

Shahjahan, an avid tree lover

ZAHANGIR SHAH, Manikganj

"Only if my village looked as green as Malaysia!"—this is what ASM Khalequzzaman Saju, an avid lover of trees, had in his mind when he returned to his home at Kowri village in Manikganj in 1979.

Since then, he has planted about 60,000 trees and today stands as an idol to many in his village in Harirampur upazila.

Saju, known as Shahjahan Biswas to the villagers, went to Malaysia in 1977 right after passing SSC. There he worked at a construction site for a year and a half.

"The rows of trees there were so eye-soothing," said the 57-year-old while recalling his Malaysia days to this correspondent.

"I was enchanted to see how they had planted the trees in an organised manner. I thought that if we could adopt that in Bangladesh, then not only our forest crisis will be solved but also many people will gain solvency," said the nature lover.

With this vision, Shahjahan initially opened a nursery at his home on 27 bighas of land and planted mahogany, palm, neem and coconut trees.

Gradually, he went on to planting trees in educational institutions, mosques, graveyard, and by the roads of the village.

Monirul Islam, a youth of the village, is a follower of Shahjahan. He sold seven mahogany trees at Tk 1,45,000 four years ago. After that, he planted 250 more saplings on his homestead three years ago.

"Ten years down the lane, I will get at least Tk 60,00,000 by selling these trees. Shahjahan Biswas visits my place and gives me necessary advice regularly. He even helps me nurture the trees," Monirul told this paper.

Pavel Mollah, a rickshaw-puller, made fortunes by selling trees and owes his success



**CHANGE
MAKER**

Tree lover Shahjahan Biswas of Kowri village in Manikganj's Ghior upazila planted these trees on both sides of his village road. Right, Shahjahan stands at his house yard.

PHOTO: STAR

to Shahjahan.

"My father was a farmer. He had bought three mahogany saplings from Shahjahan 20 years ago. He died seven years ago leaving behind my mother, me and my younger sister. I then sold the trees and with the money, built a tin-shed house, bought a rickshaw and arranged my sister's wedding," said Pavel.

Anwar Hossain Aynal, a farmer, is also

inspired by Shahjahan. He has planted 200 mahogany trees till date.

Gala Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Shafiq Biswas said, "The villagers are proud of Shahjahan. We will engage him in projects that are in the pipeline, for example, construction of new roads. He will advise us on how to make the spots greener."

"Hundreds of people from different areas

come to visit this village now, thanks to Shahjahan's selfless act," he added.

Acting principal of Kowri MA Rauf Degree College Manaranjan Karmaker said, "People in this village go to Shahjahan for advice. For example, if someone wants to create a partition, Shahjahan will help them do it by planting trees in rows instead of building a wall."

Shahjahan, who is also a freedom fighter, never got married.

Mohammad Zahirul Hoque of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Harirampur said, "Shahjahan is making a huge contribution to the government's programme of expanding forests. He has helped not only himself but also his community. We need people like him in every district."



The iron bridge on a canal has been lying collapsed for a week, causing immense sufferings to people of six villages in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Villagers suffer as bridge lies collapsed for a week

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Local people of six villages in Kalapara upazila of the district have been facing untold sufferings since an iron bridge on a canal near Joybangla bazar in the upazila collapsed a week ago.

The bridge collapsed due to lack of proper maintenance, said villagers.

The villages are Mithaganj, Pashchim Mithaganj, Aliganj, Aramganj, Joybangla and Baliatoli.

Especially students of seven primary schools and madrasas are the worst sufferers.

The institutions -- Mithaganj Government Primary School, Pashchim Mithaganj Ashrafal Uloom Quran Qawmi Madrasa, Aliganj-Aramganj Darul Islam Dakhil Madrasa, Aliganj

Government Primary School, Aramganj Government Primary School, Aramganj Mohila Hafizia Madrasa and Ahmedia Hafizia Madrasa -- lie on both sides of the bridge.

The students cross the canal on a dinghy amid risk of accident every day, said locals.

In 1987-88 fiscal year, Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) built the iron bridge on Sapuria canal to ease communication of the villagers with the upazila headquarters.

On October 13, the bridge collapsed suddenly and since then communication with the upazila remained suspended.

Md Milon, a student of Aliganj-Aramganj Darul Islam Dakhil Madrasa, said they have been suffering a lot since the bridge collapsed. They have to cross the canal on a dinghy amid

accident risk.

They have to pay Tk 10 for per trip during crossing the canal on the country boat, said Milon.

Md Saidul Islam, a trader of Joybangla bazar, said they have to face immense problem to bring goods from the upazila headquarters after the bridge collapsed.

They urged the authorities concerned to build a new bridge there immediately considering the sufferings of the villagers, especially the students, said the trader.

Contacted, upazila LGED engineer Md Abdul Mannan said they have already sent a proposal to the higher authorities to build a 45-foot-long Bailey bridge on the canal but to no respond yet.

Fine rice blast disease worries northern farmers

They cultivated fine variety this harvest season after suffering losses from coarse variety last season

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Many of the farmers who incurred losses last harvest season due to low prices of coarse rice, had opted for growing fine variety of rice this season. But cases of rice blast disease in the fine variety in many areas of Dinajpur and other northern districts are leaving them worried about further losses.

With only a few weeks left for harvesting the paddy, the fine variety of rice plants, especially BR-34 (Jira Katari), on hectares of land have been detected with rice blast, one of the most severe diseases of rice caused by fungus.

Till date, infection of rice blast has been detected in Chirirbandar, Phulbari and Biral upazilas of Dinajpur and in Raninagar upazila of Naogaon.

Blast is considered a major disease of rice because of its wide distribution and extent of destruction under favourable conditions, according to International Rice Research Institute.

Severe infection of the disease may result in reduction of grain yield, said experts at Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Many farmers in the affected areas said they were not getting expected cure for the disease despite applying pesticide doses as prescribed by the DAE.

With targeted harvest of 7 lakh tonnes of rice in Dinajpur this year, BR-34 was cultivated on 1.06 lakh hectares out of total 2.60 lakh hectares of land that were brought under Aman cultivation, according to DAE.

DAE officials said although they discouraged farmers in cultivating the BR-34 variety for its susceptibility

to infectious diseases, many did not pay heed with the excuse that they suffered losses last harvest season for cultivating coarse varieties, including BR-28 and BR-29.

Rice farmer Mamtaz Ali from Daroil village of Biral upazila in Dinajpur said last week he detected blast infection in around 20 percent of the BR-34 that he cultivated on four acres of land.

"I suffered losses last season when I cultivated coarse variety (Boro) of rice. And that's why I chose to cultivate fine rice variety this season."

Another farmer, Sushil Chandra Roy from the same village, said he also planted Jira Katari on four acres of land for better price. "But the blast disease, that infected 30 percent of the crop, has diminished my hopes."

While speaking with this correspondent, Touhidul Iqbal, DAE deputy director in Dinajpur, however said the cases of blast disease will not affect the total targeted harvest this season in the district as rice fields in only a small area have been infected and 25 percent of paddy has already been harvested.

He also said there is no possibility of further infection.

In Raninagar upazila of Naogaon, farmer Idris Ali from Khatshwar village said blast disease has infected almost half of his fine rice on three acres of land. "I applied pesticide as prescribed by DAE, but no result."

Shahidul Islam, DAE official in the upazila, said the blast disease will not affect rice production in the upazila because only a small area, 18,000 hectares, has been affected by it.



Santal community people bring out a procession in Satmatha area of Rangpur on Wednesday, urging the local administration to recover their land from illegal occupiers.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

GRAFT CASE

Hospital director among 2 land in jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A court here on Wednesday sent the field director of Bogura Christian Mission Hospital and the former accountant of the hospital to jail after rejecting their bail prayers in a graft case.

The accused are Riva Uttam Dewan, field director of the hospital, and its former accountant Protap Khandakar Dulal.

Bogura Chief Judicial Magistrate Md Rabiul Awal passed the order when the duo surrendered before his court, said Public Prosecutor (PP) Abdul Motin.

On July 3 in 2018, John Augustine Biswas, secretary of managing committee of the hospital, filed the case with the Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court in Bogura, said the PP.

According to the case statement, the two embezzled Tk 64,21,800 from the hospital's fund during 2015 to 2016.

The hospital is a non-governmental organisation funded by the Church of God General Conference of the United States of America, said John Augustine.



Half ripe rice plants infected by blast disease in Awliapukur village of Dinajpur's Chirirbandar upazila. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR