



LEAPING BOUNDARIES BREAKING STEREOTYPES

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'Slates, Smiles and Ambitions' is an article that was published in the Daily Star's 'Star Campus' back in 2012. It highlighted the positive characteristics of madrasahs and narrated an elaborate discussion on how the presumably 'third stream' of our education sector could be better integrated inside the society. The article instilled a thought into young Syeda Shagufe Hossain, which eventually turned into a determination to help out and empower students from this often neglected sector. "The article was one of the few positive takes on madrasahs that I had read until then. It didn't talk about madrasahs from an extremism or counter-extremism perspective. It also spoke of some challenges that the madrasah sector faced. It really made me want to help them out in any capacity I could," says Shagufe.

Shagufe eventually started her own project called 'Leaping Boundaries' in 2012, which initially was an English language tutorial programme. "Back then, I thought teaching English would help reintegrate madrasahs into the mainstream," explains Shagufe. "But that was not the case. In 2013, we shut down the project and took some time to re-conceptualise it as one that was geared towards visibility." Leaping Boundaries re-started in 2014, but this time, it catered towards 12 to 16 year old girls. It helped the girls to develop three primary aspects: soft skills, technological education and psychological



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support to ensure their general well-being, with the goal of increasing visibility on platforms where they are typically underrepresented.

Leaping Boundaries currently has 40 permanent members working for them. Eight members work on access to madrasahs, communication, procurement, events and fundraising while others provide direct field support. Volunteers work on a one-year contract during which they receive specialised

training on the component that they are recruited for. "The feeling is overwhelming, really," says Sohana Hassan, a volunteer for Leaping Boundaries and a student of North South University. "I've always thought that madrasah students are backdated in terms of mentality and philosophy, but after I met the girls, it was definitely not the case."

Last month, the project hosted a unique tech exhibition named Toppled.

The event took place on Thursday, 22nd June at the EMK Centre and it was an attempt to break stereotypes and incorporate madrasah girls into mainstream platforms by displaying their talents in the field of technological education. Toppled was a six month programme on technological education under its Collaborative Tech Reasoning component. It aimed to expose madrasah girls to technological education, which they lacked severely in their

normal curriculum. The initiative was supported by the EMK Centre through a partnership with Tech Academy and THRIVE. Girls from Madinatul Ulum Model Women's Kamil Madrasah, Al-Amin Islamia Madrasah and Gawsia Islamia Madrasah received training from volunteer trainers from various universities in Dhaka. "Their dedication, interest towards learning and enthusiasm to compete with the mainstream platforms are something that is helping the project move forward," says Tanzila Shawquat Ira, who has been working with the project for two years. "At the age where we used to play computer games, these girls are making and developing them! More than anything, Toppled is a huge confidence booster for our girls," she states.

"In the next few years, the goal is to finish developing curriculum for each of our components and then work with the government to scale up the project at the national level," says Shagufe.

With various limitations, Leaping Boundaries has come a long way from where it began. It earned Shagufe the first ever Dalai Lama Fellowship from Bangladesh this year. Going forward, she wants the project to be successful on a National level. "In the next few years, I want to help as many people as I can. The sector provides education to 1.5 million girls in Bangladesh, and they simply cannot be overlooked. We would like to impact their lives in a meaningful way," Shagufe expresses.



PATHAO INTRODUCING MOBILITY TO THE CITY

TABASSUM BINTE TABRIZ

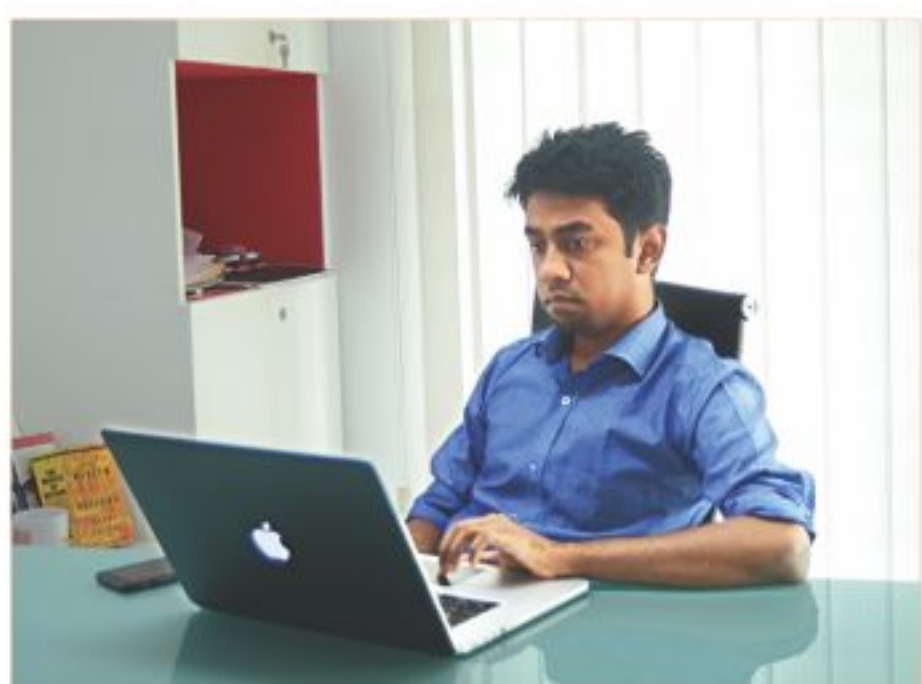
One of the biggest problems we face today in the city is the traffic jam. So, when asked what made him take the decision to start Pathao, Co-founder and CEO Elius Hussain simply replies, "The traffic." In a densely populated city like ours, startups like Pathao, transports people and goods in two wheels beating the traffic. And it has received a great response from the common people after marking its launch in 2015.

The path was not always smooth. Initially, Pathao started as a delivery service. It delivered parcels and goods on bicycles to people in and outside Dhaka. In the middle of 2015, Pathao decided to shift to motorcycles, as they were fast and on the demand transports. In the beginning, there were approximately 100 drivers employed by the startup.

Pathao was launched from the business idea Elius Hussain first started with his friend Fahim Saleh and Adnan Shifat. Adnan Shifat is now the CTO of Pathao. Like all successful startup stories, they had to face a lot of obstacles. There were financial issues and the families weren't much of a supporter. As time passed, the business started to grow fast and caught people's attention. There were people who believed in them and offered them the support they needed. Now, there are almost 500 freelancers who are serving the customers.

The customers who use Pathao Rides are mainly students and service holders. All they have to do is request a ride on the app, mention their destination and the location they are at and get dropped for a fixed price. Pathao's rides are priced so that they cost less than an auto-rickshaw's. Pathao Rides is avail-

able from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week. It is a metered system, so you do not need to bargain at all. The app has a great interface, where you can pinpoint your pick up location on a map, which makes it way more convenient than giving out directions over the



phone. But the startup's core business still relies on deliveries. When launched in 2015, Pathao wanted to introduce themselves as instant courier service, delivering parcels through time and speed. The regular merchants were not that interested as they wanted reliability. But Pathao has improved since

then. They have launched 'Free Experience Campaign: My First Pathao Ride' on December 1st, 2017. During this campaign, customers were offered to experience their first Pathao ride for free in Dhaka City.

"We hope to expand in the nearby future," says Elius Hussain. Pathao does have some local competitors, like Amarbike. Regarding this, Elius Hussain says, "I won't say that we are better than the local competitors. Of course, there are fields where we need to improve more."

Pathao is one of the most successful startups in recent years. There are a lot of unemployed young people around the country who have the ability to start businesses like this, but cannot find the inspiration. For them, Elius Hussain says, "The young people need to believe in themselves. There will be a lot of people who would say that they can't do it or it is crazy to take such risks. However, if they believe in themselves, anything is possible."

Although Pathao is still in its improvement stage, we can hope that it will expand more in the future and offer mobility and safety to the people in the commuting field.



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