Light, Shadow and the General

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Judging by the way a horde of people have pounced on General Moeen U. Ahmed, you would think the former chief of staff has committed a grievous wrong, has indeed placed the future of the country at risk through the active role he played in national politics for close to two years until the general elections of last year. Now, of course, a good number of blunders were made on the general's watch for which reason there is every cause for him to be condemned. You think here of the morally and legally untenable manner in which the teachers and students of Dhaka and Rajshahi universities were treated in August 2007 and the months that followed. Taking academics on remand and putting them through various degrees of torture is behaviour you do not accept from anyone, no matter where he or she might be placed in life. And arresting students and having them go through excruciating physical pain is medievalism at its worst.

And that is the truth where taking General Moeen and his friends to task over the role they played in an emergency-governed Bangladesh is concerned. The atrocious way in which politicians were taken into custody and swiftly sent over to remand is a dark chapter in Bangladesh's history, one that will forever be recalled by the people of this country. It is inconceivable that men like Abdul Jalil and Moudud Ahmed can be treated with absolute contempt and threatened with everything that makes people cringe in fear. But they were indeed forced into that pass, to our everlasting shame. The shadowy men who tried to convince the nation that everything that had gone wrong with the country had to do with politicians were only giving us half the picture. The other half had simply been spirited away.

But let us move on. History will judge Moeen and everyone else associated with the Fakhruddin Ahmed caretaker government in full measure. There is always this wonderful thing about history --- it judges, and it judges dispassionately, sometimes harshly. That being the truth we have known through the generations or through our understanding of the ways in which men have conducted themselves in the varied phases of life and time, we realise too the growing possibility of history being, on balance, kindly disposed to Moeen. There are good enough reasons why that should be. For starters, General Moeen brought the country back from the precipice when he had the



General (Rtd) Moeen U. Ahmed

As in any other phase in politics, the Moeen era lived in its light and wallowed in its shadow. It made mistakes, those it did not have to.