



Shahida Akhter at the steering of a four-wheel drive.

Women drivers: Breaking the traditional barrier

DURDANA GHIAS

A professional chauffeur, Shahida Akhter, drove her four-wheel drive and negotiated skillfully all the odds of the city streets. Male drivers from other vehicles looked at her with interest. But she drove confidently with eyes intent on the street ignoring the curious looks.

Shahida, a village girl from Dinajpur, is one of the women drivers of Care Bangladesh, an NGO that took the initiative to introduce women drivers since 2003.

"From my childhood I had a dream of doing something different so when I got this chance I could hardly let the opportunity go," she said while talking to this correspondent.

Shahida started her career as a driver in 2004 when Care started recruiting women drivers for the first time. She learnt driving in Dinajpur for three months and then took six-month training in Dhaka in a Care-funded project.

"When I started the training at Dinajpur neighbours told my parents that girls should not drive and I will be spoiled if I do. At first my parents went against me but I made them understand that I was doing nothing bad. Later

they gave me support in the face of immense social pressure," said Shahida.

"Now my posting is in Rangpur. Sometimes when I have duty in Dinajpur those who had criticised my father now look at me and regret. They also confess that they should not have married off their daughters early," she said.

Now I am able to take decisions and express my opinion in important family matters, she added.

Asked what she felt when she first started driving she said: "Every time I faced a hurdle I felt a woman can do what a man can do because she has got nothing less than aman."

About marriage she said: "Whoever marries me will have to accept my job because it is my way of life and a part of my existence."

Care Bangladesh did not stop at training women drivers it is also training women into car mechanics.

Lucky Maria Cruz, 19, a car mechanic hailing from Tetulbari village of Gazipur, was working at her workshop at Karwan Bazar. Clad in navy blue uniform Lucky talked about her training. Before coming here Lucky worked at an abbey of Christian nuns for five years in Bandarban.

"My father died 10 years ago and my family was living in poverty. I have a black complexion, which was an added problem. My village brother first took me here and I decided to prove myself and help my family," she said.

"I feel so great working here that I leave the workshop after everyone leaves in the evening. I do not want to sit idle for a moment," said an enthusiastic Lucky.

"Last time when I went to village someone proposed me for marriage but I refused when he did not accept my profession. I do not want to leave my job for the sake of marriage," she said.

Hasan M Mazumdar, deputy country director of Care Bangladesh and the author of this bold project told Star City about the initiative.

"A few years ago one day I went to visit our car workshop and noticed that everyone working there was a male. I felt that in Care we have gender balance in all sections save the transport section. I decided to eliminate this imbalance and started with six female drivers," said Mazumdar.

Care started recruiting rural ultra poor women, indigenous girls and those belonging to minority religions. It gave them extensive

training and basic education so that they can understand the road signs. A separate budget was prepared for this project where the trainees had some stipend with free lodging. They also counseled the parents and brought them here so that they can see for themselves where their daughters are staying.

At first we faced internal staff resistance as male drivers feared losing their jobs but later they understood that there was nothing to fear. Now we have 30 female drivers some of whom are posted outside Dhaka, he said.

About the advantage of employing women drivers Care said that accident rate has gone down drastically as women are more careful than male drivers.

"At first we did not expect the simple village girls to fulfill all our expectations but they surprised us by their commitment and sincerity. When we doubted their ability they redoubled their effort. They did not let us down at any cost," said Mazumdar.

M Ruhul Motin, media support officer of Care said that they are replacing the male drivers whose contract expired or those who retired but they are not firing any male driver as it is not their policy.

SIEMENS' SEMINAR ON INTELLIGENT BUILDINGS

Making buildings intelligent for security and safety

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Urban experts and top bureaucrats at a seminar in the city on May 10 underscored that it is time to make today's buildings intelligent with complete automation for security, safety and efficient energy saving systems.

The seminar, organised by Siemens Bangladesh Limited, highlighted that buildings today have to be made intelligent with sophisticated solutions for security, safety, energy efficiency and savings, environment protection and personal comfort of the occupants.

Secretary to the housing and public works ministry ASM Rashidul Hai said that an intelligent building has to have solutions for various services, amenities, energy saving systems and environmental impacts. Open areas, greenery and fire safety of a building are crucial concerns today.

"Despite the fact that specific expertise, specialisation and skilled manpower, all technical requirements in a building project are often not met, codes are not followed, and violation of building construction rules are rampant," he said, "These have often led to disastrous consequences with loss of lives and property."

In this context, introduction of intelligent building solution is a timely endeavour, he said.

President of Real Estate and Housing Association Bangladesh (Reahab) engineer Abdul Awal said that structural safety of a building should be the prime concern of an engineer with other safety issues equally important.

Fire safety and energy efficiency among other safety measures are very important for an intelligent building also known as smart building, he said.

"I am in doubt whether there has been a single intelligent building built in the Dhaka city," Awaisaid.

Rudolf P Klink, chief executive officer of Siemens Bangladesh, said that his company is particularly conscious of the needs of a smart building.

"We care about your total needs including power generation, fire safety systems, water treatment plant, security sensor, efficient electrification, gas and electric power generation and transmission, telecommunications and information technology solutions," he said.

"Total security and safety of an intelligent building is our vision," Klink said.

Rene Arnt, director of industrial solutions and services of Siemens Bangladesh made a

presentation on efficient electric and electronic systems, all-in-one telephony solution, car parking provision, water treatment and drinking water filtration technology of an

intelligent building.

Huberus Boesten, director of power division of Siemens Bangladesh, presented on power generation and supply

system while senior manger Nayeem Parvez presented on Siemens' efficient fire detection and alarm systems of an intelligent building.

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HOSPITALS & CLINICS

Ahsania Mission Cancer & General Hospital
9008919, 8051618

Apollo Hospitals Dhaka
9891680-4, 01713046684/85
Emergency no. 9896623, 0171409000

Bangladesh Medical College & Hospital
9118202, 8115843

Central Hospital
9660015-19,

China Bangla Hospital (JV) Ltd
8913674

Dhaka Medical College Hospital
8626812-16

Gana Shasthyo Kendra
8617208, 8617383, 8620178,

Greenland Hospital
8912663

Gulshan Mother & Child Clinic
8822738, 8812992

Holy Family Hospital

8311721-25

Islami Bank Hospital
9333739

Japan Bangladesh Friendship Hospital
8828855, 8827575

Labaid Cardiac Hospital
8610793-8

Marie Stopes Clinic
8821874

Medinova Medical Services Ltd
8620353,

Monowara Hospital
8318135, 8319802

Pangu Hospital
9112150, 9113041

PG Hospital (BSMMU)
9614545-9, 9612550-4

Rashmono General Hospital
8317606, 9557354, 8317819

Ratan's Dental Clinic
9111090

Salimullah Medical College Hospital
7319002-6

Samorita Hospital Ltd
9131901

Shahid Suhrawardy Hospital
9122560-78

Shishu Hospital
8116061-2, 9119119

United Hospital
8836444, 0194001234

BLOOD BANK

Bangladesh Red Crescent Blood Bank
9116563

Modern Clinic & Blood Center
9883948

Sandhani, Dhaka Medical College
9668690

BUS SERVICES

Drooti
8014563

Eagle Paribahan
7101504

Green Line Paribahan
9339623, 9342580, 8353005

Hanif Enterprise
9120116

Keya Paribahan
7101894, 7101250, 9121280

Modern Enterprise
9123743

Neptune A/C Coach Service
7101945, 7101951, 9123092

Shohag Paribahan (Pvt) Ltd
9334152, 8316766, 8126293

Shoukhin Paribahan
8014397, 9001796

Silk Line
7102461

Shyamoli Paribahan
9333803

AIRLINES

lines

Aeroflot
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Air India
8617783, 8611929, Fax: 9670591

Biman Bangladesh Airlines
8917400-19 9560151, 9559610
Airport Office: 8917400, Fax: 8913005

British Airways
8815111, Fax: 8815346,

Cathay Pacific
9557117, Fax: 9562667

Druk Air
9862243, 9892862,
Emirates
9892801, 9885574-75

GMG Airlines
8825845-9, Airport Office:
8960404,8915699, Fax: 8826115

Gulf Air
9130123-5, Airport Office: 8914573

Indian Airlines Ltd
9555915, 9557813,

Kuwait Airways
9115182, 9118829

TRAIN TIMING

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Mahanagar Prabhati
Mahanagar Godhuli
Turna
Parabat Express
Joyantika Express
Upaban Express
Tista Express
Ekata Express
Upakul Express
AgniBeena Express

Leaves Dhaka at 4:30 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 7:30 am
Leaves Dhaka at 3-15 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 11-00 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 6-40 am
Leaves Dhaka at 12-45 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 9-45 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 7-00 am
Leaves Dhaka at 5-00 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 8-00 am
Leaves Dhaka at 9-20 pm

Malaysia Airlines
9888211-20
Airport Office: 8916953, Fax: 9890478

PIA
9349293-5, Fax: 9345300

Singapore Airlines
8811504-7, 9883259
Airport Office: 8911928, Fax: 8811503

Thai Airways
8314711-18, 8914343

Virgin Atlantic Airways
8816324-5, Fax: 9896481

Reaches Chittagong at 10:35 pm
Reaches Chittagong at 1-55 pm
Reaches Chittagong at 10-55 am
Reaches Sylhet at 2-30 pm
Reaches Sylhet at 9-20 pm
Reaches Sylhet at 6-40 am
Reaches Bahadurabad at 1-05 pm
Reaches Bahadurabad at 11-15
Reaches Noakhali at 5-00 am
Reaches Jagannath at 2-30 pm

LIBRARY & INFO-

Libraries, Cultural and Information Centers

Central Public Library- 8626001-4,
Shishu Academy- 9564128
Shilpakala Academy- 8614673
Bangla Academy- 8619550
Islamic Foundation- 9550280, 9556407

Nazrul Institute- 9114602
Ford Foundation- 8116133
Alliance Francaise- 8611557
Information Resource Center, The American Center - 8813440-4, 9886395-9
British Council- 8618867-8, 8618905-7
Community Development Library- 8113769, 8113604
Goethe Institute Int'l- Dhaka- 9126525-6
Indian Information Centre & Cultural Library- 8850141-2
The Russian Cultural Centre- 9116314, 9118531, 9118314
Drik Photo Gallery- 9120125, 8112954, 8123412
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