

Prof Samir Kumar Saha honoured with 2023 BDI Lifetime Achievement Award

Award recognizes significant contributors to Bangladesh's development

Saha's focus: Pediatric infections in Bangladesh

He introduced life-saving vaccines in country

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Tribune Desk

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The Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI), a non-partisan research and advocacy group of independent scholars based in the United States, has announced that Dr Samir Kumar Saha is the recipient of the 2023 BDI Lifetime Achievement Award.

The research and advocacy group made the announcement on August 25.

The award will be formally presented at the BDI's next international conference in the US. As the recipient of this award, Prof Saha will be invited to offer a keynote lecture on a subject of his choice.

Established in 2012, the BDI Lifetime Achievement Award is designed "to honour outstanding individuals or organizations who, through their scholarly or policy and civic engagements, have contributed significantly to understanding the challenges, and the ideals that have led to the development of Bangladesh and have improved the quality of life for its citizens."

Through the award, the executive committee of the BDI recognizes and celebrates the work of a scholar or institution of high reputation and integrity whose work has inspired others to develop and implement ideas for the betterment of the people of Bangladesh.

This year, the BDI selection committee determined that throughout his long and distinguished career, Prof Saha has embodied the ideals of BDI by employing his scientific knowledge, talents, and skills to prevent infections and save lives among the pediatric population in Bangladesh with research and advocacy.

Dr Samir Kumar Saha was born on December 28, 1955. He attended Chandpur Government College. He earned his MSc from Dhaka University in 1984 and his PhD from the Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, India, in 1989.

His daughter, Dr Senjuti Saha, is a rising microbiologist who works with him as director and senior scientist at the Child Health Research Foundation (CHRF).

The two have been called the “dynamic duo of global health research” by Bill Gates.

Dr Samir Kumar Saha is married to Dr Setarunnahar, an eminent public health researcher who served as a government officer at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Their son is currently pursuing his PhD in Population Health Sciences at Harvard University.

Professor Saha is the founder and executive director of the Child Health Research Foundation.

He is the head of the Department of Microbiology of Bangladesh Shishu (Children) Hospital and Institute in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

He is globally known for his research on child infectious diseases with a specific focus on pneumonia, meningitis, and enteric fever in Bangladesh.

In his research, he strives to investigate the causative organisms behind these killer diseases, drug resistance patterns and serotype distribution.

Dr Samir Kumar Saha’s work facilitated the introduction of two life-saving vaccines, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV10), into the National Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) of Bangladesh.

In recognition of his pathbreaking work in clinical microbiology, Dr Samir Kumar Saha received the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) award in 2017.

He also received a fellowship from the American Academy of Microbiology. The same year, he received (sharing with, Professor Shahida Hasnain of Pakistan) the Carlos J Finlay Unesco Prize for Microbiology.

In the fall of 2019, an article by Professor Saha and his co-authors published in The Lancet received The Charles C Shepard Science Award for its outstanding contribution to public health.

In November 2019, Professor Saha received membership (FRCPath) from the Royal College of Pathologists, United Kingdom.

In 2020, Professor Saha and his daughter, Dr Senjuti Saha, were recognized as “Bill Gates’s Hero” for their work to reduce child mortality rates among children in Bangladesh and improve global health equity.

The same year, under the supervision of Dr Samir Kumar Saha and the direction of Dr Senjuti Saha, the first SARS-CoV-2 genome was sequenced in Bangladesh.

For his lifelong commitment and devotion to the field of science and public health, Professor Saha received the prestigious Ekushey Padak (second-highest civilian award in Bangladesh) in 2021 from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Dr Samir Kumar Saha is a member of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NiTAG) of the Bangladesh government.

He serves on the board of the International Society of Pneumonia and Pneumococcal Diseases (ISPPD).

Along with his co-authors, he has published more than 200 papers in peer-reviewed scientific journals relating to childhood typhoid, pneumonia, and meningitis.

Prof Saha is currently conducting several multi-site and multi-country research projects, funded by different international organizations.