

# Thai guavas enhance farm income in Natore

Agro-entrepreneur Atique sets a shining example of successful guava farming

SHYKH SERAJ

I recently visited Madanhaat in Natore Sadar Upazila to see a dentistry diploma student, Atiqur Rahman Atique, who has started a Thai guava orchard. He believes his guava orchard is one of the biggest in the region, set upon 65 bighas of land. He has already invested more than 40 lakh taka and has been able to turn a profit with expected yield. As I set my eyes upon the greenery of Atique's guava orchard, the only word I could think of is 'huge'. All the bending trees are full of guavas. Atique is thankful to the local horticulture department for the training he received before coming into guava farming. Like him, many others have started to farm this high value fruit.

Wherever I turned, I could only see trees packed with guavas. They were covered with polyethylene so that birds and other insects can't harm them. It is a commercial guava orchard. To me, the story of Atique is a very hopeful message of educated youth of Bangladesh who are self-employed as farmers and are being able to earn a decent living. They've got involved in poultry, dairy and other high value crops. The new crops are being transferred from one young entrepreneur to the other. In Mati O Manush aired on BTV, a long time ago, I first featured Kazi Peyara (Guava) on television. You may recall how people used rooftop gardens to grow Kazi Peyara. That variety has stopped

giving higher yields. Now, the youth have brought in the Thai variety of guava, which is spreading across the country. Perhaps one day another variety will take Thai guava's place.

I learn many things from Atique, and asked "I'm amazed to see your huge guava orchard. How did you become a farmer?"

"Since my childhood, though many people didn't watch BTV, I used to watch your Mati O Manush regularly"

"I heard that you studied dentistry."

"You've heard right."

"You should have been a dentist by now. Why are growing guavas instead?"

"When I watched your programme on BTV during 80s, I felt the urge to get involved with farming."

Inside the orchard I noticed a processing and packaging facility. I also found many women and men labourers working, and shared a few words with them.

"Are you all from this village?"

"Yes."

"What did you do in the past?"

"I was a housewife. Now, I work at Atique bhai's guava orchard."

"Do you get daily or monthly wage?"

"I earn weekly, Tk. 1,050."

The Thai varieties of guavas are large and weigh pretty well. Since 2000, Bangladeshi farmers started growing them, and there are a few varieties now. Atique uses 'Thai-3' variety in his orchard. The farmers believe if

you farm in a planned method, this variety would give you best profit. The most important factor in growing these guavas is to cover the guavas with polyethylene at a specific time of growth. The women labourers working in this orchard have become really expert in doing this. This protects the guavas from pests, birds and other diseases. Without polyethylene, it's quite impossible to keep a single guava intact. There are more ways of nurturing and producing guavas apart from this polyethylene technique. Farmers cannot earn good profits without implementing the right production methods

I spoke to K.G.M. Abdul Awal, Horticulturist of Natore, who gave me interesting information on the Thai guava varieties. "The traditional guavas in Bangladesh grow during September and will stay for two months and then it's over. The trees in Atique's orchard will grow guava for the entire year. One tree can give a minimum of Tk. 3,000 worth guava and a maximum of Tk. 5,000, a year. This is simple mathematics."

"Could you explain how farmers get started with producing this variety?"

"Seven months before harvest there are some specific farming management. They have to ensure fertilizer and irrigation for the guava trees. Moreover, they need to bend their trees. When the stems are bent, you get more guavas."

"This is how they get guavas round the year?"

"Yes, this bending method is new technology."

Abdul Awal mentioned a key factor here. Without organic farming method, you won't ever achieve the expected produce.

"If farmers use chemical fertilizers to grow guavas, they won't get it all through the year. Those will not look fresh. The organic method is the secret to success."

I discussed with guava farmer Atiqur Rahman Atique regarding costs and other issues he regularly deals with.

"Each bundle of polyethylene is 2.25 KG. We get around 1600 pieces of polyethylene. When we've used about one bundle of polyethylene, we know that we've covered around 1600 guavas. On an average, three guavas weigh one KG."

There is a growing demand for guavas and other fruits at the moment. Agricultural products are profitable if farmers chalk out a proper plan for commercial marketing. If the fruits are high value, then there are good opportunities for gaining profits. However, knowledge on successful farming methods and market management are key success factors. Proper time management, assessment of opportunity, labour management are equally important. Farmers prefer to cultivate crops on their arable lands. If they want to engage their work with the industry perspective, they can easily make it happen. Atiqur Rahman Atique has followed all the basic thumb rules.

"I'm planning to sell the seasonal guava which will give me around Tk. 20 lakh. And the one which grows round the year will give me hopefully another 50 lakh taka."

I was amazed by the orchard. I've been to many guava orchards for filming, but this one was a league apart. Wherever I looked, everything appeared well-planned. Atique's success story is not his alone – there are many in the region following his example.

Since 2011, Natore has seen a revolution in guava farming. Farmers are now growing guava on approximately 1000 hectares of land. Around 60 farm entrepreneurs are directly involved with guava cultivation and most of these people are educated. Integrated Quality Horticulture Development



PHOTO: MATI O MANUSH

Shykh Seraj speaks to Atiqur Rahman Atique about the prospects of Thai variety guavas in Natore

Project of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) has played a vital role in making this a reality. Under this project, 600 farmers, farm entrepreneurs, labourers from Natore and surrounding districts have been trained in 20 batches. I came to know most of the agro-entrepreneurs of the region are paying Tk. 12,000 for each bigha on yearly lease. Most of these newly leased lands used to grow sugarcane before guavas came into the picture. Farmers are coming out of sugarcane farming due to many unwanted problems. Now the land-owners are happier with the lease money. On the other hand, on each bigha, farmers are investing Tk. 60,000 to earn between Tk. 200,000 to 400,000 per year.

There was a key issue about converting the paddy lands to guava orchards. I wanted to find out what Atique's opinion was on this vital factor.

"You are converting paddy lands to guava orchards since they are high value crop, right?"

"Yes."

"Why aren't you cultivating paddies?"

"In our region, we can't irrigate the lands massively. This is high land and paddies don't give us the profit we need."

"Do you think these lands on the other side will be

converted to fruit orchards, some day?"

"Hopefully, yes."

"It means, food production of Bangladesh will come down."

"We'll cultivate paddies in low-land areas. This is high-land area and here we have water scarcity – so paddy cultivation is not as feasible here."

Atique took the challenge of taking a grand enterprise of growing guavas huge orchards, but it all started from talking smaller farm initiatives. Guava is now one of the major cash crops of Natore. When consumers buy these Thai variety guavas, they are no less than import quality fruits, in fact they are fresher. Buying it means that the consumers are contributing to making educated youth farmers of Bangladesh become self-reliant. Atique was supposed to become a dentist but he chose to become a farmer instead. He is much better off. Following in his footsteps, many other youngsters can become self-reliant, while working towards a much more sustainable and prosperous Bangladesh.



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: MATI O MANUSH

Atiqur Rahman Atique wraps his guavas to protect them from pests, birds and other diseases

## Abandoned jails now criminals' dens

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Areas around long abandoned sub jails in Birganj and Birampur upazilas under the district have become safe haven for drug addicts and anti-social elements.

Constructed in 1980, the sub jails at Purbajagannathpur village under Birampur municipality and Hathatpara under Birganj municipality comprise office buildings, residential quarters of sub-jailers and separate wards for male and female inmates with power and water supply.

In 1990, the then government abolished the sub-jail system and since then, these two sub jails, each covering 7.5 acres of land, remained abandoned.

"It is strange that the authorities hardly took any initiative for maintenance and proper utilisation of the abandoned sub-jail in last 24 years. Many incidents of robbery occurred in surrounding areas as criminals found it a safe refuge to do anti-social activities," said Abdullahel Kafi, a resident of Birganj town.

Drug addicts and suspected people often roam around the abandoned premises, locals said, adding that the situation turns worse after evening.

During a recent visit to Birganj sub-jail, this correspondent found the infrastructure in a shabby condition while Md Abdur Rahman, caretaker of the abandoned sub jail, finds his work too tough in absence of required manpower.

Law enforcers recovered Yaba from around Birampur sub-jail on several occasions this year.

"This area has become a safe place for drug addicts and anti-social elements. Mosquitoes also breeding at places, posing health hazard to the residents and shopkeepers of nearby areas. Heaps of garbage is seen in the area," said Julfikar Ali, a local.

Birganj and Birampur upazila social welfare offices are authorised for supervision of the two sub jails.

The officials concerned said they cannot take care of these structures properly due to fund shortage.

Proposals are pending with the Ministry of Social Welfare to use the sub jails as training centre for youths, juvenile correction and rehabilitation centre, and child rehabilitation centre, said Md Motiar Rahman, an officer of Birganj upazila social welfare department.



PHOTO: STAR

The premises of this long abandoned sub jail in Birganj upazila under Dinajpur district often serve as a safe haven for drug addicts and anti-social elements.

TORTURE ON LEADER

## Indigenous people stage road march today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

A road march (padojatra) will start from Adda intersection in Gomostapur upazila to Chapainawabganj town at 10:30am today, demanding exemplary punishment to those who beat up and raped an indigenous woman leader in the upazila on August 4.

Leaders of the central committee of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad announced the programme at a press conference held at Chapainawabganj Town Club auditorium yesterday.

Rabindra Nath Soren, president of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, Sabin Chandra Munda and Bimol Chandra Rajoir, general secretary and organising secretary of the parishad, were present.

Law makers Fazle Hossain Badsha from Rajshahi and Usaton Talukdar from Rangamati and leaders of different political parties are expected join the road march.

President of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad Chapainawabganj unit was beaten up and raped by a gang of land grabbers at Zinarpur village Gomostapur upazila of Chapainawabganj on August 4.

The indigenous leader, also a member of Parbotipur Union Parishad in the upazila, came under attack while she along with labourers was planting aman seedlings on a farmland at noon.

As the labourers fled the scene in the face of attack, three of the gang- Rezaul Karim, 30, Akbar Ali, 25 and Akhtar Hossain—took her to one side of a field and raped her.

The attackers also took away her power tiller, two bullocks and a shallow pump machine. Police have so far arrested three of the gang.



PHOTO: STAR

ARTEFACT IN RUINS: This 200-year-old wooden boat, kept under the open sky near the Buddhist temple in Kuakata sea beach since December last year, is getting damaged in sun and rain, thanks to the negligence of the department concerned.

## 'Neglect' wearing away the ancient boat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The 200-year-old Rakhine boat kept beside the Buddhist temple in Kuakata tourist spot is getting damaged in sun and rain under the open sky.

The archaeology department with the help of Bangladesh Army brought the boat there in December last year from Gangamoti area on the beach where the boat emerged in July 2012.

Many tourists visit the traditional boat but it is getting damaged as it dries in the sun and wets in rain, said Md Shahjahan Akon, a local resident.

He blamed 'sheer neglect' in this regard by the authorities concerned.

The government should take immediate step to build a shed over the boat to protect it from sun and rain

The government should take immediate step to build a shed over the boat to protect it from sun and rain, Ruman Imtiaz Tusher, president of Kuakata press club.

Afroza Khan Mita, assistant director of the archaeology department, also member secretary of the 'boat salvage committee', said, "We are making

a plan to build a shed over the boat. We are looking for fund for this and hope to start work by October."

Locals saw the boat on the beach near the tamarisk garden on July 2 in 2012 during low tide. The boat 72-foot-long and 22.5-foot-wide boat with only two feet depth emerged as sand around it got removed.

"Many Rakhine community men came here from Myanmar in 1784 with around 50 boats to save themselves from torture of Bodpaya who captured the power after defeating Thamada, the then king of Arakan province. The boat might be one of those," said Uchasi Matubbar, 70, a Rakhine leader of Karanipara in Kuakata.

## College boy murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A college student was stabbed to death in Nandakul area of Shajahanpur upazila on Monday night.

The deceased was identified as Abul Kashem, 20, student of a private paramedical institute and son of Thandu Talukder, a resident of Nandakul village in the upazila.

Abdul Mannan, officer in-charge of Shajahanpur Police Station and family sources said, a gang called Kashem over cellphone and chopped him indiscriminately with sharp weapons while he was returning home for dinner about 9.30pm, leaving him seriously injured.

Family members started to look for him and later found his body near Hasan Jute Mills area.

Police said Kashem might have been killed over a land-related feud.

Police also arrested four people in connection with the killing of Kashem.