

Leading by farming

Labourer-turned farmer Altaf now an iconic figure in his locality

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Through strenuous labour and sincere efforts, vegetable grower Altaf Hossain or Altu, 52, has arrived at the pinnacle of economic success, reaching a net worth of several crore taka. It's not a bad outcome for the son of an impoverished day labourer, the late Ramjan Ali of Ganna village.

Indeed, due to his father's senility Altu first shouldered responsibility for his family in 1987. Of necessity, he took a job as a truck helper and went to Dhaka's Karwan Bazar to unload vegetables. There, introduced to traders, he became inspired to farm vegetables, which he began in 1988.

From humble beginnings, last year Altu cultivated around 160 bighas of land, producing crops of papaya, potato, cabbage, pointed gourd or potol, bananas, sweet gourd and aubergine or brinjal.

He earned Tk 24 lakh from 59 bighas planted with cabbage, over Tk 6 lakh from 10 bighas of papaya, more than Tk 2 lakh

from 4 bighas planted with aubergine, Tk 6 lakh from 13 bighas of bananas and Tk 3.5 lakhs from 20 bighas of sweet gourd.

In addition he harvested 3,465 maunds of potatoes from 61 bighas of land this year.

Altu has rented two showrooms for selling his produce, one in Dhaka's Jatrabari and the other in Sylhet.

Meanwhile, youths from adjoining villages throng to his farm to take suggestions and learn the secrets behind his success and prosperity. In both 1999 and 2001 he was awarded as the best farmer in the district.

Ganna Union chairman, Liton Biswas, said Altu is an honest farmer. He never cheats others and has reached his high level of achievement with sincerity. Altu has no pride, he said, and works together with the labourers on his own land, still today.

The Deputy Director of the Agriculture Extension Department, Joynal Abedin, agrees that Altu is an expert farmer in Jhenidah.



PHOTO: STAR

Altu Mia harvesting papaya at his orchard in Ganna, Jhenidah. Inset, The successful farmer supervises as labourers sort out the potatoes he has produced.

This is why we tried to kill you

FROM PAGE 1

Adnan Rasheed, who was convicted for his role in a 2003 assassination attempt on the country's then-president Pervez Musharraf, did not apologise for the attack, which left Malala gravely wounded, but said he found it shocking.

"I wished it would never happened [sic] and I had advised you before," he wrote.

Malala was 15 when she and two classmates were targeted by a masked gunman who picked them out on a school bus as they went home from school in Pakistan's northwest Swat valley last October.

She was seriously injured in the attack, and was flown to Britain to receive specialist treatment from doctors in Birmingham, where she and her family now live.

Last week, she celebrated her 16th birthday by delivering a defiant speech at the

United Nations in New York, in which she called on world leaders to provide free schooling for all children.

In the letter, Rasheed claimed that Malala was not targeted for her efforts to promote education, but because the Taliban believed she was running a "smearing campaign" against it.

"You have said in your speech yesterday that pen is mightier than sword," Rasheed wrote, referring to Malala's UN speech, "so they attacked you for your sword not for your books or school."

The rambling four-page letter, in patchy English, citing Bertrand Russell, Henry Kissinger and historian Thomas Macaulay, was released to media organisations in Pakistan.

In it, Rasheed - a former member of Pakistan's air force, who was among 300 prisoners to escape jail in

April last year - advises Malala to return to Pakistan, join a female Islamic seminary and advocate the cause of Islam.

He admitted that the Taliban are "blowing up" schools, but justified the attacks on the grounds that the Pakistani army and the paramilitary Frontier Corps use schools as hideouts.

Hundreds of schools have been targeted in Pakistan's north-west: activists say some had been used by the military, but many attacks were motivated by the Taliban's opposition to girls' education.

The Taliban commander also justified recent attacks in Pakistan on health workers vaccinating children against polio by claiming the west was trying to sterilise Muslims.

The letter is clearly intended to influence opinion in Pakistan: Although in much of the world Malala

has been hailed as a symbol of courage, at home she has been the subject of intense criticism and vilification. Online commentators have described her as a "drama queen" and even accused her of spying for the CIA.

Rasheed contrasted international support for Malala with the lack of coverage given to those killed in US drone attacks - a source of intense grievance in Pakistan.

"If you were shot [by] Americans in a drone attack, would [the] world have ever heard updates on your medical status? ... Would you were called to UN? Would a Malala day be announced?"

Gordon Brown, now a UN special envoy on global education, said: "Nobody will believe a word the Taliban say about the right of girls like Malala to go to school until they stop burning down schools and stop massacring pupils."

Kuril flyover

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after the opening of the flyover, he added.

Built on 12.7 acres of land, the 8.9-metre wide and 14.6-metre high flyover has four loops (two 'Y' and two 'U'). Commuters coming from the west of the capital will use loop-1 to go to Pragati Sarani and Purbachal. Commuters from Pragati Sarani and adjoining areas will use loop-2 on their way to Nikunja.

Two more loops will be used by the passengers from Banani and the west side of the Airport Road to go to Pragati Sarani. Commuters from Purbachal will also use these loops on their way to Banani.

The Rajuk had initially targeted December, 2012 for opening the flyover, but later it deferred the timeline twice to March and June this year.

Rajuk officials blamed frequent hartals and failure to acquire land in time for delayed implementation of the project.

On December 17, 2008, the foundation stone of the flyover was laid by former caretaker government chief Fakhruddin Ahmed.

The present government in March, 2010 had approved the tender for the scheme at a cost of Tk153 crore. The project costs have soared to Tk254 crore due to delayed implementation.

Govt-appointed boss

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been put on hold following instructions from the Bangladesh Bank, I still expressed surprise at how the board could approve the loans without following due procedures."

In response, the chairman asked the managing director of the bank to be careful to avoid recurrences of such events.

As is the practice in the banking sector, at the beginning of every board meeting the chairman is supposed to give a brief of the discussion of the previous meeting, but Bacchu, allegedly, never does it.

"As a result, there remains no scope to check what decisions have been taken in the previous meeting and what steps are being taken to act on them."

Moreover, the agenda of the meeting along with bundles of papers are distributed only on the eve of a board meeting, leaving the members with inadequate time to properly go through them.

"Consequently, the board members don't get the scope to play an active role in the running of the

bank."

Bacchu, although involved with the HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party, is said to be always boasting of his rapport with the prime minister. "He says he does not care about anybody other than the prime minister."

Rezaur said the chairman uses the bank's budget for corporate social activities at his own discretion, not by following the guidelines.

Regarding BB's demand that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) be signed to improve transparency and accountability at BASIC Bank, he said, "The bank's managing director is against the signing of the agreement as it will create problems in the running of the bank."

"The chairman spoke of consensus, and proposed that the bank seek time from the central bank to analyse the MoU."

Rezaur in his letter, however, said most of the board members did not have objections to the managerial style of the chairman.

Irregularities at BASIC Bank, said to be one of the

best state-run banks, were exposed by media reports in recent months, which prompted discussions in parliament.

A central bank inspection last year detected scams involving over Tk 4,000 crore in some of the bank's branches. In another separate event, the commercial audit department of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General found 17 instances of financial irregularities at the bank's headquarters in 2012.

"Following reports in the media and letter from the central bank, it seemed to me that there is authenticity in the allegations," Rezaur wrote.

Neither Sheikh Abdu Hye Bacchu nor BASIC BANK Managing Director Kazi Faqurul Islam could be reached.

AKM Rezaur Rahman declined to make any further comment to The Daily Star.

Bacchu was appointed chairman of the bank soon after the present government assumed power in January 2009. His tenure was extended by two years last September.

Mass promotion in administration

FROM PAGE 1

Initially, there was a plan to promote 200 deputy secretaries, but the government changed the plan to elevate more officials.

"Incorporation of more officials is meant to make happy the deprived officials and to quell commotion in the civil bureaucracy ahead of the next parliamentary polls," said a senior official of the Ministry of Public Administration.

In giving promotion, officials inclined to the ruling party and with strong lobbying have been considered. In this process

some ineligible officials got their position elevated, while some eligible ones were left out.

At least 150 aspirants who were eligible for promotion were left out either on political ground or for not having strong lobbying, said the official who wished to remain unnamed.

However, Senior Secretary to the Ministry of Public Administration Abdus Sobhan Sikder said eligible officials who fulfilled all the criteria had been considered for promotion.

He claimed no officials were considered on politi-

cal ground. "This time promotion was given in a fair way," Sobhan, who is a member of the selection board, told The Daily Star.

But there are instances that some officials were not considered for promotion even though their names were on top of the merit list.

Sikder admitted that accommodating the promoted officials would be very difficult for them. "Since there is no vacant post, we have decided to keep them to their current offices," he added.

This was the second round of promotion in the

final year of the Awami League-led government. In the first phase, 182 senior assistant secretaries were promoted to the rank of deputy secretary on March 14 this year.

Sources say the civil administration would see another round of promotion in September-October in which a number of joint secretaries would be made additional secretaries.

"Some 200 joint secretaries will be considered for the post of additional secretary," said the senior secretary.

Modified brinjal sees opposition

FROM PAGE 1

Farida Akhter, executive director of Ubigin, led the anti-GM activists' protest and also lobbied with local lawmaker from the ruling Awami League Zahid Ahsan Russel to raise the issue in parliament.

Bari scientists had earlier developed Bt Brinjal by inserting a crystal protein gene (Cry1Ac) taken from the soil bacterium Bacillus thuringiensis, known as Bt, into the traditional home-grown brinjal cultivars.

They claimed Bt Brinjal is effective to fight the Fruit and Shoot Borer (FSB), considered the most devastating pest in South and Southeast Asia that ravages brinjal fields and can cause loss of the crop by as much as 70 per cent unless a heavy dose of pesticide is used.

Of all vegetables produced in the country, brinjal tops the list in terms of pesticide use.

Farmers are found to apply pesticides for up to 50 times in a cropping season of brinjal against a recommended dose of 25 times, making the vegetable highly

toxic.

Reached over the phone, lawmaker Zahid told The Daily Star that he just happened to be there when anti-GM activists were protesting outside the Gazipur DC office against possible release of Bt Brinjal and "they approached me and requested me to raise the issue in parliament."

The lawmaker said he would first try to know about the GM crop developments and would consider taking up the issue in parliament if "it is a public concern."

Farida Akhter said release of GM brinjal would create "biological pollution" and damage local varieties. She was also highly critical of what she said was maintaining secrecy in seeking GM crop approval.

Contacted, Bari Director General Dr Md Rafiqul Islam Mondal said he heard from some office staffs yesterday that a group of people formed a human chain outside the Bari office yesterday morning.

Welcoming all sorts of

dissents on the GM issue, he said applying the techniques of genetic engineering in crop science is a new development, and the government would give approval to release of Bt Brinjal only when all its biosafety regulatory bodies are convinced about safety aspects of production, marketing and consumption of the crop.

Rafiqul Islam also allayed the concern about "maintaining secrecy" by saying, "There is no secrecy here. Once the National Technical Committee for Crop Biotechnology clears our application seeking approval of Bt Brinjal, it would go to the environment ministry for further clearance, and public consultation will take place."

GM crops are derived from traditional plant varieties by altering their genetic make-up in laboratories for faster growth, resistance to pests, production of extra nutrients, or any other beneficial purpose. This is usually done by adding one or more genes to a plant's

genome using genetic engineering techniques.

Once the crop is released, Bangladesh will join a group of 28 countries that grow GM crops. Though it will be the country's first home-grown GM crop, consumers have long been exposed to GM food through consumption of imported GM soybean oil.

Three countries in South Asia -- India, Pakistan and Myanmar -- grow only one GM crop -- cotton. If Bt brinjal is approved for release, Bangladesh will be the first in the region to grow a GM food crop.

The release of Bt Brinjal was stalled in India amid outcry from green groups while anti-GM activists damaged the GM crop in experimental areas in the Philippines.

But none of the two countries slapped ban on Bt Brinjal.

India imposed a temporary moratorium on its release while research on the GM crop reached an advanced stage in the Philippines.

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