

Ensure food security for their survival

SHYKH SERAJ

Dear readers, the COVID-19 pandemic has its biggest impact over people living across the world now, crippling the public health systems. It has not only affected people, but the world's most advanced economies as well. Progress of the deadly is taking toll on human lives. As a country Bangladesh heavily depends on RMG sector, remittance and of course the agriculture sector, where we need to focus more than ever.

However, Bangladesh must prepare to tackle the challenge in ensuring food security. To me, agriculture sector should get the highest priority among all the sectors since food is the centre point of our survival and agriculture is the most ancient profession which has helped people live for ages. I have been telling this in my programmes and articles since the outbreak of coronavirus in Bangladesh. For the past few weeks, it is truly appreciating that our Honourable Prime Minister has launched many initiatives including investments in the agriculture sector to tackle the challenge. To me, this sector has to be supported even more at the moment and then the health and RMG sector. If it is a case of supporting the sectors, at present we need to support the health and farming at the forefront.

We never thought this virus would fly far from China's Wuhan to the remote corners of the world. But, the reality is in front of us and we must face it with optimum awareness. Government had declared general holidays since March 26 and later extended it till May 5. However, we saw people around the country regarded it as a vacation and the social distancing is ignored. Till date, we are seeing people roaming outside their homes. And with true efforts from the doctors, law enforcers, armed forces and media, people are not just listening. I would like to notice the department of agricultural extension (DAE) in reference to harvesting paddy, maintaining social distances, which I would like to call 'physical' distance. Naturally farmers harvest paddy maintaining a good distance. But, they can do it easily maintaining six feet distance. I request the farmers to keep distance of at least five rows during harvest. One farmer will need to harvest five rows and if there is 25 rows in a field, only five farmers can do this keeping the physical distance.

DAE can work on this method and they should go for extensive training, new methodology and technology to better assist the farmers.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has requested the farmers not to keep their farmlands empty. It gives us a proper signal that we must grow diversified food, nutritious food and most importantly organic food. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina already issued a far-sighted 31-point directive in the wake of the novel coronavirus situation in the country where point 27 clearly mentions: the farmers will continue cultivation regularly and in this case government incentives will go on. So, I would stress for the input and crop damage assistance for the farmers. The crop insurance can work pretty well for the crop damage or loss. She additionally unveiled the government's plan to address the possible impact of coronavirus on the country's economy, declaring an allocation of Tk 72,750 crore (Approximately USD 8,564 million) under a set of stimulus packages. This really inspires us. She said of the allocation Tk 5,000 crore (Approximately USD 589 million) financial assistance to farmers in rural areas for boosting agricultural production.

A list of farmers should be properly chalked out so that they get the assistance. I have received news

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honours, Swadhinata Puroshkar and Ekushey Padak, respectively. He is a BIDS, Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, Hridoye Mati O Manush.



Shykh Seraj advises a farmer about personal protection on field during coronavirus outbreak.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

that people who are not involved with farming, meaning who are not farmers, are taking the support at this time of disaster. The affected farmers should get the support of seeds, fertilizers and other inputs along with other necessary needs. The price of the agricultural goods have fallen down but the price of the agricultural inputs is on the rise. The government must set a strong agency to monitor this or else there will be more haphazard. The seed price is going up; we also need to import fertilizers and particularly pesticides. Our agricultural bodies need to keep a good communication so that we can stay safe while having all the input support at the time of need.

The uncertainty of coronavirus will probably lead us to some more challenges, especially the agricultural input production will probably be hindered. It would probably have a strike on fertilizers, veterinary medicines and other inputs. So the

battle between demand and supply of inputs will be on the table. Now it's important to focus on organic fertilizers like vermicomposting. The food production must go smooth and we need to ensure that before anything else. New agricultural practices, short-duration crops, intake of low-carb and increasing the nutrition diet is a must.

We have a natural disaster coming up, that is the flood, which is going to cripple the haor areas if much assistance is not provided. We must ensure farmers harvest the Boro paddy before the flood comes. DAE should send harvester machines and all modern equipment to the haor areas of our country as we all know how important. Since the inception of Hridoye Mati O Manush, I have repeatedly mentioned that youth should get involved in farming in my programme titled Firey Chol Mati Taney (Returning to Roots). It is really praiseworthy of the Prime Minister that she has urged the youth to

contribute to the sector in this time of need. I have been promoting rooftop farming for a long time and the honourable prime minister has also requested people to use their rooftops for production. As the lockdown progresses, both harvest and sowing time is at a precarious state and necessary stimulus, assistance should be on the field right away or else the post-harvest Boro productions, both main crops, fruits and vegetables will be at stake along with Aus and Aman paddy.

If we look at the world, USA President Donald Trump on Friday announced a USD 19 billion relief programme to help US farmers cope with the impact of the coronavirus, including USD 16 billion in direct payments to producers and mass purchases of meat, dairy, vegetables and other products. The agricultural labour force in the USA are the Mexicans and these people will need to play a vital role once again to keep

the sector moving onward amid the crisis. In Germany, the government has allowed 60,000 labours to come to the country but they will have to be quarantined for 15 days under the supervision of their farm owners. In that case the farm-labourers from the northern districts who will travel to the haor areas for Boro harvest are also immigrants and they need to be regarded the same way.

It is not the right time to ponder on GDP growth, the prior concentration should be on the farming sector, the farmers, and the food. A global problem requires a global response. Food markets must function properly where the information on prices, production, consumption and stocks of food is available to the stakeholders. It will reduce uncertainty and allow producers, consumers, traders and processors to make well informed decisions which will naturally hold panic in global food markets. In a country like Bangladesh, there is no better option than informing farmers more and more on the coronavirus and how they can stay away from it. They should be alerted through media and all the other necessary means of communication.

Armed forces, police, doctors and media professionals along with different bodies of the government is really working hard to aware people in wiping out coronavirus out of the country. Ministry of food, agriculture and the social welfare can jointly come up with a mission with the help of the local administration to ensure that farmers' vegetables and crops are getting sold at a common place and at a fair price. Armed forces, local police and other authorities can assist the farmers to sell their products at a central point. The farmers will definitely need the support of transport and a selling place. Many farmers called me up and said their vegetables are getting ruined as they couldn't sell, so they are distributing among the poor farmers. It is a noble job for sure. A programme could be taken in hand by the government to ensure prices of goods. Also, if some of these products are given to the relief programmes, many other people will be benefited. We must work with solidarity to avoid the greatest humanitarian disaster. And, we must believe in the saying, 'United we stand, divided we fall.' And surely then, we will win the battle against coronavirus.

A beggar's love for the destitute

Nozim Uddin donates Tk 10,000 to UNO's fund to help poor in Covid-19 crisis

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A 70-year-old beggar in Sherpur has donated his three-year savings to the UNO's relief fund to support poor amid the countrywide shutdown to combat Covid-19.

Jhenaigati Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Rubel Mahmud took an initiative to help the poor in the crisis time. Due to this, a bank account and a bKash number were opened to receive aid. Twelve members of a local club named 'The Pacific Club' also joined the initiative as volunteers.

Club president Abu Raihan Jewel, also a filmmaker, said on Tuesday, one of their members Rokibul Islam Rokon went to Gandhigaon village in the upazila to make a list of poor people who need relief.

When he visited the house of Nozim Uddin to collect his name for relief, the latter who lives on a portion of forest land asked Rokon to take him to the UNO office as he wanted to talk to the UNO, said Jewel.

When Nozim was taken to the UNO office at noon, he donated Tk 10,000 to the relief fund. He saved the money in the last three years to repair his thatched house.

Emotional Nozim said he earned the money from begging and now he wants to return the amount to those people who have been passing days unfed or half-fed in the trying time.

Contacted, the UNO said he never experienced such an incident during his eight-year-long career.

Nozim Uddin will be supported from the government's social safety net programme in future, he said.

Total Tk 450,000 including Tk 10,000 given by Nozim has been deposited to the relief fund so far, he added.

The UNO said as the prime minister (PM) noticed the news of Nozim Uddin's contribution to serve the poor, she asked her private secretary-1 Mohammad Salahuddin to look into the matter to reach immediate help for Nozim.

The secretary asked for an estimate and a design to build a house for Nozim from special allocation of the prime minister, he said.



Nozim Uddin hands over Tk 10,000 to the UNO's fund to help poor during Covid-19 crisis in Sherpur's Jhenaigati upazila.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

"We have already prepared two designs estimating Tk 8.50 lakh and Tk 12 lakh and the estimate was sent to Deputy Commissioner of Sherpur Anar Koli Mahbub on Wednesday," said the UNO.

The government will also provide all facilities including food and treatment to Nozim during his life

time, said the UNO, adding that Nozim's wife will also get the facilities. A grocery shop will also be arranged for Nozim so that he can lead a decent life, said the UNO.

Expressing his gratitude to the prime minister, Nozim said he has never thought of a concrete house but it has been made possible because of the PM.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Education
Secondary and Higher Education Division
Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
Secondary Education Sector Investment Program
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Memo: DSHE/SESIP/SPSU/1-438/PVIP/GD-50/a/2019/944 Date: 21 April, 2020

CORRIGENDUM No. 2

This is being notified to all concerned that the following amendments are made to the Invitation for Bids and Bidding Documents of Tender Package: GD-50a for procurement of equipment for Pre-vocational and Vocational Program (PVIP) (Lot 2: General Electrical Works; Lot 3: General Electronics; Lot 4: General Mechanics) (Invitation ref. no. DSHE/SESIP/SPSU/1-438/PVIP/GD-50/a/2019/910; Dated: 12 March 2020).

This Addendum is being issued pursuant to ITB Clause-8 of the Bidding Documents:

SL	Subject to be Amended	Current Contents (Including corrigendum no.1)	Amended Contents (Contents to be read as)
1	Pre-Tender Meeting Date and Time	Pre-Bid Meeting time scheduled as 06.04.2020 at 11 Hrs. BST	Pre-Bid meeting will not be held.
2	Tender Last Selling Date and Time	26.04.2020 up to 17 Hrs. BST	12.05.2020 up to 17 Hrs. BST
3	Tender Submission Date and Time (ITB 24.1)	27.04.2020, at or before 14:00 Hrs. BST	13.05.2020, at or before 14:00 Hrs. BST
4	Tender Opening Date and Time (ITB 27.1)	27.04.2020, at 14:30 Hrs. BST	13.05.2020, at 14:30 Hrs. BST

NOTE: All other Terms and Conditions shall remain unchanged. This CORRIGENDUM No. 2 shall form an integral part of the Bidding Document.

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Memo: DSHE/SESIP/SPSU/1-439/PVIP/GD-50/b/2019/945 Date: 21 April, 2020

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3	Tender Submission Date and Time (ITB 24.1)	28.04.2020, at or before 14:00 Hrs. BST	14.05.2020, at or before 14:00 Hrs. BST
4	Tender Opening Date and Time (ITB 27.1)	28.04.2020, at 14:30 Hrs. BST	14.05.2020, at 14:30 Hrs. BST

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