

A JOURNEY TO SPREAD STRENGTH

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Inspirations come in different forms. It is something that we need every day to fight against the odds and advance further, to push ourselves little by little and become better than what we are today. However, when it comes to being a woman, the path of advancement becomes more challenging sometimes.

This is where 3.5 Billion Reasons steps in. Supported and funded by the U.S Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the programme claims to address the gap

Exchange and Study (YES) programme alumni members and trained professionals. After attending the two day long training session, the participants are expected to spread the inspiration they gain from the programme within their societies. A grant allowance is given to the participants and are hand-picked based on their potential by the programme coordinator and also the principals of the schools. Each participant is assisted by a mentor. The participants are then trained to identify their

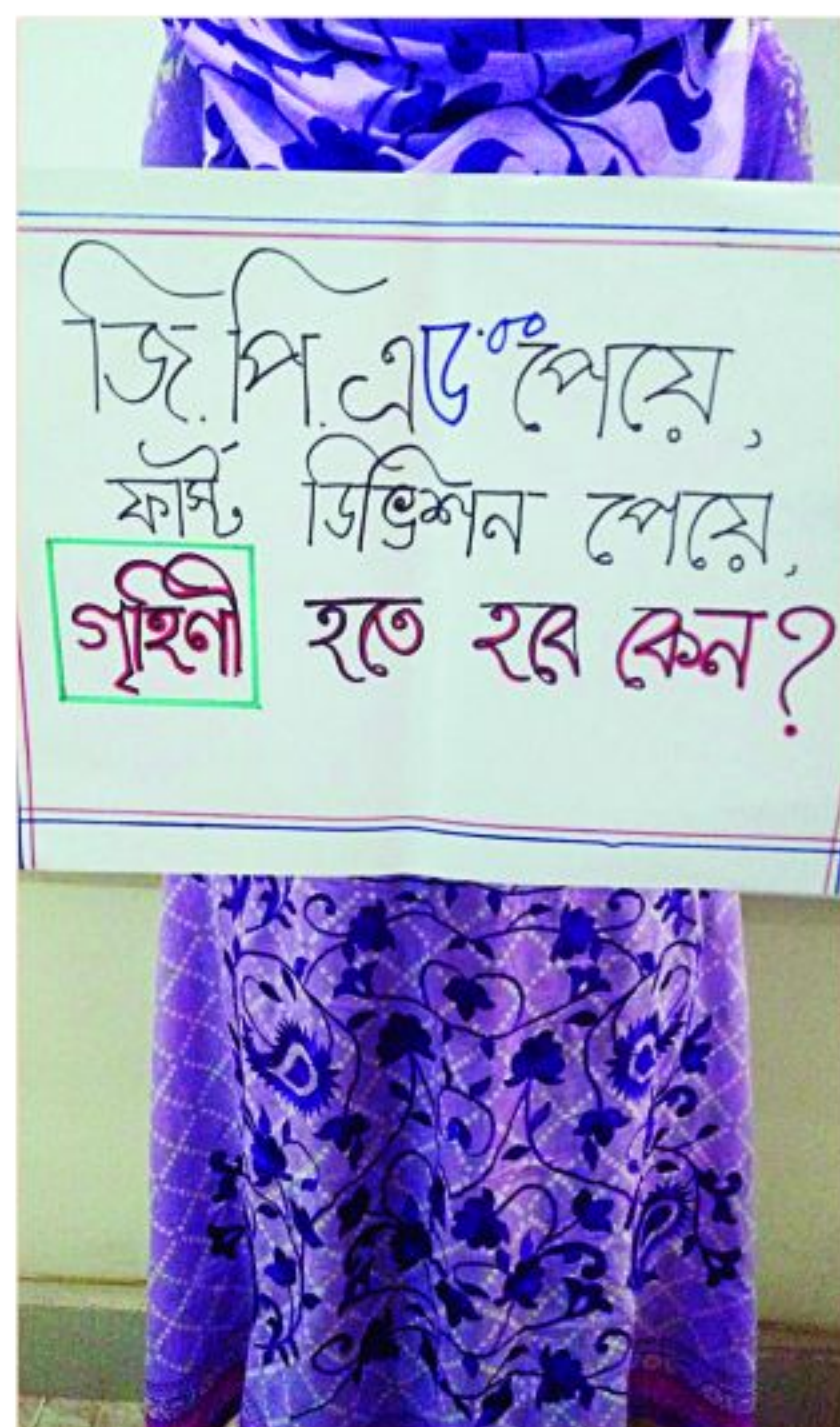
Bangladesh, Bangladesh Nari Lekhok Foundation, Aangina and more.

3.5 Billion Reasons programme coordinator Mustahsin Islam says, "In rural areas, we mostly find boys pursuing higher education. Sadly, the same cannot be said in case of girls. I had once met a young girl who got married early and could not think of pursuing higher education. This worked as a trigger and made me feel the urge to do something about it." Mustahsin got to thinking, "If I can help at least

respective mentors. Mustahsin says, "More than thirty girls were initially selected but only 18 of them made it to the programme due to the lack of support from their parents. We tried hard to convince the guardians but ultimately, their patriarchal mentality beat us."

However, there have been a number of success stories already. 12 out of these 18 participants have opened clubs in their respective schools where they discuss social problems, particularly the

Islam Oishy, a Grade 10 student from Tetaigoan Rashid Uddin High School, Sylhet, who recently qualified for the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange & Study (YES) Program 2017 with the help of her 3.5 Billion Reasons mentor. All of these achievements were exhibited on 28th April, 2017, at BRAC Learning Centre, Uttara. They were awarded with certificates later. 3.5 Billion Reasons is a ray of hope for female students living in rural areas of Bangladesh. This programme encour-



PHOTOS: COURTESY

of education and leadership opportunities between urban and rural female students in Bangladesh. It also hopes to connect and inspire the youth to take the initiative to stand up for equal rights and make communities brighter. The initiative began in September last year and has till date worked with 18 girls studying in 9th and 10th grades coming from Mymensingh, Netrokona, Sylhet, Narsingdi and Munshiganj.

The 3.5 Billion Reasons workshop is conducted by the Kennedy-Lugar Youth

leadership abilities, comprehend the importance of volunteerism in our society and become more actively involved in developing communities. The platform enables mentors and mentees to develop a healthy relationship, enabling each to become a source of inspiration for the other through communication and sharing experiences.

One of the key aims of this programme is to make the participants familiar with organisations like the U.S. Embassy Dhaka, USAID, Spreeha

ten girls to fulfill their dreams of pursuing higher education and achieve desired jobs, I would consider that as one of the most significant achievements of my life. These very thoughts led me and Toufique Tuhin to come up with the idea of creating 3.5 Billion Reasons," he explains.

It was a big challenge to convince the parents of the participants to allow their daughters to come to Dhaka, attend the programme, stay for a night and attend the consultations with their

problems regarding young girls and try to come up with ideas to solve them by taking a group initiative. Sanjida Islam, a student of Grade 9 and one of the participants from Putia High School, Narsingdi, successfully rescued one of her school mates who was about to fall a victim of child marriage. Other participants from Mymensingh opened a girls club in their school and held a training session for their peers to share their learning from this programme. Another example is that of Fahima

ages the participants to create more leaders like them and become the strength of the nation. If young changemakers like Mustahsin and Toufique continue to empower the youth of this country, someday, we will have enough leaders and active citizens to help Bangladesh become one of the most admired, empowered and developed nations of the world.

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TRUCK LAGBE: A NEW NAME IN THE DELIVERY WORLD

TABASSUM BINTE TABRIZ

Everyday tons of products are delivered throughout the country by different commercial vehicles. Sometimes, it becomes a burden when one cannot find a proper and safe transport to deliver heavy goods. To save you from falling into such a dilemma, a new app called "Truck Lagbe" has been designed to provide an instant solution. This app aims to develop a connection between the service receiver and the truck owner or the agency, ensuring a safe delivery of goods to their proper destination.

Mr. Anayet Rashid, Founder and CEO of Truck Lagbe, and Mr. Meer Hosain Ekram, COO, are the key developers of the app. The idea of developing such an app came to Mr. Anayet while handling his own business in the delivery field. He noticed that there was a significant gap in the expenses between the goods delivered by his own transport and those by other transport agencies. To find out why, Mr. Anayet contacted the local ports. While conducting the research, Mr. Anayet was hit with the idea: Why not connect the truck owners directly to the customers through an online portal? He shared the idea with his friend, Mr. Ekram. After discussing for hours, the two developers started to contact truck owners and agencies, who also seemed highly interested as the idea was a fresh one.

Currently, the Truck Lagbe app has two versions: one designed for truck owners and the other for shippers. The truck owner's one allows trucks to be registered under the app and the owners are provided with free GPS system to help keep track of their products.

Even before its launching, the Truck Lagbe app has received first position in the "Startup Challenge 2017" competition held this June, organised by the



PHOTO: AKIB ABDULLAH

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) division of Bangladesh Government. Regarding the competition Mr. Anayet says, "The experience was a good one. The judges asked all the participants practical questions. We actually learnt what to expect when going for a presentation like this." 72 contestants from all

across the country took part in this challenge and shared their ideas through presentations and other activities.

Similar to other apps, Truck Lagbe saw some difficulties in its initial days. With a limited source of revenue, the company faced financial crisis. However, once the project grew, the

other seven partners of the company carried all the expenses. Moreover, after winning "Startup Challenge 2017", the company has received a free co-working space. Also, Robi and bKash have extended their hands to work as the tracking service partner and financial partner respectively for the company.

On the bright side, both the developers received immense support from their families from the very beginning. "We are lucky that we didn't get any negative opinion from our parents," expresses Mr. Anayet.

These days, the youths are more interested into becoming their own boss by paving the country's path to development. For them, the story of Truck Lagbe app could work as an inspiration. In the past 12 years, Mr. Anayet and Mr. Ekram had thought of many brilliant ideas, but stepped back at the very last moment. However, this time, when they took a giant leap of faith with Truck Lagbe, magic happened. "The youth must work on whatever idea they have. Even if the market survey comes negative, they should work on an approach to solve it, rather than backing off. Passion will help them overcome any problem that they face," says a smiling Mr. Anayet.

Many brilliant ideas come across our minds everyday. With integrity, passion and thoughtfulness, these ideas can actually come to see the light. The Truck Lagbe app would be a great solution to many problems in the industrial world and hopefully, its journey further on will be an encouraging one.