

Remembering Azam Khan

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MEGASTHENES

LT General Azam Khan was above all else a soldier, pure and simple. His only direct involvement or interaction with the people of Bangladesh was for a brief period, from April 1960 to May 1962, when he held the office of governor of the then province of East Pakistan.

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There was more than one account as to the reasons for his appointment. The best-known version was that the then President Ayub Khan had wanted the most dynamic and effective person for the job, and Azam Khan had the well-deserved reputation of getting things done. Earlier as minister for refugees and rehabilitation, he had pushed through in six months the housing development of Korangi, to resettle thousands of refugees who were living in makeshift slum accommodations in Karachi.

Reportedly Ayub Khan had told Azam Khan that "if you don't go to East Pakistan, I will have to go myself." Another version was simpler; Ayub Khan wanted to put some distance between Azam Khan and the levers of power.

Azam Khan made his presence felt soon after he assumed office. At that time, whenever the governor travelled by car within the city, the roads on his route would be cleared of traffic a few minutes ahead of time by an advance security

vehicle. This was both for reasons of security and convenience. Azam Khan dispensed with this practice, and the gubernatorial limousine, with a security car in attendance, would be seen with other vehicles on the streets of the city.

Traffic congestion, of course, was not a problem then. He toured frequently and extensively. There was the occasional newspaper report -- and also picture -- of his sharing the frugal meal of a fisherman or farmer on such tours. Azam Khan would describe fishermen and farmers as his "jheley bhai" and "chashi bhai." There may be a similarity to what is known as "kissing babies" prior to elections in a Western country.

On the other hand, a senior member of a military regime firmly entrenched in power, would not have the time, inclination or need to indulge in a public relations exercise, not in the bad old days when the Cold War was at its apogee.

As governor, Azam Khan was also the chancellor of the few universities that existed at the time, and took keen interest in the student community. One evening, he turned up at SM Hall without notice. A thoroughly flustered security guard, Naju Mian -- who was almost integral to the ambience of the Hall of that time -- could not locate the Provost, Dr. Mazharul Haque, and so rushed to inform the general secretary of the Hall Union, who welcomed the distinguished visitor.

Azam Khan was his usual effusive and affable self. He mixed freely with the students present and was shown around the Hall. He then declared that he would dine with the students. There was no time to add anything special to the menu; the governor, however, relished the meal.

He was less satisfied, though, with the state of the crockery, which admittedly was much used. On his inquiry, the gen-

eral secretary informed him that about 300 students were living in the Hall. A week or so later a set of 300 dining plates, with matching quarter plates, and 300 drinking glasses were delivered to the Hall, courtesy of the chancellor.

In May of 1961 a devastating cyclone, with a top speed of over 100 miles per hour, struck the port city of Chittagong and surrounding coastal areas. Over 12,000 people perished; many more were severely affected. There was widespread damage to property and infrastructure. Azam Khan was indefatigable in organising and supervising relief operations, and in touring the affected areas extensively to assess first hand the extent of damage. He seemed almost to thrive on the punishing schedule that he set for himself.

As an administrator, Azam Khan had vision and drive. At that time some of the government offices functioned from tin sheds in the Secretariat. As the administration and the bureaucracy expanded, there was pressure on the available accommodation. A proposal was submitted to the governor for another tin shed to be built in the Secretariat premises to provide much needed additional space.

Azam Khan, however, had more ambitious ideas. He preferred something that would cater for future needs as well; a multi-storied building, sturdy enough for a helipad on the roof. Construction of the first nine-story building of Secretariat began not long afterwards.

Azam Khan was removed from office in May 1962. An exchange of letters at that time between him and Ayub Khan brought out a stark perception gap. Ayub Khan was emphatic that the governor was essentially the agent of the centre, and, in his opinion, Azam Khan no longer possessed the unwavering commitment to the centre's policies that was expected of the governor. In other words, he had "gone native." Azam Khan's focus, on the other hand, was simply on doing what he believed to be the right thing, doing what needed to be done.

In 1975, Bangladesh and Pakistan decided to exchange resident ambassadors, and Azam Khan was offered the ambassadorship to Bangladesh. He declined the appointment. He could not, he felt, represent either Pakistan in Bangladesh, or Bangladesh in Pakistan. He maintained contacts, of course, with

successive ambassadors/high commissioners of Bangladesh to Pakistan (Between 1972 and 1989, Pakistan was not a member of the Commonwealth).

In 1986, not long after the inception of Saarc, Pakistan hosted a meeting of Saarc finance ministers in Islamabad. Azam Khan travelled by car from Lahore to attend a small dinner party for the delegation from Bangladesh at the residence of the then ambassador.

He was in an expansive and nostalgic mood. He recalled the 1953 anti-Ahmadiyya riots in Lahore and other areas of the Punjab. It had begun as a religio-political agitation. A motley group of extremists had demanded that the Ahmadiyyas be declared a religious minority, and that all Ahmadiyyas holding important positions in the government be removed from office. The main target was Foreign Minister Chaudhury Zafarullah Khan. There was the threat of "direct action" if the demands were not met.

Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin, a devout Muslim and a thorough gentleman, could not accede to the demands. He was, however, less than firm and decisive in addressing the admittedly difficult situation. In the month of March, when civil administration broke down in the face of widespread riots, killings, looting and arson in Lahore and other cities of the Punjab, martial law was proclaimed in the affected areas. Azam Khan, as the GOC of the 10th Division at Lahore, administered the martial law and quelled the riots with utmost rigour and efficacy.

A summary military court sentenced to death Maulana Maudoodi and Maulana Abdus Sattar Khan Niazi for their role in fomenting the disturbances. The sentences were subsequently commuted to life imprisonment, and eventually both were released. This was Pakistan's first experience of martial law; it would last for over two months.

Azam Khan believed, as did many others, that the riots were a cynical ploy by a political cabal, which included Punjab Chief Minister Mian Daultana, to undermine and discredit Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin. Both Nazimuddin and Daultana would be ousted from office in the aftermath -- and largely as a consequence -- of the riots.

In the month of July, a two-member

Court of Inquiry was constituted to inquire into the "Punjab Disturbances of 1953." The Court comprised the chief justice of the Lahore High Court, M. Munir, as president and Justice M.R. Kayani, Puisne Judge, as member. The close to 400-page report of the Court exhaustively covered the issues, facts and train of events in respect of what happened. Their lordships concluded their report almost on a note of despair: "But if democracy means the subordination of law and order to political ends, then Allah knoweth best and we end the report."

Azam Khan spoke in passing about Ayub Khan. Their association went back many years, to the time when both were young officers of the British Indian army. They did not keep in touch after Azam Khan's recall from Dhaka in 1962. He did attend the obsequies though after Ayub Khan passed away in 1974, and there he met Begum Ayub Khan after a gap of many years.

She lamented -- with just a touch of reproach -- that Ayub Khan's close comrades and associates had deserted him. Surrounded by sycophants and deprived of honest counsel, his judgment had faltered in his last years of power. Azam Khan replied gently that he had never parted company with Ayub Khan; it had been the other way around.

In the late 1980's the then ambassador of Bangladesh received a cryptic message from Azam Khan. Could the ambassador drop in for a cup of tea the next time he was in Lahore; there was an important matter that the general wanted to discuss with him. The ambassador was happy to oblige and on his next trip to Lahore went to Azam Khan's residence.

Begum Azam Khan welcomed him warmly and asked if he knew what it was that the general wished to discuss with him. The ambassador did not know. She then proceeded to enlighten him. Azam Khan had drawn up papers making a gift of his considerable landed property to the people of Bangladesh, and planned to hand over the documents to the ambassador. Begum Azam Khan felt that the ambassador should know something; the estates were the main source of income for the family.

The ambassador was an astute and accomplished diplomat, one of the best of Bangladesh. He was placed in a quandary.

He could not accept the outrageously generous gift, not in the light of what Begum Azam Khan had told him. On the other hand, how could he decline gracefully without causing hurt? He had only minutes to marshal his thoughts before his host joined him in the lounge.

Azam Khan greeted his guest with his usual warmth. Over the years, he said, he had received much love and affection from the people of Bangladesh. It was not something that could be repaid. However, he wished very much to show his appreciation, and had thus decided to gift his lands to the people of Bangladesh. The ambassador thanked him.

Azam Khan's love for the people of Bangladesh was known to all, and did not need to be reaffirmed. As a student of Dhaka University in 1961, the ambassador had once attended a talk by the then chancellor at a student function. In his talk, Azam Khan had stressed the importance of self-reliance for a nation and people in achieving something worthwhile. This message had stayed with him. There were many who subscribed to such an approach. Would accepting the general's very generous gift be consistent with this teaching? Azam Khan, of course, got the drift of what the ambassador was trying to convey. He never raised the matter again.

There was a soft, almost sentimental, side to Azam Khan which seldom came to the fore. Sometime in the early 1990's he showed the high commissioner of Bangladesh an address of welcome that had been read out in his honour -- and subsequently bound and presented to him -- during a visit to a university, as governor, decades earlier.

The address was in Bangla, and Azam Khan wondered if the high commissioner could translate it for him. By the time the high commissioner had finished his verbal translation, Azam Khan's eyes were moist. He was moved to tears as much by the words of the address, as by the memories they evoked.

Azam Khan passed away not long afterwards. He was, as he himself liked to say, a simple and humble man. There cannot be too many such simple and humble men in any country of the world. May the earth rest lightly upon him.

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Toy department of news media?



work, which demonstrate, to a certain degree, incompatible values, work cultures and professional outlook." According to Raymond Boyle, a famous writer and researcher of sports media: "Sports journalism is an important part of the news media, but it is fair to observe that it is not among its most prestigious disciplines." Famous sports writer David Rowe points out: "Sports journalism -- 'the toy department' of the news media -- is a place dedicated to fun and frivolity, rather than to the serious functions of the fourth estate."

Sports reporters are not given due professional status. It is alleged that they are not serving serious functions of news media. They add too much colour to the reports, they cover unnecessary stories and they have very little scope for investigative journalism. They never go deep into the subject and mostly come up with a funny and interesting piece of work.

But, it is also fair to observe that the recent development of sports journalism has challenged this school of thought. If we consider two recent cases -- the Indian Premier League corruption and the spot-fixing by Pakistani cricketers -- we find quite a good number of reports and commentaries that served the serious functions of media.

The investigative reports in both cases depict the watchdog role of media and also deserve full credit as professional journalism. We have even seen a good number of editorials and opinion journalism that make sports a department of pure journalistic practices.

The department of sports as a genre of journalism has its own style of newsgathering and presentation. That doesn't necessarily mean that it cannot be included in traditional schools of communication and journalism. Sports creates its own market and offers scope of all kinds of serious journalistic work within a different set of practices. The above-mentioned cases prove that it totally depends on the practitioners and how they contribute to the serious functions of fourth estate.

So, sports as a department not only sells well but also produces serious journalistic productions. Now the scholars must reconsider whether it is still a "toy department" of news media.

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SPORT has emerged as one of the most important departments of news media all over the world. People are crazy about sports. They want to know about sports and about the sports persons. News media comes up with news, views, analysis, statistics, interviews and sports updates to meet the interest of the readers. But, due to the unique nature of its reporting, many people treat sports differently from other departments of the news media. Some even

call it the "toy department" of news media.

A research shows that more than 30% of readers in Europe buy a newspaper only to read sports updates. Even in our country, there is a good portion of readers who go for sports pages without having a look at the front page. News media have grasped this immense popularity of sports news and have increased time and space for it. We see increasing number of sports pages in colour in newspapers and special programmes on sports in the audio-visual media.

This mutual understanding between news producers and consumers should have delivered quality journalism in sports. But it is quite unfortunate that most people have failed to find development of sports in news media. Many researches have been conducted in Europe, Australia and America to compare the journalistic approach of sports reporting and other fields like crime, politics and economics.

These researches have pointed out the practices that contribute to make sports journalism as "non-journalistic" work. Subjectivity, lack of objectivity, lack of hard news, news gathering and presentation process, too much colourful reporting are some of them. Still scholars prefer "sports writing" to "sports reporting."

Famous communication scholar, Ed Mason, asserted: "Journalism and sports journalism are two separate areas of media



8 funniest sports quotes

Once shared an office with a sports commentator who was unable to open his mouth without uttering a cliché. When he came into the room, he would throw his 7-Up can into the bin and shout: "He shoots! He scores!"

When his girlfriend was late, he'd say: "It's a nail biter! She's going right down to the wire!"

But I shouldn't make fun of sports journalists. It's a hard job. I've done it myself.

Once had to write a 2,000-word analysis based on a single quote from a sports manager: "It's not over yet, it's over when it's over."

I was lucky. At least the quote made sense. Footballer Kevin Keegan once told a reporter: "What disappointed me was that we didn't play with any passion. I'm not disappointed, you know, I'm just disappointed."

When asked about a game featuring a team from Chile, the same Mr. Keegan said: "Chile have three options: they could win or they could lose."

And that's not the dumbest thing ever said by a long shot. When Welsh footballer Ian Rush was asked to comment on the time he spent in Italy, he said: "It was like being in a foreign country."

I've noticed that sports people in general talk rubbish. I blame it on the exercise. Exercise is a high-risk health hazard which should be avoided by sensible people.

Worryingly, even when non-athletes use sporting terminology, they start to output garbage. Former British Prime Minister John Major said: "When your back's against the wall, it's time to turn around and fight." This only makes sense if you are being attacked by a wall.

The undefeated kings of sports absurdity are British footballers. Here are the four dumbest things they ever said.

In fourth place, Ron Atkinson: "If Glenn Hoddle said one word to his team at half-time, it was 'concentration' and 'focus.'"

In third place, legendary commentator David Coleman: "Here they come, every colour of the rainbow: black, white, brown."

In second place, David Coleman again: "Ingrid Kristiansen then has smashed the world record, running the 5,000 metres in 14:58.89. Truly amazing. Incidentally, this is a personal best for Ingrid Kristiansen."

And in first place, Ron Noades, chairman of Crystal Palace football team, who said this: "The black players at this club lend the side a lot of skill and flair, but you also need white players in there to balance things up and give the team some brains and some common sense."

Thanks, Ron. My advice to you: Go back to the clichés. They're safer.

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