



'Today my father finally gets an answer for what a girl child can do'

Diana Award winner Maria Mumu speaks at NSU's TedTalk

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STAR YOUTH DESK

On Thursday, October 27, Maria Mumu, the founding president of Moshal Mental Health gave her first TedTalk at North South University.

When the time came for her to speak, Maria sat down in the corner for 30 seconds, before introducing herself. She started by saying that this short pause was her accepting her anxiety and allowing herself comfort, and why it is important for leaders to show their vulnerability.

An outlier, away from what is called the normal, is how she was labelled throughout her life. The mental health advocate did not have a structure, to begin with, because her life itself lacked one.

"One minute I was living in London, the next I was living with sex workers in a brothel, another minute I was working in a departmental, and then I was standing on the stage of Miss Universe Bangladesh. From being the founding president of Moshal, to receiving the Diana award, to standing in front of you all, giving my Ted Talk, in one of the best universities in Bangladesh," said Maria.

Maria's rollercoaster ride through life began

to begin working from the age of 12, in a desperate search for some normalcy in her life. While she was struggling in 2017, when she was in Class 9, Maria's mental health began declining. She started suffering from intense stomach pain, which no medicine could cure. Simultaneously, her academic performance began to drop off, resulting in those around her questioning her failures.

Initially, doctors said the pain was due to an ulcer. However, no medication could help relieve it. She would go to school every day and then be forced to take a medical leave. Being a student at a reputed college, everyone began questioning her ability to continue studying, especially after she failed her exams.

In such a situation, Maria began to doubt herself and question everything, isolating herself in the process. "I did not eat or sleep for seven days straight. Around this time, I started seeing things. I constantly felt as if I was in a flight or fight mode," she recounted the events as if it were yesterday.

Finally, doctors realised that the issue might not be a physical one. Incidentally, the pain would only occur when she was sad.

Maria encountered her first panic attack on July 29 of that year. She found herself feeling that someone was hurting her, falling to the floor shivering, blacking out because she could no longer breathe.

After regaining her consciousness, she was afraid of even herself. She finally gathered the courage to grab the phone and call someone for help. Luckily for her, someone from Maryland University was visiting Bangladesh then, and talking to him gave her clarity.

The person was able to explain to her that because she wasn't sleeping, her dreams were being projected as visual hallucinations and that she was suffering from a panic attack. In that moment, Maria finally realised that the person hitting her was none other than herself.

Later on, she would be diagnosed with clinical depression and anxiety. The stomach pain was from a chronic mental health issue called somatoform disorder. Maria was shocked by these findings. "If these issues can have such an impact on someone's life, why do we not know about them?" was the question running through her mind.

Sometime later, she witnessed a junior of hers jump from the stairs and commit suicide, after failing her exams. It did not stop there, Maria also lost another one of her friends to suicide. "Both of them had similar patterns," she said, "I could hear them screaming at the back of my mind, asking for help."

While researching, she was shocked to find the statistics on mental health and suicide issues. The budget allocation in the mental health sector was only 0.075 percent of the national budget. According to these findings, only one psychologist was allocated per 260,000 people. Maria also found that more than 10,000 people committed suicide every year.

These numbers were staggering enough for her to continue researching the topic. That is why, when she was able to take part in Miss Universe Bangladesh in 2019, she used the platform to talk about these issues.

Moshal was born on the February 7, 2020 with 300 students and parents in a parenting seminar. Looking back now, Maria is able to tie the strings together and realise why she felt she needed to create Moshal. If her parents knew about the concept of co-parenting and if teachers knew how to handle students with mental health issues, then maybe those juniors of hers would not have committed suicide.

"This was not an individual issue. It's a global issue, an institutional issue, and a societal issue," said Maria.

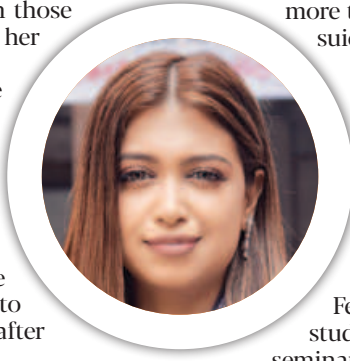
Till today, Moshal has provided more than 2,000 sessions—with its nationally and internationally recognised panel of experts. Having held more than 16 campaigns, Moshal now has 12 departments—with more than 80 people working at the organisation. It is the first and youngest mental health organisation from Bangladesh to win the prestigious Diana award.

The normalcy she had craved all throughout her childhood, she was finally able to find in her own individuality.

"We don't have to find normalcy. Instead, we should find the best version of ourselves and that doesn't have to be normal," said Maria at the TedTalk, adding, "This is not a winning story, but a survival story. There are millions of people who need our help and there are centuries of work left for us to do, but we start today. A lot of people have talked about mental health at today's TedTalk, and the fact that we were able to contribute to this, is a stepping stone for our country's mental health sector."

The young mental health advocate took a moment to think back to all those years ago, when her father had refused to take custody of her.

"Today is the day my father finally gets an answer for what a girl child can do," Maria boldly concluded.



when her mother and father got separated. She was only three years old at the time of the separation. At a time when Maria should have been playing with toys, she had to begin fighting for her life.

When her father was asked to take custody of her, he refused, saying, "What will I do with a girl child?"

"This morning, out of all the mornings of my life, would be the answer for what would one should do with a girl child," said Maria to the audience.

Due to her family situation, Maria had

Ten Bangladeshi youths on Top 100 Young Talent of Asia 2022 list

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

This year, ten Bangladeshi youngsters have been included in the Top 100 Young Talents in Asia list. This award intends to recognise young individuals, aged between 18 and 30 years, who inspire, influence, and encourage others through their talent, narrative, or work for people and communities.

Monsta Asia, Malaysia's largest talent development and engagement platform that designs, develops, and identifies talents in both personal and professional abilities, is this event's organiser. This year, the top 100 talents were chosen from more than 1000 nominees, for their impactful stories, and outstanding contributions to their communities.

Among them, the ten Bangladeshi youths are – Sadi Muhammad Tamim (Founder, Singra Students Welfare Association), Md. Moktar Hossen (Head of Operation, Jahamara Foundation), Israt Sharmin Keya (Founder and President, Briddhi Foundation), Ahshanul Mahbub Labby (Founder,



Newspaper Olympiad), Mohaimenul Solaiman Nicholas (Content Team Lead, Reverse School), Murshidul Alam Bhuiyan (Team Bertho), Sajid Ur Rashid (Content Writer, Reverse School), Talha Zubair (Founder, Bacto Crop), Tahmina Akter Supti (Founder of Light For Life and Project Fortune) and Raju Ahmed (Founder, Awareness Army Youth

Organisation). Talha Zubair is the youngest one to make it to the list this year.

SHOUT caught up with three of the winners to find out their reaction.

Labby Ahsan, who was recognised for his work with Newspaper Olympiad, said, "We have been working for the development of the media sector of

Bangladesh since 2018. Through our efforts, we are training youth journalists by organising media workshops and our learning hub is sharing knowledge with thousands of people every day."

Talha Zubair's startup, Bacto Crop, aims to accelerate sustainable agriculture by producing healthy crops in a shorter period of time. This is achieved by shortening the germination period and increasing rate of germination using microorganisms.

"Innovations like these can help us become a more prosperous nation, considering the fact that we are still dependent on agriculture," he shared.

Murshidul Alam Bhuiyan, founder of Team Bertho, said, "Team Bertho has always inspired people by presenting other's life stories. To see our work being recognised not only makes us proud but also gives us hope that our stories will continue to reach and impact more individuals."

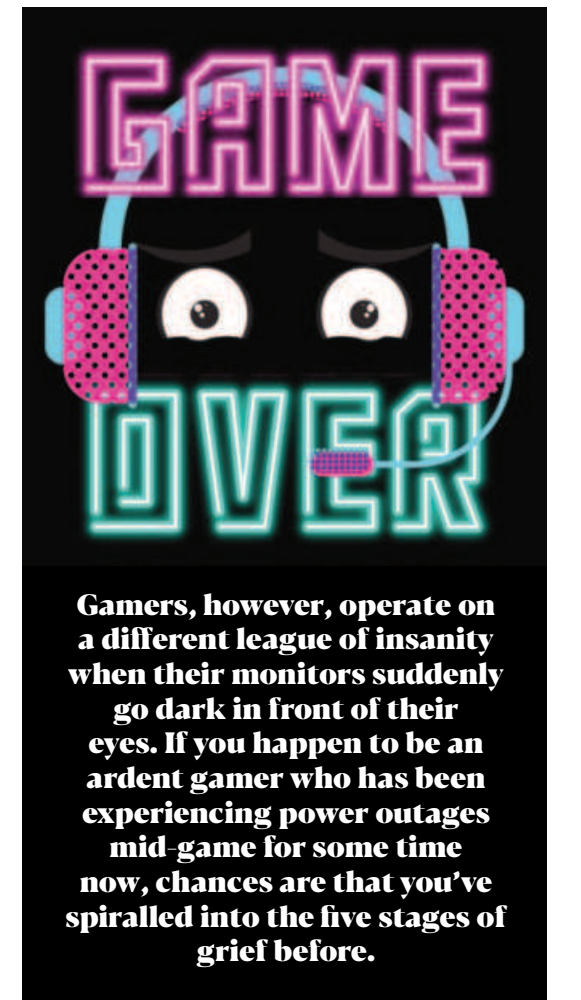
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Experiencing the five stages of grief as a gamer during load shedding

AYAAN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE

When Bane spoke his famous words, "You merely adopted the dark; I was born in it," in *The Dark Knight Rises*, chances are that he was talking about a childhood in Bangladesh. Because, let's face it, the constant bouts of electricity outages that've been plaguing us are enough to drive anyone to insanity.

Gamers, however, operate on a different league of insanity when their monitors suddenly go dark in front of their eyes. If you happen to be an ardent gamer who has been experiencing power outages mid game for some time now, chances are that you've spiralled into the five stages of grief before.



Gamers, however, operate on a different league of insanity when their monitors suddenly go dark in front of their eyes. If you happen to be an ardent gamer who has been experiencing power outages mid-game for some time now, chances are that you've spiralled into the five stages of grief before.

Denial
As the lights go out and a little part of your soul exits your body, you try to remain calm. For all you know, it might not be a power outage in the first place. Maybe it's just an episode of your life flashing before your eyes. After all, you were just on the verge of a clutch. Surely that won't be taken away from you. Right?

Anger
By the time you realise what happened, you feel engulfed by rage. You blame the country for robbing you of your moment in the spotlight. At that moment, you discern the need to break something in order to let the anger out. In a moment of oblivion, you grab your keyboard, ready to go to town with it.

But as you raise it high up in the air, you realise that it cost you an arm and a leg to afford the entire setup. Feeling dejected, you place the keyboard down gently and think of the next best thing – bargaining.

Bargaining
At this point, you might be begging your parents to hook the back-up generator lines to your computer. Sacrificing the lights and fans is only a small price to pay for salvation, after all. If that doesn't work, you can always try and convince them to break the bank and buy you an UPS. However, you refrain from taking the leap, because doing so could make your worst fear come true – they might tell you to get a job instead.

Depression
Once you've exhausted all other options, depression and sorrow seem to be your only companions. You curse the salesman who convinced you that paying an obscene amount of money for RGB peripherals would solve all your problems in life. As you despair, you wonder why you ever sacrificed your mental well-being and started gaming in the first place. Maybe, if you listened to your strict Asian parents and spent 13 hours a day studying, things would've turned out differently.

Acceptance
After everything is said and done, and the dust settles on the horizon, you come to terms with the harsh reality we live in. Maybe online video games were never meant for you in the first place. Perhaps you'd be better off sticking to board games and occasional social interactions. You look back on all the times you made fun of mobile gamers, and realise that you were the laughing stock all along.

The electricity might come back, but the fire that was once lit within you will never be reignited.

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