

Fish farmers of Sholotaka bring positive change

Combined efforts from indigenous fish farmers help develop local community



Fish farmers netting their catch for the day.

A union has come out of poverty. It used to be impoverished, but now it is a beacon of progress in the region. The name of the union is quite interesting: 'Sholotaka' (16 taka). It is awe-inspiring to see how this union has turned into a place of prosperity, growth and development, situated in Meherpur's Gangni upazila. During the past two decades, the region has revolutionized its fish farming. Zugirgofa, Sholotaka, Maheshpur, Baniapukuir have transformed in one of the largest fish farming hubs of Bangladesh. Fish is their predominant cash crop. The Zugirgofa village has 650 farming families, and all of them are doing amazingly well by farming fish.

Sholotaka is a relatively low-lying area. Not many crops could have been cultivated here due to its low-lying feature. Poor people were the victims of money-lenders and land-grabbers. However everything positively changed with Hedayet Ali Bishwas, an entrepreneur. He took the initiative to start fish farming in

the region back in 1978 using indigenous ideas.

"You can't believe how fish farming can change an entire region", said Hedayet. I was amazed at his vigor even at this age. The area of fish farming in Sholotaka is about 1,500 acres and 75% of the ponds belong to Sholotaka alone. This is something which is quite unbelievable if you don't see it with your own eyes. Hundreds of ponds developed an entire community. A newcomer in fish farming, Hasan Ali, started fish farming only four years ago. He is already an affluent man. "I took the challenge and now I'm successful at this venture", said Hasan. There were others in the union whom I met and asked myself, "Is there anyone here who is not doing well? Imdadul Haque, Abdus Samad- all the farmers I met were happy and smiling."

Osman Gani, who has been fish farming for the last eleven years, was eager to express what he has achieved. "I only have a couple of

bighas of land and now it has grown to 21 bighas of fishes", said Osman. "Cultivating paddy is costly so we're more interested in farming fish", added Osman. Fish farming became so popular in the region that it also inspired a local college teacher, Shariful Islam to join the community. He has been farming fish for the last seven years. "I have four ponds on eleven bighas of land and I'm being able to make good money", said Shariful. He's happy that he could supplement his teaching salary with some extra income.

The households look very modern in the Sholotaka union. Due to the financial development and growth in the region, farmers have better homes to stay in. They used to

live in clay huts before but now they have well-constructed 'pakkah' houses. They can provide better nutrition to their families, send their children to school and many of the women in these households have also been empowered by getting involved with fish farming.

The major obstacle for farmers in this region is low rainfall. Climate change is becoming a severe threat for the farmers across the globe and Bangladesh is no exception. High price of fish feed and labourer crisis is a slowly emerging as a major problem, according to the farmers.

No obstacle seems to discourage these farmers. Facing high price of fish feed, some of them are making fish feed on their own. They have started small fish-feed farms. The fact that the farmers are trying to solve their problems proactively instead of waiting for a solution is a good sign for our farming sector. They have learned all the fish farming techniques and crisis management techniques all by themselves.

Farmers in the union want advanced technologies and want the government to support them. They want local hatcheries in the region for further assistance. Some of them also dream that this region would be regarded as a fish-farming tourism area. It will be a combination of resources, science and advanced technologies.

This is how a responsible group of farmers can become change agents of a community. Sholotaka is just an example and there are many developments happening across Bangladesh in the farming sector, thanks to our resilient farmers. This success is replicated by others and is spreading. I firmly believe the confidence and self-sufficiency of the spirited people of Sholotaka will inspire millions of other farmers of our country.



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Farmer grows poison free vegetables

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Amir Ali, 52, son of the late Samsuddin from Babra village under the Kaliganj upazila of the district, is a farmer who studied till class five and has an innovative power in agriculture bringing him fame in villages as well as the upazila town. His name now bears the trademark of his product.

Amir Ali inherited 20 decimals of land from his father. After which, he purchased 18 more. Since then, he has leased 5 bighas 14 decimal land from other villagers on condition that he will provide 10 mounds of paddy per bigha to the owners.

According to Amir, his vegetable cultivating methods have never incurred any losses. Amir only uses organic fertilizer and no insecticides to grow edible bulbous akin to arum locally known (ool).

He cultivated 2 bighas 4 decimal land, this year which cost Tk 7,000-8,000. He harvested 8,750 kilograms of organically farmed poison free big arums which were sold for Tk 2,10,000. Customers come to his plot and collect the vegetable at a price of Tk 25 per kilogram. Apart from that, he has seeds roughly worth Tk 60,000. In addition, he has also cultivated big arums on two bighas of land which have not matured yet.

Moreover, he cultivates two kinds of vegetables on the same plot. If one crop is damaged or isn't profitable enough, the second one makes up for it. So he grows mate crops at the same time on the same plot.

Trained by a Japanese agriculturist Nagosi he rots the post harvest weeds and plants on the plot. So no extra fertilizer is

required. Consequently, no pest attacks the vegetables. He says, no insecticide, no insects. He believes multi-cropping can be done on the same plot. He only uses organic fertilizer (cow dung). He produces seeds himself. He always tries to produce something alternative than traditional. He was training in Panchagar on organic farming in 2003 and Bishnupur in Tangail in 2002.

He believes in order to live a happy life one does not need money, only contaminant free vegetables for healthy living. He agrees that more vegetables can be grown using chemical fertilizers and poisonous insecticides but doing so would compromise his family and others to the dangers of contamination.

He wants his only son to have a higher education. He has no savings at the bank, all he wants is to invest more in vegetable farming. Amir also plans to spread the merits and demerits of fresh vegetables across the country.

Vegetable trader Shahidul Islam of Kaliganj upazila town said, ool provided by Amir Ali sells like hotcakes due to its taste and the absence of contaminants. When customers hear that it is Amir's ool they are buying, they do so without bargaining.

A retailer, Harendra Nath Biswas said, customers seek Amir's vegetable. They have faith in Amir Ali because they know it is poison free and fresh.

SM Shahin Hossain, in-charge of Center for Organic Farming of Hunger Free World said, Amir is different from other farmers. His optimism always leads him to think of alternative and creative methods. He has never incurred a loss and his name is now a trademark in the market.



Amir Ali holding a 5 kilogram ool on his plot at Babra village under Kaliganj upazila in Jhenidah.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

Sticks and sharp weapons wielding activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League look for their rivals belonging to the same organisation during their internal clash at Dinajpur Medical College Hospital yesterday. Inset, arms seized by police from Dr Yousuf Ali Hostel.

Rival BCL men clash over formation of DjMCH unit

Authorities ban politics on campus for three months, probe body formed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Eight people were injured as two factions of Bangladesh Chhatra League engaged in a clash over dispute centring formation of Dinajpur Medical College Hospital [DjMCH] unit committee yesterday.

The injured -- DjMCH students Ibrahim Khalil, Md Adnan, Shourav, Md Rashed, Hillol, Jisan and Bappy, and Shahadat Hossain, an outsider, were admitted to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital, police said.

Witnesses said the BCL of Dinajpur Medical College and Hospital split in two groups. One group led by

Mujahidul Hasan and another faction led by Ashfaqur Rahman.

On November 13, the convening committee of Dinajpur district unit of BCL led by Parvej Chowdhury Porag as convener approved the 61-member committee led by Mujahidul Hasan and Kawshik Dev as president and secretary.

The committee approval angered their rival group led by Ashfaqur Rahman.

The two factions engaged in an armed clash on Thursday night.

Later on Sunday, another faction of Dinajpur district BCL led by Saikat Pal and Sadequur Rahman approved another BCL committee of

Dinajpur Medical College making Ashfaqur Rahman as president and Asfikar Sams as general secretary.

A clash between the two groups erupted at around 11:00am yesterday at Dinajpur Medical College campus after a student belonging to the previous committee tore up a poster of lawmaker Iqbalur Rahim, also whip of Jatiya Sangsad, on the campus.

The two factions of BCL armed with sharp weapons and wooden sticks engaged in a clash, leaving at least eight people injured.

The unruly students also damaged the windowpanes, entrance and furniture of Dr Yousuf Ali Hostel.

The academic council of Dinajpur Medical College held a meeting in the afternoon.

"We have decided to ban student politics at the college campus for the next three months. Besides, a seven-member investigation team led by Prof Dr Bulandh Akter Tagore has been formed. They have been asked to submit its report within seven days," Dr Quamrul Ahsan, principal of Dinajpur Medical College, said after the meeting.

"The campus is calm now. A large number of policemen have been deployed to prevent any untoward incidents," he added.

SAIDPUR RAILWAY WORKSHOP

Valuable machines being stolen thru' broken wall

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Security at Saidpur railway workshop, the largest one in the country, remains vulnerable as a portion of the boundary wall at east side near Golahat graveyard in Saidpur municipality in the district collapsed late July.

A big hole was created due to the collapse caused by earth subsidence amid heavy rainfall coupled with overflow of wastewater from the workshop drain but the damage is yet to be repaired.

Miscreants in collusion with a section of dishonest railway employees often traffic valuable metallic spare parts and equipment of rail engines

and carriages made of iron, copper and brass and also rail tracks at night, said locals.

Nur Ahmed Hossain, divisional superintendent (DS) of the workshop, sent a letter to the chief engineer of West Zone of Bangladesh Railway (BR) on August 30, requesting early arrangement for repairing the damaged wall.

The DS also sent a letter to Aminur Rashid, chief commandant of railway security force in West Zone of BR, to strengthen security measures.

In response to DS's letter, the chief engineer asked railway works department to make an estimate of the damage and start the work immediately.

"According to the direc-

tive, we prepared the estimate for the repair work along with renovation and improvement of existing drainage system. But the higher authorities of BR in a letter on September 8 suspended the work to make detailed inquiry regarding the damage for sustainable repair," said Tohidul Islam, senior sub assistant engineer of railway works department in Saidpur.

But the repair work is yet to start, he said.

Visiting the site on Saturday, it was found that the hole caused by foundation wall collapse is about 10 feet long and four feet high and so, several people can enter and exit together through it.

The workshop authority

put an old corrugated iron sheet, and an old iron grill but these can be easily removed for entering inside.

"Armed thieves often take away valuable metallic equipment of rail engines and carriages through the hole but the railway authorities and their security force hardly take any action," said Rafiq, a resident of Golahat area near the workshop.

Contacted, Abdus Salam, chief inspector of railway security force in Saidpur, claimed that security measures have been intensified to prevent unwanted activities after creation of the hole at the foundation of boundary wall of the workshop.



PHOTO: STAR

A big hole created on the foundation of the boundary wall of Saidpur railway workshop remains without any repair for the last four months, making the key point installation vulnerable to harm by intruders.