

FLOATING FARMS IN PIROJPUR

The traditional agri tech now a UN recognised heritage

SHYKH SERAJ

Each year during the monsoon months in Monohorpur village, of Pirojpur's Najirpur upazila, local farmers revisit the ways of ancestors. Vegetables are planted in floating garden beds, bringing unexpected productivity to waterlogged land.

Forefathers recognised that in order for an agrarian society to prosper in an environment surrounded by water it would be necessary to dedicate both waterlogged and drier land to agriculture.

The endemic hydroponics system thus invented has more recently been recognised by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation as a globally important agricultural heritage system, noteworthy for its innovation, sustainability and adaptability.

"The technology of floating agriculture started in Monohorpur," says local journalist Moniruzzaman, "and has since spread across Bangladesh." In near locations like Beeldumuria, Deulbari, Dobra, Padmadubi and Gaokhali, floating agriculture continues through much of the year.

Dr. Md. Abu Taiyab from Chittagong University's geography and environmental studies department says the achievement of global heritage status has been the result of the combined efforts of farmers, the media, government and NGOs.

"The government has initiated a Tk 128 crores project on floating agriculture in order to spread the technology across more waterlogged areas,"



A large floating vegetable garden in Najirpur upazila under Pirojpur district.



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says an additional secretary of the agriculture ministry.

"We are working hand in hand with the government," says the Food and Agriculture Organisation representative in Bangladesh, Mike Robson.

"We want to ensure floating agriculture is implemented in areas where it is most suitable," he continues, "because in the many

saline prone regions it won't work."

Robson underscores the need for Bangladesh to explore all its agriculture heritage, not only floating farms, in order to better serve the country's varying local conditions.

Nonetheless, in Monohorpur there can be no doubt that the past of floating farms is also the best future. "I spend

around Tk 7 lakhs per year," says Oliullah, a farmer reliant on floating garden beds. "I can make a modest profit from this type of farming."

Later, during the dry season, the same farmers will rely on "kandi" ridge farming, with the drainage channels between ridges suitable for gourds hanging from bamboo scaffolds.

THAKURGAON, PANCHAGARH DISTRICTS

Innovative measure saves boro seedbeds from cold, dense fog

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Most of the boro seedbeds in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts are growing well despite persistent cold wave and dense fog as the farmers are covering the seedbeds with polythene after irrigation at night following instructions of the agriculture officials.

"Farmers are advised to water the seedbeds in the evening, and keep them covered with polythene until disappearance of fog in the morning and then ensure draining of water from seedbeds," said Arshed Ali, deputy director (DD) of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Thakurgaon.

"Through maintaining the procedure along with proper use of fertiliser, farmers can save their boro seedlings from cold injury. Then,

if needed, they can spray Thioviot on the seedbeds," he said.

Farmers of five upazilas in Thakurgaon district have prepared seedbeds on 3,375 hectares of land while there is a target of cultivating Iri-boro paddy on 59,979 hectares of land with the production target of 2 lakh 39 thousand 387 tonnes of rice this season, said officials of DAE.

In Panchagarh, boro seedbeds have been prepared on 1,925 hectares of land in five upazilas and the DAE set a target to cultivate boro on 36,096 hectares of land with the production target of 1 lakh 45 thousand 261 tonnes of rice.

During a visit to different areas in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila including Salondor, Jamuripara and Kochubari villages on Thursday and Sakoya, Chandanbari, Kunpokhori villages on

Friday, this correspondent saw most of the boro seedbeds growing well with beautiful greenery.

Farmers said they are able to save their seedlings by following agriculture officials' instructions to use polythene on seedbeds during dense fog and cold wave.

Earlier they had to sow boro seeds two or three times in a season as cold injuries often affected their seedbeds.

Abdul Malek, 32, of Sahapara village in Boda upazila of Panchagarh said he sowed boro seeds on a 10-decimal land and the seedlings have grown well as he is using polythene covers and providing irrigation as per instructions of local agriculture officials.

Rashedul Bhuiyan, 45, of Balia village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila said he prepared boro seedbeds on

eight decimals of land and taking care of his seedbeds in the same way.

Farmers of a few seedbeds, which turned whitish or yellowish due to the adverse weather, said it happened as they had not covered the seedbeds with polythene during night.

"When the weather becomes sunny, farmers of the affected boro seedbeds can apply top dressing with a mixture of 280-gram urea and 100-gram potash per decimal of land to help the seedlings get back normalcy," said Arshed Ali, DD of Thakurgaon DAE.

Hopefully the boro production target will be achieved this season as farmers have been able to save their seedlings from adverse weather by following instructions for proper seedbed management, he added.



A farmer and his kid cover with polythene their boro seedbed at Kochubari village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, and inset, a man waters his seedbed at Barunagaon village in the same upazila as the agriculture officials suggested the measures to save the growing seedlings from ongoing cold and dense fog in the northern districts.

Dam in canal creates trouble for farmers, fishermen

M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL, Jhalakathi

A dam built across Baro Kathalia canal in Kathalia upazila under the district about eight years ago remains a nuisance for locals, especially farmers and fishermen.

Locals alleged that a few local musclemen with the help of Kathalia Sadar union parishad (UP) Chairman Kibria Shikder built the dam to get allotment under the government's test relief programme and monopolise fishing there.

"The dam in the canal affects agriculture in the

area. Earlier engine boats plied the canal but it has lost navigability after creation of the dam. A couple of years ago, we filed a case and cut off the dam but the powerful men rebuilt it," said Ali Akbar Farajee, a farmer of the area.

"I want to sell some wood for arranging some money for my child's education but the buyers are offering me less price, saying that they have to bear additional cost to carry their wood over the dam," said Tutul, a local.

"Before construction of the dam we caught fish in the

canal. But now, only men of UP Chairman Kibria Shikder and his brother Kabir Shikder catch fish there, preventing others from doing it," said a local fisherman seeking anonymity.

"This dam affects agriculture as floodwater that brings fertility to the land cannot reach there. The area also sees waterlogging in the rainy season," said Abdullah Al Mamun, agriculture officer of Kathalia.

"Fishes cannot move freely and breed well due to the dam in the canal," said Md Khalequzzaman, fish-

eries officer of Kathalia.

"Making any dam across a canal to impede the water flow is illegal. I will take steps to remove the barrier soon," said ABM Sadikur Rahman, UNO (in charge) of Kathalia.

Contacted, Kibria Shikder, UP chairman of Kathalia Sadar, said, "I supported building of the dam for public interest as the canal hampered agriculture. My brother Kabir along with some locals may catch fish in the canal but I will cut the dam very soon."



A dam built across Baro Kathalia canal in Kathalia upazila under Jhalakathi district blocks the flow of water, causing troubles especially for local fishermen and farmers.



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