

The scope that ensures 'change'

SHYKH SERAJ

Agriculture has been cornered in Gazipur, the industry prone area for a while. New industrial initiatives on arable lands coupled with industrial wastes are troubling both agriculture and the farmers. The farmers, however, have started to turn this as an opportunity as the demand for agro products went higher due to an increasing number of labours residing here, making scope for the farmers to utilize the local arable lands.

I visited Chapair Union under Kaliakoir upazila few months back. It is now a changed region with the beauty of Boroibari Beel and greenery of crops. The local farmers have changed their own fates with a few years of hard work and turned the once unused lands into productive and profitable units. The farmers are utilizing the Boroibari Beel as well, growing crops right on its heart.

I took a further step from the Boroibari market and witnessed the changes all around. I saw a cheering group of children on the way, heading to the school. The socio-economic developments and human concern travel side by side and the children appeared as if they're well aware of the necessity of education and the social issues that this region had previously gone through. It's truly a wonderful feeling. I got off the vehicle and continued the journey by motorcycle.

I spoke to a number of local farmers. Great farming initiatives on unused lands have changed the lives of people living around Boribari Beel. For instance, there's Nurul Haq who started farming on 50 decimal lands that he inherited from his father. It helped him send his son abroad for higher education, build house and get his daughter married. These

are called changes!

Necessity leads to new initiatives and eventually success. Abdul Malek, a vegetable farmer, isn't what they call filthy rich, but he's well off. His family consists of his wife and two children. Feroza Begum, his wife, helps him in farming. Each morning, he collects 60 to 100 bottle gourds from his field and carries to the market. Imran, Malek's son, helps his father in these daily activities and is already interested in profitable farming. All the available lands in this region are being used for farming and most crops are profitable. Salim, another farmer is growing papaya in a tiny land adjacent to Malek's.

Although most of the arable lands are right beside the canal, the Union Parishad has constructed concrete drainage system around the lands. In addition, the local marginal and middle size farmers enjoy facilities like well-designed irrigation system, easy access to seeds and fertilizer etc. Therefore, it's hard to find a single idle land. This area is blessed with farming success. We usually see heroes on the silver screens and hardly any in real lives. But the truth is, there's actually more than just one in this region in the forms of farmers and Abdul Ali from Ashadiabari is certainly one of them. He never had a land to his name and spent a good part of his life pulling rickshaw. He eventually leased a land here, started farming on it and changed his fate for good.

Scope and disadvantage walk side by side. I discovered a little negativity as well. Some farmers who own lands are giving up farming due to a growing labour and ingredient cost. But the marginal farmers or the ones who lease lands and put all their efforts along with their families are benefitting.



PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

Vegetable are grown around Boribari Beel in Gazipur.

Meanwhile, Abdul Malek heads to the market by a van full of bottle gourds along with his children. He'll drop his daughter school and his son is there to help him out. The Boroibari market is nearby, a place filled with new crops.

There is high demand for agro products in Gazipur these days. They sell really quickly. Abdul Malek's bottle gourds got sold within an instance as I was speaking to a couple of wholesale traders. It's noticeable how the market system and prices favoring the farmers can make all the parties happy and motivated. The abundance of pure crops in this market is a clear indication of the crop diversity in this region. Unfortunately, such markets are gradually getting away from the urban community.

This market wasn't as extensive before as it is now, and there were a lot lesser



Shykh Seraj is an Agriculture Development and Media Activist. He is an Ashoka Fellow and an FAO A.H. Boerma Awardee. At Channel i, he is Director and Head of News. He is also Director, Planner and Presenter of the popular Agro-Documentary "Hridoye Mati O Manush".

presence of farmers and wholesalers. It has now become the center for this region's socio-economic development. I spoke to the former chairman of Chapair union Saukat Imran and he addressed education as the main reason of this region's overall development. The locals are becoming more conscious about education with time.

The growing demand for vegetable is the reason why so many locals are inclining towards farming. It's amazing how the locals relate their dreams with the growing price of agro and other products. They're ensuring

both personal and overall development of the region through motivation and hard work. This is the actual face of development that is required in every village. We believe that the Agricultural Department and relevant bodies will play their respective roles to make these developments sustainable. There are many other river and canal surrounding areas that have hundreds and thousands of unused lands. They need to be brought under farming. The success in Kaliakoir could be imitable for other regions in the country.

Ismatara of Jhenidah caring for the elderly

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Ismatara president of Jhama Mohila and Shishu Unnayan Shangstha rehabilitated fifteen despised and destitute elderly women of the upazila. Feeling sympathetic for the aged widow women; Ismatara made four thatched rooms on her four decimal lands. It provides the basic necessities to these women; the old house is named Jhama and Sarejan rehabilitation center.

The women are Nimori Begum, Ferdousi Khatun, Uzala Begum, Maharan Nessa, Morium Begum, Jorimonnessa, Amena Khamon, Rabeya Khatun, Adhiron Nessa, Rizia Khatun, Rumia Khatu, Chearon Nessa and Rushia Khatun. Ismatara started her career as a tailor and handy craftsmen, later she became the president Of Jhama Mohila and Shishu Unnayan Shangstha.

She pondered about the tragic condition the elderly

women habituate in and built this house in 2013. Being aware of this noble initiative few men of great heart contributed financial to assistance in running this old house. Sadar upazila chairman Kanak Kanti Das gave Tk ten thousand; Akhil Chandra Biswas gave Tk three thousand while Lal Mohammad gave Tk one thousand.

Ismatara Khatun wife of Aynal Hossain of Jorapukhuri village under Harinakundo upazila of the district took this initiative thinking of theses elderly women as her own mother. These elderly women are despised by their family members and pitied by none; as they are burden on their respective families. They wander about for a handful of rice and other necessities. Often they are scolded and driven away as their sons and other members cannot bear their expenses.

Ismatara said she feels

for the deplorable condition of theses aged unfortunate women who remain unfed. She now shelters fifteen women, they stay and contribute by doing various works and sells them to the local market. Some are able to do tailoring works.

Nimori Begum said we are happy here; Ismatara has done a tremendous job for us, we now no longer have to work as domestic help nor beg from door to door. She provides us with all basic necessities. We pray for her well-being.

Another physically impaired divorced house wife Ferdousi Khatun said, she works as a tailor here and contributes towards her son's educational expenses. She is happy here. Harinakundo Poura Mayor Shahinur Rahman Rinto said Ismatara is doing a great humanitarian job. We should stand by her side. If such benevolent work is done for the old ones we



PHOTO: STAR

Ismatara founder of Jhama and Sarejan rehabilitation centre, standing in front of the old house, inset, members of the rehabilitation centre.



PHOTO: STAR

Illegally filled up portion of this pond in Bhuapur upazila headquarters is being used for parking buses and setting up shops, as if to perpetuate the illegal occupation.

Govt pond being illegally filled to set up shops, bus stand at Bhuapur

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

An influential quarter is filling up a big government owned pond at Bhuapur upazila headquarters in the district and constructed shops and arranged bus parking there.

The quarter having political clout has already filled up one-fourth area of the water body without taking permission from the authorities concerned, sources said.

A few months ago, Bhuapur municipality authorities started dumping wastes on a portion of the pond, jointly owned by Bhuapur Upazila Parishad and Roads and Highways Department, at the upazila parishad premises, local sources said.

Later, several shops were constructed and passenger buses started parking on the filled part of the pond.

Several shop owners seeking anonymity said they constructed the shops there after giving money to the 'brokers' of the municipality and ruling party men.

Tolls are also collected from the passenger buses parked there, locals said.

Asked about the matter, Bhuapur municipality Mayor Masudul Haque Masud said, "Passengers and transport owners and workers suffer due to lack of a bus terminal in the upazila headquarters. As space is not available elsewhere, we have planned to construct a bus terminal at the place of the pond."

"No one from the municipality is involved in taking money from the shops and for bus parking. I do not know about involvement of others too," said Masud, also

convenor of the upazila unit of Awami League.

Local sources, however, said a big government khas land just beside the municipality building was filled up during the last army-backed caretaker government to construct a bus terminal there. But the transport workers did not show interest to use the place for parking their buses as the place is a bit away from Tangail-Bhuapur Road.

M o h a m m a d Helaluzzaman, upazila nirbahi officer of Bhuapur, said, "The portion of the pond was filled up before I joined the office. The pond was leased for fish farming and none was given permission to fill it up. Now we have decided to construct a wall around the pond and the grabbers will be evicted that time."

26 rescued while being trafficked to India

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole, Jessore

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) rescued 26 people while they were being trafficked to India through Puthali border on Monday night.

Lt Col Mazharul Islam, commander of 23 BGB Battalion, said a team of border guards, acting on a tip-off, raided the area at around 10:00pm and caught 26 people, including 16 women and two children, while they were entering India through the border.

The traffickers managed to flee, sensing presence of the BGB personnel, the commander said, adding that the rescued people hail from different areas of Narail and Faridpur districts.

They were later handed over to Benapole Port Police Station.

Muggers stab trader, take away Tk 6 lakh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Muggers stabbed a trader and took away Tk 6 lakh from him in Kamalkachhna area in the city on Monday night.

He was identified as Fazlul Haque, 50, son of late Abdul Qader of Shahipara area in the city.

Quoting the victim, Md Shahabuddin Khalifa, officer-in-charge of Rangpur Kotwali Police Station, said three muggers intercepted Fazlul Haque's motorcycle in Kamalkachhna area while he was returning home from his shop in the city at around 10:15pm.

The gang stabbed Fazlul Haque and snatched a bag containing the money.

Hearing scream, locals rushed to the spot and took him to Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

EARLY WINTER GRIPS N DISTRICTS

Sale of warm clothes on rise at makeshift shops

STAR NATIONAL DESK

With the winter already set in, the northern districts see boost in the sale of warm clothes and blankets, especially at makeshift shops in different northern districts.

A good number of buyers, especially those belonging to low and fixed income groups, are crowding the makeshift shops in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts to buy warm clothes as this season sees early arrival of winter, reports our Thakurgaon correspondent.

Taking the advantage of huge demand of second-hand winter clothes including woollen sweaters, jackets, cardigans, trousers, mufflers and gloves and kids wear, makeshift shop owners and roadside vendors are charging high prices, buyers alleged.

Depending on size, quality and attractiveness, the prices of a single blanket (made of cut pieces of garment factories) vary from Tk 150 to 300, that of a second hand sweater between Tk 150 and 300, and a jacket between Tk 300 to Tk 1200.

Usually the winter comes late November or early December but from last year these northern districts witness cold weather from the first week of November.

"I have come to buy a woollen sweater or a jacket for my daughter but the shopkeepers are demanding high prices," rickshaw puller Fazlu said during this correspondent's visit to a makeshift warm-cloth's market on Thakurgaon Government

Boys High School ground on Thursday.

"As the winter arrived early I have come here to buy some second-hand warm clothes for my family members," said Shafiqul Islam, a forth class employee of Abdur Rashid Degree College at Farabari village under Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

Jahangir, owner of a shop at the makeshift market, said low and fixed income group people including day labourers, rickshaw-pullers and low paid employees of government and private organisations are crowding his shop.

Asked about high prices, he said they have to buy the items for high prices too.

During another visit in Panchagarh on Friday afternoon, Khalil Bhuiyan, who sells second-hand warm clothes including jeans jackets, woollen blazers and sweaters at Boda Bazar in Boda upazila under the district, said many well-off people, especially youths, are also buying the items from the second hand shops as their quality and designs are good.

Our Narail correspondent adds: Sale of old warm clothes at roadside footpath shops at different places of three upazilas in the district has shot up as winter seems to have arrived early this year.

Biting cold during the morning and night causes

suffering of poor people, especially those living in rural areas. Most of the poor and low income people are crowding the roadside footpath shops to buy old sweaters and jackets while a good number of ultra-poor ones are waiting for warm cloths as help from the government or non-government organisations.

These people are trying to combat the chilling cold with the heat from burning straw and old rubber tyres.

Visiting different roadside markets in the town, this correspondent found low income people thronging there to buy warm clothes but many of them are frustrated due to high prices.



PHOTO: STAR

People throng makeshift shops on the ground of Thakurgaon Government Boys' High School to buy warm clothes as winter has arrived early in the northern districts.