



PHOTO: STAR

SHAPING A GENERATION

Speakers inspire students at O- & A-level awards

MD ZAHIDUR RABBI

The Daily Star and HSBC Bank honoured high-achieving students of the O and A Level examinations yesterday at the Bangladesh China Friendship Exhibition Center. The event celebrated the success of 2,375 students -- 1,824 from O-level and 551 from A-level -- across the Edexcel and Cambridge curricula, representing the academic sessions of October/November 2023, January 2024, May/June 2024 and October/November 2024.

of success. Urging students not to be constrained by conventional notions such as wealth, fame, or status, he advised them to develop their own definitions aligned with personal goals and values.

"Write your own definition of success. It's very important," he said.

Ayman, who began his career as an educator by posting short academic videos online, recounted his early excitement at achieving initial recognition: "When I was of your age, I really wanted to make a lot of money. Then I uploaded my first video and I

experiences. "In a world chasing greats, money and fame, I really want you to pause and ask yourselves what success looks like for me. For some of you it might be creating your own company, for some it might be going abroad and starting a fresh new chapter, for others it might be becoming a great teacher, doctor or engineer. Whatever that be, own it. Because that's very important."

"There's never a 'one size fits all' version of success," he added.

In addition to defining success individually, Ayman Sadiq spoke about the importance of maintaining ties to

Sadiq's contributions to education have been recognised internationally, including receiving the Queen's Young Leader Award and being named in Forbes' 30 Under 30 Asia list.

RAHAT AHMED: IT'S TIME TO BUILD A BANGLADESH BY BANGLADESHIS FOR BANGLADESHIS

Rahat Ahmed, founder and managing partner of Anchorless Bangladesh, spoke about the necessity of building a self-reliant Bangladesh, led and developed by its own citizens rather than directed by external influences.

Rahat began by reflecting on his professional journey, which started in New York, where he worked for an investment firm specialising in emerging and frontier markets. "My job was to look at potential investments in developing countries or in this case what we call in Wall Street: emerging markets and frontier markets," he said.

In 2004, while attending a conference in Hong Kong, Rahat requested permission from his employer to visit Bangladesh. "I remember back in September of 2004, I asked my boss, David, can I go to Bangladesh? I want to see what's going on there. I was going to a conference in Hong Kong and I wanted to check out the country to see if I can somehow contribute. And it just so happens that over the next few years, my investment firm in New York that I was at became one of the largest investors at the Dhaka Stock Exchange."

Rahat explained that his commitment to Bangladesh was rooted not only in professional opportunity but also in a personal sense of identity. He discussed his investment in Pathao, one of Bangladesh's first major ride-sharing companies, which provided a new model for urban mobility in Dhaka.

"March 6, 2016, Fahim Saleh sent me an email about a company named Pathao. That night, I forwarded the email to my ex-boss David and he was interested. A couple of months later, we flew down to Dhaka, we met with Adnan and Elius and we invested in the seed round," Rahat said.

He reflected on the broader impact of this investment on urban life: "One simple investment changed the way somebody from Khilgaon goes to Mirpur. We take for granted this now. But can you imagine what we did to move around the cities before 2015/2016? It also made me realise one thing -- when you put the best Bangladeshi together, give them access to each other -- we get to build the Bangladesh we want for our people."

Rahat noted that a significant portion of Bangladesh's infrastructure and development projects remain heavily influenced by international interests. "Right now, too much of Bangladesh is still being built at the direction of outsiders who are not gonna be here. People who look at us if we need their help rather than empowering us. This has to change,"

he said.

He concluded by encouraging the students to view themselves as active participants in the nation's progress: "The future of this country again should not be outsourced. It must be built by Bangladeshis, for Bangladeshis."

Anchorless Bangladesh, the firm founded by Rahat Ahmed, focuses on investing in early-stage startups led by Bangladeshi entrepreneurs and aims to create an ecosystem that supports local innovation and enterprise.

SHAHIR CHOWDHURY: BELIEVE IN HAVING A BIG DREAM AND A BIG GOAL

The final speaker, Shahir Chowdhury, founder and CEO of Shikho, addressed the students on the importance of maintaining long-term ambition and perseverance in pursuit of their goals. Shahir himself had been an awardee at the same event in 2003, receiving recognition for academic excellence during his time at Sunbeams School in Dhaka.

"Believe in yourself. Believe in having a big dream and a big goal. And things like this -- milestones like today's award -- should fuel that fire further. But this is only a milestone, this is only one step of a long journey," he said.

Shahir recounted how, after completing his schooling in Bangladesh, he pursued higher education in the United Kingdom, earning a BSc (Hons) in Business Management from Cardiff University. He subsequently worked for over a decade in financial services in the UK, including serving as a Director at HSBC UK's Private Bank.

Reflecting on his career, Shahir discussed the concept of life as an "infinite game" -- a continuous journey of learning, evolving, and overcoming challenges. "If you keep on going, you will find there are many goals that you will achieve that unlock the next evolution of you. But to do that, you must first know how to dream big and fail forward," he said.

He also highlighted the importance of collective responsibility towards Bangladesh: "All of you together, if you have a shared vision and a shared responsibility to Bangladesh. Regardless of where you are -- in the country or outside the country. You will always be working for Bangladesh."

Quoting The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam, Shahir reiterated the value of maintaining a connection to one's homeland. "Ultimately what we should be thinking about is how do we build a better Bangladesh together. All of that diversity needs to become collaboration."

Currently, Shahir leads Shikho, an edtech company that aims to make high-quality education accessible to students across Bangladesh through digital platforms. Shikho's focus on technological innovation reflects broader efforts to modernise the country's education system and expand learning opportunities.

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Ayman Sadiq,
Founder and CEO of 10 Minute School

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Bangladesh. Referencing the national flag, he said, "As Mahfuz Anam sir said: doesn't matter wherever you go, go to the best universities. Go to any country you want. But never ever forget the red and green and to come back to Bangladesh. And whenever you get an opportunity -- never ever forget to hold the red and green higher."

Concluding his address, Ayman told the students, "Today you guys have proved that you are capable, now it's time for you to prove you are unstoppable. For that, move fast, adapt, build new things, stay curious, stay humble, stay a student for life and yes go make an amazing history guys."

Founded in 2015, 10 Minute School is one of Bangladesh's largest and most popular online learning platforms, providing accessible education to millions of students across the country.

AYMAN SADIQ: WRITE YOUR OWN DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

Ayman Sadiq, founder and CEO of 10 Minute School, addressed the audience with a focus on the evolving meaning

Awardees were accompanied by their parents, families, teachers, friends and special guests, reflecting the significance of the occasion not just for the students but also for their wider communities.

The event featured a series of motivational sessions aimed at providing guidance and inspiration for the next stages of the students' academic and professional lives.

Speakers included Ayman Sadiq, Rahat Ahmed and Shahir Chowdhury, each of whom shared personal reflections centred on success, responsibility and future ambition.

Ayman's message highlighted the personal and shifting nature of ambition, encouraging students to remain open to new priorities and life