



Two farmers are seen preparing floating Aman seedbeds made from water hyacinth at Ramjibon village in Gaibandha's Sundarganj upazila. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: KM REZAUL HOQUE

Floating Aman seedbeds to overcome seedling crisis

KM REZAUL HOQUE, Gaibandha

Prolonged flood in the char lands of Gaibandha district has completely damaged aman seedlings causing local farmers to worry about their crops. However, with advice from agriculture officers, farmers found a solution in the floating seedbed technology. This year the Brahmaputra river rose 150 centimetres above danger mark, the highest in two decades, and inundated croplands including aman seedbeds. According to district agriculture extension office, aman seedlings on 2,881 hectares of land in Gaibandha went under five to seven feet of standing water, damaging all prospect of transplanting the seeds in the next phase of aman cultivation.

Instead of waiting for the water to subside for preparing regular seedbeds on land, the agriculture department advised farmers to prepare floating aman seedbeds on the floodwater. This way the saplings will be ready for transplantation in time within the aman cultivation season and also not get damaged if another flood occurs. While visiting the flood ravaged unions of Sundarganj upazila, farmers were seen sowing aman seeds on floating beds made from heaped up water hyacinths and mud. "I have prepared two floating beds as suggested by our upazila agriculture officer and sowed seed of BRRI- 51 aman variety. The seedlings can later be transplanted to cover four and half bighas of land," said

Raju Mia, a farmer of Ramjibon union in Sundarganj upazila. BRRI- 51 aman, a flood tolerant variety suitable for flood prone areas, specially char lands along river basins, survives for two weeks under water, said SM Sarower Hossain, sub-assistant agriculture officer of Ramjibon union. Another farmer Rafiqul Islam of Bochagari village in Kapasia union, said "My aman seedbed on five decimals of land, which could have been transplanted on five bighas of land, got damaged in the recent flood. The land would remain fallow if I do not arrange aman seedlings in time." When asked why Rafiqul did not prepare floating seedbeds, he said, "I don't know how to do so but I will

talk to the agriculture department and try to start it soon." Syed Reza-e-Mahmud, Upazila Agriculture Officer (UAO) of Sundarganj said at least 32 floating seedbeds have already been prepared in different areas of Sundarganj Upazila, some people have leased water bodies to prepare floating seedbeds to sell saplings commercially. Deputy Director S M Ferdous of the Agriculture Extension Directorate, Gaibandha, said, "As per instruction of the agriculture ministry, we have selected 56 farmers of seven upazilas of the district, trained them, and gave each of them an incentive grant of Taka 1165 to prepare floating seedbeds." This will encourage other farmers to follow suit, he hoped.

Panchagarh growers leaning towards lotkon

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Mouth-watering fruit Burmese grape, commonly known as lotkon, is gaining popularity among growers in Panchagarh. Rising demand coupled with good selling price and high yield are drawing most growers to invest in the fruit for commercial production in recent times. Most growers are also taking interest in Burmese grape because its plant grows on higher land where other cash crops do not grow well. Many of them now find it more profitable to grow Burmese grape in betelnut orchards on such fallow land. Much to the delight of the growers, the commercially produced larger, tastier and bright-coloured variety of Burmese grape, especially from Panchagarh, is now in high demand across the country. Abu Hanif, deputy director of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Panchagarh, said Burmese grape is being cultivated on nearly 35 hectares of land in betelnut orchards in the district this year.

The fruit is being cultivated on 28 hectares of land in Panchagarh Sadar alone, while on 7 hectares in other four upazilas of the district, he said, adding that climate condition in Panchagarh is favourable for Burmese grape, a fruit that contains higher nutritional value than most other common fruits grown in the region. More and more people, who have betelnut orchards around their homesteads, are finding it attractive to grow Burmese grape alongside the betelnut trees after witnessing success of others and because the fruit tree grows well without much space. Initially, around 200 saplings of Burmese grape can be planted on 30 to 35 decimals of land. After reaching maturity, a tree usually produces more than 40 kilograms of fruit, the DAE official also said. During a recent visit to Panimachpukuri, Haribhasa and Boleyapara villages in Sadar upazila and Bhaulaganj Tistapara village in Debiganj upazila of Panchagarh, the areas were found abuzz with growers harvesting the fruit. Buyers from faraway places were also busy

packing the fruits for transport. Hasan Ali, a fruit trader from Panimachpukuri village, said "Lotkon produced in Panchagarh has a high demand in other parts of the country for its good taste, size and colour." He also said he paid Tk 5 lakh for harvesting the fruit from 1,000 trees in different villages and spent and additional Tk 1.20 lakh to nurture the trees. He hoped to make Tk 2 lakh profit from selling Burmese grape this season. Currently, fruit traders are paying Tk 50 to growers for each kg of the fruit. Its retail price is now more or less Tk 100 per kg. Another grower, Gokul Chandra Roy, said he planted 70 Burmese grape saplings in his betelnut orchard about two decades ago in Bhaulaganj Tistapara village of Debiganj upazila. After the trees matured this year, he earned Tk 2 lakh from the sale of the fruit. The older the tree gets, the more profitable it becomes for the grower as a matured tree does not need as much care as opposed to the care it needs during the earlier stage, he also said.



Burmese grape or lotkon is increasingly gaining popularity among growers in Panchagarh for its high demand all over the country. The photo of the sweet and sour fruits hanging from one such tree was taken recently in Haribhasa village of Panchagarh Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

ATTAKER'S THREATS

Injured madrasa girl cannot return home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A female madrasa student of eighth grade has been staying away from her home in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar as her stalker, who stabbed her on June 30, has been making threats on her and her family to withdraw a case against him. The girl's family filed the case with Kulaura police station the day after the attack. According to the case statement, Ruhul Amin, 22, son of Monaf Mia from a neighbouring village, along with two others stopped the girl on her way to the madrasa in the morning and demanded her to accept his marriage proposal. As she refused, Ruhul and his accomplices beat her up with bamboo sticks and at one stage, they started hacking her with sharp weapons. When locals responded to her cry for help, the attackers fled the scene. Dr Zakir Hossain, resident medical officer of Kulaura Upazila Health Complex, said the injured girl was initially admitted to the health complex and later transferred to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital. Afraid of possible repercussions, the girl and her family have been staying at undisclosed locations after she was released from the hospital. Family members of the girl said they could not return home out of security concern as no security was provided for them despite repeated threats made by the attackers, roaming free in the area. Asked about the alleged threats made by the accused, the police station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Yardous Hasan said Ruhul secured bail after he surrendered before a court on July 8. However, following the report of threats, they were conducting raids to arrest all the accused, he also said.

Three youths jailed for life in rape case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A Barguna court on Monday sentenced three youths to life imprisonment in connection with a case for raping a garment worker in 2007. The lifers are Hasib, 25, son of Anser Ali, Idris Ali, 24, son of Hayat Ali, and Hayder Ali, 25, son of Sona Mia. They all hail from Manikkhali village in Pathorghata upazila. Barguna Women and Children Repression Tribunal Judge Mohammad Hafizur Rahman also fined one of the convicts Hasib Tk 20,000, in default, he is to suffer one month more in jail, Advocate Mostafizur Rahman Babul said. According to the prosecution, Hasib developed a relationship with the neighbouring 17-year-old girl, then a garment worker in Chattogram, over cell phone. On July 10 in 2007, Idris and Hayder called the girl out of her home saying that they would arrange her marriage with Hasib and took her to an isolated place. Later, Hasib with the help of his two cohorts raped the girl there. On July 15, five days after the incident, the victim filed a case with Barguna Women and Children Repression Tribunal accusing the three.



Over six hundred cucumber plants belonging to a farmer were damaged with the use of sharp tools in Bagerhat's Kormoni village under Chitalmari upazila on Saturday night. The farmer filed a written complaint with local police station against four villagers and claimed to have incurred a damage of Tk 2 lakh. Chitalmari police said they launched an investigation.

PHOTO: PARTHA CHAKRABORTY

Indian among 2 Tablig men get corrosive burns

They had taken bottled water allegedly mixed with acid

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Two members of Tablig Jamat, including an Indian national, sustained burn injuries after taking bottled 'acidic' water in Khetlal upazila of Joypurhat on Monday night. They are Md Shahabuddin, son of late Rahmatullah of India's Rajasthan, and Emdad Haque, son of Jalal Uddin of Mymensingh. Twelve Tablig men sat for a discussion at Khetlal Upazila Zame Mosque on Monday evening, said local police. A dinner was arranged for them and bottled water was served there. Immediately after taking the bottled water, Shahabuddin and Emdad sustained burn injuries and they were rushed to Khetlal Upazila Health Complex. Seeing their condition, other participants of the programme refrained from taking the water. "It appears that the two men took acidic water. Shahabuddin sustained corrosive

burn injuries in the oesophagus and windpipe while Emdad's tongue was badly damaged," said Dr Omar Faruk, medical officer of Khetlal Upazila Health Complex. It seemed to the attending doctor that the acid generally used in battery was mixed with the bottled water, he said. As their condition was worsening, they were referred to Joypurhat Modern Hospital and later shifted to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogura. Shahabuddin was on the way of Dhaka yesterday afternoon. Joypurhat Deputy Commissioner Zakir Hossain and Superintendent of Police Mohammad Salam Kabir visited the spot yesterday and assured taking action if anybody is found guilty. "A case will be filed regarding the incident if we receive a complaint from the Tablig men," said Shahriar Khan, OC of Khetlal Police Station.

Fisherman found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police recovered the body of a fisherman hanging from a tree in west Kuakata area under Kalapara upazila of the district yesterday morning. The victim, Al-Amin, 28, son of Abdur Razzak of Mirzaganj upazila of the district. Officer in Charge (OC) of Mohipur Police Station Mohammad Sohel Ahmed said Al-Amin had been living at his in-laws' house in Kuakata area since the marriage a few years ago. Being informed by the villagers, police recovered the body, hanging from a palm tree, and sent it to Patuakhali General Hospital for autopsy, the OC added.