

CIAME 2018: Machines to control farming

SHYKH SERAJ

Wuhan is a populous city of the world's most populous country China. The capital city of Hubei Province, Wuhan, is apparently quiet and calm. I think, only in October, the city gets revived with a unique event. That event is popularly known as China International Agriculture Machinery Exhibition (CIAME), one of the biggest in the world. In October this year, I visited the exhibition of agricultural machinery. I did attend the exhibition last year as well. The aim of the fair is to get ideas about the technologies which can be effective in the agricultural sector of Bangladesh. The grand event was organized at the International Convention Expo Center of Wuhan. Thirty countries had participated in the huge agricultural machinery exhibition that took place across 220 thousand square metres of area.

The China Agricultural Machinery Association, China Agricultural Mechanization Association and China Agricultural Machinery Distribution Association jointly organized the three-day fair from October 26 to 28. The theme of this year's fair was 'Revitalization of rural agricultural life system through integrated and self-sustainable agricultural machinery'. Following the lead of the President of China Agricultural Machinery Manufacturers Association Dr Chen Xi, local representatives of the world's various agriculture machinery manufacturing companies including China, were introduced to the worldwide mass media. I talked to Liu Xian, President of China Agricultural Mechanization Association. I wanted to know what their expectations were from the huge fair. Liu Xian said that the nature of agriculture is changing with climate change. And for the sake of food security for the huge population, the emphasis is on increasing production. The goal is to have more produc-



Shykh Seraj looks at an AI-drone that sprays insecticides and fertilizer at CIAME 2018.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MAATI O MANUSH

tion in less time. So, there is no alternative to agricultural mechanization to have more production from limited land using less manpower. And this fair is organized with a view to introducing farmers and those involved in agricultural machinery business.

There was a three-day-long symposium on different topics as well. Researchers and experts from different fields of China presented their findings. The seminar was attended by agricultural machinery traders, scientists, extension officers, researchers, entrepreneurs and media representatives from around the world. There was a commercial economic survey of the agricultural machinery industry. Besides, there were seven international seminars, 10 thematic meetings, spot demonstrations, agricultural robot competition. In this huge event, Ru Wei, deputy secretary of China's Agricultural Machinery Manufacturing and Distributing

Company, CAMDA (China Agricultural Machinery Distribution Association), who was in charge of coordinating the global media, said, "While arranging this huge event, we had to communicate with many of the local and international organizations. This fair is the result of sincere cooperation from everyone."

After months-long preparation for this huge event, there was a three-day exhibition. There were demonstrations of thousands of agricultural machinery. There were different types of machinery. The latest research and thought about the mechanization of agriculture was discussed here. The innovators and researchers were also very excited to conduct their presentations. Along with huge machinery essential for agricultural mechanization, there were small technologies or tools. I had a talk with an entrepreneur named Liu Xiangli. He built a small rice transplanter,

thinking about the small farmers.

The huge exhibition of agricultural machinery had 15 types of tractors, absolutely ultra-modern and efficient harvesters, land farming machines, planting and sowing machines, irrigation and drainage equipments, plant and crop protection equipment. There were many participants from 30 countries of the world, as well as many visitors. Keeping in mind various factors and issues, artificial intelligence, electrical equipment and smart technology have been integrated to make agriculture more efficient, economically viable and productive. In this year's fair, there were never-seen-before machinery including fully equipped electric tractors, various types of machines that spray pesticide in fruit gardens without any driver, drones that spray water, insecticides, or plant required nutrients etc. Every year, a lot of efforts are given to increase the efficiency of the agri-

cultural machinery.

Around 120 thousand people attended the fair. There I also talked to the representatives of some of the renowned agricultural machinery manufacturing companies of Bangladesh. They determined precisely what could be implemented in Bangladesh. Alimus Sadat of Alim Industries Limited said that if you only import necessary parts of a machine from China and manufacture locally in Bangladesh, then it would only cost half the amount of importing the entire machine including VAT and TAX. This way, agriculture machines could reach the hands of the common farmers.

I think there is a need to take necessary step in this regard by the manufacturers and distributors of agricultural machinery as well as the government.

General Manager of M/S Kamal Machine Tools, Md Shabbir Ahmed showed a potato harvester. He explained that this machine is not very complicated. It is possible to make using local technology as well.

Agricultural mechanization is inevitable now. Those who are enjoying the maximum benefit of this mechanization actually earn a lot of benefit. Let's come to the excellence of the machines. There were some machines in the exhibition that were being run by drones. Last time we saw how the drone was coming back automatically by evaluating the utility and the place of applying fertilizers and pesticides in the cropland and then going back again to apply fertilizers or insecticides. Now the drone seemed to become more automatic. It was operating a huge spray machine. Entering some of the rooms of the exhibition, I was astounded by grand arrangements of audio and visual display.

Multifaceted research on agricultural machinery is going on at a full speed. The excellence of machines is increasing. Continuous experiments are going on to increase the artificial intelligence of the machines. This operation of machines for agriculture's multipurpose development is truly positive. Developed countries cannot think of agriculture without the use of machines. In this case, developing or underdeveloped countries are behind for many reasons.

The versatile agricultural success of our country is a wonder to the world. It is very important to link new farm machines with this success. In this case, we need more of Bangladesh's active presence in this large agricultural machinery exhibition. Let's move forward towards the development of mechanical agriculture, with the expectation that ordinary and low-income farmers can also enjoy the facility of using them at an affordable cost with the assistance from public and private organizations.

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*.



Untimely Teesta erosion

150 acres of croplands washed away, 55 families homeless

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Untimely erosion by the Teesta river washed away around 150 acres of croplands and rendered 55 families shelterless in Sreepur, Kapasia and Chandipur unions under Sundarganj upazila in the last one week.

Many people living in erosion-prone areas are shifting their belongings to safe places.

"I don't know where my next destination will be as my homestead was eroded by the rapacious Teesta river three days ago," said Ansar Ali a farm labourer of Ujan Bochagari village in Kapasia union.

"I had over nine bighas of landed properties in Chandipur union two decades ago, but all of those went into the river and now I have become ultra-poor. This is the third time I

have shifted my huts to another place," he added.

"I cultivated Aman on two and a half bighas of land, but the greedy river did not allow me a bit of time for harvesting the half ripe crop and washed it away five days ago," said Kabej Ali, a small farmer of Badamer Char village.

"If the erosion continues, I will have to shift my dwelling houses to a safe place and I am worried about where to take shelter. Three bighas of my croplands were devoured by the surging water of the Teesta," said Rafiqul Islam, ward member of Kapasia Union Parishad.

Meanwhile, 75 acres of cropland have gone into the river and 160 acres are under threat of erosion, and around 35 families have lost their

homesteads, he said. The erosion victims are taking shelter on embankments or nearby char lands, he added.

"We have asked the local Water Development Board (WDB) to take steps to stop widespread erosion, but nothing has happened yet. More and more areas are being eroded every day," said Sreepur Union Parishad Chairman Shahidul Islam.

"A large-scale river bank protection programme is being taken up to stop erosion by the Teesta and Brahmaputra rivers. The work will start from next year," said Gaibandha WDB Executive Engineer Moklesur Rahman.

The upazila administration has distributed CI sheets and cash among the erosion victims, said Sundarganj Upazila Project Implementation Officer Nurunnabi Sarker.



Untimely erosion by the Teesta river devoured croplands and homesteads in Kapasia union under Sundarganj upazila of Gaibandha in the last one week.

PHOTO: KM REZAUL HOQUE

Sculpture in memory of Lalon Shah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A 26-foot-high sculpture of traditional musical instrument *ektara*, built here commemorating Fakir Lalon Shah, his guru Siraj Shai and disciples Duddu Shah and Panju Shah will be inaugurated next month.

Harinakundo Upazila Parishad built the *ektara* sculpture, largest of its kind in the country, at a cost of Tk 2 lakh, in Harinakundo upazila headquarters recalling the mystics, said MA Mozid, chairman of the upazila.

Shawan Sardar, a student of the Department of Art and Crafts of Rajshahi University, built it in June. It took 15 days to complete the construction work, he said.

"We are extremely proud of this sculpture," said the upazila chairman.

The sculpture will be inaugurated in December, said Ekramul Haque Liku, regional coordinator of Bangladesh Gram Theatre.

The long cherished desire of cultural people of the area has been met through construction of the sculpture, said Liku, also the chief patron of the sculpture.

"It is our pride and heritage which will bear testimony to the devotion of Lalon devotees. The Lalon songs will stir the mind of devotees and the next generation," he said.

Lalon devotee Shariful Islam of Khazura village in Jhenidah Sadar upazila said they use *ektara*, a musical instrument, while performing Lalon songs on stage. This symbol will encourage them to go ahead.

Another Lalon devotee, Jahura Khatun of Harinakundo upazila headquarters, said she performs *palagaan* (a kind of traditional performing art) in different districts of the country. She is extremely fond of Lalon songs. She feels proud of this sculpture.



This 26-foot-high *ektara* sculpture has been built at Harinakundo in Jhenidah commemorating Fakir Lalon Shah and a few other mystics.

PHOTO: STAR

15-year-old boy held for raping Garo girl in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A 15-year-old boy was arrested early yesterday on charge of raping an 11-year-old Garo girl in Madhupur upazila of the district.

The arrestee is a resident of Gachhabari village, said Shafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Madhupur Police Station.

Victim's mother filed a case with Madhupur Police Station in this regard on Tuesday, Shafiqul said.

According to the case statement, the teenage boy raped the girl, a primary terminal examinee, after calling her out of her house on Monday evening, the OC said.

He said the boy confessed to the crime during primary interrogation.

Police produced the arrestee to a Tangail court and sent the victim to Tangail General Hospital for medical tests yesterday, he added.

Farm workers look for petty jobs in cities

Growers engage family members in Aman harvesting for lack of labourers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Families of many farmers are now engaged in harvesting paddy as most of the farm workers have gone to big cities to do petty jobs for higher wages, and those who are available demand wages that the farmers cannot pay.

Jamir Ali, 55, of Itakhola village in Sadar upazila, said he cultivated Aman paddy on 10 bighas of land, which is now ready for harvesting. He tried to hire workers for harvesting but failed as most of them had temporarily migrated to big cities.

A few farm workers who are still available demand Tk 2,500 to Tk 3,000 for cutting, carrying and threshing paddy from one bigha of land, which the farmers cannot afford, he said.

"Finding no other way, I and my elderly wife, sons, young daughter-in-law and school-going children started harvesting to prevent the ripe paddy kernels from dropping to the ground and getting ruined," Jamir said.

Visiting Itakhola village on November 23, this correspondent found Jamir, along with his wife, daughter-in-law and two sons, cutting paddy. His school-going daughters Rita and Mita

were carrying paddy bundles on their heads to the house yard.

"Overcoming their hesitation, my family members started working in the field. We are happy as we have benefitted by turning from an idle family to active and industrious labourers," Jamir said.

"Members of many well-to-do farmers' families in my union are harvesting Aman paddy by doing the work of labourers as around 80% of farm workers have migrated temporarily to cities," said Itakhola Union Parishad Chairman Hafizur Rashid Monju.

Timekeeper of Nilphamari bus terminal Abdul Mannan said labourers carrying agriculture tools come to the bus stand or rail station every day to go to other districts.

Day labourer Delwar Hossain of Nautara village, who was waiting with coworkers at Dimla upazila bus terminal to take a bus, said if they work in big towns for one month, they can earn around Tk 20,000.

"Many well-to-do farmers were idle in the past as they could get paddy and other crops cultivated by hiring day labourers, but now that attitude has changed as they have realised that industry is key to success," said Nilphamari Department of Agriculture Extension Deputy Director Abul Kashem Azad.