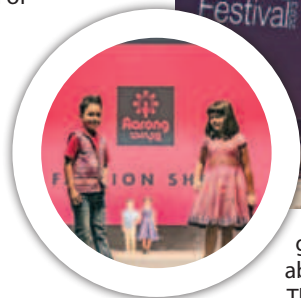


# Brac Hope Festival 2023: A celebration of resilience and empowerment

The Brac Hope Festival was a celebration to remember. The event was a riot of colour, vigour, and enthusiasm that took place in the Bangladesh Army Stadium. The three-day ceremony marked the end of a yearlong commemoration of Brac's 50th anniversary as one of the biggest development organisations in the world. The celebration, which took place from 9 to 11 February, brought together people from all occupations to celebrate Brac's remarkable achievements and to look forward to the future with anticipation.

The first day of the festival was a celebration of Bangladesh and Brac's extensive development network. The stadium was buzzing with excitement as visitors explored the various exhibitions, stalls, pavilions, and workshops displaying the different aspects of Brac's ecosystem.

Children were in for a treat with interactive workshops, learn-with-fun zones, and an architectural workshop hosted by the Brac University architecture department. One of the highlights for children was the Play Lab, an innovative solution by Brac Institute of Educational Development (BIED) that focuses on indoor games for early childhood development. Children in cities often lack space to play, so the Play Lab provides scientifically proven



games to boost their cognitive abilities.

The cultural programme in the evening was the main attraction, with Fazlur Rahman Babu's "Puthi Path" performance combining poetry and music, taking many back in time with its kerosene lamp on stage. Arnob and the band Lalon also performed, entertaining the crowd with folk songs and popular tracks.

The Brac Hope Festival's second day was packed with fun activities. The day's theme, "Power of People," emphasised people's capacity to alter their lives. Participatory workshops on a variety of topics were offered, such as rickshaw painting, urban gardening, robotics, and children's Play Lab. The audience took part in games that were run by several Brac environmental projects. Both Brac Institute of Educational Development (BIED) and Brac Seed

produced events for children called "Worlds of Play."

The presentation by Brac Enterprises, which celebrated the success stories of its businesses, was one of the main draws. The triumphs of Brac Microfinance customers were also emphasised. Students from the Government School for Deaf and Hearing Impaired, PHT Centre, gave a demonstration of sign language. The crowd enjoyed the musical performance by the Jatrik ensemble, which was based on true accounts of bravery and optimism. A stunning fashion show by Aarong that honoured Bangladeshi culture and heritage marked the end of the second day.

The three-day Brac Hope Festival culminated in a lively celebration of poetry, music, and dance performances, participatory workshops, and discussions on climate change. The festival was a gathering

of people from all occupations, with a special focus on young change-makers.

Five young innovators were awarded the "Amra Notun Young Changemakers Award," while the newly launched "Taaga Outstanding Young Professionals Award" was presented to three outstanding working women aged under 35.

Brac Executive Director, Asif Saleh was a speaker on the panel discussion on Climate Change and Adaptation Strategies. The festival also featured a screening of documentaries, including one by renowned British photographer Platon on Sir Fazle Hasan Abed and another on Brac International. The festival ended on a high note with captivating performances by Nemesis, Artcell, and James.

The Hope Festival was established with the goal of motivating Bangladesh's youth by sharing actual accounts of people who, on their own, changed their life for the better with only a small rekindling of hope. Brac witnesses the realisation of this conviction every day, from the front lines to the last mile. Each of the roughly 100 million people Brac works with—teachers, healthcare workers, business owners, artists, farmers, producers, and partners—is proof that optimism can triumph over adversity, from the heart of Bangladesh to the furthest corners of the world.

**By Fedra Al Hossain**  
**Photo: The Brac Hope Festival**

## TAAGA Outstanding Young Professionals Award: CELEBRATING WOMEN WHO DRIVE CHANGE

TAAGA is making strong statements in a society where women are frequently underrepresented in leadership roles and their achievements are frequently ignored. Young female professionals, under the age of 35, who are breaking down barriers in various fields were recognised by the brand through the introduction of the TAAGA Outstanding Young Professionals Award, as part of the Brac Hope Festival that marked the end of a yearlong commemoration of Brac's 50th anniversary as one of the biggest development organisations in the world.

Nine outstanding female professionals were chosen as finalists for the award. They were Anika Meahnaz, Assistant Manager, MRP Unilever Bangladesh Ltd.; Forhat Nazib Chowdhury, Manager, Climate Responsive Infrastructure, Save the Children International; Labiba Mustabina Oishee, Business and Clinical Development Associate, Renata Ltd.; Maria Kibtia, Area Leaf Manager British American Tobacco Bangladesh; Dr Nazmee Kabir, Specialist Orthopaedics and Trauma Surgery, Evercare Hospital Dhaka; Sahida Fatema, Operation Manager Foodpanda Bangladesh; Shabnam Rafat Ummey Sawda, Business Analyst,



MyGP Product, Grameenphone Ltd.; Tasnia Tasnim, Territory Manager Berger Paints Bangladesh Ltd.; and Zeba Samiha, Category Demand Planner, Berger Paints Bangladesh Ltd.

"It felt really good first to be nominated by my organisation, it meant that they believed I deserve a platform such as this one, and then being selected as one of the top finalists from so many other young women was itself a great achievement for me. Hats off to TAAGA for coming

up with this unique way of inspiring the new generation by recognising young outstanding professionals. Stories of the winners will definitely motivate young professionals positively," said Dr Nazmee Kabir, one of the finalists.

The jury panel consisting Moutushi Kabir, Senior Director, People, Culture and Communications, BRAC; Shwapna Bhowmick, Head of Region Bangladesh & India, Marks & Spencer; and Zaved Akhtar, CEO and Managing Director, Unilever

Bangladesh Limited, picked three winners in Forhat Nazib Chowdhury, Labiba Mustabina Oishee, and Maria Kibtia at the award show which was held at the Army Stadium, on Day three of the BRAC Hope Festival 2023.

TAAGA was launched by Bangladesh's premier lifestyle brand, Aarong in 2003. Since then, TAAGA has carved out its own identity, finding its place amongst young consumers who resonate with its ability to be responsible, versatile, and modern. With this award programme, TAAGA is taking its commitment to women's empowerment to the next level by recognising and celebrating the achievements of young female professionals.

The Outstanding Young Professionals Award recognises women who have strong work ethics and a drive for excellence. All the nominees show courage by pursuing options that may be risky, new, or untried, but they are not afraid to implement new methods, ideas, and opportunities. The award recognises young women who stand out for their extraordinary performances and are setting performance benchmarks in their respective fields.

**By Fedra Al Hossain**  
**Photo: The Brac Hope Festival**