

# Our Guiding Light

SIMEEN RAHMAN

July 1, 2020, was the day our father, Mr. Latifur Rahman, the Founder of Transcom, left us.

It was a bright and sunny morning. We had drawn open the curtains of Abbu's room in our family home at Cheora, Cumilla, and the room was filled with light. I don't know why, but at the time Abbu was leaving us, another bright and sunny day came to mind. We were in the US and were on a road trip in my younger son Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain's car. Abbu and Faraaz sat in the front and I was at the back. Elvis Presley's

however, see how Mummy held the family together, how she stood by us and by Abbu. My mother was a pillar of strength for Abbu, through the toughest times, through every struggle, and through every one of his achievements, till his very last moment.

There was one thing Abbu would always do -- we as a family would travel together at least twice a year. He would be with us throughout these trips. He would take care of everything -- where to go, what to buy, what to eat, everything.

We went to so many places both at

and many other places. Years ago, he took us to the island of Capri. There was a reason behind this. When Abbu had been in college, my grandfather had been to Capri and sent Abbu a postcard from there. He had written, "Capri is an extremely beautiful place. At some point in your life, you must bring your family here." And Abbu did just that.

I joined Transcom in 1990 after I finished my studies. I joined completely on my own accord. My parents never forced any decision upon any of his children about what to study or what we were to

undo what I've worked hard to build." Abbu only wanted one thing very profoundly and that was we do not settle abroad. Every part of his life was always in Bangladesh. He had nothing abroad.

After completing my studies, I joined Transcom as an Assistant Officer. That was the entry level position in the company.

After I joined Transcom, Abbu told me, "Don't wait for me to go to the office." So, I wouldn't wait for Abbu, I'd find a way to the office myself.

It was Abbu who taught me business. Learning business began at the dining table. He would discuss all sorts of things about business. We would listen. It was, however, from 1998 that Abbu began to actually groom me, after Gulshan Tower became Transcom's headquarters.

Abbu would make me attend the board meetings. I would watch how he ran the board meetings and what he would discuss. I would listen and observe closely. I would try to understand his way of thinking, how he solved problems and how he encouraged the team. Abbu may no longer be with us, but whenever I face a crisis, I think of what Abbu would have done in that situation and then I take my decisions.

Abbu engrained certain values into Transcom -- the values to ensure the highest level of integrity, ethics and business excellence. He would say, taxes cannot be evaded. There can be no compromise on the quality of any product, even if it means we do less business. We have not budged an inch away from that. At every meeting of the company, I say that the highest ethical standards and a hundred percent integrity are our strength. Everyone in Transcom is well aware that there is no compromise on this. Our Founder Chairman's values come first in this company, then business.

In his career, Abbu was never a loan defaulter, not for a moment. In his absence, we went through hard times over the past one year. The circumstances have been adverse due to the pandemic, not just in Bangladesh, but the world over. I was determined that we would not default on loans. We did not.

I'm proud to share that during the pandemic, in 2020, Transcom's business was almost equal to that of 2019. In the first six months of the current year, business has been better than before. Abbu would have been so happy.

Abbu would always talk about taking Transcom to the next level. I will not reveal what that next level is right now, but I will say that we are working towards fulfilling Abbu's dream. He would say that 20,000 families' livelihoods depend on

Transcom, that's 100,000 people. He would say that we were responsible for every single person in the company.

At Transcom, just as we have not moved an inch away from Abbu's values, neither have we drifted from his principles in the media business. We do have media establishments, but Abbu never interfered in what would be written or what would be published. I firmly believe that this is up to the editors and the journalists. We solely try to help the newspapers move forward as business entities. If the business aspects are strong, the media establishments as a whole will grow.

As a family, Abbu taught us to live simply. He would say, "Live well, but do not be spend thrifts."

Abbu would speak less, he'd observe and take wise decisions. After we lost our younger sister Shazneen, I saw an incredible mental strength within Abbu. He fought to bring justice for his daughter. He did not break down when we lost Shazneen. He went to court day after day. He would constantly speak with the investigating officers and lawyers.

After we lost Faraaz, Abbu's mental state was just the opposite. He completely broke down. At that time, a strong bond was forged between Abbu and my son Zaraq Ayaat Hossain. Zaraq remained by Abbu's side till the very end.

Abbu had a very different relationship with Shazneen and Faraaz. He would have a picture of Shazneen by his bedside and in his suitcase when he was travelling. Faraaz's picture was on his phone. He did not go to sleep without looking at their pictures.

I saw how he was serious with us, his children, but more of a friend to his grandchildren. After returning home at night, Abbu would have a great time with his four grandchildren.

Abbu was proud of Faraaz. After we lost Faraaz, Abbu would always say, "Faraaz wanted to be like me, but there are so many people like me. Faraaz is truly the exceptional one. Perhaps, were I in Faraaz's shoes, I don't know if I would be able to show the courage he did."

We lost Shazneen, Faraaz and Abbu. I don't know how many more trials lie ahead. Transcom was like a child to Abbu, and now my goal in life is to take Transcom to newer heights.

I am certain we'll be reunited with Abbu again, on yet another bright sunny day. We will take off together on a road trip with his favourite Elvis Presley's songs playing.

Simeen Rahman is the CEO of Transcom Group and Latifur Rahman's eldest daughter



songs were playing, Abbu's favourite. Faraaz has been gone for five years now, and Abbu for a year. We miss them terribly.

I remember our childhood, when Abbu was going through a challenging time. After the Liberation War, our family's jute mills and tea garden businesses had been nationalised, as per the government's policy. Abbu had to start from scratch, and he also had the responsibility of looking after the entire family. He would start his days early and return at night. During our childhood we didn't get to see Abbu much. We did,

home and abroad with Abbu. These trips were not just going somewhere and shopping. On these trips we learnt so much, understood the world and gained perspective. Abbu would take us around the entire city or town we were visiting, it was a must to visit historical sites and of course indulge in the local cuisine.

After he became a grandfather, Abbu would take note of his grandchildren's holidays and at the beginning of the year he would plan our travels together. I recall in 2017 we visited Italy, Spain and Austria. On that trip we visited Rome, Cordoba, Madrid, Barcelona, Vienna

do with our lives. In fact, we were under no compulsion to join the business either. Our parents always encouraged and supported us in pursuing our goals. Abbu would give the example of the American-born British businessman J Paul Getty's son, Gordon Getty. He would say that if he was forced to become a businessman by his father against his will, we would not have had such a successful classical composer.

Abbu would say, "It is up to you to decide what you want to do. But whatever you do, do it with passion. You can join the business if you want, but don't join against your will

## Letter to Chotoo on the past 5 years

Dear Chotoo,

I can't believe it's been five years that you've been gone. It feels like we were sitting in the room we shared and talking, just the other day. Of course, every one of us misses you, but I want you to know that you're still such a big part of our lives. Not a day goes by without talking about you and remembering how much you mean to us.

We spent the last five years in sadness without your presence but with our heads held high with how proud you've made us. I would have otherwise told you about how much Nana Bhai misses you and how he looks at your picture every night before he goes to bed, but you don't need me to do that anymore. The three of you, you, Nana Bhai and Chotoo Malikijaan (Shazneen), are together now, and I'm sure you're happy. Just try not to miss the rest of us too much. Jokes aside, who would have ever thought that July 1, that this very day, would be the day to remember both you and Nana Bhai and the exemplary human beings the two of you always were.

When I think about you, I often think of how much you had lying in front of you to live life to its fullest. You wanted to do so much. And then it hits me, you achieved in your 20 years on this planet both a beautiful life and left an amazing legacy.

We were all looking forward to seeing you graduate in 2018, and even though you weren't here Emory's Goizueta Business School recognized you as a graduate. But there's more, they've instituted a Faraaz Hossain Core Values Award to recognize the top student who also embodies strong core values. You've left a mark beyond that of just another graduate.

The impact you made on the

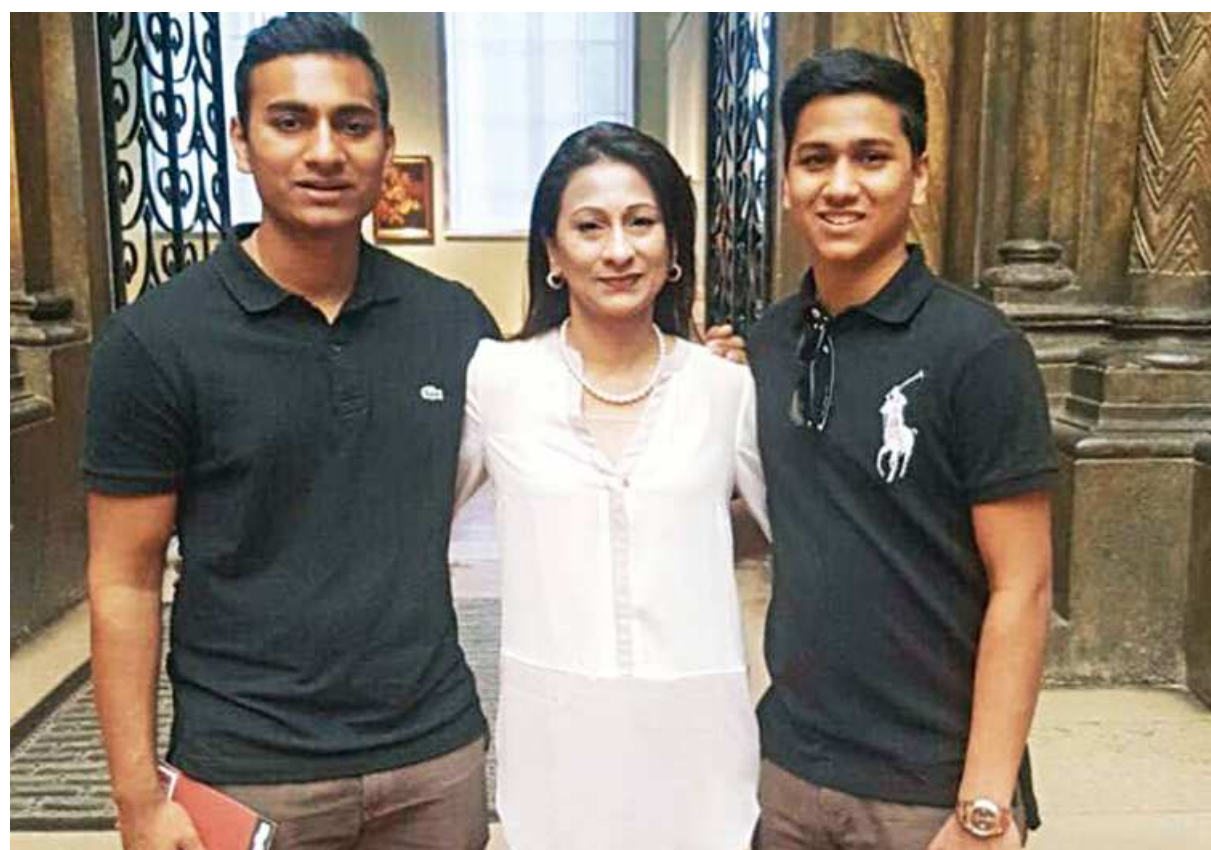
world spread far beyond the borders of your beloved Bangladesh or your college. You have been honored as a righteous individual by Italian NGO, Gariwo, who has planted trees in your name in 14 countries across the world to commemorate your supreme sacrifice. We had the chance to even travel to a small town called Benevento, in Italy, where one of the trees are planted and I just wish you could have seen students sing praises in your name. Students from a completely different country, who you had never even met.

You've been honored countless times for your bravery. You were awarded the Mother Teresa Memorial Award for Social Justice; you should have seen the pride in Mama's eyes that day. Just the way she told you, a month before you passed away, that she was proud to be your mother, not just because of you excelling in college but because of the human being you were. You set an example for the world with your act of courage.

What would've hurt is if you were forgotten, and as the saying goes, "Every man has two deaths, when he is buried in the ground and the last time someone says his name". It looks like the world won't let you or Nana Bhai die a second death.

I know you cared for your family and your friends with all your heart, you showed everyone just that till the end. You wanted everyone you loved to thrive.

Your friends are doing so well, they're excelling at everything they've set out to do. You wanted them all to come back to Dhaka and lead their lives in Bangladesh, even though most of them planned not to. Well, most of them are here, and we've laughed so many times thinking of how what Chotoo wanted ended up happening.



Nanu Ma misses you very much. She never fails to tell me all the heart-to-heart conversations the two of you would have. She tells me I don't understand her the way you did, but I'm trying! Every night, she calls out to you, Nana Bhai and Chotoo Malikijaan to help her go to sleep. She knows her three angels will always look after her.

Where do I even start with Mama? None of us can ever understand the pain she bears to this day, but we witness just how strong she is. You definitely got your courage from her. You'd be so proud of her, the woman the two of us looked up to as our role

model throughout our lives. You'd be mesmerized by the way she's taking Nana Bhai's legacy to newer heights with her sheer determination we are all too familiar with. Even then, the identity you have made her the proudest of being Faraaz's mother. There is not a day, or a moment that passes by when Mama doesn't think of you. There have been countless instances where you have made her beyond proud without even being by her side. You are constantly on her mind. She knows that one day, she'll be reunited with you.

Over the past five years, we've remembered your shining example

of humanity on July 1 and this July 1 we remember both you and Nana Bhai together. We always knew you and Nana Bhai had a special bond; it just seems as though Allah showed us all on July 1, 2020 that your souls were truly connected.

We love you. We miss you.

You live on within us all, every day.

Lots of love always,

Bhaiyu

The writer of this letter is Zaraq Ayaat Hossain, elder brother of Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain.

*Of course, every one of us misses you, but I want you to know that you're still such a big part of our lives. Not a day goes by without talking about you and remembering how much you mean to us.*