

PM's call for taking responsibility

MO CHAUDHURY

THE storm around *The Daily Star* editor Mahfuz Anam's editorial mea culpa reached a defining moment as the honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself hinted to his possible conspiratorial involvement during the 1/11 regime, and challenged him to resign, taking responsibility of his editorial lapse. This commentary analyses the Prime Minister's call in a non-partisan and objective manner.

The Prime Minister is absolutely right in her call for taking responsibility of a highly consequential error by an eminent personality in his influential capacity to mobilise public opinion. Her call, if principled, is totally in line with the historically righteous norms and practices in democracies and civilised societies around the world.

There are, however, a number of issues that attenuate the potentially virtuous nature of the PM's call. First, there is no publicly available record of Mahfuz Anam admitting, spontaneously or by coercion, to purposeful collaboration with the 1/11 regime to vilify her or former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia to facilitate the path of their riddance. A legitimate curiosity is why the Prime Minister and her two-time administration since 2009 waited all these years until Mahfuz Anam's own recent TV admission. Did the honourable prime minister become aware of the incriminating information/evidence only very recently?

Second, the Prime Minister promised to prosecute the collaborators of the 1/11 regime on the grounds of conspiring to dismantle democratic governance. If validated, such

collaboration may amount to treason. Reasonable questions, however, arise; why did the PM's regime drag its feet until now to prosecute Anam and other alleged collaborators for such a high crime (treason)? Why are the names of other alleged collaborators not mentioned in the same breath?

Third, the DGFI is a vital part of the nation's security and is believed to be run by highly competent, professional and patriotic officers. If Mahfuz Anam is prosecuted now for 1/11's facilitation, it is likely that the information supplied by today's DGFI will be needed as evidence for the 1/11 DGFI's interaction with him among others. It will then be necessary to establish that today's DGFI is trustworthy and patriotic, while the 1/11 DGFI was not. Wouldn't such a path be toxic and self-inflicting for the nation?

Fourth, both the PM and the former prime minister deserve the nation's unqualified thanks and respect for leading the country into many miraculous achievements, including the return to parliamentary democracy. But leaders are to lead the nation by example, in this case publicly taking responsibility of at least some of their past leadership and governance errors, as inadvertent as they may be. The emergence of the non-democratic interim government practice and the wrangling about it that led to the 1/11 regime is a case in question.

Fifth, the 1/11 regime had support from some senior leaders of the two main political parties and it initiated numerous legal cases against the PM, Khaleda Zia and their top associates. But only those against the PM and her associates have gathered vigour at the courts since 2009. One is

literally led to accept the monstrously incredible scenario of the allegedly evil 1/11 regime being right regarding only one set of case evidence marked along the political fault line.

Lastly, Mahfuz Anam's admission and the PM's call for him to resign may finally usher in a highly coveted democratic practice of resignation by persons in key positions for their failure to uphold the highest standards in serving the people, both in private and official capacity. It is also in this regard that the PM's call is perhaps the most vulnerable. Despite her strong leadership in maintaining the nation's admirable economic progress (since liberation) and continuing achievements in education, digitalisation, infrastructure, power supply and the like, the nation is undeniably mired in a whole litany of problems, most notably concerning security and sanctity of life for ordinary citizens (including minorities, women, progressive thinkers and opposition activists) and rampant corruption. As the well-known, high profile and widely evidenced governance failures keep reaching aggravated levels, the unholy and unreal practice of denial on the part of the cabinet and the ruling party and government officials is gathering steam instead. This is principally because no one seems to own the failures and is voluntarily paying or made to pay a demonstrably grave price, political or legal.

Japanese Economy Minister Akira Amari resigned in January 2016, taking responsibility for a political funding scandal. Romania's (a new democracy) Prime Minister Victor Ponta resigned in November 2015, following the loss of 32 lives in a club tragedy, stating that it is not fair to leave

the responsibility to the officials on the field alone. In April 2014, South Korean Prime Minister Chung Hong-Won resigned facing criticism for the handling of the sinking of a passenger ferry that claimed the lives of more than 180 people. These are but just a handful of instances of really meaning to take responsibility.

I am not advocating, by any means, the resignation of the Prime Minister for the colossal failures (like those mentioned above) during her time in governance. There will inevitably be failures and hopefully those will be fewer than accomplishments. But the point is that if the PM's cabinet and officials rush to claim credit for the country's progress under their watch, can the nation not hold them responsible for their notable failures as well? In that case, shouldn't there be consequentially more exacting, exemplary and public prices to be paid by them, like the external examples above? The traditionally argued mechanism of an electoral defeat did not historically work well in Bangladesh, is passive and reactive in nature, and is far too general and convoluted a venue for this purpose.

The commentary above raised some queries based on rational arguments. But perhaps the absence of rational discourse itself is driving the chain of events in today's Bangladesh. That certainly cannot bode well for the nation going forward. Such an ominous path can be averted if the PM and the former prime minister advance the culture of accountability by way of illustrative leadership in this crucial regard.

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The language problem



Do speakers of different languages think differently? What comes to mind when we hear mamihlapinatapei which is the wordless yet meaningful look shared by two people who desire to initiate something, but are both reluctant to start? Can speakers of English, French or German conceive of *viraha* which means "realisation of love through separation"? Ever heard of the timeless Hopi, a Native American tribe of Arizona who didn't have any words for time, no grammatical constructions indicating the past or the future?

How did they experience reality as we perceive it? The question leads us to *linguistic relativity*, popularly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, named after Benjamin Lee Whorf, the US linguist and fire prevention engineer. Simply put, Whorf's hypothesis was that speakers of different kinds of language are, as a result of differences among language, cognitively different from one another.

It sounds disturbing. The idea that people who speak some particular language are incapable of certain kinds of thought is distasteful. Japanese has a term that covers both green and blue. Russian has separate terms for dark and light blue. "Does this mean that Russians perceive these colours differently from Japanese people? Does language control and limit the way we think?" says Columbia linguist John McWhorter in his book *The Language Hoax: Why the World Looks the Same in Any Language*. Questions such as these have fascinated philosophers, anthropologists, linguists and psychologists for centuries touching on almost all the major controversies in the study of the mind.

Despite all the fuss, however, the idea that language might shape thought was considered



unprovable or simply wrong until recently. But research at Stanford and MIT, led by Lera Boroditsky, now an Associate Professor of Cognitive Science at UC San Diego, reveals interesting facts. Collecting data from China, Greece, Chile, Indonesia, Russia, and Aboriginal Australia, her team concluded that people who speak different languages do indeed think differently and that even flukes of grammar can profoundly affect how they see the world. "Appreciating its role in constructing our mental lives brings us one step closer to understanding the very nature of humanity," she said.

Even some of the rather minor aspects of language have profound impact on how we see the world. Take grammatical gender, for instance. In most Romance languages, nouns are either masculine or feminine. In many other languages, nouns are divided into more genders. Some Australian Aboriginal languages have as many as sixteen genders, among them, hunting tools, canines, shiny objects and "women, fire, and dangerous things," a phrase made famous by US

cognitive linguist George Lakoff. German and Spanish description of the world differs in a way predicted by grammatical gender. For example, to describe a "key" - which is masculine in German and feminine in Spanish - the German speakers are more likely to use words like "hard," "heavy," "metal," and "useful," whereas Spanish speakers tend to say "golden," "intricate," "lovely," and "tiny." In fact, we do not have to go far to test this concept; we can see it in an art gallery. More often than not, personification of abstract entities such as death, sin, victory, or time is determined by the grammatical gender of the word in the artist's native language. German painters are, therefore, more likely to paint death as a man while their Russian counterparts, as a woman. The fact that even quirks of grammar, such as grammatical gender, can affect

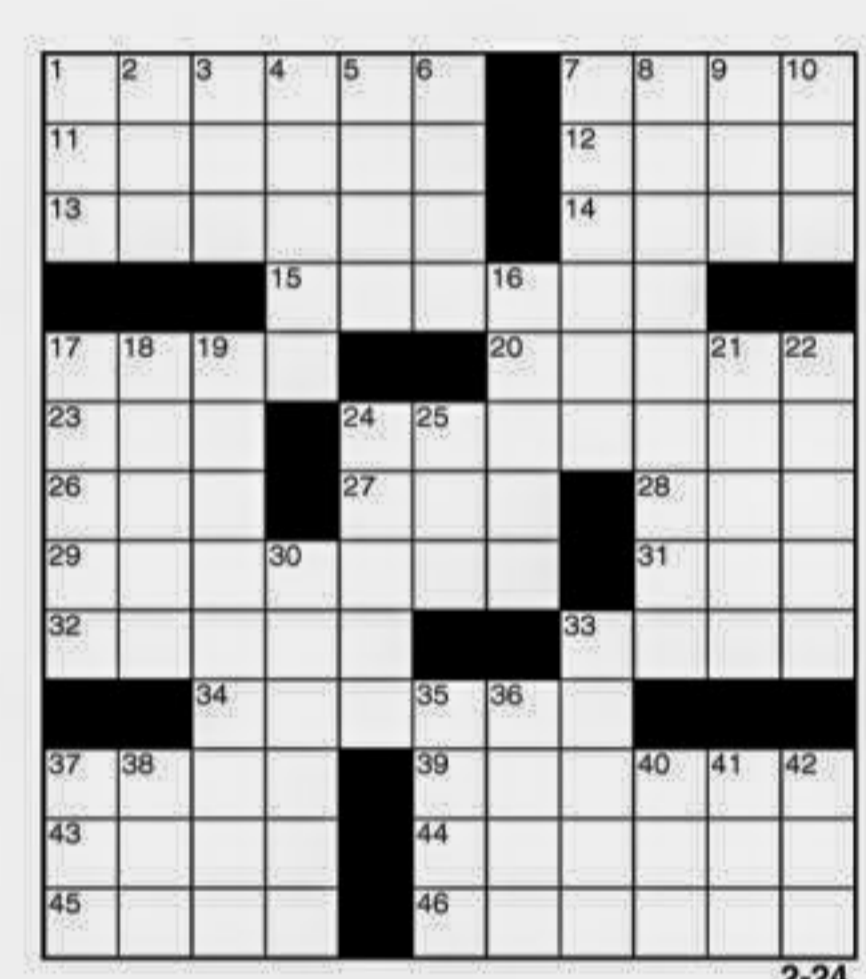
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how we think is mind-boggling. Whether or not language shapes thought, or if it's the other way around, has gone in circles for centuries and is showing no sign of fatigue. Meanwhile, how the meaning of words like courage, acknowledgement and apology is changing in some places is just absurd.

The writer is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
- 1 Hogwarts groundskeeper
- 7 "The King --"
- 11 Skiing variety
- 12 Verse creator
- 13 Quick look
- 14 Murders, slangily
- 15 Strident
- 17 George Jetson's wife
- 20 Bonnie's partner
- 23 Music's Yoko
- 24 Caught some z's
- 26 "That's gross!"
- 27 Swindle
- 28 Low digit
- 29 Mini burgers
- 31 Diarist Anais
- 32 Wyoming's -- Range
- 33 Smaller amount
- 34 "You fell for it!"
- 37 Herring's kin
- 39 Rum drink
- 43 Mountain cat
- 44 Current unit
- 45 like some wines
- 46 Freezer bag verb
- DOWN
- 1 Crone
- 2 Maximum amount
- 3 Transcript no.
- 4 Remove suds from
- 5 Ruler marking
- 6 Glade grazer
- 7 Artemis' twin
- 8 Restricted area
- 9 Excellent, in slang
- 10 "-- been real"
- 16 Computer symbols
- 17 Compete with a lance
- 18 Protractor measure
- 19 Pitching coup
- 21 TV's Leary
- 22 Blissful spots
- 24 Blood-hound's clue
- 25 Neither follower
- 30 Gizmo
- 33 Reading aids
- 35 Russian ruler
- 36 Residence
- 37 Mud bath site
- 38 Embrace
- 40 Honey maker
- 41 Radio's Glass
- 42 Snaky swimmer



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

CADET SHIRE
ARENA TIRED
MINDREADING
PAT GAG STY
BERET
CARAT DRAPE
AGOG ERIE
TOWER KNEEL
LUCID
ADO MUD WOO
MIND BENDING
PETAL AUGER
STONE POSSE

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) PROCESS SERVICES

The Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) of the Department of Social Services (Agency) is soliciting proposals for the provision of properly qualified process service in accordance with any and all regulatory and statutory requirements for

BOY! IT SEEMS LIKE THEY TRY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS BY CREATING NEW PROBLEMS!

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

WHY DO I HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL?

SO YOU DON'T END UP DIGGING DITCHES.

SO GUYS WHO DIG DITCHES DIDN'T GO TO SCHOOL?

UM...

MAYBE THEY GO TO DITCH-DIGGING SCHOOL.

COOL! MY HOMEWORK WOULD BE DIRT!

YOU'RE NOT HELPING.

33 YEARS

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From 26 to 28 February, 2016

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Venue : bti Premier Plaza
Progoti Shoroni, Uttor Badda
Time : 10 am - 8 pm

CHITTAGONG

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Wirless Moor, Zakir Hossain Road, West Khulshi
Time : 10 am - 7 pm

COMILLA

Venue : The Wilshire
West Bank of Nanua Dighi
Time : 10 am - 6 pm

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