

Around the 64 Districts in 27 Days

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Nafis Nayem Rafi and Alam Ashraf Sunny, two students of BUET, completed a cycling tour of all 64 districts after cycling for 2760 kilometres. Starting from Panchagarh, they cycled for a total of 178 hours. What started out as a crazy idea became a reality on the 22nd of February as the duo reached the final district, Cox's Bazar. Throughout the tour, they created awareness about plastic pollution with the motto 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.'

Alam Ashraf Sunny started cycling when he was a little kid. He would take out his grandfather's cycle every now and then and cycle around the neighbourhood. "Whenever I get a break, I try to go outside whether I have a cycle with me or not." Unlike Sunny, Nafis Nayem Rafi only started cycling 5 years ago. But he picked up really fast and went on his first cycling tour to Barisal in 2018. Both Sunny and Rafi have each gone to more than 15 cycling tours and cycled more than 5000 kilometres.

INSPIRATIONS

The idea of cycling across the country hit Sunny when he was a little kid. He saw in one of Humayun Ahmed's dramas that an old man went on such a trip. "I could not believe something like this was possible. Then in 2019, I got to hear about Doctor Babor Ali who hiked across the whole country in 64 days. I hiked with him for 3 districts and that is when I started believing that I could do something like that someday."

HOW IT STARTED

All of the cycling stopped when the pandemic hit. As people started sharing on social media about what they would like to do after the pandemic, Sunny posted that he would like to travel all 64 districts in his cycle after the lockdown. But it was still just an idea. He finally gathered the courage and reached out to some during the last week of 2020 to accompany him on this tour. Nafis Nayem Rafi responded. Unlike Sunny, "When Sunny reached out to me, I was sceptical at first. Although I eventually agreed, I told him that I might bail during the tour if it felt like too much pressure."

PLANNING OF THE TOUR

Sunny and Rafi started planning 3-4 weeks before the tour. Sunny planned out the accommodations and Rafi decided on the details of the route. "We reached out to many of our friends living in different districts and they were more than happy to

provide us with accommodation." During the whole tour, we stayed at hotels in only 7-8 districts. The duo planned on cycling 110-130 kilometres everyday and tried to avoid cycling at night as much as possible.

DESIGNING THE ROUTE

For the route, the duo took help from Babor Ali. They took Babor Ali's route plan and adjusted it. "We tried to take inner routes as much as possible since highways are not exactly designed for cycles and are accident prone. We also tried to take as many scenic routes as possible." The biggest challenge in designing the route plan was rivers. "We always heard that Bangladesh is a



riverine country, but while designing the route we finally realised why they say that." Another challenge was finding accommodations.

PACKING FOR THE TRIP

According to the duo, traveling light is the key to bicycle tours. The essentials to carry to any cycling tours are patch kits, extra tubes, repairing tools, pumpers, power banks, extra clothes, medicines, saline, button phones for emergency situations. Depending on the type of tour, sleeping bags, hammocks, and tents are necessary as well. The duo also took headlights and taillights for cycling after sunset if necessary.

EXPENSES

"We spent about 9000tk per person and another 1500tk for sending our cycle to Panchagarh and getting it back from Cox's

Bazar." Most of the money was spent on food and accommodation. However, they spent much less than they expected. A significant portion of the money was actually spent on crossing rivers.

BEST PART OF THE TOUR

"The best part will always be the people. We easily got attention because you don't usually see two persons like us cycling with so many things across highways." Both Rafi and Sunny stressed on how hospitable people were. "The most common question we were asked was what we were doing. To our surprise, the most common assumption was that we were from the army." Strangers invited

Dighalia - Kalia route. He also mentioned the Jibannagar - Chaugacha Road.

WORST PART OF THE TOUR

"On 16th February, we lost much time of our day walking over the sand beds of Munshiganj. But we had to reach Cumilla that day. So, we had to cycle after sunset as well." While entering Daudkandi, Sunny had to stop because of a leakage in the tube. Two people came on motorbikes and took his phone and money. Rafi was only a hundred meters ahead but could not witness the incident.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The trip was an overwhelming experience for both Rafi and Sunny. It largely boosted their confidence that they can do something like this. Rafi plans on going on a trip along the hill tracts of Meghalaya next. On the other hand, Sunny wants to keep his plans undisclosed and prepare for them by himself.

CYCLING IN BANGLADESH

Cycling tours in Bangladesh are gradually becoming more popular. Roads in general are not suitable for cycling in Bangladesh. "The most dangerous thing we faced was most of the highways did not have tarmacs on the sides. So, it was just deep sand when two lanes finished, and sand is very dangerous for cycling. Whenever a bus or truck overtook us, we always had to be prepared otherwise our tires would skid and result in accidents." The duo stressed on two things while planning for cycling tours: planning everything ahead of time and not cycling at night.

them to their homes, local cycling groups arranged small seminars, and small shop owners did not take any money from them. "In 4 districts we stayed at absolutely strangers' homes. The most memorable one happened in Gopalganj. We came across Mr. Shafiquzzaman, who went on a similar trip back in the 90s and cycled across 30 districts without any navigation tools like Google Maps. He invited us to his house and served us cordially."

FAVOURITE ROUTES

When asked about favourite routes, both of them responded with their preference towards routes of South Bengal. "The routes of South Bengal are much different from those of North Bengal." For Rafi, Bagerhat - Jhalokathi - Bogura route was the most fascinating. For Sunny, it was the

