

Obituary

DR. BASHIR AHMAD (1902 - 1957)

On the 14th of March, 1957, Pakistan suffered a grievous loss in the sudden passing away of an eminent biochemist, Dr. Bashir Ahmad. Since his return from China, where he led a delegation of Pakistani scientists in November last year, Dr. Bashir Ahmad occasionally suffered from shortness of breath. In February his complaint was diagnosed by a leading physician of Lahore as coronary insufficiency, and he was advised to take complete rest for three weeks in bed.

With the heavy pressure of work from the side of the West Regional Laboratories as its Director, and the pressing responsibilities for the organisation of the Ninth Pakistan Science Conference at Peshawar, in his capacity as General Secretary of the Pakistan Association for the Advancement of Science, he made little of the medical warnings and did not allow himself the gravely needed rest. Persuasions to the contrary elicited only a promise of taking it easy for some time after the Science Conference. At 12 o'clock on the 14th of March, he delivered a lecture at the Food and Nutrition Symposium

of the Science Conference on his life-long specialised field of work on carotenoids, and died of heart failure in his sleep the same afternoon. His body was brought to Lahore and laid to rest in the premises of the West Regional Laboratories.

Dr. Bashir Ahmad was born at Jullunder in 1902. After early schooling in his home town, he graduated from the Punjab University in 1923, securing first position in the University and winning several honours and

a gold medal. He took his Ph.D. from the University College, London, in 1931. In 1933 he joined the All India Institute of Hygiene in Calcutta, where, as Assistant Professor and later Professor of Biochemistry and Nutrition, he carried out a series of investigations on various problems of fundamental importance in the field of biochemistry and nutrition. In 1941, he came back to the University of the

Punjab as Professor of Organic Chemistry and Director, University Institute of Chemistry, where he continued till 1952, with a break of about three years (1944-47) when he worked as Assistant Director, National Chemical Laboratory, Poona, and was in charge of its planning in the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (India). From 1952 to 1954, he was Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab University, and from 1954 until his death he was the Director of the West Regional Laboratories of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research at Lahore.



Dr. Bashir Ahmad had extensively toured the U.K., the U.S.A., Canada, Australia and

the continent of Europe, not only in connection with higher studies and research in specialised fields but also, under various travel grants, to acquaint himself with modern methods and techniques of scientific research. His researches in chemistry, biochemistry, nutrition, food and related subjects are covered by about 150 publications.

While the bibliography of his papers indicates the wide range of problems on which he worked, the level of his researches, conducted with

OBITUARY

various collaborators, remained uniformly high. Dr. Bashir Ahmad chose the subject of nutrition for his speciality, and within this field, vitamins drew his major attention with special reference to vitamin A and the carotenoids. On the last subject he published no less than 23 original papers and some 7 review articles. Next in importance came vitamins B and C. Vitamin B₁₂ is a cobalt compound, and it is significant that Dr. Bashir Ahmad was the first to tackle the problem of the cobalt content of the Punjab soils. There can be no better tribute to his memory than to carry on work in this field which was so dear to him.

Dr. Bashir Ahmad's scientific work brought him a host of distinctions. He was :

- (i) Fellow, Royal Institute of Chemistry, London.
- (ii) Fellow, National Institute of Sciences of India.
- (iii) Foundation Fellow, Pakistan Academy of Sciences.
- (iv) LL.D. (Honoris Causa), University of Cambridge, Great Britain (1953).
- (v) Fellow, Punjab and Karachi Universities.
- (vi) Member or Fellow of several learned societies ; President, Secretary or Treasurer of some of them. These include :

Indian Chemical Society, Calcutta ; Biochemical Society, London ; Society of Biochemistry and Experimental Medicine ; Society of Biological Chemists, India ; American Institute of Nutrition ; Indian Pharmaceutical Association ; Indian Science Congress ; Lahore Philosophical Society ; Indian Science News Association ; Biochemical Society, Calcutta ; Physiological Society of India ; National Nutrition Association of India ; Pakistan Association for the Advancement of Science ; Royal Society of Arts, London.

- (vii) Chairman, member or secretary of a large number of scientific advisory boards, committees and organisations set up by the Government of India before partition and later by the Government of Pakistan.

- (viii) He was also elected (posthumously) a fellow of the University College, London.

Dr. Bashir Ahmad was a scientist of international repute and was highly respected in Pakistan for his sound knowledge and experience in the fields of higher education, scientific research and planning, gained through three decades of close association with research organisations in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, the U.K., Germany and the U.S.A. He endeared himself to his colleagues and fellow scientists by his enthusiasm, hard work, and dynamic personality. His approach to the problems of life was characterised by a benevolent humanism. In his presence, the humblest worker as well as the seasoned scientist felt entirely at home. In addition to his scientific pursuits, he took a keen interest in arts and literature, and was largely responsible for founding the Urdu Academy in Lahore. He was also a keen mountaineer and was President of the Karakorum Mountaineering Club.

The Ismail "Aiwan-i-Science", which is situated in the campus of the West Regional Laboratories, Lahore, and is now nearing completion, owes its existence very largely to the personal efforts of Dr. Bashir Ahmad. This Science House, which is the outcome of close cooperation between scientists and philanthropic citizens, will house a science library, the offices of the scientific societies of the country, and a human relations centre.

In the estimation of all the scientists presents at the international gathering at Peshawar, the untimely demise of Dr. Bashir Ahmad is an irreparable loss to the country, and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research will be hard put to it to replace him as Director of the West Regional Laboratories. In recognition of the great service rendered by the late Dr. Bashir Ahmad in the cause of science and its propagation in Pakistan, the Council of the Pakistan Association for the Advancement of Science, while deeply mourning his loss, has decided that a Bashir Ahmad Memorial Fund should be established through an appeal to the people, and that this fund should be utilised in a befitting manner to advance the cause for which Dr. Bashir Ahmad lived and gave his life. The President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has given his blessing to this proposal, and has graciously agreed to become the Patron of the Fund.