

ILLUSTRATION: REHNUMA PROSHOON

The repercussion of body-shaming is a real deal; it's not a made-up trauma in my head.

## Confessions of a fat person

Raffat Binte Rashid s features editor at The Daily Star.

#### RAFFAT BINTE RASHID

I am fat. I would not use any other words like chubby or plump to sugarcoat my physical appearance, because people see me as fat, or "fatty" - a word I hate with a vengeance. In fact, it is a trigger word for me.

I have been called so all my life, even when my collar bones used to stick out; old photographs are lying, maybe? As far as memory goes, I remember being called "fatty," and a distant grandmother sweetly calling me "roshgolla."

Fat or roshgolla, I have been body shamed since childhood - directly or indirectly. Back then, the concept of not hurting the feelings of a fat person did not exist. It was not even a thing to register. What's bodyshaming? And what does it mean to go into depression because of it?

These fleeting comments were not given the consideration or second thought that they might have a traumatic impact on a child. It was cruel. As an adolescent, I could never wear a mini dress for fear of my tummy sticking out. It had a detrimental effect on my confidence level during puberty, a time when, because of my hormonal changes, I was taller and fatter than all my cousins. I hated myself for being welldeveloped, as everyone around me reminded me.

Being fat is a curse that you do not want to live with. You want to look as pretty and feel as accepted as the rest of your flock. It is almost like the ugly duckling's story, except fat people never become the swan. Their selfesteem and confidence level are so battered that, by the time they face adulthood, the scars are too deep to heal. You either become the jester of your peer group at the cost of making fun of yourself, or a sad listless being. Do not think it is a women-only issue – fat men, too, face all sorts of complexes about their bodies.

Very recently, I had a bad episode of unexplained bingeing disorder. I believe it was aggravated because of my depression or anxiousness. The eating made me feel guilty, and that in turn made me eat more until I wanted to throw up.

These are real issues, my own demons I have to deal with. But my husband, who is otherwise a very caring partner, brushed it aside by trivialising it as some theory I and aunties. I cringe deep inside

for me. I enjoy a good meal, and my bakery snacks, and sugary treats. Even now, when my knee hurts, I adopt a devil-may-care attitude towards my obesity. The only reason being that it is a battle I have fought all my life; no one ever appreciated my healthy and fit self. I was always the fat one for the naysayers, whose comments devastated my ability to love myself.

The repercussion of body shaming is a real deal; it's not a made-up trauma in my head. I fight with it every day when I dress for work or a night out with friends, which actually put me in a better state of mind than meeting families must have read in a magazine that when I think I will have to meet the

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depression triggers eating issues, and thus I am practising that. It was a hurtful comment. But knowing him, I know he loves to pull my leg. Nonetheless, I was deeply hurt. Instead of helping me chalk out a healthy plan to come out of it, he passed callous comments that did not help me. My doctors suggested healthy bingeing. So, my chips packets were replaced by carrot and cucumber sticks.

Don't get me wrong, I am not trying to go on a diet. Dieting is not

social aunties at family gatherings and weddings. "Tumi mota hoye gechho" ("You've put on weight") and "Eto kalo lagchhe" ("You look so tan") are some of the comments with which they greet you. Or "Have you met your cousin? She is into Pilates now. She looks like Barbie!'

Well, okay, I am Ursula, the sea witch from *The Little Mermaid*.

Accept me the way I am. It is time you left the issues of my well-being to me. Stop body-shaming, because it actually hurts.

# Remembering a man with a magical touch



Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and works for Change Healthcare, Inc., an information technology company. He also serves as senior research fellow at the US-based International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI).

#### **ABDULLAH SHIBLI**

heart because his passing has been a big loss for me personally. A globe-trotter, Kaiser Zaman, an organiser during Bangladesh's Liberation War and a well-known humanitarian, passed away on June 19, 2023 in Dhaka, at the age of 78. A man who could be considered a reincarnation of modesty, Kaiser, known to his family and friends as Kochi, had a brilliant and long career with international organisations and multinational corporations, but his lifelong work and his heart was dedicated to the interests of the dispossessed: the victims of war and civil unrest, and those fleeing the bites of hunger, anarchy, and natural disasters.

Kaiser Zaman was a man of many talents. I have known him my entire life and have seen him in many colours. He could be a sorcerer when he needed to be, travel to remote islands to help out victims of conflict and climate change, or he could simultaneously work from Geneva or New York City with international agencies to bring relief and help for migrants devastated by wars or the forces of nature. He was also one of the founding partners of Brac.

There is no easy way to capture the life and accomplishments of Kochi, my mother's first cousin. He was the youngest of three brothers and was born into a family with eight siblings. He had a rich pedigree, being the youngest son of Abdul Hannan Choudhury (former acting chairman of Pakistan Tariff Commission) and Syed Lutfunnesa Khatun, the youngest sister of Syed Mujtaba Ali. He is survived by his two elder brothers and three younger sisters.

His CV is a testament to his unending passion and dedication for the cause of underserved and destitute people. After receiving his first MBA from the University of Karachi in 1967 (he received second MBA from American University in Washington, DC) he worked for Unilever and Shell Oil in Pakistan and Bangladesh. When Brac's founder, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, joined Shell Oil in 1968, he formed a deep bond with Kaiser, which lasted until the former passed away in 2019. The two of them collaborated in founding HELP, an NGO, to provide relief to the victims of the catastrophic cyclone in November 1970. Kaiser worked personally in the char areas of Bhola and Manpura and was motivated to leave his job at Shell to support the relief and reconstruction efforts in the

From then on, he committed himself to humanitarian efforts, working as the deputy or head of operations for numerous UNHCR (United Nations High Refugees) Commissioner for missions and non-governmental organisations across the globe. He started his stint with UNHCR

I write this tribute with a very heavy in Geneva. Kaiser was all over the globe: Hong Kong, Thailand, Azerbaijan, Somalia, and even Afghanistan, and he never wavered in his enduring purpose, that is, to assist those in need, thereby touching countless lives and bringing hope to the most

> During the 1971 Liberation War, Kaiser Zaman actively participated in various initiatives aimed at shaping public opinion abroad in support of Bangladesh. After Bangladesh gained independence, he became one of the earliest employees of Brac, joining soon after its inception in 1972. A press release from Brac said, "Kaiser Zaman's legacy will forever shine as a beacon of hope, compassion, and tireless advocacy for those who need it the most."

> In 1994, when Kaiser was

AN OPEN DIALOGUE around the block until I found him again."

After his beloved wife of 45 years, Wendy Sacks Zaman, passed away and was buried in Costa Rica in 2019, he was torn and lost. Both Kochi mama and Wendy mami were socially active, and very generous with their time, hospitality, and mentoring support for family and friends, whether in Baku, the US, Thailand, Hong Kong, or Costa Rica.

Of the many dilemmas he faced, one was: what should he do now? Should he settle in Costa Rica, the US, Thailand, or Bangladesh? He received a call from his old friend, Sir Fazle, who tried to lure him back to Dhaka and persuaded him to join the Brac governing board. Initially, Kaiser was hesitant. He could not commit because he would have to wrap up his affairs in all these countries. But Sir Fazle was persuasive. He told Kaiser, "Kochi, you only need to be in Dhaka twice a year for the board meetings." He could not turn down his old friend and mentor but left soon after that because of health problems. "Board meetings can be sometimes taxing," he'd said to me over the phone.

He was in Dhaka when the Covid lockdown happened in March the head of UNHCR in Baku, 2020, and while he travelled to Azerbaijan, he wrote about his the US after that, he developed



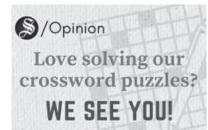
Kaiser Zaman passed away on June 19, 2023.

PHOTO: COURTESY

experience while helping the refugees during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988-1994). Kaiser arrived in 1992 in Baku amid the war and worked there until 1997.

In 1994, he wrote in Azerbaijan International, "Last night, while stopped at a traffic light here in Baku, a young child approached my car pleading, 'Help me, I'm a refugee.' The light changed and I moved on as there were cars behind me. Besides, it was 10 o'clock, I was dead tired and in a lousy mood. But then I caught myself: 'How is it that I could go 500 kilometres to help refugees in other regions of this country, and here's this desperate kid right here in my back vard and I've turned my back on him.' I realised then that if I didn't do something for him, I wouldn't be able to sleep that night. So I drove some roots in Dhaka and breathed his last there. What a remarkable journey he had! To be born in Dhaka and find his final resting place in Dhaka.

I met him in December 2022 during my last visit to Dhaka and saw him a few times at his place in Gulshan. Our chats, whether face-to-face, on messenger, or on the phone, were always long and cordial. I recorded several of my conversations with him. After came to the US, I saw on his Facebook page that he had displayed my books with the caption, "My nephew, Dr Abdullah Shibli, is not only a scholar but a romantic, too. It runs in the family but skipped me." My books had two ornate bookends that symbolised his love and the sense of fostering for all who came in touch with him.



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### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS** 1 Mamas' mates 6 Weather aid 11 Plain to see 12 Find darling 13 Revealing inadvertently 15 Refiner's supply 16 Clinic cost 17 Corn spike 18 Rakes with gunfire 20 Keats work 21 Garden section 22 Phoenix team 23 Got by 26 Campaign

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43 Midway sights **DOWN** 1 Casual shirts 2 Turn away 3 Piper of rhyme 4 Gallery fill 5 Didn't tip 6 Is furious

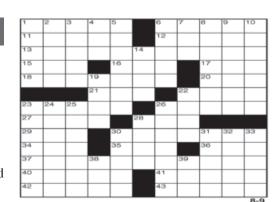
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8 Distribute

9 Daughter of Minos 10 Stifle 14 Require 19 Aid in crime 22 Musical number 23 Skilled 24 Running wild 25 Choice of colors 26 Dressing base 28 Make

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### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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