

All that glitters is pearl

SHYKH SERAJ

Pearl culture is becoming popular in Bangladesh every year. Especially, from oysters, farmers are producing pearls on a commercial basis and it's showing great hope. Most of the farmers are doing it in their ponds. As we all know, the pearl is used as an ornament, we also know pearl powder is widely regarded as a medicine for many kinds of diseases across the world. What is promising is that many young unemployed entrepreneurs have realized the prospect of pearl culture and by doing it they are becoming financially pretty much solvent. Culture is scientifically done through tissue transplantation. Following this process, China, Japan and Vietnam have been very successful commercially. Scientists say that the chemical properties of the soil and water of our country are also suitable for pearl culture. Back in 2004, there was a detailed documentary, based on pearl culture, aired on Hridoye Mati O Manush (Soil & People in Heart). Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute (BFRI) played a significant role back then and they have continued to do so.

The prosperity of pearl culture has spread to around eighty entrepreneurs who are doing it professionally by getting trained by BFRI. One such unique entrepreneur is Mohammad Al Mamun, a young man from Bharatpur village in Atharia upazila from Pabna district. Mamun did his diploma in civil engineering. He had a job, however, to earn a living on his own, he started pearl culture in his pond. He started doing it a year back as he got proper training from the BFRI. Mamun's ancestral fish farming on 40 decimal pond has become a source of income, which seemed inspiring. One interesting thing is pearl culture is not causing any problem to fish farming in the same pond. In the middle of the pond, rows of oysters are being floated with plastic bottles. Mamun rides on a boat to work in the pond.

"Why did you start pearl culture", I asked Mamun.

"I became very much confident after getting the training from BFRI and by watching your pearl culture videos on YouTube", replied Mamun.

"So, what about the market", I asked him. "Pearl market is pretty good. I have a Facebook page to promote the pearl culture and most of my customers are from either Dhaka or Cumilla. I am planning to reach more districts", replied the young entrepreneur.

"The pearl market is quite good in India and hopefully it will grow in Bangladesh", added Mamun.

Two varieties of pearls are cultured in Mamun's pond; one is called the Design Pearl and the other, the Mantle Tissue or Rice Pearl. The design takes shape within ten months inside the oyster. And it takes at least three years for the rice pearl to take shape. Mamun used a total of 2200 oysters for designs last year of which, 1000 designs of pearls have been ready to go at the market.

"How much was your initial cost for the project", I asked Mamun.

"Tk. 15000 (USD 177)", he replied.

"How much are you looking forward to earning from these 1000 designs", I asked him again.

"If the market goes well, I will earn at least Tk. 300000 (USD 3540)", Mamun replied with a smile on his face.

I was amazed to learn about this profit margin. One of the key strategies to get better production is to pick the right oyster. Four types of oysters can produce pearls in the country so far; especially these oysters

Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist.

He received country's two highest civilian honours, Swadhinata Puroshkar and Ekushey Padak, respectively. He is a BIDS, Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, Hridoye Mati O Manush.



can produce four-coloured pearls. Moreover, from one oyster, it's also possible to produce a maximum of twelve rice pearls. Scientific officers have done a great job at BFRI in this regard. I talked with Scientific Officer, Md. Nazmul Hossain, working at BFRI.

"How many entrepreneurs have been



trained by BFRI", I asked Nazmul Hossain. "Under Pearl Culture Development and Expansion Project, we have been able to train 2020 entrepreneurs. The project is still going on", replied Nazmul.

"All these entrepreneurs are working on pearl culture after the training", I asked.

"Only eighty of them are still engaged", replied Nazmul.

"Is this outcome satisfactory for you", I asked him again.

"Not everyone is doing it after getting the training. But these eighty entrepreneurs, all of them have become successful, because not only have they learned about the technology, but also they're well aware of the market that keeps on growing", replied the officer. Pearl farmer Mamun also says all kinds of pearl culture materials are now available in the country. Anyone willing to do this can be successful by culturing pearls at a low cost with proper training from BFRI. There is now considerable demand for pearls at home and abroad. Even if there is any problem in the market or culture system, the solution can be found from the Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute, says Mamun. He is also planning to increase the area of pearl culture in the future.

I have talked to the local Upazila Fisheries Officer, Md. Shariful Islam about the pearl culture development in Pabna region.

"We're always prepared to provide training and technology; moreover if any farmer wants to talk to me, they call me. I tell them about the potential and encourage them", said Shariful Islam.

"I'm very much optimistic that the unemployed youth will turn around with

pearl culture", added Shariful Islam.

The youth group in Bharatpur village is also very encouraged by seeing the success of Mamun. Some of them have already started pearl culture and have continued their jobs. Many of those young people who came to visit Mamun's pond, said they will get the training from BFRI.

Dear readers, I believe that pearl culture in our country can go ahead with great potential with the remarkable performance of entrepreneurs like Md. Al Mamun and also with supports from BFRI. Doing pearls on a commercial basis is no longer any dream, but a reality. I hope that pearl culture technology of BFRI will be disseminated across the country among farmers and entrepreneurs. And I do believe, rural women can also get empowered by learning the pearl culture to contribute to the economy of Bangladesh.

Caption: Young pearl farmer Mohammad Al Mamun beside his pearl culture pond, located at Bharatpur village of Atharia upazila in Pabna district. Photo: Hridoye Mati O Manush

The writer's short Bio: Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received country's two highest civilian honours, Swadhinata Puroshkar and Ekushey Padak, respectively. He is an Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Host of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, Hridoye Mati O Manush.

Two jobs and a mayor

KONGKON KARMAKER WITH FIROZ A MUZAHD

Ignoring the Monthly Payment Order (MPO) Policy 2021, an acting principal of a government college, has been enjoying amenities of two jobs since he was elected mayor of Dinajpur's Birampur municipality in January this year.

The mayor, Md Akkas Ali, is a member of the board of advisors of Awami League's Dinajpur district unit.

According to the MPO Policy 2021, issued on March 28 this year, a teacher or an employee of an educational institution cannot hold a post in a second organisation.

Even though he had been serving as the acting principal of Hakimpur Government College in neighbouring Hakimpur upazila, Akkas mentioned nothing about it in the affidavit that he submitted to the Election Commission (EC) as part of his candidacy application for the Birampur mayoral election, held on January 16.

The affidavit, available on the EC website, has several contradictions.

Under the field (number 4) for describing "business or occupation", ownership of a filling station (petrol pump) in the upazila is mentioned. In the next table (number 5) for calculating sources of income, Tk 95 thousand and Tk 84 thousand are shown as income from "business" and "agriculture".

The field (number 5.5) for income from "professional services" (teaching, medical practice, law practice, consultancy, etc) is left blank with cross marks. But strikingly, Tk 3.62 lakh is put under the next field (number 5.6), for income from "employment".

On May 12, Hakimpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mohammad Nur-e-Alam in a letter to government officials concerned sought necessary guidelines in a situation under which Akkas Ali has been holding the job of an elected public representative and a teacher of a government college. The letter was addressed to the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education, chairman of Dinajpur Education Board, the Ministry of Education and the Deputy Commissioner of Dinajpur.

The UNO in the letter stated that Md Akkas Ali, while being the incumbent principal (acting) of Hakimpur Government College, has contested the Birampur mayoral election on January 16. After getting elected, Akkas took oath on February 8.

While serving as the mayor of Birampur town, he has been signing various official documents as a principal of the college as well, the UNO also mentioned.

Contacted, the Hakimpur UNO refused to make any further comment on the issue.

Speaking with The Daily Star over phone recently, Mayor Akkas said there is no bar in holding of posts in two different jobs.

Though Hakimpur Government College is a state-run institution, he has been a "private employee" there and the mayoral post at Birampur municipality is of voluntary nature, he claimed.

If an official directive is issued regarding his jobs, he would comply accordingly.

Salary statements for his college job were included as attachments with the affidavit submitted to the EC, he also claimed.

30 more die

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period, have recovered so far.

Rajshahi division witnessed the highest number of eight deaths during the 24 hours, while six patients died in each of Dhaka and Chattogram divisions, four in Rangpur, three in Khulna, two in Sylhet and one in Barishal division.

Bangladesh reported its first novel coronavirus cases on March 8 last year and the first death on the 18th of that month.

Freedom

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Around 186,700 war heroes will get the financial benefit.

The families of the martyred freedom fighters get Tk 30,000 a month, while those of the war-wounded Tk 25,000.

The families of the seven Bir Shresthas receive Tk 35,000 each a month while those of the Bir Uttams get Tk 25,000, Bir Bikrams Tk 20,000, and Bir Pratiks Tk 15,000.

Bir Shrestha is the country's highest gallantry award.

Apart from the monthly allowance, freedom fighters receive two festival bonuses, equal to their monthly allowance, each year.

Freedom fighters also get three bonuses of Tk 5,000 each on the occasion of Independence Day, Victory Day and Pahlala Baishakh.

Wounded freedom fighters receive free medical care and those without homes get housing.

The finance minister in his budget speech proposed allocating Tk 4,122 crore for constructing "Bir Nibas" to ensure safe accommodation for 30,000 freedom fighters.

A total of 29,000 freedom fighters already have this facility.

To improve the socio-economic condition of the greatest sons of the soil, construction of Muktijoddha Complex in every district and upazila was at the final stage, the minister added.

Families of martyred and war-wounded freedom fighters have also been brought under the coverage of social security scheme.

Effort to form new party

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Jang, the nation's largest newspaper, reported today that moves were underway to form a new party that would include these members but would be opposed to separatism.

The government appeared to be focusing its efforts on the League's bloc of representatives elected last December to the National Assembly, which was to have met March 3 to begin drafting a constitution to return Pakistan to civilian rule.

Jang said a former Awami League politician, Begum Akhtar Sulaiman, had obtained the signatures of 109 former league representatives in national and provincial assemblies in support of the proposed party.

Begum Akhtar Sulaiman is the daughter of the late Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, one of the founders of the Awami League. She was quoted today as having said that her father would never have approved of the separatist programme adopted by the League under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. She said the new party would be headed by Zahir Uddin, a former national education minister. Begum Akhtar Sulaiman had visited East Pakistan twice in the last two months, and had conferred with President Yahya.

PAKISTAN ADMITS DESERTIONS FROM EBR, EPR

Bangladesh has shown

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The UN officials reiterated their sincere appreciation to the Bangladesh government and people for humanitarian spirit and generous hospitality towards Rohingya refugees, most of whom fled brutal military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State in 2017.

They also reiterated the urgent need to continue working towards comprehensive solutions, including the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

They emphasised that the responsibility for the current Rohingya refugee situation in Bangladesh rests with Myanmar, and that is where the solution lies. However, the recent developments in Myanmar make the prospects of voluntary repatriation in the short term more challenging.

The UN recognised significant financial investments by Bangladesh in Bhasan Char, where some 18,000 Rohingyas were relocated, but said they have protection and assistance needs.

"That is, access to meaningful livelihoods opportunities, skills development, education, health and access to cash to facilitate their daily lives," it said.

The UNHCR proposed further discussions with the government to ensure protection of refugees, as well as on UN's future operational engagement on the island, while also expressing concern over reports of refugees being arrested and detained for attempting to leave Bhasan Char.

"The UNHCR strongly discourages the use of relocation to Bhasan Char as a punitive measure," it said, stressing on relocation on voluntary basis.

Pakistan today admitted "mass desertions" of serving personnel from East Bengal Regiment, East Pakistan Rifles and the police. Quoting an official announcement in Dhaka, Radio Pakistan said "compassionate treatment" would be given to those who voluntarily surrendered to the military authorities with our without their weapons.

MALNUTRITION ADDING TO CHOLERA TOLL
The Indian government said today that malnutrition, as well as cholera, was taking a heavy toll of lives among 4.7 million East Pakistani refugees in eastern India.

Health Minister Uma Shanker Dixit told parliament that most of the refugees were "arriving in a condition of exhaustion caused by malnutrition".

He said it appeared the refugees had brought the cholera with them.

GUERRILLA FIGHT NEAR SHALDA RIVER
Freedom fighters today conducted a successful guerilla operation at Bagra Bazar near Shalda River. They attacked a nearby Pakistan army camp where the soldiers were caught unawares. Seventeen Pakistani soldiers were killed in the operation.

In another operation in Cumilla, freedom fighters today blew off a road bridge and a rail bridge.

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4,510 illegally

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prone country as a transit for illegally migrating to Europe through the Mediterranean.

The other route has been through Iran and Turkey to Europe. Balkan countries have been recently discovered as another route.

According to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training of Bangladesh's Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, only 21 registered Bangladeshis migrated to the United Kingdom in 2020.

Curiosity

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evidence of life on planets beyond Earth.

The rover has been exploring Gale Crater, likely the site of an ancient lake, since 2012. It began ascending the 3-mile-high Mount Sharp, located at the center of the crater, in 2014.

The mission began with the goals of determining if conditions on Mars ever supported life as well as characterising the Martian climate and geology. Curiosity has achieved most of what it was designed to do, but it's now crossing into an interesting new phase: investigating a transition that occurred on Mars billions of years ago.

Evidence observed by robotic missions on Mars, as well as orbiters circling the red planet, have helped scientists determine that it was likely a warmer, wetter place about 4 billion years ago. That's until some catalyst caused Mars to lose most of its atmosphere and become a frozen desert about 3 billion years ago.

Curiosity has spent much of its time over the last several years studying clay-rich rock layers on Mount Sharp. Now, it's moving into a zone where the rocks grow salty, filled with sulfate minerals, according to Abigail Fraeman, Curiosity deputy project scientist at Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

The Curiosity mission is managed by staff at the lab, which is located in Pasadena, California.

Community transmission

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and Research and Institute for Developing Science and Health Initiatives (ideSHI) has completed genome sequencing of 50 samples of coronavirus.

Among the Delta variant infected patients, 14 had not gone abroad and did not come in contact with people with travel history.

"So, community transmission of Delta variant exists in Bangladesh," found the study.

Contacted, Prof Tahmina Shirin, director of IEDCR, told The Daily Star that the Indian variant is spreading in the community and people have to follow the health guidelines to reduce transmission.

When asked about the unidentified variant, Tahmina said, "Its source was not identified. We are investigating and we can give details once the investigation is complete."

Shadow govt calls on Rohingyas

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"National Unity Government" which has sought to bring anti-coup dissidents together.

The junta has classified the NUG as "terrorists", meaning anyone speaking to them – including journalists – can be subjected to charges under counter-terrorism laws.

"We invite Rohingyas to join hands

with us and with others to participate in this Spring Revolution against the military dictatorship," the group said in a statement.

Suu Kyi's NLD government had avoided the term "Rohingya" because of sensitivity among ethnic groups in the majority-Buddhist country, referring to the minority as "Muslims living in Rakhine."

A top official of the DGHS wishing not to be named said the Indian variant was transmitting fast. Only eight of the 50 sample were of the Beta variant, South African variant.

Strain of one sample could not be identified. The Delta variant was found in samples collected from Dinajpur, Gaibandha, Bagerhat, Jhenidah and Pirojpur.

Out of 16 samples collected from Chapainawabganj, 15 were Delta variant, and all seven samples from Gopalganj was the same Indian variant, the study found.

All three samples collected from Khulna were Indian variant while two out of four samples collected from Dhaka was of Delta variant.

The Indian variant was first detected in October last year. It is far more transmissible than the virus's previous strains. World Health Organisation has termed the variant "variant of concern".

Restrictions imposed

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of Police Abdul Mannan Mia.

The Rajshahi district administration imposed restrictions on all night-time outdoor activities for seven days from yesterday evening.

Except emergency services and agricultural activities, all sorts of outdoor activities will be suspended from 7:00pm to 8:00am, announced DC Abdul Jalil on Wednesday.

At least nine people died from Covid-19 at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in 24 hours since 9:00am on Wednesday.

With this, 77 people, who were either infected with the deadly virus or had symptoms of Covid-19, died in the hospital in the last 11 days.

In Jhenidah, a seven-day lockdown was enforced in Bauli village under Moheshpur upazila from yesterday as the village is frequently used for cross-border movement.

Besides, a 15-day night-time travel restrictions have been imposed on nearby Swaruppur, Nepa, Kazirber, Bashbaria and Jadabpur unions of the upazila to prevent the spread of Indian variant of Covid-19.

In another development, Border Guard Bangladesh personnel have stepped up their vigilance in Thakurgaon to end illegal crossing of border, said Maksud Ahmed,

commanding officer of BGB in the district.

So far, 1,705 people have tested positive and 36 have breathed their last in the district till yesterday.

Contacted, Civil Surgeon Mahfuzar Rahman Sarkar said multiple measures have been taken to deal with the rising number of Covid-19 patients.

He also expressed concern as the district's healthcare system is suffering from lack of manpower and other logistic facilities like liquid oxygen plant and ventilator.

Another bordering district Chapainawabganj passed the 10th day of lockdown yesterday.

As operations of public transport remain suspended, many people were seen trying to travel on microbuses, trucks and auto-rickshaws.

Mobile courts and law enforcers remain vigil to enforce the lockdown. Shops of essential commodities and mango markets are outside the purview of the lockdown.

In Kushtia, at least 47 new Covid-19 cases were found in 24 hours ending at 8:00pm on Thursday. The figure was 51 in the previous day.

The current infection rate in the district is 25 percent, said health officials concerned. [Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to this report.]

Covax secures addl \$2.4b

FROM PAGE 16
Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, whose government pledged an additional \$800 million, called the result "an extremely significant and

meaningful step" toward equitable vaccine access.

Japan will also donate about 30 million doses of vaccines produced within the country through Covax, he said.