



YASMIN KHOJA | 20 June 2018 | USA

Ismaili Teen Achieves Rare Milestone with 139 Merit Badges

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Boy Scouts and Troop leaders raise three three fingers to show "Scout's Honor".

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Aniq Chunara of the Ismaili Troop 758 became one of only 300 Boy Scouts to earn 139 merit badges in the organization's 100-plus year history.

Boy Scouts of America has been around for over 100 years, but only about 300 of its members have earned all 139 merit badges available to them as a scout.

In January, 17-year-old Aniq Chunara of the Ismaili Troop 758 became one of them. North Star District Chairman Jeff Knowlton presented Aniq with a plaque on January 26 in recognition of this significant and rare accomplishment.

Aniq is grateful for all the support he has received from his family and troop leaders, and hopes his achievement will be an inspiration to younger scouts. "I feel proud and hope I left a lasting impact on my community with my accomplishment," he said.

Aniq earned his badges over a course of eight years during which he has persevered through a multitude of diverse and challenging experiences that include surviving 10 days in the Gulf of Mexico, hiking 84 miles in a week, leading 12 crew members while canoeing through 109 miles of boundary waters, and much more.

Troop 758, which includes 387 Ismaili Boy Scouts in North Texas, was established in 1988. Over the decades, dozens of them have earned 21 badges to receive their Eagle Scout, the highest rank in Boy Scouts,

Aniq's merit badges, however, are a source of pride for Unit Commissioner and Troop Committee Chairmen Malik Nathani. "In my 20 years of service with Troop 758, I haven't seen anyone with the drive and passion that Aniq had to earn all the merit badges," Malik said.

Aniq cites his passion for excellence as an important driving force toward this milestone. "When given the opportunity, I pounced upon becoming not just an Eagle Scout, but also one of the only scouts to achieve every merit badge," he said.

His recent accomplishment isn't his alone; it is a nod to his family's history of scouting and serving others. Aniq's father, Mansoorali Chunara, was a scout in Pakistan before moving to the United States. For the past nine years, he has served as the assistant scoutmaster for Troop 758.



Aniq's journey as a scout began when his parents enrolled him as a cub scout at age five. Mansoor and Shaheen Chirwa made a conscious effort to provide Aniq and his sister with a holistic upbringing. They trekked two hours from Angus to Plano, Texas every weekend to participate in meetings and scouting events, always being the first ones at each activity. Aniq's parents also worked hard to ensure he was not missing other important aspects, such as the Religious Education Center and Early Childhood Development classes.

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Every Saturday, they would make the long drive to Plano so Aniq and his little sister could attend REC. They would stay in a hotel so Aniq could attend his scouting events the next day, driving home that evening for school the next morning. On Monday afternoons, the family headed to Carrollton to attend ECD.

"The commute was a challenge, but the drive and ambition that scouts sparked in Aniq, and his accomplishments make it all worth it," Shahnoor said after her son was recognized in January for his scouting.

Aniq is also incredibly determined to achieve other academic and personal goals. He hopes to someday work for a corporate law firm before campaigning for political positions in state government. Ultimately though, he's eyeing the United States presidency.

Shaheen Bandedali, chairperson for the Aga Khan Youth and Sports Board for the Central United States, said she hopes to see more youth involved in programs like scouting so they can become strong leaders. "When you see strong youth leaders in the Jamat, they are likely to be scouts. Scouting teaches them strong leadership and gives great character," she said.

Aniq also has some invaluable advice for current and future scouts. "Stay passionate, love what you do and continue to learn and take advantage of every experience," he says. "Always remember to characterize what the Eagle Scout rank and what Boy Scouts stand for—inspiration, perseverance, and a legacy of service."

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