

Imam's last sermon

C.R. ABRAR

Imam's candid statement laid bare two stark facts. Firstly, the blatant partisanship that people in authority engage in manipulating appointments to public offices undermining statutory institutions such as the PSC.

Secondly, the statement of the adviser to the PM also betrayed the fact that there was widespread manipulation of the election process by the ruling party.

Mr. H.T. Imam thought he could surely speak his mind. After all, he was among a group of youth of his own clan. Clan in the sense that he and his audience at the TSC who assembled to listen to him shared common views about the genuineness of the January 5 national elections, about the positive contribution of the ruling party in ushering development in almost all fronts, about the destructive role that the political opposition is engaged in and the correctness of the use of brute force and litigation by the administration in facing such challenge, about their skepticism of civil society institutions who have been relentless in demanding transparent and accountable governance, and, most importantly, in their unflinching loyalty to the ruling party and its supreme leader.

It was befitting that the organisers of the event chose Imam to be the chief guest of the programme marked to commemorate the gruesome jail killings of November 1975. After all, he has a wealth of experience as bureaucrat and the uncanny ability to enjoy the confidence of the masters he serves. Included among them was infamous President Khandkar Moshaque Ahmed who briefly held the reins of power in tumultuous times of 1975.

Not in his wildest dreams did the political adviser to the prime minister ever think that he would find himself in hot soup for speaking the truth. After all, he is an honourable man and honourable men are meant to speak the truth.

Media reports suggest that, at the Awami League parliamentary board's meeting of November 13, when Mr. Tofail Ahmed tried to put in a few words on Imam's behalf, the PM asked him to defend with logic, if he had any. Buoyed by PM's stance another member Suranjit Sengupta, who lost his own portfolio as Railways Minister after unfolding of a bizarre series of events berated Mr. Ahmed, for being the "Imam's advocate." Reports further say that the PM asked Ahmed to advise Imam to resign from his post.

Unless that resignation is forthcoming one cannot be sure if the sermon that

Imam delivered at the Dhaka University premises on November 12 was his last. After all, he is a survivor and is known to have the innate ability to turn adversity into strength. Only time will tell if his head would really roll.

So what did Imam say at that event? Why is it that people at the helm are so upset at the statements he made?

We need to remind ourselves the context in which Imam felt obligated to go that extra mile in placating his young audience. Almost a year ago, on November 21, 2013, Imam's residence was the target of protest by a section of activists of the host organisation as they had failed to qualify in the 33rd BCS examinations. They accused the PM's adviser of "depriving them because of internal conflict" that presumably existed within the ruling party.

There is little scope to regard Imam's statement as a stray incident. The spin-doctors are at play in doing so. Earlier, on September 20, 2010 the PM's health adviser, at a ceremony in Gopalganj said: "Some 13,350 employees will soon be recruited in community clinics. We have decided that no one outside the party (Awami League) will be recruited." In the same vein, the convener of the pro-ruling party teachers' platform of Dhaka University, the Blue Panel, is on record as suggesting that only members of their party's student wing "should be recruited during the current tenure of the government." He further said: "Injuries and attacks they suffered for their involvement in student politics should be criteria for their recruitment." There has been no official rebuttal of these statements.

It was against this backdrop Imam thought it was only appropriate to convey to his audience where he and the administration stood in the audience's desire to secure a government job. As their well-wisher he advised them to study and prepare hard so that they perform well in the written test of the BCS examinations. He further assured them that once they crossed that Rubicon, "we will see how much we can help you with the viva voce". In order to reinforce his point he went on to state, "our leader has told us to arrange jobs for you by any means". Before finishing his speech Imam

reminded the audience of the dividend paid off by the government's smart move to induct pro-Awami officials in the mobile courts during the controversial last general elections.

Imam's candid statement laid bare two stark facts. Firstly, the blatant partisanship that people in authority engage in manipulating appointments to public offices undermining statutory institutions such as the PSC. Under successive regimes not only has there been erosion of the authority of the Commission through appointment of members and chairs who had obvious political bias but also in manipulating the results in the way that Imam suggested to the young Turks of the ruling party. It will be unfair to blame the incumbents only for this. During the tenures of Khaleda Zia's BNP government there were umpteen examples and allegations of misdeeds surrounding the public service examinations. Included among those were leakage of questions, trading in appointments by certain leaders of the party who commanded the blessings of their omnipotent leader, and asking candidates in viva voce examinations whether they could recite Suras of the Holy Quran.

Secondly, the statement of the adviser to the PM also betrayed the fact that there was widespread manipulation of the election process by the ruling party. It only gave further credence to the skeptics including the political opposition who all along questioned the intent behind the 15th Amendment that had done away with the provision of the caretaker government and the consequent robbing of voting rights of the people by holding general elections that most major parties boycotted.

Even though Adviser Imam was castigated by the PM and reprimanded by the ruling party's parliamentary board for undermining party's interest, there has not been any denial of the claims he had made. In that context, the nation should be grateful to him for laying bare in candor of what goes on in the corridors of authority of the State and what little regard the political leadership has for the rule of law to prevail.

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Enhancing development cooperation through AIMS

MOHAMMAD MEJBAHUDDIN

GLOBALLY, the data revolution is underway -- offering both policy makers and ordinary citizens unprecedented new opportunities to make informed decisions. The UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Post-2015 Development Agenda, in its Report in 2013, drew attention toward a number of transformational shifts that will be required for inclusive sustainable development through enhanced global partnership. In order to translate this vision into reality, goals or targets relating to development efforts will have to be rigorously monitored to assess impacts. The Secretary General's Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG), in its Report on 'A World that Counts' (November 6, 2014), underscores the need for data standards to facilitate openness, and specifically standards that accommodate open, disaggregated, accessible, timely and comparable data that caters to the needs of a wide range of users. This trend toward open data has gathered momentum following the realisation that transparency and mutual accountability are essential for effective development.

The issue came to the forefront during the third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra in 2008 and has been a prominent topic in the global aid effectiveness agenda since then.

Keeping with this global trend, Bangladesh has become one of the few countries in the world to set up a locally developed online aid information platform called Bangladesh Aid Information Management System, or Bangladesh (AIMS) -- a web-based software application that will help the country to track and manage its aid flows.

AIMS is a publicly accessible database that captures data on aid flows of a given country. This kind of online database helps both development partners and recipient countries to track where the aid is going, which groups in the society are getting benefits and what is being achieved. More importantly, it will provide a window into the channels of aid delivery and the overall quality of aid management in Bangladesh. The overall objective of such a database is to provide common aid data for government, development partners, CSOs and other stakeholders.

There has to be a big bang for bucks if we want to have effective development partnerships. In order to make it happen, we need comprehensive, comparable, timely and easily accessible data on foreign assistance. This helps the government in coordination and planning while also allowing development partners to know how their assistance is being used for what purposes and the sector composition of investments. It helps civil society, media and academia to measure the quality of aid expenditure while critically analysing our efforts and providing pragmatic and honest suggestions to ensure better results of development partnerships. All of this will ensure a stronger impact of development efforts on the lives of the people. Transparency in aid management will also assist legislative oversight of public expenditure for development.

In the recent High Level Meeting on Effective Development Cooperation in Mexico earlier this year, countries reiterated to accelerate their efforts to fulfill the pledges made in various international forums to provide timely and forward-looking data so that the gains made on transparency at the global level get translated into real benefits at country level.

The same was also echoed in the "Joint Cooperation Strategy" signed in 2010 between the government of Bangladesh and major development partners. In addition, Bangladesh's improvements in governance through the enactment of the Right to Information Act and the establishment of an independent Information Commission has contributed to promoting data openness. Against this backdrop, Bangladesh decided to develop a home-grown, economical and technically robust database to manage aid.

It is satisfying to note that the response from our development partners since the establishment of AIMS is very encouraging. For the majority of donors on the system, we now have a quite comprehensive data set. It is expected that regular and timely data sharing on AIMS will ensure better availability of comprehensive, accurate and timely aid data to get a complete picture of aid flows. This will improve national budgeting and promote sector level alignment with national priorities spelled out in the 6th Five Year Plan.

Besides, through the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), a group of voluntary donors, recipients and civil society organisations has developed a global standard defining exactly the type of aid information that is needed to ensure effective development cooperation at country level. The Economic Relations Division with the support of IATI is preparing to implement automated data transfer in the near future.

Bangladesh aspires to become a middle-income country by 2021. To overcome the challenges of poverty, the core goal of our partnership should be achievement of substantive development results. It is essential that the development partners respect strong country ownership by ensuring alignment of their programmes with national priorities in different sectors and by using our country systems in respect of Public Financial Management (PFM) and Procurement. Sharing aid data through a national database is a part and parcel of ensuring country ownership.

Bangladesh AIMS is expected to play a key role in promoting effective development partnership in Bangladesh. It must be remembered that enhancing aid transparency and ensuring better aid management are joint responsibilities of the government and the development partners and by working together we can move faster towards that goal.

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What is Modi government doing!

SHAHNOOR WAHID

Mr. Modi once again harped on the issue of bringing back all black money from abroad. He said that the poor people of India were the actual owners of this money!

TWO news items came from the direction of India in quick succession to make our jaws fall. Incredibly unbelievable! Can any government having an iota of compassion do this to its own people, and in the process embarrass some of us here in Bangladesh?

First, the attack was directed at some 'poor' Indians who kept their hard earned black money in foreign banks; paltry amounts of thousands of crores of rupees. Peanuts, really. Now, we fail to understand why in such small matters the Indian government or the Supreme Court should get involved. Don't they have better things to do? Like fending off the Pakistanis at the border? And why should the colour of money bother anyone so much? What difference does black or white make? It could be yellow, so? Michael Jackson had sung a song long ago about being black or white, didn't he?

We have come to know from the Indian news that in the first phase only some small-fry, an insignificant 627 of them, have been identified and the bigger fish are yet to be nabbed. But the investigating committee has vowed that all will soon face the music, not foreign, but deshi. Now, don't people in India have the right to amass wealth and keep them somewhere safe so that CBI or the tax guys cannot touch them? Don't those government officials keep their monthly salary safe in a bank? Does anyone raise

any hullabaloo about that? Mr. Modi once again harped on the issue of bringing back all black money from abroad. He said that the poor people of India were the actual owners of this money! Blistering Barnacles! If this happens then our Indian friends will have to give up all *karwabar* and *dhandas*, and go and live in Kashi and Goya as hermits!

Why should that embarrass us here? Good question. You see, in this age of super Internet connectivity, news travel faster than before and hit the headlines of all the newspapers in the country. And it hit some of us below the belt. Only some weeks back people were talking about Bangladeshis keeping dollars and pounds in foreign banks. It was so annoying to us. It was being said that the Bangladesh government would have the stashed away money brought back to the country. How preposterous!

After this Indian story, we are now really worried about our very own black money in foreign banks. What is going to happen now? Will Bangladesh government get inspired by the Indian move and start asking embarrassing questions? Who knows whether NBR or ACC have already read the news item?

Well, we hope good sense would prevail and the watchdogs would look the other way and allow us to amass our money, whether white, black, yellow or brown!

The other news items that also came as a shocker is the Indian government's decision not to allow government officials to travel in the first class by air and organise government programmes in 5-star hotels! All forms of foreign tours in the

name of attending conferences, discussion meetings, exhibitions etc., have been discouraged. The ban on purchasing new vehicles for government offices and officials will continue. It has also instructed all government offices to cut unplanned expenditure by 10%. The Modi government has further strongly discouraged creation of new government posts. Posts which are lying vacant for the last one year or more; there is no need to fill them up unless very urgently required.

We believe some officials from the Modi government should come and stay with us in Bangladesh and watch how some of our ministries and government departments are run by 'highly patriotic' people. They will learn how "Experience Gathering" foreign tours for engineers, accountants, surveyors and their office peons are planned before constructing toilets in some government quarters.

Once these Indian officials go back they will be able to convince Mr. Modi to allow such experience gathering tours all over Europe to study the evolution of toilets there. And if our government officials and their subordinates cannot purchase luxurious vehicles every two years how will they visit their ancestral homes to meet the 'people'? After all interacting with the people is the most important thing in a People's Republic, isn't it?

So, you see, we are quite perturbed at the doings of Mr. Modi as somehow they impact our life here in Bangladesh. We are quite worried now about what he would do next.

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QUOTE
Quote

Courage is the capacity to confront what can be imagined.

Leo Rosten

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Parody
- Crew member
- Haute
- Menzel of "Frozen"
- Tribal leader
- Body shop challenges
- Will Smith biopic
- Convoy truck
- Brief drop
- Chess pieces
- Small bill
- Julep need
- Position
- Like some wines
- Tuscan dish
- Scottish isle
- Nabokov book
- Fried tortilla
- Coat rack part
- "You bet!"
- Heir, often
- Bruins legend
- Id --
- Galoat
- City on the Missouri
- Visibly shocked

DOWN

- Ticks off
- BB, e.g.
- "William Kent Krueger book
- Metal source
- Derived from iron
- Roof feature
- Exalted poem
- William Kent Krueger book
- Lead on
- Sounded hoarse
- Shoe parts
- Hitch
- Ocean between Eur. and Amer.
- Fried tortilla
- Sewing kit collection
- Friend of Fozzie
- Pate cover
- Ticks off
- Irish poet
- That guy
- Collins base

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

COBRA TREAD
ADIEU AORTA
WELDS BORED
LOTS OF
RAH RHO BIT
ARABIA RIDE
DOLLAR BILLS
ASET PIGLET
REY PEP CRY
TATORERO
BATIK DOSES
OXIDE AMBLE
GENES LAYLA

CRYPTOQUOTE

VIMOMDMO G QGB YAQQEJC G YOEQM,
TAH LEBHC G VEJBMCC. MDMOR CMYOMJ
YOEQM ICCEJJC OMSAOJMO.
-- OGNIS VGNHA MQMOCAB

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: NEVERY FACE FACTS; IF YOU DO, YOU'LL NEVER GET UP IN THE MORNING. -- MARLO THOMAS

A XYDLBAXR IS LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

SARGE WANTS YOU TO SEE THE PSYCHIATRIST?
YEAH, HE THINKS I'M TOO EGOTISTICAL
BUT I DON'T THINK THIS PSYCHIATRIST CAN HELP

HENRY by Don Trachte

HENRIETTA IS ON THE PHONE, DEAR!