

**NURTURING DREAMS**

# A promising star of the stage



Umma Habiba performs in "Marx in Soho".

PHOTO: TOUFIQ AHMED/COURTESY OF UMMA HABIBA.

**PRIYANKA CHOWDHURY**

Talented theatre actress and dancer Umma Habiba delivered a brilliant performance in "Marx in Soho", a recent play by prominent theatre troupe BotTola, in association with Jatrik.

Unlike many, her institutional learning arc is only four years old. She embodies passion, persistence, and a 'can-do' attitude.

She left audiences in awe with her body movements, without uttering a single word, throughout her two-hour performance in "Marx in Soho". "I am very chatty, so keeping quiet throughout the play was really difficult!" she laughed.

She also practices Bharatanatyam and contemporary dance, but she struggles to prioritise those in her day-to-day life. "Dancing was never encouraged by my family. I didn't have the chance to learn it during my child-

hood, but I was fascinated by it."

It was during her second year as a student of World Religions and Culture in Dhaka University (DU) that her dancing took a sharp curve.

"Our team represented DU at Khulna University of Engineering & Technology's dance festival. I learned contemporary dance from YouTube, and choreographed a routine on the song 'Baba' by James. The performance was loved by many," she recalled. "Although I probably began learning dance late compared to others, it is never too late to learn."

Currently, she is learning contemporary dance from Tahnun Ahmedy and Bharatanatyam from Amit Chowdhury. "My gurus not only teach the ways of dancing, but the ways of living too. The confidence I have in dancing today is because of them," shared Habiba, who also teaches dance to children.

Reflecting upon her character Jenny in "Marx in Soho", Habiba said that as she was

able to express through dance and body movements instead of dialogue, the scope of acting was much broader.

The director, Naila Azad, decided to mix concepts of German dancer Pina Bausch and Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin, while Habiba co-designed the routine. "With Jenny, we intended to portray the struggles of a woman, irrespective of borders. I began to associate with the character more as we worked through the play," said Habiba.

The young actress intends to do more socially relevant work in the future. "I may not be able to change the world, but I intend to have an impact on my surroundings and inspire people through my artistic practices," she concluded.

The author is an art researcher and writer in the making. Email: priyanka.chowdhury@gmail.com.

**YOUNG ACHIEVER**

# Making strides for Bangladesh's women in engineering

**SHANIZ CHOWDHURY**

Syed Sadia Hossain is the first Bangladeshi to receive the Inspiring Women in Engineering Student Member of the Year Award by the Global Committee of Women in Engineering.

The award recognises women who have made an impact in their communities to ensure gender equality in technical disciplines. Sadia arranged over 15 different events, workshops, and outreach programmes to promote women empowerment and address humanitarian issues while she was the Chairperson of the IEEE Women in Engineering Affinity Group at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP).

One of the events she arranged was WEAVE, which equipped students with important entrepreneurial and technical skills so they are better prepared for their future careers. MasterFacts, another event, instilled competence and confidence in students by offering grooming sessions, CV writing tutorials, and interview tests.

Sadia also recently won the 6th Inspiring Women Award in the category "Leaders of Tomorrow", after being one of five students who were nominated by her university. The nominees were judged on the basis of their cumulative contributions to the corporate sector and society as a whole. The Inspiring Women Award by Women in Leadership recognises leaders of tomorrow, inspiring female professionals, and changemakers of Bangladesh.

"My friends identified the leadership potential in me and always encouraged me to lead teams. Once I started working, I noticed that women were mostly invested in academics. It made me question why women were not leading teams or becoming presidents of student clubs. When the Women in Engineering Affinity Group in my university commenced in 2019, I tried to



Syed Sadia Hossain. PHOTO: COURTESY

motivate women to take leadership roles," shared Sadia.

"Even when women succeed, there's a stereotype that they need help from others. I have faced this personally, but I was able to overcome it. There is also a notion that women are only fit to be doctors or teachers, rather than having careers in technology. I want to keep working to dismantle the barriers and biases that stand in the way of women's success in STEM, and as future leaders."

Sadia is an Information and Communication Technology graduate from BUP. She is currently a junior program associate at the international NGO Wadhvani Foundation. At work, she intends to shape the youth for the 21st century's employability challenges by facilitating their vocational skills.

The author is a student of BRAC University, and a freelance journalist. Email: shanzaychowdhury@gmail.com.

**YOUTH IN ACTION**

# A book to go with your haircut

**AKHLAKUR RAHMAN**

Inspired by the late social activist Polan Sarkar, who was also known as "Alor Ferrywala", Harun ur Rashid and his 14-year-old son Arifur Rahman Apon go around house to house, delivering books for free.

"I join my father in collecting and distributing books whenever I can," smiles Apon. "Words cannot explain how proud I am of his initiative. It brings me great joy to be a part of it."

Harun also runs a salon library initiative. "I set up my first salon library at Subrata Hair Cutting Salon in Kalakopa Bazar of Nawabganj in January this year," he says. "This initiative aims to develop young people's interest in books. I intend to carry Polan Sarkar's legacy forward."



Polan Sarkar was awarded the Ekushey Padak for his book movement in 2011.

"People wait in line at salons to get their haircut. Most of them spend their idle time on their phones," says Harun. "If there is a library in the salon, then at least 2 out of 10 people could turn to reading a book, which is enough for me."

Till date, Harun has set up 10 libraries at differ-



ent salons in Brahmanbaria, Rajshahi, Natore, and Sherpur, among other areas across Bangladesh.

"Salon library is a marvelous idea," comments high school student Mostafijur Rahman Sobuj, who visited Subrata Hair Cutting Salon. "I often come here to get my hair done and read books while waiting in line. I even bring the books I like home."

A young visitor of Nakul Fashion Hair Cutting of Brahmanbaria, Asif Iqbal Khukan, also shares his thoughts. "I come to the salon even when I do not need a haircut," he says. "I think this kind of library should be available all over the nation in every salon."

Harun is the Senior Center Manager at the Nawabganj branch of Grameen Bank. When asked about the obstacles he faced with his salon library initiative, he shares his experience. "The funding of the initiative comes from the bits of money I save from my monthly household expenses and personal expenses," he says.

Harun also runs a personal book blog, and readers can easily reach him online or via phone. His contact information is available in each of his salon libraries. "I hope to build a salon library in each of the 64 districts of Bangladesh in the future," he concludes.

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



Harun's salon library was established to instill a reading habit amongst his customers.

PHOTOS: STAR



ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD

**GUIDES**

# Tips for a successful first year of university

**MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE**

It is not uncommon for new students to struggle with adjusting to university life, especially for those who go to study in a new city, away from home. Fortunately, however, students can take steps to set themselves up for success in their first year of university. Here are a few tips on how to make the most of your university experience.

Keep all official documents ready  
Before beginning university, make sure you have all official documents ready and updated. This includes your National ID and passport. In addition, make sure you also have a copy of your academic transcripts for applying to various fellowships or student programmes.

Open a bank account  
In order to keep track of your finances, open a bank account and maintain a monthly budget. A bank account comes with both independence and addition-

al responsibility, and makes it easier to maintain a monthly update. Part-time pay checks, tuition fees and other essential finances can be deposited in this account to be spent wisely later.

Engage in co-curricular activities  
You can consider joining a club, organisation, or sports team. This will help you make new friends, identify your interests, and feel more connected to your university. Over time, you can also run for a position of responsibility and hone your leadership skills. Many social organisations are run by university students who are passionate about a cause. Volunteering for organisations, within and beyond your university, can be a learning experience and boost your networking skills.

Develop your own note-taking system  
Developing your own note-taking system may include jotting down points on a notepad, recording lectures, drawing chapter maps or making slides for import-

ant topics. Find out what works best for you and maintain a neat set of notes for each course.

Find a part-time job  
As it is important to become financially independent, try to find a source of earning your own money. It could be through tutoring students, freelancing or any other job that suits your interests. With your part-time job, you can use your free time productively while preparing for the actual work life after graduation.

Take care of your health  
Taking good care of your body and mind is important, even more so when you start a new phase of your life. Try to maintain a healthy lifestyle with good food, enough sleep, and exercise.

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