



Nomita Halder with her students.

PHOTO: FARZANA AKHTAR

A SURVIVOR IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Born in Khulna, acid attack survivor Nomita Halder, is a teacher and scholar who has dedicated her life to educating visually impaired children for the last two decades. She is known to be amongst the very first writers, who typed Braille books for their students. Up until now, she has typed over 200 books in Braille voluntarily.

As a young girl, Nomita prepared for her matriculation exam with the goal of becoming a professor some day. However, an incident in 1983, when she was a ninth grader, changed her life. "A middle-aged man stopped me while I was on my way back home after classes. Before I could even notice, he spilled some kind of liquid on my face and hands. As I was holding my school books in my right hand, I tried to wipe my face with my left hand," shared Nomita. In matter of seconds, she started to feel a burning sensation on her face. "Out of pain and unable to tolerate the agony, I started to scream. The last thing I can remember is seeing how my hands were melting right before my eyes," she added.

She was immediately rushed to the Khulna Sadar Hospital where the doctors examined her and informed her parents about the attack. Apparently, the liquid

that was spilled on Nomita's face was a highly corrosive acid. Around seventy-five per cent of Nomita's face, head, and hands were utterly burned and damaged. Her fingers had melted and stuck together. Most regretfully, Nomita lost her sight as her eyes were completely damaged from the acid attack.

While she was under treatment in Khulna, one day Brother Joseph Marjello, an Italian missionary, dropped by the hospital to see Nomita. That meeting changed her life. Brother Marjello consulted with Veronica Campbell, a British Missionary who used to run Baptist Mission Integrated School (BMIS), a special school for blind girls, which eventually became Nomita's second home in Dhaka. Initially, it was very difficult for Nomita as she could not see her books and went through episodes of depression.

During that time, Manju Samaddar, the then principal of BMIS, helped Nomita to finish her schooling. Nomita learned to read and write in Braille and resumed her education. In 1987, Nomita appeared for her SSC examinations, with a writer who wrote the papers on her behalf, under Mirpur Ideal Girls Laboratory High School. Nomita passed her exams with good grades and sat for her HSC examinations under Tejgaon Mohila College in 1990. She later applied at Lalmatia

Mohila College's Department of Sociology, and was selected for admission.

After college, she worked towards her dream of becoming a teacher for other visually impaired girls. She came back to BMIS in 1996 with Brother Majello and was hired as a staff for a monthly salary. In 1998, Nomita was sent to Spain with five other victims of acid attack, for skin



drafting. Doctors informed her with regret, that the condition of her skin would not allow any notable improvements. However, they managed to separate Nomita's fingers and she could move them more freely. They even drafted her facial skin and gave her a wig.

In 2004, Nomita was sent to Ahmadabad, India, for higher specialised

training. She participated in Intensive Teacher's Training Programme for Visually Impaired, under an initiative which enabled Nomita to advance her mathematics skills. She learned how, with the help of Abacus, blind students can learn to count numbers easily. After coming back from India, she enrolled in a computer course under Vocational Training Centre for the Blind. She soon began teaching computing skills to her students and further educated herself on different software which facilitated typing, internet surfing and e-mailing for the visually impaired. She also learned to use Perkins, a Braille typewriter for blind students, during a conference in Japan. She also facilitated music and dance lessons for her students.

Nomita continues to work as a teacher at BMIS and has implemented numerous innovative teaching techniques at the school. In her spare time, she likes to sit in front of the television, listen to old melodies, weave sweaters and make hand-made bead bags with floral patterns and designs. Eighty blind students are currently schooling under her guidance. She lives with thirty-five of her female students at the BMIS hostel. Nomita, who faces every day of her life with a smile on her face, aims to work for the betterment of the visually impaired for as long as she can.



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FRUGAL INNOVATION FORUM 2019

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

BRAC, considered one of the world's largest non-governmental organisations, arranges the Frugal Innovation Forum (FIF) every year with a new theme. This year's theme was titled 'Scaling Opportunities for Youth'. It was attended recently by 200 young participants from different countries including, Denmark, Venezuela, UK, Tanzania, Ukraine, Nepal, US and India.

According to the organisers, FIF is a platform for leaders from the Global South, to connect and explore solutions to the world's toughest challenges that feature development practitioners and funders, young change-makers and innovators, in a two-day long conference to collaborate for impact at scale.

The event started off with a day-long field visit to give the participants an exclusive experience of frugal innovations in Bangladesh, followed by intense debates

and plenaries on disruptive models and solutions. The programme focused on topics like 21st century skills, impact of technology on youth and youth on the move.

Speaking at the event at BRAC CDM in Savar, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and chairman of BRAC, emphasised that the youth should be concerned about climate change, as it will heavily impact their future. "Unless we change human behavior in terms of consumption of resources, the

future will not be sustainable. I would like to see more youth involvement with issues relating to climate change. Sustainable development is the key," he added.

Radwan Mujib Siddiq, trustee of Centre for Research and Information (CRI); Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, honorary fellow of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD); Deepta Arjun, co-founder of Hackergram, from India, were amongst the many guests who attended FIF this year.



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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

New Zealand Commonwealth Scholarship 2019

New Zealand government will give Master's/Phd scholarships to Bangladeshi candidates. Applicants should demonstrate strong academic ability, leadership qualities and a commitment to the development of their home country.

DEADLINE: March 28, 2019 | Scholarship

Geneva Challenge 2019: Challenges of Global Health

The 2019 Advancing Development Goals International Students Contest invites teams of Master students from all academic programmes to devise innovative and pragmatic solutions to the challenges of global health.

DEADLINE: March 24, 2019 | Competition

Youth Entrepreneurship Workshop 2019 in Netherlands

Youth Entrepreneurship Workshop is a great opportunity to learn how to make a business from your idea! We will teach you how to choose a business model, to write a business plan, where to look for finances and a lot more!

DEADLINE: July 10, 2019 | Workshop

