



Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB)

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VAB Annual Report 2023

25 years of service of VAB

In 2023 VAB completed its 25 years of service in helping underprivileged rural students of Bangladesh to obtain quality education and skill training. Twenty-five years of service is a remarkable achievement for any organization, particularly for a charity organization almost solely dependent on individual philanthropy from all over the world and utilizing the funds for beneficiaries in remote corners of a Third World country. Surely, it has been possible because of VAB's patrons and donors on one end and its beneficiaries on the other, along with the hard work, dedication, and steadfastness of everyone in between – organizers, managers, field workers, volunteers, etc. It is a time for VAB to reflect on the milestones and achievements of the past quarter-century that can provide valuable insights into the organization's growth, evolution, and impact. It is also a time for VAB to learn from such reflection and inspire its team, engage its community, and set the stage for even greater accomplishments in the years to come.

2023 a transitional year

2023 was devoted to transitioning from the past to the future – putting in place leaders and co-workers in the organization, evaluating the financial situation, and aligning the programs to the new financial realities.

New Board of Directors and Management Committee

A new Board of Directors was in place in the U.S.A. The 14-member board was headed by renowned physicians and philanthropists, Dr. Ehsanur Rahman (Chair) and Dr. Fazlur R Chowdhury (Vice Chair). A 5-member Management Committee was formed with a new position of President-Elect, Dr. Maksud Chowdhury, who is a leader in the community engaged in a number of charities including Pediatric Education Development Society International (PEDSI) Global Health of which he is the Co-Founder. He would be the President of VAB after the retirement of Dr. A T Rafiqur Rahman, Founder of VAB, who steered VAB for its first 25 years.

Change of Office and mailing address

VAB's office will be moved from Irvington, NY to Jamaica, NY, and a new Post Office Box in Jamaica, NY will be its mailing address. The details are being worked out. All associated with VAB will be notified accordingly.

New Board of Advisors and CD in Bangladesh



A meeting with VAB-NY officials and VAB Bangladesh Officials held on February 12, 2024 in VAB Dhaka Office. On behalf of VAB-NY, Dr. Maksud Chowdhury, President-Elect, along with ANM Mostafa Khandaker, Treasurer-VAB NY, Dr. Shamim Begum, MBBS, FACP, Treasurer & Director of Women's Health, PEDSI, Dr. Waseem Hafeez, MD, FAAP, Medical Director, PEDSI, Attending Physician Associate Clinical Professor, PALS Course Director, The Children's Hospital at Montefiore were present at the meeting.

The new 10-member board will be headed by veteran social worker Dr. Haroonur Rashid, CSP, ex-secretary in various Ministries of the Government of Bangladesh. Well-known chemical engineer and philanthropist Dr. M. M. Zahid Hassan has taken the helm of VAB on July 1, 2023 as the Country Director. A five-year cycle of program execution and budgeting started on January 1, 2024. VAB has submitted the five-year program and budget to the NGOAB, which is the overseeing governmental agency for international NGOs like VAB. It is expected to be approved soon.

Salient features of the new program

Catering to the needs of the economy of a Middle-Income Country, VAB will aim at helping rural youths of Bangladesh develop the requisite skills and be employable. Hence, the focus of VAB's work will be awarding and administering two types of scholarships – skill development in high-demand vocations in the case of underperforming high schoolers, and higher levels in general and professional education in the case of bright but needy high schoolers. In addition, addressing the lacunae in the prevalent system, the scholarships will cover costs of entrance into high standard institutions and those of counselling/mentoring to obtain employment. The scholarships would also pay for living expenses for needy awardees.

The Malala Fund Project: Second year of the three-year project was completed



A discussion on gender budget in education held in Upazila Parishad Hall Room, Belabo, Narsingdi funded by Malala Fund and supported by CAMPE (Campaign for Popular Education). To discuss and strategize on gender-sensitive budgeting in education, with a focus on ensuring equitable allocation for both girls and boys in Narsingdi district.

The accomplishments of the Malala Fund Project by VAB in its second year are indeed commendable and reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by marginalized communities, particularly in respect of gender and environment-conscious secondary education. Some of them are:

Addressing social challenges like child marriage, educational deprivation, child labor, disabilities, and promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR); **Local-level dialogues on education budget** demonstrating the importance of education budget allocation, especially with a gender lens, which is crucial for ensuring that resources are distributed equitably and gender disparities in education are addressed; **Establishment of debate clubs** focusing on girls' issues in schools that provide a platform for girls to express their concerns and opinions; **Formation of school-based environment clubs**, creating environment clubs in schools which

are essential for raising awareness about climate-related issues and promoting sustainable practices; **Training school students as disaster volunteers**, in order to equip students with disaster preparedness and response skills, crucial for building resilient communities.



A Workshop on Disaster Preparedness and Management at Raigonj Girls' High School, Nageshwari, Kurigram organized by VAB, Funded by Malala Fund and Supported by CAMPE. Upazila Vice-Chairman Ms. Amina Begum Anannya was present as the chief guest.

Overall, the various activities undertaken by VAB through the Malala Fund Project have a significant and far-reaching impact on students, teachers, community leaders, and journalists in the targeted areas. By addressing social and educational challenges comprehensively, VAB is contributing to the empowerment and development of communities in Belabo, Narsingdi, and Nageshwari, Kurigram, paving the way for a brighter and more inclusive future for marginalized “char” communities.

Achievements of VAB Special Scholarship Awardees



Sourabh Chandra Mondal
MBBS Class (2022-2023)
Sher-E-Bangla Medical
College (SBMC), Barisal.



Nazma Khatun
B.Sc. Nursing (2022-2023)
Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad
Nursing College, Gazipur.

Sourabh Chandra Mondal and Nazma Khatun's achievements indeed exemplify the power of education and support systems in transforming lives, especially for those from underprivileged backgrounds. Their admission to prestigious medical programs despite facing financial constraints underscores the importance of initiatives like the scholarship provided by VAB. By receiving support from VAB since grade nine, Sourabh and Nazma were able to focus on their studies without the burden of financial worries. This enabled them to excel academically and ultimately secure admission to medical college, where they are now poised to make significant contributions to the field of medicine. Their success stories serve as inspiring examples of how educational scholarships can break the cycle of poverty and provide opportunities for talented individuals to fulfill their potential.

Student's Health and Hygiene Improvement and Monitoring Program



Dr. Maksud Chowdhury is giving orientation on school health program to 32 teachers in four high schools in Raozan, Chattogram covers various important aspects of CPR

VAB has initiated the program in February, 2024 in one school in Raozan, Chattogram. It is a collaborative program with PEDSI Global Health. Currently, VAB has plans to add one school in a new cluster every year (total five schools in 5 years). The program will continue in each enrolled school as long as the funds are available. As early detection of any health issues and subsequent treatment can significantly enhance the chance of better education for a student, this program could be one of the most important programs of VAB that can be scaled up with the help of the government. A small contribution from the governmental funds of the education, health or any other sector could scale up this program to the national level. VAB should meticulously keep track of all activities, document and monitor the program, and prepare a case study to submit a proposal for the Government of Bangladesh or any other donor agencies.

VAB Technical Training institutes (TTIs)

The Shyamnagar VAB TTI is ongoing since 2022. The registration of the training institute with the National Skill Development Authority (NSDA) has been done in March 2024. Registration with the Authority will allow the TTI to offer government-approved certificates to graduates; it will also open the door for getting government funds for the institute.

A new vocational training program on Dress Making, Printing, and Handicrafts has been initiated at Bhangura Jarina Rahim Girls' High School, Bhangura, Pabna since October 15, 2023. The school, which is already in the VAB Education Program is providing 16 sewing machines and other facilities. A very competent trainer is providing the training who would also work as the representative for all other VAB activities including attending the NGO Bureau meetings with the Upazila authorities in Bhangura Upazila. The training program-

brought huge attraction among the communities, forcing VAB to run 2 shifts simultaneously. There is also a long waiting list for the next batches. As per the trainer, the 1st batch has made excellent progress. The trainees have also been trained in making handicrafts and are preparing to sell their products in the upcoming big week-long Baishakhi Mela in April 2024. Since the local administration is eager to help in establishing a full-fledged VAB Technical Training Institute, a preliminary survey on the location and other conditions that would meet the NSDA requirements has been done for **a new VAB Technical Training Institute in Bhangura, Pabna.**

Vocational training is going to be a major focus of VAB's work in the coming years since significant funding could be available from NSDA and from other donors including Bangladesh Bank. Learning from the Shyamnagar TTI would help making the decision as well as preparing the budgetary requirements for all upcoming TTIs. VAB should take the necessary actions to set up the TTI at Bhangura, Pabna and start looking for setting up TTIs in Raozan, Chattogram, Nageshwari, Kurigram and Keshabpur, Jashore.

VAB successfully completed the Rotary Global Grant Project



VAB Computer trainer and teachers are welcoming Rtn. Syed Ehsanul Hoque and Rtn. Shahidanaz Huda, MPH at the computer teachers training program in Pabna.

It is a remarkable achievement that in 2023, VAB successfully concluded the three-year Rotary Global Grant Project #1989638 on "Quality education for poor rural children in Bangladesh through training of under-equipped teachers of rural schools". The central thrust of the project was: 125 teachers received training in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and computer skills, and 75 teachers received training in English Language. The project positively impacted a significant number of individuals, including 4,288 students, 1,715 parents/guardians, 312 school management committee members, and 108 community leaders. This project has evidently made a significant contribution to improving the quality of education for underprivileged children in rural areas of Bangladesh. The collaboration among the Rotary international/

the Rotary Foundation, the host Rotary Club of Banani Dhaka, the foreign Rotary E-Club of Heritage, NY, and the executing agency, VAB, made achieving these commendable outcomes possible.



Dr. Ranjit Pordder, Associate Professor of Government Dhaka Teachers Training College is conducting English Teachers Training under Rotary Global Grant Project in Shyamnagar, Satkhira.

Under the project, there were a number of enabling activities, which added value by themselves. Five Project Launching Events were organized to inaugurate the project and create awareness. Twenty-five Teachers' Workshops were conducted to enhance the skills and knowledge of teachers. Another twenty-five Group-Based Teaching-Learning Facilitation Workshops focused on improving teaching and learning methods in classrooms were also conducted. Twenty-five Performance Evaluations were conducted in subjects like English, Computers, Mathematics, and Communication Skills to assess progress. Twenty-five Community Awareness Engagement Programs were held to engage and educate the community on the importance of quality education.

VAB lost two "Friends, Philosophers and Guides" in one month



Dr. Sufian Khondker



Engr. Shaju Shahjahan

Dr. Sufian Khondker, who helped in the establishment and initial growth of VAB, passed away on March 3, 2024, in New York (Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un). He was a great leader, and a good person, a devoted community activist. Dr. Khondker gave leadership to a number of civil society organizations in the Bangladeshi American community in the U.S.A. For VAB also, he provided guidance, extended community outreach and gave practical assistance by providing office space and a platform for publicity and advocacy.

VAB also mourns the passing away of Engr. Shaju Shahjahan on March 04, 2024, in Dhaka (Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un). Engr. Shaju Shahjahan, a distinguished philanthropist, provided invaluable support in the initial and growing stages of VAB, with guidance, financial assistance and comradeship in institution building. He is the father of Ms. Sharmin Shahjahan, who is one of the greatest Patrons of VAB. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the families of the two friends, philosophers and guides who helped VAB come into being and grow. We pray that Allah grant them eternal peace.

Appeal to Patrons/Donors

VAB is planning to award scholarships (including educational and living expenses) for under-performing students as well as bright students. As is well known, VAB works with the most underprivileged students and schools in the most underprivileged areas of Bangladesh.

- Sponsor one or more **Employable Skill Development Training Scholarships** for six months, each at US \$250
- Sponsor one or more **High School Scholarships** for one year, each at US \$150
- Sponsor one or more **College Scholarships** for one year, each at US \$300
- Sponsor one or more **University Scholarships** for one year, each at US \$400
- Sponsor one or more **Medical/Engineering Scholarships** for one year, each at US \$600

Donors may target their donations and may also personalize their charity in any name. VAB will accord appropriate recognition for them in line with their wishes. It is your support that allows VAB to provide a brighter future for Bangladeshi youths.

In the USA, for donation, please pay online or send to VAB at P.O. Box 234, Irvington, NY 10533.

Bank account in Bangladesh: Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB), A/C-148.120.0005550, Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited, Ring Road Branch, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

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