

Natural cold storage for potato preservation

SHYKH SERAI

The news isn't an old one. In the greater Bogra region of the country, farmers have been trying to keep their potatoes at the cold storage. Every year, we see the same picture—the picture of loss. Since Bangladesh produces a great amount of potatoes, we find these unwanted incidents around us. Farmers stay in dilemma when they are about to preserve the potatoes at the cold storage across the country. When farmers can't match their profit with what they have spent for production, they fall into greater crisis. It again is the same old picture and repetition of the same event. Farmers invest a lot in potatoes and end of the day, they face multifaceted loss. When they don't get anyone beside them, they throw the potatoes on road in protest. I have also seen different other forms of protests, when farmers don't get fair price for their produce over the years.

Munshiganj, Bangladesh's largest and traditional potato producing region. I have witnessed the same story. One thing is very much evident that from production of cereal crop to varieties of vegetables and different crops, success has spread steadily. Traditionally, farmers in our country tend to produce in larger quantities the crops which gave them profit last season. If the market demand is there, farmers get the profit, they feel inspired; however, if the situation is unfavourable, they suffer loss. Later on, they look for money and as a result become a slave of credit and try to find another profit-making crop. In these cases, farmers have always been in a helpless state. The market is never in their control. Even the government can't assure them the desired market price for their produce. There is no particular pre-production research on what crops would be best for them to go into the field. This is a guideline for them from the government mechanism. We know the agriculture ministry has a potato advisory board. If the board wants, they can easily set goals for the seasonal production,

analyze the situation beforehand, work on the fixing system and even could think of marketing at market price, which would have been easier for farmers. However, we never see these ideas put into effect.

Dear readers, the main worry regarding potato production is more severe when it comes to preservation at the cold storage. When they are preserving, in every step of their journey with the hope of profit. If they want to make some profit in the next season, they rarely get any chance to preserve some for the purpose. In this regard, I would like you to recall the CDP (Crop Diversification Programme). They took an initiative of preserving

authority, most of them couldn't pay back. Hence, the authority has sent them legal notice. Farmers are hiding from the administration, law and order. Generally in Bogra, by this time, 80% of potatoes go out of the storage to the market, but not even 30% went out so far.

And, the cold storage association of the country informs, more than ten million tonnes of potatoes have been produced, among which in 390 cold storage, 5.3 million tonnes have been preserved.

Dear readers, I would like to share a different story, which is related to the story I'm writing now. Two years back I went to The Netherlands to witness the most-advanced farming systems, invited by the Netherlands government.

journey. It was magnificent. How extremely wonderful it was! After crossing the bridge landscape of fields came in from me. My travel partner was an old friend, whom many of you already know—Dutch national Ad Spijkers, former FAO representative in Bangladesh. Since we started very early in the morning, the nature itself was inspiring, its colour, fragrance and it makes a very destination. Finally, I reached my destination, PPO Lelystad, a farming research centre. You won't believe where they have taken the agricultural research. This research site is operated by Wageningen University.

This can be called the ultimate research hub of Wageningen University. The centre located in



potatoes in a natural method. In Munshiganj, they made a bamboo-shelf through which air and light could easily pass. However, following this method, farmers can preserve the potatoes for a maximum of two to three and a half months. Farmers believe this time isn't enough for them.

As I started this article, I mentioned about the Bogra issue. In the greater Bogra region, potato farmers are facing an odd time as potato price continues to decline. Farmers are counting loss in every variety of potatoes. In every 100 kg of potatoes, the loss is Tk 300 to Tk 500. On the other hand, the farmers who preserved potatoes at the cold storage and managed some petty loan from the storage

During the tour, I have seen very closely the ultra-modern farming facilities, hi-tech farming, greenhouse operation and many more agricultural opportunities and research advancements, which eventually are helping farmers a lot. During the filming for Hridoy Mati O Manush, I went to a small island called Texel, which is locally known as the kingdom of sheep. You have to go across the North Sea to reach there. After the end of my work there on saline tolerant crops and sheep farms, I moved towards Lelystad, another city in the Netherlands. As we all know, Lelystad is located well under the sea level. When I was on my way to Lelystad, lakes were on both sides of the bridge, at one point of

Lelystad's Flevoland also supports progressive farmers. One of them is Harry Schreuder, a potato farmer to be exact. I have involved him in this write-up because he has built a natural cold storage (run with +w=wind and light from nature through automatic computerized control panel) with the help from the university's research hub. Harry cultivates on his own 50 hectares of land. He cultivates potato, carrot, onion, wheat and many more. But, potato is his main cash crop. Here, Harry has a cold storage. This is a great advantage for him. He stores 60 tonnes of potato per hectare whereas in our country the average production per hectare is 20-25

Youth hacked to death in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A youth was hacked to death allegedly by his rival in Dholidia area in the town yesterday afternoon.

The victim was identified as Mamunur Rashid Shawon, 27, son of Wazed Mia of Kathgola area.

Md Kamruddin Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali police, said there had been previous enmity between Shawon and Mustaq Ahmed of the same locality over sand business.

A tense situation had been prevailing between Shawon and Mustaq following a fight, added the OC.

He further said Shawon along with his two friends were roaming in Kathgola area on his motorcycle when an alteration occurred between Mustaq and him around 12:00noon.

Mustaq went to his house immediately and allegedly returned with a sharp weapon and chased Shawon, said the official.

As Shawon tried to speed up, he fell from his motorcycle and Mustaq allegedly hacked him, subsequently, killing him on the spot.

Police later recovered the body from a bush in Dholidia area and detained Mustaq from a house in the area.

During primary interrogation, Mustaq confessed to killing Shawon the OC said.

No case was filed as of filing this report last evening.

Blight threat to good Aman production

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Aman crop in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh are being attacked by different diseases, posing a threat to the farmers' hope of a good yield of the paddy this season.

The diseases are Bacterial Leaf Blight (BLB) and Sheath Blight (SB).

Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Deputy Director (DD) Maudul Islam said the situation is under control and they are advising farmers to drain out the water from the paddy fields immediately and apply potash to the affected fields.

But the farmers are worried as they did not get result even after taking different measures to save their paddy plants.

During a recent visit to different villages of the districts, this correspondent saw farmers struggling to save their paddy plants from the diseases by spraying medicines on their fields.

Sabuj Sarcar, 45, a farmer of Sardarpur village in Sadar upazila, told this correspondent that he cultivated Aman on 2.5 acres of land spending Tk 40,000. About one-third of the field was attacked by BLB. The disease could not be controlled even after spraying of medicines prescribed by the local fertiliser, seed and pesticide vendors.

Arun Chandra Barman, 55, of

Yakubpur village, said he cultivated Aman on one acre of land spending Tk 15,000. Suddenly, BLB attacked different parts of the field, and the leaves of the plants turned yellow and dried up, he added.

Sirajul Islam, 58, of Salapara village in Bodalakunda upazila of Panchagarh told this correspondent that his paddy plants are drying up from the roots as they were attacked by SB.

DD Maudul said the situation was under control.

It is still unknown why BLB attacks paddy plants, and a remedy is yet to be found to protect plants from the disease, he said, adding that draining the water from the paddy fields and applying five kg of potash per hectare helps to control spreading of the disease. Urea should not be applied, he added.

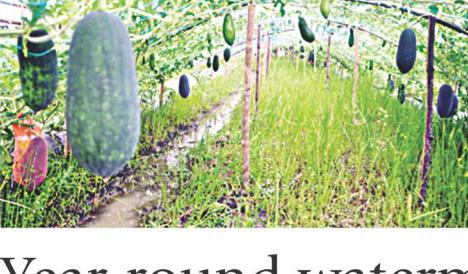
For SB attack, farmers have been advised to spray Tilt-250 (fungicide) three times at intervals of 12 days on their affected fields.

Despite scanty rainfall in the Aman planting season, farmers have cultivated Aman on 1,36,885 hectares of land against the target of 1,35,743 hectares, with production target of 3,86,035 tonnes of rice in the district.

In Panchagarh, 97,590 hectares of land have been cultivated against the target of 96,025 hectares, with production target of 2,71,162 tonnes of rice.



PHOTO: QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAYAT



Year-round watermelon cultivation makes farmers happy in Jessoré Sadar. The photo was taken from Khajura area in the upazila recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Year-round watermelon

Tariqul's homesickness spurs the farming in Jessoré

MOHSIN MILON with ANDREW EAGLE

After completing his Secondary School Certificate in 1999, Tariqul Islam, from Rahelapur village in Jessoré Sadar upazila, took a job at a photo frame factory in Malaysia. Despite the promise of a good livelihood, a future as an expatriate worker was not his. None could have foreseen that Tariqul would come back to his all-season watermelon farm in his district. Many have since followed his initiative. Year-round watermelon cultivation in Jessoré is proving a profitable endeavour.

While making frames in the Malaysian factory Tariqul had only one problem: the only frame that could contain his heart was his memories of his motherland. Thoughts of a Rahelapur childhood drove him, proved to be his passion. Thus, after eight years he did the only thing he could do. He gave in to his heart and returned home.

Tariqul then went to visit his elder brother who at the time was working in Chudanga.

There, he noticed that farmers were growing watermelons, of the usual Chinese and Japanese varieties. Watermelons weren't a common crop in Jessoré at the time. Tariqul com-

monly acknowledged as the local industry's founder.

"Common watermelon varieties are grown from February to April," says the

sub-assistant agriculture officer of sadar upazila's Islami union, Abu Sayed Mohammad Arif. "Those watermelons are brought from other districts to sell here. But all-season watermelons are grown here. They have high demand since they are available to consumers year-round."

Besides, the Taiwanese varieties are less susceptible to insect attack which means the chance of loss to farmers is reduced. Apart from excess water build-up at the base of the plant there is little to disrupt its growth.

An additional advantage of all-season cultivation is that they can be grown on paddy land that usually remains fallow for two months after the Boro rice crop harvest. "An all-season watermelon crop can be harvested before the next rice crop is due for planting," Arif says.

Barely three years ago, there were few farmers in Jessoré who thought about watermelons. These days, the raised structures on which the hanging melons grow are an increasingly common part of the landscape. It's a story of innovative agricultural success that started quite unexpectedly, with an expatriate worker's longing for his childhood home.

BRUTAL MURDER OF SAGOR 'Bring killers to book'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Family members of slain Sagar Mia as well as the people of Charsirampur village in Gouripur upazila, where the teenager was brutally murdered on Monday, have demanded punishment of the perpetrators.

Akhas, 22, was beaten dead Sagar Mia, 18, bringing allegation of attempt to steal a water pump from Gaudhia Hatchery owned by Akkas at Charsirampur village beside Mymensingh's Khorganj road on Monday morning, said locals and police.

Sagar, second among seven children of Shijon Mia of Mymensingh's Natoktoli Lane Railway Colony area, went out of their home around 4:00am on a rickshaw to collect scraps, family members said.

"Hearing that a boy was beaten on charge of theft, I rushed to the spot around 6:00am and saw the indiscriminate brutality of Akhas and his men," said a youth of Charsirampur.

"Several people requested Akkas and his men to release the boy as his condition turned critical. But an arrogant Akkas replied that he would manage it with money," added the youth.

The boy screamed, cried for water and begged for his life but the merciless toads went on. He even fainted several times.

Around 8:00am, when Sagar crumpled to the ground, the



PHOTO: STAR

This picture, showing Sagar in a jovial mood with his mother and younger sister, would now incite only agony among his near and dear ones.

beaters left the place with him in a CNG-run auto-rickshaw, said another witness.

Police recovered Sagar's body from the bushes beside the hatchery on Tuesday morning.

Akhas and his family members fled the area after the incident.

Demanding punishment of the killer, victim's mother Hashi Begum said, "My son was not a thief. He used to collect scraps as we are a poor family. They brutally killed him."

Neighbours gathered at Hashi's house said Sagar had no previous records of criminal activities.

Police arrested Reaz Uddin, 50, of the village Tuzzia night and during interrogation, he confessed his involvement in the killing, said Delwar Ahmed, OC of Gouripur PS.

Earlier, the victim's father Shijon filed a murder case against 12 people, including Akkas, his brothers Hashu Mia, Abdur Sattar Chhuto, Jewel Mia and Sohel Mia, and Akkas' employee Kaimur with Gouripur Police Station.