



**Nazrul Islam at his tea garden in Jhaljhali village of Dinajpur's Birganj upazila. Inspired by lowland tea plantation in Panchagarh, the man has made the first tea garden on two acres of land in Dinajpur.** PHOTO: STAR

## Nazrul Islam Bringing Tea Gardens to an Unlikely District

Inspired by the well-established lowland tea plantation in neighbouring Panchagarh and in some parts of Thakurgaon district, Nazrul Islam from Jhaljhali village in Dinajpur's Birganj upazila has been trying his hand at cultivating tea in his hometown.

In August 2015, the 36-year-old planted 6,000 tea saplings, which he had bought from a nursery in Panchagarh for Tk 4 each, on two acres, and six months later, leaves were plucked for the first time, making up the initial harvest of almost 50 kilograms.

The volume of suitable leaves produced by the plants has been steadily increasing. In total, Islam says he has collected nearly 1,000 kilograms of leaves from his tea garden, and he sells the leaves to North Bengal Tea Factor in Panchagarh for Tk. 25 per kilogram.

While he plans to expand his groundbreaking endeavour, Islam estimates that even without expansion, after two years he will be able to earn Tk. 25,000 per month, which he earned in 2016, as the tea bushes will mature further.

Nazrul's efforts have already inspired many; Azad Ali, a farmer from nearby Patlapur Ahrayan village, has planted tea saplings on two acres of land in early February 2016, and thus far he has harvested 300 kilograms of leaves.

Mostafizur Rahma, an official of the Agriculture Extension Department in Birganj says that Nazrul Islam is the pioneer tea grower in Dinajpur, explaining that growing tea there could be very fruitful, as the local geography and climate are favourable, especially as it is not too far from the Himalayas. Thus, through one small step of Nazrul, Dinajpur's rural economy can be transformed by tea cultivation.

Paving the way for many other local farmers to grow tea, Nazrul has successfully brought forward the potential of tea production in Dinajpur, enabling it to hopefully become the newest agricultural success of the district.

Source story: KONGKON KARMAKER & ANDREW EAGLE

## Abul Kalam Azad: Conquering Challenges

When as a child Abul Kalam Azad lost his eyesight from a severe attack of typhoid, he would not accept that he had to give up his passion for reading. Reading in Braille was not enough, as it was a strenuous method that did not offer a range of literary materials. He then started looking for alternatives, initially keeping an eye for recitation of Bangla books but he found none. Eventually, he decided to develop a website which would include Bangla audio books especially for the visually impaired.

He started work on the site in November 2014, and by the end of January 2015 he almost single-handedly finished designing gyanbikash.com, where he has so far uploaded 50 audio books - including novels by Rabindranath Tagore, Manik Bandyopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Humayun Ahmed, Syed Shamsul Haque, and many others - for the visually impaired. Work to upload more books is underway.

Apart from offering audio books, Azad has also created a rich online library of Bangla books under diverse categories such as history, the Liberation War, novels, poetry, science fiction, horror, and travel, which can be accessed by all and sundry. All of these books are available in PDF format and can be read online or downloaded for free.

Azad, who graduated in English from Dhaka University, and currently works as a teacher at a school in Laxmipur, is the sole breadwinner of his family, which consists of his aging parents. But this hasn't stopped him from bearing all the expenses of building the site.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

**Visually impaired Abul Kalam Azad working on his laptop while attending a training course on digital content development at the capital's Teachers' Training College (TTC). He has almost single-handedly designed a website that introduces people with no eyesight to Bangla audio books.**

His future plans include further developing the site into a grand institution, where books will be printed in Braille alongside audio versions, so that visually impaired people can have access to them.

He might be blind but that hasn't prevented Azad from dreaming big, as he says, "I don't know how long I will live, but I want to leave something behind for people, especially for those who cannot see."

Source story: WASIM BIN HABIB & TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

## CriticalLink: Emergency Superheroes

Overcoming the Rana Plaza tragedy that left over 1,100 people dead and hundreds of others disabled, Bangladeshi Rahat Hossain and US citizen Jennifer Farrell founded CriticalLink in 2014, a non-profit enterprise that could save lives in emergencies, while also developing a mobile app to alert the nearest volunteer first responders who can rush to the emergency spot to save lives.

Till date, CriticalLink has trained over 3,000 people on emergency medical services, and around 380 of them are registered with and certified by the organisation. Farrell claims that they have treated around 600 patients in 2016 alone.

Farrell, who spent four years as a volunteer emergency medical technician at Duke University, USA, and trained first responders in South Africa, came to Bangladesh in 2012 to train doctors and young volunteers on emergency medical service for two months. Currently a senior Doctor of Medicine candidate at the Tulane University of Medicine, she says that she understood that mobile phones and Facebook worked very well in Bangladesh, which is how she realised that mobile apps could be used to help people in emergency situations like building collapse or road crashes. Thus, after the Rana Plaza disaster, she returned to Bangladesh as a Fulbright Scholar to research on accidents and see how a project like CriticalLink could save lives.

That's when she met Rahat Hossain, then a BBA student of East West University, who along with his friends had actively participated in rescue operations of the Rana Plaza disaster. Hossain, engaged in volunteering since his school days, and Farrell decided to train volunteers as well as connect them through the

app so that they could be dispatched immediately in emergencies, where they could offer a range of services, starting from giving first aid to transporting patients to hospitals.

Anyone can download the app on the smartphones and get registered. Users can contact the call centre of CriticalLink based in Dhaka, which is open from 8:00 am to 11:00pm, or simply report an accident. CriticalLink notifies the closest responders in case of emergencies, who are divided into eight zones:

Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Uttara, Banani, Gulshan, Mirpur, Lalbagh and Old Dhaka. Users will also find the address and contact details of the nearest police station, fire station and hospital on the app.

CriticalLink is currently working on road accident victims, lives of many of whom could have been saved if there were dial codes like 999 or 911, as in other countries, that ensure emergency services in minutes. Rahat and Farrell add that they hope to have a dial code similar to 911, and need support from the government and telecom companies to expand their services all over the

country. For now, however, CriticalLink is operating with the small amount of money it receives as fee for the first aid training to volunteers and corporate houses. The volunteers are also selected based on their desire to help, and are not provided any incentives.

Future plans of the organisation also include licensing the app and allowing others to use it in various cases, including stopping sexual harassment. Hossain and Farrell, however, believe that their work would only be complete when they are able to take the mobile app and dispatch centre anywhere in the world where people need help.

Source story: PORIMOL PALMA



**US citizen Jennifer Farrell, CEO of CriticalLink, and volunteers of the non-profit enterprise taking an accident victim to a hospital. Jennifer and Bangladeshi Rahat Hossain, inset, founded CriticalLink and developed a mobile app for saving lives of such accident victims.**

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