

## UPF Bangladesh holds 1st Religious Youth Service project on the Bay of Bengal

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It was like a dream came true as UPF Bangladesh held its first ever Religious Youth Service (RYS) project in Cox's Bazar, on the Bay of Bengal, Oct. 22-26, 2016. There was a total 39 participants: 27 from Bangladesh and 12 from Nepal.

For the past three decades a numbers of energetic young Bangladeshi delegations participated in RYS projects outsides their country. But their strong desire to hold an RYS project locally finally materialized.

The Opening Ceremony was held in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, with the gracious presence of Dr. Chung Sik Yong, Chairman UPF-Asia, and Mr. Masatate Kajikuri, Executive Secretary of UPF-Asia. At the Opening Ceremony Dr. Yong explained about the history, activities, and the vision of RYS. Further he went on to encourage youths to take an active role as a global youth ambassadors for peace.

Dr. Yong explained, that RYS “aimed at stimulating interreligious, and intercultural cooperation and understanding,” adding, “We bring together young adults, representing their religions and nations in service to others, with the goal of building a culture of peace and lasting friendships.”

Following the launching of the project, participants travel 12 hours by bus to the worksite. The UPF Founders are Father and Mother Moon.



**Educational Program:** As part of the education component, a series of presentations based on the UPF Founders' Principles of Peace, which included: the importance of pure love, the need for spiritual values and leadership development were conducted. These educational programs helped participants understand the role of youth in peace-building, the importance of personal and social responsibility and the qualities to be a true leader in their society.

**Group Activities:** During the education sessions the team were divided into the five groups. Discussion, interaction and brain storming sessions gave ample opportunity for each participant to share their experiences and vision.

**Interfaith Site Visit:** As part of interfaith dimension to promote peace and harmony among religions, the participants visited a Buddhist temple and Muslim mosque. While visiting these religious sites, the RYS youth had direct dialogue with the respective religious leaders allowing them to have a firsthand experience of different faiths, traditions and cultures.

**Interaction with School Children:** During the project all the RYS participants visited the Sonapara Higher Secondary School. Throughout an entire day there was lively interaction centering on RYS's Pure Love program and more than 100 school students attended. In addition, RYS organized a quiz competition for the students. Finally, the RYS team provided prizes to 10 students and gave a token of love to the Head Master of the school.

**Service Activities:** The RYS community service project centered on a cleaning campaign surrounding a Mosque and the National Martyr Monument. Through this the virtue of humanity, sacrifice and patience was planted in the hearts and minds of the participants.

**Building Friendship through Friendly Games:** All the participants joined in a football game at Inani Beach. Throughout the 5-day program they developed lifelong friendships, learned about the different cultures of Nepal and Bangladesh, and developed an open-mindedness that will last a lifetime. The project concluded with the awarding of certificate at graduation.



## Reflection

**Mr. Forkan Ahsan:** RYS's service and learning activities, held in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, will obviously build personal leadership and peacemaking skills among the participants, tender students and community people. We got chance to exchange our views there and had a change to exchange culture and religious beliefs. RYS service and teachings will enlighten the world.

**Emran Azad:** We had a chance to know the principles of different religions. Thus, through this religious harmony will be created, I believe. Cultural programs, seminars and community service, sightseeing opportunities were included in our program schedule too. We learned many things from our experiences and about the different cultures. If RYS continues these types of projects then the globe will certainly be a peaceful place.

**Mahmudul Hasan:** RYS is a one-off concept that bridges the common beliefs and fundamental principles of all religions and this convergent essence is strengthened through community-based service. I was supremely fortunate to be a part of this noble expedition in Cox's Bazaar, which helped me to polish my leadership strength to a new extent. All the sessions, where we got to refresh our minds with pivotal peace establishing factors, like family values, true love and effective leadership qualities, were superlatively worthwhile. The interactive session with the school children was an eye-opening experience for them and it will definitely pave the way for those enthusiastic minds. Visiting the temple gave us a fragrance of sanctity. And obviously we all enjoyed our time together to the very last bit at the longest sea beach of the world.