

# DOERS TODAY, NATION BUILDERS TOMORROW



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## Allowing Yourself to Dream

Musfika Akter Bithe won gold medals in four consecutive national level gymnastics competitions from 2010 to 2014. These competitions were organised by Bangladesh Gymnastics Federation. In her 23-years of life, Bithe has achieved much more than she expected. After completing HSC from BKSP School and College, she resumed her sports career by joining the Ansar and Village Defence Party (VDP) and started her undergraduate in Laalmatia Mohila College. The Daily Star speaks to Bithe about her successes, failures, and challenges.

**SANJIDA CHOWDHURY**

Thank you very much for your time. Could you please tell us about the beginning of your journey as an accredited gymnast?

My love for gymnastics dates back to



Musfika Akter Bithe

PHOTO: AKIB ABDULLAH

2006, when I was in grade eight. Back then, Gazipur Physical College introduced the first gymnastics course for children and adults. It was my father's dream to see me as an athlete, so, he got me admitted to the college. His fascination about sports is the reason why I am here today. Initially, the institution was a fun place for me. After practicing there for some days, I felt stronger and more flexible than ever

before. One day, I was informed about a match at the NAC Bhaban of Bangabandhu National Stadium, and it required a month of training. I was called for that camp and was given a month of training by Coach Nazrul Islam. After a month of practice, I took part in the game and won the second from the junior group. From then onwards, I started playing for Gazipur Zilla. My father and my coach were always there to train me for the coming events.

How did BKSP help you to be a national level gymnast? Not everyone from this institution can make it to this level.

The journey was not very smooth for me. Right after I started playing professionally, I lost my father. Even months after his death, I could not accept his departure. Often times, I thought of quitting sports, but, one night, I realised that the only way to remember him was through fulfilling his dreams. I resumed my career and participated in some local competitions. One day, the then Secretary of Bangladesh Gymnastics Federation, Ahmedur Rahman Bablu, told my uncle to get me admitted to the BKSP. He said that he could see the zeal for sports in me and if I continued like this, one day, I would be in the national team. Till then, I did not know anything about this institution. So, after some days, I tried for BKSP. I was called in for a camp to train myself for the admission test. I was selected for the primary level. After that, I attended another week of campaign. Our physical and mental soundness, academic performance and medi-

cal condition were scrutinised there. After the final analysis, leaving four other contestants behind, I was selected as a student of BKSP in 2007.

Tell us about the eventful 8 years of your journey as a student of BKSP. After joining BKSP, I participated in National Gymnastics Competition from junior section for the first time in November 2007. We have four events in gymnastics- floor, vaulting table, balance beam and uneven bars. In that competition, I won three medals - two silver and one gold. In 2008, I took part in the Junior National again and bagged the championship award as a team. I individually claimed two gold and one silver medals. In 2009, I participated in both junior and senior sections and was rewarded with runners-up in individual category. From 2010 onwards, I participated in national gymnastic competitions. As a team, we won the second prize in Sultana Kamal Central South Asian Gymnastics Competition. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan and some other countries came to participate in that competition. That was the first international gymnastics competition to be held in Bangladesh. All these achievements were the results of the constant supervision and guidance of my coaches, Kazi Akram Ali and Nasrin Akter Milu. I could not have been here today without their support.

In the four segments of gymnastics, which includes floor, vaulting table, balance beam and side bars, which one is your strong suit?

I participate in all the four segments. But my strong suit is vaulting table. I

win gold medal in vaulting game every year. Floor is another segment I find very interesting. I have won second and third prizes in floor so far. I have been receiving gold medals in vaulting game since 2008. We had notched team championship in gymnastics in Bangladesh Games. I won an individual silver medal in that contest.

How supportive has your family been throughout the journey?

My family has been tremendously supportive throughout the journey. My father gave me the first exposure to gymnastics in my childhood. After his death, I was almost on the verge of giving up sports. Then I found my mother, sisters, uncle and my maternal grandfather beside me. Their inspiration and constant support made my path easier. Even though he is very old and weak, my Nana Bhai (maternal grandfather) still manages to come to my shows quite often.

After completing HSC from BKSP, you joined Ansar and VDP to continue your gymnastics career. Do you find any inadequacy between these two institutions in terms of functionality and facility?

I have been playing for Ansar and VDP for last two years. In the past two years, we could not defeat BKSP due to the lack of resources Ansar and VDP have. We only have two gymnasiums in the whole country. We never have the opportunity to practice in Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium. We practice in Bangabandhu National Stadium and that is only right before the match. We have 10 events (6 for boys and 4 for

girls), so, we need a whole gymnasium for this. However, we divide the whole gymnasium in four sections for gymnastics, karate, fencing and wushu. We get the whole gymnasium only three days of the game. On the other hand, BKSP gets the chance to practice for the whole year in their own gymnasium. They even get different facilities as students. As a result, they perform better. Another big inadequacy is the lack of sponsorships the private clubs face. Companies hesitate to sponsor us due to our average performance compared to BKSP students.

What kind of supports do you seek from the government in order to raise the credibility of the less recognised sports in our country?

We want to dream big, that's all. We want our government to recognise our efforts. If we are given financial security, we could actually concentrate on our sport. We want a stadium with the necessary amenities for players. We want more scopes to showcase our talent. The discrimination between other sports like football and cricket and gymnastics is very visible. Just like gymnastics, karate, wushu and tennis are also hopeful sports for Bangladesh. But not many of us know about these players and their struggles. As gymnasts, we have to have alternative jobs in order to run our families. For instance, currently I am working as a fitness trainer at Zaara's Beauty Lounge. Like this, my friends work for different institutions. We want our sponsors to have faith in us and let us exhibit what we are capable of.

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