

LS PICK

Adopt an artisan and save our heritage

Sobita Modi, a woman in her early fifties, had to take charge of her life with no aid from anyone else. Having to raise her children all by herself and ensure a proper education for all of them, she had to work relentlessly, weaving cane mats (*shitol pati*) and selling them to merchants at the district bazaar in Munshiganj. Even that was not enough because at the end of the day, there would not be enough food on the table and Modi had to go empty-bellied on most days, just to be able to feed her entire household with the bare essentials. The pandemic only made things worse for Modi.

"I am a weaver for cane mats and there isn't any other trade that I am experienced in, nor are my children. I am living on leased land, borrowed money and my business has been completely put to a halt for the time being. We will all die if this continues any longer," said Modi.

Modi's livelihood is not any different from the thousands of artisan families suffering as a result of the viral pandemic.

Ashutosh, another struggling master craftsman of our country, shares his ordeal.

Born and brought up in Sonargaon, Ashutosh's family had always been related to crafting wooden dolls (*kather putul*). After years of struggle, things were finally looking up for him, as Ashutosh managed to acquire a shop at the Sonargaon Museum and display his artwork over there.

"I used to make considerable money, especially during the Baishakh festivities. A few local craft shops from the capital used to purchase my products in bulk and



sell them in the city. This pandemic ruined everything; a huge amount of money is stuck as investments. Meanwhile, my family needs to be fed, and I have no clue as to how our lives will go on if the lockdown continues any further," said Ashutosh.

These are just two separate narratives, amongst thousands suffering as a result of COVID-19.

The artisan community, in general, are unique. They are an extremely talented

and fine-skilled group of people who choose not to master any other skill during their lifetime because they wish to hone their already existing skills and achieve brilliance.

"The various master craftsmen of our society help illustrate our heritage and legacy. Without them, we would not even have an identity. So, it is imperative that we save these skilled groups of people, strengthening the local economy in return and safeguard our cultural identity, especially during the prevalent crisis situation," stated Maheen Khan, the Founder President of Fashion Design Council of Bangladesh (FDCB).

Based on this understanding, FDCB has taken the pledge to support the most vulnerable artisan communities of our country, which include the high risk, elderly, and impoverished section of the craft society. FDCB is also seeking support in their noble venture to be able to reach out extensively and for a worthy period of time.

"Our initiative is currently meant for three months. Each month, we hope



to provide the artisan families in the mentioned category, with Tk 5,000 cash assistance, so that their basic necessities are met and they can survive through the temporary fallout," assured Khan.

For the time being, both Ashutosh and Sobita Modi's families have been facilitated with donations under the #ADOPTANARTISAN program by FDCB, and many more families such as theirs can be helped if only the rest of us unite and lend a hand to the fashion council's noble initiative.

Only a united effort in these times of crisis can help protect and support the artisan communities who have been persistently putting Bangladesh at the forefront of the global arena for the longest conceivable time.

By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury

Essentials —

#ADOPTANARTISAN

FDCB BKASH: 01707063537

Photo courtesy: Maheen Khan



WISDOMTOOTH

BY SANIA AAMAN

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Help the helpers: support the extended hand

In these days of the pandemic, as we practice social isolation as a family, I have been the one designated with any tasks that required venturing out of the house. Even though these trips were few and not too far, every time I stepped outside of the house a distinctly more dire situation was observable. These snippets, when extrapolated, indicate to increasingly difficult times for many. Numerous people asking/demanding money desperately, visibly destitute yet shy alms seekers, and of course a smattering of goonish extorters, are all a large part of the outside landscape.

As even large companies struggle with salary expenses, thousands of little businesses and service personnel who all depend on a steady flow of freelance work to stay afloat are even worse off, and are cutting expenses. As the multiplier effect kicks in, the trickle-down dries up, large swathes of the society desperately flounder on the brink of utter destitution, and many have fallen over. Many of these people are otherwise quite self-sufficient, making do with their hard work and resilience in normal times.

In all of this doom and gloom, the one golden ray of hope is the sheer gargantuan relief effort being run by the private sector. The resolute dedication hundreds of people have displayed in extending a helping hand is truly amazing. While personal networks have been tremendous, so has been social media in bringing together donors and groups of people with relief plans and determination to create a difference.

Ramadan is when many of us pay off our zakats, and do any extra charity we can. In the run up to this Eid, let us join our hands some more. Of course, we can all individually pick families or people we take services from and support them month-to-month. We can also try seek out some of the following groups, who are also doing a tremendous job, for people, and even for the stray animals who depend on our daily lives for their sustenance.

SHAHAJJO

Shahajjo (*tader jonno amader cheshta*), formed out of the individual efforts of a number of friends. The group has reached more than 2,500 families with

relief packages of various sizes. The entire effort has been executed with a different approach, as some of the members have previous experience and current connections with development agencies. This has helped them identify and reach pockets of struggling population who otherwise often fall through the cracks of large-scale relief work. Typically, this includes lower middle-income citizens, small service holders, sections of marginalised communities like transgenders, people caring for family members with special needs — all who have fallen into unforeseen troubles.

Shahajjo delivers various types of care packages to many different urban areas, including Mohammadpur, Old Dhaka, Keraniganj, Mirpur, Hajariabagh, Khilgaon, Uttara, Bhatara, etc. Connect via Facebook or call 01918937840.

OBOLASHROYE

One of the newer organisations working for stray animals, taking up the responsibility to distribute food to numerous hungry stray cats and dogs all over the city, is this non-profit. One can sponsor one animal

for an entire month for just Tk 750, or Tk 500 to feed 20 dogs once. They also work on rescue and rehabilitation of injured and sick animals and aim to increase awareness and action for protection of animal rights.

Connect via Facebook or call/Bkash 01728871732.

Jagoron (01986070403), Dhaka COVID-19 Crisis Relief (01952720385), Chattogram COVID-19 Crisis Relief, members of Care for Paws, Pashe Achi Initiative (01975888855) are just some of the groups that can use financial support. On the international front, UNHCR, and many other organisations make regular appeals for funds on social media, and even our small donations can make a huge difference in the lives of the people that they reach.

The economic crisis created by the prolonged lockdown is likely to have far reaching effects on the financial situation of millions of people, and although it is the government's job, it is just not feasible for them to reach everyone in a country like ours. Let us join the effort, however we can.