

An unlikely patch of green in a grey mega city

SHYKH SERAJ

Sufia Akhter Jahan is passionate about her garden. Vegetables, fruits and herbs, she knows when each variety is thirsty or needs attention. She talks to the plants, sometimes gently strokes them to encourage growth. From dawn to dusk Jahan is ready to give time, with the plants treated almost as offspring. It's not only that her garden brings profit. It satisfies her desire for growing her own food. It soothes her soul.

The most remarkable aspect of her garden is its location: on the rooftop of an otherwise unremarkable building at Eskaton Gardens Officers Quarters in the midst of hectic Dhaka.

"When I moved in here seven years ago I felt I needed to do something and rooftop gardening came first to mind," says the wife of the current Bangladeshi Ambassador to Vietnam. "I've been fond of farming since childhood."

Pumpkin, white radish or red spinach; with her husband regularly abroad, Jahan set to work establishing at least 50 plant varieties on the rooftop. There's even a minor goose farm up there.

It's strange to find such an unexpected patch of green in the concrete mega city. People commonly note that Dhaka is becoming tree-less, with constant new construction in every gap, on every land parcel. Somehow the city has to make room for up to half a million new faces annually. It's in this urban grey that sits Jahan's well-tended patch of green.

"This roof is not only great for produce but the neighbours love to be surrounded by the greenery", says Jahan. She is an entrepreneur, for the garden

produce turns a good profit, who believes rooftop gardens can improve life quality in urban environments.

Besides, from the most often disused roof space, Jahan is able to supplement the nutritional demands of family members and pass enjoyable hours. What better mental relaxation could there be?

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation has been supportive of rooftop gardening for decades. Urban and peri-urban horticulture projects have been implemented in similarly

dense city environments such as Cairo in Egypt. The idea is to promote fresh vegetable consumption by even poor families, while earning a stable income and decreasing or eliminating pesticide use at the same time.

Almost 25 years back I started a campaign for rooftop gardening on Bangladesh Television. Many unemployed youth, homemakers and other professionals participated. These days it has a proven track record of success.

The government can yet cooperate with rooftop

growers through the provision of tables, stands, containers and other inputs such as seeds, soil, fertilisers, irrigation systems and small gardening tools. Rooftop gardens can make Dhaka's concrete buildings agriculturally and commercially productive, and importantly, provide a healthier environment for families, neighbours and city dwellers.

Jahan likewise believes in the benefit of the activity to the mega city. "I think the whole of Dhaka can be changed by rooftop gardening," she says.



PHOTO: STAR

Sufia Akhter Jahan, a passionate grower of vegetables, fruits and herbs, holds a pumpkin, along with agriculture development activist and media personality Shykh Seraj, at her rooftop garden at Eskaton in the capital.



Shykh Seraj is a Media and Agriculture Development Activist. He is an Ashoka Fellow and recipient of Ekushey Padak, FAO A.H. Boerma Award and many other prestigious accolades. At Channel i, he is Director and Head of News. He is also Director and Host of the popular agro-documentary, "Hridoye Mati O Manush".

PANCHAGARH, THAKURGAON

Mustard farmers eye bumper yield as reaping time nears

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Mustard growers and agriculture officials in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts are expecting a bumper yield of the cash crop this season.

"Bumper yield of mustard is expected due to favourable climatic conditions this season. Besides, coming of more honey bees in mustard fields during the pollination period helped healthy fertilisation and pod formation of the crop," said Arshedul Haque, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Thakurgaon.

Farmers have been suggested to spray 3/4 ml of Melathion or any other pesticide of the same group mixed with one litre of water on the fields if there is aphid attack on the crops due to dense fog and severe cold, he said.

The farmers have cultivated mainly six varieties of mustard -- BARI Sarisha 9, BARI Sarisha 11, BARI Sarisha 14, BARI Sarisha 15, Tori 7 (a local improved variety) and Bashori (Indian).

During this correspondent's recent visit

to different areas of Sadar upazila in Thakurgaon and Boda and Tentulia upazilas in Panchagarh, farmers said they will start harvesting the crop late this month.

Bozlar Rahman, 53, a farmer of Dakkhin Bothina village in Sadar upazila, said he cultivated mustard on one and a half bigha (one bigha = 0.3306 acre) of land and made a profit of Tk 10,000 last year.

"This season I cultivated mustard on two bighas of land and expect a bumper yield," he said.

"Mustard cultivation, requiring only two times light irrigation, is easier and less costly than cultivation of other crops but it brings good profit. It is done between the gap period of aman and boro paddy farming," said Islam, 45, a sharecropper of Moidandighi village in Boda upazila, who cultivated mustard on 1.5 bighas of land.

October to mid-November is the suitable time for mustard cultivation and it takes 65/70 days to get the yield, said farmers and officials.

But many farmers in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts cultivate the crop till late December.

In Thakurgaon, 9,520 hectares of land has been brought under mustard cultivation against the target of 13,190 hectares with the production target of 15,564 tonnes this season, said DAE officials.

Although the cultivation area is less than the target, good yield is expected as the crop has grown well.

In Panchagarh, farmers cultivated the cash crop on 1,694 hectares of land against the target of 1,690 hectares with the production target of 1,994 tonnes, said DAE sources.

The farmers are interested to cultivate the crop as they got its repeated bumper yield and expected prices in recent years, DAE officials said.

The DAE authorities campaigned among the farmers for cultivating hybrid varieties of mustard invented by Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) between the gaps of aman and boro to get better profit.

The DAE, BARI and other organisations distributed quality mustard seeds while commercial banks disbursed agriculture loan among farmers in the two northern districts for the cultivation of the cash crop.



PHOTO: STAR

Mustard sees good yield due to favourable weather and arrival of more than usual number of honey bees in Thakurgaon district this season. The photo was taken from Yakubpur Battali village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila a few days ago.

Youth hacked to death in Narsingdi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

Criminals hacked a young man to death at Birpur village in Narsingdi Sadar upazila on Tuesday night.

Deceased Abu Faruk, 28, son of Abul Kashem, was a resident of the village.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) Abul Kashem of Sadar Police Station said criminals called Faruk out of his house around 9:00pm.

They hacked Faruk indiscriminately with sharp weapons and later slit his throat and left the scene. He died instantly.

Informed by locals, police went to the spot, recovered the body and sent it to Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy, the OC added.



PHOTO: STAR

This Bailey bridge at Khan Tila of Goalbari in Juri upazila under Moulvibazar district collapsed under the pressure of a stone-laden truck yesterday morning, causing suspension of road communication with the upazila headquarters.

Rejected foreign oranges on sale at Burimari land port

Syndicate brings the fruit illegally from India, Bhutan

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Huge quantities of rejected oranges illegally brought from Bhutan and India see open sale in Burimari land port area of Patgram upazila under the district, posing risk to the consumers.

A syndicate conducts the malpractice allegedly through managing a section of customs officials and law enforcers.

Around 5,000 sacks (each containing 20 kg) of reject oranges are brought to Bangladesh through Burimari land port daily and sold to fruit traders from different areas as customs officials and law enforcers hardly take any action, local sources said.

"I buy a 20-kg sack of substandard orange for Tk 450 to 500 on the spot, and it is sold for Tk 55 to 60 per kg in the local market. I pay Tk 70 to 80 as illegal toll to the syndicate against purchase of one sack of the fruit," said Mahubar Hossain, a trader from Lalmonirhat town.

"The substandard oranges are brought by the drivers and helpers of Indian and Bhutanese vehicles. We collect some toll money from traders for managing law enforcers to continue the business in the land port area," said Mati Miah, a member of the syndicate.

Ram Chandra, 48, a truck driver from Bhutan, said they transport reject oranges from Bhutan and India as

local people pay in advance for getting it at Burimari land port.

The illegally brought substandard oranges are highly susceptible to carry harmful germs as no check-up is conducted on them, said Abdul Quader, deputy director of Plant Quarantine Office at Burimari land port.

Contacted, Enamul Haque, assistant commis-

sioner of customs at Burimari land port, admitted open trade of illegally brought substandard oranges in the area.

But he refuted the allegation of customs officials' getting illegal benefit from the trade.

"On several occasions, customs officials' attempts to stop the illegal business by a strong

syndicate failed due to lack of support from law enforcement agencies," he said.

However, Mohan Lal Singh, commander of Burimari camp of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), said customs officials never seek any help from BGB to stop the open trade of the illegally brought substandard oranges.



PHOTO: STAR

Substandard oranges, illegally brought from Bhutan and India, are on open sale at Burimari land port in Patgram upazila under Lalmonirhat district.

Domestic help commits 'suicide'

UNB, Bhola

A teenage domestic help allegedly committed suicide at Wasten Para in the district town on Tuesday night.

The deceased was identified as Amena, 15.

Officer-in-Charge of Bhola Police Station Khairul Kabir said Amena, who had been working at one Babul's house as a domestic help for the last two years, killed herself by hanging with a ceiling fan, when other members of the family were out of house around 10:00pm.

3,170 Yaba seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) seized 3170 Yaba tablets from different places in Hakimpur upazila of the district in the last two days.

They also arrested two people in connection with the incident.

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Memo No.: APSC/MD/PROJECT-400 MW (EAST)/2015/4268; DATED: 31/12/2015

GENERAL PROCUREMENT NOTICE

The People's Republic of Bangladesh
Power System Expansion and Efficiency Improvement Project
Mode of Financing: Leasing
Financing No.....

The People's Republic of Bangladesh has applied for financing from the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) toward the cost of the Power System Expansion and Efficiency Improvement Project, and it intends to apply part of the proceeds to payments for goods, works, related services and consulting services to be procured under this project. This project will be jointly financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The project will include the construction at the Site of the existing 146MW CCPP Power Plant after demolition and disposal of the said Plants. The Project will be constructed to retire old inefficient Plant (Unit#3, 150MW) with energy efficient power plant to meet the growing electricity demand of the country and to increase the stability and reliability of the power system.

Procurement of Goods and Works which are being jointly cofinanced with Asian Development Bank (ADB) shall be conducted in accordance with ADB's and IDB's Procurement Guidelines, using an expanded list of countries to allow procurement from all countries that are eligible under ADB Procurement Guidelines and IDB Procurement Guidelines. Goods, Works and Services being financed exclusively by ADB will be procured in accordance with ADB's Procurement Guidelines.

Specific procurement notices for contracts to be bid under the ADB and IsDB international competitive bidding (ICB) will be announced, as they become available, in the ADB and IsDB Website, international widely circulated media as well in local newspapers.

Interested Bidders may obtain further information, and should confirm their interest in writing by contacting:

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