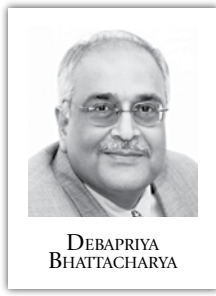


# Bidding Adieu to Emeritus Publisher Mohiuddin Ahmed



**E**MERITUS publisher Mohiuddin Ahmed, the doyen of Bangladesh's publishing industry, left us on June 22, 2021. As it is said, life ends but memories do not. When I recall my association with him, three distinctive episodes and numerous encounters flash across my mind.

I came to know Mohiuddin Ahmed, founder of the University Press Limited (UPL), in Dhaka during the late 1980s. This was in connection with the processing of a publication titled *From Aid Dependence to Self-Reliance* (1990), a task entrusted by Professor Rehman Sobhan, the then Director General of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). In the old-fashioned process of preparing the final typescript of the book, I have had the opportunity to observe Mohiuddin Ahmed, then in his energetic late 40s, in full form and action. For a young researcher, it was indeed instructive for me to see how he visualised the whole value chain of production and implemented each of the discrete activities with finesse. He could envision the final product—how the book will look like.

My second cherished involvement with him took place when he undertook the responsibility to publish the 29 Task Force Reports, prepared by more than 250 national experts under the stewardship of Rehman Sobhan when he was an Advisor in the caretaker government led by Justice Shahabuddin. I remained closely engaged with Mohiuddin Ahmed in planning and delivering the four volumes which came out under the title *Report of the Task Forces*

on *Bangladesh Development Strategies for the 1990s* (1991). I witnessed how he approached this project from the perspective of national responsibility. He even got his daughter Shamarukh to design the cover of the volumes.

My third set of intimate interactions with him relates to the second half of 1990s when the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) entered into an arrangement with UPL for publication of the series captioned *Independent Review of Bangladesh Development (IRBD)*. The first volume of the series, captioned *Experiences with Economic Reform: A Review of Bangladesh Development*, came out in 1995. I was impressed to observe Mohiuddin Ahmed's approach in providing an expanded readership to our otherwise uncheerful analysis of the state of the economy. This was indeed an illustration of how he combined commercial and creative acumen.

In the 2000s, my interactions with Mohiuddin Bhai (by that time I could allow the familiarity) became limited for a number of reasons, one being his weakening health. Yet, whenever we met, conversation with this erudite and accomplished person would be an enriching experience for me. I fondly remember the dinner discussion we had at his residence when he invited a group of his authors.

Our conversations would often veer towards the future of book publishing, particularly given the changing reading habit, infringement of copyright and escalation of printing cost. I would often raise my concern over the limited English readership in Bangladesh; he would always reassure me that the libraries around the world will be the main repository of the UPL publications. Mohiuddin Bhai's optimistic outlook regarding the prospect of book reading is vindicated by the fact that book sales value increased globally by 1.4 percent in 2018.



Mohiuddin Ahmed (1944-2021).

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Another major theme of our discussions had been the evolving business model for book marketing. I was struck by Mohiuddin Bhai's readiness to adapt to technological and digital innovations—whether it concerned print to order, tie-in publishing, referral marketing or use of e-commerce platforms for sale and publicity. This was the time when Kindle was gaining popularity. For him, printing hard copies and going digital were not an either/or situation. His bottom-line was: under conceivable circumstances, quality of the books produced should not get compromised. I guess this attitude spoke about his deep passion for books and profound respect for his authors.

In this connection, we often jointly

lamented the absence of a string of decent bookshops—spacious and well-stocked—as Dhaka's socio-cultural mini-epicentres. This theme would often take us to the issues concerning Ekushey Boi Mela organised annually by Bangla Academy. Mohiuddin Bhai was of the view that such book fairs should be held more often and target specific audience. He was mindful of the changing demographic profile of the readership and the need to appreciate that from a publisher's perspective. Thus, he ventured into diversifying UPL's catalogue including books of various genres. We also talked about lenient return policy and public availability of imprints.

Mohiuddin Bhai was a person with an

international outlook, underpinned by his grooming and conviction. I remember mentioning to him that book publishing is a global industry amounting to about USD 100 billion, where almost a million people are employed. He would then implore us to do research on the publishing sector of Bangladesh and highlight the policy challenges that it faces. I guess one day a proper study will be done in this area as a tribute to Mohiuddin Bhai and other pioneers of the country's publishing industry.

Mohiuddin Bhai, through UPL, has created a brand identity. I wonder what underlies this vaunted identity. What are its assets? Is it because UPL is a market leader? Or is it because of its ability to inspire the market? My best guess in this regard is quite simple. The values espoused by its founder underpin UPL's brand identity. He had been an eminent standard-bearer of post-independence Bangladesh. He was engaged in promoting creation of a democratic, secular and progressive society by instilling reading habits among the citizens. He greatly valued the power of knowledge as a driver for change. He maintained that the ability to read is not a privilege, but a right.

Mohiuddin Bhai had been a lucky person. He could find in his other daughter, Mahrulkh, a talented and conscientious chief executive of UPL. In her hands, UPL's brand value is only expected to rise. I trust the vision and ideas, hopes and dreams of Mohiuddin Ahmed are making an inter-generational transition.

That makes me believe that Mohiuddin Ahmed's mortal being may not be with us anymore but his spirit would always be with us, as we strive for an inclusive and prosperous Bangladesh.

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## Mass vaccination leading to herd immunity is our best chance



**I**N a recent cross-sectional serosurvey conducted by icddr,b, antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 (widely known as coronavirus) from blood samples were found in 71 percent and 55 percent of Dhaka and Chattogram city-

dwellers respectively (*The Daily Star*, June 23). More than two-thirds of slum-dwellers developed seropositivity (antibody positive) against the virus, the report added. It means they were exposed to and infected with the virus but did not necessarily develop symptomatic disease. In fact, study results showed that only 35.5 percent of seropositive people had mild symptoms while the rest were asymptomatic.

Antibodies are protective proteins made by the immune system to fight infection, and utilised to assess seroprevalence of an infectious disease of public health importance in a community. In some instances, it is also used for diagnostic purposes in case of diagnostic dilemmas in severe Covid-19 cases, where RT-PCR tests are negative—such as post-Covid multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children—and when antibody detection remains the only laboratory diagnosis. More importantly, during the current pandemic, serological testing appears to be a useful strategy to determine human-to-human transmission of the virus. The utilisation of serological tests for the asymptomatic population or those showing mild symptoms is crucial as they rarely opt for PCR testing, masking the population's actual rate of Covid-19 infection.

However, there is another significant takeaway as well as some fallacies surrounding the seroprevalence of Covid-19. About 72 percent of the population in slum areas were exposed and infected with the virus, the above report said, despite popular belief that Covid-19 has mostly infected

people of upper socioeconomic classes so far, sparing the poor. This belief or illusion, however, is not completely shattered from the interpretation of the study results. Although slum-dwellers are more exposed to and infected with the virus than non-slum-dwellers, they rarely developed Covid-19 symptoms. People may be infected with a virus but may not necessarily develop the disease. Subclinical infections producing protective antibodies without causing



Mass vaccination remains our best chance of defeating the coronavirus.

FILE PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

symptomatic disease are like a blessing in disguise, as it protects the person from future infection through previously formed immunity—although antibodies formed by previous infection may not last long or may not show the same efficacy with different variants of the virus.

High seroprevalence was similarly found in Dharavi, Mumbai, the largest slum in South Asia. The serosurvey carried out by

the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in July 2020 found 57 percent of slum-dwellers to have developed antibodies against the virus. They were mostly asymptomatic with a very low case fatality rate (0.05-0.1 percent), which resembled the Bangladeshi scenario. High density of population, lack of social distancing, and common utilities like shared toilets could be attributable to high seroprevalence, the BMC report stated, and the low symptomatic Covid-19 caseload



in the population was due to effective containment measures. In the icddr,b report, however, no such explanation was given.

People who performed good hygiene practices like washing hands frequently and not touching their nose and face were found in the icddr,b serosurvey to be at a lower risk of exposure to Covid-19 as evidenced by lower seroprevalence. However, people with low exposure to an infectious disease with low

seropositivity are more vulnerable to future symptomatic infection from the same virus as they developed no protection from previous subclinical exposure. A published study in Bangladesh, where I was a co-investigator, found that urban adolescents and children of higher socioeconomic status with lower seropositivity against the Hepatitis A virus were more vulnerable to developing severe symptomatic Hepatitis A than their rural and urban counterparts of lower socioeconomic status, who developed higher seropositivity due to previous subclinical infection, as a result of poor hygiene and sanitation practices in their households.

Considering the high prevalence of coronavirus antibodies in the non-representative sample size, a question arises: are we heading towards developing herd immunity? It is one of the most talked-about weapons in fighting a virus. Herd immunity occurs when a virus can no longer spread easily because enough people are already immune to it due to natural infection or from mass vaccination, thereby preventing the virus from jumping from person to person and reaching those who have not yet been infected or vaccinated. For herd immunity to develop, 60-90 percent of the population need to develop immunity through mass immunisation or natural infection. The icddr,b researchers, despite finding reasonably high seroprevalence in their study, ruled out such a possibility, the non-representative sample size being an important reason.

Herd immunity through natural infection, however, can be disastrous even in high-income countries with an enormous loss of lives as the health system will be overwhelmed with patients. It also requires a number of waves of Covid-19 infection to develop, which is why herd immunity is generally pursued through mass vaccination. Immunity (seropositivity) developed from natural infection is also unreliable as there is still poor understanding as to how long it will last. Most importantly, the constantly mutating coronavirus is giving rise to deadlier and more contagious variants which may

show resistance to immunity developed from past infection.

India is a glaring example of why relying on natural infection-induced herd immunity may not work. A recent deadly second wave of Covid-19 caused a public health catastrophe there, leading to apocalyptic scenes of overwhelmed hospitals including in the capital. A serosurvey carried out by the Indian National Centre of Disease Control on 21,387 Delhi city-dwellers in June-July 2020 found that 23 percent of residents had developed Covid-19 antibodies with the remaining 77 percent still susceptible. Thus they interpreted that one-fourth of Delhi residents had developed immunity without vaccine or symptomatic Covid-19. Dr Jayaprakash Mulyil, chairman of the scientific advisory committee of the National Institute of Epidemiology in India, mentioned in an interview with the *Outlook* magazine on July 22, 2020 that judging from the seroprevalence survey, India was "fast approaching herd immunity" and Covid-19 was "going to end on its own when we reach herd immunity".

However, Delhi and other states witnessed a devastating surge of Covid-19 in April and May 2021, where up to 400,000 daily cases were recorded. Clearly, the previous seropositivity didn't help. The emergence of the highly transmissible and immunity-evading Delta variant of Covid-19, together with religious festivals, election rallies, and ignoring early warnings, were responsible for this catastrophe.

Therefore, it is desirable to achieve herd immunity with mass vaccination covering at least 70 percent of the population which can be done faster and without people getting sick or dying. Until that is achieved, we have to protect ourselves by simple health safety measures like putting on a face mask, frequent hand washing, social distancing, maintaining respiratory hygiene, and staying away from social gatherings and the sick.

Prof Dr Md. Salim Shakur is a senior consultant at the Department of Paediatrics, United Hospital Limited.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR**  
(1908-1986)  
French writer and political activist

*One of the benefits that oppression secures for the oppressor is that the humblest among them feels superior.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Last Supper attendee
- 6 Clear sky
- 11 Deal maker
- 12 Tremble
- 13 Neighbor of Togo
- 14 Goaded on
- 15 Evolution proponent
- 17 Lass
- 19 Big shot
- 20 Chemist's place
- 23 Comes up
- 25 Walk through water
- 26 Race ends
- 28 Yard units
- 29 Caress
- 30 Snaky shape
- 31 Fellow

**DOWN**

- 1 Drinking spree
- 2 "That's gross!"
- 3 Editor's concerns
- 4 "The King and I" role
- 5 Goes without food
- 6 Outfit
- 7 Rotate
- 8 Crone
- 9 - out a living

**32 Rent out**

- 33 Deli meat
- 35 Spanish port
- 38 Friend of Han
- 41 Banish
- 42 Occupy
- 43 Onions' kin
- 44 Beginning

**10 Wine choice**

- 16 Kind of thinking
- 17 Social blunder
- 18 Spring sign
- 20 Disappearing phone connections
- 21 "Hello singer"
- 22 Plague
- 24 Command to Fido
- 25 Take the prize
- 27 Serving
- 31 Loving looks
- 33 Necktie material
- 34 Primary
- 35 Animation frame
- 36 Sack
- 37 Game cube
- 39 Expected
- 40 Make a choice

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**TUESDAY'S ANSWERS**

**BEETLE BAILEY**

**BABY BLUES**

**BY MORT WALKER**

**BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT**