

'People expect a lot from the army'

Former Election Commissioner Brigadier General (Retd) M Sakhawat Hossain talks to Shakhawat Liton of The Daily Star about the deployment of army personnel and the role they are expected to play during the election.

As you know, members of the armed forces were deployed on December 24 to help maintain law and order during the election. What's your view on that? Military deployment is a common phenomenon ahead of national elections in Bangladesh. Even during the 2014 election, the army was put on IS (internal security) duty. The purpose of such deployment is to provide security and help conduct the election. That being said, I think the army's power has been limited this time by the requirement that they would have to act in line with the CrPC (Code of Criminal Procedure)—"in aid of civil power." What does that entail? As far as I understand, among other things, it means that if an executive magistrate feels that a situation is getting out of hand, he may employ the army to restore order. But under the CrPC, without a magistrate's instruction, the army cannot make an intervention, arrest or put anyone in custody. Which means, a magistrate must always accompany a troop, big or small, for the latter to intervene.

There is another provision that says that if an emergency situation arises, say, if the army is attacked, and there is no magistrate around to authorise action, a commissioned army officer may initiate action but he must later appeal, in writing, for retrospective authorisation from the magistrate. However, "in aid of civil power" means that the army will act to "disperse unlawful assembly" if its assistance is sought. But how would you decide if an assembly is "unlawful"? This condition suffers from vagueness. I think to prevent "unlawful" assemblies, you will have

to ban any gathering of 3-4 people, say, around a polling centre but that will hardly qualify as normal. Plus, for the army to respond to a situation, taking action after receiving permission from the magistrate and acting on its own initiative as soon as the situation unfolds are not the same thing.

The army was deployed both during the 2001 and 2008 elections. Do you see any difference between those elections and this election in terms of the power that the army can exercise?

A gulf of difference, actually. For example, during those elections, in the definition of law enforcement agency in the RPO (Representation of the People Order), the army was mentioned first, before other forces such as the police. Which means that the army could take immediate action on its own initiative in case of any election-related offences described in the RPO without needing permission from the magistrate. The army could do what the police can in such situations, for example, making arrests in case of an attack on a procession or preventing violation of any electoral code of conduct. Any army officer, whether commissioned or not, could authorise action. The advantage of this arrangement was that the EC could, directly, provide guidelines to the army and the army would act accordingly. Now it will have to act "in aid of civil power", pursuant to the instructions of the magistrate.

But according to the home ministry's circular about the deployment of the armed forces, the army will "extend all-out support" to the Election Commission for the sake of holding



Brigadier General (Retd) M Sakhawat Hossain

a free and fair election.

That sounds fine on paper. In fact, the whole purpose of deploying the army is to assist the Election Commission to conduct the election. But has the EC released any circular of its own outlining how it wants the army to be used? Does it have any specific guideline? As far as I know, the EC has produced no such circular yet. The important thing for us to keep in mind is, the army was deployed under the CrPC and so it must act in line with it. The CrPC is the guiding principle here. Despite what anyone says or promises us, eventually it all comes down to what the Code allows or not.

So, you think there are complications? Yes, there appear to be some complications.

But this is what I think, and others may have a different opinion. I think the EC should have a guideline for specific tasks and specific days—before, during and after the election. Let me give you an example. During the 2008 election, army deployment was guided by the RPO, and even then we had provided specific instructions to each of the forces—police, Ansar, BGB, RAB and of course the army—with the conclusion that whoever is needed, or nearer, at the time of an emergency situation, would be called in to deal with it. Even the Presiding Officer was given the authority to call in the army if needed; it was possible because of the RPO, which is the not the case now.

The deployment of the army has created expectations in the minds of the general people. They expect that there will be no violence. But what can be done if, say, the army is in one area and a violent incident

takes place in another area? The army has its own command channel. It functions through that command channel. But when they are asked to assist the civil administration, despite their internal command channel, they have to readjust to the former's priorities and expectations.

What would be your suggestions for the army to play an effective role during the election?

I think the EC should, on a priority basis, release its circular in this regard with specific tasks set forth for the army for different phases of the election. It can also, under the RPO, grant magisterial powers to its own officers which, I must stress, are to be used only for the purposes specified under the sections of the RPO dealing with that power. That may be done after discussion with the home ministry but I don't know if there is time for that now. In the absence of a circular by the EC, we don't know what particular duties the EC expects the army to perform or their plans of execution.

I would like to highlight one point here: the public have a lot of expectations from the army, primarily because it is a disciplined force and also because it is among the first to respond in case of any disaster. People feel a strong affinity with it. They believe the army will not play a partisan role or work in anyone's favour and that it will act in light of its code of ethics and the law. Because of these reasons, I would say that people's expectations are high, very high.

This is a translated excerpt of an interview in Bangla originally aired on the website of The Daily Star on December 25. Scan the QR code to watch the full video.

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A magician with words

83rd birth anniversary of Syed Shamsul Haq



MAHFUZ ANAM

EVERY time I heard him speak I felt dazzled—dazzled by his thoughts, his insights, his ability to pinpoint what needed to be understood, his precision of language and his immaculate choice of words in expressing himself. Each time I heard him I felt what a magician with words he was.

Syed Shamsul Haq's presence in Bangla literature is so all-encompassing and his brilliance so overwhelming in all the branches of creative writing in which he is present that the accolade that he was a literary genius would not in any way overstate his extraordinary talent.

Syed Haq, as he was called by most of his admirers, is simultaneously a novelist, a poet, a playwright, an essayist and a powerful social commentator, and in all these varied fields he impressed his readers with his originality. In everything he wrote he showed his uniqueness just as much in what he had to say as in the way he said it. He had an intuitive sense of the format that would best express his thoughts—whether through a poem, a play or a novel, etc.

Before him most of the well-known novelists or short story writers based their stories on rural Bengal. But Syed Haq captured the life of urban Bengalis and wrote about the turmoil, tensions and contradictions of the rising middle class," wrote Professor Anisuzzaman pointing out the new trend in literary work that Syed Haq's writing triggered and how a whole new generation of writers was created under his influence.

In all his works his vigour and zest for life were prominently present which he expressed in ways that only his writings could. Every moment was for him a new, never-again-to-be-lived moment and which deserved to be experienced in everyone's unique ways. But as he never missed a chance to state that one must have the courage to "want to experience it."

On the occasion of his 83rd birth anniversary he commented that birthdays are not of any significance and neither is age, "only life is, and that should never escape our mind." He urged everyone to be conscious of the beauty of life and see this beauty both in its serenity as well as in its turmoil. For him life itself was an inspiration as he said in an interview that "life has to be driven, for which you need strength." By suggesting life to be "driven" he probably meant that life must signify movement, and that movement must

A writer's tool is language and of course words are at its heart. Here was a special talent of Syed Haq—his choice of words. In all his writings the words that he used always seemed like the only words that could have been used in that particular situation, be that in describing a scene, an emotion, or an event. I always marvelled at his choice of words and never stopped wondering how he could manage to think of the most appropriate word at just the right time. The more I read him the more I realised both the

the peasant uprising in Rangpur area during the British colonial period. In both these plays he truly excelled himself and majestically so. The power of the sentences he wove into mesmerising long monologues was magical. The dialogues that pitted the powerful characters he created swayed his audience from one point of view to another as the battle of words kept his listeners glued to each word as if to miss one would amount to missing the whole plot.

Nuruldin also showed the capacity of a writer to take a forgotten hero of history and bring him back to life and to public consciousness with meaning for the contemporary world. This he did with incredible power and impact.

But just as powerful the stories, so was his narrative capacity. He captured the intense drama, the deep emotions and the highs and lows in individual lives in endless verses. It was amazing how he was able to tell highly complex stories and narrate history-making events in verses that never seemed for a moment to be laboured, they flowed naturally. It was equally amazing how he was able to capture the imagination of his audience and keep them mesmerised throughout the hours that staging his plays required.

One needs to make a particular mention of his two translations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* that he did in the late sixties. About translating great literary works into Bangla he said, "When you are translating into a language it has to be like the language in which it's being translated, with all its specialties and nuances. The translation will have to be a work in Bangla regardless of what the original language was."

His adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* into *Gononayok* was a remarkable piece of work with the power, the universal message and timeless appeal of the original play mostly remaining intact.

As a journalist I was intrigued by his comment that he thought novel-writing was to him "creative journalism". While trying to understand what he meant I discovered anew the art of novel-writing and the importance of journalism: Both try to depict the realities of

life but while the latter does it through daily reporting and commenting, the former depicts the same through creatively weaving the same reality into a composite story with a far deeper meaning that perhaps gets lost in the cacophony of the daily dose of the media.

Syed Haq's remark jolted me into looking at my own profession and to try to find a bit more meaning and substance in what I was doing.

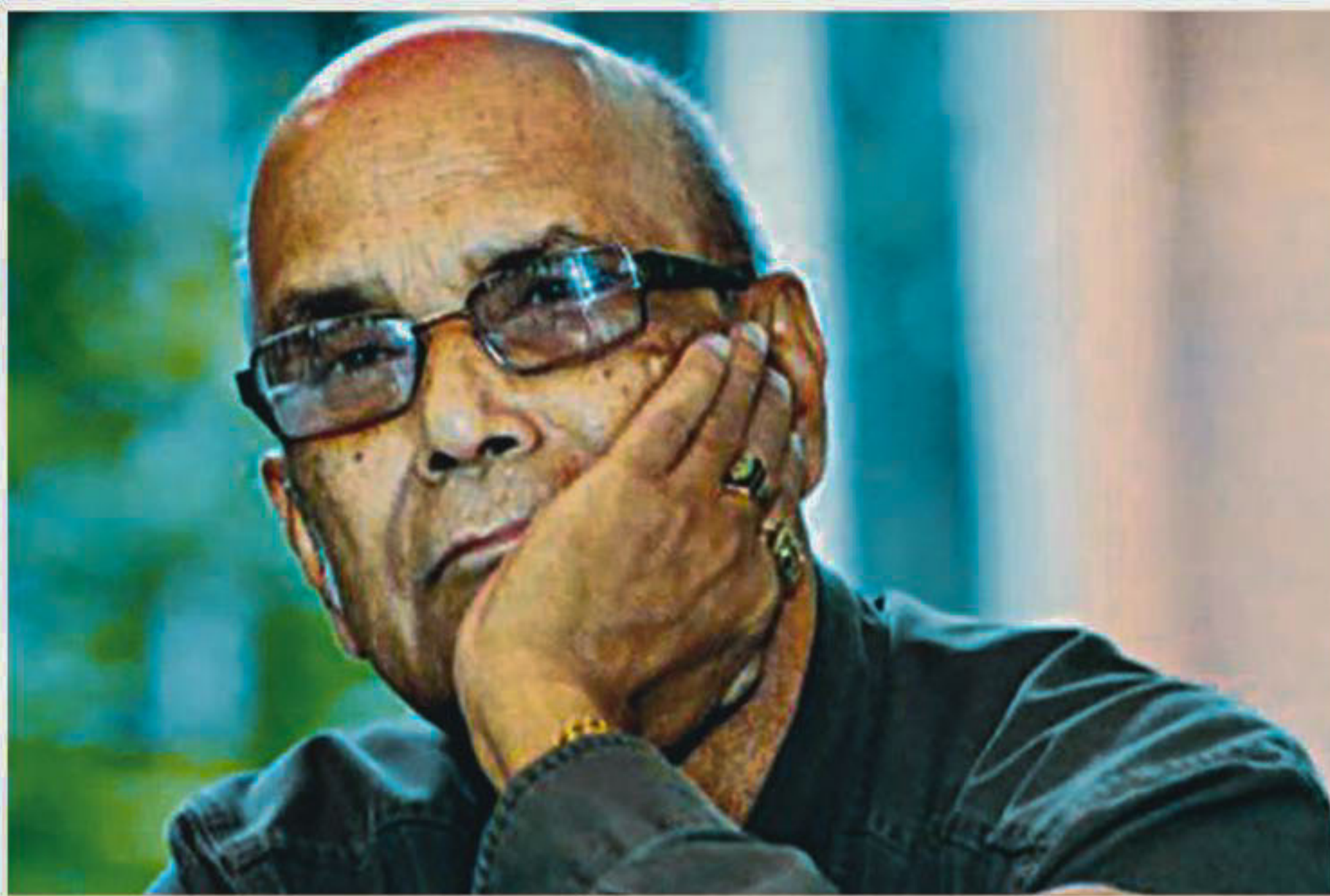
He was a patron of *The Daily Star* drawn to the paper from its inception due to his friendship with SM Ali, the paper's founding editor. He was a constant inspiration to me for what we were doing. He would call me on most occasions when he liked a report, a feature or something that I wrote. He seemed to rejoice at the fact that English journalism was acquiring a new maturity in the newspaper of his choice and wanted to encourage us every step of the way.

On a personal level I would like to flatter myself with the thought that I enjoyed a special affection from him which he would generously express every time he would see me. He was particularly effusive when my elder daughter, Tahmima Anam, made her debut as a novelist and I remember him saying at the launch of *A Golden Age* that, "There is a first novel in everyone's heart. The real challenge will be for you to write your second one." Several years later he told me after reading Tahmima's *The Good Muslim* that he was very proud of her as a writer. He would chide me for not ever trying to follow my father, Abul Mansur Ahmad, in literary writings and was particularly happy that she had taken after her grandfather.

Syed Shamsul Haq was one of the most brilliant literary figures of our time. His short stories, poems, novels, children's novels and lyrical plays make him the most versatile and accomplished writer of independent Bangladesh and perhaps the greatest literary figure in Bangla literature in the contemporary period.

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This article was originally published on September 27, 2017 in a commemorative book titled *Syed Shamsul Haq Swarangantha* on the celebrated poet and writer.



Syed Shamsul Haq (December 27, 1935 – September 27, 2016)

be guided by individual dreams. To pursue dreams there has to be ambition to make that dream come true. Nothing happens by itself, it has to be "asked for," there has to be an inner urge to "want" it. As for the "strength" one needs to drive life, he probably was referring to the "strength of character" that is innate in all of us—waiting to be recognised and nurtured into life every moment that we are alive.

beauty and importance of words for effective writing. I owe him my own greater attraction and love for words and how to value them in both personal and professional life.

In my view his exceptional strength lay in *kabya natya*, lyrical plays (plays written in rhymes), the two most famous ones being *Payer Awaj Pawa Jai* (1976) written in the background of our liberation war, and *Nuruldin Sara Jibon* (1982), a play based on

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



DECEMBER 27, 1945

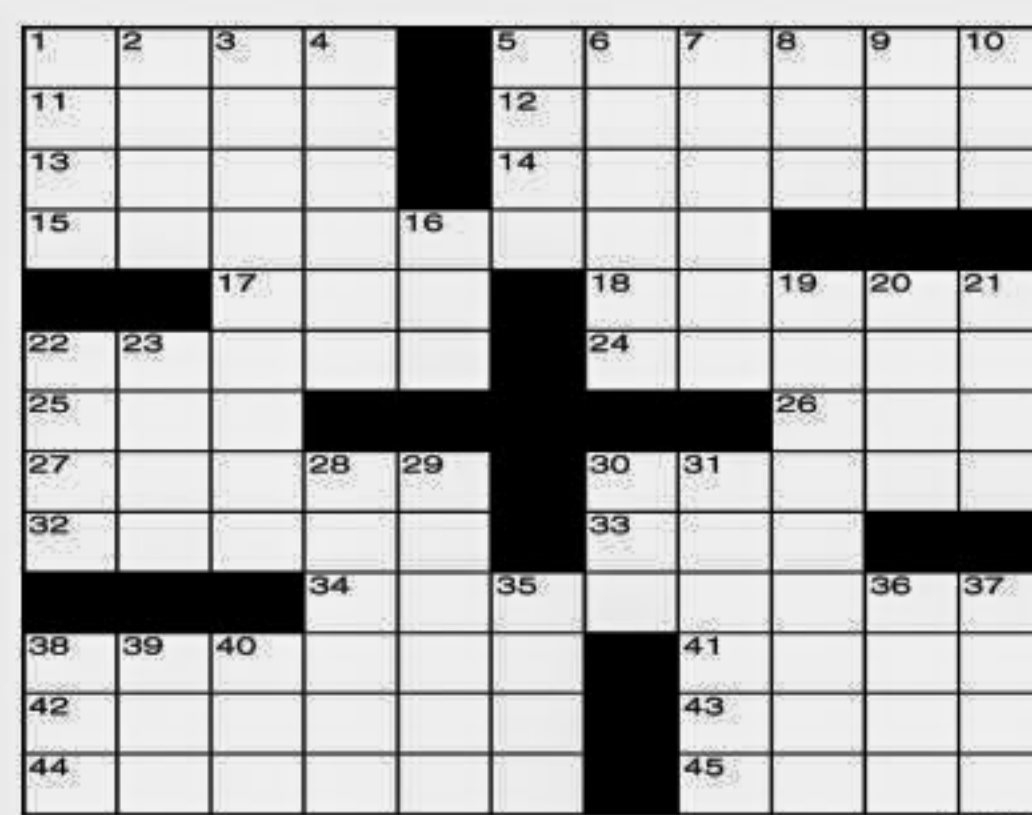
IMF FORMALLY ESTABLISHED

Formed in 1944 at the Bretton Woods Conference in New Hampshire, United States primarily by the ideas of Harry Dexter White and John Maynard Keynes, International Monetary Fund (IMF) came into formal existence in 1945 with 29 member countries and the goal of reconstructing the international payment system.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Dainty drinks
5 Reserved lane on a road
11 Brilliant act
12 Audience cry
13 -- Domini
14 Rouse
15 Yellowfish, for one
17 Egg layer
18 Defame, in a way
22 Make better
24 First lady before Michelle
25 -- relief
26 Quick bite
27 Rough fellow
30 Chopped up
32 Fluttery tree
33 "That's gross!"
34 Gymnastic jump
38 Sea off Estonia
41 Norwegian city
42 For each
43 Inning count
44 Vital
45 Location

DOWN
1 Racket
2 Hebrides island
3 Enlivens, as a speech
4 Aloud
5 Den critter
6 Sick
7 Justice Antonin
8 Stir-fry pan
9 Common verb
10 Longing
16 Finish
19 Gathers in a cluster
20 War of 1812 port
21 "Dragnet" org.
22 "Waterloo" group
23 Earth neighbor
28 Examined
29 Lead on
30 Used a spade
31 Domes shaped homes
35 Passed with ease
36 Choir voice
37 Fence part
38 Outlaw
39 Galoot
40 Tall tale



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

R I F F E Q U I N E
I N R E T U R N E R
A T O Z H O N K E R
L O G V A T S
M A I N E T W O
T I A R A S T O O D
A C R E H A R D
R E C A P H I D E S
A S H O P E N S
H O A X T A B
R E M E D Y J O S E
O R A C L E I O T A
B A N K E R B L O T

BEETLE BAILEY



BABY BLUES



BY MORT WALKER



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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