

Magurartair's mixed fruit orchard: a success story for others to emulate

MOSTAFA SHABUI, Bogura

Hundreds of people flock to a mixed fruit garden in Magurartair village of Bogura's Sherpur upazila every day to see ripe mangoes hanging from their branches as it is uncommon during the winter season.

This is all thanks to the efforts of three individuals -- Shahidul Islam, Mamunur Rashid and his brother Sohel Reza -- who went from humble beginnings to farming different varieties of fruit every season on their 40-bigha orchard.

They have already sold 400 kilogrammes of the Katimon and BARI-11 varieties of mango at Tk 500 a kg during the ongoing winter.

Islam had travelled to Malaysia in 2001 but eventually returned to Bangladesh 7 years later. After that, he tried to earn a living from numerous ventures, including poultry and cattle farming, but failed in his endeavours.

He then tried to return to Malaysia but was instead cheated out of his capital by a fraudulent agent.

"After failing in all these efforts, I started a guava orchard on a 5-bigha plot in Magurartair village in 2013 and started making profit," Islam said.

Rashid and Reza, who hail from the district's Vatra village, eventually joined hands with Islam in 2018 but before that, they too failed to earn a living from various occupations.

The pair completed their honours in social work from Bogura Government Azizul Haque College in 2010 and went on to finish their master's degree in the same discipline from Rajshahi College in 2011.

Despite achieving good marks in exams, none of them were successful in securing a single government or private job.

This led to two years of frustration. But then Rashid decided to help his father, a local farmer, to introduce safe vegetable cultivation to their village.

This was a turning point for him as the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) selected him as the country's best farmer of 2013 for his contribution to safe vegetable cultivation.

Later, the government sent Rashid on a 7-day study visit to Thailand under Kasetart University to learn how fruit production and management is done in that country.



Three individuals in Magurartair village of Bogura's Sherpur upazila produce different varieties of fruits such as apple, guava, malta and mango every season on their 40-bigha orchard.

After his return, Rashid and Reza started cultivating Thai varieties of guava on a 3-bigha plot in Vatra village.

In 2016, they added 2 bighas to cultivate bari malta-1 alongside the guavas.

After hearing of the success the orchard had brought them, Islam paid a visit to the brothers.

Ever since that fateful meeting, the trio have worked to expand their orchards and in 2018, they leased a 15-bigha plot in Magurartair village to cultivate all sorts of fruits.

With the advice of the district horticulture centre, they cultivated bari mango-11 on 4 bighas, banana mango on one bigha, gouromoti mango on three bighas and Thai

variety katimon mango on 18 bighas in 2019. In 2020, they grew kashmiri apple ber-1 on one bigha, kashmiri apple ber-2 on three bighas and Australian balsudari jujubes on 12 bighas.

"After extending the garden, we collected plants from the different horticultural centres in the country," Rashid said.

In 2020, they earned about Tk 35 lakh from the apples, guavas, malta and mangoes harvested in the orchard.

"We also made Tk 12 lakh by selling different saplings to interested farmers across the country last year," Islam said.

For their now 40-bigha orchard, Islam, Rashid and Reza have collectively invested



PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUI

around Tk 1 crore, which includes Tk 20 lakh in loans taken from different banks and NGOs.

"This year, we hope to harvest jujube worth over Tk 75 lakh and other fruits worth around Tk 25 lakh," Reza said.

"We hope we will get returns on our investment this year and from next year we will only enjoy profits," he added.

The idea behind running a mixed fruits garden is to make profits every season, according to Rashid.

In a bid to imitate the success of these three farmers, others from different districts regularly visit the orchard to buy saplings for their own plantations.

Among them is Abdus Salam of Chaknur

village under Sirajganj's Raiganj upazila.

"I heard about the Magurartair mixed fruits orchard in 2018 and visited the place immediately. In 2019, I brought 250 apple plants, 100 Thai guava plants and 60 pieces of bari malta plants for a 1.5 bigha garden," he said.

In 2020, Salam harvested malta and guava worth Tk 90,000 from his plantation.

"I used to visit the Magurartair garden regularly to learn about mixed gardening," he added.

Md Samsu Mia of Korab village under Habiganj's Lakhai upazila said that he heard about the Bogura garden from YouTube and visited the garden three months ago to learn about mixed gardening.

"I eventually bought 2,000 pieces of katimon mango and cultivated them on 10 bighas of land three months ago," he added.

Abdur Rahim, deputy director of the Bogura Horticulture Centre under the DAE Bogura, said Rashid is a progressive farmer.

The 40-bigha mixed fruits garden in Magurartair village started making profits within 1.5 years of its inception.

They are cultivating fruits safely without any pesticides following the advice of the district horticulture centre and are implementing modern technology, Rahim said.

The orchard also features a 6-acre mixed fruit gardening demonstration area, which includes a 1-acre for high density guava gardening and 1-acre for high density jujube gardening, under the Year Round Fruit Production for Nutrition Improvement project.

"Therefore, the gardeners are able to harvest a huge amount of fruits throughout the year from a small area of land while general people benefit from the nutrition of fresh fruits all year long," Rahim added.

Rashid told The Daily Star: "Thousands of educated youths in our country are left searching for jobs for years and this creates unemployment problems."

"We have suitable land and have opportunities to get loans and modern technology. If the educated people were more interested in modern farming, especially in mixed fruits cultivation, their financial problems would be gone and the country's farming would get a new look," he added.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

China GDP grows at slowest pace in more than four decades in 2020

AFP, Beijing

China's GDP grew at the slowest pace in more than four decades in 2020, official data showed Monday, but it was still expected to be the only major economy to grow at all after a strong rebound from the coronavirus crisis.

Covid-19, which has ravaged the world economy, first emerged in central China in late 2019. But the world's second-largest economy also became the first to bounce back after imposing strict lockdowns and virus control measures.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said last year was a "grave and complex environment both at home and abroad" with the pandemic having a "huge impact". The 2.3 per cent expansion in 2020 was a marked slowdown from 2019's revised growth of 6.0 per

cent -- itself already the lowest in decades -- with the country hit by weak domestic demand and trade tensions.

But it is better than that forecast by an AFP poll of analysts from 13 financial institutions, who had predicted a 2.0 per cent expansion.

In the last three months of 2020, China's economic rebound continued with a better-than-expected 6.5 per cent growth on-year, a sustained improvement since the second quarter.

This brings it back to a pre-pandemic trajectory, although full-year 2020 growth is still its worst performance since a 1.6 contraction in 1976, the year Chairman Mao Zedong died.

That was two years before former leader Deng Xiaoping set in motion a shift away from communist-style central planning, turning China

into an industrial, trade and tech powerhouse.

NBS commissioner Ning Jizhe told reporters the foundation for China's economic recovery "is still not yet firm". "There are many uncertainties in the changing dynamics of the pandemic, as well as the external environment," he said.

According to the latest data, industrial production grew 2.8 percent on-year for 2020, slowing further from previous years.

Retail sales, whose recovery has lagged behind that of industrial activity, shrank 3.9 percent for the full year with consumers wary of spending as the pandemic lingered.

This marks the first contraction in retail sales since 1968, underscoring difficulties amid China's push to rebalance its economy with domestic consumption as the main

driver. But the urban unemployment rate remained at 5.2 percent, and Ning said the number of newly-employed in urban areas was more than 11 million -- exceeding the target of nine million.

However, experts have cautioned unemployment could be higher than official figures suggest due to the large numbers of people in China's informal workforce. "The strengthening momentum of China's economic rebound during the fourth quarter of 2020 reflected improving private consumption expenditure as well as buoyant net exports," Rajiv Biswas, IHS Markit's Asia-Pacific chief economist, told AFP.

He added exports were helped by rebounding orders from the United States and Europe, including shipments of medical equipment during the pandemic.

Samsung chief jailed for 2.5 years over corruption scandal



REUTERS

Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong arrives at court in Seoul yesterday.

AFP, Seoul

The de facto chief of South Korea's Samsung business empire was convicted Monday over a huge corruption scandal and jailed for two and a half years, in a ruling that deprives the tech giant of its top decision-maker.

Lee Jae-yong, vice-chairman of Samsung Electronics, the world's biggest smartphone and memory chip maker, was found guilty of bribery and embezzlement in connection with the scandal that brought down president Park Geun-hye.

Lee "actively provided bribes and implicitly asked the president to use her power to help his smooth succession" at the head of the sprawling conglomerate, the Seoul Central District Court said in its verdict. "It is very unfortunate that Samsung, the country's top company and proud global innovator, is repeatedly involved in crimes whenever there is a change in political power." It jailed him for two and a half years, concluding a retrial that was the latest step in a long-running legal process that has hung over Samsung for years.

The multi-billionaire Lee -- who had earlier walked into court grim-faced and wearing a facemask, without responding to reporters' shouted questions -- was immediately taken into custody.

He has effectively been at the head of the entire Samsung group for several years after his father was left bedridden by a heart attack, finally dying in October. "This is essentially

a case where the freedom and property rights of a company were violated by the former president's abuse of power," Lee's lawyer, Lee In-jae, told reporters. "Given the nature of the matter, I find the court's ruling regrettable. "Samsung is by far the biggest of the family-controlled conglomerates, or chaebols, that dominate business in the world's 12th-largest economy.

Its overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national gross domestic product and it is crucial to South Korea's economic health.

Its rise has been driven by a willingness to invest billions in strategic bets on key technologies.

But experts say the sentence will create a leadership vacuum that could hamper its decision-making on future large-scale investments. "It's really a huge blow and a big crisis for Samsung," said Kim Dae-jong, a business professor at Sejong University.

Samsung Electronics, the group's flagship subsidiary, declined to comment on Monday's ruling. Like many tech firms, its shares have risen significantly during the coronavirus pandemic, more than doubling from their lows in March, but closed down 3.4 percent on Monday.

The case centres on millions of dollars the Samsung group paid Park's secret confidante Choi Soon-sil, allegedly for government favours including ensuring a smooth transition for Lee to succeed his then-ailing father.



REUTERS

Vendors wearing face masks following the coronavirus disease outbreak work at a seafood and freshwater fish stall inside a market in Beijing, China on January 15.