

INTERVIEW

Ahmed Imtiaz Jami on making it to Forbes 30 under 30 Asia list

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Ahmed Imtiaz Jami has been named in the Forbes 30 under 30 Asia list 2021, under the category of Social Impact. Jami, a graduate of Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, established OBHIZATRIK Foundation in 2010, to work with underprivileged children. So far, his foundation, with the help of 3,500 volunteers, has supported 1 million people on poverty elimination, education, health and nutrition, and human rights issues. *Star Youth*, *The Daily Star*, caught up with him to learn about his aspirations, and more.

Congratulations. How do you feel about making it to the Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia List?

Thank You. My family and I are over the moon. When I started OBHIZATRIK Foundation, my parents were worried about how it will affect my academic performance, but today, they are really proud of me. I have always dreamt of seeing myself among Forbes honourees.

What was your inspiration behind starting OBHIZATRIK Foundation?

Through OBHIZATRIK Foundation, I wanted to work to alleviate poverty and child labour. It traces back to the day I saw a seven-year old boy selling newspaper, and it made me think about the lives of these children. I discussed this idea with my friends and we came up with the initiative. Initially, arranging donors to fund our programmes was a major challenge. Being students, we had to use our pocket money and conduct several small events to raise funds. Over time, we started receiving support from people and began recruiting volunteers.

What are some of the greatest accomplish-



PHOTO: COURTESY OF AHMED IMTIAZ JAMI

ments of this foundation?

Over the past decade, we have established three schools in Mirpur, Rayerbazar and Patuakhali respectively, where we provide institutional knowledge to over 500 underprivileged children. Our project, Shokkhom, uses zakat funds for social development as we design income generating models for underprivileged families. Through this, we have supported 550 families by providing them with entrepreneurial resources and skills training.

Has OBHIZATRIK Foundation introduced any new project to combat the pandemic?

We started a boat ambulance service in Patuakhali, for Covid-19 patients. Currently,

we are distributing 200 food packets every day. We have also introduced a tele-education model, where teachers call up students to provide them with lessons, and the assignments are delivered to students' homes.

What are your future plans?

I want to expand OBHIZATRIK Foundation and reach all 64 districts of the country. We will also establish more schools to facilitate the education of underprivileged children.

The author is a freelance journalist who likes reading, planning and scribbling. Write to her at mislammonamee@gmail.com.



ILLUSTRATION: TAHSEN MOSTAFA CHOWDHURY

TALESPEOPLE SPIELS

I turn to you

SABRINA FATMA AHMAD

I created Sehri Tales in 2016 as a coping mechanism for some melancholia I was experiencing at the time. I knew that the exercise was calming and centering for me, but I didn't quite think about writing's potential to heal until I partnered up with the online readers' community Litmosphere, in 2018.

Every night, I was amazed at the areas explored by these early Talers – frank confessions about childhood abuse, bullying, depression and more. I wish I could be half as brave as they were, to be so publicly vulnerable. So many reached out afterwards, saying that being able to speak their truth, and be in control of their own narrative helped them in ways they had not thought possible. It was a most gratifying experience. This year, as I cope with both parents

affected by Covid, the Sehri Tales keep me company on sleepless nights in the hospital. From Tareq Adnan's exploration of existential crisis, to Shehtaz Huq's personal vignettes; from Shamima Nasrin Liza's snapshots of a sugary romance to the delightful concoctions of verse by Sabiha Younus, this year's crop of Talers, both the newbies and the vets, have really raised the bar. I hope, dear Readers, that you're enjoying some of the highlights we're publishing on the Star Youth, The Daily Star page every day, and stay tuned for more amazing stories for the rest of the month. Talers, if you're reading this, keep doing what you're doing. Your words are magic.

The author is a writer and journalist, and the creator of the annual Sehri Tales creative writing challenge.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SAIFUL ISLAM RASEL

YOUNG ACHIEVER

Swimming towards glory

LABIBA KABIR

Saiful Islam Rasel, popularly known as 'Rasel the Seahorse', became the first Bangladeshi to complete a two-way crossing of the 16.1 km Bangla Channel in the Bay of Bengal, on March 29, 2021. The competition was arranged by Shwaroz Adventure to celebrate the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence.

This year, there were four other swimmers from Bangladesh— Shamsuzzaman Arifat, Moniruzzaman, Rabbi Rahman, and Ershad Hossain Morshed— who attempted a double cross, but stopped midway. Rasel has crossed the Bangla Channel thrice before in 2018, 2019, and 2020, respectively. He broke the record of the fastest cross in 2018, with a time of three hours, eight minutes and seven seconds, while his previous best time stood at three hours and forty minutes.

Rasel won inter-school swimming competitions in 2001 and 2002, before moving on to divisional and national level tournaments. As a student of the Department of Soil, Water and Environment at Dhaka University (DU), he led his swimming team to inter-varsity tournament glory in 2019. After that, he came to be known as 'Seahorse' among his peers.

"Another turning point for me came in 2016, when I participated in a talent hunt

organised by Bangladesh Navy and the Swimming Federation from my university and made it to the top 160, among thousands of swimmers," Rasel added.

Rasel's family plays a vital role in his journey, and always supports him through thick and thin. His brothers also have a demonstrated history in sports. Rasel further expressed his regards for Md Shahjahan Ali, Director of Department of Physical Education, DU, who guided him throughout his university life.

"Shahjahan sir was my coach and mentor. Everything I did related to swimming at my university was according to his advice, and he was always encouraging," says Rasel.

Right now, Rasel has an international competition, "Ocean Man", lined up for him with full sponsorship. The event is going to take place in Bali, Indonesia, where swimmers from 50 to 60 countries will be participating. "Ocean Man", which was supposed to be held in June this year, was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. When it takes place, Rasel will be the third Bangladeshi to compete in it.

Moving forward, Rasel dreams of crossing the seven toughest channels in the world, including the English Channel.

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SPOTLIGHT

The realities of online education in Bangladesh

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA & MORMEE MAHTAB

When the pandemic hit, Bangladesh saw educational institutions -- both public and private -- move their academic activities online. But this was uncharted waters for most of these institutions, and their teachers, who would have to conduct these classes. Despite the slight ray of assurance offered by the vaccine for Covid-19, educational institutions remain shut. Students and teachers are still struggling with online workload demands, even after a year.

"Most of the time, it is hard to determine if the students understood the lectures or not, as the scopes of interaction are limited. We have to carry on with the lectures, without any one-on-one interactions with the students," shares Farzana Rahman, a teacher at Academia, Dhaka.

Getting teachers and department staff members to cooperate is also a challenge.

Sanjeeda Protasha, a fourth-year undergraduate student at Rajshahi University, shares that many of her classmates are not attending online classes because their respective departments are not cooperating with them. For example, several departments have postponed online classes, because of their reluctance to continue lectures without conducting exams. Despite students' pleas to move forward with online classes, departmental authorities are paying them no heed.

While many private universities are assisting students with recorded lectures and pre-planned assignments, public universities are lagging behind. Most public university students are facing session jams, as final exams are being postponed.

"Session jams are frustrating, to say the least. Many of my friends in private universities are graduating and getting jobs after finishing their courses online, which is yet to be implied in public universities. We need an online assessment system in public universities," shares Arsia Tabassum Kabbya, a fourth-year undergraduate student at Dhaka University.

Mental health issues, as well as back pain, obesity and headaches among other



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

illnesses, are on the rise, for both students and teachers.

"Spending long hours in front of screens causes permanent neural changes in young kids, which leads to an addiction to electronic devices, and stifles their capability to judge between right and wrong," says Dr Mahjabeen Haque, Director, Student Counselling and Guidance Office, Dhaka University.

Sizan Ahmed Jim, a master's student at Dhaka University, states that many of his classmates who have no WiFi facilities at home, resort to cellular data to attend online classes, or go to nearby cafes or shops that provide Internet access. However, they are unable to attend classes regularly. "The teachers usually instruct them to collect class notes afterwards, but the university authority never helps these students with logistical support," he adds. As a consequence, many of these students were forced to drop semesters altogether.

"To be honest, most of the online classes are not helping at all. It is nearly impossible to understand critical topics, without in-person interactions," shares Zawad Zarir Pasha, a student of Adamjee Cantonment College, Dhaka. Similarly, Mahinoor Ekram, a first-year undergraduate student of North South University, shares that her mental health has been in shambles because of online classes, and she feels that she is not really learning anything anymore.

"In our country, we must come up with a smoother version of online classes, with more ways to involve the students, and making the system more interactive," concludes Mohammad Ali, Assistant Professor, Bangladesh University of Professionals.

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