

## Moeen U Ahmed: commendation or condemnation?

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For obvious reasons, General Moeen U Ahmed, who is retiring from the Army on June 15, is the most known and talked-about chief of staff of the army (CSA) after the end of prolonged military and quasi-military rule that Bangladesh had to endure from August 15, 1975 to December 6, 1990.

General Moeen started his military career from January 1975. His service profile started as Distinguished "Chief of Army Staff's Cane" holder (which he took from Bangabandhu) of the pioneer Short Service Course-1 from Bangladesh Military Academy. However, General Moeen's army career stalled to a certain extent, until BNP was elected to power in 2001. General Moeen is from Noakhali, birthplace and bastion of BNP supremo Khaleda Zia and her family. His appointment as the chief of staff on June 15, 2005, superseding a few other generals (a common phenomenon in all democracies, however) was believed to be guided partly by the geographical proximity of his birth place to that of Khaleda Zia and largely that he was close to her brother, retired Major Sayeed Iskander.

However, what distinguished him from the other CSAs, was the so-called 'one eleven' in which he along with his counterparts of the Navy and the Air force forced the then President and Chief Adviser of the caretaker government to resign, formed a new CTG and declared the state of emergency. It would always remain a debatable issue if declaration of emergency was a necessity. However, given the fact that the country was heading from the rubble of the BNP-Jamat rule towards the ruins by the Iajuddin-led CTG, any form of deviation from it was a welcome respite. The massive popularity that Fakharuddin-led CTG enjoyed at the initial months of its tenure testified the justification of the change of 'one eleven'.

Over the next two years, the action and inactions of the apparent government of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed would give rise to the speculations about the presence of seemingly multiple governments within the government. Appointment of Dr. Fakharuddin Ahmed as the Chief Adviser (CA) was as laudable as the occurrence of 'one eleven' itself. However, many actions of the government, especially of the so-called 'joint forces' made such a decent person absolutely embarrassed. It was rumoured that when in a commando style operation by around a thousand members of the law enforcing agencies, some of them wearing bullet proof vest, who reportedly brought dog squad with them to arrest Sheikh Hasina, CA's wife woke him up from sleep to give him the news. Similarly, the CA shrugged off a question when the reporters were enquiring why a BNP standing committee meeting had to be arranged by the members of a particular agency of the armed forces. The so-called 'minus two' formula, the formation of so-called 'king's party', General Moeen's venture to define a 'home brand democracy', etc. were big embarrassment for the CA.

While, albeit arbitrary, arrests of many politicians, who are widely known for their unbridled corruptions, were welcome by the people, arrest, lodging legal suits and summary convictions of seemingly a few clean, at least publicly, politicians and in some case for trivial reasons, cast a dent on the integrity of the whole process. Cases of extortions against a few politicians were

made to file by the plaintiffs under pressure and duress by the ‘invisible forces’. It was not difficult to hypothesize the existence of political motives behind those arrests, cases and convictions. Many of the arrestees had to endure severe atrocities in the torture cell of the joint forces. All those actions of the government did not add up to the fact of what General Moeen was preaching to the nation. Unlike, all other previous Generals who lectured the nation one time or the other, General Moeen’s smiling face and soft style of delivery did never reflect that he was lecturing an ignorant nation or an army General teaching the ‘bloody civilians’ any lessons. Because of his obvious humility, his public appearances, actions and speeches never reflected that it was him, not Dr. Fakhruddin, who was in charge.

On the contrary, a few actions of the government (really of General Moeen) deserve special commendations. Firstly, the history of our liberation war which was absolutely distorted during the dark era of the BNP-Jamat government was reverted back, to a great extent, to its true form thereby facilitating our children learn true history of their nation’s birth. Secondly, the father of the nation was given due respect with the visit of the President, the CA and the chiefs of three services to his mausoleum on his death anniversary. Thirdly, no appeal was made by the CTG against the HC verdict overturning the cancellation of August 15 as the day of national morning and the government observed the day with due solemn and dignity. Fourthly, a few of the Indian Generals who led the Indian forces in our war of liberation were invited to view our victory day celebrations; an overdue reflection of gratitude of a grateful nation.

Finally, the election commission was reconstituted from the rubbles with persons of high integrity. The election commission with the help of the army accomplished a historical task of making a full-proof voter list eliminating 12.7 million fake voters. Shrugging of all the apprehensions, the general election was at last held with unprecedented 85 per cent turnout of the eligible voters, in a free and fair environment never seen in the past ballots. The landmark election has not only given the country a popular and representative government, but has greatly elevated the dignity of the nation to the international arena as well. Helping to hold this free election, in presence of 20,000 national and international observers, the prime purpose of ‘one eleven’, General Moeen has kept his words that ‘Kadombini did not have to die to prove that she was alive’.

If the axiom ‘all is well that ends well’ is to be given credence, then General Moeen who, at the warranted moment, rose above the personal gratitude to the person who appointed him to the position – that gave him the power to change the course of the nation, which was otherwise, heading towards an inevitable catastrophe, must be given due commendation. During those turbulent days, his ability to maintain total discipline within the rank and file of his men reflected his strong leadership, failing which the nation could have been plunged into turmoil. He did not follow the foot step of two of his predecessors in usurping the state power, albeit there was no dearth of provocations. History will surely evaluate appropriately all what happened, positive or negative, during the said periods. When the dusts will settle, the grandeur of commendations of his actions will greatly outweigh the intensity of condemnations.

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