

Goodbye, mayor



Rest in peace - Photo: MAHMUD HOSSAIN OPU



Abak Hussain

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No doubt, DNCC Mayor Annisul Huq had the right ideas, and the right vision.

It is a tragedy for the nation that we lost him to illness before those visions for the city could be fully realised.

For months, the mayor had been suffering from cerebral vasculitis, a disease causing the inflammation of the blood vessel wall involving the brain.

On Thursday night, he passed away at a hospital in London, UK, at the age of 65. He had his wife and children by his side.

And while it is a matter of great sadness that he passed away without having the time to fully see through his vision for a “clean, safe, and smart” city, no one can say he wasn’t able to live life to the hilt.

His life and journey have been extraordinary, and few people in the world can boast of such diverse accomplishment within a lifetime.

Born in 1952 in a Noakhali village, Annisul Huq went on to study economics at the universities of Rajshahi and Chittagong.

In the 80s and 90s, Annisul became a known face in Bangladesh as a television host, interviewing personalities like Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and BNP chief Khaleda Zia.

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After founding Mohammadi Group, his reputation grew as a businessman, and many years later, he found himself as head of the BGMEA, and later as president of FBCCI in 2007-2008, during the caretaker government’s regime.

His ascension to the post of mayor of the municipality of Dhaka North was a surprise to some, but in retrospect, seems inevitable -- his work had been influencing government policy for some time, both home and abroad.

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Few challenges are as daunting as the job of fixing Dhaka city.

Nonetheless, Annisul Huq did bravely take the bull by its horns and made better headway than most of his predecessors.

Smart, clean, and green -- that was his motto. Of course, those words conjure up an image of perhaps Singapore or Vancouver, not Dhaka.

So it is not surprising that Mayor Annisul received his share of criticism, as any mayor of the most unliveable city in the world is bound to.

Dhaka won't become all those things any time soon, but Mayor Annisul had the right idea.

Whether we like it or not, digital is the future, and modern cities have the choice of getting on the technology train or getting left behind.

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To that end, he set up hundreds of closed circuit TV cameras in residential areas in Gulshan, Banani, and Baridhara.

It is a fact that crime levels have dropped since those initiatives, and people in Dhaka North do feel much safer.

The bane of the residents of Dhaka, though, is the city's horrifyingly bad traffic jam situation. Annisul Huq understood that the way to fix it was to reform public transport, which meant regulating the bus companies and bringing them under six umbrellas.

As for his attempt to clean up the city in a rather literal sense, Annisul Huq deserves praise for setting up thousands of rubbish bins at the roadside across Dhaka North.

Of course, old habits die hard, and not all Dhaka residents used the bins as much as they should, but the mayor cannot be blamed for human nature.

Mayor Annisul's death feels, to many -- even those who never personally knew him -- quite disheartening. And this is because many Bangladeshis truly felt that his policies were slowly

but surely making a difference.

Rest in peace, mayor. You will be sorely missed.

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