



PHOTO: DIPU MALAKAR

Rafid Hoque Swad learnt how to nurse eagles and pigeons back to health, when he rescued an eagle a couple years ago.

YOUTH IN ACTION

A friend of the fallen

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Rafid Hoque Swad, a BBA student at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), looks after injured birds of prey at his 'Chilbari' (Kite house). It all started with the bird Scar, whom he brought from a trader in Old Dhaka.

"I named her Scar because she gave me a scar in our first meeting, even though she was a caged bird. She is a spirited fighter who refuses to give up," shares Rafid, who has been an animal lover from an early age. "Seeing Scar fly away will be my biggest success story, but it will also fill my eyes with tears."

While studying birds of prey such as eagles, he came across tutorials on YouTube and other social media platforms. "I learnt how to nurse eagles and pigeons back to

health when I rescued an eagle a couple of years ago. Online platforms have been my most trusted trainers," he adds.

Rafid also founded Doggo Sage, an animal rescuing platform that feeds stray dogs around fifty different areas of Dhaka with the tagline, 'If you donate BDT 50, you can feed one dog.' A team of 14 young volunteers at Doggo Sage has fed 150 dogs across Dhaka so far, from their own pockets, and they hope to continue doing so in the future. Their goal is to feed 1,000 stray dogs in the first phase of this nine-week campaign.

The team of Doggo Sage aims to raise awareness about neglected animals. "Ten of my friends donated small amounts from their pocket money. We have no demands or expectations when it comes to other people joining our initiative," says Rafid, who prefers to work independently, rather than relying on

donations.

His residence is currently home to five dogs, five cats, five kites, a rabbit, a hen, a crow, more than 50 pigeons and 10 other types of injured birds.

Rafid's 'Chilbari' is turning quite crowded with each passing day. As a consequence, he plans to move to Keraniganj to open a Doggo Sage Cafe and Restaurant, which will offer shelter and grooming facilities for injured and needy animals.

"I have been bullied for my actions. However, my affection for my winged and four-legged friends has always empowered me to overcome any challenges along the way," concludes Rafid.

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ILLUSTRATION: TASHFIA SHAMIM/THE NOBODY'S GALLERY

SPOTLIGHT

An anxious experience for college students

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE AND MORMEE MAHTAB

The two years of college play an instrumental role in shaping the lives of young students. But the pandemic has led to impediments, with many beginning their college life at home, online.

"Initially, I used to attend classes attentively, but as the re-opening of the education institutions kept postponing, I began losing interest. I barely attend my classes now. My experience is nowhere close to how I imagined it would be," shared Samiya Arefin, a first-year student of Holy Cross College.

Prithul Haque, a student of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College, added that receiving academic guidance while sitting at home significantly decreases exposure to newer surroundings, interactions, and life lessons.

Second-year college students regret missing out on different opportunities. Rakib Hossain Pranto, a student of Pabna Cadet College, could only do five months of physical classes before educational institutions were shut down. "My college highly appreciates spontaneous participation in different inter-house competitions, along with extracurricular

activities. I was mentally preparing for those," he asserted. Rakib viewed online classes as a weak alternative, as his syllabus sometimes remains incomplete, due to limited time or connectivity issues.

Moez Uddin Ashrafee, a student of Notre Dame College, set out to harness and expand the skills that he learnt in school into his college life. Making new friends in college during these unprecedented times has been difficult for him.

On the other hand, Hamim Islam, a student of Notre Dame College, brought attention to the recent rise in Covid-19 cases and deaths. "Things are just going to get worse if we re-open institutions at this time. Even if we stay safe, our families might have to suffer as a result of us going out. Education does not outweigh the value of life," he asserted.

As most of the students explained, without in-person classes, they are struggling to prepare for their HSC exams, and having to rely on self-learning more than ever before. Yet, they do not wish to attend classes physically, as we are battling a health crisis.

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YOUNG ACHIEVER

A promising lawyer's commendable feat

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Elinore Rema, a second-generation Bangladeshi immigrant, is on her way to becoming the first lawyer in Australia from Bangladesh's Garo community. Elinore has a bachelor's degree in Philosophy from University of New South Wales. She developed a passion for law during the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, as she wanted to make a difference and help refugees from war torn countries find asylum in Australia. Subsequently, she got a diploma in Migration Law at Australian National University, before completing a Juris Doctor (a postgraduate degree) at University of New South Wales.

Her family immigrated to Australia in 1993, when Elinore was just five years old. Leaving the familiarity of her birthplace and coming to a foreign country was tough for Elinore, initially.

Over time, she made good friends, learnt English, and explored different places in Sydney. Her family was determined to provide her with a solid education.

"Growing up, my parents worked tirelessly to provide a secure and enriched childhood for me and my sister. One of my fondest memories is getting pizza together as a family on the beach one time, as we watched the sun set," she recalled.

Elinore's maternal grandfather was one

of the first Garo individuals to graduate with a college degree. He also pursued a bachelor's in Education, and worked as the headmaster of a boys' high school. Additionally, Elinore's father is the first person in his family to have a tertiary education.

As a migrant, embracing her cultural identity was important to Elinore. "During my formative years, I wanted to be accepted by my peers. I did not want to feel different. After embracing my Bangladeshi Garo heritage, I realised that what makes me different also makes my experience unique," she said.

Moreover, Elinore volunteered at prominent community legal centres in Sydney, including the Refugee Advice and Casework Service, which advocates for the rights of refugees, and people seeking asylum.

She served as a volunteer at the Redfern Legal Centre in their Health and Justice Partnership Program with Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

Elinore is truly empowered by her cultural heritage. "We are one of the few remaining matrilineal societies in the world, which is an indication of the central role women play in Garo culture. I want young Garo individuals to know that it is possible to follow your dreams," she concluded.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ELINORE REMA

Elinore Rema's parents were determined to provide her with a solid education.

NURTURING DREAMS

Striving against gender discrimination

LABIBA ANJUMI KABIR

Anika Subah Ahmad Upoma is one of the nineteen changemakers from Bangladesh who received this year's Diana Award. She founded Evolution360, an organisation that promotes the Sustainable Development Goal of gender equality and women's empowerment, in 2016.

Initially, she replicated the 'HeForShe' campaign through 'Project Poriborton- Be The Change', beginning in a small village at Manikganj. The motive of the campaign is to teach teenaged boys about consent, and teach young girls self-defence. Later, Evolution360 expanded the campaign to Dhaka, Habiganj, and other areas. 'Project Poriborton- Be the Change' is currently being conducted by 300 volunteers.

Upoma got selected for the UN Women fellowship programme as UN Women Champion. In this programme, she was the only person from Bangladesh. She worked collaboratively with different NGOs, but it was difficult for her to do the work alone. As a consequence, she started Evolution360 with 15 of her friends from different backgrounds.

Through extensive research with UN Women, Upoma learnt about the abuse and discrimination faced by women every day, across cities. "Evolution360 is a platform



Anika Subah Ahmad Upoma.

for the youth, by the youth. It is important to give young people the proper guidance and motivation to be the change they want to see," she says. "The involvement of youth plays a central role in building a resilient and progressive nation." The organisation is currently mobilising 500 volunteers.

Through their work, Evolution360 has reached more than 5 lakh people online and thousands of people offline so far, by creating a volunteering and soft-skill development platform. Besides, the organisation connects women with professionals in case of any sort of violence, with help from various law enforcement

agencies and legal aid service providers, along with lawyers and counsellors.

Evolution360 also relentlessly advocates for a safe cyber space, helping victims of cyber bullying. The organisation has reached out to 20 victims of cyberbullying so far, with direct legal help. During the pandemic, the team of Evolution360 provided relief packages to more than 500 individuals from low-income families, and distributed masks amongst 2,000 underprivileged people.

Currently, the organisation is working on a project with the organisation, Wreetu, on safe menstruation, by promoting reusable sanitary pads amongst 5,000 girls.

Evolution360 is the only youth organisation from Bangladesh to receive the International Arch of Europe Award in Gold Category at Frankfurt, Germany, for the Leadership, Innovation and Excellence section. They also received distinct certification from Youthopia Bangla and UNDP for their contribution in social development.

"With the Diana Award, my responsibilities have increased as I have higher expectations to meet," concludes Upoma.

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PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ANIKA SUBAH AHMAD UPOMA

Team members of Evolution360 at a session on safe cyberspace with slum dwellers in 2018.