

DRIVING CHANGE:

The inspiring journey of Zainab Binte Mainuddin Monem

In the realm of business and innovation, few stories are as compelling and inspiring as that of Zainab Binte Mainuddin Monem. She has carved a unique path in the corporate world, blending technology, entrepreneurship, and social responsibility. As the business development lead at Igloo Ice Cream and the founder of Azad.ai, her journey from a curious student with a passion for economics to a pioneering leader driving change in the industry exemplifies the power of resilience, innovation, and a deep-rooted commitment to social impact.

This interview delves into Zainab's multifaceted career, her inspirations, and the remarkable legacy she is building.

Q. Can you share your journey and how it led you to where you are today?

Absolutely! I graduated from Mount Holyoke College with a B.A. in Economics and Nexus in Global Business. Initially, I pursued biochemistry, but the broad liberal arts curriculum opened my eyes to a range of disciplines, ultimately leading me to economics.

My family's involvement in business also deeply influenced my upbringing. Growing up, dinner table conversations often revolved around our family business, including visits to our Igloo and Coca-Cola factories during weekends.

The exposure to the business world from a young age and the analytical training I received honed my ability to synthesise information and conceptualise solutions,

Business Development involves strategising new product development, branding, strategic partnerships and investment, leading research and development (R&D) and automating business processes.

My background in data analytics and my experience with Azad.ai — a marketing SaaS I founded in 2020 that won the Harold Grinspoon Entrepreneurship Award in May 2021 — has thus been very important to my professional role today.

Azad.ai is a great example of how technology can revolutionise traditional marketing approaches. It provides digital marketing, website development and software solutions that are both effective and cost-efficient for multiple industries. Its journey pivoting towards a broader industry focus illustrates the importance of adaptability within innovation and showcases a personal commitment to leveraging technology for business growth.

When speaking of inspiration, it would be amiss not to mention the tremendous influence that my grandparents have had in my life. My Dada, late Al-Hajj Abdul Monem, taught me the importance of discipline and experiential learning while my Dadi, Mehrun Nessa Monem set

her life to women's and children's safety and education.

Their influence has shaped my commitment to social impact which I can actualise particularly through the Abdul Monem (AM) Foundation.

The AM Foundation is poised to make a significant social impact through Igloo Dairy's initiatives. We are working to

In Bangladesh, a country at the forefront of climate change, some of our most innovative leaders are women from coastal areas developing unique strategies to safeguard farming from freshwater depletion. It is their example and that of so many women fostering change within our communities that invigorates my dedication to women's empowerment.



which laid the foundation for strategic thinking instrumental to where I am today.

Q. What are Igloo Ice Cream, Azad.ai, and the AM Foundation? What inspired you to embark on these ventures?

Joining my family's business, Igloo Ice Cream, in August 2022 marked a significant step in my career. My current role in

herself up as an exemplary matriarch by creating opportunities for rural communities.

My Nana, the former Chief Justice Mustafa Kamal, ignited my passion for knowledge and social justice, while my Nani, Professor Husne Ara Kamal, was a beacon of progressive values, dedicating

empower 5,000 to 10,000 female dairy farmers by establishing milk collection centres.

The AM Foundation and the causes it supports are a reflection of the values I have learned from my family and my commitment to making a tangible difference in people's lives.

Q. Can you share a highlight of your career?

A cherished moment of mine was when Igloo received the Most Loved Brand award by the Bangladesh Brand Forum for the 8th consecutive year in 2023 alongside setting a new sales record.

Milestones like this underscore the impact of the collaborative effort and creativity we value in our business. Beyond accolades and awards, however, seeing a child gleefully unwrap one of our ice creams reaffirms the joy Igloo brings while impacting so many in our community — personally, this always feels like a feat worth celebrating.

Q. How should we celebrate women in our society?

We should recognise and support the unique perspectives that women bring to traditionally male-dominated fields.

I am also inspired by my father's support for initiatives like the Bangladesh Women's Math Olympiad Gonitkonyas and my mother's constant efforts to empower women in our community to upskill themselves through targeted philanthropic ventures.

My goal is to create infrastructure to support women's participation in business and technology in Bangladesh.

Building on my commitment to increase female participation in business, I aim to transform the AM Foundation into a key socio-economic initiative of Abdul Monem Limited. By creating avenues through the foundation for investment in women-led enterprises, designing workshops for upskilling the employees in our factories (of which 60 per cent are women) and collaborating with female dairy farmers in the Igloo Milk project, we are driving forward women's entrepreneurship.

Q. What words of wisdom can you share with our readers?

Several unexpected turns in my personal and professional journey have taught me the importance of resilience and adaptability. For me, success is about shaping life with your unique voice and vision regardless of what challenges present themselves along the way. Stand strong, be adaptable and let your voice be heard.

**Interview by Samayla Mahjabin Koishy
Photo: Courtesy**