

IN CONVERSATION WITH NABANITA NAWAR

# The first Bangladeshi on Forbes' 30 Under 30 Local: Toronto

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Nabanita Nawar, a Bangladeshi researcher and entrepreneur residing in Canada, has recently been featured in the Forbes' '30 Under 30 Local: Toronto' list. Nabanita is the co-founder and CEO of HDAX Therapeutics, a biotech company working towards drug discovery. With a background in medicinal chemistry, she is leading the treatment of peripheral neuropathy, a condition that affects over 30 million people globally.

We recently caught up with Nabanita to learn more about her background, work, and aspirations.

Could you tell us about your educational background?

I was born in Narayanganj and later moved to Dhaka where I completed my schooling from The Aga Khan School. After my A-Levels, I moved to Canada to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Biological Science from the University of Toronto. Toronto allowed me to be at the forefront of innovation, and my university provided me with the opportunity to explore and participate in diverse research work. I experimented with a lot of things and began seeing science from a translational perspective. During my final year thesis, I worked on a therapeutic treatment for blood cancer and later completed my PhD in medicinal chemistry.

When did you start developing a fascination for medicinal chemistry? I have always been passionate about life sciences and enjoyed studying biology. However, I never really

wanted to become a healthcare practitioner. My love for science and innovation, coupled with the desire to have a meaningful impact on human life, led me to medicinal chemistry. I wanted to be a part of scientific innovations that went from the bench to the bedside, leaving a profound effect on real-time healthcare services.

How did you come up with HDAX Therapeutics?

We founded HDAX Therapeutics in 2021 when I was still a PhD student. At its core, HDAX Therapeutics focuses on developing new treatments for diseases that presently have no medicine. The Canada-based company strives to develop a targeted therapeutics platform for the safe and efficacious treatment of HDAC-driven pathologies such as neuropathies and neurodegenerative disorders.

Could you tell us more about the treatment method you are pioneering?

We are currently working on chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy. The chemotherapy provided to cancer patients is very toxic and does not discriminate between cancer and healthy cells. This leads to various side effects, with neurotoxicity being a disease in itself, and can cause nerve damage, which leads to discomfort, loss of sensation, immobility, and paralysis. Presently, the advancement of the disease cannot be slowed down, stopped, or reversed by medication. We are developing an oral molecule that has a disease-modifying effect on patients. According to our progress so far, trial patients can receive doses of HDAX by 2025.

What are some other projects you are working on?

We are also working on some secondary

diseases, and developing a technology that addresses cardiovascular disease. Since it is the first-ever treatment and a lot of research-based work, we still have a long way to go. Our early study shows great potential in this field, and we are quite optimistic.

What are some challenges you face in the field of drug discovery?

I think one of the biggest challenges is the lack of representation of women of colour in this field, specifically within leadership roles. While embarking on this journey, I did not have a role model who I could relate to. Moreover, the drug discovery process is very capital-intensive and does not generate revenue or profits on a simultaneous basis. It becomes very difficult for us to raise funds, especially being a women-led company.

How do you plan to expand HDAX Therapeutics in the future?

We are looking for partnerships with pharmaceutical companies. We also wish to collaborate with leading educational institutes and medical schools to engage in interdisciplinary research. Additionally, we are willing to engage with similar companies in Bangladesh, since most of these companies do not have the proper research and development facilities for early-stage work.

What are some suggestions you have for a newcomer in this field?

Be open to making mistakes and taking risks, and do not let the fear of failure control you. My failures have led me to where I am today, so take that leap of faith and play around with your ideas. This field is a journey of never-ending learning opportunities, so make the most of these.



## Jobs Spotlight

**BAT (British American Tobacco)** - Commercial Finance Manager

**Deadline:** N/A

**Eligibility:**

- Bachelor's degree in finance, accounting or equivalent
- 3+ years of experience in a global FMCG or similar dynamic operating environment
- Thorough understanding and knowledge of relevant finance tools and systems

**Minimum experience:** 3+ years

To apply through BAT's official LinkedIn page or visit the career section on their website.



**Daraz** - Lead Analyst, Business Intelligence

**Deadline:** 25 August

**Eligibility:**

- Bachelor's degree in MIS, CSE, or BBA
- Needs to have experience in a data analyst role, running a team, and working with a large number of cross-functional teams

Must have strong proficiency in SQL and Python. Experience in dashboard creation in any data visualisation platform is a plus

**Minimum experience:** 5-7 years

To apply, visit Daraz's official LinkedIn page or visit the career section on their website.



**Standard Chartered Bank** - Senior Analyst, CDD Operations

**Deadline:** 7 September

**Eligibility:**

- Bachelor's degree with a major in business administration, finance, accounting, economics, or related disciplines. Master's degree in the same subjects preferred

4+ years of experience and knowledge in the banking industry with AML experience

Must have role-specific technical competencies such as analytical ability, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, etc.

**Minimum experience:** 4+ years

To apply, visit Standard Chartered Bank's official LinkedIn page or visit the career section on their website.



**MetLife Bangladesh** - Assistant Manager, Application Development and Maintenance

**Deadline:** 28 August

**Eligibility:**

- Bachelor's/Master's degree in CSE or equivalent.
- Must have experience in CI-CD practice, especially familiar with JBOSS deployment.

Needs to have strong knowledge in RESTful web API, hybrid/native Android web applications, fragmented UI/UX design, JavaScript, etc.

**Minimum experience:** 3-5 years

To apply, visit MetLife Bangladesh's official LinkedIn page or visit the career section on their website.



## THE BOSSMAN

BY E. RAZA RONNY



# From startup to sensation: Harnessing the power of communication in fast-growing companies

SANJIDA TANNY

Startups are hot and they're also the cool kids on the block, and everyone wants to be a part of their action. The speed at which both the mainstream businesses and startup landscape is evolving, keeping the momentum going and ensuring that your company remains the 'talk of the town' is crucial. That is exactly where strategically planned communications and public relations (PR) play the role in shaping the reputation and credibility of your company, particularly if you are at a growing stage.

Fast-growing companies, often referred to as startups or scale-ups, are businesses that experience rapid expansion in terms of revenue, customer base, and market presence within a relatively short period. Their growth trajectory is characterised by exponential gains rather than a linear progression. This meteoric rise is fueled by innovation, disruption, and the ability to identify and address untapped market needs. Unlike traditional businesses, fast-growing companies thrive on agility, adaptability, and a keen understanding of their target audience.

Some of the common challenges that most of these companies face can include struggles with scalability and resources, hiring the right talent, changing customer expectations and needs, market saturation and competition, local regulations, media scrutiny, and a lot of communication overload.

Central to the success of such companies is their adept use of strategic communications and PR which specifically includes communicating accordingly with its stakeholders, including customers, investors, and the media. To engage with various stakeholders, such companies invest in recognising the power of storytelling, brand identity, and engaging content to capture the attention of their audience, and additionally differentiate themselves from the competition.

Effective communication helps create a compelling narrative around the company's

mission, value, and offerings, fostering a sense of connection with customers. PR efforts amplify this narrative by securing media coverage and industry recognition, further elevating the company's visibility and credibility.

This can be done in the following ways:

**Telling stories**

Everyone loves to connect with a compelling narrative crafted to engage, and the single most powerful strategy of every business is to inform, and sell while connecting emotionally, that's what keeps these businesses on top of their stakeholders' minds

**Segmenting your audience**

While you could be the best storyteller in town if it is not targeting your stakeholder, it is an effort in vain. Successful startups understand early on that there are diverse groups invested in their company, from investors and customers to employees and industry peers. These businesses tailor the communication strategies to address the specific interests and concerns of each group, and sometimes in different channels knowing where each stakeholder lives.

**Media relations mastery**

Forging relationships with key media outlets and industry influencers is one of the key steps that startups need to adopt from the very beginning. The successful ones don't wait for the media to approach them. Rather they proactively share newsworthy developments, product launches, and success stories to garner media coverage. Positive media attention not only boosts brand visibility but also enhances credibility and trust.

**Crisis preparedness**

Another key step for fast-growing companies is to be ready to address unexpected challenges. While we hope no major crisis hits the business, it is realistic to be prepared for how you plan to address if one does hit, and more importantly in what tone you address it.

**Consistent branding**

Your communications and public relations efforts should be consistent across all communication



channels.

This means using the same messaging, tone, and visuals. When your communications are consistent, it builds trust with your target audience.

Understandably, companies want to move on to the 'next thing', but steps such as measuring results regularly are important to adapting accordingly as well to improve your efforts and also be cohesive to the market dynamics.

Another measure often forgotten is having a system for managing your communications and public relations

efforts. This helps you stay on top of deadlines, track your progress, and measure your results.

And while following all these measures, being patient but agile as you build a brand is very vital, remember, building a brand does not happen overnight, and similarly, the success of your communications and PR strategy will also show in time and on channels you probably did not even anticipate.

With the power of strategic, targeted communications, fast-growing companies have the potential to transform industries and captivate markets. The potential of transparent and consistent communication cannot be overstated; it nurtures a sense of purpose, creates a shared vision, and fuels collective efforts.

Even as you navigate through challenges related to scalability, resource constraints, and increased expectations, it is your communications and PR that will help you keep things together. This is where you need to remember that your audience will support you no

matter what when they connect with you emotionally, when they relate to the story you built for them, and when you build it around them. And while you build your story, remember to let the story be told through your stakeholders as well, that's how you know your communications and PR team has done its job.

*Sanjida Tanny currently leads the Communications department at Wagely, a financial wellness startup. She was the former Lead Storyteller at ShopUp, a B2B commerce startup.*