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Tashnuva Anan Shishir and Ho Chi Minh Islam's journey to breaking barriers



Photo: Courtesy of Ho Chi Minh Islam

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For the first time in Bangladesh, Ho Chi Minh Islam and Tashnuva Anan Shishir, two transgender women, received scholarships to pursue higher studies in an international platform of BRAC James P Grant School. The scholarships were awarded to them in two categories to pursue higher studies in the Master of Public Health (MPH) programme.

Tashnuva and Ho Chi Minh have already started their classes virtually, along with 45 students from 14 different countries, including Bangladesh. After a rigorous and diverse admission process, selected students who were at the top of the merit list were asked to

sit for another exam to obtain the scholarship, and both Tashnuva and Ho Chi Minh were selected for it.

"Our classmates are very supportive. Different people from various walks of life are attending the classes together, and they are very understanding," shares Tashnuva, who is a theatre artiste. Passionate about dancing and acting from an early age, she is also an active social worker.

"The curriculum design, course structure and module are wonderful. The classes are giving me a platform to expand and explore my knowledge," says Ho Chi Minh. "I have worked on subjects like activism, feminism, gender rights and sexual rights before, but now, I am gaining a deeper understanding and learning more." Tashnuva shared that attending classes for this programme is helping her understand herself better and fill the gaps in her knowledge.

"Our society is very judgmental and it is not easy to break out of old mindsets and perspectives. This programme will make me a better human being in the process. Above all else, we should all aspire to be good human beings," adds Ho Chi Minh.

Ho Chi Minh Islam graduated in Nursing from TMSS Medical College in 2018, and later joined Square Hospital Ltd as a nurse. She has been an active frontline fighter during the ongoing pandemic.

Tashnuva further addressed the obstacles faced by the transgender community. "I think there is still a lot to achieve when it comes to the good health and social acceptance of my community," she says. "I want to work for my people, and address these issues."

"Equality is fragile without equity. There still is not an equal platform for everyone," adds Ho Chi Minh. "Our country must work for the welfare of minority groups."

Ho Chi Minh plans to further work in the public health sector and aims to provide the transgender community with a proper healthcare system and services. "As a nurse, I want to work for the people on the margins. I believe that it is the only aim I want to live for," she concludes.