



PHOTO: MONON MUNTAKA

Shammi's inspirational journey to Uttoron

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA

The transgender community are prone to discrimination and stigmatisation in our conservative society. Our constitution acknowledges all people as equal under the law. But unfortunately, the reality is quite different. "Previously, people used to run away when they saw us. Today, they are the ones who wait in line to get our services and I believe that is my greatest achievement," says Shammi, a transgender woman who opened her own beauty salon, Uttoron, in 2017 in Ashulia. Since then, she never had to look back. "Now, when I walk down the street, people look at me with respect," she adds. Many people in the transgender community have followed Shammi's path, finding respectable jobs for themselves. Shammi was born in Dhamrai as Samiul Alim. The government has officially given the transgender community the right to vote and

as per voter ID regulation, the birth certificate's name must be followed. Subsequently, Shammi had to use her birth name to earn her voting rights. At fifteen, Shammi left her family and her home. "Because of me, my family members had to suffer a lot and I wanted to stop their suffering," says Shammi. Even after so many years, Shammi's loved ones have not yet accepted her as a part of their family. Although she was invited to her brother's wedding reception, she was not allowed to sit with the other guests. As Shammi was passionate about accessorising and dressing up from a young age, she decided to start a career in the beauty and fashion industry. She went to India to receiving training under renowned hair stylist Jawed Habib's centre. Shammi's Uttoron now has branches in Dhamrai, Savar, Brahmanbaria and Manikganj. The salon is sponsored by a police officer. After the success of her salon, Shammi opened a training centre in 2018, with an aim

to train others from the transgender community, free of cost. Shammi shares, "When we opened the salon, everyone was scared and superstitious about us. They didn't know about us and refused to take our services at first." As days went by, people gradually started accepting them and the business boomed. Shammi runs the salon's Ashulia branch, along with her three fellow transgender women, and two local employees. "We want to include more people from outside our community. I wanted to prove that we can all work and live together peacefully," she says. Shammi is also a liaison officer at Bandhu, a social welfare organisation. "The society refuses to give us chances and we are often labelled as criminals or outcasts. All we want and need is the opportunity to do something that we are good at," she adds. Shammi plans to expand her training centre to help out more people like her in the years ahead.

'Workshop Encouraging Film and Web Content on Social Issues' in Cox's Bazar

YOUTH DESK

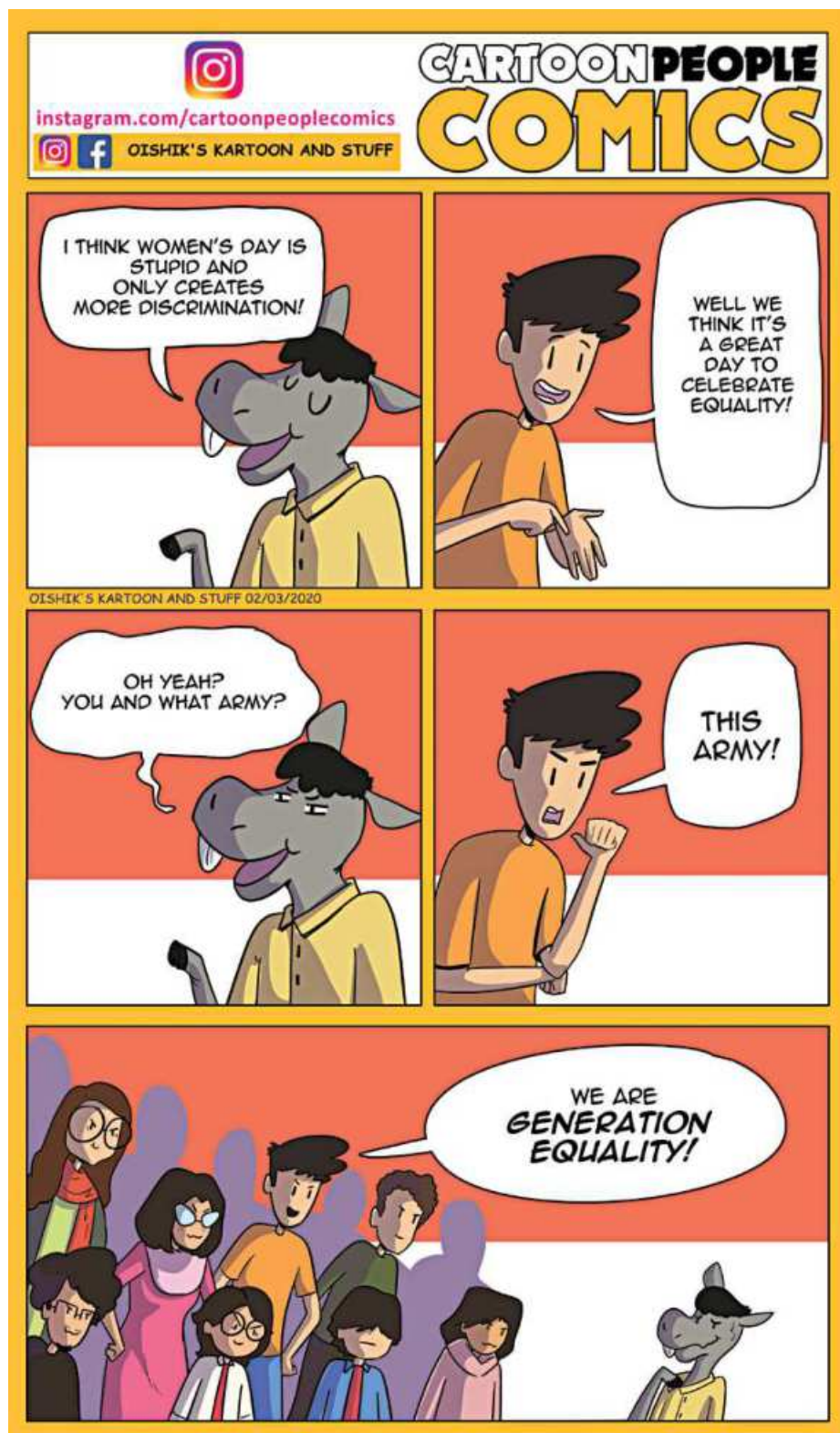
'Workshop Encouraging Film and Web Content on Social Issues' will take place in Cox's Bazar in April 2020. The on-line applications of this fully funded programme are open till tomorrow (March 7). Through this skill development programme, 20 young filmmakers (10 males, 10 females) will receive extensive training to develop film and web series projects. The aim of this three-month programme is to bring sustainability in the film industry of Bangladesh by empowering and nurturing young creative minds. This project is funded through an Alumni TIES small grant from the US Department of State, which is administrated by World Learning. EMK Center and Dream On are collaborating as the partners of the project. Grace Cox Smart Hotel is the hospitality partner.



DESIGN: SYED MINHJ HUSSAIN

"Through this workshop, young and aspiring filmmakers can develop projects covering social causes, and learn about how to take their projects to international film festivals, film markets, as well as local film and web series investors," said Shahla Islam, Project Lead. The programme will train aspiring filmmakers by focusing on untold stories of the underprivileged communities, youth movements and social stereotypes. The programme has three stages. In stage one, participants will attend a workshop conducted by two award-winning filmmakers: Arifur Rahman and Bijon Imtiaz. They will be developing film and web series ideas in a residential workshop at Cox's Bazar, where Bijon Imtiaz will be mentoring them on the directorial aspects of filmmaking and Arifur Rahman will take sessions on creative producing. In stage two, participants will continue working on the projects they have de-

veloped in groups during the residential workshop. They will make mood videos of 3 to 5 minutes, to visually depict the ideas of their fiction projects. In the third stage, a film market will take place, where investors, including representatives of web content platforms, media agencies, and sponsoring companies will be present, along with established filmmakers and media professionals. Workshop participants will pitch their feature films and web series projects, and a screening session will take place, where all the mood videos will be projected. For this advanced workshop, participants are required to have previous experience of writing, directing and producing short films, documentaries and television commercials in last five years. The programme has no particular age limit for the participants. To apply, go to: <https://forms.gle/wLqCLJfEcqzYxApq7>



Freelancers ruling the world

MD MIZANUR RAHMAN HIMADRI

Morsheda Mouri is a BBA graduate from University of Dhaka and the mother of a two and a half year-old child. She quit her teaching job at Sheikh Borhanuddin Post Graduate College when she became a mother in 2017. After a few years, she set out to pursue freelancing, so that she can work from home while spending ample time with her son. She opened Gigs, an e-learning centre that trains women in freelancing, in January 2018. Till now, the centre has successfully trained close to 100 women. Mouri always had a keen interest in computing. According to her, there are a variety of

work-from-home opportunities for women in fields such as graphic design, web design, web development, virtual assistance, search engine optimisation and content preparation among others. Her start-up, Gigs, offers 12 courses at reasonable prices. Their courses focus on digital marketing, graphics design and YouTube marketing among other subjects. According to Mouri, many women who are a part of Gigs have also received training through Skype, Facebook and other social media platforms from their homes. The length of the training courses varies from one to six months. After learning about outsourcing through Google and YouTube, many students of Gigs

are earning well from the comfort of their homes today. Ameena Helali, a resident from Mymensingh, said that she worked on a project of Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) for 12 years. After completing the project in 2017, she was just sitting idle at home for about a year. One day, she came to know about Gigs from Facebook and decided to take their course on social media marketing. Today, she is happy to be working in good online jobs. "Initially, I started as an IT trainer at Gigs, but as the number of students increased, I recruited five other female trainers," Mouri said. The start-up also helps women to land jobs in freelancing platforms like Upwork.



Morsheda Mouri

PHOTO: COURTESY