

Condolences

FROM PAGE 1
activist Sultana Kamal, Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation Shaheen Anam, Executive Director of Campaign for Popular Education Rasheda K Choudhury, Vice Chairperson of BRAC Dr Mushtaque Raza Chowdhury, Chairman of Business Initiative Leading Development Asif Ibrahim, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of Centre for Policy Dialogue Professor Mustafizur Rahman, and Chairman of Landmark Footwear Ltd Syed Nasim Manzur also sent condolence messages.

In a condolence message, Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan said Latifur made an outstanding contribution to the development of the country's economy, business, industries and investments.

"He will live in the heart of the new generation entrepreneurs as an inspiration," said the message, adding that the Bashundhara chairman was praying for the eternal salvation of the departed soul and was extending his sympathies to the bereaved family members.

Economist Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya told The Daily Star last night that Latifur will be remembered as an entrepreneur who made remarkable contributions to building the national capital base of the country. He has done that not only by reinvesting his profit in the country, but also through acquisition of foreign firms.

"The conglomerate he has built ranging from tea estates to pharmaceuticals, fast food to media houses, is an extraordinary feat in a country where we see rampant capital flight," Debapriya added.

Latifur proved that enlightened ownership can ensure professional independence of the media, he said.

"I remember him telling me that if one takes financial and commercial benefits from the government, then one cannot really protect the independence of the media.

"That is probably why he did not do business with the government... Many governments tried to harass him with tax-related cases and administrative measures, but to no avail," Debapriya said.

Everybody knows what a remarkable gentleman he was, Debapriya added.

"I had the privilege of observing him over the last three decades. He highly valued his employees and had an extraordinary belief in the bright future of the country.

"In his death, the country has lost a great citizen. The industries have lost a unique leader, and many of us lost a wise and sensitive guardian to go to."

Iftekharuzzaman said Latifur will be remembered as a modest, unassuming and exceptional example of the rare category of business leaders who practice the highest standards of business integrity.

"Unlike many of his peers, he not only refrained from capitalising the loan default culture, but also successfully stayed away from linking his business success with advantages of partisan political patronage.

"Rather, he credibly survived the adversities of attempted political victimisation for being a top ranking promoter of free media," Iftekharuzzaman said.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Planning Minister MA Mannan, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Information Minister Mohammad Hasan Mahmud, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmad, Environment and Climate Change Minister Shahab Uddin, State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Enamur Rahman, State Minister for Information Murad Hassan and Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam expressed shock at his death.

BNP top leaders in a condolence message said the death was an irreparable loss.

Former information minister Hasanul Haque Inu and AK Azad, president of the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh, expressed their shock.

Latifur was the founding director of Mediaworld, the company owning The Daily Star, and chairman of Mediastar, the company owning Prothom Alo, both leading English and Bangla newspapers of the country. He was the driving spirit behind the establishment of The Daily Star.

He was an honoree of "Oslo Business for Peace Award 2012" for his recognition of business ethics and social responsibilities. He was awarded Business Executive of the Year 2001 by the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh. He was also president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka for seven terms.

Trustees of Liberation War Museum in their message said that they will remember the contribution of Latifur Rahman and Transcom Group in building the museum.

Laid to rest

FROM PAGE 1
graveyard to have the last glimpse of Latifur.

Before the namaz-e-janaza, Zariaf Ayaat Hossain, another grandson of Latifur Rahman, stood in silence. On behalf of his family members, he urged all to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

Mentioning his brother died exactly four years ago, an emotional Zariaf said, "Our grandfather has left us on the same day... Please pray for him."

A munajat was offered there.

Light of ethical business

FROM PAGE 1
the global business community and a recipient of many prestigious global awards, Latifur Rahman single-handedly built one of the biggest business conglomerates in the country with his hard work, perseverance, and entrepreneurial skills.

And truly he reached the pinnacle of success by setting up numerous prosperous new enterprises. Simultaneously he maintained a vocal stance against unethical business practices and never entertained any unfair means, not even in the early seventies when the country's atmosphere was not congenial to business.

Soft-spoken and humble, this visionary, who with his elegant

Prothom Alo -- both leading English and Bangla newspapers of the country.

His demise prompted a number of cabinet members to express profound shock and sorrow. As the news of his death spread, condolences and memories of working with the corporate giant poured in also from his friends and colleagues.

Latifur Rahman was married to Shahnaz Rahman. Together they have three daughters Simeen Hossain, Shahzreh Huq, (late) Shazneen Rahman, and a son, Arshad Waliur Rahman.

His passing coincided with the death anniversary of his grandson Faraz Ayaaz Hossain. Faraz, a student of Emory University in Atlanta, US, was

But when the government nationalised industries in 1972, Latifur found himself in a very difficult situation.

The family also owned some tea estates in north-eastern Bangladesh. But after the independence of Bangladesh, the price of the produce was less than the production costs.

But he did not give up hope. The same year, Latifur came across a Swiss company and started a trading

Latifur's enterprises boast immaculate tax and bank loan records and are also among the highest-payers of corporate tax, VAT, and import duties in a country where many top companies are willful defaulters.

In 2012, he won the prestigious Oslo Business for Peace Award for keeping commitment to social responsibility and ethical values. The award is considered the most celebrated recognition in the business world, and

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As if to make it a reunion, Latifur Rahman leaves this mortal world on July 1, the day his favourite grandson Faraz Ayaaz Hossain was brutally killed in a terrorist attack.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

personality would light up people around him, passed away in his sleep around 11:00am yesterday at his paternal home in Cumilla. He had been suffering from lung-related illness for a long time.

He was 75. The founder chairman and CEO of Transcom Group, a well-known and highly respected business house in the country, left behind an unmatched legacy of entrepreneurship and industrialisation.

He was the founding director of Mediaworld, the owning company of The Daily Star, and chairman of Mediastar, the owning company of

brutally killed by terrorists during the July 1 terror attack at the Holy Artisan Bakery in Gulshan in 2016.

Born in Jalpaiguri on August 28, 1945, Latifur lived at the capital's Gendaria.

He began his education at St Francis School and then went to St Edmund's School, Shillong, in 1956. He also studied at St Xavier's College in Calcutta (now Kolkata).

After coming to Dhaka, he started his career as a trainee at his family-owned jute mills -- W Rahman Jute Mills -- in Chandpur in 1966. It was the first jute mill owned by a Bangalee in the erstwhile Pakistan. He worked there as an executive until 1971.

business.

There was no looking back after that. As his business activities branched out into different sectors, he established Transcom Group in 1981. It is now one of the country's largest conglomerates, with operations in the areas of manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, electronics, beverages, media, consumer, food, and insurance.

The group has an annual turnover of more than \$600 million, employing over 14,000 people. Its pharmaceutical products are exported to 27 countries. Transcom Group has won multiple global accolades for its excellence and ethically strong business practices.

Two independent newspapers were his gifts to Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 1
hint as to what should or should not be published, or how a news should be treated. Like everybody else he would read the newspaper in the morning. In this long journey it is quite possible that he may have disagreed with what we did but he never, even once, allow his views to override ours.

Even when he faced the wrath of the powers that be, simply because of what the two newspapers published, he would never allow that to affect our daily work. In fact, he would never even tell us that he lost certain contracts, or that his factories' permissions were delayed or denied, or that his expansion plans got derailed because of the way we were reporting, taking editorial positions or writing commentaries. There was never a word but that of standing steadfast behind the two newspapers.

An anecdote from the very first year of my editorship perhaps makes the point beautifully. The boss of a certain big business house asked Latifur Rahman why The Daily Star was publishing certain findings of the Bangladesh Bank, to which he said, "Why don't you talk to the editor, he runs the paper." To which the businessman replied with disbelief, "You are financing the paper and the editor runs the paper. How can

that be?" Well that is how it was and has been all along, and that is what made The Daily Star what it is today.

The other fundamental belief he held most firmly was the need for democracy for Bangladesh to prosper. These two beliefs -- democracy and the need for a free and independent press -- fed into one another, making a symbiotic whole that formed the totality of his life's philosophy. That later turned into his life's passion -- and it was my honour to be a humble part of the fulfilment of that passion.

He was a gentleman par excellence. With impeccable manners and immaculate courtesy, his was a personality that immediately drew the attention of any gathering both for his insightful observations and strongly held opinions. He would not invite controversy in a conversation but would not shy away from it if the situation so unfolded. He was a man of firm beliefs but always open to counter positions if they were well argued and supported by facts and logic. But challengers would soon become aware that he had his own arsenal of facts and logic which were formidable to say the least.

There was a hidden humour in his personality. He would not easily

open up but once he would his hearty laughter would brighten up the occasion and enjoin everybody else in a merriment that was unforgettable.

Another unique aspect of his personality was the sense of dignity with which he always conducted himself. Even at his most tragic moments -- when he lost his daughter and years later, his grandson -- he bore these two incalculable losses with an inner strength and dignity that seemed to most of us as superhuman. In a strange coincidence, he passed away on the day of his grandson - Faraz - falling victim to the dastardly act of cowardice by some beastly terrorists in Dhaka four years ago.

In the world in which he spent his whole life -- the world of business -- he was an iconic figure. He was respected by all, even those with whom he was not too popular. His honesty was awe striking and adherence to ethical business practice almost legendary. He was known to have given up many business opportunities because the deals were not cent percent above board. His reputation for honesty and integrity were unrivalled and he was universally respected for upholding the highest ethical standards in business.

At his untimely demise, my loss

an independent committee of Nobel Prize winners in peace and economics chooses the award's recipients.

The recognition put Latifur in the group of exceptional business personalities like Ratan Tata, chairman of India's Tata Group, who got the award in 2010, and Jeffrey R Immelt, CEO of the US's General Electric, who received it in 2009.

He always believed in providing employees with appropriate compensation, training, position, and more importantly "empowerment".

"Respect for the individual is of utmost importance. People may make mistakes, and of course they need to be taken to task for that, if required, but upholding an employee's self-esteem is vital. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect," he once said.

He used to reject a popular perception that there are no qualified people in Bangladesh.

"We are as good as any professionals in the world. We have quality people. It is a question of providing them the right opportunities, atmosphere, and guidance," he said.

He urged young students not to be disheartened in times of difficulties as adversity is a part of natural progression. "You should continue fighting. You should live up to your values, courage, and character."

Latifur was a member of the executive board of ICC-Paris, vice-president of ICC-Bangladesh and member of Brac's governing body. He was a member of Bangladesh Better Business Forum and the Advisory Committee on World Trade Organization (WTO).

He was also president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka, for seven terms and of Bangladesh Employers' Federation. Besides, he was the chairman of the Bangladesh government's Trade Body Reforms Committee.

He was awarded Business Executive of the Year 2001 by the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh.

He was also honoured with the "SAARC Outstanding Leader" award and Lifetime Achievement Award which was presented by the UK Bangladesh

Catalysts of Commerce and Industry for setting a "rare example" of doing business by upholding moral values while also fulfilling the organisation's social responsibilities.

Latifur served in many important national bodies in various capacities, including the president of Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF) for two terms and member of the Executive Committee of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FBBCCI), Bangladesh Jute Mills Association and Bangladesh Tea Association.

Besides, he was the member of the Executive Board of Bangladesh Bank and was closely involved in fiscal and trade policy making bodies of the government as chairman, Trade-body Reforms Committee and member, Advisory Committee on WTO.

He was re-elected as a member of the Executive Board of the Paris-based ICC for a second three-year term from July 2017.

The business icon believed that Bangladesh has an extremely bright future on the global stage and that there are huge opportunities for entrepreneurs in the country.

"There are ideas all around us. So, young entrepreneurs will have to keep their eyes open and work on them [ideas] to become successful," he once said.

COVID-19 VACCINE Sign pledge to declare it common good

Prof Yunus urges all

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus has issued an open call to the people of all strata to sign a pledge declaring the Covid-19 vaccine to be a common good.

The pledge can be made at www.vaccincommongood.org, said a press release circulated by the Yunus Centre yesterday.

The Covid-19 vaccine, being a common good, would ensure that it is available to all globally, and that those who cannot pay for it, will not be excluded.

Those who sign this pledge will also agree that results of vaccine research done by the private sector should be in the public domain, making it available to any production facility, as long as it operates under an international regulatory supervision.

This pledge has already been signed by 105 world leaders, including 18 Nobel laureates, 32 former heads of state and government, political leaders, artists, international NGOs and institutions.

They include Nobel laureates Muhammad Yunus, Tawakkol Karman, Shirin Ebadi, Mikhail Gorbachev, Nadia Murad, Malala Yousafzai, Mairead Maguire, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu among others.

The former heads of state who signed this unified appeal include former Pakistan prime minister Shaukat Aziz, former New Zealand PM Helen Clark, former PM of Italy Romano Prodi, former Brazilian president Luiz Inacio, former president of Mauritius Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, and former UK PM Gordon Brown.

Other signatories include former presidents and prime ministers of Romania, Finland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Croatia, Poland, Moldova, Albania, Bulgaria, Mexico, Ireland, Ecuador, Latvia, Montenegro, Serbia, Belgium, Hungary, Malaysia, Kyrgyzstan, Andorra, and Georgia.

43.27pc of dead

FROM PAGE 1

Including yesterday's 17,875 RT-PCR tests for Covid-19, some 7,84,335 people have so far been tested for the virus.

Of them, 19.03 percent tested positive for Covid-19. Yesterday, the rate was 21.12 percent.

Among yesterday's deceased, 38 were male and three were female, while 23 died at hospital and 18 at their houses, said the DGHS.

Four were aged between 31 and 40, five between 41 and 50, 12 between 51 and 60, 11 between 61 and 70, and seven between 71 and 80, and one was between 81 and 90. Another was over 100 years old.

Division-wise, 13 of yesterday's deceased were from Dhaka, 17 from Chattogram, five from Khulna, three from Barishal, and two from Sylhet, while information of the other deceased was unavailable from the DGHS.

According to the DGHS data, 43.27 percent of all 1,888 deceased were over 60 years old, while 28.81 percent were aged between 51 and 60, 14.99 percent between 41 and 50, while others were from under 10 to 40 years old.

Prof Nasima added that there were 6,075 general beds and 139 ICU beds for Covid-19 patients in Dhaka city's Covid-19 hospitals or hospital units.

In the country, there were 14,784 general beds and 381 ICU beds for Covid-19 patients in Covid-19 hospitals or hospital units.

Besides, there were 11,144 oxygen cylinders, 204 high-flow nasal cannulas, 98 oxygen concentrators in the Covid-19 hospitals across the country.

As of yesterday noon, 4,873 Covid-19 patients were admitted to general beds of hospitals while 216 were to ICUs.

In the same 24 hours, 538 patients were admitted to Covid-19 hospitals or hospital units while 497 were released.

Lost friends remembered

FROM PAGE 1
9:00am to 12:00 noon and placed flowers at a makeshift stage. General people were not allowed there amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the night of July 1, 2016, five armed militants stormed the cafe in Gulshan diplomatic zone and held the diners hostage. By the end of the night, they had murdered nine Italians, seven Japanese, one Indian, and three Bangladeshis.

Twenty-year-old Faraz Ayaaz Hossain, a student of Emory University in the US, was one of the three Bangladeshis killed there. He was given the choice of walking out of the cafe. But he refused to leave his friends Abinta Kabir, a Bangladesh-born US citizen, and Tarishi Jain, an Indian student of the University of California. He was killed along with his friends.

Two police officers also lost their lives as groups of law enforcers tried to close in on the place. The five militants and a chef of the cafe were killed in a commando operation the next morning. Another staffer died in hospital while in custody.

Around six months after the attack,

the cafe reopened a few blocks from its original location. Currently, the two-storey building, that was once the Holy Artisan Bakery, is being used as home by the land owners.

Rab Director General Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Shafiqul Islam, US, Italy, and Japan ambassadors to Bangladesh paid tribute to the victims.

Talking to reporters, Shafiqul said militants have no capability to carry out big attacks as the law enforcement agencies have destroyed their dens after the cafe attack, reports UNB.

"For this, the capability of militants came down to minimum level. Even they have no expert to make improvised bombs," he claimed.

"Many of the militants are now in jail or were killed in various anti-militant operations. So, they have no capability to occur big incident," he said.

All the militants who directly took part in the cafe attack were killed in a military commando operation, he said, adding that other militants who were involved in the attack were given punishment by court.



Top police officials paying their tributes to the lives lost in the militant attack at Holy Artisan Bakery at the capital's Gulshan as the country yesterday observed the fourth anniversary of the gruesome murders. Diplomats and other law enforcement officials also visited the site.

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