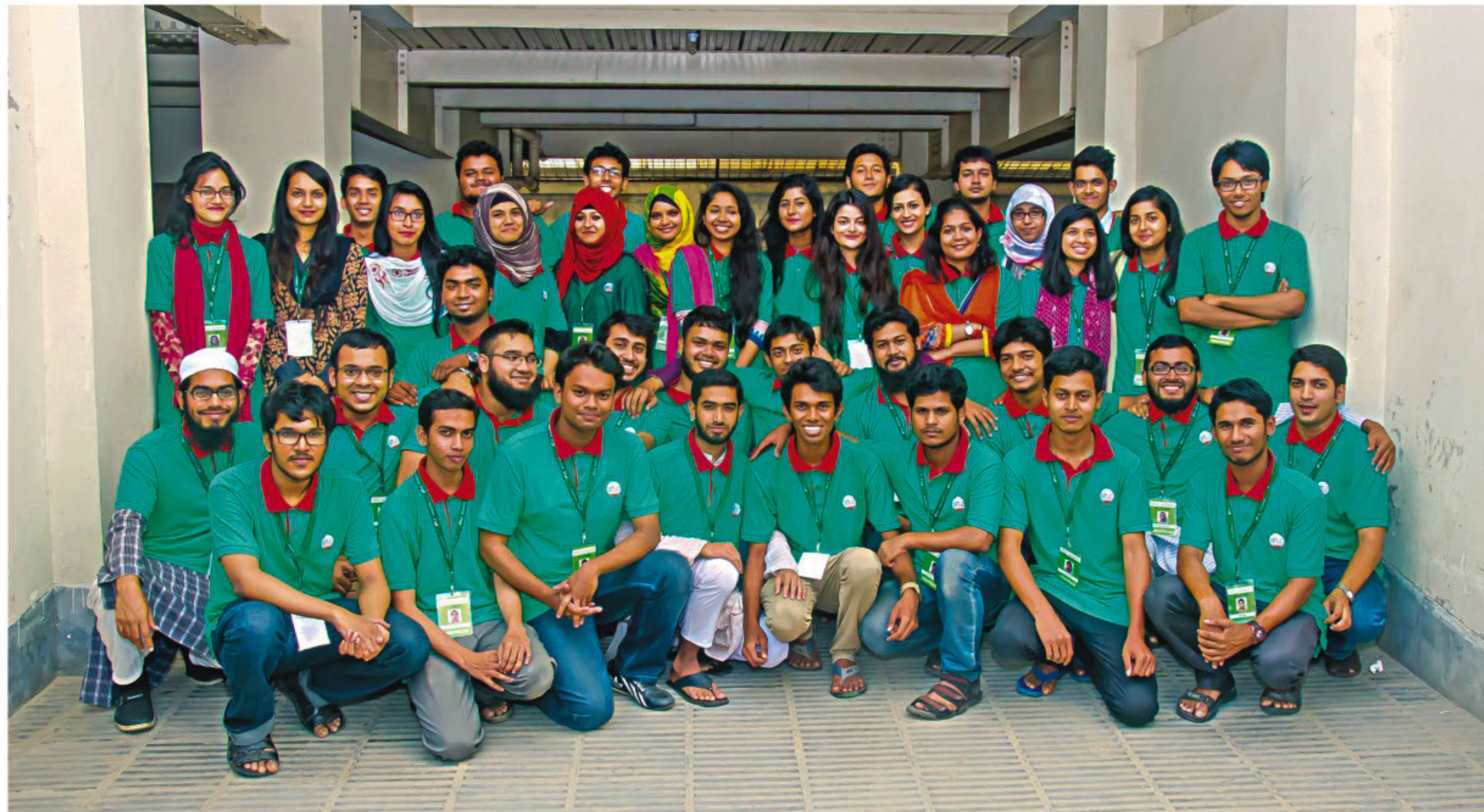


“What makes a leader?” This question was asked the lead instructor, Khaled Saifullah, to my class, on the first day of the Building Bridges through Leadership Training (BBLT) programme at BYLC. Each of us produced different answers. One participant said, “A leader is someone who mobilises people”. Another said, “A leader is one who takes initiatives”, “A leader is someone everyone looks up to”, “A leader motivates, inspires and represents people,” the comments poured in. Khaled Bhai neither refuted any idea nor did he rule one as accurate. Geared up with pens and notebooks, we all waited intently for him to give us the answer. A moment of silence ensued, accompanied by confusion. We looked at one another, some of us shifting in our seats, others trying to hide their growing anxiety. As the restlessness became palpable, we waited for him to relieve our tension. There came no answer and on that momentous first day we never ended up learning what qualities define a leader. But this was only the beginning.

The BBLT journey, for me, was a rewarding experience, one that tore at my convictions but exposed me to a world of opportunities. Thrusting myself into new territory, I was able to transcend the limits of thought, and gained the confidence to initiate action addressing social issues that are important to me.

Once we were equipped with the rights tools, the second phase of the programme required us to implement what we learned in the real world and catalyse social change. This was the hard part; no matter how many books you read on leadership, nothing can prepare you for practical situations, if you lack the knowledge acquired by experience. My teammates and I chose a makeshift school for the street children in the vicinity of



BEING A LEADER

ZEHRA NAWREEN KHAN

PHOTOS: COURTESY

Panthokunja Public Park, as we were familiar with the area. After brainstorming different ideas and assessing the site, we came up with a plan to help the school.

We felt that, in addition to poverty alleviation, lack of access to essential services such as primary education, basic healthcare, water sanitation, nutrition, etc. are the most pressing issues and

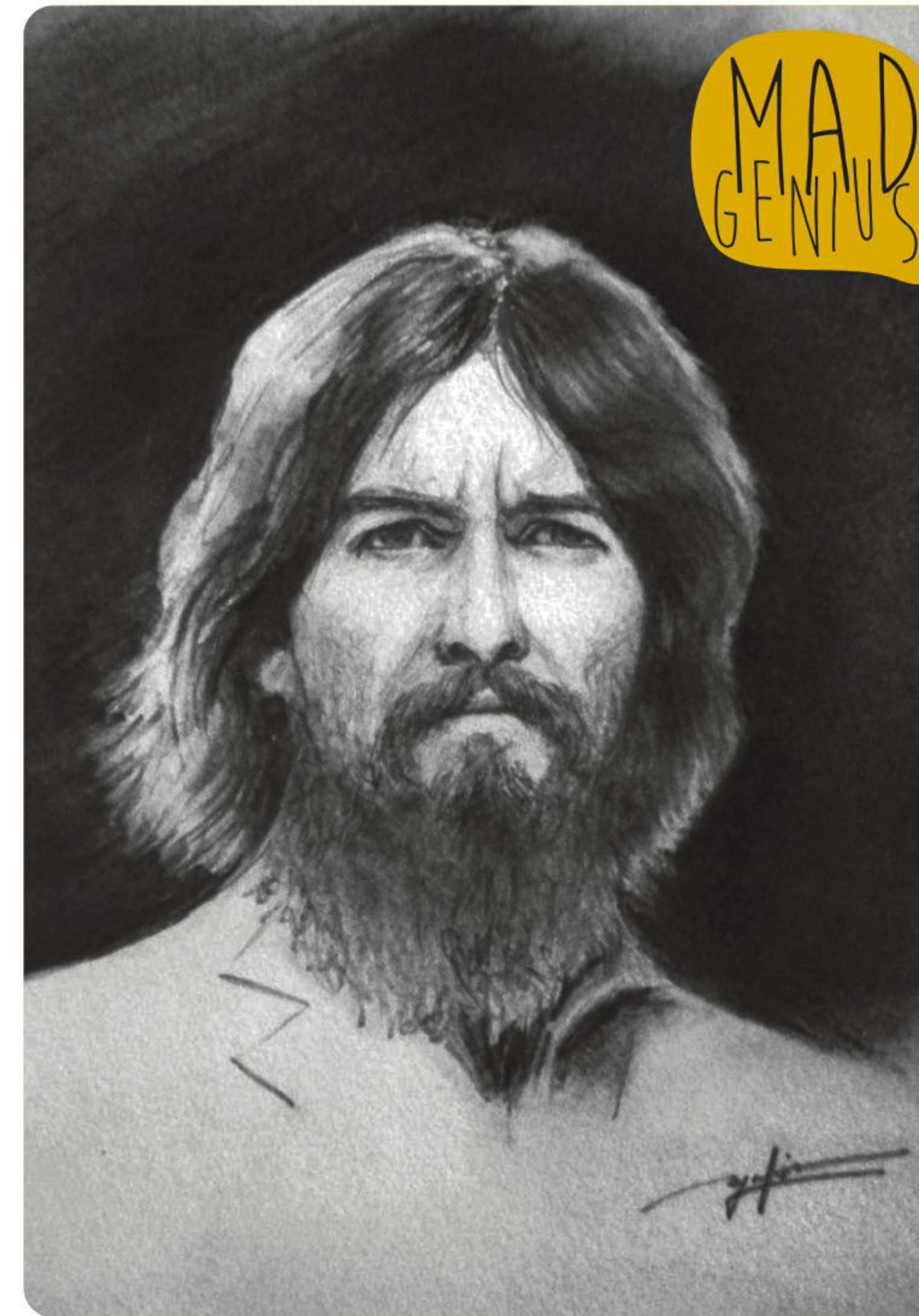
overarching challenges facing Bangladesh. Due to lack of access to essential services in underprivileged communities, our group, Project Lighthouse, decided to work on raising awareness about education, health and hygiene among the underprivileged children attending the school, as well as delivering modest support services to improve their standard

of living. However, since we only had modest resources to aid our project, we decided to focus on education and sanitation. We planned to donate an electronic projector so that they could learn from different visual mediums, and to install a portable toilet to ensure better sanitation.

The challenges we faced to achieve our mission were formidable. One such instance was when we realised that it is easier said than done to install the toilet. We needed prior permission from City Corporation before we could put it in place. The City Corporation recognised the importance of the matter for provision of sanitation facilities to the community. It was fortunate for the community and us that they agreed to donate a toilet from their own resources. We then had to revise our plans, but it could not overshadow the joy and satisfaction of making a small difference in the lives of those students.

So, back to the question at hand, 'what makes a leader?' Without having the answer laid out in front of us, we learned what we needed to through experiential sessions. It is this heuristic approach to learning that enabled us to discover our potential and develop qualities attributed to leaders. Going into the programme, we all had our individual concepts about what 'leadership' meant and we realised that none of them can be ruled out as either accurate or otherwise. But one thing that we learned on Day 1 is that when there is a crisis, a leader is one who does not look up to authority for answers.

The writer is a graduate of the twelfth Building Bridges through Leadership Training programme and is currently studying A Levels in Maple Leaf International School.



SKETCH: YAHIZ SIDDIQUI

GEORGE HARRISON

(25 February 1943 – 29 November 2001)

To Bangladeshis, the late Beatle, George Harrison is more than just a guitarist and singer. He is long remembered for his contribution to the Bangladesh War of Liberation in 1971. When his friend, the great Sitar maestro Ravi Sankar, approached him asking for help for a flood and war ravaged Bangladesh, Harrison, also known as the “shy Beatle” decided to organise the Concert for Bangladesh at Madison Square Garden in New York City. He invited his famous rock star friends to participate, including Bob Dylan and Eric Clapton, and the concert was a resounding success that not only got global attention for a South Asian Nation, it also became an amazing example for large scale big name benefits.

“TRY TO REALIZE IT'S ALL WITHIN YOURSELF NO ONE ELSE CAN MAKE YOU CHANGE, AND TO SEE YOU'RE ONLY VERY SMALL AND LIFE FLOWS ON WITHIN YOU AND WITHOUT YOU.

YOU'VE GOT AS MANY LIVES AS YOU LIKE, AND MORE, EVEN ONES YOU DON'T WANT.

AS LONG AS YOU HATE, THERE WILL BE PEOPLE TO HATE.”

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA AND BRAINY QUOTES

STARDIARY

ARE WE REALLY THERE YET?

Just a couple of days ago, a friend was talking about her “eligible-for-marriage” sister, who the potential groom's family was about to come “see” that evening. What bothered me was that the groom-to-be lives abroad and won't even be present during the first meeting. His parents were just coming to see whether my friend's sister would make a good wife to their son or not. How can you know a person in one meeting when it comes to making such a life altering decision? On another occasion, I was talking to someone about a common friend who was “looking” for a girl. I imagined a market place where I was looking for a fresh, shiny fruit. Even though we talk about equality, we are still ages behind when it comes to treating women equally to men. I am not asking girls to adopt the same method to “look” for the perfect match. It's about having the right to take one's life in their own hands. It's the 21st century; and we talk about equality and gloat about having a female leader. Yet, we end up with dishevelled faces, struggling to fight for women's rights in a land of non-empathisers. These stories will probably not be taken as seriously, but it shows the mentality and attitude of our general people. It shows how women are still being showcased to the world like a product in a shop, waiting to be chosen by people who think that they are “right” for them.

Fabiha Tanzeem
Purana Paltan, Dhaka



PHOTO: KAZI TAHNISIN AGAZ APURBO

IN THE HOPE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

One evening, I was going to Dhanmondi 32 by a Gazipur bound bus from Azimpur. There was unbearable traffic congestion on the road, so after reaching Kalabagan, I decided to walk the rest of the way to Dhanmondi. As I walked by Dhanmondi Lake, I noticed that two children, who lived by the lake with their parents, were reading books using the light of lamp posts. People like me who were passing by were as astonished as I was to see their enthusiasm for education. Despite my desire to talk to them, I could not stay there for long. I just want to say that these kids are like our brothers. They have dreams just like us. They also want a good education. We have a responsibility toward them. Throughout my life as a teacher, I have seen many students who never concentrated on their studies. Their parents had to hire home-tutors to give extra classes to these kids on every subject. I suggest that those parents who spend lots of money on their kids' education to take their children to those poor kids who, after working or begging all day long, try to continue studying in the dim light of a lamp post. I urge people who feel that they have a responsibility toward society to bring these poor children into light. Let their potential be explored. Who knows, some of these kids might one day turn out to be the next Ishwar Chandra Biddiyasagar?

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