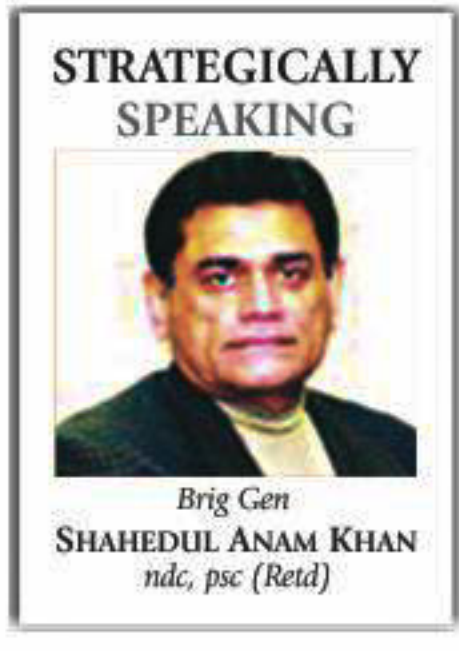


Free the transport sector from the vices of the most powerful syndicate



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING
Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

OUR transport sector can never become what it really is supposed to be—an important people-friendly service provider. That is unless the sector is freed of the political grip influencing, running and shielding it. And that, perhaps, is a tall order.

Like everything else, this sector was under state control soon after liberation, but only for a short while. Given the galloping need for intra-country connectivity and the gradual decay of the railways in spite of the occasional attempts to resuscitate it, and clogging up of the major river routes, road transport became the preferred and the most used mode of travel and transportation of goods. The gap in the market—due to the government being unable to meet the growing demands in this sector—was filled in, naturally, by private operators. And that is when the control of the transport sector devolved on the private operators. This is where politics and economic interests colluded to exercise paramount control on it. Like most institutions, private service providers and practitioners, this also came under the pervasive and harmful political control.

The fact that all the major political parties have more than one of their members at the helm of the controls of various organisations of bus and truck owners, drivers and workers, leaves no scope for guessing why the private operators have used the roads and the highways in the manner as



Protesters attempt to stop an ambulance. The photos were taken at Shanir Akhra on October 28, 2018.

PHOTO: STAR

they did. One would not be remiss in thinking that such an attitude is engendered by a feeling of complete impunity. And if you are wondering why none of the major political parties has come out with any statement on the strike and the way it was enforced, you should stop wondering. On the other hand, it would have been too much to expect the ruling party to come out with anything stronger than the whimper we heard from the mouth of the road transport minister. It was quite comical that while the minister was requesting the transport workers to

call off the strike, he appeared to be oblivious of the fact that it was actually one of his cabinet colleagues who happens to head the transport workers' association and was responsible for calling the strike.

During the 48 hours that the transports were off the roads, it cost the lives of at least three children, and as per FBCCI, the economy Tk 7,000 crore, not to speak of the unspeakable torment that commuters had to endure, which defies monetisation.

There are a few fundamental questions in this regard that someone

has escaped the notice of the policymakers of the government.

Without going into the irrationality of the transport workers' demands, which wants to do away with many provisions of the new Act, one would ask: Why did the transport workers call a strike to change the provisions of the newly enacted Road Transport Act at all? Didn't anyone tell them that the head of their federation had not only approved the proposed Bill in the cabinet but also voted for it in the floor of the house to consecrate it as a law, and a poor law too? So, if anybody, it was him that they should have held to account.

For 48 hours, people were held hostage to this syndicate which was blackmailing the state to allow their current impunity to continue. Any political programme which lacks popular support generally has to employ the instrument of force and coercion to impose it, as we saw the transport workers do, which drew the ire of helpless commuters. It was the antithesis of the students' programme for safe roads. Can one ask if the police had done its duty to help those drivers whose faces were being smeared by burnt engine oil by the strikers? Although a case has been filed on October 31 for the death of one of the babies, has anyone been arrested so far for their role in the death of at least three children because their ambulances were barred from running? Does the transport body bear no responsibility for the three deaths since he heads the federation that called for the strike? Will the police act with the same swiftness as they did to hound out leaders of the students' movement from their houses, to arrest the culprits in this case too?

.....

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan, ndc, psc (ret'd) is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

IN MEMORIAM

The passing of another friend

MUSHTAQ CHOWDHURY

I wasn't ready for this. Zahin Ahmed, the executive director of Friends in Village Development, Bangladesh, popularly known as FIVDB, breathed his last in a Dhaka hospital on October 27. A cancer survivor, he unfortunately couldn't fend off the virulent infections that kept him in hospital for the previous ten days.

Zahin and I had known each other since we were students of class VI back in 1962 in Sylhet Government High School. Shortly, we had befriended Masrur Chowdhury, who later went on to found the Nandan Group. Our friendship was so strong that some of our teachers started calling us "The Three". Masrur passed away in 2013. The last of "The Three", I now feel so alone in their absence.

We laid Zahin in his eternal resting place at the Dargah of Hazrat Shah Jalal in Sylhet, close to his mother and two brothers. The following day, civil society organisations of Sylhet organised a memorial event attended by people from all walks of life, particularly his friends and colleagues in the development sector. It was amazing to see how he touched the lives of so many people in so many ways.

As its founding executive director, he has been at the helm of FIVDB since its inception in 1980. Under his



Zahin Ahmed at FIVDB, Sylhet.
PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

leadership, the organisation grew to be a foremost and influential NGO, not only in Sylhet but nationally. It worked for the poor and disadvantaged people, particularly women and girls. It has developed and implemented many innovative programmes in the areas of education, health, agriculture, poultry, and microfinance that touched the lives of millions of people. Perhaps two of the most important contributions of FIVDB are in adult education and duck rearing. The adult learning material that it developed are used widely by the government and NGOs. The landmark work of introducing new breeds of ducks (such as Khaki Campbell from Thailand) has had

immense impact in improving the breeds and creating duck value chains in the haor areas of the country. FIVDB is now a large institution with a yearly budget of over Tk 240 crore.

His introduction to the field of development started in December 1971, well before my own entry into this field. The Manipuri community in Sylhet town was badly affected during the liberation war as their houses and properties were either looted or destroyed and most of them sought refuge in India. Barrister Viquerul Islam Chowdhury, who happened to be Zahin's cousin, had returned to Sylhet

Our friendship was so strong that some of our teachers started calling us "The Three". Masrur passed away in 2013. The last of "The Three", I now feel so alone in their absence.

from Shillong in Meghalaya within a few days of the ending of the war. Staying at Zahin's home in Sylhet town, he, with support from his close friend Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, carried out a relief operation for the Manipuri community in which the young Zahin joined. They successfully rehabilitated many of the affected families. Sir Abed and Barrister Viquerul Islam were his gurus. He believed that some of the seeds for a future BRAC were sown in his drawing room!

Following a pledge made by Sir Fazle Hasan Abed at the Jomtien Conference on "education for all" in 1990, we started working on developing a simple methodology to measure basic education. The first person I talked to on this was Zahin. We quickly developed the outline for what was later known as the "Assessment of Basic Competencies" or ABC. Many other experts later joined the initiative, and this methodology quickly received wide traction and was implemented in many countries including Pakistan, India and Nepal. Zahin was one of the founding trustees of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE). He was a prominent member of the Education Watch group.

Zahin epitomised a true "plain living and high thinking" character as iterated repeatedly during his memorial programme. Hailing from an

illustrious and well-to-do family of Habiganj, he devoted his entire life to the service of the downtrodden. Not only was he revered by those around him, because of the simple way he lived his life, but they also benefitted from his deep knowledge of development, culture and history.

His interest in poetry and mysticism was enthralling. He was a proud follower of Sufism and the poetry of Tagore, Rumi and Hafiz. Mehdi Hasan was one of his dearest ghazalists. This part of his character was probably inherited from his educationist father Najmul Hussain Chowdhury who was a scholar in Persian language and literature. He was an ardent believer in the teachings of Paolo Freire, the celebrated Brazilian philosopher, which he internalised and exuded passionately through his work in FIVDB and in his writings. He was a prolific writer. His depth of knowledge and understanding allowed him to express complex subjects in terms that even the most common person was able to absorb them. It would genuinely be a collective loss for us all should we fail to preserve his contributions and carry forward his legacy.

Zahin Ahmed's passing has created a national void which will be difficult to fill. And for me personally, I have become a loner!

.....

Mushtaque Chowdhury is Vice Chairperson, BRAC.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

NOVEMBER 4, 1922

HOWARD CARTER DISCOVERED TOMB OF TUTANKHAMUN IN EGYPT

Howard Carter, a British archaeologist and Egyptologist, discovered the intact tomb (designated KV62) of the 18th Dynasty Pharaoh, Tutankhamun, colloquially known as "King Tut" and "the boy king".

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Lunch hour

5 Top floor

10 Toledo's state

11 One-horned beasts

13 Soda fountain

14 Enthusiastic

15 Partial floor cover

17 Yank's foe

18 Bowler hats

19 "... we there yet?"

20 -- Angeles

21 Harbour structure

22 Lama's land

25 Homes for koi

26 Metal sources

27 Touch lightly

28 Tofu source

29 Seasoned sausages

33 -- -cone

34 Radius or ulna

35 Climate-affecting current

37 Metal source

38 Holy

39 Composer Satie

40 Tired

41 Aegean and Ionian

DOWN

1 Wanderer

2 Chicago airport

3 Edmonton player

4 Famous folks

5 Debates

6 Ruffians

7 Light metal

8 Fix firmly

9 Stuck together

12 Gets serious

16 Mob revolt

21 Beverages

22 Flings

23 Rule with no exceptions

24 "Crazy in Love" singer

25 Tropical

27 Spoof

29 More reasonable

30 "Arthur" star

Dudley

31 Nepal neighbour

32 Looks for

36 Lyricist Gershwin

Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dsopinion@gmail.com.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

10 11 12

13 14

15 16 17

18 19

20 21

22 23 24 25

26 27

28 29 30 31 32

33 34

35 36 37

38 39

40 41

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

M I S S E S D E P P

O N E T W O E L I E

T A M P E D T E L L

O W I E S L E G A L

R E S T K A R A T E

S E V E N N E T

S T R A Y C A T S

L I E S E E D

A B A T E D M A M A

M E M O S P I N O N

A R I N D T O R I N O

R A G S E R A S E D

D E L E T E

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

WHERE'S THE CHEESE?
OH, YOUR DOCTOR CALLED
AND DON'T FORGET TO GET THE CAR FIXED
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TODAY?

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

SO I HEARD THAT YOU LIKED THE SEWING CLASS TODAY.
YEAH, IT WAS AWESOME!
YOU JUST GRAB SOME FABRIC AND SHOVE IT UNDER A RAZOR-SHARP NEEDLE THAT'S STABBING UP AND DOWN ABOUT A MILLION TIMES A SECOND
WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?
SOMETIMES YOU MAKE ME NERVOUS.

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

DID YOU HEAR WHAT I JUST SAID?
WHERE'S THE CHEESE?

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?
SOMETIMES YOU MAKE ME NERVOUS.