



SKS Employees Joined Universal Pension Scheme



Executive Chairman of the National Pension Authority, and Executive Vice Chairman of MRA are inaugurating the Universal Pension Scheme (Inset: the audience of the event).

Employees of SKS Foundation have officially joined the Universal Pension Scheme. The inclusion of SKS employees was declared on 25 May 2024 at a Discussion Forum on the Universal Pension Scheme held at SKS Inn, Gaibandha.

Kabirul Izdani Khan, Executive Chairman of the National Pension Authority, inaugurated including SKS employees in the Universal Pension Scheme as the Guest of Honor while Md. Fasiullah, Executive Vice Chairman of the Microcredit Regulatory Authority (MRA) graced the event as the Chief Guest. Chaired by Murshed Alam Sarker, Chairperson of the Executive Committee (EC) of SKS Foundation, Executive Director, POPI, and Chairman of CDF, Dr. A.B.M. Abu Hanif, Director (Health) of Rangpur Division, and Sushanta Kumar Mahato, ADC- Education & Development of Gaibandha attended as Special Guests. (See page 3)

Workshop on VAT & TAX Held

SKS Foundation organized a Workshop on VAT and TAX for its administrative and finance officials on 26 June 2024 at its Conference Hall, Gaibandha. The day-long event aimed to update relevant employees on the latest VAT and TAX regulations. (See page 2)



Deputy Commissioner of Taxes, Circle-19, Gaibandha is conducting the session.

Municipality People Demanded Increased WASH-Budget

The civil society of Gaibandha urged the Municipality to allocate an increased budget for WASH, waste and environmental management in the upcoming fiscal year. This call was made in a *Pre-budget Sava* held on 10 June 2024 at the Public Library. Gaibandha Municipality organized the *Sava* in collaboration with SKS Foundation's *Rising for Rights for Strengthening Civil Society Network in South Asia to Achieve SDG 6* Project being implemented under the network of FANSA- Bangladesh.

The residents of the Municipality focused on the urgent need for significant budget allocations to address the existing WASH & waste management challenges. Special budget allocations for marginalized groups, including women, people with disabilities, transgender persons, and *Dalit* communities were also urged to aid their integration into the mainstream.



The Mayor of Gaibandha Municipality is addressing the residents.

Presiding over the event, Mayor Md. Matlubour Rahman was joined by Md. Arshad Uddin, BPAA, Chief Executive Officer, and Executive Magistrate of Gaibandha Municipality, emphasized the importance of public participation in budget finalization. "The purpose of presenting the proposed budget to the public through today's *Sava* is to ensure accountability and responsiveness. Public opinion will be the key to finalizing the proposed budget," stated Arshad Uddin. He assured that special emphasis had been placed on environmental protection, waste management and sanitation.

Md. Abdul Hanif, the *Pouro Nirbahi Officer (PNO)*, presented the proposed budget, while Md. Robiul Islam, Social Development Officer of the Municipality showcased a video reflecting public expectations and opinions. (See page 3)

SKS Observed Safe Motherhood Day 2024

SKS Foundation observed Safe Motherhood Day 2024 on 28 May focusing on the theme "Make baby delivery in hospitals, save mothers' and newborns' lives". The event, organized by the *Promotion of Maternal and Newborn Health (MAMOTA)* Project, included rallies, discussions, and quiz competitions across 5 *char* unions i.e. Holdia, Uria, Arendabari, Kamerjani, and Kapacia in Gaibandha district.



Dr. Armina, Technical Manager-Maternal Health, is addressing the pregnant mothers.

The DD of the Directorate General of Family Planning, UP Chairmen, healthcare professionals, and local government representatives participated in the events alongside expecting mothers. The dignitaries stressed the importance of collective family planning decisions for sustaining individual choices. They emphasized universal awareness of safe motherhood among all family members.

Project Launched to Combat

(from page 4) The Project aims to address drought-centric problems by promoting water management through adaptive technological practices, infrastructure maintenance, planning for irrigation, drinking, and domestic usage. The Project also focuses on reducing water needs by promoting the cultivation of crops that require less water during the dry season, potentially reducing irrigation demands by up to 70% during the winter season. Additionally, the Project will establish more water access points for drinking purposes, thus alleviating the burden on women who typically manage water collection.

Chaired by Md. Mostafizur Rahman, Upazila *Nirbahi* Officer, the Inception Meeting, was graced by Md. Lutfar Haider Rashid Myna, Chairman of Upazila Parishad, Tanore, as the Chief Guest, while Dr. Md. Firozur Rahman, Assistant Project Coordinator (M&E) of PKSF was the Special Guest.

The Chief Guest emphasized, "The project's potential to alleviate the current water crisis is crucial for Tanore upazila. Farmers must adopt water-efficient farming practices to mitigate severe water scarcity affecting local agriculture."

The Special Guest stated, "We have outlined specific steps in the project aimed at reducing the drought problem in Tanore. We hope the measures under the Project will bring positive changes with cooperation from all relevant departments."

The chair emphasized the project's importance stating, "The Project promises to mitigate drought impacts in Tanore upazila through innovative water management and sustainable agricultural practices. Let us work together to ensure its success and uplift our communities' livelihoods."

In the welcome note, Khandaker Zahid Shorwar, Deputy Director–Development Programs, SKS Foundation, welcomed and expected stakeholders like Upazila officials, BMDA officers, UP representatives, and NGO officials & CSOs to cooperate in the project implementation. Baharam Khan, Coordinator– Field Operation, Microfinance Projects, SKS Foundation, shared the project goals, objectives, implementation methods, potential challenges, and strategies to address drought in Tanore.

Char-families Got Solar Home Systems

SKS Foundation provided Solar Home Systems to 150 hard-to-reach & unserved *char*-families in Kapacia and Belka unions of Sundarganj upazila, Gaibandha. The distribution took place under SKS' *Lighting the*



A project participant is receiving the Solar Home Systems from the UP Chairman.

Poor and Disadvantaged Families Living in Char Areas (LTP) Project on 3-4 June 2024 at its project office at Sundarganj. The respective union Chairmen distributed the Solar Home Systems while senior officials of SKS Foundation were present.

Demonstration Demanding Protection from River Erosion

Residents from Fulchari and Fazlupur unions of Fulchari upazila, Gaibandha organized separate human chains on 26 May 2024 demanding urgent measures to protect their homes, agricultural land, educational institutions, and other vital establishments from river erosion.

Sensitized under SKS Foundation's *Community-based Resilience, Women's Empowerment and Action (CREA)* Project, mass people organized the Human Chains at Tengrakandi Ghat in Fulchari union and Madhya Khatiamari Ghat in Fazlupur union. *Char* residents from Tengrakandi and Pipulia villages in Fulchari union and Khatiamari, Madhya Khatiamari, Pashchim Khatiamari, and Fazlupur villages in Fazlupur union took part in the demonstrations.



Residents of Fulchari union are making the human chain.

The demonstrators emphasized the urgency of their demands highlighting the increasing threat to their livelihoods & properties. They demanded action from the Bangladesh Water Development Board, and other relevant authorities to prevent their livelihoods from river erosion.

Workshop on VAT & TAX Held

(from page 1) As many as 55 officials from SKS Foundation and its sister concerns attended the Workshop. Notable experts in the field S.M. Sharif, Consultant for Income TAX; Md. Hasanul Islam Tipu, VAT consultant; and S.M. Abraham Lincoln, Deputy Commissioner of Taxes, Circle-19, Gaibandha led the conduction of the Workshop. The workshop sessions covered existing laws and policies of VAT & TAX as well as upcoming changes proposed in the new budget.

Simulation on Flood Forecast-based Early Action Conducted

In preparation for the upcoming monsoon season, SKS Foundation conducted a simulation on Flood Forecast-based Early Action for communities residing along the Jamuna River. The event was held at Mothurapara Government Primary School in Kornibari union, Sariakandi upazila of Bogura, under the *Scaling Up Forecast-based Action and Learning in Bangladesh (SUFAL-II)* Project.

The simulation aimed to demonstrate how various sectors, including government departments such as Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, and Public Health can assist in early flood action. Disaster volunteers from the union performed the simulation and community members observed and learned from the activities.



A disaster volunteer is role-playing in the simulation.

Key activities in the simulation included Early Warning Dissemination, UDMC Emergency Meetings, Identifying and Repairing Roads and Evacuation Routes, Repairing Temporary Flood Shelters, Livestock Vaccination Campaigns, Silage Preparation, Fishpond Netting, Cattle Shed Setup, and Miking Early Warning Messages through Mosques and Temples. Other actions featured Harvesting Matured Crops, Collecting Cattle Feed/Fodder, Boat Repair, Early Evacuation, Portable Cook Stove Preparation, Repairing Tube-wells and Latrines, and providing Cash Support through mobile banking.

Municipality People Demanded

(From page 1) The Mayor acknowledged the challenges in meeting all expectations but assured that efforts are underway to address the focused needs. "We are working to fulfill the expectations of the citizens," he stated. "However, there are limitations to our capabilities, and we cannot implement everything at once. People's cooperation and awareness are crucial for the successful implementation of the municipal plans. With your help, we will build Gaibandha Municipality into a well-organized city."

The event was participated by the residents including the councilors, municipal officials, TLCC members, NGO representatives, political leaders, Women Forum members, youth volunteers, journalists, and so on.

Nari Forum Urged for Inclusive Sanitation



Gaibandha Nari Forum submitted a Memorandum to Md. Motlubour Rahman, Mayor, Gaibandha Municipality on 2 May 2024 at his office demanding an increased sanitation budget for 2024-'25 for constructing new toilets and upgrading the existing ones to make those inclusive. Receiving the Memorandum the Mayor assured that the demand would be seriously considered.

SKS Employees Joined

(From page 1) Emphasizing on the importance of the Scheme, the Chief Guest said, "The Universal Pension Scheme embodies the dream of Bangladesh's independence, focusing on the economic liberation of the people. The government is building a well-organized social safety net to ensure the social and financial security of the elderly population, aiming to create a prosperous 'Smart Bangladesh' by 2041. There are about 2 lakh employees and 4 crore people in around 600 institutions in the microcredit program of the country. We believe that all of them will join this pension scheme."

Highlighting the operational system of the Universal Pension Scheme, the Guest of Honor said, "In realizing the dream of an equitable society, Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has introduced the Universal Pension Scheme to provide the elderly population with a sustainable social safety net. This initiative is a landmark people-oriented step offering financial freedom in old age for all citizens."

Dr. A.B.M. Abu Hanif remarked, "Families are becoming nuclear day by day. This Pension Scheme is crucial for the care of the elderly in such family structures."

Sushanta Kumar Mahato said, "We must remember that the government guarantees everything done through the law. We need to raise public awareness about this Scheme."

The Chair of the event urged, "If we can motivate people, many will join this program. Propelling the country forward, SKS Foundation will continue its efforts in this regard."

Rasel Ahmed Liton, Chief Executive of SKS Foundation, opened the Discussion Forum with a welcome speech, stating, "SKS Foundation works as a partner of the government to protect and enhance the quality of citizens' lives. Today's event formally includes SKS employees in the Universal Pension Scheme."

Along with SKS Staff, a huge number of intrigued people including teachers, freedom fighters, businessmen, religious leaders, NGO professionals, cultural activists, LGI representatives, media professionals, and SKS' program participants from Gaibandha district attended the event and shared their views and gathered information on the Scheme.

MRA & SKS Signed Annual Performance Agreement



Executive Vice Chairman of MRA, and Chief Executive of SKS Foundation are holding the APA.

The Microcredit Regulatory Authority (MRA) and SKS Foundation signed an Annual Performance Agreement (APA) on 26 June 2024, for the fiscal year 2024-'25 in the MRA's conference room in Dhaka. Executive Vice Chairman Md. Fasiullah signed on behalf of MRA, and Rasel Ahmed Liton, Chief Executive signed on behalf of SKS Foundation.

Alongside SKS Foundation, the top 20 MFIs by loan outstanding signed the APA. The Cabinet Division started results-based performance management in 2014-2015 to boost government efficiency and accountability, improve service quality, and increase effectiveness. Now, these institutions will provide quarterly updates on key indicators and the MFIs will be rewarded based on their performance. This Agreement will enhance public-private collaboration and accelerate socioeconomic growth.

Project Launched to Combat Drought in Tanore



The stakeholders are discussing the project issues.

To help the vulnerable communities of Tanore upazila, Rajshahi under the Barind region combat the drought challenges, a new project titled *Extended Community Climate Change Project- Drought (ECCCP-Drought)* was launched on 27 June 2024 Tanore Upazila Parishad. SKS Foundation, in partnership with *Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF)* and *Green Climate Fund (GCF)*, is implementing the Project across all 7 unions of Tanore upazila. (See page 2)

Tree Plantation Campaign Launched on World Environment Day

Aligning with this year's theme "*Land Restoration, Desertification, and Drought Resilience*," a tree plantation campaign was launched on 5 June 2024, World Environment Day. Jointly organized by Gaibandha Municipality, SKS Foundation, and BRAC, the campaign included a discussion forum and tree planting at Gaibandha Islamia High School.

With Md. Arshad Uddin, BPA, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Magistrate of Gaibandha Municipality in the chair, Md. Matlubour Rahman, Mayor, Gaibandha Municipality was the Chief Guest, and Md. Ehsanul Kabir, Headteacher of Gaibandha Islamia High School was the Special Guest.

The Chief Guest attributed the current hot weather to the lack of sufficient trees, emphasizing, "Trees are our life-saving friends. They provide oxygen, shade, and cool air. Therefore, to protect lives and maintain a cool environment, we need to plant more trees."

The Chairperson highlighted the importance of holistic environmental care, stating, "To protect the environment, it's not enough to just plant trees; we also need to take care of the soil, water and air because these elements together form the environment. As part of the environment, we all have to play the role of environmental protectors."



The Chief Guest is addressing the audience.

The Special Guest stressed, "The importance of trees in saving life and the environment must be felt by the next generation. If we can instill this awareness in the next generation, we will make significant progress in protecting the environment."

Joseph Halder, Director, Advocacy & Communication, SKS Foundation underscored the event's theme by stating, "In addition to planting trees to recover the damage done to the environment by continuous pollution, we need to focus on water security, sanitation, and waste management."

Residents of the municipality participated in the event, including teachers, students, municipal officials, sanitation workers, NGO representatives, women's forum members, youth volunteers, and journalists. Following the discussion, the Chief Guest inaugurated the tree plantation campaign and drove a cleanliness program involving municipal sanitation workers at the High School campus.