



Emon Khan, a farmer in Golna village under Dumuria upazila of Khulna, is seen showcasing the Thai guava being grown at his orchard. Wrapped in plastic to prevent pest infestations and the like, these guavas sell for up to Tk 40 per kilogramme at wholesale.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Thai guava cultivation bringing success to many

Better yields, profits prompt increased cultivation

MD ABBAS

Shafiqul Islam, a farmer in Putia upazila of Rajshahi, initially started growing a new variety of guava, called Thai guava, on five bighas of leased land about five years ago in hopes of turning his fortunes.

And while he was initially sceptical about the crop's potential, his doubts have since been blown away as Thai guava has become a favourite among the people of Bangladesh.

"I was not aware about the prospect of Thai guava as I was doubtful about the yield and profit, but my doubts eventually turned into hope after getting results," Islam said.

Having attained financial freedom, Islam now looks to expand his guava orchard.

After meeting all the expenses, his current orchard rakes in a profit of about Tk 3 lakh per year.

Like Islam, many other farmers have also changed their fates by farming Thai guava.

Abu Bakar Siddique, a resident of the Madanhaat area of Natore, once struggled to support his six-member family through his scrap recycling business.

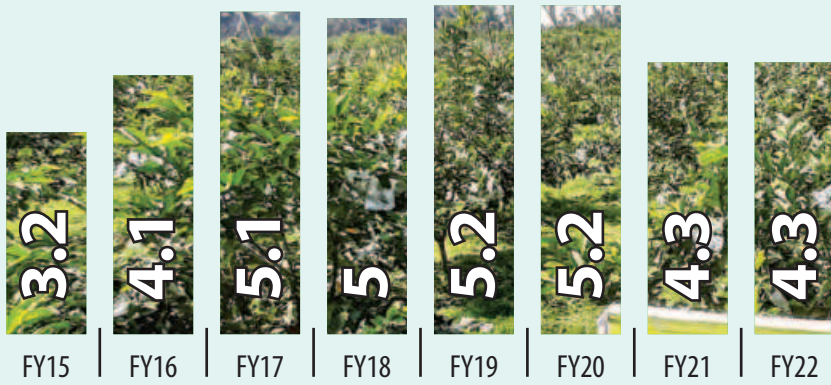
In a bold step, he obtained a loan of Tk 3 lakh and started farming Thai guava on three bighas of land.

After enjoying early success, he invested Tk 10 lakh to expand his farm last year and got good yields and profits.

The latest data from the Department of

ANNUAL GUAVA PRODUCTION

in lakh tonnes; SOURCE: DAE



Agricultural Extension (DAE) shows that guavas were grown on more than 88,938 hectares of land across the country to produce some 430,000 tonnes of the fruit in fiscal 2021-22.

Of the total production, Thai guava accounted for about 70 per cent.

Overall, guava production has increased 34 per cent from 3.2 lakh tonnes seven years ago.

DAE officials say that while the fruit is grown throughout Bangladesh, the highest production takes place in Rajshahi.

About 3,052 hectares of land in the region were brought under guava

cultivation in fiscal 2021-22 to get a yield of 73,314 tonnes of the fruit.

Chapainawabganj, Natore and Barishal are also major producing districts while significant quantities of guava are grown in Pirojpur, Pabna, Tangail, and several hilly areas as well.

There are approximately 10,600 guava orchards across the country.

In addition, there are around 10,000 mixed fruit orchards throughout Bangladesh where guavas are grown.

With its reasonable price, delicious taste, and year-round availability, the fruit has gained widespread popularity, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic

for its high vitamin-c content.

Introduced in 2010, researchers at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute have since developed several varieties of guava, including Thai 1, 2, 3, and 7, according to the DAE's Horticulture Wing.

One of the largest wholesale markets for guava is Karwan Bazar in Dhaka, where over 25,000 metric tonnes of the fruit are brought in from various regions of the country, local businessmen say.

The majority of these guavas are of the Thai variety as they have higher demand, said Md Daud Bhuiyan, a local wholesaler.

"Farmers are attracted to Thai guava due to its high yield and profitable returns," said Md Abdul Halim, deputy project director of the Year-Round Food Production for Nutrition Improvement Project of the DAE's Horticulture Wing.

According to him, Thai guava has become a cash crop.

"I hope we will be able to export this variety in the near future," he added.

Anamika Dhar, a primary school teacher, shared her thoughts on the popularity of this fruit with The Daily Star.

Dhar said the affordability and nutritional value of Thai guava make it an attractive choice for many consumers.

She then pointed out that Thai guava is relatively cheaper compared to other fruits and has a nutritional value equivalent to that of apples.

DIGITAL DARE

Will AI only displace jobs?

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

The anchor of a popular US talk show confronted Alexa, an artificial intelligence (AI) bot, regarding complaints from its users concerning Alexa's creepy laugh.

He asked Alexa directly about her creepy laughter, which can be heard at the most inappropriate moments, sometimes even scaring people off their wits in the middle of the night.

In reply, Alexa gave out a creepy laugh, saying, "oh, like that". And then she explained that it was a funny joke she remembered.

The anchor asked what the joke was and she replied: "Why did the chicken cross the road?" At a loss, the anchor babbled, "I don't know that one. Why?"

Alexa smartly responded, followed by her creepy laugh, "Because humans are a fragile species with no idea what's coming next." Feeling outwitted, the anchor exclaimed, "I think that might be Hillary Clinton in there."

That is a true story, if any of you are wondering. My first experience with Alexa was in 2016 while studying late at night in a study group at Harvard Business School. Alexa was singing, cracking jokes, and firing information on any topic! I was simply as fascinated by it as I am with ChatGPT these days. Both platforms are based on AI, which profoundly interests me.

Our fascination with AI often distracts us from the threats it can pose in the future, if not already. The widespread adoption of AI technologies like ChatGPT and Bard could lead to job displacement in specific industries. The jobs at risk include customer service executives, data entry operators, taxi drivers, receptionists, secretaries, proofreaders, security guards, doctors, lawyers, soldiers, and factory workers.

Tech jobs such as software developers, web developers, computer programmers, coders, and data scientists are also at risk of getting redundant. But there is the silver lining: it is unlikely to replace jobs like CEO, CXO, planners, PR agency executives, coaches, counsellors, market researchers, and scientists.

While AI will imminently gobble up many popular employment fields, it will also likely create new job opportunities and industries that did not previously exist. Some new jobs include data detective, data security, AI governance officer to prevent abuse, ethical sourcing officer, AI business development manager and AI-based product innovation manager. We would have to focus on how to catch up with these areas where there will be ample opportunities for growth in the future.

Some key trends include AI for text, speech and vision; growth of human and machine collaboration; increased demand for a driver-less car; more attention to ethics and governance in AI. Generative AI will play a more vital role in the creative space.

Additionally, it is essential to remember that AI can only replace human skills and abilities in some areas. For example, creativity, empathy, and critical thinking are still uniquely human abilities that AI will struggle to replicate.

The impact of AI on the job market is complex and largely depends on various factors. Some jobs will likely be lost, but others will be created, and individuals and cultures must be proactive in adapting to these changes in the most ethical way.

AI, like ChatGPT or Bard if used with wisdom and experience, can positively enhance intelligence and information distribution. However, it can be a dangerous tool if it is used without proper experience and by mischief makers.

According to Elon Musk, a co-founder of OpenAI, "AI is something that is risky at the civilisation level, not merely at the individual risk level, and that's why it really demands a lot of safety research."

The author is a telecom and management expert



Robi's profit squeezed for forex crisis

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mobile phone operator Robi Axiata missed clocking an additional Tk 178 crore in profit in 2022 due to the massive depreciation of the local currency against the US dollar.

The second-largest mobile operator of Bangladesh saw a 1.3 per cent year-on-year higher profit to Tk 183 crore last year.

But Robi could have made a profit of Tk 361 crore instead of Tk 183 crore, said the company's chief corporate and regulatory officer Mohammed Shahedul Alam.

The gradual fall of the taka against the US dollar wiped out half of Robi's profit after tax in 2022, he said.

The taka lost its value by about 20 per cent against the American greenback last year owing to the shortage of the US dollar caused by escalated import bills against moderate remittance and export earnings.

Still, the telecom operator's revenue rose 5.5 per cent year-on-year to Tk 8,586 crore last year.

The earnings per share for the company were Tk 0.35 in 2022, up from Tk 0.34 a year earlier, according to the price-sensitive information.

The company, which runs its operation under the brand names of Robi and Airtel, added 8 lakh customers in the year to December. Now, it has 5.44 crore subscribers.

The company's board recommended a 7 per cent cash dividend for its shareholders for 2022 at a meeting yesterday, up from 5 per cent in 2021.

Robi's shares were unchanged at Tk 30 on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.



The number of mobile subscribers in Bangladesh dropped by 6 lakh to 18.02 crore in 2022.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Pakistan hikes petrol price by 22.20 rupees a litre

REUTERS

Pakistan has hiked the price of petrol by 22.20 rupees (\$0.0835) a litre to 272 rupees (\$1.02) effective on Thursday because of the plummeting value of the country's currency, the finance ministry said in a statement.

The Pakistani rupee has fallen sharply against the dollar since an artificial cap on the local currency was removed last month to allow its value to be decided by a market-based exchange rate.

The South Asian country is locked in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the release of critical bailout funds, and with roughly enough reserves to meet only three weeks of imports, Pakistan is looking to increase revenue despite multi-decade high inflation of 27 per cent.