

# BUILDER OF DREAMS

TANVEER AHMED CHOWDHURY

There is hardly any major infrastructure development project in Bangladesh that has not benefitted from the engineering acumen and solid leadership skills of Professor Dr Jamilur Reza Choudhury. He was not only the country's foremost civil engineer but also a leading educationist, researcher and social activist.

Professor Choudhury earned his Bachelor's degree (First Class First with Honours) in Civil Engineering from BUET (erstwhile East Pakistan University of Engineering and Technology, EPUET) in 1963. Next year, he went to the University of Southampton, UK, on a scholarship and earned his Master's degree in Advanced Structural Engineering in 1965. He continued his study there and earned a PhD in 1968. His PhD research was on 'Shear Wall and Structural Analysis of High Rise Building'. In 1975, he was offered the

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Commonwealth Staff Fellowship to pursue his post-doctoral studies at the University of Surrey, where he spent a year as a visiting associate professor. Known as a pioneer of engineering education in Bangladesh, Professor Choudhury had an illustrious career in academia. He joined the Civil Engineering Department of BUET as a lecturer in 1963 and became a full professor in 1976. He served



Jamilur Reza Choudhury (1943-2020)

as the Dean of the Faculty of Civil Engineering from 1983-85. Professor Choudhury also held the position of the Director of Computer Centre for about ten years (1982-1992) which has later grown into the Institute of Information and Communication Technology (IICT) in BUET. Upon his retirement from BUET in 2001, Professor Choudhury was appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of BRAC University, Dhaka, where he served

till 2010. In the same year, he joined the University of Asia-Pacific in Dhaka as the Vice-Chancellor and held that position until his demise. In recognition of his contribution to the education sector, he was appointed as a National Professor in 2018 along with two other eminent educationists, Dr Anisuzzaman and Dr Rafiqul Islam. Professor Choudhury envisioned building a modern Bangladesh.

He played a cardinal role in the development of the infrastructure system in the country. He was the team leader for the Multipurpose Cyclone Shelter Programme and prepared the master plan for cyclone shelters in the coastal areas of Bangladesh in the early nineties. He was a key member of the steering committee on the Bangladesh National Building Code (1993) and played a vital role in formulating the first design wind speed map and seismic zoning map of Bangladesh. He was the chairman of the Panel of Experts (advising the Government, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF), Japan) for the Bangabandhu (Jamuna) Bridge. He was also the head of the International Panel of Experts for the Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project. Besides, he acted as the chairman of the panel of experts in many other mega projects such as the First Dhaka Elevated Expressway PPP Project (21 km), Karnaphuli Tunnel, Dhaka Subway, Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway Project (24 km) and many others. Both engineering and non-engineering communities hold immense respect for Professor Choudhury. He was the president of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) for a year. He was appointed as the Advisor in the Non-Party Caretaker Government in April 1996 and was in charge of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and the Ministry of Water Resources. Besides such top-tier leadership activities, Professor Choudhury also served as the chairman or head of many other government and non-government committees and organisations, including as Chairman of the Board of Directors of Bangladesh Shilpa Bank (1996-1998), Chairman of the Board of Governors, Bangladesh Institute of Technology, Chittagong

(1997-2004), Vice President of the Bangladesh Computer Society, founder president of Bangladesh Earthquake Society etc. Professor Choudhury received numerous accolades nationally and internationally in recognition of his contributions. In 2019, he received 'The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon', the highest civilian award in Japan, for his outstanding contribution to the economic development of Bangladesh through Japanese official development assistance (ODA) projects. In 2017, he was awarded the prestigious Ekushey Padak for his contribution to science and technology. Professor Choudhury was also the first person of Bangladeshi origin to receive an honorary doctorate from a British University; he was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Engineering by Manchester University in 2010. Professor Choudhury was also the recipient of numerous other awards and medals such as the Dr MA Rashid Memorial Gold Medal (1997), IEB Gold Medal (1998), Rotary Club Foundation SEED award (2000), Bangladesh Computer Society Gold Medal (2005), ICT Champion Award by Bangladesh Association for Software and IT Services (BASIS, 2009), and the BDI Lifetime Achievement Award (2017). He was born in Sylhet on November 15, 1943, and passed away on April 28, 2020. He was happily married to Selina Choudhury and blessed with two children. Professor Dr Jamilur Reza Choudhury proved to the world that Bangladeshi engineers could confidently lead challenging mega-projects. Bangladesh will remember his exceptional contributions to infrastructure projects for decades to come. **Tanveer Ahmed Chowdhury is a journalist and researcher.**



Jamilur Reza Choudhury was born in Sylhet amid British colonial rule on November 15, 1943 as the middle child of five siblings. Mr. Choudhury graduated from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), in 1963.

He was a proud alumnus of Dhaka College, BUET and the University of Southampton. He was one of just dozens of structural engineering students in the country. A mind with brilliant acumen, he was the vice chancellor of the

University of Asia Pacific as well as president of the Bangladesh Mathematical Olympiad Committee since 2003. Choudhury was also conferred with the Commonwealth Academic Staff Fellowship in 1974 and was requested to spend

## The eminence of a structural icon

a year at the University of Surrey as a visiting associate professor for his tremendous prowess in his field. In September 1964 he was awarded a scholarship by Burma Shell to pursue MS in structural engineering. His thesis was on "Cracks in Concrete Beam using Computer-Aided Design". In 1968, he was conferred a PhD on the topic of "Shear Wall and Structural Analysis of High-rise Building". Professor Choudhury had a major impact on the infrastructure development of Bangladesh. His reputation as the country's top civil engineer was garnered by his involvement in key infrastructure projects throughout the country. One such contribution that Professor Choudhury made to Bangladesh was in the early nineties, as the team leader for the Multipurpose Cyclone Shelter Programme, where he drafted the master plan for cyclone shelters that were established in the coastal areas of Bangladesh. Alongside this, he also played a key role in formulating the initial designs for wind speed map and seismic zoning map in Bangladesh as a member of the steering committee on the Bangladesh National Building Code. More than anything, it can be said that his contributions will continue to affect the lives of Bangladeshis as he played a vital role in the creation of the Bangabandhu (Jamuna) Bridge and the Padma Multipurpose Bridge. In both cases, he was the chairman of the experts panel that advised the government and

other stakeholders during the planning and construction. In 2010 he was honoured with Doctor of Engineering (Honoris Causa) by Manchester University for his contribution to augmenting engineering techniques and studies as the first ever Bangladeshi citizen to receive so from a British university. While working in BUET till 2001, Choudhury taught a few generations of engineers who made Bangladesh chart newer echelons of technological and engineering feats, so much so that they are capable enough to rub shoulders with the best and brightest in the world. He was also entrusted with developing a "Computer Center" at BUET and was appointed the director for about 10 years. Apart from this he has authored more

than seventy international papers in journals and elite conferences which has also made the face of civil engineering in Bangladesh's face glow brighter. He has also served time in the erstwhile caretaker government of Bangladesh. He was appointed as vice-chancellor of BRAC University between 2001 and 2010. Choudhury was appointed the chairman of the task force for developing software export and IT Infrastructure in Bangladesh from 1997 to 2000 under the Ministry of Commerce. He was a ranking member of the Prime Minister's Task Force on developing Digital Bangladesh. Besides, he was involved with several local and international organisations. Choudhury was a prolific scholar,

a humane individual and an exemplary teacher. He was a thought leader in his field of expertise and made tumultuous contributions to the nation's infrastructural development, for which he was awarded the Ekushey Padak in 2017. Unfortunately, we lost this precious soul on April 28, 2020, and his absence has left a clear void in the industry and in us. On this day we solemnly tender our heartfelt gratitude to this great son of the soil.



Prof. Jamilur Reza Choudhury at GPH Green Factory