

Arum brings smile to farmers

The tasty, nutritious vegetable earns better than traditional crops in Kishoreganj and Kurigram

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Cultivation of arum sees gradual rise in Kurigram and Kishoreganj districts as the nutritious vegetable brings good profit for low production cost and less labour.

Our Kurigram correspondent reports: Mukhi kachu and pani kachu varieties of arum have been cultivated on 238 hectares and 133 hectares of land in the district this year, said Bimal Kumar Dey, sub-assistant agriculture officer of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Kurigram.

While visiting arum fields in Kathalbari union under Kurigram Sadar upazila on August 13, this correspondent found farmers busy to harvest it.

"I planted seed of mukhi kachu on 25 decimals of land in February this year. I spent around Tk 8,000 for the cultivation and I have sold arum of Tk 19,000 today [August 13]," said Dhiren Chandra Roy, 49, of Rangatipara village of Kathalbari union.

"I have continued cultivating arum for several years as it brings more profit for low production cost," he said.

Kurigram Sadar upazila agriculture officer Md Kamruzzaman said, "Arum cultivation is profitable for farmers as it requires low production cost and less labour. We advise farmers to cultivate mukhi kachu on high lands and pani kachu on low lands."

By cultivating mukhi kachu, a farmer can gain profit of Tk over 1 lakh per acre of field in six months, he said.

Our Kishoreganj correspondent reports: Farmers cultivated arum on 260 hectares of land in six unions of Kuliarchar upazila under the district this year, according to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in upazila.



A farmer carries arum after harvesting it from his field at Gobaria Abdullahpur village in Kuliarchar upazila under Kishoreganj district. PHOTO: STAR

"We arranged trainings and conducted campaign for using organic fertiliser before arum cultivation. And the cultivation of latiraj variety is gaining popularity among the farmers as it is about five times more profitable than paddy farming," said Kuliarchar Upazila Agriculture Officer Aminul Islam.

The soil of the region is suitable for arum cultivation, locals said, adding that different varieties of arum are cultivated in the area, mostly in the water-logged fields.

Latiraj variety of arum is cultivated from early January and its harvest continues from mid-April to December, said Md Kamal Mia, an arum grower of Gobaria Abdullahpur union of Kuliarchar upazila.

"Farmers use only some organic fertiliser during arum cultivation and they do not need to

use insecticides. It remains safe as cattle do not eat arum plants. Very little labour is required to look after it," said Ashraful Islam of Osmanpur village in the upazila.

Md Ratan Mia, another arum cultivator from Chhaysuti union in the upazila, said, "I have cultivated arum on five bighas of land spending Tk 22,000 this year. I have already earned Tk 40,000 in the last two weeks and hope I will earn profit at least Tk 2 lakh by December."

At present one kg of latiraj variety arum sells for Tk 50-60 in the local market. The price is expected to rise much in two to three months.

This vegetable is in high demand as it is tasty and nourishing, locals said.

Arum is a nutritious vegetable and it works as a remedy for different diseases, especially diabetes, said Dr Md Faruk Ahmed.

Housewife tortured, strangled for dowry

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

A housewife was killed allegedly by her husband for dowry at Charkawria Simarpar village in Bakshiganj municipality on Wednesday.

The deceased was Taslima Begum, 25, wife of Md Solaiman, 30, son of Abu Sayeed of the village, and daughter of Anwar Hossain of Sujanagar village.

The victim's mother alleged that Taslima's husband and in-laws often tortured her for dowry after seven years of their marriage.

On Wednesday evening, Solaiman along with his family members strangled Taslima following an altercation over the issue.

There were injury marks in the throat, said Aslam Hossain, officer-in-charge of Bakshiganj Police Station.

Solaiman along with his family members went into hiding soon after the incident, said the OC.

A murder case was filed, accusing Solaiman and six other his family members, said the police official.

The body was sent to Jampur General Hospital morgue for autopsy, he said.

SNIPPETS

JMB man detained

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Police arrested a member of banned Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) from Narundi railway station area in Jamalpur Sadar upazila early yesterday. The arrestee is Abdul Kader, 32, son of late Javed Ali of Chitholia village. He was also accused in a robbery case, said Nasimul Islam, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station.

Pistol, bullets seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) seized a pistol, eight bullets and two magazines from a passenger bus near the rail gate at Atapara village in Hakimpur upazila on Wednesday night. Acting on a tip-off, the border guards raided the bus in the area and seized the firearm and bullets. However, none was arrested in this connection, said Ashraf Ali, deputy assistant director of BGB-3 Battalion.

Trucker held with Phensidyl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) arrested a trucker with 1012 bottles of Phensidyl in Sonamasjid area under Shibganj upazila yesterday morning. The arrestee is Shahidul Islam, 35, son of Jahidur Islam of Poba upazila in Rajshahi. A BGB team, acting on a tip-off, raided a truck and arrested its driver with the Phensidyl. A case was filed, said Lt Col SM Abul Ehsan, commanding officer of BGB-9 Battalion.

Youth drowns in river

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A youth drowned in the Jamuneshwari River in Badarganj upazila of Rangpur yesterday. The deceased was Md Dulal Mia, 25, son of Altaf Hossain of Nowapara village. Locals said Dulal went to take a bath in the river in the morning and drowned.



A speedboat with eight passengers, including a child, leaves Aricha ghat for Kazirhat in Pabna. Though the child is wearing a lifejacket, the rest of the passengers are risking their lives. PHOTO: STAR

SPEEDBOAT SERVICE ON ARICHA-KAZIRHAT RIVER ROUTE

Owners-BIWTA row over legality

ZAHANGIR SHAH, Manikganj

Speedboats have been plying with passengers on the Aricha-Kazirhat river route illegally for the last 11 months. The service started with only two speedboats before the last Eid Ul Azha that has now increased to 18.

Passengers are crossing the river on the speed boats at great risk. Rizia Begum, 45, of Boro Dalima village under Baufal upazila of Patuakhali, and her granddaughter Srabonti, 6, went missing when a speed boat capsized in the Jamuna River at Char-Shivalaya under Shivalaya upazila of Manikganj on August 11.

This correspondent visited Aricha ghat on Sunday and saw two permanent counters at launch ghat No 4 to sell tickets to speed boat passengers.

Monoranjan Sheel Nokul, a local Awami League leader, also manager of the speedboat managing committee, said they started the service with the help of Golam Nabi, general secretary of Pabna Bus-Truck Owners' Association. The association's president, Khandaker Azizul Haque Arzu, is lawmaker from Pabna-2 constituency. Manikganj-1 constituency lawmaker AM Naimur Rahman Durjoy also helped them, he added.

Nokul said they have no legal papers. "We will get registration and survey certificates within a week or two," Nokul said.

AM Naimur Rahman Durjoy said the speedboat owners' association is running the service on the route with the required papers.

This correspondent tried to contact Khandaker Azizul Haque Arzu on his cellphone, but his phone was switched off. Traffic Inspector of BIWTA Aricha office, Md Faridul Islam, said they have no legal paper or route permit. "We wrote to the deputy commissioner of Manikganj asking for a mobile court to stop the illegal speedboat service," he added.

Manikganj Deputy Commissioner Rashid Ferdouse said a mobile court will start operations soon.

President of Launch Owner's Association, Anwar Hossain, said they are giving taxes to the government, but the speedboat owners are not. The government is losing revenue because of this, he added.

Where vultures come to feast

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responded to one of my colleague's call to visit the vulture conservation project and help him out with a brief research.

The project is currently being conducted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Bangladesh in collaboration with the Forest Department. Unlike many other conservation projects in Bangladesh, this project is showing good signs.

One of the positive outcomes of the project is the installation of vulture feeding station in Habiganj's Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary, where safe and supplementary food is provided to vultures. I had visited the project site in winter but this time the purpose was different -- more exciting than just watching vultures.

We crossed a narrow river when the sun was at its height and humidity pinched our sweaty bodies. We walked past a tea garden with white cotton-like clouds floating across the vast blue sky. Then there

were dwarf-hills, above which tall shade trees stood still. As we walked further west, shadows of large wings fell across the short carpet of tea plants. I looked up, enthralled by the sight of the wide wings of a White-rumped vulture.

We continued to walk towards the vulture observation centre where Tarik Kabir and Shimanto Dipu had built a small thatched hut. Sitting in front of the tiny window of the hide, a light breeze touched my face and a strange smell engulfed my mind. I spotted a half-eaten cow provided by the project officials the day before and the vultures seemed to have a grand party on the carcass. The observatory is on a hilltop and the carcass is about 50 metres from it in a valley of sand, little larger than a tennis court, close to a narrow strip of water.

Thirty minutes of silence and a lone vulture landed near the carcass, looked around carelessly and started to clean up the rotten meat. Perhaps there is nothing in the world sadder than

watching a vulture descending on a numb body, but this time I was mesmerised.

I looked through my binoculars, captivated, and took a few snaps. In a few moments, more vultures landed on the sand, fast but steady and majestic. The moment was so captivating that I put down my binoculars, camera and notebook and looked at the descending vultures.

It is fascinating to know that the vultures can digest deadly viruses like rabies or anthrax and clean up an ecosystem so efficiently that after every feast nothing of a carcass exists except for some bones. Turkey vultures have such a strong sense of smell that they have remarkably helped natural gas companies detect gas leaks. The gas contains the same chemical found in a dead animal, which attracts the vultures to the leak.

Unfortunately, we have lost 99 percent of our vultures over the last 25 years. Extensive research has identified the cause of the decline to be "diclofenac" -- a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory

drug used in treating livestock. Vultures feeding on the carcasses of animals recently treated with the drug suffer renal failure and eventually die. In order to avoid such unfortunate deaths and boost the declining population, the feeding station in Sylhet has been built.

Team members, Miron, Sakib and I installed three camera traps around the feeding station in order to determine vulture species and their population, disturbance as well as other species scavenging at the station. The automatically generated photos through these cameras (detects motion and triggers) will allow us to understand more about the vultures of Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary.

We left the place with new hopes that vultures will not vanish into the memories of our elders and children. They will be seen flocking in plains of Bangladesh.

The writer is a Conservation Biologist, currently working on threatened species conservation and research in Bangladesh and abroad.

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