

■ OFF CAMPUS ■

The Green Bangle MOVEMENT

A lore of women empowerment and reviving the Bengal mangrove

PROGGA SHILA CHAKMA

The Green Bangle Movement logo embodies the shape of a bangle – a symbol of femininity, affection, and strength across various cultures of South Asian countries. It also shows three hands clenched and graced with bangles, indicating the movement's desire to inspire coastal women towards empowerment along with the revivification of the declining mangrove forests in Bangladesh. It's an ambitious project consisting of environmentalist professors and students, working toward combating climate change in Bangladesh.

"The ideation of this project began in 2019. We started to plant palms around the Asian University for Women (AUW) campus as a bio fence. That was our first initiative, with the involvement of our students," says Dr Mosae Selvakumar, associate professor of Chemistry, AUW, and founder of the Green Bangle Movement.

The project is taking place in Guliakhali, a coastal village in Chattogram. Due to climate change, the level of seawater is increasing and because of its location, Guliakhali is now at risk of submersion. Safe drinking water is also a dwindling resource here. Women of Guliakhali spend most of their time collecting drinking water, unable to invest that time into work and become financially independent. The Green Bangle Movement wants to support coastal women by introducing the concept of ecofeminism, a branch of feminism that connects women and nature.

The project is being supported by different

non-profits, youth, and research organisations. AUW's Dr Ahmedul Kabir, co-investigator of the project, played a key role in setting up these collaborations.

Assistant project manager Nuzaba Tasannum, talking about her motivation to join the movement, says, "Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Green Belt Movement, was the inspiration behind our project. Our work is multidisciplinary. On one hand, our students are doing fieldwork-based research empowering women and at the same time, a book on palmyra culture is in the works."



The goal is to plant about 30 thousand mangrove and palmyra palm trees along the shorelines of Guliakhali over three years to combat soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, and rising sea levels. AUW VC Dr Rubana Huq allocated a half-acre of land on the main campus of AUW to create saplings for the plantation. Dr Selvakumar explained that women in that area will be

trained to create small-scale nurseries in their yards and eventually become ecopreneurs or eco-friendly entrepreneurs.

The project is entirely driven by AUW students' dedication and commitment. Some are under work-study programs and some are volunteering to be a part of this climate action activity. Referred to as Green Warriors, students help to nurture and maintain the saplings at the nursery, conduct fieldwork, and so on.

Progga Shila Chakma is a Campus Ambassador for The Daily Star from Asian University for Women.



PHOTOS: GREEN BANGLE MOVEMENT



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

It is okay to graduate late

MASHIYAT NAYEEM

Back in school, the path forward was clearly defined and laid out for you. You simply had to jump from one hurdle to another till you reached the finish line. I thought university was going to be the same. I had a plan and I was going to conquer it. I wasn't going to be a carefree person who graduated from university without an end in sight. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I had naively underestimated the higher education experience on several grounds.

I had not accounted for the fact that it was easy to fail a course and get stuck in a loop of retakes, that courses wouldn't be offered consistently every semester, or accommodate everyone who wished to take them. Sometimes it would be impossible to tackle a heavy workload like in high school without burning out. And projects, research, and jobs wouldn't flow smoothly either. Life-changing events like the death of a loved one, financial constraints, mental health issues, and accidents are all factors that can deter us from following a predefined timeline.

When you have spent most of your life and education surrounded by the same people, experiencing everything incrementally together, you are under the illusion that life will follow the same pace even when you are out of school. This idea couldn't be further from the truth. It becomes very apparent quickly that you are on your own. As the shared path forks into wholly different directions, it becomes easy to constantly compare yourself to peers whom you went to school with. Someone might have gotten a job, others will get married, while a fraction will go on to do great things. I have reached the point in life where I am grappling with these developments regularly and constantly feeling left behind. "But it is not a competition" is a mantra I have to repeat to myself daily to prevent myself from spiralling about not graduating "on time" so I can also feel like a grownup. A lot of people harbour the idea that doing well in school equates to doing well in the later stages of one's life.

For the longest time, I struggled with low self-esteem as I felt like I wasn't upholding my "usual standards" and my school batchmates were acquiring shiny new achievements with relative ease. These feelings usually occur when we have high expectations of ourselves and a rigid definition of what our life is supposed to look like.

When I realised that the people who went abroad graduated faster because the systemic problems and bureaucracy that exist in Bangladesh are not issues that persist overseas, and the people who went on to achieve major milestones do so because of the differences that exist in our socio-economic backgrounds, connections, wealth, and a lot of luck, I stopped beating myself up over it. It is okay to graduate later, it doesn't mean things will go badly in the future because of it.

It is important to remember that we are each on our own path and we are exactly where we are meant to be. Things will come to each of us in due time. It is not worth attaching our self-worth to the duration of our educational journey because life has different seasons and it isn't always supposed to follow a blueprint. Falling behind is not the end of the world.

Mashiyat Nayeem is a student at NSU.