



Parvez Islam spends time with a few children, after a food distribution.

PHOTOS: COURTESY

Sohomormita Foundation looks out for the ones in need

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Parvez Islam started Sohomormita Foundation in 2018 to restore the basic rights and fulfill the basic needs of underprivileged families across Bangladesh. The idea came to him when he saw two kids trying to comfort their mother, who was too tired and drained due to the scorching heat in the busy street of Sobhanbagh, Dhanmondi. Belonging to a low-income family himself, Parvez has seen and lived a similar life to those children.

"I saw two young kids nursing their mother with just one small bottle of water, while I was returning home, after running some errands. Inadequate water supply is one of the major challenges in Dhaka, but this did not stop them from trying to help their mother," shares Parvez. "They were pouring the water over their mother's head, using a small plastic bowl." Parvez decided to help out this family and that night, he posted their photo on his Facebook profile, which was widely shared. Many reached out to him, and the next day, he came back to Dhanmondi to find out more about the mother and the kids. "They were a family from Kurigram who had lost their house. The father was a heart patient and his treatment cost them a fortune," explains Parvez. "Later, the DC of Kurigram contacted me and in a collaborative effort, we bought the family an easy bike and restored their house. The children now go to school."

Since then, many joined hands with Parvez in Sohomormita Foundation to fac-



Parvez Islam (R) at a villager's house in Satkhira, a region harshly affected by Cyclone Amphan.

itate education for underprivileged children. They also help out lost citizens. "Till date, we have managed education facilities for 44 children, and we have successfully reunited 88 families with their lost parents or old relatives," adds Parvez.

The foundation has been working relentlessly with 2,000 volunteers in these unprecedented times. Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, Parvez, along with his team, has been providing food to middle-income families. "The low-income families can access food and other forms of relief, but it seems like the middle-income ones are overlooked. Many of them are also unemployed," asserts Parvez. "Under such

circumstances, we were able to reach out to around 500 such families and help them confidentially." The members and volunteers of the organisation take all necessary precautions when they step out.

Parvez and his team also distributed food and other essentials to victims of Cyclone Amphan in Satkhira. When news about the cyclone broke out, they rushed to the disaster-prone area and started evacuating villages. Upon arriving in Satkhira, the team was faced with some unexpected challenges. They found out that most of the proper toilets were destroyed by the cyclone and a lot more people were left homeless and starving, than they had anticipated. As a

result, they had to stay back, and ensure health and hygiene measures for the people, alongside distributing food boxes. The volunteers travelled to the villagers' houses by boat and took them to shelters, where they were provided with cooked meals and other necessary items for the following week. "We soon noticed that the women and girls were unable to maintain menstrual hygiene, as there were no proper toilets or sewage systems in the region," says Parvez. "To overcome the problem, we provided the female villagers with sanitary napkins and also built 10 toilets in a higher land of the region, so that the sewage water does not mix with the flood water." Sohomormito Foundation has successfully provided food and sanitary napkins to over 2,000 families and is currently working to rehabilitate them by restoring their damaged houses.

Ek Takar Medical Camp, a project initiated by the organisation, provides doctors' consultancies and free medicines to those in need. They have also helped over 3,500 patients with blood donations. Sohomormito Foundation also organises *Hashir Dukan* for children during festivals, where they can buy toys and new clothes in exchange of flowers, crafts, paintings, or just simple promises to help others. The organisation currently operates in 31 districts in the country, including areas of Dhaka, Comilla, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Barishal. "We need as many hands on deck as possible. So, anyone is welcome to join us in Sohomormito Foundation," concludes Parvez.



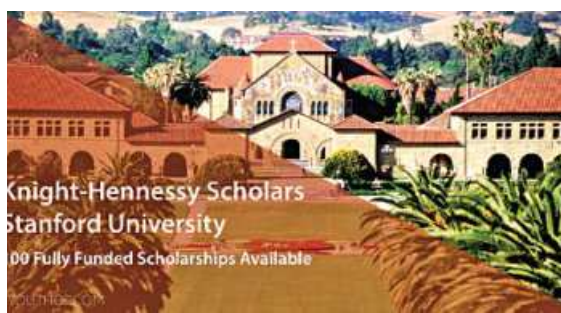
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Six changemakers from Bangladesh honoured at Diana Award 2020

YOUTH DESK

The Diana Award was established in memory of Princess Diana in 1999. It is regarded as the most prestigious accolade young individuals can receive for their social and humanitarian work. With a vision to empower the youth, it celebrates individuals from different countries for their notable contributions to society. The Diana Award is given out by the charity of the same name and is supported by Princess Diana's sons, The Duke of Cambridge Prince William and The Duke of Sussex Prince Harry. Six young changemakers from Bangladesh received the award this year at a virtual ceremony on July 1.

Shah Rafayat Chowdhury, Co-Founder & President, Footsteps Bangladesh

Shah Rafayat Chowdhury, a young environmentalist, is the co-founder and president of Footsteps Bangladesh, an organisation that began its journey in 2013. With over 13 social ventures and campaigns today, the Footsteps team aims to address social challenges such as access to safe and clean drinkable water, sanitation, waste management and disaster response to create vital development tools for underprivileged communities. In a bid to support marginalised communities through access to safe water, Footsteps initiated Project Trishna in 2015. Through the project, corporations can fund safe water filtration systems in marginalised communities, in return for their branding and promotion. "Project Trishna has grown into something much bigger in purpose, spreading across not just public places, but also schools and garment factories in Bangladesh," says Rafayat. "The journey so far has been an incredible learning experience. We will keep empowering communities with access to safe and clean drinkable water until it becomes a basic right for all," adds Rafayat. Project Trishna is currently running in 53 areas for 75,000 people across Dhaka, Chattogram and Tangail.



Sheikh Inzamamuzzaman, Founder, Study Buddy

Sheikh Inzamamuzzaman is the founder of Study Buddy, a start-up that provides an alternative learning platform to children with learning difficulties and their parents. The organisation uses interactive approaches such as augmented reality and gaming. Sheikh matches each child with unique learning methodologies and then connects them with relevant learning tools and special needs professionals. Since its inception two years ago, Study Buddy has supported over 1,000 children and 1,500 parents, led by a group of 4,000 volunteers. Sheikh regards winning the Diana Award as a great inspiration.



Muhammad Jahirul Islam, Founder, Ignite Youth Foundation

Founded by Muhammad Jahirul Islam in 2016, Ignite Youth Foundation (IYF) aims to alleviate poverty by ensuring secure futures for underprivileged children across rural areas, through access to quality education. IYF established a school in 2017, which currently hosts 67 students in Uttara. "I plan to expand our platform to incorporate secondary, higher secondary and university education," Jahirul shares. IYF also plans on opening an IT centre, to facilitate modern information technology-based training and education for students in rural areas.



Sakia Haque, Co-Founder, Travelettes of Bangladesh

Sakia Haque cofounded Travelettes of Bangladesh, an online community with over 50,000 women. As well as encouraging women to see the world, Sakia uses her travelling as an opportunity to educate young girls, particularly about menstruation, which is often considered a taboo topic. The road has not always been an easy one, as Sakia and her fellow volunteers have faced criticism for their work. Despite such challenges, they remain committed to their mission. "During a trip on a motorbike, I met 23,000 young women across 64 districts of the country. I also conducted sessions in different schools on the Liberation War of Bangladesh and self-defence," Sakia shares.



Raful Haque Anter, Organising Secretary, Dhaka Division, Volunteer For Bangladesh, JAAGO Foundation

Raful Haque Anter works with JAAGO Foundation to combat poverty by providing education to underprivileged children. He has led multiple campaigns, drawing attention to water pollution, eco-friendly transportation and the issue of economically disadvantaged youth. Among the most notable was the 'Sponsor a Child' campaign, which in one year organised 150 sponsor parents to help fund underprivileged children's access to education whilst also raising \$40,000. Raful is the organising secretary of the Dhaka division of Volunteer For Bangladesh, the youth wing of JAAGO Foundation. He develops project ideas and campaigns for the betterment of the society, engaging young individuals. Currently, Raful is also running a campaign as a JAAGO team member, to fundraise for COVID-19 relief for underprivileged communities across Bangladesh. "I am also working on a project through which students of JAAGO Foundation can access online education at this time," shares Raful.



PHOTOS: STAR & COLLECTED