

Recognising more than just volume

A total of 66 companies have received the National Export Trophy award recently, in recognition of their extraordinary performances in the country's export earnings

in 2016-17. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina handed over the awards under 28 categories at a ceremony jointly organised by the Commerce Ministry and the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), on September 1.

Kudos to each of these companies—many of them from the apparel sector—for their achievements. Bangladesh's status as a net exporter—we export far more than we import—is vital to improving living standards in the country. For 66 companies to achieve national recognition in this area is a remarkable achievement.

The National Export Trophy awards are well established and have been handed out for many years. But a question perhaps now is the time to ponder on is, are these awards in need of a revamp? Does their focus need to be broadened beyond recognition of our export successes?

The argument in favour of expanding these awards is straightforward: the world is changing, and so is the apparel industry. Bangladesh's largest export sector by far. To achieve success globally in international markets moving forwards, it will not be enough to simply focus on volume. Buying trends are changing, and increasingly apparel brands and retailers are looking for other attributes from their suppliers; namely, they want to know what they are doing regarding sustainability,



Untreated wastewater from a textile factory gushing out of a pipe at Bank Town in Savar on the outskirts of the capital.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

innovation and product diversification. Is a supplier investing in the latest sustainable production techniques? Does it have a modern research and development department to drive product innovation? Can it go beyond the production of staple items to offer value-added products, with high quality design or other attributes?

With these issues in mind, national awards need to be developed which would recognise our business efforts in these important areas.

There is a precedent here—we can learn from the examples of other countries. For example, in the UK they have the Queen's Awards for Enterprise. This award programme is best known for recognising British businesses and other organisations, which excel in exporting.

The awards were set up in 1966 and since then have expanded to

now encompass international trade, innovation and sustainable development including environmental achievement. This final category was not added to the awards until 1992, a time when such issues first began to capture the public imagination. The UK has been celebrating their success in the sustainability space for more than 25 years; so why can't Bangladesh?

Likewise, in Australia, the main awards for international trade are the Australian Export Awards, which celebrate the achievements of Australia's export community. Now in their 57th year, the awards were once focused only on export. In recent years, however, they have expanded to include categories such as digital technology and e-commerce.

These awards have evolved to reflect the shifting trends in the industry. In Bangladesh, I would like to see the

prestigious National Export Trophy awards evolve in a similar way. Exporters who sell huge volume abroad have been the stars up until now. But the stars of the future will be businesses which can prove their credentials in the sphere of sustainability, innovation and product diversification. So we need to recognise and reward them too for the future of the industry.

It is also important to consider the nature of the companies which often gain recognition. There is at present a focus on export volume and, of course, large volumes of exports should be celebrated. But it is sustainability and innovation that, in many cases, is happening in small and medium sized enterprises or niche technology businesses.

For instance, there might be a garment factory which has launched its own line producing garments from recycled scraps of fibre. A factory might have introduced amazing effluent treatment technology alongside a range of water-saving techniques so that it can rapidly reduce its use of water—a massively important issue for Bangladesh, where the thirsty nature of garment production is a real industry worry. Or a factory might have a project going which is seeking ways to use excess scraps of fabric to save them going to incineration or landfill.

Works such as the above, which I am aware are taking place in the RMG industry of Bangladesh, are worthy of greater recognition and should surely be promoted alongside the export success of our leading RMG businesses.

Mostafiz Uddin is the Managing Director of Denim Expert Limited. He is also the Founder and CEO of Bangladesh Denim Expo and Bangladesh Apparel Exchange (BAE). Email: mostafiz@denimexpert.com.

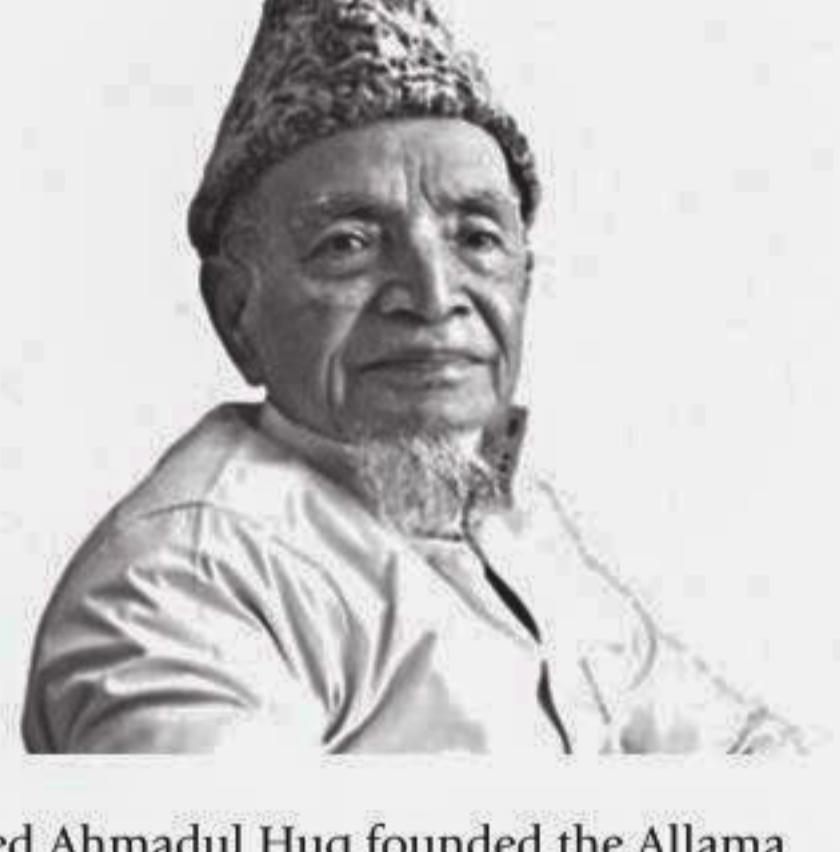
LEST WE FORGET Remembering 'Banglar Rumi'

Md SHAH NOORUR RAHMAN

On this day, exactly eight years ago, Syed Ahmadul Huq—a very well respected public servant, noted scholar, Sufi practitioner and philanthropist—bade us farewell leaving behind a rich legacy of his scholarly research and interpretative works of Sufi masters, including those of renowned poet and mystic Allama Jalaluddin Rumi. For his scholarship on Rumi, he was popularly called "Banglar Rumi". Syed Ahmadul Huq was a towering scholar on Sufism and the timeless creations of Sufi masters.

He authored many masterly works and wrote sixteen books, along with a number of research papers on a whole range of subjects. But his main focus was on Sufism and the Sufis. He was a great admirer of the great Sufis of the medieval world with special reference to Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, whose work Mathnawi is considered as a religious text next to the Holy Quran and the Hadith in the Muslim world. Two Volumes of *Syed Ahmadul Huq Rochnaboly* (Works of Syed Ahmadul Huq) on Sufism, published in 2017 by Allama Rumi Society Bangladesh have made significant contributions to the history of world Sufism in Bengali language, where he has given adequate space to Jalaluddin Rumi and his philosophy. He firmly believed that the philosophy of Rumi can save humanity and human beings from destruction.

Though Enamul Huq, Abdur Rahim, Abdul Karim, Barkatullah, JN Sarkar, Tapan Raychaudhury, Hossain Rahaman, Osman Ghani and some other scholars wrote books and articles on Sufism in Bangla; yet their contribution mainly highlights the history of Sufism in the contexts of India and Bangladesh. Ahmadul Huq has written on the life and philosophy of the world Sufis in Bengali language only to introduce these great Sufis to the Bangalee readers. He propagated that the mystic teachings of the Sufis can change the life of the people in a positive way.



Syed Ahmadul Huq founded the Allama Rumi Society and believed like Arnold Toynbee that the modern man needs a religion, and so he tried to preach the essence of religion through Sufi Philosophy. He had a dream to establish a society wedded to the ideas of liberal philosophy, peace, harmony and non-communalism where there would be no discrimination between human beings in the name of caste, creed and religion; his dream came true with the foundation of Rumi Society in 1992 during his lifetime. Following the teachings of the Prophet of Islam, he also tried to liberate and unite humankind, emphasising the need for education in man. In essence, humanising man was the sole mission of his life.

He was deeply opposed to communalism. In critiquing, he often quoted in his works extensively from western liberal literature including from the works of Shakespeare. In his work tracing the origin of human beings, he quoted passages from Wordsworth on devotional love for God. He also used to cite often from the English poet John Milton on issues of faith and spiritual communion with God. He also liberally quoted from medieval and modern Bengali poetry in support of his belief in the primacy of universal humanitarian messages.

All the Sufis, especially Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi inspired Syed Ahmadul Huq to lead a life of piety and in service to humanity. The Holy Quran, the Hadith and Sufi literature provided for the main guiding principle for his penchant and love for the Divine One.

Md Shah Noorur Rahman is an Associate Professor at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Germany's Divided Soul

THIS November, Germany will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. But the country is in a gloomy mood, and cheers will be few and far between—

especially in the east.

Today, more than one-third of eastern Germans describe themselves as second-class citizens. Contrary to their expectations at the time of German reunification in 1990, the east of the country has not become as prosperous as the west. Unsurprisingly, eastern Germans today think, feel, and vote differently than western Germans do. In fact, Germany is one country with two souls.

The latest evidence of this came on September 1, when the xenophobic right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) secured a strong second place in regional elections in the eastern German states of Saxony and Brandenburg, with 27.5 percent and 23.5 percent of the vote, respectively. In western German states, the AfD's electoral share is typically half of that.

Germany's east-west political divide reflects sharp economic differences. Between 1991 and 1996, per capita income in eastern Germany increased from 42 percent to 67 percent of west German levels. But in the 20 years after 1996, this figure rose only to 74 percent. In other words, the post-1989 process of economic convergence between eastern and western Germany largely came to a halt around 25 years ago. Former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's 1990 prediction of "flourishing landscapes" in the east still has not materialised.

Economic convergence within Germany stalled largely as a result of

policy decisions. Prior to reunification in October 1990, the West German government decided to liberalise trade with East Germany overnight. All barriers to the movement of capital and labour were removed, and the East German Ostmark was converted into Deutsche Marks at a rate of 1:1 for smaller amounts, and 2:1 for larger sums. The currency reform caused eastern German wages to rise to western German levels, even though eastern productivity was only 10 percent of that in the west. As a result, East Germany's manufacturing sector went bankrupt overnight, and its firms lost all their

low-wage advantage. The programme worked: by 1994, the Treuhandanstalt had sold virtually all eastern German firms to western investors, and the agency was dismantled.

For a while, the eastern German economy grew rapidly and started to catch up with western Germany. But without the Treuhandanstalt to provide further subsidies, western firms did not want to invest in eastern Germany. And as investment dried up, the east's convergence process came to a standstill.

Eastern Germans, meanwhile, hated the Treuhandanstalt, and saw it as the body giving away valuable assets to



Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) secured a strong second place in regional elections in the eastern German states of Saxony and Brandenburg.

Eastern European markets.

In 1990, the East German government established a new super-authority, the Treuhandanstalt, to help the country's manufacturers to survive. The agency privatised and sold eastern German companies and assets to western firms, often at a symbolic price of one DM in exchange for job guarantees. This massive subsidy gave western German firms an incentive to move to the east, even though the latter had lost its comparative

western firms. The agency's first chairman, Detlev Rohwedder, was assassinated in 1991; even today, two populist German parties—the left-wing Die Linke and the right-wing AfD—blame the organisation for eastern Germany's economic plight.

After 1989, eastern Germans were told that there was no alternative to the Treuhandanstalt, because they had no high-quality products to sell. But the law of comparative advantage holds that a country always has something to sell

if its wages and prices are low enough. Unfortunately, the high wages and prices resulting from the 1990 currency reform prevented the eastern German economy from thriving like other Eastern European countries did following the collapse of communism.

The narrative of having "nothing to sell" and a "low-value manufacturing sector" had a detrimental effect on the eastern German psyche. People felt they had no value in a market economy and lost their dignity. In the 1990s, I worked at the Humboldt University of Berlin in the east of the city, and experienced firsthand this feeling of worthlessness among eastern Germans.

The German government's biggest mistake, however, was to dismantle the Treuhandanstalt after all the eastern assets were sold. Instead, the agency should have continued to offer subsidies to foreign firms willing to invest in eastern Germany, in order to compensate for the high wages there.

But it is never too late for Germany to restart the economic convergence process. Encouragingly, the government is now discussing how to create equivalent living conditions (gleichwertige Lebensverhältnisse) in the east and west of the country. By introducing economic incentives for foreign investment in eastern Germany, policymakers could yet help to bring about the flourishing landscapes that Kohl envisaged.

Moreover, an economic recovery in the east would not only bring material benefits. It would also help to heal Germany's psychological divide, and thus make eastern Germans less likely to vote for extremist parties that prey on their fears.

Dalia Marin is Professor of Economics at the Technical University of Munich and a research fellow at the Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR).

Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2019.
www.project-syndicate.org
(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Racket
- 5 Fires
- 9 Outpouring
- 10 Take as one's own
- 12 Shakespeare's Athenian
- 13 Fashionably dated
- 14 Contemporary
- 16 Comic's offering
- 17 Nonsense
- 18 Cheap
- 20 Hot, in a way
- 22 Some poems
- 23 "Golden Boy" playwright
- 25 Teacher's reward

DOWN

- 32 When a show is shown
- 34 Homer's bartending pal
- 35 Sleep state
- 36 Not in time
- 38 Sun Valley
- 40 Barber's need
- 41 African nation
- 42 Civil rights leader Medgar Evers
- 43 Book unit
- 44 Physics amount
- 45 Barber's need
- 46 Insertion sign
- 47 "Impressive!"
- 48 Pixie
- 49 Flag features
- 50 Lugs
- 51 Finds on the dial
- 52 Token of love
- 53 Manor head
- 54 Corollary's kin
- 55 Indian gowns
- 56 Busy
- 57 Fleet
- 58 Floors
- 59 Helicopter parts
- 60 Prophetic ones
- 61 Make amends
- 62 Kilauea flow
- 63 Threatened

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

G	R	I	T	C	A	M	O
L	I	N	E	E	X	E	R
O	F	F	E	R	D	E	T
A	L	A	G	S	A	G	O
T	E	A	R	G	B	O	T
E	R	O	A	S	S	O	N
S	T	O	O	P	S	O	N
I	O	N	G	E	L	T	
D	O	O	M	P	A	L	I
I	N	P	R	A	E	N	S
V	E	R	S	R	A	T	
O	R	A	T	E	C	R	A
T	U	T	O	R	E	A	T
N	E	W	S	C	T	E	N

BEETLE BAILEY



BABY BLUES

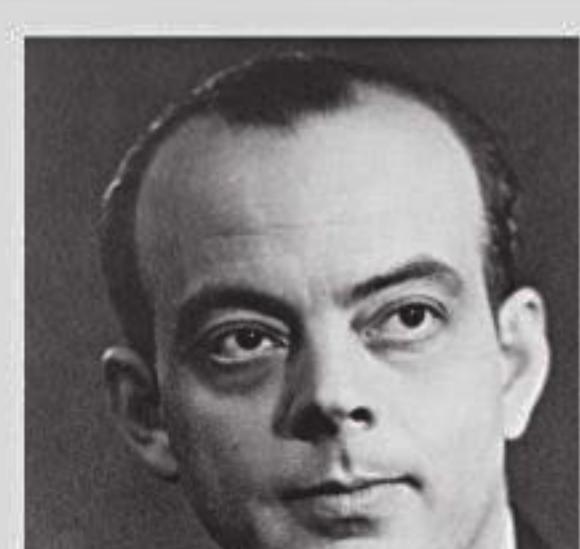


by Kirkman & Scott



Quotable

Quote



ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY
(1900-1944)

French writer, poet, aristocrat, journalist and pioneering aviator

The meaning of things lies not in the things themselves, but in our attitude towards them.

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

by Mort Walker