

Foreign vegetables boon for young farmer

SHYKH SERAJ

In 2012, I read a report about the production of vegetables in India in The Times of India. At that time, a government project for exporting vegetables to Europe was running in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Following the terms and conditions of the European Union, a list of farmers of the mentioned states was prepared and they were trained for producing quality vegetables. Perhaps, it left its reflection in India's vegetable cultivation. Revolution came. Because, according to statistics, India, which produced 33 million tonnes of fresh vegetables in 2016, is the world's second largest vegetable producer after China. At the same time, India has captured a lion's share of export at the Europe's market.

In Bangladesh, farmers with their own innovative power have added new dimensions to the country's agriculture sector. Dear readers, you may remember I had shown woman entrepreneur Sultana Razia's huge vegetable farm at Savar in an episode of 'Hridoye Mati O Manush'. She initiated a successful farm by taking a land on lease. She is cultivating varieties of vegetables including broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and lettuce.

In this era of scientific and technological excellence, more and more diversified crops are being grown in countries across



Kobbadi Hossain Ovi talks with Shykh Seraj at his broccoli field in Hemayetpur, Savar.

PHOTO: HRIDOEY MATI O MANUSH

areas of the country. You probably would also remember Ansar Ali from Buzruk Shokra village in Shibganj, Bogra. He played the pioneering role in creating an enthusiasm for cultivating popular European (or you may read foreign) vegetables in Bangladesh.

In March 2018, I met Kobbadi Hossain Ovi, a talented young agricultural entrepreneur from Dakkhinmetka Daktarbari area of Hemayetpur, Savar. His farm lies on about 20 bighas (6.6 acres) of land. He does not cultivate any local vegetables there. He cultivates a variety of foreign vegetables including capsicum, cherry tomato, cabbage, beetroot, celery, Chinese cabbage, baby corn, sweet corn, nira leaf, broccoli etc. He showed me his vast agricultural farm set on the banks of the Dhaleshwari river.

Ovi started his farm in 2004 with a focus and a challenge. He was worried about how to take care of his family after his father passed away. Once in Gulshan, he saw foreign vegetables were being sold. Those were very expensive. He thought he could also cultivate them. Without wasting any time, he started cultivating foreign vegetables on two bighas (0.66 acres) of land. No, the decision to become a farmer was not a whimsical one. In fourteen years, the extent of his foreign vegetable cultivation area has reached 200 bighas (66.11 acres) of land. Some 30 varieties of foreign vegetables are being grown there.

Twenty bighas (6.6 acres) of the cultivable land is Ovi's own and the rest is taken on lease. Salad items like curly leaves and lemon grass are being cultivated across a large tract. Ovi says, he cultivates vegetables seasonally considering the consumers' demand and he also considers how much profit he can make out of it.

I had noticed the avocado fruit garden in Ovi's farm. Five to six years back, Ovi planted 10 avocado trees. Flowers have started coming in all the trees. They look much like mango buds. Avocado is a popular fruit in Central America and Mexico. The production and sales of this highly nutritious fruit is in full swing worldwide. Many farmers in our country have made avocado orchards. A few days back, Dr Shamsul Bari (chairman, Research Initiatives, Bangladesh) said during a phone conversation that his avocado orchard has grown lots of fruit in Magura's Kajli village. He insisted that I visit his farm. He also asked for my assistance to know where to market them. I could not visit his avocado orchard. I remember, in 2006, I went to Dr Bari's farm to do a report on Kazli date juice. At that time, he used to make syrup from date juice and export it to the USA.

At Ovi's farm, workers are working with onion leaf in groups. We get to know that this onion leaf, dill leaf, celery leaf, iceberg lettuce leaves grow throughout the year. Thus, to ensure year-round

supply, seedlings are also being produced.

All the vegetables of the field are stacked in the courtyard and surrounding open spaces. Then the job of sorting and packaging is done and afterwards they are sent to the market. The farm's leftover vegetables are being used as cattle feed. That's why Ovi has a future plan to raise cattle.

All the vegetables produced are regularly supplied to different parts of the country. Besides Dhaka, they have great demand in Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, and Khulna. Every day vegetables worth Tk 60 to 70 thousand (USD 836) are marketed. Yearly, Kobbadi Hossain Ovi markets vegetables worth Tk 2 to 2.5 crore (approximately USD 3 million). Covering all the expenses, 40%-50% profit remains. Ovi says, if new entrepreneurs work with sound knowledge and technological know-how along with effort and devotion, cultivating foreign vegetables can be a great area to explore. However, even in this case, the traditional crisis of intermediary share has been a big problem. On the other hand, imported vegetables from the neighbouring country make the market prospect very much uncertain. Therefore, even though the demand for new crops or vegetables grows across the country, the entrepreneurs are afraid to increase production. Ovi believes, in this case, it is necessary to bring more changes in government's import policy. He insists that the government opens the export door to the world for local farmers through formulating suitable rules and regulations alongside arranging training and providing facilities so that in the end, Bangladesh can earn a lot from this endeavour.

Although some of country's vegetables are now being exported abroad, foreign vegetables are yet to be exported from our country. But it is possible to export them by ensuring quality production and packaging. We only need pure and chemical-free vegetables which will follow the internationally recognised market policy.

Through new farming initiatives of young farmers like Ovi, Bangladesh's farming sector is having new trends, diverse markets are being created and new sectors of potential opportunities are now in front of us.

Dear readers, the instance of producing European crops in our country is really astonishing. It is very inspiring in terms of commercial agriculture. Similarly, it brings diversity in our regular diet and nutrition. Now it is no longer difficult to bring any vegetable to our plate. Moreover, we need to support the farmers so that they can grow these more and market it across the country and to different countries of the world with the right policy support from the government.

Youth held for raping 6-year-old

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Faridpur

A youth was arrested on Tuesday night on charge of raping a six-year-old girl at Vagolpur village in Goalanda upazila of Rajbari on Sunday.

The victim is now under treatment at Rajbari General Hospital.

The arrestee is Akir Ali, 20, son of Ratan Fakir of the village.

Quoting victim's family members Goalanda Police Station OC Mirza Abul Kalam Azad said, "Akir raped the girl when she went to watch television at his house around 5:30pm on Sunday. Akir was alone at the house during the incident. The victim told her elder sister about the matter after returning home. Later, family members took her to Goalanda Upazila Health Complex and the on-duty doctor shifted her to Rajbari General Hospital."

The victim's father filed a rape case against Akir yesterday evening and the police arrested him around 8:30pm, the OC added.

Lightning kills boy in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Dinajpur

A teenage boy was killed and another man injured in a lightning strike on Tuesday when they were working at a paddy field in Chiribandar upazila.

The boy was Shahadat Hossain, 18, son of Mosharaf Hossain of Sharswatipur village under the upazila. Taimur Rahman, 23, was injured in the same strike.

Police said the boy was working at a paddy field at Sharswatipur village when he was struck by lightning. He died on the spot. Taimur Rahman was treated at Chiribandar Upazila Health Complex.

Chiribandar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Haresul Islam said the body was handed over to the victim's family.

Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received country's two highest civilian honours, *Swadhinata*, *Puroshkar* and *Ekushey Padak*, respectively. He is an Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, *Hridoye Mati O Manush*.

the world. The added diversity in vegetable cultivation helps to meet up nutritional needs of population. There is no longer any obstacle to produce tropical crops in temperate regions. Once, the demand of foreign vegetables was only in the elite hotels and restaurants. Now, due to the diversified development of lifestyle and the increase of buying capacity, the demand of foreign vegetables has also grown in families who are much concerned about nutrition. In order to meet this demand, cultivation of foreign vegetables has started in many



Around 90-metre area of Rajbari Town Protection Embankment in Sonakandor area under Mizanpur union in Sadar upazila was eroded by the Padma river on Sunday. Inset, affected villagers are seen busy shifting their houses to other places.

PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

Padma devours Rajbari town protection embankment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

The Padma devoured about 390 metres of the Rajbari town protection embankment at two places in the last couple of days, forcing dwellers in nearby areas to shift their homestead elsewhere.

Besides, thousands of people living in the area are passing days amid fear of losing their homesteads and croplands due to the erosion.

Locals said erosion first hit Godarbazar

area, around 1.5 kilometres north of the town, in Sadar upazila on August 27 and washed away about 300 metres of the town protection embankment.

Another 90 metres of the riverbank protection embankment went into the river when erosion hit Sonakandor area under Mizanpur union in the upazila on September 9 while another 110-metre area is facing threat of being eroded anytime, they said.

Mojaher Mondal of Sonakandor

village said, "Erosion hit my family two times before. I have been living here for

the five years and I might have to shift my home again."

Babul Sardar of the area said, "Before the erosion I owned 40 bighas of land but I am landless now."

Rajbari Water Development Board (WDB) Sub-Assistant Engineer Hafizur Rahman said the WDB constructed the 2.24-kilometre embankment stretching from Godarbazar to Botla Sluice Gate in Sadar upazila at a cost of Tk 47 crore and 71 lakh in 2009.

Hafizur said they have been dumping

geo bags in the affected areas and regularly visiting the other affected areas.

Rajbari WDB Executive Engineer Krishna Sarker said, "Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) recently dredged the riverbed to carry equipment to Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant."

As a result, sand underneath the riverbank protection embankment got displaced and it might have triggered the fresh

erosion, he added.

DOCTORS' CHEATING

Orbit Hospital runs illegally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Orbit Hospital in Nabiganj upazila of Habiganj, now under discussion following doctors' alleged attempt to fleece the parents of a healthy baby by falsely claiming her as a sick one, is running without valid documents.

"As I asked Orbit Hospital authorities to show their documents, it was found that the validity of the license of the hospital and the permission for running it by district's civil surgeon expired in June 2017," said Touhid-Bin-Hasan, Nabiganj upazila nirbahi officer.

Dr Mohibur Rahman Harun, director of the hospital, said they have applied for new documents.

Earlier on Monday, Habiganj Civil Surgeon Suchinto Chowdhury formed a three-member committee to probe the allegation of doctors' attempt to fleece the parents of 40-day-old Ismat Nahar by cheating.

Ismat, daughter of Rubel Mia and Shirin Akther in Nabiganj, was taken to Dr AHM Khairul Bashar, paediatric doctor of Orbit Hospital, on August 31.

"Later at the suggestion of Dr Bashar, I admitted my baby to Mamun Hospital in Moulvibazar. On September 4, through a leaked mobile conversation between Dr Bashar and Dr Biswajit of Mamun Hospital, I learnt that my baby was fully well but Dr Bashar asked Dr Biswajit to keep the baby admitted there," Shirin Akther said.

"Failing to get justice from the hospital authorities I filed written complaints to the upazila and district administrations, police superintendent, civil surgeon, and Consumer Rights Directorate," she said.

She alleged that the hospital authorities are threatening her to withdraw the complaint.



Orbit Hospital at Auskandi in Nabiganj upazila of Habiganj.

PHOTO: STAR