

## Business luminaries remembered

MCCI pays tribute to Samson H Chowdhury, Syed Humayun Kabir and Amjad Khan Chowdhury

Star Business Report

In the pantheon of Bangladesh's entrepreneurs, few rank higher than Samson H Chowdhury, Syed Humayun Kabir and Amjad Khan Chowdhury.

A host of business leaders, economists, diplomats and civil society activists gathered yesterday to pay tribute to them for their contribution to the economy.

"Each of them was truly larger than life," said Syed Nasim Manzur, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, at a memorial meeting at the chamber's office in the capital.

"It is remarkable how each of them blazed trails for others to follow, creating new industries in their wake, yet they each remained humble, committed and full of hope to the end."

"I thank their families for sharing them with us. They will also be a source of inspiration for the future generations," he said.

Samson H Chowdhury, the founder of Square Group, served the MCCI as its president in 1996 and 1997. He transformed a small medicine business in Pabna into one of the largest and most successful conglomerates in Bangladesh. He died in January 2012.

Syed Humayun Kabir, chairman of Renata Ltd, a pharmaceutical company, was the president of the country's oldest chamber in 1979 and 1984. He created Sajida Foundation in 1993 as a marriage anniversary gift to his wife and funded it with a majority shareholding in Renata.

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He helped in shifting and renaming Narayanganj Chamber to the MCCI. He passed away last month.

Amjad Khan Chowdhury, founder of Pran-RFL Group, served the MCCI as its president in 2011 and 2012. He transformed his dream of rural advancement into reality and created an agro-processing firm. He also died a month ago.



Dignitaries observe a one-minute silence at the beginning of the memorial meeting at the MCCI office in Dhaka yesterday. Photo: STAR

A one-minute silence was observed at the beginning of the memorial meeting.

"Their departures have left behind not just world-class companies, organisations and industries, but also inspiration for future generations to be great like them," said Nasim Manzur.

CK Hyder, founding secretary general of the MCCI, said the chamber was lucky to have the three as its president as they made it a respected trade body through their leadership.

"They never saw leadership as a privilege; rather they accepted it as a huge responsibility. The MCCI has benefitted from their leadership."

He recalled one incident when Samson H Chowdhury gave away his own cardigan to a Bangladeshi migrant worker during their trip to Seattle via Seoul.

"Amjad Khan created his business out of his concern for the rural poor," said M Anis Ud Dowla, chairman of ACI Ltd.

Latifur Rahman, chairman of Transcom Group, said the business community, the economy and he himself have benefitted from the values and ethics the three nurtured.

"When the word 'values' comes to my mind the name of Syed Humayun Kabir also comes up instantly, while Samson H Chowdhury was a giant in the business community and advised me when I entered the pharmaceutical sector even though I was going to be his competitor."

About Amjad Khan Chowdhury, Rahman said: "He never basked in his success."

Syed Manzur Elahi, chairman of Apex Group, said the three led simple life and money did not bother them. "People like them are becoming scarce day by day as most

entrepreneurs are running after making money at any cost.”

Barrister Rafique-Ul Huq called for national recognition for the three for what they have done for the country in terms of poverty eradication and job creation.

Mahbub Jamil, chairman of Singer Bangladesh, said the three have proved that one can achieve anything in their life even by doing business ethically.

“There should be essays about them in textbooks so young generation can learn from their ethical and moral standards,” he said.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the three were the architects of post-Bangladesh industrialisation. “They invested in different sectors, leading diversification of the industries.”

“They also applied corporate social responsibility in their companies much before the theory came,” the economist said.

Farooq Sobhan, a former foreign secretary, said they showed enormous sense of social responsibility.

Speaking on behalf of their families, Anjan Chowdhury, a director of Square Group, Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, deputy managing director of Pran-RFL, and Kaiser Kabir, chief executive of Renata Ltd, thanked the MCCI for organising the meeting and paying tribute to their family members.

Dr Kamal Hossain, a noted jurist, M Matiul Islam, first finance secretary of the country, Rokia Afzal Rahman, a former MCCI president, and Simeen Hossain, chief executive of Eskayef, were also present.