

Rakib Update: Feb 18 - May 2, 2010

Feb. 18, 2010 –

Rakib called me this morning. I was a bit concerned. We usually talk on Sundays today is Thursday. Rakib wanted to inform me that his teachers had arranged two recreational days for the students. They have been studying very hard and the teachers thought they deserved a break. The next two Fridays they will be traveling by bus to areas outside of the city limits. They will view cultural programs, picnic and play some football (soccer). Rakib was concerned because this will cost the students about 200 taka per event. Rakib had some money left from the money we sent him for last months. I told him to go ahead and use it for the recreational program that his teachers had offered. Rakib also reminded me that if he had a camera he could share photos with the scouts. I told him we would continue to try to obtain a camera for him.

Rakib also informed me that Dr Ahmed, the cardiologist from Maryland, will be visiting Bangladesh in a few weeks and he hopes to meet him while he is there.

I told Rakib that I was at work and had to keep the call short and that I would call him on Sunday.

Feb. 28, 2010

When I spoke to Rakib this morning, he asked me why I did not call him last Sunday. I informed him that last Sunday was Scout Sunday in the US and I had attended church service at the Neshanic Reformed Church with the scouts of Troop 1776. I went on to explain that on Scout Sunday, scouts all around the US are encouraged to attend church wearing their scout uniform, as a way to show that “a scout is reverent”. I told Rakib that Reverend Hill, the Pastor of the church, gave a sermon to day that reflected on his own father / Son scout experience of building a pinewood derby car with his son, and how a father can sometimes more involved in building pinewood derby cars that the scout does. Rakib did not know what the pinewood derby was. I explained and after I did he seemed to understand what the event was. I also told Rakib that I was asked to speak to the congregation and inform them of Rakib’s progress in the past year. I told Rakib about the special offering that was collected for him and that last year the members of the church gave enough to pay for three months of his education expenses. I let him know that it would be a few weeks before we knew how much was offered this year. Rakib said that he thought Scout Sunday was a great program and asked me to thank everyone for helping to pay for his medical college expenses.

Rakib asked what our scouts were doing. I told him the Venture Scouts were continuing to plan and train for the Teton / Yellowstone Trek and the area of training we were focusing on at this time was meal planning. I explained that we would be carrying all of our meals for up to seven days and they had to be light weight and nutritious.

I went on to tell him that Cub Scout Pack 1776 held their *pinewood derby* recently and the Cubs decided to donate all of the profit they raised from the sale of food and beverages at the event to the Troop 1776 Rakib education fund. I told Rakib that I had emailed him a few photos from the event.

Rakib said that he had to inform me that he *Lost* 200 taka. He said he had to spend some of his miscellaneous expense money to buy some extra food. He said that he had attended the two recreational events that his teachers had arranged. Most of the cost, of the student tour trips, was paid for by the college. He did have to buy some food while on the trips. I told him that he has not *lost* the money, the food was a just expense, and that I thought the word *lost* was a translation issue.

I asked how his study was going. He said he had a medical science test last week and the teacher did not give him credit for his answers to one of the questions. The question was, “how does the body control water and electrolytes and how does it balance them”. Rakib said he had answered the question in detail and was confident in his answer. He asked the teacher why he did not get credit for his answer. The question was a two part question. The second part was “what is the summery of the question”. During the oral portion of the exam Rakib told the teacher he had answered the question in detail and that he did not understand the second part of his question. The teacher explained that he wanted to know what

resources and reference material the students used to get the information for their answer. Rakib told the teacher what books he used to obtain the knowledge of the subject and the teacher agreed to give him full credit for his answer.

Rakib said most of his study is hard and he must spend most of his time studying. Rakib said he and his two roommates have become good friends. They are also medical students and they have formed a study group and help each other. He said “a group study is a must for a medical student”. Rakib said that for the past three days he has been studying until 3:00 AM. He is studying for his first card exam. A card is an area of study and there is a card exam at the end of the study period. Rakib’s first card exam will be in anatomy. He said he enjoys anatomy and feel he will do well on the exam.

Rakib asked me to extend his love to the Scouts and their families. He specifically asked that I thank the members of the Neshanic Reformed Church and the Cub Scouts of Pack 1776 for the money they raised for him, their compassion and generosity. He also asked that I tell the Scouts he was proud of them for attending Scout Sunday. I assured him that I would.

March 7, 2010

I had a hard time getting a telephone connection today. It often takes multiple tries to get through. It was late in Bangladesh when I finally got through. Rakib was still up studying but he was ready to go to bed for the night. I kept the call short.

I asked Rakib if he had received the money we sent him for his March expenses. He said he did and he had paid his tuition, hostel rent, and for the cook and food for the month. He said he would have sufficient money left to pay for his lunch, and misc expenses for the rest of the month.

Rakib informed me that last Friday he went on a second student recreational tour. He traveled about three hours by bus to an area in a district outside of Dhaka City. It cost him about 100 taka (\$1.45 U.S.). He thought the cost would be more but he found out that a medicine company paid for most of the cost of the trip. He said the weather was hot but “I enjoyed the day of recreation”. They had a picnic by a lake and played some football.

Rakib informed me that he had taken his first card exam. The exam was in anatomy and the grade was not released yet but he was confident that he had passed it.

I asked Rakib if he had spoken with his family recently. He said he did and that they are doing well. His younger sister is attending school. She is in grade nine. This is considered to be secondary education in Bangladesh. The government pays for school up to grade ten. Rakib’s middle sister completed higher secondary school (grade eleven & twelve) but is not able to continue her education due to lack of money. Rakib’s oldest sister is in a university in the city of Khulna, not too far from their village of Rayenda. Her father has been able to earn enough money to keep her in college. Her area of study is accounting.

Rakib said the weather has been hot. The city is hotter than his home village. The hot season starts in April and extends through June. It often starts earlier and extends later. Rakib said most of the students in the hostel have fans to cool them. He cannot afford to buy one.

Rakib asked what the scouts were doing. I told him the Venture Scouts were training for bear safety and that the risk of bear attack in the National Parks we will hike this summer would be similar to the risk of a Bengal Tiger attack in the Sunderbans National Park which straddles the boarder of India and Bangladesh near his village of Rayenda.

Rakib told me “scouts in Bangladesh would not have the opportunity to do such a long trek. They could not afford to spend the money and if they had that much time off from school they would have to use it to make money”.

Rakib said at the end of the year interest is due on the loan his cousin took to help pay Rakib’s admission fee. He was concerned that he will not have the money to pay it. I told him I would see if we could find a way to help him pay the interest.

Rakib ended the call by asking that I give his cordial love to the scouts.

March 14, 2010

Rakib informed me that there is now a thirteen hour time difference between Bangladesh and the US, they no longer use daylight savings time in Bangladesh. The government finally decided to change the time back to standard time. There is no plan to go back to daylight savings time in the future. It caused too much confusion for the people due to poor communication about it and not having a plan in place to go back to standard time in the fall of the year.

Rakib said that he had read my updates on the troop 1776 website. He said that he was proud of me for sharing our conversations with the scouts. He also said he was pleased with how accurate my reports were. He said I was smart and understood what he was telling me about his education, country, people and politics.

I asked Rakib “how often do you go to the internet café”. He said several times a week. The teachers post instruction and notes on the college bulletin board which he must retrieve. He also said each book has a website that he can access for updates and additional information.

Rakib told me a bit about how the grading and exam system works. In each area of study there are item exams each week. At the end of subject an area of study there is a card exam. The card exam is both written and oral. At the end of March Rakib will have three card exams in the subjects he is studying at this time. Those subjects are anatomy, biochemistry, physiology and cardiology. At the end of one and a half years the first professional exam will be held. At that time he will be tested on all of the subjects he studied in the last eighteen months. Rakib stated that he was very proud of his college and his teachers.

Rakib asked if we had any success in obtaining a laptop computer or a digital camera for him. Several people in the troop said they might be able to obtain one of these items for Rakib. I told him we had not secured them at this time but we were still pursuing it. Rakib said he was very grateful for the efforts.

Rakib spoke a bit more about the student recreation tours he went on. He said they also listened to a concert and observed a football match. He said the students really enjoyed it and that it was a reward for all of the hard study they had done. Rakib said a friend had a camera and took some pictures on the trip. He will put them on a pen drive and give them to Rakib so he can email them to us.

I asked Rakib if he had talked to Dr. Mohsin recently. He replied “I talked to him last week. Dr. Moshin told me Mr. Bob really likes you very much. He told me this over and over. He also told me you will be a good Doctor Rakib”.

Dr. Mohsin told Rakib that he believes his personality had a great deal to do with him getting admitted to medical college. One of the Doctors on the college medical board who interviewed Rakib told Dr. Mohsin that he told the other Doctors on the board, “you should admit Rakib, and he is very respectful and has a good attitude”. Dr. Mohsin thinks the college medical board was impressed with Rakib as a person, and his personality was the reason they created an additional seat for a child of a freedom fighter.

Rakib told me, “I respect all of my teachers and the other students, and in return I get their respect”. Having the respect of this group of people is a great honor, accomplishment and source of pride for Rakib. In Bangladeshi culture there is a separation of classes due to the cast system that still exists there.

I asked Rakib if the people in his home village of Rayenda knew he was attending medical college. He said many of them know and have told his parents that they are proud of Rakib. Rakib reminded me how his Mother cried out with joy when she heard the news that Rakib was admitted to Med. school. Rakib’s mother told him “after cyclone Sidr we lost everything, God watched out over our son and made our dream come true”.

Rakib told me a bit about what he is studying. He has been studying the bones of the arm, hand and back. He told me he knows them very well. He also studied the structure of the breast, just the structure for now. He will learn about diseases including breast cancer in his third year of med school. Studying the breast reminded him about Dr. Ahmed’s desire to start a program in Bangladesh for breast cancer screening and treatment.

Rakib told me that due to Bangladeshi culture many women are shy about showing their breast to a doctor even if they know something is wrong. He also stated that not many doctors go into gynecology because women won't go to one. Rakib is smart and perceptive, he is also open and honest in our conversations, and I learn a lot about the culture and customs of Bangladesh from Rakib.

Rakib asked how my children were doing. He mentioned that he enjoyed talking to my daughter Dawn when I spent time with her over the Christmas holiday. He said to tell her he was proud of her for the medical research she does with animals. He also said to thank her and her coworkers for the money they donated to buy his new cloths for medical college and new scout uniform. He asked me to give his love to all of my children.

Rakib asked if we had located a laptop computer or digital camera for him. He said he feels bad asking, we have been so generous to him already. Many students have laptops and access the internet from the hostel. Rakib travels to the internet café several times a week to access the notes his teachers post and to do additional research on the internet. He reminded me to look for some photos he sent to me. He told me that it takes about four minutes to download each of the photos I send to him.

It was about midnight in Bangladesh. Rakib said he had to go back to his studying. We ended the call by wishing each other well.

March 21, 2010

When I spoke with Rakib today I asked how he was doing. He said he was doing well but it was very hot in his room on the seventh floor of his hostel.

Rakib said he got the results of one of his exams this week. Out of a possible ten marks he got seven. Only two other students got ten marks. I believe this was an anatomy exam. He went on to tell me he had finished the study of the structure of the breast and all of the bones and structure of the arm and hand.

Rakib said he had also completed an area of study about blood. He learned about methods of blood transfer and transfusions. He also studied blood cancer. He asked me if I knew what leukemia was. I assured him that I did. He said he also learned about jaundice, anemia, and blood clots.

He is now studying for an exam on the back of the body. He informed me that there are two triangular areas on the back that doctors use to examine patients. He went on to explain that doctors use a stethoscope at these locations to hear the lungs. He said these areas have little or no muscle and they can clearly hear the lungs and detect any problem with them. Rakib was hesitant to use medical term, *stethoscope*, he did not know if I would understand it.

Rakib told me that there were several additional medical books that would be very useful to him to prepare for his upcoming exams. They contain updated information about the subjects he will be tested in. I asked Rakib if the other students in the hostel had them, and if he could borrow them from them. He said the students often share books but since they are all studying for the exam at this time it is difficult to borrow the books at this time. I asked how much the additional books would cost. He said about 6500 taka (\$88 U.S.). He said he had about 600 taka in hand, left from the misc. expense money we sent him last month. I told him I would send an additional 6000 taka when I sent the money for his April school expenses.

Rakib said he called Dr. Ahmed's sister to inquire how Dr. Ahmed was doing. Dr. Ahmed's sister is Dr. Mohsin's wife. Dr. Ahmed is the doctor from Maryland, he and his wife are helping Rakib with the cost of medical school. Dr. Mohsin is the doctor who lives and practices in Dhaka Bangladesh and is Rakib's mentor. Dr. Mohsin informed Rakib that Dr. Ahmed will be coming to Bangladesh on 28 March. Rakib hopes to meet him when he is in Dhaka.

I ended the call by wishing Rakib good luck on his upcoming exam. He asked me to give the Scouts and their families his love.

April 4, 2010

When I spoke with Rakib this morning I informed him that we are now on daylight savings time in the U.S. Since Bangladesh is on standard time there is now a fourteen twelve hour time difference between NJ and Bangladesh.

Rakib said he had taken his card final exam and he feels he did well. The results have not been published yet. He said it is in God's hands, if he wants it to be, it will.

Rakib told me he called Dr. Mohsin and asked him and his wife to visit his medical college. Rakib said I am very proud of my college. Dr. Mohsin said he would try to find the time to visit the school.

Dr. Ahmed was in Dhaka this week. He had a very busy schedule but Rakib was able to travel to Dr. Ahmed's sister's house and meet him. He said Dr. Ahmed is a very smart man and a good man. Dr. Ahmed will be leaving Bangladesh today but plans to return with his family in December.

Rakib said has been getting only about three hours of sleep per night. He spent long hours studying for the card exam. He said my study of the hand, arm, and back of the body is complete. He said this is a subject he likes very much and feels he now knows it well. Rakib said "I am very proud of his accomplishments. I come from a very modest college in the poor, rural area of Bangladesh. Other students who were educated in renowned colleges of Bangladesh come to me and ask for help with their study of anatomy and to understand parts of the body".

Rakib said it is the start of the hot season and it is very hot in his hostel room which is on the seventh floor. There is no air conditioning in the hostel. The electricity is unreliable in Bangladesh and it goes out often. It can go out five or six times during the day and five or six times at night for five minutes to two hours or more. When the power goes out at night Rakib has to study by candle light. He said "it is not good light to study by". The other students in his room have lights and fans with battery backup, so when the power goes out they can continue to study and keep cool.

Rakib said "you have done so much for me already and I am very grateful, I'm embarrassed to ask but do you think you could send me money to buy a stand fan and a rechargeable light?" A Stand fan with battery backup costs about 5,000 taka (\$74 U.S.). A rechargeable light costs about 1,700 taka. (\$23 U.S.) Total cost about \$100 U.S. Rakib said if he had these items it would make it much more comfortable for him and make it easier to study.

I asked Rakib if he received the money we sent for his April expenses and for the additional books he needed. He said he did and had paid for his hostel and tuition for the month. He bought several new medical books and had enough left to buy a book about cultures and customs around the world. Learning about cultures around the world is his hobby. He said the book about cultures and customs was a used photo copy of a book written in the Bangla language. He said he could not afford to buy a new one.

I asked Rakib if he had spoken with his family recently. He said he called them last Friday and they were doing well. His Mother said she was thankful for all we had done for Rakib. Two of his sisters are living at home. His youngest sister was attending secondary school. This is similar to high school in the U.S. His middle sister has not been able to continue her higher education due to lack of money. She helps his mother with chores and tries to earn some money for the family. Rakib said he missed his family and would like to visit them some time soon. He would depart Dhaka on a Thursday night after class on the night bus to Rayenda, spend Friday with his family and return to Dhaka on the Friday night bus. He would arrive in Dhaka on Saturday morning in time to attend class.

Rakib said he was aware that it was Easter for Christians in the U.S. and around the world. He extended his wishes for a good holiday to the scout families who are Christian. Rakib is aware that Boy Scouts is open to boys of all religions. He told me that Scouts Bangladesh is also open to boys from all religions.

He ended the call by asking me to give his love to the scouts and their families

April 15, 2010

Rakib signaled me this morning that he wanted to talk to me. He calls me and lets the phone ring just a few times and then hangs up before my voice mail picks up. When I see his name on the called ID I don't pickup. I call him back so he does not have to spend his money to call me.

Rakib asked why I did not call him last Sunday. I told him I tried to call many times, but I could not get through. I sometimes have a problem getting a telephone connection.

Rakib wanted to share some good news with us. He passes his exam in anatomy. He got 26.5 marks out of a possible 40. He placed seventh in his class. Rakib said some of the medical students from Nepal did very well on the exam. Some of them had earned 28.5 – 30 marks. Rakib said in Nepal they start to learn English at an early age and he feels this gives the Nepali an advantage.

Rakib informed me that yesterday was New Years day in Bangladesh, but since the day fell on a government holiday they will celebrate it next Sunday. There will be a lot of song and dance at the celebration.

There will be a celebration at the Dhaka Medical College campus for the students. Rakib is looking forward to a day of relaxation and recreation. He reminded me that if he had a digital camera he would be able to email photos of the event to us. He will ask one of his friends to put some photos on a pen drive so he can send them to us the next time he goes to the internet café'.

Rakib reminded me about his need for a fan and rechargeable light. I told him I would continue to try to find the funds for him to use to buy them.

I asked Rakib if he would have a summer recess to get a break from the heat. He said “no, the students will not get a break until next summer, after the first practical exam”. After the first practical exam they will get two to three weeks off before class starts again.

Rakib said he had used a little of his free time to read the book he bought about cultures and customs around the world. He very much enjoys learning about the subject.

I told Rakib that I had been informed of the amount of money that was raised at the Cub Scout Pack 1776 fundraiser they did at there pinewood derby, and from the special offering collected at Scout Sunday. I let him know that \$330 was collected by the Cub Scouts and another \$781 was collected at Scout Sunday. A total of 75,548 taka, enough to pay for four months of his medical college expenses.

When Rakib replied I could tell that there was a lump in his throat and with much emotion in his voice he said “I am very grateful for all the Scouts have done for me, please give my love to them”. Rakib went on to say he would like to send a letter to the Cub Scouts and the Church to thank them for their help. He said he was afraid he will make a mistake and say something wrong. I assured him that if he wrote letters that came from the heart, like the one he gave me to read to the scouts when I returned home from Bangladesh, it would be fine. He asked me if I would review them before I sent them on to the Scouts and Church. I assured him I would proof read them and advise him of any mistakes.

Each time I talk to Rakib I notice that his English is getting better. I would like to have the Scouts talk to Rakib directly sometime soon. Thursday night meetings work well for a phone call to Bangladesh. On Thursday night it is Friday morning in Bangladesh, Rakib's day off.

Rakib asked me to give his love, and Gods blessings to the scouts and my family. I assured him that I would.

April 27, 2010

Rakib signaled me to call him this, and when I called back he asked why I did not call him on Sunday. I reminded him that I let him know the last time we talked that I would not be able to call him last Sunday, and that I would be on a Venture backpacking training hike with the Grand Teton Venture Scouts in Massachusetts State. Rakib said “I understand”.

Rakib said he was still studying for and taking written and oral exams in four areas of study; physiology, (systems of the body) anatomy, biochemistry, and cardiology. Rakib got his final grade in physiology. He got a combined grade, written & oral exam, of 68.2 the highest grade in the class was 71.4. This puts Rakib in seventh position in his class of 121 students. Only 60students passed the exam. The rest will have to study more and take the exam again.

Rakib asked me if I got the photos he emailed to me. The photos were of him and some other students at the New Year festival held at the college. The photos were taken with a friend's camera. His friend put them on a pen drive so he could take them to the internet café' and send them to us. Rakib told me he bought a new shirt for the festival with some of the money we sent him for miscellaneous expenses. I told him I saw the new shirt and he it looked very good on him and that all of his friends looked like they were dressed very nice for the occasion. I have attached several photos of Rakib and the other students to this update.

I asked how everything else was going. Rakib said it was still very hot and the power failed often; a fan and rechargeable light would be a big help. Rakib asked if we could increase the amount of money we send each month for drinking water by 100 taka. We now send 400 taka per month for water. It is my understanding that each hostel room has a large bottle of drinking water. The cost per month is 1200 taka and the cost is shared by the three students in the room. The water is not refrigerated and is warm at this time of year. Rakib said he would like to occasionally buy a cold bottle of water. I asked Rakib if he had running water in his hostel room. He said he did in the bathroom, they put it into a container and use it bathing and cleaning the toilet only, the water is not ok for drinking. At the end of the conversation Rakib said "don't worry about sending extra taka for water, I can get buy with what I have".

I told Rakib I was at work and had to do some work for my employer so I had to keep the call short, and I would call him on Sunday. He said he understood and said to give his best wishes and love to the scouts and all of my friends and family.

May 2, 2010

When I called Rakib this morning I asked how he was doing. He said the weather has been hot and it has been very hot in his hostel room which is on a higher floor in the building. The electricity is "not good" and goes out often. He said he sometimes goes to a corridor in the building, where a breeze sometimes blows, to cool off. He said it is so hot that his pillow & bedding get very wet from perspiration when he tries to sleep at night.

Rakib said he called his family this week and they are doing well. Rakib's Father asked him to tell the Scouts that he thanks us for all of our help. I asked how his sisters were. He said his middle sister was well and was helping his Mother. His little sister was well and attending grade nine in secondary school. The government provides school up to grade ten. I asked how his little sister's grades were. He said they were ok and added "you need to have a private tutor if you want to get really good marks". Rakib's family was able to barter for a private tutor for him. They are not able to do this for his little sister. Rakib said his older sister is attending university in Khulna, a city not far from her home in Rayenda, and is studying accounting.

Rakib asked how the weather was in NJ. I told him it was spring and the weather was very pleasant. He said spring in Bangladesh is a pleasant time of year also. He said it is summer now and it is hot. Summer starts around 14 April and ends 14 June. It can continue to be hot after 14 June. The rainy monsoon season is usually August – September. The seasons in Bangladesh seem to run a few months ahead of the seasons in NJ.

I asked Rakib what he did on his day off on Friday. He said he did his laundry, and did some writing in his personal notebook. I think this is a journal. I asked how his roommates were and he said they were well and were good friends and they help each other study as a group.

Rakib said this week he will have a card exam in the chest area of study. This includes the heart and lungs. He said he knows the function of the heart, it's structure, and how it supplies blood to the body well.

Through his study of community health Rakib has learned that people in developing countries do not know health, nutrition, diet, or hygiene very well. He said in the U.S people have great knowledge of this and are healthier people.

I asked Rakib how the food was at the hostel. He said "the food is ok, medium. I know I'm not here on vacation, I'm here to study, the food is secondary, it's not a problem.

We ended the call by wishing each other, and the Scouts good health and God's blessings.