



An assortment of ornaments decorated with pearls is seen on display at a local jeweller in Kotchandpur upazila of Jhenaidah, where one farmer is popularising pearl farming across the region. With minimal costs and labour, the business is becoming a promising avenue for securing riches.

PHOTO: AZIBOR RAHMAN

Pearl farming: a rich avenue for earning



INSPIRING STORIES FROM THE FIELD

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenaidah

Pearl farming is providing a new road to success for people in Jhenaidah, where many youths have become allured to this form of aquaculture.

Dr Nazrul Islam, who obtained a doctorate from Shizuoka University in Japan, led the way with his farm in Panchlia village under Kotchandpur upazila.

The agro-entrepreneur cultures freshwater pearls in a native species of oyster, which are collected for Tk 3-5 apiece from local fishermen.

He then sorts through the oysters to select the best ones for breeding in his pond, which currently houses around 15,000 of the molluscs.

Pearl farming is a promising industry in Bangladesh, according to Islam, who began the business with 2,000 oysters in 2020.

He has sold Tk 10 lakh worth of pearls up till October this year and expects to sell another Tk 12 lakh by next July.

To facilitate new entrepreneurs in the business, Islam has trained around 2,000 youths in different districts of the country.

Pearl farming alongside fish cultivation does not carry any extra cost for feeding the oysters as they only eat phytoplankton and algae, and are fairly easy to manage.



It is possible to produce pearls in oysters in just 6 to 8 months and besides, it is a woman-friendly business, Islam said.

Bangladesh has considerable demand for pearls, which are used to make ornaments such as rings and buttons while they are also used in medicine and cosmetics.

Islam says his farm produces top grade pearls that sell at a good price through online platforms, such as social media, while companies like Aarong and local ornament makers buy them too.

Considering the demand for his pearls, Islam has already contacted business associations in Dhaka for wholesale.

The agro-entrepreneur graduated from Rajshahi University in 1999 and then completed his post-graduation the following year.

After that, Islam obtained a PhD in

fisheries from the same university in 2008 but after being unable to live his dream of working for the institute, he moved to Japan for higher education in 2010.

It was there that he studied at Shizuoka University until 2013, when he returned with a Doctor of Science degree before joining the Japan International Cooperation Agency in 2014.

His life was going well in Dhaka, but the coronavirus pandemic changed everything.

Islam's department was closed down following the Covid-19 outbreak in 2019 and after losing his job, he returned to the village in 2020 and set up an organic farm project called "Ryan Organic Agriculture" on 3.3 acres of land.

Five labourers work at the project while two serve as guards for the farm, which has about 30 species of fruit, vegetables,

spices and two ponds.

Robjel Ali, one of the guards, said that visitors through the project just to enjoy its beauty.

Bapi Biswas, an entrepreneur from Gopalganj, said he was trained in pearl farming by Islam in 2021.

He then began his own farm with 1,000 oysters at a total cost of Tk 45,000 in July 2022 and expects to start harvesting pearls in May 2023.

Liton Shikdar, another entrepreneur from Kotalipara upazila of Gopalganj, said that after being trained by Islam, he started his own farm with 1,000 oysters in May 2022 with funds from the local fishery office.

Similarly, Ashraful Alam, a local of Shibnagar village under Kotchandpur upazila, said he was inspired by Islam to learn about pearl farming, which is a very profitable business.

Sanjay Kumar, senior fisheries officer of Kotchadur upazila, said 60 farmers were trained on pearl farming in 2021.

"This training has been provided with the technical assistance of the Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute. Pearls could make a huge contribution to the country's economy," he added.

Islam went on to say that he will make the district a pearl farming hub by expanding such activities.

In addition, he aims to remove unemployment problem and empower women in the region.

"For this, multiple training centres are needed for the smooth training of jobless youths and women," he said, adding that the government should allot a suitable loan for this purpose.

DIGITAL DARE

How does social media know what I am thinking?

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

Back in my university days, I had the privilege of learning a management theory which was of significant value later in my corporate years. It is called Johari Window for self-awareness, a technique to self-improve by knowing oneself better.

But in recent years, I find the method is losing its appeal as the electronic gadgets around me seem to read my thoughts better!

I am sure most of you have also discovered how apps, internet and social media platforms have this uncanny knowledge of your mind.

Sometimes, it gives you a recommendation that had only crossed your mind before you even got the opportunity to speak of it! You feel caught off guard and exposed completely.

How do these websites know what I am thinking? How do they know what I intend to shop or the book I want to read?

Websites and apps often claim they offer a 'tailored experience' for their users. In most cases, if you are enjoying the 'tailored experience', it is because you may have unknowingly agreed to give them access to your innermost knowledge.

All your browsing through social media is in fact busy collecting your personal data based on your consent through different ways. It includes: 1. agreeing to privacy policies, 2. accepting cookies, 3. access to photo albums, 4. access to the microphone, and 5. access to location.

If we say no to any consent, we would not be allowed to use the app, site or platform. So, driven by our immediate needs and whims, we click on "agree" without realising how our privacy is being compromised.

But we can also outsmart them too. There are also ways to manage damage control to some extent.

For a better understanding of what is happening, check your privacy and security settings across the apps installed and all devices being used.

Some of the prominent social media sites and our own devices e.g., mobile phones, laptops and desktops have the feature to show how personal data is being tracked and used.

It also offers the option to change data preferences by restricting personalised services or turning off certain services and apps and withdrawing location access to specific apps or all apps etc.

Give location access only to specific apps like food delivery, logistics and Uber kind of apps.

At least periodically review the privacy settings and disable unnecessary cookies on your browser, and this can be done through Google Chrome, Apple Safari and Microsoft Edge etc.

In most cases, data is being collected, analysed, and monetised to sell products (online ad), influence opinions (Cambridge Analytica), give personalised experiences to drive stickiness etc. If the use of personal data is limited to the above-mentioned platforms, then it is fairly safe.

But if it is used in the wrong way by the wrong group or app, then you are in deep waters.

In our age of Artificial Intelligence, cloud computing and machine learning, the prediction tool has become so powerful that it can predict with an impressive level of accuracy what we are thinking or what we want right now.

If this trend continues, it won't be long before they start predicting what we will be thinking a few months or years down the line. If so, then you needs Johari Window!

The author is a telecom and management expert.

Govt to import 60,000 tonnes of urea fertiliser

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government's purchase committee yesterday gave clearance to the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) to import 60,000 tonnes of urea fertiliser at Tk 392 crore.

Of the quantity, BCIC will buy 30,000 tonnes of granular urea from Qatar under a state-to-state contract.

The state agency will buy the other half of granular fertiliser from Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company Ltd (Kafco) at Tk 191 crore.

Last week, the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase gave the nod to the BCIC and Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation to buy 115,000 tonnes of fertiliser from two Middle Eastern countries to increase fertiliser stock for producing crops in coming seasons.

In September this year, the government granted clearance to the state agencies to import 90,000 tonnes of fertiliser from Qatar and Morocco under the state-to-state contract.

The agriculture ministry projects a requirement of 55.5 lakh tonnes of chemical fertiliser for fiscal 2022-23 and most of it would be met through imports because of inadequate domestic production.

State factories produce 10 lakh tonnes of urea and insignificant quantities of triple super phosphate (TSP) and diammonium phosphate. Farmers used over 55 lakh tonnes of fertiliser in fiscal 2021-22 and most of the demand was met through imports.



The agriculture ministry projects that Bangladesh will need 55.5 lakh tonnes of chemical fertiliser for fiscal 2022-23 and most of it would be met through imports because of inadequate domestic production.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

Power Grid Company makes Tk 122cr profit

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Power Grid Company of Bangladesh Ltd's profit plunged 61.77 per cent year-on-year to Tk 122.59 crore in the financial year that ended on June 30.

The state-run electricity transmission and distribution service provider made a profit of Tk 320.73 crore in 2020-21.

The company reported earnings per share of Tk 1.72 in the last financial year, down from Tk 4.50 in 2020-21.

The board of directors has recommended a 10 per cent cash dividend for general shareholders for 2021-22.

Power Grid Company also published its unaudited financial statements for the first quarter of 2022-23.

It posted a profit of Tk 104.06 crore in the July-September quarter, which

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