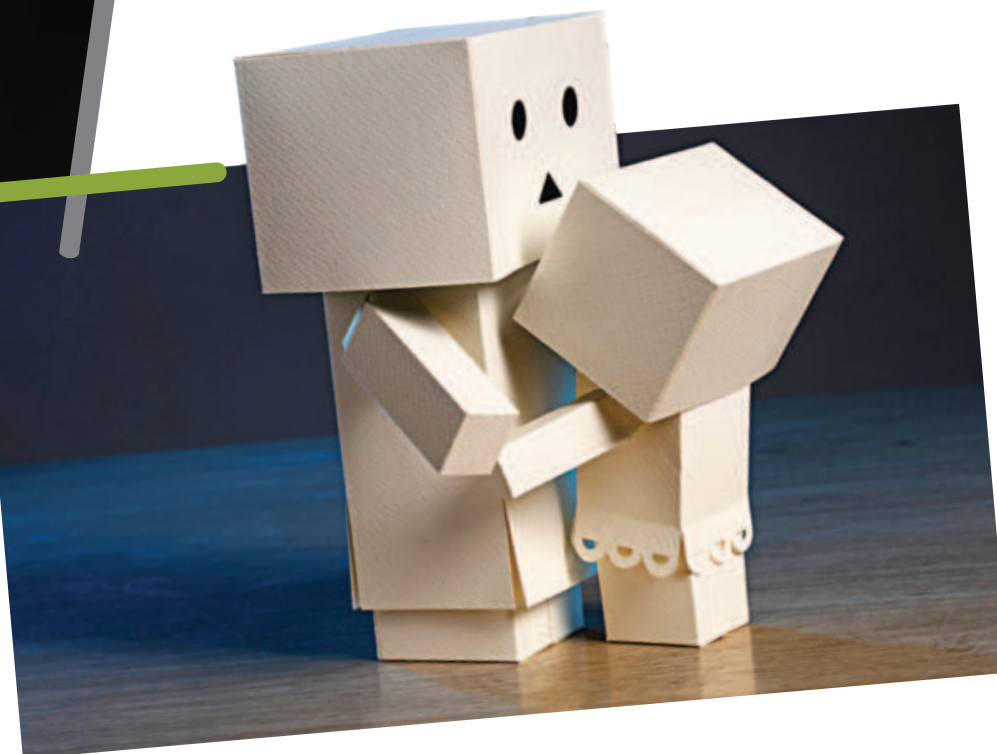
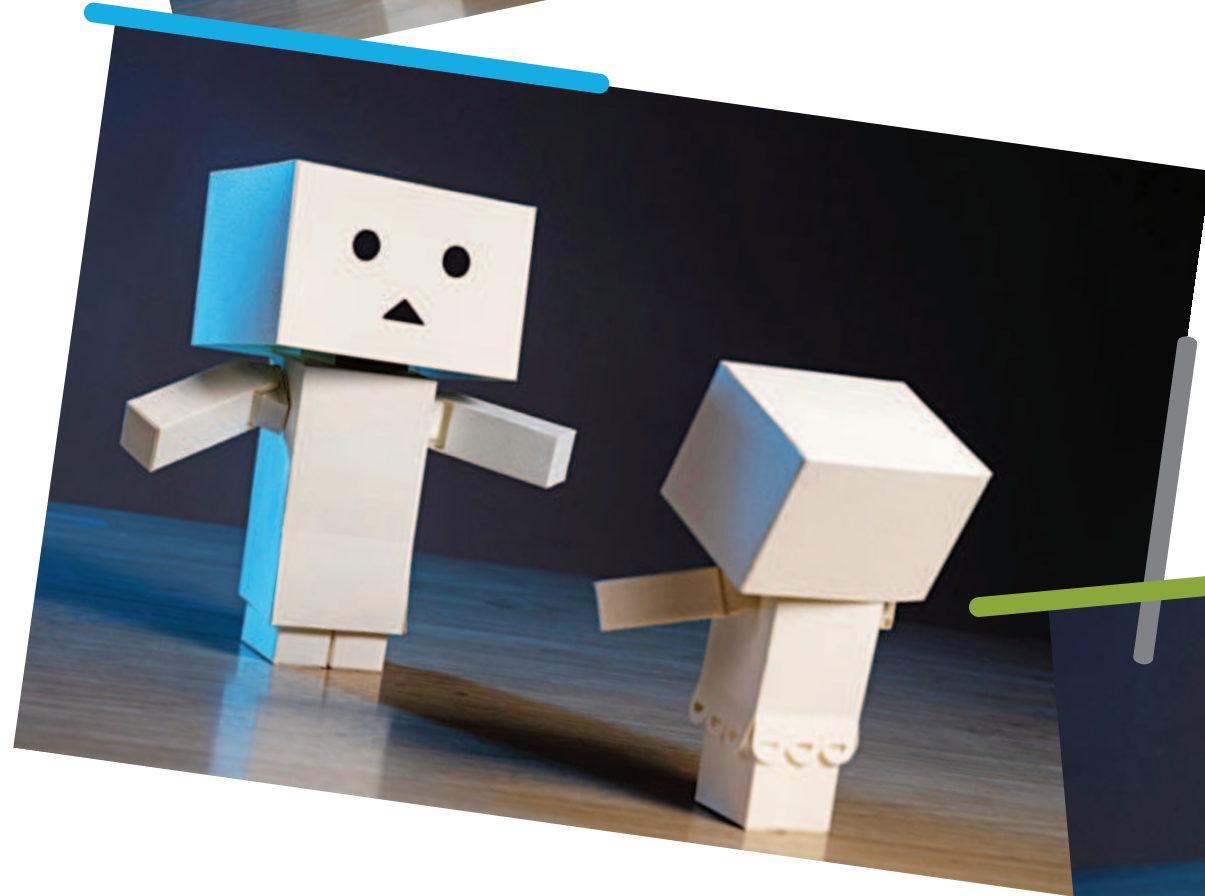
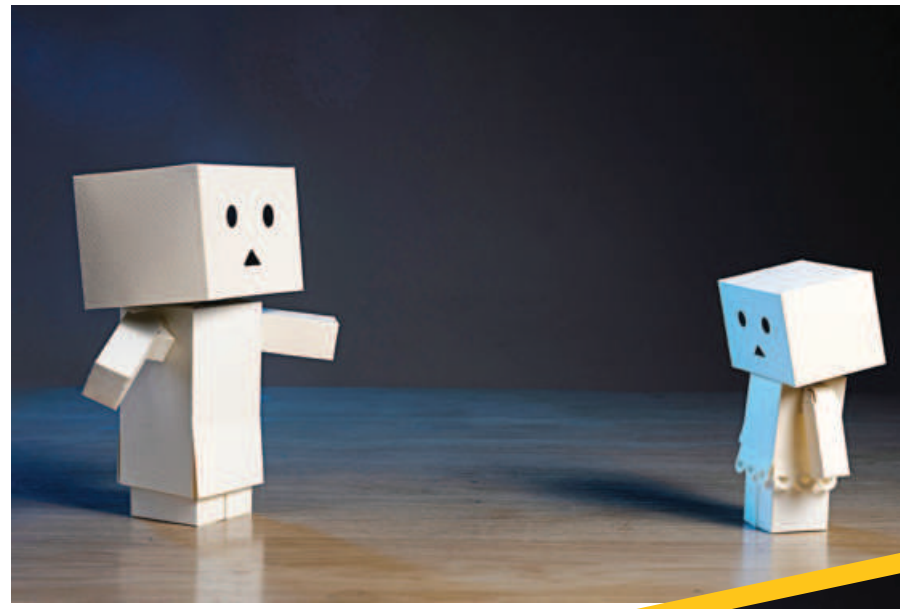


Redefining Family, EMBRACING LOVE



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 05

When their daughter returned for the holidays, she found herself not just as their grown child but as an older sister. It was at this moment that the Rahmans decided to take the leap of faith and seek legal guardianship of Dahlia.

"Our proposal was initially met with mixed emotions from Dahlia's biological parents. While her mother understood the sad reality that we could offer a better life experience for her child, the husband was quite apprehensive and not ready to accept the facts," Sayeda recalled.

She added, "Knowing fully that Bangladesh law does not allow adoption by Muslim families, we were not offering to adopt her and give Dahlia our family name anyway! All we sought was permission, from a legal standpoint, to provide the best for her. And it took some time for Sakina and her husband to come to terms, but they eventually agreed."

In Bangladesh, formal adoption is not recognised under Islamic family law. Instead, the Guardians and Wards Act of 1890 is followed, where a person or couple can be appointed only as a legal guardian of the child.

Afrin Ahmed, advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, explained further, "The law tries to focus on placing children in need of care, such as orphans or those without proper parental support, under the guardianship of individuals who can

provide a stable, nurturing environment. The process requires court approval, where the judge evaluates the suitability of the prospective guardians based on factors like financial stability, moral character, and ability to meet the child's needs."

Ahmed further added that guardianship does not automatically grant the child inheritance rights or a change in surname, so Muslim guardians often need to make additional legal arrangements to secure the child's future financial needs.

Speaking on the psychological journey, Ahmed added, "Adoptive parents, welcoming a child into their homes and their hearts, must prepare themselves for the legal procedures. They often face societal stigma, as the culture highly values biological lineage, leading to judgment and intrusive questions from their community. This can be emotionally taxing, alongside challenges in bonding with their adopted child.

"Parents also fear not being fully accepted by the child or worry about the child's desire to seek their biological family in the future. To overcome these issues, adoptive parents can focus on building a supportive network, educating those around them about adoption, practising empathetic parenting, and fostering open communication to strengthen their bond and create a loving environment for their child."

Dahlia is now a fourth grader at a reputed English medium school in the

country and spends her time at the house of her "adoptive parents" and also that of her biological father and mother.

"The school authorities are well aware of the whole arrangement and have been more than willing to extend their hands in assistance for this adoption process to work. Her friends and peers are aware of the circumstances surrounding Dahlia's guardianship, and so far, there have been no major issues," Syeda said.

Farzana Sultana Nila is a clinical psychologist attached to the Center for Mental Health and Care, Bangladesh (CMHCB). For over a decade, she has been working primarily with women and child issues.

She expressed that at times, parents seeking legal guardianship do so amidst a problem — at times, they are childless; sometimes they are couples who seek companionship in an advanced stage in life.

Depending on the circumstances, psychologists suggest that the child and her new family maintain contact with the child's biological roots. "To overcome all the negativities that we associate with adoption, it is important to realise that the adopted child deserves the same level of respect as one would show to one's biological child.

"One must understand that irrespective of the age of the ward, for the whole process of legal guardianship to be successful, the child can never be considered a 'problem solver'. No matter

the situation, adopting/taking legal guardianship can never bring a solution to a 'crisis'. It should be one done with reasoning and complete dedication. While it is understood that the financial strength of the new parents is important, the psychological aspect should be of greater importance," Nila opined.

The story of Dahlia and her adoptive parents is a success story, almost straight out of a fairy tale. Perhaps, the lesson one can draw from the real-life experience of the Rahman family is that they prioritised the emotional aspect of the transition rather than focusing on other needs.

Sayeda Rahman is now in her mid-50s, and Dahlia follows her like the moon. They recently went on a trip to Nepal, along with some of Sayeda's best friends, who introduce Dahlia as their granddaughter.

Seeing the sunrise over the mighty Himalayas brought Sayeda a little closer to her ward. In that serene moment, surrounded by the majestic peaks, Sayeda felt an unspoken closeness to Dahlia — a bond that had grown deeper than she had ever imagined, filling her heart with a sense of fulfilment and peace. Maybe, Dahlia felt the same!

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif

***Some of the names have been changed at the request of the interviewees.

Danbo Box Characters: Mahamud Hasan Reaz

Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel