



Shariful Islam PHOTO: FARZANA AKHTAR

ASHLEY SHOFTORSHI SAMADDAR

Shariful Islam, born in Nakhhalpara, Dhaka, started his journey as a traveller in 2008, with his first bicycle tour from Teknaf to Tetulia. A couple of years later, he cycled to all 64 districts of Bangladesh on his bicycle in 55 days. His book, *64 Zillai Ki Dekhechi*, based on his experiences from the trip, was released at the Ekushey Boi Mela this year.

Shariful, who journeyed from the coast of Cox's Bazar to Teknaf on foot in 2009, has cycled in Malaysia and Sri Lanka. He further planned his first skating trip along the Marine Drive coast of Cox's Bazar, in 2017.

His family has gone through several financial difficulties over the years. "I had to stop my formal schooling at the age of ten, as my parents were unable to pay my tuition fees," says Shariful. "My name was permanently taken off from the school registers when I was in third grade."

Self-sufficient from a young age, Shariful sold bananas as a child. "One of my maternal uncles came to Dhaka and started living with

us. In exchange for the place we provided him, he offered to buy us food," he adds. Shariful's uncle had set up his banana stall in front of a mosque. Every day, while his uncle was away getting groceries, Shariful looked after the stall.

Shariful resumed his schooling after a gap of three years. During that break, he held several jobs to meet the basic needs of his family. "In those three years, I had worked at a tailor's shop, a garment factory, an electronics store, a betel-leaf shop, a DVD store, and as a banner writer in my area," he mentions.

His mother passed away when he was in the seventh grade. "Soon after my mother's death, my father left me and my brother. Chisty to fend for ourselves," he expressed. After that incident, his life took a new turn. Looking for full-time work, he started knocking at people's doors until Bablu, an acquaintance from his locality, helped him to find some volunteer work at Bishwa Shahitto Kendra. "I used to work for the book reading sessions. Each day, I was allotted a stipend of BDT 25," shares Shariful.

It became very difficult for him to survive on such low income. Thus, he went on to work at

a mobile recharge shop, where his salary was BDT 1,000 per month.

Soon, Shariful was unemployed again, and it left him homeless. He could only afford one meal a day. His brother helped him to arrange accommodation inside a library, close to a mosque. "The library did not have a toilet, so, we had to use the one inside the mosque," adds Shariful. "The mosque closed at 11 every night. After it closed, I had to climb the mosque walls to go to the bathroom."

Shariful eventually landed a job at the Centre for Asian Art and Culture (CAAC), where he had access to computers. He started learning the basics of computing after everyone left the premises. "I met a boy named Rafi in CAAC. He inspired me to learn the basics of how to use a computer," says Shariful, who currently works at the Centre for Advanced Theory at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

Shariful plans to go on his next trip soon. Besides that, he is working on his forthcoming book, *Cycle Bhromoner Rojnamcha*, which he hopes to release at the next Ekushey Boi Mela.



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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

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DEADLINE: December 31, 2019 | Exchange Programme

Blueprints 5.0- An International Financial Case Competition in Bangladesh

Blueprints 5.0, Bangladesh's International Financial Case competition, is a business modeling competition that aims to provide a platform to the undergraduate students to learn and implement the appropriate skills needed to create a pitch-perfect business model.

DEADLINE: December 01, 2019 | Competition

Youth Photo Fest, Workshop and Art Fiesta 2019 in Dhaka

Photographic Arena is going to arrange "Youth Photo Fest, Workshop & Art Fiesta 2019 (Explore Bangladesh)". They would like to call the talented photographers and artists to attend this festival.

DEADLINE: December 02, 2019 | Competition

Brihonnola: Working towards an inclusive society

Brihonnola, an inclusive platform for the transgender community, has been working to achieve equal rights for transgender individuals since its establishment in 2018. Founded by Sadikul Islam, a master's student at Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka (DU), the organisation has arranged many events and meetings focused on young people and their acceptance of the transgender community. Brihonnola received Joy Bangla Youth Award in 2018 for their outstanding contribution in promoting inclusive society.

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA

In 2017, Education Entrepreneurship Society arranged an event, titled 'Edupreneurship Idea Quest', where Sadikul presented his idea of an inclusive platform for the transgender community. "On a gloomy evening in 2011, I had an unexpected encounter with a transgender person whose kindness and thoughtful behaviour got me thinking about how badly we treat these people, without the slightest thought," shares Sadikul. From that day onwards, Sadikul thought of doing something for the transgender community.

Brihonnola started with just 15 members, and has expanded with 45 volunteers and 21 executive community members who are working actively to achieve its goals.

They arranged their first event in 2018

Eid-Ul-Fitr. As part of their campaign for mainstream inclusion of the transgender community, Brihonnola also organised a tour to Sylhet with 21 transgender people and 26 DU students in the same year.

For the first time in DU, Brihonnola hosted 'Ifitar for Inclusion' with 70 transgender people, this year. They are planning to organise another inclusive tour in Cox's Bazar in December.

With the slogan, 'Change habit, save lives', Brihonnola organised a cleanliness campaign this October, where 100 members of the transgender community participated. In this event, team Brihonnola introduced *Udbastu Aronnyak*, the first ever wall magazine by the transgender community. They are planning to launch another campaign to clean the beaches in Cox's Bazar this year, as a part of their 'War Against Rubbish' campaign.

Sadikul plans to set up a learning centre in each district, arrange training facilities, and provide basic education and counselling facilities, especially for the transgender community. "We want the transgender people to be empowered socially, academically, and economically. This will help their inclusion into the mainstream society," he mentions. "Right now, legal recognition as an organisation will help us in gathering funds for the future initiatives so that we can play a more impactful role for the transgender community."

At present, Brihonnola has four separate wings: research, cultural, youth networking and relationship development, and accessible environment promotion. The organisation has already included Chittagong University and formed an executive committee at the institution. They plan to do the same in other universities, inside and outside Dhaka.



Team Brihonnola with the transgender community. PHOTO: COURTESY