

Celebrating the legacy of a chronicler



KAMAL AHMED

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CAN journalists be activists? This is perhaps the most troubling question every journalist has to confront while dealing with issues of public interest. Journalism is about assembling and verifying facts, and conveying fair and accurate accounts. But it is also about speaking for the people who do not have a voice. And many of our predecessors, in both pre- and post-independence Bangladesh, came to journalism to do just that. It was something like a mission of their life. Their publications too had socio-political agenda. Sadly, such activism has increasingly become partisan and now it's driven mostly by narrow self-interests rather than the greater good.

Syed Abul Maksud, who died on February 23, 2021, was an exception—a true activist-journalist. Perhaps, with his demise we may see an end of activist journalism.

His distinct attire, with two pieces of unstitched white cloth, too was a symbol of his activism which he carried out both through his pen and by taking to the streets. A video clip posted on Facebook by journalist Sharifuzzaman after Abul Maksud's death shows his body, draped in white sheets on a trolley, being taken out from Square Hospital—an apt reminder of the life of an activist without any stain. He ditched his regular outfits in 2004 in protest of the US invasion of Iraq. Many people then wondered whether anyone in the United States would even notice his protest, but his resolve remained unshaken. His newspaper

columns had a large following, making his voice a powerful one, but his physical participation in protests was no less powerful.

He was always on the side of the oppressed and victims of injustice. He joined them in all corners of the country. Sometimes he was the lone voice, the initiator. In 2011, he staged a solo sit-in on the Shaheed Minar premises on Eid day demanding safer roads, after the tragic deaths of noted director Tareque Masud and media personality Mishuk Munier in a road accident in Manikganj.

Since his death was announced on Tuesday, a picture of him holding a large padlock inscribed with the message—“Do not close down Adamjee Jute Mills”—has been circulating on social media. But it was a partial depiction of his commitment and support to protecting the nationalised jute and textile mills and their workers. He walked with marchers for the cause of saving the Sundarbans. He rushed to stand by the victims of communal riots in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. Now that he is no more, his absence will be felt by activists in each and every social movement in the country.

He also landed in trouble with the higher judiciary for his activism. His statement on preserving religious sites at Mahasthangarh was suspected as a conspiracy against the government, and the then registrar was asked to lodge a criminal case against him. He was a pacifist and follower of Gandhi's tradition of non-violent activism. Many people mistook him as a Gandhian for his two-piece white cloth which was somewhat similar to Gandhi's. But he was a Gandhian not in attire but in philosophical following. He was also a director of the Gandhi Ashram Trust.

My personal interactions with Maksud Bhai date back only a decade,



Syed Abul Maksud (October 23, 1946 – February 23, 2021)

since my association with Prothom Alo, where he had been a contributor since its inception. It was a column he wrote for Prothom Alo that irked the then BNP government, leading him to quit his job at the state-owned news agency, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS). Since then, he continued to write for Prothom Alo, and his last published column was one in which he argued why revoking BNP founder Ziaur Rahman's Bir Uttam title would be a mistake. It was indeed a testimony to his ability to rise above political bias and personal grievances.

Maksud Bhai used to write in the traditional mode of pen and paper. So, he would frequent the Prothom Alo office to help compose and proofread his manuscripts. It was next to my office room at the second floor of CA Bhaban, the previous address of the newspaper. Most of the time I was a keen listener and he spoke about current affairs of the state. Occasionally, he would call me in the morning when I was still in bed. Those

calls were mostly about expressing his frustration over what was not in the day's papers and what they didn't report due to either self-censorship or partisanship of the owners of mainstream media.

I was one of his millions of avid readers. His style of writing was quite different from others on at least two counts. First, it had humour that hit hard the establishment. Secondly, his writings were full of historical accounts of the subcontinent. It was very enlightening. But when he was writing books, he was no longer a journalist, but a researcher. His books on Maulana Bhashani, Dhaka University, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Syed Waliullah, Buddhadeb Basu, Nawab Salimullah and poet Govinda Das are results of painstaking research which is an essential trait of any academic. Noted economist Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud wrote on Facebook that Abul Maksud was his classmate. But Maksud seemed to have chosen different avenues of research

than his subject. Political history, philosophy and literature dominated his world.

His biographical publications on Maulana Bhashani are undoubtedly his most valuable contribution to our national history. His book on Kagmari Conference, published in October 2017, narrates some fascinating and hitherto-unknown stories. It quotes novelist Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, who attended the Kagmari Conference in 1957, as saying that one day while walking through a village, Maulana told him that the eastern wing would secede from West Pakistan within 12 years. Tarashankar conveyed this assessment of Maulana to Annadashankar Roy and Prime Minister Nehru in a personal letter. Maksud wrote that Annadashankar had warned Tarashankar not to disclose it to anyone else, saying it would cost Maulana his life. Kagmari was the place where Maulana first publicly issued his famous warning that East Pakistan would be forced to say Assalamu Alaikum (meaning goodbye) to West Pakistan if discrimination and exploitation weren't ended. Maksud wrote that Maulana's prophecy of Bangladesh becoming an independent nation came true within 14 years.

The year 2021 is a time when we are celebrating the golden jubilee of our independence and the centenary of the country's premiere educational institution, Dhaka University. It is an irony that one of the most revered researchers of our country, who chronicled with diligence the history of both our independence war and the University of Dhaka, will not be with us in person in those celebrations. But his work and legacy will.

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Amid global warming, why are we in a deep freeze?



QUAMRUL HAIDER

DURING winter, more often than not, a large part of northern United States is pummeled by an Arctic blast, sometimes severe,

sometimes less severe, that lasts for a week or two. But this winter's blast plunged not only the Midwest and the Northeast into a deep freeze with bone-chilling temperatures as low as negative 45 degrees Celsius, it also tested the mettle of millions of people living in the Deep South, particularly Texas, a state that seldom experience sub-freezing temperature.

An onslaught of wicked wintry weather—a cocktail of heavy snow, sleet and damaging ice storm—with sub-zero temperatures knocked millions of Texans off the power grid and plunged them into deep freeze, the lowest being negative 12 degrees in Houston. Frozen and burst water pipes in homes and businesses were widespread. Unlike northern states, Texas is not equipped to handle ice, sleet or snow. As a consequence, hundreds of vehicles, including dozens of 18-wheeler, were involved in horrific and sometimes fatal pileups on untreated icy roads.

The recent extreme weather is not limited to the United States. That is because when the winter is extreme in one part of the hemisphere, it is often extreme all across the hemisphere. Thus, the “beast” from the Arctic hit Europe too. In January, Spain experienced a deadly snow storm with dangerously low



PHOTO: QUAMRUL HAIDER

including New York City, in December 2017, former US President Donald Trump tweeted, “Perhaps we could use a little bit of that good old Global Warming to protect against” harsh winters. Only someone who is “ignorant of his own ignorance” could make such a stupid statement!

It may be counterintuitive, but paradoxically, among the many factors, anthropogenic climate change is mainly responsible for the short-lived bursts of extreme winter weather that we have been witnessing in recent years. Indeed, there is strong scientific evidence that rapid heating of the Arctic caused by global warming is pushing frigid air from the North Pole further down south due to distortion of the polar vortex.

Under normal conditions, cold air is concentrated in a huge low-pressure gyre around the North Pole in an area called the polar vortex—about 15 to 50 kilometres above the Earth's surface in the layer of the atmosphere known as the stratosphere. When the vortex is strong, the jet stream—a narrow band of strong, fast-flowing wind in the upper atmosphere that generally blows from west to east all across the globe—acts as a barrier between the spinning cold air in the north and the warmer air to the south. As a result, cold air remains trapped in the Arctic, making winters in the northern mid-latitudes milder.

How does global warming distort the polar vortex? It is well-known that the rise in global temperature is not evenly spread around the world. Because of the loss of Arctic ice which otherwise would have reflected a substantial amount of solar radiation back into outer space, average temperature in and around the North Pole is increasing about twice as fast as in the mid-

latitudes. This is known as Arctic Amplification. Several studies show that the amplification is particularly strong in winter. Consequently, a rapidly warming Arctic weakens the jet stream, which in turn weakens the polar vortex to the extent that it becomes distorted, thereby spilling its cold air southward.

According to meteorologists, in a span of two weeks from December to January, Arctic Amplification gave rise to a phenomenon called Sudden Stratospheric Warming, in which temperatures in the atmosphere 15 to 30 kilometres above the Arctic jumped by nearly 55 degrees, from negative 80 to negative 25 degrees. This accelerated warming weakened the jet stream considerably and subsequently distorted the vortex so severely that it got knocked off the pole, resulting in a sudden plunge in temperature south of the Arctic Circle all the way to the US-Mexico border. Hence, the once-in-a-lifetime cold winter in Texas and other southern states.

Continued rise in global temperature will not necessarily mean an end to bitter cold waves during winter any sooner. One group of researchers believe that Arctic blasts will still occur, but their intensity will depend on how much greenhouse gases we vent into the atmosphere. It is very probable that they will become rarer over time, but

the ones we are experiencing now will more likely persist and last longer. Another group says that warming in the Arctic will increase the chances of frigid polar air spilling further south, leading to more periods of extreme cold days in the future, much colder than the ones we are experiencing now.

Nevertheless, the recent weather pattern clearly demonstrates that

both extreme heat and extreme cold can happen side by side. Besides, two to four weeks of cold snaps do not make a winter. They are short-term weather events, while climate is about long-term trends. Arctic blasts are, therefore, not enough to compensate for the overall warming of the climate across the planet. In fact, last year was one of the hottest years on record, with the average temperature

surpassing a number of all-time highs. And it occurred without the warming influence of El Niño.

Finally, we are in a deep freeze amid global warming because our “senseless and suicidal” romance with fossil fuels has fundamentally changed the global weather systems for worse.

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temperatures. Even a tropical country like Bangladesh, especially the northern region, could not escape the wrath of the cold wave.

Snow fell hard in Greece and Turkey, where it is far less normal. Snow also fell in Jerusalem and parts of Jordan and Syria, while snow-covered camels in Saudi Arabia made for a rare sight. We also had more than our fair share of snow. In the lower Hudson Valley of New York, where I live, Mother Nature already dumped around 36 inches of snow

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

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তারিখঃ ২৪/০২/২০২১খ্রিঃ

নিলাম বিক্রয় বিজ্ঞপ্তি (২য় আহবান)

১.	নিলাম বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং	ঃ	১২/নিঃপ্রঃ/সঃনিঃবিঃ, ঢাকা/২০২০-২১খ্রিঃ।
২.	কাজের নাম	ঃ	সড়ক ও জনপথ অধিদপ্তরের অধীন সওজ, সড়ক বিভাগ-নড়াইল এবং ফেরি বিভাগ-খুলনা এর বিভিন্ন সার্ভে রিপোর্টে উল্লেখিত খোলা আকাশের নিচে সম্পূর্ণ ব্যবহার অনুযোগী পুরাতন, অকেজো, মরিচামুক্ত, ক্ষয়প্রাপ্ত, পরিত্যক্ত, জরাজীর্ণ অবস্থায় টায়ার রোলার এবং পল্টন মেরামতের পর প্রাপ্ত প্লেট, এ্যাংগেল, জয়েন্ট, পুলি, বোলার্ড এবং ফেরির ইঞ্জিন, প্রপেলার শ্যাফট ও গিয়ার বক্স মেরামতের পর প্রাপ্ত লাইনার, পিষ্টন, বিয়ারিং, গ্যাসকেট ও অন্যান্য ক্র্যাপ যেখানে যে অবস্থায় আছে এই ভিত্তিতে সওজ, সরঞ্জাম নিয়ন্ত্রণ বিভাগ, ঢাকার তত্ত্বাবধানে নিলামে বিক্রয় (গ্রুপ অনুযায়ী)।
৩.	বায়নার টাকা	ঃ	উদ্ধৃত মূল্যের ১০% (শতকরা দশ ভাগ)।
৪.	মোট গ্রুপ	ঃ	০৬ (ছয়) গ্রুপ।
৫.	কার্য সম্পাদনের সময়	ঃ	কার্যাদেশ জারির তারিখ হইতে ৩০ (ত্রিশ) কর্ম দিবস।
৬.	টিকাদারের যোগ্যতা	ঃ	বাংলাদেশী ইচ্ছুক ব্যক্তি/ফার্মসমূহ (ব্যক্তির বেলায় এনআইডি/ইউনিয়ন পরিষদের চেয়ারম্যান/ওয়ার্ড কমিশনারের সনদ প্রয়োজ্য) এবং তাহা ১ম শ্রেণীর গেজেটেড কর্মকর্তা কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত হতে হবে।
৭.	নিলাম দরপত্র প্রাপ্তির স্থান	ঃ	নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ, সরঞ্জাম নিয়ন্ত্রণ বিভাগ, ঢাকা/সড়ক বিভাগ-নড়াইল ও ফেরি বিভাগ-খুলনা। নিলাম দরপত্র বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ পর্যন্ত অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে প্রতি সেট নিলাম দরপত্র ৫২০/- (পাঁচশত বিশ) টাকা নগদ মূল্যে (অফেরতযোগ্য) বাংলাদেশ ফরম নং-২৯০৮ সহ ক্রয় করা যাইবে।
৮.	নিলাম দরপত্র গ্রহণকারী অফিসসমূহ	ঃ	নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ, সরঞ্জাম নিয়ন্ত্রণ বিভাগ-ঢাকা/সড়ক বিভাগ-নড়াইল ও ফেরি বিভাগ-খুলনা।
৯.	দরপত্র খোলার স্থান	ঃ	নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ, সরঞ্জাম নিয়ন্ত্রণ বিভাগ, সড়ক ভবন, তেজগাঁও, ঢাকা।
১০.	নিলাম দরপত্র বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ	ঃ	১৪/০৩/২০২১খ্রিঃ (অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে)।
১১.	নিলাম দরপত্র গ্রহণের তারিখ	ঃ	১৫/০৩/২০২১খ্রিঃ (দুপুর ১২.৩০মিঃ)।
১২.	নিলাম দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ ও সময়	ঃ	২১/০৩/২০২১খ্রিঃ (দুপুর ২.৩০মিঃ)। দরপত্র খোলার সময় আত্মহী দরদাতা অথবা তাহাদের প্রতিনিধি উপস্থিত থাকিতে পারিবেন।
১৩.	লটারীর তারিখ ও সময় (প্রয়োজনে)	ঃ	২১/০৩/২০২১খ্রিঃ (দুপুর ৩.৩০ ঘটিকা)।
১৪.	অকেজো মালামালগুলি পরিদর্শনের স্থান ও সময়	ঃ	অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে সংশ্লিষ্ট বিভাগের অনুমতি সাপেক্ষে নির্দিষ্ট স্থানে।

মোঃ রুহুল আমিন

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মোঃ মমিনুল ইসলাম

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