
- 2 Michael's sister
- 3 Menu choice
- 4 Female rabbits
- 5 It's alluring
- 6 Belfry dweller
- 7 Mine find
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## YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



## BEETLE BAILEY



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## BY MORT WALKER

## BABY BLUES



OKAY, WHEN WE GET TO THE RESTAURANT, EVERYONE SHOULD BE ON THEIR VERY BEST BEHAVIOR.



THAT MEANS KEEPING YOUR KNEES UNDER THE TABLE, USING YOUR SILVERWARE, AND CHEWING WITH YOUR MOUTHS CLOSED.



GOOD ONE! ACT LIKE SOMEBODY ELSE'S KIDS.



ARE WE BEING CRITICIZED?

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