

Monday, July 19, 2021



(<https://www.newagebd.net/>)

# Opinion

Advertisement

{ }

## TRENDING:

[national budget for 2021-22 \(https://www.newagebd.net/tags/national budget for 2021-22\)](https://www.newagebd.net/tags/national-budget-for-2021-22)

[Coronavirus \(https://www.newagebd.net/tags/Coronavirus\)](https://www.newagebd.net/tags/Coronavirus)

[COVID-19 Vaccine \(https://www.newagebd.net/tags/COVID-19 Vaccine \)](https://www.newagebd.net/tags/COVID-19-Vaccine)

[golden jubilee of independence \(https://www.newagebd.net/tags/golden jubilee of independence \)](https://www.newagebd.net/tags/golden-jubilee-of-independence)

[Rohingya Crisis \(https://www.newagebd.net/tags/Rohingya Crisis\)](https://www.newagebd.net/tags/Rohingya-Crisis)

[COVID-19 \(https://www.newagebd.net/tags/COVID-19\)](https://www.newagebd.net/tags/COVID-19)

# In memoriam: Emajuddin Ahmad

Md Mahmudul Hasan ([https://www.newagebd.net/credit/Md Mahmudul Hasan](https://www.newagebd.net/credit/Md-Mahmudul-Hasan) ) | Published: 00:00, Jul 17,2021  
| Updated: 02:42, Jul 19,2021

(<https://www.newagebd.net/print/article/143920>)



Professor Emajuddin Ahmed. — Wikipedi

---

IN 1992, when I entered the University of Dhaka as an undergraduate student, professor Moniruzzaman Miah of the department of geography and environment was its vice-chancellor. Soon, however, the university had a new vice-chancellor, professor Emajuddin Ahmad of the department of political science, because Moniruzzaman Miah became Bangladesh's ambassador to Senegal.

Some of us developed an added interest in professor Ahmad because we discovered a commonality with him. In the 1950s, he had studied an additional master's degree in our subject, English literature. Although he was known as an eminent political scientist, we listened to him keenly whenever he was invited as an honourable guest to our department. Words — clear, distinct and measured — dropped like pearls and diamonds from his lips. His was a style of public speaking far removed from linguistic orthodoxy.



([http://onelink.to/nagadapp?](http://onelink.to/nagadapp?fbclid=IwAR30pUjxqMBcotZlm9jSlk9Bppc9UN7jumjYNdDS5rGsbjEP4JXMbjmi_Wo)

[fbclid=IwAR30pUjxqMBcotZlm9jSlk9Bppc9UN7jumjYNdDS5rGsbjEP4JXMbjmi\\_Wo](http://onelink.to/nagadapp?fbclid=IwAR30pUjxqMBcotZlm9jSlk9Bppc9UN7jumjYNdDS5rGsbjEP4JXMbjmi_Wo))

By the time I was studying for master's degree in English and American literature, Ahmad's term as the vice-chancellor of the university already ended and he moved to his residence in Kantaban. Around then, I had visited his house to invite him to a seminar at the National Press Club on genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Keeping his background in English literature in mind, I carried with me the draft of the programme with me. As he sat next to an impressive, gigantic analogue phone set, I showed him the draft. He read it, made changes and added the phrase 'sickening height' in relation to the atrocities on Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since then the phrase has remained engraved in my memory.

An earlier memory of Emajuddin Ahmad involves the movement and rally culture on the campus. In 2010, before I left the University of Dhaka to join International Islamic University Malaysia, I had some foreign guests and I took the visitors to campus to show them around. Just before climbing up the stairs of the arts faculty building to go to the department of English, we had encountered a student rally. The young men in the procession were shouting the usual incantations and blowing dust around at the expense of the environment.

←

Ads by Google

Stop seeing this ad

Why this ad? ⓘ

Such loud processions through the heart of the campus were disruptive. As the chants were nearing classrooms, lecturers had to stop. They would resume their lecture only after the procession had passed. Being a former student of the same university, I was used to such rallies and disruptions. However, my guests were not. They were bemused and puzzled, as that was the first time they had witnessed such a scene at a university. One of my guests looked more panicked than bewildered and asked me: What do they want? I had no answer for her.

Not all of the students in such rallies join voluntarily. Student leaders — under the auspices of their political overlords — force and intimidate poor, vulnerable students (mostly) of rural origin to join such processions only to swell numbers and make noises louder. Noncompliance often results in mistreatment, beating and even unlawful expulsion from student dormitories.

When I was a student, another type of activity was quite common — movement for the postponement of examinations. For good reasons and for not-so-good reasons, students used to campaign for the delay of year-end examinations; and the usual methods to drive their demands home were shouting slogans around the campus and staging sit-ins in front of the vice-chancellor's office. Showing solidarity with fellow classmates in such andolans was the norm, and remaining aloof from them often risked being interpreted as 'treachery' and 'betrayal'.

During most of my undergraduate years, Emajuddin Ahmad was the vice-chancellor of the university. We witnessed the longest, violent too, general strikes in the history of Bangladesh. The worst was in 1995 when I was a final year honours student, and ours was perhaps the longest final year in many years. I remember for about six months the campus was deserted and classes were cancelled because of continuous hartals. When some sort of normality gradually returned and the university authority announced dates for examinations, students demanded their postponement.

Even though classes were called off, I stayed at my student dormitory, Surja Sen Hall and studied on my own. I was in some way prepared for exams and, personally, I did not consider the stated reasons behind the demand for the postponement very convincing. By the way, those who were at the forefront of the andolan were actually not very regular in attending classes anyway, so hartal-related cancellation of classes had made little difference to them. However, the double-edged sword of peer pressure was overwhelming and I had to join the demonstrations for the postponement of examinations.

When our prayers, then song and dance, and then yelling did not work, we pushed the movement to a new level of intensity. We staged sit-ins in front of the vice-chancellor's office for a few days, but the authority was still unyielding to our demands. On the last day of the andolan, some untoward incidents of serious misconduct came to pass.

Since my hall of residence, Surya Sen Hall, is adjacent to the university's administrative building, on that day I sneaked off during lunch time. By the time I came back in the afternoon to show my face to my fellow demonstrators, all those inappropriate occurrences had already taken place. A group of students — not known to have any political links so were considered 'ordinary' — took the law in their own hands.

Emajuddin Ahmad was in his office. Those students smashed glasses of his office windows, and hurled unspeakable taunts and insults at him. That misdemeanour continued for some time. However, even provocation of that gravity did not cause him to lose his cool. He kept his composure and thoughtfulness exceptionally well. His administrative acumen took the form of fatherly forgiveness. When I think about this incident retrospectively, it heightened my regard for Emajuddin Ahmad.

During one of our sit-ins, one prominent student leader came over and had a chat with us in order to persuade us to halt the movement. He then went in and most probably met the vice-chancellor. Understandably, Emajuddin Ahmad was in contact with student leaders and could easily quell our andolan by letting them loose upon us. He did not do that. What is more, none of those poorly behaved students who vandalised his office and heaped verbal abuses upon him faced punishment or reprisals by the university administration or by student leaders.

Nowadays, we often come across unpleasant media reports involving vice-chancellors of various universities in Bangladesh. They reportedly unleash musclemen in the guise of student activists to crush legitimate movements of ordinary students. Academic administrators' desire to exercise political power at the expense of academic traditions have worsened campus climate around the country. This makes us nostalgic of times gone by when political links of the vice-chancellors were less evident and they were not keen on unleashing assailants to suppress dissent, limit ordinary students' freedom of expression or disrupt their peaceful gatherings.

On 17 July 2020, professor Emajuddin Ahmad passed away at the age of 87. It was not a premature death. However, we hope that we will have considerate vice-chancellors like him who will retain the dignity of their chair and will not debase it by their anti-academic behaviours.

*Md Mahmudul Hasan teaches literature at International Islamic University Malaysia. He edits 'Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature'.*

More about: **Bangladesh** (<https://www.newagebd.net/tags/Bangladesh>) |  
**Dhaka University** (<https://www.newagebd.net/tags/Dhaka University>) |  
**Senegal** (<https://www.newagebd.net/tags/Senegal>)