IN MEMORIAM

A Comrade Fallen

SONIA NASREEN AHMAD

IT often takes the life of one man for a nation to wake up or to gather the courage to call a spade a spade.

Dr Md Moyeen Uddin, an assistant professor at the Department of Medicine of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College, a colleague, a friend, beloved to all who knew him, passed away on Wednesday. I don't want go into the details about the circumstances of his death, so let me just say that we all grieve in different ways—there are those of us who knew him well, those not so well, and then there were those who got the feeling of knowing him through the reports of the print/electronic media.

I got to know Dr Md Moyeen Uddin through my husband, when they were both studying for their postgraduate exams. Tucked away in the reading room of the DMCH library, they would both be there studying along with some others.

With time, everyone went their own way, but the few times we went to Sylhet, we did drop in on him in his chamber. Once we went on a family trip with our parents and he and his family hosted a river-cruising dinner for us on the Surma River. Our children got on well, playing together. And now when I tell my son to observe a special prayer for an uncle who has just passed away, he quizzes me, "don't you remember, this uncle came to our house, and Abbu reminded me that he was the boat uncle!" Children remember things when you least expect them to. I'm certain there are many more people out there who have a treasure of memories to share about Dr Moyeen.

All will agree on the fact that he was a rare gem of a person, polite and modest. But will his death go in vain?

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19, and with the measures being put in place in Bangladesh, my husband and I (like many other doctor couples) discussed what would we do if either of us got infected with the virus. We discussed quarantine and isolation measures, how to examine patients and so forth. We even touched lightly, in our weakest moments, on the topic of succumbing to the virus.

> *Could we not have put our egos and differences aside, and followed the advice of the experts who repeatedly stressed on building our own healthcare capacity?*

It must be acknowledged that the doctors are doing a tremendous job at the moment despite various limitations, especially those in the hospitals/labs designated as Covid-19 centres. All doctors, whether in the public sector or private, are doing their best to carry out their practices defying risks and odds.

We doctors have had a lot of negative media coverage in the past, and until recently, the general public had more or less the same impression too. But when nearly the whole world is in lockdown, with the privileged finally robbed of their luxury of escaping to some "highly developed" medical centre overseas for a "full body check-up", do they now regret that our own medical system is not up to par?

In all these years, with all the medical experts that we have grown both at home and abroad, could we not have improved our own healthcare sector?

Could we not have put our egos and political differences aside, and followed the advice of the experts and professors who, time and again, stressed on the importance of building our own capacity?

Could we not have developed a good emergency service delivery system in all government and private hospitals to properly triage patients as they come in?

Could we not have utilised the experience of experts in the field of emergency?

Could we not have invested more in the health sector so that government hospitals in all the districts of Bangladesh could have the same level of experts and logistics at hand, so that no critical patient would have to waste valuable time in the transport?

Could we not have used the funds and resources that come to us from home and abroad to procure and ensure proper utilisation of medical equipment instead of leaving them to rust and rot in some godforsaken place?

Could we not have ensured that the condition of private medical college hospitals was improved to an extent that their services would be on a par with the best government hospitals?

Do I write out of anger, out of despair? No, I write because my sense of mortality is actually staring at me in the face. What I should have written in the past to address these points is no longer valid now. At home, we have elderly parents and young children. The constant worry about what will happen to us all is now no longer a new issue. It's our daily reality. It's the air we breathe. Any one of us may die tomorrow, and the coronavirus is not the only reason we may die. And so we, doctors, will have to continue to look after our own safety and go to our hospitals and chambers to fulfil our duties. We will all have to justify our actions to our Creator when the time comes. Just as the doctors who go to hospitals and their chambers to help their patients with or without adequate safety measures, they can hold their heads high and say, "I stuck to my sworn oath", the same way bureaucrats, politicians and the media personnel and even the general patients might take a moment now to think, "what shall I say when I meet my Creator?"

Let the death of our fellow comrade not go in vain.

Dr Sonia Nasreen Ahmad is an Assistant Professor of Medicine at the Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College and a director at Dr Nizam Medical Center.

Dr Md Moyeen Uddin

MUJIBNAGAR DAY

A milestone in the War of Liberation

ZAHID HOSSAIN

TODAY is April 17—Mujibnagar Day. On this day in 1971, the Mujibnagar government was formed by the elected leaders of Bangladesh as the rightful constitutional, logical, and realistic step forward towards the full realisation of our dream of an independent country of our own.

The formation of the Mujibnagar government and its pronouncement to the world at large on April 17, 1971 was really a red-letter event in our national history, especially after the thumping victory of the Awami League in the elections of 1970 under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The 167 MNAs and 293 MPs who composed the Constituent Assembly, fulfilling their constitutional obligation to the electors, made the dream of an independent Bangladesh a reality. From this point of view, Mujibnagar Day is a landmark in our struggle for independence as well as in our national history.

The Mujibnagar government was formed at the Baidyanathtala mango grove of Meherpur, a former subdivision of Kustia district, following the April 10 proclamation of independence order of Bangladesh. The oath-taking ceremony was witnessed by hundreds of foreign journalists who had assembled there to hail the birth of a new nation.

The president of the new nation was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; Syed Nazrul Islam became the acting president in the absence of Bangabandhu. Tajuddin Ahmed was the Prime Minister; M. Mansur Ali, the Finance Minister; M. Quamruz Zaman, the Home, Relief and Rehabilitation Minister; and Khandakar Mustaque Ahmed, Foreign Affairs and Law Minister. General M.A.G. Osmani, who was then a retired colonel and MNA elected from Awami League, was made the C-in-C of the Bangladesh armed forces.

It was a Herculean task. Organising civil administration and the freedom fighters, securing arms for the latter and training them, mobilising international support for the Liberation War through intense diplomatic action, ensuring speedy communication and effective coordination of various activities at a hundred different levels, and above all, keeping the morale of the freedom fighters high throughout the dark, difficult days of the war, called for extraordinary wisdom, dedication, patience, foresight and courage on the part of the Mujibnagar government and all those connected with it.

The formation of the Mujibnagar government had great significance for the nation as the great men who led the war in the absence of our supreme leader and continued the armed struggle over the following eight months, having allowed no breach in the unity of their people, fought valiantly involving everyone and kept our leader alive in the minds of every freedom fighter as if he were fighting side by side with them.

The creation of the government, in fact, gave the total war effort a fuller meaning. It cemented the unity of the people, brought the world closer to the freedom fighters, made the war effort blossom in its full focus, and above all ensured the presence of Bangladesh in the comity of nations. It was in effect a formal introduction to the rest of the world of the political leadership that was set to guide the nation into a concerted and organised war of independence.

Bangabandhu had never preached armed revolution and it had never been part of his platform either. Therefore, when the assault of the Pakistani military machine came, it remained for him to inform his associates that a long and hard struggle on the battlefield had become necessary. The declaration of independence which he gave moments before his arrest by the Pakistani military forced upon his associates the need for armed struggle. And that was proof that while he awaited uncertain and terrible incarceration, he had briefed his associates on what needed to be done. The dispersal of the leadership out of Dhaka as the army went into action was a sign that there was to be no turning back from the course that Bengalis had set for themselves. And thus the formation of Mujibnagar government was a decisive step by the trusted and capable associates of the great leader.

The establishment of the Mujibnagar government was an absolute necessity for another reason. Had it not been put in place, diffuse and disorganised guerrilla movements would have spawned all over the country without any form of central control. The danger inherent in such a development lies in an absence of legitimacy. And in Bangladesh's politics at that point in time, the absence of the Mujibnagar government would only have given the freedom struggle a clearly secessionist hue, to the delight of the Pakistanis and to the consternation of a Bengali population directly in the military's line of fire. Seen from this angle, the presence of Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam and Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed with their colleagues in Meherpur in April 1971 was a clear, unequivocal statement of intent: that the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh had taken it upon themselves to give shape and substance to an independent statehood for them.

It was thus that the global community was left with hardly a choice. The initiation of the war of national liberation, given the fact that it was being waged by a leadership privy to the electorally acknowledged support of the nation, could not be dismissed as an insurrection or a secessionist enterprise. Moreover, the military's excesses and barbarities assisted the cause greatly. The killing of unarmed civilians, the razing of villages and townships, and the atrocities against women only strengthened the cause of the provisional government. In the months between March and December 1971, the flight of ten million people to India convinced the global community of the importance of the Bengali cause, and helped the Mujibnagar government to inform the world that there was no alternative to an independent Bangladesh.

The provisional government undertook the onerous responsibility of moulding international opinion in Bangladesh's favour: the effort was assisted to an great extent by the momentum of declaration of allegiance to the national struggle by Bengali diplomats stationed in Pakistani missions abroad. Placing the entire diplomatic efforts in the hands of a well-respected personality like Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury was yet another factor for the success of the efforts of Mujibnagar government in mobilising world opinion in our favour.

The speeches and statements made by the Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam, Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed and other leaders of the Mujibnagar government at the formal oath-taking ceremony and other subsequent occasions were widely appreciated the world over as those reflected the democratic and progressive principles of the new government. The guiding principles and the state policies announced from time to time by the exiled government were all fully democratic, based on universal human rights principles and other widely accepted international norms and protocols.

Finally, the formation of the Mujibnagar government saw the real birth of a new nation, a nation imbued with the spirit of democracy, nationalism, secularism, and socialism, and drawn by the call of a man whose stature as a statesman had surpassed that of any in his time and most of his predecessors. He united the Bengali-speaking people of the land and raised a nation so steadfast in its commitment that it went ahead to face the fierce army of Pakistan, equipped only with the strength of their conviction.

Zahid Hossain was associated with the Mujibnagar government as the Chief of Psychological Warfare, Ministry of Defense. This is an abridged reprint of an article originally published by The Daily Star in 2005.

> *The creation of the government cemented the unity of the people, brought the world closer to the freedom fighters, and ensured the presence of Bangladesh in the comity of nations.*

The Mujibnagar monument with 23 pillars and a brick square in the centre, which marks the spot where the Mujibnagar government ministers took their oath.
PHOTO: **MASUM AL HASAN/WIKIMEDIA**

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Throws in
5 Pal, to a pirate
10 Database option
11 Convict's hope
12 Eye drop
13 Beautiful boy
14 Nile diverter
16 Prized prosciutto
20 Punctual
23 Pitcher's stat
24 Paris sight
25 Studio sign
27 "Very funny!" in a text
28 Throat danglers
29 Fleeing
32 Patriotic symbol
36 Disinclined
39 Steak choice
40 Western writer
41 Historic times
42 Singly
43 Highlands girl

Louis

DOWN
1 Nick and Nora's dog
2 Some deer
3 Tie
4 Fasten one's seat belt
5 Palindromic address
6 Kitchen come-on
7 Great weight
8 New Haven student
9 "Sure thing!"
11 Mission man
15 Newborn's need
17 Get better
18 Diva's piece
19 Earth neighbor
20 Ibsen's home
21 Very bright
22 Incline
25 Egg outline
26 XVI, for one
28 Peptic problem
30 Cheboygan's lake
31 Follow as a result
33 Long story
34 Son of Zeus
35 Disorder
36 Imitating
37 Kilmer of "The Doors"
38 Punk rock offshoot

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

R	A	P	S			P	A	R	T
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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT