

INTERVIEW

# A sibling duo's inspiring journey

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA

Siblings Zahin Razeen and Rizvana Hredita were named in the Forbes 30 under 30 Asia list recently, under the category of Social Impact, for co-founding Hydroquo+, a Dhaka-based startup that uses AI to improve water management. Last September, Razeen, CEO of Hydroquo+, was selected as one of the United Nations' 17 Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals, for leading efforts to combat the world's most pressing issues. *Star Youth*, *The Daily Star*, caught up with the duo to learn about their work, and more.

**How did Hydroquo+ start out?**

**Zaheen:** I was one of the fellows in One Young World in Hague, back in 2018. I pitched the concept of Hydroquo+ and got funding opportunities. We started out with a government contract. We monitor the health of water in real-time. By using mathematics and real-time existing sensors, spectrophotometers, we measure the wavelength of water, ensuring its safety. Hydroquo+ delivers autonomous water testing and monitoring, real-time data stream monitoring, analytics and alerts. We have significantly reduced cost in labour and equipment, providing accurate lab test results. We are collaborating with different national and international organisations to expand our model. Our goal is to reach 164 million people of Bangladesh in the next four years.

**Rizvana:** Our implementation project was divided into two phases, for getting the machine and deploying it. Combatting several obstacles in our way, we implemented our machine under Dhaka WASA supplying potable water across Zone 3 Dhanmondi to more than 200,000 people so far.

**Tell us about your education and childhood.**

**Rizvana:** Initially, I wanted to study law but later, I realised that I wanted to pursue finance. I went to York University in Canada to study finance and then, I worked at the Royal Bank of Canada for two and a half years. Zahin was always a curious and mischievous kid, he always tried to find out how things work from an early age. When I was beginning to lose sight of my goals, I came back to help Zaheen with Hydroquo+, leaving my life in Canada behind. We always have each other's backs, no matter what.

**Zaheen:** I went to six different schools growing up. I studied mechatronics engineering in my first year as an undergraduate student at the University of Glasgow, and later, shifted to mathematics. My elder sister left Canada to come and help me pursue my



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ZAHIN RAZEEN AND RIZVANA HREDITA

dreams. She took a huge risk, which worked out in the end. She is someone that I can always rely on.

**How would you define the vision of Lingwing, another venture of yours?**

**Zaheen:** it is an AI-personalised language learning application. Users can learn specific languages like Bangla, and it is appropriate for anyone who doesn't understand a word of English or other languages. We have beginners and elementary stages for English, Georgian, Italian, Spanish, French and Russian. As I am partially dyslexic, I designed it for dyslexic people to make it an inclusive learning platform.

**Rizvana:** Usually, people spend a lot for language courses. Lingwing provides a more affordable way for them. We have a freemium mode, where people can learn languages for free.

**With an emerging social business scene in Bangladesh, what do you think we should focus on?**

**Zaheen:** We need effective thought leaders, who will equip people to leverage soft skills and match them to socioeconomic opportunities. We must focus more on practicality and unlearn every cognitive bias embedded in our system.

**Rizvana:** Young people in Bangladesh are now more driven towards purposeful work rather than going for safe job options. They are thriving to break through conventional norms and to find innovative solutions to the problems around us. We must make way for them to win, and work on their methods.

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



ILLUSTRATION: TAHSIN MOSTAFA CHOWDHURY

## TALESPEOPLE SPIELS

# Of words and limits

SABRINA FATMA AHMAD

A frequently-asked question during this year's Sehri Tales was 'why the 250-word limit?' My knee-jerk reaction has been to want to snap 'Do you also ask why a limerick has to be five lines, or a haiku three?' Since anger never solved anything, I figured a more level-headed explanation was necessary.

Sehri Tales was created as an exercise in writing discipline. The first part was of course committing to doing this within a narrow window of time every night. The second part was to be conscious of form and the rules of various poetry/micro-fiction formats. I found the challenge of these restrictions very grounding, and it has helped my writing and mental health more times than I can count. That's what I decided to stick to when I made it available to other participants.

But don't just take my word for it. The standard upper limit for most forms of flash fiction – and let's please not forget that Sehri Tales is essentially a flash fiction contest – is 250 words. You'll find it easier to get published if you stick to that. That's also a good size for college essays, mission statements, book blurbs and elevator pitches, so, those are good writing muscles to build.

It's easy to rant and ramble while trying to find a story. But if you can distil your idea into a smaller piece, cutting it down to its very essence, that's a powerful writing tool to include in your skillset. Happy writing!

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

## SPOTLIGHT

# Behind the wheel with young delivery agents

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE AND SADIA TAHSIN

Delivery agents stand among the frontline workers keeping the country safe and running amidst the coronavirus pandemic. Beating the heat and other tough conditions every day, they do their work diligently, posing risks to their safety.

Fariya Tabassum's classes at Narsingdi Govt College are currently discontinued. After moving to Dhaka, she found work at Foodpanda as a delivery rider, which allowed her to be self-sufficient. She cycles around in Dhanmondi to deliver packages. "It is empowering to be working in a platform that is expectedly male-dominated," Fariya said. "Riders always carry cash and devices, which puts them at risk on the streets. We need to be attentive at all times."

Adil Rahman, a student of Green University of Bangladesh, is a delivery agent at Uparjon, a platform that connects service providers with clients, promoting socio economic development. People, including small business owners, can choose what kind of doorstep services they need from Uparjon's app. Adil does his delivery job during the day, as his classes are in the evening. "I stay on a schedule, and have learnt to juggle multiple responsibilities," he added.

Priyanka, a student of Eden Mohila College, covers zones in Gulshan with her scooter. "I joined Foodpanda amidst the pandemic. Right now, the demand for groceries, medicines, and food is very high. Nonetheless, being a part of a public service in these tough times is rewarding," she shared.



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Siddik Al Amin, a student of Dhaka Polytechnic Institute, has been a food delivery agent since 2019. "Initially, I used to deliver packages from my acquaintances. Last month, I started working for Meals on Wheels, a company for homemade food," he said. Siddik also said that his merchants are immensely respectful. "At times, the merchants also have iftaar with us," he shared.

Shahin Alam, a student of Government Titumir College, has been a delivery agent for the past one year. "I picked up a job at Shohoz during the pandemic to earn some money in my free time," he shared. He ensures his safety by wearing masks and following social distancing protocols during work. Even though it is a demanding job, as most of the delivery agents explained, they are proud to be able to do something meaningful for the country.

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## FYI: FOR YOUR INFORMATION

# When Rabindranath Tagore met Albert Einstein

MORMEE MAHTAB

What transpired when a poet met a physicist and they participated in a stimulating debate around the fundamental aspects of human existence? The spark of intellectual ingenuity anticipated between Albert Einstein and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore is evident from the conversation between them when Einstein invited Tagore to his residence in Berlin on July 14, 1930.

The two personalities explored their individual reflections on the nature of reality and its relationship to man, while discussing the long-standing friction between the scientific and philosophical visions of reality.

Both Einstein and Tagore disagreed upon the existence of any form of divinity isolated from that of the world. However, when it came to the nature of truth and reality, their perceptions took separate routes. Tagore perceived reality as reflections of human consciousness contrary to Einstein's belief, which implies that some truths of the universe exist in their own right and are independent of humanity.

Tagore, who took a spiritual stance in this regard, argued that absolute reality does not exist. Rather, every individual's truth is relative to their own reality. He also believed that truth is limited to human perception and science can only direct us towards those limitations. However, it is only through religious reconciliation and the harmony of a man's consciousness with that of the universe, that one attains the virtue of truth. This essence of the cosmic reconciliation of the collective human consciousness lies at the core of Tagore's endeavours in music, literature, and poetry.

Both Einstein and Tagore believed that the existence of beauty is not possible without an admirer, and requires the sense of value attached to it by man. In this regard, Tagore perpetrated: "Beauty is in the ideal of perfect harmony which is in the Universal Being;

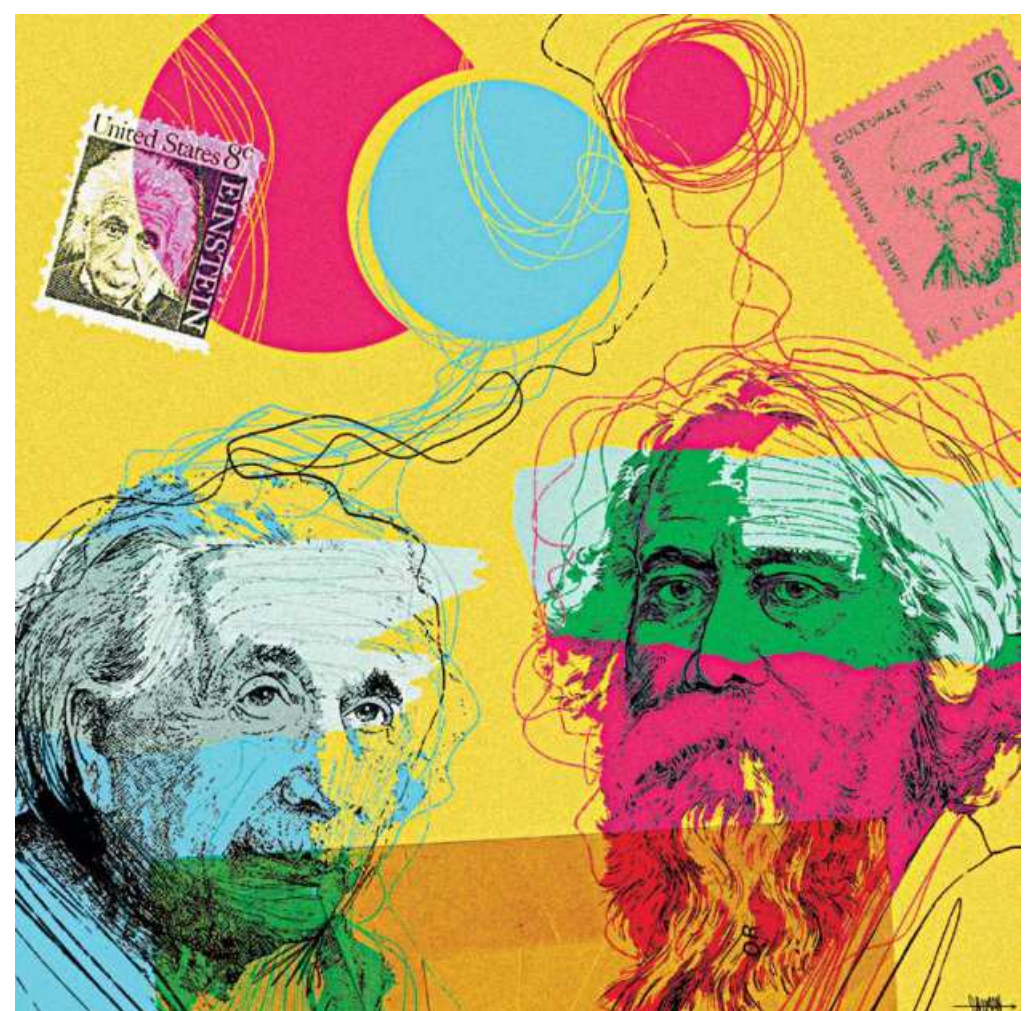


ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Truth the perfect comprehension of the Universal Mind. We individuals approach it through our own mistakes and blunders, through our accumulated experiences, through our illumined consciousness — how, otherwise, can we know Truth?"

In this brilliant exchange, Tagore's philosophical perspectives complemented Ein-

stein's scientific beliefs, touching upon the concepts of science, religion, beauty, consciousness, and human existence.

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