



More to mango than the himsagar 300 varieties and counting

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SANIA AIMAN

Small, fragrant and completely yellow when ripe, the Ranipasand mango was named such after being excessively liked by a visiting British royal during the colonial time, local Chapai Nawabganj folklore says. It is but one delicious mango, and a rather obscure one at that, of the hundreds of varieties of mango that the north-western region in of Rajshahi and Rangpur Bangladesh produce abundantly every summer.

The Ranipasand is a delicate fruit, with a smooth skin and soft flesh, small enough to fit two of them in one palm.

As soon as summer arrives, the wait for mangoes to ripen begins, and the early varieties usually start surfacing in the markets from mid-May. This year mango output has been less than projected because of unexpected rain

conditions and a prolonged winter, as the relatively slower pace of the Kansat and Baneshwar wholesale hubs prove. However, even in those markets, host of visibly different mangoes are offered to buyers as being the famous Haribhanga, Khirsapat, Himsagar, Lengra and such, with baskets and crates and trucks of mangoes arriving and being sold daily, and farmers and businessmen are happy with the demand

and prices.

Love for mangoes is fairly widespread in Bangladesh, yet many avid enthusiasts remain unfamiliar with the sheer variety of this fruit as the more celebrated varieties dominate the public psyche. But, Bangladeshi mangoes have much more to offer as nearly 300 varieties are produced in Rajshahi region alone, which holds its ground as the traditional mango hub of Bangladesh and produces about two-thirds of the country's mango output.

Some of the areas producing the finest mangoes viz Chapai Nawabganj, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Natore are expected to produce around 4.6 lakh tonnes of mangoes this season, and that is not even counting the production from other large producers like Rangpur and Satkhira.

Amongst the earliest varieties and one of the stars of the mango pantheon is the Gopalbhog, a rounded at the top variety that is medium-sized, fleshy, and smooth textured. The skin of a ripe Gopalbhog is a bit thick and remains greenish around the bottom and appears yellow near the top when ripe.

The most popular and beloved variety of mango is commonly known as the Himsagar, but in Rajshahi it is known as the Khirsapat, and both are thus one and the same in Bangladesh, said Md Habib Al Sadi, mango orchard owner and businessman. This is a really fragrant, deeply sweet smelling medium sized variety with a very smooth and light flesh and a flat seed. It is also the second most cultivated variety in Bangladesh and a GI tagged product of Chapai Nawabganj.

The most famous variety that arrives



Ranipasand



PHOTOS: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

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mid-June is the Lengra, variants of which are also cultivated commercially in India and Pakistan. An average Lengra mango is about 300g, yellow tinted and is known for its sweet taste with a very slight sour after-taste. Interestingly, another contemporary variety called the Lakhanbhog is locally called the "diabetes mango," as it is a tasty but lightly sweet variety, thus presumably "better for diabetics." There is no medical advice behind this, just local assumption. Fazli is the king of mango in terms of sheer size of individual specimen. Very few mangoes can get as huge as Fazlis do normally, and each piece can be a full kilogram!

It is very usual to find as many as 40 or more varieties of mangoes growing in the same garden, and the farmers and workers are keenly aware of each tree and its fruit. The exotic sounding

names include Gourmati, Mallika, Chonsa, Modhuchuski, Rajbhog, Kohitur, Jibonsudha, Misrikanto, Bhogla, Surmai, Misribhog, Jhinuk Ashwina, and many more.

The Totapuri mango, for example, is named for its light green colour and a pointed bottom, reminiscent of a parrot's beak. The Golapbhash, on the other hand, is so fragrant that it is compared to a rose. One variety known as Bou Shundori, which literally translates to "beautiful wife," is a large sized elongated and fleshy mango variety with a red top and yellow bottom. Despite its fancy name and beauty, it is not popular for direct consumption as it is not as tasty as the other variants, and is more suitable for making secondary mango flavoured products like juices and such. The Baishakhi is called such as it matures really early, and the Batasha is really sweet and light.

Rajmohon, a recently named variant of mango which was earlier considered a nameless local type, which are collectively called "guthi," is one example of many that the general people remain unaware of, said Anwarul Hoque, an ex-forest officer and an enthusiastic mango researcher, who named the variety. He has christened another tiny variant as Modhuchuski, as these mangoes are small like chocolates or candy, and equally sweet. Hoque feels that there are many such varieties that need to be nurtured consciously, to add to the variety and richness of the mango industry. The Gourmati, erstwhile considered a guthi, now sells for up to Tk 400 per kg, as it is a delicious but late harvest and ripens after most other mangoes are already finished for the season.



Khirsapat Heemsagar

Mango bonanza of Kansat wholesale market



Whether you are looking for Himsagar, Amropali, Fazli, Lengra, Haribhanga or Ashwini mangoes, Kansat bazaar can offer them all. "The star here is Khirshipat aam."

ASHIF AHMED RUDRO

During fruit harvesting season, if you are looking for mangoes for consumption or business, Kansat is the ultimate place to be. The Kansat mango market at Chapai Nawabganj is renowned as the largest mango bazaar in Bangladesh and like all bazaars, there's madness here, but there's also distinct method to it.

The Bazaar

Activities start as early as 7AM. The farmers pick mangoes directly from the trees very early in the morning, pack in bamboo baskets or plastic crates and bring them in the bazaar on cycle vans and motor vans.

A continuous stream of vehicles carrying baskets will greet the approaching visitor, and pan out into a large field of the haat, which once was a courtyard of a grand home of a zamindar, now derelict and in ruins.

The main bazaar is an open space that plays host to hundreds of cycle vans carrying baskets of mangoes lined up so

densely that it's difficult to walk.

The two baskets balanced on two sides of each cycle easily carry an astounding 200 kg each.

The mangoes come in all shapes and sizes and the sweet aroma of the fruit wafts through the whole market. The farmers here only pick fresh mangoes matured on the bough. As a result, the market turns all shades of green and yellow with dashes of red of ripe mangoes. It is a sight full of promise for any mango connoisseur.

How it goes
Bamboo baskets carry about 100 kgs of mangoes and each crate carries around 20/30 kgs. For each successful sale, the farmers are required to pay a toll, known as 'khajna', at the end of the day — Tk 25 for each basket and Tk 6 for each crate sold.

The selling of mango here is quite a spectacle too. People come here from all over the country and the market hosts the sellers who are both producers and dealers. The transaction begins with inquiries of the mango's origin, or

location of the garden. Then comes the bargaining: offers and counter offers and the conversation gets loud and enthusiastic quickly.

People from other cities usually come here in numbers, and each seller usually has a helping hand with them. As a result, a lot of the bargaining become passionate group encounters. Interestingly, the conversation is loud but not heated and every bargaining draws a crowd.

The surroundings

The sea of mangoes is bordered on the sides with warehouses. The warehouses (aarat) play the role of third party between the farmers and businessmen from across the country.

While the market is buzzing with buyers and sellers looking for a good deal, the warehouses are busy with packing and loading the mangoes.

compete with Himsagar.

As Kansat is a wholesale market, one has to buy a minimum of 1 maund mangoes if they were to purchase. "Every day I buy at least 40 maunds of mangoes from here and send it to Dhaka, where I have a business. Sometimes the quantity is larger, depending on the demand in Dhaka. I usually end up staying here



for the two/three months of mango harvesting. I've been doing this for the past nine years," said one Md Rubel, a wholesale fruit supplier of Dhaka's Malibagh.

"I come here because the mango here is really good, supply is plentiful, and the good quality mango means that my business in Dhaka will be doing well. Every day I do a business of Tk 80-100,000 here," he added.

However, the locals are not happy this year because Kansat bazaar is seeing about half its usual sales. "It's terrible. There's supposed to be at least twice as many mangoes, twice as many vans and twice as many people. This place becomes so full of mangoes that it becomes difficult to find an empty space to stand, but this year the production is lower than expected. We are missing at least 40 percent in volume," said Md Tia Alam a local mango dealer.

The change in weather and rainfall has affected the production this year and the farmers are suffering because of it. Untimely rain affects the taste, quality and harvesting time of mangoes and if similar weather follows, the Kansat market will lose its appeal in the future.

PHOTOS: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

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If you watch closely, you will find that often a single mango is sent to the warehouses with a few words scribbled on it. The writings are made with pen and explain details of a mango dealing such as name of the warehouse, selling price and quantity, essentially a receipt. This is an accepted practice around here, along with the fact that one maund comprises of 50 kgs instead of the usual 40.

The mango business

Whether you are looking for Himsagar, Amropali, Fazli, Lengra, Haribhanga or Ashwini mangoes, Kansat bazaar can offer them all. "The star here is Khirshipat aam. It's known as Himsagar in the cities," said Md Sahabuddin, a mango farmer who promises that no other mangoes could