

SEA TO SUMMIT

with Youth Advocate Ikramul Hasan Shakil



PREAMBLE

Plastic at 8,844 Metres Above Sea Level!

What do you think? How did plastic end up at the highest point of earth from the sea level? Because it is no longer an issue confined to cities, rivers, or oceans.

Rather, it travels. From roadsides and waterways, it spreads across ecosystems reaching forests, mountains, and even the world's highest peaks. What begins as waste becomes a long-term threat, affecting nature in ways that are often invisible, but deeply damaging.

Each year, an estimated 11 million tonnes of plastic enter the oceans, while microplastics have now been detected from deep sea trenches to high-altitude environments. This growing footprint reflects a systemic challenge, one that extends far beyond waste management and into how materials are produced, used, and discarded.

This is where the development work becomes critical. As the UN's lead development agency, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works with governments, communities, and partners to address complex, interconnected challenges like plastic pollution.

In Bangladesh and beyond, UNDP supports circular economy solutions, strengthens waste management systems, and promotes policy reforms that reduce plastic leakage into the environment.

Yet policy and systems alone are not enough. Awareness and behaviour change remain essential, and this is where youth play a defining role. They act as a bridge, connecting policy with people, and turning global challenges into local action.

It is within this space that Shakil's journey begins as a youth advocate against plastic pollution with UNDP Bangladesh. This book captures glimpses of a journey that was shaped by determination and grounded in a deeper commitment to the Earth, and to the shared responsibility to protect it.

A JOURNEY WITH A PURPOSE

Ikramul Hasan Shakil was about to go on a voyage from Sea to Summit. He has always been concerned about the wellbeing of mother earth. This is why he wanted to keep carbon footprint as low to zero during his endeavour. He was also aware of the growing concern of plastic pollution across the landscape and specially in the Everest. So, he decided to make this voyage more than just an expedition.

His journey became rooted in purpose, carrying a message from the shores where plastic begins its journey, to the peaks where its consequences are now visible. UNDP recognises that this crisis is not only environmental but deeply human and that Shakil's journey represents more than adventure alone. Shakil joined UNDP as a Youth Advocate on plastic pollution in **February 2025** to convey a sense of urgency that policy alone cannot capture, an urgency that only a lived story can make real.





SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

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I hope Shakil's expedition will inspire people to reduce single-use plastic and embrace sustainable practices.

”

Stefan Liller

Resident Representative
UNDP Bangladesh,



THE START OF SEA TO SUMMIT

The endeavour was not a sudden decision. Though Ikramul Hasan Shakil grew up in a farming family, working in paddy fields - far from the world of high-altitude climbing, he always had a calling for the hills and mountains.





His parents hoped him to follow a conventional path. But he chose to live many lives. Theatre gave him confidence and opened up a wider world.



Above all, one thing stayed constant, his pull toward the mountains. With limited means, he travelled whenever he could, turning small journeys into learning experiences.

Over time, those journeys became deliberate. He trained, climbed, and built endurance. One of his most significant milestones was completing the 1700-kilometre Great Himalaya Trail.



A wide-angle photograph of a vast, flat, brownish beach. The beach stretches from the foreground into the distance, meeting a line of white-capped waves. The sky above is a clear, solid blue. The overall scene is desolate and expansive.

On **25 February 2025**, he stepped onto Inani Beach in Cox's Bazar to begin the Sea to Summit journey, joined by the UNDP Resident Representative, Deputy Resident Representative, and others marking the start. He carried a backpack, some dry food, and a clear purpose.

Behind him was not just a coastline, but years of persistence shaped by a modest upbringing in a farming family in Gazipur, where discipline and hard work were part of everyday life.



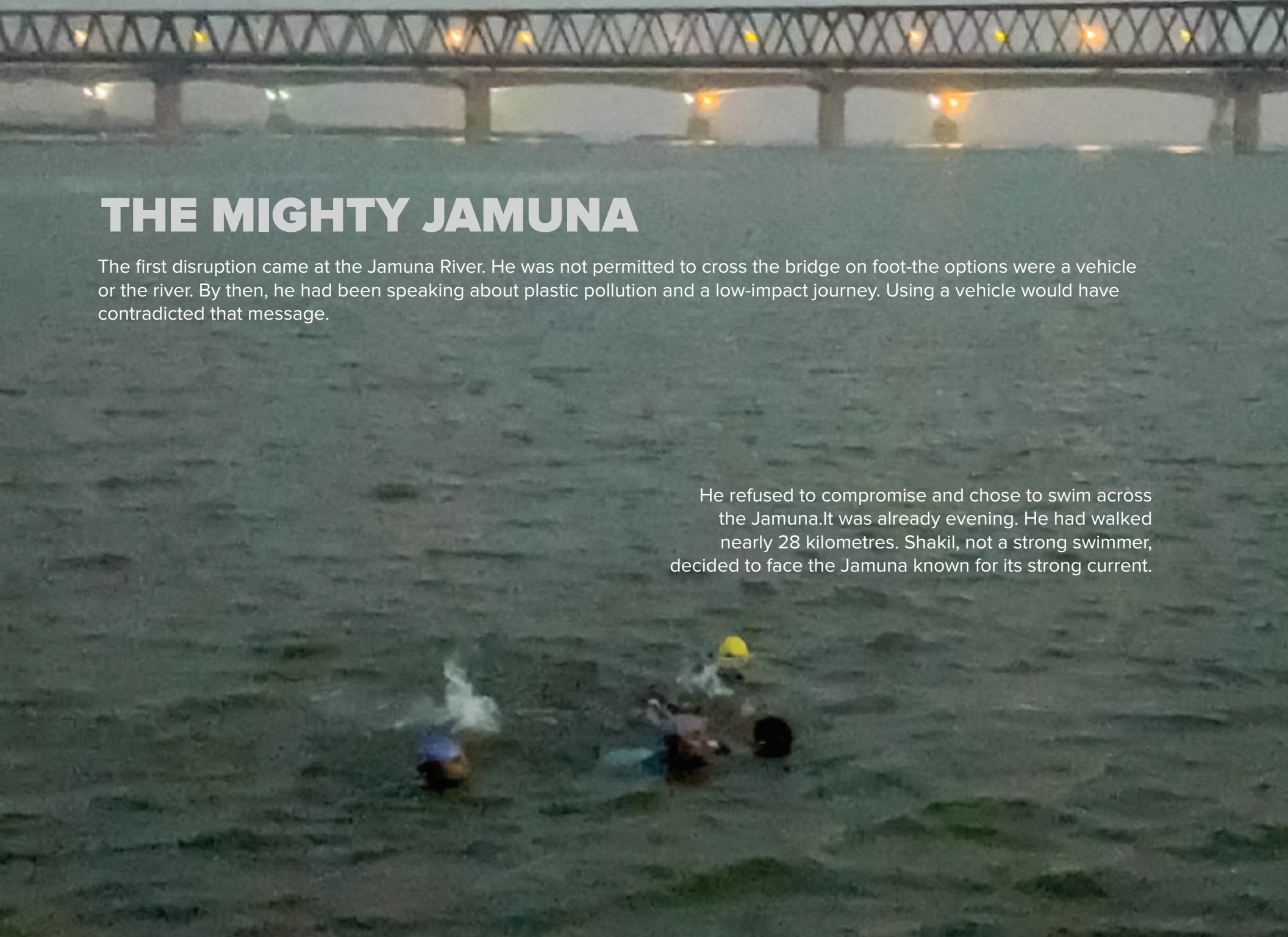
ACROSS BANGLADESH





Shakil had set out with friends and well-wishers. He walked through rural Bangladesh in steady rhythm. Each day was carefully planned-distances, rest points, and progress tracked on his phone, as he moved through rural Bangladesh in a steady rhythm.

As Ramadan began, he observed how it was practiced across districts—quietly, intimately, as part of everyday life.

The background image shows a wide, dark river at night. In the distance, a large bridge with a truss structure spans the river, illuminated by warm yellow lights. The water in the foreground is dark and rippled. In the lower center, a group of people are swimming or wading, with some splashing water visible. One person is wearing a bright yellow cap.

THE MIGHTY JAMUNA

The first disruption came at the Jamuna River. He was not permitted to cross the bridge on foot-the options were a vehicle or the river. By then, he had been speaking about plastic pollution and a low-impact journey. Using a vehicle would have contradicted that message.

He refused to compromise and chose to swim across the Jamuna. It was already evening. He had walked nearly 28 kilometres. Shakil, not a strong swimmer, decided to face the Jamuna known for its strong current.

“

By the time we started,
the water was low. The current
kept pulling me the other way.
At one point, I thought I had lost it,
until my feet touched the riverbed.

”



He reached the bank exhausted, lay on the sand, then rose
again. He rested that night. Moving north, a new worry grew
his visa timeline.



THE CHICKEN NECK SAGA



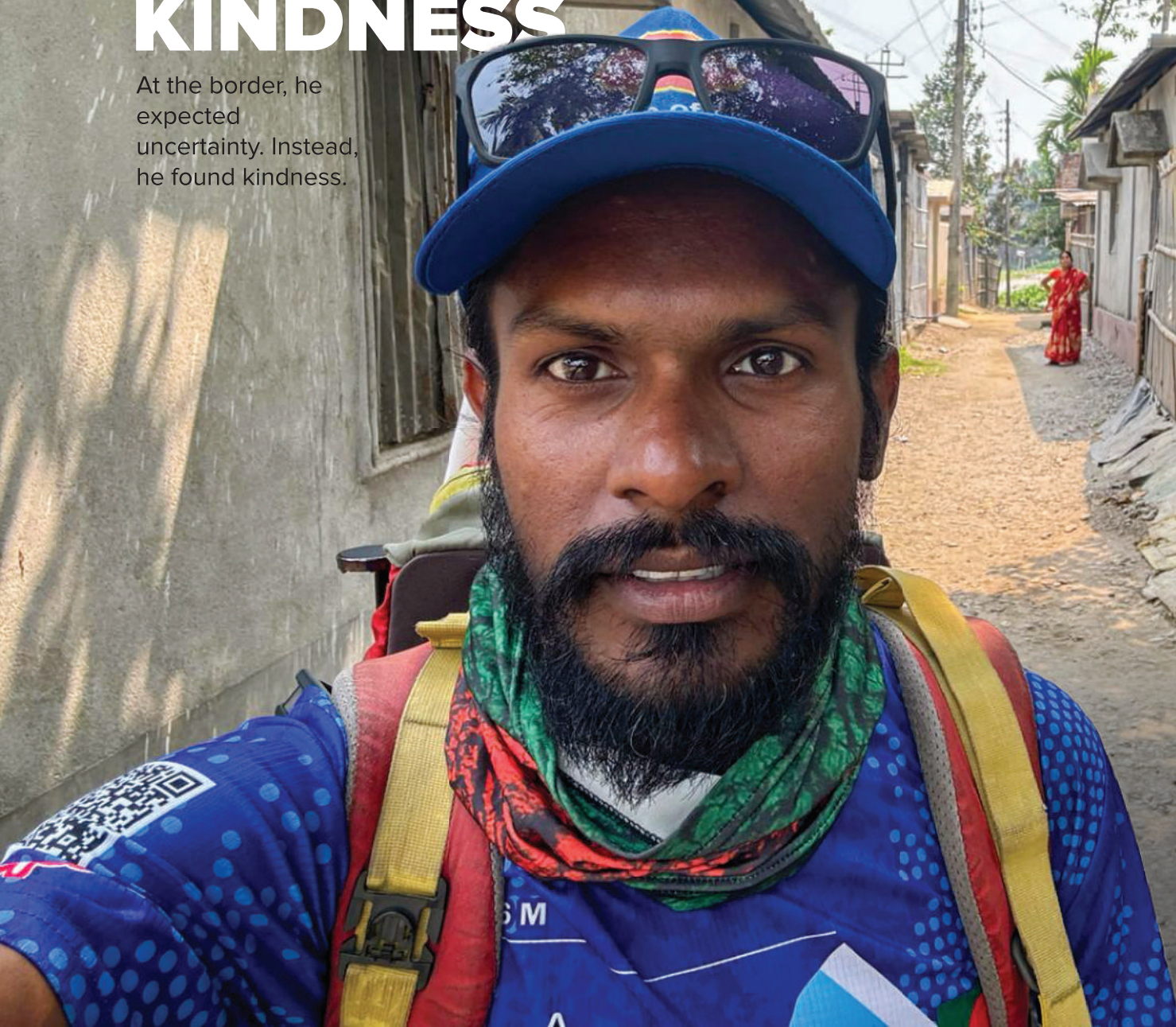
To reach Nepal, he had to pass through the narrow corridor known as the “Chicken Neck.” For that he had applied for a special “SAARC” visa. But his SAARC visa was rejected. Time was running out. Days before Eid, he made a public appeal. The post went viral. The visa came through and the journey moved forward.



After days of uncertainty, endless waiting and countless efforts behind the scenes, this moment finally arrived. While Ikramul Shakil waited near the border to continue his “Sea to Summit” expedition, his friends and teammates in Dhaka kept fighting through every step of the visa process. This photo captures more than just smiles - it holds the relief, emotion and renewed hope of a journey that almost came to a halt. The moment they finally received the passports with the visas felt like the expedition had found its heartbeat again, ready to move forward toward the summit.

UNEXPECTED KINDNESS

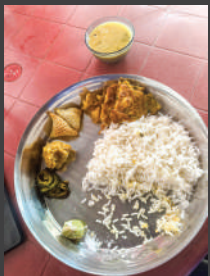
At the border, he
expected
uncertainty. Instead,
he found kindness.



“

The real world and
social media are
not the same.

”



“

Online, people spread division. On the ground, empathy still exists.

”

A local family welcomed him into their home. They shared food, celebrated Eid with him, and offered rest.

ENTERING NEPAL

On **31 March**, he entered Nepal. At first, the landscape remained green and familiar. Gradually, the terrain opened up the hills rose, and the distant outlines of the Himalayas began to take shape.

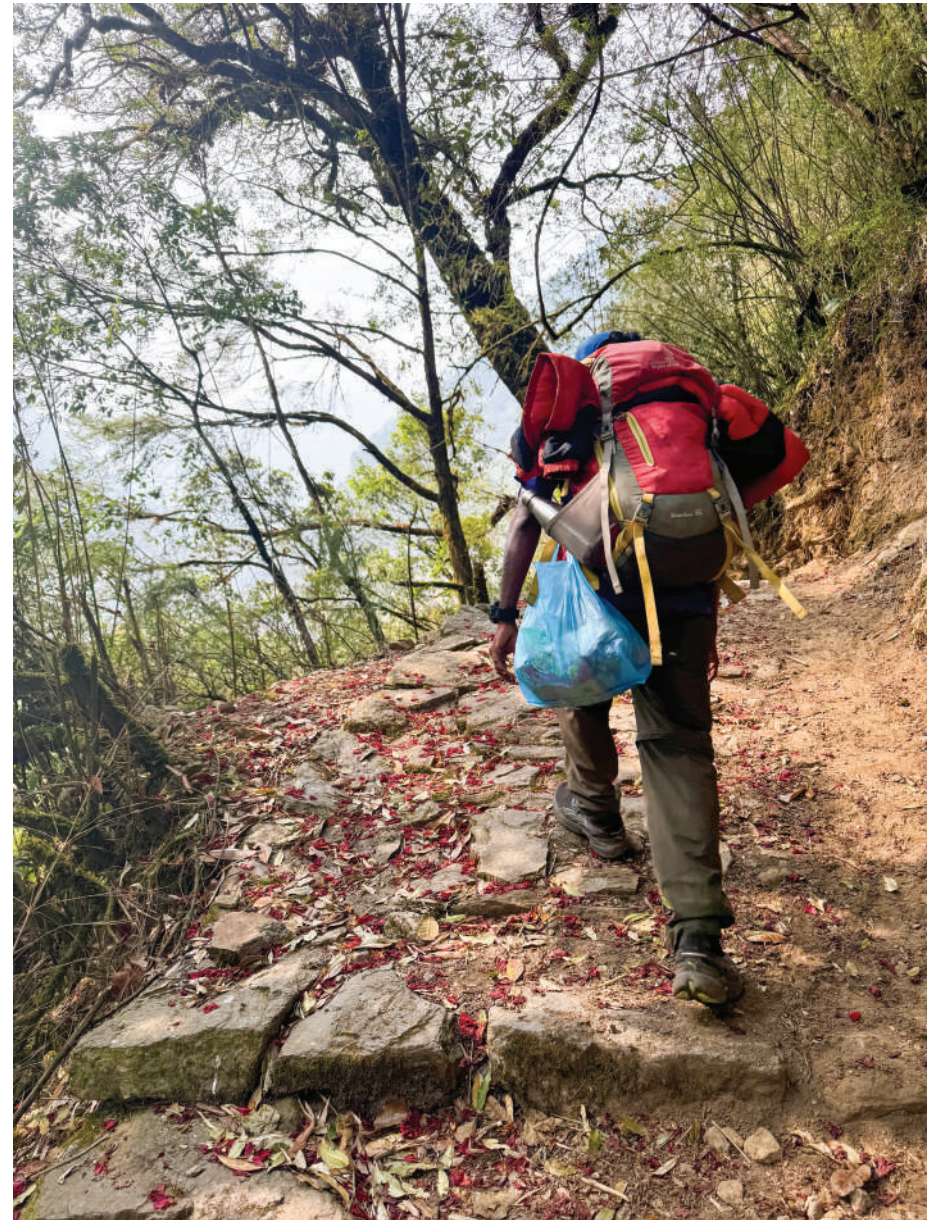


NEPAL IMMIGRATION



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JHAPA			
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Throughout his journey, he collected plastic waste whenever he could spot some





Any attempt on Everest requires time – time for rotation, for acclimatisation, for the body to adjust to altitude and conditions. For Shakil, that margin had narrowed with delayed. The delay in visa processing had already cost Shakil valuable time, forcing him to move faster to stay within his planned window.



He pushed toward Kanchenjunga Base Camp, using the terrain to build acclimatisation before heading toward the Everest region. By **29 April**, 64 days into the journey, he reached Everest Base Camp.

He paused there for six days to rest and recover before the final phase of the climb.

KITCHEN TENT

After reaching Everest Base Camp on **29 April**, the expedition entered its most dangerous phase. Here, the romantic idea of a long journey gave way to the harsh realities of high-altitude mountaineering.

At high altitude, appetite often drops. The kitchen tents become essential spaces not just for meals, but for warmth, hydration, and recovery. Snow is melted for water, food is prepared carefully, and climbers gather there to regain energy.





These tents also bring people together. Climbers from different parts of the world cross paths here exchanging stories, greetings, and moments of quiet conversation.

It was here that Shakil met a climber from the Philippines. They spoke, exchanged views, and reflected on their journeys. For Shakil, it was also a moment to look back. He felt hopeful. Yet one thought stayed with him the presence of single-use plastic he had noticed along the way, even in places so remote.





KHUMBU ICEFALL



The Khumbu Icefall is one of the most critical sections on the route to Everest. It is not only the crevasses that make it dangerous, but the constantly shifting ice, seracs, ladders, and unstable terrain that demand absolute focus. Temperatures can drop to -20 to -30°C, and even a small mistake can lead to frostbite or worse. The cold, combined with altitude, adds to physical and mental fatigue.



Climbers must gradually adapt to these conditions. Shakil's first approach to the Icefall was not with his own team; his Sherpa was already on Everest with another team. During this phase, he fell into a crevasse and dislocated his arm.

He chose to keep this to himself, concerned that it might prevent him from continuing the climb. During the rest period that followed, he managed to recover enough to proceed.



“

I realised I was sweating even in that extreme cold and had no option but to remove some of my layers

”



THE DEATH ZONE

MT Everest (8848.86m)

Death Zone

Camp 04 (7920m)

Camp 03 (7200m)

Camp 02 (6400m)

Camp 01 (6065m)

Khumbu Ice Fall

Base Camp (5364m)



Above 8,000 metres lies the death zone. Oxygen is scarce. Every step cost energy. There is no margin for error. In this zone, Shakil faced one of his hardest moments. He came across a body, the climber from the Philippines who

He paused. The sight unsettled him. For a moment, he wanted to stop. He steadied himself and moved on.

Around 8,400 metres is the Balcony where climbers stop, adjust their oxygen and take the final decision where they will continue or go back. Shakil and his Sherpa, Tashi Gyalzen, crossed the Balcony in





Higher up, near the Hillary Step, more bodies were lined the route. With exposure, cold, altitude each step heavier than the last. Here, he thought of turning back.

“

I recalled my mother's face. She had let me go knowing I might not return. I thought of my friends, those who believed in me when I had nothing. I could not stop. Either I reach the summit and return, or I do not return at all.

”











THE CLIMB TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD

The final ascent began in harsh conditions. As the weather turned unstable, visibility dropped, many turned back. For Shakil and his Sherpa, Tashi Gyalzen, retreat was not an option. The climb mattered to both. So, they moved upward.

On **19 May 2025**, around 6:30 a.m., Shakil stood on the summit of Mount Everest with Gyalzen. At 8,848 metres, where oxygen is scarce and survival is uncertain, he raised the red and green flag of Bangladesh.



SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

He stayed for only 10–15 minutes. He took photographs. In that brief moment, he removed his goggles and gloves. Within seconds, he realised the mistake. The cold was immediate.

He put them back on and began his descent as the weather worsened.

“

I could not see
the world properly
from the top
of the world.

”

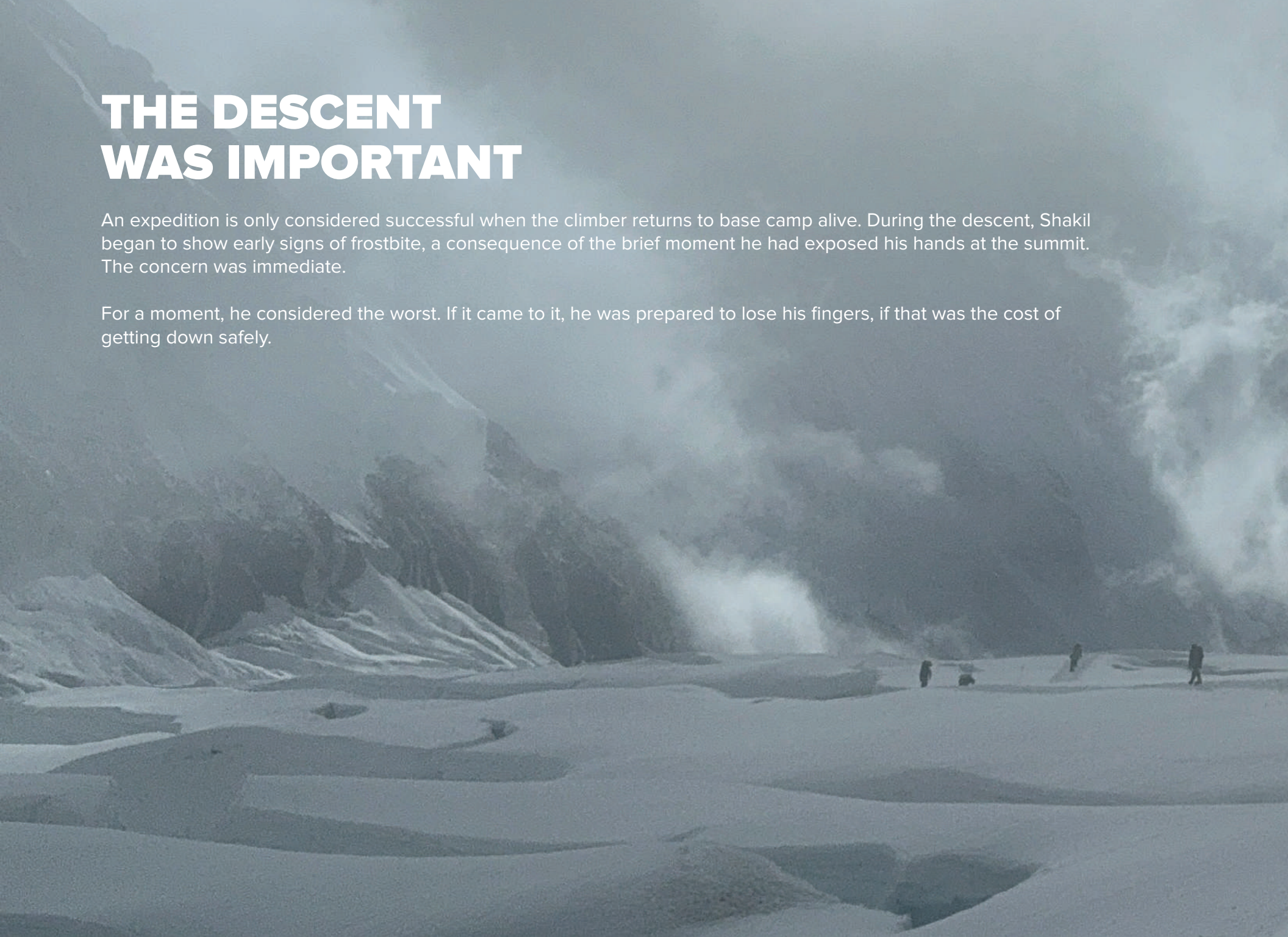




THE DESCENT WAS IMPORTANT

An expedition is only considered successful when the climber returns to base camp alive. During the descent, Shakil began to show early signs of frostbite, a consequence of the brief moment he had exposed his hands at the summit. The concern was immediate.

For a moment, he considered the worst. If it came to it, he was prepared to lose his fingers, if that was the cost of getting down safely.





But this time, conditions worked in his favour. He descended to Camp IV, received initial treatment, and continued down to base camp. In doing so, he completed the Sea to Summit expedition in a record time.







“

After descending, I took a moment to thank everyone who supported me in this journey.

This does not only include people, but it also includes my sponsors like UNDP, PRAN, Mr. Noodles, Systema Toothbrush, Makalu e Traders

”



UNDP Nepal greeted him with warmth and cordiality.





Rain drenched welcome from
UNDP Bangladesh for Shakil



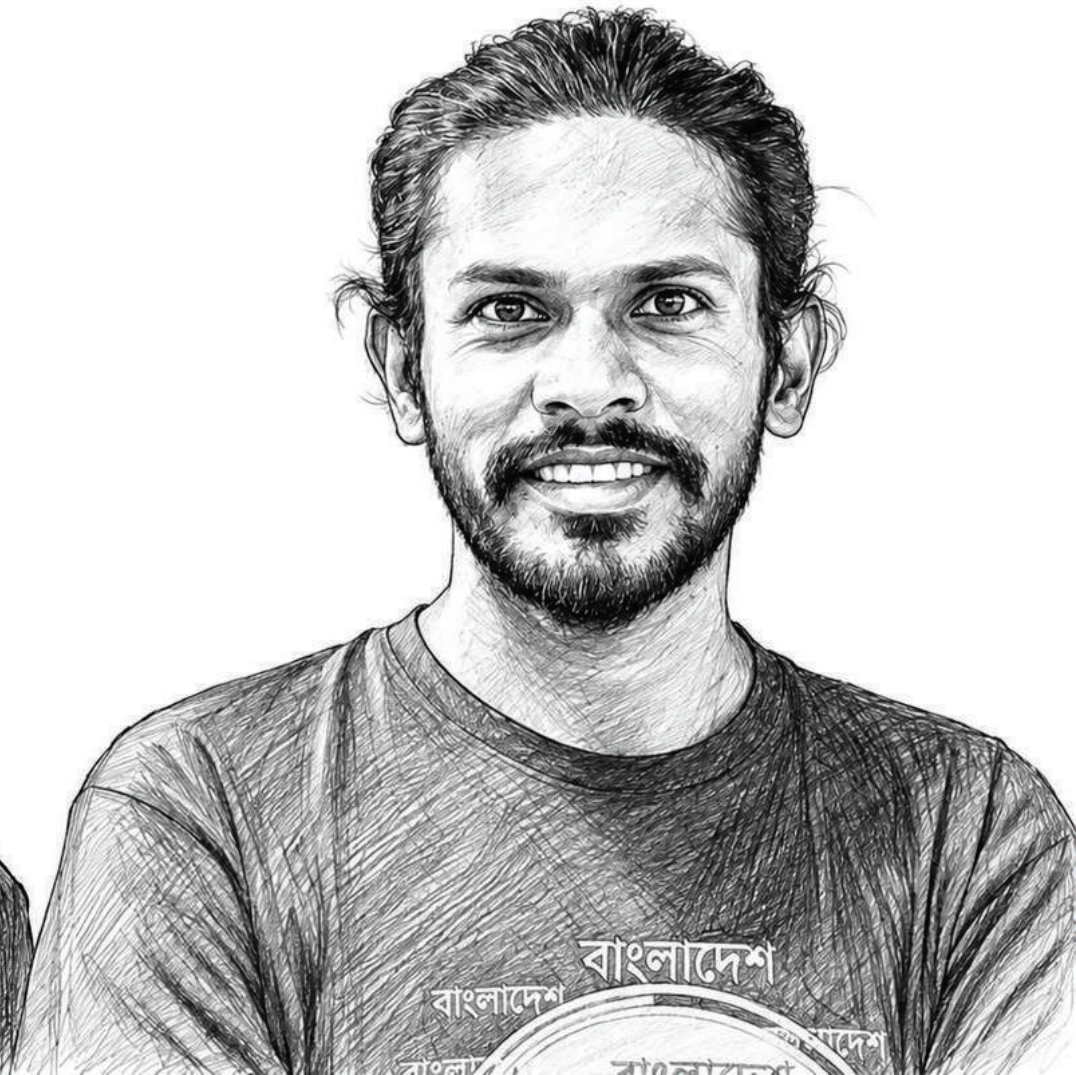
A NATIONAL MILESTONE

On his return, Shakil was welcomed as a national figure. His journey also marked a shift in Bangladesh's presence in global mountaineering.

Over 84 days, he covered more than 1,300 kilometres on foot across Bangladesh, India, and Nepal – moving through coasts, towns, forests, and high mountain trails. He navigated bureaucratic hurdles, endured uncertainty in the mountains, and at one point went nearly two weeks without a bath. The expedition was never only physical.

He moved with intent, clarity, and resolve and has since called for mountaineering to be recognised as a prestigious and important sport in Bangladesh.





BEYOND THE SUMMIT

The concept of Sea to Summit was not new. In **1990**, Australian mountaineer Tim Macartney-Snape completed a comparable sea-to-summit journey. Shakil reached the summit in 84 days from sea level, faster than earlier recorded attempts of similar expeditions.

What set Shakil's expedition apart was everything that came with it.

From coast to mountain, he not only kept his commitment of zero carbon footprint, he used the journey to engage with communities, discussed issues like plastic pollution and climate change. The message was simple: what begins at the sea does not stay there.



Shakil's climb was not just about endurance, but also about purpose.
And a call for collective action, across borders.

Sincere appreciation goes to all colleagues involved in the process of this photo book.

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Plastics Circularity Project