

Back to roots to set up agro farm

FROM PAGE 12

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.

Indian PM to announce

FROM PAGE 12

say.

Special focus will be on each state and even region in states, the sources said. Most importantly, the changes are likely to factor in polls in five states next year and the 2024 national election.

Some of the probable ministers, who have arrived or are heading to Delhi, include Jyotiraditya Scindia, Sarbananda Sonowal, Lok Janshakti Party (LJP)’s Pashupati Paras, Narayan Rane and Varun Gandhi.

Former Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, who agreed to give up the chief minister’s post in Assam for Himanta Biswa Sarma after the BJP’s reelection, is also set to be a Union Minister.

So is Pashupati Paras, who led the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) coup in Bihar against ex-Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan’s son Chirag Paswan.

Others camping in Delhi are Anupriya Patel (Apna Dal), Pankaj Chowdhury, Rita Bahuguna Joshi, Ramshankar Katheria, Lallan Singh and Rahul Kaswan.

The Union Cabinet, which can have 81 members, currently has 53 ministers. This means 28 ministers can be added.

Before the exercise, PM Modi carried out a month-long review of ministers’ performance, especially during the second wave of Covid in April-May, which had the government facing unprecedented criticism in the country and abroad.

One evacuee every second

FROM PAGE 12

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

FROM PAGE 12

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 Rakhmon has 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.

The area once served as the stronghold for the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance during the gruesome civil war in the 1990s and was never routed by the militants.

A psychological war has also been taking shape online.

The Taliban has marshalled its forces on social media, with insurgent-affiliated accounts providing live updates of the fall of districts and posting numerous videos of Afghan soldiers surrendering and handing over weapons caches and equipment to the group.

The Afghan government in turn has been releasing its own footage on social media – mostly grainy black and white videos of airstrikes obliterating alleged Taliban positions, while boasting of inflicting heavy casualties on the jihadist group.

Back on the ground, Afghan commander General Mirassadullah Kohistani, who is now in charge of Bagram Air Base following the US exit last week, put on a brave face when asked about the insurgents rapid advances.

“We are trying to do the best and as much as possible secure and serve all the people,” he said.

South Korean general arrested for sex crime: official

AFP, Seoul

A South Korean two-star army general has been arrested for sexually harassing a female subordinate, officials said Tuesday, in the latest high-profile sex crime to rock the country’s military.

The case comes just a month after the country’s air force chief resigned over

the suicide of a master sergeant who was sexually assaulted by a colleague.

She reported the case higher up the chain of command, only to have her complaints ignored, and took her own life in May.

That sparked a national outcry in South Korea, which maintains a conscript army to defend itself against the nuclear-armed North.



Covid-19 Taskforce officers wearing personal protective equipment (PEE) spray disinfectant on the road to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease in Solo, Central Java Province, Indonesia yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Serum silent yet Dhaka ‘hopeful’

FROM PAGE 1

past few weeks due to massive vaccination, with the daily positivity rate coming down to 2.34 percent, health officials in Bangladesh hope the embargo on vaccine exports will be removed soon.

The latest update shows the Covid-19 recovery rate in India went up to 97.06 percent.

“As the situation is improving in India, we hope that we will get our procured vaccines soon. We are communicating with the Serum Institute and are hopeful about getting a good amount of vaccine doses in August,” Health Minister Zahid Maleque told The Daily Star on Saturday.

“We expect that Serum will give us at least 15 lakh doses of the Oxford vaccine immediately to inoculate those waiting for their second dose,” the minister added.

Nazmul Hassan Papon, managing director of Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd, the local dealer of Serum, said they were in touch with the Indian company but are yet to get any date of vaccine arrival.

“The Covid-19 situation in India has improved. India should allow vaccine exports,” he said, without elaborating further.

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.

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.

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

FROM PAGE 12

fisheries and livestock ministry to provide safe and cost-effective services amid travel restrictions imposed because of the pandemic.

But this year’s restrictions on transport services are enforced 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

FROM PAGE 12

implemented from November 16 last year 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

FROM PAGE 12

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

FROM PAGE 12

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.

Timeline Extended

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