



Takia Sultana Nova has successfully taught over 400 women how to ride scooters.

YOUTH IN ACTION

The wheels that SET HER FREE



I attune my trainees with the road rules through tours, which not only equip them with practical experiences, but also refresh their minds.

AKHLAKUR RAHMAN

Takia Sultana Nova, a third-year student of International Islamic University Chittagong, received the IVD Bangladesh Volunteer Award 2021, securing the third place. She has successfully empowered over 400 women by teaching them how to ride scooters.

Takia's journey dates back to her days at Hazera-Taju Degree College. "My college was quite far from my house, and with buses stopping every ten minutes for passengers, it was tough to be on time for classes," she shares. "On some days, the buses had no female passengers, which made me feel unsafe."

Back then, Takia was inspired by a friend's elder sister Mahmuda Khanom, who rode her scooter to work.

Initially, she learned scooter riding from Mahmuda, and later, from her uncle.

Her father and uncle surprised her with a scooter in 2018. Takia is also grateful for her mother's support.

She started the Facebook page RoadBook



Takia Sultana Nova. PHOTOS: COURTESY

BD in 2019. "At first, people were skeptical about girls riding scooters, but their attitudes are gradually changing," she asserts.

Jannatul Afsan, a school teacher of Chattogram and graduate trainee of RoadBook BD, faced harassment in public transportation on a regular basis. She has

been riding her scooter to her workplace for the last year and a half. It saved much of her time and travel expenses, especially during the lockdowns.

"Scooters are no longer a luxury for women. They are a need," she adds. "Takia has made women riding scooters acceptable, even in the rural areas of Chattogram."

Takia believes that riding scooters gives women an unparalleled sense of freedom and confidence.

Recently, she was appointed as the Speed Girl Riding trainer of Chattogram by YAMAHA Riding Academy, a programme that is active in seven more districts.

"I attune my trainees with the road rules through tours, which not only equip them with practical experiences, but also refresh their minds," she adds.

In the future, Takia plans to set up her own office, make the licensing process easier for new riders, and open a space where girls can practice riding.

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

NURTURING DREAMS

Bristy's triumphant journey from MIT to Google

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

A Computer Science and Engineering graduate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Bristy Sikder is a Senior Software Engineer at Google. Before that, she had applied to 18 foreign institutions, and got accepted to 14 of them, including Harvard, Princeton, and Oxford University.

Bristy always aspired to study at a well-reputed university. She won a bronze medal at Asian-Pacific Informatics Olympiad in 2013. She was the champion of the National Informatics Olympiad, and a runner-up in Bangladesh Mathematical Olympiad the same year. She was also a bronze medalist at the International Olympiad in Informatics in 2012.

She enjoyed the collaborative environment at MIT, and picked some PhD courses, whenever she got the chance. During her first year at the university, Bristy interned at Google, and eventually, went on to work for companies like Quora, Yugabyte, Deepmind, Bridgewater, and Rubik Inc.

These early experiences helped her gain valuable insights to secure a position that is otherwise reserved for older engineers.

Bristy was fascinated by the career opportunities and workplace dynamics at Google. "I wanted to excel at something which is different from mainstream options, and Software Engineering seemed fun. The risks and rewards were well-balanced," she said.

In 2020, she started the platform Journeys in Tech, where she hosts talks with Bangladeshi women from different backgrounds who have built successful careers in technology.

"Girls underestimate their capabilities and are afraid of failing. They also do not have enough role models. However, life is about choosing your challenges and playing safe is not always the best choice," asserted Bristy, addressing the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields.

In the future, she hopes to start her own company.

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



Bristy Sikder. PHOTO: COURTESY

EVENT

UCB organises Monash Admission Information Session

YOUTH DESK

Universal College Bangladesh (UCB) arranged the Monash Admission Information Session 2022-23 on February 10, via Zoom. Over 1,000 students showed interest in this event.

UCB, the exclusive partner of Monash College, Australia, in Bangladesh, created this avenue for prospective students to start their Monash degree from Bangladesh. Students can start with a guaranteed 70 percent lesser tuition fee compared to the Australian fee for their Monash University Foundation Year and Monash University First Year Degree equivalent programme here in Dhaka at UCB right after their O, A, AS, level exams or HSC Year 1, and continue to their desired destination after completion.

Students who have been a part of the Monash College Programme from UCB have done exceptionally well in exams, assessed by Monash College. One of the Campus Ambassadors Naier Ahmed said, "I recommend Universal

College Bangladesh because the Monash University Foundation Year Study just after O level exams is going to save me a year and put me in a top university like Monash."

"My elder brother and I both studied in Monash. Being a Monash graduate myself, I can say that the learning experience was amazing," said Jamal Uddin Jamy, Head of Enrolment, UCB.

Amid Hossain Chowdhury, Head of Marketing, UCB, who is also a Monash alum, appreciated the initiative as well.

As the only Ministry of Education-approved international education provider in Bangladesh, UCB is determined to enable Bangladeshi students to become confident with their approach to foreign education, with highly-trained faculty members and academic counsellors.

This session successfully guided the students with necessary advice to secure their luck according to their own preferences.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF UCB

INTERVIEW

Ananya's remarkable feats in microbiology

SHANIZ CHOWDHURY

Ananya Ferdous Hoque is a researcher in Virology at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr). She graduated with a BSc in Microbiology from North South University, and pursued an MRes at the University of Manchester.

She is also an active frontline researcher on icddr's emergency Covid-19 initiatives, in collaboration with the government.

Ananya's cutting-edge research and relentless contribution to the public healthcare scenario granted her a place in the Dhaka Hub Global Shapers Cohort 2021.

The Global Shapers are a community of young leaders and changemakers aged between 20 and 30, curated by the World Economic Forum. The Dhaka Hub was founded in 2014.

In an interview with The Daily Star, Ananya talked about her research interests, and more.

Can you explain what your research is about?

My research focuses on the genetic surveillance of common human respiratory and enteric viruses such as the Nipah virus, norovirus, influenza and coronavirus during their seasonal and non-seasonal outbreaks. I perform regular real-time RT-PCR testing of Covid-19 suspected individuals and track the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern via genome sequencing.

How has your research proved instrumental to the public health field?

As an active Covid-19 frontline researcher, I worked continuously on supporting country-wide emergency outbreak response. I provided hands-on training to medical technologists and healthcare



Ananya Ferdous Hoque.

PHOTO: COURTESY/MD JOWEL RANA

workers from around Bangladesh on the detection of Covid-19 cases using real-time RT-PCR and necessary biosafety practices. I also co-authored a peer-reviewed journal article that proposes the incorporation of antigen-based rapid diagnostic test kits under the national Covid-19 testing policies of Bangladesh. These kits can increase the number of Covid-19 tests and reduce reporting time in resource-poor settings that struggle with emergency containment and healthcare services. Another seminal study I co-authored examines the emergence of new SARS-CoV-2 variants that potentially reduce the effectiveness of existing vaccines and increase reinfection cases in the community.

What was it like being a researcher at the beginning of the pandemic?

I had to maintain necessary biosafety precautions like wearing personal protective equipment for long hours at the lab. Although the psychological distress sometimes led to burnout, my persistent optimism helped me stay motivated.

What are your biggest takeaways from Dhaka Hub?

It has given me confidence in my potential to positively impact lives outside of my scientific endeavours. The people I have met inspire me with their passion towards developing and implementing the hub projects.

What kind of challenges do you face as a woman in science?

The pandemic affected the lives of many, and my frontline service has often disrupted my work-life balance. Nevertheless, I took on the challenge with the same vigour and resilience as my male co-workers and leveraged this opportunity to expand my skill-set. They say "the future is female", but I believe so is the present — only if we give women's contribution in STEM fields the credit it deserves.

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