

BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF TAJUDDIN AHMAD

Portrait of a Patriot

SYED ABUL MAKSUD

TAJUDDIN Ahmad, the prime minister of the provisional government-in-exile, would have been 96 this year. He was born on July 23, 1925 in Kapashia upazila. His life tragically came to an end on November 3, 1975.

In his early youth, he participated in the Pakistan movement. As he came from a rural middle class background, he could feel the hopes and aspirations of the common man. Immediately after Pakistan came into being, he realised

that the feudal ruling class could not serve the interest of the Bangalis. He dissociated himself from the ruling Muslim League and joined the opposition camp.

A staunch nationalist and social democrat, Tajuddin played an active role in all the democratic movements against the autocratic Pakistani rule. He was one of the youth leaders who spearheaded the historic Language Movement and was arrested for his active participation in the movement. He joined the Awami League in 1953 and was elected general secretary of the

Tajuddin was not a revolutionary leader but was destined to shoulder a historic responsibility at a critical juncture of an armed struggle.

Dhaka chapter of AL. He was elected a member of the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly in 1954 at the age of 29.

Tajuddin was elected general secretary of the AL in 1966. As a trusted lieutenant of Sheikh Mujib, he played a vital role in popularising the six-point charter. He suffered imprisonment many times in 1952, 1954, 1958, 1964 and 1966.

Tajuddin was not a revolutionary leader but was destined to shoulder a historic responsibility at a critical juncture of an armed struggle. After the crackdown on the night of March 25, Bangabandhu was arrested and Tajuddin, along with other leaders, crossed the border to organise resistance against the Pakistani army. They formally proclaimed independence on April 10. The swearing-in ceremony of the provisional government was held at Boidyanathala, now Mujibnagar, on April 17 with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as president and Tajuddin Ahmad as prime minister.

After the swearing-in ceremony, Tajuddin in a statement, said, "Bangladesh is at war. It has been given no choice but to secure its right of self-determination through a national liberation struggle against the colonial oppression of West Pakistan." Giving a detailed background of the freedom

movement, he said, "Sheikh Mujib, however, continued to seek a political settlement. In calling for a programme of non-cooperation on March 3, he chose the weapon of peaceful confrontation against the army of occupation as an attempt to bring them to success... Never in the course of any liberation struggle has non-cooperation been carried to the limits attained within Bangladesh from March 1 to 25. Non-cooperation was total."

People were united to achieve freedom at any cost. Sacrifice of the freedom fighters was immeasurable. But it was not easy to run the government-in-exile with its headquarters in Kolkata as there were bickering and groupings within the party and in its youth and student fronts. Tajuddin successfully managed them.

A week before the surrender of the Pakistani army, in an address to the nation on December 8, Tajuddin said, "We in Bangladesh now complete the task assigned to us by history and drive the last nail into the coffin of a fascist state led by crazy militarists."

Many people who lost their near and dear ones during the Liberation War sought revenge against Pakistani collaborators, including the Urdu-speaking bharis. Basically a humanist, Tajuddin called upon the "citizens of Bangladesh to avoid the temptation to take the law into their own hands." He further assured them that the collaborators would be "punished according to the due process of law. If a single citizen of Bangladesh is harmed or hurt because of his language or racial identity, it will be a betrayal of the ideals of the founder of the nation and the flag of the free Bangladesh."

The provisional government was a presidential form of government.

Upon his return from a Pakistani prison on January 10, 1972, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed a Provisional Constitution

Ordinance of Bangladesh Order 1972 replacing the presidential form with a parliamentary form of government. Bangabandhu became the prime minister and Tajuddin was given the portfolio of the finance minister. As a minister, he was very serious, responsible and committed. He devoted all his time to the economic reconstruction of war-ravaged Bangladesh.

Tajuddin did not do politics for personal gains. He did politics with complete honesty and integrity. But no man is above mistakes. Tajuddin was capable of rectifying his mistakes. He served with dignity. His progressive ideas and independent views led to his removal from the cabinet. He resigned on October 26, 1974.

Tajuddin had many virtues. He led a disciplined life. From his student days, he maintained a diary. He recorded daily events and his thoughts in his diaries, which are invaluable sources of study material for researchers of social and political history studying that period. His scholarship could have well taken him a long way in the academic field, but he preferred the challenging world of politics.

I knew him from up close. As a politician, he was a moderate. He was a man of extraordinary political insight and was friendly, affectionate and generous. He lived a simple life. Everybody who knew him well is aware of his humility and merit.

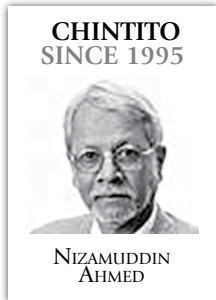
Sometimes he differed with his leader but he was always loyal to Bangabandhu. As far as human qualities were concerned, loyalty and firmness of principles were what he valued most. He embraced death for his leader but he will remain in the hearts of the people of Bangladesh for ages.

Syed Abul Maksud, who passed away on February 23, 2021, was a noted author, researcher and social activist. This article was originally published on July 23, 2015.



Tajuddin Ahmad with wife Syeda Zohra Tajuddin.

Lay and parley, eat and meet



ONCE the pandemic is over, that's optimism, one thing I hope I will not miss, and you too perhaps, are meetings round the clock, that shall be

freedom.

Even with regard to the frivolous peck on the cheek or wherever, there is a "never ever on a Sunday" bar, "because that's my day of rest". Who cares about a 1960 song? These meetings can be held on Sundays to Wednesdays, Thursdays to Saturdays.

Time? You are telling me? A luncheon meeting in Chattogram is breakfast in London, morning snacks in Dubai, high tea Sydney, dinner at Wellington, and Sehri in New York. Reversals are common too, as students of US universities will concur. Sent on Covid homestay tuition, a luncheon lecture at Dallas was eerie hours in Dhaka, especially for those undertaking a course on paranormal studies.

Online, refreshments are arranged on have-your-own basis. You could be caught having seafood *sashimi* in Tokyo, or grinning over a sumptuous meal of *nyama choma* (grilled meat) in Dares Salaam, or relishing Kathmandu's mouth-watering *dal bhat*. Keep that video off, or better still, eat before a meeting.

The host has the pole position. He does not need to book a venue, no banner to design, no worries about a menu, no headache to meet a budget, and invitation is conveniently emailed or texted.

Yet, the supposed "master of

ceremonies" is sometimes unfair and impolite, taking the privilege of launching the meeting several minutes later than he scheduled because, being inherently callous, he was late. But, the blame falls on poor internet connectivity.

People do not need to travel, so attendance is usually good. That's a plus-point for online get-togethers. Nor do finicky partakers need to worry about what to wear because of "stop video", which also allows one to join from one's bed, or the loo. The drawback is that for any serious deliberation, professional attitude in preparedness and effective interaction is totally lacking.

Deodorants, body spray and perfumes, gold wristwatches and heavy chains, earrings and trinkets are all a waste. Shave? Nahhh... Mind the toilet flush and other noise emissions though, if perchance you have unmuted the audio.

In one such meeting, my upper only being visible to other attendees, my smart move was to put on a good shirt. However, proceedings surprisingly required I stand up, which I did, along with my laptop, lock, stock and barrel, held at arms level, all because my bottom was not befittingly clad.

I had done one better than the Canadian parliamentarian who was caught stark naked during a House of Commons video conference last April. Liberal MP William Amos from Quebec later tweeted an apology to his colleagues in the House for "an honest mistake".

Lazybones can live in a pigsty and join a sombre discussion. Switching on virtual background mode is further liberty to keep your surroundings dishevelled. Additionally, there is "blur background" in case you forgot to remove a delicate piece of clothing

from view. Thankfully, a device that can convey odour online has not hit the market.

Late Latifs are common even in the digital world, and loud as well. A participant will join a meeting that was well under way, and will liberally interrupt proceedings with a vociferous and questioning "Aassalamulaikum", a tone where the greetings is combined with how-do-you-do, as if the world was waiting for that moment. Recurring late arrivals can ruin any meeting.

Speaking by turn and muting one's microphone when not speaking are common etiquettes of online conferencing. Alarmingly, unmuting could reveal the auditory profile of your house, which could include pigeons' *bak-bakooming* to couples quarrelling over who left the cage open, TV, cooking, and playfulness. Background noise is a nuisance, caused by carelessness and unnecessary activities, collectively known as lack of focus of the attendee. But, not many care to the point of being rude to the others.

Then there is your camera, handheld on a mobile device or a more stable web camera on your desk or laptop. If one is careless, both have the potentiality of catching matters behind the scene; some could be hilarious, others a touch embarrassing, and another that clarifies the identity of the boss of the house. "Are you again gossiping on the Net? Go and take your shower, lunch is ready... ooops!"

Multi-taskers seem very busy during meetings. Receiving a phone call, writing notes on some other matter, finger-picking *choon* for the *paan* in his mouth, drool, disgusting! Nose cleaning, scratching, fixing hair, and laughing at something else is not uncommon. Spitting out a tiny object does look a lot bigger on someone else's screen.

Over the past many months, nominated presenters have irritated others by failing to bring their topic to the point. Some did not prepare materials in advance and created a state of confusion. File sharing is an art not being mastered caused delays and loss of tempo.

Some of us involve the entire household in an online meeting by not wearing a headphone. Then we yell to make a point. We jumble up what we want to say, especially if we are munching on something. Formality has never been this informal.

Perhaps the most common nuisance, "Can you hear me?" Simultaneous response from several, "Your microphone is muted." "Put it on." "Unmute..." which are also inaudible to the speaker because he did not switch the audio on over the internet. More nuisance. "Can you hear me?"

We never allow the host to take control of the affairs; the syndrome of village *matobbar* in us returns time and again. In spite of instructions, we speak without raising the virtual hand. When we do, we speak out of context for the sake of speaking. We repeat what has

been said already. We repeat what we have said.

Participants look everywhere but the camera. They are hesitant to establish eye contact. There is no sense of engaging anyone in the conversation. They are as individualistic in a web meeting as they are in isolation under the global epidemic.

A few have the nerve to join while driving, very dangerous, or when



travelling because their Net connection is as good as the telegram days. Their video is bouncing up and down as a swimmer doing the butterfly, their voice is breaking up like a rap song, and their concentration is as good as the next horn, frequent as it is.

Our online video etiquette will perhaps improve over time, as has the public's general response to journalistic queries on television channels. Let us pray the deadly virus does not last that long.

Nizamuddin Ahmed is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

QUOTABLE Quote



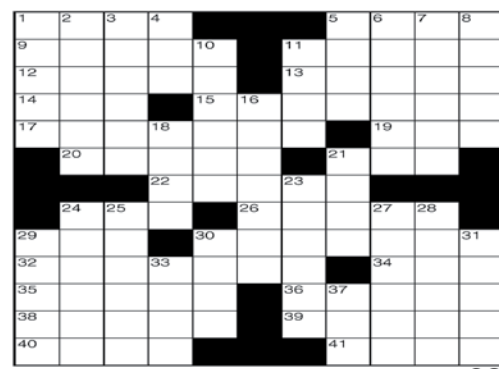
AIME CESAIRE
Martinican poet and politician
(1913 - 2008)

It is no use painting the foot of the tree white, the strength of the bark cries out from beneath the paint.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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| ACROSS | 30 Storage furniture | 6 Bullring star |
| 1 Fly high | 32 Storage furniture | 7 Disloyal |
| 5 Check mate? | 34 Mayo buy | 8 Plague |
| 9 Multiplied by | 35 Computer command | 10 Act the usher |
| 11 Go piece | 36 Wake up | 11 Would reminder |
| 12 Skirt | 38 Run-down furniture | 16 Pour drinks |
| 13 Shoppers' aids | 39 Egerton of "Kingsman: The Secret Service" | 18 Pantspart |
| 14 Twisty fish | 40 To boot | 21 TV's Hatcher |
| 15 Storage furniture | 41 Tear | 23 Burns or Browning |
| 17 Storage furniture | | 24 Ranch pen |
| 19 Deep groove | | 25 Lets on |
| 20 Stuttgart | | 27 Hurt |
| souvenir | | 28 Fall, for one |
| 21 Low digit | DOWN | 29 "Meet John Doe" director |
| 22 Agassi of tennis | 1 Spirited horse | 30 Metropolis |
| 24 Purr producer | 2 Edmonton team | 31 Pollster's find |
| 26 Writer Pasternak | 3 Lucky charm | 33 Aware of |
| 29 Atlantic catch | 4 Antlered animal | 37 Crew tool |

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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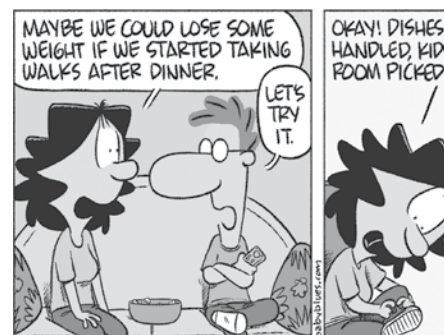
BETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

