

Remembering Sultana Kamal Khuki

A pioneer woman athlete and a great soul



CHINTITO SINCE 1995
NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

NOT that we remember her only on August 15th, but she comes alive during events she embraced, at places that hold her memory, on the morning dew shimmering on the green, in the clouds that stand still, dark and heavy.

In 1972-73, some of us HSC graduates published daringly, so to say, the first sports magazine of newly independent Bangladesh. Typesetting and letterpress printing in a dimly lit sweaty workplace was our home of passion.

Sultana Ahmed Khuki was already a champion athlete several years before our independence, a Bangali celebrity with triumphs in the Pakistan Olympics in Long Jump and 100m Sprint. She was popular across the country despite the now inconceivable media paucity then.

Perhaps her interview was published in our very first issue. As a follow-up, a few of us plucked up enough courage and popped the question at Dhaka Stadium, now Bangabandhu National

Stadium. To our delight, she consented with a smile. She became the Assistant Editor of our monthly "Kirangan".

Khuki apa, later Sultana Kamal, was an extraordinary personality. Many knew her as a top-grade athlete, but she was also a woman of exceptional qualities. She was extremely popular on and off the field. Although she was one of the pioneer woman athletes in the days of extreme conservatism, there was not a speck of blemish on her character.

In 1975, her marriage to (Sheikh) Kamal bhai, another doyen of our sporting world, was big news. In addition to that commonality, they were both from the Sociology Department. Quite a while before there was any talk of this wedding, she had mentioned to me matter-of-factly while we were chatting about security, "If any girl student of our department would like to be escorted home by a boy after any evening programme, that would be Kamal bhai."

Her would-be groom was the eldest son of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, but she was not at all unnerved.

Kamal bhai had many loyal friends. That friendship has blossomed into today's Abahani Kriira Chakra. Sultana Kamal was, the same as me, a Mohammedan player and supporter since 1967-68. Although from the camp

of lifelong rivals, I have to reluctantly admire Kamal bhai's constructive faculty. Almost half a century after his demise, the club has retained its status as the country's foremost sporting organisation. That is testimony to the depth of allegiance his friends have for the club's founder.

In those days there was fierce rivalry between Mohammedan and Abahani; on the field, in offices, on the street, among friends and within the family.



Sultana Kamal Khuki PHOTO: ARCHIVES

Kamal bhai was not being any different, nor was he going to let an opportunity to rag me pass by. Around sometime during his last few weeks, he teased me, albeit jovially at the Dhaka stadium, "Now what will you do? I have married your sister!"

I was by then a student of Architecture at BUET. Sultana Kamal's Bakshi Bazaar house was near my university, to the east. It was convenient to pay her a visit every now and then. She was always very welcoming, rushing to the front door to open the

latch, running through the house to open the door to the living room; no less than a 25-metre dash.

With the bashfulness of a future bride, coupled with joy, she showed me scores of her engagement photographs, never stopping to explain each, narrating how the proposal was offered from Bangabandhu's family, and what were some of the plans for the big day.

She was then full of life; she always was. On that day, she was agog as any young woman would be with wedding bells ringing. Contrary to then contemporary obnoxious and later unlearned propaganda by conspiracy theorists, she was not forced into the marriage. The last time I saw her, she was in her bridal attire.

One of her elder brothers, a Dhaka University athlete in his own right, brought the wedding card to my Titumir Hall room by walking up all the way to the third floor, end of the corridor. I imagined Apa must have insisted.

On the wedding night, July 14, 1975, I saw Sultana Kamal from afar in a bridal procession moving across the corridor of the Officers Club (old building). I gave the moment no thought. That I would be seeing Kamal bhai and his bride later was not even on my mind; it was obvious. Unbeknownst to us, an evil fate awaited.

From under a *shamiana* near the southern wall, I could see only her headdress amidst the throng of friends and family. A few yards away, Bangabandhu was in conversation with most probably Dr Abdul Matin Chowdhury, the Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University. There was no crowding around him though, no overtly visible security. A few weeks later, the nation paid the price.

Sultana Kamal and Sheikh Kamal both lived their life simply and joyfully with friends and family. They were

hugely admired, extremely sociable and totally conversational. They took active part in every sociocultural programme that defined the Bangali nation. They were both gunned down most savagely on one ill-fated morning.

Early on August 15, 1975, I was woken up by seniors from an adjacent room, "Listen to the radio, quick!" Shell-shocked and in disbelief we heard. Bangabandhu was assassinated by a group of derailed midranking Bangali Army officers, his own countrymen; an act not dared by the Pakistan Army. It remains the most abhorred chapter in our history.

Hoping in naivety, I assumed that Sultana Kamal must have been spared the brutality. As the sun climbed higher, that distressing news too trickled to our huddle at the hall gate. In spite of rumours abound, we had no indication of the carnage at Road No 32. There was no parallel in history of an entire family and more being murdered with such ruthlessness. Her wedlock was one month old.

Khuki Apa, you are the first woman Blue of Dhaka University. The Women's Sports Complex at Dhaka has been entitled "Sultana Kamal" in your memory. Not forgotten 40 years after you stopped sprinting on earth, in 2011 the Bangladesh Women's Sports Association introduced the Sultana Kamal Independence Day Award for contribution to women's sports.

You did not know that we would have to cross a bridge named after you to go over the Shitalakshya to travel from Demra to Tarabo. How would you? You did not get the time.

May the Almighty grant Jannat to you and the departed in your family, and bless the living with faith and fortitude.

Nizamuddin Ahmed is an architect, a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

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Bangladesh apparel industry needs to tackle mistruths head-on



RMG NOTES
MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

IF one were to read the international media, one might be given the impression that Bangladesh is a wasteland, when we all know that it is anything but. For years, as a country, we have worked to drag ourselves out of poverty and build a presence on the international stage. Many of us in the industrial sector work unhealthily long hours and have done so for years in an effort to better ourselves and our people.

Our garment workers toil in challenging conditions to meet the needs of demanding international buyers who can pick and choose their suppliers in an ultra-competitive market. It's tough alright. But we get on with it as proud Bangladeshis, we take satisfaction in our achievements of becoming established as a pre-eminent apparel sourcing hub. We won't stop as we know that only through hard work can we raise living standards in our country.

But, just sometimes, we need a break. It feels at times like many people globally have not kept pace with Bangladesh's economic development. They still seem to think the clothing we produce is made in ramshackle buildings using antiquated equipment and of low quality.

The most recent example of this complete misrepresentation of Bangladesh was made by one of

the world's largest media streaming businesses, Netflix. In a French movie called, "The Last Mercenary", released on the global streaming platform on July 30, 2021, one character says, "Yes, Bulletproof Tuxedo, Made in France. I'd be dead if it were Bangladesh." As our industry trade body the BGMEA rightly points out, the comment is disrespectful and derogatory to our RMG industry and belittles the hard work of the four million garment workers of Bangladesh who are delivering "Made in Bangladesh" apparel to about 160 countries in the world, including the USA. BGMEA, in a bold move, demanded Netflix to immediately expunge the comment and stop streaming the movie until the comment is removed.

This is not the first time we have been misrepresented and we all know it won't be the last. The problem with such depictions is that, for many viewers of films such as this, the impression they gain of Bangladesh will be their first. And, as well all know, first impressions count and they stick. It is very difficult to win hearts and minds when people already have pre-conceived ideas about your industry. This is why so many visitors I welcome to our country are always pleasantly surprised when they see that things are not as they have been portrayed in the global media.

Another recent report in the *New York Times* was headlined, "Dozens Die as Another Factory Fire Strikes Bangladesh". This was not an RMG factory but the report conflated the incident to our RMG sector and noted that, "despite a public outcry after the tragedies, conditions in many factories

have remained largely unchanged, and fires are common."

Really? Our RMG sector witnessed one of the largest industrial safety programmes ever implemented with the advent of the Bangladesh Accord and Alliance for Worker Safety. These two programmes saw tens of millions of dollars funnelled into RMG factories, fixing remedial works, fire safety and a range of other issues. What was the actual point of all this if we are still to be labelled as "largely unchanged"? Why do we continue to be judged so harshly and unfairly?

How do we counter the negative perceptions of Bangladesh and its RMG industry which continue to do us unfair reputational damage? I have touched on this issue before, but some of the messages are worth repeating, especially at a time when it is more important than ever to win the hearts and minds of customers.

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We are at a genuinely pivotal moment for the global garment trade where, I believe, many big fashion players are making decisions about their future direction as far as sourcing is concerned.



How do we counter the negative perceptions of Bangladesh and its RMG industry which continue to do us unfair reputational damage? PHOTO: AFP

moment for the global garment trade where, I believe, many big fashion players are making decisions about their future direction as far as sourcing is concerned. We have an opportunity to position ourselves as the de facto, one-stop-shop sourcing hub for many big players in the post-Covid world.

But poor PR and misleading stories about our industry will not help us on this journey. I repeat many of my previous messages—namely that public relations and marketing is the next step (perhaps the final step) in our journey towards becoming the number one choice for fashion sourcing moving

forward.

For too long, we have been allowing external influences to control the message around our RMG sector, depicting us in less than favourable terms among customers and industry stakeholders. It's time to fight back with our own, modern, hard-hitting messaging, befitting of an industry which has a completely different status quo to that which it is all too often depicted.

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).

QUOTABLE Quote

MEHDI HASAN
(born 1979)
British-American journalist

Billionaires and corporations buy and sell politicians, while citizens struggle to exercise their right to vote or hold their elected representatives to account.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Sweeping
- 5 Site of Sevilla
- 11 Cave sound
- 12 Extreme fan
- 13 Magnetic metal
- 14 Dwell
- 15 Anchor's offering
- 17 Spotted cube
- 18 Lab work
- 22 Fantasy creature
- 24 Skate-boarding jump
- 25 Bow wood
- 26 Shelley work
- 27 Superman's adoptive family
- 30 Chopped down
- 32 Failed car
- 33 Unoriginal

DOWN

- 1 Blood bearer
- 2 Land unit
- 3 Decisive confrontations
- 4 Throat mass
- 5 Poet Pound
- 6 Takes care of
- 7 Soft color
- 8 Oscar winner Mahershala
- 9 Tacit approval
- 10 Had a snack
- 16 Animation frame
- 19 Economic declines
- 20 Ocean motion
- 21 Parrot snack
- 22 Young one
- 23 Oboe part
- 28 Block-dropping game
- 29 Shirt part
- 30 Weed whacker
- 31 Rio Grande city
- 35 Lusty look
- 36 Track part
- 37 Keyboard goof
- 38 Convened
- 39 Raw metal
- 40 Radio's Glass

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FRIDAY'S ANSWERS

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

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

THIS IS MY CAKE AND YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TAKE IT FROM ME! REALLY? HEY! WHERE DID IT GO? SWISH MAGIC

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

CAREFUL... CAREFUL... CRINKLE! GASP! YOU TRIPPED THE CANNY-PAPER ALARM! STEP AWAY FROM THE MOTHER'S DAY GIFT!