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YOUTH IN ACTION

MAHMODUL'S EARNEST mission to combat violence against women

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AKHLAKUR RAHMAN

Student Community against Rape and Sexual Violence (SCaRSV) is an organisation founded by A B M Mahmodul Hasan in 2015, which aims to protect the rights of women and girls across Bangladesh. "I was born with male privilege," says Mahmodul. "I wanted to do something to break the gender bias, and an incident of rape at TSC in 2014 was a wake-up call for me." Soon, he gathered students and organised a parade to stand up for the rape victim until justice prevails. The incident inspired him to take a firm stance against rape and sexual violence, leading to the formation of SCaRSV. Until 2017, SCaRSV organised different road parades, protesting against sexual violence and gender discrimination. "Due to fellow social workers being students, we often have to restrict our



A B M Mahmodul Hasan.
PHOTOS: COURTESY

actions and protests thinking of their futures," adds Mahmodul. Members of the organisation hosted a press conference in 2017 at Dhaka Press Club, where they discussed their goals with many noted human rights activists and NGOs. SCaRSV initiated the project, 'Raise Human, Bring Light', the same year, reaching out to educational institutions in different districts. It included running awareness programmes at educational institutions against rape and sexual violence, operating a quick response team for any kind of violence against women all over the country, as well as a 24/7 hotline for helping victims from all corners of Bangladesh. Under this project, SCaRSV continues to provide law and technical support as well as raise social awareness across social media. So far, they have reached 850 educational institutions. The organisation found out that less than two percent schools in the country have sexual harassment committees, during their

campaigns. In 2020, after a Dhaka University student was raped in Kormitola, SCaRSV submitted a 'Six Point Demands Memorandum' to the government. Among other things, it included the formation of a special cell under the Home Ministry for quick response on sexual violence-related cases. "The evidence of rape disappears from a victim's body if they take a shower, and naturally, after 48 hours," says Mahmodul. "How can they prove the rape if law enforcers take days to register, investigate, and submit the case to court?" Furthermore, SCaRSV plans to mark unsafe roads for women, showing where CCTV cameras are absent around the city, under their project 'Safe City for Women', which will be presented to the city councillor. The organisation hopes to march ahead, working towards a nation that is void of sexual violence and gender discrimination. **The author is a freelance journalist. Email: akhlakurrahmancharles@gmail.com**

INTERVIEW Celebrating the shape of you

SHANIZ CHOWDHURY

Founded in 2019, SHAPE is an innerwear brand that works with South Asian body types, to celebrate intimacy and inspire confidence. It was recently selected for the Stanford Seed Spark incubation programme. Monoshita Ayruali, the woman behind the enterprise, took a minimalistic approach that encompasses form and function so all bodies can lead more empowered lives. With different types of lingerie and cosmetics, SHAPE ensures that it stocks something for everyone. We caught up with Ayruali, who spoke about how she curated a brand that promotes inclusivity and diversity. **What made you decide to launch a body-positive lingerie brand?**

For centuries, we have been conditioned to believe, "Women need to be beautiful first, comfortable later." So comfortable lingerie always seemed like a mirage to me. I decided to introduce the notion that innerwear can not only fit, but also flatter every body type.



Monoshita Ayruali.
PHOTO: COURTESY

How will the Stanford Seed Spark incubation programme benefit SHAPE? It is a five-month programme that works with start-ups and helps them scale. We will get access to a wider network of global funds and get connected with other ventures that are operating in similar fields. The networking opportunities, expert sessions and mentorship will be instrumental in expanding our enterprise. **What challenges did you face in building this brand in a conservative country like Bangladesh?**

The biggest hurdle was starting the conversation since innerwear is a huge taboo in Bangladesh. Once we did that, it was like breaking through a glass ceiling. Since women have had the displeasure of wearing uncomfortable lingerie for decades, when the subject was broached, people eventually welcomed it with open arms. **Besides lingerie, how do you think we can fight the stigma surrounding weight?**

A lot has to do with the narrative we set for ourselves and for the women around us. We need to have healthy, body-positive discussions. Our Facebook group "Shape Girl Talk" is a platform where women voice their concerns about topics that are typically considered taboos – sex, reproductive health, mental health, marital life issues, period, and of course, innerwear choices. **What is next for SHAPE?** We plan to expand to other divisions in Bangladesh. We see international brands penetrating Bangladesh all the time but not many local brands make it abroad. So, I want to introduce SHAPE to neighbouring countries.

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NURTURING DREAMS

Weaving the way to success

ZAREEN NAWAR

Entrepreneur Shafia Shama completed her second post-graduate degree from BRAC University after more than two decades of study gap. Her journey of finding herself during those years propelled her towards success and gratification. Shafia started out with Studio Uran in 2003, after fighting with her family to pursue her dreams. She did block prints on clothing for sale all by herself with a starting capital of BDT 4,000. Her tenacity to engage with people, and get work done allowed her to easily break through professional barriers that could have been. Following her clothing line, Shafia opened a jute factory in 2007 for her brand M/S Shama, which produces biodegradable, diversified jute products such as corporate gifts, bags, and decorative items. While working as an SME trainer with Care Bangladesh, she visited several international fairs, which in turn, provided her with connections and buyers and allowed her to eventually export jute products. "In 2019, I shut down my jute factory, but the massive expansion of work in the online world encouraged me to dip my toes back into selling clothes and jute products. My clothing factory is still open, but for the orders related to jute, I outsource the finished products from different factories,"



Shafia Shama.

explains Shafia.

The same year, she was the first person from Bangladesh to qualify for a fellowship programme from Women in the Vital Voices Global Leadership Network on business, with Hillary Clinton as chairperson of the initiative. She also won the Australian Award for Women Trading Globally by the Australian government. Shafia is one of the three female entrepreneurs whose portfolio is published on the website of the project by WEconnect International and IFC, World Bank Group, which aims to create sustainable market linkages between women-owned businesses as well as local and multinational corporations in Bangladesh. She spoke on behalf of Bangladesh during the 11th Women's Affairs Ministerial Meeting in Samoa in 2016. In February this year, Studio Uran took part in an exhibition on Bangladeshi fabrics, for which Shafia presented typographic sarees with lyrics from S D Burman's songs. In the future, she looks forward to pursuing a PhD degree academically, while professionally, she hopes to see Studio Uran take flight by producing authentic Bangladeshi products that stand out amongst popular designs and brands in South Asia. **The author is a freelance journalist. Email: nawarzareen@gmail.com**

PHOTO: COURTESY



Pampered Paws Bangladesh recently celebrated their first anniversary at Purbachal.

EVENT

Pampering your pets with style

JASIYA BINTAY SHAMIM

Pampered Paws Bangladesh is the country's first ever pet grooming salon. Recently, they celebrated their first anniversary at Purbachal. The event was a successful one, featuring a pet walk, pet photography, tasty treats, face painting, and launching of membership plans. Over 50 happy dogs and cats joined the celebration. Ahona Rahman, the Founder and Head Groomer of the salon, started the initiative with her friends, Nadia Hossain and Asadur Rahman. "Hungry Paws by Pampered Paws Bangladesh offers nutritious meals and treats cooked with carefully selected ingredients that are good for dogs and cats. People can also get birthday cakes especially made for their pets. Our Trendy Paws initiative has clothes and accessories for pets," shares Nadia, who is an expert on pet food and clothes. Meanwhile, Dog Valet by Pampered Paws Bangladesh offers proper and reliable dog walkers. Asadur is a professional dog trainer. Ahona manages the salon and Paw



Key team members of Pampered Paws Bangladesh.
PHOTOS: COURTESY

Town, a hotel and daycare centre for pets by Pampered Paws Bangladesh. While some independent groomers use general anesthesia to groom animals, Ahona makes sure that does not happen in her salon, as it is detrimental for pets. With the motto, "Making every paw beautiful, one at a time", Pampered Paws Bangladesh hopes to serve pets all over the country.

The author is a freelance journalist.



Myra the cat at a grooming session in Pampered Paws Bangladesh.