

Malta cultivation sees success in Pirojpur

SHYKH SERAJ

The southern region of Bangladesh is blessed with fertile soil and abundant water. Farmers there are trying out diversified high value crops.

The land of the South is the land of promise. Its soil, nature and everything around is just absolutely in the right tune for producing more and more. Along with it, farmers there are trying out different crops and doing it with great success.

Couple of days back I went to Pirojpur's West Durgapur, specifically to Dakatia village. The government has raised several malta orchards there.

We all know popular fruit orange is traditionally cultivated in Sylhet. Now malta, another nutritious fruit, is catching many eyes in the southern part of Bangladesh. Betel nut and coconut are the cash crops for the farmers of Dakatia. Now, malta is taking the lead.

The road to Dakatia is really poor and quite risky. The reason I'm here is to see the orchard of Reboti Sikder, an agricultural entrepreneur who claims his maltas are sweet like anything. I really would love to see that, in fact taste Reboti's maltas.

Reboti was waiting for me at his orchard. He hugged me as if he got paradise in his hand. But I had a short glance at his orchard when he was hugging me -- and that orchard seemed to me to be the paradise. Ripe maltas covered all of Reboti's orchard.

"You have a lot of maltas," was the first thing I said to Reboti. "This had been my dream. That I'll have an orchard full of maltas," said Reboti. "I am so happy that you are here," he added.

Reboti has already sold maltas worth Tk 70,000. The maltas are sold across Pirojpur, Bagerhat and even sent to Dhaka. Following Reboti's footsteps, other

farmers have started malta orchards and the promising orchard number is 'fifty'.

Reboti says there could be about 500 fruits on a three-year-old tree. The BARI 1 variety is really sweet, says Reboti. Those have circular sign at the bottom. Reboti is cultivating two varieties, BARI 1 and an Indian variety.

He's earning more than from rice. Reboti is cultivating malta over 10 decimals of land, from where he has already sold maltas worth Tk 70,000. He still has maltas on the trees, worth Tk 30,000. And, you know what, his initial investment was only Tk 20,000.

Some children were roaming around Reboti's orchard. I called a couple of them to practically take a test on the taste of Reboti's maltas. I gave four kids maltas and all of them said it's really tasty, sweet and juicy.

Then, I tried one, and believe me it's the sweetest malta I have ever had in my life. I said, 'kora mishty' (extremely sweet).

I realised that Pirojpur's soil and water are great for malta cultivation. Agriculture extension officers are also advising the farmers about getting better production, but from the beginning it's been a learning experience for the farmers and they exchanged the experiences with each other.

Many other farmers say they feel free to take advice from Reboti and then implement them on the fields.

Agricultural officials say many other malta orchards have been built near Dakatia, such as Nagbari, Kochubunia, Dakkhin Jibogram, Dakkhin Gabtola, Jujkhola, Kodomtola, Khanakuniyari, Pouroshobha, Namazpur, Pantadubi and Morichal.

M o h a m m a d A b u l

Hossain Talukder, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension, highly appreciates the success of the farmers.

Dear readers, malta production in Pirojpur Sadar was started by a man named Amalesh Ray. When I was visiting Pirojpur he wasn't there. I hope to see his orchard soon. It's wonderful to see the expansion of such a fruit that is full of nutrition and vitamin C, and which is economically a much better crop for farmers.

I believe that the neighbouring districts will start producing malta in a few years. I also believe that in this age of modern agriculture, malta can be cultivated anywhere in Bangladesh. We just need some dreamers like Reboti Sikder, who can take our country further ahead with innovation, creativity, indigenous knowledge, hard work and patience.



Shykh Seraj with Reboti Sikder at the latter's malta orchard at Dakatia village in Pashchim Durgapur of Pirojpur district.



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".

Irri-boro farming starts in full swing in Dinajpur, Joypurhat

Many growers want capital as previous season's stock lies unsold due to low prices

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Farmers of Dinajpur and Joypurhat districts have started sowing Irri-boro seedlings with the hope of recouping the losses in aman season this year.

However, many farmers are facing problem as they failed to recover even the production cost in last boro and aman seasons.

During a visit to Raniganj area under Dinajpur Sadar upazila, this correspondent saw one Kurban Ali sowing paddy on his two bighas of land.

"As around 100 maunds of my aman paddy from the last season has remained unsold, I am facing monetary problem to bear the cultivation cost this season," he said.

In Dinajpur and Joypurhat markets, a 75-kg sack of paddy is selling between Tk 1,000 to Tk 1050 while according to farmers, their production

for the same was Tk 1,100 to Tk 1,200.

Azizul Islam, a leader of farmers in Dinajpur, said many paddy growers in the Irri-boro season are facing fund shortage as their paddy produced in immediate past aman season did not bring them much money.

"Many farmers sold their paddy for low prices while others kept their produce stocked with hope to get better prices in future. They are looking for loan to bear the cost of Irri-boro farming, which has gone up," he said.

He urged the government to extend help for the farmers.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), 1.76 lakh 651 hectares of land has been brought under Irri-boro farming in Dinajpur district this year with a target to produce 5.5 lakh tonnes of rice.

Golam Mostafa, deputy director of Dinajpur DAE, said farmers have

already completed sowing seedlings on 25 percent of the targeted land.

The department is working for proper distribution of fertiliser in the district, he said.

In Joypurhat, Anisur Rahman of Jamalpur village under Joypurhat Sadar, Tafiz Uddin of Jamalganj village under Akkelpur, Anwarul Islam of Hatiar village under Kalai upazila and Khalil Uddin of Dasra village under Khetlal upazila said this year they started maize cultivation to avert losses in paddy farming.

Abdul Wahed of Ramnagar village under Panchibibi upazila of Joypurhat said he took a loan of Tk 20,000 from a local NGO as he fell short of capital to plant Irri-boro on three bighas of land.

DAE officials in Joypurhat said this year they have a target to bring 72,313 hectares of land under Irri-boro farming in the district to produce 2.96 lakh tonnes of rice.

already completed sowing seedlings on 25 percent of the targeted land.

The department is working for proper distribution of fertiliser in the district, he said.

In Joypurhat, Anisur Rahman of Jamalpur village under Joypurhat Sadar, Tafiz Uddin of Jamalganj village under Akkelpur, Anwarul Islam of Hatiar village under Kalai upazila and Khalil Uddin of Dasra village under Khetlal upazila said this year they started maize cultivation to avert losses in paddy farming.

Abdul Wahed of Ramnagar village under Panchibibi upazila of Joypurhat said he took a loan of Tk 20,000 from a local NGO as he fell short of capital to plant Irri-boro on three bighas of land.

DAE officials in Joypurhat said this year they have a target to bring 72,313 hectares of land under Irri-boro farming in the district to produce 2.96 lakh tonnes of rice.



Two women collect boro seedlings at Nashipur in Dinajpur Sadar upazila as transplantation goes on in full swing during the ongoing peak cultivation season.

Maize growers eye bumper yield in Jamuna basin areas

MAMUN-UR-RASHID, Bogra

Farmers of the Jamuna basin areas under Shariakandi, Sonatola and Dhunat upazilas of the district are very happy as they are expecting a bumper maize crop this year.

Sales-centres and service centres have been set up in the areas for giving suggestion to farmers and for buying the produce at a good price.

Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) sources said around 2,000 hectares of land have been brought under maize cultivation in the three upazilas, targeting 22,314 tonnes of maize production, which might be exceeded.

900M, 900Gold, SK-40, Miracle, BARI-07, Don-11 and other varieties of hybrid maize have been cultivated in the char areas for ensuring bumper production of maize, added the sources.

Khairul Mondal, a farmer of Sonpocha char, said he planted maize on his 15 bighas of land spending around Tk 1 lakh. He is expecting to harvest around 500-600 maunds this year. He hopes to sell the produce at Tk 400-500 per maund, earning a profit of around Tk 1.5 lakh.

Like him, Anis Mondal



A growing maize field at Chaluabari Char in Sariakandi upazila under Bogra district.

cultivated maize on 14 bighas, Ansar Ali on 12 bighas and Azizar Sheikh on 20 bighas of land in the same char. They are hopeful of getting bumper crop and huge profit in the current season.

Md Rabiul Hasan, market development coordinator of Market for Chars, said they have been working in the char areas to develop the market system and to ensure good price for the farmers.

Salahuddin Sardar, upazila agriculture officer of

Sonatola, said proper advice on seed and fertiliser selection, timely nursing and, above all, regular field-level visits by the DAE officials with the help of RDA and some local NGOs, have made the dreams of the farmers, come true.

Seven Jamaat men land in jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A Gaibandha court yesterday sent seven Jamaat leaders and activists in connection with the cases for killing four cops, arson and looting in Sundarganj upazila in the district in 2013.

Shahidul Islam Manju, general secretary of Sundarganj upazila unit of Jamaat, Ekramul Huq, general secretary of Sundarganj municipality unit, Nur Alam, member of Sundarganj municipality unit, Al-haj Mizanur Rahman, ameer Ramjiban union unit and activists Hossain Ali, Titu Mia and Ashrafur Islam.

They appeared before the cognisance court and sought bail. Judge Moniuzzaman Sikder rejected their bail prayers and sent them to jail.

Away in Mymensingh, Police on Monday night arrested two Jamaat leaders, including ameer of Gouripur upazila unit, reports our correspondent.

The arrestees are Maulana Badruzzaman, 40, ameer of Gouripur upazila unit, and upazila Jamaat leader Md Sarwar Alam, 38, also a teacher of Shahganj Moniruddin Dakhil Madrasa in Gouripur.

RAJSHAHI, NARSINGDI Alleged thief, robber killed in mob beating

STAR COUNTRY DESK

An alleged thief and a robber were killed in mob beating in Rajshahi and Narsingdi districts yesterday.

Our staff correspondent from Rajshahi reported that a youth was beaten to death by local people on mobile theft charge at Baksoil village in Poba upazila.

Police recovered the body of the victim, Hasan Ali, 25, son of Tobjul Islam of Darshanpara area from a club at the village, said Shariful Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Poba Police Station.

The body was sent to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Police quoted locals as saying that Hasan was caught red-handed while he stealing a mobile phone from a grocery shop in the area. Locals took him to nearby Tarun

Sangha Club and beat him up mercilessly. Hasan succumbed to his injuries on way to the upazila health complex, but locals took the body to the club.

In Narsingdi, villagers beat a robber dead at Gazaria under Palash upazila yesterday morning, reports our correspondent.

The dead was identified as Yusuf Miah, 22, son of Modhu Miah of Baluchar village in the upazila.

Police said villagers chased a gang of 10 to 15 robbers while they were going to Taltoli area in the upazila at around 2:00am. They caught one of the gang members named Yusuf Miah while the rest managed to flee.

Locals beat him up mercilessly and informed the police who went to the spot and took the robber to Palash Upazila Health Complex where he died in the morning.

5 drug stores fined for selling date expired medicines

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A mobile court fined five medicine shops and sealed another for selling date expired medicines at Chechua Bazar in Muktagachha upazila of the district yesterday. The court, led by Dr Umme Afsari Johra, upazila nirbahi officer of Muktagachha, fined four shops Tk 30,000 each and one shop Tk 20,000. They also sealed Jerin Medical Hall as the shop was running without license, sources said. The court recovered date expired and contraband medicines worth around Tk over 50,000 from the shops. The medicines were later destroyed at the upazila parishad premises.



An infected potato field in Galachipa upazila under Patuakhali district. Inset, a farmer shows diseased potato.

Diseases in potato worry Patuakhali farmers

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Potato farmers in Galachipa upazila under the district are worried as late blight and scab diseases affected the fields in the ongoing harvesting season.

Over 500 hectares of land have been brought under potato cultivation in this upazila this year, said sources of the upazila agriculture office.

"I cultivated potato on my two and a half acres of land and expected bumper yield due to favourable weather this season. But diseases in the form of black spots appeared in the potatoes during the harvesting season. Now I am worried about recovery of the production cost, let alone profit," said Nayan Majhee, 45, a potato grower of Muradnagar village under the upazila.

"I tried to save rotting potato plants by using pesticide but in vain. We are facing loss this year as many black and brown spots appeared on potatoes, reducing its demand to buyers," said Md Kuddus Mollah, another farmer of the same area.

Md Jakir Fakir and Jamal Pahloan of Panpatti village of the same upazila said they made profit of over Tk one lakh each by selling potato last year but this year they have to incur loss.

Contacted, Md Delwar Hossain, Galachipa upazila agriculture officer, said he found the diseases during visit to different potato fields in different areas.

"Dense fog, rainfall, cloudy weather, and use of additional fertilisers are responsible for these diseases. We are suggesting farmers to use pesticides as a remedy," he added.