

# Awarding the best in leadership

## Young Leaders Program steps into its 5th instalment



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

**MOHUA MOULI**

Young Leaders Program (YLP), a reality show that brings together the brilliant young minds of our country to showcase their leadership skills, is stepping into its 5th season. We sat down with Taslim Ahmed – CEO of Unitrend Ltd. and Consultant, ICAB – who is one of the chief initiators and a jury member of YLP to talk about the programme and what we can expect this season.

**SHOUT: Tell us about the Young Leaders Program.**

**Taslim Ahmed:** It's an initiative of Channel i. It started with the hope to help young graduates become leaders. By "leader", we don't specifically mean a business leader but people coming from all backgrounds learning how to attain leadership qualities. We wanted to guide them and award them for showing growth as an individual.

Alongside regular media, we have digital media that enables people from all over the country to apply. We only take applicants who have already completed their bachelor's degree. The champions in our show receive full scholarships for a master's degree in renowned universities abroad.

**SHOUT: From what academic backgrounds do you usually find applicants?**

**Taslim Ahmed:** For the first 2 seasons, we had applicants who were mostly from business backgrounds. Hence we only

provided scholarship opportunities for MBA programmes. But since then we started receiving more applications from more diverse academic backgrounds. We had to change our affiliations with foreign universities so that if someone from a background other than business wins the competition, they can pursue programmes other than MBA.

Now we get applicants who are arts or science students, and we are looking forward to participants from all backgrounds for the seasons to come.

**SHOUT: How is YLP different from other competitions?**

**Taslim Ahmed:** I believe we have definitely gained a lot of confidence over the years and that has garnered popularity as well as good reputation. It comes from the singular fact that our show is a "reality show" in its true sense; there is no nepotism nor is any part of the show made to look the way it does. The authenticity of our programme is what makes it stand out. We don't take any patronage. If anything, you can think of this show as a social responsibility project on our part. So we are very passionate about its execution.

Last season, the Ministry of Education, and University Grants Commissions were also affiliated with us. They helped us connect with universities abroad as well.

**SHOUT: What are the procedures of the competition?**

**Taslim Ahmed:** We have a few thousand applicants each year; from this pool we

shortlist contestants, who then have to pass a standardised test. From here we select the top hundred or so contestants who sit for an interview. Around 50-70 young graduates are finally selected to take part in YLP. Last year we had faculty members from IBA, DU who helped us in the selection and grooming of the participants as mentors.

Each year we have judges who are renowned figures in the corporate world. Abdul Muktadir, Managing Director of Incepta Pharmaceuticals Ltd. and I are the core members of the jury. We also have a company affiliated to the show each season, and have different members join us in the judging panel each year. So far we have partnered with Incepta, Symphony Mobile, Well Food, and so on.

Every season we work with many such companies who provide the participants with real tasks relating to their brand. We have done social work with Concern Worldwide Bangladesh, sales and product development for Meena Bazar, ACI, Kazi & Kazi Tea, etc. Contestants are given a week to complete the task after which they face the boardroom where they have to showcase their ideas. Contestants are eliminated after each round until we end up with the top 5-10 young leaders who are awarded the scholarship to study abroad.

**SHOUT: What changes can we expect from the new season?**

**Taslim Ahmed:** This season we will defi-

nately have a more diverse range of applicants. During our initial stages we mostly had applicants from private universities and specifically from business backgrounds. This year we are expecting more response from public university graduates; a larger number of CSE graduates are also taking part in the competition. This is because more often technology is affiliated with ideas and so knowledge in ICT fields tends to give many contestants an edge over their peers.

**SHOUT: Lastly, how do you see the youth of Bangladesh?**

**Taslim Ahmed:** People often say that the youth of Bangladesh will change the country. I believe that they are already doing so and will continue to do so. The youth of this country have immense potential to do great things at home and abroad. With YLP, we are trying to give them a platform through which they can grow, fulfil their ambitions, and make the country proud. I am amazed each season by the talent that is latent in these young graduates. What they accomplish in the span of 7 days for a particular task is no easy job, even for experienced individuals like us. I am hopeful about the youth of our nation.

*If you think you have what it takes to be a true leader, take a leap of faith and apply this season to win a chance at a prestigious post grad scholarship abroad. To find out more, keep an eye on the news and Channel i.*