

# For a homeland they would love to return to

RUBAIYA MURSHED

We grew up in a joint family. I'm the eldest of the girls, and have always felt like I have to set an example for my two little sisters. So, nine years ago, when I was the first of us to get a national ID card, I was beyond excited. I would be able to vote. I'd have a say in the politics of my country; I was practically a grownup. I told my sisters, quite smugly, that a few years later, Rusafa would be able to vote, and then a few more years later, Rubana would be able to vote too. It was fun being able to brag about something I would be able to do that they were too young for.

Unfortunately, fate had a different, rather embarrassing, plan. Time flew by and my first time to vote finally came in 2018, when both my sisters also became eligible to vote. So, we three sisters, with years of difference between us, would be first-time voters together. Rubana didn't vote though. She, like my other younger cousins and their young friends, was too busy with preparations to go abroad to study to get her NID. As I think about them leaving to start their lives in another land, I feel my heart sink. I feel like a failure for not finding the courage in my heart to tell them not to go, or to return even if they do. I wonder whether they'll come back to cast their first votes in five years.

There was a time when I used to tell them and my friends not to think about settling abroad. I told them that we have a responsibility towards Bangladesh. It was in those times of optimism that I, with my husband, decided that we'd settle in our homeland. We knew it would mean lesser facilities, and it would mean choosing a challenging world over a more developed one. But we were determined that playing our part for the progress of this country was a priority for us. We tried to convince our near and dear ones to do the same and plan to settle at home. Over the years, our efforts became more and more subdued, and today, I'm at a point where I'm forced to question this priority. I am not sure about telling



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anyone to come back home after they finish their studies. I hesitate to ask my sister and my cousins to apply for admission in Bangladeshi universities. Why ask them when I'm not even sure they'll get fair access, opportunity or freedom?

It's not that these kids don't care for Bangladesh. On the contrary, they've shown us that they care more than any generation before them. This is the generation that took to the streets to stop grownups and check their vehicle registrations and their driving licences. They sent waves of unity rippling through the nation. It was one of the times, besides a cricket match, that we were united as a nation in our aims, in our spirits. These kids' revolution, and the passion shown by older generations like ours in the quota reform movement, had given me hope that we as a younger generation would be united in what we want for our country. But sadly, as I observed everything going on around me in the days leading up to

the 11th national parliamentary elections, I realised that we are as divided a generation as our predecessors, if not more.

I'm speaking to supporters, from my generation, of all parties. How much more do you love your country than your party? My expectation from my generation was that we would be ambassadors of what is right, for what is hopeful for our Bangladesh regardless of our parties, our backgrounds, our histories. I thought we'd look to the future together, and that we'd stand united against any immorality that comes our way for the sake of that future. I was naive. And, slowly, the Bangladesh I dream of seems to be moving further and further away.

I wanted to vote for a party, for leaders, that I believe would help us make a Bangladesh where our youngsters would want to come back to. A Bangladesh where "networks and connections" wouldn't be the criteria for access and opportunity in education and

in employment. A Bangladesh where "who the boss will be" wouldn't depend on which party wins the elections. A Bangladesh where everyone would be equal, and wouldn't be judged by their party affiliations. A Bangladesh I could tell my sister to come home to settle in someday. For now, it doesn't look too hopeful that we'll ever see that Bangladesh.

I started writing this piece the day before the election, and as I write this sentence, the last hour of voting is about to kick off. Yes, I technically don't know who will win, but the rest of this piece is dedicated to them. Sadly, all the parties we have to choose from are, in case of many issues, merely the two sides of the same coin. And so whatever happens, what I want to say is a message to anyone who is about to take the reins.

I want new rules. I want a rule that the new elected leaders and their families will have to use public transport a few days a week. A rule

that the children and grandchildren of leaders will have to study in our country's education system. I want to see who would have the will to want to rule this country amidst such rules. I want transparency, I want accountability, and for these to be used as instruments to test which leaders truly love this country.

I want candidates who will listen to our ideas. I want ministers, MPs who will not silence our voices. I want leaders who will take our ideas, reform them if they're not good enough and will make them better. Leaders who won't discourage or shut down an idea because it came from someone who represents the "enemy" party. Leaders who will put the country before the party.

I want representatives who will fight for our ability to think for ourselves. Representatives who will stand against wrongdoing even if it means sacrificing their own comfort and luxury. I want to be able to support a stand if I like it, and not be branded a particular party supporter just because of it.

I want a parliament that will constructively criticise each other's ideas, not throw mud at each other. I want responsible, kind-hearted leaders, including opposition leaders. I want a party, a team, that will value initiatives and will pursue the half-done initiatives left behind, irrespective of the party alliance, of the team before them.

I'm not for any political party because I haven't seen enough passion—in anybody—to put our nation, our people, before their party. I'm not for only development. I'm not for only democracy. I'm not for political figures who just have rich historical roots or promising futures. I'm for someone who will carry the ideas from generation to generation.

Leaders aren't forever. Ideas are. Parties don't inspire. Ideas do. In the end, after all the fights are fought, only ideas are bullet-proof.

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## A towering figure in child healthcare in Bangladesh

Remembering Dr Tofayel Ahmed founder of Dhaka Shishu Hospital on his 90th birth anniversary

SHEIKH SAZID

In recent years, a series of studies by the United Nations and World Bank applauded Bangladesh's efforts in curbing child mortality. In Asia, among the least developed and middle-income countries, words of praise were particularly reserved for Bangladesh. According to Unicef, the UN children's emergency fund, Bangladesh has done an "outstanding job" of decreasing the rate of child mortality by almost 80 percent since 1990. The country also has a higher than average annual reduction in child mortality rate at 5.5 percent.

This impressive gain has not been achieved in a single year or a decade. There have been contributions from many people and organisations that have led to it. Dr Tofayel Ahmed, a founder of the Dhaka Shishu (Children) Hospital (DSH) is one of them. As a paediatrician and a leader in his field, he oversaw the construction of the country's—and one of the world's—largest specialised hospital for children. But these days he has become a forgotten man. All that remains is his mural at the hospital. A giant in public health in Bangladesh is hardly remembered, other than by his close friends, relatives and colleagues.



Dr Tofayel Ahmed (January 1, 1929 – March 12, 1997)

Dr Tofayel was born in Bikrampur in the then undivided Dhaka district to a well-known Muslim family in January 1929. He did his MBBS from the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. He later went abroad to be trained as a paediatrician. He had private practices, but mostly spent his career building institutions that now proudly serve millions of people every year. Apart from being the member secretary of DSH, he was a professor and the head of Department of Community. He was also a senior

consultant at the BICH, an institute at the DSH. He died in Dhaka on March 12, 1997.

His 90th birthday was on January 1, 2019 and this is an apt time to remember his contribution towards Bangladesh's impressive gains in the healthcare sector. Dr Tofayel, as he known to his friends, was the member secretary of the DSH Trust Fund and the founder member secretary of the Management Board of the 535-bed DSH. He was also the member of the construction committee of the DSH, which started functioning at its current premises at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in 1977.

He was one of the youngest professors of paediatrics. But while many of his colleagues spent their whole life in private practices, Dr Tofayel dedicated all his life towards providing public healthcare. Former colleagues still remember him for his years of leadership and tireless efforts to build one of the world's best hospitals for children.

"All I can say about him is that he was a born leader who loved children. Ensuring quality healthcare for every child and mother in the country was his lifelong dream," said his former colleague and one of the country's top paediatricians, Sirajul Islam.

Islam still fondly remembers those years in the 1970s when he helped set up a tent hospital for children at Dhanmondi, which later grew into the DSH. "The war of liberation had just ended. The country was still very poor. And there were hardly any good hospitals for children and mothers. It was during those years that Dr Tofayel Ahmed realised the need for a quality community healthcare for children," he said.

But the government alone could not fund the construction of such a big hospital. Dr Tofayel and his colleagues, including professor Sultan Ahmed Chowdhury, who was the first director of the DSH, came up with the novel idea to raise funds through lotteries. Holding a lottery to raise fund for a noble cause is a western idea. It was never tried or tested in Bangladesh. But thanks to their tireless efforts, the lotteries proved to be a huge success and provided some seed money for the giant hospital.

"Those were difficult times. The government's budget was very low. We had to depend mostly on foreign aid to construct any major project. Still Dr Tofayel and the other founders did not give up their hopes," said Dr Islam.

Islam also recalled Dr Tofayel's contribution in delivering quality child and healthcare to the doorstep

of his countrymen, especially rural people. "He was a pioneer in rural healthcare," he said, adding that Dr Tofayel also built Palli Shishu Foundation (Rural Children Foundation), which still provides quality healthcare to children in villages. "He also helped set up a top child healthcare institute at the BSH."

Dr Hanif, a reputed child nephrologist who uncovered the paracetamol scam that killed hundreds of children, lauded Dr Tofayel's "tireless efforts" to shape the BSH into a world-class hospital and institute. "He was a workaholic, who hardly took any rest even when he became sick during his late years," remembers Dr Hanif.

"He was also a visionary who felt the need for a top public hospital for children. He wanted to turn the DSH into an institution that not only serves the rich and middle-class but also the poorest of children from the countryside. During those days, when public healthcare was still not adequate, he felt the need for training doctors who provide healthcare in remote villages. He had a deep love for the poor rural children," he said.

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### ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq

January 2, 1979

#### THE MASSACRE AT MULTAN COLONY TEXTILE MILLS

On the orders of President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, paramilitary forces opened fire on peaceful protesting workers in Multan, Pakistan, leaving up to 200 dead and many others injured. The incident was one of the most brutal acts committed by the then military regime in Pakistan.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

#### ACROSS

- 1 Stadium sound
- 5 Supermarket aid
- 9 Stage direction
- 11 Stationery buy
- 12 "Step aside, I'll do it"
- 13 Friendliness
- 14 Here, to Henri
- 15 Floor covers
- 17 They make

#### DOWN

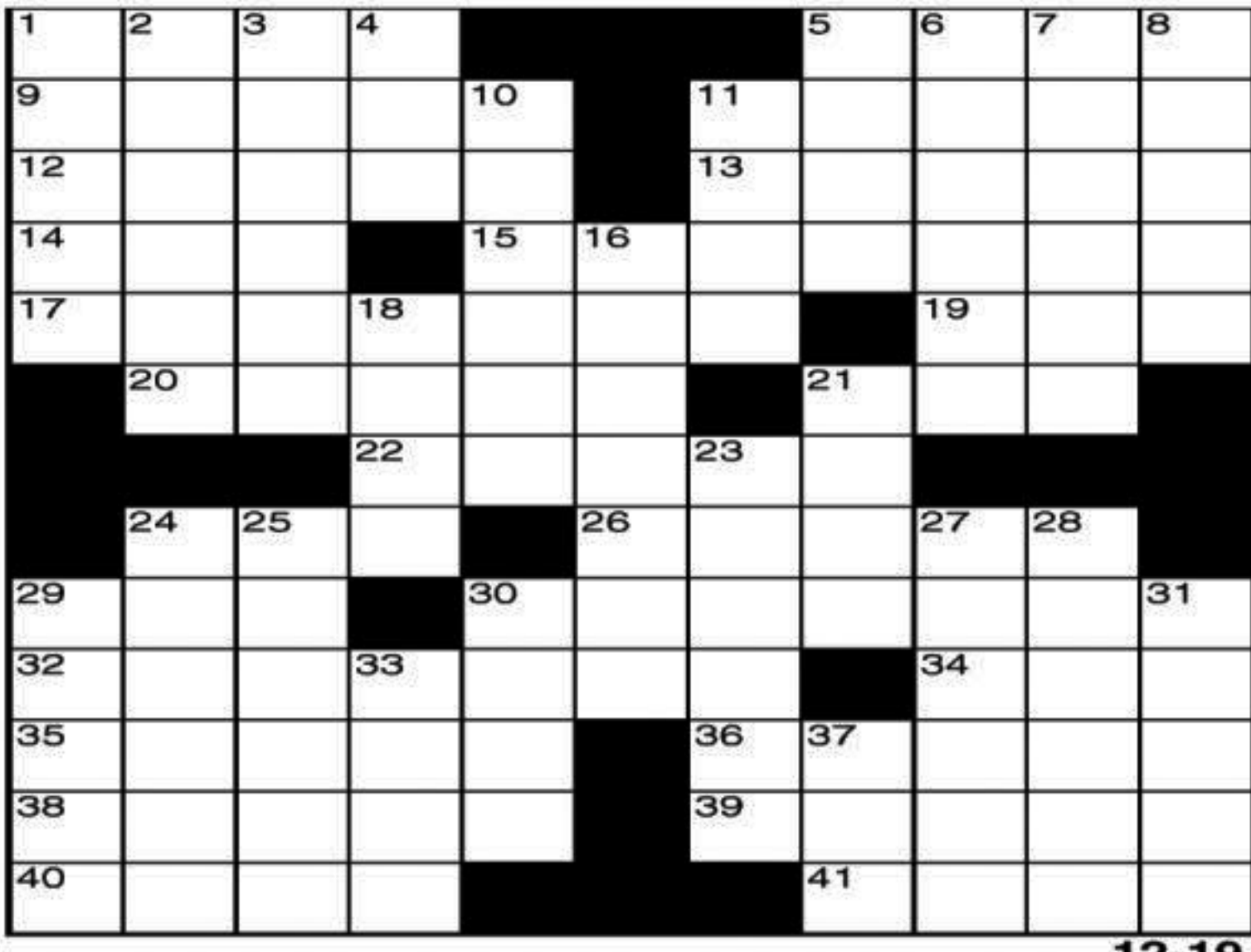
- 1 Museum piece
- 2 Like some garages
- 3 Duds
- 4 "Man on the Moon" band
- 5 Scout's base
- 6 For each
- 7 Star of the 1984

#### ACROSS

- 30 Blocs
- 32 Wrist bones
- 34 Kilmer of "The Doors"
- 35 Island ring
- 36 Make a speech
- 38 Defy authority
- 39 Was partial
- 40 Wilma's husband
- 41 Cell feature

#### DOWN

- 8 Secret meeting
- 10 Fall back
- 11 Golf goals
- 16 Weapons store
- 18 Brewery sights
- 21 Close
- 23 Some sculptures
- 24 Fastball, in slang
- 25 Oxygen-thriving organism
- 27 Utah neighbor
- 28 Christian of "Mr. Robot"
- 29 Muffler's kin
- 30 Ref's decision
- 31 Snow gliders
- 33 Entreated
- 37 Vault part



#### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

AGATHA WIFISAMIAM AWLSPIILLINGOUT  
TREYHEAP  
POORWORSEN  
AUGMOWSEATREBEKRELY  
STUDROTE  
GAMUT  
CHILLINGOUT  
HIKECOURSE  
IDESENTREE

### Beetle Bailey

by Mort Walker



### BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

