

# Honourable president's inspirational letter to a farmer

SHYKH SERAJ  
Five to six years back, farmer Rahimullah came all the way from Cox's Bazar to meet me at my Channel i office. We spoke over lunch that day. After being asked about the purpose of his visit, he told me his life story.

During the 80s, an episode of Mati O Manush, hosted by me, about papaya farming was aired on Bangladesh Television. Watching that, Rahimullah pressed his father to bring papaya seeds. Later on, Rahimullah went to the Middle East for work. Channel i's Hridoye Mati O Manush was a Bangladeshi show he could watch there. Despite all the hard work there, this agricultural show was Rahimullah's only source of entertainment.

Rahimullah decided to return to Bangladesh after watching different episodes of the programme on success stories of farmers who grew baukul (Bau plum).

He came back with his hard-earned money and had been trying to cultivate baukul for the past two years. He said he spent all his money that he had saved up abroad, but was not getting much success.

Before we finished our lunch, Rahimullah requested me to visit his newly built farm with a strong belief that his orchard will flourish further if I paid a visit there.

A couple of months after our meeting, I went to visit his orchard in Eidgah area of Cox's Bazar. The orchard was already huge. I told Rahimullah that he came this far with great efforts and he certainly can go even further.

When I was leaving, Rahimullah approached me again and showed me two papers -- a work permit (known as Akama in Saudi Arabia) and an air ticket to Saudi Arabia. He asked me whether he should go to Saudi Arabia again or stay in Bangladesh to pursue his farming dream.

I told him that the answer has to come only from himself. He then tore up both the Akama and the air ticket. I left a revolutionary farmer back in Eidgarh and became a witness to a glorious history, proving that passion of a farmer can take him far. Later on, I loaned him some money, which he returned successfully.

Today, Rahimullah is a financially stable farmer. He is not only cultivating baukul, but also papaya and banana. He also has a large fish farm. In addition, he started a seed and fertilizer business.

At the end of the year 2018, Rahimullah told me that he wanted to send baukul, grown in his farm, to His Excellency Honourable President Md Abdul Hamid and Her Excellency Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina. He asked me if I could arrange it. I told him that I would try my best.

Few days ago, Rahimullah sent me fresh



ICT State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak hands over a letter from President Abdul Hamid to farmer Rahimullah during a pre-budget discussion of 'Krishi Budget Krishoker Budget' in Cox's Bazar recently.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

baukuls from his farm for the honourable president and honourable prime minister. Attaching a letter, I sent the packaged baukul to the honourable president and honourable prime minister.

In February 2019, I had the privilege to meet the honourable president. He said to me, "Seraj, I have something for you." He then handed me a letter that was addressed to farmer Rahimullah. It is astounding that the president wrote a letter to a common farmer after receiving the fresh baukuls. It is not only inspirational for only Rahimullah, but also for all farmers in Bangladesh. I did not deliver the letter to Rahimullah right way. I kept it as a surprise gift, hoping to hand it over to him in a special manner.

Like every year, I have started the pre-budget discussion 'Krishi Budget Krishoker Budget'. At its Cox's Bazar session, I listened to problems and prospects of farmers. Around four thousand farmers were present there. Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for information and communication technology

(ICT) division, was present there as a member of the cabinet.

Many other government officials along with key policy makers of the community also attended the event.

At one stage during the programme, I asked if Rahimullah was present in the crowd. Amid thousands of farmers, a man stood up. The letter written by the honourable president addressed to Rahimullah was displayed on the big LED screen. By my request, ICT State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak read out the letter for the audience in the most heartfelt manner. The translation of the letter is given below:

"Dear Rahimullah, Assalamu Alaikum. I thank you for sending me your farm's baukul as a gift. You are a hardworking man. I am delighted to know that Shykh Seraj's show on Channel i 'Hridoye Mati O Manush' has inspired you to cultivate baukul. You started from the roots and now you have become the owner of a huge baukul orchard. You have become financially self-reliant. I believe your

success will encourage other farmers and general people of this country to cultivate agricultural products, fruits and crops and hence you all will be able to contribute a significant amount to the nation's GDP along with achieving personal goals. Mr. Shykh Seraj's agricultural programme already created a great stir among the farmers and mass people while leaving a positive impact on agricultural production. I hope he will continue his innovative initiative for the development of Bangladesh's farmers and the farming sector. I myself am a son of a farmer. Thus, I understand the agonies, pains, tears and smiles of the farmer folk. The present government has taken an initiative of 'turning every village to a city'. I believe you will start getting the benefits of this enterprise very soon. This project will develop the rural socio-economy as well as add a new dimension to the overall livelihood of ours. I pray for your family's and your good health, long life and continued success. May Almighty Allah grace us. Goodbye, Long live Bangladesh. Md Abdul

Hamid."  
This letter inspired thousands of farmers and created such an environment, which I personally cannot explain. Tears of joy rolled down Rahimullah's cheeks. Farmers present there also felt extremely proud of his accolade and their eyes also filled with tears. Rahimullah was asked to get on the stage so the letter written by the honourable president could be delivered to him.

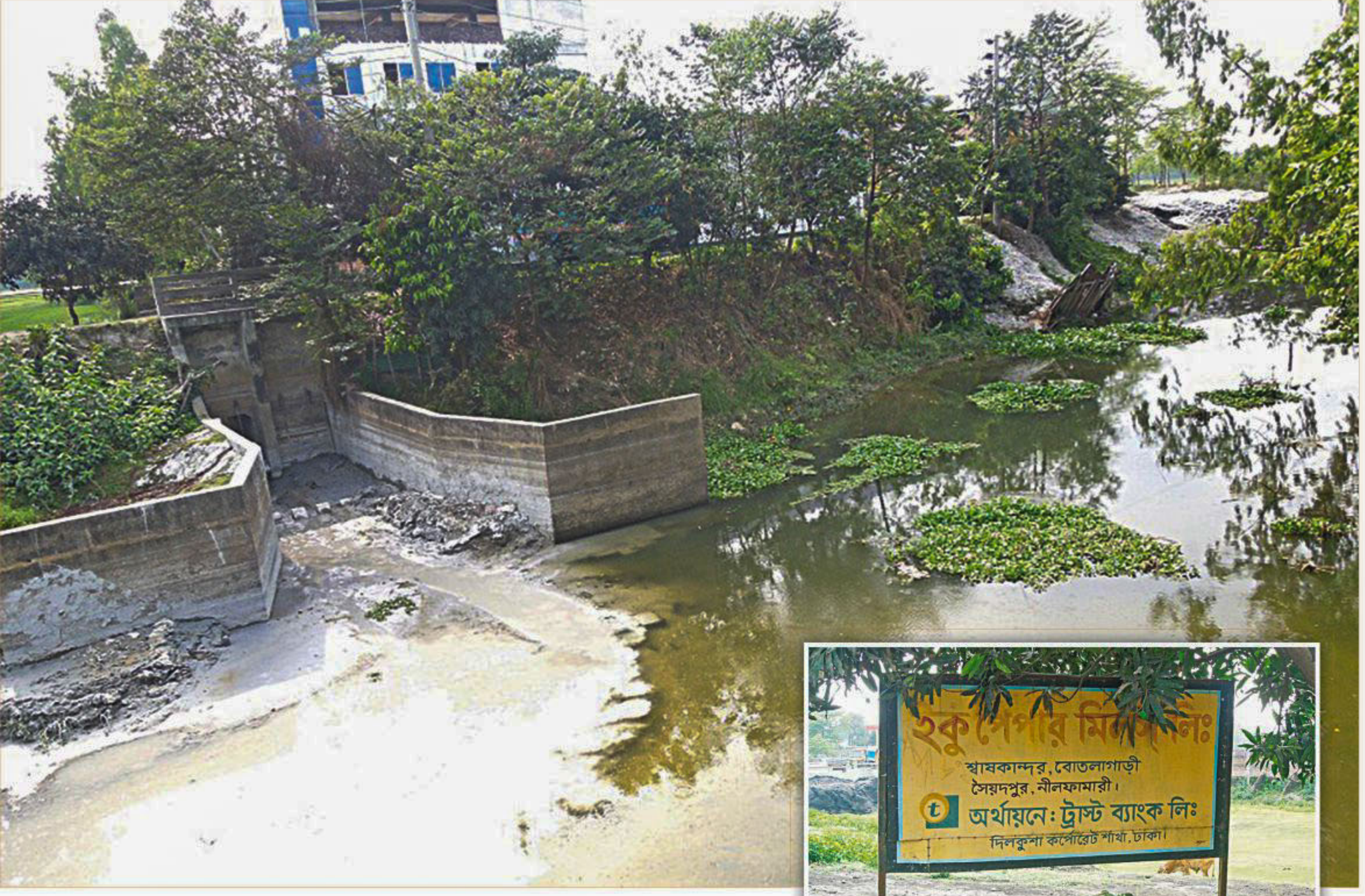
Zunaid Ahmed Palak embraced Rahimullah, who still had tears in his eyes. I asked Rahimullah if he wished to say for the audience. A common rural farmer Rahimullah, handling such an emotional and proud moment, said in a quivering voice, "First, I wholeheartedly thank the honourable president and convey my salam to him. From the bottom of my heart, on behalf of the Cox's Bazar district residents and my struggling farmer brothers, I would like to send him lots of greetings..."

Rahimullah finished his speech sobbing, "I thank you, honourable president."

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.



Chemical wastes from Equ Paper Mill Ltd beside Dhaka-Dinajpur highway in Nilphamari's Saidpur upazila discharging into the Khorkhoria river are polluting the water. Inset, the mill authorities put up the signboard beside the road.



# Industrial waste killing Khorkhoria river

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Chemical waste from privately-owned Equ Paper Mill Ltd beside Dhaka-Dinajpur highway in Saidpur upazila is pouring into the Khorkhoria river, polluting environment and effecting on biodiversity.

During a visit to the area on Tuesday, this correspondent found toxic waste and chemical continuously coming out of a concrete pipe from the mill at Shaskandar village and mixing with water through a culvert.

Constructed by the owner of the mill, the culvert lies at right embankment of the river. Abdul Mazid Babu, 30, of nearby Kundal village, said the marine species have disappeared from eight kilometer long segment of the river

stretching from Shaskandar to Patwaripara due to the presence of harmful chemicals in the water.

Abdul Hakim, a resident of Eidgah area, said the river is so badly polluted that its water is unsuitable for use even after treatment.

"If we take bathe here, we suffer from scabies," he said.

A number of fishermen and farmers like Moksed Ali, Abdul Mannan and Mokbul said once they used to catch fish and use the river water for irrigation, but they cannot do it now.

"Chemical waste from the mill discharging into the river is so seriously effecting on biodiversity that no aquatic plants can't grow posing threat to human existence," said Shahin Jahangir Alam, executive director of local NGO

'Camp' working to protect environment.

Demanding the authorities' concerned stern action to stop this unlawful activities, hundreds of people blocked Dhaka-Dinajpur highway and also besieged the mill a few months ago which was withdrawn after an hour as the local administration assured of taking steps to resolve the matter, said villagers.

Siddikul Alam, managing director of the mill, said "We have waste purifying machinery called ETP and a good number of people are maintaining livelihood by working in the mill."

Stern action will be taken soon after investigating into the matter, said Mihir Lal Sardar, assistant director of Directorate of Environment in Rangpur.

# Man to die for murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A Kushtia court yesterday sentenced a man to death for killing a fruit trader in the town in 2017.

The convict, Nur Alam, is a resident of Chourhas area in the town.

District and Sessions Judge Arup Kumar Goshwami handed down the verdict in presence of convict Nur Alam, lone accused in the murder case.

According to the case statement, slain

Robiul and Nur Alam jointly used to run a fruit shop in Chourhas area for long.

Following a feud over the business between the two, Nur killed Robiul on June 20, 2017 and later dumped the body inside an abandoned garage nearby.

On June 23, police detained Nur after deceased's wife Bonna Khatun filed a case with Sadar Police Station.

Later, according to Nur's confessional statement, police recovered Robiul's body from the abandoned garage.

# Brick kiln damages Boro fields

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Standing Boro paddy on at least three acres of land were completely damaged due to pollution from a nearby brick kilns in Nagarpur upazila.

Moreover, as the brick field owner is a locally influential man, the affected farmers could not realise any compensation for the damage yet.

One Kader Mollah constructed the brick kiln along the croplands at Nolsandhya village under Sohobotpur union in the upazila about a year ago.

Locals alleged that though they had raised objections during the construction of the brick kiln and submitted a petition with the local administration, they could not stop its construction as the owner is locally influential.

Due to the omission of excessive heat

and ashes from the furnace of the brick kiln, many farmers found their Boro paddy field adjacent to the kiln badly damaged recently.

The owners of the damaged paddy fields -- Juran Ali, Nawab Ali and Sakim Miah -- alleged that though the brick kiln owner assured them of giving compensation for the damage, they are yet to get it.

Contacted, owner Kader claimed that the affected farmers were already given compensation for the damage.

He said he constructed the brick kiln following all necessary legal procedures.

Nagarpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Syed Fayeul Islam said he did not receive any complaint from anyone in this regard, adding that steps will be taken if any complaint is lodged.



This brick kiln, constructed alongside a vast tract of cropland at Nolsandhya village in Nagarpur upazila of Tangail a year ago, causing damages to adjacent Boro fields.

PHOTO: COLLECTED