

Palm cultivation in fallow high lands

Osman Gani of Ghatail eyes commercial harvest after five years: Bangladesh soil suitable for growing palm like Malaysia, he says

JAHANGIR ALAM back from Tangail

NETRAKONA: Bangladesh, like tropical Malaysia, can raise palm gardens in fallow hilly and high lands to meet its demand for edible oil.

This has been proved by Osman Gani, a retired government official.

He has successfully raised two palm gardens in Atharadana village in Diger union and Bogra Amtali village in Deolabari union in Ghatail upazila in Tangail district, covering about 20 acres of high land.

Osman hails from Pakutia Ramjibanpur village in Ghatail upazila.

Some of the trees started bearing palm this year. He extracted oil from those through an oxen-driven indigenous method.

He hopes to begin commercial extraction of oil from palm after five years.

Bangladesh's climate and soil are suitable for palm cultivation as in Malaysia, he says.

He was overwhelmed when he invited to his gardens some young men who worked in Malaysian palm gardens. At home on holiday, they visited his garden recently and were surprised. They told him that his gardens were like those in Malaysia and the palm grown were of similar quality.

But agriculture officials and experts in Ghatail were awed when he told them about his success and sought advice.

They said they never thought of the possibility. They however admitted that Bangladesh could grow palm like Malaysia as both are tropical countries.

Years back, some young men from Osman's area were working in Malaysian palm gardens. Osman Gani requested them to give him some palm seeds.

He sowed these in a high land in his village. When the plants grew, he transplanted those in his high lands in Atharadana and Bogra Amtali villages. This was in the year 1999.

After five years' nursing, Osman has now over 50 tress.

Fallow high lands in Modhupur, Mirzapur and Ghatail could be suitable for palm cultivation, he told this correspondent during a recent visit to his gardens.

Malaysia had also started palm cultivation experimentally in 1911 with seeds collected from Java in Indonesia.

Now it is the number one palm oil exporter in the world. Having the same climate, Bangladesh can also cultivate palm commercially, Osman said.

Palm was first grown in Bogor Botanical Garden of Java in 1848 on experimental basis.

Osman lamented that neither the Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) nor any research institute has done any experiment on this highly productive crop.

A palm tree bears bunches of palm five years after sowing. Palm can be harvested twice a year. Four to five kilograms of palm can be plucked from one tree after every six months, which produce two to 2.5 kilograms of oil, Osman says. The yield increases with the growth of tree. A tree gives fruit for 40 to 50 years.

Osman said he has so far spent around Tk 40,000 in raising and maintaining the gardens. He is now multiplying the seeds for expansion of the garden. He hopes to go for commercial harvest after five to six years. But he will then face a major problem in extracting oil from palm seeds because the machine is costly and has to be imported, he said.

Osman said palm cultivation can be highly productive, which will meet the country's demand for edible oil. It can be a profitable business

because a garden lasts 40 to 50 years. The government should look into the possibility.



Osman Gani in his palm garden, snapped on Sunday.

PHOTO STAR

Gunfight with outlaws: 4 cops hurt in Babuganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Seven persons including four constables of Babuganj police were injured in a gunfight between alleged outlaws and police on Sunday.

Police arrested five alleged outlaws and recovered one gun and 13 bullets from them. The outlaws belonged to Swarbahara group, police sources said.

Acting on a tip-off, police went to Bramandia, Ramjankati and Char Alga villages in the early hours of Sunday to nab outlaws.

Sensing police presence, the armed outlaws opened fired, that ensued a gun battle.

After about one hours' gunfight, police arrested alleged outlaws Zamal Hossain, Qaium Hossain and Maniruzzaman in injured conditions.

Later, acting on their confession, police arrested ERussell from Ramjankati and Shamim from Char Alga.

Babuganj thana Officer-in-Charge Abdus Salehin, SI Abul Khan, ASIs Md Faruk and Abdul Aziz were also injured in the gun fight.

They were admitted to Babuganj health complex. Barisal Police Superintendent Mainur Rahman Chowdhury, ASP Mizanur Rahman and other high officials visited the spot and interrogated the arrestees.

Police lodged a case with Babuganj police station under Arms Act.

Driver averts train accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A train accident was averted at Akhaura railway junction due to a driver's prompt action on Monday.

Wrong entry of Chittagong bound inter-city Karnaphuli Express in the station through Line No 3 raised the chance of accident.

But Dhaka bound Joyantika Express coming from Sylhet was scheduled to arrive through the same line, according to an announcement in the station.

Within 20 minutes, Joyantika Express rushed there. But to utter dismay, the inter-city train driver found Karnafoly Express to be standing there. At once he stopped his train saving lives of hundreds of passengers of both the trains.

Gas from Moulvibazar now by end of March

Affected landowners obstruct pipeline laying

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Supply of gas from well no. 2 and 3 in Moulvibazar gas field to the North-South Pipeline (National Grid) may now begin in late March as the pipeline laying work is being delayed due to alleged resistance by some affected land owners.

They are resisting pipeline laying as the administration has ordered suspension of compensation payment due to alleged insufficiency in land documents, sources said.

Out of total of 425 affected landowners, 365 got compensation and 60 are yet to get.

Some of the affected landowners while talking to this correspondent alleged that many 'fake' landowners were given money in the name of compensation, while many 'genuine ones' are being deprived on the 'plea of insuffi-

cient document. Many others were given compensation which is far below the actual price of land, they claimed.

US company Unocal is supposed to supply 70 MMCFD gas to the National Grid from the two wells, drilled five years back.

Work on laying 23-kilometre pipeline from Moulvibazar gas field at Kalapur to Muchhai in Habiganj district was started last year. It was scheduled to be completed this month.

So far, 18-kilometre pipeline laying has been completed, sources said.

The work was delayed by rains in September-October last year.

A private firm--BFEW--is laying the pipeline on behalf of Unocal.

A Unocal official when contacted yesterday said they are sorting out the land-related problems and expect to get

things right within weeks.

"We have deputed an official to resolve the matter in consultation with the land office and the landowners", he said.

"The rest of the work would be completed by mid-March and gas supply to the national grid would be started in late March", he said.

Unocal is has been running 'hydro test' in wells for the last few days to prepare the wells for gas production.

'Flare test' in the wells, earlier scheduled for February 17, and 19, will be done next week, the sources said.

The wells are about two kilometres off Magurchhara, where a massive blowout took place on the night of June 14, 1997 when US Company Occidental was drilling a gas well there.

Occidental later left the country after handing over its work to

BNP factional clash over Ekushey: 9 hurt in Jhalakathi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

At least nine people including a police official were injured in a clash between two rival factions of BNP at a programme in observance of Ekushey in Jhalakati town on Sunday night.

Those injured include district BNP Publicity Secretary Mehdi Hasan Khan Bappi, Jhalakati Sadar thana OC Sohrab Hossain and constables Abul Kalam and Md Russel.

All the nine were admitted to Jhalakati Sadar Hospital and at some other clinics in the town.

Mehdi Hasan Khan was later sent to Barisal Sher-E- Bangla Medical College Hospital for better

treatment.

Witnesses and police said the clash ensued as the two rival groups tried to hold their separate programmes at Amtala Road at the same time.

Both groups used lethal weapons and firearms in the clashes. The office of district Jubo Dal, BNP's youth front, was ransacked.

Police charged batons and fired five tear gas shells to disperse the clashing groups.

State Minister for Law Shahjahan Omar was in the town when the clash took place, sources said.

Police later arrested 12 BNP activists.

Police inquiry centre at B'baria village

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A police inquiry centre was set up at Mirjapur village in Sadar upazila on Monday.

The centre was established to make urgent inquiries of different cases. The respective investigative officer (IO) will stay here even at night, according to police sources.

In the opening ceremony, Brahmanbaria Superintendent of Police (SP) ATM Tareque was present as chief guest while ASP (Sadar Circle) Md Kamruzzaman and Brahmanbaria Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Muhammad Ismail were special guests.

The ceremony was presided over by Ichapur North Union Parishad Chairman Md Akter Hossain.

Among others, Md Shamim Cahudury, Md Ziaul Haque, Dr Md Abdus Sattar and journalist Dipak Chowdhury addressed there.

NORTHERN MEDICAL COLLEGE

Students demand govt step for continuing studies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Students of Northern Medical College in Rangpur staged a sit-in in front of Rangpur Press Club yesterday demanding government steps for continuation of studies elsewhere.

The government cancelled registration of the college last month due to alleged irregularities by its authorities.

The private medical college had 143 students on roll.

The students at a press conference later on the day said their life

will be ruined if they can not continue studies in any other medical college.

They said they should not suffer for the alleged irregularities done by the college authorities.

They said the chairman of the medical College, Begum Rockeya Lovli, and her husband Dr. Zahirul Hoque are absconding since the government banned all activities of the college on January 30.

The health ministry had given affiliation to Northern Medical College on condition that it would fulfill some terms and condition. But

the authorities failed to fulfill those. Rather, the authorities adopted "forgery" in students' admission, sources claimed.

The students said they were not aware of any irregularity or forgery done by the college authorities.

The government must punish the authorities of the college, not the students, they said at the press conference.

They said many of the students already passed four years in the college and they will have no chance in any other medical college in the country.

IRRI-Boro faces setback in 16 N districts

Power outage, fuel price hike hamper irrigation

ANWAR ALI, RAJSHAHI

Irrigation is being hampered in the ongoing IRRI-Boro cultivation season due to fuel price hike and load shedding in 16 districts under Rajshahi division.

Frequent power outage and low voltage result in damage in irrigation machines.

'We can hardly operate irrigation machines for five hours a day instead of required eight to 12 hours,' according to the Manager of Fulsho-1 Boro Scheme Deep Tubewell at Mohonpur upazila, Ibrahim Hossain.

'Since morning I have to restart

my power-driven deep tubewell at least 50 times in six hours due to loadshedding. Because of this phenomenon, I had to repair my machine thrice in last five days', Hossain said further.

Azibor said that he found three irrigation machines out of order due to power fluctuation at Deopur, Keshor villages in Mohonpur and Khoira village in Paba upazila.

A Bmda official told this correspondent, power dearth reduced paddy production by 90,000 tons last year. It may happen this year also if the situation continues, cautioned the official.

Shrimp culture in Satkhira protested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Over 4000 people from Bardal, a remote union in Assassuni upazila, brought out a precession in Satkhira town and held a rally in front of the collectorate building yesterday protesting shrimp cultivation in cultivable lands.

The villagers had earlier gathered at Shahid Abdur Razzak Park, wherefrom they brought out the procession.

With Bardal Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Yunus Ali Sama in the chair, the rally was addressed by, among others, former lawmaker Dr Mokhlesur Rahman, Advocate Mustafa Lutfullah and UP members Suranjan Dhali, Chandana Rani Mondal, Hafez Ruhul Amin, Afzal Hossain, Abdur Rahmanand and Abdur Razzak.

They alleged that a local Awami League leader --ABM Mustakin-- leased 300 bighas of land from local landowners to cultivate shrimp. But he is raising enclosures covering over 900 bighas of land by threatening some landowners.

They said shrimp cultivation in cultivable lands will affect the soil due to use of saline water and also damage the environment.

This will make the lands barren and ultimately affect all the farmers and their cattleheads. They vowed to resist the move anyhow.

They submitted a memorandum to the DC to stop the planned shrimp cultivation in cultivable lands and threatened of tougher agitation for non-compliance. They also submitted another memorandum to the Police Superintendent later.



PHOTO STAR

People from Bardal union held a rally in front of the collectorate office in Satkhira town yesterday protesting shrimp cultivation in cultivable land.



PHOTO STAR

Students of Northern Medical College staged a demonstration in front of Rangpur Press Club yesterday demanding government steps for continuation of their studies.

SNAPS

Housewife beaten to death by in-laws

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A housewife and mother of three daughters was beaten to death allegedly by her in-laws at Islampur village in Sadar Upazila on Sunday. Nehara Khatun, 33, was living with her in-laws in absence of her husband working abroad for 15 years. Her husband used to send money to his elder brother. On the fateful day, Nehara wanted to know the detailed records of her husband's money from him, according to eyewitnesses, hospital and police sources. She had an altercation with him. At one stage, other members of her in-law's house beathert to death.

AL-backed panel sweeps Satkhira Bar polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

The Awami League (AL) backed panel swept the Satkhira Bar Association polls bagging 10 posts including that of general secretary (GS).

The election was held at the Bar Association office here on Saturday. The ruling Four-party Alliance backed panel won five posts including that of president.

Here is the list of persons elected from the AL backed panel. Vice presidents: Golam Mostafa and Kismat Ali Daffari, General Secretary: Shah Alam, Joint

Secretary: Sheikh Raihan Ali, Treasurer: Shafiul Islam and Assistant Secretary: Abdus Sattar. Members: Afsana Sharmin, Azibar Rahman, S M Shokar Ali and Ruhul Amin.

List of those elected from the Four-party Alliance backed panel is President: Abul Hossain, Assistant Secretary: Mostafa Zaman. Members are: Yunus Ali (2), Mollah Abdus Sobhan and Salah Uddin.

Three hundred forty-four out of 357 voters cast their votes, according to Election Commission sources.