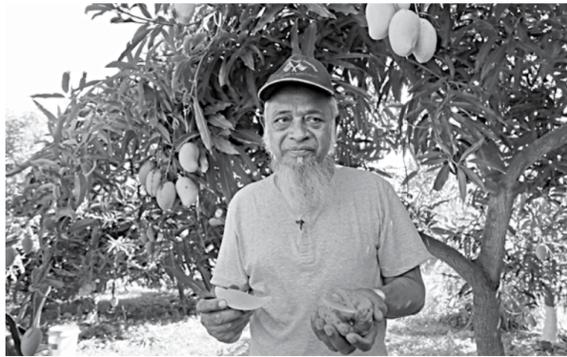


A patriot's devotion to his country and farming

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 Fatar 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

endeavour as the country is going to celebrate its 50th anniversary of independence this year.

Major (Retd) Sulaiman's journey began with fish and papaya farming in 640 decimals of land back in 1993. His father was a farmer. He took part in the Liberation War and later joined the army. After retirement, he thought about going back to his ancestral profession. He says it's his honour to serve his country as an agricultural entrepreneur after serving as a

Myanmar cops arrest nearly 100

FROM PAGE 12

Myanmar, where they are denied freedom of movement and citizenship, and lack access to work, healthcare and schools.

With the remaining languishing in camps that rights groups have described as "apartheid-like", many choose to embark on treacherous routes with human smugglers to reach Malaysia and Indonesia.

The latest smuggling operation was uncovered by Yangon police Wednesday, who raided two houses in Shwepyitha township and discovered 99 Rohingya.

"They came from Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Sittwe and Kyauktaw townships (in Rakhine state) to travel to Malaysia to work," Tin Maung Lwin, the township's deputy police superintendent, told AFP yesterday.

Images published by local media showed the Rohingyas huddled

barefoot and wearing face masks, in front of a leafy two-storey house where they had reportedly been hiding for months.

Seventy-three of the group were women, Tin Maung Lwin told AFP, and they were accompanied by a number of children between the ages of five to 10.

They are currently quarantined in a local university where they have been tested for coronavirus, said Kyaw Soe Aung from the Arakan City Cooperation Network, a Rohingya aid group.

"We heard they haven't eaten for three days, so we sent them food and clothes yesterday," he told AFP.

Police said authorities were first alerted to a "suspicious man" who wasn't able to speak Burmese fluently.

They followed him to a house where they discovered the others. No smugglers were reportedly arrested.

"We will continue investigating the people who brought them here," Tin Maung Lwin said, adding that he couldn't say whether the Rohingyas would be sent back to Rakhine state.

Myanmar -- which has long maintained the 2017 crackdown was necessary to root out Rohingya militants -- now faces charges of genocide at the UN's top court.

Faced with widespread discrimination and little chance to build a viable livelihood, many of the Rohingyas trapped in squalid camps are willing to pay around \$1,500 to traffickers -- life savings for some -- in order to get out of Myanmar.

"Camp leaders try to warn people about the traffickers, but people are still trying to leave," said one Rohingya man at Thet Kal Pyin camp near Rakhine's capital Sittwe, declining to be named.

"It is their hope for a better life."

Rollout likely by this year

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He added that it would be possible 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.

'Hard road ahead' to beat Covid

FROM PAGE 12

is no apparent change in disease severity, said Van Kerkhove.

The faster-spreading mutation is "not catastrophic, in the sense that it means it's out of control and there's nothing we can do", the US expert said, because the existing basic measures to stop the virus spreading would still work.

Ryan said there was "absolutely no indication" that the vaccines as developed would not work against the new variations.

But, he added, "even if there

was a change in that, it is relatively straightforward to tweak the vaccines".

When viruses mutate, they "can become more infectious but they rarely become more severe, because it's not in their interest", he explained.

Meanwhile, WHO's European branch yesterday said more needed to be done to deal with the alarming situation brought on by recently discovered variants of the coronavirus.

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First industrial

FROM PAGE 12

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.

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

Robot dog gains

FROM PAGE 12

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

FROM PAGE 12

"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 Fakhru [Islam Alangir] 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.

Govt slaps 10pc

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of onions for two years encouraged by the higher prices after India banned exports.

Last year, onion acreage grew 18 percent to 237,000 hectares.

The prices of onion skyrocketed when India banned exports in September last year, pushing the retail price in Bangladesh to as high as Tk 110 per kg on September 16, according to the Department of Agricultural Marketing.

The prices had jumped to a record Tk 250 per kg in 2019 after a similar Indian ban.

Bangladesh has to depend on import of

nearly 10 lakh tonnes onion, mainly from India, as its annual production falls short of demand.

The Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) has targeted to bring 249,000 hectares under onion cultivation in the current fiscal year.

Farmers in Bangladesh planted early onions on 65,000 hectares in Bangladesh, around 8 percent more than the last year, according to the DAE data.

"We want to bring 184,000 hectares under onion seedling cultivation this year," said DAE Director General Asadullah earlier this week.

31 more die

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At least 966 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the period.

The total number of recoveries now stands at 464,446 and the recovery rate at 89.33 percent.

Among the 31 dead, 21 were men and 10 women. Of them, one aged between 11 and 20 years, one between 21 and 30, two between 31 and 40, two between 41 and 50, five between 51 and 60, and 20 above 60 years, added the release.