

DR SAYED SAIKH IMTIAZ

A vanguard of youth leads social movements to end violence against women and Girls

BY MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN



Bicycle rally of BraveMen Campaign participants.



Students float boats writing their pledges in it.

When we think of women's rights, a stereotypical picture of protests, conferences and meetings often come to mind. But can we imagine hundreds of school going boys and girls taking to the street, expressing their pledge to prevent violence against women and girls? Not only that – imagine them visiting every household in their village and involving their neighbours in activities so that everyone respects their female family members.

This revolutionary picture can be seen in most of the villages of Pabna, Sirajganj and Natore districts. It is the outcome of Sayed Saikh Imtiaz's BraveMen Campaign; an action research that tries to develop most effective strategies to end VAW&G involving young men and boys in schools. It includes a series of co-curricular activities aimed at developing a positive mindset among school going students especially young boys regarding the rights of women and girls. Besides taking part in various kinds of activities, every participant has to maintain a diary called Brave Man Diary where the student writes his daily activities of how he regularly respects or treats his female acquaintances.

Organised by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and supported by the UNDP, Dr Imtiaz and his team at the Centre for Men and Masculinities Studies (CMMS) have been running this campaign in more than 50 schools of rural areas and Dhaka. Imtiaz says, "The participants of BraveMen Campaign are young students because at this stage in life they usually develop a particular

notion regarding women. If we can instill in these young minds gender equitable ideas, there will be the end of violence against women and girls."

He has also set up the country's leading voluntary youth organisation in 1999 as the Founder President-- "United Nations Youth and Students Association of Bangladesh" with the active support from the UN system and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh. With branches in all the divisional districts and prominent universities, it initiated the MUN (Model United Nations) movement in Bangladesh and last year organised the International MUN conference on the prevention of Violence against Women. His TV talk show with youngsters called "Maximus Tarun Kontho" in Channel I is also very popular.

About the future of the BraveMen Campaign Dr Imtiaz reveals, "I started to plan the campaign from my experience with the reality show "The Campus Hero", which was telecast in Channel I. It was based on my PhD research to inspire the youth. In the next couple of years I want to dedicate my time to set up the BraveMen Network involving the youth and organisations of different types. I believe at some point in my life BraveMen Campaign will be a Global Campaign involving millions of youth from different countries."

There are obstacles and challenges but determined minds like Imtiaz can give us some hope that society will view men and women as equals.

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