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Power of passion: a eulogy for Annisul Huq

by Helal Uddin Ahmed | Updated at 11:11pm on December 27, 2017

‘LET’S do something out of the box’ — this would be his usual remark whenever he planned any event, big or small. Something new, something innovative — not just usual pattern or something commonly seen or available — would be his way of doing things. He was not a politician in the typical sense of the term, yet he was concerned about politics. He was involved with the chamber of commerce politics, if we may say so, with a view to bringing about some changes in the overall ambit of that outfit, not just to catch the limelight per se. And he certainly could accomplish a great deal as president, FBCCI, which may not have been well publicised and received much attention since it was not something to catch national focus. But people of business circle who knew him knew quite well what he accomplished. Finally, his charisma and dynamism came into enormous public focus and attention when he became mayor of Dhaka city’s north, notwithstanding the controversies involved in his election. He got a chance to serve the people of Dhaka, but more importantly to realise a long-cherished dream of making some changes in a bigger domain. Nonetheless, for him, it was somewhat like swimming in the sea while it appeared he was capable of swimming in the ocean. He was a man of tremendous energy coupled with a vision and, of course, a dream of seeing Bangladesh to achieve a higher state of its tremendous potential. He often would share his thoughts, his dreams with people around him.

A very passionate personality as he was with a degree of impatience appearing at times to be an obsession to achieve his mission and goals at any cost has have been evident and is still evident in some parts of Dhaka city. As the commuters wheel on the newly paved roads and streets of Gulshan, Banani and some other parts of the city, their feeling suddenly get a ‘shock’ to find that their bodies are no more bouncing, which they have been accustomed to for a long time, even being inhabitants or being visitors of the most posh area of the capital city. The purported diplomatic enclave of the capital city bore the brunt of an absurd state of mismanagement because of a naive neglect for a long time till a man like Annisul Huq took charge of Dhaka city’s north. I can dwell upon a long list of what he had accomplished in just less than two years, but I prefer not to, because that is already known to the city dwellers. He blended three Cs — conviction, commitment and courage in his persona. He was unique in his own right. A seething energy inside him would always search for a vent to burst out to be used in something that makes an impact in society. He would not hesitate to tread a very hard and rough terrain if achievement of his goal demands so. Sometimes, it would even

appear to be an impossibility to implement what he plans to do. But at the end, that turns into a reality, thanks to his indomitable will power to achieve something ostensibly impossible. I may share a bit of my experience of working with him for a spell of two years. My time with him was extremely rewarding on many counts. After my retirement from service, I happily took up my new role as director (planning and coordination) of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce to coordinate SAARC Chamber activities on behalf of Annisul Huq, president of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industries. It was not as much rewarding monetarily as it was to have had the opportunity to work with or see closely how a man performs without any political power or authority and still achieves his goal with sheer power of passion and determination. We assembled a great number of celebrated entrepreneurs in Dhaka for the SAARC Youth Conference in the fag end of 2011. Annis Bhai wanted to expose the youth of the country to the most successful entrepreneurs of the SAARC region and beyond and he contacted iconic figures such as Bill Gates, Zuckerberg, Jawed Karim, Sal Khan, among others, from the region and across the globe; many of whom responded, however, could not match their schedule with ours since we had to match the timing of the youth conference with SAARC Chamber executive committee meeting scheduled to be held at that time. We did not have any set organisation to organise such a great event where about hundred celebrated entrepreneurs and chamber leaders spoke to an audience of 1,500 to 2,000 strong youth of the country in the BICC. All the visitor, celebrities, were accommodated and looked after like state guests when Annisul Huq did not have any sway even over the FBCCI since he was no more the president of the chamber body when the event took place. Neither he had any state apparatus at his disposal. It appeared to me that we were trying to do something impossible. But we together made it possible with just a handful of young volunteers who got motivated by dint of the Annisul Huq charisma. I knew him as a TV presenter and lately a chamber leader with beautiful presentation skills but when I worked with him, I discovered a new personality who could be assigned with any task that would be eventually accomplished with sublime finesse. In retrospection it appears to me, his last assignment as mayor of Dhaka city's north was just like a power play in the last few overs in a cricket match, the parable may appear to be a bit crude, but I have my reason to make this comparison. The batsman played power shots and about to secure a near impossible victory in a losing battle, but succumbed to perhaps a predestined end state, before fulfilling his mission. His power was power of passion, not physical, though he had an excellent health with a regular habit of walking at a convenient time of the day, be it morning before starting the day's chores or in the evening after a day of hectic schedule. He worked days and nights, even, perhaps, sometimes in his sleep to do or complete what he wanted to do. He would compensate his rest and sleep in the journey or travel as it often would have been long overdue.

As a mayor, he literally declared a war against many irregularities or evils, of course, not all, or may be a very minuscule part of the enormous backlog of mismanagement that have plagued the Dhaka city for long and nobody dared to address these issues, may be due to these being sponsored by very powerful vested interests that cannot be challenged by even

the most powerful political authority. Then how could a businessman-turned-political person, a newcomer in this arena, without a horde of musclemen dared to do so? Although it is heard that he enjoyed support of the highest political authority for setting the things right, it still remains unanswered why then other people's representatives do not dare to take similar actions since such support is certainly enjoyed by all public functionaries, for after all the higher or the highest political authority ought to support such actions that uphold the public interest. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is not political power per se, rather his indomitable conviction, commitment and courage that made the difference. These are not very common attributes found in too many people, especially in our society, when people tend to avoid antagonising the powerful vested interests. Therefore, I would rather call him a passionate warrior with a commitment to change society even if it requires a heavy price that he has already paid and with it he paid his debt to the people, who admired him, loved him and prayed for his success in a daunting or even an impossible task. May Annisul Huq rest in peace, which has been again long overdue for him. Like many other such personalities, Annisul Huq would eventually fade away from memories of many of us and his works, if not carried forward or maintained by someone equally passionate and committed, would also be worn out as the days go by, but his spirit must remain alive in hearts and minds of our growing youths. I would only urge them to muster up the courage to say 'yes' to good and 'no' to evils and perhaps only then the souls of Annisul Huq and many others like him will get solace in their present abode.

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