

PHOTO STAR
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 spoilt 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.

"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.

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 a man."

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.

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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," Awal said.

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 manager Nayem Parvez presented on Siemens' efficient fire detection and alarm systems of an intelligent building.

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health, bus services, airlines & train timing

HOSPITALS & CLINICS

Ahsania Mission Cancer & General Hospital	8311721-25
Isiami Bank Hospital	9333739
Apollo Hospitals Dhaka	9891680-4, 01713046684/85
Emergency no. 9896623, 0171409000	
Bangladesh Medical College & Hospital	89118202, 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	8317606, 9557354, 8317819
Monowara Hospital	8318135, 8319802
Pangu Hospital	9112150, 9113041
PG Hospital (BSMMU)	9614545-9, 9612550-4
Rashmoni General Hospital	8822738, 8812992
Sohag Paribahan (Pvt) Ltd	9334152, 8316766, 8126293
Shahid Suhrawardy Hospital	9122560-78
Shishu Hospital	8116061-2, 9119119
United Hospital	8836444, 0194001234
Medinova Medical Services Ltd	8620353,
Salimullah Medical College Hospital	7319002-6
Samorita Hospital Ltd	9131901
Shahid Suhrawardy Hospital	9122560-78
Shishu Hospital	8116061-2, 9119119
Modern Enterprise	9123743
Neptune A/C Coach Service	7101945, 7101951, 9123092
Blood Bank	7101945, 7101951, 9123092
Bangladesh Red Crescent Blood Bank	9334152, 8316766, 8126293
Modern Clinic & Blood Center	8014397, 9001796
Sandhani, Dhaka Medical College	9668690

BUS SERVICES

Drooti	9862243, 9892862,
Aeroflat	9559930, 9559111, Fax: 9563787
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
Shoukhan Paribahan	8014397, 9001796
Silk Line	7102461
Shyamoli Paribahan	9333803

AIRLINES

lines	Druk Air
Aeroflat	9862243, 9892862,
Eagle Paribahan	9892801, 9885574-75
Air India	8617783, 8611929, Fax: 9670591
Green Line Paribahan	8617783, 8611929, Fax: 9670591
Biman Bangladesh Airlines	8917400-19, 9560151, 9559610
Paribahan	917400-19, 9560151, 9559610
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
Shoukhan Paribahan	8014397, 9001796
Silk Line	7102461
Shyamoli Paribahan	9333803

TRAIN TIMING

Subarna Express	Leaves Dhaka at 4:30 pm
Mahanagar Prabhati	Leaves Dhaka at 7:30 am
Mahanagar Godhuli	Leaves Dhaka at 3:15 pm
Turna	Leaves Dhaka at 11:00 pm
Parabat Express	Leaves Dhaka at 6:40 pm
Joyantika Express	Leaves Dhaka at 12:45 pm
Upaban Express	Leaves Dhaka at 9:45 pm
Tista Express	Leaves Dhaka at 7:00 am
Ekata Express	Leaves Dhaka at 5:00 pm
Upakul Express	Leaves Dhaka at 8:00 pm
Agnibeena Express	Leaves Dhaka at 9:20 pm

LIBRARY & INFO-

Libraries, Cultural and Information Centers	Central Public Library- 8626001-4, Shishu Academy- 9564128
PIA	9349293-5, Fax: 9345300
Singapore Airlines	8825845-9, Airport Office: 8960404, 8915699, Fax: 8826115
Gulf Air	881504-7, 9883259
British Airways	Airport Office: 8911928, Fax: 8811503
Thai Airways	8314711-18, 8914343
Virgin Atlantic Airways	8816324-5, Fax: 9896481
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