

Obituary



Professor Dr. Ahmad Shamsul Islam (1924-2025)

Professor Dr. Ahmad Shamsul Islam, an internationally reputed scientist, educator, researcher, teacher and a distinguished Fellow of the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences and a Founding Fellow of the Islamic World Academy of Sciences left us on 14 April 2025 at the age of 101 after a life of distinguished academic careers, research initiatives, and paramount and long lasting scientific influences. He made great contributions to the development of biological science in the country, especially the introduction of contemporary biotechnology research. With his departure, Bangladesh lost not only a pioneer in the fields of plant breeding and tissue culture techniques but also a patriot.

In recognition of his contribution to education, the government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh awarded him with the prestigious Ekushey Padak (Martyrs' Day Medal).

Prof. Dr. Ahmad Shamsul Islam, son of Late Moulvi Md. Serajul Islam was born on August 06, 1924. He earned his Bachelor of Science in 1945, and in 1947, he received a Master of Science in Botany from Presidency College in Kolkata. Prof. Ahmad Shamsul Islam earned his Ph.D degree from the University of Manchester, UK, in 1954 with the financial support of the British Council. He received the Carrie Memorial Prize in 1954 for his outstanding work on seedless strawberries.

The training he received from the University of Dhaka and subsequently in the UK, the USA, and Japan promoted him in his development as a pioneering scientist.

Professor Islam taught Botany for over 40 years at the undergraduate and graduate levels in different universities, namely Dhaka University, Bangladesh; Sind University, Pakistan; University of Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania; and University of Nairobi, Kenya. He also served as a Supernumerary Professor of Botany at the University of Dhaka.

During his research career, he first successfully hybridized two commercial jute varieties and later established tissue culture and micropropagation techniques for jute and native orchids. He also successfully developed virus-free plants from potatoes. In addition, he introduced various tissue culture techniques, such as somaclonal variation, meristem culture, and micro-propagation for many crops, ornamental, and horticultural plants.

He established breeding technologies for disease resistance in jute, cotton, and kenaf. He published four manuscripts in the prestigious journal 'Nature' from 1952 to 1960, one in 'Science' in 1969, five in 'Biologia' (1959-70), one in Experimentia, and one in the Journal of Heredity. All these were possible through his work within the country, especially at Dhaka University. He produced 20 Ph.D. and many M.Sc. students during his research career. He published over 80 papers on significant work in Cytogenetics, Breeding, Tissue Culture, and Trans-formation.

He established the Plant Tissue Culture and Genetics Laboratory at the Department of Botany, DU, through national and international grants, including the British Council. He also started a successful scientist exchange programme financed by the British Council, through which at least a dozen scientists from the Botany Department got the opportunity to train in tissue culture, Algal physiology, and Mycology at the University of Nottingham, UK.

He organized many international conferences from the 80s to the 90s. He worked tirelessly to induct Bangladesh into ICGEB by pursuing the Foreign and Science and Technology Ministries. He was instrumental in starting the Web-based Global Network of Bangladeshi Biotechnologists (GNOBB) in 2004, which is now a full-fledged organization bringing together Biotechnologists of different Disciplines. Professor Islam received five prestigious awards within the country. President's Gold Medal in Agriculture (1984), Ekushey Medal (Martyr's Day Medal) in Education (1986), Bangladesh Academy of Sciences Gold Medal in Biology (1987), Gold Medal as Eminent Botanist by Bangladesh Association of Botany (19997), and Lifetime Achievement Award by GNOBB in 2017.

He has written several Textbooks. In 1978, he was invited to present a paper at a UNESCO-sponsored seminar on improving Science Courses at the School level. He was a Member of the Education Commission from 1978 to 1979 and participated in many meetings relating to science education problems and their probable solutions. He worked as a short-term consultant for FAO to prepare two projects, one for the consultants to prepare a feasibility study for establishing "The National Institute of Biotechnology" in 1992-19993.

He was the founder editor of five journals, including the Bangladesh Journal of Botany and the Journal of Plant Tissue Culture and Biotechnology, Sind University Research Journal; Pakistan Journal of Botany; Science Series of Dhaka University and the Dar-es-Salam University Scientific Research Journal, Dar-es-Salam, Tanzania.

He has published over 100 papers and two textbooks and a book entitled, "Character building through the teaching of the Qur'an."

Because of his polite and approachable nature, sharp memory, and sympathetic attitude towards students, staff, and friends, he earned the love and respect of thousands of colleagues, friends, and former students, many of whom hold reputed positions in Bangladesh and across the globe.

May Allah (SWT), the most Merciful, grant him Zannatul Ferdous. Ameen.

- Z N Tahmida Begum