



THE FRUIT OF PERSEVERANCE

PHOTO: COURTESY

FAHIM IMTIAZ

Born into a lower middle-income family, Ahsan Al Rifat was passionate about joining the army from a young age. After graduating from Dhaka Residential Model College (DRMC) he sat for the Inter Services Selection Board (ISSB) exam, and was part of the 71 BMA long course. When it seemed like all was going his way, fate struck a tragic blow to Rifat's military aspirations.

Being the oldest son in his family, the weight of expectations bore heavy on Rifat's shoulders. Just after high school, Rifat wanted to support himself and sat for the ISSB exam in hopes of joining the army. After successfully completing the exam, Rifat began his training. It was during this time that an unfortunate knee injury hindered his performance and he was discharged.

Dealing with the frustration of failure even pushed him to contemplate suicide. But even after hitting rock bottom, he decided to use his knowledge to help others pursue their military dreams. He began taking classes at some popular military coaching centres to pay for his tuition fees at BRAC University. The coaching centres were often overfilled, resulting in an overall mediocre quality of service to the students, which failed to prepare them for the actual test. Rifat was usually met with resistance whenever he attempted to teach outside the assigned curriculum.

He noticed discontent among the students at these coaching centers. One such student asked Rifat to teach him personally. With his ISSB exam only four days away, Rifat sat with

him twice daily up until the reporting day. Little did Rifat know that the boy would be the first of many students to receive green cards, thanks to him. Soon, Rifat started coaching seven to ten students in his own home, marketing his services via Facebook and his initiative, Tactical Road to Defence, was born.

However, life decided to throw Rifat another curve ball, in the guise of his land owner disallowing his private coaching sessions. Rifat could not afford to rent a room for his coaching, neither could he risk losing the money it brought in. A former teacher from his college agreed to loan Rifat some

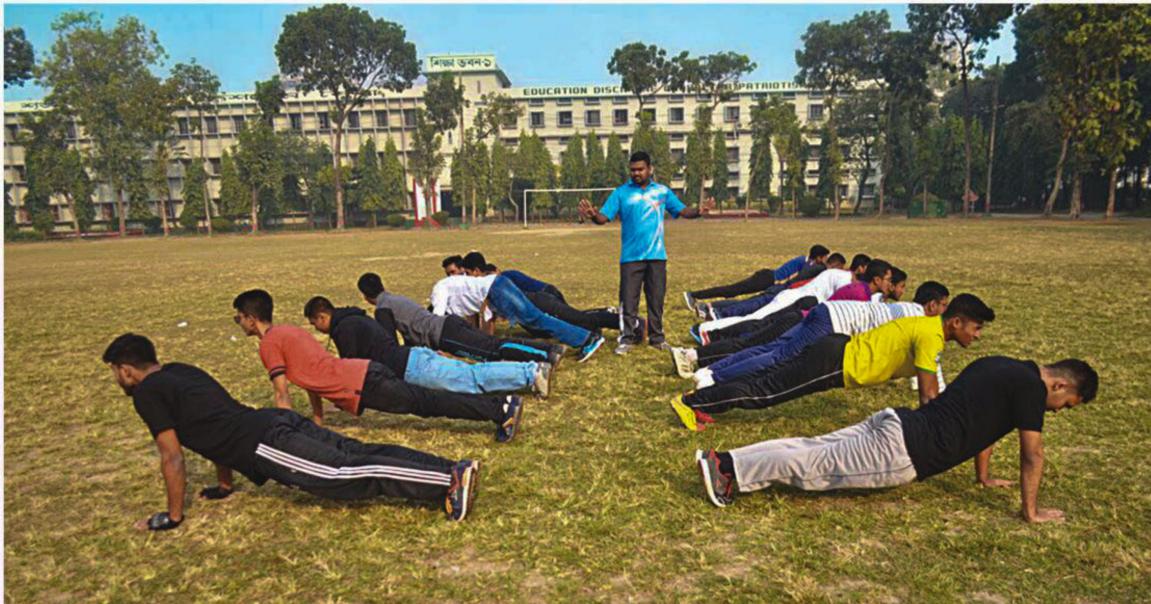
money. With her help, he rented a small room that could barely hold 20 students at a time. But soon, Rifat's coaching sessions started attracting more students with each passing month. His students were separated in batches and provided with one-on-one counseling as well as physical training.

Within a year, he was able to pay back the loan to his teacher and then some.

After his third semester at BRAC University, Rifat was to attend his residential semester at Savar. This meant that he would be unable to continue his coaching and pay his tuition fees. After careful consideration, he decided that his work was more important. Since his parents would not approve, Rifat began leaving home early and coming back late with the pretext of classes, all the while trying to figure out what to do next.

Rifat decided to invest in a bigger room, a projector, and begin holding free seminars to attract more candidates. With the money from incoming students, he enrolled into Daffodil University. "Balancing my university classes and my coaching became a challenge," says Rifat. "I started taking early morning physical training classes and scheduling the batches in the gaps between my classes." Seeing this, one of his faculty members recommended that he participate in the Global Student Entrepreneur Awards (GSEA), which brings global visibility to pioneering student business owners, honouring outstanding students who simultaneously attend university full-time while running their own businesses.

Rifat's business idea was one of the top five finalists at the National Finals of the GSEA held in Dhaka. There was no shortage of obstacles for Rifat to overcome to get to where he is, but his journey is an example of what can be achieved with passion and perseverance.



Rifat's students are provided with one-on-one counseling as well as physical training.

PHOTO: MONON MUNTAKA

BOHUBRIHI

Providing multidimensional online courses

SHARMIN JOYA

Bohubrihi, an online educational platform, offers different courses for e-learners. Yanur Islam Piash and Galib Hassan Khan, the two founders of Bohubrihi, met while studying at BUET. They were both interested in creating an online platform where students can complete courses, learn skills and receive certificates online. Bohubrihi offers courses like Python for Beginners, Adobe

Illustrator, Web Development with Laravel and many others.

"We were in our second year of university, as students of chemical engineering, when the idea came to us. We used to do many courses available in foreign online platforms like Edex and Coursera," says Piash. "We learned things like excel, data science and the fundamental elements of businesses. We wanted to introduce similar courses in Bangla." The foreign courses offer credits which further are

approved by the top-ranked universities, and they provide certificates which students can add into their resumes.

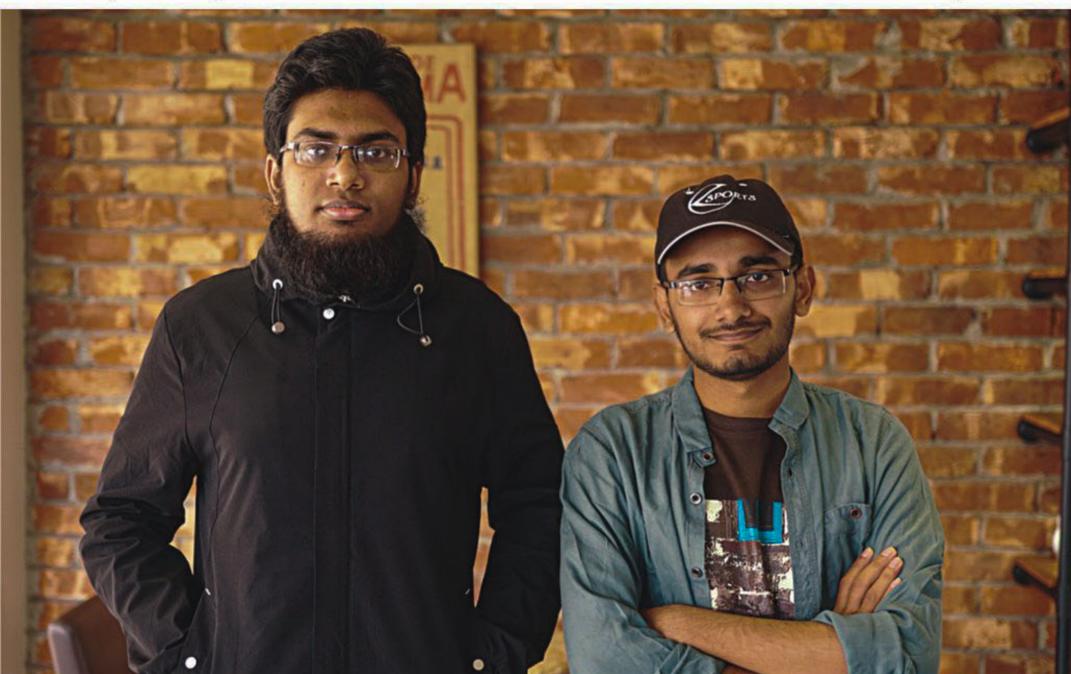
What makes Bohubrihi different from other online platforms is that they provide multidimensional courses which are not only related to education but hobbies and businesses as well. But the journey to starting Bohubrihi was certainly not a smooth one. "We did not have funds to hire web developers. So, we learned how to create websites. We bought web

domains with a small budget," explains Galib.

The website of Bohubrihi was launched in May 2018. Since then, around 200 learners have bought their courses. Apart from their current available courses they have many underdevelopment business courses which they wish to complete soon. With two full-time employees and four volunteers, the founders are doing well for the time being and wish to expand their business with time. "Our courses are targeted at undergraduate students, but we want to have courses for high school and college students soon," says Piash. "We also want to provide courses on farming, gardening and cooking." Bohubrihi encourages freelance instructors, especially from renowned institutions like BUET and Dhaka University. These instructors are free to use their merits in creating new courses on different topics, which can help students in learning new things out of their regular curriculum. The payments for the courses are done through BKash and Rocket.

Moreover, the Bohubrihi team aims to connect people from different sectors who can easily avail the opportunities and learn skills online related to their own interests. Anyone can submit demonstrations of courses to the website, and if they will have a standard quality, they will be approved. People can watch the demonstrations before buying them, and those who do not have a broadband connection can attain the courses through DVDs. Their videos are hosted by Vimeo.

"Currently, we have ten courses but by 2020 we wish to increase this number to thirty, and by 2022, we want to start corporate training. It is a draft plan for now and a matter of time and sponsors," says Piash.



The founders of Bohubrihi.

PHOTO: AVIPSU DAS GUPTA



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