

# Strawberry cultivation offers opportunity to farmers

Needs supply chain integration, marketing facilities and government patronization

KAFIL MAHMUD, from Khagrachhari

Strawberry cultivation is a dream of Bimal Chandra Chakma and Munmun Chakma, who is now the pioneer couple of Khagrachhari who has made strawberry cultivation commercially successful in the district. They started strawberry cultivation in 2011 on 50 decimals of lands at Karallachhari Mukh area under Mohalchhari upazila. Now, as of 2014, their plantation has grown to 200 decimals within three years. In the last season they harvested 1,500 kilograms of strawberries from 4,000 plants and sold about tk 7 lakhs. Their target now is to sell around 4,000 kilograms from 9,000 plants and to sell double in value. Each kilogram of local strawberries are sold at 700-800tk to the end consumer.

Two farmers of the same area has started strawberry cultivation on their 200 decimals of land collecting seeds from Bimal. During a recent visit at their orchard the couple was found busy harvesting as the season has just started, and is expected to continue till April. "We feel really happy - collecting the strawberries from the orchard is like extracting pearls from oysters", said the couple. Bimal, professionally a school teacher, sought to realize the dream of cultivating it. At first, he collected only three strawberry seeds from Comilla district on 2007, but he could not succeed because he didn't know the proper method of cultivation.

Initial failure could not

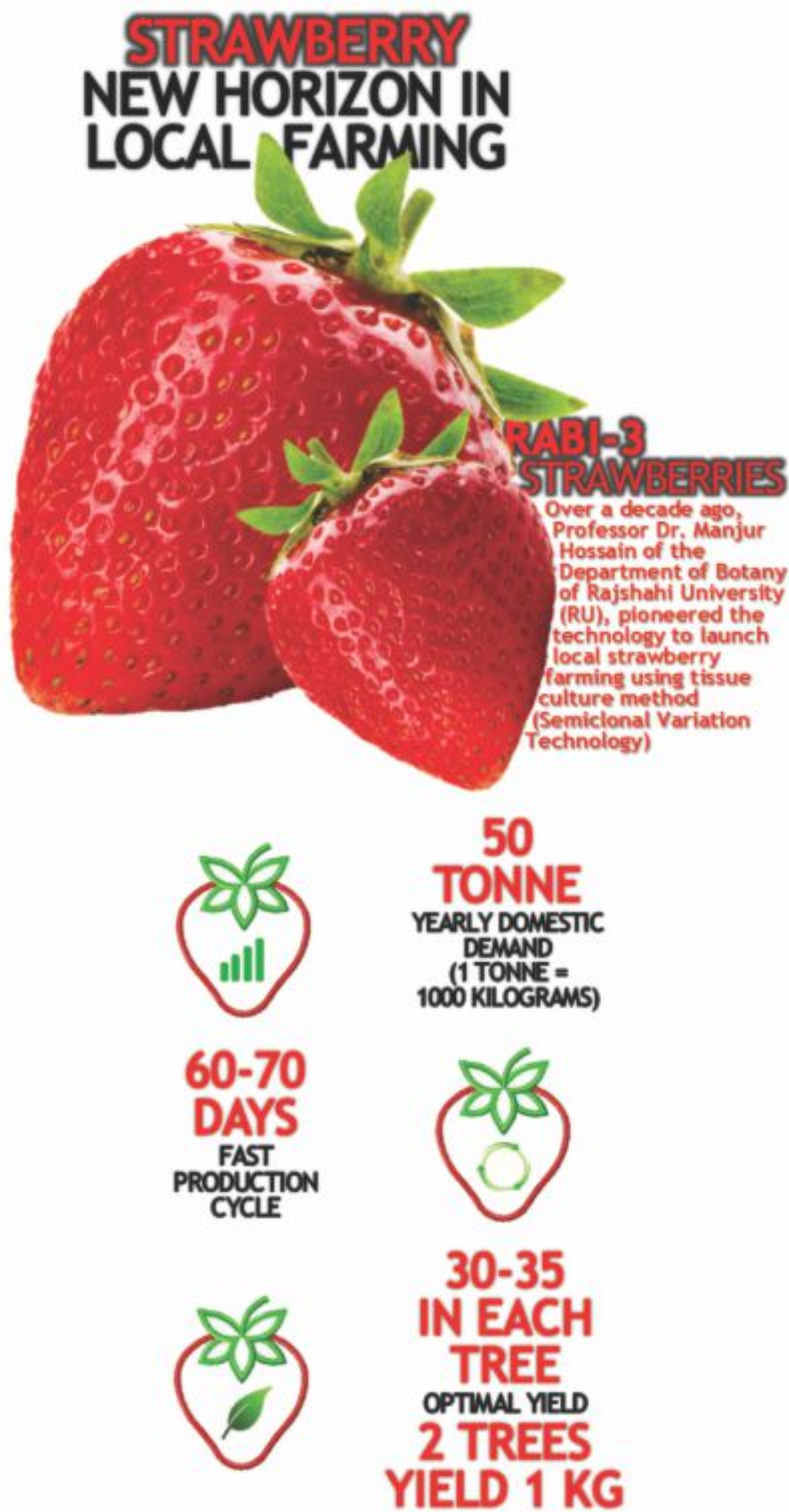
frustrate Bimal. He collected 500 seeds of Rabi-3 species of strawberry from successful cultivator Razaul Karim of Cox's Bazar in 2012 and planted them on 10 decimals of land. He and his wife worked together and gradually raised the plants. Talking to the Daily Star, Bimal mentioned some positive sides of strawberry cultivation. Anyone with a small investment can cultivate strawberries quickly if he has access to some land. Profit are reaped quickly as well, since the production cycle is very short - strawberries are harvested in 60 to 70 days, about 30 to 35 fruits are harvested in each tree. Since 50 to 60 fruits weigh one kilogram, every two trees yield about one kilogram of strawberries. And it is easy to reproduce strawberry plants due to its vegetative reproduction habit. It can be reproduced constantly through runners or clones that resemble tendrils. "The runners grow roots and create new plants when they touch the soil and bear fruit; eventually sending out more runners," Bimal added.

According to Bimal, sandy loam soil and regular care of the plants are essential elements for good output of strawberries, not to mention planned marketing, without which the fruits will not reach the end consumer fast enough. This is crucial since strawberries rot quickly. Bimal says that strawberry cultivation can open a new horizon for farmers, but appropriate supply chain integration, marketing facilities, along with some government patronization are needed to



PHOTO: STAR

The farmer couple of Khagrachhari tends to their strawberries.



INFOGRAPHIC: FACEBOOK.COM/BANGLADESHINNUMBERS

Over a decade ago, Professor Dr. Manjur Hossain of the Department of Botany of Rajshahi University (RU), pioneered the technology to launch local strawberry farming using tissue culture method. Dr. Manjur's research evolved RU-1, RU-2 and RU-3 (Rabi-1, 2, 3) varieties of strawberry through tissue culture method using 'Semiclinal Variation Technology' at the Plant Breeding and Gene Engineering Laboratory at Botany Department of RU. Demand for strawberries in the country can be estimated at about 50 tonnes annually, since that is roughly the amount of imports per year, from Thailand, Australia and the USA. Strawberries, in addition to direct consumption, are also used in preparing ice-cream, jam, jelly, pickles, chocolate/candy products, biscuits, cake and flavoured drinks.

Mohammad Abul Kasam, the Crop Production Specialist of Khagrachhari Agriculture Extension Office, said that Bimal's initiative in cultivating strawberries and turning his project into a commercial success in the district in a milestone. The soil and weather of the district is suitable for the fruit and this can definitely be a profitable source of income for farmers. The official also added that they are planning to collect Strawberry seeds from Bimol and distribute it among interested cultivators, along with necessary knowledge, suggestions and support aiming to increase the cultivation of strawberries in Khagrachhari.



PHOTO: STAR

IRRI-boro seedlings being farmed using the new dry bed technology

## Dry bed technology boosts rice yield

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

The dry bed system, a new technology in the northern region is installed for growing IRRI-boro saplings has become popular amongst farmers at many villages in Lalmonirhat this year. A number of farmers are in queue to learn to use this new tech as this system of growing saplings is better than that the traditional system. According to farmers said, they generally produce IRRI-boro saplings at low lands, where irrigation water isn't needed. Farmers who installed the new technology for growing IRRI-boro saplings are satisfied as they get hundred percent output from their seedbeds, as opposed to the general method which yields only fifty to sixty percent output due to many saplings damaged by heavy cold and fog.

"For producing saplings, we need high land bed and polythene. We use the polythene to cover the saplings in order to save them from the fog," said

farmer Ranjit Chandra Roy at Rajpur village in Lalmonirhat sadar. Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officer in Lalmonirhat sadar Alok Adhikary said, at least 50-60 days are needed to produce IRRI-boro saplings traditionally but only 25-30 days are needed using the new technology. Sowing 50 percent seed yields cent percent sapling in this technology, he said, adding that the crop yielding rate is 25-30 percent higher than that of the traditional method. "The new technology's saplings never face damage in cold weather or in heavy fog. Farmers can easily harvest this system's saplings as these are healthy and strong," he said. He wants to provide the system in the countrywide of Bangladesh.

Lutful Karim, a farmer at Madhupur village in Lalmonirhat sadar said, "I installed this technology using saplings on one decimal land last year. As the output was impressive, I am installing this technology on twelve decimal lands this year." Maruf Islam, a farmer at Jagotbar village in Lalmonirhat sadar said, "Tk 1,100 to 1,150 is needed as

expenditure to produce saplings on one decimal land using dry bed technology, where Tk 1550 to 1600 is needed traditionally. Also, we can save at least 25-30 days for growing IRRI-boro saplings in the process," he said, adding that he has installed new technology to produce saplings on 20 decimal lands. "We don't face additional burden to irrigate water in the seedbed as new technology is a system of dry beds. This system is profitable for farmers as it saves land, time, money and labour," said Aminur Rahman, another farmer at same village.

Lalmonirhat AED official sources said, at least five hundred farmers at different villages in the district have engaged them in this new tech on saplings growing in this current season. At least 250 to 300 bighas of land have been used for producing IRRI-boro sailings under the new system. The Deputy Director of Lalmonirhat AED Abdul Mazid said, agriculture officials advising the farmers for producing saplings in this new method to earn windfall profits in agriculture. He hopes that a



PHOTO: STAR

**PRAISEWORTHY....** Locals gather to see floating exhibition on a large country boat, decorated with colourful paintings of dolphins and whales, on the Bhairab River near Bagerhat town on Saturday. From February 6 to March 2, the boat is scheduled to anchor at 30 places in the Sundarbans and coastal areas of Khulna, Bagerhat and Barisal districts as the Wildlife Conservation Society arranged the programme to create awareness among locals about safety and preservation of the graceful creatures.

### 2013 ROUND-UP

## Killing of 68 people raises concerns in Jhenidah

UNB, Jhenidah

At least 68 people were murdered in the district last year.

Such a large number of killings has increased fear among the common people about their security in six upazilas of the south-western district.

Among the deceased, 11 were women and seven children.

Police sources said, at least 27 people, including four women and two children, were killed in Sadar upazila, nine, including one woman, in Shaikupa upazila, 10, including one child, in Kaliganj upazila,

12, including three children and one woman, in Harinakundu upazila, and five, including three women, in Kotchandpur, and, two women and one child, in Moheshpur upazila.

Of the dead, six people were victims of political violence.

The victims are: Harinakundu upazila unit BNP president Abul Hossain, Kaliganj upazila unit Awami League leader Abdur Rauf, Jubo League leaders Mithun and Khairul Hossain Malitha, Dhaka city unit BNP leader Rafiqul Islam and Jamat-e-Islami activist Abdus Salam.

Besides, A BNP activist named Intazul Islam (Intaz) of Purbo Daripara in Moheshpur upazila and Shibir activist Israil Hossain of Harindia village in Kotchandpur upazila were killed in police firing while a police constable, named Gazi Omar, was killed in a clash with pickets during hartal enforced by Jamaat-e-Islami on March 3, 2013.

A total of 66 people were killed in the district in 2012. Assistant Superintendent of Police Nazrul Islam said, social rivalry and family disputes were the major reasons behind the killings.

## Two get life for killing woman in Chuadanga

### Wife murdered in Bogra

UNB, Chuadanga

A court here on Monday sentenced two people to life term imprisonment for killing a housewife in 2009.

The convicts are Milon, 35, son of Chhotoburo, and Ahad Ali, 43, son of Raisuddin of Nafarkandi village of Sadar upazila of the district.

Two other accused Azizul and Mirajul were acquitted as the allegations against them could not be proved.

According to the prosecution, housewife Shahana Begum of the village was beaten to death by the convicts for protesting the killing of a pet dog on May 15, 2009.

Shahana's husband police constable Abdul

Khalek filed a case with Sadar police station.

Police submitted charge sheet against the four accused in 2012.

In Bogra, a housewife was killed allegedly by her husband at Parihara village in Kahalu upazila here early Monday.

The deceased was identified as Ismat Ara Begum, 35, wife of Abu Bakar of the village.

Officer-in-charge of Kahalu police station Tofazzal Hossain said the couple often locked in quarrels over economic miseries in the family.

On the fateful midnight of Sunday, at one stage of brawl, Bakkar hit Ismat in the head with an axe, leaving her dead on the spot.

## Patali pricey as date trees disappear fast

PONUEL S BOSE, Narail

Date juice collectors and producers of molasses from it are still passing busy time as the items of the winter are on high demand.

The juice, also taken raw as a tasty drink, is boiled into molasses that is used to make various kinds of pithas (traditional cakes).

The solid molasses is locally called *patali gur* and the best quality of it is known as *nalini patali*.

Narail is famous for good quality *patali* molasses and there are around 30 *haats* (sales centres) of the item in Sadar, Lohagara and Kalia upazilas under the district.

Date trees grow abundantly in this district due to favourable climate, said Ashok Kumar Halder, district training officer of the Department of Agriculture

*Narail is known for good quality patali molasses and there are around 30 markets of the item in Sadar, Lohagara and Kalia upazilas.*

Extension (DAE) in Narail. Depending on quality, a kg of *patali* is now selling for Tk 90 to 190.

Surprisingly, the prices have almost doubled during the last one year as date trees, often sold for use as fuel in brick kilns, are gradually becoming less available, said locals.

Famous *patali* sales

centres at Ruppang Bazar, Tularampur, Chachuri and Maijpara in Narail attract buyers from different areas including Jessore, Faridpur, Khulna, Magura and Gopalganj districts.

Visiting Ruppang Bazar a few days ago, this correspondent saw around 40 traders sitting in a row with their *patali* for sale while people thronged there to buy the item.

"I have come to buy some *patali* for making winter cakes but the price is much higher than last year's," said Sajjad Hossain, 45.

As the prices of *patali* is much higher than that of sugar this year, a section of traders mix low quality sugar, flavour and colour with the molasses to make windfall profit, said Aghor Das, a trader at Maijpara.



PHOTO: STAR

**A sales centre of patali gur (molasses made from date juice) at Ruppangj Haat in Narail** Sadar upazila buzzes with activities as the area, famous for high quality date molasses, attracts customers from different regions.