

Light in the Darkness

ANIKA HOSSAIN

Nineteen-year-old Abdullah-Al-Shayem graduated his HSC exams from the Peoples' DG College in Kushtia this year with a GPA of 5. He was the only examinee in this college among the 278 students who took the exam, to graduate with a perfect score. But what makes his achievement more remarkable is that he managed to do this without the ability to see his question papers.

Abdullah suffers from Retinitis Pigmentosa, a hereditary degenerative eye disease that causes severe vision impairment. "The doctors have told me that people usually do not get affected by this illness before the age of 30," says Abdullah, "It is my bad luck that I started suffering its effects since I was in third grade." When Abdullah first noticed his weakening eyesight, his parents consulted a doctor in their village Goborgara, Dawlatpur Upazilla in Kushtia. "The doctor was not able to diagnose me properly, and not understanding the extent of my illness, I did not get the treatment I needed," says Abdullah.

He continued his studies, always coming out first in every class until he reached class 10, when his vision diminished significantly. During his SSC exams, he had trouble reading his question paper despite the table lamps he kept on his desk to aid him. "I could not write properly and my lines were overlapping. I graduated with a 4.0 GPA that year," he recalls. "That was a terrible time for me; I broke down mentally and did not want to continue my education."

Abdullah's father, Munirul Islam, who is a farmer in Kushtia was already in dire financial constraints trying to support his wife China Khatun and two children. His property consists of two and half bighas of land and two cows. Despite this however, his parents brought him to Dhaka to see and eye specialist at Islamia Eye Hospital and Ispahani Institute of Thalmology as a last resort. He was completely blind by this time.

The specialist at this hospital informed the family that Abdullah would not be able to regain his vision. "During this time, my parents and my teachers all encouraged me to not give up hope and that helped me beyond imagination," says Abdullah. "When we returned to Kushtia, my family contacted a school for the disabled that would allow me to study using Brail, but in order to take my HSC exam I would have to go to Dhaka and we did not have money for that."



COURTESY PROTHOM ALO

At this time, a staff member of this school, Enamul Haque (late), advised him to record his textbooks in order to study. If he was able to do so, he would be allowed to take his HSC exam using a proxy writer. "My mother advised me to use a mobile phone for the recording. She herself did not study past the class 7, so it is important to her that her children are properly educated," says Abdullah. "Every night, after completing her housework, she would record my study material and I would memorise what she read."

His professors and headmaster at Peoples' DG College were so

impressed by his desire to learn, he was exempted from paying his fees. The college even offered to pay the entrance fee of his exam.

Abdullah has now gained enough confidence to plan his future. "I would like to continue my higher education in Dhaka University studying either Political Science or Law. I would also like to do my Masters one day," he says.

"People like me are hardly ever talked about; I was surprised when Prothom Alo, and then The Daily Star wanted to write about me. I am grateful for the recognition and hope I will continue to excel in whatever I choose to do."



A Foodie's Haven

NAZIBA BASHIR

Food carts have revolutionised the concept of street food in Dhaka. Now, besides just phuchka and chotpoti, we find an array of food in carts scattered all around the city. Though most of the carts offer just burgers on their menus, some individuals are trying to be creative and take the concept further.

Food Street, situated in Banani Road 15, is literally a street of food. Though the leading steps were taken by Adnan Al Rajeev to start this, a few of his friends soon became his partners in this venture. "When we were younger, we used have regular 'addas' in tea stalls situated on the road, on the footpath, and just chat for hours. We thought of making this 'rastar adda' a trend, with more than just tea or phuchka," says Johnny Shikder, one of the partners.

While the idea of Food Street was being mulled over, back in January of this year, they came across Infaqul Islam Limon (owner of Limon's Souvlaki) and knew from then on that he would be able to make Food Street the talk of the town with his expertise in the culinary arts. "After I finished studying Electrical Engineering, I studied culinary arts in Canada. I try to blend my knowledge in science with my knowledge in food as much as I can and try to invent new exciting

foods," says Limon.

Food Street, currently, has four carts running, though there are plans to fill up the whole street soon. The available carts are Spice and Momo- serving momos of different kinds along with scrumptious sauces that are specially made, Wrap Factory- serving different kinds of wraps,

mostly souvlaki, and a delicious new item they call 'the chicken ass' made from a chicken's behind, Water Lemon- serves delicious and refreshing drinks like Long Island Iced Tea, Blue Lagoon and more, all made with Limon's special syrup, and Slider-Station- serving delicious little burgers made of chicken, beef or roast beef.

"We believe, to be able to make a name on the streets, we have to be unique with our food. Our foods are regular foods with a twist- and so far, the responses have been great!" says Johnny. With Limon brainstorming ideas for unique foods, they have been recruiting and training workers who they have brought in from named restaurants such as Nando's and

American Burger.

Food Street will start delivery service soon to cater corporate and personal parties. But with the atmosphere that they have created in the area, there is little need for individuals to take the food home.



Digital Definition

ELITA KARIM

Sometimes changes happen in small waves and independent entrepreneurs are doing just that in Bangladesh right now. Starting small and hitting it big -- seems to be the motto of these young innovators. Kamal Hossen Rony is an example of the self-employed entrepreneurs, who have created a niche in the Bangladeshi economy. Today, the Managing Director of Greymatter Communication Limited, an IT based company, Rony had started out working for call centres. "As a freshman in 2007, I joined Vodaphone UK in Bangladesh," says Rony. "A year later, I joined Stamford Group, where I was the Assistant Operational Manager. In

2011, a few friends

and I started our very own Call Centre Solutions. Eventually, we founded Greymatter Communications Limited."

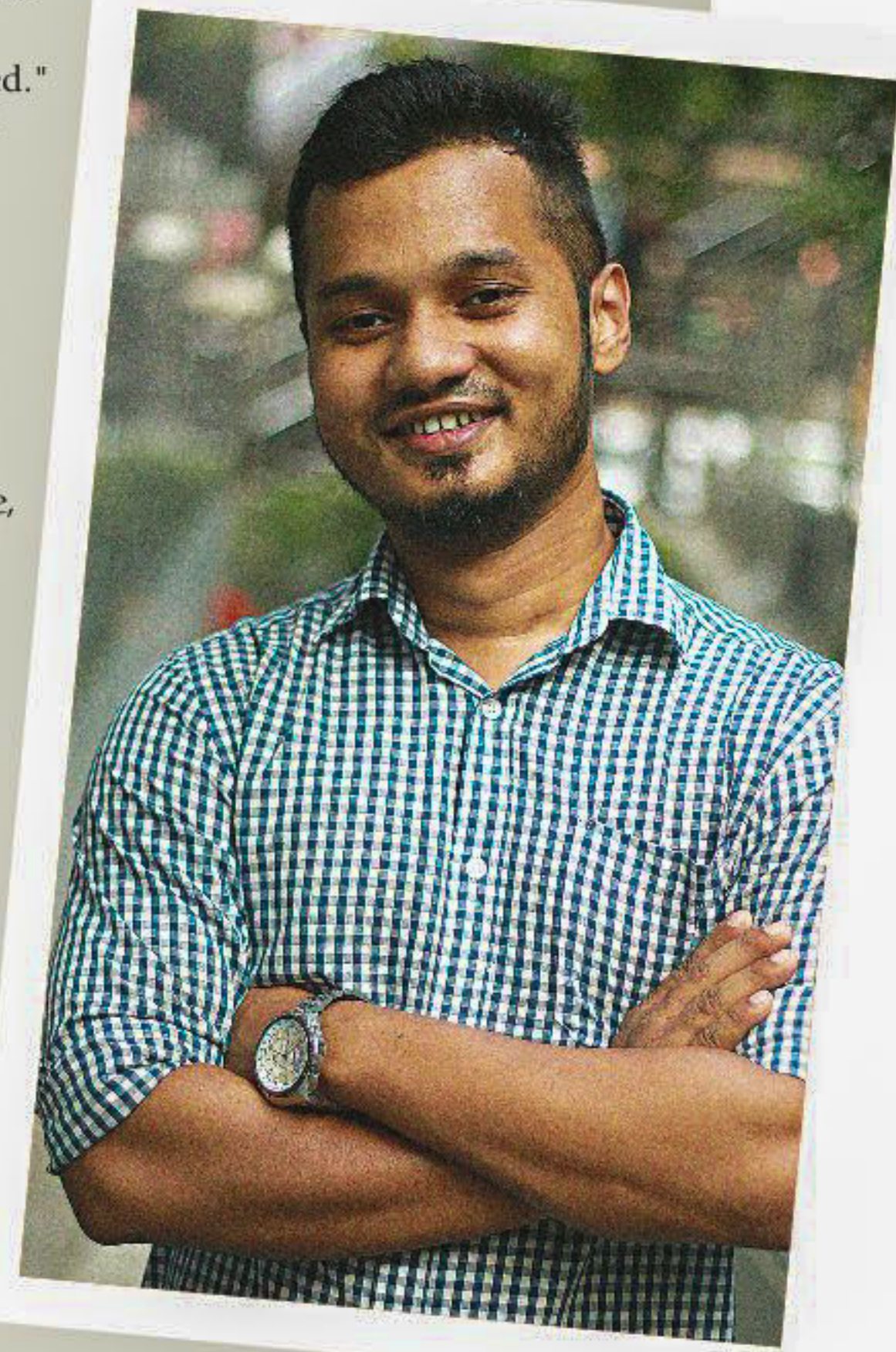
Operating in Bangladesh with six wings, the company boasts skills in segments namely Idea Store BD, Greymatter IT, Greymatter Films, Greymatter Event Management, Greymatter Artist Management and Call Centre Solutions.

A popular area of the company is Idea Store Bd, a digital agency. "Here, we help out with promotions, marketing and branding of products, commodities and ideas on Facebook and other online platforms," explains Rony. "We also do web marketing, search engine optimization and online affiliations."

Recently, Greymatter Communications Limited rose to popularity amongst the youth after the company began to design, stylise and promote Facebook Pages and Websites of famous personalities in Bangladesh. "Our expertise, however, lies in providing call centre solutions," says Rony. "In fact, we had even started our business with this. Eventually we would like to provide call centre solutions, along with other online solutions to major corporate companies in and outside Bangladesh."

Currently, Greymatter is providing call centre solutions to companies in Canada. "We have some regular clients there who have been using our services for the last couple of years. Eventually, we plan to reach out to more establishments in Bangladesh and outside."

Where Bangladesh is trying to build a digitally sound nation, allowing independent innovators and entrepreneurs to fill the gaps would be a good idea. After all, self-employment is just one side of the coin, where the other side would define platforms for creating a better and a smarter job market.



CORRIGENDUM:

On August 30 2014, the article 'Awe Inspiring Strength' published by Star People mentioned that Dr Jon Morrison was one of the founders of Acid Survivor's Foundation (ASF). We would like to be more specific and mention that the Founding Executive Director of ASF was Dr John Morrison, Founder Board of trustee members were Kazi Fazlur Rahman, Dr. S.L Sen, Advocate Sigma Huda and Mr. Selim Ahmed.