



# YOUNG BANGLA

## Engaging youth in nation-building

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*An occasion dedicated to the youth of the nation, the second installation of 'Joy Bangla Youth Award' – organised by Young Bangla – completed its journey last month with a beautiful grand finale, awarding 30 organisations from across the country for their works that are changing the lives of their respective communities.*

*Launched in 2014, Young Bangla is a special initiative that aims to bring together young individuals. It presents them with a platform that can launch their ideas and enhance their skills so they can give something back to their communities and help build a better Bangladesh for everyone.*

This year's competition awarded teams under three categories: Community Development, Cultural Development, and Sports Development.

Thirty teams passed through rigorous tests to win the awards. These remarkable teams included:

1. **Shopno Dekho** (Community Development), Jessor
2. **Barisal Youth Society** (Community Development), Barisal
3. **Durbar Foundation** (Community Development), Comilla
4. **Kaktarua** (Community Development), Sylhet
5. **I Positive** (Community Development), Thakurgaon
6. **Jhumpul Theatre** (Cultural Development), Rangamati
7. **Theatre Muridchad** (Cultural Development), Sylhet
8. **Choupassh Nattanchal** (Cultural Development), Bogra
9. **Rangatungi United Women Football Academy** (Sports Development), Thakurgaon
10. **Wheelchair Cricket Association Bangladesh** (Sports Development), Gazipur

Going back to its formative time, Sabbir Bin Shams, Executive Director of Center for Research and Information (CRI), that works as the secretariat of Young Bangla, recalled how and why it all began, "What we wanted

to do with this organisation is look for youth all over the country, who, despite not having many resources at their disposal were trying to do something for the betterment of the society – be it making bird houses, or donating clothes to the homeless, or teaching street children. We wanted to shed light on young change-makers of this nation. We wanted to find stories of people who have something to give back to the country."

He spoke about how through this programme, a lot has changed in the way they thought of the youth of Bangladesh. "We had this impression that the youth are not usually involved in social activities on their own, especially in areas outside of Dhaka. But when we started working on Joy Bangla Youth Award, we were overwhelmed with the response we received from all over the country. Thousands of young men and women are working tirelessly to bring about social change and we wanted to give them a platform from which they can reach out to more people effectively."

The initiative was developed to achieve three things:

### 1. BRINGING YOUNG THINKERS TOGETHER AND GIVING THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH LIKEMINDED INDIVIDUALS

Young Bangla arranged workshops and seminars where the participants could interact with each other and develop their own net-



work of social workers.

A great example of such growth is Barisal Youth Society, which won an award in the Community Development category. Starting with only a few friends who wanted to help a poor domestic worker who was expecting and was abandoned by her husband, the group started their journey in 2014 with the hopes to establish equal rights in their community.

Fayez Belal, the founder of this organisation has worked tirelessly with people in his community with over 10,000 active members, helping children go to school and saving young girls from child marriages.

Belal said, "It was our dream to help individuals in need but we have grown to create an organisation that can now facilitate many."

### 2. RECOGNISING THE EFFORTS OF THESE YOUNG INDIVIDUALS TO MOTIVATE THEM

Efforts that were validated include the Wheelchair Cricket Association of Bangladesh and Rangatungi United Women Football Academy, both of which won awards in the Sports Development category. The founder of Wheelchair Cricket Association of Bangladesh, Mohammad Mohasin, spoke about how his organisation came to be after working with differently-abled cricket players for many years and realising that people in wheelchairs were not allowed to participate in teams. "Today we have 200 players in our organisation and we even got a chance to play in the 2016 national tournament," he said.

### 3. PROVIDING YOUTH-LED ORGANISATIONS WITH RESOURCES

Raja Fakir from Choupassh Nattanchal, who won an award in the Cultural Development category, explained how winning this competition has opened many doors for their organisation: "There were only 11 of us, looking for a place to hold drama rehearsals and workshops. But living in a small community, not everyone saw our work as something good. We wanted to help young boys and girls by giving them an outlet to unleash their creative energy and keep them off bad social influences. Today we have over 25 people in our team and after winning the award, we had

the chance to meet the Finance Minister, who asked us how Young Bangla could help us grow."

After scouring all over the nation to find and encourage youth organisations to participate in the contest, it took over 6 months to do 70 activations and 100 field visits across 40 districts that ended in 1300 applicants. Hundred teams passed through arduous challenges and finally 50 teams were nominated for the Joy Bangla Youth Award. All of the 50 nominated organisations were given WE smart-phones from Aamra Companies and the top 30 received a laptop each, courtesy of the ICT Division of Bangladesh, and trophies.

Some special awards were also given to three problem-solving based projects by Young Bangla member organisations; each team received a BDT 500,000 cheque from Microsoft Bangladesh. Kumar Biswajit Barman, one of the winners, also a Joy Bangla Youth awardee in 2015, received a cheque worth BDT 500,000 for the best Microsoft Young Bangla lab.

The success of Joy Bangla Youth Award speaks for itself, as each of the participating teams is making positive impact on their localities – gradually trying to build a better Bangladesh. If you have an idea that you believe can bring about positive change, take a leap of faith and apply for the next instalment of Joy Bangla Youth Award.

