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NURTURING DREAMS

Carrying the torch beyond the basketball court

SHANIZ CHOWDHURY

Gulnahr Mahbub Monika is one of the nineteen Bangladeshi changemakers to receive the 2021 Diana Award. She is the youngest female athlete of Bangladesh to earn this accolade. Monika and Ashreen Miridha are the co-founders of Deshi Ballers, a platform for female basketball players who are determined to follow their athletic pursuits.

Being no stranger to winning accolades in her motherland, Monika also participated in the 58th International Session of the International Olympic Academy for Young Participants, in 2018. The following year, she was invited to the One Young World International Summit, where she was championed by The Queen's Commonwealth Trust, and met The Duke and Duchess of Sussex. This year, she was invited to the Championship Principles, a sports exchange programme by AAU Global Coach Academy and the US State Department.

The national-level basketball player discovered the sport when she was in the fifth grade. Her coaches were Niaz Mouta, Sayeed Ahmed, and Mahtabur Rahman Bulbul. Monika juggles being the Project

Manager at Alice Labs and creating opportunities for women in basketball. "I want to complete my master's in Sports Management, and continue playing for my country. Deshi Ballers aims to inaugurate the first ever national women's basketball league in Bangladesh by 2024," she says.

Since their inception in 2018, Deshi Ballers has won accolades such as the Joy Bangla Youth Award and Plan International Equality Award.

In the 16 years that Monika has played basketball, she observed that sports communities are alarmingly discriminating against women. Her personal experiences led her to want to build a better and more inclusive future for women in sports.

For young girls whose lives in the basketball court are just beginning, Monika has some earnest advice. "Never give up playing the sport which makes you happy. There will be many obstacles, but if you are determined to succeed and represent your country globally, opportunities will fly towards you," she concludes.

The author is a freelance journalist. Email: shanzaychowdhury@gmail.com



YOUTH IN ACTION

Advocating social awareness through Youth Parliament

AKHLAKUR RAHMAN

22-year-old Sarkar Tanvir Ahmed Tanim, the founder and acting president of Youth Parliament, is one of the nineteen changemakers from Bangladesh who received the 2021 Diana Award. He went to K&G High School, and passed his SSC in 2013 from R B Govt High School in Joypurhat. Being a student of Business Studies in school and college, he pursued Economics at Varendra University in Rajshahi. Marking International Youth Day, he joined a summit organised by World Youth Summit for Peace on August 12, 2021.

Tanvir's journey with Youth Parliament started in 2018. "I was heartbroken after the Holey Artisan Café attack in 2016," he mentions. "The event

national flag, the nation's constitution, and drug addiction, among other topics. They also provide winter clothes to underprivileged communities, and engage the youth in tree-planting campaigns. Additionally, they host an annual assembly to discuss matters which should be brought under the national assembly's attention.

"I received the Central Khalaghor Asor Award from the President of Bangladesh, Abdul Hamid," says Tanvir. "Another memorable event of my life was when I received the National Award from the President for working with the youth."

He holds different positions in notable international organisations such as World Humanity Commission, British



PHOTO: COURTESY

Sarkar Tanvir Ahmed (R) receives the Best Parliamentary Debater Award from former High Commissioner of Bangladesh to UK, Professor Dr Sayeedur Rahman Khan, at Debate Festival 2018, Varendra University, Rajshahi.

brought about pressures for many students of private colleges and universities. Ever since then, I wanted to do something to assist the youth of the nation. Working with young people, Youth Parliament found many scopes for improvement in regards to SDG-2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG-13 (Climate Change)." Youth Parliament publishes a magazine with their documented information and possible solutions, yearly.

Currently, the platform is working with SDG-16, which promotes justice, peace, and strong institutions. "We facilitate seminars, workshops, and training sessions for the youth," shares Tanvir.

Every year, Youth Parliament conducts sessions about the uses of our

Council, Humanist ECO-Citizens International, and International Youth Society amongst others, representing Bangladesh. He has received multiple trainings on leadership and youth engagement in social welfare.

In 2019, Tanvir received the National Tree Plantation Award. The same year, he also got the official pass from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. However, due to the pandemic, he attended the programme virtually. "It is my dream to have Youth Parliament's voice heard in the national assembly," he concludes.

The author is a freelance journalist. Email: akhlakurrahmancharles@gmail.com.

INTERVIEW

Building the path to a data-driven Bangladesh

LABIBA ANJUMI KABIR

Mir Sakib, CEO of Cramstack, was inducted in the 2021 Forbes 30 under 30 Asia list, under the category of Enterprise Technology. Cramstack is a startup that uses artificial intelligence to automate the extraction of information from unstructured data to provide insights for businesses. Mir Sakib graduated from North South University (NSU), and is pursuing his master's from Higher School of Economics, Russia. Star Youth, The Daily Star, caught up with him to learn about his aspirations, and more.

What was your initial idea behind Cramstack? When I graduated in 2015, I joined Incepta Pharmaceuticals as a management trainee, and life was monotonous. So, I took a day off, and joined a hackathon by Asia Foundation, with my thesis partners at NSU. We won the hackathon, and a few angel investors were present at the event. Some of them were interested to invest in my project. They gave me the incentive to start working on Cramstack. Soon afterwards, I left Incepta Pharmaceuticals, and joined a software company to understand how things work in

my relevant study field. I left the job after two months, and started Cramstack in April 2016 with my childhood friend, Hasib Mamun.

What makes Cramstack stand out? The idea behind Cramstack is to build a search platform that allows users to search enterprise data sources as easily as a Google search. It also offers tools to extract and process data from portable document format (PDF) files and images.

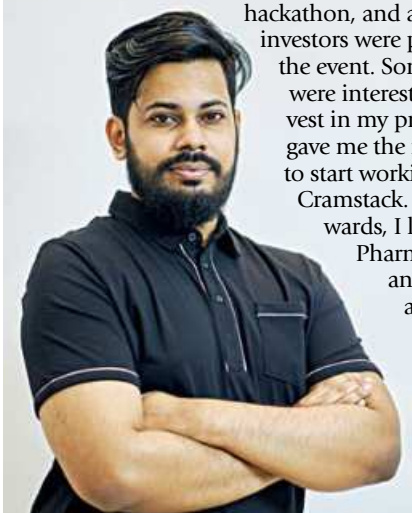
Hasib Mamun and I came up with the idea to work with natural language query. We developed a natural language enterprise database while participating in Grameenphone Accelerator in 2019.

Currently, we have clients in the Ministry of Power in Bangladesh, a number of renowned banks and RMG exporters, as well as international firms such as Boston Consulting Group.

How is Cramstack tackling challenges during the pandemic?

Owing to the pandemic, we had to face obstacles, like most other businesses. Our bills got delayed, but we did not lay off employees or cut off salaries. Even if we went broke, we wanted to make sure our employees had full support from our side. We also provided government data from healthcare workers and immigration officials to help track and curb the spread of the coronavirus. We raised over \$1 million from Rockstart (Netherlands), Grameenphone (unit of Telenor) and angel investors.

The author is a freelance journalist. Email: labibakabir99@gmail.com.



Mir Sakib.

PHOTO: COURTESY

YOUNG ACHIEVER

CUET students shine at Concrete Projects Competition 2021

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

American Concrete Institute (ACI), a Michigan-based international professional organisation, recently hosted the Concrete Projects Competition, an annual event for undergraduate students from all across the world. This year, it was organised virtually.

Three teams from Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET) secured the first, second, and third positions at the competition. Each team consisted of two students, and all six winners were recent graduates of CUET. They worked on the projects for their final-year theses.

Mahfuzul Islam and Imtiaz Ibney Gias were the champions. Their project, 'A critical review on the performance of microbial concrete developed using E. coli bacteria', was supervised by Professor Moinul Islam. The project intends to manufacture a concrete which is stronger and more durable than the conventional one. "For this purpose, we incorporated E. coli bacteria strain into concrete as a partial replacement of water. The bacteria would help in healing the micro cracks developed at an early stage," Imtiaz explained.

Syed Maruf-Ul Hassan and Ezaz Ahmed secured the second position. Their project, 'Effect of compaction on the properties of eco-friendly building blocks produced from industrial by-products', explored ways to generate value for waste materials. "Wastes produced from coal power plants and steel manufacturing industries require safe disposal. Our research introduces an alternative solution for the traditional clay burnt brick, using



(Clockwise) Ezaz Ahmed, Mahfuzul Islam, Jannatul Ferdous, Imtiaz Ibney Gias, Tabassima Faria, and Syed Maruf Ul Hassan.

PHOTOS: COURTESY

industrial by-products. Subsequently, the produced brick is more cost-effective, and eco-friendlier," Maruf shared.

The third position was achieved by Jannatul Ferdous and Tabassima Faria. Their project, 'Ternary combination of industrial wastes for sustainable geopolymer mortars', attempts to utilise wastes generated from different industries as binder materials to prepare eco-friendly geopolymer mortars. "Cement emits a large amount of carbon dioxide. Additionally, the proper disposal of waste is a problem encountered by different industries. Our project intends to minimise carbon emission, discard waste effectively, and prepare sustainable construction materials," Jannatul said.

The participants submitted two electronic copies of their reports. The first copy included the students' contact

information and ACI member numbers, as well as the ACI member numbers of their faculty advisors. On the other hand, the second copy had no identification information of the students or the universities, in order to ensure fair results.

There was no virtual ceremony for the winners. However, the organisers have invited them to the Concrete Convention, which will be held at Orlando, USA, in March next year. The winners extended their gratitude to their faculty advisor, Prof Dr G M Sadiquul Islam, who also supervised the teams that achieved the second and third positions.

The author is a medical student and a freelance journalist who likes reading, scribbling, and blogging. Email: mislammonamee@gmail.com.