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Being a Part of BYLC's Fourth BBLT Program

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I thank Star Campus for that day tremendously when it introduced me with Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC). It was a run of the quick glance at one of the Star Campus issues back in August 2009 where I had first seen a little of what these four words incorporated within them. Disgruntled as I was to see that I was not eligible then, I decided that I would participate in its Building Bridges through Leadership Training (BBLT) programme as soon as I finish my Ordinary Level Examinations.

It was during my vacation after my exams when I heard that BYLC was going to organize its fourth BBLT programme in Chittagong! For the first round of selections, I had to submit three essays. Amongst roughly 500 applicants, 180 were chosen for a second round of testing which involved assessing their analytical abilities. Out of these 180 examinees, 80 were selected for a round of interviews with finally 38 making it to the much anticipated training sessions.

But before sharing anymore, first let me share a bit about BYLC. BYLC is a non-profit organization, the vision of which is to enliven the leadership qualities already possessed by the students and make them work together to build a poverty-free Bangladesh. It was developed in 2008 by Ejaj Ahmad who studied at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and in 2009 was profiled as one of Asia's most promising young leaders; and Shammi Shawkat Quddus, then an undergraduate at MIT. BYLC has won the 2008 Kathryn Davis Projects for Peace Prize and was a finalist in the 2008 YSEI Social Entrepreneurship Competition. It believes that to exercise proper leadership, bringing together the different mediums of education of Bangladesh is imperative. That is why it tries to build a connection between the students of Madrassa, Bengali and English medium students by selectively choosing equal numbers of students from all three educational mediums.

Our month long training programme began on the 10th of July at the Regional Public Administration Training Center (RPATC), Chittagong. For the first two weeks, we were given captivating lectures that opened doors towards a whole new outlook on leadership. The lectures not only influenced the entire class, but it also brought them together in a way so overwhelming that we are now left astounded discovering how much we can actually achieve when all the three mediums known to have never communicated before, come together in unison. We all realised how wrong we were when we thought that leadership was just a sort of authority that a person has over others. We comprehended that leadership not only involves mobilising people but also mobilising them for creating a positive impact on peoples' lives. We understood that judgments could be made only after a thorough analysis of the many aspects of a person's work. Everyone was given a chance to share a personal leadership failure story in small groups where our stories were profoundly analyzed by the rest of the team members based on the learning acquired from our preceding classes. The investigation helped each one of us to fully identify why we failed and what we could have done instead to be successful.

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The training session was followed by a team-building retreat to the Marine Boat Club where acquaintances became friends and friends became even closer friends. A poetry session took place where the students who volunteered had to recite the poems closest to their hearts with charisma and grace. To wrap up the two weeks, a session on public speaking was held, after which the students had to give two speeches - one persuasive and one informative where they were judged by their facilitators and their fellow classmates on the basis of their credibility, logic and emotional appeal.

After the Public Speaking portion of the training, it was time to put our learning to action. All that we had learnt on efficacious leadership was put to a test after we started the third part of the programme - community service. Effectual leadership involves doing something good for your people. So, after two days of surveying the Motijharna Slum in Lal Khan Bazar, each of the six groups chose the project that they felt was a major problem in their community, and started working on that. The pilot version of our community service project ended on the seventh of this month, and we are now going to work on weekends till November 5th this year, expanding our activities to improve life in Motijharna in every attainable way we can. Bangladesh is in dire need of valiant, compassionate and able leadership - and BYLC hopes to give Bangladesh just that. BYLC has made us believe that you do not need to bear authority to lead, and more importantly, that leadership is NOT authority. It has taught us that very small things can actually make a lot of difference. We hope that we can implement all that we have learnt here and actually make Bangladesh a better place - for everyone.

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