



The Engineers: Khaleda Shahriar Kabir, Monawara Begum, and Shirin Sultana Chumki

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Have you ever been told you can't do something for no good reason? How did it make you feel? Small and powerless, right? That is how the Supergirls Khaleda Shahriar Kabir, Monawara Begum, and Shirin Sultana Chumki felt when they were told they could not study engineering because they were girls. But they were not ready to give up just like that! Together, they set out to prove that girls can study anything and became the

first female civil engineering students in East Pakistan.



Do you know what civil engineers do? They build big structures for cities and design bridges and roads. Khaleda, Monawara, and Shirin dreamed of studying at the East Pakistan University of Engineering and Technology (EPUET), but there was only one problem: no girls had ever been admitted to the Civil Engineering Department. The Vice-Chancellor believed that the subject was not suitable for women. He told the girls to

study architecture instead—this was a more 'feminine' subject—and they could draw and design pretty houses. The three friends did not agree.



To prove that girls are just as good at engineering as boys, the three friends sat for the admission exam amidst whispers and mean words—and they passed with very great marks! The Vice Chancellor could not say 'no!' anymore. And so it was that in 1964, Khaleda, Monawara, and Shirin became the first female students of the Civil Engineering Department.



On the first day of class, Khaleda, Monawara, and Shirin walked into the classroom, shocking all the boys. Some tried to say mean things, some were too nice, and others treated them with respect. The girls were good students; they listened, asked good questions, and learned to work the machines. They proved that the university is for women and men, and there is no such thing as a "female" or "male" subject.



After graduating, Khaleda joined the Water Board and worked on building dams, Monawara became a chemical engineer, and Shirin worked as an engineer in the United States. But their biggest achievement was the day that they changed the mind of the Vice Chancellor. The three friends did not take no for an answer, and like true Supergirls, they opened the door for others. Because in engineering—as in all things—teamwork

makes the dream work.



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Original Story

ইঞ্জিনিয়ার - খালেদা শাহরিয়ার, মনোয়ারা বেগম এবং শিরীন সুলতানা চুমকী (The Engineers: Khaleda Shahriar Kabir, Monawara Begum, and Shirin Sultana Chumki), Author: HerStory Foundation. Illustrator: Humayra Kabir. Released under CC BY-NC 4.0.

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