

TIGERS

VS

COVID-19

Two cartoon-style tiger heads are positioned between the words 'TIGERS' and 'COVID-19'. The tiger on the left is orange and white, looking towards the right. The tiger on the right is yellow and white, looking towards the left. They are facing each other as if in a confrontation. The word 'VS' is written in a stylized, blocky font between them.

TALES OF
FEROCIOUS ACTS OF KINDNESS

This book has been commissioned by UNDP Bangladesh and produced by HerStory Foundation.

The stories in this book were collected through a nationwide open call for nominations in June 2020. The stories were selected based on merit, impact and the power to celebrate acts of kindness big and small that tackle the effects of COVID. The COVID heroes are represented as tigers to symbolize the heroism innate in all.

We have researched and verified the validity and integrity of the characters and their work, however we cannot take responsibility for what they do in the future and hope our readers will take away the positive message of this book. We wish our Tigers all the best in their journeys and hope that our readers will follow in their pawprints.

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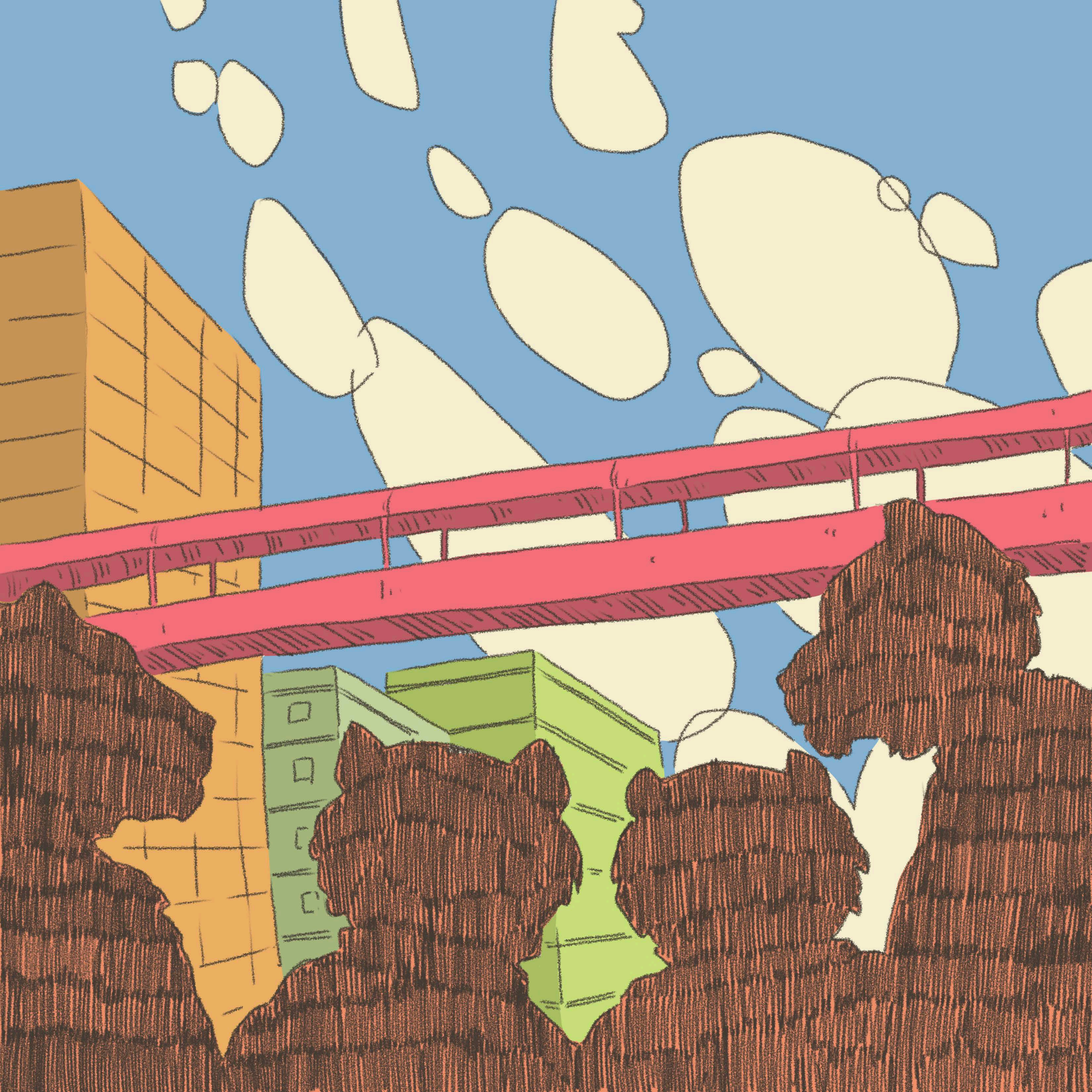
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When we look back on 2020 we will remember the many tragic effects of COVID-19. But above all else, we must recall the regular people who rose to the occasion to provide support and aid through acts of kindness big and small.

This book is dedicated to that tiger spirit which motivates the front-liners, volunteers, service providers, and mobilizers who continue to roar in the face of danger.



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FEROCIOUS
ACTS OF
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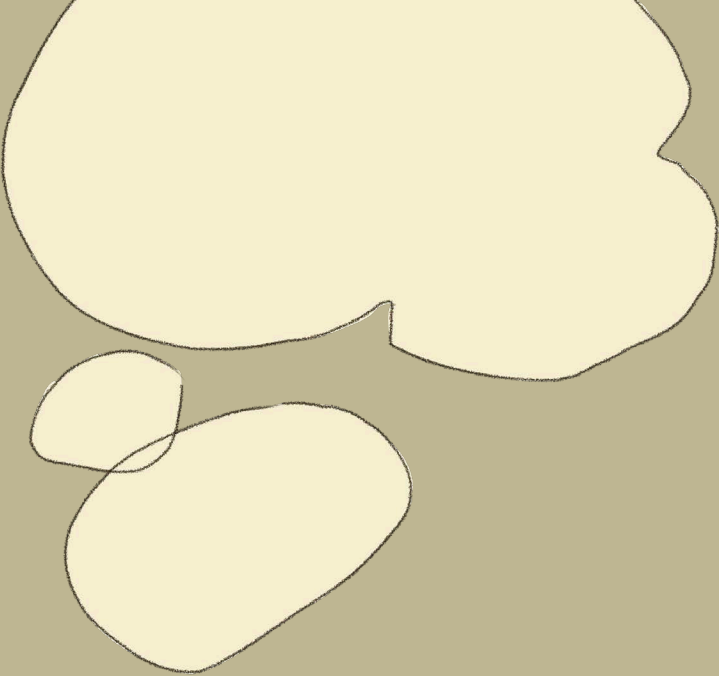
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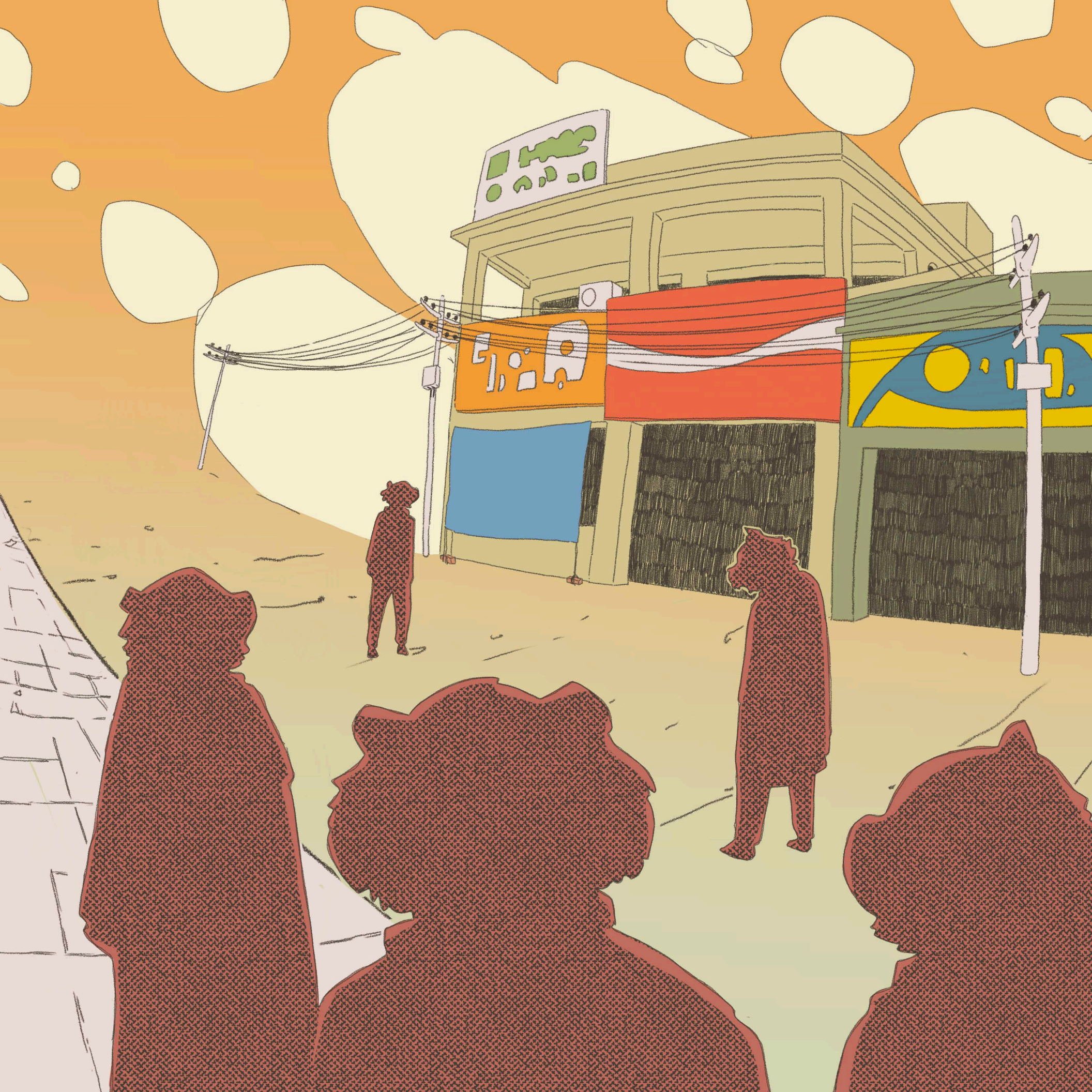




On New Year's day of 2020 people woke up to a normal day. They rode the bus, stood in line at the shop, visited friends and family. The next day, kids sat together in class and played tag during recess. Traffic was busy like usual, markets were bustling and streets were swarming with crowds.

All this would soon come to a sudden stop.







By March, cities and villages across Bangladesh looked deserted. Millions of people were forced into isolation. Schools and offices shut down. Traffic disappeared.

A new and highly contagious virus called COVID-19 affected not just people's physical health but every aspect of life, from social to personal to professional.

But then, out of everywhere, the Tigers began to rise.





1



TIGERS FEED

When life as we knew it came to a halt, so did the economy. Thousands of people lost their jobs. Daily wage-earners, such as construction workers, rickshaw pullers and street-side hawkers, could no longer earn enough money to survive.

These hardworking people could not support their families to buy the basics of rice and daal, let alone the soap needed to kill the virus. People started to say that if COVID-19 did not kill you, the hunger would.

But all across the country, the Tigers began to share their money and food, organizing drives to feed those who were suffering the most.



TAHNIAT BUSHRA WAHEEDI, 23

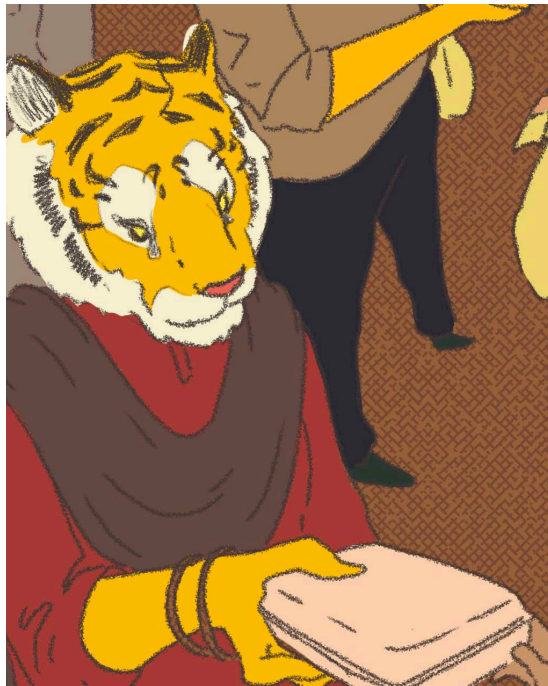
Staying safe at home during the pandemic was not an option for everyone. In a country where a proportionally large number of people sustains on daily wages, for many staying at home meant going hungry. Bushra focused her efforts on raising funds for hardest-hit families who would have to risk their lives to earn a living. She started by setting up a Facebook group to bring awareness to their plight and raise money. Over the course of several weeks, Bushra was able to raise over Tk 14 lakh. She used the money to purchase food, soap, masks, medicine, and other supplies, which were then distributed among 3,400 families.

'It's very important to be hopeful in this dire time. This is a chance for us to show up for our fellow human beings and positively impact society. Hope and resilience keep me going forward.'

NADIA SARKER, 35

Nadia took it upon herself to feed over 200 people every day during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This lone warrior fared out every day with a mission to feed rickshaw-pullers, CNG drivers, and anyone struggling to survive, in and around Dhaka. Nadia also fed people in need back in her home village of Dinajpur. Nadia has managed to feed over 500,000 people so far, and justly received at least five nominations to be featured in this publication.

'I worry about the people who are at risk in the line of duty and marginalized communities. When I started working with these people, more than receiving the food I think what they appreciated most is me saying "Thank You" to them for their contributions to society. We need to make these people feel valued for their hard work and resilience.'



MOSHIUR SHAFI, 18

Moshiur and his group of friends are investors - but not the ordinary kind. They invest in smiles. All sorts of smiles - smiles of joy, smiles of relief, and smiles of gratitude. When the pandemic hit, the young volunteers did not hesitate to alleviate people's hardships.

With hearts full of hope and pocketfuls of Eid *salami*, savings and donations amounting to Tk 200,000, they set out to help out.



Moshiur and his team started off in North Bengal where they distributed food to over 500 people. Every day during the month of Ramadan, they distributed iftar to over 600 families who had lost their livelihoods.

Cyclone Amphan created an atmosphere of terror and distress in the coastal regions of Bangladesh when the country was already in a state of panic. The team was quick to respond with aid in the affected areas. They ventured into a very remote area in the Sundarbans to supply monthly rations of food and necessities to the local communities.

Apart from food and financial aid, Moshiur distributed sanitary napkins to over 150 women in Jhalakathi district. In Bogura, they bought potato chips for some 3,500 children. With their Eid *salami*, the volunteers committed to help at least one family in their own neighborhood. They came to the aid of our furry friends as well and fed hundreds of street animals.

'I want to work tirelessly until my local area is free of COVID-19. I want to do something for my society when it needs me the most.'



TANBIR HASSAN SHAIKAT, 27

Thousands of people migrate to Dhaka, the bustling capital of Bangladesh, every week from the villages. From ambitious students to hardworking day laborers, this city is populated by people who survive and thrive in search of a better life. The pandemic cut many of these city dwellers off from their sources of income. Students who could only afford to live on-campus on a small income from tutoring, were evicted from their dorms and unable to teach. Middle-class families who survived on meager salaries and laborers who survived day to day also had their means of income taken away.

Tanbir understood the plight of these vulnerable groups and set up an immediate charity system through which he collected donations to provide food and supplies to them. He arranged for food to be distributed to some 2,000 people twice a day from TSC in Dhaka University, with full maintenance of safety guidelines. He helped 150 students who have no source of income due to the pandemic. His mission to help the vulnerable extended to middle-class families as well, at least 200 of whom were assisted with groceries.

His mission to help the vulnerable and voiceless will continue as long as he keeps receiving donations from the privileged section of the society.

‘Hope is seeing the light in the darkness. The year 2020 is a very difficult year for the world and especially for developing countries. So we have to look after ourselves, and we have to cooperate with government initiatives. Good will and hope can give us the power to overcome this difficult situation together.’



MD MAMUN BISWAS, 32

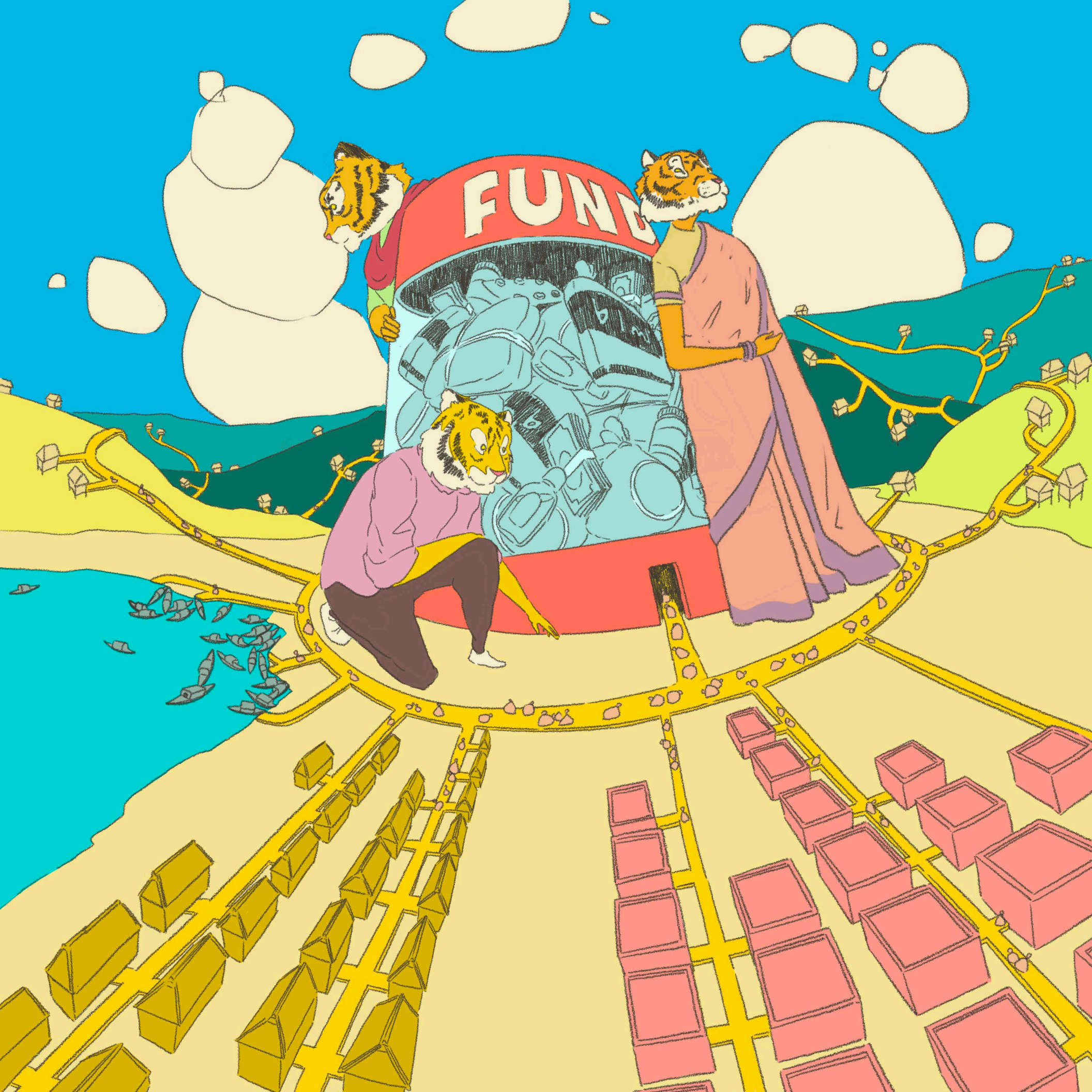
In 2014 Mamun suffered the loss of his only child. His newborn son had died just 36-hours after birth. Mamun had all the resources at hand, but there was no treatment to save his child's life. That's when he truly realized the difficulty and tragedy faced by those who don't have access to healthcare or the right resources. For them illness and injury are always a matter of life and death.

From then onwards he pledged to help those in need, in whichever way he could. Everyday Mamun makes it his mission to lend a helping hand, whether it be to a homeless child or a bird with a broken wing. When the COVID-19 restrictions came into effect, Mamun distributed masks, disinfectants, and informative leaflets alongside food to 3,200 families in Sirajganj and Khulna.

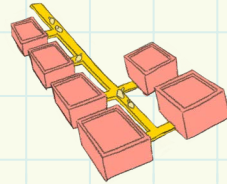
He used his Facebook page and his contacts to raise funds, and with the help of local officials, he was able to reach hundreds of people in his area. He installed a tube-well in Khulna's Amphan affected area and distributed relief packs before Eid to families. He also distributed food to the most neglected groups -- widows, people with disabilities, and Rohingya refugees. Mamun provided medical assistance to 60 people, helped 19 with their educational expenses, assisted in funding the construction of 41 houses, and distributed relief among 1,833 flood-affected families. He also provided 21 wheelchairs, helped in finding nine missing persons, and bought two sewing machines for two women in need.

Everyone's needs are different and Mamun was able to address them and help in personalized ways.

‘I am supplying food, masks, soap, and information to people who lost their jobs to COVID-19 - particularly in remote areas. To do this I travel by buses, bikes, boats and vans. I am optimistic people are slowly becoming more aware and are trying to move ahead while maintaining necessary precautions.’ 🐾



2

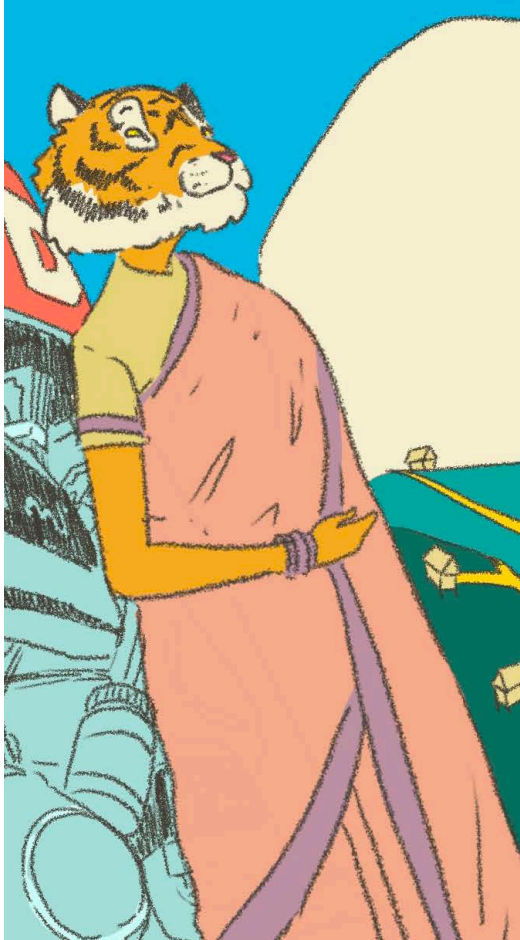


TIGERS SHARE

COVID-19 affected everyone.

But the poor were hit the hardest. With little savings, low access to funds and no way to pay the growing bills for education, housing, electricity and food, many people were sinking deeper and deeper into debt.

As a response the Tigers went on- and off- line to raise money for those most in need of financial support. In times of crisis, everyone can be a hero and people of all ages and backgrounds stepped up to collect, donate and distribute funds to communities all across the nation.



**JUNEYNA FRANCES KABIR, 26
& MAHIA RAHMAN, 25**

Juneyna and Mahia set up a not-for-profit resource sharing platform called Resource Coordination Network Bangladesh (RCNB) on Facebook. The network pools together resources and funds to support small organizations that help people combat the COVID-19 crisis in ways big and small.

RCNB is responsible for connecting donors to organizations and independent groups. They also provide funding, link bulk suppliers and distributors and provide information and advice. In addition, the two friends organized their own drives to distribute food and protective equipment for medical staff and garbage workers. Using their networks, Juneyna and Mahia raised 300,000 taka. About three weeks into their activities, they connected with an Bangladeshi-American who had raised \$16,000 (approximately Tk 13 lakh) through Facebook and was looking for a proper channel to use the funds.

Within a short span of time, he became a core team member, and together they conducted many drives together.

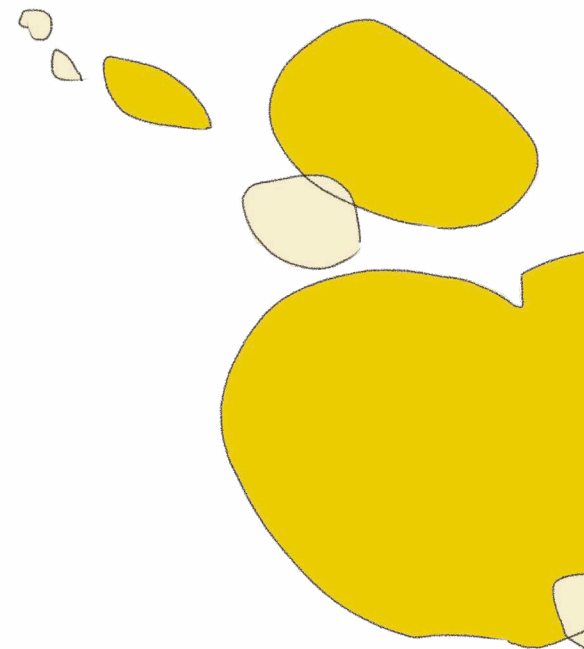
Bangladesh is a country with a diverse population and too often the most marginalized among them are the indigenous communities. RCNB provided food relief to the Santal community and the Bede, a nomadic river-based community.

RCNB works to help the people who live outside traditional aid networks such as waste collectors and sex workers. The volunteers provided hygiene kits consisting of personal protective equipment (PPE), gloves, sanitizers and bleaching powder to the waste collectors and food relief to the sex workers and their children. Monthly food rations were given to garments factory workers. Sanitary napkins were sent to female madrasa students.

The platform also organized countless food drives in and around Dhaka and the areas in the Southern region of Bangladesh where families are struggling in the aftermath of the cyclone Amphan.



‘RCNB will keep collaborating with diverse, youth-led initiatives to help the socioeconomically disadvantaged communities of Bangladesh. The leaders behind simple yet impactful ideas coming together with vigilant volunteers and communities is our biggest strength. This is what makes us optimistic about overcoming any calamity as a nation.’





‘I believe hope is stronger than fear. But we must be careful. If we face challenges tactfully, there is nothing we can’t overcome.’ 🐾

AHMED IMTIAZ JAMI, 27

Ahmed Imtiaz Jami heads the Obhizatrik Foundation. Thousands of young volunteers of the foundation work tirelessly throughout the year to bring about positive social change. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the foundation raised around 1.2 crore taka in funds which were used to support 65,000 families across Bangladesh. The foundation provided monthly food assistance to families in Dhaka, Rangpur, Khagrachhari, Kushtia, Sylhet, Chittagong, Lakshmipur, Patuakhali, Galachipa and several other Upazilas to alleviate the economic strains of the crisis. The volunteers worked day and night to distribute iftar during Ramadan and medical supplies in hospitals.

The foundation’s project ‘Bina Poyshar Bazar’, a makeshift marketplace which provided staple food for free, served 200,000 people. Through their various activities, Obhizatrik Foundation touched over 600,000 lives and is continuing their noble efforts.



3



TIGERS SUPPORT

There were many invisible side-effects to the COVID-19 outbreak.

People of all walks of life felt depressed and frustrated about having to stay indoors. Service providers like medical workers and security forces had to deal with fear and uncertainty.

Tigers made time to listen and offer help without discrimination; serving all, including the animals of the cities, who were left to wander the deserted streets, with no cafe or restaurants open to scavenge leftovers from.



TAWHIDA SHIROPA, 33

As more and more people were forced to stay home, struggling to maintain their mental health, Shiropa noticed that while there was a lot of talk about physical health, not much was being done to take care of the detrimental impact of COVID-19 on people's psychological well-being.

Back in 2016 Shiropa started 'Moner Bondhu', a mental healthcare and well-being platform. She knew the importance of mental health and after the pandemic took hold, she understood that it would shake many people to the core. Shiropa took it upon herself to offer assistance by providing free 24/7 video and tel-counseling to people all over Bangladesh. She also released several free guided meditations in Bangla on their website and online pages.

'Through persistent effort we have taken a holistic approach to mental healthcare. We are strongly advocating for awareness, mindfulness and openness of mind. I believe, to fight the pandemic there is no other alternative than a healthy mind.'

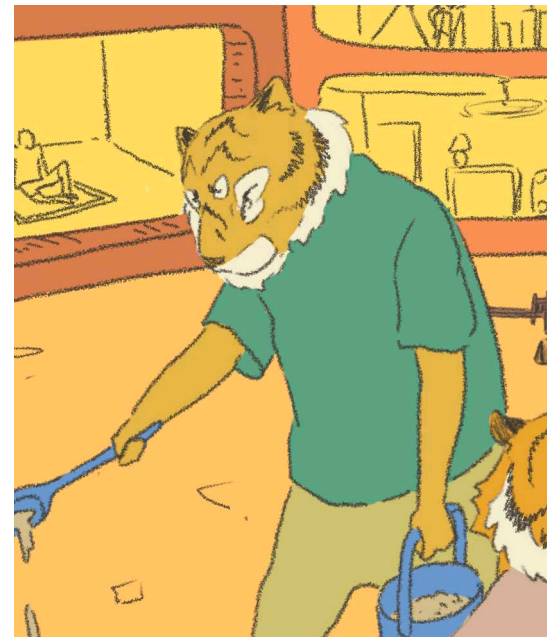
KISHOR KUMAR DAS, 35

As the founder of 'Bidyanondo Foundation', Kishor has always worked with the most vulnerable communities in Bangladesh - building schools, orphanages, infirmaries, hostels and providing legal aid or food support around the year. He works twice as hard during humanitarian emergencies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bidyanondo undertook one of the most extensive and thorough community support initiatives. They distributed approximately 20,000 cooked meals across Bangladesh, sprayed disinfectant in public spaces and transport vehicles, made and distributed masks, PPE and sanitizer and also provided relief packs to 350,000 families with support from the government.

Their most noteworthy initiative is CMP-Bidyanodo Field Hospital in Patenga, Chattogram, a 100-bed hospital built to provide proper treatment to those living below the poverty line. The hospital is administered by 12 doctors, 18 nurses, and 50 volunteers. During the pandemic, their projects have supported children, families with no income, the third gender community, refugees, sex workers, widows, and those hit by cyclone Amphan.



'We took a comprehensive approach to providing support - we made sure everyday needs are met and at the same time built up our fellow citizens for the future, helping them become self-reliant.'



RAKIBUL HAQ EMIL, 32

When the cities of Bangladesh went under full lockdown, the streets were deserted, and stray animals were left wandering and wondering where their friends and food had disappeared to. That is when Rakibul Haq Emil and his associates came to the aid of our four-legged friends.

In 2015 Emil founded 'People for Animal Welfare' (PAW) Foundation, an organization of animal activists. He had always believed in raising awareness on animal rights to protect the innocent creatures from abuse.

At a time when rumors of transmission from pets were running rampant,

Emil sent legal notices to several departments of the government to stop the spread of misinformation. PAW fed stray animals and birds, including dogs, cats and monkeys as there were no food sources on the streets. For over three months, they fed over 30,000 animals in Dhaka, Jashore and Khulna providing around 70 thousand meals.

“This pandemic taught us to be more empathetic to the helpless ones. That’s why I am hopeful that human beings will keep learning and growing more responsible to protect animals and nature.”

SALAH UDDIN HERO, 28

One of the most pressing issues arising from the COVID-19 crisis was burials. Families were unable to provide proper dignified burials because of fear of



contamination. With the death toll rising every day, many families couldn't find the additional resources for a safe burial, while already dealing with the pressure of grief. In the immediate aftermath of the

COVID-19 outbreak, both hospital authorities and funeral homes often refused to take responsibility for completing the deceased's last rites. Hero understood the struggle. He works along with two organizations in Chattogram, 'Shebai Dhormo' and 'Projonmo Lohagara', to provide both burial services and funeral prayers, easing the pain of families that have already lost so much. In the future, Hero plans to set up an isolation centre in Chattogram to help those in his community.

‘I am always ready to be by the side of the people throughout epidemics, disasters, floods and other bad times.’



ALL THE PEOPLE WHO STAYED HOME

One of the hardest, yet most effective ways of combating the spread of COVID-19 is to stay home. For a lot of people, this meant not going to work, not experiencing nature and staying away from their families for months on end. The isolationists, understood that staying in was (and is) a matter of life and death for many. We acknowledge all the people who stayed home and did their part to help slow the spread of COVID-19, as well as those who could not afford to, for economic and professional reasons. 🐾



4



TIGERS RELIEVE

In May 2020, during the first wave of the virus, Bangladesh, a country in the delta region that remains highly vulnerable to climate change, was hit by Cyclone Amphan. The storm devastated many towns, villages and chars (islands) in the south of the country.

Following this natural disaster, in the months of July and August, the nation experienced heavy rainfall resulting in a flooding crisis amidst the pandemic. But Tigers braved the weather to help communities tackle the storms and build their lives back up from the silt.



BUSHRA HUMYRA ESHA, 30

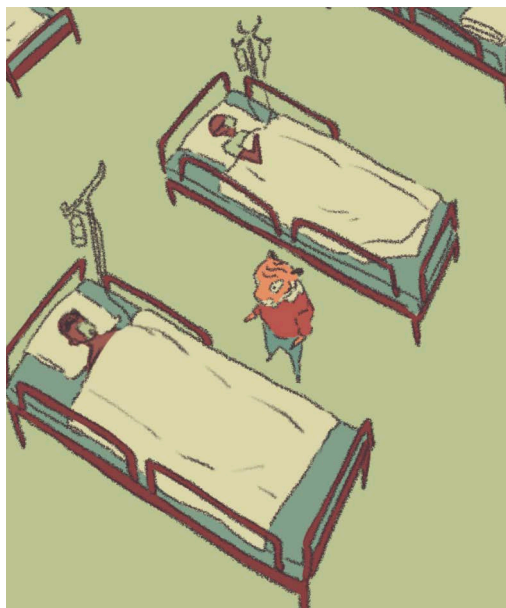
With two calamities happening in the country at the same time, there was a major scarcity of food, and people in the remotest areas were deprived of basic necessities. Every day Bushra would read news about the sufferings of people across Bangladesh. Inspired by her friend who made a plea on Facebook for donations for the displaced Bihari population of the Geneva camp, she decided to join in.

Bushra managed to raise enough money to supply 400 food aid packs that contained three months' supply of grains such as rice and lentils.. To consolidate her efforts, she set up the aptly named Facebook group, 'Privileged for Underprivileged' through which she raised 20,00,000 taka. This amount went a long way - funding almost 2,000 relief packs that were distributed in the most vulnerable, diverse, and underprivileged areas of Dhaka.

Bushra also reached out to minority groups in Rangamati and Bandarban. Her team went to Bandukbhanga, a remote village, in Rangamati, distributing sanitary napkins and soap to 150 girls. It was an area with no electricity or mobile network. In Bhola and Shatkhira, two districts badly affected by the cyclone and flooding, she helped 80 families immediately after the virus struck the country, making it through a waterlogged village where most villagers were out of food.

Bushra waded through waterlogged valleys, like a true Tiger, to get to the people that needed her the most.

'Challenging periods are the best time to discover great opportunities. An immense amount of consideration and support has encouraged me to start a charity platform in which I have connected several artists and architects to contribute their artworks to support people who live in areas affected by Amphan and the indigenous people living in CHT. I have seen people are compassionate about supporting each other and I am hopeful I can keep serving the underprivileged community to alleviate poverty in Bangladesh.'



ASHFAQUE KABIR, 32

Ashfaque founded 'BEACON' (Bangladesh Emergency Action Against COVID-19) based on his experience of working with the dynamic youth of Bangladesh. He mobilized a team of volunteers in Dhaka, Mymensingh and Rajshahi, who were passionate about

youth-led community action. Ashfaq connected, advised, supported and guided them to co-design projects that reached vulnerable populations to deliver food aid during the extended lockdown period as well as after.

'BEACON' has initiated different projects supported by mass fundraising campaigns. One of its most remarkable initiatives is a successful campaign in support of healthcare workers.

In the months of the rains, when Bangladesh was struck with Cyclone Amphan which was followed by severe flooding, 'BEACON' volunteers boarded boats to jet down rivers, through wetlands and up streams, to deliver essential survival goods to communities that were entirely cut-off from air and communication. True beacons of hope!

'We should be resilient and hopeful. The valiant young volunteers have proven that they are great leaders and they have played a vital role in not only safeguarding their communities but also raising awareness. The path that the youth have carved for themselves when it comes to emergency response should give us a lot of hope and means to be resilient to face such emergencies in future.'

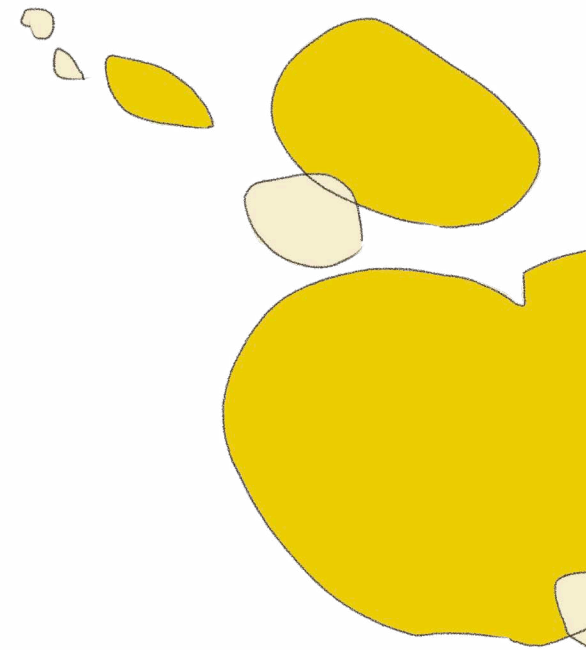
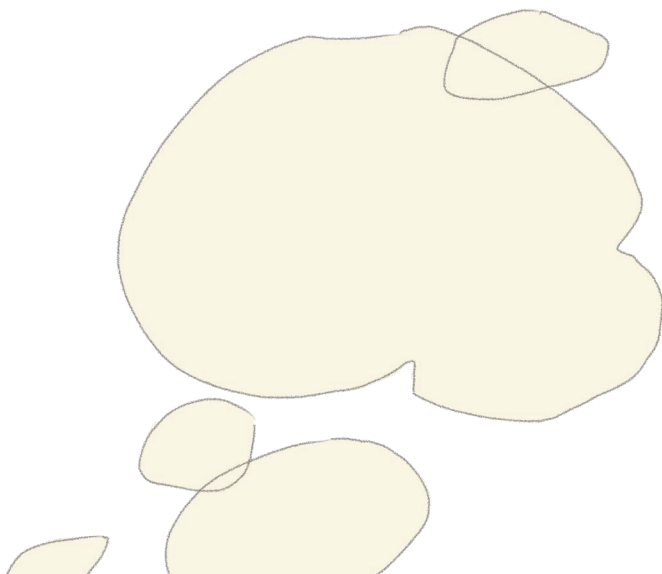


MOHAMMAD TIPU SULTAN, 24

Tipu's journey of helping people during this crisis began out of a sense of responsibility towards the less privileged. He realized that not everybody had the luxury of staying safe at home while still being able to afford food on their table and clothes on their back. He used his connections from his alma mater to gather support and funding for those in need, raising around 300,000 taka from 261 donors.

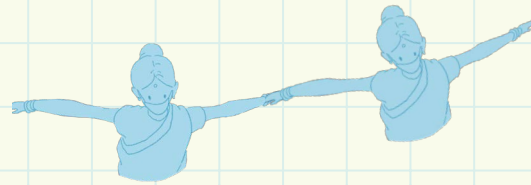
His initiative was also backed by Arla Foods Bangladesh Ltd, Mission Save Bangladesh, The Daily Star and Samakal. What started off as a small initiative is now a government registered organization that has managed to support almost 4,000 people most affected by the cyclone Amphan.

'No matter how bad the situation is, what matters is how you choose to deal with it.' 🐾





5



TIGERS SPREAD

During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, many rumors began to circulate, deepening people's fear and confusion. Many people, cut off from credible sources of information, were left in the dark about health guidelines and the 'do's and don'ts' of this unprecedented situation.

Tigers began their fight against misinformation to educate people about the dangers of the virus and how to stop its transmission.



WARDA ASHRAF, 30

In the very first days of COVID-19, Warda Ashraf and her friends started brainstorming ways to spread news and information about the outbreak. They knew that they could reach a great number of people through social media, but what would be the language and message? How could they communicate critical information to people across generations and interest groups?

Art, they thought would be the common denominator. Warda and her friends set out to create 'Art to Heart' a visual-communication initiative to raise awareness. Warda and her teammates began reaching out to artists and cartoonists asking them to donate their time to create visual messages about health. As the weeks went by and COVID-19 began to take its toll in various ways, they created awareness messages on sharing domestic work at home, the increase in violence against women and children and other critical issues.

The online platform also creates child-friendly content and shares educational activities to do during the lockdown. The content not only sheds light on the virus but also addresses its less talked about effects such as the increasing burden of household work on women and the spike in domestic violence.

The platform reached over a million people in just three months and raised funds for more than 100 families.

'If I fight alone, I will only reach so many people. But if I fight in a team with my fellow cartoonists, we can make a movement that can change our societies and create a more inclusive and just world to live in.'



MD ZUNAID, 30

Although the virus was spreading rapidly across Bangladesh, many people were not able to gauge the seriousness of it. Villagers, in particular, were for the most part, averse to wearing masks and social distancing. This new reality was too far-fetched. With villages having a high concentration of older adults, it was disconcerting for Zunaid to see such disregard for warnings and safety practices.

Zunaid knew this wasn't because they didn't care but it was because they weren't fully aware of the impact of COVID-19. Hailing from Pekua Upazila of Cox's Bazar, he decided to raise awareness in any way he could. And so he set out with nothing more than a loudspeaker on a CNG auto-rickshaw to drive around his area.

Zunaid broadcast information about what COVID-19 is and how to combat the virus. He also set up information stalls around town to inform and educate the community in his Upazila. With a team of 24 people, he continues to raise awareness in his area to help people around him make informed choices - from washing their hands for 20 seconds to social distancing and staying home.

'We must spread valid information amongst the masses and avoid rumors.'

SHADMAN SAKIB ANIK, 27

In March, Shadman and his team began an awareness campaign called 'Utshaho' in 20 districts outside Dhaka through their 'Kindness Ambassadors' project. The goal was to bring to light the dangers of COVID-19 in rural areas. The team worked to translate the existing information into terms that would make sense to the people. For example, social distancing or the 'six feet distance' rule became "dui haat" (length of two hands) distance.

The 'Kindness Ambassadors' went to towns and unions in 24 districts to do public presentations (miking) on the topic of COVID-19, reaching almost a crore people. They went shop to shop, putting up posters, banners and social distance markers in public areas.



‘COVID-19 hit our country hard but now more than ever in recent history, we see people uniting to ask - ‘How can we help?’. I aim to create a culture of good deeds by developing ‘skill donors’ who will lead an inclusive, grass-roots social movement. We want to give people not just money, but long-term support and connect good-will to where it’s needed most. Through our platform, normal people cooked and donated over 100,000 meals and distributed thousands of clean clothes, mobiles and laptops. We want to keep building bridges so that anyone can donate skills or time to help communities in any way.’ 🐾

Shadman also started the project ‘Shuddhota’ to teach people how to wash their hands the right way. They worked with other organizations to come up with low-cost and low-maintenance hand-washing stations which are not easily damaged or stolen.

These stations, as well as social distance markers and posters, have been set up in seven large bazaars in different districts across the country.

The ‘Kindness Ambassadors’ are also busy helping nursing mothers, pregnant women, and farmers. Throughout, they wrote down the names and contact details of everyone they helped, so in future, if there is ever another crisis they will be able to immediately reach out.



6



TIGERS CARE

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic was not the same for everyone. Depending on location, age, health, socio-economic status and gender, many people were disproportionately affected.

Some groups, such as women and indigenous communities, needed more assistance than others. During the government-ordered shutdown, women faced the grave danger of domestic abuse and violence, which was only heightened by the stress of losing income and stability. Pregnant women worried about how and where to deliver their children. Minority groups were often cut off from primary sources of funding and resources and forgotten during aid efforts.

But Tigers heard their needs and delivered, sometimes literally. Because the pain of one person is as important as that of a thousand.



PAVEL SARWAR, 31

Sanitary napkins and sexual health-related products have been systematically stigmatized, despite being essential for female health and wellbeing.

If access to these products and sexual health education was difficult to access before COVID-19, it became nearly impossible for many women during the pandemic.

Pavel understood this difficulty when his wife asked him to buy sanitary napkins during the lockdown. After contacting several e-commerce sites he managed to finally purchase a pack. This led Pavel to consider the difficulties women face on a monthly basis. In response he created a website called 'Trikonomiti' using funds from his group 'Youth Hub'.

'Trikonomiti' delivers sanitary napkins at women's doorsteps without any service charge when ordered through their website. They have included all sorts of female hygiene and sexual health products to the range of goods on their the platform. With almost a thousand sanitary napkins safely delivered already, Pavel plans on expanding the range of goods and services provided on his website in the future.



'Essential hygiene products are a priority for the health, dignity and welfare of all women and periods don't stop during a pandemic. The energy of young people can bring positive changes if used properly and we are working restlessly on it. Our dream includes a pledge that no one will be left behind.'



SRABANTI A HUDA, 33

& SHARNILA NUZHAT KABIR, 21

Daulatdia is home to one of the world's largest brothels, where 1,500 women make a living through sex work. Located in Rajbari district, the area is so big that it is often called the 'brothel village'. When the pandemic hit, most of these workers lost their means to a livelihood.

In March, when the government banned customers and announced the closure of the brothel to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the residents of the brothel made a public appeal for help - they were starving.

Sharnila, a development worker who was then working with 'Footsteps', and her cousin Srabanti A. Huda decided to take matters into their own hands, setting up an online fundraiser on CholoShobai.com. They raised 700,000 taka and were able to provide funds to 1,300 sex workers and 400 children.

'Hope shows us how to act - it allows us to look beyond the immediate future and to what is possible with a little effort and dedication. We need to hold on to hope and keep fighting in order to come out strong from this trying year.'

MOHAMMAD MOHASIN, 32

The pandemic has affected people of all ages, genders and races, crippling entire economies. Some of the hardest-hit sections of society are differently-abled people, who are in many cases more vulnerable to the virus. Moving about to procure basic necessities during the outbreak, all the while maintaining social distance and safety protocols, has been a paramount challenge for them.

Mohammad Mohasin was just six months old when he lost mobility in his legs to another epidemic - polio. But he did not let it stop him from becoming a champion! Mohasin is the Founder of Bangladesh Cricket Association for the Physically Challenged and the Captain of Bangladesh's Wheelchair Cricket Team. When the Covid-19 pandemic began to gain momentum in Bangladesh, Mohasin knew that people like him would be double-challenged. And he stepped up to lend a hand to the differently abled by mobilizing volunteers and donations from organizations. In the weeks that followed, he pooled together enough funding to help 4,000 families of differently-abled people to support themselves.

‘While the number of deaths from COVID-19 increases all over the world, I am working to help the people in my community. I collect relief from various organizations for the physically challenged and helpless people.’

Trishia Nastaran, 34

Meye Network is a feminist grassroots organizing platform that has been uniting women for a greater cause since 2011. Their COVID-19 response initiatives are Sisterhood, Service, Gabura, Benami and Kajer Meye. Through these initiatives, they have been able to help 901 families in various parts of Bangladesh. The nature of the pandemic crisis is quite different from other natural or human-made disasters. This time the middle class, those living paycheck to paycheck, with no substantial savings, were severely affected. Many people lost their jobs. To assess the situation, Sisterhood conducted surveys to understand the needs of the affected individuals and families.

The second project, Service, started as a by-product of the first. The network had identified the most vulnerable members of society and started providing financial aid to families who lost employment because of the pandemic.

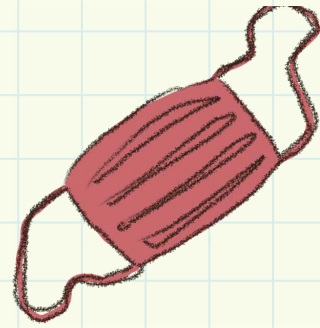
The third project, Gabura, was initiated to provide aid to the ‘Tiger Widows’ of Gabura. Tiger Widows are the women who lost their husbands to tigers (and other perils) in the Sundarbans. These women are believed to be cursed and are socially ostracized.

Benami and Kajer Meye, designed to be support systems for women in crisis, provide mental and professional guidance. Both of these initiatives are active during the pandemic to meet the evolving needs of women.

‘I will continue to fight the pandemic by listening to marginalized voices closely. I plan to combine the lived experiences, knowledge, and expertise from different walks of life to co-create an inclusive, life-centric future through storytelling, design thinking, and foresight strategy. I have seen over the years that wonderful things can happen when people come together and connect through empathy and courage. That gives me hope for a better future, no matter how dire the present reality is.’ 🐾





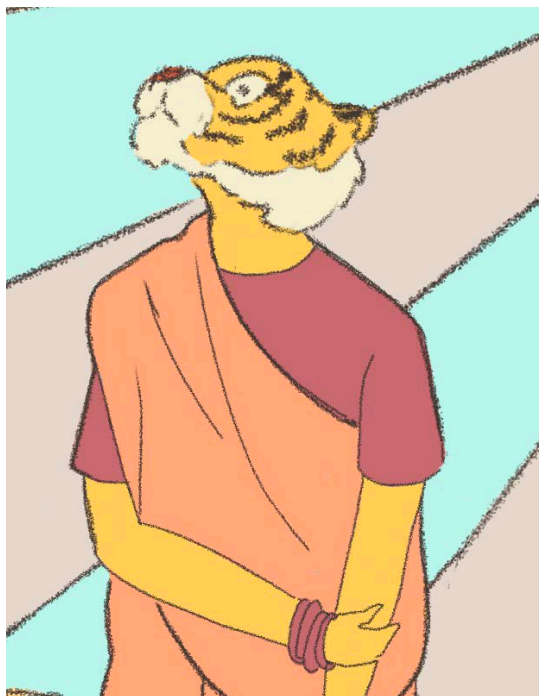


TIGERS CURE

Medical workers treating COVID-19 patients are the heroes of our time.

Doctors and nurses who took an oath to treat and help their patients rose to the occasion for the good of the country and its citizens.

And many Tigers across the nation supported their efforts by providing health information, protective gear and sanitation advice.



HO CHI MINH ISLAM, 25

The sufferings faced by trans-gender and sex workers' communities in their daily lives were rarely a part of any conversation, even before the pandemic began. COVID-19 only escalated their sufferings and restricted their opportunity to earn a decent income. Society turns a blind eye on them and their voices get lost time and time again. Ho Chi Minh Islam has been working for many years to give these communities a voice. A nurse by profession, Ho Chi Minh is also a trans-activist who has represented Bangladesh in international LGBTQI conferences. She noticed the lack of initiative to help these communities during the COVID-19 crisis and set out to collect funds and distribute relief materials to them. She managed to serve more than 600 people, distributed over 4000kgs of rice and raised around 200,000 taka in funds.

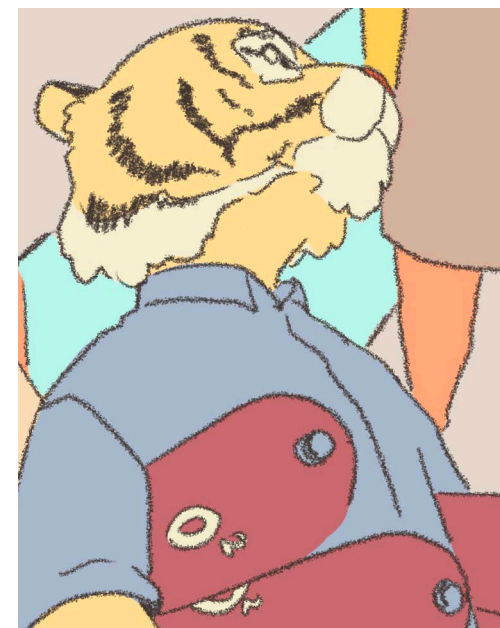
Ho Chi Minh was disheartened by the lack of inclusive leadership and tolerance towards these communities when she started her work but after this experience, she experienced a positive change within herself. She now believes in the power of youth and the power of solidarity to bring about social change.

'Discrimination, vulnerability, stigma and taboos made our community more practical and insightful about life. We are fighters and we can fight! Our fight did not just start. Nothing has muzzled us until now and nothing will! We still exist against all odds, stigma and taboos. This is hopeful and resilient!'

ALI YUSUF, 49

Ali Yusuf is a poet turned philanthropist from Mymensingh who raises funds for COVID-19 patients and also helps cremate and bury those who pass away from the disease. Ali serves as the coordinator of one of the three teams of volunteers that bury or cremate deceased COVID-19 patients in Mymensingh city. Ali also arranges financial aid for the underprivileged using his social media platforms. His work shows that in a time like this, even the smallest of initiatives can make a difference in people's lives, regardless of how affluent the initiator is.

'I feel the urge to do philanthropy because I come from a family that has known struggle. Since my childhood I saw my dad was always by the side of needy people despite our own needs. I believe we have a responsibility to help others.'



MD. JAKIR HOSSEN, 26

The constant shortage of medical supplies is an everyday reality for many. Before the pandemic, people made do with what they had, but during the outbreak, being well-equipped was of utmost importance.

At the worst stage of COVID-19, the patient struggles to breathe, and needs a ventilator and oxygen tanks for survival. When Jakir Hossen identified the mismatch in supply and demand, he quickly found ways to help. He bought five oxygen cylinders and travelled across Dhaka to bring oxygen to those who couldn't afford it. He has managed to help 30 people who were in need of emergency assistance and hopes to continue helping people through his humble initiative.

'Since it has not been possible to prevent people from venturing out, I work on raising awareness of safety precautions. I also keep distributing oxygen among infected people. I am hopeful because the vaccine is already under development and most people are careful now. However, we should not be too relaxed yet in dealing with the deadly disease.'

QUAZI TAIF SADAT, 34

Masks and hygiene supplies quickly disappeared off the shelves of stores at the onset of the pandemic. Common people were forced to buy overpriced masks and sanitizers.

Quazi Taif Sadat took it upon himself to make affordable masks and sanitizers. The first few thousand pieces were distributed for free among those in need. Since then Quazi has been working on creating a cheaper ventilator machine which can be used in remote medical centers. He has already created a prototype of the ventilator and hopes to save precious lives in the future using it.

‘I am continuously working on my ventilator project. Beside that I am distributing hand sanitizers and food among the underprivileged almost everyday from the month of March. I strongly believe I can help lots of people.’



ARAF AHMED, 23 & TAHMID HASIB KHAN, 26

Araf and Tahmid, two Bangladeshi expatriates in Canada, set out to find a way to help their country during the unprecedented crisis of the pandemic. Their movement, ‘Bachar Lorai’, has been working as a social innovation incubator, to support initiatives on all levels - logistics, supply chain, fundraising and distribution.. Together they make sure that initiatives have a significant impact on communities.

Since April 2020 they have supported 13 grassroots initiatives, whose work ranges from providing oxygen cylinders to rural hospitals to a WhatsApp information dissemination campaign. They have also helped create informative videos and webinars with public health experts to educate the general public about COVID-19.

Apart from the awareness campaigns, ‘Bachar Lorai’ has reached out to four Amphan-affected communities and helped over 500 families

through food distribution, funding medical camps, and capital investments to assist rehabilitation.

Since its inception, ‘Bachar Lorai’ has raised over 18,80,000 taka solely to provide COVID-19 food relief to socio-economically disadvantaged families and vulnerable communities. They have managed to provide more than 10,000 meals to some 700 families. They have also arranged 5,000 daily meals and 1,000 CDC-grade masks for frontline workers and healthcare heroes which were accompanied by instructional videos on the reuse of masks.

‘Throughout this pandemic, I have been inspired by the grit of frontline workers which made me to want to join them in the fight. Initiating the ‘Bachar Lorai’ movement has opened me to the reality of my privilege, while realizing the continuous burning needs of Bangladesh. ‘Bachar Lorai’ plans to address various resource and socio-cultural determinant deficiencies.’ 🐾



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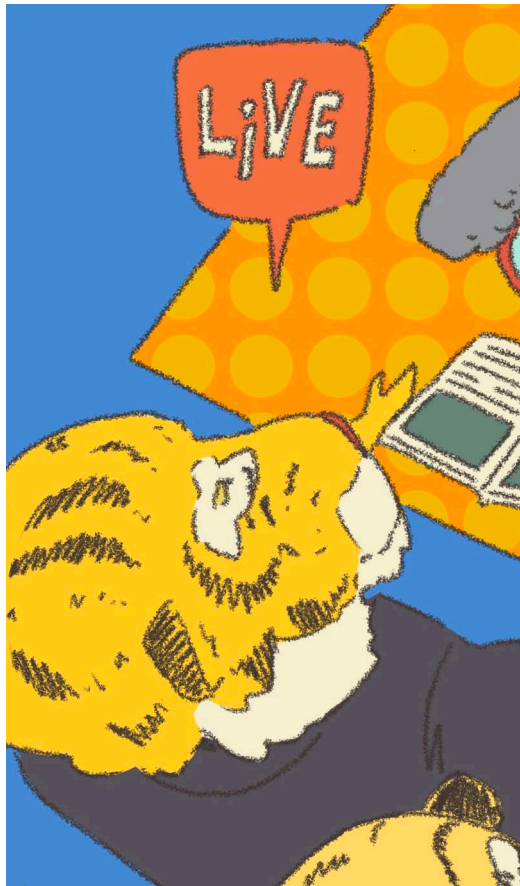


TIGERS TEACH

Children, although not at high risk of being infected by COVID-19 were greatly affected by the closure of schools.

Millions of children were cut off from education in 2020. All across the world, close to 10 million children may never return to their classrooms. This has forced many educators and institutions to rethink learning, and to invent new ways of teaching.

Tigers also looked for ways to continue teaching and reaching those falling into the digital divide.



SAMIM ASHRAF, 30

Samim's work with education and children began with 'Mentor Moshai', a development and lifestyle platform for children. He creates and shares free content to educate children on topics such as mental health, technology, communication, internet safety, cybercrime etc.

During the COVID-19 shutdown, the 'Boi Dao - Give a Book' campaign involved collecting old, used books then distributing them among underprivileged students for free.

'Mentor Moshai' provides online lessons for free, and also distributes awareness leaflets and safety masks to underprivileged children and rickshaw-pullers in Raipur, Chattogram. They share daily content on their YouTube channel and Facebook page with a focus on awareness building. A lot of their videos are tutorials to

educate children on how to wash their hands and use hand sanitizer or masks. Alongside these initiatives, they are also donating books for free to children across Bangladesh.

'We are working to make children aware of good health practices by creating the content. We believe in hope, and quiet, hard work. We are able to serve mankind and will keep fighting this pandemic.'

WAHIDUL ISLAM, 25

Wahidul's strategy to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic was a multifaceted approach - from raising awareness, food distribution, and helping to fund the education of high school students.

He made an impact in many areas - but education was his main focus. He raised funds to pay for the tuition of five students in his village and reached 450 people with his awareness campaigns.

He reached out to students in his village home, particularly the lower middle class families that struggled to pay for their children's schooling and the increased data-bills of online classes.

Using his own resources to help them continue their education, Wahidul encouraged them to keep studying. He also provided relief packs to 260 homeless women, distributed grocery items to 10 families and helped 15 widows from his village.

'We have very little time in this short life and so there is a great joy in doing something good for others in this trying times. This is my way of giving to the future and I am hopeful that every challenge teaches us some important lessons about life, makes us stronger, gives us scope to build solidarity and drives us to some new inventions and new systems of living.'





MONIRUZZAMAN MONIR,25

A Teach for Bangladesh Fellow, Monir has worked with children and education for years, but when the pandemic hit, he was forced to rethink the way kids are taught. Currently working as a teacher in a disadvantaged primary school in Chattogram, he came up with the idea of starting 'Helping Hands', an initiative to provide aid to the families of his students -- especially those that aren't able to make ends meet. He ran three projects -- 'COVID-19: During Ramadan Initiative', COVID-19: Eid Salami' and COVID-19: Mental Well-Being and Health & Hygiene.'

They were able to deliver food items to about 3,600 students and their families, reaching 16 underprivileged school communities in Chattogram, three Upazilas in Bandarban and one special children's school in Jhalakathi, Barishal. Keeping in mind the crisis in hospitals, Helping Hands also provided 20 extra-large oxygen cylinders in five hospitals of Chattogram. They also distributed about 7,000 different types of safety equipment. He is currently working on the mental wellbeing, health and hygiene project, providing support to 1,000 families that have lost their income sources and need support with their children's mental well-being and family's health. This project is implemented in the same 17 disadvantaged school communities in Chattogram city.

'I believe that by helping each other we can grow stronger together. We plan to continue to fight COVID-19 through continuous community development projects. We can be hopeful and resilient as long as we are surrounded by helping hands and friends. COVID-19 is almost everywhere now and this is the new normal. To ensure maximum efficiency and ensure sustainable development, we must collaborate and cooperate.' 🐾



The Tigers in this book come from all over Bangladesh. Some of the Tigers are small. Some are tall. Some are seniors. And some are cubs. Some Tigers wear sarees. Others sport half-pants. Each Tiger is unique, but they all have one thing in common - the Tigers care.

These are only a few examples of the thousands of acts of compassion that occurred in response to the COVID-19 epidemic.

We hope these Tiger tales will forever inspire you to earn your own stripes by being of service to others.

