

Dhundal farming gaining popularity in Lalmonirhat

The cheap vegetable sells well in local markets

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Ridge-gourd, a vegetable locally known as dhundal, sees cultivation on a commercial basis in the district for the last few years. The demand for this vegetable is increasing because it is cheaper than other vegetables, with the price of one kg being Tk 8-Tk 10 in the local market.

Jahurul Islam, 45, a dhundal grower in Shivram village under Lalmonirhat Sadar, said he cultivated dhundal on two bighas of land, from which he is getting up to 150 kg every day. "I cultivated dhundal taking loan in easy instalments from a non-governmental organisation (NGO)," he said, adding that he has been farming this vegetable for the last five years.

"Dhundal price is low in the local market, but we get bumper production, so we are farming it on a commercial basis," he added.

Abdul Gani, 56, a farmer at Kulaghat village, said, "We harvest dhundal for three months from June to August. I earn a profit of Tk 20,000-Tk 25,000 from each bigha of land. Once, people didn't grow this vegetable, but now it has high demand among the customers, especially low income group people."

Atiar Rahman, 42, a van puller at Bhadaï village



PHOTO: STAR

A farmer sells farm fresh ridge gourds from his field at Shibram village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

under Aditmari upazila, said he purchases one kg of dhundal at Tk 8-Tk 10 in the local market everyday. "My family members are habituated to taking dhundal curry," he added.

Shariful Islam, 46, a vegetable trader at BDR Hat market in the town, said 70 percent of those who buy dhundal are people from the low income group. "We purchase one kg of dhundal at Tk 6-Tk 7 from the grower in the field," he said, adding

that they also send this vegetable to the capital and other parts of the country.

Jahedul Islam, Lalmonirhat branch manager of an NGO said, his organisation provides loan in easy instalment to the farmers for farming dhundal on a commercial basis.

Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) official sources said dhundal has been cultivated on 700 acres of land this

year in Lalmonirhat, while it was 400 acres last year. Farmers get 130-140 maunds of dhundal from each bigha of land spending Tk 12,000-Tk 15,000.

Enamul Haque, Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila agriculture officer, said dhundal farming in the district is increasing day-by-day as growers are getting profit. DAE officials advise farmers on how to take care of dhundal fields, he added.



PHOTO: STAR

A good number of traditional guava growers in Pirojpur district are switching to profitable hog plum cultivation as the prices of guava remain persistently low for years. The photo was taken from Zindakathi village in Nesarabad upazila under Pirojpur district.

Will Pirojpur's guava heritage stand the test of time?

HABIBUR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Pirojpur's people are serious about guavas. Grown in the area for more than a century guavas are a part of Pirojpur's identity, so much so that there's even a tantalising tale about how the first guavas arrived. Yet despite the historical legacy, guava production at a practical level is becoming less enticing. Many orchardists are favouring the amra, the hog plum, which promises better profits.

It is said that around 125 years ago a man named Purno Mondal from Bhabranko village of Atgar Kuriyana union in Pirojpur's Nesarabad upazila set off on a pilgrimage to Gaya in Bihar, India.

Both Gaya is believed to be where Gautam Buddha attained enlightenment. For Buddhists, it's a well-established destination. Why Mondal, a Hindu, would go there isn't entirely clear; but in Pirojpur, it's well enough accepted that he did.

In Gaya, as people say, Mondal collected some guava seeds which, upon his return, he sowed in his household yard. For the first time, neighbours were able to taste the delectable fruit, and it proved popular. Gradually, other villagers established guava orchards, in adjacent villages, as far away as Jhalakathi.

In his honour, the local variety of guava is called the Purno Mondal guava, or alternatively, the Swarupkathi guava, immortalising the former name of Nesarabad.

The guava is, in actuality, native to Mexico and Central America, with

guavas well-established on the islands of the Caribbean too.

The word 'guava' originates from the language of the Arawaks, an Amerindian people from the Caribbean. They called the guava tree 'guayabo', which became the Spanish 'guayaba' and spread from there in various forms to other old world languages.

Interestingly, the Bangla name for the fruit, 'peyara' also likely derives from Spanish or Portuguese. Derivatives of the Spanish and Portuguese word 'pera', meaning pear, as a name for guavas, are to be found in several languages in the Indian Ocean region.

But none of this means that there wasn't a man named Purno Mondal or that he didn't travel to Gaya.

Nor are history's details of any practical help to local orchardists who, for about the last five years, have faced guava losses.

"Once the orchard is established we don't have huge upkeep expenses," says one orchardist, Jaharlal Mondal, from Nesarabad's Kathurakathi village. "But it costs a lot to harvest. We have to pay Tk 450 per day to each labourer; and when the market price for guavas is so low it becomes a challenge."

Many growers agree. While guavas still fetch a decent price at the beginning of the season, by peak season the price tends to plummet. By then, 40 kilograms of the fruit, 1 maund, can sell for below Tk 50, which is unsustainable.

The situation leaves growers whose orchards according to the department of agriculture extension yet cover over 650 hectares in Nesarabad, dispirited. Indeed, with no way to preserve the fruit, guavas are sometimes left to rot on the tree.

"We faced losses from guava cultivation for the last several seasons," says Rabintranath Mondal from Kathurakathi. Like many, he is diverting efforts to hog plums.

"Our guava orchard brings losses every year," agrees orchardist Bimol Halder. "We have no choice but to grow a different fruit."

According to Nesarabad agriculture officer Md Rifat Sikder, there are already 152 hectares of hog plum orchard in the upazila, a figure that's increasing annually. Not only is the hog plum in high demand but unlike guavas they are longer lasting, staying fresh for over a week.

Yet despite low prices, the short shelf-life of guavas and increasing disease attack, attempts are being made to protect the tradition.

"We are trying to introduce Thai guavas as the variety has better longevity and attracts higher prices," says Sikder. "But many farmers are reticent. We also hope cold storage could be set up in the upazila to allow farmers leeway in waiting for prices to rise before selling their crop."

"We would like to save guava cultivation," he says, "because in Nesarabad, it's a century-old tradition."

Veterinary doc shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A veterinary doctor was shot dead by an unidentified gang at Eidgarh, a remote hilly area in Ramu upazila of the district, early yesterday.

The deceased is Mohiuddin, 40, son of late Foyez Ahmed of the area.

Locals said the gang opened fire on Mohiuddin at Mohammad Sharifpara at around 1:40am, leaving him critically injured. He died while being taken to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Police and locals said Mohiuddin was accused in several cases and had been absconding for long.

Sub-Inspector Mohammad Hashem, in-charge of the local police outpost, said police are trying to unearth clue to the murder and arrest the culprits involved.

Two burnt as car catches fire

CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Two people sustained burn injuries as a car caught fire in Hakimpur upazila of the district early yesterday.

The injured are Masud Rana, 35, son of Hajarat Ali, and his driver Apan Rahman, 34, son of Azizur Rahman of Joypurhat Sadar upazila.

Witnesses said the car was going to Dinajpur from Joypurhat in the morning. As the car arrived near Basudevur village under Hakimpur upazila of the district at around 7:00am, it hit a roadside tree while taking a turn and caught fire.

Locals rescued them from the car and took them to Hakimpur Upazila Health Complex. Later, they were taken to Rangpur Medical College Hospital, said Mokhesur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Hakimpur Police Station.

Firefighters of Hakimpur doused the fire, but the car was completely burnt, police said.

Fratricide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A drug addict killed his younger brother, accusing him of stealing Tk 20 in Sirajganj's Ullapara upazila early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Shohag.

Shakil, 18, and Shohag, 16, sons of Dulal Hossain of Jhikira Pashchimpara village under the upazila, were drug addicts, police said.

Dewan Koushik Ahmed, officer-in-charge (OC) of Ullapara Police Station, quoting family members of the victim, said Shohag took Tk 20 from his elder brother's pocket, which made Shakil angry.

The brothers had an altercation over the issue. At one stage, Shakil hacked Shohag, leaving him severely injured. He was taken to Ullapara Health Complex where he succumbed to his injuries.

Informed by locals, police rushed to the spot and arrested Shakil. No case was filed as of filing of this report yesterday noon, the OC said.

Stalker jailed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A mobile court in Brahmanbaria sentenced a youth to one month's imprisonment for teasing a schoolgirl on Wednesday.

The convict is Faisal Ahmed, 20, son of Abdul Ahad of Panchgaon village in Bijoyagar upazila of Brahmanbaria district.

Quoting victim's family members, police said Faisal had been teasing a Class IX student of the village for long. Around 3:00pm, locals caught Faisal in front of the victim's school while he was teasing the girl and handed him over to the police.

Police later produced Faisal before the court.

Upazila health complex in poor health

Shortage of doctors, nurses hampers treatment at the health centre in Jamalpur's Dewanganj; medical equipment lying inoperative

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

The 50-bed Dewanganj Upazila Health Complex in the district is running with inoperative medical equipment and acute shortage of doctors, nurses and other staff.

Though the health complex was upgraded to a 50-bed hospital, with the posts of 14 doctors, 10 consultants and 15 nurses, on October 15, 2011, it still remains a 31-bed one. There are only five doctors and five nurses posted in the hospital, sources said.

The posts of upazila health and family planning officer (UHFPO), resident medical officer (RMO), junior consultants of surgery, medicine, anaesthesia, and five posts of staff nurse have remained vacant for three years, said hospital sources.

Only four doctors, including a gynaecological consultant, cannot provide treatment to 300 outpatients and 35/40 inpatients every day, said Afrin Islam, medical officer and in-charge of UHFPO.

A large number of patients with acute and lower abdominal pain, gynaecological problems,

respiratory tract infection, chest pain, peptic ulcer disease, cardiac problem and other health complications are being deprived of proper treatment from the hospital due to the prevailing situation, she said.

The brand new ultrasound and ECG machines, which had been installed in mid-2015, became dysfunctional in January and February, 2016, while the new China-made X-ray machine, installed on November 25, 2015, went out of order on May 12, 2016, the medical officer said.

As a result, many poor women, who visit the hospital with complications in pregnancy, cannot get imaging tests done in the hospital.

Besides, both male and female patients with acute and lower abdominal pain and kidney ureter bladder (KUB) problems have to go to private diagnostic centres to have their tests, spending Tk 700 for each imaging test -- seven times more than the hospital rate, she added.

Many patients with chest pain, uncontrolled blood pressure, cardiac problem and shoulder pain cannot get the tests done by the

hospital's ECG machine, she further said.

The situation is the same with the X-ray machine as it remains dysfunctional, said Khairul Islam, radiographer of the hospital.

During a recent visit to the health complex, the correspondent found that the defective ultrasound machine and ECG were kept in the storehouse of the hospital, and the radiographer sitting idle beside the inoperative X-ray machine.

This correspondent saw a pregnant woman named Bulbuli Begum, 20, of Sabujpur village under the upazila, who was admitted to the labour ward for normal delivery on May 17.

"I had imaging check-ups of my pregnancy twice in a private diagnostic centre spending Tk 1400," Bulbuli said. "If I could get the same tests done in the hospital, I would have spent only Tk 200 as per government rate," she added.

"I have already written to the higher authorities concerned for repairing the instruments, but I do not know when the problems will be solved," the UHFPO-in-charge added.



PHOTO: STAR

The ultrasound and the ECG machines at Dewanganj Upazila Health Complex in Jamalpur district are lying inoperative for months, hampering diagnosis and treatment there.

50-km Naogaon road to Bogra in awful state

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

People of Atrai upazila of Naogaon district are suffering immensely because a 50-km road connecting with Bogra remains in a dilapidated condition for long Bogra.

Locals said half of the road is full of potholes as the tarmac got displaced.

The traffic situation worsens during monsoon every year as the rainwater gathers at places.

Often heavy vehicle gets stuck if the wheels fall into the holes, said Alamgir Hossain of Kaliganj area in the upazila.

This road from Atrai-Bogra via Kaliganj has never been renovated in the last 25 years, he said. This is the only way for communicating with Bogra, said local people.

The farmers and school going children of 15 villages around this road in Atrai upazila are basically the worst sufferers.

Farmers face immense difficulties to take their produced crops to markets while school-going children need to walk through dirty water for attending their institutions, said locals.

Mokamtolahat of Bogra, a famous wholesale trading place of crops including paddy and vegetables, is located at a suitable

place where farmers of Joypurhat, Naogaon, Bogra and Natore districts can bring their produced crop easily for having good road connectivity.

Locals said the situation turns worse if anybody wants to take a patient to hospital.

As there is no alternative route, people of Atrai upazila are risking their lives for travelling to their destination everyday. All type of vehicles including passenger buses, trucks and minibuses are plying on the road with high risk.

Besides, CNG run vehicles also used the road for refuelling gas from Bogra. Such light vehicles often turn upside down if it falls into the big potholes.

Mosaddeq Sarkar, a residence of Kaliganj village, said this road is quite important for them as they have no alternative route linking to Bogra. But it sees no renovation in the last 25 years.

Many politicians pledged to them to repair the road, but it is yet to take place.

Contacted, Alim Khan, executive engineer of Roads and Highways Department of Naogaon, said they have already prepared a project proposal for repairing the road, which is now pending for approval of high officials of the department concerned.



PHOTO: STAR

A log carrying truck gets stuck at a large pothole on Atrai-Bogra road at Kaliganj village in Atrai upazila under Naogaon district a few days ago.