



PHOTOS: FARZANA AKHTAR

Improving the living standards of the Christian community

SADIA TAHSIN

The largest credit union in South Asia, The Christian Cooperative Credit Union Ltd, Dhaka, was founded in 1955 by Rev Fr Charles J Young CSC in Lokhhibazar. The union aims to provide the Christian community with affordable services, helping them to achieve financial viability, operational efficiency, competitive advantage, and good co-operative governance. *The Daily Star* has formed a partnership with the organisation, under which 100 copies of the newspaper are

provided to them every day, for free. "We began with 50 members and with a capital of only BDT 25. The organisation completed 64 years in July 2019. Today, it has 16 branches with 40,000 members and a net worth of BDT 750 crores," said the president, Babu M Gomes. The union actively works for the bright future of the youth in the Christian community, providing them with a wide range of facilities, including home loans and funeral support services. Christians who belong to the Garo community are highly benefitted from

these services. The union also consists of a daycare centre, which follows the Singaporean schooling system, where working parents can drop their children off. They further provide loans to students of their community for higher education, starting from BDT 1,000,000 for local universities up to BDT 4,000,000 for foreign universities. In addition, they offer part-time job opportunities under their internship programme. Currently, 50 students are participating in the programme. They also provide medical

insurance and access to a gymnasium for their members. The union also plans to open their own hospital, called Divine Mercy General Hospital, for all of their members. It will be the first hospital in Bangladesh to be built by a cooperative. Besides, the union's own medical college is set to open soon. They also have an ambulance centre, a resource and training centre and two girls' hostels, where close to 200 women are currently living. The organisation also runs their own school, with around 400 students, along

with a cultural academy, with around 200 students taking part in different programmes and workshops. They plan to initiate a nursing institute for young people. The have also partnered up with Nitol Tata to train their members in driving, given that nowadays, the demand for drivers is high. They also aim to empower women, especially those who belong to the Garo community. They plan to open a ten-storied salon training centre in Norda, to equip women with the skills that are needed to be employed at beauty salons.

Getting to know Team Positive Bangladesh

SHARMIN JOYA

Team Positive Bangladesh, consisting of eight students, won the Peer to Peer Facebook Global Digital Challenge Spring 2019, beating 500 university campaigns all around the world. The event was held in Brussels this year. The members of the team are Sousan Suha, Tousif Tanzim Ahmed, Samin Yasar and Mohammad Sifat from the Department of International Relations, Zulkernain Tasin from the Department of Robotics and Mechatronics Engineering, Saif Mostafiz from the Department of Biochemistry and

Molecular Biology, Mahdi Hasan Sarkar from the Department of Economics of University of Dhaka and Adib Reza Rongon, an A-level candidate. Besides their education, each of the members are involved in cultural and creative fields like art, music, design and others. "Our aim is to engage the youth in productive cultural activities so that they invest their energy in making positive changes, rather than going down negative paths," explains Saif. Positive Bangladesh was initiated in 2016, after the Holy Artisan tragedy in Dhaka left the team members in complete shock. The team faced many setbacks in

their initial stages. "When we approached educational institutions with our idea, many people mocked us, but others were really welcoming and allowed us to talk to their students," says Sifat. Team Positive Bangladesh shares inspirational stories to highlight the benefits of social and extra-curricular activities for the youth. Other than online activities, they host face-to-face sessions with students, during which participants are encouraged to discuss different topics open-mindedly. For conceptualising the idea for Positive Bangladesh, the team carried out thor-

ough research, speaking to law enforcement agencies and psychologists. "Young people are highly at risk of turning to crimes or facing identity crises and depression when they want everything in their lives to happen instantly," says Rongon. "Their lack of knowledge about Bangladesh's culture and roots also contributes to that. We believe that when young people are involved in activities in sports, art, music and other such fields, they become less isolated." Team Positive Bangladesh hopes to make their platform a more professional one, with volunteers and sponsors, in the near future.



ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD



PHOTO: SHAMS ASIF

Rafiq Siddique, former Managing Director of Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory, passed away in June this year at the age of 70. He also served as the Governor of Rotary Club. In March, he had written a heartfelt post about his life on his Facebook profile. We hope that his thoughts about the importance of kindness and gratefulness as we grow older will resonate with the youth.

As I've aged, I've become kinder to, and less critical of, myself. I've become my own friend. I have seen too many dear friends leave this world, too soon; before they understood the great freedom that comes with aging. Whose business is it if I choose to read, or play on the computer until 4am? I will dance with myself to those wonderful tunes of the 60s, 70s & 80s, and if I, at the same time, wish to weep over a lost love, I will. I will walk the beach, in a swim suit that is stretched over a bulging body, or deemed inappropriate for my age and will dive into the waves, with abandon, if I choose to, despite the pitying glances from the jet set. They, too, will get old. I know I am sometimes forgetful. But then again, some of life is just as well forgotten and, eventually, we remember the important things. Sure, over the years, my heart has been broken. How can your heart not break, when you lose a loved one, or when a child suffers, or even when somebody's beloved pet gets hit by a car? But broken hearts are what give us strength, and understanding, and compassion. A heart never broken, is pristine, and sterile, and will never know the joy of being imperfect. I am so Blessed to have lived enough to have my hair turning grey, and to have my youthful laughs be forever etched into grooves on my face. So many have never laughed, and too many have died before their hair could turn silver. As you get older, it is easier to be positive. You care less about what other people think. I don't question myself anymore. I've even earned the right to be wrong. So, to answer your question, I like being older. It has set me free. I like the person I have become. I am not going to live forever, but while I am still here, I will not waste time lamenting what could have been, or worrying about what will be. And I shall eat dessert every single day (if, I feel like it).