

“Look at the difference- when the men are playing a game of cricket, the whole country is at a standstill, watching and cheering. When the women are playing, no one watches with so much angst and zeal. And if there is such discrimination in cricket, what will I say about other sports. I'm hoping to be one of the many women to bring a change in this scenario,” says Mahfuza Khatun Shila, the first Bangladeshi woman to win gold for swimming in the South Asian (SA) Games, and the first Bangladeshi to win 2 consecutive Golds in the SA Games.

Shila took 34.88 seconds on her way to win the gold medal in the event, breaking the previous record of 34.97 seconds timing made by Sri Lankan swimmer Raheen Mayuni in 2006 SA Games in Colombo. Earlier in the Games, Shila won the gold medal for Bangladesh in 100m Breast Stroke (women) event in swimming.

Since she was a mere teenager, Shila has been looking after her family, finding financial aid and help within her own sporting talents. While in school in Noapara, Jessore, she was always quite the athlete. “I used to be a part of the Shishu Academy and would always play the sprint and long jump games.” There would be frequent competitions held thana, zillah (district) and bibhag (division) wise. “During one such competition, when I was in grade 3 at school, I was too late to apply for anything except swimming. Our then school sports teacher taught me some basic techniques and asked me to just go for it.” She came first- for thana, and then district and then ultimately the whole division.

And thus, began Shila's journey as one of the best swimmers the country has seen.

When in grade 4, Shila competed in the national board and also came first. In 2002, she was noticed by Abdul Mannan, who asked her to join BKSP (Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan) - the national sports institute. “Due to financial restraints, I could not join and I didn't see any scope. I gave that up, until a letter arrived from BKSP urging me to join. I took the letter to my school and asked my trainer, Suleiman sir, what I should do. His friend Rijol Bishesh, from BKSP, then took me under his wing.”

From 2004 to 2016, Shila has won gold for 100m and 50m breaststrokes in all national games. In 2006, she secured 3rd place at the SA Games in Colombo, then silver at the SA Games hosted in Dhaka.

While supporting her family single-handedly since she was in grade 8, and also bagging gold after gold with her



Mahfuza Khatun Shila

# OUR GOLDEN GIRL

NAZIBA BASHER

PHOTOS: COURTESY

remarkable skills and talent, Shila knew a good education's worth and enrolled herself into Chittagong University where she completed her Bachelor's and Master's in Mass Communication and Journalism.

In 2013, she joined the Bangladesh Navy and made the record time for breaststroke while she was stationed at Gopalganj. “This year, I'm hoping to become a Civil Officer.”

Right before the Games, Shila had faced some issues. “There were many times when, even though I was training hard, I was not being selected for games. That really frustrated me. I was swimming, then taking a bus to Chittagong to give exams, then taking another bus to Dhaka to train- and when all that hard work was being undermined, I started becoming demotivated,” says Shila. When selected for the SA Games, Shila had lost that enthusiasm, and was going for the sake of going. Until she met their coach, South Korean specialist Park Pagun, who said to her, “you are the only one who can do it.” For him, she tried to bring that spark back within her. He

trained them rigorously. “We even had a training where we would throw up for hours. He would make us drink litres and litres of water and then train, which is difficult beyond words.”

The day before her competition, Shila spoke to her parents, who have given her more support than she could ever have asked for, throughout her entire career. They said to her, “You trained hard, you worked hard, if you won't win, who will?” The day of her competition, her coach said similar words to her, “I know you can win. Just go out there in the water and swim your heart out. Leave the rest up to me.” With those words, Shila got her magic back. While she went towards the water, she decided to not look back for a second and just go for it with all her heart.

And she won- medals and hearts alike.

“When I was received back in my hometown, everyone was so happy, I could see it in their faces. I couldn't believe I was the one who brought this joy to them. I won a lot more than I had hoped to win,” says Shila.

Shila wants to help pave the way to freedom and victory for women in our country. “Our women are so talented, but they hardly get highlighted. In this male



dominated society, I was lucky my family was so supportive of me. In cricket, men get more importance, in football too. Let alone other sports,” she says. “There are 1000s of girls all across the country just waiting to unleash magic. I want to inspire these girls. Help them be confident. With one Shila winning, 20 Shilas will rise.”

Shila believes that women will get the recognition they deserve once they get the exposure they deserve. “My only request to the people of Bangladesh, especially the parents, is to please, please let your daughters out. Let them take on the streets, let them play, let them acquire skills—you don't know the wonders our women can do. Give us the chance and we'll show you.” ■

STAR PEOPLE

QUIRKY SCIENCE

## THREE 'TWISTED' PHOTONS IN THREE DIMENSIONS

Researchers at the Institute of Quantum Optics and Quantum Information, the University of Vienna, and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona have achieved a new milestone in quantum physics: they were able to entangle three particles of light in a high-dimensional quantum property related to the 'twist' of their wave front structure. The results from their experiment appear in the journal Nature Photonics.

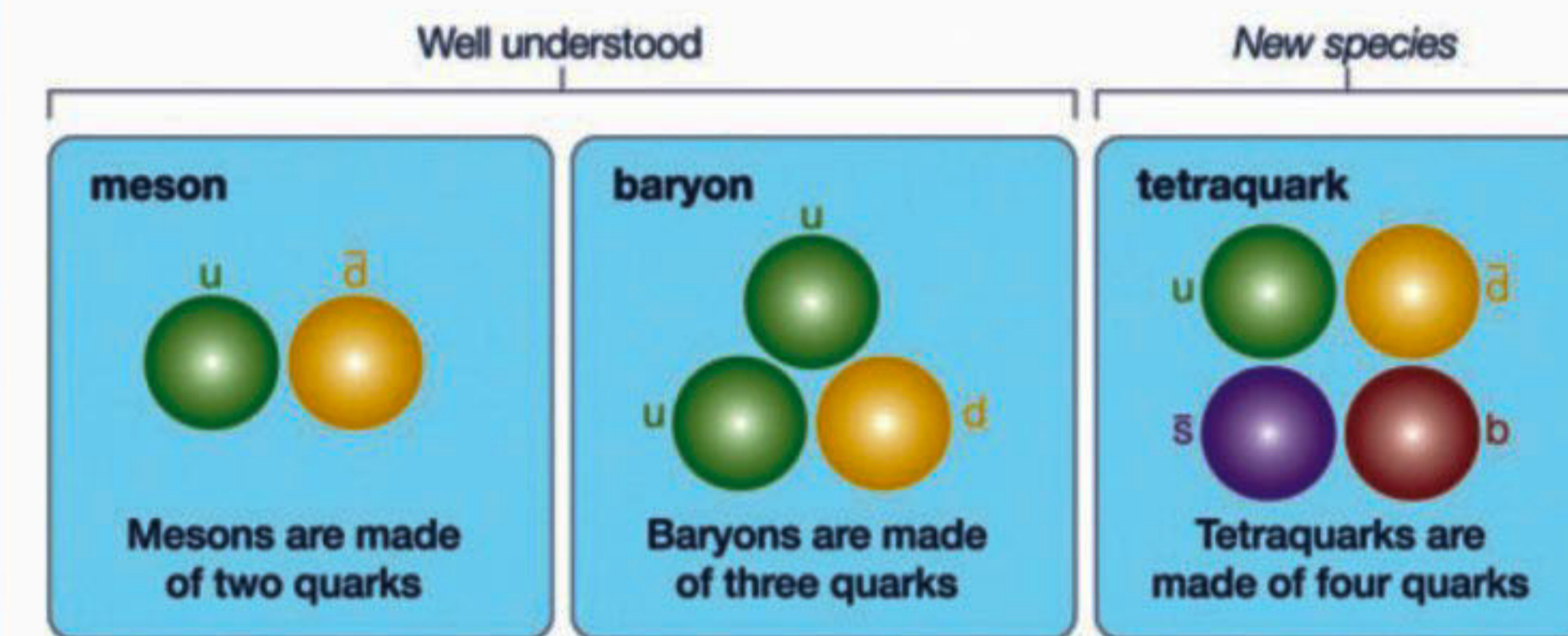
Entanglement is a counterintuitive property of quantum physics that has long puzzled scientists and philosophers alike. Entangled quanta of light seem to exert an influence on each other, irrespective of how much distance is between them. Consider for example a metaphorical quantum ice dancer, who has the uncanny ability to pirouette both clockwise and counter-clockwise simultaneously. A pair of entangled ice-dancers whirling away from each other would then have perfectly correlated directions of rotation: If the first dancer twirls clockwise then so does her partner, even if skating in ice rinks on two different continents.

“The entangled photons in our experiment can be illustrated by not two, but three such ice dancers, dancing a perfectly synchronized quantum mechanical ballet,” explains Mehul Malik, the first author of the



paper. “Their dance is also a bit more complex, with two of the dancers performing yet another correlated movement in addition to pirouetting. This type of asymmetric quantum entanglement has been predicted before on paper, but we are the first to actually create it in the lab.”

## TETRA QUARKS: NEW FOUR-FLAVOUR PARTICLE DISCOVERED



Scientists on the DZero collaboration at the US Department of Energy's Fermi lab have discovered a new particle – the latest member to be added to the exotic species of particle known as tetra quarks.

Quarks are point-like particles that typically come in packages of two or three, the most familiar of which are the proton and neutron (each is made of three quarks). There are six types, or “flavours,” of quark to choose from: up, down, strange, charm, bottom and top. Each of these also has an antimatter counterpart.

Over the last 60 years, scientists have observed hundreds of combinations of quark duos and trios.

In 2008 scientists on the Belle experiment in Japan reported the first

evidence of quarks hanging out as a foursome, forming a tetra quark. Since then physicists have glimpsed a handful of different tetraquark candidates, including now the recent discovery by DZero – the first observed to contain four different quark flavours.

DZero is one of two experiments at Fermi lab's Tevatron collider. Although the Tevatron was retired in 2011, the experiments continue to analyze billions of previously recorded events from its collisions.

As is the case with many discoveries, the tetra quark observation came as a surprise when DZero scientists first saw hints in July 2015 of the new particle, called X(5568), named for its mass – 5568 megaelectronvolts.

Source: Sciencedaily.com

FIVE THINGS

5 THINGS ALL WOMEN SHOULD BE PROUD OF

NAZIBA BASHER

In our country, you will hear women, every now and then, exclaim 'ughh, only if I were a man!' out of the frustrations in living in a highly patriarchal society. But there are many things for us women to be proud of. There are many reasons for us women to love being women. Many reasons for us to thank God for making us exactly who and what we are. Here are 5.



PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

- Compassion:** There may be many strong independent women, feminists even, who look at this as a weakness. But a woman's compassion is her greatest strength. Women are naturally more compassionate, sympathetic, kind and patient in nature. They can relate to the hurt and pain suffered by others and will go to any lengths to offer relief to them.
- Emotional Strength:** Of course men would like to believe women are stronger emotionally. But if they only knew the kind of turmoil our feelings have to face in a society such as this, they may want to think before they speak. Women are emotionally stronger when compared to men. From a very early age, they face several kinds of difficulties internally and externally that make them strong. This ability gives them the power to face any kind of challenge.
- Multitasking:** We have seen women do it all. While many think 'taking care of the household' is not such a big deal, let a man one day take care of your home while you sit back and relax and you may just end up thinking you're watching a sit-com regarding how unproductive men can sometimes be. Groceries, cleaning, cooking, teaching, nursing- name it! All women are superwomen- and you know it!
- A History of Women:** While we may think women have been in the backseat forever, there are many a reason for us to look back and feel proud. Some of the most notable personalities starting from Joan of Arc to Florence Nightingale, from Maya Angelou to JK Rowling, from Begum Rokeya to Wasfia Nazreen- we have more women to proud of than ever thought of. And we are one of them!
- Perfection:** All our abilities- our compassion, our emotional strength, our history, our bodies, our physicality combined make us the perfect caregiver, leader, and an overall person. Let's remember- all embryos start off as women- the epitome of creation.

A little prouder than you were a few minutes ago, aren't you?