

Rakib Update 9/27/2009

I called Rakib this morning and he was a bit upset. The banks in Dhaka would not release the money we sent him through Western Union. He has a customer ID card which was given to him by the bank manager in his village. Using the bank ID card he was able to obtain the money we sent him last month. When he tried to receive the money this month the bank manager told him that last month was a courtesy and he could not do it again. Rakib tried other banks, but none would release the funds. He told me the banks informed him that he needed a passport as ID. He said the passport would cost 5,000 taka (\$75 U S) and it would take at least one month to get one. He asked me what he could do. I remembered that he had a half brother living in Dhaka. I asked him if I could cancel the Western Union I sent him and resend it in his brother's name. He said his brother did not live far from the hostel and he was sure he would claim the money and give it to him. Rakib said it is 27 October and my Hostel payment is due 30 October. He said the Hostel manager is a "good man" and he was sure he would wait a few days for payment before he asked Rakib to leave.

Rakib stated that he did not feel well the past week. I think it was a combination of stress from not being able to claim the Western Union Money and lack of good nutrition due to fasting for Ramadan. Rakib also said he had to "starve" because some of the food at the hostel was not good quality. He said he used a little of the extra money we sent him to buy some "good food". I asked if he could see a doctor. He said it was expensive to see a doctor, maybe 500 taka (\$7.50 U S) for an exam and more if tests or x-rays were needed.

Rakib said that he found out that the Bangladesh military has a medical college. They have a height requirement though. 5'- 6". Rakib said he is only 5'- 4", and asked me if I knew what he could do to grow. I told him to try to eat a balanced diet. I know that this is probably not possible. It is unlikely that Rakib can afford to buy high protein foods necessary for body building.

I made this call short since I had to go to the Western Union agent and try to change how Rakib would receive the money we sent him for this months expenses.

Rakib Update October 4, 2009

When I talked with Rakib this morning he asked how the scouts and scouters were. I told him that we were all fine. He said he visited the Troop 1776 website this week and was pleased to see our recent activities and calendar of upcoming events.

He said that he heard that the economy in the U S was not good and asked if that were true. I told him we were in a recession, but we had had downturns before and America had always come out of them. He told me that his brother was able to collect the money we sent him from Western union and he gave it to Rakib.

Rakib said that later this week, 7 October he would travel by bus to Khulna to take his first medical college admit exam. He would stay in a hostel on 7 & 8 October and take the exam on 9 October. After the exam he was going to travel to his village to visit with his family for a few days before returning to Dhaka to resume coaching class.

Rakib said "I have lost my heart a bit". One of his teachers told him that the system for admission to medical college was not fair. He was told that some wealthy families make donations to medical colleges and get preferential treatment. Some do not even take the admit exam. His teacher told him about a medical college in the UK that has a program for students from developing nations. He said the web address was ISMU. net or org. I searched it and could not find anything. He was also told that there were medical colleges in Calcutta India that took Bangladesh Students. This area or India speaks a similar language to Bangla. Rakib said he will try to "collect more information".

We talked a bit about scouting. Rakib said "I would like to continue with scouting all of my life". I need to join a school to continue, since most scouting in Bangladesh is sponsored by schools. He has been told that there may be a few organizations in the cities that sponsor scouts. He is going to try to learn more about it.

I told Rakib that I had learned that the NGO, Medicines sans Frontiers, (Doctors Without Borders), Is working in a refugee camp near Cox Bazaar Bangladesh. The refugees are from Myanmar, formerly the country of Burma. They have been chased out of their homeland due to their religious beliefs. They are now refugees in Thailand and Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a poor country and cannot afford to host them. They have sponsored a government run refugee camp for many of them but there are many more than the camp can support. The UN and other organizations are trying to help, but not enough is being done. I told Rakib that I had given some thought to volunteering with MSF - Doctors Without Borders, as a logistician on one of their relief projects. I asked Rakib if he spoke the language of the Royhingya refugees. He said he knew of the situation and the people but they spoke Urdu a different language than his native Bangla. I thought that he might be able to volunteer as an interrupter for Doctors Without Borders and maybe get assistance obtaining a scholarship.

We ended our call with best wishes and God's blessings for our friends, family, and the scouts.

Rakib Update October 12, 2009

I had a short phone call with Rakib this morning. On Friday Rakib took the admit exam for the medical school in Khulna. Rakib feels that he did well on the exam. He said the chemistry question was hard, but he felt he did well on the physics, biology, English and general knowledge questions. The results should be published in a few days. Rakib is now in his home town of Rayenda. Khulna is half way between Dhaka and Rayenda so he took advantage of the opportunity to visit with his family for a few days. He will return to Dhaka tomorrow and when he gets there he intends to collect the forms for the admission test at a medical college in Dhaka. Rakib has been preparing for the possibility that he may not be admitted to a medical college in Bangladesh. He has been collecting information from teachers and other students about applying to medical schools in foreign countries.

Update October 18, 2009

I spoke with Rakib this morning. He is back in Dhaka, he returned from Rayenda on the Tuesday morning bus. Rakib informed me that he has been feeling ill and he has been studying quietly in the hostel. The results of the admission test he took in Khulna have not been published yet. Rakib's teachers informed him that the new government has set new rules for medical college admission tests. Going forward the admission test will be administered by the government. Government and private colleges will have to use the test results for admission. Individual colleges will no longer be able to administer their own admission tests. The test Rakib took in Khulna may have been a waste of time and money. Rakib feels that the new rule is not good. If you are not feeling well and do not do well on the test you can not take it again. Rakib will collect the application form and take the government admission test when it is offered.

When we last talked I told Rakib that the Venture Scouts are currently working on planning and training for a High Adventure Trek to Grand Teton and Yellowstone National parks. Rakib asked his teachers if they knew about Yellowstone. One said he had read about it and told Rakib it is the largest national park in the world. He was told that there is a book about Yellowstone available in the library, but Rakib does not have a library card. He will look into how to obtain one. He is very interested in following the Venture Scouts with planning and execution of the Trek.

Rakib ended the call by wishing the scouts and their families "good health and a long life"

October 26, 2009

I called Rakib on Monday night, Tuesday morning in Bangladesh. Rakib asked why I did not respond to his call on Sunday morning. I told him I was on the Appalachian Trail backpacking with a patrol of first year boy scouts. He said he understood and remembered that I earlier told him I was helping to prepare them for their first backpacking trip.

I asked Rakib if he the results for the admission test he took in Khulna were published yet. He said no and he was told that they may not be published. He informed me that the date for the government

administered medical college admission test has been set for 20 November. It will be administered on the campus of the Bangladesh medical College. He has collected and filed the test application form. He was told that the results for that test should be published 3 – 4 days after the test.

Rakib told me that he bought a new shirt and pants with the \$20 I sent him as a festival present. He seemed very pleased with his new cloths. He also said he joined a student organization that offers information on applying for colleges both in Bangladesh and foreign. It cost 10 taka (.67 cents US) to join. He attended a seminar at a local hotel. He learned that the University of Arkansas has a medical program for students from developing nations. He will try to get more information. He asked if any of the scout families knew anything about the program.

We ended the call with good wishes for our mutual friends and families.