

INTERVIEW

# Sazzad Hossain's aspirations to empower migrant workers

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA

*Sazzad Hossain, a Bangladeshi-Singaporean entrepreneur, was named in the Forbes 30 under 30 Asia list recently, under the category of Social Impact. An engineering student at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, Sazzad established SDI Academy in 2013 to help migrant workers lead better lives abroad. Star Youth, The Daily Star, caught up with him to learn about his aspirations, and more.*



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SAZZAD HOSSAIN

**What was your inspiration behind starting SDI Academy?**  
I migrated to Singapore when I was a sixth-grader. In a new country, I struggled a lot with my English initially. Despite studying at a prestigious school in Bangladesh, language was a barrier for me when I came to Singapore, and it impacted me deeply.  
Over the years, as I started interacting with migrant workers, I learned more

about their struggles. I soon understood that learning English can solve a lot of their problems with understanding safety instructions and consulting doctors, among other things. I started teaching English to five to six people on a park bench. Gradually, the numbers started growing.

**What teaching methods did you follow?**  
As I went through the same problems as my students, I customised the lessons myself at first. I spent eight months designing the

curriculum and the syllabus.  
Learning English is not about the quality of education, it's about the way it is taught. So, I focused more on the methodology.  
After the park bench proved inadequate for the growing number of students, I first started with 134 students at a community centre. In 2013, I finally established SDI Academy.

**What are the main objectives of SDI Academy?**

SDI stands for Social Development Initiative. The idea is to not just teach English. It is about creating a pathway for migrant workers.

We are working towards creating safer and more productive workplaces by providing communication, IT, financial literacy entrepreneurship training to them.

We currently have 18 part-time trainers and we teach Indian, Filipino and Chinese migrant workers.

**How did SDI Academy combat the pandemic and what new initiatives did you take?**  
Initially, we provided necessary food packages and other essentials to the migrant workers. Then, we started teaching them online. 10,000 migrant workers enrolled for the course during the pandemic, surpassing the 8,500 trained physically at the academy previously.

We launched an app with a mental health module, live classes, quizzes, and a COVID-19 advisory option.

**What is your take on the growing entrepreneurship sector in Bangladesh?**  
Bangladesh is home to many amazing startups, and Bangladeshis are now willing to take more risks. Our biggest strength is our youth population. If they have the right ideas and successfully execute them, there will be more opportunities.

**What are your future plans?**  
We plan to build a one-stop platform for migrant workers for education, entertainment, financial advising, and long-term career plans. We want to work with governments in Qatar, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and other countries with migrant populations. Our goal is to impact one million migrant workers over the next five years.

*The author is a night owl who likes binge-watching, reading, and writing. Write to her at rasheetmondira@gmail.com.*

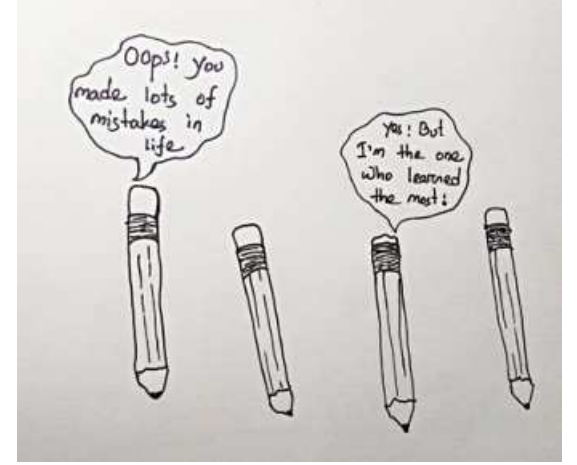


ILLUSTRATION: NOWSHIN TASNIM

## TALESPEOPLE SPIELS All together now

SABRINA FATMA AHMAD

We just crossed the ten-day mark for Ramadan this past week, and the 1000 posts for this year's Sehri Tales challenge. I don't know if the thrill of crossing these milestones ever wears off – it certainly hasn't for me.

While Sehri Tales has produced some gripping confessionals over the years, we're going through some turbulent times now, and there were some concerns about whether we'd be adding to the stress with potentially triggering stories. I was pleasantly surprised to find an outpouring of positivity in this year's crop of tales – beautiful, inspiring pieces for the 'Forward' prompt, a couple of sweet, heart-melting romances for the 'Date' prompt, and of course, plenty of mouth-watering offerings for the annual tenth-day prompt 'Kacchi'. We're so grateful to cloud kitchen Ms Katchamoch for sponsoring our tenth-day prompt. Please check them out at <https://www.facebook.com/Ms.katchamoch/> for budget friendly South-Asian meals.

I'm also happy to witness the beginnings of a community this year. Virtual strangers have been cheering each other on and encouraging each other to post. A few strong contenders for Talespeople favourites have already emerged (Tabia Tabassum's streak has been particularly strong this week), but aside from the ones battling it out with poetry, prose and pigment, a fierce team of cheerleaders have also taken it upon themselves to keep everyone's spirits up. Honestly, this is exactly the kind of energy the world needs right now, and I hope this continues.  
So stay safe, stay hydrated, and stay tuned for some more healing, heartwarming stories.

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

## YOUNG ACHIEVER

# Making the nation proud, one record at a time

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Konok Karmakar holds the highest Guinness World Records from Bangladesh. A freestyle footballer, Karmakar graduated from Feni Polytechnic Institute. Currently, he has 15 Guinness World Records to his name. He set his first record in January 2019, by balancing 1,150 paper cups on his forehead.

His other records include balancing a guitar, eggs, pencils, toilet paper rolls, a lawnmower, and a chair, in different ways. He also created a record by balancing a football on his knee for the longest duration. "I love making records with my skills as a freestyle footballer," he explained. Some of his other notable records are the most football knee touches in a minute, most football arm rolls in a minute and most football head-stall to nose-stall transitions in a minute.

When asked about how difficult it is to create such records, Karmakar shared that his only fear is getting injured. "The toughest task was to balance a lawnmower on my chin as I had to hold the 7.5 kg device for seven minutes," he added.

The lack of opportunities for freestylers often demotivate young people to participate in such activities. "I have faced a lot of financial obstacles. We need to invest money and time to make certain records and being a student, it is difficult for me to arrange funds," Karmakar shared.



Karmakar created a record by balancing a football on his knee for the longest duration.

"Creating a Guinness World Record for my country is a surreal experience. Through my work, I want to motivate young people to break records," he said. Karmakar shares tutorials on his YouTube channel, featuring step by step guides for people who wish to learn and replicate his tricks.

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



Konok Karmakar has 15 Guinness World Records to his name.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF KONOK KARMAKAR

## NURTURING DREAMS

# Striving for an inclusive world: Empowering communities

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

*TransEnd is a social welfare organisation that empowers the transgender community through education, training, employment, and entrepreneurship. Founded in 2019, the organisation primarily arranges awareness campaigns and programmes, educating people on the gender spectrum. The founder of the organisation, Lamea Tanjin Tanha, a student of Dhaka University, was selected for the Sir Fazle Hasan Abed Ashoka Young Changemakers 2020.*

To further uphold the legacy of Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, Brac joined social entrepreneurs' global platform Ashoka, and launched this initiative named after the Brac founder to promote young changemakers. Tanha was also selected for the YY Goshti Incubation Programme. Furthermore, TransEnd won UNDP's Digital Khichuri Challenge this year.

When Tanha was a newborn baby, a bunch of transgender people came to her house, and Tanha's mother got to interact with them. "My mother was so welcoming towards them that the leader of the group shared many of her life struggles with her. She always told me to be empathetic towards the transgender community," shared Tanha. "I talked to transgender individuals in different locations and visited their hubs as well. All of them had their individual stories,



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LAMEA TANJIN TANHA

full of hardships." TransEnd has successfully provided skill-based training to 135 transgender people. "Over 65 transgender people were employed in mainstream fields, as a result of our efforts," Tanha added.

Celebrating 50 years of Bangladesh's independence, Pathao employed 50 transgender people as their food delivery agents. Under the campaign, 'Freedom for all', TransEnd conducted several surveys, interviews, and field-research projects, to train these people on cycling, digital literacy, and communication. 50 cycles and smartphones were provided to the newly hired agents.

The organisation also conducted an intersex awareness initiative to highlight human rights issues faced by transgender people, through their campaign 'Oshadharon Kichu Shadharon'.  
TransEnd's 'Project Nobojibon' provided

free handicraft-training to transgender individuals. Their month-long campaign, 'Celebrating Trans Icons in Bangladesh' highlighted notable transgender individuals who are determined to create a better world for their community. "We also helped Shantona apa, an unprivileged transgender woman who was suffering from unemployment during the pandemic, by selling t-shirts, masks, and socks," Tanha shared.

TransEnd's fundraising campaign in response to the pandemic supported over 1,500 unprivileged transgender people. Moving forward, the organisation intends to expand their work on sustainable awareness-building activities.

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