



PHOTO: SHANTO LAWRENCE COSTA

AN AFTERNOON WITH YOUNG STORYTELLERS

Authors of 'The Mason Jar 2' discuss their ambitions and more

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Recently, Worthy Publications, founded by sibling duo Kafia Haque Samara and Nuzaimul Hoq Xishan, launched *The Mason Jar 2*, the second edition of their anthology, *The Mason Jar*, which came out last year. They received a total of 200 submissions of short stories for *The Mason Jar 2*, out of which 50 compelling stories by 42 young writers were selected for the book.

The Mason Jar 2 features stories of different genres, including magic realism, historical fiction, contemporary fiction, romance, dystopia, paranormal, science fiction, fantasy, suspense, crime and thriller. The stories chronicle the experiences of a generation that expresses a sense of resilience, strength and robust optimism for a brighter future, in the face of uncertainty.

Star Youth, *The Daily Star*, caught up with

several authors of *The Mason Jar 2* to find out more about them. Tamim Mostafa, Sarazeen Saif Ahana, SM Tahmid, Sadrina Afrin Mowna, Rifah Tashfa, Quazi Tasnia, Nahreen Saleha Shahadat, Nahian Jamal Joyeeta, Syed Rafid Kabir, Usrat Fahmidah, Rafi Azad, Fahiba Fairooz Islam, Tiasha Idrak, Labib Mahmud, Mehnaz Tabassum, Abhab Alavi Islam and Rasheek Tabassum Mondira participated in the discussion. From the importance of familial support in their lives to the dearth of platforms for young writers to flourish in Bangladesh, they touched upon a wide range of topics.

As creative and passionate individuals, having a climate for storytelling at home and sharing their experiences with their loved ones are crucial for the writers. Sarazeen Saif Ahana, a student of Independent University, Bangladesh, wrote the story, *Sentinel*, in *The Mason Jar 2*. She shared that her sister helped

her to decide which story to submit for the anthology, and ultimately, the one that her sister talked her into submitting was the one that was published.

While the first edition of *The Mason Jar* consisted of stories in both Bangla and English, *The Mason Jar 2* offers only English stories. According to the authors, writing original English fiction as young natives of Bangladesh comes with both advantages and challenges. "Being bilingual allows us to not only read works of different writers, but also become better storytellers. It exposes us to perspectives from different cultures," explains Tamim Mostafa, a student of North South University and the author of *Biryani Kingdom* in *The Mason Jar 2*. "As a consequence, we are able to tell our own stories in another language and also broaden our horizons as authors." However, more often than not, such writers are looked down upon in

Bangladesh. "Most publishers in our country support only well-known and established authors. Very few of them are actually willing to take chances with promising, young writers, especially with those of us who write in English," shared Tiasha Idrak, a student of University of Dhaka and the author of *Of Monikers and Chocolate Milk*.

Speaking about the developments that they would like to see in the publishing industry of Bangladesh, the writers shared that professionalism and quality management of books is necessary. "Publishers should establish a channel for providing feedback and constructive criticism to emerging writers," added Rafi Azad, a student of University of Dhaka and the author of *A Bird of Two Feathers and Home*. "If my story gets rejected, I would like pointers on how to be better as a writer."

Fortunately, Worthy Publications is bring-

ing about positive changes in the literary landscape of Bangladesh. With the unfading vision of encouraging young writers to express their creative ways with words, they have sparked the interest of a large audience. Sadrina Afrin Mowna, a student of BRAC University, who wrote the story, *Endings*, in *The Mason Jar 2*, explained that the people at Worthy Publications are welcoming and cooperative. She is thankful to them for giving her a platform to express herself. "Since Worthy Publications is a young organisation itself, their team understands the voice of the youth and are able to relate to their writers, which is great," added Nahian Jamal Joyeeta, a student of University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh and the author of *Getaway* and *The Night We Met*. While the endeavours of these young writers and Worthy Publications are inspiring, it is clear that they still have a long way to go.

Promoting jute poly bags



PHOTO: FARZANA AKHTAR

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Team Robi, comprised of Tasmeem Farizma Mihika (graduate trainee) and Md Faisal Imam (manager) from the Brand and Market Communications Department of Robi Axiata, won the Young Marketers Competition Bangladesh, this year. In September, they attended a three-day training programme called Marketers Academy, organised by Spikes Asia in Singapore.

Marketers Academy prepares young marketers and brand managers for a successful future in the communications industry. It consists of presentations from industry leaders, seminars and exhibitions of innovative works.

During their initial research project, the team discovered that Bangladesh ranked tenth in generating plastic waste and the country banned plastic in 2002. Inspired by scientist Mubarak Ahmed Khan's work, Team Robi discovered that jute is an excellent substitute for plastic.

With the objective of persuading people to use ECO BONUS bags (jute poly bags) instead of plastic ones, the team's campaign included raising awareness about plastic pollution. They further came up with a system where consumers will be rewarded with ECO BONUS points if

they incorporated environmentally friendly practices into their daily lives. According to the system, each jute bag will come with a one-time use code. By texting the code to a particular number, consumers can receive bonus points, which they can utilise later. ECO BONUS will also partner up with government services to provide special offers to the consumers, such as discounts on railway tickets. Other possible partners of ECO BONUS can be well-known brands that will provide discounts for consumers who use eco-friendly bags.

Retailers who have to provide plastic bags to consumers for free can charge some money for the ECO BONUS bags. Having retailers as promoters will provide the jute bags with a bigger distribution channel.

Team Robi also aims to reach out to countries across the globe through digital media and channels such as Nas Daily. Their product has potential markets in countries like India, Mozambique and Netherlands.

In Bangladesh, Team Robi plans to integrate their product in people's daily lives by putting up the slogan, 'Aaj apnar eco-bonus niyechen to?' (Have you collected your eco-bonus today?) on the backs of rickshaws. They also aim to work on eco-friendly bottles in the near future.


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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

UNESCO WHV 2019 – Let's Heritage at Historic City of Ahmedabad, India

World Heritage Volunteers (WHV) 2019 – Empowering the Commitment to World Heritage. The WHV 2019 campaign provides empowering and enriching opportunities to young people and enables them to go beyond borders in some of the most outstanding places in the world. Volunteers will work together to preserve natural and cultural sites, as well as to raise awareness among local communities about their heritage.

DEADLINE: November 25, 2019 | Exchange Program

Young Social Entrepreneurs 2020 in Singapore

The YSE programme seeks to inspire, equip and enable youth of different nationalities to embark on social enterprises (SEs) in Singapore and beyond. If you or your network have/has a SE idea, we want to help you make it happen! Participants will learn from leading social entrepreneurs, business professionals and other youth who are keen on social innovation, while expanding their networks for potential collaborations for good.

DEADLINE: December 15, 2019 | Grant

Robi Graduate Trainee Under Young Talent Program

Robi Axiata Limited is currently receiving applications for its flagship "Graduate Trainee Under Young Talent Program". The program is designed to groom future leaders by engaging them in a developmental framework that will ensure that the trainee has the training and opportunities to turn his/her talent into an exciting career.

DEADLINE: December 15, 2019 | Miscellaneous