



# SALUTING THE PIONEERS

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

The Airport road and Pragati Sarani are two of Dhaka's most important and busiest streets. Every hour, hundreds of vehicles pass through the Natunbazar and Kakoli intersections of these streets thanks to timely signals and careful management of some of the members of Bangladesh's first batch of female traffic sergeants. For the first time in its history, Bangladesh Police recruited 28 women to do the difficult job of managing urban transport. Defying the scorching sun, monsoon shower, irritating comments from unruly drivers, these brave women have been doing their round-the-clock duty diligently alongside their male colleagues, perhaps, better than them in many cases.

During the rush hours, the entire avenue of Pragati Soroni has to be managed very carefully with frequent signals due to excessive congestion. In one of these signaling points works Rozy, a 24-year-old young lady, who has been policing in this part of Dhaka for 6 months. Rozy is regularly seen fining the vehicles who break the traffic rules by disobeying signals or rushing through the wrong side of the street.

Md Anisul Islam, a bus-counter manager who sits beside the street, regularly observes Rozy's activities. He says, "I am amazed every time I see Rozy apa, doing her duty so honestly and sincerely. Other sergeants often leave the motor-bikers who frequently come through the wrong side, but, if these bikers have to face this young female

sergeant, they have no escape."

Similar instance of such sincerity can be witnessed in another part of Dhaka's busy street. In Kakoli intersection, sergeant Happy is seen standing in the police box from 7 am to 2 pm, when traffic congestion remains at its peak in this avenue. She stands with an automatic license checker and wireless set to monitor every vehicle's movement. Whenever she finds any lawbreaker, she stops the vehicle, checks the license and papers, and files a case according to the country's traffic rule.

Behind such performances, the contribution of Bangladesh Police's female officer is noteworthy. Sergeant Happy says, "When I see Nusrat sir, my commanding officer, I am really inspired. She often stands with me on the streets to help me manage the intense traffic. She cares about every problem we face, and we, the sergeants, always find her by our side."



## EMPOWERMENT

Police's Gulshan Traffic Zone says, "I always tell my sergeants to forget about whether they are male or female. Their first identity is that they are the police and their duty is to enforce law and order."

The inhabitants of Badda have also witnessed another instance of such professionalism and sincerity. Rahima Acter Lucky, Senior Assistant Police Commissioner of Badda traffic zone, with her force and other local inhabitants, filled up many potholes and crevasses on the roads which used to create immense traffic congestion. They also removed construction material piled up on the road to make it free for pedestrians and vehicles.

"We, the women members of Police have to prove our mettle in every step. We have to prove that we are equal and sometimes, even more efficient than our male counterparts. However, when we get respect and recognition from people and our officers, it inspires and motivates us further," says Rahima.

"One day, after freeing a road from intense traffic, when I returned to my post, a lady came and suddenly gave me a warm hug. I was amazed and then she said she was driving a car and she was moved by how much effort I had given to get rid of the troubling traffic. That hug was a great achievement for me", adds Rahima.

However, the authority should also be careful about the facilities these female traffic sergeants badly need during their duty. "One of the major problems faced by the female sergeants is inadequate washroom facilities for women. Due to this limitation, I station my female sergeants near to the police stations at present," says Assistant Police Commissioner Nusrat.

"Besides my job, I am also studying for my approaching Master's exam. My other colleagues and Nusrat sir helped me manage my job and my studies", adds a beaming Happy.

Nusrat Jahan Mukta, Assistant Police Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan

According to the police authority, the recruitment of female traffic sergeants is the result of Prime Minister's special attention on police reform and women empowerment. Let's hope that these fresh recruits of sincere and skilled female police officers will be the pioneer of an honest, non partisan and people friendly police force in Bangladesh. ■



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## ENDEAVOUR



# A STEP TOWARDS HUMANITY

APURBA JAHANGIR

PHOTOS: COURTESY

In our country, the number of people with disabilities is high enough to merit special attention. Based on a report from the World Bank and World Health Organisation, there are 10.5 million disabled adults living in our country. Most of these people are unable to work, mostly not because of their disability, but for their lack of training.

The good news is that a lot of effort is now being given towards their establishment in society, both from the government and private sectors and NGO's. Contributing to the energy, Sightsavers International along with the Institute of Communication Studies (ICU) created a training course by the name

'Promoting Persons with Disabilities through Participation in Media.'

"These people need a voice. Though there are a lot of people working for their betterment, I think they need to shout for themselves to get something done. And what better way to do that than through the media," says Alim Bari, advocacy and communication coordinator at Sightsavers International. Mass media, especially news media in Bangladesh are becoming very popular and influential for its strong roles in creating public awareness and attitudes. The team behind this project thought if these people with disabled conditions get a mass media training, they will be able to understand how media works, which can be a pathway for their voices being heard.

Their aim was to train the people for two months on a journalism course designed especially for them. "We set up criteria and gave a brief to every NGO, newspapers and every other resource. We got more than 150 entries from which we selected 20 people who fit perfectly with our criteria." He also adds, "As this was



our first project we couldn't cater to as many people we wanted."

A lot of prominent journalists came to train them these two months, and the 10 who did well got the chance to do an internship in a media house. One of them was Md Borhan Uddin, who did his internship in Independent TV. "As guy who can't walk, I never imagined that I would once work in a media office. This is huge deal for me, this opportunity reminded me that I can live like a normal human being," says Borhan. He is now

working as a researcher for the television.

Though it was a small scale project, the outcomes were in a huge amount, according to Alim Bari. "They did very well on their internship and even got permanent jobs." A bunch from the training program even started their own online portal which other than daily news will specialise on disablement. Though it was Sight Savers' first step, it is hoped that a revolution will come in the near future where the disabled will receive the livelihood they deserve. ■



## NUMBERS

# 1500

The number of families of Khumi, Mro, Marma and Tripura communities in Thanchi Upazilla, Bandarban that are suffering severe food shortage as they could not grow enough Jhum crops for their families last year due to rainfall and insect attacks.

PHOTO: STAR FILE