

Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, born in Sylhet in British India, 11 January, 1945.

Father's name: Sakhawat Ali Chowdhury, public servant who participated as a student in the nonviolent noncooperation movement of India.

Mother's name: Sufia Chowdhury; maternal uncle, Noor Ahmed Chowdhury took active part in what was dubbed as 'Naval Mutiny', 1946 against the British rule in India.

Siblings: brothers: Mamud Elahi CSS, Qudrat Ilahi Chowdhury CSP, Engr Jahangir-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Engr Shahjahan-e- Elahi Chowdhury and sisters: Fatema Mobin Chowdhury, Rahima Sofi Chowdhury

Wife: Asma Tawfiq, daughter of famed Poet Jasim Uddin

Children: Daughters, Dr. Bushra Tawfiq Chowdhury and Mehnaz Tawfiq Chowdhury married to Dr. Munawwar Sohul and Ahmed Shadmann respectively; two grandsons, Rayeed Munawwar and Aadi Tawfiq Shadmann.

Alma mater: Barisal Zilla School (Matriculation), Dhaka University (BA), Panjab University (MA), Leeds University (Postgraduate Diploma), Harvard University (Doctorate)

Awards: Bir Bikram for gallantry in the Liberation War of Bangladesh, Spanish...

Professional occupations: Lecturer, Dhaka University, Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP), Commissioned Officer, Bangladesh Armed Forces (BDF) and a civil servant of the government of Bangladesh.

Offices held: Spent only a few years in the service of Pakistan government and the rest, three decades in the service of Bangladesh government. Details are below:

Assistant Commissioner (Quetta, Dhaka & Dinajpur), Subdivisional Officer (SDO), Meherpur, Subsector Commander, Sector 8 (BDF), Deputy Secretary (Ministry of Defence), Deputy Commissioner, Tangail, Director, Freedom Fighters' Welfare Trust, Deputy Secretary, (Family Planning & Welfare Division), Joint Secretary (Establishment Division & Finance Division), Managing Director, Bangladesh Shilpa Bank, Additional Secretary, Finance Division, Principal, Planning Academy, Secretary (Food Ministry, Statistical Division, Ministry of Power & Mineral Resources and Planning Ministry), Executive Chairman, Board of Investment.

Current occupation: Adviser to Prime Minister of Bangladesh for Energy, Power & Mineral resources with the rank of a Cabinet Minister since 2009–

Early life and education: Born in British India, Chowdhury had his early education in Dinajpur, K D School, Naogaon and went on to matriculate from Barisal Zilla School in 1959; he graduated from Dhaka University in 1964 and later got MA from Panjab University, 1965

Professional career: Chowdhury joined Dhaka University in 1966 as a Lecturer of Economics till he joined Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) in 1968. Since then he served the government of Bangladesh for over three decades, a third of which spent at the highest level of bureaucracy. After training at the civil service academy in Lahore in 1968, he served as Assistant Commissioner, Quetta and Dhaka and Dinajpur; he was appointed as Subdivisional Officer (SDO), Meherpur in 1970. Chowdhury ditched his public office of the Government of Pakistan to join the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. He was commissioned in the Bengal Regiment of Bangladesh Defence Forces (BDF) and was company and sub sector commander, Sector 8 of BDF. Besides the two companies under his command, Chowdhury was in charge of 4000 guerrillas to combat the Pakistan army from deep inside Bangladesh. He was decorated for gallantry with Bir Bikram for leading daring raids behind the enemy lines. Chowdhury was one of the main organizers of the Proclamation of Independence and swearing in ceremony of the Government of Bangladesh on 17 April, 1971 in Mujibnagar, situated in his subdivision. He along with Capt Mahbub deposited tk 44 million (equivalent to US\$ 10 million at that time) on behalf of Sector 8—the money collected during retreat, and also gold jewelry weighing 21 kg. These were the financial life lines during the early days of Bangladesh Liberation War.

Chowdhury reverted back to civil service of Bangladesh In 1972 and was subsequently posted as Deputy Secretary (Ministry of Defence), Deputy Commssioner (Tangail) where he established law and order in the wake of a devastating war in Bangladesh. Later, as the first Director (Freedom Fighters' Welfare Trust) he helped the treatment and rehabilitation of freedom fighters. Chowdhury went to Leeds University to do postgraduate diploma in 1974; on his return, he joined as Deputy Secretary (Ministry of Family Planning & Welfare) government of Bangladesh in 1975. In this capacity, as the leader of a core team, he designed the national family planning and welfare strategy and programs, which were not only acclaimed globally for success in reducing population growth of Bangladesh, but also remain till today—after four decades—the backbone and network of the health and family welfare infrastructure across Bangladesh.

Chowdhury left for Harvard in 1978 and earned Doctorate degree in 1983. His thesis examined theoretical aspects of decision making under uncertainty and the empirical investigation focused on technological diffusion.

On his return to Bangladesh , he served as Joint Secretary (Establishment Division, Finance Division), and was later posted as CEO (Managing Director), Bangladesh Shilpa Bank, leading industrial development bank. He helped restore the health of the bank which was

reeling under nonperforming loans. He reverted back to Finance Ministry where he served as an Additional Secretary and worked as a core team member that launched a successful major in-house “reform of budget and expenditure control” (CORBEC), of Finance Ministry of government of Bangladesh. For a brief period, he worked later as the Principal of Planning Academy. As a Secretary to the government of Bangladesh, he served in the Ministries of Food, Statistics, Energy & Power and Planning. He led major restructuring of public food procurement and distribution systems saving tens millions of dollars for the government. He was instrumental in designing and implementing reforms and innovation of power sector, including the induction of private sector in power generation to cope with the acute power shortages in the country. The competitive bidding in mid 1990s gave Bangladesh one of lowest power tariffs in the world and at the same time helped overcome power shortages. The model still remains in place as an effective strategy for power sector development with participation of private sector. Chowdhury also served for a brief period as Executive Chairman of Board of Investment. As the Secretary of Planning Ministry in 2000, he initiated formation of national task force for promoting digital innovation which he served as the member secretary.

Chowdhury retired from public service in 2002.

He spent few later years doing consultancy services for UNDP, UNFPA, World Bank and US Aid. Chowdhury led an innovative program of generating and distributing electricity produced from biogas in remote areas of Bangladesh named “Emergence”. The project was recognized with a silver medal for innovation by Asian Wall Street Journal in November, 2007.

Chowdhury was appointed as Adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for Energy, Power & Mineral Resources with the status of a cabinet minister in 2009. In this capacity he contributed significantly to overcoming the dire straights of power sector, in fact making Bangladesh surplus in power in 2020. The fast increase in power generation, transmission and distribution in the decade of 2009-2020 made possible extension of access to power to whole of Bangladesh and supporting an unprecedented economic growth and human development.

Bangladesh thus graduated to the rank of developing countries.

Chowdhury traveled widely sharing Bangladesh’s experiences in global, regional and multilateral fora. He also wrote profusely on Bangladesh and its journey to shared prosperity. He was invited to the Economic Growth Center of Yale University as a visiting fellow.

Publications: “Out of the shadow of famine: evolving food markets and food policy in Bangladesh”, Chowdhury co-authored with Raisuddin Ahmed, Steve Haggblade, published by John Hopkins University Press. His selected narratives of first hand experiences, including the Liberation War of Bangladesh: “Chariot of life: Liberation War, politics and sojourn in jail” was published by Penguin Random House, India and Srabon Prokashoni, Bangladesh.

Bangla and Check translations have also been published by Srabon Prokashoni. Chariot of Life received wide acclamations from local and regional media. An audio version is in progress.

References

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