

Rakib Update – November 23 – 29, 2009

November 23, 2009 – Great News

Rakib called me at 5:00 AM, (5:00 PM in Bangladesh) he said he had good news. He told me that he just got a text message from the government that said “Thank you for taking the medical college admission exam, your position is #530. Only the top 1000 students who took the exam will be able to apply for admission to medical college. Rakib placed # 530 on the exam and he will be allowed to apply to medical colleges. There were seven students at his hostel who were attending medical college coaching class. Only three of them passed the exam, Rakib placed #530, another #768 and the third #932. Rakib can apply to multiple colleges. If he is accepted at more than one the choice of which to attend is his. Rakib must now wait for further instruction on when he can apply to college. Rakib thinks he will be able to collect and submit application forms on 25, 26, 29 & 30 November. 27 & 28 Nov. are a holiday and the colleges will be closed. He would like to apply to 6 colleges that he has been told are the best. Three are in Dhaka City, one is in Dhaka state near Dhaka city, and another is Khulna Medical College in Khulna City, Khulna state and Chittagong Medical College in Chittagong City, Chittagong state. The admission fee is 1000 Taka for each college. He also needs money for transportation to the colleges and 5000 taka for his December hostel fee. I told him I would try to send him 15,000 TK (\$225 U.S.) today. I later sent \$260, 17,000TK. The admission announcements should be between December 1 & 10. Students on the waiting list will be admitted between December 9 & 30. Class starts in January. I asked Rakib if it would help if the Troop sent a letter that he could give to the colleges advising them that he had financial aid from us. He did not know if such a letter would help.

I’ll bet they are celebrating in Rayenda tonight. Rakib’s parents, his teachers and tutors I’m sure are quite proud of him. This could possibly be the first student from the Sharonkola College to pass the Medical College admission exam. This is quite a tribute to his teachers who are working in grossly substandard buildings, with few books and teaching supplies. In this rural area computers, internet and audio visual aids are non existent.

Rakib asked me to obtain a certificate of appreciation and present it to the scouts. He said “this has changed my life”. I emailed him a draft certificate for him to review and add text to. I hope to present it to the Troop 1776 Scouts at the next COH.

Rakib ended the call by expressing his gratitude to the scouts and their families and asking me to extend his Thank You to them.

November 26, 2009 – Applications Underway

My phone rang at 10 AM this morning. It was Rakib’s signal for me to call him. This was unusual, we talk once a week and I had just talked to him a few days ago. I thought it might be important so I called him. He was quite enthusiastic as he spoke. He told me he had received a text message from the government that authorized him to apply to medical colleges. He said he had no trouble collecting the money we sent him to pay for college applications and related transportation costs. He told me that he had already applied to three medical colleges in Dhaka City. They were Bangladesh Medical College, Ibrahim Medical College and Holy Family Medical College.

He was quite concerned that Bangladesh Med. College had raised its tuition from 10 lakh to 12 lakh taka, (\$14,700 to \$17,700 U.S.) There is also a tax of 4.5% added, \$795 U.S. and a monthly fee of \$103. The monthly fee does not include room and board. Surprisingly he said that the tuition fees are posted in U.S. dollars and converted to taka for the local students. This may be because 10% of the seats are reserved for foreign students, mostly from other countries in the Asia / Pacific region. The increase in the tuition is most likely due to the declining value of the dollar against world currencies.

The tuition at Ibrahim Med. College is 9 lakh & 40,000 TK (\$13,800 U.S.) the monthly fee is 5000TK (\$73 U.S.) Rakib thought all tax was included in this fee.

Rakib spoke with great enthusiasm when he mentioned Holy Family Medical College. He said it was a Christian based college that was closely related to the international Red Cross / Red Crescent. He said they

gave him a brochure with over thirty pages that explained its mission and history. He insisted on reading a couple of paragraphs about the mission and history of the Red Cross to me. In summary he read;

The Red Cross idea was born in 1859, when Henry Dunant, a young Swiss man, came upon the scene of a bloody battle in Solferino, Italy, between the armies of imperial Austria and the Franco-Sardinian alliance. Some 40,000 men lay dead or dying on the battlefield and the wounded were lacking medical attention.

Dunant organized local people to bind the soldiers' wounds and to feed and comfort them. On his return, he called for the creation of national relief societies to assist those wounded in war, and pointed the way to the future Geneva Conventions.

The Red Cross was born in 1863 when five Geneva men, including Dunant, set up the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, later to become the International Committee of the Red Cross. Its emblem was a red cross on a white background: the inverse of the Swiss flag. The following year, 12 governments adopted the first Geneva Convention; a milestone in the history of humanity, offering care for the wounded, and defining medical services as "neutral" on the battlefield.

Rakib informed me that the tuition for Holly Family Med College is 9 lakh & 75,000 TK (\$14,400 U.S.), and a monthly fee of 4000 TL (\$59 U.S.). Rakib was quite impressed that there was a complete breakdown of the tuition fee in his paperwork. The breakdown included items such as admission fee, development fee, library card, student ID card, etc. All of the colleges include a fee for caution money in the tuition. He was not sure what this is but we believe it is to pay a few months of monthly fees if you fall behind. It is refundable after a certain length of time.

I asked Rakib what the campuses looked like. He said they were all rather small, they are in the city and land is at a premium. Bangladesh Med. College had three buildings. All are associated with a hospital. The government requires that medical colleges have an association with a hospital that has 250 beds per 50 med. students. He said he would have the internet café scan the fee schedule documents and he would try to email them to us.

Rakib said he will travel to Khulna state tomorrow, stay overnight, collect and file the application forms for Khulna Med. College and return to Dhaka the following day. He said to save money he would take the local bus, rather than the express. The local busses are in pretty rough condition. People sometimes ride upper-class (on the roof). The express busses are in much better condition but would be well past their retirement age by U.S. standards. The express bus costs about \$9 one way the local bus \$4.50. This is for an eight hour trip.

Rakib ended the call by asking that I give his love, appreciation to all of the scouts and their families.

Rakib Update November 29, 2009 – A Very Busy Young Man

About 11:00 AM my phone rang two times, Rakib's signal to call him. It took me about ten tries to get through. I think this was a U.S. problem due to the Thanksgiving holiday I think the overseas circuits were overloaded. By the time I got through it was 12:00 Noon (midnight in Bangladesh) and I woke Rakib up; he had gone to bed early. He said he was quite tired due to all of the traveling he was doing. After he shook off the sleep he was quite enthusiastic to inform me of his progress over the past few days. He said that he had a safe and productive trip to Khulna on 25 & 26 Nov. He collected and submitted the admission forms for Khulna Med. College. He was back in Dhaka for the festival on 27 & 28 Nov. This morning, 29 Nov., he traveled from Dhaka to a town near Dhaka and collected another admission form for a Medical College then, around 1:00 PM he boarded a bus to Chittagong City. He arrived in Chittagong about 8:00 PM. He went to a hotel, where he was when I called. Tomorrow he will collect the forms for Chittagong Medical College and then return to Dhaka. The trip back to Dhaka will take about ten hours and he will have to change busses once.

Rakib educated me a little about how the areas of the country are broken down. There are four states, within the states there are 64 areas called districts, within districts there are sub-districts called upazilas, in the upazilas there are wards and villages. So, Rakib's home village would be in Khulna state, Bagerhat district, Sharonkola upazila, Rayenda village. Rayenda is spelled Raenda and Sharonkola, Saronkola on

some maps. Rakib also stated that due to climate change water levels are rising around the world. Much of southern Bangladesh will be under water within 40 years, including Rayenda. 10s of millions of people will be displaced.

Rakib ended the call with “Give my thanks to the Scouts and your friends”

Talking with Rakib brought back memories of my time spent in Rayenda.

If you would like to follow Rakib’s travel around the country here is a link to an interactive Google map.

<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?t=h&hl=en&ie=UTF8&msa=0&source=embed&ll=23.084785,91.082153&spn=2.364808,4.916382&z=8>

If you move Dhaka so it is at the top of the map, just left of center you can see Khulna on the middle left side of the page. Chittagong is on the lower right side. You can find Rakib’s village if you look for Morrelganj on the lower right side. Move Morrelganj to the center of the page and zoom in a couple of times and you will see Raenda directly below Morrelganj. To the right of Raenda is Saronkola. This is where Rakib went to community college. It was about a twenty minute walk from his home. Saronkola is next to the Sunderbans national Park, home of the Bengal Tiger. It is rare but, occasionally someone in this area is attacked and eaten by one.

When I look at the map of Rayenda, it brings back memories of the first day I met Rakib and he took me on a walking tour of the entire village and introduced me to his friends and family. The map does not zoom in far enough to see Rakib’s home but I can identify the lane or ally that his house is on. What great technology. Just south of Morrelganj is where HODR rebuilt a school. I designed the plans for the school using just the Microsoft excel toolbar. The school was completed by HODR volunteers after I left the project using my plans. If you received this by email there are two attached files Morrelganj school old and new. The new school looks just like I had envisioned it to look like. The old school photos are similar to a school Rakib attended.