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A true patriot with exceptional integrity: speakers

Commemorative event on Akbar Ali Khan held

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Despite being at the centre of the establishment, Dr Akbar Ali Khan was always an outspoken and objective person, speakers at a webinar said yesterday.

As a civil servant, he was exceptional during a period when integrity and objectivity were fading in bureaucracy, they said.

Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) and Brac University jointly organised the webinar to commemorate the eminent economist, luminous scholar and former caretaker government advisor.

The webinar titled "Dynamics of Statecraft, Governance Reform & Public Intellectualism in Bangladesh: The Legacy of Dr Akbar Ali Khan" was joined by scholars and colleagues who have known him and his work for decades.

Akbar Ali Khan passed away on September 7, after suffering from cardiac complications.

Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairperson of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and former member of the advisory council of the caretaker government, said, "We need to explore his life as a civil servant. He stood firm and had to pay the price for it."

Analysing Akbar Ali Khan's writings, Prof Rounaq Jahan, CPD distinguished fellow, said Khan was a true patriot.

"It is visible in his writings that he was an academic at heart. He believed in promoting reforms and was very objective about it. He always encouraged discussions and debates and was a believer in public reasoning," she added.

Dr Ahrar Ahmad, director general of Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Foundation, said, "Dr Khan was fluent and lively with his writing and had the ability and expertise to connect disparate dots, which created curiosity among general people, provoked thoughts, and inspired them to learn more."

Dr Syed Akhtar Mahmood, former lead private-sector specialist at World Bank Group, said, "As the chairman of the regulatory reform commission, he sent a proposal to the government to amend the 1898 Postal Act to make courier services legal. The proposal was accepted, and the law was duly amended."

Dr Mirza M Hassan, senior research fellow at BIGD, delivered a presentation on the intellectual legacy of Dr Khan, focusing on analytical approaches and theories that Dr Khan frequently used to reflect on Bangladeshi statecraft, governance reform, and many other topics.

Dr Asif Shahan, associate professor of development studies at Dhaka University, said, "An interesting aspect of Akbar Ali Khan was that he was both a scholar and a practitioner. He heavily contributed to providing academic explanations for the bureaucratic phenomenon. His work also challenged colonial legacies of thought."

The webinar was chaired by M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, former cabinet secretary and BIGD senior advisor. Scholars, activists, researchers, development professionals, bureaucrats, journalists, and students attended the webinar and expressed their admiration for Dr Khan and his work.