

BYLC VIRTUAL YOUTH CARNIVAL 2020

Celebrating the resilience of youth

ROSHNI SHAMIM & NUZHAT TABASSUM TUREE

After what has possibly felt like the longest year of our lives, 2020 is finally coming to an end. Although it would be inaccurate to assume that January 1, 2021 will automatically bring back normalcy in our lives, it will still bring forward a new ray of hope for the New Year and the new possibilities that it will entail. A significant factor to shape this hope has much to do with the progress that Bangladeshi youth have brought forth amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

To celebrate the contributions of today's youth in combating the deadly virus and to share with them a myriad of opportunities for changemaking, Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC) hosted the BYLC Virtual Youth Carnival 2020 on December 19, 2020.

In light of the ongoing pandemic, the day-long carnival, supported by MJF and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) of the UK Government, was held virtually with over 5,000 youth participants, aged 15 to 30 years, from all divisions of the country and socio-economic backgrounds. Through their stories, the speakers and participants expressed how youth are initiating social change in Bangladesh, regardless of whether they are studying in a school in a remote area of the country, or working for an international organisation situated abroad. Participants at the Carnival gained insights on making a mark on the global platform, practicing adaptive leadership during crises, acting as key influencers in policy making, volunteerism, and other issues prevalent to youth in today's society. Additionally, there was a Math Olympiad, workshops, and performances by popular musicians Elita Karim, Fairouz Nazifa, and Tapesh Chakraborty.

The carnival hosted an impressive lineup of speakers which included Md. Atiqul Islam, Mayor, Dhaka North City Corporation; Chamok Hasan, Research & Development Engineer, Boston Scientific Corporation; Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation; Mirza Salman Hossain Beg, Vice President, Head of Innovation, DTAC; Shams Jaber, Founder, The Tech Academy; Sabhanaz Rashid Diya, Public Policy Manager, Facebook Bangladesh; Mowmita Basek Mow, Co-founder at Ithiki, Weidenfeld and Hoffmann Scholar, University of Oxford; Sakal Roy, Academic Counselor, Bangladesh Mathematical Olympiad Committee (BdMOC), Senior Math Olympiad Consultant at Directorate of Primary Education (DPE); Kazi Jawoad Hossain, Chevening Scholar at University of Sussex; Palki Ahmad, Project Coordinator, Ontario Youth United Project, Toronto Former Youth Coordinator, UNDP Bangladesh; and Mashrur Rabbi Enan, Founder, Keto Bhai Movement, among many other esteemed personalities.

Each session had a refreshing perspective on issues that affect youth. One of the most important pieces of advice was shared by Mayor Md. Atiqul Islam, who spoke on the importance of being edu-



Opening ceremony: Power of Youth in the 21st Century

Panel Discussants



Mirza Salman Hossain Beg
 Vice President
 Head of Innovation, DTAC



Shaheen Anam
 Executive Director
 Manusher Jonno Foundation

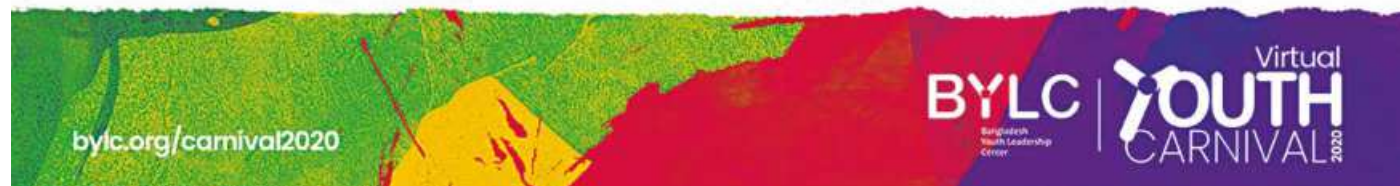


Senjuti Saha
 Scientist
 Child Health Research Foundation
 Bangladesh



Almeer Ahsan Asif
 Manager
 Leadership Development and Teaching
 BYLC

Moderator



cated. "There can be no compromise on prioritising your education," he stressed to the participants. On the subject of youth's initiative, he added, "During COVID-19, the youth of Bangladesh have shown the transformation they are capable of implementing in their communities. Their participation is critical in developing our nation post-COVID-19."

Sessions at the carnival focused on a range of topics from education, leadership, and volunteerism, to critical thinking and leadership and professional skills development. In his engaging hour-long session on "Asking 'Why?': The Significance of Critical Thinking," Chamok Hasan elaborated on the difference between subjective and objective thought processes. "As a child, you get to learn many mathematical fundamentals. A lot of it, however, has to do with memorising formulas. Amidst all the memorisation, did you ever really think about why $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$? Once you learn to question, you learn to be objective, thereby improving your critical thinking," he explained.

Participants also got the chance to meet winners of prestigious international scholarships in a session on "Higher Studies Abroad: Meeting the Scholars". The session featured Kazi Jawoad Hossain, Chevening Scholar at University of Sussex; Juwel Rana, Erasmus Scholar and Lecturer, North South University, Bangladesh; and Md. Mostafazur Rahaman, Swedish Institute Scholar, and Research Manager, Dnet. In the session, speakers provided useful tips that participants could apply when scouting for solid scholarships. Kazi Jawoad Hossain advised the participants, "Show your

leadership potential in your application, and don't focus on creating an emotional impact. Write about your personal experiences because that is what makes you seem authentic and original."

In another session that focused on "Leadership beyond Borders", speakers expressed how despite being based out of Bangladesh, they continue to dream and work for the country of their origin. Mowmita Basek Mow explained how her current initiative was inspired by a desire to showcase the craftsmanship of marginalized communities of Bangladesh to an international audience. "I once came across a Rohingya mother who made her own handicrafts as a source of livelihood and perhaps even as a way to preserve her heritage. This little incident made me assess the value of my education in public policy and leadership, and the ways it was making me connect to minority communities who were rebuilding their lives even in conflict areas. I then decided to launch Ithiki to aid these immensely talented but invisible communities of our country, and help them sell their products and thus tell their stories to a larger audience," she said.

Speakers inspired the youth participants by sharing personal stories of creating their own paths to success despite challenges. Pavel Sarwar, co-founder and president of Youth Hub, Malaysia, mentioned in his session, "I started from a small town in Bangladesh and now I am one of the founders of a software company and a youth organisation in Malaysia. Despite not being proficient in English or even lacking certain skills, I have been able to impact change only because I have been

able to persevere with my passion and continue to do what I love."

Speakers also addressed concerns from youth on how they could develop soft skills to move forward in their professional as well as changemaking initiatives. Some participants wanted to know how they could deal with failure despite working hard to achieve their goals. In response, Palki Ahmad, Project Coordinator, Ontario Youth United Project, said, "The traits of patience and courage are a brilliant combo. You are not going to develop either of them in one day; you will need to first nurture and take care of yourself. You must persevere until you meet your goal."

The youth of our country have a role to renew and refresh the status of our society through their leadership, skills, innovation, and initiative. The BYLC Virtual Youth Carnival 2020 was organized as a platform to celebrate the grit and initiative of youth, while also providing them with insights on how they can create sustainable impact. As young adults just about to start their lives, young people will naturally be confronted with several incidents that might feel intimidating and daunting. The goal is to keep digging deeper into finding what drives us forward, and therefore, learning the ways of opening up our minds more.

Apart from the Carnival, BYLC also offers leadership and professional development training to youth. You can also avail free courses from their online academy, BYLCx. For more information on their programs and initiatives, you can visit their website www.bylc.org or stay tuned to their Facebook page for updates.