



For a Better Tomorrow

SUMAIYA AHSAN BUSHIRA

If you take a walk to Shahbagh on a sunny weekday and happen to pass by a footpath next to Aziz Market, you will find yourself looking at an intriguing sight. A group of about 70 shabbily dressed street children, sitting on the side of the road, books open in front of them, looking at a few adults standing next to a blackboard -- an open air school!

The founder of this unusual school,

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Nasiruddin Biswas Rubel a student of the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh (ICMAB) decided to start this project after having stumbled upon a young boy named Ridoy, who came begging to him for money. Rubel took him to a small local restaurant to have a meal instead. There, he unveiled the truth behind Ridoy's misery. He realised that the child had wanted the money for drugs to feed his addiction. Rubel, after having thought about this incident, went to a slum near Shahbagh. He saw many poor children like Ridoy, deprived of their basic rights, getting an education being one of many. Rubel

decided to create a school for these street children, and thus began Prothom Shurjo in 2010.

By the year 2011, around 40 students were enrolled and in the past two years, another 50-55 students had been admitted. In total there are now 130 students, from which a large number are eventually sent to attend government schools. Since the students are past a certain age when they begin their education, they are tutored under Prothom Shurjo by students from different universities before they are admitted into government schools. Expenditures for uniforms, stationery, and medical expenses are taken care of by the organisation and its body of volunteers, some of whom are interns at government hospitals. The school meticulously follows the syllabus and books assigned by the education board. Additionally, they provide lessons on issues of awareness and hygiene.

In a country where there are countless uneducated children who grow up to become vagrants or get involved in crime, endeavours such as this provide a great opportunity for them to learn and become productive members of society. The Prothom Shurjo project and others like it have proved that the desire to learn is there, it is just a question of accessibility to a proper education system that is lacking.



Just For Laughs

NAZIBA BASHER

Graduating from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) with a Bachelor's Degree in Electrical Engineering, and getting his Master's degree on the same subject from The University of Michigan -- naturally, Naveed Mahbub was destined to be a big-shot engineer. However, Naveed simply could not ignore the talent -- the power to make people laugh.

"I was always the clown amongst friends," he says. "I enjoyed making people laugh since I was a 'child' - to a point where I felt like it was my duty to bring laughter into people's lives." He won the title of Best Male Comedian at the Las Vegas Comedy Festival in 2007. "That's when I realised that this is what I wanted to take up as a career," he says.

There are always challenges for a person working in the entertainment field. Since the art of stand-up comedy was not well-known in Bangladesh, it took a while to kick-start the career, according to Naveed Mahbub. "Thankfully, the scene has changed a lot," he says. "Stand up comedians are now invited to host events just because people want to have a bit of a laugh. And that's one of the best reasons for one to choose this profession- knowing that people can rely on you for that."

Naveed still faces other challenges in the field. "It's been 10 years since I've been doing this and I still consider myself stuck at infancy at times. The crowd is something to always



worry about," says Naveed. The crowd, he explains, won't always have the same sense of humour that the comedian does. "But it's a chance you've got to take," he adds. Another factor is the need for new jokes. A new script has to be thought of before every show because it's a given that most people won't laugh at the same joke twice. "Writing my own script all this time, I have to admit that there's a time when you have to outsource that responsibility to someone else—for instance, a professional writer. But even hiring

one has complications. You have to make sure the writer uses the kind of words I would use while talking," exclaims Naveed.

Naveed has faced criticism for choosing this profession from some parts of his extended family, but his immediate family was more than just supportive. They had no complaints and motivated him to pursue it. "I was the CEO of IBM, the CEO of NOKIA, worked for Ford, as an engineer," he says. "Some relatives would gasp at the fact that I threw all of that away to become a comedian, but I

don't let it affect me and just tell them that it was a part of the experience."

After his first accomplishment as Best Male Comedian, he became a finalist at the California Comedy Festival, became a regular at the Comedy Store in Hollywood (which was a starter's accomplishment for names such as Jay Leno, Jerry Seinfeld, Eddy Murphy and the like), and also did a lot of improvisational gigs in various comedy clubs. He was also a guest in 'Mirakkel', a well-known television comedy show

originating from Kolkata, and has hosted various local television shows. Along with all of that, he had his own television show on NTV, 'The Naveed Mahbub Show', for one year. He also writes a column for The Daily Star called 'Humorously Yours.'

Knowing that the sky's the limit, Naveed urges comedians to take the big leap and become a part of a world like no other. He knows that such a world will thrive its way into a bright future, because a world that is just for laughs would never fail.



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