

Jahangir's library for farmers

The source of light for hundreds of farmers

SHYKH SERAJ

Rural Bangladesh is a world of fields beset with crops. Everywhere, we work to bring a sustainable change. This is our soil. Bangladeshis rise from within the soil. We have taken great strides with agro-based improvements and productions. But, how far has the same community come in terms of access to education and information?

Farmers sacrifice their life for cultivation. Soil and crops bestow upon them the necessary elements of life. But, farming or otherwise, the world moves ahead with information and contemporary education. But Bangladeshi farmers are stuck without any direct access to knowledge. Academic learning, advanced technologies are very important in unlocking the full growth potential of any sector. Nevertheless, in the competitive crowd of info-business, farmers are mere participants. Today, I will tell you a story of a true exception.

Today, I'm taking you to a source of light in rural Bangladesh, a library set in rural Bangladesh. It's situated in Kaliganj village in Naogaon's Mandah upazila. Two years back, a local entrepreneur, Jahangir, established this library, and named it Shah Agriculture Information Centre. Farmers often find themselves in crisis due to the lack of information while they cultivate. This man has established the library where farmers will get all kinds of information. He firmly believes that a farmer has to be educated, regardless of what kind of work or farming he is involved with. His library has books of different genres, including agricultural books. Farmers can also find books on edu-

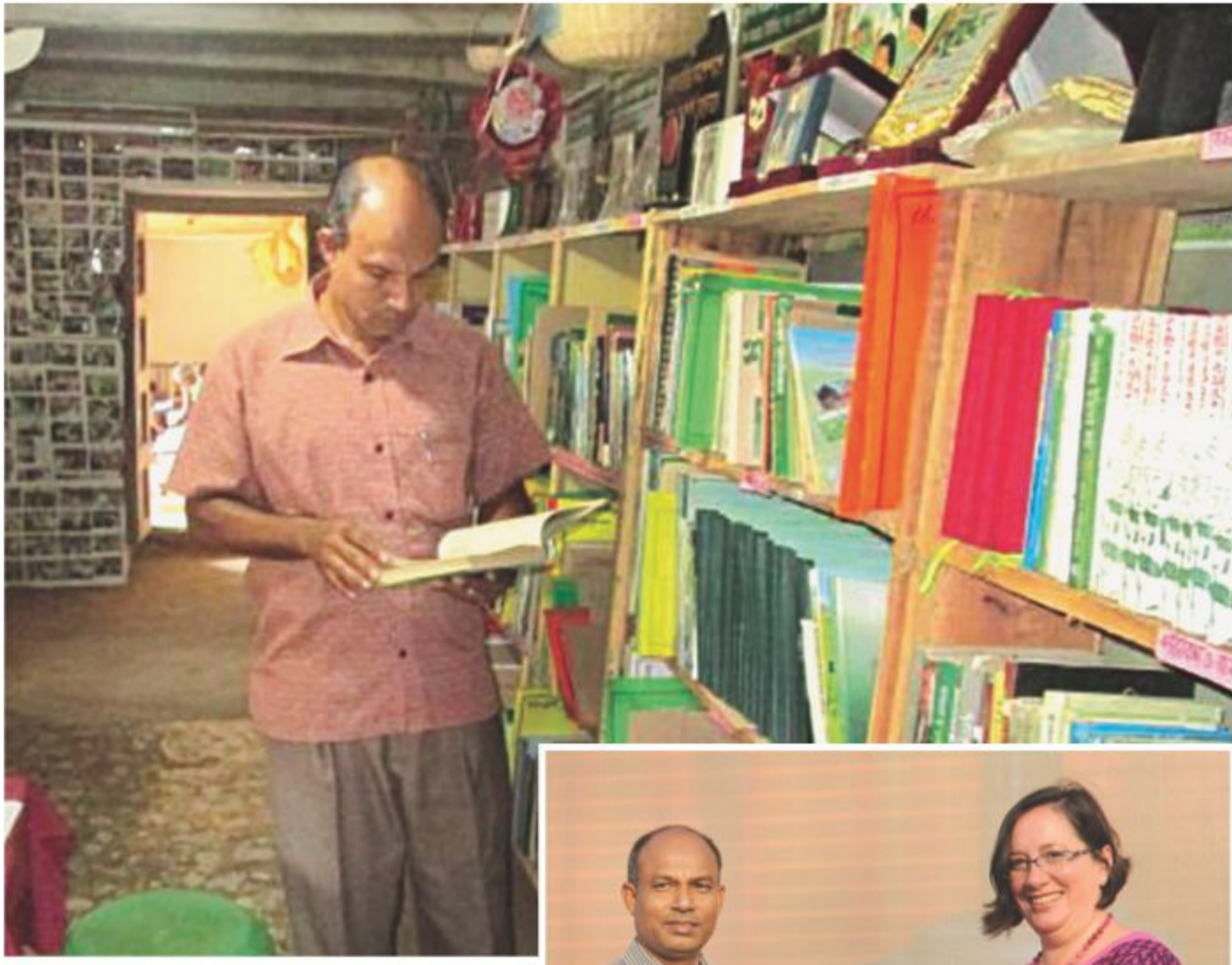


PHOTO: STAR

Jahangir flipping through the pages of a book. (Inset) Jahangir receiving 'Best Essay' Award from US Embassy's Press & Information Officer Kelly McCarthy.



cation, health, sports and other necessary books. Wherever he went, he collected books for his library. Farmers come to his library to take advice and they take books home to read. Many illiterate farmers are learning how to read and write as well from their peers.

Everyone in the region knows about the library. There is a farmers' school on the extended veranda. Inside the hut, the library awaited. Some elders were reading inside. Many come here from far-flung areas in search of knowledge. And I engaged in conversation with one of them.

"What are you reading?"
"A book on raising ducks and chicken."
"Do you use the knowledge that you get from the

library?"
"Definitely!"
I talked with another farmer who was reading intensely.

"Why are you here, sir?"
"This library has helped me a lot. I have learnt so much. I am here to keep learning."

Educated mass and successful farmers rush to the library to learn something new. This small clay-hut is a knowledge-hub for villagers.

"I received the best fish-farmer award in this upazila," a farmer told me.
"I am very glad to hear that. Did you become a member of this library?"

"No. There is no membership requirement."
"Do you need to pay?"
"No."

They not only read here but take books at home. To take a book home, all one has to do is sign his name. Often taking part in school-learning, farmers have opportunity to learn the letters. The library has a tremendous impact on farmers and on their production.

"I'm have been able to get better yield from my farm using the knowledge I acquired from the library."
"Tell us more."

The way I used to produce crops, it has certainly increased now as I've gone through books...learned about new technologies. In the past, I used to get 10 maunds of rice from one-bigha land, now I'm getting around 14maunds from the same land!"

"That's really great to know!" I exclaimed.
Jahangir Alam Shah, is a devotee of agriculture and education. He is behind the making of successful farmers, and is the man who has illuminated the lives of farmers with knowledge. This century-old clay hut belongs to Jahangir's ancestors. The old hut has awakened with the light of knowledge.

They come here to take books, owing to their passion for education. I spoke with Jahangir about his noble initiative.

"I am a farmer since my childhood. I couldn't solve my agricultural problems as I couldn't go to any experts. I also searched for books-to know and learn better. But, I failed."

Then, he met Professor Moyeenuddin of Rajshahi Medical College. He learned from him that books have solution to everything. And that is what kindled Jahangir to begin collecting books.

"I started off at the agricultural library to quench my thirst for information", he added. Jahangir Alam Shah, teacher of Rajshahi Collegiate School, been thinking about the crisis of knowledge at the grassroots. He has always given emphasis on the issue of farmers' learning and closely observed how people become defenseless due to lack of education and information. Seeing the reality, Jahangir established this school-cum-library in a remote area like Kaligram.

"I want to establish a full-

fledged agro-info centre. I want to make sure that farmers will get new information", that's the objective of Jahangir.

The school looks animated each day, abuzz with people. To educate the illiterate farmers, Jahangir has appointed teachers at his own cost. In a short time, farmers learn to read and write. It's simply outstanding! Many farmers like Azahar and Shahanara take lessons. Everyday, the number of literate people increase in the village.

There are many initiatives to inspire farmers towards education. Jahangir regularly hands out 50 pens among his students. Farmers can only get a new pen while giving back the old empty one - an innovative incentive mechanism to boost farmers to write.

Meanwhile, Jahangir organized seventeen agro-based seminars. Farmers were highly benefited from the knowledge disseminated at these events.
The library has enabled farmers to think in new avenues which they never considered before. Jahangir's library is the ideal instance of the engine that has powered a knowledge based farming community. Like the education and agro-entrepreneur Jahangir, if at least one individual comes forward from each of our 70,000 villages, then, very soon, the dream of a truly illuminated Bangladesh will become a reality.



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".



PHOTO: STAR

A farmer in Jhenidah next to his crops.

Maize cultivation on sharp rise

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

The farmers in the south-western districts of Bangladesh are going to harvest optimum yields of maize this season. Optimum production and huge demand were mainly the reasons for the expansion of the cereal crop. The Agriculture Extension Department (AED) of Jessore office source said, 75,869 hectares of maize cultivation have been brought in SW districts.

Of them, three districts out of ten have surpassed the records of the past in maize cultivation in the current season 2013-2014. Of them 47,530 hectares are in Chuadanga district, 15,994 hectares in Jhenidah and 7,355 hectares in Kushtia. Besides, there are 323 hectares in Jessore, 2 hectares in Magura, 65 hectares in Khulna, 225 hectares in Bagerhat, 150 hectares in Satkhira, 4,225 hectares in Meherpur district under maize cultivation. While 481,978 MT of maize are expected to be harvested in the current season from 75,869 hectares of land from ten SW districts, the production yield might be 7.25 per hectare this year.

In 2012/13 season 64,599 hectares had been brought under maize cultivation and 8.7 MT maize had been produced per hectare while the total production was 563,174 MT in ten districts. In

2011/12 season 60,401 hectares had been brought in SW districts while 8.0 MT had been produced per hectare and the total production was 487,774 MT. Seeds supplied by some private companies made the farmers confident in maize cultivation, said a farmer, adding that they used 900M, 900M Gold, MK 40, Pinacle and some other varieties. Farmer Bazlur Rahman of Protappur village in Jhenidah sadar upazila said, "I am cultivating maize at the moment on all my 14 bighas of cultivable land."

Faruk Hossain of Tamibas village under Jibonnagar upazila in Chuadanga district said, he has cultivated maize on one acre of land this year, at the production cost of harvesting tk 24 thousand. But he is expecting to sell the output at at one lac taka or slightly more. The maize farming does not betray the farmers as it can be grown in any adverse weather.

Additional Director AGM Momtazul Karim of Department of Agriculture Extension in Jessore region said, the farmers in SW districts have earned good profits in the last few years from maize, and the demand for maize is stable as it is being used as poultry feed. Further, better prices have encouraged farmers to expand farming maize in the region. Not only is the cultivation cost less than other crops, but the risks of pest attacks are very low,

Farmers eye bumper bean yield in Moulvibazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Farmers of Kulaura upazila are optimistic about getting bumper production of beans this year due to favourable weather conditions and timely supply of necessary inputs.

A total of 200 hectares of land have been brought under bean cultivation in the Upazila of the district this season, said Department of Agriculture officer Saffar Uddin.

Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) has taken steps to provide the growers with high yielding varieties of seeds, organic fertilizers, insecticides and other inputs for making the programme a success.

The farmers have showed their interests in cultivating the vegetable as it is more profitable than any other traditional crops for its easy farming.

Alamin Miah, 45, a farmer of Boromchal village in the upazila, said "I am now self-reliant by growing the vegetable instead of cultivating sugarcane or mustard."

Another grower, Masuk Ahmed, 50, of Sripur village, said "Earlier, finan-

cial hardship used to haunt me round the year. But, I am now able to educate my children and live in brick-built house as my income has increased. I could make it possible because of profitable bean cultivation on my cropland."
"The farmers are now

growing the vegetable commercially to reap more profit. The wholesaler from nearby Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Dhaka and other areas visit our local markets to purchase it. The crop here is sold at satisfactory price," said Masuk.
Farmer Shafiqul Islam of

Sripur village said, "DAE encourages the growers on how to cultivate the vegetable on their cropland successfully."

"I have cultivated 23 acres of land which costs Tk 1200. I have already earned Tk 25000 from the cropland", said Shafiqul.



PHOTO: STAR

Three farmers engaged in tending and spraying pesticides on bean plants on their farmland at Sreepur village in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar district.

Rly land recovered from grabbers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

The authorities in a drive yesterday recovered a railway land grabbed by a local gang near Mission Road in the district town.

Chittagong divisional land officer led the eviction drive to free one acre of land worth about Tk 2 crore

near Chandpur Court Station.

Assistant Director Arefin Badal of Chandpur Environment Department said the gang was filling up the water body of the railway near the station.

Being informed, the Department of Environment put up a legal

notice there in connection with the grabbing following a general diary filed with Chandpur Model Police Station on Sunday.

Chittagong Divisional Assistant Land Officer MA Bari visited the spot and other grabbed spots in the area.

Chittagong Land Officer

Jasim Uddin said they are investigating the matter. Chandpur deputy commissioner and police superintendent were informed about it.

None was permitted to fill the water body. The names of the alleged grabbers have been collected, he added.

20 suspected militants held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bhola

Police arrested at least 20 suspected militants from Pilot village in Sadar upazila of the district early yesterday.

Police said they, acting on a tip-off, arrested 20 members of 'Kalemar Dawat' an Islami militant outfit, raiding the house of one Ali Ahmad member of the village around 1:00am.

Police Superintendent Md Moniruzzaman said they have been arrested for their suspicious movement in the area.

The arrestees are from different upazilas of Satkhira, Narsingdi, Noakhali and Bhola districts.

Md Akram Hossain, one of the arrestees, said they are the followers of 'Kalema Dawat' chief Prof Abdul Majid and came to the village to invite

Cattle trader shot by BSF

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram

A Bangladesh cattle trader was shot by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on Shimulbari border in Phulbari upazila yesterday.

The injured is Shamsheer Ali, 45, son of late Alim Uddin of Buriarkuthi village in the upazila, said an official of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

A BSF patrol team opened fire while a group of cattle traders while they were entering the Indian territory to bring cattle in the morning.

Shamsheer sustained bullet injuries in his leg, said Subeder Ali Emran Nizami, company commander of Shimulbari BGB camp.

After the incident, BGB men arrested three cattle traders including Shamsheer. The other arrestees are Abdus Salam, 40, son of late Abu Bakkar Siddik of Bidiyabagish village and Jahedul Islam, son of Nandirkuthi village of in the upazila.



PHOTO: STAR

Police foiled a bid to demolish a Hindu temple in Deopara area under Nachole upazila of Chapainawabganj and arrested an alleged land grabber and his men yesterday.

Police foil bid to demolish Hindu temple in Nachole

Alleged land grabber, 8 others arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Police arrested nine people while they were demolishing a Hindu temple on three decimals of land in Deopara area under Nachole upazila of the district on Tuesday.

The arrestees are Nurul Islam, 65, of Kanthal Bagicha, Sweet Hasan, 29, of Masjid Parain Chapainawabganj town, Golam Barki, 28, of Nachole Bazar area, Shahid Momin, 65, Shahjahan Ali, 32, Wazed Ali, 60, Sher Ali Mollah, 50, Sadiruddin, 40, and Faruk Hossain, 28, of Nachole upazila.

Sanaul Haque, officer-in-charge (OC) of Shibganj Police Station, said one Nurul Islam and his men went to Deopara area near Nachole Railway Station at around 9:00am to grab the land by demolishing the temple.

As Nurul Islam and his men started demolishing the temple, Local Hindus informed the police, who rushed to the spot and detained nine people including Nurul Islam.

Nurul Islam told police that he had bought 2.5 bighas of land in and around the temple from some locals. Temple com-

mittee members said Nurul Islam had earlier tried to grab the land, claiming its ownership. A case in this regard is already pending with the court, they added.

Ranjana Rani Pal, president of Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Pariashad Chapainawabganj unit, Nurul Islam along with his men went to the area to grab the temple's land.

She demanded exemplary punishment to the criminals who damaged the temple. Nachole Upazila Nirbahi officer (UNO) Sufia Akhtar also visited the spot yesterday.