



PHOTO: MUKUL HOSSAIN

Amra (hog plum) is becoming increasingly profitable to the farmers

Money-spinning sour fruit

Seasonal fruit hog plum has become much profitable for Barisal farmers

SHYKH SERAJ

Barisal is famous for amra (Hog plum). This fruit, full of vitamins is one of the diversities of Barisal. Hog plums originated at the south region of Bangladesh, while Jhalokathi, once known as the second Kolkata, is the hub for hog plum's wholesale trade. Most districts in the South region are involved in hog plum farming. But Atghar Kuriana in Pirojpur district, Barisal's Banaripara and Jhalokathi's Poshonda and Dumuria are the leading areas in hog plum farming. Traders have been using waterways for supplying and marketing of hog plum and guava for years.

"Around 50 maunds" "What's the market price?"

"Tk. 700 per maund. But hopefully it'll reach Tk. 2,000"

"What could be the profit from 50 maunds this year?" "About Tk. 70,000 to Tk. 80,000"

The lives of Greater Barisal's farmers evolve around the river-based farming and communication. The branches of the main river are associated with every aspect of their lives. The land and climate of this area are suitable for farming hog plum and guava. But the farmers have been following the age old traditional farming methods. Dumuria's hog plum farmer, Pijush Kanti Mandal says, effective and scientific ways could get us more production from these hog plum orchards.

In the recent years, the farmers are becoming more inclined to farming hog plum due to guava's lower market price. Hog plum as a raw material lasts longer than guava and so, it's easier to market and generates more profit. These are the reasons why a lot of people have been inspired to take loan and involved in hog plum farming.

The hog plum trade goes on about four months of a year in this region. Every year the traders supply a few lakh maunds of hog plum to Dhaka, Chittagong, Noakhali, Feni, Khulna, Faridpur, Shariatpur, Madaripur, Rajbari and many other districts.

Bite: Jahangir Hossain, Hog plum trader, Jhalokathi

The hog plum, which is three times more nutritious than the apple is now being exported and we are earning foreign currency. But the devastating cyclones Sidr, Aila and Mohasen destroyed the hog plum orchards in the south region along with many others. The local farmers are trying to get over these losses and their efforts got them decent production. Last year, hog plum was farmed on 732 hectares of land which has now expanded to 997 hectares. Local farmers are optimistic about the huge commercial scope of hog plum. I talked with the

local journalist Manik Ray to get an insight on hog plum farming and production.

"There was a time when people planted just a couple of hog plum plants to meet their family demand. But then people started farming it commercially on whatever space they have, and it's expanding. People are inclining to wherever there's success."

Dear readers, the southern farmers' activities against the adverse weather conditions are imitable for farmers of other regions. It is important to maintain a connection between hog plum's production and the market structure that will eventually turn out to be an industry. The entrepreneurs can launch a market processing structure based on hog plum and guava. The farmers will be benefitted from this and various food items produced from such a luscious fruit will be spread over the country and across the world.



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Four visually challenged students aced at HSC

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Despite of visual disability, four underprivileged youths, Shaheb Ali, Md. Moniruzzaman, Md. Monsur Rahman and Md. Alhaz Uddin showed that determination is the key to success.

The four students appeared in HSC examination this year and earned 'A' grade after a long break of study.

Their results were impressive: Md. Alhaz Uddin earned GPA 4.3 (A Grade), Md. Moniruzzaman earned 4.1 grade point average (A), Md. Shaheb Ali earned 3.90 grade point average (A-) and Md. Mansur Rahman earned 3.60 grade point average (A-).

Shaheb Ali of village Char-Malshapara passed SSC in 1999, Moniruzzaman of village Brammanpara in Narshandi, Md. Monsur Ali of village Rajabari in Godagari of Rajshahi passed SSC in 2008 and Alhaz Uddin of village Kuthibari in Khoksha of Kushthia passed SSC a year ago.

After the results were out, they cried out of joy. "I never imagined that I would pass HSC and continue my academic career. I sat for HSC examination this year after a long study-break; I passed SSC in 1999", Shaheb Ali said after learning his result on 3rd of August.

All of them left studies due to poverty. This year, a humanitarian organization, 'Manob Kollan Trust' arranged their examination facility. "They were taken to trust last year as they were eager to continue restart their studies. 'Manob Kollan Trust' helped them to sit for HSC examination this year in private registration," said Professor Md. Abul Hossain Chairman of the Manob Kollan Trust.

With special permission from the education board, they appeared in HSC exams along with their scribe. Professor Hossain said that the visually challenged youths conducted their study using Brail.

The visually challenged students said that they want to continue their study and build their career. "Since long pause in study, I have passed the SSC examination with the help of the 'Manob Kollan Trust'. I am now inspired to continue my academic career. I want to prove that even being visually challenged I can do something better for the nation," Shaheb Ali and Alhaz Uddin said. They both want to be lawyers while Monsur and Moniruzzaman want to be teachers.

"We all can help the vulnerable people of the society. If we have the combined effort to assist such physically or mentally challenged people they can do many thing for the society," said Professor Mostafizur Rahman Rumi.



PHOTO: STAR

Visually challenged students sitting for HSC exam with the help of scribes



PHOTO: STAR

Farmers harvesting early-jute in Narail

Low jute price in Narail

PONUEL S BOSE, Narail

Due to continuous heavy downpThe farmers of three Upazila's in Narail district started harvesting jute at an early stage. Expectations are higher for prices and to cultivate Rupa-Amon paddy in the same field in this season. But the optimism to get higher prices is beginning to fade as the early coming of golden fiber is selling for lower price than the last year.

Each maund of raw jute is now sold at Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,200. The jute market price is less than last year for all varieties, farmers said.

The market price of jute in Narail district last year was high which made many farmers interested in Jute cultivation.

According to DAE (Department of Agriculture Extension) sources, this season, the farmers of the district cultivated jute on 22,610 hectares of land against the target of 22,266 hectares while the production target set by DAE is 2,42,525 bell (5 maund = 1 bell).

Asok Kumar Halder, district training officer of Narail DAE said that heavy rain damaged the growth of jute this year. He further added that usually jute plants grow up 8 to 9 feet, but heavy rain damaged the growth to 3 to 4 feet and made the plant thinner. The farmers are worried about recovery of the production cost as heavy rain hampered jute production and low price in the market.

Several Farmers said that expectation on higher prices this season and to cultivate Rupa-Amon encouraged them to harvest jute early, although they usually reap it between late August and September. Cultivation period of Rupa-Amon paddy is beginning of July and the harvesting period is mid October.

"A labourer is paid Tk. 400 to Tk. 500 per day. More processing is needed for jute to be market-ready. "If proper price is not fixed, farmers do not get profit", said Romen Biswas, a farmer at Mulia village of Narail Sadar Upazila of the district.

Rezaul Islam, a farmer of Auria village under Sadar upazila of Narail district said, "I sold 37 maunds of jute at Tk 1,000 per maund. The price is disappointing compared to my production cost."

Horosit Roy, another farmer of village Bamonhat in Sadar Upazila of Narail said that the production was good but he had to sell the jute at Tk 1,000 just after harvest."

As the government yet not has started to buy jute, and also the quality of early-harvested is not sufficient to get higher price, according to DAE. Lacking of more information on newly introduced ribbon rating system, which enables jute rotting with much less water and extracting quality fiber, most of the farmers rotted jute in local ditches, rivers and other water bodies.



PHOTO: STAR



Heat from burning of toxic gas at nearby gasfield has damaged paddy on 300 acres and many trees in three villages at Bangora of Comilla, inset, triggering protest by locals who also demanded compensation.

YASMIN REEMA, Comilla

EXPLORATION IN BLOCK 9 IN COMILLA

Heat from burning gas damages crops, trees

Paddy on three hundred acres of land and a good number of trees in three villages got burnt allegedly due to the heat from burning of poisonous gas by Tullco Bangladesh Ltd, a company of UK-based Tullow Oil plc, at Bangora gas field in Muradnagar upazila under the district during the last couple of days.

member of the union parishad.

Fruit trees like mango, jackfruit and litchi are also badly affected due the situation.

"I cultivated paddy on three kathas of land, spending Tk 5,400. But now I cannot hope to get even a maund of paddy as the plants got burnt," said Borhan Uddin, 54, a farmer of Capitala village.

Affected farmers of the three villages -- Khanpura, Chaptitala and Bangora -- have demanded compensation for the damage.

They also brought out a procession protesting the matter and held a rally in front of gate no 1 of the company a few days ago.

Enayet Ullah Khan, public relations manager of the gas field, said, "Following allegations from the farmers, we told the agricultural department to give us a report about this. If it is proved that the crops were damaged due to burning of poisonous gas, the farmers will get compensation."

As this correspondent sought his cooperation to

talk to higher authorities of

Bangora gas field, especially any expert on the matter, the PR manager said, "They will not talk to journalists without permission from the authorities concerned of Petrobangla."

Tapon Ranjan Majumdar, agricultural officer of Muradnagar upazila, said, "I have received a phone call from Tullco Bangladesh Ltd to inspect the area and give a report about the situation. I shall visit the area after two or three days and take proper step in this regard."

Former UP member murdered in Bogra

UNB, Bogra

A former union (UP) member was murdered in Nandigram upazila early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Nazrul Islam, son of Nurul Islam of Amra Gohail village. He was elected member of Thalta Majgram union three times.

Police said a gang attacked Nazrul at Patgari around 12:10am while he was returning home from Choumohani Bazar riding on his motorcycle.

Later, the criminals slit the throat of the former UP member and dumped the body into a nearby paddyfield.

Family sources said, someone called Nazrul out of their residence around 6:00pm on Monday over mobile phone.

Senior assistant police superintendent Ashrafur Islam, who visited the spot, said Nazrul might have been killed following a previous enmity.

BSF picks up cattle trader

UNB, Thakurgaon

A Bangladeshi cattle trader was picked up by the members of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) troops along Dharmagarh border in Ranishankail upazila yesterday.

The victim was identified as Farjal, 18, son of Mohammad Abdul of Sahanabad village in the upazila.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and police said, the BSF men of Sripur camp picked up Farjal from the bordering area when he went there to bring the cattle early this morning.

Acting Commander of 30 BGB-Battalion Major Kazi Alamgir Hossain said, BGB has sent a letter protesting the incident.

Mat-making changes format of their life

Ajiron shows the way to other poor, helpless women in Gaibandha

KM REZAUL HOQUE, Gaibandha

Ten poor families at Char Deluabari along the Jamuna basin in Phulchhari upazila under the district have achieved self-reliance through producing mats.

Local woman Ajiron Beowa showed the way while timely help of NGO SKS Foundation helped the poor women, mostly divorced and widows, to change their life.

Married off at the age of 14, Ajiron became mother of two children within two years.

After eight years of marriage, her ailing farm labourer husband died without treatment and she started working as a domestic help.

Unhappy with the scanty pay and ill-treatment from

employers, she gave up the work and started making mats and nakshi kantha (embroidered quilt).

In 2010, local NGO SKS Foundation arranged training on mat producing to a group of ten ultra poor widows and divorced women, said Osman Ghani, project manager of SKS Foundation.

"Donor agency Oxfam-GB allocated grant of Tk 18 thousand for each of the trained women to start producing different qualities of mats. Within a year they have changed their life through the cottage industry," said Lasen Ahmed Liton, chief executive, SKS Foundation.

"We collect dried stalk of a kind of grass used in weaving mats from Raninagar in Natore district. By selling

the mats, one earns Tk 150 to 175 daily, excluding the production cost," Ajiron said.

Thanking SKS for their help, she said, "Now we are living well. My two children are attending school too."

"My husband and other family members help me in weaving mat in their leisure time," said Asma Begum, another mat weaver in the area.

Mats are being sold at local markets of Fulchhari and Saghata upazilas in Gaibandha district and Gutail market of Dewanganj in Jamalpur district.

The prices of small, medium and large sized mats are Tk 30, Tk 60 and Tk 120 per piece. Besides, they produce special embroidered mats that sell for Tk 500 each.



PHOTO: STAR

Ajiron Beowa, right, instructing a few local poor women the way of finishing some mats at Char Deluabari in Phulchhari upazila of Gaibandha.