

WORLD DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR ROAD TRAFFIC VICTIMS

Governmental inertia in ensuring emergency medical services



RASHNA IMAM

NOT a day passes by in Bangladesh without news of death due to a horrible road crash. Each year, countless lives are lost and many more are left disabled. In 2019, the 4,219 reported road crashes caused around 4,628 fatalities, and maimed around 8,621 more, according to the Shipping and Communications Reporters' Forum. Despite intermittent lockdowns, this year has been no exception. Access to timely and quality pre-hospital and hospital care would significantly curb fatalities from road accidents and prevent permanent disabilities. Yet we see little to no governmental action to ensure emergency medical services (EMS) for road accident victims.

There are many barriers to accessing EMS for a road accident victim in Bangladesh. First, paucity of quality ambulance services means that victims are rarely transferred from the accident spot to the hospital on time and even if they are, the pre-hospital care required during this time is never provided given the poor structural state of our ambulances, and the absence of trained technicians/paramedics in the ambulance. Second, the phenomenon of private hospitals refusing treatment on the ground of financial inability or that the case is a medico-legal case and hence the patient should go to a government hospital, deprives the victim of essential EMS within the

Golden Hour (60 minutes) leading to death or permanent disability. Third, even if they are admitted by the hospital authorities, the dismal state of emergency departments of hospitals in Bangladesh mean that the victims hardly ever get quality EMS, resulting once again in death or permanent disability.

In 2016 a bus helper was run over by his own bus. A good Samaritan named Saif Kamal took the victim to three different private hospitals, only to be turned away. By the time he took help from a nearby police station and reached the fourth hospital, close to two hours had elapsed and the victim was declared deceased. This is only too common a phenomenon in Bangladesh. In 2018, following a public interest litigation filed by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) and the good Samaritan



Improvement of public health is a fundamental responsibility of the State under Article 18 of the Constitution. Road crashes have clearly emerged over the years to be a major public health crisis in Bangladesh.

in 2016, the High Court Division presided over by Justice Syed Reifat Ahmed and Justice Farid Ahmed, delivered a judgment sanctioning Guidelines (framed by the Ministry of Health pursuant to court orders) for EMS for Road Accident Victims and Protection of Good Samaritans.

The guidelines were a product of extensive consultations with experts and stakeholders and took approximately two years to prepare and fine-tune. The guidelines made it mandatory for hospitals to provide EMS to road crash victims irrespective of financial ability of the victim or the medico-legal nature of the case. It imposed express obligations on hospitals to screen, stabilise and then transfer if they did not have the

requisite facilities to treat a particular victim. It imposed express obligation on the police to assist in transferring a victim to the hospital in the absence of availability of express ambulance services. It required the health ministry to lay down infrastructure and manpower requirements and targets for emergency departments of hospitals and issue directions for road ambulance services within a given timeframe. It made creation of an emergency department a condition of the licence given to hospitals. It created a monitoring cell within the health services department to implement the guidelines and monitor compliance.

The High Court, in this landmark judgment, expressly gave the guidelines the force of law until appropriate

legislation is enacted, thus, in effect, plugging the legislative gap we had in mandating EMS. This was the first step to establishing a specific legal and regulatory framework for EMS for road crash victims in Bangladesh.

With regard to implementation of the guidelines, the judgment mandated wide dissemination of the guidelines through publication in the official gazette and through electronic and print media, and expressly required such dissemination to start within a period of two months from the date of receipt of a certified copy of the judgment. But alas, despite over two years having elapsed, the guidelines are yet to see the light of day!

This inexplicable governmental inertia in implementing the guidelines, despite a judgment from the Supreme Court of Bangladesh mandating it, forced BLAST to file proceedings for contempt of court, which are currently pending hearing.

Improvement of public health is a fundamental responsibility of the State under Article 18 of the Constitution. Road crashes have clearly emerged over the years to be a major public health crisis in Bangladesh that demands urgent attention. For any real change to take place, we need political commitment to this issue. Successive court orders cannot take us very far on their own. This issue must be made a national priority by all three organs of the State. Apathy of the Executive and the Legislature would mean sustained loss of lives and permanent disabilities that are wholly preventable.

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IN REMEMBRANCE OF SHEGUFTA BAKHT CHAUDHURI

A life dedicated to public service

AN OPEN DIALOGUE



ABDULLAH SHIBLI

November 11 at United Hospital, Dhaka. He had dedicated his life to public service since 1955 after he passed the Central Superior Service Examination in erstwhile Pakistan and joined the Pakistan Taxation Service. His life since then was one of high honours and prestigious assignment here and abroad. He held senior positions in the governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh and had the unique distinction of serving as the Chief Controller of Exports and Imports in both Pakistan and post-Liberation Bangladesh. He was survived by his wife and two children.

SB Chaudhuri was born on September 1, 1931 in Bongaon in Nabiganj Thana of Sylhet. His father was Dewan Mamun Chaudhuri and his paternal grandfather was Khan Bahadur Wasil Chaudhuri. His mother, Syed Zebunessa Khatun was the daughter of Khan Bahadur Syed Sikandar Ali, and a sister of Syed Mujtaba Ali, the eminent writer. He passed his Matriculation Examination from Sylhet Government School, Intermediate of Arts from

Murari Chand College, Sylhet, BA (Honours) in Economics from Dhaka University (in 1951) and Masters in Public Administration from Harvard University (in 1967).

SB Chaudhuri was one of the few economists in Pakistan and Bangladesh who worked in moulding economic policy in different capacities in the civil administration and shaped the financial, trade and taxation policies for almost five decades. Early in his career in 1964, he was selected for the Economic Pool in the central government administrative cadre and made his mark as an efficient, diligent and brilliant administrator. He was promoted to the position of Chief Controller of Exports and Imports in Islamabad at the young age of 38 in 1970. After Bangladesh's independence, he earned the trust of all regimes and served as Chairman Board of Revenue (1983-1987), Secretary, IRD, and Chief Controller of Exports and Imports. He worked tirelessly to protect the interests of an emerging nation and to keep the country moving forward. Personally, he was shy and modest, as many of his colleagues have unanimously acclaimed, but did not flinch from voicing his opinion during the turmoil that followed the Liberation of Bangladesh. He left his indelible mark in an era when the world and the country were going through enormous changes in the 15 years following our independence, i.e. 1972-1987, and played a major role in many key areas and articulated his judgement and



PHOTO: COURTESY

Shegufta Bakht Chaudhuri.

knowledge as a trained economist in taxation, foreign exchange, trade and economic policies.

SB Chaudhuri took over as the fourth Governor of Bangladesh Bank on April 12, 1987 and served with distinction until December 19, 1992. With his steady hand at the helm of Bangladesh Bank, the financial and business sectors flourished and his moral reassurance facilitated a smooth transition from the long rule of General Ershad to the first years of emerging democracy under the new Prime Minister Khaled Zia. During these five years and eight months, with SB Chaudhuri at the steering wheel, Bangladesh Bank was able to manage the money supply efficiently leading to

steady growth of the economy, while keeping the inflation at a modest level allowing commercial and state-owned banks to enhance lending to small and medium enterprises.

Former Chief Justice Habibur Rahman, the first chief advisor of the first caretaker government in 1996 appointed SB Chaudhuri as an adviser with the portfolios of industries, commerce, jute and textiles.

SB Chaudhuri who was the first cousin of SM Ali, the founding editor of *The Daily Star* tried his hand in journalism at the beginning of his professional career. After getting out of the University, he worked for *The Morning News* in 1951 and then wrote a column in *The Daily Star*, named "Along My Way" for four years. During my last visit to Dhaka two years ago,

replied in his customary modest manner, "That is for you and posterity to judge. But for me, it was to stay on track, on mission and keep out of the limelight."

Tributes for SB Choudhuri have been pouring in from across the nation. The current Governor of Bangladesh Bank, Fazle Akbar said, "As a leader of the central bank, he successfully and responsibly overcame several unique challenges in the financial sector". Dr Farashuddin, who followed SB Chaudhuri as the Governor of Bangladesh Bank a few years later, expressed his respect for and appreciation of the role of the latter. "He was an honest, capable, hard-working, and principled Governor. He exhibited his talent in the formulation and execution of the

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I visited SB Chaudhuri, who was my mother's first cousin and was known to his family as Tawfiq, at his Dhanmandi home and asked him, "Mama, what was your biggest career achievement?" He paused for a few seconds, and

principles that guide the central bank of the country."

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and currently works in information technology. He is also Senior Research Fellow, International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI), a think-tank in Boston, USA.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



NOVEMBER 15, 1988

Palestinian statehood proclaimed by Yasser Arafat

Meeting at Algiers, the Palestine National Council, at the urging of PLO chairman Yasser Arafat, issued a declaration of independence for a state of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on this day in 1988.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Gown parts
- 7 Muscle quality
- 11 Turkish peak
- 12 Traveling
- 13 Launch site sight
- 14 Flying toy
- 15 Lab liquids
- 16 Mercenary
- 17 "Auld Lang --"
- 18 Excited feeling
- 19 Early farmer
- 21 -- for tat
- 22 Beefy sandwich
- 25 Cattle call
- 26 Rural sight
- 27 Annual tennis tourney
- 29 Casual assent
- 33 Wilson and

Evans

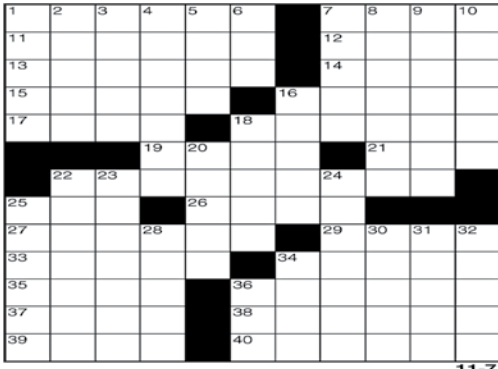
- 34 Madrid museum
- 35 Reduced amount
- 36 Serve
- 37 Give off
- 38 Last
- 39 Wallet bills
- 40 Went off like a smoke detector

DOWN

- 1 Heroic tales
- 2 "Boys Town" star
- 3 Arrested
- 4 Chrysler
- Building's style
- 5 Course numbers
- 6 Pig's place
- 7 Reserved

8 Because of

- 9 Merchant of music
- 10 Lace's place
- 16 Recorded material
- 18 Easy basket
- 20 Church parts
- 22 Plippant alternative to "I'm sorry"
- 23 Checks
- 24 Reckless jaunt
- 25 1980s hairstyle
- 28 Nuisances
- 30 "Dig in!"
- 31 Dote on
- 32 Sharp-ened
- 34 Glass section
- 36 Fly catcher



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

D	I	C	E	S		H	A	C	K	S
I	N	A	L	L		I	N	A	N	E
A	M	P	L	E		T	Y	P	E	D
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E	T	A		P	A	N		A	L	T
R	E	I	N	I	N		R	I	S	E
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S	E	C		E	S		R	O	W	
C	L	A	R	A		D	A	V	I	S
A	I	R	E	D		I	R	E	N	E
P	A	D	D	Y		M	E	L	T	S

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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