



Bongaon Villa, an agro-tourism centre situated in Bhaluka of Mymensingh, provides guests with a unique experience through its self-service facilities. Here, the villa's pond is seen surrounded by paddy crops. Visitors have the option of preparing their own meals by picking the required ingredients, including fish, for themselves.

PHOTO: AHSAN HABIB

Bongaon Villa: a true agro-tourism centre

Some other spots are sprouting amid growing popularity

AHSAN HABIB

If you like the idea of putting together your own meal by picking vegetables from a field and catching fish from a nearby pond, then you would love to visit Bongaon Villa, an agro-tourism centre situated in Bhaluka of Mymensingh.

From rice to oil, spices and other ingredients, all the materials required to make a delicious feast are available at the resort.

Although there are other agro-tourism spots in the country, Bongaon Villa provides a unique experience for those who truly enjoy such activities, visitors wrote in its comment book.

What sets Bongaon Villa apart from other agro-tourism spots is that visitors can even plough the field with a tractor and then sow seeds to facilitate future harvests.

When you get tired, a glass of mango or sugarcane juice is only a short walk away and after a quick refreshment break, visitors can return to the field.

And based on the season, the travellers themselves can pick the sugarcane or mangoes required for their drink.

"People who have an idea about agro-tourism are rare in our country, but I have dreamt of it since my childhood," said Moin Al Kashem, owner of Bongaon Villa.

"I initially built the villa for my own pleasure, but then decided to open it to the public so that other people could enjoy it as well," he added.

Bongaon Villa features a top class kitchen where visitors can cook their meals with help from the staff.

"This way, travellers can get the taste of a different kind of tourism," Kashem said, adding that there are a number of barbecue stoves and pizza ovens at the resort.

Besides, the Bongaon Villa Farm Stand is a modern shop complete with all the cooking essentials and it is conveniently placed near the kitchen.



And it goes without saying that a coffee vending machine can be found almost every time you turn a corner at the agro-tourism centre.

"I did such an arrangement to ensure self-catering service, which is very popular abroad. People go to a spot and cook their own dish but such an idea is yet to evolve in our country," Kashem said.

However, the villa has a chef on hand for anyone who wants their meals prepared for them.

After catching fish and picking vegetables that go with the curry in mind, cooking it yourself can provide

a sense of mental peace.

"In addition, the vividly coloured vegetables and fresh fish give any curry a delicious taste than anyone can definitely enjoy," he added.

There are two honeycomb shades beside the mustard plot, so guests will be treated to their gentle buzzing whenever they walk along the villa's wooden walkways. The tourist spot has a football field, badminton court and an area for table tennis to meet the peoples' entertainment needs.

Visitors can also enjoy quality time with their significant others on a boat in the pond.

"It is a good place to live for a while for one or two families at a time," said Kashem, who is managing director and chief executive officer of Prime Finance Asset Management.

"I invested almost all my money in the villa to make my dream true," he added.

The list of facilities goes on though as guests are treated to artwork in almost every inch of the villa, which features a wooden veranda, ghat and three open cottages as well.

It costs about Tk 8,000 to rent the villa for a single day and although complimentary breakfast is included, purchasing other meals will add to the bill.

The villa has a dining tent that has all the required equipment to set up a buffet for about 50 guests so corporate retreats or family outings can be arranged.

Agro-tourism is in a nascent position in the country but the authorities are trying to boost it since foreign tourists love this kind of vacation, according to Md Rafeuzzaman, president of the Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh.

"They don't want to live in a five-star hotel here. Instead, they want to enjoy the country's real rural nature," he said.

Agro-tourism could be one of Bangladesh's major attractions since all the requisite elements are readily available.

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Stocks continue steady recovery

Investors buoyant after regulatory intervention, experts say

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Domestic stocks maintained an upward trend for a third consecutive day yesterday as investors continued their buying spree.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), rose by 38 points, or 0.57 per cent, to close at 6,668 by the end of the trading session.

A total of 212 points were added to the index in the last three days.

At the same time, turnover of the country's premier stock market rose 37 per cent to hit Tk 1,061 crore while it was Tk 773 crore a day earlier.

This is the first time in the last ten trading sessions that the DSE's turnover has crossed Tk 1,000 crore.

General investors are hopeful about seeing a further increase in stock values as the market regulator pushed some institutional investors to invest money and lowered the circuit breaker limit to 2 per cent instead of 10 per cent, according to a stockbroker.

"So, they bought shares as their hopes turned into confidence," he said.

However, institutional investors are still shaky about investing, he added.

Beximco Ltd remained the most traded stock with shares worth Tk 49 crore changing hands followed by Fortune Shoes, BDCOM Online, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, and Genex Infosys.

At the DSE, 193 stocks advanced, 147 declined and 39 remained unchanged.

BDCOM Online topped the gainer list, rising 9.93 per cent, followed by Meghna Condensed Milk, Agni Systems, VFS Thread, and Quasem Industries.

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Oil bounces from a sharp drop

REUTERS, London

Oil prices bounced on Thursday from a sharp drop in the previous session after the United Arab Emirates backtracked on statements saying that OPEC and its allies might increase output to help to plug the gap in exports from Russia.

In a volatile market, Brent crude futures were up \$5.43, or 4.9 per cent, at \$116.57 a barrel by 1042 GMT after trading in an \$8 range. The benchmark contract slumped 13 per cent in the previous session in its biggest daily drop in percentage terms for about two years.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were up \$4.49, or 4.1 per cent, at \$113.19 after trading in a \$7 range. The contract had tumbled 12 per cent in the previous session in the biggest daily decline since November.

PVM oil market analyst Tamas Varga called Wednesday's slump a "temporary correction".

Uncertainty over where and when supply will come from to replace crude from Russia has led to forecasts for oil prices up to \$200 a barrel.

While oil from the world's second-largest exporter is being shunned over its invasion of Ukraine, comments from the United Arab Emirates energy minister and the its ambassador to Washington sent conflicting signals.

UAE Energy Minister Suhail al-Mazrouei said on Twitter that his country was committed to the agreement by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies including Russia to ramp up oil supply by only 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) monthly after sharp cuts in 2020.

Only hours earlier prices slumped on comments from UAE's ambassador to Washington, saying his country will be encouraging OPEC to consider higher output.

EU leaders tackle escape route from Russian fossil fuels

REUTERS, Brussels

European Union leaders will tackle ways to wean themselves off Russian fossil fuels on Thursday and debate how quickly to ditch their key supplier, with countries split over whether to sanction oil and gas imports as Moscow wages war in Ukraine.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted Brussels to unveil plans this week to reduce reliance on Europe's top gas supplier this year and end it within the decade.

How to implement those plans, not to mention how to finance them, will be a key topic under discussion at a two-day summit in Versailles, France. read more

A draft of the summit statement, seen by Reuters, would agree to phase out the EU's dependency on imports of Russian gas, oil and coal, including by ramping up liquefied natural gas imports and speeding up deployment of renewable energy. It did not set a date for the phase-out. read more

"Some are asking 2030, some are asking 2027, some are saying now," an EU official said, referring to the member states.

The 27 countries of the EU rely on Russia for 40 per cent of their collective gas needs, 27 per cent of oil imports and 46 per cent of coal imports.

Russian gas flows to Europe have continued at a steady pace since the invasion, which Russia calls a "special military operation", but Moscow has warned that Western sanctions on its oil could prompt it to close a major gas pipeline to Europe.

The EU leaders will discuss also contingency plans for supply disruptions.

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A person refuels a car at a gas station as fuel prices surged, in Manhattan, New York City on March 7.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russian inflation strikes six-year high

AFP, Moscow

Consumer price inflation in Russia, which has been accelerating for months, hit a six-year high in February, Russia's national statistics agency said Wednesday.

The 9.15 per cent annual inflation rate recorded last month by Rosstat was also the first time it has exceeded nine percent since January 2016.

Food prices were up nearly 11.5 per cent on an annual basis.

The inflation rate is more than double the four percent target of the Russian central bank and the data does not yet include the effect of Western sanctions imposed on Russia over Ukraine.

High inflation has already hit the purchasing power of Russians, who have little savings, and proved a headache for the authorities in recent months.