



Some ripe plums at Shawkat Ali's orchard in Mymensingh's Muktagachha upazila. PHOTO: COLLECTED

## COVID-19 FALLOUT

# Exotic fruit grower in hot water

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Shawkat Ali had been doing good business selling fresh plum, widely known as aloo Bukhara, grown in his nursery in Muktagachha upazila since 2013.

But this year, when people have been compelled to limit their movement due to the coronavirus pandemic, he is watching ripe plums in his orchard, consisting of 15 trees, falling off or getting spoiled.

Dried plum or prune, mostly imported, is popular among chefs, especially in Dhaka, who use it to prepare various sweet or savoury dishes including biriyani. But this home-grown fruit is going unsold since buyers from Dhaka had been unable to visit Shawkat's orchard amid the virus scare.

Owner of Banolata Nursery, Shawkat said while his expected total harvest of plums this year would be around 120 kilograms, he so far has sold only 11 kg of the fruit to local buyers, at Tk 400 per kg.

"If the fruits could be dried, each kg would've been sold for Tk 1,000 to 1,200. But I haven't been able to find out about the process of drying the fruit."

His lack of knowledge in fruit preservation techniques will cost him at least Tk 50 thousand in losses this year, he also speculated.

Shawkat said he was the one who first introduced cultivation of the exotic fruit to Mymensingh. He first collected a sapling from Germplasm Centre of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) in 2009 and in 2013 he started small-scale cultivation of plums in his nursery.

A plum tree usually starts bearing fruits from

May to July and demand for its saplings has been on the rise in recent years, he said, adding that interested buyers from different nurseries from various districts including Dhaka, Bogura, Jashore, Gazipur and Mymensingh used to contact him for saplings, but this year none of them contacted him.

He now has a stock of 100 saplings, with prices ranging from Tk 400 to Tk 500, and a few matured plants that he used to sell for Tk 4,000 to Tk 5,000.

BAU's Germplasm Centre Director Prof Dr Mohammad Abdur Rahim said the drying technique of plum is quite difficult and it would not be easy to introduce the process at farmers' level.

Plum is a nutritious fruit as it is rich in vitamins, potassium, magnesium, and iron. It is used to add taste in various gourmet recipes as well as in drinks such as burhani.

Farmers could easily have an additional source of income by growing plum trees around their houses and there is even export potential for the fruit, Prof Rahim also said.

After this correspondent reached Saidul Islam, agriculture officer in Muktagachha upazila, to draw his attention on plum grower Shawkat's predicament, he said under current circumstances, Shawkat or any other farmer should take advantage of the government's online marketplace at <https://foodformation.gov.bd>, where the farmers can sell their produce to buyers without any charge.

Though plum is a relatively unknown fruit in the country, his office would also try to find its buyers for Shawkat, he also said.

# Bridge condition precarious as earth displaced from approach road

The bridge on the Dhaleswari river at Charabari of Tangail Sadar upazila needs permanent repair to evade collapse

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

The bridge on the Dhaleswari river at Charabari in Tangail Sadar upazila lies in a vulnerable condition as earth got displaced from one of its approach roads due to heavy rain for the last few days and increasing current on the river.

The bridge on Charabari-Torabganj road connects five unions of the char areas in the western part of the district.

Hundreds of vehicles, including heavy ones, and thousands of people of Katuli, Hugra, Kaku, Mahmudnagar unions in Sadar upazila and Bharra union in Nagarpur upazila move on the bridge every day.

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) constructed the bridge in 2006 for developing road communication between the district headquarters and the char area.

But the west side approach of the important bridge was damaged several times due to floods and heavy rain after its construction. Every time, the authorities did temporarily repair work by felling

sandbags.

As a large portion of the approach road was damaged last year, authorities set up a Bailey bridge in one side on it for continuation of vehicular movement there.

Sumon Dewan, former chairman of Katuli union parishad (UP), said the approach of the bridge was damaged as the river has changed its course due to filling of its west side with sand, which increased the pressure of current in the east side.

Locals alleged that a section of influential people having political clout continued illegal sand extraction from the river near the bridge during the dry season for the last few years, which is another reason behind the repeated damage.

Iqbal Hossain, chairman of Katuli UP, said over one lakh people of char areas take their crops, vegetables and other products to different places, including the district town, by different vehicles, including heavy trucks, through the road.

"If steps are not taken immediately, the bridge can see further damage, disrupting

communication with the char areas and causing sufferings to the people. The local lawmaker, upazila parishad chairman and upazila nirbahi officer were informed about the matter," he said.

Shahjahan Ansary, upazila parishad chairman in Tangail Sadar, said he has already informed the Water Development Board (WDB) and LGED of the matter and told them to take immediate steps to protect the bridge. He also emphasised taking permanent measures to repair the damaged portion and protect the bridge.

Md Sirajul Islam, executive engineer of WDB in Tangail, said LGED constructed the bridge and so, they will take measures in this regard.

AKM Hedayet Ullah, upazila LGED engineer in Tangail Sadar, said, the damaged deck of the Bailey bridge has been temporarily repaired for continuation of vehicular movement.

Necessary steps with the coordination of WDB will be taken for repairing the approach road when the river water recedes, he said.



One of the approach roads of the bridge on the Dhaleswari river at Charabari in Tangail Sadar upazila lies badly damaged after the heavy rain for the last several days.

PHOTO: STAR

# Winning against colour discrimination

Once bullied and mistreated, dark-complexioned Rubina is now a successful entrepreneur

MD MIZANUR RAHMAN HIMADRI WITH BULBUL AHMED

Her only 'crime' was her dark complexion. It led to her divorce only 34 days after marriage and during that short period her in-laws even tried to kill her.

But Natore's Rubina Khatun did not allow these societal attitudes to put her future at stake. Through hard work, she has become a successful entrepreneur and an award winning farmer.

In 2018, she received the KIB (Krishibid Institute, Bangladesh) Agriculture Award from President Abdul Hamid. Besides, she received several other honours as a woman entrepreneur. Sharing snippets of her life, Rubina said she fell in love and married a Saudi expatriate in 2012, by exchanging vows over the phone.

Soon afterwards, his family members started to torture her physically and mentally for her dark complexion. Once her sister-in-law tried to drown her in the pond, Rubina recounted those traumatic days.

To avoid the torture the young woman returned to her father's house in Ekdala Chandpur village of Natore Sadar upazila only to receive a divorce letter from the Saudi

expatriate, later.

But Rubina did not let the adverse situation destroy her hope. She took over the responsibility of her four-member family including her mother and two younger siblings, as her father passed away before her marriage.

Rubina started tailoring work at home, determined to become self-reliant. After a few days, she opened a poultry farm on family land with Tk 50 thousand, borrowing the money from a local NGO. The venture earned her a profit of Tk 30,000.

In 2015, she earned a prize of Tk 2 lakh prize by taking part in a competition by Fair & Lovely Foundation named "Tomar Shopno Koro Shotti" (Make Your Dreams Come True) in Dhaka. Since then she did not need to look back.

Afterwards, Rubina along with her younger brother started an agro-farm, after receiving training from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Natore.

Initially, she began the venture on 12-bighas of her family land but soon she had to lease another six bighas as her business grew.

Guava, litchi, dragon fruit, banana, plum,

mango, coconut and various vegetables were cultivated. She also started farming fish in their pond and dairy farming. Apart from this, she is now rearing around 200 pigeons and 100 ducks at her farm.

She now earns a profit of around Tk 30,000 from her project every month, said Rubina.

She also runs a organisation named IFMC, where she trains helpless women on cow, duck and poultry farming. Moreover, she has set up a sewing training centre for women, who fell victim to torture.

Like many other small businesses, the pandemic has affected Rubina's farm.

Income from her agro-project has reduced because of the thin presence of customers at the local haats where she would sell poultry and cattle. Yet, she refuses to give in to despair.

"Many people bullied me for my dark skin after I was divorced but the same people are now praising me seeing my success, which really gives me immense pleasure," said Rubina.

Ali Sufi Shantu, a local journalist, said "Many people, especially helpless women, are now following Rubina's footsteps. She is a farming hero in my eyes."



Rubina Khatun feeds her goats at the courtyard of her house in Natore Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: BULBUL AHMED

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### Corrigendum Notice

Following corrections have been made in the Tender Documents of the Invitation for Tender Ref. No. ER/PUR/IT-07-11/2020 dt. 31.05.2020.

Serial No.	Reference Number	Corrections
a)	ER/PUR/IT-07/2020 ERW Carbon Steel Pipe	Tender last selling date & time: <b>20 July 2020, 16:00 Hrs</b>
b)	ER/PUR/IT-08/2020 Variable Area Flow Meter for ABP Unit	Tender closing date & time: <b>21 July 2020, 11:15 Hrs</b>
c)	ER/PUR/IT-09/2020 Thermometer & Thermometer Gauge	Tender opening date & time: <b>21 July 2020, 11:30 Hrs</b>
d)	ER/PUR/IT-10/2020 Heat Exchanger Tube	Tender last selling date & time: <b>27 July 2020, 16:00 Hrs</b>
e)	ER/PUR/IT-11/2020 Aero Condenser Fin Tube for Storage Tank & SCP Unit	Tender closing date & time: <b>28 July 2020, 11:15 Hrs</b> Tender opening date & time: <b>28 July 2020, 11:30 Hrs</b>

**All other terms and conditions of Invitation for Tenders shall remain unchanged.**

**Kazi Mahabubur Rahman**  
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GD-1116