

COPING WITH PANDEMIC

'Pashey Darao' only a phone call away

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Members of 'Pashey Darao', a voluntary organisation in Chirirbandar upazila, has won the hearts of locals by standing beside the helpless who contracted Covid-19 or lost their livelihoods due to restrictions imposed to curb the pandemic.

The organisation was established amid the first wave of the outbreak last year, on March 6, when drivers of vehicles, including those driving ambulances, had been refusing to transport Covid patients.

Launched initially with a handful of members, Pashey Darao now has 120 members, split in 12 teams to serve residents of all 12 unions in the upazila.

Laila Banu, chief adviser of the organisation and also the elected woman vice-chairman of Chirirbandar Upazila Parishad, said their primary objective is to help out the less fortunate in the upazila.

But after the pandemic broke out, they have been focusing on building Covid-19 awareness and providing all necessary support, including distributing food and logistics, to Covid patients in the upazila.

Their awareness campaigns could be credited for the low infection rate of the disease in the upazila where 238 people have been tested positive since April 14 last year till May 28 this year, she said.

Aside from distributing food aid to the poor during the month of Ramadan, Pashey Darao has been bringing food at the doorsteps of those who have been unable to provide meals for their families after their earnings shrunk or stopped due to various restrictions enforced to contain the virus.

All the team members contribute to raise necessary funds for their humanitarian activities,



Pashey Darao volunteers approaching a shanty, beside a rail track in Dinajpur's Chirirbandar upazila, to distribute food aid.

PHOTO: STAR

Laila Banu added.

Mahfuzul Islam Asad, convener of Pashey Darao, said so far they provided support to at least 100 Covid patients in the upazila and their teams in each union are always on standby to provide any assistance Covid patients require during home quarantine.

They also distribute face masks and hand sanitizers to the lower-income group of the society.

Pashey Darao has been standing by the distressed even when ambulance drivers had refused to transport Covid patients. In

acknowledgement of the effort, concerned citizens in Chirirbandar came forward and donated the organisation two ambulances, which are being used to carry Covid patients to and from hospitals in Dinajpur and Rangpur, he also said.

A local Covid patient who received assistance from Pashey Darao said, "Covid patients and their families in some places sometimes feel dejected due to non-cooperation of their neighbours. But the patients now can rest assured that help from the members of Pashey Darao is only a phone call away."

Magura litchi growers happy with good yield, fair price

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

The litchi growers of Magura are happy with good yield and fair price of their produce.

Magura is the best litchi growing district among the six districts in Jashore region.

According to Magura Department of Agricultural Extension, in 2019-20 fiscal year 580 hectares of land were brought under litchi cultivation while 588 hectares of land have been cultivated in 2020-21 season.

In 2019-20 season 5,730 metric tonnes of litchi worth Tk 30 crore were harvested in Magura, however, it is expected that litchi worth Tk 35 crore might be sold this year.

This correspondent visited some litchi orchard of Khalimpur village under Magura Sadar upazila.

Ronju Hossain, a litchi grower of

Farmer Tokon Khandakar said the variety he cultivated became matured at least 15 days earlier than other varieties in Bangladesh.

cultivated became matured at least 15 days earlier than other varieties in Bangladesh for which he has got a good price.

Litchi trader Palash Hasan said he is purchasing litchi at Tk 800 to 1000 per thousand from the owners. He hoped that he will be able to sell them at Tk 1600 to 2000 per thousand.

He also said that the cost of harvesting



Growers at a litchi orchard in Magura Sadar upazila all smiles over fair prices of the juicy fruit.

PHOTO: STAR

Magura police lines area, said that he has cultivated litchi in 10 orchards this year, spending Tk 50 thousand for irrigation, fertilizer and pest control purposes. He has already sold litchi worth Tk 2 lakh.

He cultivated Bombay variety and local improved variety (LIV), which is very tasty and delicious.

Another farmer Tokon Khandakar of Khalimpur village said he has cultivated litchi in eight orchards this year. He has sold the fruits at Tk 1.60 lakh. He has spent only Tk 30 thousand for the cultivation.

He also added that the variety he

is high this year because of labour crisis.

Deputy Director (DD) Sushanta Kumar Pramanik of Magura DAE said Magura is famous for litchi. This district stands supreme among other six districts in Jashore region. The harvesting has not been completed yet. It will continue till the last week of May. The farmers of Magura get high price as this variety gets matured 15 days earlier than other varieties of Bangladesh.

A plant can provide litchi for 20 to 25 years at a stretch if it is taken proper care, he added.

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Tax cut galore

FROM PAGE 1

products like cars, in a move similar to the Narendra Modi government's 'Make in India' initiative.

The tax holiday would be extended for another 10 years on certain conditions, according to finance ministry officials.

The provision of a 10 percent value-added tax on locally-manufactured sanitary products would be lifted, in yet another move aimed at diverting consumers away from imports.

The advance income tax for raw material imports for domestic manufacturing would be trimmed by 1 percentage point to give a lift to industries battered by the pandemic.

The pandemic has left the country's health infrastructure woefully exposed, and with the view to addressing the problem, the government has decided to extend a tax holiday for 10 years for constructing hospitals outside of Dhaka with at least 250 beds.

There would be tax benefits by way of lower corporate tax for setting up vocational training centres, in a move aimed at upskilling abundant available labour and taking advantage of the country's demographic dividend that will wind down from 2035.

The pandemic has turbocharged digitalisation and brought to the fore the convenience of technology.

In keeping with that spirit and in preparation for the fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), nine more ICT services such as cloud service, e-learning platforms, mobile apps, system link, e-book platforms, app developers, IT freelancers will be extended tax exemptions from next fiscal year that are currently enjoyed by 22 tech-enabled services.

The existing provision of no tax or duty on imported computers and their spare parts will continue, while there would be tax exemption for local manufacturing of computers.

The provision for legalising untaxed income unquestioned in this fiscal year's budget would continue. The scope to whiten black money has been open for decades but subject to the payment of a penalty and limited to a few sectors. Until the last fiscal year, the government agencies could raise questions about the source of the money declared.

But in fiscal 2020-21, the government expanded the scope for all sectors and dropped the provision to question the source, with the view to generate more revenue and jobs.

In the first nine months of the fiscal year, taxpayers legalised a record Tk 14,295 crore by showing their wealth in the form of cash, fixed deposit receipts, saving certificates and shares. The National Board of Revenue (NBR) got Tk 1,439 crore in taxes.

Since independence, Tk 30,823 crore has been whited, which fetched about Tk 3,900 crore for the state coffers.

There would be no need to present the Taxpayer's Identification Number (TIN) for purchasing savings certificate of up to Tk 2 lakh from the next fiscal year. At present, the TIN needs to be furnished for savings certificate purchase of Tk 1 lakh and above.

The interest rate on the national savings certificate, whose sales have shot through the roof for its lucrative returns in contrast to other instruments, would be brought down by 1 percentage points.

At present, the average interest rate on national savings instruments is 11.4 percent.

The wealth surcharge structure, which applies to those with a net wealth of Tk 3 crore, would be revamped, too.

The number of slabs would be brought down from seven to five.

An individual taxpayer having a net wealth of Tk 50 crore or above shall pay the higher of 0.25 percent of net wealth or 35 percent of his/her income tax payable as a surcharge in the next fiscal year.

At present, it is 0.1 percent of net wealth or 30 percent of income tax.

The penalty for VAT evasion would be brought down too to give some leeway to businesses amid the pandemic.

At present, the penalty is twice the amount of VAT evaded. From the next fiscal year, it would be the same amount evaded.

Companies employing transgender people would get corporate tax cuts as well as other benefits.

The measures are expected to fetch the government Tk 330,000 crore, 9.6 percent more than fiscal 2020-21's revised revenue collection target and the same as this year's original target.

In the first 10 months of this fiscal year, the revenue authority managed 12.7 percent higher receipts of Tk 197,583 crore, and tax officials expect the full year collections to be no more than Tk 280,000 crore.

This begs the question of how the government would manage the higher collections next fiscal year amid the wave of tax relief.

Kamal is pinning his hopes on a 7.2 percent economic growth, inflation, rising imports, deployment of electronic fiscal devices and expansion of income tax -- all of which will set the state coffers ringing.

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