



Rising to the Top

ELITA KARIM

Torikul Islam, a young man in his early twenties, is a student, trying to work his way towards a BBA degree from a private university. A straight 'A' undergraduate, Torikul, in his fifth semester, plans to major in Finance and eventually join a bank. A huge fan of actors Chanchal Chowdhury, Mosharrar Karim, AKM Hasan, respectively, and television fictions that portray lives in rural villages, Torikul is a young student with dreams of making it big in the city.

After getting into Bangladesh University in Mohammadpur, Torikul looked for ways to survive in the capital. "I went to a nearby garage and rented a rickshaw to pull," he says. "For the first two semesters, I would pull the rickshaw after or before class, six days a week, earn my keep and rest and study only on Fridays." It was on such a fateful night when Torikul picked up a banker named Kamrul Hasan and struck a conversation with him. He told him about himself, his grades and his life back in Joypurhat. Hasan clicked his picture and uploaded it on Facebook. "My friend told me about the picture and initially I felt insulted," says Torikul. "None of my friends knew about me being a part-time rickshawallah! I found Mr Hasan and requested him to take the photo down and he did."

The sudden revelation of Torikul being a rickshawallah had some repercussions. "My roommates would avoid me," he says. "The situation got so bad that I had to shift my residence. In fact, some students would also taunt me. But now, everything is normal. Some of my friends know about my part-time work and

respect it. In fact, after the Facebook post, Mr Zahid, a lecturer at Dhaka University contacted me and offered to help me financially. He is now sponsoring my education at Bangladesh University." Strangely enough, Torikul's request for a scholarship based on his merit and financial situation was rejected by the BU authorities. "I did find Mr Kamrul Hasan once again and apologised to him profusely!" he smiles.

Torikul came to Dhaka from Joypurhat in January 2013 to apply to public universities. He had done quite well in his SSC and HSC exams and was confident enough to apply to one of the public universities or colleges. "But I could not get in," he says. "That's when I decided to get into a private university." Torikul's father is a day labourer in his 40s and his mother is a homemaker in her mid-thirties. Clearly, the parents are unable to provide a proper education to Torikul and his younger brother. "My brother is also a good student. He secured a Golden A in his SSC exams this year!" he says proudly. "I earn whatever I can and send some money for his education."

Thanks to the sponsorship, Torikul now gives more time to studies and hopes to earn enough to get some computer lessons. "I am also saving up for a second hand computer," he says. "I believe I can get a part time job at a call centre if I can improve my typing and learn computer basics."

As preparations take place to celebrate the United Nations International Youth Day on August 12, clearly, Torikul Islam becomes a model of hard work, perseverance and working slowly yet steadily towards the top, amongst the Bangladeshi youth.

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

Sky's the Limit

APURBA JAHANGIR

Over the last few years, young people have been proud builders of a distinguished generation -- in many ways. The two biggest obstacles young people face is poverty and illiteracy, for which life gets a lot harder for most.

Jasmin Akhter is one, who can inspire a lot of people as she overcame these obstacles and much more on her own. Coming from a lower middle class background, Jasmin proved to everyone around her that if you have the will, you will find a way. "When I was little, I

wanted to be in the corporate world. But very soon I had a harsh reality check when I realised that the world was not a bed of roses. But even after that, I never gave up on my dreams," says Jasmin. After completing her SSC and HSC from Tangail, she came to realise that if she wants to study further she needs to help her mother, working as a cleaning lady in an office. She says, "I took my first job as a security guard at an international organisation and got admitted in the Business department of Bangladesh University."

Though it got very hectic for Jasmin, she continued her job for which she could pay her tuition fee. "For two years, I worked and studied for 17 hours," she says. "However, as I saw a huge burden lifting off of my mother, I was happy. I learned a lot from my job, especially how to deal with people," says Jasmin.

Currently, she is working as a call centre operator at a telecom company and has also completed her BBA. Very soon, Jasmin will be pursuing an MBA degree. "Looking back on my childhood, if there is a person, without whom I could not have gotten this far, is my mother. The support I got from her was enormous," says Jasmin.



A Passion for Achievement

NAZIBA BASHER

Science was always been a subject of interest for Sharmin Akter. From when she was a child, she wanted to study something related to medicine, if not medicine itself. After finishing school and college in Bamoil Ideal School and College, Demra, and Ideal School and College, Motijheel, respectively, Sharmin got herself enrolled into Dhaka University to pursue a Bachelor's Degree in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. After graduating in the first division, being one of the top 15 scorers, she continued studying Biochemistry for her Master's Degree and all on scholarship.

Sharmin's father, a peon in an office along with her homemaker mother, would always encourage her in school. They did not decide her future; they wanted her to have the capability to do it on her own. Giving education as much importance as her parents did, Sharmin sailed through school, college and university with scholarships. For her Master's thesis, she was even awarded a fellowship from the Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of Bangladesh. "I was lucky to be blessed with a family that always supported me and never let me feel the bitterness of financial constraints. Along with that, all my teachers always believed in me and knew I had it in me to do well," says Sharmin.

At the moment, Sharmin is waiting for her Master's results to be published which are due in a month or two. After that, she hopes to apply abroad, preferably the USA or Europe, to obtain a PhD. During her wait, she wants to get a job either in the field of Biochemistry or in the Development sector. "I want to get some good experience before I leave and also take some time to improve my English for which I am going to be giving me IELTS," says Sharmin. She is also studying classical music.

In the future, Sharmin plans to open up her own Biochemical firm and Research centre, along with helping to improve tools for diagnosis. She plans to become a full-time researcher, and obtain a post doctorate degree

later on. Her more elaborate plans are to inspire the youth to take up a subject like Biochemistry that can bring a lot of positive changes in the medical arena of our country. Lastly, Sharmin says, "I know my parents could not achieve everything



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

that they had wanted to but they have given me the power and courage to achieve a lot. And through that courage, I wish to make them as proud as they can be and fulfil their dreams. That is my most important future plan."