

Kamal Ziaul Islam: A legend in his own time

BELAL EHSAN BAAQUIE

A titan, a legend, an iconoclast, a pioneer—these are some of the words that come to one’s mind when recalling the memory of Kamal Ziaul Islam, popularly known as KZ Islam, who passed away on May 3, 2021. It is hard to accept that his charming personality and uplifting presence will no longer be a part of our lives. A charismatic figure, equally at ease with seniors, contemporaries and juniors, KZ Islam was the life of every gathering and his infectious optimism and ebullient personality would win him friends wherever he went.

KZ Islam’s contributions to Bangladeshi cricket are well-known, and he had had many accolades and achievements, such as being the President of Bangladesh Cricket Control Board (presently Bangladesh Cricket Board), President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB), President of Gulshan Club, and so on. I will instead focus on his personal side, which is as fascinating as his public persona.

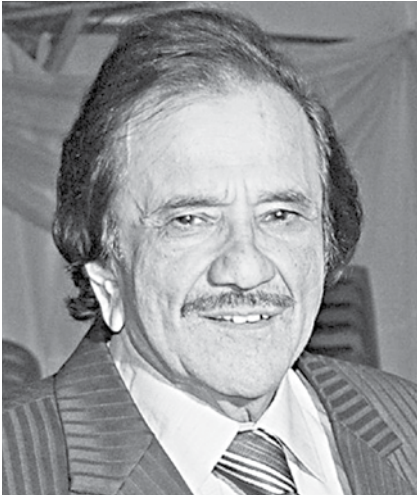
KZ Islam’s story starts 86 years ago in Mymensingh, where he was born, one of eight siblings, of illustrious parents Khan Bahadur Sirajul Islam and Rahat Ara Begum. His mother was a renowned person in her own right—a writer of short stories in Urdu. At the age of 11, he was awarded a scholarship to the Royal Indian Military College in Dehradun, but due to the Partition of India, he went on to complete his schooling at Lawrence College at Murree, Pakistan (1947-52). He completed his education by getting a BSc in chemistry from Calcutta University (1955) and earned BCom (Hons) at the University of Leeds, UK, in 1960. After becoming a Chartered

Accountant in 1962, he held a few positions in the UK and returned to Bangladesh in 1964.

He continued his professional life as a Chartered Accountant in various private and public institutions, and had a large circle of friends both in Dhaka and Chattogram. He was a leading socialite for many years and an accomplished singer. On many occasions, he would entertain family and friends with a large repertoire of songs.

In 1971, he moved to Dhaka from Chattogram and continued to serve in public-sector corporations. In 1976, he ventured into the world of business and was one of the pioneer entrepreneurs of Bangladesh, launching his own company called Nirman International Limited. It is in the name of this company that he later founded the Nirman School Cricket Tournament in 1982. Nirman was a construction firm that built the first 32-storied skyscraper in the country for Bangladesh Bank in 1985, and later diversified into projects overseas as well as project promotion and implementation in the power and telecom sector, property development and real estate, marble business, cold storage and so on.

The Nirman School Cricket Tournament was a result of the abiding interest KZ Islam had in the sport of cricket and his perennial optimism and confidence in the abilities of the youth of the country. He was the President of Ramblers Club from 1975 till he passed away, a club of enthusiasts who would play cricket on weekends for personal entertainment. He was always worried about the fact that there were not enough playgrounds for the youth to develop their sporting skills. KZ Islam’s abiding faith in the youth led to his consistent personal support of cricket at



KZ Islam, who died on May 3, 2021.

a time when there was no professional or any form of organised cricket in the country.

He combined his love of cricket with philanthropy and decided to take it upon himself to develop and fund the sport of cricket for the youth of the country. The seeds that he sowed resulted in Bangladesh becoming a part of the international union of cricket champions. KZ Islam did not stop at cricket; he went on to contribute to the development of football in the country, being the Chairman of the Development Committee of Bangladesh Football Federation (2003).

KZ Islam’s philanthropy extended beyond sports, and among the many projects he supported was Shishu Polli, an NGO for marginalised women, of which he was a patron.

One would have thought that being a professional Chartered Accountant, a pioneer entrepreneur and a philanthropist would have

been enough, but not for KZ Islam whose creativity took yet another turn when he developed a serious interest in writing and scholarship. Starting with writing a column in the weekly Holiday on the great personalities of the world, which was later transformed into a book called *Glimpses of the Great* (2012), KZ Islam turned his attention to an event that has occupied many a great mind: the Partition of India.

Based on meticulous scholarship and painstaking in-person interviews of leading personalities still alive in South Asia and the UK, who wrote or were involved with the Partition, he wrote a voluminous book with a tentative title *The Mountbattens and the Partition of India* (to be published). In the book, he showed, using multiple original and secondary sources, that Mountbatten had a clear bias towards India and against Pakistan; in fact, an earlier title of his book was *Mountbatten’s India Bias*.

In the view of KZ Islam, if not for Mountbatten being the Viceroy of India, the Partition of India would have been fair to both sides instead of being biased towards India. One may agree with or contest this rather momentous conclusion, but one cannot fault the scholarship that went into KZ Islam coming to this conclusion.

KZ Islam was sharp-witted, humorous, light-hearted, brilliant—a delightful and engaging person. His magnetic personality would win over all those who would come across him, and he was the first to help anyone whom he could, without any hesitation or expectations. During the Liberation War of 1971, he helped many people under very trying circumstances.

KZ Islam was a loyal member of his extended family, and being one of his nephews, I can vouch that for us he

was a hero and a role model that we all tried to emulate. What intrigued me the most was how KZ Islam could manage to be so many different things with such felicity. He was always the bedrock of support for all family members. I remember on many occasions my late father would call KZ Islam at odd hours, and he would always find a willing helping hand in KZ Islam.

KZ Islam came from a deeply religious family, with many famous Islamic scholars amongst his ancestors. He was a religious person who had a firm belief in the tenets of Islam, and he practiced all the compulsory edicts. His practice of Islam was also a model for us, his extended family members, as we saw a thoroughly modern person effortlessly combining the practice of Islam with the contemporary world.

The recounting of the achievements of KZ Islam is to throw light on the many dimensions of his personality: professional, entrepreneurial, philanthropist, scholar, socialite, a religious person and a loyal family man. KZ Islam combined so many diverse dimensions into a meaningful life full of attainments, achievements, joys and struggles. He was a legend in his own time, and his legacy lives on. He leaves behind his wife and four sons.

One can only wish him well in his journey to the eternal life, with the conviction that all the good he has done to so many people and over so many years will stand him in good stead on his final journey. But his absence will be sorely felt, and his memories will remain with us.

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Can Biden save our planet from overheating?



QUAMRUL HAIDER

EVERY year, the Earth Day comes and goes while we continue to dig ourselves deeper and deeper toward climate and ecological disaster. Since the first Earth

Day on April 22, 1970, we have pushed our planet to the brink of climate catastrophe, so much so that for those of us born in this century, every year has been warmer than the 20th-century average with last year ravalling the hottest year in modern times.

For the first time in recorded history, concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide measured last month at the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii was more than 420 parts per million. It is a disconcerting milestone, especially if we note that the planet has already warmed by more than one degree Celsius around halfway to doubling pre-industrial levels of carbon dioxide.

Then there is methane, a greenhouse gas that is a shape-shifter. The rapid rise of methane from an obscure trace gas to a major player in forcing climate change is often ignored by the policy makers, although global methane concentration in the atmosphere is now nearly two and a half times the pre-industrial levels of roughly 770 parts per billion. Methane may account for a minuscule portion of the greenhouse gases, yet it is extremely efficient at trapping heat from the Sun. Over a period of 20 years, it is 80-85 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

Armed with these alarming data, on this year’s Earth Day, President Joseph Biden of the United States of America invited 40 world leaders, including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, for a two-day virtual summit to discuss plans

on how to save humankind from the looming “existential threat” resulting from anthropogenic climate change. At the summit, he urged them to combat climate change collectively in order to prevent the planet from heading toward the climate tipping point—a critical threshold where a tiny change could push the climate system into a completely new, irreversible state. Some scientists believe that a “global disaster”

every sector of the US economy. And that will require, among other things, producing electricity from renewable sources, cars and trucks running on electricity, phasing out chemicals used in refrigeration and air-conditioning that are thousands of times more potent than carbon dioxide at warming the planet, and using greenhouse gas removing technologies to suck carbon dioxide out of the air.



President Joe Biden speaks to the virtual Leaders Summit on Climate from the White House in Washington, US on April 22, 2021.

PHOTO: AP

is already unfolding because the climate may have crossed the tipping point.

Biden announced an ambitious plan to cut US greenhouse gas emissions to half their 2005 levels by 2030, reaching zero emissions no later than 2050. Although the proposed cut was part of the Nationally Determined Contribution under the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, the White House did not provide a specific road map outlining what has to be done to implement the plan. Nevertheless, the target of 50 percent cut by the end of the decade will entail a steep and rapid decline of fossil fuel use in virtually

While a broad spectrum of people in the USA and elsewhere welcomed Biden’s plan as an encouraging starting point, environmental activists argue that his aggressive goals to switch to clean energy by 2030 is “nowhere near enough” to keep our planet habitable. According to them, as the “biggest historical polluter,” the USA needs to aim for at least a 70 percent reduction compared to 2005 levels—the high point for US emissions—if he wants to achieve zero emissions by 2050. More importantly, they are justifiably concerned that Washington’s history of backing out of or failing to ratify

climate commitments will jeopardise support for Biden’s plan.

To the conservatives and anti-environmental groups, Biden’s plan is a political hot air. They fear that if implemented, there will be massive destruction of wealth, surrender of America’s international trade advantages, creation of a huge intrusive government-run bureaucracy, inhibition of free markets and a precipitous drop in the living standards of most Americans. A cadre of Republicans beholden to Donald Trump and the ultra-right Fox News even claimed, albeit falsely, that Biden will take hamburgers and steaks off the menu as part of his plan.

It is, therefore, an open question whether Biden’s new policies will survive the American political system. In the past, policies on climate change have repeatedly shifted when Republicans were in power—first with George Bush undoing Bill Clinton’s attempt to join the Kyoto Protocol, and then with Donald Trump pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement negotiated by Barack Obama. Hence, for Biden’s policies to succeed, he has to convince moderate Republicans to break ranks with their conservative colleagues who have succumbed to Trump’s fallacious argument that climate change is a Chinese hoax. Biden’s policies could also face obstacles in the courts.

Not only will Biden have to contend with congressional Republicans, he will also have to balance the demands of environmental groups that want him to go big on renewable energy while at the same time be wary of what it will mean for organised labour—in part because there are fewer union jobs in the renewable energy sector.

Biden’s age is also a big factor. In the best-case scenario, setting an emissions target for the next ten years seems plausible if he remains president for two terms. In the worst-case scenario,

78-year-old Biden will in all likelihood be president for only one term. What if Trump or another Trump-like chump comes to power in 2024 and rolls back everything put in place by Biden? After all, the Republican-controlled Congress wiped out most of the Obama administration’s environmental rules in the first 16 weeks of Trump’s presidency.

Biden’s plan overlooks an important aspect that plays, and will continue to play, a devastating role in heating up our planet. It totally ignores the fact that the heat-trapping gases presently in the air will not magically vanish even if we instantly stop adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. That is because different greenhouse gases take different amounts of time to break down via chemical reactions. Carbon dioxide has an atmospheric lifetime of hundreds to even thousands of years whereas nitrous oxide lingers for about 100 years. Methane dissipates relatively quickly, persisting for about 12 years. But there is a problem—a feedback-loop situation. When methane breaks down, it can turn into carbon dioxide, thereby replacing one greenhouse gas with another.

So, can Biden save our planet from overheating? Anyone hoping that Biden’s plan will lead to a habitable future on this fragile planet should be circumspect because like most politicians, Biden is working with targets, not solutions. Moreover, he is trapped by the short-term self-interest of multi-national corporations and fossil fuel industries who fear that any real change will cut into their profit and power. Besides, his initiative of cutting greenhouse gas emissions without simultaneously removing the ones currently in the atmosphere will not be enough to stop the nightmarish effects of climate change.

Quamrul Haider is a Professor of Physics at Fordham University, New York.



QUOTABLE
Quote



MICHELANGELO
(1475-1564)
Italian sculptor

There is no greater harm than that of time wasted.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Golf feat
6 Long tales
11 River catch
12 Make amends
13 Squirrel's find
14 Caller's need
15 Campus leader
17 Dutch cheese
18 Field workers
20 Imperfection
22 Moody music
23 Snowbird's destination
26 Like some online videos
28 Weasel's cousin
29 Rock concert venue
31 Bowler, e.g.
32 A bunch

33 Saddler's tools
34 Pronto, in
36 Go it alone
38 Way to go
40 Fable ending
43 Borders
44 Agassi of tennis
45 Phoenix source
46 Bowler's button

DOWN
1 Greek vowel
2 Curved path
3 Entertaining
4 Entices
5 Sicilian peak
6 Easy victim
7 Basically
8 Glib
9 Visitor to Siam

10 Appear
16 Saints' org.
18 Guns
19 Give off
21 Weaving machine
23 Move like a moth
24 Start a hand
25 Fine study
27 Pet from the pound
30 Fleet letters
33 Singularly
34 Open space
35 Supplies with turf
37 General Bradley
39 Slalom section
41 Is for two?
42 Rent out

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TUESDAY'S ANSWERS

B O P S M O D E S T
A B U T A D A G I O
C O L A D E N O T E
H E L P D E S K
E L I S E P A L
C O D E D A R U B A
O A F S L Y
S T O R M A S H E S
T H R E E G E E
I N D I G O C A L E N D A R
C O U P E S A F R O
E D G E R S T O G S E R O S

BEEBLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

YOU COULD WORK FOR A CEO AT A MAJOR CORPORATION. WHY DO YOU STAY HERE?

I LIKE BEING THE SMARTEST ONE IN THE OFFICE

OH WAIT... UMMM...

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

I GOT AN EMAIL FROM A COMPANY THAT WANTS TO SPONSOR MY YOUTUBE CHANNEL.

HERE'S WHAT THEY'RE OFFERING.

THAT'S MORE THAN I MAKE!

YEAH I'M EXCITED, TOO!