

▶▶ SPOTLIGHT

Graduating in the shadow of a PANDEMIC

MADIHA ATHAR KHAN

Graduating and navigating the start of your career can be daunting even under normal circumstances. The Covid-19 pandemic added more challenging aspects to this experience. The mental toll of taking on a job for the first time amidst a pandemic has weighed down on many young individuals.

Muyeed Murshed, an EEE graduate of BRAC University, co-founded the start-up Catch Bangladesh in 2017. Due to the pandemic, he had to face uncertainties for the future of his business. "Initially I was scared, but after doing some research, I realised that the job market in Bangladesh was not heavily affected due to the pandemic," he said. "Some renowned companies were carrying on their recruitment process at the same rate as before. Moreover, due to the unique circumstances, some organisations implemented friendlier hiring practices." Muyeed elaborated that certain multinational companies have introduced a virtual internship programme, which allowed young professionals from different parts of the country to be eligible, without leaving their homes.

On the other hand, Atish Kabir*, a CSE graduate from IUB, noticed a lack of opportunities on online job portals, especially for full-time employment. "I already completed an unpaid internship. I expected to attain a full-time job after that, but it has been slim pickings for me," he said. "I am working as an intern again at another company, but I hope I will be promoted soon." For many like Atish, navigating the purely virtual nature of applying for jobs, attending exams and appearing for Zoom interviews has been difficult.

Leeyana Rahman, an EEE graduate from BRAC University, had been trying for a while to get a job. "It has been tiring to keep tabs on every relevant job opening and following up with them. When I got rejected from my dream job in the final interview, I decided I needed a break," she said.

Fariha Mahzabin's thesis was delayed, and she also felt the impact of the lack of faculty

support and supervision on her work. An English major from Metropolitan University of Sylhet, she was set to graduate in April 2020. Most universities took a couple of months to begin online classes at that time. Eventually, Fariha finished her undergraduate thesis in January 2021, but not without derailing her postgraduate plans. She wanted to go abroad for further studies, but is currently finding it difficult to make any decisions. Maliha Akhter, another English major from the university, found the experience of her last semester unsatisfactory, and missed the face-to-face discussions.

Atanu Chowdhury, currently a master's student at Rajshahi University, also graduated during the pandemic from the same institution. "It took nearly an additional year for me to

complete my undergraduate education. During that time, I lost all inspiration for studying abroad, as I had previously hoped to do," he said. Atanu's family faced financial instability due to the pandemic. Consequently, he picked up freelance jobs, whilst continuing his studies.

Most universities in the country do not hold convocation ceremonies annually. So, this aspect of graduating has not been visibly impacted. Yet, finishing up their undergraduate education from their homes was a strange and sad experience for these students.

The author gets by in life with books, movies and making fluid art, while maintaining a job in software engineering. Write to her at madihak1923@gmail.com.



ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD

▶▶ YOUNG ACHIEVER

Courting success

Mashfia Afrin started playing tennis from the age of four. Her father being the administrative officer of Bangladesh Tennis Federation, Mashfia got to visit the court regularly. She participated in more than 40 national tournaments and more than 12 international tournaments.

LABIBA KABIR

A student from Viqarunnisa Noon School and College, she is set to sit for her SSC exams this year. "I never had trouble balancing my studies and tennis," explains Mashfia. "Sometimes, I have to participate in tournaments all day and study at night for an exam tomorrow, but that does not bother me. Time management is one of my best traits, I would say." Her family and friends have always been supportive of her playing tennis.

Her first participation in competitive tennis came with the Engineer Jabbar Memorial Tennis Tournament, hosted by Bangladesh Tennis Federation. She might have missed her first win, but her training started off.

Mashfia feels that female players in Bangladesh have to face different setbacks, in terms of a lack of sponsors and security.

In inter school tennis championships from 2011 to 2015, Mashfia bagged five championship awards in singles and duets. She won the best duet at the Asian Under 14 Series 2018, alongside Sajida Raji. She played in the semifinals in the singles game that time.

She took part in the ITF Asian Under-14 Development Championships 2019, which was approved by the International Tennis Federation (ITF). She took a place in the quarter finals at the championship. Although she did not get any award there, the coach was satisfied with

everyone's performance.

After returning to Bangladesh, everyone was surprised to see the international results. Mashfia's name rose to 30th in the Asian Tennis Federation (ATF) Junior Tennis Tour Rankings for girls under 14 on the week of January 28, 2019. According to the Bangladesh Tennis Federation, it was the highest rank for any Bangladeshi girl in the last few years. "It was my dream to be among the top 50 in the ATF Rankings. I was really happy. Now, I am trying to be in the ITF's World Tennis Tour Junior Rankings for girls under 18, as in the last few years, no Bangladeshi girl has had a ranking in it," concludes Mashfia.

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PHOTO: COURTESY OF MASHFIA AFRIN

▶▶ YOUTH IN ACTION

A modern-day haven for women

ZAREEN NAWAR

Anondolokey, a hostel for women and girls in Bashundhara, was founded by Moriom Mannan around six years ago. Ahead of International Women's Day (March 8), she talks about her journey with *Star Youth*, *The Daily Star*.

What began as Moriom's idea of being able to live fearlessly and comfortably around women, became a driving force for her in 2018.

She took part in Bangladesh's Quota Reform Protests to peacefully get the points across, but never imagined that she would be tormented in the streets, and detained by the police for more than 24 hours.

Moriom was living in Dhaka, away from her family in Khulna, before the incident. When she went back to Khulna, she was not welcome. Her family was more concerned about what people were saying about her, as opposed to being concerned about her well-being.

The people at Anondolokey also turned their backs on her. After returning to Dhaka, she found refuge in a hostel at Indira Road. She met a woman named Fatema Khatun by the end of 2018, and they formed a close bond.

Fatema inspired Moriom to continue her work towards Anondolokey instead of aban-



Moriom Mannan

doning it, and eventually, became a shareholder of the hostel. Moriom shared that Fatema is one of the most important people in her life. Her support was essential for Moriom to tread on with her dream to build a safe space for women and girls.

Moriom rents out rooms to women who find it hard to arrange accommodation, as independent individuals. She also provides space to destitute women, free of cost.

Throughout the pandemic, Moriom wit-

nessed an influx of women renting out space to take breaks from their otherwise exhausting lives. She accommodated a pregnant woman and several injured women for weeks, because they were craving space and time for themselves. A young girl's aunt left her with Moriom since the girl's mother passed away and her father abandoned them prior to that. Moriom took the girl's responsibility without any hesitation.

A European woman took refuge under Moriom's care, after she was violated at home. Last year during Ramadan, Moriom cooked meals for rickshaw pullers around the hostel, alongside cooking for the 17 women under her care. "At the cost of wanting to help as many women as I can, I was hurt several times by unfaithful people, but the women at Anondolokey add value to my life," she said. Anondolokey operates under certain strict rules. For example, the women are required to inform Moriom about their whereabouts, in case they plan to come home late.

"In the future, I hope to pay off my debts and get more renters for the empty rooms that I procured," Moriom added.

As a progressive and understanding woman, she is making our community a better place through her efforts.

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PHOTO: COURTESY OF AWSAF KARIM

▶▶ NURTURING DREAMS

Dedicated to improving mental healthcare

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Established in 2017, The Johnson & Johnson One Young World (JJOYW) Scholarship Program recognises young leaders who are striving to leave behind an extraordinary impact in healthcare. Awsaf Karim, Founder of Orodho Health, received this prestigious scholarship. The programme is set to begin on March 15 with a six-month accelerated training, organised by Johnson & Johnson and conducted by trainers from renowned universities. This will be followed by individual coaching from senior Johnson & Johnson leaders.

The highlight of the programme is the One Young World Summit 2021, where the scholars will get to interact with renowned personalities, including Kofi Anan, Prof Dr Mohammad Yunus, J K Rowling, Emma Watson, and Meghan Markle. It will officially end in September, with the scholars being promoted to One Young World Delegates.

Healthcare professionals across the world are eligible to apply for the programme. The procedure begins with a nomination from One Young World, for which applicants are asked a series of questions. "If your nomination form stands out, it will be accepted and you will be called for an online interview conducted by One Young World from London. During the interview, you will be asked more questions about the work you do, and share your thoughts about the future of global healthcare, before the selection," Awsaf shared.

Being a student of Army Medical College, Chattogram, he closely saw how memorising was an integral part of our education system.

"Almost none of my peers have a knack for spending time in research and innovation. This problem was even more evident during the ongoing pandemic, when our medical infrastructure is changing and innovation has become mandatory," he said.

Orodho Health was formed after Awsaf conquered his battles with mental health issues. "I suffered from depression and anxiety. While seeking help from professional psychologists, I realised that counselling services were really expensive," he shared.

The platform provides peer support through their Facebook page. After registering as a client, the person seeking help is assigned to a dedicated member. "If any client requires professional help, we refer them to one of our partner psychologists, and arrange therapy sessions for them at low prices" Awsaf added.

Orodho Health's Facebook group, Project Uddipok, promotes mental wellbeing of the youth. They encourage creative activities such as art and music to keep the members engaged and active during these difficult times.

Their e-book, *Heal-Ink*, features true stories from people who triumphed over their mental health issues. "We are planning to make the book an annual publication, with a new volume releasing annually," Awsaf added. Their future plans also include collaborating with a team of psychologists, who will provide professional services free of cost, around Bangladesh.

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PHOTOS: MONON MUNTAKA