

Surf's up!

Younus Ali's dream of conquering the Californian waves



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NAZIFA RAIDAH

When I came across Surfer Younus' profile on social media, I was quite amused. A young surfer in his late teens was conquering Cox's Bazar's tides with a fleet of young surfers behind him, following his every move.

I was even more enthused to see women surfers on his team, especially considering how our society views women's participation in sports. So, on my next visit to the sea, I knew I had to meet this curly-haired marvel and learn about his journey.

Younus Ali's journey with surfing emerged from a great loss. In 2008, his father, who used to be a sea-farer, died at sea. At the time, he was just six years old. After suffering this loss, his mother often used to warn Younus about the dangers of the tides. This had instilled a deep fear within Younus and he equated water with imminent death. "When my father passed away, I knew I had to overcome my fear of water and drowning. But I didn't know how, until one day in 2009, when I met my mentor, Ramzan Miah. Under his tutelage, I trained for four years. He was like a watchful protector for me. He made me believe that I could realise all of my dreams, and would perpetually push me to pursue every one of those goals," said Younus when asked how his journey started.

Younus officially became a surfer in 2014, anointed by the Asian Surfing Federation after winning a national championship in Cox's Bazar. For that particular competition, Ramzan had registered Younus in the senior category without informing him. By

the end of the competition, Younus was crowned the winner in his category.

"Ramzan bhai used to enlist me into the senior categories of every competition and used to tell me, quite stubbornly, 'You can do it.' The people I was competing against in that competition had been champions internationally. One of them was even a seven-time champion. But although I was afraid of the competition, I was not afraid of the water. I was just 17 when I won that title and it was all because of Ramzan bhai," said Younus.

I don't know if it was because of his "surfer's state of mind," but I understood that Younus is a man who wears his smile like an armour. And as a child who dreamt of being a surfer and lost his father at an early age, his life has been far from easy.

Younus started working at the age of 13 or 14. He told me with a smile, "My brother and I started working at an early age to make sure our mother had the time to grieve and didn't have to worry about money ever. I started working for different NGOs as a volunteer to get some cash. I even work as a tourist guide. Somehow, both my brother and I built a career around the ocean's tides. While I'm a professional surfer, he's a professional lifeguard."

Younus' first international competition was in Bali, where the waves were as tall as 30 feet. He was used to waves that don't go higher than 10 feet, which he could glide on

for a minimum of four to five hours daily. "The first time I got crushed under a wave in Ubud, I cried because I thought I wouldn't get up. When a wave plunges on a person, they have to stay under the water for at least two minutes before getting out. I think I was underwater that day for over five minutes. The water in Bali was different, it had a different weight and

arena, where he witnessed 30-foot waves while living in Bangladesh. He said that he visited many places to get a well-rounded experience such as Sonadia Island, Saint Martin's Island, Patuartek, Teknaf, Shaplapur near Marine Drive, and others. Younus said, "Sometimes we get close to the Myanmar border where the navy supports our training by permitting

we paused all sorts of training until 2022. It was more difficult for our female surfers to stick to their passion. Often, they would be called when wearing their surfing gear. Sometimes, their parents would prevent them from continuing surfing. I voluntarily visited their houses and sat down with their parents to seek their permission.

sponsorships the board receives which aren't used. But even these funding sources cannot fully sustain this sport on the coast.

"As surfing is not a popular sport in Bangladesh, we lack essential gear that is needed to ensure safety. We also don't have good trainers, and the surfing boards we use were donated to us. A good surfing board costs anywhere between \$2,000 to \$3,000, and these boards are very prone to getting damaged."

When asked about what could change this status quo to create an ecosystem where our surfers are better supported, Younus told me, "Currently, there are four surf clubs in Cox's Bazar. These clubs must work together to create a surfing community. Right now we have clubs that only look after their interest and this is hurting us all. Moreover, the surfing association that we have in Cox's Bazar is futile because it consists of non-surfers who call the shots and do not work at any length to collect more sponsorships. This needs to change. Government support would help tremendously in this regard. For example, if we had a South Asian membership at an international surfing association, which is a one-time membership that costs around \$3,000, we wouldn't have to seek new competitions or get sponsorships on our own. The association would do these tasks for us. It's also a lot easier for the sports ministry to send abroad a 10-member surfing team bearing Bangladesh's flag than it is for us. If the logistics are made simpler, surfing will improve, too."

"So what's next for Surfer Younus?" The young man smiled shyly at my question and said, "My dream is a death wish. I want to win two more championships so that I get the clearance to ride a 100-foot wave in California."

I could tell that his dream is not a dream per se, but an event that will only require time to come true.



PHOTO: NAZIFA RAIDAH

As a child who dreamt of being a surfer and lost his father at an early age, Younus' life has been far from easy.

it pulled on me."

While that may have tamed any other person's passion, it wasn't the case for Younus.

"I took on a personal challenge for myself to conquer this new terrain. I had made a list of all the risky places to surf in Bali and I surfed at every single one of them. There's even a spot called Killer Point where accidents happen often. I even surfed there to prove a point for myself."

I became curious to know how Younus trained for the international

us to surf there. I guess that's one perk of being a surfer, you get to surf near the waters of restricted islands!"

The young surfer is now a member of the Divine Beach Club, part of Divine Eco Resort, where he trains a small team of surfboarders. Not only does Younus help these youth to learn surfing, but he and his team also spend their leisure time keeping the space in front of their club free from trash.

"I started training other interested folks in 2019, but after Covid hit,

Once I was able to convince them of their daughters' safety, some parents allowed their daughters to surf," informed Younus.

Conversing with Younus Ali, I wondered how the young surfer finances his passion, especially since he comes from a background of struggle. When asked, Younus replied that he is currently sponsored by the National University of Singapore. He explained that the Bangladesh Cricket Board also provides his team with partial funding from different

THE GREAT AMERICAN ECLIPSE

The longest, most visible eclipse for the US in 100 years



Dr. Quamrul Haider is professor emeritus at Fordham University in New York, US.

QUAMRUL HAIDER

On April 8, millions of North Americans will experience an awesome astronomical phenomenon that has so inspired and humbled humans throughout the ages. It is a total solar eclipse, a cosmic confluence caused by a delicate "dance" between the Moon, the Sun, and the Earth. Lasting for nearly 4.5 minutes in some areas, the eclipse will move northeast at more than 1,500 miles per hour along a narrow path (110 to 120 miles wide) from Mazatlán in Mexico, cutting diagonally across the US and into easternmost Canada. The next total solar eclipse will sweep across the US on August 3, 2044, but it won't have the broad reach as the upcoming eclipse.

As totality approaches, the sky will become dark, mid-day will turn into dusk, and stars will twinkle in the sky. Wispy strings of light from the Sun's extremely hot outer atmosphere, called corona, will suddenly appear. Just before totality and right before it ends, the bright spot of sunlight called the "diamond" will become visible. A few seconds after the diamond ring forms, the dazzling jewel of sunlight will break up into points of light known as Bailey's beads.

But what causes solar eclipses? And how can we predict their occurrence with great accuracy thousands of years into the future?

The Moon's orbital plane is tilted by about five degrees to the Earth's ecliptic (orbital plane). The points where it crosses the ecliptic are known as nodes. Because of the tilt, the Moon spends half the lunar month (which is 29.53 days) above and the other half below the ecliptic. Solar eclipses can occur only when the Moon is between the Sun and the Earth at or near a node.

Although the Moon crosses the nodes twice each lunar month, episodes of total solar eclipses, with the Sun completely obscured by the Moon, are rare. They occur only when the phase of the Moon at a node on the line of nodes between the



A child looks at the American Falls ahead of the solar eclipse (that will take place across parts of the US and Canada on April 8), at Niagara Falls, New York, US on April 5, 2024.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Earth and the Sun is New. Furthermore, the Moon must be relatively closer to Earth. If these conditions are not met, the long, narrow shadows of the Earth and Moon will miss their marks and no eclipses will occur.

When the New Moon is farther from Earth but still at a node, it will appear too small to completely shield the Sun, resulting in an annular solar eclipse, in which the outer edge of the Sun remains visible as a ring of sunlight. An eclipse will be partial if the Moon, the Sun, and the Earth do not align in a perfectly straight line. In that case, only a part of the Sun will appear dark, giving it a crescent shape.

So how can the Moon, which is much smaller than the Sun, completely block it out from our view?

It is a happy coincidence that the Moon

and the Sun appear the same size in the sky because their angular diameters, or the angle subtended by them at the point of observation on Earth, have the same value of half a degree. Therefore, when their orbital planes intersect and the distances align favourably, the New Moon can completely block the Sun.

People also often wonder how

Earth will rotate an additional one-third of a turn farther east, shifting the region of visibility west.

Eclipses separated by the Saros interval form the eclipse series. Each Saros series starts off with an eclipse near the north or south pole, after which every successive eclipse shifts south or north, respectively ending at the other pole. Once the occurrence of the first eclipse is found, predicting future eclipses is a straightforward task.

A Saros series typically lasts 12 or 13 centuries and contains 71 to 73 eclipses. The total eclipse of April 8, 2024 will be the 30th member of Saros 139, which began on May 17, 1501 and will conclude on July 3, 2763, with subsequent eclipses separated by a Saros.

Sure enough, the immediate forerunner of the April 8 eclipse occurred one Saros earlier, on March 29, 2006. Looking ahead, the next eclipse belonging to Saros 139 will occur one Saros later, on April 20, 2042.

To date, there are 181 Saros series numbered from zero to 180. Thus, total solar eclipses occur, on average, every 18 months somewhere around the world. Though they belong to different Saros series, a given location will experience totality once in about more than 100 years. For example, the last total solar eclipse in Bangladesh was on July 22, 2009. The next one will be on June 3, 2114.

Thanks to the Babylonians, the Saros series is a clever and powerful tool for predicting solar eclipses thousands of years into the future. It is fair to say that Saros' predictions are so precise that, if there is a deviation, it is very small and we will most likely not notice it. But ultimately, modern astronomers do not rely on the Saros to predict eclipses. They use sophisticated mathematical models to predict solar eclipses. Nevertheless, the Saros remains a simple and useful tool to understand the recurrence of solar eclipses.

CORRIGENDUM

In the article titled "Human rights in Bangladesh: Political will key to effective UPR implementation", published on this page on April 5, 2024, we mistakenly used the wrong author photo. We apologise for this oversight.

CROSSWORD

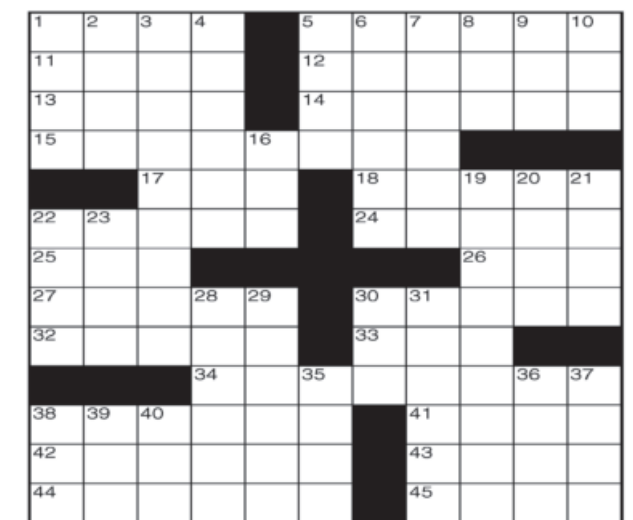
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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WEDNESDAY'S ANSWERS

