

The Sunday Guardian

Write To Us :
letters@sunday-guardian.com

WEDNESDAY | NOVEMBER 25, 2015

[Home](#) [News](#) [Investigation](#) [Analysis](#) [Business](#) [Sports](#) [Search...](#)[Subscribe](#) [facebook](#) [Follow](#) [RSS](#)[Guardian20](#) [Artbeat](#) [Bookbeat](#) [Young&Restless](#) [Technologic](#) [MasalaArt](#) [ReviewZone](#) [ViewAskew](#) [Columnists](#) [PictureEssay](#)

DATELINE DHAKA

ZAFAR SOBHAN

www.sunday-guardian.com/profile/zafar-sobhan

Zafar Sobhan is editor of the Dhaka Tribune, a daily newspaper.

Syed Humayun Kabir was one of Bangla's best



Syed Humayun Kabir

He believed that business should be a force for the common good and ran his businesses accordingly.

We have all heard of Prof Muhammad Yunus and Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, and both these gentlemen deserve all the praise and plaudits that they have received over the years. But when the history of Bangladesh's development is written, there is another name that deserves to be mentioned alongside theirs, and that is of Syed Humayun Kabir, who passed away on 7 July at the age of 83 after a

long and distinguished career in business and philanthropy.

Kabir's contribution to social welfare and social justice in Bangladesh was every bit as remarkable as that of his better-known compatriots and brothers in arms, and will in the long-run be seen to be every bit as significant. In fact, it is in this field that Bangladesh can truly be said to lead the world and it is this sector that we should be most proud of. We inherited a war-torn, impoverished, devastated country in December 1971, and it is nothing short of a miracle that

The Sunday Guardian

Write To Us :
letters@sunday-guardian.com

WEDNESDAY | NOVEMBER 25, 2015

[Home](#) [News](#) [Investigation](#) [Analysis](#) [Business](#) [Sports](#) [Search...](#)[Subscribe](#) [facebook](#) [Follow](#) [RSS](#)[Guardian20](#) [Artbeat](#) [Bookbeat](#) [Young&Restless](#) [Technologic](#) [MasalaArt](#) [ReviewZone](#) [ViewAskew](#) [Columnists](#) [PictureEssay](#)

in 44 short years we have come as far as we have, in terms of human development.

In area after area, from infant mortality to life expectancy to poverty rates to immunization to education to empowerment of women, the list of our achievements is long. Of course there is much left to do and a long way to go, but we should never lose sight of what it is we have achieved so far and how and why it is that we have been able to accomplish what we have done. And it is to men such as Syed Humayun Kabir and his vision and creativity that we owe where we have come to as a nation. His story is an extraordinary one.

Let us start by lauding him as a businessman, who was widely respected by his peers, both inside the country and outside, as the chairman and managing director of Pfizer Ltd in Bangladesh for over two decades and then of Renata, its successor. His probity and integrity as a businessman are legendary, as was his acumen and ability. His business career alone provided a model for how business could be conducted in this country, and his integrity has served as a beacon to two generations of business leaders and executives in Bangladesh.

It was in recognition of his moral and intellectual authority that he was elevated by his peers to the presidency of the MCCI and FICCI, among a host of other leadership positions in industry, to say nothing of his many other board directorships, both of businesses as well as non-profits.

In a country where business is seen by many as a byword for corruption and criminality, he stood out as a shining example of what a businessman could be and what the sector could do for the country.

It was this reputation for probity and ability, combined with his commitment to the common good, which led to his invitation to join the board of BRAC (a world-renowned NGO), which he subsequently chaired for over two decades. His long association with BRAC alone would itself serve as a mark of his commitment to social welfare and social justice. But it was in the final chapter of his career that Kabir came into his own and left a legacy behind that will serve as a lesson and an inspiration for all of us who want to make a difference and to contribute to the common good.

His achievements as a business leader or as the chairman of BRAC alone (or indeed as a founding member of Transparency International, Bangladesh) would have been sufficient to cement his legacy, but he did not stop there. And it was with the founding of the SAJIDA Foundation in 1993, a 25th wedding anniversary gift to his wife, Sajida Humayun Kabir, that he not only created his most enduring legacy, but also laid down a template for philanthropy for the future, which combined his commitment with his creativity in a unique way.

Kabir had always held that business should and could be a force for the common good and ran his businesses with this philosophy in mind. But what was so remarkable about the founding of SAJIDA Foundation in 1993, which was funded by a majority shareholding in Renata, was the explicit joining of a private enterprise (Renata) to a public purpose (the funding of the work of SAJIDA).

In doing so, Syed Humayun Kabir became one of those rare men who truly walked the walk. He did not just profess a commitment to social welfare and social justice, he embodied it. But equally important, he has created a template that others who wish to devote themselves to the common good may follow.

It is his creativity, as much as his commitment, that makes his contribution so noteworthy and serves as an example of the genius we have for innovative ways in which to serve our fellow men and women, in which Bangladesh leads the world.

Zafar Sobhan is the Editor, Dhaka Tribune