

THE DAILY STAR-IPDC UNSUNG WOMEN NATION BUILDERS AWARDS

Saluting unsung women heroes

Despite attempts by different forces in society to keep women confined within the four walls or traditional gender roles, many have broken the glass ceiling and become self-reliant. These courageous women have shown that women and girls can do anything if allowed to take control of their own lives. Seven such fighters were recognised on May 27, 2022 at the sixth edition of the "Unsung Women Nation Builders Awards", an initiative of The Daily Star and IPDC Finance. The winners also received Tk 2 lakh each.



The Daily Star, in association with IPDC Finance Limited, started this initiative in 2017 to honour unsung women heroes of the nation and provide them with a platform where they will be celebrated for defying barriers and contributing towards the socio-economic development of the country.

The seven unsung leaders who received the prestigious award were Jamila Begum, who started her own butchery service in the Birganj upazila of Dinajpur; Takiya Sultana Nova who started her own only female driving school RoadBook BD; Zannatul Ferdous

Mohua who despite being differently-abled went on to become a successful entrepreneur; Taheatul Jannat who started her free school called Hasimukh Pathshala for the local poor; Birangana Shila Guha a freedom fighter who was recognised for her sacrifice during the Liberation War; Jannatul Sarkar Champa who went from being on the streets to becoming a newspaper hawk to finally becoming a Union Parishad member; and Tammana Akter Nura who despite being born without any arms and only one leg, has continued with her studies with brilliant results and now dreams of becoming a BCS cadre.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi gave out the awards at a ceremony held at the auditorium of Independent University, Bangladesh in the capital's Bashundhara. The awardees were introduced by: Shaheen Anam of Manusher Jonno Foundation, Hasin Jahan of WaterAid Bangladesh, Senjuti Saha of Child Health Research Foundation, Sintia Sharmin Islam of Shajgoj, Maria Mumu of Moshal Mental Health, Tawhida Shiropa of Moner Bondhu and Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kori. Mominul Islam, Managing Director and CEO of IPDC Finance Limited and Mahfuz Anam, Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star were also present at the event.

A cut above the rest

Jamila Begum is breaking the stereotype of a male-dominated profession by earning solvency from butchering cattle in the Birganj upazila of Dinajpur. In an effort to become financially stable after her drunkard husband abandoned her and her children, she took the lead of the business she had set up for her husband and became a butcher herself. Jamila's business is now booming and she not only managed to clear her and her family's long-standing debts but also build a home in her village. She earns around 700-1000 taka daily. Besides, her son Jahurul is also helping her at the shop while her daughter Salma reads at grade VIII at Jharbari High School. Initially, she was frowned upon for taking up a male-dominated job as a female. But now the villagers and other male butchers have accepted her. They even come to help her. "Jamila is well-known for her profession in the village. She sells quality meat," said Jakir, a youth of Debarupara.

She is breaking the stereotypes that women are supposed to do certain jobs and breaking the discrimination in the profession.



Setting the wheels of change in motion

Takia's journey dates back to her days at Hazera Tajur Degree College. Her college was quite far from her house, and with buses stopping every ten minutes for passengers, it was tough to be on time for classes.

Back then, Takia was inspired by a friend's elder sister Mahmuda Khanom, who used to ride 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. Her mother also mentioned that in spite of being taunted by people nearby, Takia didn't back down. Riding a scooter in Chattogram, especially for girls, and promoting it was challenging because girls riding scooters was completely a new matter for the society.

She started the Facebook page RoadBook BD in 2019. At first, people were sceptical about girls riding scooters, but their attitudes are gradually changing.

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.

Nova has embraced the freedom and shown the others that girls are free to ride scooters as boys do.



From physically challenged student to successful entrepreneur

Zannatul Ferdous Mohua (24), a physically challenged student has become a successful e-commerce entrepreneur. By exporting several hand-made embroidery products to foreign countries, Mohua, who is unable to walk, move her hands, or speak clearly, and can only move her fingers, is now selling her products online in over 18 countries and employs 35 women.

Her family suffered greatly as a result of her disability at birth, as society opined that Mohua would be a burden to her family. Despite all odds, Mohua managed to complete her graduation from the Azizul Haque College's English Department in 2019 and is currently pursuing her master's degree at the same institution.

When she was an HSC student in 2012, she learned some hand embroidery techniques from her aunt, who lived in the house where they used to live. She was thinking about some financial freedom at that time. Since she made the decision to start a business, it has not been an easy task. Through teaching, she had earned TK. 7000 and started an online business by buying phones in 2018.

She has proved that autism is not a disability but rather being differently abled and that they can contribute to society just like others.



Talent isn't measured by limbs

Seventeen-year-old Tamanna Akter Nura was born with no arms and only one leg. But she wants to prove that physically challenged people are not a burden to society. She believes in her own potential. She wants to be a BCS cadre.

She earned the highest GPA in her high school graduation exams. She took the exams by holding a pen between her toes.

Initially, no schools were willing to accept Tamanna, because of her disability. The Principal of Ajmain Adus Pre Cadet School was very kind to her. He agreed to enrol Tamanna into his school and Tamanna's mother laid out a mat in a corner of the classroom for her. Ever since then, their daughter has stood first in each of her classes. She completed her SSC exams with GPA 5 from Bankra JK Secondary School, in 2019.

Tamanna now looks to achieve GPA 5 in her HSC exams. Tamanna has proved that talents do not require any certain criteria and it's all about dedication.



Providing education free of cost

mental development, moral education, cleanliness and proper care of children and adolescents in the sweeper community. At present 30 children are being taught at the school regularly.

To ensure proper hygiene facilities for women and girls during menstruation, a group of young people along with 'Hasimukh Pathshala' and Taheatul Jannat have formed a voluntary organization named 'Nandita Suraksha'. The organisation works on gender equality, women's empowerment, menstrual health hygiene, prevention of child marriage and dowry, prevention of sexual harassment, and mental health.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Taheatul Jannat worked for the helpless destitute women and children in Faridpur. During the flood, in addition to food, she distributed sanitary napkins among poor women. In any crisis in her community, Taheatul Jannat came forward to stand beside the helpless people.

To stop violence against women and children, Taheatul Jannat creates awareness among children regarding safe and unsafe touch where she is trying to educate women about their legal rights. Also, her self-defence training for women in her district is quite well known in the community.



In 2018, Taheatul Jannat started the free-of-cost school Hasimukh Pathshala with the neglected children of the sweeper community of Bandhab Palli at Faridpur Sadar Upazila. The school focuses on the

Fighting day in day out

A brave woman who had endured torture during Bangladesh's War of Independence, Shila Guha's story of misfortune is as horrendous as that of other girls and women who had been taken to the Pakistan Army camps. She survived that experience by a stroke of luck. However, her second round of tryst with fate began when her father refused to take her in after the war, as the Pakistanis had picked her up. Her life since then has been one of despair, denial, and betrayal even without any fault of her own. Even at this age, the trouble and harassment she is going through speak volumes about the negligence of society toward our poor elderly individuals and specially Biranganas.

Shila Guha finally saw a ray of hope when the honourable Prime Minister, in a video conference in June last year, reportedly assured her that she would be accorded due respect, and her days of misery would end soon as she, at last, finds the peace and recognition she deserves.

Women deserve respect despite such tragedies happening in their lives. This mindset of society needs to develop for women to live a peaceful



and respectful life. Although recognized by the government, society still owes the same respect to Shila Guha.

Withstanding hardship through independence

Hailing from Pabna's Chatmohar upazila, Jannatul Sarkar had a very hard life at a very early age after her father's demise. In 2005, she got married and got divorced within a year, owing to her husband being a drug abuser. Once again, Champa was left stranded.

When she was selling newspapers, many people passed snide remarks at her for being a woman. In the beginning, she had no fixed customer and could barely sell five to seven newspapers a day. She never took the criticism to heart and continued doing her job with diligence. Now, she is earning Tk 500-550 a day selling newspapers, travelling 20-25 kilometres. People who had criticised her are now praising her.

In November 2021, she was elected as a female member in the reserved seat of wards 3, 4 and 5 of Parshodanga union.

"After serving her role as a newspaper hawk, she joined the Union Parishad on time and performed her duty successfully. This is truly inspirational," Azhar said.

