

| ENDEAVOUR |

CHANGING YOUR STORY

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PHOTO: COURTESY



My leadership journey began when I was a first year Alim student. The Sajeda Foundation encouraged me to apply to the Building Bridges through Leadership Training program as I had always been involved in different extracurricular activities. My interest was particularly aroused by the term “leadership”, as I had always wanted to do something of purpose, but was self-conscious, and doubted my ability to mobilize people. I felt that people wouldn't listen to me.

A part of the reason for my self-doubt was because I was studying in a Madrassa. Madrassa students are often put in a box. Marginalised from various job opportunities, they are not expected to go too far in life. Even my family expected that I would end up becoming a teacher at a Madrassa.

This reaction is symptomatic of how society views Madrassa students. If we look closely at the educational system in Bangladesh, the disparity in treatment between English and Bangla medium institutions and Madrassas is quite apparent. Except for a select few, most Madrassas are underfunded and lack resources. The best learning opportunities and placement programs prioritize students from Bangla and English medium schools, disallowing madrassa students from achieving more holistic life experiences. In a way, they are isolated from the real world and real jobs. This discrepancy has contributed to growing suspicion and intolerance between the different education mediums, further perpetuating social barriers.

This barrier was first broken for me when I was participating in the BBLT programme that included students from English and Bangla medium schools. It took me a while to eventually mix freely with all the other students. What was even more challenging for me was working in a gender inclusive environment, which I had never done before. During the community service phase, my group, Bohumatric, consisted of girls and boys from all mediums, and it was the first time I was working with women. Despite initially being uncomfortable, I eventually stepped out of my comfort zone and had no qualms about working side by side with women. We even decided that our community service project should focus

on empowering underprivileged women. I realised that I had a lot to learn from everyone. Through building an inclusive learning environment, BYLC had created an equal platform for all of us where each of us felt like an equal part of society. This unity fascinated me and motivated me to work harder.

It has been 7 years since I completed the BBLT programme. The confidence that I too can contribute to the betterment of the society has grown within me throughout the years, which is why I continue to work at BYLC today. Inspired by my own metamorphosis, I contributed to designing the BBLT Junior programme, aimed at secondary school students. So far

230 students have gone through 8 programmes, where I have worked as a facilitator in 2 and an instructor in 6. The reason behind teaching leadership to adolescents is to help them realize the importance of active citizenship and demonstrate that leadership can be exercised at any age. I realised that it was my responsibility to pay forward the positive transformation I had gone through, and inspire younger generations to want to change the world. When I see my students graduating and say that BBLT has been instrumental in their lives, I realize the time and energy I have invested has been worthwhile. It is an amazing feeling to watch a shy Madrassa

student walk confidently in front of a class and deliver a heartfelt speech about their dreams and aspirations.

Inclusive spaces like BYLC can contribute to reshaping narratives and help everyone to move further, together. The most important lesson I have learned throughout my journey, that I would like to share with my fellow students, is that it is vital that we, the youth of Bangladesh, break away from the confining categories and roles that society often forces us into, and continue to have big dreams, and be confident about turning them into reality.

The writer is a graduate of the second Building Bridges through Leadership Training program and is currently studying dentistry at blah, and works as Project Executive at BYLC.



DID YOU TAKE MY DUSTBIN?



PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

As part of the Clean Dhaka 2016 campaign, an initiative undertaken by the Mayor to make Dhaka a more liveable city, the capital has recently seen installation of around 5000 dustbins in numerous key points. These waste bins are to help reduce the intolerable amount of garbage and rubbish that constantly float around the city. The mayor should be lauded for at least taking the initiative. Think of it as a “participatory medal”. At least someone is trying. The problem is that someone else is trying to rain on the mayor's parade and instead of using the waste bins for disposal, a vested quarter are stealing them instead.

Now, you'd be forgiven for wondering who on earth would steal dustbins of all things. Well, they are probably the same people who steal sewer lids and light from the streetlights. It seems the drug addicts and the anti-liberation forces are

at it again and this is a growing concern. But, even more concerning is the general reaction to the dustbins. They are placed too far apart. Now, let's face it, we are all for saving the environment and cutting down our carbon footprints and what have you, but not at the expense of walking for literally five whole minutes. Why not provide the citizens with portable trash cans? This would also probably cut down theft.

The dustbins, again, are a wonderful idea. And they are also quite versatile in their usage, although the versatility in this case is a little unexpected. Dhaka also lacks public toilets and apparently these dustbins have done a wonderful job as a makeshift 'you know what'. This kind of activity though happens at night. Ironically, when the mayor asked us to dispose of our waste at the night time after 7:00 pm as one of the other strokes of genius of tackling the waste problem,

this is certainly not what he meant. But dual usage of anything can almost always be cost effective.

As for those stealing the trash cans, it's certainly not the crash collectors. In yet another directive according to a February 10th Star Online Report, the Dhaka South City Corporation decided in February to track all the 5,216 cleaners (exclusive of the members of the alleged toothless ACC) of the city to ensure they do their work with “transparency and accountability”. The tracking would be done through their mobile sim cards and while we can think of a 1000 other public servants who need this kind of tracking more urgently, it does ensure that the cleaners will certainly not steal the waste baskets.

In fact, stealing of waste baskets shouldn't even be a topic because our vigilant forces have reminded us time and again that we have nothing to panic

about, such as crime. What is even a crime in Dhaka? It's all political anyway. Forgive and forget till you are elected. In the meantime may we suggest embedding the trash cans with tracking chips? We can institute a rule where each trash can has a biometric registration at the same time so we can track it, watch over all its activities at any time, snoop around its contents for dangerous things and of course do it all in order to keep it safe.

On the end note, if you are the new trash can stealer and are reading this then we urge you to stop. We don't care if you think this is the best solution or not since you don't really have a better one and even if you did you clearly never had the ability to execute. So stop littering and wait till you see these cans somewhere and with 5000 of them around, you'll be sure to find one. Unless they are stolen or a bus is parked where the can used to be. Yes. That happens. ■



PHOTO: REUTERS

10 NUMBERS

10 is the number of people who were killed in air strikes on a town in Idlib province in Syria's northwest, on Tuesday. Low-level fighting also appeared to continue inside the city of Aleppo, 50 km (30 miles) from Idlib city, and there were heavier clashes around Aleppo, the British-based group said. The Syrian army announced the extension of a ceasefire in Aleppo late on Monday. The airborne raids, by either Syrian or Russian warplanes, struck the town of Binnish, 6 km (4 miles) from the provincial capital Idlib. They wounded a number of others, the Observatory said. It said a local insurgent commander was among those killed. There were no immediate details about other casualties. Idlib province, which borders Turkey, is almost completely controlled by insurgent groups, including the al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front and powerful Islamist group Ahrar al-Sham.

Source: Reuters