

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.



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 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

Bangladesh

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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 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.

"They should have freedom of movement on the island and must be granted the possibility to return to Cox's Bazar and to maintain family connections with those in the camps," said Triggs.

The UN Refugee Agency said while ultimately, the desired solution by the majority of the Rohingya refugees is to return home voluntarily, safely, sustainably and in dignity, when conditions in Myanmar allow, the crisis is now in its fourth year and refugees cannot remain fully dependent on aid.

"Livelihoods and skills training opportunities will provide refugees with a sense of purpose and autonomy while they are in Bangladesh, while preparing them for reintegration when conditions allow them to return home," stressed Mazou.

UN officials said while working towards voluntary repatriation, they also discussed the possibility of introducing alternative solutions for Rohingya refugees. Those include resettlement to third countries for the most vulnerable with specific protection needs, as well as complementary pathways overseas, which could include employment and educational opportunities.

They said additional challenges have been presented by Covid-19 and related restrictions in the Rohingya camps and that they observed a reduced humanitarian presence in the camps and associated protection risks.

The UNHCR has advocated for essential protection services for the most vulnerable, including women and children who are particularly exposed to gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation, early marriage and child labour.

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.

Allowance

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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 Pratikhs 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 Muktiyoddha 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.

A boost for ICT

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and will also leave a positive impact on materialising the dream of Digital Bangladesh," said Kamal.

"This tax holiday will help bring in more investment, create entrepreneurs and generate employment. We welcome the step of the government," said Syed Almas Kabir, president of the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS).

The apex trade body for software and IT-enabled service industry proposes new services for inclusion in the list for tax exempted services every year before the budget.

"However, we wanted tax exemption for all forms of digital payments and tech-enabled services until 2013 as Covid-19 has brought some setbacks," added Kabir.

"Now we need more investment to attain our targets. If local and foreign investors see long-term tax holiday, they become more interested in making investments," he said.

The industry also wanted a Tk 500 crore fund from the budget to implement big ICT projects such as those for e-government procurement (e-GP), digital national identification (NID) card and smart driving licence in underdeveloped and developing countries.

"If the government inks agreements with these foreign countries and provides them subsidies on condition that the services will be developed by Bangladeshi companies, then we will get our money back as well as new experience and exposure," said Kabir.

The industry also demanded a 4.5 per cent VAT exemption at source.

"Bills of the services usually come a few months later and in many cases, the clients don't pay the full amounts. So it is really problematic for us. VAT must be paid, but

Restrictions imposed

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In Noagaon, a seven-day lockdown was enforced in Noagaon municipality and Niamatpur upazila from yesterday, said Superintendent of Police Abdul Mannan Miah.

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 remain 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 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 the Indian variant of Covid-19.

In another development, Border Guard Bangladesh personnel has stepped up

not at source," he added.

The IT industry first got a shot in the arm in 2008, when the government provided income tax exemptions on tech-enabled services until 2024.

The government also added e-learning and e-books within the scope of information technology-enabled services (ITES). The "Make in Bangladesh" theme for IT hardware was also encouraged.

The tax exemption for industries producing certain hardware also aims to increase self-sufficiency by reducing dependency on imports.

The items include computers (including laptops, all-in-one (AIO) and desktops) and most parts and accessories; notebook, notepad, tabs and e-writing pads; closed-circuit televisions (CCTV), power banks, projectors and digital watches.

"This will definitely decrease the production cost for local manufacturers," said Mustafa Jabbar, minister for posts, telecommunications and information technology.

"Like mobile manufacturing advancement, we want to be self-dependent for computer, laptop and other digital hardware devices," he said.

IT hardware manufacturers welcomed the government steps.

"If you want to give a boost to the local industry, there should be a gap in terms of VAT and tax between the locally manufactured ones and imported ones," said Liakat Ali, deputy managing director at Walton Digi-Tech Industries, one of the country's top IT hardware manufacturers.

"And with such tax and VAT exemptions, local manufacturers will get encouragement. It's a good step and we welcome it," he added.

vigilance in Thakurgaon to end illegal crossing of border, said Maksud Ahmed, commanding officer of BCB 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 a 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 remained suspended, many people were seen trying to travel on minibuses, trucks and auto-rickshaws.

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

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

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.

Covax secures

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The funds will allow Covax to secure 1.8 billion fully subsidised doses for delivery to lower-income countries in 2021 and early 2022, enough to protect 30% of adults in those nations, GAVI said in a statement.

"We have taken a big step towards 'one world protected'," said Jose Manuel Barroso, GAVI chairman. The fresh funds brought total Covax financing to \$9.6 billion, he added.

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.

The Covax mechanism has distributed 77 million doses to 127 countries since February but has been stymied by India restricting exports of vaccines amid a major outbreak there.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, who pledged 15 million doses and 50 million euros (\$61 million), said: "Only by leading by example we will be effective in preaching solidarity."

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."

Effort to form new party

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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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'Made in Bangladesh'

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next fiscal year, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal also wanted VAT exemption to encourage domestic manufacturing of all types of computer parts, including laptops, scanners and motherboards so that more people get jobs.

In order to modernise the agricultural sector, VAT exemption will continue on

production of various agricultural products.

Mahbub Alam, president of the Chattogram Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the VAT exemption on the production of various daily necessities, including mobiles and computers, would encourage domestic entrepreneurs.

However, the advance tax should be completely withdrawn.