



PHOTO: AVIPSU DAS GUPTA

NAJMUN NAHAR SHOHAGI

THE FEARLESS GLOBETROTTER

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

All across the world, women are stepping out of the safe confines of their homes to explore unknown cities, countries and continents. They are challenging the idea that they cannot take care of themselves, especially when they are outdoors. Najmun Nahar Shohagi, a Bangladeshi-Swede, has set a benchmark in this regard. She has travelled to 125 countries across the world with the flag of Bangladesh. She is proud to represent her beloved motherland during her travels. In many of these trips, Najmun travelled all by herself. Growing up, Geography was Najmun's favourite subject. Looking at maps, locating countries, studying the atlas and learning about capital cities and international currencies are some of her fondest childhood memories.

She went on her first tour in 2000. "I took part in an international camp, which was organised in the hills of Pachmarhi, India. Students from 80 countries attended the camp," she explained. "I tried different activities like rock-climbing and also went on a safari there, and that is when my knack for adventures began." When she moved to Sweden to pursue her higher studies, she saw it as an opportunity to fulfill her wanderlust. Najmun's grandfather was a traveller, and his stories of roaming around the Middle East inspired her. Najmun's family is truly supportive of her aspirations. Najmun follows a planning system for her travel expenses, which includes mapping the places to visit, finding the cheapest ways to get to those places and gathering all the necessary information, from bus connectivity to train services. She

books her flights in advance of the travel dates, and makes sure to get the tickets at a bargain. "Mostly, I travel by road, walking across the borders and sleeping in youth hostels," she added. She also spoke about some of the challenges she dealt with throughout her travels. Many times during her adventures, she faced extremely dangerous situations which could have easily led to death. However, Najmun faced them sportingly and went ahead, travelling to one country after another. "While climbing the Rainbow Mountain in Peru, I had an altitude attack. The decreased oxygen levels started affecting my respiratory system and I felt dizzy. After a co-trekker offered me his inhaler, I regained my strength and control over my body," she

mentioned. "When I went to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia for scuba-diving, midway through the journey, my pipe had a leak and the saltwater filled my mouth. At Atacama in Chile, I suffered from skin rashes and bleeding due to the harsh climate." Fortunately, the people Najmun crossed paths with during her travels, always stepped up to help her during difficult times. She believes that when it comes to travelling on your own, it is important to be fearless. From all the countries that Najmun has visited so far, her favourite destination is Iceland. Since her father's demise in 2010, Najmun started travelling with her mother and appreciates her support even more now. By the end of 2021, she aims to fulfill her dream of travelling to every country in the world.

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Love, education and food for underprivileged children

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Prabhudan Halder Dino's Love, Education and Food (LEF) for Life is a school that has been providing underprivileged children with education, food and vocational training since 2001. Over 300 children are schooled under the organisation. Besides literacy, LEF for Life teaches these children different life and leadership skills. "My childhood was a bitter phase of my life as most of my nights were spent in hunger. When I started this organisation, I just wanted these children to have enough food and nutrition. At LEF for Life, we work to diminish hunger, especially for children who live in extreme poverty," says Dino. "We also want to build the confidence of these children." The school started with eight students from a slum. "As a student at Notre Dame College, I tutored students from affluent backgrounds and earned a good sum of money. However, after a while, I realised that it is not what I want," states Dino. "I wanted to change the lives of underprivi-

leged children. So, I started going to slums and tutoring the children living there. However, after a while, I started to notice that as they come to my classes in half-full stomachs, they find it difficult to concentrate on their studies." That is when Dino decided to offer them food. Proper meals for around 500 children are prepared at LEF for Life, ensuring two meals for the students daily. While the children are fed one meal at the school, they can take the other meal home. "We only take children from families that have an average monthly income of below BDT 12,000. After we receive admission requests, we visit their homes to check their eligibility," explains Dino. 20 full-time trained teachers take care of the academics, while two former students, Shobuj Ahmed, a graphic designer and Kakoli Akhter, a web designer, provide semi-vocational IT training to the students. "Our students can design apps and web pages. We try to sell these apps and websites to raise funds. Even our own website is designed by our students," mentions Shobuj. They also provide

vocational training to 30 students who have passed their JSC examinations, under expert supervision. Jute handbags, comforters, and other goods are made by the students and put up at a handicraft section for visitors to buy. At the school, recreation is also given equal importance. "We have a band where all our students are welcomed to learn how to play the violin, keyboard, guitar, and other instruments after school," says Dino. "These sessions entertain them and also give them a chance to pursue their hobbies." Besides the school, LEF for Life provides accommodation to orphans and five differently-abled children through their House of Nehemiah Orphanage. "We met Smrity, a 22-year-old physically challenged girl, who was going through many difficulties. We taught her to sew using a machine and to make beautiful handicrafts. Today, she is independent and confident," adds Dino. Dino is in the process of managing scholarships for the students' higher education and plans to introduce more facilities for them in the near future.