

When Birds Mean

BORN to a poor family on the bank of the river Buriganga in Char Wasspur, Din Islam was forced to drop out of school at a very early age. The eldest of six brothers and sisters, Islam's childhood was mostly confined to a workshop that operated lathe machines. Later, as a young man, Islam learnt to repair various electronic appliances and earned a meagre sum working at a shop in the city's Jigatola area.

It was back in the eighties, a few years after he got married, that a small event changed his life altogether. On a shopping trip to New Market, his three-year-old daughter Shumi, pointed her finger at some caged birds and said she did not want a frock but two of those *munias* instead. Islam quickly gave in to Shumi's demands.

At home Islam and his daughter enjoyed the company of the *munias*. Several years later, when a friend told him that he could legally breed many other birds in captivity, Islam grabbed the idea.

Islam recalls how he had lied to his wife, Laila Islam alias Parveen, about the price of the three pairs of Java, each pair costing Tk 1,800. "I did not dare tell Parveen, who bore the brunt of the hardship at home, that I had invested my savings of Tk 5,400 on those three pairs of Javas."

Three months after the Javas had hatched a dozen chicks, a buyer arrived at Islam's doorstep. For Islam, it was a day he would never forget. The chicks fetched him Tk 20,000 in cash.

"How come chicks are so highly priced while you told me the three adult pairs were 360 taka?" Islam quoted his wife saying. Islam says he eventually confessed to Parveen but explained to her that he had concealed the fact for the sake of the family's welfare. From that day on Islam and Parveen have never looked back.

Twelve years later, the Islam family, with two sons and a college-going Shumi, is one of the most successful breeders of caged birds in the country, having more than 1,000 rare and common birds of various species. Islam and Parveen have bought an acre of land by the river and set up their farm, which the entire family looks after. Buyers from all over the country come to Islam every day. And the good thing is Islam and Parveen do not preserve any trade secret as the couple readily offers all

Business

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sorts of dos and don'ts to people who want to join the business.

Breeding of caged birds is spreading fast in the country. Like the Islams, there are more than 200 breeders in the country producing both common and rare birds in cages. With a perfectly ideal climate for round-the-year breeding in Bangladesh, the sector promises a huge prospect in the international market.

With 102 members, Azizul Haque Farhad is the Senior Vice President of the Bangladesh Cage Bird Breeders Association (BCBBA). He says that Islam's story could encourage young men to join the trade, which is easy, cheap and extremely rewarding. Some people believe that caging is a cruelty to birds but Farhad explains that



Din Islam has more than 1,000 exotic birds in his farm.