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Mastul Foundation: A beacon of hope for the underprivileged community

SHARMIN JOYA

Mastul Foundation was established in 2013 by Kazi Reaz Rahman, a student of International Relations from University of Dhaka. With an objective to provide basic literacy and ethical knowledge, the organisation gathered volunteers who can guide underprivileged children. "I was engaged in many voluntary activities during my school days. I was an outgoing young boy and always believed in helping others as much as I can," explains Reaz. "I also encouraged my friends to engage in social work. I started with a blood donation campaign in 2013 and then started working for underprivileged children."

Mastul Foundation is a government registered organisation which works to ensure basic rights for underprivileged people in Bangladesh. Other than Dhaka, they are active in 5 divisions and 14 districts of the country.

The organisation has 8,700 registered young volunteers across Bangladesh. There are seven members in their Board of Trustees. They are: Ferdous Wahid (Chairman), Lamisa Kabir (Vice Chairman), Saiful Islam (Treasurer), Mohsena Akter, Mahmuda Khanam and Shahana Akter (Executive Members).

Sponsor A Child is their lead project through which they connect children with their donor parents. Reaz informs that every month a sponsor donates BDT 1,000 to a child and takes the responsibility of their education. Through the project, the children and their sponsor parents build strong connections with one another. The children often send letters to and receive gifts from their sponsor parents and they also spend quality time with their sponsor parents. Mastul Founda-



Kazi Reaz Rahman

PHOTO: SHAMS ASIF

tion's other noteworthy projects are Children's Skill Development, Gifts for Children, Hygiene and Sanitation, Nutrition, Civic Education and Awareness Programmes.

"We came across several cases where parents or guardians were incapable of taking care of their children," informs Reaz. "One cancer-stricken old lady came to us because she was unable to take the responsibility of her grandchild.

There are many such children, who come from broken families or have financial limitations." For these children, Mastul Foundation has a shelter home called Safe Heaven, which was registered in 2016. Currently, Safe Heaven hosts nine children. Additionally, the foundation supports underprivileged street children by taking care of their basic needs and equipping them with ethical knowledge, as they are at risk

of turning to crimes.

Under the wing, Projects for Women, Mastul Foundation operates several projects, which focus on matters such as women empowerment, women's rights, ending violence and sexual harassment against women, child marriage and women's health. The objectives of these projects include developing women's skills in handcrafts and tailoring, as well as teaching women about their legal rights and providing them with legal counselling support, and educating both men and women about human rights, social norms and human behaviour. They also run health camps to provide support to underprivileged women for any complications during menstruation, family planning, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause.

Mastul Foundation also has youth-based projects that are focused on leadership, skill building and developmental work. These projects are directed and coordinated by young people through workshops for the youth. Through these projects, the organisation aims to improve the youth's knowledge about communication, project management, networking, and community development.

"Project for Conflicts and Natural Disasters and Refugees is one of our most effective initiatives," mentions Reaz. This project includes Trauma Care Centre, Temporary Shelter, Medical Camp, Water and Sanitation Facility and Non Formal Education and Counselling. We help disaster and conflict-affected people by establishing facilities for them. We stood by the Rohingya people, we built houses for them, gave them food, gave them medicines, arranged sanitation for them and established pure drinking water for them."



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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES



International Youth Forum 2019 on Peace, Social Justice & SDGs in India

The International Youth Forum is therefore an important dedicated space to engage in the discussion on how to make globalization work for everyone through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The third International Youth Forum, to be held from 14 to 15 September 2019, will take place in Chennai, India.

DEADLINE: August 24, 2019 | Conference

Google for Education Certified Innovator Program 2019 in USA

The Google for Education Certified Innovator Program recognises and supports top educators around the globe who are using technology to solve meaningful challenges in education. Become a Certified Innovator and join a community of more than 1,700 passionate educators in over 50 countries who are excited to grow professionally, advocate for innovative technologies and drive school transformation.

DEADLINE: September 6, 2019 | Competition

Teaching Opportunity at Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program 2019

The American Center at the U.S. Embassy Dhaka is pleased to announce the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program for 2020-21. The primary goal of the FLTA program is to strengthen foreign language instruction at U.S. colleges and universities, while providing teachers of English and related fields with the opportunity to refine their skills, increase their English language proficiency, and enhance their knowledge of the United States.

DEADLINE: August 31, 2019 | Miscellaneous



AHMED YESVI RAFA A dedicated researcher

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

19-year-old Ahmed Yesvi Rafa completed his HSC this year from Dhaka Residential Model College (DRMC). He will soon be starting his first semester at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA, majoring in Biological Systems Engineering, with a 65 percent scholarship. He was also one of the first runners-up at the National Biology Olympiad in 2016. From a young age, Rafa harboured the dream of studying in the USA. He knew that to stand out amongst other university applicants, he needed to take part in co-curricular activities as well as research. He served as the General Secretary of the DRMC Language Club. After completing his SSC, he founded Yugen Research Organisation in Bangladesh, with two of his friends who participated in the National Biology Olympiad with him. It is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation that works for biomedical research. Rafa opens up about his goals in research and more.

How did you develop such a keen interest in research?

I came to discover my inherent interest in biological sciences when I was in school. My first research paper was on Quantum Theory after which I shifted to Biology. Research in biology is a lot easier to carry out, in the absence of experimental data. So, despite my love for Mathematics and Physics, I chose Biology, simply because the research in this field is more feasible and theoretical. My interest in the field of Biology led me to work under Mauro Luisetto, an Italian scientist, who has published over 100 articles. I co-wrote and published 12 articles with him. One of them is added in the digital libraries of renowned institutions, such as Duke University and Harvard University. My research publications helped me to become an advisor of the Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology at International Mariinskaya Academy, Russia. I want to put in as much work as I can towards making the world a better place.

Share some details about the projects of Yugen Research Organisation.

We are currently working on two researches based on cancer. Our objective is to use negative beams to penetrate cancer cells, and build relations

between pions and the human body and simultaneously, identify biomarkers for directing cancer cells.

As a young researcher, what do you think about the state of the research sector in Bangladesh?

Bangladesh falls behind in the arena of experimental means, without which research papers are incomplete. To develop the youth's interest in research, we need to incorporate actual experiments in schools and colleges, offering students a wide range of lab activities. We also lack the exposure to new technology. Building strong connections with university professors worldwide is also crucial when it comes to research. It is difficult for students to conduct research in the country, especially as undergraduates. We at Yugen Research Organisation are providing encouragement and support to undergraduate students to carry out theoretical research.

You also attended the 9th Social Business Day. How was the experience?

Being in the presence of well-known entrepreneurs and seeing how social businesses can change the world was exciting to say the least. I learned about the role of social work in businesses and it was a fun as well as educational experience.



PHOTO: SHAMS ASIF