

# Growers claim they hardly use chemicals on mangoes

SHYKH SERAJ

Mango season knocks at the door. Throughout this season, mango will be like a national fruit. Planned mango orchards have been set up in hills, estates, chars, high and low-lying areas.

Millions of people are involved in mango production, processing and marketing. According to a report on global agriculture production by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, the production rate of mangoes is the highest in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh started exporting mangoes last year. In terms of exporting mangoes, Bangladesh has a lot of advantages in the world market, according to FAO.

For example, when mangoes in Bangladesh ripen, mangoes from other countries are not available in the world market. Besides, buyers of the UK consider Bangladeshi mangoes the best in the world. If Bangladesh can maintain international quality in production, exporting a thousand tonnes of mango per year is not impossible at all.

In 2015, the government set a date for mango harvesting. After hearing the news, I went to Rajshahi's Chapainawabganj. As I went from orchard to orchard, I heard from the farmers and traders that they are facing heavy loss due to this fixed date. Information varied in different areas. The Mango Research Institute (MRI) and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) had their own standpoints. Overall, the whole situation is very confusing.

Everyone fears that a date will be set again. All their dreams and hopes will turn to ashes. A couple of days ago, I had the opportunity to attend a farmers' meeting in Charghat's Pannapara of Rajshahi. There were almost 200 people there -- orchard owners and traders.

Farmers claimed that they do not use chemicals on the mangoes. "We don't

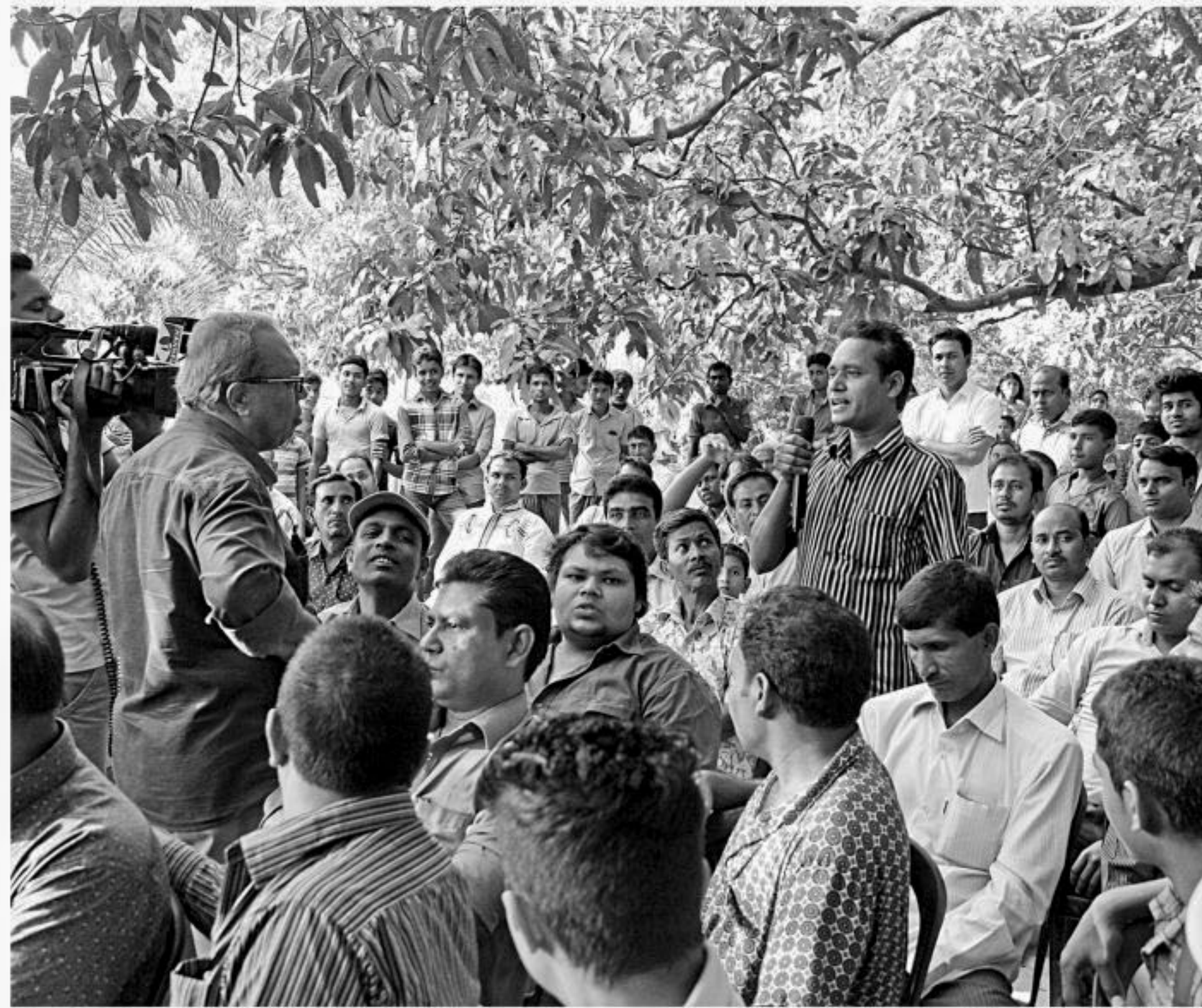


PHOTO: STAR

Shykh Seraj talking with mango growers and traders at Pannapara in Charghat upazila under Rajshahi district a few days ago.



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".

even know what formalin is," said a mango grower.

They don't want to experience such inconveniences this year. They say the government can test the mangoes. If there is any extra chemical, it won't be hard to find out what it is and where it came from. The government has a responsibility to protect public health and ensure food safety.

I learned that sometimes orchard owners or traders use ripening hormones after harvest. They use these under the advice of the DAE and local pesticide store owners. Experts say that limited use of these chemicals is not harmful to health.

Anyway, in a situation like this, nobody wants a date to be set to pick mangoes from trees. I talked with Dr Alim Uddin, chief scientific officer of Rajshahi

Fruit Research Centre. He says there should not be a fixed date for harvesting mangoes.

On my way back from Rajshahi, I talked about this issue with Deputy Commissioner Kazi Ashrafuddin. I told him everything. I requested him to make sure that farmers don't face any inconvenience during the mango season.

Mahbub Siddique has been researching on mangoes for quite a while now. He wrote a book on mangoes as well. He has drawn up his own calendar, which shows when each type of mango should be collected from the trees. According to that calendar, Gobindabhog should be collected during May 15-May 30, Gopalbhog May 25-June 10, Khirsapat June 7-June 30, Himsagar June 10-

June 30, Bari-2 or Lokkhonbhog June 15-July 15, Lengra June 15-July 15, Amropali June 28-July 25, Mohonbhog July 8-July 30, Chosha July 10-August 10, Ashwina July 20-August 30, and Gobindobhog July 20-September 10.

This calendar is based on the experience of the farmers and the reality of mango orchards. Consumers will learn which mango will be available when. Orchard owners know these thoroughly. Having walked with farmers in their orchards for a long time, I saw that they talk with their crops, they also understand what their crops say.

Obviously, mango orchard owners, farmers or traders all talk to their orchards' mangoes as well and they understand what their mangoes say to them. I



PHOTO: STAR

The flood triggered by the heavy rainfall during the last couple of days submerged standing boro paddy on a vast field in Shanir Haor area of Taherpur upazila under Sunamganj district.

# Teacher suspended for beating up 10 female students

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A high school teacher was suspended on Wednesday following public outrage over beating of 10 female students of Class VIII in Bancharampur upazila of Barhamanbaria district.

Mohammad Ali, teacher of Kolakandi HK

Ashmatunesha High School in Pahariakandi area in the upazila, beat them on Monday as they failed to answer his questions.

When some students protested against it, the teacher beat them up too, said Mamun Akther of the same class.

Later, other students called the parents of the

victims, who took them to the Upazila Health Complex in Bancharampur.

Hearing about the incident, people from nearby villages surrounded the school, demanding removal of the teacher.

Aongsu Kumar Deb, officer-in-charge of Bancharampur Police Station, said he assured the

locals that the teacher would be suspended.

Md Siddiqur Rahman, general secretary of the school's managing committee and headteacher of the school, confirmed that the teacher has been suspended.

A 3-member team has been formed to investigate the incident.

# Drug addict hacks mother, sister

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A drug addict hacked his mother and sister at Kushiara village in Bera upazila of the district yesterday morning.

The victims are Wazifa Khatun, 45, wife of Abdul Aziz, and their daughter Jolefa Khatun, 25. They are undergoing treatment in Pabna Medical College Hospital (PMCH).

Locals said Manik Hossain, younger son of Wazifa, hacked his mother and sister following a family feud at around 8:00am.

Md Julhas, a resident of the village who took the victims to the hospital, said Manik is a drug addict. He beat up his brother a month ago and went into hiding.

"Returning home on Thursday, he hacked his mother and sister," he added.

No case was filed as of filing this report at 6:00pm yesterday.

# Govt rejects

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shipment and the ship left Bangladesh," said an official.

American company ADM International supplied a second consignment of 50,000 tonnes of Russian wheat, to sell for \$215.87 a tonne. This shipment was also rejected after the lab test revealed that the wheat's "test weight" was below Bangladesh's set standard.

"We declined to accept it as well and the ship carrying the wheat is now in the process of leaving our territorial waters," the official said.

Russia, a major global wheat exporter, is a prime supplier country for Bangladesh.

Public and private sectors have to import over three million tonnes of wheat to meet the annual demand in Bangladesh as the country produces over one million tonnes of domestic production a year.

Moscow apart, the grain quality issue and subsequent shipment rejections surprised many in Bangladesh's food ministry and food directorate since they consider Russia as one of the providers of the finest wheat.

Asked whether the supplying companies had anything to do with the quality issues, Ilahi Dad Khan, director (procurement) at the Directorate of Food, did not rule out the possibility.

He too was surprised by the quality of the Russian wheat and said, "We can't accept wheat compromising our grain quality specifications."

Ilahi told The Daily Star that they would cooperate with the Russian team in every possible way.

In recent months, Bangladesh's public sector wheat imports hit a snag as it rejected three shipments, involving 1,25,000 tonnes of French wheat, after the grains failed to meet the standard specified in the tender late last year.

Those rejections came after the government faced severe criticism for importing wheat from Brazil, some of which was found to be sub-standard.

Earlier last year when the government imported 2.05 lakh tonnes of wheat from Brazil, its grain quality and insect infestation sparked a huge outcry across the country.

Even ruling party men put up barricades at places blocking entry of the consignments into their public granaries.

Food officials, however, dispelled any concerns over immediate shortage of wheat in the domestic market due to the import hiccups.

They said the government was buying 2 lakh tonnes of wheat from local growers on top of some 3 lakh tonnes of wheat already in stock.

# Vitamin A enriched sweet potatoes a boon for Gaibandha farmers

KM REZAUL HOQUE, Gaibandha

Cultivation of vitamin A enriched improved varieties of sweet potatoes is getting popular in Gaibandha Sadar and Fulchhari upazilas, as poor people in remote rural areas are using the item as alternative to traditional main food items like rice and wheat.

International Potato Research Center in collaboration with voluntary organisation Brac extended cooperation for the cultivation of vitamin A enriched sweet potato that requires very small production cost.

This year over 2500 men and women of 28 villages in seven unions of the two

upazilas cultivated the improved varieties of sweet potatoes, including Bari-4 variety on 52 hectares, Bari-8 on 100 hectares, Kamola Sundari on 230 hectares, and Tripti on 93 hectares, said sources at the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

Besides, local variety of sweet potato was cultivated on 275 hectares of land, they said.

The estimated yield is 29 tonnes per hectare.

Sweet potato, presently selling for Tk 12 to 15 a kg, is cheaper than other food crops, said locals, adding that poor people in remote char lands eat sweet potato instead of rice and wheat.

"Spending Tk 1200 to

1500 for cultivation of sweet potato on a bigha of land, a farmer can get 25 to 30 maunds of yield. The potato plants are also used as vegetable," said Golzer Ali, a potato grower of Ratanpur village in Fulchhari upazila.

The improved varieties of sweet potato will help to remove vitamin A deficiency for the expectant mothers and children and fight against night blindness and eye sight problem, said Shah Moazzem Hossain, district marketing manager of Brac.

"We arranged special trainings on cultivation of improved variety of sweet potatoes and got good response," said AKM Ruhul Amin, deputy director of DAE, Gaibandha.



PHOTO: STAR

Women harvest vitamin A enriched sweet potato at a field of Ratanpur village in Fulchhari upazila under Gaibandha district.

# Passengers suffer

FROM PAGE 1

since early yesterday.

Low-income people suffered the most as they could not afford to travel on buses. Many were seen lying on the floor of the terminal.

Passengers were stranded at different launch terminals in the district. However, some travelled by engine boats and trawlers.

Taking an undue advantage of the strike, operators of engine-run boats and trawlers charged passengers high fares.

Shah Alam Bhuiyan, president of the BWTWF, said the last time the minimum wage was hiked was in 2013, from Tk 3,000 to Tk 4,100.

The federation was compelled to enforce the strike as the government failed to deliver on its promise of pay hike, he added.

The BWTWF's other demands include ensuring security and issuing appointment letters to workers, stopping extortion and robbery on waterways, and maintaining navigability of rivers.

On January 24, the workers' leaders at a press conference threatened to enforce a countrywide indefinite work stoppage from January 27 to realise their demands.

But they postponed the programme on January 26 following assurances from the authorities concerned of revising their wages.

Meanwhile, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan said the since the strike is an issue between vessel workers and owners, they should settle it through negotiations.

Revision of workers' wages is being delayed due to negligence of vessel owners, the minister told reporters at a programme in

Ashulia on the outskirts of the capital.

Talking to The Daily Star last night on condition of anonymity, a shipping ministry official said informal negotiations between the government bodies concerned, owners and workers were underway to address the problem.

He hoped that the problems would be over within a day or two.

CHITTAGONG

Unloading of imported goods from mother vessels at the outer anchorage of Chittagong Port and unloading of goods from lighter vessels at private terminals remained suspended due to the strike.

Besides, transportation of goods by rivers from the port city to the other parts of the country was halted.

According to Chittagong Port Authority, at least 49 mother vessels carrying 12.30 lakh tonnes of goods remained at the outer anchorage of the port as workers of lighter vessels went on strike since morning.

However, loading and unloading of goods in containers at the port jetties were normal.

Unloading of around 7.80 lakh tonnes of goods from 681 lighter vessels docked at private terminals at 36 points including Chittagong, Narayanganj, Baghabari, Nogarbari, Bahirab, and Ghorashal was suspended, said sources at Water Transport Cell, a Chittagong-based private organisation that coordinates schedules of lighter vessels.

Visiting different private terminals in the city's Majhirghat area, The Daily Star found that workers of lighter vessels were sitting idle.

BARISAL

The workers' strike put thousands of passengers in peril in the city.

"I was not aware of the strike. I along with my family wanted to go to Bhola. But now I'm just anxious and worried," said Md Tajul Islam, a labourer, at Barisal Launch Terminal.

Abdul Baset, a private company employee, said he would take a speedboat to Bhola for an urgent work.

Buses running on local and inter-district routes were overcrowded.

CHANDPUR

Passengers at Chandpur Launch Terminal demanded the workers withdraw the strike immediately.

Nurul Amin, an apprentice lawyer in the town, said workers should end the strike considering peoples' sufferings.

"I wanted to catch a launch for Dhaka, but now I have to travel by a motorcycle," he added.

PATUAKHALI

No water vessels left Patuakhali Launch Terminal for Dhaka and others districts yesterday.

Passenger Amir Hossain said, "I along with my six-member family came here four days ago. We were scheduled to return today [Thursday] for Dhaka. Our journey has now become uncertain."

Mahbub Uddin Ahmed Bir Bikram, chairman of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport (passenger carriers) Association, last night told this newspaper that they sought 15 more days for resolving the problem, but the workers didn't agree.

"Negotiations between the stakeholders should be held to address the problem," he added.