



PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

Shafiqul Alam Mollah and his fish farm in the deserts of Saudi Arabia

Against the odds

A Bangladeshi is farming fish on the sandy deserts of Saudi Arabia

SHYKH SERAJ

For ages, human race have been failing to find lives on infertile deserts. I had featured Tayef's Bani Saad locale back in 2008 on 'Hridoye Mati O Manush', and how the Bangladeshis turned deserts into fertile farming lands. I have shared with you the success of Bangladeshi farmers on foreign soil. Mohammad Ali, for example, cultivated vegetables at Palm Deserts of Los Angeles, on the land that he leased from the Americans. 'Hridoye Mati O Manush' featured similar stories of Bangladeshi success in Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and other parts of the world. Bangladeshis are gifted with indigenously growing crops, fruits and vegetables—they don't care much about the soil; they depend on their own merits and keep on producing abundantly. Growing crops and plants in Bangladesh is easier than any other parts of the world. They believe that the land would never let them down, no matter where on earth

they are growing.

Kholes, a place in Saudi Arabia is gradually changing, and I have been there to see the surprising success few days back. In fact, Kholes is located very near to historic Asfan city that is enriched with great Islamic tales and heritages. It is near Madinah, 120 kilometers away from Makkah.

I was amazed to learn that a Bangladeshi named Shafiqul Alam Mollah from Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar is farming fish on deserts in Kholes. And, I was eager to see what he has really done. It was my great privilege to meet this hero. This man has gradually taken fish farming into a new level. He has spent half the time of his expatriate life in fish farming and achieved tremendous success.

Shafiqul has twenty ponds, on a land that he leased from the local Arabs back in 2003. He is farming Monosex Telapia. He covered the base of the pond with polythene and then put water into it; otherwise the desert soil would absorb the

water rapidly. Pipelines are connected to all the ponds for regular supply of water. In fact, Asfan and Kholes are blessed with freshwater.

"We have access to all the Bangla TV channels here in Saudi Arabia and we watch them regularly. Hridoye Mati O Manush' had fueled my interest", said Mollah.

"But why this weird interest", I asked.

"I had once visited a Saudi Arabian household and noticed how they had preserved fish in a swimming pool. Then I had the idea of setting up large polythene (Known as 'Terpal' in Bangladesh) underneath the pond and put water in it", replied the ever-creative Mollah.

There isn't much problem, but a syndicate has emerged in recent times who are involved in the fish feed business.

"Initially, there were three companies that supplied fish food. Now, there's only one remaining. This situation gave birth to a syndicate who are supplying fish food for 65 Riyal which

was previously 40 Riyal only", complained Mollah. "Just the same in Bangladesh", I asked.

"Yes, we have syndicates here as well", replied Mollah.

I didn't see many people working at the farm. There were twenty ponds as I said and there weren't too many people helping Mollah.

"How many labours do you have in your farm?"

"Four"

"Only four do the entire work?"

"Yes, I don't have any other option."

Even facing these obstacles, Shafiqul now earns more than ten lakh taka per month from these twenty ponds and healthy fishes!

The demand for bigger and healthier fish is more here. Mollah thinks that the supply of sufficient Bangladeshi labours can lead to a revolutionary change in fish farming in these deserts. But getting

visa is a major issue here. In fact there is restriction, just like it happens mostly in other Middle East countries.

According to Mollah he needs at least ten people, but he's helpless because of the restrictions in visa. Besides, they can't process the fish due to the shortage in manpower. The consumers in Saudi Arabia demand only big fishes that weigh at least 250 grams. People here don't like the bones, they only enjoy the fish. That's why they need more time for processing and marketing.

Shafiqul Mollah says many other Bangladeshi expatriate entrepreneurs have built fish farms here, following his path. Shahidul Islam is one of them and he has done an excellent job like his mentor. In fact he has grown bigger fishes but he doesn't deny the historic deed of Mollah, the trendsetter of fish farming on desert.

Shahidul is a wholesaler and has his own fish farm as well.

"How many ponds do you have?"

"Twenty-six"

"What's your monthly income from supplying fish?"

"More than 20 lakh taka"

"And what's your monthly income from your own farm?"

"Approximately 10 lakh taka."

"That means your total monthly income is 30 to 40 lakh taka"

"Yes"

I was wondering whether others are involved with fish farming or not. Shafiqul Mollah said there are some Egyptians who are involved but Bangladeshis are doing much better and making more profits than others.

Dear readers, if there was a supply of efficient and even semi-efficient labours from Bangladesh, there would have been more successful initiatives on foreign soil. In one hand, these success stories astonish us, and on the other hand, the obstacles in supplying labours from our country, frustrate us. We believe that the Government would ponder upon our agricultural success in the foreign lands and resolve this stagnant situation of supplying labours.

So, the unreal becomes real at the hand of a fellow Bangladeshi far from Bangladesh, on a desert land where a man actually grows fish where the nature is absolutely dry, hot and humid. He not only grew his own but inspired others. This is how our Bangladeshi golden sons are proving their worth all across the world and I firmly believe if we can assist them effectively in true manner with the right interception of bilateral relationships and policies with foreign countries, it means we will actually be helping Bangladesh, no matter wherever we live in this world. And, that is what the Bangladeshi oath should be.



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Shelter for tribal girls

MONG HLA, Bandarban

Baishiri Union in Bandarban district is one of the remotest places in Bangladesh. Tribal girls Orphans' Home' provides education to poor and orphan indigenous children. The 'female only' institution is situated in an indigenous village near Dhabon Khali Master Para of Baishiri Union in Naikhanchari Upazilla. It not only provides education, but also training on various skills needed.

In 1995, two Buddhist monks, Guru Uttilokkha Mohather and Jibonanodo Mohather started the institution. From various Upazillas of Bandarban, poor orphan children who couldn't afford to have education were welcomed to the institution. Other than education and training, it also provides lodging, food and health care to the children.

Unfortunately, in 2000, Uttilokkha passed away, and later Jibonando suffered stroke and lost eyesight. Local primary school

teacher, Thoaimrai master, with the help of locals and all his possession continued to run the orphanage. He also passed away in 2005. His son, Monglaoai has been running the home since then.

Currently, there are about 100 helpless children from the remotest places sheltered at the orphanage. The home is in dire situation due to the lack of funding. Director of the home informed that there are three teachers, a cook, a guard and a sewing trainer working. It is becoming harder by the day to pay the employees. Moreover, there is an acute shortage of furniture in the orphanage home, said committee member Umanu Marma. She also added that the little fund they receive from Shomaj Sheba Odhidoptor (Social welfare office) is not enough to run the orphanage.

Help from well-off locals, philanthropists and humanitarian institutions will enable the orphanage to continue running.

Translated by Zia Nazmul Islam



PHOTO: STAR

Students of Tribal Girls Orphan's Home in Baishiri



PHOTO: STAR

Thousands of weavers in Tangail, especially in Delduar upazila, are engaged in producing saris of creative designs and patterns to attract buyers from different districts during Eid festival.

Tangail sari weavers busy as Eid nears

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Thousands of weavers in the district are passing busy time to meet the demand of famous Tangail Sari ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, the biggest festival of the Muslims.

Sale of saris produced in the area sees boost on the occasion of big festivals, as the traditional handloom item with various patterns and flexible prices attracts buyers at home and abroad.

Wholesalers from different places of the country including the capital start coming from the beginning of the Ramadan to buy the ever popular 'Tangail sari', the first choice of many women as Eid wear, as the creative weavers in the district come up with trendy varieties.

They weave yarn into beautiful saris of different

qualities and kinds, including cotton, silk, half silk, soft silk, gas silk, dotari silk, endy silk, jamdani, dengu, kuchi, frorfly, tashar, baluchuri, khaddar, benarasi etc.

Although sari is produced in different upazilas of the district, Pathrail in Delduar upazila is known as the 'capital of Tangail sari'.

The local weavers said they produce different qualities of handloom saris with prices ranging from Tk 400 to Tk 20,000 to meet the demand of people of all classes.

The local weavers adapt new designs and varieties of colours every season to match the latest fashion trends, said weaver Nilkomol Basak, also general secretary of Tangail Sari Traders' Association.

"Tangail saris enjoy continued popularity due

to the creativity of the local weavers. The weavers of other areas of the country had tried to emulate the designs of Tangail saris in the past but could not match the qualities and varieties of our saris," said Roghunath Basak, president of Tangail Sari Traders' Association.

"I have introduced new designs of soft silk and gas silk saris and various designs of three-pieces with prices ranging from Tk 700 to Tk 3000 on the occasion of the coming Eid," he said.

Around 2.5 lakh workers are presently employed in around 75,460 handloom units in the district to meet the rising demand of the clothes before the Eid, said Habibur Rahman, general secretary of Tangail Weavers' Rehabilitation Organisation.

SNIPPETS

Hilsa seized near border

UNB, Salkhira

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) seized 450 kg of hilsa from a private car while those were being smuggled to India through Bhomra border in Sadar upazila on Monday. Acting on a tip-off, a BGB team conducted a drive in Mahmudpur area in the early hours and seized the hilsa, said Major Majhar, operation officer of Bhomra camp of BGB 38 Battalion. They also seized the car. The market value of the seized fish would be more than Tk 4.68 lakh, added Majhar.

10-km-long tailback

UNB, Natore

A 10-km tailback was created on Natore-Dhaka highway after a bridge collapsed at Duttapara in Sadar upazila early yesterday. Locals said the bridge collapsed when a truck was crossing it around 2:30am. The accident disrupted traffic on the highway for about eight hours. Later, the road communications resumed around 10:30am after the Roads and Highways Department arranged an alternative road by the bridge.

Minor girl commits suicide

UNB, Magura

An 11-year-old girl allegedly committed suicide by hanging herself in Mohammadpur upazila headquarters on Monday. The deceased was identified as Asha Akhter Nupur, a Class-VI student of a local school and daughter of Mustafizur Rahman, a retired army man. Officer in-charge (OC) of Mohammadpur police station M Sagir Miah said Nupur's mother used to rebuke and beat her for study. The girl killed herself on Monday morning in a huff after her mother beat her on Sunday evening on the same ground, the OC said.

Fake magistrate jailed

UNB, Jhenidah

A mobile court here on Monday sentenced a young man to 15 days' imprisonment on charge of entering the district record room posing as executive magistrate. The convict was identified as Ektiar Hossain, son of Sohrab Hossain of Sreepur village in Harinakundu upazila. Assistant Commissioner Sukla Sarkar, in-charge of Jhenidah record room, said Ektiar entered the record room around 10:00am and tried to steal papers. On formation, the AC rushed in and interrogated the intruder. At a stage the youth confessed that he was not a magistrate.

Minor child drowns

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A 6-year-old girl drowned in a pond near her homestead at Ghatmagura village under Chamrul union of Dupchanchia upazila on Monday afternoon. The deceased was identified as Farzana Banu, daughter of Anisur Rahman of the village. Police quoting the girl's family members said Farzana was playing with other children near the pond. All on a sudden she fell in the pond and drowned. Later the dead body was found floating in the pond.

LONE GIRLS' COLLEGE IN MADARGANJ

Torchbearer of higher edn for rural women

ABM AMINUL ISLAM, Jamalpur

Nurunnahar Mirza Kashem Mohila College, the lone girls' college in Madarganj upazila under the district, has already made its mark as a torchbearer of higher education for women in the remote area.

Students of the college appeared at the degree examinations under the National University of Bangladesh for the first time in 1999.

Seventy students appeared at the degree examinations of 2011 (held in December 2012) from the college. Four of them -- Evana Jahan (BA), Shabana Aktar (BA), Mahmuda Khatun (BA) and Rakhi Aktar (BSS) got first division, 52 students got second division and two got third division, said Nazrul Islam, vice-principal of the college.

"The pass rate stood at 82.86%, which is 8% over the average pass rate of the degree examinations-2011 according to the recently published results under the National University. The pass rates of 2010, 2009 and 2008 were 54%, 64% and 63% respectively," he said.

"Due to congenial atmosphere of education here, the number of degree students sees gradual rise every year. As many as 143 students got themselves admitted to degree (pass) course at the college in 2012-2013 session, which is nearly double compared to the previous session" he added.

Mariom Begum, principal of the college, said the degree students did good results as they attended the classes regularly, studied attentively and listened to

the teachers who are always helpful to the learners.

"My college is playing a vital role to help the rural girls, mostly from poor families, get education at low cost, flourish in life and have empowerment in the society," she added.

Mahmuda Khatun of Balijuri Panditpara village under the upazila said she is very happy to get first division and grateful to her college teachers for helping her to achieve the feat.

"My joy knew no bound when I heard that my daughter Evana Jahan had got first division in the degree examinations," said Md Asadullahil Galeb, senior assistant teacher of Junail Raichhia Dakhil Girls' Madrasa in the upazila.



PHOTO: STAR

Nurunnahar Mirza Kashem Mohila College, the lone such institution in Madarganj upazila of Jamalpur, has opened up scope for the girls from remote villages to have higher education at low cost.