



KEEP OUR HERITAGE ALIVE

"The upsurge of religious fundamentalism, communal intolerance and violence against women are the most pressing issues in our country. In order to combat them, the youth should be informed of our glorious heritage and culture. High-school level religious books still have distorted interpretations of Jihad, while Bangla books fail to portray core patriotic values. Our education systems must be reformed immediately.

We also need to decentralise. The distance between the capital and its

adjacent districts should be brought under two hours' journey by developing a strong train network, so that office-goers can commute to work and their children can receive education and treatment from respective districts, thereby relieving the strain on Dhaka. Government hospitals at all administrative levels must be equipped with sufficient doctors and medical facilities. Above all, I would like to see our artistic and cultural activities flourish and be celebrated even further. Bangladeshi youth may have an

aversion to politics, but we also have an affinity towards development. If political parties can uphold pro-people and pro-youth election manifestos, bring about positive changes in political culture, implement youth empowerment policies and motivate us to initiate entrepreneurs through loans with low interest rates, there will be much more enthusiastic participation of the younger generation."

TANJILA SUMAIA SIDDIQYE

Freelance Artist & Student, Faculty of Fine Art University of Dhaka

PROVE US WRONG, BANGLADESH

"I'd say President Xi Jinping's visit was the highlight of the year. The fact that China, at a time of economic crisis, thought of Bangladesh as a major ally proves how economically strong we are.

At the same time, I am horrified by the Holey Artisan Bakery incident and the complete failure of the law enforcement to bring justice to victims like Tonu, the latter highlighting how the country turns a blind eye to crimes perpetuated by a stronger force among us. Journalists are being attacked, women are being raped, and citizens are

being assassinated.

We don't want much. Give us a level playing field and the youth will take the economy to greater heights. But if you give us a country where we have to bribe higher ups before kick-starting a business, where we have minimal safety, where there is no funding for research, then the youth will always be more interested to take their trades and potential elsewhere.

All I want from 2017 is stability. I want a change of culture where no crime gets swept under the rug because of

outside influence.

What do I expect to occur for change? Not much. But maybe Bangladesh will surprise me. There is nothing I would like more than to be proved wrong."

NUREN IFTEKHAR

2nd Year, Applied Chemistry and Chemical Engineering University of Dhaka



UNSTOPPER THE SILENCE

"I see victories in little developments, in the way that we are creating our own initiatives for a better world, that is steadily and one hopes, sustainably growing.

We view politics and governance as a defunct system that is someone else's mess to clean. It is a dangerous mindset to have; it takes away the power to change. Bangladesh needs to create the access, opportunity and inspiration for us to engage in the economic and political landscape.

We must think about how we collectively treat differences in our societies and the underlying intolerance we nurture. There needs to be a place for discourse, and people willing to have that discourse.

On issues of child rape and the Child Marriage Restraint Act – I am exhausted. As a woman, it is depressing to watch how our bodies and our lives are treated by the society and the rule of law. It makes all the work I have to do every day to validate myself as a woman in

this society feel useless.

I don't expect changes immediately, but I would like for us to begin to question and debate. This is a space we are rapidly losing, in the absence of which our silence will only contribute to our problems."

ISHRAT JAHAN

4th Year, Economics and Anthropology BRAC University

TEACH THE RIGHT KIND OF RELIGION

"I am deeply concerned with the restraint on expression of alternate views in our country. In fact, terrorism and violence often result from the lack of democratic space.

The involvement of young adults from liberal and affluent backgrounds in recent events highlights the vital role of education in any society. Young minds who want to learn about religion are often misguided. The government and society must therefore help *madrasas* to provide correct religious education and prevent such extremist ideologies.

Meanwhile, our leaders should set

examples of harmony for the youth to follow, as our founding fathers did. They can do so by practicing tolerance and allowing the opposition, be it political or ideological, to engage in the country's growth, through a fair election, discourse platforms and partnerships in development projects. Initiatives like Islamic Bank Bangladesh's move to help two million entrepreneurs must be decentralised towards rural areas to reduce pressure on overpopulated urban hubs.

Finally, simply ensuring high enrolment will have no benefit – we

need quality education in primary schools and *madrasas*, and university education that is practical to our vision as a nation. Recently, the Malaysian Air Asia Group's CEO decided to finance a student attending Oxford University. If our corporate leaders undertake the responsibility of educating underprivileged students with potential, Bangladesh can reach much greater heights."

MAHFUZ RAHMAN

Former student of Alia and Cowmi Madrasa, BA Honours in English North South University

