

How a mother's love took a nursery to astounding heights

DIPANKAR ROY, KHULNA

"Whenever someone visits for the first time, the serenity of being surrounded by saplings all around is bound to amaze. Sometimes even I am baffled by the many varieties added over the years."

Eagerly showing off his prized possession, Sarder Abdus Salam, owner of one of the country's biggest nurseries, emanates genuine love for greenery.

The passion caught on from his mother. And that took his business to astounding heights.

To bring things to perspective, Hybrid Nursery in Khulna sells anywhere between 10,000-15,000 saplings every day during the peak planting period in late monsoon.

Its annual revenue hovers in the region of Tk 10 crore to Tk 15 crore. And Salam has expanded his business from one bigha of inherited land to over 100 bighas.

"Trees never betray...as you treat or nurse plants will they reciprocate threefold," said the man with green fingers.

He said his mother Rokeya Begum used to nurse saplings as if they were her own children. She started the business 45 years back to bring some financial solvency to the family.

"She didn't have any other use of coconuts and betel nuts falling to the ground on their own, so that got her thinking how she could use those to bring in some money," said Salam.

Begum decided to start planting those on a wetland and sell the saplings once they germinate, leading to the founding of Rokeya Nursery and Salam's four brothers joining in.

She was presented a national agriculture award in 2007 while Salam another in 2015.

The nurseries sit in Bejerdanga area of Phultala upazila, where the soil is said to be very much fertile, enabling the cultivation of various fruit, wood and medicinal plants and trees.

"I took on the business in 1990 with the high demand for foreign fruits and trees in mind," said Salam.

He said to have a longing for cultivating fruits of high quality, for which he experimented with local varieties.

"I thought about how I could increase the sweetness of oranges and grapes. My target was to do something special, that nursery owners generally do not even think of," he said.

His trials led him to bring over various varieties of flowers and improved varieties of fruit trees from abroad.

Salam also strives to preserve plants and trees facing the threat of extinction.

He now has around 3,400 species, all available for sale.

"There are some 10 to 12 lakh saplings of



DIPANKAR ROY

Hybrid Nursery in Khulna, one of the biggest in the country, could very well be a unique ecosystem on its own, boasting the availability of around 3,400 species of fruit, flowering, wood and medicinal plants on over 100 bighas of land.

different varieties of fruits, wood and medicinal trees at my nurseries where more than 75 farm hands are employed," Salam said.

"I am supplying my saplings to districts around the country. Some NGOs are also buying these saplings to export to Europe and other countries," he said.

A visit to the area earlier this week revealed a sprawling nursery industry involving 15 villages, all of which came about in the late 70s. The business is helping some 30,000 people in and around the upazila lead a better life.

Over 5,000 are directly earning wages from the nurseries, thanks to increasing demand for saplings, said SM Nazmus Sakib Shahin of the Department of Agricultural Extension's Phultala office.

Poverty is being alleviated, people are becoming self-reliant while the rural economy, environment, ecology and biodiversity are improving, he said.

However, many of the nursery owners conveyed a mass exodus of entrepreneurs from the business for a lack of space.

This was evident from mushrooming brick kilns and industrial factories all around.

Those who were putting in the effort to continue running nurseries taking lease of land further out were being bogged down by a doubling of production cost.

Many could not bear the continuous losses. Now there are 350 nurseries, down from 1,778 a decade ago. Exacerbating the situation was the coronavirus pandemic.

Customers could not come freely, so tens of thousands of saplings are being left out on the field to die out, said Abul Basar, chairman of Phultala sadar union and secretary to Phultala Nursery Owners Association.

"We are now facing a scarcity of land. Many brick kilns and other industrial establishments, including jute mills, are being set up on fertile land. This is proving a hindrance in expanding our business," he said.

"We have been demanding that the government designate the area as a nursery zone," he said.

Time has come to think about the environmental benefits as well as economic development facilitated by nurseries, added Basar.

Last season, saplings worth around Tk 25 lakh to Tk 30 lakh were sold every day. Due to the coronavirus, daily sales this year were barely reaching Tk 5 lakh to Tk 6 lakh, said Md Anwar Hossain, president of Phultala Upazila Nursery Owners Association.

"We depend on the nursery industry all year round to support our families. Due to the low sales, we are struggling to meet expenses, including that for labour," he added.

Ctg customs to auction Tk 45cr goods

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Ctg

Chattogram Customs House will auction off around 1,050 tonnes of abandoned goods worth Tk 45 crore on Sunday.

It will get rid of around 50 lots of goods, including 180 pieces of CNG-run auto-rickshaws, 150 tonnes of garment fabrics, 300 tonnes of steel items, and 130 tonnes of chemicals.

Furniture, plastics, hand sanitizer, fish and other food items are also included in the list.

The importers did not take the delivery of the goods in time that were brought in through Chattogram port between 2018 and 2020.

The customs authority starts the procedure to auction off foreign goods if the importers do not receive the items within 30 days after they arrive at the port.

Usually, businesses refrain from taking the delivery of goods because of a fall in the prices of goods in the local market, failure to submit original documents in support of the shipment, failure to get clearance, and refusal to pay fines for anomalies.

"The bidders are getting good response as the goods are in good shape," Deputy Commissioner for Auction Faisal Bin Rahman told The Daily Star.

To reduce the pressure on auction-able goods, the customs authority has taken an initiative to organise one auction every month. "Hopefully, if it is done regularly, the abandoned products will be saved from wastages," Rahman said.

- 180 CNG-run auto-rickshaws
- 150 tonnes garment fabrics
- 300 tonnes steel items
- 130 tonnes chemicals
- Furniture
- Plastics
- Hand sanitisers
- Fish and other food

In the last five years to 2020, the customs authority sold Tk 265.62 crore worth of abandoned goods through 64 tenders.

About 7,553 containers weighing around 15,000 tonnes of abandoned goods piled up at Chattogram port yards between January 2016 and December 2020, data from the Chattogram Port Authority showed.

The auction process was delayed due to the shortage of adequate workforce and equipment, according to customs officials. Sometimes importers or auctioneers go to courts, causing further delay, they said.

Grow habit of paying tax: PM's adviser

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bangladeshis need a change in mindset to grow the habit of paying taxes as revenue generation is very important for inclusive development, said Salman F Rahman, the prime minister's private industry and investment adviser, yesterday.

He also laid emphasis on increasing the tax-GDP ratio, pointing out that it was relatively low in the South Asian region.

"In the last fiscal, the NBR (National Board of Revenue) was able to bring 55,000 new taxpayers under the net. Still, we have to widen the tax net," he said.

"The government is also working to upgrade and modernise the overall revenue structure," said Rahman.

He was addressing a call on by Rizwan Rahman, president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), and its

board of directors.

A third terminal is being constructed at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. There is a plan to soon upgrade the Cox's Bazar airport to that of international standard, the adviser added.

Rizwan Rahman said Bangladesh has to meet 27 conditions to avail the GSP Plus facility on exports to the European Union once it graduates from the grouping of least-developed countries to a developing nation.

He proposed forming a national strategy committee engaging all stakeholders in mapping preparedness roles and time-bound actions for all relevant agencies.

The same is needed for foreign direct investment promotion and its alignment with government strategies such as the industrial, import and export policies and foreign exchange regulations, he added.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

India expected to harvest record wheat, rice crops this year

REUTERS, New Delhi

India is likely to harvest a record 109.24 million tonnes of wheat this year, the farm ministry said, further boosting stocks at government granaries that are fast running out of storage space due to more than a decade of bumper production.

Wheat output in India, the world's second biggest producer, is expected to go up by 1.3 per cent in the crop year to June 2021, the Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Ministry said in its second crop forecast for 2020/21.

Rice output is estimated to rise by 1.2 per cent to 120.32 million tonnes. India is the world's biggest rice exporter and second biggest producer.

The Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Ministry forecast this year's total grains output at a record 303.34 million tonnes against 297.5 million tonnes produced in the previous year.

Output of rapeseed, the main winter oilseed with the highest oil

content, is expected at 10.4 million tonnes, higher than previous year's production of 9.1 million tonnes.

Production of chickpeas, a variety of pulses, is likely to be 11.62 million tonnes against 11.08 million tonnes harvested in the previous year.

Any increase in rapeseed and chickpea production cuts imports of expensive vegetable oils and pulses - the commodities that are mostly in short supply in India, the world's biggest importer of both cooking oils and protein-rich pulses.

Also, a string of bumper rice and wheat harvests - thanks to high-yielding seed varieties, increasing farm mechanisation and good weather conditions - have bumped up local supplies.

Brim-full granaries have hardly any extra space to accommodate new season harvests that will start trickling in from next month, potentially exposing food stocks to rains and rodents.

Despite bumper harvests, the government of Prime Minister



A worker collects boiled rice to spread it for drying at a rice mill on the outskirts of Kolkata, India.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

Narendra Modi is grappling with protesting about three new discontent in the countryside, agricultural laws introduced in September.

Xi boasts of Chinese 'miracle' in tackling poverty

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday declared his country had achieved the "human miracle" of eliminating extreme poverty, though questions continue to surround the Communist Party's criteria for making the claim.

In a glitzy ceremony in Beijing, Xi bestowed medals on officials from rural communities, some wearing traditional ethnic-minority attire, and promised to share this "Chinese example" with other developing nations. "No other country can lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty in such a short time," Xi said. "A human miracle has been created that will go down in history. "China last year claimed it had achieved its long-trumpeted goal



Chinese President Xi Jinping

of lifting all of its people above a poverty line of \$2.30 in daily income.

That is slightly above the World Bank's lowest threshold of \$1.90, but below what is recommended for higher income countries. The World Bank says China has lifted more than 800 million people out of extreme poverty since turning to market reforms in the 1970s, after decades of state planning and ill-advised Maoist campaigns that had stifled the economy.

China is now "providing help to developing countries" still struggling with poverty, Xi said.

In 2015, Xi vowed to eradicate extreme poverty by 2020, a pillar of the Communist Party's goal to build a "moderately prosperous society" by the 100th anniversary of its founding later this year.