



A farmer is seen clearing weeds from his cumin plantation in Shibganj upazila of Bogura. The Spices Research Institute recently rolled out its own variety of the crop, called the BARI Jira-1, which can only be grown in sandy loam soil due to its low water tolerance.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

# First variety of cumin faces setback

If plants can be saved from fog and water, wider cultivation can help reduce import dependence, say scientists

MOSTAFA SHABUJ, Bogura

The Spices Research Centre (SRC) in Shibganj upazila of Bogura has released the first variety of cumin for commercial cultivation on February 22 in a bid to reduce Bangladesh's import dependence for the spice. However, farmers have been left frustrated as about 50 per cent of the crops being grown under a trial basis have already been damaged by rain and fog.

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The SRC, a department of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, developed the BARI Jira-1 variety of cumin through 12 years of intensive research, according to officials of the research centre.

Farmers can grow BARI Jira-1, which is the first type of cumin to be fully developed by the SRC, in sandy loam soils.

Dr Mazharul Anwar, chief scientific officer of the SRC, said farmers can take the seeds and advice on how to grow them from his organisation.

The SRC in Bogura has so far

developed around 48 varieties, of which BARI Jira-1 was most recently cleared for release by the Seed Certification Agency, he added.

Md Mahmudul Hasan, senior scientific officer of the SRC, had worked with cumin since 2008 in hopes of releasing a new variety.

"After an adaptation and evaluation trial, a committee reviewed my work and decided that Bangladeshi farmers could grow the cumin, which remains a 100 per cent import-oriented spice even now," he said.

During the development phase, it was found that BARI Jira-1 can be grown in dry areas like the abandoned char areas that have low water percolation as cumin is less tolerant of water compared to other crops.

"We had heard that many farmers cultivated cumin in different areas in the past, but it was found that they were growing dill," Hasan said.

Besides, some farmers in Naogaon, Faridpur, and Rajshahi previously tried to cultivate actual cumin but failed.

"This year though, we have given BARI Jira-1 seeds to 65 farmers in Bogura and Gaibandha's char areas, and 50 per cent of them have found success," he added.

Ataur Rahman, a farmer of Kanaipara char beside the Jamuna river in Gaibandha's Saghata upazila, said he cultivated cumin on six decimals of land last November.

"The growth of it was lucrative as the plants bore flowers but 50 per cent of the plants have died already due to the sudden rain in the first week of February," he said.

"I will harvest the remaining 50 per cent within one or two days and the yield will be good I think," Rahman added.



Amir Ali, a farmer of Haludia char under Bogura's Sonatala upazila, said the SRC provided him with seeds, fertilisers and other facilities to grow cumin this year.

"I have cultivated BARI Jira-1 on four decimals of land. About 50 per cent of my crop was damaged by the rain in February while the remainder was damaged by fog," he added.

Scientific officers of the SRC said cumin can be planted in November and harvested about 100 days later.

Cumin cannot tolerate water and so, farmers need not irrigate their lands. If farmers can save the plant from fog and water, they can get around 2 to 2.5 maunds of cumin from each bigha, said SRC Senior Scientific Officer Hasan.

This amount of cumin can then be sold for about Tk 30,000 at the current market price.

Besides, farmers need only Tk 6,000 to Tk 7,000 to grow one bigha of cumin.

Hasan went on to say that Bangladesh consumes about 25,000 tonnes of cumin worth about Tk 500 crore to Tk 600 crore each year. Domestic demand for the spice is met through imports, both legal and illegal, from countries such as India and Pakistan.

In fiscal 2020-21, 20,602 tonnes of the spice was imported for about Tk 328 crore through Chattogram port, down some 15 per cent from 24,232 tonnes the year before, according to Chattogram customs. Meanwhile, about 4,223 tonnes of cumin worth Tk 68.27 crore has been imported in the first seven months of the ongoing fiscal year. Cumin is also imported through other channels such as land ports.

"So if farmers can grow it on a massive scale, then we can save our foreign exchange reserve," he said.

As cumin does not require much preservation, farmers of the abandoned char areas can preserve the spice in their houses to sell it any time they need money, Hasan added.

"We had imported several varieties of germplasm from Iran, India, Pakistan and Turkey to conduct our research. After the adaptation trial, we released the BARI Jira-1 which can be grown successfully in dry sandy loam soils," said the SRC's Chief Scientific Officer Anwar.

## Old guards versus new guards

MAMUN RASHID

In today's dynamic and ever-changing business environment the need to transform, reshape and restructure is a constant and no longer an option.

Business enterprises continuously need fresh ideas and newer ways of thinking that may set them apart from competitors and make them seem exclusive in the eyes of their consumers. As a result, it is no longer possible for any business executive to become too comfortable in their elevated position simply and only based on their years of loyalty to the organisation.

In the past, loyalty and length of service were major factors when determining whom to retain, whom to show the door and whom to promote. In other words, the loyalty and years of service are what created the notion of the "old guards", which are those executives who have a long history with the organisation and through those years, they have managed to accumulate substantial power and authority from an informal and social standpoint.

However, due to constantly needing new ideas and new ways of thinking to survive in today's marketplace, businesses also have to keep on bringing in new and fresh energy into their executive structure and through this, the "new guards" are created.

For most of my own highly diverse career, I have been viewed as the new guard because I was someone who was brought into the organisation to drive the change and infuse new ways of thinking.

Despite being very successful in terms of the numbers and results, my presence was not always welcome, especially to the old guards who had perhaps gotten a little too comfortable in their ways of doing things for decades. Thus, began the conflict between the old guard and the new guard.

Every large organisation in the world has a distinctive culture, which identifies and differentiates them from other organisations. We often get to hear: "It does not work here, or we do it differently." This basically implies that the people within an organisation feel that somehow, they are different from others and what they are doing is unique.

Edgar Schein, a former professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management, defines organisational culture as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems."

My favourite definition would be this one - liner by Deal and Kennedy: "The way things get done around here."

Suppose you join a new organisation at the top management level. You start by studying the hard numbers but don't get too bogged down. The most important aspect of the organisation that a leader must realise is the culture because the culture directly dictates how the organisation functions and it also defines its value structure.

An organisational leader must understand that true power is not always formal or officially designated because there is also the phenomenon of informal or social power, and often the latter could have more influence than the former.

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## Eurozone growth slows as war threatens recovery

AFP, Brussels

Business activity in the eurozone slowed in March, according to a closely watched survey, as high prices and a gloomy outlook raised fears the Ukraine war could snuff out economic recovery.

Thursday's data indicated that while Europe was still growing at a solid pace after the lows of the coronavirus pandemic, clouds loomed for the health of the economy moving forward.

The survey underscores the "immediate and material impact" of the war on the economy and "highlights the risk of the eurozone falling into decline in the second quarter", said S&P's chief business economist, Chris Williamson.

Had it not been for the easing of coronavirus measures, "business activity would have weakened far more sharply in March", Williamson added.

The purchase managers' index (PMI) from S&P (formerly IHS Markit), slipped 1.0 points to 54.5, a statement said. A figure above 50 indicates growth.

Among eurozone countries, France best resisted the negative effects of the war, as its service industry boomed and consumer demand offset slumping exports.

Growth slowed more steeply in Germany, Europe's biggest economy, but manufacturing was still above the levels seen late last year, when the country's crucial export sector suffered deeply due to the pandemic.

Analysts and officials warn that the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have made economic forecasting highly uncertain but most agree that predictions of major growth will have to be significantly lowered.



The headquarters of the European Central Bank on the banks of the river Main and the banking district (in the background) are pictured in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

## US reinstates 352 product exclusions from China tariffs

REUTERS, Washington

The US Trade Representative's office said on Wednesday it has reinstated 352 expired product exclusions from US "Section 301" tariffs on Chinese imports, well short of the 549 exclusions that it was previously considering.

The reinstated product exclusions will be effective retroactively from October 12, 2021, and extend through December 31, 2022, USTR said. They cover a wide range of the initially estimated \$370 billion worth of Chinese imports that former president Donald Trump hit with punitive tariffs of 7.5 per cent to 25 per cent.

The list released by USTR includes industrial components such as pumps and electric motors, certain car parts and chemicals, backpacks, bicycles, vacuum cleaners and other consumer goods.