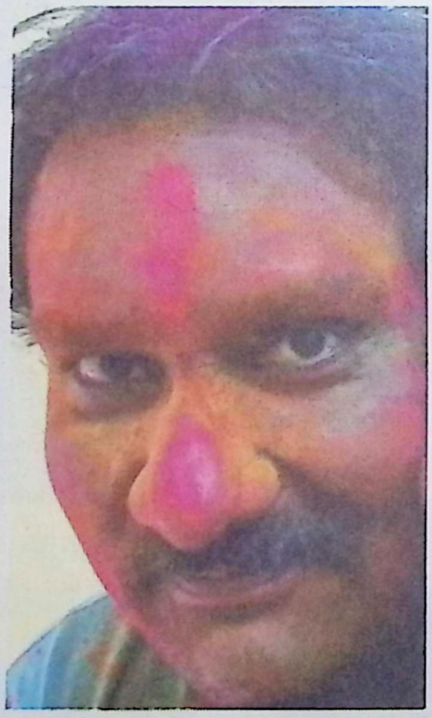
Our Favourite Funny Man

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

Talent and insanity go hand in hand and being slightly cuckoo has always been a prerequisite for *the Star* magazine team member. Nobody has personified this curious combination more beautifully than Zahedul I Khan, known as Zahed Bhai or Zik as I sometimes like to call him. As the magazine's photographer for over 15 years he has created a standard of photography that others who have succeeded him strive to follow. It wasn't just taking a few clever snaps for a story, for Zahed, it has always been about being totally involved – sometimes his photography has expressed far more coherently than the text. Often his photographs have stood alone as the storyteller. But along with his extraordinary gift as a photographer, it has been his eccentric, yet endearing personality, that has kept *the Star* for so many years, a fun place to be.

Zahed Bhai's most favourite activity was to shock people. When he wasn't making deliberately politically incorrect statements he would demonstrate his quirkiness through actions: dipping sweet Energy biscuits into beef curry or freezing milk tea – just to see what it would taste like. On the road in his motorcycle, which he rode at 20 miles speed per hour, he was the most insane. He would insult people blatantly to clear the roads, make up fantastic stories if stopped by cops who found it safer to let him go than endure more craziness. He would stop in the middle of traffic and ask the traffic police for detailed directions unmoved by the loud honking and expletives from vehicle drivers. He would make friends with beggars, sex workers and drug addicts who would often greet him on the streets, much to the embarrassment of the person sitting behind him on the bike.

He hated sitting still. Once the photographs were taken it would be painful to watch Zahed trying to stay focused, struggling to keep his eyes open. Once, he spent a good one hour playing with stuffed toys left by the grandchild of an elderly scholar who was being interviewed for a story. It was especially trying for the interviewers to restrain from hysterical giggling while Zahed threw a stuffed Popeye into the air and then catch him quickly, going back to a normal posture and serious expression whenever the gentleman turned around.



Zahedul I Khan

Trying to track Zahed Bhai down, has always been a challenge. Those who have known him and worked with him for many years will know that he detests answering to people. Whenever we called him to ask where he was his standard answer was "very close, in Panthapath". But Panthapath became a kind of 'Bermuda Triangle' from where Zahed Bhai would disappear for hours. Years later he sheepishly admitted that many times when he said he was in Panthapath he was actually out of Dhaka, roaming around in his motorbike just for the heck of it.

Though loved by men and women alike his popularity with females of every age, is worth mentioning; it is something that has remained constant even now when he is far away in Delhi, studying film and journalism. This was not true only for his female colleagues but for any female he interacted with, and inevitably photographed. One of the most irritating things about going on an assignment with Zahed Bhai was the frequent greetings: 'Hi Zahed Bhai' or 'Hello Zahed, why have you disappeared', from women, usually very attractive, of all ages.

Children, too, have been instantly drawn to him and he has always had a special bond with all of our children. Perhaps they have seen in him a kindred spirit.

Preferring to feed rather than be fed Zik would bring tiffin boxes full of delectable chicken biryani, which he made himself at home, or rush off to get fried chicken from a fast food shop. We women colleagues especially benefitted from his Santa Claus spirit, being presented with beautiful saris and trinkets on every occasion – Pahela Baishakh, Eid, birthdays, etc.

Now, miles away from us, no doubt charming the women and men of New Delhi and keeping them in splits, we think of all those fun-filled moments that only Zahed Bhai could have created. On the Star's 18th birthday, Zik, we celebrate your precious presence in our lives, your craziness and your love.