

FOR THE RIGHT TO LIVE WITH HOPE AND DIGNITY

The struggle of a selfless social worker for the rights of some of the most isolated and poverty ridden people of the world.

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

In the silted islands of the northern districts of Bangladesh, although inhabited by thousands, once upon a time there were no citizen facilities available. With no school, no health care system, no administration, the people living on those islands were some of the most isolated and poverty ridden population in the world.

Then in 2002, a noble initiative started to transform the situation. For the first time in Bangladesh, these poor and isolated people of these islands realised that they did not have to cross hundreds of kilometres of waterways for medical treatment but the hospital itself had come to them with free medicine and free treatment. Thanks to Runa Khan's noble and innovative initiative of the floating hospital, she has saved millions of lives by providing primary and secondary health care and free medicine to the destitute people of these isolated islands.

Runa Khan is the founder of Friendship, one of the most successful value based social service organisations that has been transforming the least privileged communities of the country into self dependent, productive and self sufficient communities not only by providing

materialistic support but also helping people with value based approaches, to find a new, peaceful, harmonious and ethical way of life. Its wide range of social services includes healthcare, education, nutrition, sustainable economic development and advocacy and so on.

It all started when the French adventurer Yves Marre sailed to Bangladesh from France on a river barge with a view to utilising the barge for any humanitarian work. "At that time I had an opportunity to visit some of the isolated char areas and the horrible living condition of these poor people appalled me. The most unfortunate thing that I saw was that they were dying of simple diseases like diarrhoea because of no medical care," says Runa.

"So, when I heard about Yves's noble intention, the idea of a floating hospital struck my mind," she adds. And with the help from Unilever the Lifebuoy Friendship floating hospital was launched in 2001.

Currently, Friendship is operating two floating hospitals namely Emirates Friendship Hospital and Rongdhonu Friendship Hospital in the remotest parts of the country.



Runa Khan

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Runa Khan with her organisation has developed an innovative three tier health care system in Bangladesh whose efficiency is second to none in the country if not in the world. Besides the floating hospitals, each of which treats 20,000 patients every month, Friendship has been running around 229 satellite clinics in the chars. These satellite clinics manned by a paramedic, health assistant and a helper visits the isolated settlements on motor boats and provides emergency healthcare

and counselling on child care, safe motherhood etc.

"We observed that providing primary and secondary health care through satellite clinics and floating hospitals cannot be feasible or long term solutions of the problem," says Runa.

"So, we decided to launch Friendship Community Medics Programme (FCM) through which we have been providing quality training to the community medics so that they can ensure a right primary treatment at the right moment to the right patient," she adds.

Besides healthcare services, Runa Khan and her organisation's contribution to ensure a quality education for these least privileged people is also notable. More than 6000 children of 143 schools of Friendship all over the country have been receiving well designed courses on dignity and ethics besides their formal education. "For a better Bangladesh, we need not only skilled, educated manpower but also we need men and women of character and ethics. Therefore, in our schools we give special emphasis on teaching and learning moral values, ethics and sense of dignity," says Runa.

There are many organisations in Bangladesh which do similar activities like Friendship but what sets Friendship apart from those is Runa's dedication and determination to provide an ethical and dignified life of quality and social security. "I never compromise with the quality of services provided by my organisation for these people who have all the rights to lead a dignified life just like me," says a determined Runa.

"I will continue to fight for the rights and justice for these people so that these least privileged and unaddressed people can have equal opportunities and can live with dignity and hope," she adds.

STAR PEOPLE

QUIRKY SCIENCE



GLOBAL FOSSIL-FUEL EMISSIONS

Annual global carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels could drop slightly in 2015, according to a report from the Global Carbon Project led by a Stanford University researcher. This surprising result contrasts with the rapid growth in emissions before 2014, underlining the need for action to stabilize and permanently lower global CO₂ emissions, the researchers conclude.

"In 2014, global CO₂ emissions from burning fossil fuels grew by just 0.6 percent," said lead author Rob Jackson, a professor of Earth system science at Stanford. "This year we expect total emissions to flatten or drop slightly, despite strong growth in gross domestic product worldwide."

While CO₂ emissions have slowed during times of economic recession, this would be the first decline during a period of strong global economic growth, Jackson said.

The new report, titled "Reaching Peak Emissions," was published on Dec. 7 in the journal Nature Climate Change, with detailed data published simultaneously in Earth System Science Data.

"Decreased coal use in China was largely responsible for the decline in global CO₂ emissions," said report co-author Corinne Le Quééré of the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom. "After a decade of rapid growth, China's emissions rate slowed to 1.2 percent in 2014 and is expected to drop by 3.9 percent in 2015."

The researchers identified China as the world's top CO₂ emitter in 2014, responsible for 27 percent of global emissions, followed by the United States (15.5 percent), the European Union (9.5 percent) and India (7.2 percent).

HUBBLE SEES THE FORCE AWAKENING

Just in time for the release of the movie "Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens," NASA's Hubble Space Telescope has photographed what looks like a cosmic, double-bladed lightsaber.

In the center of the image, partially obscured by a dark, Jedi-like cloak of dust, a newborn star shoots twin jets out into space as a sort of birth announcement to the universe.

"Science fiction has been an inspiration to generations of scientists and engineers, and the film series Star Wars is no exception," said John Grunsfeld, astronaut and associate administrator for NASA's Science Mission Directorate.

"There is no stronger case for the motivational power of real science than the discoveries that come from the Hubble Space Telescope as it unravels the mysteries of the universe."

This celestial lightsaber does not lie in a galaxy far, far away, but rather inside our home galaxy, the Milky Way. It's inside a turbulent birthing ground for new stars known as the Orion B molecular cloud complex, located 1,350 light-years away.

When stars form within giant clouds of cool molecular hydrogen, some of the surrounding material collapses under gravity to form a rotating, flattened disk encircling the newborn star. Though planets will later congeal in the disk, at this early stage the protostar is feeding on the disk with a Jabba-like appetite. Gas from the disk rains down onto the protostar and engorges it. Superheated material spills away and is shot outward from the star in opposite directions along an uncluttered escape route -- the star's rotation axis.

Source: Sciencedaily.com



AN APPLE A DAY

I won't bore you with another regular Apple A Day article, where I tell you what happens when something bad happens to you, and you can take care of it. No sir, today's Apple A Day will be a lesson, learning about something pretty cool, if you will.

On a recent trip to China, I came across an Irish journalist who told me the most fascinating stories. One of them was of a boy with extraordinary powers. He was bad at math and would constantly fail grade school. Until one teacher paid really close attention. I had heard of people listening to music as colours before, but this boy would see flashes of



PHOTO: INTERNET

A COLOURFUL MIND

NAZIBA BASHER

colours instead of numbers. He was, of course, recruited by an intelligence agency for his amazing abilities (no, no one treated him like a handicap. It was indeed a power.)

I came back home to research on the case and came across synesthesia- a neurological phenomenon in which stimulation in one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway. People who report a lifelong history of such experiences are known as synesthetes.

In one common form of synesthesia, known as grapheme → colour synesthesia or colour-graphemic synesthesia, letters or numbers are perceived as inherently coloured. In spatial-sequence, or number form synesthesia, numbers, months of the year, and/or days of the week elicit precise locations in space (for example, 1980 may be "farther away" than 1990), or may appear as a three-dimensional map (clockwise or counter-clockwise).

Not much is known about how synesthesia develops. The first studies of synesthesia in children and its development are currently ongoing. Based on the findings that synesthesia is not a phenomenon of crossed senses but has the properties of ideasthesia, it was proposed that synesthesia develops during

childhood at the time at which children are for the first time intensively engaged with abstract concepts. This hypothesis—referred to as *semantic vacuum hypothesis*—explains why the most common forms of synesthesia are grapheme-color, spatial sequence and number form: These are usually the first abstract concepts that educational systems require children to learn.

Although often termed a "neurological condition," synesthesia is not listed in either the DSM-IV or the ICD since it most often does not interfere with normal daily functioning. Indeed, most synesthetes report that their experiences are neutral or even pleasant. Like perfect pitch, synesthesia is simply a difference in perceptual experience.

Not many people can recognise conditions as such due to lack of knowledge and understanding. The lack of knowledge on conditions of the brain can contribute in deteriorating a child's development. For children and people with such conditions, we must remember that they need their own kind of grooming and nurturing, their own ways of growing up. And most importantly, we must remember that what they have is a gift. A gift given to them by God and it is one we all must cherish, like that boy's teacher from the story I was told.

Information Source: Wikipedia



PHOTO: COURTESY