

The legacy of Zafullah Chowdhury

GOLAM MORTOZA

EVERYONE employed at the hospital are involved in farming—from doctors, interns to general employees as well as its founder. It's not their hobby but part of their job description.

The hospital was set up in 1971 in Agartala, India. Khaled Mosharraf, the commander of Sector 2, was operating in this area. Named "Bangladesh Field Hospital", the 480-bed hospital was founded to treat wounded freedom fighters.

Among those who established this field hospital were Zafullah Chowdhury and MA Mobin, the only cardiac surgeon in the entirety of Pakistan. A group of volunteers were trained as paramedics, one of whom was Sultana Kamal, now an eminent human rights defender.

In 1972, when the founders tried to replicate their wartime endeavour in the newly independent country, the government had objected to its name. Irritated, Zafullah went to the secretariat to meet President Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"Mujib bhai, [they] are not allowing us to build Bangladesh Field Hospital," he complained to Bangabandhu.

"If the name contains 'Bangladesh,' it sounds like a government hospital," Bangabandhu explained. "Find another beautiful name for the hospital."

After much deliberation, Bangabandhu offered him a new option. "You come up with three names, and I will come up with three. We will choose the best one through discussion," he told Zafullah.

In their next meeting, Zafullah was reading out his list: "Bangladesh Field Hospital, Gonoshasthaya Kendra..."

Bangabandhu abruptly interrupted him, saying "Gonoshasthaya Kendra is a beautiful name. It will be the name of the hospital. Ganasasthya Kendra will not only provide treatment, but it will also have to work on health, agriculture and education."

Zohra Begum, MA Rab, a joint secretary, and Lutfor Rahman donated five acres of land from their family properties in Savar for the hospital, while Bangabandhu arranged a further 23 acres of land. The hospital, now named Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK), began its journey in 1972.

In GK, Zafullah Chowdhury shattered the

fixed notions of what women could or couldn't do. He engaged women in unconventional works, employing them as electricians, carpenters, welders, etc. In 1982, many of GK's large truck drivers were women. The hospital currently employs 2,500 people, 40 percent of whom are women.

In its early days, GK introduced a health insurance system. Its Dhaka branches charge patients only Tk 200 for delivery, while its caesarean section costs around Tk 12,000-

and suburban areas of the country.

Physically Zafullah is not well. Both his kidneys are almost non-functional. He needs to go through kidney dialysis three days a week. Anyone who has not gone through it cannot understand how expensive the procedure is. The number of patients undergoing kidney dialysis in GK is nearly twice that in all private and public hospitals combined.

Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital has a 100-



Bangladesh Field Hospital during the Liberation War.

14,000, without any additional charges in the name of doctors' fee, medicine and pathological tests. Unlike private hospitals, GK always encourages its pregnant patients to undergo normal delivery, unless her medical condition requires otherwise. The cost of pathological tests is half of that charged by an average private hospital. In 1981, GK introduced "Gonoshasthaya Pharmaceutical", which still provides drugs that are far less expensive than those marketed by private pharmaceuticals.

After Savar, Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital was built in Mirpur road, Dhaka. In addition, GK operates about 50 health centres in rural

bed advanced kidney dialysis centre. Even India doesn't have such a large kidney dialysis facility. It is the largest of its kind in South Asia, but the cost is unbelievably low. In Bangladesh, the cost of the treatment generally varies from Tk 7,000-8,000, minus doctors' fee and cost of medicine. GK deals with about 250 such patients every day, 10-12 percent of whom get their treatment for free. Twenty-percent patients pay only Tk 800, while the maximum fee is Tk 2,500—which includes all other additional fees.

Bangladesh's drug market used to be dependent on import and controlled by multinational companies. Zafullah

approached Bangabandhu about the need to build a local pharmaceutical industry. His suggestion that drugs should be imported from socialist countries was heeded by Bangabandhu.

He persuaded President Ziaur Rahman to follow a similar policy. Ziaur Rahman wanted Zafullah to join his cabinet and work on the drug policy. Zafullah declined the offer in a four-page letter, citing the presence of an anti-liberation politician in Zia's cabinet. In 1982, he persuaded Ershad to adopt a drug policy, which banned the import of thousands of unnecessary drugs.

The boom that Bangladesh's pharmaceutical industry has since witnessed was a direct result of that drug policy. Bangladesh now exports drugs, in addition to meeting 95 percent of local demands.

Zafullah Chowdhury has won many national and international awards including the Ramon Magsaysay award. Although he lives a very simple life himself, he has always been very hard-working. He always did what he thought was best for people and never thought of the consequences of his activities. Gonoshasthaya Kendra is not a state-of-the-art hospital but it provides treatment to the poor at the lowest possible cost.

Zafullah formed Bangladesh Medical Association in London towards the beginning of our War of Independence. In April 1971, during a rally at Hyde Park, he tore apart his Pakistani passport and burnt it, thus becoming a stateless citizen.

There's another interesting incident I want to mention here. In 1996 when Sheikh Hasina was the prime minister of the country, her husband Wajed Mia retired from the Atomic Energy Commission as its chairman. The prime minister did not extend the tenure of his chairmanship, as he might have expected. So Wajed met with Zafullah and expressed his willingness to join Gonoshasthaya Kendra. The only barrier to his joining the organisation was smoking. Wajed was a chain-smoker. So Wajed quit smoking within one month and joined Gonoshasthaya Kendra as its Science Adviser.

Zafullah Chowdhury had made some inaccurate statements recently. Although he apologised for it later in a press conference, a sedition case was filed against him. Following this case, several others were also

filed, one after another, on charges of land grabbing, extortion, stealing fruits and fish, etc. against him.

Even his worst enemies won't be able to raise allegations of dishonesty against him. He has lived a very simple life even though he had all the opportunities to live a lavish one. Zafullah, who played a significant role in our Liberation War is now accused of treason, theft, land grabbing and extortion.

Shaheed Janani Jahanara Imam in her monumental book on the liberation war, "Ekattorer Dinguli" (Days of Seventy One), wrote of Zafullah:

"Zafullah Chowdhury and MA Mobin have become familiar faces. Both of them studied FRCS in England. After having completed their MBBS degree from Dhaka Medical College and studied inexhaustibly for four years in Britain, when they were just a week away from their final exam, the war of liberation began in Bangladesh.

These two boys quit their education and partook in the Bangladesh movement. They renounced their Pakistani citizenship. Having obtained an Indian travel permit, they got aboard a Delhi-bound flight to reach the battlefield through Calcutta. The plane belonged to Syrian Airlines. It was delayed for five hours in an airport in Damascus. All passengers, except those two, got off the plane. Thank heavens, they didn't.

A Pakistani colonel was at the airport to detain their two fugitive citizens. But you can't detain someone from a plane because it was traditionally considered an international zone.

Officials of Syrian Airport in Damascus later told them that the plane was delayed for five hours just because of them. They reached the battlefield in late May through such dangers."

If those who run an institution are involved in politics, the institution suffers, one example being Proshika. What would happen to GK, which was born out of the Liberation War? One can disagree with Zafullah and, thus, can criticise him. But that GK, as an institution, has to suffer because of such disagreements is unwarranted for the sake of public interest.

Golam Mortoza is a journalist

The article was translated from Bengali to English by Nazmul Ahasan and Naznin Tithi

A TALE OF MISSILES AND MEN

Arms control and disarmament to arms decontrol and rearmament

IFTEKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY

ONLY a few would be persuaded that President Donald Trump is deeply informed about any moderately complex subject. Ballistic missiles is one such. In fact, such a notion becomes firm when one considers his expression of bewilderment when Japan did not shoot down the North Korean "Hwasong-15" missile in flight just as the Saudis had done the Houthi projectile fired from Yemen. Anyone with even meagre understanding of missile technology would know that the two situations were not the same. And that the former action would have been well-nigh impossible with available Japanese capability. So when he caught out the Russians cheating on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty of 1987, he took many by surprise. The Russians might have indeed tried to pull wool over American eyes by quietly deploying a new medium range weapon in violation of that landmark agreement. This is not to say that Mr Trump came to this conclusion on his own. At least it was apparent that he heeded counsel in this regard, which in itself is a silver lining of no mean consequence.

During much of the Cold War period, as nuclear weapons, particularly among the superpowers proliferated, peace was maintained on the premise of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). In other words, since the key powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, had the capability to obliterate each other, neither wanted to initiate a war. Then in the mid-1970s a US Secretary of Defence propounded that all nuclear conflict need not lead to MAD. In what is known as "Schlesinger Doctrine" named after him, he enunciated a kind of "limited war" that there could be small scale nuclear conflicts, with weapons of lesser yield, gradually escalating to higher levels, rendering a nuclear war "fightable" and even "winnable". The view was that the enemy would capitulate along the path of escalation. Design and production of weaponry followed theory. Shorter range missiles, more precise weapons, and theory justifying their "tactical" rather than "strategic" use, emerged.

There are usually two types of targets in a nuclear war: "counterforce" directed against hardened and military structures, and "countervalue", against "soft targets" as cities and civilian populations. Since long range Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) were imprecise, their targets were logically softer, or mainly "countervalue" ones. But intermediate or medium range missiles (IRBMs and MRBMs) would have

greater precision and therefore higher capacity to "kill" hardened "counterforce" targets. Because there would be greater propensity to use more precise weapons with lesser collateral damage, theorists considered these more "destabilising" than the larger imprecise weapons which would certainly attract devastating response.

Acutely aware of these dangers, the US and Soviet leaders, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev signed the 1987 INF Treaty. It required them to eliminate and permanently forswear all of their nuclear and conventional ground-launched missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometres. As a result, both superpowers destroyed 2,692 missiles by the treaty's implementation deadline of June 1, 1990. The US removed their Cruise and Pershing missiles deployed in the UK and Germany, and the Soviets their deadly SS-20s out of the range of Europe. Some believe North Korea may have gone on to procure some of these.

Around the middle of the current decade, both the Americans and the Russians began to allege non-compliance of the treaty by the other. The US blamed Russia for developing the SSC-8, a land-based intermediate range cruise missile. Moscow raised its own concerns about the US placement of a missile defence launch system in Europe that can be used to fire cruise missiles, and manufactur-

ing armed drones that equalled ground-launched cruise missiles prohibited in the treaty. Nonetheless, both parties declared their "support" for the treaty in a United Nations General Assembly statement on October 25, 2007, inviting other nuclear powers to join it. An intended target of the call was perhaps China, which roundly ignored it, and continued developing its own deadly weapons. It includes the "Deng Feng" (East Wind), DF-26, an IRBM with a maximum range of 4,000 km which put the US installation of Guam in the Pacific under threat. The non-party status of China to the INF Treaty actually concerns both the US and Russia, though the former, understandably more so.

Others have also got into the game. The Indians have "Agni" and "Shaurya" missiles, with some variants of the former IRBMs having ICBM range and capabilities. The Chinese of course would factor in India. While Pakistan does not have ICBMs, which is not required vis-à-vis India, it has its "Shaheen-3" missile that would be its credible deterrent with regard to its principal adversary. It can strike at any target within India or as far as Myanmar, or even Israel if appropriately deployed. Israel, another undeclared nuclear power, possesses "Jericho-2" and "Jericho-3" with ranges of 1,500 to 3,500 km and 4,500 to 6,500 km respectively. Iran, which does not have nuclear weapons, has developed several

types of IRBMs, namely "Emad", "Qader", "Sejil", "Soumar", and "Khorramshahr", all with range between 2,000 and 2,500 km. Of these "Khorramshahr" can carry three conventional warheads, weighing upto 1,800 kg.

The massive destructive power of some of these conventional weapons are so great as to blur their difference with smaller tactical or "theatre" nuclear weapons. There exists a voluntary agreement with 35 members called the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), set up in 1987. It seeks to limit control on spread of export of missiles and related technology, but only India from those with recently acquired capabilities is a member.

Should Mr Trump pull out of the INF Treaty, the result would most certainly be destabilising. Both the US and Russia will begin to develop newer and deadlier weapons. Without the INF Treaty, and others of this ilk, disarmament and arms control initiatives will take a huge hit. Then, in a new era of rearmament and arms de-control, peace and stability can only hinge only on deterrence, or fear of devastating retaliation. This will be a return to primordial human behaviour and psychology. Not a wholesome situation, or solution, but sadly may be an inevitable one.

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QUOTABLE Quote



KATHARINE GRAHAM (1917-2001)
Former publisher of Washington Post

A mistake is simply another way of doing things.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	33 Office notes	8 Swanky
1 Feels the absence of	34 Nevada tree	9 Exercise system
7 "Ed Wood" star	35 Verdi piece	10 Bit of shot
11 Ring combo	36 2006 Winter Games setting	16 Joust need
12 Writer Wiesel	37 Orange cover	18 Typed in
13 Packed down	38 Made blank	20 Bud holders
14 Relate	39 Hobo attire	22 Much of Russia
15 Kids' boo-boos	40 Take out	23 Joining forces
16 Bar-based		24 Fleet leader
17 Musical symbol	DOWN	25 Hedy of "Algiers"
18 Dojo doings	1 Power provider	28 Marsh croakers
19 Tied up	2 Blown away	30 Biscotti flavor
21 Capture	3 Truck stop sights	31 "Nymphs" painter
22 Alley prowlers	4 Pearly Gates	32 Battery end
25 Avoid the truth	5 Rams' mates	34 Skin opening
26 Canary snack	6 Lawn starter	36 Talking bear of films
27 Let up	7 Discourage	
29 Cry from the crib		

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S	A	F	E	S	H	A	F	T	S
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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



YOU STILL USE A PEN AND PAPER TO WRITE LETTERS?

YEAH, WHEN I WRITE TO MY PARENTS

4-29

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



HAMMIE, I'M AMAZED AT HOW QUICKLY YOU'RE LEARNING TO SEW!

NOT ME.

ANYTHING THAT IRRITATES MY SISTER JUST COMES EASY TO ME.

NOT FAIR!!!