



Ribana Haque discusses order details with the team members of Bunon.



The Bunon team working together in Naogaon.

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# Valiant women contributing to culture and economy

Bunon is an online-based social business that aims to economically support women through the production of crochet handicrafts. Founded by architecture student Ribana Haque in 2014, the initiative has been empowering 256 underprivileged women (200 locals in Naogaon and 56 Bihari women in the Dhaka Geneva Camp in Mohammadpur), who weave crochet handicrafts for the platform.

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Ribana started Bunon with only an investment of BDT 500 and a pair of crochet sticks without any concrete planning. She had to visit the Dhaka Geneva Camp to conduct a survey for academic purposes. This is when the struggles of the women from the Bihari community residing there, especially in terms of gaining economic stability, came to her knowledge. With Ribana's determination and relentless efforts from her team, Bunon gradually gained ground as a proper e-commerce platform on social media. It also helped the members to establish their own identities, in their respective circles.

As a social business focused on economically uplifting women, Bunon actively trains and employs them, making them financially stable, while lending a hand in the national economy. "It takes us two to five days to teach the basics of crochet arts to a girl. We have five trainers who are always available to our beginners," mentions Ribana when asked

about their vocational training structure. "The trainers help them through this process, which is enough to start working. Then, we slowly introduce the design-based work to them."

Girls who gain expertise in the weaving technique eventually become trainers and help the novices. "I have been with Bunon from the beginning. After joining this organisation, I could support myself financially and even contribute to my family," shares Khaleda Binte Alam, a trainer at Bunon. "Besides, I enjoy working with others and learning new things. I hope to stay with this initiative for as long as I can."

Bunon, as an organisation, brought huge changes in the lifestyles of these women, allowing them to walk with their heads held high. "Before joining Bunon, I faced many obstacles with work and was struggling to provide proper education for my children," says Forida Begum, the lead worker at Bunon. "But now, they are studying and the other women in my family have started working too. We are no longer fully dependent on our family. Instead, we have become a support system

for them."

Even as the world is grappling with the coronavirus pandemic, the members of Bunon are working from home and sending out handmade products through home delivery services. Working equipment with detailed briefing and raw materials are delivered to the workers' homes once a week, and collected by the end of the week. Ribana personally calls each of the workers from time to time, while the trainers ensure that they understand the designs and colour preferences, as per the orders' details.

Ribana aspires to reach out to a lot more women who want to be financially independent, but are struggling to find such opportunities. She dreams of opening an outlet in the city and extend her measures, to be able to employ at least 2,000 women. She had also started taking up online orders to ship abroad. However, those are on hold for the time being. "I believe that in the next 30 years, the women in Bangladesh will be economically empowered through their own skills," concludes Ribana.



# An affordable solution to combat COVID-19

Young researcher Mohsinul Bari Shakir has built an ultraviolet (UV) janitor to combat COVID-19 in Bangladesh. He is also the shareholder and Chief Operating Officer at the IT-based company, Aqualink BD. Born in Dhaka, Shakir's hometown is in Sylhet. He completed his BSc in Computer Science from BRAC University in 2018. As his father is a government official, Shakir had to travel a lot and attend different schools at different points of his life. He has three internationally published researches, and is currently working on two more journals.

SHARMIN JOYA

Ever since the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China, Shakir was concerned about the spread of the virus. For precautions, he thought of using the ultraviolet type C light that has been used for many years for sterilisations in developed countries. "In China, they used UVC lights to germicide. It was quite effective," Shakir says, "with that idea, I thought of making such a product from a sense of responsibility towards my country." Sterilising with UV light is one of the most effective methods of disinfection. It is also approved by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, USA.

Shakir, along with four others, formed a research and development team. The other members are Syed Mohammad Kamruzzaman (Quality Assurance Engineer), Shahriar Sakib (Senior Embedded System Engineer), Sazzatuz Zumma Ismam (Production Engineer) and Tanvir Ahmed (Embedded System Engineer). "We developed some prototypes based on UV light to slow down the spread of COVID-19," shares Shakir. It took them three months to complete the project.

"Usually, such devices are very expensive. However, we have used local technologies to minimise the cost and keep it affordable," explains Shakir. "Developing the UV janitor at an affordable price was amongst the biggest challenges, as was importing materials amidst all the travel restrictions." Shakir is grateful to his father, for his guidance in the process. The Bangladesh Army and most government offices are currently using the machine. "Ours is the first UV janitor to be available for all kinds of consumers in Bangladesh," adds Shakir. "It comes in a compact box, in which cellphones, wallets, sunglasses, masks, keys rings, helmets, files, food



(From left) Sazzatuz Zumma Ismam, Fahim Shahriar Sakib, Mohsinul Bari Shakir, Syed Mohammad Kamruzzaman and Tanvir Ahmed. PHOTO: COURTESY

packages, wrist watches, bags and most importantly, cash, can be disinfected in just a few minutes." The machine has two versions, the UV Janitor and UV Janitor Pro. They differ in size and intensity of light, with different UVC light-based solutions for homes, offices, hospitals, airports, hotels, resorts and restaurants. The researchers have also developed disinfecting machines, using the same UVC light, for factories. They have tried their best to maintain international standards, with this project. "Our Managing Director, Abdul Gafur Bashir, supported us the most, as being a technology company, we had many IOT products and research to do," shares

Shakir. "He supported us with research and development for the UVC based solution. He told us that we should do something for people with the technology available right now."

The team struggled to find the UVC light with the wavelength of 253.7 nanometer, which is effective in destroying the SARS and MARS group viruses and is being used to combat COVID-19 now. Their UVC light has CE certification. "The light is harmful for the human eye and body. Keeping that in mind, our product has a smart safety system - whenever its door is opened, the light automatically turns off," concludes Shakir.