



PHOTOS: CAP

THINK PINK AND WHITE

Cancer Awareness Programme for Women (CAP)

RASMIA RAHMAN AMREEN

Musa Karim Ripon, a third year student in the economics Department of Islamic University, Kushtia, still remembers the day when he heard about the untimely death of his aunt in 2013. After fighting with breast cancer for two years, she had finally given in. Ripon felt distraught losing his beloved aunt as she was no less than a mother. What made the whole scenario even grimmer was that she was aware of her sickness but too embarrassed to reveal it. However, when she finally did, it was too late.

Ripon's family faced two more shocks when his own mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and his paternal grandmother with cervical cancer. This time, the family did not delay in getting help for both. White Ripon's mother survived the ordeal, his grandmother is still under treatment.

Ending all this, Ripon expressed his concern to his friend Saiful Islam Musa, a final year student of Government Homeopathic Medical College, Mirpur. They soon realised that social stigma surrounding the topic, irregular medical checkups, poor awareness campaigns in rural areas and scarcity in proper cancer facilities in the country have always been the main reasons as to why Bangladesh women have high mortality rate once inflicted with breast or cervical cancer. According to a Daily Star report, two thirds of breast cancer deaths and 9 out of 10 deaths from cervical cancer occur in low- and middle income countries (LMICs).

Ripon and Musa felt it was time to make a difference. Towards the end of 2015, Ripon and Musa founded a non-profit volunteer organisation named Cancer Awareness Programme for

Women, or CAP in short. Through CAP, they were planning to raise awareness amongst both the men and women in and outside the community, talk more about breast cancer and also organise camps for women to get free checkups.

The entire 2016 stood as a test for the founders of CAP. Ripon and Musa were rebuked by friends and family for

says Ripon. The teachers did not stop only at motivating the pair. When Ripon and Musa proposed to the university to hold a day long cancer awareness seminar, their faculties took upon the responsibility of ensuring a high student turnout. With more than 150 people attending the event, their hard work paid off.

Ripon attended the day-long event both the years. There, they came across Dr Habibullah Talukder Ruskin, Associate Professor at National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital and Professor Dr Sabera Khatun of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University. Besides knowledge and appreciation, the duo took back home

posters, leaflets, pamphlets, rallies and holding seminars in Islamic University and Iban Nagar Degree College in Kushtia. Ripon and Musa decided to extend their helping hand to the under-privileged women of Mohakhali slum areas in Dhaka. On Mother's day last month, CAP organised a day-long breast and cervical cancer awareness and diagnosis campaign where 120 women were provided with free diagnosis tests and medicine. At the Infectious Diseases Hospital's conference room beside the slum, a discussion on 'Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention' was also organised. Dr Sabera Khatun was invited as the chief guest and Professor Ashrafunnessa, also of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, was present as a special guest. "Even though we had very limited funds, we could reach out to many who wanted to help spread the awareness," says Musa.

Currently, CAP is focusing on launching a website in Bangla where all the information regarding breast and cervical cancer would be available. Besides, the founders also plan on making informative videos, aimed at helping people in remote areas of Bangladesh. "We also have a dream of owning a Cancer Awareness Caravan that would roam around the country, offering free screening and education on breast and cervical cancer," adds Ripon.

By spreading awareness, eliminating stigma from the society and showing the path to recovery, CAP wants to save each and every woman of the country from the claws of cancer. The two youths, Ripon and Musa, march forward like valiant soldiers, carrying the pink and white badge. Let's hear their call.



the initiative they took. They faced numerous criticisms and were told to not pursue such "nasty topics", even having their integrity questioned. However, Ripon's university teachers were always by his side, providing courage and confidence. "My teachers did not fail me. Instead of doubting my purpose, the faculties stood by my side and motivated us for our initiative,"

When The Bangladesh Breast Cancer Awareness Forum organised Pink Road Show across Dhaka city to raise awareness on breast cancer in 2015 and 2016, cancer specialists, survivors, social workers and volunteers participated in the road show and demonstrated their solidarity by wearing pink and distributed leaflets containing important information on breast cancer. Musa and

the idea to compile a pamphlet where the more information on breast and cervical cancer were mentioned. "It took a lot of research on our part to design the pamphlet. We incorporated diagrams too, just in case someone does not know how to read," says Musa.

While spreading awareness about breast and cervical cancer through

Eliminating the IT language barrier

OSAMA RAHMAN

When Titas Sarker was a student of the Institute of Information Technology in Jahangir Nagar University, he faced a problem many students are perhaps familiar with. Pursuing certification courses to build his resume and learn certain skills required by IT professionals, he realised that all his course materials and training sessions conducted were in English. Like any other native Bangla speaker, the English language morphed into a barrier as more technical jargons came into frequent use. That is when he realised that there was a crucial gap here that needed to be filled. Thus was born the idea of a venture that would keep him busy right after his graduation.

To solve his immediate problem, Titas began to rewrite the course material in Bangla. His notebooks were soon full of translated texts, something he did back then to help himself learn faster and better. "One of my friends then suggested that I upload the Bangla content I created online so I could help others. I did and immediately received a lot of positive feedback," Titas says, fondly recalling the humble beginnings of a venture that would force many educators to rethink their strategy in the years to come. Initially, Titas maintained a blog where he would upload his content, along with a few other research sites. However, for Titas, the reach just wasn't enough. He wanted to do a lot more. "While people could search the blog to find what was needed, they were still not arranged chronologically. I wanted the approach to be more user-friendly and so this led me to creating a website where I was able to design the interface and organise the content in an easily accessible manner," he informs. This was not to do the end though.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Enosis Solutions, Titas founded a startup company called Tsoft and started the website TsoftIT in 2015. The main purpose of this site was to create educational content for the IT industry. Along with the text, Titas began making video tutorials in Bangla. Currently, the site hosts around 1600 videos, all focusing on a particular skill

mandatory in the IT sector. From setting up a wifi zone to more advanced materials, TsoftIT's main aim now is to make IT courses more affordable and accessible. "It is my desire to spread IT knowledge across Bangladesh. I want to make it affordable also. For this, I publish my materials online and in our other language," Titas says.

Titas recently also began hosting his videos on Youtube, where he currently boasts around 4000 subscribers with the numbers growing. He averages around 1000-2000 views but his most popular video has over 20,000 views. Expanding his horizons, Titas has branched out into teaching the basics of Microsoft Excel and ways of maximising the benefits of social media. Furthermore, he has designed material to aid individuals in their preparations for IELTS courses and even how to conduct oneself during job interviews. "I took this initiative so people could learn mandatory courses from anywhere and for free. I am also currently taking workshops on such skill set development," he says. "One very real challenge in our university is that while there is focus on IT courses, not much practical world applications of the knowledge learned is offered. I have brought together the required devices to teach these skills using a more hands-on approach. You can watch the video and learn but by using our devices you can actually use those learnings in real world settings," he adds.

While the material online is free for all to use, if one wishes to attend a class with TsoftIT, they are required to pay a small fee, depending on what they want to learn and how many courses they want to do. In his pursuit to spread the knowledge, Titas has not stopped with only urban-centric solutions. "In Dhaka, it is easy to go to any learning centre and get your desired courses. However, for those outside of Dhaka, this isn't so easy and even access to internet is hard to come by. Thus, I make video tutorials in DVD formats and have also compiled my notes into a book," he says. The books and DVDs can be availed using both SA Paribahan and Sundarban courier services.

Titas' desire to spread IT knowledge across the country is slowly coming to fruition. He doesn't work for acknowledgement or money. He does it because he knows that IT is a booming sector and such a sector should always welcome positive changes. In that aspect, he is only, but importantly, a changemaker, paving a path that many others can follow.

For more information, visit www.tsoftit.com