

Start-ups to support our agriculture and environment

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Agriculture and the environment. Closely related and at times complementary, these two sectors of the economy are at the heart of our lush, green country. While environmental issues make for a relatively new chapter, agriculture – as lifestyle and livelihood – is a very old book. And Krishi Shwapno is taking it to a new level altogether.

Krishi Shwapno is a blockchain-based agricultural technology platform and business where farmers are connected directly to their business to ensure fair price and safe food for consumers with food traceability, all the while creating micro entrepreneurs.

"I belong to a farmer's family and know my parents' pain since childhood. They don't get fair price, proper farming advice and real-time information. The traditional agricultural supply chain gives scope to fraudulent activities and unsafe food. We want farmers to take farming as a business rather than just a means of livelihood. These awakenings led us to start Krishi Shwapno in 2019," shares Sayed Zubaer Hasan, founder and CEO of the start-up.

Over 76 percent of Bangladesh's farmers work on small and marginal lands. They lose their fair share of earnings when they sell their produce to local middlemen. Krishi Shwapno provides a one-stop solution by using blockchain technology in a very transparent manner, with pre-harvest to post-harvest monitoring for better yields and fair prices.

Ideas and efforts to assist the grass-roots population and inspiring them to be part of the economic environment warrant plaudits. In a very similar way another start-up, Crafts for Conservation, is helping the local indigenous commu-



nities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

"We aim to provide a livelihood option that is environmentally-friendly and culturally-appropriate. The idea was generated after discovering that the indigenous women and children in this area are highly skilled master craftspeople, so we created a supply-chain to help market their beautiful products in urban areas where there is a high demand," explains Asif Ibne Yousuf, Chair of Crafts for Conservation.

The project partnered and received support from organizations like Jatra and Aranya, and later became its own business in 2019. Without the intervention of an environmentally-friendly livelihood option, conservation of the area will be extremely difficult, as most project-based conservation initiatives rely on donor funding which is often highly competitive, uncertain and has time constraints.

Our next two start-ups, Garbageman and Biotech Bangladesh, are closely working in what can be called a revolutionary environmental movement in the country.

Launched in 2018, Garbageman is more than just a waste management company. Founder Fahim Uddin Shuvo says, "During my undergraduate education, I saw the lack of planning, coordination, and management in waste disposal methods and consequent urban environmental problems.

We introduced an efficient and scientific approach to the waste management system and convert waste into resources to reduce the usage of landfill. We work to improve the environment and the socio-economic status of waste-pickers simultaneously."

The initiative set out to collect on-source separated waste, both organic

and inorganic since 2018. And in the last two years, it has gained considerable attention from people and organisations for its work. Along with ongoing online social media campaigns, clean-up drives, school campaigns and a webinar series cleverly named "Trash Talk", Shuvo plans to launch a recycling platform app in the future.

Biotech Bangladesh, on the other hand, is already recycling used cooking oil from the food industry into renewable biodiesel and glycerin.

Abdulla Al Hamid, founder and Managing Director, shares, "The government awarded us with an innovation fund in 2016 to turn our idea into reality. We propose the restaurants that we would recycle their used cooking oil. This way, we try to prevent food adulteration as well. We offer them a monetary amount for their waste as we profit by recycling this waste into biodiesel. Therefore, we try to encourage them financially as well."

Currently, Biotech produces 6 tons of biodiesel every month. By 2025, it looks to increase production capacity and supply chain of 1500 tons monthly.

The abovementioned start-ups are supported by UNDP Bangladesh and Youth Co:Lab, the largest youth social entrepreneurship movement in Asia and the Pacific co-created by UNDP and Citi Foundation, and aligned with multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

An extended version of this article is available online. Read it on The Daily Star website, or on SHOUT on Facebook and @shoutds on Instagram.

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Build Your Personality: *Cake Edition*

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As evolving human beings, we usually tend to look back at our past selves quite often. Naturally, the mind begins to wonder: *What if I took up that job? What if I did speak up against my bully? What if I could go back and undo all the hurt that I caused to my loved ones?* The questions keep spiralling down the well while you stare at your own self, transfixed.

There is of course, no actual way to fully validate if our present self is a better version of our past self or not. Regardless, what if we *could* choose how we wanted to shape our ideal "self"?

I decided to whip up a simple "personality" menu through the thing that we love most -- food or, in my case, cakes -- to help understand who we really are and the characteristics that define us. Here's hoping this makes the ever-prevailing journey of finding our identities a little lighter, easier



PHOTO: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

and possibly happier.

Chocolate cake: The Empath

You have a deep sense of understanding and are well liked by the majority. Although you can also lead a simple life should you choose it, you do have the ca-

pability to adorn it instead by the decoration of multiple perspectives (or sprinkles).

Cheesecake: The Achiever

You have your goals well defined and set firmly in place. Most people are left in awe and always feel inspired to be like you. Your life mostly feels well set and indulgent, but just a little crack could also ruin your grand show.

Vanilla cake: The Rational

You see the world as black and white... err, mostly white, come to think of it. While others may often misunderstand your demeanor to be too dry, your personality does end up growing on people over time.

Mousse cake: The Over-thinker

Okay, you're a little tricky. Despite shining on the outside with that alluring chocolate glaze, there really seems to be layers of endless surprises -- or shock -- inside. Just when it seems like someone has pinned you down, they are left aghast to

find the third layer of that set gelatin which you have been trying so hard not to reveal.

Red Velvet: The Critic

You identify yourself as elite and in many ways to be much higher above than the others. There is almost always a 50/50 chance on whether or not you're going to be well liked by people. Some may dislike you on the spot while others will feel inclined to at least understand your cynical outlook, and eventually may also make peace with it.

I now leave you with a lingering thought: If we could know exactly how we function as human beings, could it possibly lead to fewer regrets and happier decisions instead? Maybe it is time to find out.

Roshni believes a steaming cup of tea can be the solution to most problems in life, save for math. Send Roshni your best math hacks and tips at roshni.shamim@gmail.com