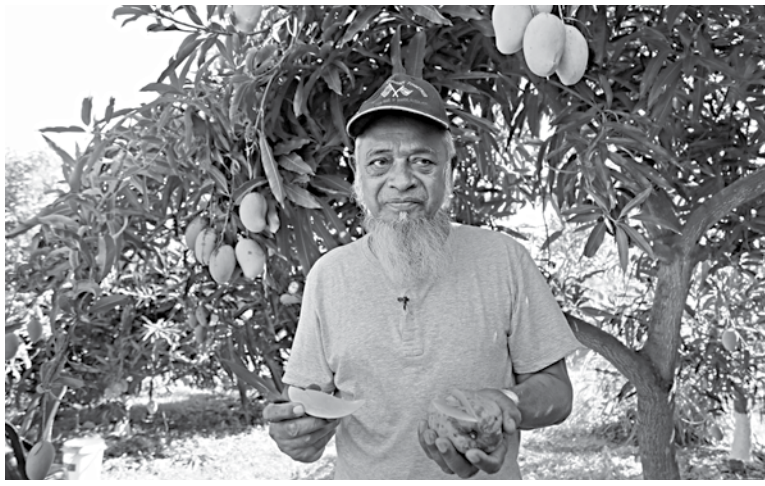


A patriot's devotion to his country and farming

SHYKH SERAJ

Happy New Year to all my readers. Today, I would like to tell you the story of a great man who is not only a dreamer but more than that. He is growing Baromashi (year-long) mango and doing it pretty successfully for long. A few days back, I went to Sonagazi upazila in Feni. Retired Major Sulaiman is the entrepreneur I am talking about. He has been doing his mango orchard for the past 12 years. He is cultivating BARI-11 variety of Baromashi mango and has 70 trees in his orchard. He says it is quite possible to earn approximately Tk 26 lakh (USD 30,682) a year from his Baromashi mango orchard. It is my privilege to share the story of a freedom fighter's agricultural



Major (Retd) Sulaiman at his Baromashi (year-long) mango orchard in Feni's Sonagazi upazila.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

freedom fighter. In time's course, Mr Sulaiman turned into a veteran farmer. He acquired in-depth knowledge in farming, bio-diversity and latest agricultural technologies. He applied this knowledge at his farm and shared the knowledge among others as well. He has a fish farm on a 33 acres of land and does other crops on the remaining land. Mr Sulaiman constructively thinks about farming and spends a lot of time doing it. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his family has been staying with him at his farm.

"We are very happy. We all are staying together. My daughter, my granddaughter, everyone is here," Sulaiman said.

There are many fruit trees along the bank of the ponds and about 80 varieties of mangoes are produced here. Last season, he yielded 22 tonnes of mangoes. Coconut trees have been planted beside the mango trees. It's like a nature park.

"What is the estimated size of your farm and what do you produce?" I asked Sulaiman.

"Seventy acres. There are 22 ponds covering a total of 33 acres land. I am cultivating different crops alongside the ponds. I was amazed to see the BARI-11 variety Baromashi mango orchard. There were so many of those. Everything is done so neat and so methodically and that is why Sulaiman is getting so many mangoes. His orchard is undoubtedly very organized.

"I yielded 7,000 kilograms of

mangoes from these 70 Baromashi mango trees and roughly earning approximately Tk 40,000 (USD 471.72) from a single tree," Sulaiman proudly said.

He collected the Lubna variety from one of his friends from Malaysia and his mission of mango farming started. He gave this variety to Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute who later developed the same breed as BARI-11.

"I get mangoes round the year and the flowers come to the trees quite frequently," Sulaiman gladly added.

I tasted the mango and it was so sweet and juicy. The entrepreneur was also talking about its commercial aspect. Selling these sweet mangoes at a low price all the year round is giving him both joy and money. While talking, I noticed a mango just brought down from a tree weighing 551 grams.

Dear readers, can you imagine a year-long mango would weigh that much? Two mangoes weigh almost one kilogram. The wholesale rate from the orchard is Tk 400 (USD 4.72) per kg. So you can imagine he's getting more than Tk 800 (USD 9.44) from only two mangoes. Mr Sulaiman, however, doesn't sell mangoes to the wholesalers. He only sells to general consumers, who learned or heard about his farm and orchard. He believes the traders sell their items at higher rate to the consumers and he feels that it is totally unjust.

Major (Retd) Sulaiman informed

me with utter delight that it's very much possible to earn Tk 26 lakh (USD 30,682) from his orchard in a year. He says he can get 100kg of mangoes from each tree. If he sells per kg at an average price of Tk 400 (USD 4.72), each tree can give him Tk 40,000 (USD 472) and from 70 trees, he can earn Tk 28 lakh (USD 33,042). If Tk 2 lakh (USD 2360) is deducted as production cost, getting a profit of Tk 26 lakh is very much possible, he added.

Mr Sulaiman also praises the BARI-11 variety and requests the attention of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) as many fraud nursery owners are selling other mango plants in the name of BARI-11. He claims that if the entrepreneurs follow proper planning in producing BARI-11 mangoes, then it's very much possible to earn foreign currency after fulfilling local demands.

"Farming is the lifeline of our country and our economy. It is the same for other countries as everyone needs to consume food. We spend a lot of currency to import mangoes. There's no need for it. We can do it on our lands. We must encourage local entrepreneurs who would take up the mission to produce mangoes to meet the local demands and export and the government has to be supportive in this regard," Sulaiman said.

Dear readers, Bangladesh is going to celebrate its 50th anniversary of independence on March 26 this year. Farming success is a key that determines the economic development of a country. I am sure many others will be inspired to become entrepreneurs like Sulaiman and will start their orchards. Dedication is a must in farming and what a great example this man is. He has proper knowledge on seeds and technologies. I do not doubt that Bangladesh as a country will grow even more with the great deeds of such passionate and patriotic souls. Respect and salute to the martyrs who sacrificed their precious lives to free our country during our Liberation War in 1971 and hats off to the freedom fighters like Major (Retd) Sulaiman who fought not only to liberate us but continues to contribute to the farming sector to make us stronger, better and proud.

USE OF LOUDSPEAKERS

Kuakata beach: Sound pollution unbearable

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Sound pollution (also termed as noise pollution) in Patuakali's Kuakata sea beach has turned acute as loudspeakers used by owners of engine-driven boats are affecting the hearing power of tourists.

The owners mainly invite the tourists over loudspeakers to travel in their boats to visit different tourist spots, said locals.

During a recent visit to Kuakata beach, it was seen that passengers were being called using loudspeakers tied to bamboos on the west side of Zero Point on the beach.

The staffers of at least eight boats are loudly inviting passengers to travel in their vehicles through loudspeakers.

The tourists are annoyed with the situation.

Tourist boats from Kuakata beach are visiting some of the most spectacular tourist spots including Fatra forest of Taltoli upazila of Barguna, Haringhata forest of Patharghata upazila, Laldiar char and Katka of Sundarbans in Bagerhat.

Owners of eight tourist boats on the beach are using loudspeakers to invite tourists to visit the spots. Among them, Sunrise Eco Tourism, Kuakata Tourism, Swadhin Tourism, Sea Star Tourism, Khalifa Tourism, Sea Tourism, Hossain Tourism are notable.

Ekramin Shikder, a tourist from Narsingdi, said because of the noise

intensity in the beach, the tourists are exposed to a number of health risks -- from deafness to heart attack. They come to see the natural beauty of the tourist spot but they are really annoyed due to this sound pollution.

It should be stopped.

Mohaiminul Islam, a tourist from Kushtia, said tourists mainly come here

The staffers of at least eight boats are loudly inviting passengers to travel in their vehicles through loudspeakers.

to see some of the scenic spots, including the beautiful view of sunrise and sunset. This kind of sound pollution is really uncomfortable for everyone.

Kalapara Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Abu Hasnat Mohammad Shahidul Haque, also the member secretary of Kuakata Beach Management Committee, said he was not aware of the matter.

Necessary steps will be taken to stop noise pollution, said the UNO.



Loudspeakers placed by owners of engine-driven boats affect the hearing power of tourists in Kuakata sea beach of Patuakhali.

PHOTO: STAR

3 BR officials suspended over graft

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of the east zone and Zahid Kawsar, assistant controller of stores of the west zone.

All three officers worked under the BR's west zone when the irregularities took place.

Their suspension order was signed by Railways Ministry's Secretary Salim Reza on December 29 last year, but the orders were released yesterday, sources at the railway's ministry said.

Apart from suspension, they would face both criminal charges and departmental action, as per the directives of the Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujon, he said.

The ministry would write to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) for legal action against the three, they said. Besides, it would issue show cause notice to ask why further departmental action would not be taken against them, they added.

The railways ministry on September 20 last year formed a three-member probe committee, led by its Additional Secretary Bhuban Chandra Biswas, after a Bangla daily published a report over the matter.

According to the report, some officials of the BR's west zone bought

some materials on inflated prices. For example, they bought each key, plastic bucket, dustbin, curtain at the cost of Tk 5,550, Tk 1,890, Tk 18,000, and Tk 8,995 respectively.

Yet, those products could be bought at the cost of Tk 150, Tk 300, Tk 1,200 and Tk 780 respectively, according to the report.

Through such purchases, the official misappropriated Tk 16.40 crore in the 2018-19 fiscal year, the daily reported citing a report of Transport Audit Directorate.

The probe committee submitted its report last month holding 4 persons, including these three officials, directly responsible for the irregularities.

Another accused is Al Amin Talukder, upper division assistant of west zone. As he is a lower-level staffer, the ministry yesterday asked the director general of BR to suspend and take further action against him, sources said.

Speaking to The Daily Star recently, a member of the probe committee said they have recommended for "severe punishment" for Shahnewaz, the chief commercial manager, Belal, the controller of stores, Kawsar, the assistant controller of stores, and Al

Amin.

"Severe punishment" includes termination from the job and demotion from their posts, he said.

They also recommended for departmental action against 13 more officials of the BR's West Zone as they were also liable for the irregularities to some extent, he said.

Railways Ministry sources said they would take departmental action against the 13 officials after "scrutinising their offences" and the punishment may include demotions and warnings. They, however, would not face criminal charges, they said.

A BR official said Yusuf Ali Mridha, the then general manager of BR's east zone, was suspended after he was caught with the then railways minister's assistant in a car near the BGR headquarters with a huge amount of cash, allegedly collected from job seekers as bribe, in April, 2012.

Two other officials were also suspended following the much-talked about incident, he said wishing not be named.

"As far as I can remember, no BR official was suspended over corruption allegations after the 2012 incident," he added.

First industrial

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rural industrialisation by making available improved design and techniques, essential raw materials, credit, marketing and training facilities to the artisans.

ERADICATE SMUGGLING:

BANGABANDHU

Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today calls upon BDR personnel to completely eradicate the menace of smuggling along the borders. The prime minister, who inspected the attestation parade of the first batch of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) recruits at Peelkhana, asks them to be disciplined and honest and to love their fellow citizens.

Bangabandhu recalls the role of BDR (the then EPR) in the liberation struggle and says he is very glad at the opportunity to come to them. At his call the jawans of the rifles boldly faced the enemy empty-handed and sacrificed their lives by the hundreds, says Bangabandhu. He adds that the BDR men at Chittagong had communicated to all places his call to resist the enemy which made it possible to resist the Pakistan army simultaneously everywhere.

Source: January 9, 1973 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Bangladesh Observer and Ittefaq.

Robot dog gains

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millions of times," University of Edinburgh roboticist Zhibin Li, corresponding author on a paper in Science Robotics, told Wired.

"So in the simulated environment, I can create all possible scenarios. I can create different environments or different configurations. For example, the robot can start in a different pose, such as lying down on the ground, standing, falling over, and so on."

Eight simulated "experts" were trained in order to develop the robot's various skills, such as walking, maintaining balance, running, and more. When the robot faced a difficult task, such as falling down over uneven surfaces, each of the algorithmic experts could spark into life and tell the machine what to do in order to get back up.

As such, when a human comes over to the dog and pushes it to the floor, the robot knows how to return to its feet.

The end-goal of this research is to teach robots to learn in the same way that human babies do; rather than having to code specific actions and resistances for climbing stairs, for example, the robot could simply be "told" that moving their limbs is enough, and then artificial intelligence could - eventually - achieve the correct movement.

Mirza stirs up debate once again

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"You [journalists] will have to see the wealth statement of Sheikh Hasina before looking into mine. Does Sheikh Hasina have any businesses? She does politics and everything else with the help of people. Maybe, her family members help her.

"Don't people help Sheikh Hasina do politics? Don't people help Obaidul Quader, Khaleda Zia, Mirza Fakhruul Islam Alamgir in a similar way?" he asked.

Mirza is the mayor of Basurhat municipality in Noakhali. He is contesting the Basurhat municipality polls, slated for January 16, for the mayoral post on the AL ticket.

At the rally in Charhazari area under the municipality yesterday, he slammed some journalists alleging that they were conspiring against him.

"My prime target is to ensure a free and fair election on January 16. This is a part of my movement. Despite all the conspiracies against me, I will not step back," he said.

He further alleged that an Awami League leader in Noakhali embezzled thousands of crore of Taka through tender manipulation and urged one of the incumbent election commissioners to monitor the upcoming election to make it free and fair.

He also sought blessings for ailing Barrister Moudud Ahmed, a BNP standing committee member from Noakhali, who has been in a hospital in the capital since December 30.

Mirza, at least on two occasions, has claimed that if elections were held in a free and fair manner, all AL MPs in greater Noakhali, except for the ones in three or four constituencies, "would not have found ways to escape".

While unveiling his election manifesto on December 31 last year, he brought

allegations against some local lawmakers and AL leaders of corruption, tender manipulation and recruitment scams at the local level.

He claimed that the district AL committee was formed, excluding the party's devoted and tested leaders.

"With regret, I want to say some sycophants often claim that the BNP's bastions in Noakhali and Laxmipur have been destroyed because of certain leaders," he had said recently.

"Have the BNP's bastions really been destroyed? If elections were held in a fair manner, our MPs, except for the ones in three or four constituencies in greater Noakhali, would not have found ways to escape. That's the truth."

Mirza's remarks have put the AL top brass in an awkward position. Cashing in on the situation, BNP leaders said Mirza's remarks proved that the government has been deceiving people, using the Election Commission.

Asked about his brother's remarks, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said no one except Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is essential for the party.

"There is no scope for sparing anyone under special consideration. The party chief can make any decision over violation of party discipline," he told journalists at a programme in the capital on Wednesday without mentioning his brother's name.

Meanwhile, in reply to a question, Information Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday said Mirza's remarks proved that democracy prevails in the country.

"Here anybody can express his or her views in a democratic environment. Many leaders expressed their views this way in the past... Mirza is getting the media coverage as he is the brother of Obaidul Quader," he told journalists at the secretariat.

Rollout likely this year

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to open the metro rail to the public by December unless the pandemic took a turn for the worse.

On Sunday, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader told reporters that the project is likely to be complete by June next year.

When Siddique was asked whether they were planning to open the entire route at once or partially open it in the beginning, he said they were aiming to open the entire route.

"However, it will be possible to open the Uttara-Agargaon section, because we have a crossover [apparatus] needed to change the direction in Agargaon," he said.

To another question, he said his team was supposed to visit Japan

this month to inspect the five pairs of trains manufactured there, but the plan had to be postponed because of travel restrictions imposed by Japan until January 31.

In case Japan extends the restrictions, the company might consider hiring a third party to do the inspection.

Initially, the implementation period of the project was 2012-2024. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina later directed that the lines from Uttara to Agargaon be made operational by 2019, and from Agargaon to Motijheel by 2020.

Failing to achieve the target, the authorities in May 2019 announced that "early commissioning" of the project would be made on December 16, 2021, when the country would celebrate the golden jubilee of its

independence.

NEW YEAR MESSAGE

Stating that 2020 was an unusual year for the global health and economy, ITO Naoki said despite the pandemic, bilateral relations between Japan and Bangladesh grew stronger. Japan provided Bangladesh with support to fight the pandemic.

The two countries also signed a loan package worth over \$3.2 billion in August last year, while the mega projects are making significant progress without considerable delay.

Japan is proud to make contributions to the future development of Bangladesh and expects that 2021 will bring new opportunities of partnership beyond the difficulties caused by the pandemic, Naoki said.

on stream last month, but people could not breathe a sigh of relief and slacken their vigilance against the disease.

"We're all a year into this. It's a really, really long battle," he said. "We've got another three or six months of hard, hard road ahead of us. But we can do it.

'Hard road ahead' to beat Covid

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admissions to intensive care units", she said.

Social mixing of households over the Christmas and New Year period will result in a further rise in case numbers in January, she told a live event on WHO social media channels.

"We are starting to see it now; we will see it in the coming weeks. In many countries, we will see the situation will get worse before it gets better," she said.

Michael Ryan, the WHO's emergencies director, said there had been a wave of expectation when vaccines began to trickle