

# Gayal, a great prospect in livestock

SHYKH SERAJ

Near the hills, I went to a cattle farm a few days back. The environment was peaceful and quite. And the weather was amazing as well. No nearby houses around the farm. It is located completely in a natural environment. However, the animal is a new one, not like the other livestock animals we generally see at farms. It's really brawny and the cattle species has lots of meat. From in front of its face, it may look like a regular bull from Char land. It is also regarded as one of the largest species of oxen, named Gayal. It is now being reared at the farm of Ershad Mahmud, located at Shukhbilash village under Padua union in Chattogram's Rangunia upazila.

Cattle farmers of Chattogram, Rangamati and Bandarban have achieved remarkable success in breeding Gayal, which is an endangered feral animal species of Bangladesh. Its scientific name is *Bos frontalis* and is also known as 'mythun' or 'mithan' to the inhabitants of the forests along the hill in India. Since it's mostly seen in the Chattogram's hilly forest areas, it's also being called Chattogram Bison.

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.



Ershad Mahmud at his Gayal farm in Chattogram's Rangunia upazila.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

"It is more profitable than farming cattle," says Ershad. He has three different species of Gayal at his farm. Ershad says, there are double benefits in farming Gayal. This will not only save the endangered animal, livestock farmers can make more profits from it compared to cattle farming.

Although its size and face looks a bit wild, but there is no wild activity from Gayal that I have noticed. Back in 2007, Gayal came out of forests and people embraced the animal. It was earlier prohibited to farm but there is no restriction now. However, many farmers back then didn't understand the real prospect of the animal. But, Ershad did understand its importance and started farming it with a high commercial hope.

"When I first planned to start rearing it, many people laughed at me, but I said

this would be the best alternative for meat," says Ershad.

Originated in the country's hill forests, especially the hill districts, Gayal is a graminivorous animal. Ershad didn't restrict the Gayals in his farm. They roam around the hills freely and come back to his farm. He wants to see that Gayals can eat and recover from their diseases from the nature. However, the ones that only roam around in the forest can't become as big as Ershad has in his farms. "They need extra care," says Ershad.

The size and shape of the Gayal in Ershad's farm is close to cattle and buffalo.

In 2007, Ershad started his farm with 40 Gayals. "Food is easy to get, it's very comfortable to rear them in the hill areas and they hardly come up with any diseases," says Ershad.

They may weigh up to 400 to 800 kilograms. They are either black or white, while some are brown in colour. Gayal has the black-brownish colour and from under the knee to the hoof they have white hairs. It looks like they're wearing white socks. They have two big horns. The hump of Gayal is right in the middle of their shoulder and back. A strong bull leads the team and a female Gayal stays pregnant for 10 to 11 months. Gayals can live up to 15 to 16 years.

"I have already done the cross-breeding with the local cattle and the result is pretty good," says Ershad.

"It's a fun to stay with them and I really enjoy my time in the farm," Ershad added.

"We're supporting Ershad's Gayal farm in many ways," Veterinary Surgeon Harun-ur-Rashid said.

It's to be noted that Ershad's Gayal farm is probably the only notable story of success. There are some indigenous people who are also rearing it in the hill forests but they do it in their own way.

I came to know that a regional livestock station was established in Naikhangchhari back in 1990, but no remarkable work was done afterwards. A Tk 120 crore (14.25 million USD) project for Gayal rearing, breeding and research is under process, said Dr Nathuram Sarkar, director general of Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute (BLRI).

Ershad collected three Gayals from an indigenous family of Rangamati. It was just a hobby back then and now he understands the rising demand of it. He sold Gayal during the Eid-ul-Azha, each one varying from Tk 2 lakh (2372 USD) to Tk 3.5 lakh (4152 USD).

Seeing Ershad's success, some other farmers have started breeding and farming Gayals in Bandarban, Rangamati and Chattogram. Its meat is more popular in Chattogram region as it is tastier than cattle meat and has less fat.

A joint research findings on Gayals of Bangladesh stated that reproductive efficiency was high and calving interval was 402 days. They exhibited high disease resistance. The high growth rate and reproductive efficiency of Gayals in the home tract indicates that this species can be utilized economically if a proper breeding plan and a sound extension service can be adopted.

Gayal is now one of the endangered animal genetic resources in Bangladesh and measures should be taken to conserve this species by utilizing it as an economic resource. Across the country the government is working a lot to meet the demand of animal protein. American Brahman breeding has started extensively. As the illegal import has stopped, many farmers have joined in cattle farming to give boost to the livestock market. People like Ershad has been rearing it for 12 years now and show us hope by gaining great commercial success. He firmly believes Gayal would contribute immensely in animal protein. In this regard, the government has to encourage Gayal farming and provide financial support to such farmers so that it becomes an emerging sector to meet the demand for meat in the country. Government's support for the sector to ensure its expansion is very significant, I believe like Ershad Mahmud.



A farmer plucks organic cucumber at his field of Chasra village in Narail Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: PARTHA CHAKRABORTTY

## Organic cucumber farming benefits Narail farmers

PARTHA CHAKRABORTTY, Bagerhat

A good number of farmers in Narail are benefiting from the organic cultivation of cucumber.

Over 200 hectares of land, including 140 hectares in Sadar upazila, 56 hectares in Kalia and 15 hectares in Lohagara upazila have been brought under the organic farming of cucumber, said Chinmoy Roy, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension in Narail.

Vermicompost, an organic fertilizer made mainly of cow dung and earthworm, is used by farmers mostly in Baragati, Shoilpur, Kalora, Sheikh-hati, Bisli in Sadar upazila, Baro-Kalia, Gobindopur, Baoisona, Khasial of Kalia, and Naldi, Mithapukur, Narandiya, Itna of Lohagara, he said.

"And to kill insects, the farmers use sex pheromone traps. Male insects are attracted by the artificial scent similar to that of the other sex, drop to containers with detergent mixed water and die," the official added.

"Use of vermicompost and sex pheromone traps has lowered our

production cost for cucumber. It takes only 50 thousand taka to prepare an acre of land for cucumber and the harvest starts within 45 days of planting. The produce is sold for up to Tk 3 lakh," said Ali Haider Litu, a farmer of Chasra village.

Due to good yield of the crop, some temporary warehouses have been made in the village, he said.

Yusuf Ali, another farmer of the village, said he planted cucumber on his 24 decimals of land 45 days before the Eid-ul-Azha and started selling the vegetable for 50 to 60 taka during the festival.

"Although the price has come down to around 40 taka per kg, I have got about one lakh taka by selling the item. The cultivation cost stood at only 20 thousand taka as I have not used any chemical fertilizer or pesticide on my cucumber beds," he said.

Nurul Haq, a wholesaler from Jashore, said he buys organic cucumber from Narail for Tk 1200 to Tk 1300 per maund (40 kg) and sell it for Tk 1700 to Tk 1800 in different and markets.

## Third grader dies 'by suicide'!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Body of an eight-year-old girl, student of third grade, was found hanging in her house in Panchagarh town on Tuesday night.

Arifa Akhter was third among five daughters of Aminul Islam, a construction worker in Purbo Jalasipara area of the town. She was a student of Jalasi Government Primary School.

Her family members claimed that their mother, Selina Akhter, came home that night after visiting her elder daughter at Panchagarh Sadar Hospital. After no one opened the door despite repeated knocking, she looked through the window and saw Arifa hanging from the ceiling.

Locals helped break the door open and send her to the hospital where she was pronounced dead, they also said.

Panchagarh Police Station Officer-in-Charge Abu Akkas said to ascertain the cause of death, they would wait for the report of autopsy that was conducted yesterday.

## Two newsmen hurt in attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A gang allegedly led by a local Jubo League activist beat two journalists at Kalaiya Bazar in Baufal upazila on Tuesday night.

The victims are Nurul Islam Siddiki aka Masum, Baufal upazila correspondent of the daily Inqilab, and Md Mizanur Rahman, Baufal correspondent of the Prothom Alo.

Masum is also sports and cultural affairs secretary of Baufal Press Club and Mizan an executive member.

"Masum and I were walking beside the pond at Kalaiya Bazar around 10:30pm when a four-member gang led by a Jubo League activist started beating Masum with iron pipe and stick. They also hit me when I tried to save Masum," Mizan said.

Hearing their screams, locals rushed to the spot and attackers fled.

Masum was admitted to Baufal Upazila Health Complex while Mizan took primary treatment.

Protesting the attack, Baufal Press Club held an urgent meeting around 11:00am yesterday with Md Delwar Hossain, vice president of the press club, in the chair.

"We took a decision to hold a human chain programme in front of Baufal Press Club on Friday if police fails to take necessary steps," said Kamruzzaman Bachchu, secretary of the press club.

ASM Feroz, lawmaker from Patuakhali-2 (Baufal), said, "In the law and order meeting held at upazila auditorium, I asked the upazila nirbahi officer and the officer in charge of the local police station to take lawful step after proper investigation into the incident."

Khondakar Mostafizur Rahman, OC of Baufal Police Station, said they are taking legal steps in this regard.

No case was filed as of filing the report around 5:00pm yesterday, he added.

## 2 to die, 4 get life term

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A Kushtia court yesterday handed down death sentences to two people and life term imprisonment to three others for killing a youth in 2012.

Those given death sentence are Nazmul Hossain, 27, of Mirpur upazila, and Mohammad Rony, 24, of Bheramara upazila in Kushtia.

The lifers are Mohammad Rabbi, 23, and Rafiqul Islam, 30, of Chourhas area in the town, and Suja Uddin, 25, of Kumargara area.

According to the prosecution, the convicts called Sohag Hossain, 24, son of Abbas Uddin of Kumargara in Kushtia town, out of his home on October 9 in 2012 and took him to Hardinge Bridge area in Bheramara, about 25 kilometres from Kushtia town, and killed him there before snatching his costly mobile phone.

Three days after the murder, Sohag's body was recovered from the Padma river.



Hundreds of residents in Uttar Ganjpara near Khagrachhari town use this makeshift footbridge on the Chengri river for communications with the town. They raise funds for the bridge when water in the river recedes. The bridge is replaced with boats when water rises in the river. They hope the authorities would take notice of their sufferings and make a permanent footbridge on the river. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SAIKAT DEWA