

Floating market of guavas

In the floating bazaar over the Kirtipasha canal in Bhimruli farmers grow guava abundantly with no fair price

SHYKH SERAJ

The southern region of Bangladesh is famous for guavas, more popularly known in Bangladesh as 'Bengal's Apple'. Specially in Jhalokathi Sadar Upazila and at Swarupkathi and Banaripara Upazila in Pirozpur, farmers heavily rely on guava farming. Such diversity of life is hardly to be found in other places of the country. Loss in guava farming in one season usually leads to extreme distress for the farmers throughout the year. The current year is one of those.

Very recently I went to visit these canals of Barisal and wondered whether I am actually roaming around Venice or not. The floating guava market at Bhimruli over Kirtipasha canal was simply majestic. I spoke with farmer Amal Bishwas who purchased a 1.5 bigha (measurement of land) guava orchard few months back for Tk. 25,000. Six to seven maunds (unit of weight) of guava are collected every day from his orchard. The methods of collecting guava from the tree are very tricky. Farmers are now finding it really tough because of the low market price. The price of guava per KG is Tk. 2 or 3.

According to the farmers, the prices get even lower than this, going down to 10 taka per maund! In this circumstance, it's getting difficult for Amal to work really hard from dawn to dusk along with his wife Anjali to acquire his desired profit.

"It takes 10,000 taka to 15,000 taka of labour cost and our family members are working to save that cost", says Anjali.

All the guavas become ripened due to the constant



PHOTO: ADITYA SHAHEEN

Farmers trading guavas at local floating wholesale market at Kirtipasha canal, Barisal.



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heavy rain just few days ago, and it's now a challenge to sell these guavas in the market. Amal's hope of getting a market price of Tk. 200 per maund is just a dream now.

The eye-soothing guava orchards on canals over Jhalokathi's Sugandha, Bishkhali, Gabkhan and Sandhya river are Southern region's main places of guava farming. Every day, thousand of tons of guavas are supplied all across the country. Boats are the main transportation for supplying. Farmers carry the guavas onto the boats from the river-adjacent orchards. There are hundreds of boats filled with guava and all the trades occur on boats.

The floating market appears as the centre of Barisal's (aka The Venice of Bengal) beauty. Nobody knows when the idea of this floating market began, but it's a hundred-year old tradition. Development and modernization are taking over the country but it's surprising to see them not reaching to this river-oriented life yet. For more than 100 years, the local farmers have been experiencing the ups and downs of life along with the ebb and flow of the river. Many farmers and wholesalers gather here every day.

The problems that farmers have here are common: they don't have proper communication, cold

storage facility which results in only poor market price. We don't see or hear any development programmes or even discussions about the natural beauties and the stories of profit and losses of the south which could well be an ideal spot for agrotourism. I spoke to Tapash Majumder, a hapless farmer at the Bhimruli bazaar who says many farmers have drowned their boats full of guavas because they didn't get the fair price and he himself is one of them.

The same guavas are sold for Tk. 50 to Tk. 100 per KG in Dhaka. But here the farmers don't get to sell a maund for Tk. 10. The nutritious fruit seems to have become a curse on these farmers' lives.

Mihir Haldar was heading to the market by a boat full of guavas through the Kirtipasha canal. Farmers like him are aware of their salvation and how they can

make profit. They've been waiting for years for the government and private initiatives. They want a guava processing factory.

Last but not the least, a number of shrewd intermediaries is taking advantage of the cold storage and communication crisis. Farmers are suffering with their families. There's hardly any land for rice farming, and so guava is the only hope of the farming families.

Dear readers, this huge mine of guava could become a significant aspect of our national economy. But it didn't happen. It's so unfortunate that farmers are going through such terrible situation even in this modern time. I really do hope that the government's 10-year programme to develop the agriculture sector and the lives of the southern region will include these guava farmers of the south, and they'll be free from this uncertain and cursed life.

Girls in Jessore prepare to tackle hooligans

MOKAMMEL SHUVO, Jessore

These girls don't let themselves be repressed by the unruly men or youths. They vow to resist the people who try to abuse them sexually. The resistance is not only with voice but with action as well. They vow; to prevent the eve teasers, the sexual abusers, the whistle blowers by hitting them hard. Hence they are taking lessons on how to be saved from the beasts, who runs around in the guise of man.

These girls are preparing themselves to be a strong woman; like a lioness, who can protect herself in any situation. They are also building up their self-confidence.

These girls are practicing martial arts and unarmed combat technique. 60 students of Jessore Women College from first year to master classes have joined the karate-judo training class; which starts from 5 pm every day and continues till dusk at college campus.

Nasrin Aktar Shefa, final year student of History department of the college said, some of my friends were harassed by the deprave youths in Jessore town. I had a wish "if I could be free from the fear of harassment", she added. When I heard about the karate training program, I joined the training as soon as possible, she said.

Rupali Khatun Rupa, a student of first year honours course said, now I believe I can protect myself from sexual abusers. Martial arts training builds confidence in

me, she added.

This initiative has been taken locally; consulting with different professional groups, said Sheikh Nazmul Islam, program officer of Relief International, an international organization, who initiated the project. The project was taken under the program 'Combating violence against women through community participation, education and media access' funded by European Union, he added. The karate training was started from July 16 and we received a huge response from the students, he said.

Mohon Karate Academy of Jessore has been assigned to train up the girls. Trainer and director of the academy Mahbubul Rahman Mohon said, mainly it's a physical training for girls to raise their confidence and teach them the technics to protract themselves from danger. It's not only for self-defense but also an extra curriculum activity, so authorities of every schools and colleges especially girls' schools and colleges should arrange such types of training for their students.

Dr. Ahsan Habib, associate professor of History department of Jessore Women College, who has encouraged his students to join the physical training said, experiences of girls inside and outside home, are not pleasant. Therefore every girl should take up such types of physical training to build up their mental and physical confidence, he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Girls are learning karate to protect themselves from sexual predators at Jessore women's college campus.



PHOTO: STAR

Flowering early variety bean plants covering a vast land in Ishwardi upazila under Pabna district offer an eye-soothing sight as a good number of farmers in the area now cultivate the popular off-season vegetable.

Fortune smiles on early variety Ishwardi bean

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Cultivation of *rupvan*, an early variety of bean, has become a profitable venture for the farmers of Ishwardi upazila, the biggest bean producing zone in the country.

"Bean is usually a winter vegetable but *rupvan*, an early variety of bean, is widely cultivated in this upazila. The cultivation starts in July and farmers get harvest from late August," said Md Khurshid Alam, Ishwardi upazila agriculture officer.

Farmers of 25 villages in Ishwardi upazila cultivated

bean on 1,345 hectares of land this season while the area was 1,245 hectares last year, he said.

During a recent visit to Muladuli, Faridpur, Sheikhpura, Ramnathpur villages of Ishwardi upazila, this correspondent saw vast fields full of bean plants with colourful flowers.

"We get more profit by cultivating early variety of bean. Cultivation of *rupvan* on each bigha costs Tk 15 to 18 thousand and we can easily sell the produce for Tk 30 to 35 thousand," said Aminur Rahman Babu, a bean producer.

"Now a kg of bean is

selling for Tk 30 to 35 in market. A total of 2,100 farmers of Ishwardi upazila have cultivated *rupvan* this year," he said.

Meanwhile, large-scale use of insecticides in *rupvan* bean poses health hazard for consumers.

"Use of insecticides is essential for bumper production of bean. We spray insecticides at least once a week throughout the cultivation season to save the vegetable from *majra* (stem borer) and *chhatrak*. We need insecticides worth Tk 6 to 8 thousand for cultivating bean on a bigha of land," said a local bean farmer.

Man gets life for killing daughter

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A court here yesterday sentenced a man to life term imprisonment for killing his 14-month-old daughter in 2009.

Convict Md. Jasim Uddin hailed from Norerkathi area of Laharhut in Sadar upazila.

The court also fined him Tk. 30,000, in default, to suffer more 6 months in prison.

Md. Matiar Rahman, additional district and session judge of Barisal, handed down the verdict in presence of the accused.

According to the prosecution story in brief, Jasim married Eliza Begum of Dudhal village under Bakerganj upazila in the district in 2006.

The couple gave birth to twin babies, a son and a daughter in September, 2008.

After that Jasim started torturing his wife demanding money from her parents to bear expenses for rearing the twin babies.

At one stage of feud, Eliza fled the house of her husband with the babies and took shelter at parents' house.

After some days, Eliza returned to husband's residence with the babies following an arbitration by local leaders.

On November 11, 2009 Eliza went to nearby pond for taking bath, leaving the babies under the care of Jasim.

On return from pond, Eliza found the nose of her daughter Tamanna bleeding profusely and Jasim was not at home.

Tamanna was rushed to local health complex where the on duty doctor declared the girl dead.

On the same day, Eliza lodged a case with Barisal Kotwali police station, accusing her husband of killing their daughter.

Pest attack on sugarcane worries growers, mills

KM REZAUL HOQUE, Gaibandha

Massive pest attack on vast areas of sugarcane fields this season worries farmers as well as authorities of Rangpur Sugar Mills in Gaibandha district.

Sugar production at the mill in the next crushing season will be badly affected if the situation cannot be tackled early, said the authorities concerned.

The mill depends on sugarcane supply from eight sugarcane producing zones covering 7,040 acres of land. Total 5,476 cane growers are now engaged in sugarcane cultivation there.

But stem borer, locally known as *majra*, has attacked vast tract of sugarcane fields and the menace is spreading fast, said Jahangir Alam, a grower of Shahebganj sugarcane farm

in Mohimaganj.

The affected sugarcane turns reddish inside and later dries up, said Abul Kashem, another grower.

"There is no instant remedy for the problem other than weeding up the affected sugarcane, and so, fields are becoming thinner day by day. The insect moth develops inside the sugarcane and spraying pesticide does not work here," said farmer Nizamuddin.

After visiting the affected sugarcane fields at Shahebganj, Alik Shom, general manager (Agriculture) of Rangpur Sugar Mills, suggested growers to uproot the affected plants and destroy or brunt it at a distant place, to prevent spreading of the disease to other plants.

Several sugarcane growers including Wadud Mia,

however, said they removed affected sugarcane plants from the field twice, but fresh pest attack occurs subsequently.

"Earlier we saw such pest attack in March-April but this time, the menace appeared in late August. Once farmers simply sprayed ashes on sugarcane fields and got rid of pests and insects within a week or two, but now the situation seems uncontrollable," said Sadek Ali, an elderly farmer of Mohimaganj union.

The authorities concerned did not take timely initiative to deal with pest attack, and now it has become widespread and difficult to control, said Jinnath Ali Prodhon, president of 'welfare group' of the sugarcane growers who supply sugarcane to the mill at Mohimaganj.



PHOTO: STAR

Massive pest attack on sugarcane in vast areas of Gaibandha district this season has become a cause of concern for the growers. The photo shows an affected field in Shahebganj of Gobindaganj upazila.

3 to die for murder in Madaripur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Madaripur

A court here yesterday sentenced three people to death for killing a man in Kalkini upazila of the district in 2006.

Judge of District Sessions Judge's court Bimol Chandra Shikder handed down the verdict against Nazrul Chowkider, 25, and his brother Mannan Chowkider, 28, sons of Sirajul Islam Chakider and the third convict Dider Chowkider, 38, son of Aftab Uddin Chowkider.

Of the convicts, Nazrul went into hiding after getting bail in the case filed in connection with the murder of Hafizur Rahman, 25, of Pashchim Shikermangal village under the upazila, on October 9 in 2006.

According to the prosecution story, Hafizur Rahman 'went missing' on October 9 the same year after the trio called him out of the house.

After three days, Hafizur's mutilated body with the hands and legs tied with rope was recovered from Arial Kha river in Gourmadi upazila of the district.

Al Amin, elder brother to the deceased, said the incident took place after Hafizur stood as a witness against the trio at a local arbitration over a burglary incident.

In Netrakona, four people were sentenced to life term imprisonment and fined Tk. 20 thousand each, in default to suffer two more years in jail yesterday, for killing a man.

The convicts are Mohammad Haiul, Mohammad Latif, Mohammad Abdul Rejjak and Mohammad Lotu Mia of Ashuari village under Kendua upazila, reports our correspondent.

According to the case in brief, on December 20 in 1999, the four killed one Rokun Uddin, 35, of the same village with sharp weapons due to previous enmity.