

Small mistake, big damage

Pineapple grower in Tangail suffers huge financial loss after mistakenly spraying weed killer on his field

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Around 65,000 pineapples of a farmer in Tangail's Ghatail were damaged by mistakenly spraying weed killer instead of growth hormones.

The incident happened in Foitamari village, and the pineapple grower who suffered the loss is Mofazzal Miah.

Mofazzal told The Daily Star that he had planted 70,000 pineapple saplings on nine bighas of land.

From the beginning, he was buying agro-inputs, including growth hormones and pesticides, for his orchard from pesticide trader Ashish Kumar Saha at Sagardighe Bazar, he said.

"On May 13, when I went to his shop for buying vitamins (local farmers called growth hormones vitamins) superfix and flora, Ashish gave me the medicines after packing," Mofazzal said.

"I got these vitamins sprayed on my orchard by a labourer the next day. After three days, I saw the plants along with the fruits dying. Then I found that

Ashish gave me weed killer 'emiraxon' in stead of vitamin superfix," he alleged.

"I later went to Ashish and told him about the matter. He then gave me another medicine and suggested spraying it on my damaged orchard," he said.

"As per his instruction, I also sprayed the medicine on my orchard but got no results," he said.

Mofazzal also said he cultivated pineapple after borrowing several lakh taka. "Now what can I do? How can I repay the loans?" a wailing Mofazzal asked.

But Ashish did not agree to sit with him to discuss the matter, he said.

Contacted, Ashish said after using the weed killer on the orchard, Mofazzal informed him that he got weed killer instead of growth hormones.

It was a mistake from both sides as buyers should check what they bought, Ashish said, adding that now he had nothing to do in this regard.

On the other hand, Mofazzal said

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An agro-input seller in Ghatail of Tangail mistakenly sold herbicide instead of growth hormones to a pineapple farmer and the result is 65,000 ruined. The farmer is now staring at a colossal loss. The photo was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh leads in solar home systems

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Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi), UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

The report also credited microcredit schemes for helping Bangladesh achieve the feat of becoming the largest SHS market in the world.

"Markets for both mini-grids and stand-alone systems are evolving rapidly. Bangladesh, with 4 million units installed, has the largest solar home system market using mainly microcredit schemes," said the report.

Bangladesh is followed by many African nations.

Currently, 2.86 percent of all power generated in the country comes from renewable energy, including solar power, according to power and energy ministry data.

The report observed that the cumbersome process of providing electricity access through grid extension alone is becoming obsolete, as new business models and technologies enables the development of off-grid markets.

The 4 million units installed in Bangladesh so far have all taken place in areas beyond the reach of the national grid.

According to the report, approximately 60 million people or 38 percent

of the population in Bangladesh have no access to electricity.

The REN21 report noted that mini-grids and stand-alone energy systems are evolving rapidly, as is the growth of pay-as-you-go business models supported by mobile technology.

In 2012, investments in solar companies using these technologies were only \$3 million (2.6 million euros). By 2015, that figure had risen to \$158 million, growing to \$223 million in 2016.

A record volume of renewable power capacity was installed worldwide last year as falling costs for wind and solar made them more competitive with fossil fuels.

However, the 15 percent VAT on solar panels, as proposed in the next fiscal year's budget, will lead to higher prices than before in Bangladesh.

According to the REN21 report, Bangladesh also emerged as 5th in installing clean cooking stoves with gradual increased use of the improved stoves.

Five lakh clean cooking stoves were installed in 2014 in Bangladesh, which rose to seven lakh the next year. Bangladesh reduced its import duty on improved stoves by 10 percent, making the stoves more cost-competitive, the report observed.

"In 2015, some 20 million clean cook stoves were distributed, an 18 percent increase from the 17 million distributed in 2014. China continued to lead installations in 2015, followed distantly by India, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Bangladesh."

The report also highlighted that Bangladesh belongs in the list of top five countries to have installed domestic biogas plants. The number of biogas plants stands at 45,610 in Bangladesh.

The use of biogas for cooking continued to increase in 2016, the report noted, adding that Asia leads in total installations of domestic biogas plants, most of which are in China (42.6 million units at the end of 2016) and India (4.7 million units), with an estimated 620,000 units installed elsewhere in the region.

In addition, an increasing number of companies were working in 2016 to integrate renewable energy technology directly into vehicles.

For example, an inexpensive solar-powered three-wheeled ambulance is set to provide service to rural areas of Bangladesh before the end of this year.

The report also said the renewable energy sector employed 9.8 million people globally in 2016, an increase of

1.1 percent over 2015.

In the field of technology, Solar Photovoltaic (PV) and biofuels provided the largest number of jobs. Employment shifted further towards Asia, which accounted for 62 percent of all renewable energy jobs (not including large-scale hydropower), led by China.

"Renewable energy employment increased during 2016 in several other countries, particularly in Asia. In Bangladesh, the number of jobs in solar PV rose 10 percent, primarily due to growth in deployment of mini-grids and solar water pumps."

Solar PV panels on the roofs of homes and businesses use energy from the sun to generate electricity cleanly and quietly. The conversion of sunlight into electricity takes place in cells of specially fabricated semiconductor crystals.

The report states that in 2016, renewable energy provided nearly 20 percent of the world's final power consumption.

Global additions of renewable power capacity outpaced all (net) fossil fuel capacity additions, accounting for around 62 percent of net additions to global power generating capacity in 2016.

"Solar PV was the star performer in

2016, accounting for around 47 percent of the total [capacity] additions, followed by wind power at 34 percent and hydropower at 15.5 percent," the report said.

Investments in new renewable capacity in 2016 reached \$249.8 billion, roughly double the investments in fossil fuel capacity.

Record bids for offshore wind energy in Europe brought the industry closer to its goal to generate offshore wind power more cheaply than coal by 2025.

"The world is adding more renewable power capacity each year than it adds in new capacity from all fossil fuels combined," said Arthouros Zervos, chair of REN21, in a press release.

Renewable power generation capacity had its largest annual increase in 2016, with an estimated 161 gigawatts (GW) of capacity added.

Total global renewable power capacity, including hydropower, rose to 2,017 GW in 2016, up almost nine percent from the previous year.

In 2016, renewables accounted for almost 62 percent of net additions to global generating capacity, the report said.

"Renewables are becoming the least costly option," it said.

LONGADU ARSON ATTACK A victim finally files a case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

One of the victims of the arson attacks on indigenous homes and shops in three villages in Rangamati filed a case with Longadu Police Station yesterday.

On behalf of all the victims, Kishor Kumar Chakma, 50, of Tintila village, filed the lawsuit against 79 named and 500 unnamed accused. He also demanded compensation for them, said Mominul Islam, officer-in-charge of the police station.

On June 2, Bangalee settlers unleashed a series of arson attacks on the indigenous community in Longadu upazila after police recovered the body of Nurul Islam Nayan, organising secretary of Sadar union unit Jubo League. More than 200 houses and shops were looted, vandalised and burned to ashes, according to victims.

Later in the night, police used more than 400 people over the incident.

Asked, the OC said the two cases would be investigated separately.

Police on Saturday arrested two persons-- Runel Chakma and Junel Chakma -- in Dighinala upazila of Khagrachhari in connection with the killing of Nayan.

Meanwhile, Parbatya Chattagram Bangalee Chhatra Parishad observed a dawn-to-dusk hartal in Rangamati yesterday, demanding immediate arrest of Nayan's killer(s) and protesting "mass arrest of Bangalee settlers" following the arson attacks.

Except some motorbikes, no vehicles plied the roads in the district, forcing many to walk to their destinations during the 12-hour strike that ended at 6:00pm.

Contacted, Md Rashid, OC of Kotwali Police Station, said there was no untoward incident during the hartal.

Prisoner freed

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"I don't believe in luck, I believe I was blessed," Jones told the Kansas City Star.

Jones appealed his case several times to no avail while he served his 19-year jail sentence. Two years ago however, he heard about a man in prison who looked just like him and even shared his first name.

Realizing that this could be the key to his exoneration, he contacted the Midwest Innocent Project - a non-profit organization that provides legal services to the wrongly-convicted - to help argue his case.

"We were floored by how much they looked alike," said an attorney working on Jones' case.

During the new trial, Jones reiterated his alibi that he was with his girlfriend and her family at the time the victim reported she was robbed in a park.

His lookalike 'Ricky' also took the stand and denied committing the crime.

Having seen the doppelgänger next to one another, the robbery victims confirmed to the judge they were no longer sure who committed the crime.

Jones' lawyers also argued that the lineup of men the police had put forward to the victims 17 years ago was "highly suggestive" because he was the only who resembled the criminal they described.

Jones is now assimilating to life after jail and says he's happy to be back with his children.

"When it comes to my kids, it's been a rough ride, but they are now at an age where they can understand," he said.

He told the Kansas City Star that he understood why the victims made the grave mistake after seeing 'Ricky'.

'Everybody has a doppelgänger,' said an attorney on the case. 'Luckily we found his.'

Crooked traders make most of lax



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The price of locally produced garlic has remained at Tk 120 and average quality rice at Tk 56-58.

The variety of good quality pilau rice has become costlier by Tk 8 to Tk 90 and low quality by Tk 5 to Tk 75, compared to the prices in the last week.

Some vegetables like cucumber, green chilli and eggplant saw their prices decline by Tk 10 to 20 per kg at this market. An essential Ramadan item, chickpeas are sold at Tk 85-90 as before.

At Kalmilata kitchen market in Tejgunipara, beef sells at Tk 480-500, up by Tk 5-25 from the government-fixed rate.

cucumber, tomato, eggplant and green chilli have fell by Tk 15-20 per kilogramme.

Though Dhaka South City Corporation fixed the price of red meat at Tk 475 for Ramadan, shopkeepers at Dhupkhola kitchen market sell beef at Tk 500 per kilogramme.

The authority at a meeting with meat traders fixed the beef price at Tk 475 (local variety) and Tk 440 (imported variety) and the mutton price at Tk 775.

"We sell beef at a higher price since we fail to maintain good quality if we sell at the fixed rate," said trader Mohammad Azim.

He, however, added that fixing the

prices of meat was a good measure. Otherwise, the beef price would soar to Tk 575 to Tk 600 a kg.

The price of Chinese garlic was found abnormally high at the Dhupkhola market. It is sold at Tk 300 a kg compared to Tk 160-180 a week back. The price of local garlic too rose by Tk 10 from the last week's price.

Compared to other kitchen markets, the prices of commodities were much higher at Mohammadpur Town Hall market. The prices of different varieties of fish increased by Tk 100 to 300 a kg on average and the price of imported garlic rose to Tk 300.

Eggplant, cucumber and green chillies were also sold at prices up by Tk 10 to 20 per kg.

Some dishonest traders take advantage of inadequate monitoring and hike prices illogically, said Shaful Islam Laskar, director general of the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection.

"We have just two teams conducting market drives every day [in Dhaka]. They can at best fine an unscrupulous trader if not accompanied by an executive magistrate," he said, adding that there were other organisations also responsible for market monitoring.

An additional secretary of the commerce ministry, who leads the import and internal trade wing, said the wing had two teams comprising representatives of home, agriculture, food and industries ministries, city corporations, FBCCI and tariff commission to oversee markets in the capital.

The teams suggest what should be done to maintain fair prices. They along with mobile courts sometimes randomly visit markets and penalise manipulators.

"It is true that such random visits cannot stop price manipulation. It would require at least 50 teams," said the commerce ministry's additional secretary.

Dhaka North City Corporation's public relations officer Monzur-E-Mowla said the city corporation also conducted random drives with help from two executive magistrates and five zonal executive officers, but it was not enough to keep the crooked traders at bay.

Worries over VAT

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from the indirect tax.

Industry insiders fear the imposition of uniform 15 percent VAT, a consumption tax, will lead to a price spiral of packaged powders of spices and mustard oil, affecting mainly people from low and fixed income groups.

"The price hike will discourage many to go for hygienic food. As a result, the demand will fall," said Choudhury Atiur Rasul, director (accounts) of Pran-RFL Group, a leading food processor and exporter.

He said companies would reduce purchases from growers if their sales drop because of increased prices of the products for imposition of uniform 15 percent VAT.

"Farmers will be affected," he said, adding that many growers have increased production of turmeric, chilli and coriander for selling those to agro-processors.

The new VAT law comes into effect on July 1, ending the two-and-a-half-decade system of multiple VAT rates applicable to more than 100 goods and services.

The imposition of the flat VAT rate is feared to fuel living costs and affect people, particularly those from low and mid-income groups. People will have to spend more to buy garments, furniture, plastics goods and even electricity.

While placing the budget early this month, Finance Minister AMA Muhiht proposed enforcing the much-talked-about VAT and Supplementary Duty Act 2012 from the next month by offering concessions to small and medium firms, and VAT exemptions for 1,042 items, instead of 536 under the existing VAT Act 1991.

However, essentials such as powdered spices and mustard oil have not been given VAT exemption whereas many of the goods that got VAT exemptions are not essential items.

Powdered spices are used by almost every family irrespective of income, owing to hassles in grinding the ingredients at home, say stakeholders.

Now, the National Board of Revenue collects VAT on powdered

spices, mainly chilli, turmeric and coriander, based on tariff value or minimum value.

Under the method, the revenue authorities collect Tk 6 as VAT by fixing the price of each kg of packaged powders of spices at Tk 40. But the VAT collection based on fixed value will no longer be applicable once the new VAT law comes into effect.

People will have to pay VAT on the market prices of spices instead of the administered price.

For example, Tk 0.60 is collected now as VAT against every 100-gram packet of coriander sold for Tk 30 at retail. But the VAT amount will surge to Tk 4.5 for the same packet once 15 percent VAT is imposed on it.

Given the current market rate, the price of each 100-gram packet would go up by around Tk 4, said Atiur.

Syed Alamgir, executive director of consumer brands of ACI Ltd, said, "People will suffer. They will have to pay more to buy powdered spices."

The government should waive VAT on essential cooking ingredients such as powdered spices, noted the high-up of the company that processes spices for both domestic and global market.

Industry operators say Bangladesh is nearly self-sufficient in meeting the annual demand for spices, thanks to increasing production of spices and condiments over the last several years.

In fiscal 2007-08, farmers produced 13.69 lakh tonnes of spices and condiments, including chilli, onion, turmeric and coriander.

Seven years later, the production went up to 24.08 lakh tonnes, show data of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

According to an estimate by the Department of Agricultural Extension, production of spices and condiments stood at 33.80 lakh tonnes in fiscal 2015-16.

Ghulam Rahman, president of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said spices are essential cooking ingredients. "VAT should not be imposed on these under any circumstances."

He also demanded VAT waiver on mustard oil.