

Rajdhola lake returns to fishermen

ZIA NAZMUL ISLAM

The round-shaped Rajdhola beel is by nothing extraordinary than other lakes, but it provides livelihood for more than 200 families living adjacent to the lake – most of who are of the Hindu community. Stretched just over one kilometer on both sides, the beel is situated in Purbodhola thana in Netrokona. Like many other lakes in scattered all over Bangladesh Rajdhola beel once, was a property almost consumed by land-grabbers. But now, with the help of Bangladesh fisheries department, Caritas, World Fish Centre, Bella and FEMCOM, it belongs to fishermen who have been fishing there for generations. The fishermen owners have their own committee to protect and collect fish from the lake.

Although origin of the lake is untraceable, Rajdhola beel has its share of mysterious stories. The name of the lake suggests that the lake was a property of local landlord. The landlord family moved to India long back but the stories remain. It is said that the area was a plain grazing land before. Once a monk came to the area and asked the locals for water but there was no drinking water nearby. With spiritual powers the monk turned the field into a lake. It is also told that cooking-ware used to float on the lake out of nowhere. Villagers used to use the cooking-ware and leave them back into the lake after usage. It was forbidden to keep any cooking-ware. Once a family lost one and floating of cooking-ware stopped surfacing.

One of the committee members, Naresh Chandra



PHOTO: ZIA NAZMUL ISLAM

Fishermen returning and unloading fish after a catch at Rajdhola lake in Netrokona.

“Before, ownership of the lake used to keep changing and local fishermen were not allowed to fish in the lake. Moreover, the owners didn’t take any care of the lake which almost rendered the lake fishless.” Now it belongs to proper fishermen, and is well taken care of. The lake is surrounded by a thana and three villages: Purbodhola thana, Raajdhola, Kaldoura and Haatdhola. Sri Shwapon Chandra Das, a member of the lake committee said, “Caritas took lease of the lake from government. With interest-less installment the

committee members have paid Caritas back. End of 2013, the whole lake came into the hands of fishermen committee with full control.

Usually, they fish twice a day: early in the morning and in afternoon. Each catch brings about Tk 300-400 for each member. Portion of the profit is kept by the committee for maintenance and personal savings. Jahangir Alam, teacher of Jagatmoni Pilot High school lives beside the lake. He claims that he regularly used to catch fish as large as 40 kg when he was young, and share them

with family and friends. “Size of fishes has gone down, so is the number. If the initiative to reclaim the lake for the local fishermen was not taken, the lake would’ve been nothing but an empty water-body”, said Jahangir.

Annually, around Tk. 20 lakhs is spent for maintaining the fish population of the lake. Selling fish, the committee earns around Tk. 35-40 Lakhs. With the lake generating 100% in profits yearly, some local fishermen find the lake to be a blessing and some think of it as a miracle.

Homestead gardening changing lives of char women

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

For the last 4 years, homestead vegetables gardening has brought fortunes to the distressed and landless women living in the remote and hardly reachable char areas on the Teesta River basin at five upazilas in Lalmonirhat district. The charwomen have achieved this success through cultivating vegetables on their tiny homesteads along with other income generating activities, driving away ‘monga’ and beginning a new life under assistance of the Char Livelihoods Programme (CLP).

Over 20,000 extremely poor families living in the char areas of Lalmonirhat sadar, Aditmari, Kaliganj, Hatibandha and Patgram upazilas in the district have achieved the success to overcome poverty comprehensively so far. CLP beneficiaries are mostly cultivating pumpkin, sweet gourd, Korola, Chichinga, Borboti, patol, Kakrol, Jhinga, Shosha, brinjal, cauliflower, chilli, Palong and Lal sak and other vegetables, they said adding they are happy earning additional to support the poor family.

Char woman Shilpi Begum, 48, at Char Gobordhan said, “Before taking up vegetables farm-

ing as the means of our subsistence, most of the women were in abject poverty in the erosion-and poverty-prone sandy char on the Teesta basin.” “Now the charwomen are leading a changed life and out children are going to schools and dreaming of a better Bangladesh,” she said. “I have cultivated pumpkin vegetables on tiny homestead brings good result for us. I have already sold vegetables at Tk 3,000 in the last one month, after meeting my family’s requirement.

Mohishkhocha union parishad UP Chairman Mosaddeque Hossain Chowdhury said, huge quantities of vegetables are being produced in over 65 char villages of the Teesta basin under five upazilas in Lalmonirhat. The Deputy Director in Lalmonirhat Agriculture Extension Department Abdul Mazid said the poor charpeople have been improving livelihoods through homesteads vegetables cultivation, animal husbandry and other income generation activities. The poor char families are being enabled to escape floods through raising plinths and are becoming self-reliant through various income generations including



PHOTO: STAR

A char woman posing in front of her homestead-grown gourd.



PHOTO: STAR

A large number of migratory birds arrive during winter at Arunima Golf Club in Narail.



Birds of winter at Kalia

PONUEL S BOSE, Narail

Like others years, much to the relief of nature enthusiasts and bird lovers, migratory birds have started arriving at Arunima Golf Club at Panipara village in Kalia upazila under Narail district. At the same time the water lilies and lotus has begun to blossoming on the lakes of Arunima.

To protect themselves from the terrible cold of the northern countries, migratory birds start coming to Bangladesh in November and usually stay till late February when they start return journey.

Last year, Arunima attracted a large number of visitors and tourists to enjoying lively chirping and fluttering of thousands of native and migratory birds, said Erfan Ahmed, Managing Director of the Golf Club. The club has been well decorated for

guests, and fish farming facilities allow tourists to catch fishes. All the food item here are organic.

While visiting the club recently this correspondent found birds viewers from different corners of Narail and country side enjoying the flights of the birds. Established in 2000 about 48 km away from the district headquarters, the resort comprises a 60-acre water body, premises with hundreds of different trees, flower gardens, and cottages and restaurants for visitors including nature lovers and bird watchers.

Khahir Uddin Ahmed, chairman of the golf club said we have made this place a safe haven for birds and arranged facilities for the visitors to stay and enjoy the beautiful surroundings. The resort remains lively with migratory birds of winter till March.

What's Your Insight?

Send your contributions to star.insight@gmail.com. Articles/stories/profiles should be between 500 and 1000 words in length and should be accompanied by at least two photographs.

Growing healthy, tasty vegetables without using chemical fertilisers

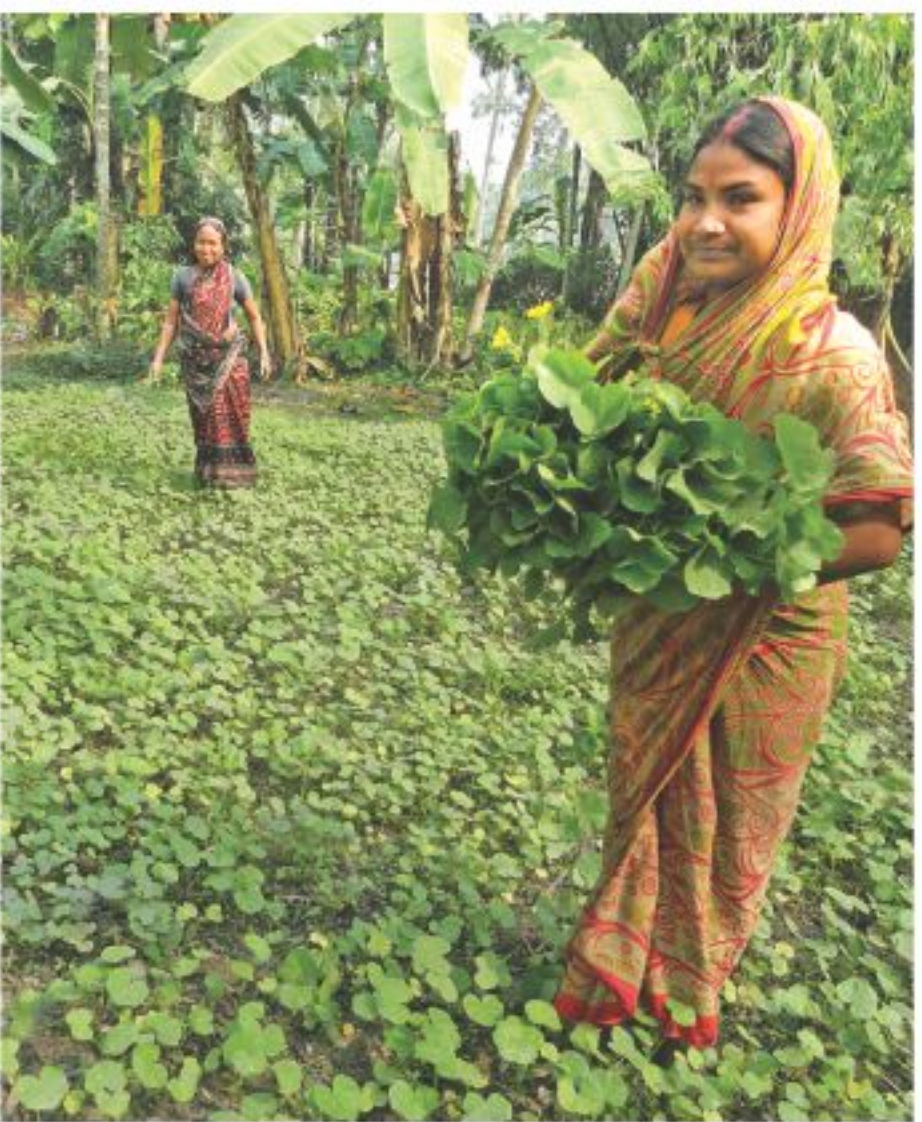


PHOTO: STAR

A farmer nurtures sweet gourd plants at an orchard at Durakuti village in Lalmonirhat Sadar where most villagers have opted for growing vegetables without using chemical fertilisers. From bottom left: a bitter gourd garden at Karnapur village and women collecting 'healthy' greens at a field at Haridev village in the upazila.

Farmers in a number of villages in two upazilas of Lalmonirhat opt for vermicompost

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Farmers in a good number of villages of Lalmonirhat Sadar and Aditmari upazilas are now producing vegetables without the help of any chemical fertiliser and insecticide as such items sell for good prices due to high demand among consumers.

Vegetables including aubergine, coriander, okra, green chilli, tomato, spinach, bottle gourd, *lal shak*, *palong shak*, *napa shak* and *lau shak* are grown with vermicompost instead of chemical fertiliser. For insecticides, farmers use natural remedies like spraying of water treated with neem leaves.

Local NGO RDRS provides seeds and technical support for the purpose, farmers said.

The areas that see vegetable farming in this way include Panchagram, Sindurmoti, Fokirertokeya, Horidev, Shakertari, Radha Ballov, Madhutari, Khedabag, Kashinath, Gokunda, Etapota, Kurul, Karnapur, Durakuti, Batrish Hazari, Madoner Chalk, Pangatari and Purantari villages in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila and Kamlabari, Haziganj, Mahistuli, Gobdha, Purbo Doljor, Dewdoba, Palashi, Namuri, Ratharpar, Senpara, Shibpara and Kutirpar villages of Aditmari upazila.

“We don’t use any chemical fertiliser and insecticide to produce vegetables. Instead we use vermicompost. Such vegetables

grow slowly but it is healthy, tasty and more nutritious,” said Mrinal Kanti Barmon, 62, of Sindurmoti village in Lalmonirhat Sadar.

“I have cultivated vegetables on one bigha of land without using any chemical fertilisers and insecticides. After meeting up family demand, I sell it. Forty of the 150 farmer families in the village are engaged in producing vegetables in this way,” said Ramani Kanta Barmon, 55, of Haridev village in Lalmonirhat Sadar.

“Local people purchase chemical-free vegetables from the field for about double the prices than that of the ones grown with chemical fertilisers and insecticides,” said Mohanta Kumar Roy, 50, another farmer at the same village.

Azfar Hossain, a school teacher at Karnapur village in Lalmonirhat, said he makes advance payment to the vegetable growers to get chemical-free vegetables.

Farmers at many villages have started cultivating vegetables without chemicals as officials of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) and RDRS are encouraging them, said Abdul Mazid, deputy director of Lalmonirhat DAE.

“Farmers now get seeds and technical supports from us to make vermicompost. We will work for motivating farmers to produce vegetables without the use of chemicals at all the villages in the district,” said Ziaul Islam, development programme manager of RDRS.



PHOTO: STAR

Bees collecting honey from mustard fields is a commonplace during this season when blooming flowers of the popular oilseed turn vast tracts of land in many districts into 'yellow carpets'. The photo was taken from Malopara in Abhaynagar upazila of Jessore

Farmers take heart seeing maize bring good profit

UNB, Jhalakati

Farmers in the district are cultivating maize in larger areas of their land this season as they made a reasonable profit from the item last year, despite onslaught of cyclonic storm 'Mahasen' during its harvest.

While visiting different areas of the district a few days ago, this correspondent found growers busy with cultivation of the cereal in their fields.

They have started sowing seeds after tilling Aman fields immediately after the harvest of the paddy.

This year, they have begun farming of the crop earlier in order to avoid repetition of losses from Mahasen-like natural disaster.

'Mahasen' caused serious harm to maize cultivation in the southern district last year, making the growers deprived of more profit from the crop.

The farmers said, non-government organisation Brac, under its Food Safety Programmes, encouraged them to cultivate maize.

Under the supervision of the leading NGO, hybrid variety of Pacific 984 maize is being cultivated on 213 acres of land (one acre=30 decimals) in Sadar and Rajapur upazilas.

Besides, being encouraged by the officials of local Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), farmers are growing the

crop on further 385 acres of land in four upazilas, including Rajapur and Sadar, of the district.

Of the 385 acres of land, 125 acres are in Sadar upazila, 63 acres in Nalchity upazila, 135 acres in Rajapur upazila and 62 acres in Kathalia upazila.

Local agriculture officials said, farmers require Tk 15,000, including the costs of seeds, fertiliser and irrigation, to grow maize on each acre of land, which usually gives 90-100 maunds yield (one maund=37.32 kgs) of the crop.

Maize is sold at Tk 8,000-9,000 per maund.

Anisur Rahman, a farmer of Bangkura village in the Sadar upazila, said they made profit by farming maize last year though 'Mahasen' damaged the crop during harvest. Describing maize farming a profitable venture, Abdul Hamid Akon, another farmer of the area, said that the crop is not only a nutritious food but also a key ingredient of fish and cattle feeds.

Champak Aich, manager of Brac's Food Safety Programme, said as part of their initiative to expand maize farming in the district, they are encouraging the farmers to cultivate the crop and providing necessary supports.

He also said that farmers can earn a net income of Tk 50,000 by cultivating maize on one acre of land.