



BYS and Duronto Foundation volunteers work in Atakathi, Barishal, with necessary precautions.

PHOTOS: COURTESY



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## YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

### The Art Moves 2020 International Billboard Art Competition

The Billboard Art Competition is a part of the 13th Festival of Art on Billboards Art Moves. The invitation is addressed to all the interested people, artists and students. There is no entry fee.

The artwork is supposed to be a creative response to this year's competition theme: Epidemics – a global catastrophe, a punishment, or a chance to reinvent yourself and the world?

DEADLINE: July 23, 2020 | Competitions



### Asian Development Bank – Japan Scholarship Program at the University of Auckland 2021

The Asian Development Bank – Japan Scholarship Program (ADB – JSP) was established in April 1988 with financing from the Japanese government. The aim is to provide an opportunity for well-qualified citizens of ADB's developing member countries to undertake postgraduate studies in economics, management, science and technology, and other development-related fields at participating academic institutions in the Asia-Pacific region.

DEADLINE: July 19, 2020 | Scholarships

### DSM: Brighter Living Scholarship | 2020 | One Young World

As a longstanding partner of One Young World, DSM is proud to support the Brighter Living Scholarship. Their purpose is to create brighter lives for people today and generations to come. They connect their unique competences in Life Sciences and Material Sciences to create solutions that nourish, protect, and improve performance.

DEADLINE: June 29, 2020 | Scholarships

# Strengthening communities hit by Cyclone Amphan

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Barishal Youth Society (BYS), in association with Duronto Foundation, has initiated their project 'Shompoke Bhalo Thakuk Desh', to help underprivileged families that were harshly affected by Cyclone Amphan. Currently, they are operating in a small island named Atakathi, in the suburban region of Jhalokathi, Barishal. Cinopoetic is the media partner of this project.

Atakathi is home to 25 families who have not only been hit hard by the cyclone, but have also been struggling to fulfill their basic needs such as food, clean water, and medical help, since the coronavirus pandemic hit Bangladesh in March 2020. "Amphan has left these families homeless and helpless. Most of these individuals are daily labourers who have not been able to earn since the past couple of months. Subsequently, they have been completely away from any form of funds or aid, since the country went into isolation," shares Faez Belal, Founder of BYS.

In the first phase of the project, the families were provided with food and cleaning supplies alongside other basic necessities. Their monthly food boxes consist of rice (25 kg), potatoes (5 kg), cooking oil (4 litres), onions (2 kg), flour (2 kg), lentils, salt, sugar, and spices. Other basic items such as hand and shower soaps, medicines, face masks, sanitary napkins as well as stationaries were also distributed among the families in distress. "BDT 2000 will also be donated to each family every month until things get back on track," Belal adds. "All these supplies are a token of support from 25 solvent families who are helping the Atakathi villagers in these tough times."

While hunger and destruction are prevalent in these times, many other problems also surfaced as the organisations started to visit the village before planning their initiative. "Child marriage is very common in this region and the women are not allowed to work after marriage," says Tahseen Anik, Founder of Duronto Foundation. "Around 60 women reside in this village, from which



The organisations are providing families in distress with food, medicines, soaps, face masks and sanitary napkins among other things.

33 are young girls. They are fully dependent on their husbands and fathers. With time, we have also come out with different ways to empower them."

The organisations are currently trying to promote the necessity of using sanitary

napkins to ensure menstrual hygiene among girls. "My mother has donated the first month's supply of sanitary napkins and we are currently asking our female volunteers to share and demonstrate the importance and usage of sanitary pads to the villagers," asserts Belal. Weekly medical camps are also being organised alongside the facilitation of 24-hour telemedicine services and counselling.

They plan to establish sustainable practices in the village, in the long run. Subsequently, the organisations have already started providing free seeds to help the farmers in the region. "Alongside agricultural goods, we will also be providing them with domestic animals such as chickens and ducks to rear," mentions Anik.

The initiators are currently looking for ways to empower the female population in Atakathi. They soon plan to launch a handicraft product line, especially based on *Shitolpaati*, the traditional signifier of the region, to ensure jobs and feasibility for women.

# Promoting reading for a good cause

SUMAIYA KABIR

The Pashe Achi initiative began its journey on March 22, 2020. What started as an idea of two friends to supply essential food items to only about 50 people has now turned into a whole team of volunteers helping over 6,000 families in distress, amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Founders Tahmid Hasan and Rafiul M Chowdhury saw that a few shopkeepers on the sidewalks of Nilkhet were still desperately trying to sell books even in this time of crisis, but in vain. Having spoken to these sellers, they realised that only providing them with a ration package would not suffice. Subsequently, they decided to buy their books in bulk, and resell them online at low fixed prices.

The Nilkhet shopkeepers receive financial help through the initiative, and selling the books online provide Pashe Achi with the funding they need to supply food packets to families in need across the country. Additionally, their plan promotes reading more books during self-isolation.

This initiative was not the first venture for Pashe Achi. Every struggling business has received their help somehow or the other, from areas in Panchagarh to Pabna or Kurigram.

Once a milkman said there was no one to buy his milk. Subsequently, Pashe Achi bought milk from him and supplied it to starving people on the streets.

When Tahmid and Rafiul first had their idea, they were able to supply basic food items such as rice and lentils to CNG drivers and rickshaw pullers who were struggling to put together a decent meal, but not under any banner. Once they posted on their Facebook page about it and realised a lot of people were willing to come forward and help as well, they decided to give themselves a name, and began to crowd-fund.

Soon after, when they decided to help the Nilkhet booksellers, they created 'Project Gronthomongol', which has been a success. They buy a certain number of books from the shops, mainly literature, and list them online for sale. They have been receiving almost over a hundred orders per day, and each of their customers are ordering three to four books.

However, as with every non-profit organisation, a few challenges prevail. In their whole process of collecting orders online to packaging and delivering, a large number of people are required. At present, there are only fifteen volunteers. Even if the number of volunteers increase,

there remains the problem of too many people being gathered in a single small space, which is not advised right now. As the funds coming in from selling books online are widely spent on providing food for the less fortunate, they cannot be renting a space either. "We are unable to deliver books outside of Dhaka right now," adds Tahmid, a current student of Masters in Economics at DU.

Nonetheless, Pashe Achi's efforts continue ceaselessly. It is no news that between government relief funds and multiple non-profit organisations helping the poor, the middle-class people of respected professions fall through the cracks. They are naturally hesitant to demand financial support, and are not enlisted for government help either. The organisation recently reached out to some of these families in Feni. They have sent ration packages to employees of twelve private colleges there, who have not been receiving any allowances during this crisis.

When asked about future plans, Tahmid remains optimistic. "These are unprecedented times. We cannot particularly be making plans, but we know that we want to be able to continue supporting whoever needs us the most," he concludes.



Pashe Achi volunteers provide food packets to families in need across the country.

PHOTOS: COURTESY



The Pashe Achi team bought books from Nilkhet shopkeepers in bulk. They resell the books online at low fixed prices.

