

Back to roots to set up agro farm

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Against all odds, Sumi did not stop. She and her 30-year-old sister Shamima Begum took various initiatives to become agro-entrepreneurs, but they were initially unsuccessful.

Later, the sisters started producing vermicompost, a technology by which fertiliser is made from cow dung (or other organic matter) and earthworms, with eight kilograms of earthworms in 24 concrete rings in May last year.

They named their project Shamima Agro Farm and after seeing success, the sisters set up another 17 concrete beds (larger than the rings).

In October last year, Sumi and several others in the village participated in a training on vermicompost by an organisation called Sabuj Paribahan.

Sumi then involved 10 villagers struggling to get by and formed a community organisation "Chetonayon". They all now receive profits from the vermicompost project collectively.

"We are now getting a lot of orders to supply vermicompost to Dhaka, Cumilla, and other parts of the country. But we can't supply this demand as we have low production due to less investment," said Sumi.

Regardless, the others who learned the business from Sumi are happy to sell vermicompost and earn some extra money

from their small farms.

Zamshed and Rasheda Mondol of the village said they had been struggling to get by with their work in the fields. After Sumi involved them in learning how to set up a vermicompost farm, they were able to recently sell around 100kg of vermicompost as well as some earthworms, said Zamshed.

Fifteen-year-old Saida Binte Shahinur of Goriapara village said, "Sumi aunty taught me how to cultivate vermicompost at home."

She started recently with five rings and has already made profits. "I sold vermicompost three times till now and 1kg of earthworm for Tk 3,000."

Md Al Muzahid Sarker, Shibganj upazila agriculture officer, told The Daily Star that what Sumi is doing after completing her master's degree at DU is praiseworthy. "Modern agriculture needs more highly educated youth like Sumi."

Demand for vermicompost is increasing day by day as chemical fertilisers reduce soil fertility, he said.

"Sumi sometimes visits our office for advice. We are trying to help her by providing training and market access," said the agriculture officer.

Sumi urged the government to provide loans at a low interest rate to small vermicompost entrepreneurs so they are able to expand their businesses.

Serum silent yet Dhaka 'hopeful'

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limited scale this month with Sinopharm and Pfizer vaccines. But the administration of the second Covishield jabs of around 15 lakh people hangs in the balance due to no supply from Serum, the largest vaccine producer in the world.

India halted vaccine exports after donating or selling more than 66 million doses. The move has left countries including Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and many in Africa scrambling for alternate supplies, Reuters reported on May 19.

The suspension also affected Covax, a global initiative coordinated by the World Health Organisation, Vaccine Alliance Gavi, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. It was formed to ensure that low and middle-income countries have equitable access to Covid vaccines.

Under this, Bangladesh was supposed to get 6.8 crore vaccine doses this year. This could have covered around 20 percent of the population. But the country has received 1.06 lakh doses of Pfizer and 25 lakh doses of Moderna from Covax so far.

Covax also failed to keep its promise, made on March 2, of delivering 1.09 crore doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine by May. "This supply was disrupted as Serum has suspended vaccine exports," said a health official, requesting not to be named.

Talking to this correspondent again yesterday, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said one million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is likely to arrive in the country either at the end of this month or the beginning of the next month under Covax.

"We urged Covax that we have a deficit of 15 lakh doses of the Oxford vaccine and we wrote to them several times. In response, Covax has informed us that they will give us 10 lakh doses of the Oxford vaccine," he said.

In the meantime, Bangladesh has been bearing the brunt of the Delta variant of Covid. Currently, the daily positivity rate in the country is around 30 percent, which was below five percent in April.

Bangladesh recorded 164 deaths on Monday, the highest single-day casualty since Covid-19 cases were first detected in March last year.

The country suspended administration of the first doses on April 26, immediately after the Indian government barred exports of Covishield. Less than three percent of the 163 million population have been inoculated so far.

The government resumed inoculation of first doses on a

limited scale this month with Sinopharm and Pfizer vaccines.

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Serum delivered the first 50 lakh doses in January but shipped only 20 lakh the following month. Besides, the Indian government sent 33 lakh doses as a gift to Bangladesh.

After the Serum snub, the Bangladesh government wrote to AstraZeneca in April requesting the company to authorise production of its Covid-19 vaccine in Bangladesh.

A proposal was sent to AstraZeneca seeking its technology to manufacture the vaccine or import and repackaging it.

But the government has yet to get a response from the British-Swedish multinational pharmaceutical company.

Contacted, Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, a member of National Immunisation Technical Advisory Group, said they opined for administering Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine to people waiting for the second shots.

"Based on evidence and studies we found, we did not recommend a vaccine mixture," he said, adding that though it was delayed, the first shot would give some sort of protection.

"If the gap is around six months, a small group of first dose recipients can be tested to see the antibody level and if it is not satisfactory, then a booster dose can be given after administering the second dose," he said about mixing vaccines.

Recently, Germany has recommended that all people who got the first shots of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine switch to a different type of vaccine for their second shot.

It was aimed at increasing the speed and effectiveness of vaccinations as the more contagious Delta variant spreads, according to media reports.

Researchers have said mixing vaccines is likely safe and effective but they are still gathering data to be sure.

BR to run cattle

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more rigorously as the government imposed a "strict lockdown" amid rising numbers of new cases of Covid-19 and deaths from the disease.

The special train would leave Dewanganj Bazar at 3:00pm and reach Dhaka at 6:00am the next day. Each train would carry up to 400 cows.

Such service was first provided in 2008.

Eid-Ul-Azha is likely to be observed on July 20 or 21.

Malaysia extends

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to June 30 this year, Bernama reported.

Dahlan said that as of July 1, 248,083 illegal immigrants registered under the plan.

Of them, 97,892 got registered under the Return Recalibration Programme to return to their countries of origin and 149,889 under the Labour Recalibration Programme to get regularised, he added.

Dead, retired

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by the ministry's Senior Assistant Secretary Sharmin Sultana, was issued on July 4.

The third row of the list had the name of Ferdous Ara Sheikh, assistant professor of the gynaecology department at Rangpur Medical College. She died on February 26.

Meanwhile, Momotaz Begum, who went into retirement four months ago, was also promoted by the concerned ministry, with her name in the fourth row.

She was an assistant professor in paediatric department.

AKM Nurunabi Lyzu, principal of Rangpur Medical College Hospital, confirmed the death of Dr Ferdous Ara and added that it was a mistake made by the health ministry.

Smart foam gives

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material, especially in robotics and prosthetic devices, where robots need to be a lot more intelligent when working around humans," explained lead researcher Benjamin Tee.

To replicate the human sense of touch, the researchers infused the material with microscopic metal particles and added tiny electrodes underneath the surface of the foam.

When pressure is applied, the metal particles draw closer within the polymer matrix, changing their electrical properties. These changes can be detected by the electrodes connected to a computer, which then tells the robot what to do, Tee said.

"When I move my finger near the sensor, you can see the sensor is measuring the changes of my electrical field and responds accordingly to my touch," he said.

This feature enables the robotic hand to detect not only the amount but also the direction of applied force, potentially making robots more intelligent and interactive.

Tee said AiFoam is the first of its kind to combine both self-healing properties and proximity and pressure sensing. After spending over two years developing it, he and his team hope the material can be put to practical use within five years.

Outbound migrants face trouble

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made Surokha app, developed for nationwide Covid-19 vaccine registration, available for migrant workers from Monday afternoon, incorporating a new feature in it for them.

Md Mamun, a Kuwait-based migrant worker who returned home on vacation in January, said for BMET registration, he submitted required documents to the Dhaka District Employment and Manpower Office housed on the capital's Proshahi Kalyan Bhaban on Sunday.

He said upon submitting the documents, officials assured him that they would further process the documents and that he would be able to register with Surokha app later.

Mamun said he himself tried to do the registration via mobile phone yesterday but failed. Later, he went to a nearby computer shop in the city's Shanir Akhra to complete the registration.

"However, an operator there took my passport number and date of birth and he later said the [registration] process was not working at this moment," he added.

He added that two of his fellow migrant workers outside Dhaka also tried to get registered with Surokha but failed.

Nazrul Islam, Saudi Arabia-based worker who came home in February, said he registered with the BMET through Ami Proshahi app on Saturday.

The expatriate said he could not complete his registration despite attempting several times from Monday afternoon to night.

After giving passport number and date of birth, a message appeared citing the "verification" is not completed, he added.

He said his visa will expire after July 13, while his flight date is on July 10.

"Thinking that getting vaccine will be impossible within this short time, I have already confirmed hotel booking in Saudi

Arabia for quarantine," he added.

He further said other migrant workers known to him also could not complete their registration with Surokha app yesterday.

Asked, Debabrata Ghosh, assistant director at Cumilla District Employment and Manpower Office, said both the BMET and Surokha app registration processes are linked to the server of the passport authorities.

There is a possibility that the process can show "pending" if data is not generated from the passport database, he said.

It could also happen that such migrant workers' BMET registration have not been completed yet, he told this newspaper by phone.

Under the BMET registration process, about 20,000 to 21,000 migrant workers have registered between Saturday and Monday, according to the expatriates' welfare ministry.

On the other hand, health authorities said they would inoculate up to 1,400 migrant workers, who are waiting to travel to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, with Pfizer vaccine shots each day at seven hospitals in the capital.

Meanwhile, Quazi Md Rashid Un Nabi, director of Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital (SSMCH), yesterday said they would start administering the workers with the jabs from today.

He said they got the names of over 250 eligible migrant workers for Pfizer vaccine doses.

The vaccination centre at SSMCH is one of the seven centres in the capital where migrant workers can get Pfizer vaccine jabs.

The government decided to vaccinate Saudi Arabia and Kuwait bound migrant workers with Pfizer shots as it is one of the four vaccines approved in the Middle East countries.

One evacuee every second

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armed forces. Senator Church did not elaborate on how he had made the estimate of \$35 million in additional military equipment awaiting shipment to Pakistan. Qualified sources said, however, that this was the total value of outstanding licenses issued by the State Department's Office of Munition Controls before the programme of military sales was suspended on April 6.

These sources said the State and Defense Departments had prepared a memorandum listing the outstanding licenses and recommended to the White House that they be cancelled.

But, they said, Nixon ruled that the shipments be maintained.

WAR INEVITABLE, SAYS PAKISTAN LEADER

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, West Pakistan Chief of the Pakistan Democratic Party, said today in Lahore that war with India

was inevitable and the country should prepare to fight. He claimed India was trying to bleed Pakistan white and said the situation was now more dangerous than in 1965 when India and Pakistan fought a three-week war.

MALAYSIA WILL NOT INTERFERE IN PAKISTAN'S AFFAIRS

Malaysia will not interfere in the conflict between East and West Pakistan as it was an internal matter, Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak said in parliament today. He hoped that the problem would be settled amicably and peacefully between the parties concerned. On the aid given by Malaysia for the relief of the refugees, the prime minister said this was channelled through the United Nations in response to UN appeal by the UN Secretary General U Thant.

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Afghan forces vow to retake

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on securing major cities, roads and border towns in the face of the Taliban onslaught, launched as US and Nato troops pressed ahead with their final withdrawal in early May.

The militants' rapid gains have spurred fears that Afghan forces are facing a spiralling crisis, particularly now vital US air support has been massively curtailed by the handover of Bagram Air Base.

Mohib acknowledged that the Afghan air force was stretched and largely unable to support bases that were in remote districts.

But he said the air force was now being reorganised and would offer the needed back-up support to troops on the ground.

"We had some glitches as a result of the (US) retrograde... (that put) additional pressure on the Afghan air force, he said.

On Monday, more than 1,000 Afghan troops fled into Tajikistan, forcing the neighbouring country to bolster the frontier with its own soldiers.

Several hundred Afghan troops had already crossed into the country in recent weeks, in the face of an advancing Taliban.

Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov ordered "the mobilisation of 20,000 reserve troops to further strengthen the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan", a statement from the presidency said late on

Monday.

"We had to abandon our base because there was no coordination or interest among our commanders to counter the attack," said Mohammad Musa, a soldier who had fled to Tajikistan after his base in Kunduz province fell to the Taliban last week.

The fighting in the north has also forced Moscow to close its consulate in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of Balkh province and one of Afghanistan's largest urban centres near the border with Uzbekistan.

"The situation is changing rapidly. The Afghan forces, as they say, have abandoned too many districts. This logically creates nervousness," Moscow's envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov told the state-run TASS news agency on Monday.

Mohib said the soldiers who fled were returning and rejoining the security forces.

"They may have abandoned their posts because they ran out of ammunition or they ran out of supplies, but by no means has anyone defected to the Taliban," he said.

'TRYING OUR BEST'
The speed and ease of the Taliban's effective takeover of swathes of areas in Takhar, Badakhshan and Kunduz represent a massive psychological blow to the Afghan government.

'Not intimidated' by Belarus migrant pressure: EU chief

AFP, Medininkai

EU Council President Charles Michel yesterday said member states suspect the Belarusian regime of having a hand in the influx of migrants entering Lithuania, adding that the bloc was "not intimidated".

The Lithuanian border guard service said that over the past 24-hours alone they had detained 131 migrants, mostly from the Middle East and Africa.

That brings the total number of detected illegal crossings by migrants to more than 1,300 so far this year, compared to just 81 for all of 2020.

"There is the suspicion indeed that there is a role played by the Belarusian regime," Michel said during a visit to the Lithuanian border town of Medininkai.

"We are not naive in Europe. We are also not intimidated," he told

reporters.

He spoke alongside Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, who said that the "serious" migrant influx was "inspired by (Belarusian) government structures".

Belarus strongman President Aleksander Lukashenko yesterday blamed Lithuanian authorities for triggering the migrant influx themselves after Vilnius announced on Monday that it would cut the asylum request process to 10 days.

"If you declare to the whole world that you will register those who make their routes through Belarus even faster, they will keep going. You are opening the door for these migrants even wider," Lukashenko said, according to the local Belta news agency.

Minsk said last month it was suspending its participation in the

Eastern Partnership, an initiative to boost ties between the EU and its ex-Soviet neighbours, after Brussels imposed new sanctions over the forced landing of a European flight.

The Belarusian foreign ministry added that the suspension of the agreement would have a "negative impact" on fighting illegal migration and organised crime as Belarus shares a border with EU members Poland and Lithuania.

As most of the migrants coming to Lithuania are from Iraq, Michel said he would speak with the Iraqi prime minister later this week in an effort to repatriate the individuals.

"We will also be in contact with other origin countries to see how... to cooperate more with these countries to send the signal that it is not possible to come here using illegal tools and illegal instruments," he added.

Timeline Extended



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