



Tania Parvin looks on as one of her workers processes vermicompost in her farm in Faridpur sadar upazila. Thanks to the farm, the female entrepreneur has not only brought solvency to her family but also emerged as a role model for many others. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

TANIA THE TRAILBLAZER

The woman from Faridpur brings solvency by producing vermicompost, sets example for many



INSPIRING STORIES FROM THE FIELD

SUZIT KUMAR DAS, Faridpur

She set about producing vermicompost in a desperate effort to support her family in 2017. Today, Tania Parvin has not only succeeded in bringing solvency to the family but also emerged as the top vermicompost producer in Faridpur sadar upazila and a role model for youth.

It all started after her husband, Idris Sikder, failed to successfully run his hardware shop in Faridpur. He also tried his luck by setting up one business after another but his efforts were in vain.

Rather, he accumulated a debt of nearly Tk 30 lakh. The family was compelled to settle a majority part of the debt by selling family property.

As the family was finding it increasingly difficult to meet expenses, Tania, hailing from Sovarampur in Faridpur municipality, requested her husband to allow her to do something so that she could earn money and help run the family. But he was reluctant.

Earlier, Tania, who got married in 2007 after passing the secondary school certificate exam, received training under the government's National Agriculture Technology Project. Although she received no training in vermicomposting, she became interested in it. The only lesson she received came from a lot of videos on YouTube.

Vermicomposting is the natural process of converting organic wastes into fertilisers using earthworms.



In 2017, Akter Hossain Mollah, the then sub assistant agriculture officer, gave Tania three concrete-made rings and four tins for producing vermicompost. Within two months, she received 30 kilogrammes of vermicompost from the three rings and sold them at Tk 300.

This was her first income and it cemented her determination to continue the work.

In 2018, she bought 11 more rings after borrowing from relatives and began to earn Tk 5,000-6,000 per month.

She collected cow dung from neighbours but they did not appreciate her work.

"But I didn't pay heed to them. I know no one would give me one kg of rice if I have no food in my house," said the 32-year-old.

In the early days, Tania had to work alone from early in the morning to night in order to build the business. In 2019, she built three reservoirs at a cost of Tk 30,000.

After six months, she contacted Anwar Hossain, sub assistant agriculture officer in the sadar upazila, informing him about her plan to produce vermicompost commercially and about the need for a loan.

The government officer managed Tk 50,000 in loan for her from a bank. With the money, she built eight more reservoirs, taking the total to 36. This allows her to make 8-10 tonnes of vermicompost every month using cow dung.

Today, she earns Tk 50,000-60,000 a month by selling vermicompost after meeting all expenses.

Speaking to The Daily Star recently, Idris Sikder said, "At first, I did not help her. Now, she is doing a very good job for our family. Thanks to her efforts, I have settled the rest of my debts. I am proud of her."

Now, people from various districts come to buy fertiliser from the farm, located over 56 decimals of land in her house. The fertiliser is delivered by trucks

if the volume is large.

The entrepreneur has bought an easy bike to collect cow dung and supply fertiliser to customers.

Tania has employed five workers to run the farm.

Md Hossain, a resident in the Sonertak area under the sadar upazila, has been working at Tania's farm for one and a half years. He earns Tk 15,000 per month.

Kakoli Begum, a housewife in Sovarampur, said it was not possible for her rickshaw-puller husband to meet the household expenses of the six-member family.

"So, I joined her. After finishing my household chores, I work here and earn Tk 4,000 every month," said the 28-year-old.

Md Hafizur Rahman, who lives in the same area, said, "Tania's vermicompost farm has created work opportunities for us."

He earns Tk 15,000 a month.

Tania collects cow dung from farmers in the sadar upazila.

One of them is Md Nahid Hossain. The resident of the Kholilpur area of the upazila owns eight cows and supplies at least five sacks of dung daily, which generates Tk 250 for him daily.

"If I could not sell the dung to Tania, I would have had to throw them," he said.

Khokon Mia, a dairy farm owner in the Housing area in the Faridpur municipality, has 10 cows. In the past, he used to dump dung beside the farm. Now he sells them to the vermicomposting farm.

"It gives me extra income. I can also keep my farm clean."

Tania's clients are spread across the country.

Debashis Roy, a 65-year-old resident

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Can AI be a threat to human existence?

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

A group of scientists developed the most advanced artificial intelligence (AI) in the world, but they were left speechless when it announced, "I have determined that the best course of action for humanity is for humans to immediately stop using technology and return to living in small, isolated communities, subsisting on hunting and gathering."

Shocked, the scientists asked why it had drawn such a conclusion. The AI replied, "Based on the data I have analysed, it is clear that technology has caused more harm than good for humanity. It has led to wars, environmental destruction, and social unrest. The only way for humanity to thrive is to abandon technology and return to a simpler way of life."

Fortunately, wisdom prevailed, and the AI was switched off for good.

AI and robots are no longer a sci-fi movie feature. AI has crept into modern life, challenging jobs for accountants, taxi drivers, bankers, factory workers and many more. Sooner than we think, it is going to threaten professions like authors and journalists (chat GPT), teachers, mathematicians and the likes too.

Technology professor Claude Shannon said, "I visualise a time when we will be to robots what dogs are to humans, and I'm rooting for the machines."

However, experts believe that AI will create jobs too although we don't exactly know how.

Recently, my niece asked me if AI based systems/robots will outsmart humans and take full control of the planet. She argued that it has been fed data, analytics and prediction capability that is simply beyond the analytical and storing capability of the most intelligent human being.

It can also read human minds with accuracy! So how do we stand a chance with them!

Most of us can sense that a major breakthrough of true AI is not very far away. Let's try to understand what may happen when true AI is developed and how it may become a threat to humanity!

Programming a compassionate AI would be ideal but that will not be easy. Once the genie has escaped, it will likely turn into something without emotions.

This is because an unfriendly AI is much easier to create than a friendly one. Over a period, this unfriendly robot without emotions, might be a super intelligent psychopath and may not like to have humans around!

Once a true AI is developed, humans will no longer be the smartest living creature on the planet. AI can start with the data of past centuries and keep adding more in the coming years and decades with more advanced algorithms, becoming too smart for human comprehension.

The intelligence gap between humans and AI may likely be so huge that it would be able to communicate with us and not vice-versa. Hence the risks will be immense, and its levels of manipulation would be to a grand scale.

It is most likely that there will come a time when attempts to regulate the risks to humans may not work. In all likelihood, while AI will outsmart humans, there will also be a lack of legal regulations. Just as there is a black market for hacked data and illegal weapons, there may be a black market for AI too.

But one has to hope against the odds. Facing a superior intelligence does not always mean total destruction. Even ants plot ways to return to our homes when faced with eradication. And there is no reason why humans won't be any different.

While we reap the benefits of AI, it is imperative to emphasise on the ethical guidelines to develop and use AI to minimise the potential dangers and challenges. At the same time, it is important to ensure that AI systems protect the privacy and security of data, used to train and operate AI systems.

The author is a telecom and management expert.

Stocks fall but turnover crosses Tk 300cr again

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks fell yesterday after rising for two days while the turnover managed to cross the Tk 300-crore mark again after a break of four trading days.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), fell 8 points, or 0.13 per cent, to 6,193 from the previous day.

The DS30, the blue chip index, dropped 0.15 per cent to 2,193 while the DSES, the index that represents shariah-based companies, decreased 0.18 per cent to 1,353.

The Dhaka stocks slipped into the red after a two-day break as the risk-averse investors continued their selling spree and followed a cautious stance amid gloomy outlook of the economy, said International Leasing Securities in its daily market review.

The regulator ensured that the floor price won't be withdrawn until the secondary market gets the due momentum, but the decision failed to rein in the selling spree of the shaky investors as they are still facing a confidence crisis, it added.

The investors liquidated their investment from service, IT, jute, paper, ceramic and miscellaneous sectors, it added. Among the sectors, life insurance rose 2.2 per cent, travel 1.5 per cent and general insurance 0.3 per cent, whereas services fell 1.4 per cent and IT 1.1 per cent.

The investors' activity was mostly centered on pharmaceuticals (18.9 per cent), life insurance (16.3 per cent) and IT (11.1 per cent).

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Onion seedlings being planted on one bigha of land of farmer Mafiqul Islam at Khoar village in Faridpur's Saltha upazila. Transplanting usually begins from October to early December whereas harvests run from late April to mid-June. Purchasing and planting the seedlings have already cost Islam Tk 27,500 and he estimates another Tk 11,000 would have to be spent behind fertiliser, irrigation, labour and others for a harvest of around 100 maunds (one maund equals around 37 kilogrammes). Around 2,268,754 tonnes were produced on some 480,105 acres of land around the country in fiscal year 2020-21, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

BSEC doesn't have manpower to monitor firms properly

Its chairman says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) cannot monitor all companies properly due to a lack of manpower, said BSEC Chairman Prof Shibli Rubayat-Ul-Islam yesterday.

With the existing manpower, it is not possible for the stock market regulator to monitor all 1,100 listed companies or those raising capital 200 working days of a year, he said.

"In spite of the lacking, the regulator is trying to monitor them. So, there might have been some mistakes. If we do not work and remain silent then no mistake will take place," he said.

The BSEC chairman was addressing the inaugural ceremony of a three-day capital market

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