

Selim Reza: The one man agro think tank!

SHYKH SERAJ

Being a development journalist for three decades, I've had the opportunity of meeting many dedicated officers who stand by local inhabitants and farmers. But today, I'll introduce you to a Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officer (SAAO) of the Department of Agricultural Extension who really stands out amongst the lot. He's a very creative officer who is truly committed to the growth of rural farmers - his communication with them has to be seen with one's own eyes to be believed. Fourteen years back, he thought of building a pest diagnostic centre. Farmers would then be able to learn about unknown pest attacks as well as varied crop diseases, along with friendly and enemy insects. Now, at the Union Parishad building of Dulla Union, in Mymensingh's Muktagachha, he now has that centre. When he came here, the Chairman gave him a small room and then he built this centre gradually over time.

A small room, 12 by 12 feet, is a room of prospect and admiration. What is not here in this room? A place where samples of different plant diseases and the pests which affect the plants, are kept in bottles and a library as well. Collection of colourful butterflies, arrangement for measuring the quality of fertilizer and identifying adulterated ones. Agricultural learning and strategies- all takes place in this little room. All these initiatives are for farmers and for farming. A man who loved farming throughout his life, with all his dreams, hope and efforts, Selim Reza, one dynamic Sub Assistant Agriculture Officer (SAAO) among 13,224 others across the country.

After we met and exchanged greetings, the inevitable question popped up: Why this initiative and how did he manage to put it all together?

"I took the decision of starting a pest diagnostic centre. I started spending Tk. 200 from my salary every month. I could have taken a Tk. 50 lunch. Many people know, still I spend only Tk. 15 behind my lunch, eating yogurt and chira (flattened rice). I saved some and spent it behind the centre", replied Selim and I started to feel even more honoured sitting right in front him. Some NGOs were interested and offered him to take some classes for an honourarium of Tk. 500. He invested that amount for the centre as well. This centre truly is the result of months and years of his love and passion.

Life cycle of plants, friendly and enemy insects - all these cycles circle around the life of Selim Reza. He can fluently name all the diseases and pests and attributes of the plants and pests. Every year, farmers use approximately 50,000 Mt. tons of pesticides, fungicides, miticides, weedicides, spending Tk. 50,000 crore collectively. Farmers are using these without having full knowledge and sometimes they are forced to do so. This is making the farming environment vulnerable, not to mention making the farming output and food vulnerable as well. But, with Selim Reza's farming solution centre, you can find answers to any question on crop disease or pest attack. "Farmers don't have much knowledge on pesticides. They don't know whether they should use miticide, pesticide or weedicide. They only look for quality seeds", says Selim. "Farmers also come here with affected leaves", added Selim. "They just show me the bottle and I can identify the disease and give the solution instantly matching both the leaves", replied Selim. Everybody is concerned about the environment. Specially after using too much pesticide and adulterated fertilizer, soil is losing its fertility. IPM (Integrated Pest Management) is the best



Selim Reza, Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officer (SAAO) of the Department of Agricultural Extension, in his pest diagnostic centre at Muktagachha. PHOTO: MD MUKUL HOSSAIN

solution out of this scenario, according to Selim.

He has also collected local varieties of paddies. And he also has managed to collect all the rice varieties released from BRRI (Bangladesh Rice Research Institute). With his effort and perseverance, he could master all the information on the characteristics of these varieties. Not only chemical fertilizers, he has developed a system here to measure the qualities of vermin-compost. Selim Reza has all the necessary farming related books in his library. He also has advanced agro-technology and machineries. He is continuing his experiments throughout the year.

"What inspired you to become who you are today?" I asked.

"I have been inspired by the farmers", replied Selim. "Farmers can't express the problems they face and it was becoming tough to understand them. I started thinking of a different strategy to communicate and learn about their problems", added Selim. Everyday farmers come to visit the pest diagnostic centre of Selim Reza. Beside attending to the farmers who come to the centre, he also makes field visits to reach out to the farmers. I had the luck to accompany him on such a visit.

"Selim Bhai, have a look on my mango flowers", requested a farmer.

"This happens due to mango malformation. It's a fungal disease. You need to dig soil and put it under. Secondly, you have to dissolve five naphthalenes and then spray on your tree", answered Selim.

"The papaya doesn't have a good shape, right?" asked



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".

Students go hungry at the only primary school for char children

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Smrity Roy Primary School was established by Crystal Open Scouts in 2009 for the students of four chars bordering Dharla River char Nagodtari village of Mogholhat union in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila. Since then, children from 200 poor families at char Nagodtari, Char Falimari, Char Ibrahim and Char Osman Tanti have had access to one of their basic rights - education.

People who live here are dependent on catching fish in the river for their livelihood. Crystal Open Scouts, with their HQ at Motijheel in Dhaka, runs Smrity Roy Primary School on 10 decimal khas lands. Now a total of 159 char children are studying here, in play group to class five. The school recruits four female teachers for imparting education to the char children in the school. The Crystal Open Scouts bear the teachers' and school's expenditure, since the school does not receive any government patronage.

The local people informed that they didn't educate their children before 2009. "We only cast our votes, but no representative came to build a school here for educating our children," said a local inhabitant. "Now our children are becoming educated but we the guardians cannot support them properly. Many of our children don't get lunch as we are poor - we have no choice but to watch our children go hungry in the school," said local guardian Babul Hossain. His comment was also echoed by Pacha Chandra Barmon, Rafiqul Islam and other guardians to local children of Char Nagodtari village.

Nazmul Haque, a student of class five said, "I come to the school after eating some rice at home in the morning, but I never eat lunch. I pass every afternoon hungry, but try my best to remain attentive in my lessons." "There is no food at lunch time in our home, so I never try to go to home in the afternoon either," he said, adding he will do better at his studies if he gets to eat lunch. "I eat rice in the morning and night every day, but in the afternoon, I go hungry. I pass my noon in the school, but I do not demand lunch from home because I know my parents cannot afford it," said Sumaiya Akhter, a student of class five. The headmaster of the school Fatema Khatun said, she and three other teachers, Juliya Sultana Sumi, Kulsum Begum and Parvin Akhter are trying their best in carrying out the lessons of the children of the four chars. "All the students of the school come from ultra-poor families, and they do not get enough food to eat. They try their best to pay attention, but in the end they are not properly nourished," she said. Another teacher of the school, Parvin Akhter said, the salary structure for them is not their primary concern - they are happy teaching at a place where it really matters, at the remote char areas where students do not have any other alternative.

The founder president of Crystal Open Scouts, Sarwar Mohammad Shahriar informed the Daily Star that they built the school in the name of their friend's mother Smrity Roy. They spend Tk 17,000 as teacher's salaries and stipends of the school every month, and they have also planned to donate bicycle to each student so that they can commute to and from the school easily after passing class five in the school.

The guardian, students and their teachers urged the authority concerned and the government for running food programmes at the char school assuring proper nutrition for the char students.



PHOTO: STAR

Marma youths throw water to each other as they celebrate Moitri Pani Barshon (splashing of water as a token of friendship) on the premises of Old Rajbari in Bandarban town yesterday, during the community's traditional Sangrai festival marking the Bangla New Year.

Shaheed Minar vandalised night before Pahela Baishakh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Miscreants damaged the main Shaheed Minar of Polashbari union under Nilphamari Sadar upazila beside Nilphamari-Domar road on Sunday night, hours before Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla New Year.

Locals found one of the three pillars of the Shaheed Minar broken as they gathered at the field adjoining the Shaheed Minar to celebrate Pahela Baishakh on Monday morning.

Locals including teachers and students were shocked to see the Shaheed Minar damaged when they gathered on the school premises to attend a function on Pahela Baishakh, said Subash Chandra Roy, headmaster of New Model Pre-Cadet School, standing beside the Shaheed Minar.

"A vested quarter belonging to anti-liberation forces torched and looted houses of local Hindus in December last year. We suspect the same forces, which are opposed to Bangladeshi culture and heritage, damaged the Shaheed Minar just before the joyous day of Pahela Baishakh," said Tapon Kumar Roy, chairman of Polashbari union parishad, also district unit president of Bangladesh Workers Party.

A land grabbers' syndicate attached with fundamentalist forces is active to occupy Hindus' land in the area, said Anisuzzaman Rumi, principal of Polashbari Degree College.

The syndicate is trying to occupy the khas land, formerly owned by a Hindu, on the premises of the Shaheed Minar.

Visiting the Shaheed Minar on Monday noon, this correspondent saw a few school kids putting pieces of the broken



PHOTO: STAR

School kids put together broken parts of a pillar of the main Shaheed Minar in Palashbari union under Nilphamari Sadar upazila on Monday to make it appear like its original shape. Criminals on Sunday night damaged the memorial dedicated to the martyrs of 1952 Language Movement.

Over 100 Bagerhat prisoners fall sick

They get food poisoning allegedly due to taking special meal on Pahela Baishakh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Over a hundred prisoners of Bagerhat district jail are undergoing treatment for food poisoning allegedly due to taking special meals provided on the occasion of Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla New Year.

With massive diarrhoea, 20 prisoners were admitted to Bagerhat Sadar Hospital at 8:00am on Tuesday, said Dr Koheli Begum, acting resident medical officer (RMO) of the hospital.

Forty other diarrhoea patients and 42 more attacked with fever, stomach ache and body ache have received treatment inside the jail.

The prisoners were served with traditional panta ilish (watered rice and hilsa), in the morning of Pahela Baishakh.

A good number prisoners developed digestion and vomiting problems and

their condition worsened gradually, jail sources said.

Jail Super Mohammad Amanullah said, "The quality of the food was fine. The food poisoning might have happened from drinking water."

A team of physicians from the Sadar Hospital visited the district jail to see the condition of the other prisoners.

There were 529 prisoners in the jail as of yesterday evening.

DIG (Prison) AKM Fazlul Haque has formed a three-member enquiry committee headed by Dr Nazrul Islam and asked them to submit report on the matter within three days, said Jail Superintendent Mohammad Amanullah.

Another inquiry committee headed by Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Mahamudul Hasan will also submit report on the food poisoning incident in the jail within three days, said the ADM.

80 houses gutted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

At least 80 houses were gutted in separate fire incidents at two villages in Sadar upazila yesterday and the day before.

In Shaslapeyala village, a fire gutted over 30 houses in the area of the upazila early yesterday.

The fire originated from an electric short circuit at a house at 12:30am and soon engulfed the adjoining houses, said Thakurgaon Fire Service and Civil Defence Office Azizul Haque.

On information, fire fighters rushed in and doused the flame after one and a half hours of hectic efforts.

Meanwhile, at least 50 houses were gutted in a fire at Rampur village in the upazila on Monday night.

The affected house owners claimed that the loss caused by the fire could go up to Tk 30 lakh.

'Missing' youth found dead

A CORRESPONDENT, Feni

Police recovered the decomposed body of a 'missing' youth from Dewanganj intersection on old Feni-Comilla highway on Monday.

The deceased was identified as Shahidul Islam, 26, son of Mokbul Ahmed of Bananipara in Feni municipality area.

Victim's mother Morium Begum said one Swapon called Shahidul out of house on April 3 and since then he remained missing.

Later, she filed a case with a court on April 9 as police refused to file any complaint, said Morium.

Contacted, Alamgir Hossain, sub-inspector of Feni Model police station, said Shahidul was a listed criminal and wanted in seven cases.

বিনিয়োগের শ্রেষ্ঠ সময় এখনই ...
জাতীয় আসন্ন বাজেট এর আগেই

Commercial Projects @

- ☑️ Banglamotor
- ☑️ Dhanmondi
- ☑️ Paltan Ready
- ☑️ Motijheel
- ☑️ Shyamoli Ready
- ☑️ Kachukhet Ready
- ☑️ Progati Sharani
- ☑️ Malibag
- ☑️ Ashulia
- ☑️ Narayangonj
- ☑️ Comilla
- ☑️ Chittagong
- ☑️ Sylhet

RUPAYAN Shopping Square @ Bashundhara

01733385856
01733385820 01733385866
01733385907 01733385867

RUPAYAN Housing Estate Ltd Corporate Office: RUPAYAN Centre 7/2 Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka-1212 Tel: 02 8822526

Member REHAB 1st=0.0929 sqm