

The year is 1980 something. I am 10/12 years old. My entire family is sitting in front of the TV on the eve of Eid, bubbling with excitement. Soon, *Ananda Mela* will come on. Eid was a lot of fun back then. There were three major attractions—new clothes, money received as *salami*, and *Eid Ananado Mela*. The programme begins. The anchor appears looking debonair and very handsome in his black suit. A few minutes later, my mother says “*eicheley tar uchcharon bhalo*” (This boy has good pronunciation)! My mother, who was militant about pronunciation, rarely complimented anyone's Bangla. To pass her test, you had to be really good. This “boy” in the black suit was really that good!



PHOTO: STAR FILE

THE BOY IN THE BLACK SUIT

RUBAIYA AHMAD

Fast forward 20 some years. I am at the bedside of my dear friend Rumana Manzur (Hema) at Labaid hospital. Her story was all over the news. Her husband's brutal attack on her left her blinded. Many well-known individuals were coming to see her and to share their good wishes and prayers. Most stood at a distance, stayed for a few minutes, then left. On the second day, Annisul Huq came. He walked right up to Hema and placed his hand on her feet. Hema, even in that state, gasped, started to struggle to sit up and reach the hands on her feet. Sensing her embarrassment, Mr Huq said: “You are my daughter. Aren't you? Aren't you?” Neither said much after that. Hema wept in silence. The hand on her feet stayed where it was.

Fast forward another six years. It is now 2017. I am at the new office of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), waiting for a high up official to meet with me. The official had asked me to come at 11 am. I had been waiting for three hours. I was used to waiting long hours at government offices. At around 2:30 pm, I see the mayor and his PS Mizan *bhai* walking into his office. A few minutes later, my phone rings. It's Mizan *bhai*. He asks “Apa, did you have a meeting with sir (the mayor)? I reply “No, Mizan *bhai*, I am waiting to meet with “Mr X.” Mizan *bhai* says “ok,” then hangs up. Seconds later, Mr X comes out of his room hurriedly,

sees me (for the 17th time that day), and says, “Oh you are here already! I had been waiting for you for a long time!”

The day I met Mr Annisul Huq for the first time was when he became our mayor. I was called into a meeting with the then CEO of DNCC who had been giving us hell with our work with the dogs. The discussion began between me and the CEO. Soon enough, I broke into an argument with him and the volume of my voice crossed the acceptable limit. My inner voice kept saying to me: “Shut up, you fool! You are ruining your first and only opportunity to impress the mayor! He is never going to support you if you speak to his staff this way!” I listened to the voice, quickly composed myself and when I

managed to look at the Mayor, I saw him shaking his legs in amusement and thoroughly enjoying the ‘drama’ with a witty smirk on his face. All he needed was some popcorn.

A few months later, the Mayor inaugurated our Dog population Management Programme in Dhaka's Zone 3. He let us set up a state-of-the-art spay neuter clinic inside the brand new Mohakhali DNCC market, bought us two brand new dog catching vehicles within months, and made sure that our programme ran smoothly. On the day of the inauguration, he asked me before his speech “What would you like me to say”? I said “Only what you mean, Sir.” The ever-eloquent Mayor of ours delivered the most heart-warming speech, referring to his daughter (in-law) Nabila and his son Navid and how their love for dogs transformed him. Fed up by the constant pressure from the VIPs to get rid of dogs, once in a while he would call me with absurd propositions such as hiring a huge truck and hauling all the Dhaka dogs to Neverland. I would chuckle and he would then move on to discussing the status of our work and how else we could be more effective and efficient. The essence of Annisul Huq was just that. If he saw the sense in something, he pursued it no matter what the popular opinion was. He was never impressed, influenced or intimidated by big names. If you wanted to impress him, you better had big ideas!

I always wanted to meet the “boy” with beautiful Bangla, but I was too young. I wanted to say a few words to the deeply compassionate man, who extended his fatherly love to my friend, but it wasn't the right time. But the lucky me got to work under the guidance of an uber cool, super dynamic mayor, which this city had never seen. I was his fan as a kid. I was his fan as a young woman. I became his biggest fan as a Dhaka resident.

Today, I weep for my favourite TV anchor, my favourite mayor, and one of my favourite people. I will miss you looking out for me and for Obhoyaronno. I never got to tell you how much I admired and respected you, but I suppose you know that by now. Rest in peace, Annisul Huq. Dhaka's good fortune was too short-lived.

Rubaiya Ahmad is Founder, Obhoyaronno - Bangladesh Animal Welfare Foundation.

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PHOTO: STAR FILE

FAREWELL DEAR MAYOR!

SARA ZAKER

“You have to dream before your dreams can come true.” As I remember these words by APJ Abdul Kalam Azad, I say to myself, they resonate so perfectly with what our late Mayor Annisul Huq believed and expressed as much in a speech the graduating class of Daffodil University.

As the Asr Azan rings in my ears, I can see the Army Stadium fill up with the masses from my window, the road in front chock-full of cars trying to reach the place on time for the janaza.

I have just finished listening to his speech to the graduates on YouTube. His statement were logical, rational and emotional. He spoke on behalf of his own generation, those of us who did not have the good fortune of choosing from many options for higher studies. Only we know what he mean by this. Dhaka University was the only place to study and a close second was Jagannath College in Dhaka. And of course, there was Chittagong and Rajshahi University. But no big dreams could be nurtured at the time unless one went out of his or her way to pursue their own dreams and struggled against all odds.

In one breath, the Mayor uttered the whole truth—a fact that cannot be ignored or sidestepped. Annisul Huq said “[I] envy all of you who are sitting beyond the second row of this congregation.” He will never be able to go back to his youth and see the future bit by bit and build a dream step by step. What a harsh reality Annis speaks about, standing on the podium only a year back. Little did he know that he had but one page of life left to live.

I have always felt that youth is the exceptional blessing of life. In one's green days, life is bountiful—you are fit, you are alert, and you are full of passion. All your senses are active and raging.

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FAREWELL DEAR MAYOR!

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What else can one ask from life? It is a harsh reality that all these attributes start to decay as the years go passing by.

Putting aside these thoughts, Annisul Huq moves on to encourage the youth to never be discouraged by the things that they may not have. Keep on fighting, he says. So what if you have not studied in a good university abroad? So what if you cannot speak English as well as the boy standing next to you? You can always win the race if the will is there. It is true that we are daunted by the slightly better, the more fortunate, walking by our side.

This part of Annis' speech reminds me of what a nephew of mine told me the other day. He was relating his experience in Dhaka when he came from his village to study for the HSCs. As he looked at the boy sitting next to him back in college, he had said to himself, “So what if I have studied in the village and got a C in my SSCs. I can make an effort and get a much better grade.” He went on to say, “I dreamt of an A and I achieved it in the end.”

Annisul Huq wanted Dhakaites to have a dream and to act upon that dream.

It is past Maghrib and our dear Mayor is being laid to rest in the Banani cemetery, but his words still ring in my ears. The men who were there for his burial tread out of this place of eternal rest. As I watch the people homeward-bound, Annis' face comes to my mind. He would always speak about getting his mother's *doa*—he sought it on every occasion. He spoke of the miracles that would come from his mother's prayers. We all ask for our mothers' *doa*, at all times. There is not a single home in Bangladesh where “*Doa koro, Ma*” is not uttered. I, for one, will not embark upon any venture without Amma's *doa*.

Annis felt the pulse of his people and the youth of Dhaka city. In his speech, he also paid tribute to his partner Rubana, describing the challenges she had to overcome to be in the place she is now. I thought this was indeed a modern man's speech for the youth of today.

I am convinced that Annisul Huq was a man who religiously followed his duty.

Time and again Martin Luther King's “I have a dream” speech came to mind while I was listening to the late Mayor. Maybe Annis was inspired by that historical speech, for example, when he says man never stops dreaming. He talked about his father, who at the age of 95, wanted to visit his village home. With his charismatic smile, he tells the youth in the audience, “But I can't carry him to his village, even on a helicopter, but this does not stop him from dreaming to go back to his roots, to his dear village.”

Our Mayor's speech was given to the youth from his position as Mayor of Dhaka North and it was no less than a call to action to Dhaka dwellers. “There is no limit to dreaming. A man dreams even minutes before his death,” he said. Annisul Huq wanted Dhakaites to have a dream and to act upon that dream. In the same way he had a dream for Dhaka and acted upon it, we too wish to have the Dhaka of our dreams and we must take a vow that we will act upon it.

Sara Zaker is a theatre activist, media personality and Group Managing Director, Asiatic 360.

PERSPECTIVE |



NAIMUL KARIM

This October, UNESCO recognised Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's March 7 speech as part of the world's documentary heritage. One of the most influential speeches of the country, those 20 minutes at the Ramna Race Course inspired tens of millions of Bangladeshis and laid the seeds for the country's freedom.

It begs the question, what makes speeches great? Is it just passion? Or do you need to plan and package your idea in the best possible manner?

In the case of the speech on March 7, it was both. When you listen to it, the first thing that hits you is its high emotional intensity. But at the same time, Sheikh Mujib had analysed his audience beforehand and his speech was designed with a clear purpose.

He knew that he was speaking to the masses and kept the words simple. Right from the very beginning, he tried to relate to the audience and therefore referred to those who were killed by the Pakistani Army as his own brothers and sons.

When you analyse the speech by the book you realise that it followed almost every step in the guide.

Attention-grabbing devices

The speech delivered on March 7 used what trainers often refer to as attention-grabbing devices in the introduction in order to relate to the audience.

Different speakers use different kinds of attention-grabbing devices in the introduction. It depends on what your target is. Steve Jobs's commencement speech at Stanford University in 2005 is one of the most shared speeches on YouTube. He begins with:

“I am honoured to be with you today at your commencement from one of the finest universities in the world. I never graduated from college. Truth be told, this is the closest I've ever gotten to a college graduation.”

Jobs uses humour to interact with the audience and the raucous laughter that followed suggested that he was successful at it.

Another popular speech that is often used to explain the importance of an introductory device is by J K Rowling. The writer was invited to speak at the graduation ceremony of Harvard University in 2008, and she began with the following lines:

“The first thing I would like to say is ‘thank you.’ Not only has Harvard given me an extraordinary honour, but the weeks of fear and nausea I have endured at the thought of giving this commencement address have made me lose weight. A win-win situation! Now all I have to do is take deep breaths, squint at the red banners and convince myself that I am at the world's largest Gryffindor reunion.”

She used humour and then went on to refer to a Hogwarts House from her fictional series.

Other speakers have used numbers and personal stories to grab the audience's attention right away, for example, Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid's often

begins his speeches at graduation ceremonies with stories from his childhood, which going by YouTube, are a huge hit. Again, he analyses the audience first and then designs his introduction.

The importance of stories in you main body

The main body of a speech can be slightly trickier. You might have a lot of information. However, if you don't have a set plan for explaining it, you are likely to lose your audience's attention. A large number of speakers use stories to explain their main points.

Take for instance the case of Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus. He often explains the technical aspects of microcredit and social business—his creations—through stories. Rather than talking about the benefits of social business, he narrates stories of the time he convinced Adidas to create a shoe which would cost less than one dollar. The shoe was created to be sold to the poor via a sister concern of Adidas and the profits would be used to make more shoes. And only after stories like these does he explain the model of social business.

According to Carmine Gallo, the bestselling author of “The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs” and “Talk Like Ted”, stories help us break barriers. Brene Brown on TEDx once said, “Maybe stories are just data with a soul.” That's because as human beings, we are accustomed to listening to stories from a very young age.

Conclude with a bang

Like in the introduction, every good speech needs a concluding device, based on the motive of the speaker. Concluding devices can range from throwing challenges to imagining a better future. Sheikh Mujib challenged the people who had gathered there to fight for independence and freedom. He ended his speech with the famous lines: “*Ebarer shongram amader muktir shongram, ebarer shongram, shadhinotar shongram*” (This war is a war for independence, this war is a war for freedom), and asked the people to rise up.

In a similar vein, Martin Luther King ended his speech “I have a dream” on the Civil Rights Movement at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 by imagining the future, as depicted in this excerpt from the conclusion of his speech:

“I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” ■