

Life and Work of Mohammed Nasser: Some Recollections

Pranab Kumar Sen

University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, NC 27599, USA

I came to know Mohammed Nasser (Mintu) almost twenty years ago when my wife (Gauri) and I were in Bangladesh for 10-day visit to Jahangirnagar University (JNU), Dhaka, and Research Center for Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Chittagong University. During that time, we met with his wife Nazma and daughter Naima. We were in JNU for 5 days where I interacted with the faculty in Statistics Department and also paid a visit to the Institute of Statistical Research and Training (ISRT), in Dhaka.

Nasser was our local host and he then took us to Chattogram where for almost a week we spent together. Professor (late) Jamal Nazrul Islam was our host in Chattogram, and he was also the supervisor of Nasser's doctoral dissertation work. Jamal was an extremely energetic and academically bright person who tried to build the advanced institute in Chattogram despite the hard political unrest time ranging over the entire Bangladesh, and Chattogram was one of the disturbed places. In spite of that Nasser, Jamal and other associates were able to carry out their normal academic activities well. In fact, I went for conferences in Chattogram two more times (in 1999 and 2001), the latter time, also as the external examiner of Mohammed Nasser's Ph.D. dissertation under Professor Jamal Nazrul Islam. Now that both Mohammed Nasser and Jamal Nazrul

Islam are no longer with us, I felt that we should pay a tribute to both and appreciate their hard work and organizational acumen in Bangladesh, in the greater area of mathematical and physical sciences.

Mohammed Nasser was born on January 1, 1960 in the Village Baitpur, Bagerhat district, Bangladesh. His father, Late Shamsuddin Ahmed was an educationist and principal of a High School in Bagerhat, moving later to Dhaka. His mother Reshatun Naher and her husband were living in a home in Dhaka in the late 1990s and I had a chance to be in their residence for a little while with their son; needless to say that I was very impressed with their family status, and their connection to other dignitaries in Bangladesh.

His father was very well versed in both English and Mathematics; he was a chain smoker without realizing that the fumes from his smoking could affect Nasser who had chronic respiratory disorder which was also associated with his heart problems. In spite of that, Nasser completed both his BSc (Honours) and MSc in Statistics from JNU, and then got a teaching position in Rajshahi University. For a few years, he was in Chattogram University while completing his doctoral work. After that he moved back to Rajshahi University for a regular position as Professor, Department of Statistics. Unfortunately, in 2016, he suffered a heart attack and died at an age of 56. He is survived by his wife and daughter.

Inspired by Professor Jamal Nazrul Islam, Nasser tried to build a group of scientists in statistical sciences (named Statistical Learning Group (SLG)), with people from Chittagong University, Hazi Danesh Science and Technology University, Islami University, Uttara University, and Rajshahi University, among others. The task is left to his successors in Rajshahi University. At the personal level, Nasser's research interest spanned several areas of current importance, including robust statistics, kernel methods, resampling methods, statistical data mining, environmental statistics, functional analysis, nonlinear programming, among others. In some of these areas, he managed to publish some research papers, in collaboration with his associates, and I felt that in the difficult academic environment in Bangladesh, his work should be appreciated with reverence.

Back in 2011, he got a big grant (partially from the World Bank) on Environmental problems in Bangladesh and possible statistical appraisal. In 2012 December, he organized a very fruitful International Conference in Rajshahi University, with participants not only from within Bangladesh but also from other countries. I had a chance to be in Rajshahi (University) for about 10 days and was immensely impressed with Nasser's organizational capabilities and personality. Two years later, in Dhaka we had another International Conference in Dhaka University where I met with Nasser for the last time. He took us in the last day of the meeting to his home in Dhaka and we had a very enjoyable time with his family and other near and dear ones. He was having some possibly heart-related problem for which we all suggested to him to take rest and minimize work load. But, the problem continued to grow and in a short time it culminated with his premature death. We will all miss the pleasant smile, warm heart and cordial friendship of Mohammed Nasser. In Khodatallah place, we pray for his peaceful sojourn.