

IN SEARCH OF EQUALITY

Dr Sayed Saikh Imtiaz speaks to the *Star Weekend* about his life as a student and teacher of Women and Gender Studies, and how we can look forward to achieving gender justice.

NAZIBA BASHER

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Dr Sayed Saikh Imtiaz

"The hardships that my mother, like other mothers in our country, went through- she did not deserve it," says Dr Sayed Saikh Imtiaz, Chairperson and Associate Professor, Department of Women and Gender Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Executive Director (Honorary), Center for Men and Masculinities Studies (CMMS). With a single tear at the corner of his eye, he looked into thin air with melancholic nostalgia, remembering the woman, his best friend, he used to call 'amma'. "She was the reason, the sole reason I studied on women."

After finishing his High School studies in Rangpur High School and then Carmichael College, Rangpur, he first enrolled himself into the Bangla department of Dhaka University but after stumbling across a book in the British Council about Anthropology, he made a swift turn towards that direction. "While I was studying for my Bachelor's in Anthropology, I came across 'anthropology of women'. I was awestruck reading on the past and present of women, and their plight. I felt like I was reading about the life of my mother. There was a pang in my heart that urged me to keep studying about this." Once graduated, Dr Imtiaz then began his post graduation studies in Women and Gender. "The more I delved into the subject, the more I felt for amma."

During his Master's studies, a professor from the Netherlands prompted him to do a PhD on this subject. In 2004, he joined Dhaka University as a lecturer, after completing a one year internship at UNDP and declining a job offer there. He went on to acquire his PhD at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He has already completed a post doctoral assignment on climate change in Sundarban area with Vanderbilt University, USA and is currently working on his second post doctoral on SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights) issues with the generous funding support from the Dutch Government as part of the NOW-WOTRO scheme.

On the subject of Women and Gender, Dr Imtiaz's main focus lies in men and masculinity. "I wanted to learn and see how much men can contribute to gender equality. While women have the ultimate role to play, we men have responsibilities

too. We need to look past this patriarchy and come up with a way to live in harmony, with equality. I want boys and men to be involved in achieving gender justice."

"The injustice stems directly from 'male entitlement'," says Dr Imtiaz. "According to research, the rate of divorce has increased substantially over the past few years among middle-class educated couples. What you will notice is that it began right about the time when women started going out and fending for themselves- when they began earning, when they became independent. This financial independence or becoming a bread-winner, or even the fact the a woman might have to stay out late for work, or work with other male colleagues-- these ideas become unbearable for men. They firmly believe, due to how our society has brought them up, that they alone are entitled to these things, and women must stay indoors and cook and clean for the family- like they have watched their mothers do in the previous generations."

When it comes to sexual harassment, Dr Imtiaz believes it has a lot to do with power and entitlement as well. "We have grown up learning that 'meyar der ke ghor thakte hoy' (women should stay indoors). Those who grew up learning that the streets are for men wonder why a girl should even be allowed to roam the streets freely, and they try to 'put them in their place' through the means of humiliation and harassment. They are afraid women will snatch their place on the streets, that women will take up jobs they 'deserve' to get. They are

afraid of losing the power they were entitled to over the other genders. And that fright in them leads to backlash in the form of violence and harassment." He continues, "If we want to change the situation we will have to focus on educating men regarding gender equality and the earlier we start, the better. We have rightly focused on empowering women but have not thought of preparing men to accept the change."

Dr Imtiaz has carried out a number of action researches based on the insights of his PhD research to identify ways to empower men and boys. The BraveMen Campaign, one of the projects led by him, included a series of co-curricular activities aimed at developing a positive mindset among school children, especially young boys, regarding the rights of women and girls. Every participant was to maintain a diary called 'Brave Man Diary' where he narrates and reflects on how he interacts with and treats his female acquaintances on a daily basis. They were also asked to imitate the chores that their mothers carry out throughout a day, which ended up receiving immense results with boys admitting that they did not realise how tough a life their mothers lead. The initiative tests how to involve boys in feminist activism to initiate long lasting change in conventional masculine practices.

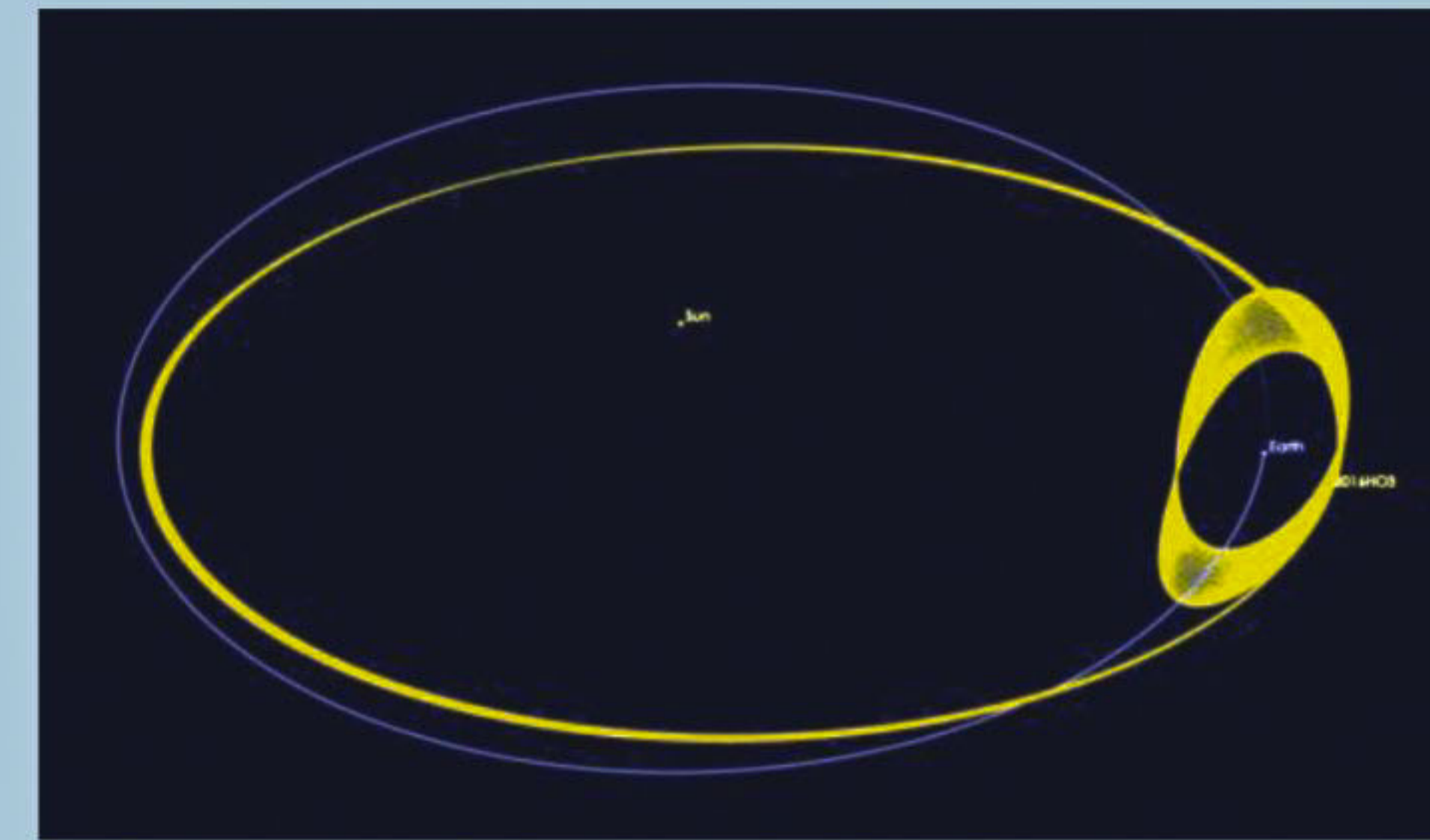
Another initiative called the "Prio Baba Campaign" is organised by the Centre for Men and Masculinities Studies (CMMS) together with Promundo US and funded by

UBS Foundation. As an action research initiative "Prio Baba Campaign" is conducting awareness campaigns in the rural areas of five districts of Bangladesh. The campaign involved mostly fathers to sensitise them about family planning, rights of wives and children, and the negative impacts of domestic violence. This action research is trying to develop and test a community dialogue initiative involving fathers to stop violence in their homes. The uniqueness of this initiative is to involve fathers who have educated their daughters as role models and have not married them off at an early age, and have performed their household responsibilities. Dr Imtiaz says, "We want to see whether stories of the life of these fathers can inspire the younger fathers to be different."

With exemplary feminist leaders like Dr Imtiaz paving the way for us to join him in the journey of achieving gender equality, we can see the day when we finally achieve what we all have been fighting for. "We need to stop being silent. In the case of harassment and injustice, even silence in violence- it is supporting the bad guys. But there are people who are supporting the women they are with. These are first generation men- they are the first in our society who have begun accepting women as equals, and these are the men who give me hope. These men and women will teach their children the value of equality and justice, and as we see that roll out- I think we can be confident about a good future. I remain hopeful still," and it is evident in his concluding smile. ■

QUIRKY SCIENCE

EARTH'S CONSTANT COMPANION



A small asteroid has been discovered in an orbit around the sun that keeps it as a constant companion of Earth, and it will remain so for centuries to come.

As it orbits the sun, this new asteroid, designated 2016 HO3, appears to circle around Earth as well. It is too distant to be considered a true satellite of our planet, but it is the best and most stable example to date of a near-Earth companion, or "quasi-satellite."

"Since 2016 HO3 loops around our planet, but never ventures very far away as we both go around the sun, we refer to it as a quasi-satellite of Earth," said Paul Chodas, manager of NASA's Center for Near-Earth Object (NEO) Studies at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. "One other asteroid - 2003 YN107 -

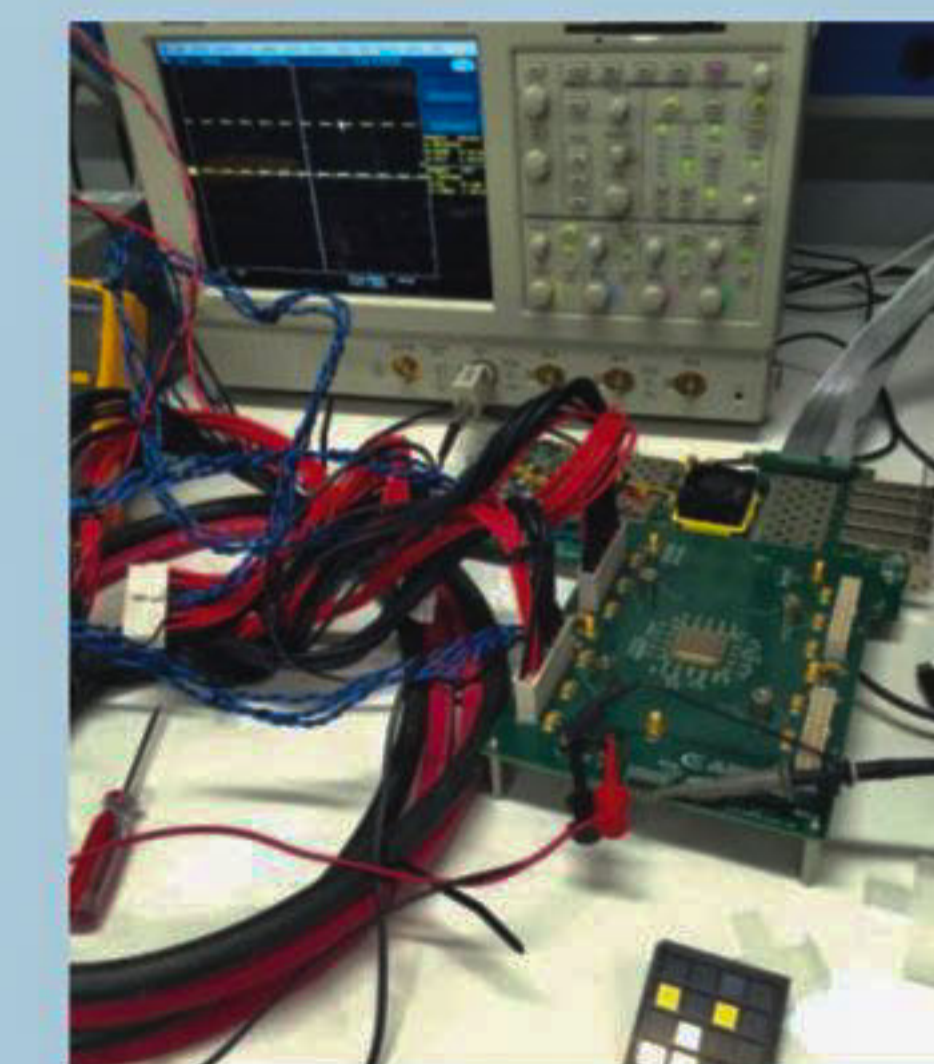
followed a similar orbital pattern for a while over 10 years ago, but it has since departed our vicinity. This new asteroid is much more locked onto us. Our calculations indicate 2016 HO3 has been a stable quasi-satellite of Earth for almost a century, and it will continue to follow this pattern as Earth's companion for centuries to come."

In its yearly trek around the sun, asteroid 2016 HO3 spends about half of the time closer to the sun than Earth and passes ahead of our planet, and about half of the time farther away, causing it to fall behind. Its orbit is also tilted a little, causing it to bob up and then down once each year through Earth's orbital plane. In effect, this small asteroid is caught in a game of leap frog with Earth that will last for hundreds of years.

1,000-PROCESSOR CHIP

A microchip containing 1,000 independent programmable processors has been designed by a team at the University of California, Davis, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. The energy-efficient "KiloCore" chip has a maximum computation rate of 1.78 trillion instructions per second and contains 621 million transistors. The KiloCore was presented at the 2016 Symposium on VLSI Technology and Circuits in Honolulu on June 16.

"To the best of our knowledge, it is the world's first 1,000-processor chip and it is the highest clock-rate processor ever designed in a university," said Bevan Baas, professor of electrical and computer engineering, who led the team that designed the chip architecture. While other multiple-processor chips have been created, none exceed about 300 processors, according to an analysis by Baas' team. Most were created for research purposes and few are sold commercially. The KiloCore chip was fabricated by IBM using their 32 nm CMOS technology.



Each processor core can run its own small program independently of the others, which is a fundamentally more flexible approach than so-called Single-Instruction-Multiple-Data approaches utilized by processors such as GPUs; the idea is to break an application up into many small pieces, each of which can run in parallel on different processors, enabling high throughput with lower energy use, Baas said.

Source: Sciencedaily.com

5 THINGS THAT DO NOT BREAK YOUR FAST

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PHOTO: FARHAN ZAHIN

People in our region have a lot of misconceptions about what breaks the fast and what does not. After going through some fatwas and advice given by Islamic scholars from around the world, we have come up with 5 things that we originally believed to break one's fast but in actuality don't.



- 1 Eye drops/Ear drops-** According to many fatwa's by Islamic scholars including Shaykh Ibn Al-Uthaymeen and Ibn Taymiyyah; anything that does not enter your blood stream or is not orally consumed will not break your fast. Eye drops and ear drops are perfectly safe to use while you are fasting
- 2 Blood test-** According to fatwa given by Shaykh Ibn Al-Uthaymeen, undergoing a blood test will not break one's fast. Blood transfusion, on the other hand, is said to break your fast considering that it provides nourishment into your blood system.
- 3 Brushing your teeth-** Using toothpaste or mouthwash will not break your fast, as long as you ensure that it does not reach your throat (which is quite simple to do), according to fatwa by Shaykh Ibn Al-Uthaymeen, Shaykh Ibn Bas and Shaykh Al-Fawzan.
- 4 Using make-up/perfume-** Applying make-up on one's face or using perfume or deodorant will not break or invalidate the fast as nothing is entering the blood stream or your throat. This fatwa has also been given by Shaykh Ibn Al-Uthaymeen.
- 5 Tasting food-** Contrary to popular belief, if you make sure to spit it out before it reaches your throat, tasting food during cooking or preparing iftaar, is not prohibited or will not break your fast, also according to a fatwa given by Shaykh Ibn Al-Uthaymeen.

Shaykh Ibn Al-Uthaymeen (March 9, 1925 - January 10, 2001) was a Sunni scholar of Saudi Arabia who was considered "a giant within conservative Salafi Islam."