# Farmer reaps a fortune from mixed fruit orchard

Thanks to the orchard, Mofijur Rahman Mafi has not only changed his own luck but also created jobs for at least 12 people.

PHOTO: STAR

Suzit Kumar Das, *Faridpur*

He tried to make a living by venturing into seasonal crops, grocery shop and cattle farming after returning from Kuwait in 2007. But all of Mofijur Rahman Mafi's endeavours were in vain.

He began a Kashmiri apple plum orchard on a seven-bigha plot in Hat Gobindapur village under Sadar upazila in Faridpur by taking the land on lease in 2019, although his father was not sure about its success.

But it took only nine months for his father, Akkachh Sardar, to find that his son was right as the plants started bearing a huge number of fruits. He sold the plum for Tk 30 lakh after an investment of only Tk 5 lakh.

"After returning from Kuwait, I had attempted to try my luck in many things, but all of them were unsuccessful before the idea of setting up an orchard to grow Kashmiri apple plum came to my mind," Mafi said.

Buoyed by the success, the forty-year-old later added 35 bighas of land to the orchard. Thanks to the orchard, Mafi has not only changed his fortune, he has also created jobs for at least 12 people.

This year, he has grown orange on six bighas of land, malta on two bighas, plum on 16.50 bighas, guava on 13.50 bighas, dragon fruit on 30 decimals, sapota on 30 decimals, and wood apple on 26 decimals of land.

He also planted 1,250 mango saplings and 900 lemon saplings.

In 2021 so far, he sold plums, guavas and malta worth Tk 75 lakh. He also made Tk 1.5 crore by selling saplings to farmers across the country.

He needs at least 12 people daily to maintain the orchard.

Kanchan Sardar, one of the workers, has been employed in Mafi's orchard for two years. Before joining the orchard, the 28-year-old did not have any permanent job.

"Now I can work round the year in the orchard."

Young and educated people from other districts visit the orchard and buy saplings.

Md Azadul Islam, a resident of Islampur village under Bhurungamari in Kurigram, saw a YouTube video of Kashmiri apple plum in Mafi's orchard in 2019. He visited the orchard in December of the same year.

Islam bought 1,250 pieces of Kashmiri apple saplings in March last year. "This year, I sold plums grown in those plants."

Osman Goni, a resident from Fazilpur village under Sadar upazila in Noakhali, said after watching a video of Mafi's mixed fruit orchard, he contacted him. He bought 50 pieces of Kashmiri apple plum saplings.

Md Hazrat Ali, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Faridpur, said Mafi had become a role model for the educated, unemployment young people in the district.

"Seeing his success, some educated people are communicating with us for technical supports to set up mixed fruit orchards."

# Winners in a pandemic-affected world

OPINION

Arijit Chakraborti

On March 11 this year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared that the Covid-19 outbreak was a pandemic. During the last one year, this pandemic has spiralled into an unprecedented global crisis, which has adversely affected the lives and livelihoods of billions.

Bangladesh was not immune to this crisis. Like many countries across the world, the people of Bangladesh observed stay-at-home orders for many months ever since a nationwide lockdown was announced on March 26, 2020.

The Covid-19 outbreak was first detected in early December 2019 and eventually spread worldwide, resulting in nationwide lockdowns. It also resulted in the complete shutdown of industrial and economic activities for a certain period in many countries, including Bangladesh and most South Asian countries.

While healthcare professionals worldwide have been working tirelessly to attend to patients who have tested positive for Covid-19, scientists have been striving to develop vaccines and effective medicines during this last one year.

There has been very significant advancement in science and technology.

A typical multi-year vaccine development timeline has been shortened to less than a year due to proactive global collaboration between research communities, accelerated data-sharing through the use of advanced storage and communication technologies, and the use of sophisticated computers and algorithms.

All these initiatives have taken forward research activities rapidly.

With the initiation of vaccination programmes in many countries, we expect to witness unprecedented achievements in the manufacturing and supply chain segments. Worldwide, billions of people are being vaccinated at a rapid pace due to major advancements in manufacturing and supply chains that have been modernised through the adoption of advanced technology.

The speed of vaccination witnessed has led to expectations that economic activities will return to pre-pandemic levels very soon. However, the risk of another virulent infection of the scale we have witnessed cannot be ruled out in the future.

In fact, we are aware that the Covid-19 virus is mutating in many countries and spreading infection at a faster pace than during the past year.

Therefore, businesses, governments and other stakeholders must start learning how they can manage the risk of the occurrence of another pandemic and be productively engaged in economic activities simultaneously.

During this one-year period, technology, especially collaborative and communicative technologies, has become the single-largest contributor to the continuation of businesses.

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ORCHID CHAKMA

After the Covid-19 outbreak, physical meetings have been largely substituted by video interactions, which have become the norm for both one-to-one and group meetings.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

# Nokia to cut up to 10,000 jobs by 2023


The Nokia headquarters is seen in Espoo, Finland. The Finnish telecoms equipment maker Nokia announced yesterday that it will slash up to 11 per cent of its workforce within two years.

REUTERS

AFP, *Helsinki*

Finnish telecoms equipment maker Nokia announced yesterday it will slash up to 11 per cent of its workforce within two years as the firm looks to cut costs and focus on a few key areas in the face of tough competition over super-fast 5G networks.

Announcing a $715-million cost-cutting programme, it said it expects to become an 80,000-85,000 employee organisation, over an 18-24-month period, instead of the approximately 90,000 employees Nokia has today. The company said it is "too early to comment in detail" on where the job cuts will take place, but told AFP that France is excluded due to previously announced planned restructuring.

The loss of over 1,000 jobs in France is still underway following Nokia's 2016 takeover of Alcatel-Lucent Finland, where the group is headquartered and where it last year recruited over 1,200 new 5G posts, is also expected to be largely spared, with Nokia saying that it expects the restructuring to have a "net positive" impact in the Nordic country.

Market developments in the next two years will determine the exact number of job losses, the company said, adding that the firm will also streamline its portfolio and reduce "site fragmentation" in the long-term.

Nokia has flagged in the three-way race against Ericsson and Huawei to dominate the 5G equipment market, losing out on a major Verizon contract in the US last year and failing to make inroads in China. The firm has in the past had difficulties competing on price against its rivals and has struggled to convert its existing 4G bases into 5G contracts.

After Chief Executive Pekka Lundmark took the helm in August last year, he scrapped previous CEO Rajeev Suri's "end-to-end solutions" strategy, replacing it with a more focused approach and pledging to "invest whatever it takes to win in 5G".

The company will in future be structured around four business groups aligned with customer buying behaviour -- Mobile Networks, IP and Fixed Networks, Cloud and Network Services and Nokia Technologies -- each with its own profit and loss sheet.

"In those areas where we choose to compete, we will play to win," Lundmark said in Tuesday's statement. The firm announced in February that predicted market share loss in North America in 5G and 4G along with price erosion meant the firm's 2021 outlook remained unchanged, with a 7-10 percent operating margin target.

# Asia's fuel exporters target sales bump as refineries shut down under

Reuters, *Singapore*

Asian fuel exporters are hungrily eyeing Australia as the country's shutdown of almost all its refineries creates a bright demand spot amid otherwise coronavirus crimped markets.

China appears to be best placed to take advantage of the opportunity, industry sources and analysts told Reuters, potentially leapfrogging the current top suppliers Singapore and South Korea in the scramble for a piece of the action.

Australia, already the region's largest fuel importer, will likely boost imports by a third next year to 630,000 barrels per day (bpd), according to energy consultancy FGE.

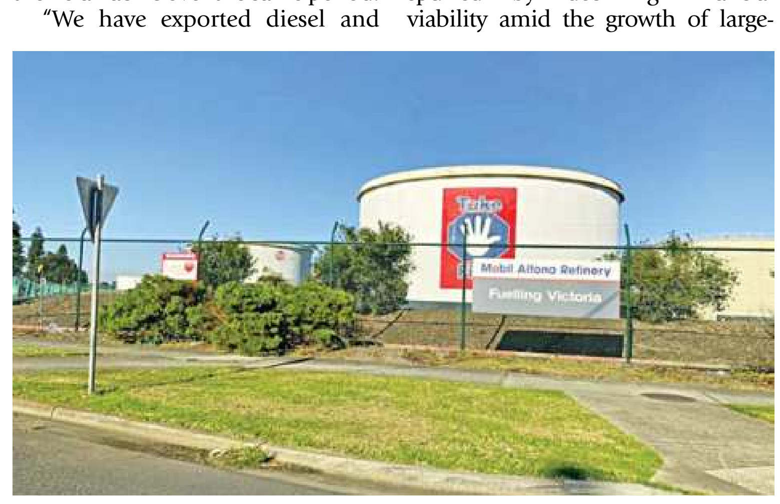
"We expect most of the fuel imports to come from Chinese refiners, due to Chinese officials' continued increase in refined products export quotas and the 600,000 bpd (barrels per day) expansion to Chinese refinery capacity in 2021," said Julie Torgersrud, an analyst at consultancy Rystad Energy.

"New, high-complexity refinery capacity starting up in China puts increased pressure on competing refiners in the Asia Pacific region, who are suffering from lower margins and usually have older, less efficient operations."

China's refinery capacity is forecast to increase by 1.5 million bpd over the next two years, according to Rystad, compared with a net reduction of 1.2 million bpd across the Asia Pacific over the same period.

"We have exported diesel and gasoline to Australia before but it wasn't as economical as selling into Southeast Asia," a trader with a Chinese refiner told Reuters. "If demand rises with refinery closures and push up prices, then we'll export more."

There are only three oil refineries still operating in Australia after four shutdowns over the past decade, spurred by declining financial viability amid the growth of large-scale, export-oriented refineries throughout Asia and the Middle East.



REUTERS

Exxon Mobil Corp's Altona refinery is seen in Australia. The closure of such refineries has led to an opportunity for Asian suppliers to increase exports.

Exxon Mobil Corp's decision to close its 90,000 bpd plant in Victoria state later this year will leave just two, owned by Ampol Ltd and Viva Energy, which will meet less than 25 per cent of the country's almost 1 million bpd annual fuel consumption.

Ampol's Queensland refinery and Viva's Victoria plant have a combined production of about 87,000 bpd of diesel, a meagre 17 per cent of Australia's consumer sales of 509,000 bpd last year, a Reuters analysis of government and companies data showed.

Potentially adding to the squeeze, Ampol is reviewing the future of its refinery with a decision expected by June.

Australia is heavily reliant on diesel to fuel its robust mining and trucking sectors, and diesel accounts for over half the country's refined product imports.

To boost energy security, the government is planning to increase the minimum level of national diesel stocks, which averaged 1.4 million tonnes (10.2 million barrels) in 2020, by 40 per cent by 2024.

# China asks Alibaba to divest media assets

AFP, *Beijing*

Beijing has asked Chinese e-commerce titan Alibaba to divest its assets in the media sector out of concern over the company's growing public influence, The Wall Street Journal reported Monday.

Its founder Jack Ma, the ebullient and unconventional billionaire who officially retired from Alibaba in 2019 but remains a large shareholder, has been in authorities' crosshairs in recent months.

In November, Chinese regulators halted a colossal $34 billion IPO by Ant Group, an Alibaba subsidiary for online payments. The following month, regulators opened an investigation into Alibaba business practices deemed anti-competitive.

Now authorities are asking the tech giant to drastically reduce its presence in the media sector, the Journal said, citing people familiar with the matter.Alibaba is most notably the owner of Hong Kong's leading English-language daily, the South China Morning Post.

It also has stakes in China's popular Twitter-like Weibo social media platform and online video platform Bilibili, as well as other media and advertising. Chinese leaders are worried about growing influence on public opinion exerted by the company founded by Ma, the Journal reported.

The government didn't specify whether Alibaba was requested to completely withdraw from the media or divest part of its shares.

On Friday, the Journal reported that Alibaba risks being slapped with a record fine in China for anti-competitive practices, which could exceed the $975 million paid by US chip maker Qualcomm in 2015, the biggest anti-monopoly fine imposed by Beijing to date.

According to the article, authorities accuse Alibaba of preventing merchants who sell goods on the platform from also selling on rival websites.