

Faraaz’s message
to the world

The visionary and
the hero

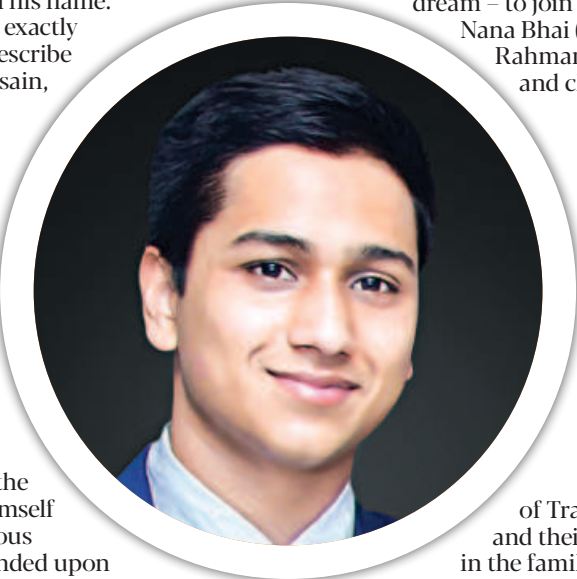
AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

Stumbling across a post on the meaning of “Faraaz”, I was taken aback by the qualities attributed to this name – “someone full of love”, one who “creates balance and harmony for anyone lucky enough to be called his friend”. The website further informs those with this name: “people around you feel safe because you give them joy. Giving joy to the world is one of your greatest gifts.” In Persian, Faraaz means “exalted” and “elevating”.

It was as if his destiny was already reflected through his name.

Because that’s exactly how one would describe Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain, the 20-year-old young man who became famous on July 1, 2016 – not through his brutal death along with 22 others in a terror attack in Holy Artisan Bakery, but by an act of remarkable loyalty and courage. He had the chance to save himself from the murderous group that descended upon innocents that night. All he had to do was walk away. But it meant abandoning his two childhood friends Abinta Kabir and Tarishi Jain, promising young university students with dreams to bring about change in society. And that was not who Faraaz was. He decided to stay and accept his fate which was certain death. In that moment, this slight young man, lovingly called “Chotoo” (little one), who loved to play pranks on his brother, cousins and friends, showed the world what loyalty, friendship, and integrity could look like in the face of terror.

All throughout his brief, precious life, Faraaz was known for going out of his way to help a friend. He had a natural flair for leadership and was elected president of his school’s student council. He lived a life of privilege yet was full of humility. He was class valedictorian



when graduating from high school. An all-rounder, he was a straight A student while excelling in athletics and volleyball. He was an ace student at Emory University in Atlanta, US. His grieving mother Simeen Rahman (now CEO of Transcom Group) stated, after he was so cruelly snatched from her: “He really was such a good child. I honestly couldn’t find any flaw in him.”

His best friend was his older brother Zaraif, with whom he shared a special bond. They were only a year and 10 months apart, going to the same university and sharing the same dream – to join their Nana Bhai (Latifur Rahman, founder and chairman

in their twisted minds, had decided to mercilessly kill anyone they considered the enemy of their religion. Among the slain foreigners were seven Japanese, nine Italians, and one Indian (Tarishi). Ishrat Akhond, a young Bangladeshi woman who defied the terrorists, was also murdered. Faraaz, a devoted believer of Islam, who prayed and fasted and had performed Umrah many times, who celebrated pluralism, cultural diversity, saw women as equals and embraced inclusiveness with open arms, just did not fit the stereotype of the violent, inflexible, backward face of Islam that dominates the mainstream Western narrative. Instead, he represented a progressive, accepting, and peaceful face of Islam. As the news of Faraaz’s act of

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of Transcom) and their mother in the family business. In fact, he was always very categorical about who he wanted to be like – his Nana Bhai, who doted on him and by strange coincidence, left the world the very day Faraaz died, four years later. Both brothers were very close to their maternal grandparents. To their maternal cousins Zoheb and Mikhail, they were buddies and big brothers. Very often people thought they were four siblings.

While family was a priority for Faraaz, so were his friendships, and this he proved in the most profound way, moments before death.

But that was not all he did when he sacrificed his life for others – two women, one from another faith. He provided a counter narrative to the ruthless, radicalised, sadistic youths who called themselves saviours of Islam and who,

courage spread, people around the world applauded him with the loftiest tributes – the Mother Teresa International Award (2016), recognition by the Garden of the Righteous Worldwide, and the Faraaz Courage Award 2016 to recognise exceptional acts of courage to encourage empathy and the spirit of bravery among young Bangladeshis.

Young people especially have been inspired by Faraaz. One hopes that his example has provoked individuals misguided and swayed by militant groups to rethink, and perhaps even shun, their allegiance to an ideology that promotes violence, misogyny, and blind hatred for anyone considered an outsider. The story of Faraaz must be told to our present and future generations to remind them of the noblest standards of humanity: friendship and acceptance of “the other”.

Aasha Mehreen Amin is the joint editor of The Daily Star.



ZARAIF AYAAT HOSSAIN

July 1 for many reasons could have been a day of mourning, but as I look back at the past six years I see instead, a day of immense significance. The fact that both Faraaz and Nana Bhai left us on the exact same day, just four years apart, continues to baffle me; but I guess that’s what makes July 1 even more important for us. Not a day goes by without thinking of Chotoo or Nana Bhai, and somehow over the past few years we are marvelously reminded of their presence in even the most unexpected moments.

Both Mr. Latifur Rahman and Faraaz have turned from loved ones whose loss we suffer, to beacons of values that act as our moral compass. Our symbol of ethics and our symbol of courage. Two years since Nana bhai left us, and six years since Chotoo, we expected that we’d need more time to move on yet today we move forward with them in our hearts. Even after they have left us, we witness the impact they’ve left behind.

Nana bhai continues to leave us awestruck. I can oversimplify how we, his family, remember him every day through a question I find myself asking ever so often: “How did you build this Nana bhai?” His legacy of Transcom and business built with uncompromising ethics, is a legacy we have the pleasure of witnessing every day. His dream, of his legacy outlasting his lifetime really did come true and it grows stronger every day. The leaders and luminaries who I hear calling Nana bhai their mentor or their dear friend sheds light on how he wasn’t just building a business; he made sure he took everyone around him ahead as well. But when I find myself looking up and asking how he built “this”, it is far from just his business, instead it is his life. We continue to feel how he was the one who held our family together, and kept everyone around him feeling optimistic about the future. We feel his presence in the actions taken by those in the Transcom family every day, and it continues to astound me how each and every person has internalised the code of ethics he instilled in his life’s foundation. We realise every

moment how Mr. Latifur Rahman truly led his company and his family - by example.

Faraaz too, never fails to make us proud. I find myself asking my brother: “How did you find the strength to stay back for your friends? It amazes me to see how, even after six years, not a person around us has forgotten Faraaz, and to see how they still speak about him with such admiration. Be it a personal setting or even professional, Faraaz somehow invariably comes up in discussions. Faraaz’s courage is not simply an inspiration for us but rather an example to take our minds to during the darkest moments. The answer to “what would Faraaz do?” continues to be the light at the end of every tunnel. What strikes me about Faraaz’s example is not just the mental strength he inculcates, but how he continues to spur us all into action. Be it through the activities of the Faraaz Hossain Foundation or simply standing by our loved ones. What we continue to understand is that what we do in Faraaz’s name is only but a fraction of what he means to those around us, and that his own legacy continues as the boy who did not back down. A legacy not only in our minds, but in the lives Faraaz has touched, for those he never met but did not fail to inspire.

On July 1, 2016 and 2020, we feared that one day we’d move past our precious Latifur Rahman and Faraaz, a fear that they’d be forgotten someday. However, what these last six years have taught us is that both of their lives continue beyond their presence in this world. They prove to us every year, every July 1, and in fact every day that they live on in us.

It’s almost poetic for Nana bhai and Faraaz to have both left us on July 1, I’m sure neither of them would have had it any other way. They had a special bond between them which is hard to explain in words, so I’ll share a story that sums it all up.

When Faraaz was six years old, and I was eight, we were asked the typical question of what we wanted to be when we grew up. I, of course, probably said something you’d expect a typical young boy to say. Faraaz simply said “I want to be Nana bhai”. When asked “okay, so what does Nana bhai do? What does that mean?” He simply said “I don’t know, but I just want to be Nana bhai when I grow up.”

Nana bhai was his hero, not the businessman but the human being. Little did he know that after July 1, 2016, he would become Nana bhai’s hero and that one day they’d be together again after leaving this world on the same day.

The writer is the grandson of Latifur Rahman and elder brother of Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain

HOLEY ARTISAN ATTACK VICTIMS

BANGLADESHIS

INDIAN

ITALIANS



FARAAZ AYAAZ HOSSAIN, 20
He was the grandson of Latifur Rahman, chairman of Transcom Group and Shahnaz Rahman, and son of Simeen Hossain, managing director, Eskayef Bangladesh Limited, and Muhammad Waquer Bin Hossain. He was completing his undergraduate studies at the Emory University in Atlanta, USA, and came to Dhaka on May 18 to spend his summer holidays.



ISHRAT AKHOND, 45
She worked as a human resources director at ZXY International FZCO and Arts Provocateur at Institute of Asian Creatives, Dhaka. According to her relatives and friends, she was always jolly, cheerful and loving. On June 26, 2016, Ishrat updated her Facebook status: “Key to happiness is to stay away from negative people, even if you know them for long. Stay blessed.”



ABINTA KABIR, 19
A US citizen of Bangladeshi origin, she was a student of Oxford College of Emory University in the US. She came to Dhaka on June 27 to visit her family and friends on summer vacation. She is the daughter of the chairperson of Elegant Group that owns Lavender Superstore in Gulshan.



RABIUL KARIM, 34
Rabiul Karim, assistant commissioner, DB, is one of the two officers who got killed as they responded to the hostage crisis immediately. He established a kindergarten named “Kabi Nazrul Bidyasiri” and a school named “Blooms” for physically-challenged children at his village. He used to bear all the cost of the schools. Splinters hit him in his chest during the attack.



SALAUDDIN KHAN, 49
The officer-in-charge of Banani Police Station suffered splinter wounds in his throat. He bled excessively, which led to his death. He left behind his wife Remkim, two children and a host of well-wishers. Born in Bankpara village of Gopalganj Sadar in 1967, Salauddin joined the police as a sub-inspector in August 1991. He was posted to Banani Police Station in 2015.



TARISHI JAIN, 19
She was an Indian citizen in Bangladesh. She was studying Economics at the University of California, Berkeley. She was in Dhaka on summer vacation and was among those trapped inside the café.



MARCO TONDAT, 39
He was a young businessman in textile sector of Cordovado (Pordenone) and worked for StudioTex Ltd. He was the father of a six-year-old daughter.



VINCENZO D'ALLESTRO, 46
A native of Caserta, Piedimonte Matese, he moved to Acerra (Naples) in October 2015. He was born in Wetzikon, Switzerland.



NADIA BENEDETTI, 52
Benedetti, managing director of StudioTex, a company with headquarters in London and a branch office in Dhaka, had been living in Bangladesh for 25 years. She had previously lived in Italy and Kenya.



MARIA RIVOLI, 33
Rivoli of Lombard lived in Solza with her husband and three-year-old daughter. She worked in textile sector and was on a business trip. She was in Bangladesh for several months before the attack.

ITALIANS



ADELE PUGLISI, 50
Adele, from Catania worked at Artsana as the quality control manager. She was planning to travel back home on July 2 (the day after the attack).



CLAUDIO CAPPELLI, 45
For over five years, Italian worked in Bangladesh with his textile company, which produced T-shirts, clothing and bedding. He lived in Vedano al Lambro in the province of Monza.



CRISTIAN ROSSI, 47
The Italian lived in Bangladesh for 15 years before going back to Italy. He was on one of his occasional business trips. He had intended to return home the day before the attack, but had to delay his departure to finalise a business contract.



CLAUDIA MARIA D'ANTONA, 56
She was the managing director of Fedo Trading Ltd, an Italian textile company operating in Bangladesh. She lived in Dhaka for over 20 years with her husband, Gian Galeazzo Boschetti, the sole Italian survivor of the attack.



SIMONA MONTI, 33
Monti, who worked in a textile firm, was seven months pregnant. She was supposed to return home soon from a long vacation. She lived in the town of Magliano Sabino in Rome.

JAPANESE

KOYO OGASAWARA, 56
Ogasawara of Katahira & Engineers International was an environmental impact assessment expert. He was scheduled to return home on July 5.

MAKOTO OKAMURA, 32
He was a transportation systems expert. He worked for ALMEC Corporation, a consulting company in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo.

YUKO SAKAI, 42
The Japanese was an engineer of ALMEC Corporation, a consulting company in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo.

RUI SHIMODAIRA, 27
He was an engineer of ALMEC Corporation, a consulting company in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo.

NOBUHIRO KUROSAKI, 48
He used to work for Oriental Consultants Global, a Tokyo-based construction consulting company.

[The seven Japanese were involved in the work to improve the traffic situation in Dhaka, according to NHK, Japan's national public broadcasting organisation]

JULY 1
Five terrorists storm the Holey Artisan café at 8:45pm
19 hostages, including 16 foreigners, killed within 30 minutes
One more foreigner killed a couple of hours later
31 police officials injured in grenade attacks around 10:30pm
Rab DG urges TV channels

to stop live coverage at 11:20pm
JULY 2
Banani OC Salauddin declared dead at 12:14am
DB AC Robiul Islam pronounced dead at 1:08am
SITE Intelligence reports at 1:26am that IS claimed responsibility
Meeting held at the Gono Bhaban among the PM,

chiefs of the three services and top officials of law enforcement agencies around 3:00am
Army, navy, police, BGB, Rab and SWAT prepare for commando operation around 5:00am
Army-led “Operation Thunderbolt” begins at 7:40am
The operation ends at 8:30am; 5 militants, one chef killed



TIMELINE