

the nation.

A Life in the Day ...

Through the Lens of AKM Mohsin



Dhaka is fast becoming a city of restaurants. In the plush areas of Gulshan, Dhanmandi and Banani, countless restaurants offering cuisine from around Asia have cropped up. But another type of restaurant, popularly known as "Italian restaurants" have thrived on the streets of Dhaka for years. As the population of the city has grown, so has the need to provide cheap, fast food. Micro entrepreneurs have responded in a manner only they know how -- by setting up shop anywhere and everywhere. From a cup of tea with a piece of bread for breakfast to hefty lunch on rice and vegetables to little delicacies like *pithas* of all kinds, the fares at these eateries appeal to both the palate and the pockets of low-income people. The Daily Star's Chief Photographer AKM Mohsin recently captured the throbbing restaurant life on the streets of Dhaka in his lens:



Apple of Bengal Up Against New Foe

By Aroop Talukdar

Barisal

BARISAL: The guava, the protein-rich fruit affectionately known as the 'Apple of Bengal' is being produced in abundance in some areas of the vast southern districts for over a hundred years.

The southern region remains the biggest guava producing area in the country. Even by the standard of the area, Aghar-Kuriana in Swarupkathi thana of Pirojpur district is considered the leader. This guava-rich area used to be part of the Khulna division, but it is now in the Barisal division.

The southern districts in general and Pirojpur in particular remains one of the major suppliers of guava for the rest of the country.

The fruit is largely produced at least in thirty villages in Pirojpur, Jhalakathi and Barisal districts. But the largest number of gardens are located in the Swarupkathi thana of Pirojpur.

These large gardens produce several thousand tons of guava every year. According to villagers in Swarupkathi, the abundance of guava has given these parts of the country almost legendary fame.

Aghar-Kuriana unions of Swarupkathi also has a historical background. The guava gardens in this area were a battlefield during the liberation

war of Bangladesh in 1971. In 1971 Maoist revolutionary group, then known as the Purba Bangla Sarbahara Party headed by Siraj Sikder, set up base in the gardens and began a guerrilla campaign against the Pakistan occupation army in the region, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy.

At one stage of the war the Pakistan army, in effort to flush the guerrillas out of the guava gardens, deforested huge areas. Unable to withstand the assault of the heavily-reinforced Pakistan army, the Sarbahara guerrillas forced to retreat from their safe zone, leaving behind many comrades dead.

However, few people in the area, including the older generation, can say exactly when or how guava cultivation became popular in the area. They say that, guava cultivation was started here more than one hundred years ago by Hindu landlords. From the middle of the 19th century onwards, guava production increased gradually and acquired fame across the country. Guava is now the second-largest agricultural produce in the area after paddy.

"Guava is now so profitable that more and more people are showing interest in investing in cultivation and marketing of this fruit", said Abul Hossain, a local wholesale trader of guava.

Now, guava has also become an exportable item, earning foreign exchange like other

fruits of Bangladesh such as pineapple and mango. At home, other than household consumption, guava has a steady market because of the high demand from different jelly producing factories.

According to the Swarupkathi thana agriculture office, guava is currently being cultivated on more than 600 hectares of land. This land was divided into six blocks. These are: 240 hectares in Kuriana, 260 hectares in Dhalhar, 22 hectares in Muslimpara, 7 hectares in Dalabari, 51 hectares in Ganapatikati and 20 hectares in Madra block.

Guava provides the area with steady employment opportunities, with some 1,200 farming families earning a living from guava production and marketing businesses.

"We prefer to cultivate guava than paddy because the fruits give a higher return", said Faindra Nath Sikder, a 7-year old school teacher at Kuriana Girls' High School who also owns two guava gardens. "I have a 90-year old garden and it is still making money for me", Sikder said.

Adamkati, a village some eight kilometres from the Swarupkathi thana headquarters are extended for some several miles amid schools, hats and bazars including dwelling houses.

Rabindra Nath Mandal, teacher of the Adamkati Government Primary High School

and a owner of eight gardens, however, complained that farmers in the area are getting little help from government agencies to expand the production of special types of guava.

"Strongly enough, except local variety of guava no other variety like the Kazi guava is easy to cultivate in this soil. I tried to produce Kazi in my gardens earlier, but that was not really profitable enough to justify further investment", Mandal said. "Local guava cultivators went to the agriculture office for necessary fertilisers after examining the soil, but nobody in that office paid any heed to the matter", he said.

Guava farmers normally use compost and green fertilisers, cowdung, mustered extracts, water hyacinth etc. in their gardens.

Some of them said chemical fertilisers eventually hamper the guava production after two or three years, so they prefer not to use it. For last two or three years, a plant disease has seriously affected production, causing huge losses for garden owners.

"A kind of fungus is responsible for spreading black dots on the guava", said entomologist Md Ehsanul Haq said. "It is spreading very fast".

The infection spread fast, from the leaves to the trees then to the fruit. This infection is visible with change of colours of the trees, fading of leaves and huge light or dark black dots on the guava. It has also changed

the taste of the fruit. Recently, agriculture experts termed this fungal infection as 'Anthrocnosis', which is responsible for creating indiscriminate dark black dots on the guava changing its shapes, colour and taste.

Swarupkathi thana Agriculture office said that, gardens on at least 575 hectares of land in different areas have been attacked by this fungus. The Agriculture Research Institute, Barisal region here now has come forward to save the guava cultivators and to find out the reasons of this type of viral infection in the guava gardens.

Later, Regional Agriculture office, Agriculture Extension Department (AED) and the South Regional Agriculture Development Project (SRADP) jointly took a programme which is being financed by the latter.

In that team gardenologist Majedul Islam, garden expert Mostafizur Rahman Talukdar are working with the scientific officer of the Regional Agri-Research Centre.

They conducted research works including into this utter havoc caused by the fungal attack on three guava gardens of Aghar, Kuriana and Bhimruli.

Their monitoring and findings revealed that 'Noin' and 'Topsin', anti fungal medicines were more or less effective in controlling infections by 85 and 26 per cent respectively in the guava gardens.

Seed Scarcity Sour's Agri Scene

By Our Own

Correspondent

Mymensingh

ACUTE scarcity of seeds in Mymensingh threatens drastic decline in production of winter or 'Rabi' crops, including vegetables.

The farmers, who have lost aus, aman and other standing crops, and jute plants during the flood, have already started preparing their lands for the winter crops.

The District Agriculture Extension Department (AED) has undertaken an extensive programme for cultivation of winter crops on a total of 25,479 hectares of land in the 12 thanas of the district - Sadar, Muktagacha, Phulbaria, Bhaluka, Trishal, Gafarganj, Gouripur, Phulpur, Nandail, Iswarganj, Haluaghat and Dubaura.

According to AED sources, under the programme maize will be cultivated on 500 hectares, sweet potato on 7,100

hectares, ground nut on 500 hectares, musur on 600 hectares, chhola on 3,000 hectares, maskala on 1,500 hectares, motor on 240 hectares, khesari on 1540 hectares, arahar on 25 hectares, onion on 1,000 hectares, garlic on 800 hectares, dhania on 500 hectares, chilli on 1,500 hectares, ginger on 249 hectares, turmeric on 850 and winter vegetables including tomato, lalshak, data shak, potato and others on 5,700 hectares.

The AED has also set a production target of 10,24,489 metric tonnes and expects proper implementation of the programme will see the farmers harvesting 9,000 metric tonnes of maize, 67,000 metric tonnes of mustard, 950 metric tonnes of groundnut, 400 metric tonnes of musur, 2,790 metric tonnes of chhola, 170 metric tonnes of mug, 1,100 metric tonnes of maskala, 180 metric tonnes of motor, 1,140 mts of khesari, 10,000 metric tonnes of onion, 4,600 metric tonnes of garlic, 1,000 metric tonnes of dhania, 3,000 metric tonnes of chilli,

249 metric tonnes of ginger, 850 metric tonnes of turmeric and 100,500 metric tonnes of winter vegetables.

An official of the AED told The Daily Star that necessary measures would be taken to sanction loans, supply of high yielding variety (HYV) seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and other agricultural inputs for the flood-affected farmers of the district under post-flood rehabilitation programme to make successful the 'Rabi' crops cultivation scheme.

However, against the backdrop of acute scarcity of seeds, the AED programme appears headed for disaster.

The Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) has only distributed 20 kilograms of onion, six kilograms of tomato, nine kilograms of brinjal, 143 kilograms of radish, six kilograms of cauliflower, two kilograms of bati shak, 75 kilograms of spinach, 130 kilograms of lal shak, 12 kilograms of beans, 113 kilograms of pea, and two kilograms of gourd seeds

through live stores and 61 dealers at different thanas. The BADC supply is far from adequate. Higher demand in the market has led dramatic price hike.

At the local markets, seeds are sold at prices two or three times more than the BADC rate.

Farmers have to pay 1,200 to 1,300 taka for one kilogram of onion seed while the same amount of tomato seeds costs 2,300 to 2,500 taka whereas the BADC rate is Tk. 600 and Tk. 1,400 respectively.

Dealers appointed by the BADC are making most of the situation by selling the seeds in the black market at a higher price, the farmers complained.

Besides, the farmers in the remote areas cannot even get the chance to collect seeds as only five stores is operational in 12 thanas.

Farmers fear if they do not get sufficient seeds at reasonable price, winter crops cultivation will drastically decline and production will miss the AED target by miles.

Never Say Die

By Our Own

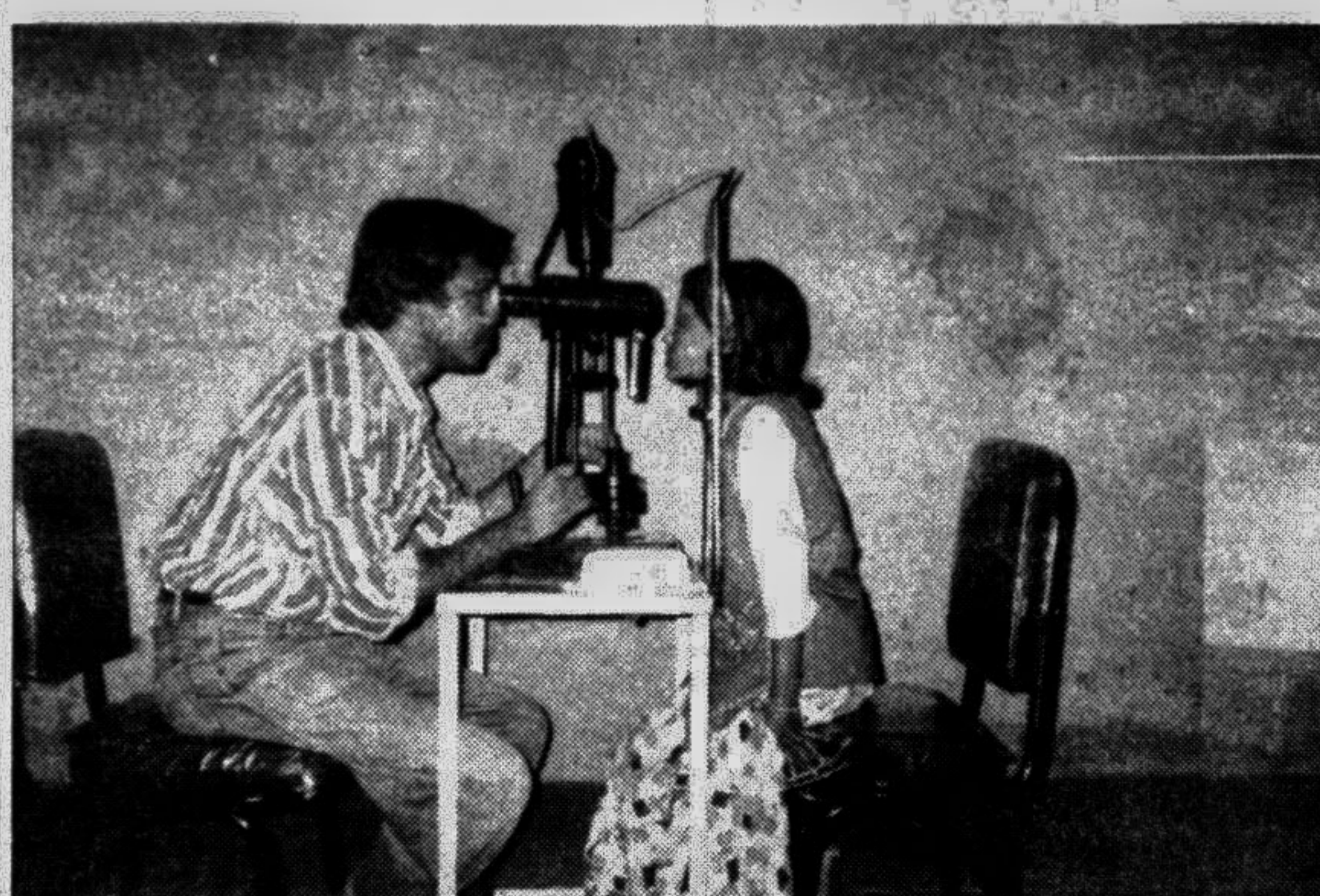
Correspondent

Faridpur

THE flood-hit people in Faridpur have not given up hopes despite being beset with multifarious problems.

The prolonged flood has ravaged the district, causing damage to houses, schools, roads and other infrastructure. The farmers were the most affected. But the flood-hit people haven't lost heart. To help them start anew, the government has extended help. Besides, non-government organisations and others have also come forward.

The government has so far distributed more than a million taka, 1,246 metric tonnes of rice, 6,402 pieces of sarees, 1,450 pieces of lungis, 2,000 pieces of old clothes, 285 tonnes of biscuits, 1,080 cans of baby food, 1,000 packets of noodles, 990 kilograms of chira, 326 kilograms of molasses and 100 cartons of protein biscuits among the flood victims in eight thanas of the district up to September 29, according to a district relief and rehabilitation office source.



A Poor Man's Slit Lamp

By Rajat Kanti

Goswami

Moulvibazar

SLIT lamp is an essential equipment for an ophthalmologist. The lamp is not manufactured in Bangladesh and the imported ones cost Taka three lakh each, which is a lot more than most private practitioners can afford. A young eye doctor in Moulvibazar has come up with a slit lamp that is cheap but efficient.

Dr Md Rafiqul Alam, an eye specialist at the BNSB Eye Hospital, has made a slit lamp using old parts of automobiles. The only new part is the bulb. The slit lamp is almost as effective as the imported ones in examining different parts of the eye - like cornea, interocular chamber etc.

Dr Alam, who hails from Tangal and has been working at the BNSB Hospital since 1992, felt the need of a slit lamp every time he attended a patient outside the hospital. In the

hospital he could use one but in his private chamber there was none. The pressing need led to innovation and the result was the low-cost slit-lamp. The slit lamp Dr. Alam made out of old automobile parts involved an expenditure of taka nine thousand only.

"It took me seven months to make this one," said the young doctor, who believes he can ensure regular supply of the low-cost slit lamps in the market, if duly patronised.

Gateway to Smuggler's Paradise

By Aroop Talukdar

Barisal

BARISAL: Over the past several years, Chowkighata, a riverbank area in Daulatkhan thana of Bhola district has become a convenient shipment point for smugglers of the southern region. So much so that local people have taken to calling it the "Golden Door" of smuggling.

Foreign goods of various kinds exchange hands involving several lakhs of taka here every night. Money and political clout have made the smugglers so powerful that no one seems able to put a brake on this illegal cross-border trade.

According to the local people, foreign ships often stop at Chowkighata for changing the pilot on the way to and from Chittagong and Khulna-Mongla ports. But the crews are more interested in dropping contra-

band items to the smugglers than changing the pilot. They stop their ships in the river midstream from where foreign goods are carried by different trawlers and engine-powered boats used by the smugglers.

Later on, these huge quantity of smuggled goods including foreign cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, clothes, umbrella, cosmetics, cement, chemicals, medicines, kerosene oil etc., are carried to Bhola district headquarters. From there, the goods are sent to different destinations through river routes.

The entire operation takes place in the cover of darkness, but it is an "open secret" nowadays. But no one dares to protest or do anything against the highly powerful smuggler ring.

In this way smuggling of different types of goods has continued for years. There hardly any legal action to the illegal trade, as the smugglers maintain close liaison with the powerful local elite and political bigwigs.

Sometime ago, the Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO) of Daulatkhan thana himself conducted an operation to check the smuggling at the Chowkighata point and seized a huge quantity of smuggled goods. A case was later filed with the local thana but eventually nothing was more done to curb the activities of the smugglers.

In another incident, Bangladesh Navy personnel caught and seized Burmese salt worth about 20 lakh taka and arrested 11 crews and deckhands from a marine vessel on October 14 last. But the "god fathers" behind the smuggler rings remained out of reach as usual.

"These smugglers are very powerful, they are invincible" - say the local people. "They can do and undo anything in their jurisdiction, none is there to tell them anything about their misdeeds."