

# Organic farming gaining popularity

Endeavours from many help vermicompost technology spread across Bangladesh

SHYKH SERAJ

Mymensingh's Harirampur village, situated in Muktagachha upazila's Dulla union has become a hub of vermicompost plants with the help from Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) and local associations and farm entrepreneurs, specially women. If we really want to revive soil fertility, we need to use a lot of organic fertilizers.

Production and extension of vermicompost is moving onward pretty fast. The rural women are benefitted in two ways. They can earn extra money while setting up vermicompost plants, and also by producing organic food using this technology. I have talked with homemaker Ruma and others from Chandpur village in Dulla union.

"How many times can the earthworms be reproduced?"

"Many times."  
"Don't the earthworms lose their strength?"

"No."

I also spoke to another female farmer.

"Do you use cow dung?"

"Yes."

"No straws?"

"No."

"Did any of you used vermicompost on your crop land", I asked.

"I have used it on my paddy land", replied Sima along with other women in the village.

"What differences did you find?"

"The paddies look stronger and greener."

Twenty two women are commercially producing vermicompost through their association. This association is doing a very good job in the village and across the union.

"I don't have to buy fertilizer from market. Rather, I can produce it from household waste", said a female member of the asso-



Rural farmers producing organic fertilizers right at home.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

ciation. These women are contributing to revive the soil quality in a meaningful way.

"What's the cost difference between using urea and vermicompost?"

"Vermicompost saved a lot of cost for me. It's a very handy technology."

Mohammad Ali and his wife Fulesa Begum have built their own plant of vermicompost at home.

"This fertilizer is very much necessary. If you apply it on soil, it gets more fertile. It works better than the chemical fertilizers."

Another farmer from this village, Anwar Hossain Kamal. He's using vermicompost on his egg-plant plot.

"Before using vermicompost my eggplants looked reddish."

"How much have you used here on this land?"

"20 KGs."

"What's the price of it?"

"Tk. 200 only."

I talked with Jalil, a young and educated farmer who had the same experience.

"I used to spend around Tk. 1000 before on chemical fertilizer, and now I only spend 200 taka."

Ruhul Amin is the Chairman of a local youth association based on voluntary labour, known as 'Jubo Krishi Shomaj Unnayan Shongstha'. This association is also helped and guided by DAE and is contributing to promote vermicompost.

"We have three major targets. Using agricultural inputs in an integrated way, revival of soil quality and better farming", said Ruhul. The organization tries to raise awareness amongst farmers through field level training. They tell them that chemical fertilizers are not the food for soil but only for crops.

The organic fertilizer is just the opposite of chemicals. Mostly they have to deal with illiterate farmers.

Ruhul has formed this organization to make them aware about the benefits of organic farming.

Amin says it would have been impossible to spread the organic farming across the region without the help of farmer-friendly SAAO, Selim Reza.

It's a great news that farmers are becoming aware of producing fresh agricultural products while maintaining soil fertility. Hridoye Mati O Manush's Grow Green initiative has also helped them in this awakening process.

Meanwhile, in different regions of the country, farmers as well unemployed youth and people from different walks of life are building their own vermicompost plants. This is very profitable and environmental friendly agricultural initiative for sure.

Bangladeshi arable lands have gradually lost 85% of fertility. According to SRDI, soil lacks both organic mat-

ters and nutrients. Out of 8.3 million hectares of arable land in the country, nutrients have decreased alarmingly in 3.3 million hectares of lands. Plants absorb 14 organic chemical compounds from among the total 17 from the soil. All over Bangladesh, these chemical compounds are missing from the soil. The main reason behind this is the organic matter from the soil is decreasing.

For a higher yield, using the organic fertilizer is the only way. In the past, with government initiative, for producing quality organic fertilizer, entrepreneurs were provided with loans. Around 30 organizations

received loans from government but only four of them actually built plants. One of these four is the Agro Organic Food Complex, situated in Faridpur's Komorpur area. But, the organization is closed now. The concerned authority says until the market of organic fertilizer is not settled, the producers can never run their organization. The closed factory has ten thousand tons of organic fertilizer. These fertilizers could have played a great role in the revival of the soil fertility.

This factory had once all the facilities for producing quality organic fertilizer. As they didn't get any market, the entrepreneurs had to shut it down. Agro-entrepreneur Syed Abu Siddiqui was explaining why organic fertilizer couldn't get the market.

"Farmers are not fully aware of this new technology and that's why they weren't interested to use vermicompost. If government takes the initiative to promote the benefits of this technology among farmers of Bangladesh, definitely farmers will show up for using organic fertilizers", said Syed Abu Siddiqui.

When saving the soil fertility and producing crops without pesticides are the most important issues, we need an integrated venture to spread the organic fertilizer across the country. Public and private initiatives are key to restart facilities like this huge organic fertilizer producing factories.



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PHOTO: STAR

Deceased NGO officials (from left) Mokhesur Rahman, Azim Uddin and Abdul Hamid.

## Road crash kills NGO officials

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Four NGO officials died in a fatal road mishap at Jokarchar point of Kalihati upazila in Tangail under Dhaka-Tangail highway. The accident took place on the Dhaka-Tangail highway on June, 28, bringing sorrow to four families.

The victims were officials of Ananya Somaj Kollan Shangthata, an NGO: Md. Abdul Hamid, 48, Executive Director, Mohammad Azim Uddin, 46, Deputy Director, Md. Mokhesur Rahman, 45, Director and their driver Mostafa Hasan, 40. They were on their way to join an official meeting in the capital before the fatal road accident claimed their lives. A truck rammed into a pick-up carrying them on the Dhaka-Tangail Bangabandhu Bridge Highway at about 8.30 in the morning on the day. Local people broke out into tears when their bodies arrived at the office of the organization in Arifpur village of the district headquarter.

The families of the deceased are in mourning. "Serving in NGO my husband recently built a residential house in Radhanagar area. The construction work did not complete yet, but it was supposed to be complete before Eid. But he (Abdul Hamid) passed away without being able to do so," lamented Salma Akter, wife of late Abdul Hamid. She along with her two young daughters is worried about the future of their family. Md.

Adnan, son of late Azim Uddin said that his father had a dream that his son will go abroad for his studies, a dream that is unlikely to be fulfilled. "Me, my younger brother and mother do not know how we will run our family as my father was the only earning member in our family." Adnan is a student of class eight, and is worried that his education may not continue. He broke into tears saying his father left home assuring them that he will return from Dhaka after his meeting before first Ramadan so that he can have iftar with the family. Jhorna Begum, wife of late Mokhesur Rahman could not speak at all. Mother of three daughters, she has no clue as to what the future has in store for her newly born baby, or for her older daughter who scored GPA 5 in SSC.

Ali Quadery, the Chairman of the NGO where the officials worked in, said that the fatal death of the officials is a great loss for development activities in Pabna. He assured that the organization will assist the families of the victims and will also contribute to the educational expenditure of the children of the families.

People from all over Bangladesh rush to and from the capital every day to attend important meetings, events and for business. Despite the uncertainty, people have no option but to accept the risks every day and go about their work; their only protection are their prayers to God to keep them safe on the roads.

# Tahirpur noukar haat comes to life in rains

MINTU DESHWARA, back to Moulvibazar from Tahirpur

The noukar haat (boat market) at Kawkandi Bazar in Tahirpur upazila of Sunamganj district that sits twice a week becomes crowded every Saturday and Monday as the traditional country boats, serving as convenient transport in riverine southern region, go on sale during the ongoing rainy season.

Carpenters of Nowapara, Mohabbatpur, Chokbazaar, Payekpara, Lakhipur, Kushiura and Voktarpur in Doarabazaar upazila and Maharam, Lakmar and Lamakata villages under Tahirpur upazila of the area build mainly panis, dingi

and naak golui types of boats and bring to the weekly market stretching about two kilometres.

The timbers used for building the boats are locally available koroi, rain tree, jarul, shal, sundari, mahogany and teak.

The timber is seasoned and tar or tannin of mango-steen is applied for making the boats water resistant.

Boat making is a traditional family business for many people in the area and the skill is learnt through apprenticeship with father, brother or any elder relative.

Assisted by a helper, a carpenter can build a boat within four days after purchasing sized woods from local saw-mills, said Swapan

Sadhu, a boat maker of Muktahar.

"Depending on design, size, finishing, coating, and construction materials, manufacturing of a boat usually costs Tk 1200-4000 and is sold for 15-20 percent profit," said Yusuf Ali, a boat maker at noukar haat.

At the market, a small pinis boat sells for Tk 1500-1700, large one for Tk 2500-4500, dingi Tk 2500-3000, naak golui for Tk 1500-2000, said boat trader Motin Miah.

"Most of the boats of this market are of flat-bottom type. These are suitable for canals and often used for carrying guava, crop and nursery items," said Munjer Hasan, a boat purchaser.

These are usually 13.5 to 18 feet long and 3 to 4 feet wide and can be operated easily by one or two boatmen to cover short distances, he said.

A well-built and properly maintained boat can be used on shallow waters for more than one season, said Anwar Mistri of Lakhipur village.

"Over 500 families are involved in boat building trade in this region. On an average, 60-100 boats are sold every Saturday and Monday, the market day at noukar haat. The business continues for weeks from July, depending on the length of monsoon," said Mohammad Ali, a resident of Kawkandi Bazar.

## Its all for an Eid dress

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chuadanga

A 15-year-old schoolgirl allegedly took her own life over buying a popular Indian dress ahead of Eid at Nimtala village in Sadar upazila of the district on Monday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Shela Khatun, daughter of Laltu Rahman. She was a Class IX student at Katholi High School of the village.

Quoting the family members, police said Shela asked her father to buy Indian 'Pakhi' dress for Eid but her father bought another dress from the market.

At this she locked in a quarrel with her father over the issue in the afternoon.

At one stage, she committed suicide by hanging herself from the ceiling of her bedroom.

Later family members took her to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital where the attending doctor pronounced her dead.

## Gunpowder Seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) recovered four kilograms gunpowder from a house at Laxmi Narayanpur village in Sadar upazila of the district on Monday night and arrested a man in this connection.

The arrestee person was identified as Khairul Islam, 45, son of Mohammad Baset of the village.

Sub-Inspector Dulaluddin of Sadar police station said, on secret information, a team of the elite force from Chapainawabganj camp went to Laxmi Narayanpur village and raided Khairul's house around 11:40pm. After searching his house, Rab recovered four kg and 25 grams of gunpowder and arrested him.



PHOTO: STAR

This awfully dilapidated maternity hospital at Mandarbari village in Moheshpur upazila of Jhenidah needs immediate renovation to resume healthcare services in the area.

## Maternity hospital dies the death in 2 decades

Scores of local women deprived of benefit

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

A ten-bed maternity hospital set up in 1965 at Mandarbaria village in Manderbaria union of Moheshpur upazila under the district has remained dysfunctional for the last 20 years, much to the sufferings of treatment seekers in the remote area.

"The then Pakistan government set up this hospital on 49 decimals of lands here in 1965 when I was chairman of Mandarbaria union parishad. Patients, especially pregnant women in the remote area, were greatly benefited as operations were conducted and medicines given free here," said Rabiul Islam, 91, former chairman of Mandarbaria UP.

But as the building devel-

oped cracks, it was declared abandoned in 1994 and doctors and nurses were transferred elsewhere, said

*When the building developed cracks, it was declared abandoned in 1994 and doctors and nurses were transferred elsewhere.*

sources at the district family planning office.

"Once the maternity

hospital provided medical services to around a hundred patients daily. If the hospital building is renovated and services resume, more rural women will get treatment for low costs," said Mosabbir Hossain, a retired peon of the hospital.

Dr Jahid Ahmed, deputy director of family planning office in Jhenidah, said, "The functions of the hospital were stopped in 1994 and the building was declared abandoned due to its dilapidated condition. I have forwarded several letters to Public Health Engineering Department for starting its renovation work. We are waiting for allocation of fund for the purpose."



PHOTO: STAR

Traditional country boats are kept in line for sale at noukar haat (boat market) at Kawrakandi Bazar in Tahirpur upazila of Sunamganj. Boats are brought to the market, which sits twice a week, hours before it opens.