



(L) Volunteers of Nandita Suraksha hand out relief packages to flood victims. (R) Nandita Suraksha's team teaches children about good touch and bad touch.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF NANDITA SURAKSHA



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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

Gates Cambridge Scholarship Program 2021 in University of Cambridge

The Gates Cambridge Scholarship programme was established in October 2000 by a donation of US\$210m from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to the University of Cambridge; this is the largest ever single donation to a UK university. Scholarships are awarded to outstanding applicants from countries outside the UK to pursue a full-time postgraduate degree in any subject available at the University of Cambridge.

DEADLINE: October 14, 2020 | Scholarships



"World Tales" Short Story Competition by UNESCO and Idries Shah Foundation

With the aim to foster imagination, resourcefulness and ingenuity, UNESCO and the Idries Shah Foundation (ISF) launch the World Tales Short Story Competition in close collaboration with the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities of UNESCO (ICCAR). Young teenagers from all over the globe are invited to write about the challenges of today and tomorrow in the format of a short story and share their perspectives.

DEADLINE: October 15, 2020 | Competitions

IBRAF Fellowship Program 2020

The IBRAF FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM ON SOUTH-SOUTH AND TRIANGULAR COOPERATION (IFP) aims to overcome the gap between studying and engaging in international cooperation, taking scholars and professionals to hands-on experiences in Brazil in order to explore, understand and disclose good practices and projects in socioeconomic development.

DEADLINE: October 12, 2020 | Fellowships

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD SPECIAL

Nandita Suraksha: Enabling women and children across the country

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA & MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Nandita Suraksha started their journey in April 2019 as a non-profit voluntary organisation, with an aim to support underprivileged women and children across the country. The organisation intends to ensure gender equality through social and economic empowerment of women and girls, as well as the creation of safe spaces for them. Ahead of International Day of the Girl Child (October 11), we caught up with the team to find out more about their projects.

"Women in our country face threatening situations on a daily basis. We aim to protect them and build secure futures for them," shares Tahiyatul Jannat Remi, Founder and President, Nandita Suraksha. "We work as fearless soldiers to ensure and protect the safety rights of women and children." In 2018, Remi, a student of Govt Sarda Sundari Mahila College, established a free school, Hashimukh Pathshala, which is now run by Nandita Suraksha's team. 35 young children are currently enrolled in the free school.

The organisation has reached out to 9,000 children and 3,000 parents in several primary schools across the country, encouraging open discussions on the differences between good touch and bad touch, among other subjects. Along with discussions and

awareness campaigns, Nandita Suraksha's team provided emergency menstruation kits to primary and secondary schools, reaching out to 30 educational institutes. "Nearly 86 percent of women and girls in our country still use cloths instead of sanitary napkins, and are unaware of the diseases a lack of proper menstrual hygiene can cause," adds Remi.

Nandita Suraksha's team also organises medical camps and conducts tree plantation drives with rural women and children. Their project, 'Pashe Ache Nanditara', extends support to women, children, elderly, disabled and transgender people in times of need.

"While studying child development, I had to visit different places for surveys. I've grown up listening to people's plights through Nandita Suraksha," says Nafisa Mim, a volunteer of the organisation. "We aim to connect with people and initiate impactful conversations."

In 2019, the organisation launched a self-defence course to equip women from all walks of life with basic self-defence skills at an affordable cost. At present, 50 women are enrolled in this course.

Nandita Shuroksha's team started their COVID-19 initiatives in March by providing necessary hygiene products to 500 people. They also provided menstrual kits to 500 women from underprivileged communities in Faridpur. During Ramadan, they provid-



Girls demonstrate self-defence techniques during a session.

ed iftar packets to 650 people in Faridpur, Jhalkathi and Barishal.

Recently in Faridpur, 30 unions were flooded. With the collapse of the dam in Sadiapur, hundreds of villages were waterlogged. Nandita Suraksha's team, in collaboration with the district administration of Faridpur, recently provided menstrual kits and other necessary items to the flood affected families.

Though other relief programmes provide people in these areas with food and other items, sanitary napkins and other menstrual necessities are largely ignored. Under their initiative, 500 women in these waterlogged

areas were provided with menstrual kits, including sanitary napkins, underpants and soaps, among other things. Recently, Amal Foundation partnered up with Nandita Suraksha to distribute sanitary napkins and other hygiene products in Faridpur.

Their team also conducts discussions on sexual harassment, menstrual hygiene, child marriage, online harassment and mental health issues, among other things, under their project, 'Aparajita Suraksha', with an aim to provide necessary information to women living in the most remote areas of every upazila. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the organisation launched an emergency helpline to provide assistance against sexual assault, child marriages and online harassment for women. The virtual platform will also provide necessary support with the help of the administrations in nine upazilas of the country.

With 40 active members across the country, Nandita Suraksha's team reached out to 18,000 women and children so far through their different projects. To support underprivileged communities, the organisation works mostly in remote villages, densely populated areas and slums. They recently expanded their initiatives in Dhaka as well, and are working to launch their projects in Rangamati and Rajbari. "We dream to provide a platform to young individuals, who dare to stand beside people in the face of adversities," concludes Remi.

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY SPECIAL

'Bolte Pari Na Bolte Chai', a supportive space for a heart-to-heart

PRIYANKA CHOWDHURY

To this day, mental health remains one of the most neglected subjects in developing countries like Bangladesh. Despite the sheer number of people living with traumatic experiences and mental health issues, it is not uncommon for many of us to feel isolated and alone. Ahead of World Mental Health Day tomorrow (October 10), we had a conversation with Sumaiya Kabir, also known as RJ Arunima, about her newly launched podcast, Shadhin Music App's *Bolte Pari Na Bolte Chai*, where people open up about their most guarded secrets and their hardest life experiences.

RJ Arunima has been associated with radio since 2013. With her signature show, *Ek Cup Bikel* on Radio Foorti, she became a household voice. She recently made her comeback with *Bolte Pari Na Bolte Chai*, a show designed with true stories from callers who struggle to talk about their upsetting life experiences, even with their close ones. Guests on the show can remain anonymous.

"I am not a psychologist or a psychiatrist, but I think at times, we just need to lend an ear to others. I hope to be that listener and that friend to our guests. The show offers a non-judgmental space for them," says the host.

With the coronavirus crisis taking a toll on people's mental health, this year felt like the right time to start the show. "Shadhin Music App came to me with the concept when we saw a rise in cases of depression, with people staying indoors during the pandemic. We planned the show in just two months," RJ Arunima shares. The weekly podcast kicked off on September 19.

Returning to her favourite medium was a huge relief for the RJ. "I've always enjoyed connecting with people through my voice. I really like how different people respond differently to me," she says.

So far, only female guests have participated in the podcast. However, it will feature a male participant soon. "Men are reluctant to open up about their feelings and embrace vulnerability, mainly because of social stigmas," says RJ Arunima. With her show, she hopes to have heartfelt talks with the guests and encourage others to open up about their struggles as well. "Our traumas and suppressed emotions often lead to mental health issues. The more we talk about our issues, the more aware people will be," she concludes.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF RJ ARUNIMA

