



Rakibul Hasan

PHOTO: PIYAS BISWAS

# AN AQUATIC PARADISE

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Tiny ponds with pink, yellow, blue, red and purple lilies are a common sight for visitors of Rakibul Hasan's water garden. An accountant by profession, Rakibul has been pursuing his passion of water gardening since 2014.

The water garden is located in Rakibul's home yard, in Ponchobiti, Narayanganj. It has over 80 different types of aquatic plants. "I have over 60 different types of waterlily and lotus plants," said Rakibul. "Besides those, I have collected many other rare varieties of aquatic plants from different places around the world, especially from Europe, USA and Thailand." A couple

of years back, Rakibul started getting requests from his friends to share some of his collections.

He first started germinating water plants from tubers and rhizomes, commercially brought from abroad. "This hobby has now turned into my part-time profession. Since 2016, I have been selling exclusive and exquisite varieties of water plants online through my Facebook page, Agri Aqua Bd," shared Rakibul. He is the first person in Bangladesh to sell Giant Victoria Amazon waterlily plants online.

According to the gardener, Bangladesh is home to many beautiful and rare varieties of aquatic plants, such as *Shormokumud* (Nuphar Lutea), *Holud*

*Pana* (Yellow Head Sawah Lettuce), *Jol Lojjaboti* (Neptunia Aquatica), and *Water Hawthron*. However, these types of plants have nearly gone extinct and today, they are rarely found anywhere. "Collecting plants from locations outside Dhaka has always been a challenge for me," mentioned Rakibul. "People are unwilling to share information, especially when it comes to revealing the exact locations. Some even deny that they have specific plants in their collections."

With the dengue virus spreading all over the country, Rakibul has faced several questions and queries about his initiative. "I have around 2,000 Guppy fish in my mini-tanks. They feed on mosquito larvae and eggs. An adult Guppy

fish can eat nearly 35 mosquito larvae daily," he shared. "This helps me keep my garden free of mosquitoes. I also clean my tanks regularly. There is a large group of people living in my home, including my son and other family members. None of them have been diagnosed with any water-borne diseases yet."

The young gardener hopes to expand his collection and gather over a hundred different varieties of plants by next year. Besides working to collect more types of aquatic plants from different parts of the world, Rakibul aims to cultivate and conserve uncommon plants. In addition, he wants to share his knowledge about native and rare aquatic plants with aspiring water gardeners in Bangladesh.

## BIZMAESTROS 2019 KICKS OFF

YOUTH DESK

Unilever Bangladesh Ltd has launched the 10th installment of their flagship student competition, BizMaestros. The competition allows university students to experience real challenges in business, even before they have entered the workforce.

The winners of BizMaestros get the opportunity to represent Bangladesh at the global platform of Unilever Future Leaders League (FLL) in London. In the past, teams from IBA - DU, JU and BUIP have performed remarkably well in the league. Team Boom Boom, consisting of Ayman Sadiq, Sajeed Alam and Ishmam Chowdhury from IBA- DU, were the champions of Unilever FLL 2016.

The winners will also be fast tracked to the Unilever Future Leaders Programme, the management trainee programme of Unilever.

This year's theme for BizMaestros is "Purpose-led, Future-fit". Participants will work with purpose-driven brands of Unilever Bangladesh and create future-fit businesses in different landscapes. Registrations began on September 26, through a digital round where students formed teams of three and submitted their solutions in the form five-minute videos. 95 teams across 16 institutes from all over Bangladesh registered for the competition. The top 20 teams went to the second round. These teams came from different universities, including Army IBA, BUIP, IUB, IBA - DU, JU, NSU, CU and DU.

The grand finale of the competition will take place at the end of this month in Dhaka, where renowned judges will announce the champions who will represent Bangladesh in Unilever FLL 2020.



PHOTO: COURTESY

## Laister: An affordable cooking solution



Team members of Laister.

PHOTO: MONON MUNTAKA

ZAREEN NAWAR

Farzana Mubassira, Tasnim Ahmed Tahasin, Mehedi Hasan Bappy and Mostafizur Rahman are undergraduate students from Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST). At the first Hult Prize competition, organised by MIST in 2017, they introduced a digester called Laister, which creates an affordable cooking solution for families. It is installed on rooftops and uses collected waste materials to produce gas for household supply. People will be paying the team directly for the gas. The objective of Laister is to convert any form of organic and inorganic waste materials into gas. Inorganic waste materials such as plastic and paper will be collected by Laister as raw materials for industries that recycle inorganic waste. Kitchen waste, cow manure and even human faeces can also be used to convert energy into gas. The cost of renting Laister is estimated to be around BDT 7,000 per month.

The team claims that the digester

would help change the lives of 10 million people by harnessing energy in the next seven years. They combined their educational backgrounds in Petroleum and Mining Engineering and Industrial Production Engineering to eliminate the crisis of energy in Bangladesh through biogas technology.

They initially came up with the concept when they decided to try and make biogas technology portable. Then, they delved into researching other existing digesters. Based on the ideas they had already accumulated and their research of other existing digesters, the founders consulted their seniors and professors about the ways in which to improve and elaborate the design of Laister. It took them nearly two years to develop and create the pilot model of Laister. They also attempted to communicate with people from underprivileged backgrounds, their target audience.

The founders participated in several competitions after conceiving the idea of Laister. They were the first Bangladeshi team to be selected as fi-

nalists in The Singapore International Foundation (SIF)'s Young Social Entrepreneur (YSE) competition. If they are selected, their final pitch should provide them with the prize money as their capital. The other competitions they received recognition in were: IEEE Women in Engineering, A2I Women's Innovation Camp and BRAC Urban Innovation Challenge.

Currently, the founders are focusing on launching their pilot model of Laister, with an emphasis on kitchen waste. They intend to see the outcomes of the project in Dhaka first. The team has contacted several slum dwellers, in collaboration with BRAC, to identify the types of problems in slums. Many slums at Bhashantek have clay stoves, due to low gas pressure.

The team of Laister intends to reach several sustainable development goals at once, after receiving their certification of safety. In addition to garnering potential customers and investors, they hope to see a greener Bangladesh in the future.

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