

# Let the truth speak for itself

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It came to my knowledge through social media that *The Daily Star* editor Mahfuz Anam in a TV interview has admitted to his "biggest mistake" in journalism, saying it was wrong of him to run corruption stories against Sheikh Hasina during the 2007-8 military-controlled caretaker regime. My immediate status on the social media was as follows:

It's heartening to see an editor admit his past faults, if any. On the other hand, during the military-led caretaker government (CTG), none of my articles criticising, and in some cases admonishing the CTG, was ever refused to be published in *The Daily Star*. Also, one should read the commentary of Mahfuz Anam on July 17, 2007, headlined: "This is no way to strengthen democracy: Just as 'command economy' failed, so will 'command politics', following Sheikh Hasina's arrest the day before". Incidentally, the aforesaid piece has been republished in today's TDS to put the truth in perspective.

Some people are making a mountain out of a molehill, as if it was only *The Daily Star* that had published all those 'unsubstantiated' stories. In fact, as I remember, all the newspapers of the country were running such stories at that time. The DS editor has probably come in focus only because he admitted it as his "biggest mistake". I thought that would be the end of the story. But to my complete surprise, I saw in the media that six treasury bench lawmakers and an independent MP last night on the floor of the Parliament had demanded the trial of the editor and publisher of *The Daily Star* Mahfuz Anam for "running false reports" on Sheikh Hasina after the 1/11 political changeover in 2007. They said sedition charges should be brought against Mahfuz Anam as he had "committed sedition" by getting involved in a "conspiracy" to destroy democracy and establish an unconstitutional government. What an audacity of the lawmakers to discover 'sedition' and 'conspiracy' against the editor of the most respected English news daily of the country, who wrote the most courageous commentary to advise the military general of the consequences of armed forces advent into politics! I have decided to write this not because Mahfuz Anam or *The Daily Star* needs my testimony; the whole objective of my writing this piece is to put the truth in real perspective.

I will refer to only one editorial and a commentary by Mahfuz Anam out of the 203 editorials that *The Daily Star* had published during the whole period of the emergency caretaker government.

On April 3, 2007, the then army chief Moeen U Ahmed delivered a

written speech titled, "The challenging interface of democracy and security", where he spoke on democracy in Bangladesh. The salient part of his speech went as follows:

"I believe the aspiring democratic process of Bangladesh and the current transition period allow us an opportunity to develop a new concept and find a new sense of direction to the future politics of Bangladesh. By its own merit, the country has a principle to live by and a purpose to strive for, and this needs rethinking so that we can reinvent a system of governance with new leadership at all levels. I reckon Bangladesh will have to construct its own brand of democracy, recognising its social, historical, and cultural conditions, with religion being one of several components of its national identity. On the other hand, we have to read the resolute char-

political issues, some of which are controversial and debatable in nature. He dilated on the political future of the country, structure of the polity, need for 'our own' brand of democracy, presidential and parliamentary systems of government and a balance of power between the president and the prime minister. We are baffled as many of these concepts are mentioned in passing without any elaboration. We wonder, how are we to interpret his expansive views? His observations cannot but trigger speculation and spin the rumour mill which may not contribute to stability, especially at a time when the country is looking forward to free, fair and credible elections. It is an emergency the country is going through when fundamental rights are suspended, an emergency that in public perception has been brought about to aid the process of democratic

go public on political issues, he must be ready, willing and open to public debate on them including criticism of his views, if any".

The commentary went on, "To start with, should a sitting CAS speak in public and in presence of the President on the political future of a country? Such speech making will naturally raise questions as to whether or not the army chief or his institution plans to get involved in the country's politics? ... So what do we make of the General's speech? Was it a mere intellectual exercise? Or a purposeful floating of ideas to gauge public reaction?"

It added, "So far the armed forces had done very well in remaining behind the scene. Now that has changed. The CAS' speech told the nation, as well as the world, as to who really is running the show. Does this coming out into the

making them more and more controversial and their intervention into politics hated by the people in general".

The commentary concluded with the following:

"Simply put, we strongly feel our armed forces should not involve themselves in politics. They have a mission behind which there is popular support, which they should accomplish and return to their barracks. This will tremendously enhance their moral standing and bring them far greater dividend in terms of love and respect of the general people, which is the greatest gift for any patriotic army. And ours is such an army".

A few weeks later, in a press interview when General Moeen was asked to expand his comment on "our own brand of democracy", his response was, "I have already got my lesson by opening my mouth once. I am not going to do it again". One does not have to be a Harold Lusk of politics to extrapolate what 'lesson' General Moeen was referring to. And this is the same editor our honourable MPs accused of hatching a "conspiracy" to "destroy democracy and establish an unconstitutional government!"

In fact, according to my well-wishers in Bangladesh, it was possible for me to write the 18 pieces that I wrote for TDS during the military-backed CTG only because I live outside the country, and in their view, it was only TDS that was brave enough to publish those pieces.

In its 25th year of publication, hailing *The Daily Star* for introducing a healthy trend in journalism, Professor Anisuzzaman said that "it has embraced truth and proved its courage. The only partiality it has shown is that for the country's War of Liberation". As a contributor of this esteemed news daily for the last two decades, I absolutely concur with the views of Prof Anisuzzaman. A newspaper loses objectivity when it becomes a mouthpiece of any political party; *The Daily Star* has only been the mouth piece of our Liberation War. Over the years, I have rebutted international critics of our trials of war criminals; foremost among them were *The Economist*, *Human Right Watch*, *Amnesty International*, *United Nations*, and some US lobbyists. *The Daily Star* has always given me free rein in taking on such national and international critics while writing in favour of the trials of war criminals to uphold the true history of our liberation war.

Since *The Daily Star's* readership extends beyond the boundary of our border, this is the sole newspaper that has contributed most in quelling both national and international criticisms of our war crimes trials and in guarding against the distortion of our history.

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acter of Bangladeshi people that enabled us to overcome the perpetuation of dynastic rule for a transparent and accountable Bangladesh".

In a rebuttal to Moeen U Ahmed's suggestion "to construct its own brand of democracy", *The Daily Star* published an editorial on the following day (April 5, 2007) under the title, "To build democracy, let's restore it first. Shouldn't Gen Moeen's views be tested in wider public discourse?" An excerpt of the editorial is given below:

"There is an element of surprise with a tinge of shock at what Army Chief Lt Gen Moeen U Ahmed said in his keynote speech at a regional conference of International Political Science Association on Monday. One gets the impression that he may have gone far beyond the purview of a serving CAS to air his views on the entire gamut of

elections. The General is for a reinvented, homegrown democracy. Gen Moeen has spoken of things of far reaching implications. No individual or group can singly take decision on these. The need is for an open debate on the ideas thrown open by him which cannot take place in an emergency. Only when emergency is lifted such a public discourse can be held where the validity of his thoughts can be really tested. To build democracy, let us restore it first".

*The Daily Star* did not end this piece only with the above rebuttal; Mahfuz Anam followed the paper's editorial with a commentary on the following day (April 6, 2007) titled "Gen Moeen goes public on politics. How can national interest be served best?" An excerpt read:

"Now that Chief of Army Staff (CAS) Lt Gen Moeen U Ahmed has decided to

open serve the interest of the nation and that of the armed forces? From now on the full responsibility for all political decisions, both good and bad, will automatically fall on the armed forces. They are now out in the open with all the attending vulnerabilities".

The commentary further said, "In independent Bangladesh, the first unfortunate entry of military into politics was the dastardly murder of Bangabandhu along with his family (save two daughters) by a section of army officers and troops. This was followed by the killing of four national leaders in the jail, coming of power of Gen Ziaur Rahman, his shameful act of indemnifying Bangabandhu's killers and the subsequent tragedy of his killing by another section of the armed forces. None of these brought any credit to our army and contributed in

# Strategic marketing in US elections

NAJMUN NOOR

AS intra party feud picks up steam in the USA, surprises rein the election theatre in any and every possible way. Yet the projection, marketability and eventual nomination of a candidate hover around the basics of personality marketing and impression management. The glitter and gala of events and party theatrics play second fiddle to how the candidates are perceived.

Electability continues to be the key decisive factor. More important than visual appearance is the element surrounding the "package" that the candidate is likened to. Track record and experience are far more crucial than idealist stances. At the same time, an impeccable CV will draw less traction if it fails to address and anticipate challenges for the future. Among Democratic candidates, while Bernie Sanders' political experience ranks far below Hillary's, it is his ability to tower

over any of the potential Republican candidates that is suspect. Additionally, his idealist stance on a multitude of platforms like offering tuition free college education or reforming or improvising healthcare look grand on a text book. Even within party stalwarts, the case for a Socialist narrative is risky. From a position of strength for Democrats and a potential successive third term presidency that resonates with a brittle Republican position, chances look to be far brighter with Hillary's nomination.

The issues look to be secondary, at best. As Obama's legacy carries with it an enviable track record delivered on a silver platter, the Democratic slogan, the message seems to forebode from within: "...if it ain't broke, don't fix it...". While the Republicans continue to run helter skelter for damage control, their adversaries in the Democratic Party are out to exercise caution so as not to rock the steady boat. In all fronts, the Obama presidency has

weathered every storm from the negativity let loose from the GOP ruled Senate and Congress. On all fronts, namely the women voters, young voters, LGBTQ voters, minority voters, diversity voters, it is a safe bet to kow tow Obama's policy and strategy. Economically, too, the deficit looks immensely minimised and paints a glowing picture with the lowest ever unemployment in a decade.

The momentum is in essence the harbinger of days to come. Dynamics in either or both parties look to be tremendously different. While Democrats are least keen to ruffle feathers and disturb the status quo and may even harbour ambitions for a return to a Democratic controlled senate and the House in the next mid-term, the fate of the Affordable Care Act is sure to face the axe with a Republican president. On the other hand, fully knowing that their front runner is the least electable, party stalwarts are sending panic calls and alarm bells throughout the nation

with the sole objective of disturbing the status quo and creating waves of dissent.

Fate in the caucuses will have a tell-tale effect in both short as well as long term. In other words, caucuses in Iowa and New Hampshire will have a lasting effect in favour of Bernie Sanders only if millennial voters, mostly within the age bracket of 18-34 year olds, turn up as the polls have indicated. It will still be tall order to topple the cart that is now heavily tilted in favour of Hillary Clinton in other states that is in excess of 70 percent. The initial primaries are scheduled to start in early February and opponents of Donald Trump continue to be apprehensive of the strong loyalty of his supporters. He has played his cards very well and the latest endorsement from Sarah Palin has literally secured the support from Tea Party diehards that look potent enough to be stronger than the support that evangelicals have for Ted Cruz.

Endorsements and alternate depic-

tions of the opponents are proving out to be pivotal for all candidates. Interestingly enough, the Republican administration looks to be portraying their frontrunner as negatively as possible. The Republican machinery is still out to discredit Donald Trump, not champion him. Some are, in actuality, endorsing the third possible candidate. While endorsements from major publications and personalities are valued priceless, the element of alternate depiction of candidates (in essence, negative portrayal) is bewildering. Republicans are out to herald and champion Bernie Sanders with the hope that he is nominated so as not to have to face the seemingly invincible Hillary Clinton.

All told, this promises to be an exciting Primary to look out for as a fore-runner to the end game of marketing strategies for the presidential election in November 2016.

The writer is an Airline Executive.

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**QUOTABLE Quote**



**BEN OKRI**  
Nigerian poet and novelist

*The magician and the politician have much in common: they both have to draw our attention away from what they are really doing.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- Reach across
- Leave
- To boot
- Broad way
- Nullified
- Corrupt
- Greek vowel
- Tour de France vehicle
- Portland setting
- Diamond worker
- Capital on the Nile
- Bender
- Pop's sister
- Cruise stop
- Chilly dessert, informally
- Snort source
- Lobed organ
- Empire
- Waiting room call
- Charged particle
- Desert sight
- Poker prize
- Magazine worker
- Speck
- Mouse or muskrat
- Urge on

**DOWN**

- Be thrifty
- Book basis
- Turkey setting
- Silent assent
- "Spish Splash" singer
- Conjures up
- Fountain of jazz
- Aardvark snack
- Regret
- Top rating
- Book jacket bit
- Pretentious
- Polaris' constellation
- "Alice" diner
- Quick look
- Casual eatery
- Mystique
- Pharmacy unit
- Portland setting
- Diet no-no
- Put to use
- Cager Archibald
- Director Premierer
- Call for
- Sea, to Simone
- Altar words
- Relieve
- Guitar booster

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

S	A	S	H	S	A	N	D	S
O	T	T	E	R	P	R	E	O
P	H	O	N	E	N	U	M	B
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**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker



**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

