



Team members and volunteers of Solace with their certificates, after the distribution drive in Banani.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF SOLACE

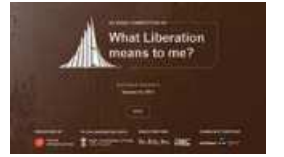


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## YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

### An Essay Competition on 'What Liberation Means to Me?'

We understand that "Liberation" can mean different things to different people, places and contexts. In 1971, for us "Liberation" meant getting freedom from the genocidal regime and establishing Bangladesh as a valorous and independent country. As we look back and contemplate, we want to ask you the following question:



What does the word "Liberation" mean to you – the youth of Bangladesh?

Submit your answer in the form of an essay to participate in the "What Liberation means to me?" competition, which is organized by Youth Opportunities in collaboration with the High Commission of India, Dhaka. The competition gives you a platform to share your vision and idea of "Liberation" with the whole nation.

DEADLINE: January 10, 2021 | Competitions

# Working towards a stronger nation through empowering women

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

With the tagline, 'Empower our women, bloom our nation', the social welfare organisation Solace intends to address gender-based discrimination through important conversations. Founded by Zainab Tanzim and Reesha Ahmed, the organisation has taken several initiatives to uplift the lives of underprivileged women and other communities. "After losing both my grandmothers in a span of six months, I was feeling very lost. Through this organisation, I wanted to help people," Zainab shared. Solace has provided aid to more than 4,000 individuals so far.

The organisation works closely with women's issues. According to the founders, large wage gaps, tokenistic representation in the workplace, lack of job opportunities and ignorant ideas about female healthcare are some of the many issues that women have to deal with. "Majority of underprivileged women experience domestic abuse and those who decide to take a stand have

little to no help available. We hope to be agents of aid by providing a safe space to inspire such women," Zainab said.

In February 2020, Solace's team raised BDT 90,000 to help the victims of the Banani slum fire. With 35 young volunteers, they distributed packets of rice, lentils and potatoes among the slum dwellers. During the initial days of the pandemic, they conducted the virtual event, 'Help from Home', to inspire people to prepare meals for rickshaw pullers and homeless individuals. "We distributed cooked meals and handed out food packages until the third day of Eid," Zainab said. Through this initiative, they were able to feed over 2,000 people on the streets. Moreover, they supported 50 families during Eid by providing them with relief packages, along with monetary donations.

Solace also organised a virtual bake sale in August and all the proceedings of the event were used to purchase reusable sanitary napkins for the flood victims in Sylhet. As far as their annual events are concerned,



Team members of Solace distributing reusable sanitary napkins in Sylhet

they plan on continually organising their winter wear distribution drives over the next few years. Solace is currently participating in the collaborative project, 'Usshotar Khoje', with TransEnd, The Dhaka Apologue, Ekhoi, Unstitched Women's Tapestry and ProjectDebi, in order to help transgender communities. "Using our collective donations, we are distributing blankets among impoverished transgender individuals,"

Zainab added.

They are using their social media platforms to raise awareness and help educate people about several gender-based issues. By covering the incidents that women encounter, Solace is shedding light on the problems that either do not receive substantive media attention, or do not have meaningful constructive discourse due to the prevailing stigma.

In the long run, the organisation intends to make education more accessible, and build a safe learning environment for young women and girls. They hope to impact the employment rates of women, by spreading awareness regarding healthy work environments. Solace also aims to educate more women about the importance of menstrual hygiene and give them access to proper, sustainable menstrual hygiene tools.

The author likes to read her way through life, and you will always find her scribbling and planning. To send recommendations and help, write to her at [mislammonamee@gmail.com](mailto:mislammonamee@gmail.com).

### Call for Startups: SDG Impact Accelerator (SDGiA) Programme 2021

Applications are now open for SDG Impact Accelerator (SDGiA) programme 2021. SDGiA is back again with its second global call for impact entrepreneurs to find innovative solutions for SDG-related complex development challenges. SDG Impact Accelerator (SDGiA), a global accelerator launched by Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNDP in 2018, aims to build a unique model for accelerating the discovery and market entry of solutions for the selected big problems.

DEADLINE: January 22, 2021 | Competitions

### ConnectJapan Online Volunteering 2021

Want to work in one of the largest educational platforms for Japan? ConnectJapan is a multinational platform operating in Bangladesh, India, Nigeria and Japan helping international students around the world to apply and study in Japan with full scholarships. It is one of the largest educational platforms that aim to help the aspirant for getting admission to international universities. If you have plans on studying abroad, ConnectJapan would be the perfect place to get your first work experience. Therefore, whether you are a high-school student, a university graduate or want to work remotely from home, you can still apply!

DEADLINE: January 25, 2021 | Miscellaneous



## A beacon of hope for those struggling with mental health issues



(L) Maria Mumu, the Founder of Moshal. (R) Students of Rajuk Uttara Model College at the session organised by Moshal.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MOSHAL

ZAREEN NAWAR

Moshal aims to spread awareness about different mental health issues, by providing people with useful information and by connecting them with counsellors and therapists on the basis of their needs.

Founder Maria Mumu completed her A-levels recently. At such a young age, she has managed to find a way to help people who may suffer like she once had with her mental health. The death of an official university degree did not deter her from following through with her idea as an entrepreneur. The idea, however, came to her at the cost of her own suffering. Maria lost her father when she was just three years old. As a result, she had to start working from the age of 12. She worked at a departmental store, tutored kids and started modelling when she was 13. In 2017, she stumbled upon familial and financial problems, and her best friend died by suicide. Eventually, Maria spiraled into clinical depression.

She didn't even realise she had mental health issues until one of her brothers took her to a graduating student of Psychology.

"I felt an ache in my stomach, I was incapable of eating and sleeping. I stayed awake for seven days. I struggled with my studies a lot until one day, I experienced a panic attack. I was

unaware of my condition. I felt like I was being choked," says Maria.

She does not properly remember what happened to her afterwards, but she does remember the phone call from her brother. She gradually asked for help through regular appointments with a professor at Maryland University, who is also a professional psychologist. With the psychologist's help, Maria created a healthy routine for herself.

She wants Moshal to help people find the light at the end of their tunnels, in the same way that she did.

In 2018, she found the motivation to enter the Miss Universe Bangladesh competition. Her intention was to use the platform to speak about mental health for there still remains negligence in the accountability of mental health issues. She successfully made it to the Top 5, following which she attracted funding for her foundation.

Moshal was inaugurated in February 2020 at Uttara Club, where Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader made an appearance. 300 students from various schools in Dhaka were also present.

The first major event following the inauguration took place in Maria's college, Rajuk. 600 students participated in the event. The principal also asked Maria for suggestions about appoint-

ing a psychologist at the institution. As a former student, Maria proudly helped them out.

Moshal consists of 12 active, young psychologists and assistant clinical psychologists from DU, New York State University, Maryland University and India. During the pandemic, the foundation provided free first sessions to those in need. Moshal also focuses on communication via platforms like Zoom and WhatsApp. So far, they have catered to around 200 clients.

Recently, the foundation arranged a group therapy session with students who have been gravely affected by academic uncertainty due to the pandemic. It was an exclusive session with 20 students from all over Dhaka. Moshal partnered up with Amal Foundation for the 'Rukhe Darao' campaign, which connected girls at Women's Dreamer Cricket Academy with a clinical psychologist. They also organised an open dialogue about the past, present, and future of mental health with some professionals.

Maria hopes for Moshal to become more accessible to people beyond borders too. "As youths, we are the strongest generation. So, keep talking about your mental health problems to help yourself and inspire others," she concludes.

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