

Major-General Moinul Hussain Chowdhury (Retd): As I knew him

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I am deeply saddened to learn that former Adviser to the caretaker government Major-General Moinul Hussain Chowdhury (retd) passed away in the city's Square Hospital on 10<sup>th</sup> October morning. He served as High Commissioner in Australia for Bangladesh in the late 90s.

I did not expect his untimely death because I used to contact him quite often. Sometime in July, when I spoke to him as he returned from Singapore, he told me he was not keeping well. I did not ask him further about the nature of his illness. Since I have been away from Dhaka for sometime, I could not keep in touch with him in recent times.

I came to know him first when I replaced him in 1984 in the Philippines from Australia. Later I met him in Canberra when he was High Commissioner to Australia in the late 90s. Although coming from different life experiences, I gradually became close to him as the years passed by.

Physically he was a tall and fit person and looked typically an army officer in his manners. He was not only a distinguished army officer but also an excellent human being.

Any job he took on was carried out with great courage and determination. He was a hard master and did not tolerate inefficiency. What made him different was his unruffled conviction that there was a solution to every problem. He had his own style and wherever he served he made an impact on others.

He was a straight-talker of truth and did not mince matters, although he knew that he might be unpopular in saying so but he did care little. He had looked at things from a dispassionate perspective.

He was a great nationalist and in his conversation he used to make clear that he detected a large gap between the rhetoric and reality of freedom and democracy in the country. He thought the best way to judge the health of a nation's heart was by how it treated the disadvantaged and the poor of the society.

He was critical of Western interference in the affairs of developing countries and believed adherence to ideals advocated by the West might not be necessarily suited to developing nations. He did not approve the ways diplomats from big powers stationed in Bangladesh interfere in domestic issues which are beyond the ambit of diplomats under the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. He felt that in other countries they would not dare to conduct themselves as they do in Bangladesh.

He was a great narrator of events of his life during the war and after the war in a manner which are interesting and captivating to all of us. His study was replete with certificate of honours, medals and other military decorations which he earned during his extraordinary career. He displayed good sense of wit and humour when we used to admire him for his courage during the war.

He was a very hospitable person and used to look after each guest with warmth whenever he invited to his residence on social occasions.

General Moinul had joined the Pakistan army in 1962 and was commissioned in 1964. He also took part in the Indo-Pak war in 1965.

A valiant freedom fighter, he revolted as a captain against the Pakistan army from Joydevpur cantonment in March 1971. During the Liberation war of 1971, he led the 1st and 2nd East Bengal Regiment. He led his regiment into Dhaka on December 16, 1971. The Bangladesh government conferred the Bir Bikram gallantry award on him for his bravery during the Liberation War.

He was Military Secretary to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and had been the youngest Major-General in the army at the time..

He had a posting in London before he was promoted to the rank of Major-General.

He was appointed, on deputation, Bangladesh Ambassador to the Philippines in 1982. He subsequently served as Ambassador in Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Australia. Although he served overseas, he missed his army career which was his first call of duty.

General Moinul Hussain was an Adviser to the caretaker government in 2001 headed by Justice Latifur Rahman. He reportedly played a key role in the care-taker administration, besides his portfolios.

After his retirement, he became a consultant to UNDP for sometime in Dhaka. He used to appear in various talk-shows in TV and provided frank answers to the issues of the day. He became popular with the TV presenters for his comments on issues regularly in interviews either at his house or at the studio. Many people might not agree with his views, but he demonstrated his courage and conviction to lay bare the facts and hidden causes of the problems before the audience, exhibiting his penetrating mind.

He wrote his autobiography in which many interesting facts are provided, unknown to people about the Liberation War of 1971. He used to write articles in the newspapers both in Bangla and English who are different in kind and laced with humour.

He is survived by his wife, a son, a daughter and a host of relatives and friends to mourn his death.

May his family get the fortitude and strength to bear this irreparable loss. We pray to Allah for eternal peace of his soul.