

MAO'S GIFT TO BHASHANI

A tractor that carries a piece of history

MIRZA SHAKIL, *Tangail*



PHOTO: STAR

An old tractor, covered in dust and rust, stands in a tin-roofed shed at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University in Tangail. It has not tilled a field in decades, but its history goes far beyond farming.

The tractor was a gift from Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong to Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani in 1967, reflecting a friendship between the two leaders and Bhashani's dream of transforming agriculture through cooperative farming.

Today, the tractor remains at Santosh, just northwest of Bhashani's grave, where years of inadequate maintenance have left it in a state of neglect.

The story of the tractor began with Bhashani's visits to China in the 1960s.

In 1963, Bhashani travelled to China as head of the Pakistani delegation attending the country's National Day celebrations. He stood beside Mao at Tiananmen Square and held meetings with him and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai.

He returned to China in 1964 and later wrote "Mao Zedong-er Deshe" (In the Land of Mao Zedong), drawing on his experiences during the visits.

During his third and final visit in 1966, Mao promised to give Bhashani a tractor. The following year, it arrived in East Pakistan. The gift had a practical purpose.

Bhashani believed that farmers cultivating small, scattered plots could not escape poverty without changing the way agriculture was organised. He advocated cooperative farming, where farmers could work together and use modern machinery to cultivate larger areas of land.

The tractor was capable of cultivating 50 acres of land in a single cropping season, reflecting Bhashani's vision of cooperative farming.

It was first used in Mohipur, under Panchbibi upazila of Joypurhat, where Bhashani had initiated agricultural projects to experiment with cooperative cultivation.

In 1974, the tractor was brought to Santosh in Tangail.

Bhashani later handed it over to the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), hoping it would continue serving farmers rather than remain unused.

The corporation operated it in Jamalpur for some time. Eventually, the tractor broke down and became inoperative.

There were even moves to sell it.

But in 1995, the then Board of Trustees of Santosh Islamic University intervened and brought the tractor back to Santosh, saving it from being sold.

It has since remained under the care of the university authorities.

Azad Khan Bhashani, a grandson of Maulana Bhashani, said the tractor remains a reminder of the historic friendship between Mao and his grandfather, as well as Bhashani's ideas on agriculture, farmers and the rural economy.

He called for proper preservation of the tractor as part of a wider government initiative to protect Bhashani's historical belongings.

MBSTU Vice-Chancellor Professor ABM Shahidul Islam said the tractor and other historical items had been inspected in consultation with Bhashani's family. He assured that steps had already been taken to preserve and display them properly.

IN BRIEF

Measles outbreak shows no signs of slowing

1,509 more suspected cases in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Measles cases and hospitalisations have continued to rise, while the death toll climbed further, even seven weeks after the government launched an intensified catch-up vaccination campaign to contain the unprecedented outbreak.

A total of 1,509 suspected measles cases and 173 confirmed cases were reported in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to DGHS. Four more patients died with suspected measles, taking the total death toll to 1,318.

During the same period, 1,405 patients were admitted to hospitals, the second-highest single-day hospitalisation figure since the outbreak began. The highest was 1,415 admissions on July 27.

The government launched an intensified catch-up measles vaccination campaign on September 26. It initially targeted around 34 lakh children and was scheduled to end on October 31. However, an additional 19.06 lakh children have received the vaccine since September 27, as of yesterday.

As the vaccine usually takes three to four weeks to develop immunity, a decline in cases was expected by now. However, DGHS data show that cases and hospitalisations have continued to rise.

In the first 16 days of November, the daily averages stood at 1,405 cases and 1,214 hospital admissions, up from 1,267 cases and 1,088 admissions in October. Deaths averaged 4.12 a day this month, slightly lower than October's daily average of 4.65. In May, the daily average was 10.

Four districts see sporadic violence

STAR REPORT

Several violent incidents, including gunfire, arson attempts, and bomb attacks, took place in four districts between Sunday night and early yesterday.

A group of armed men fired 15 to 16 blank shots while chanting "Joy Bangla" at Dattapara Bazar in Natore Sadar upazila on Sunday night, police said.

The incident took place around 10:00pm. The group arrived in several microbuses, and they also allegedly tried to set a vehicle on fire.

Natore Sadar Police Station OC Monsur Rahman said police went to the spot after receiving information, but the men fled sensing their arrival.

Police recovered 14 bullet casings from the scene. No injuries were reported.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

National health hotline to be back in service within days

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The health ministry has decided to extend the contract with the vendor operating the national teleconsultation service, Shastho Batayan, with the much-needed service expected to resume within a day or two.

Accessible through the 16263 hotline, the round-the-clock service came to an abrupt halt on November 12 after the health authorities decided not to extend the service provider's contract, which had expired last month.

The sudden suspension, without any alternative arrangement, left thousands of service seekers in trouble and drew severe criticism. The hotline enables people across the country to consult doctors and receive health information and advice free of charge over the phone.

"The service is expected to be revived within a day or two," ANM Bazlur Rashid, secretary of the Health Services Division, told The Daily Star last night.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) had been instructed to contact the service provider and take necessary steps to renew or extend the agreement, the secretary said.

"There is no scope for shutting down this public service, and the government will not do so," he added.

Contacted, Shohorab Ahmed Chowdhury, managing director of Synesis IT, manager and operator of the service, said they had also heard about the decision but were yet to receive any formal communication.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3



'A report doesn't mean anything'

Shama Obaed dismisses BBC Bangla report on India's conditions for Hasina's extradition

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

State Minister-2 for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam yesterday dismissed a BBC Bangla report claiming India had set two conditions for the extradition of the ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, saying it had no basis.



Responding to a question at the foreign ministry, Shama said it had not come from any responsible Indian government authority.

"A report doesn't mean anything. If anything comes officially from India's Ministry of External Affairs or on behalf of the Indian government, we will accept it and respond accordingly," she told reporters.

Asked whether India had communicated the reported conditions to Bangladesh at any level, Shama said there had been no such communication.

According to the BBC Bangla report, Indian government officials had indicated that New Delhi had two main conditions for Hasina's return.

The first was that the Bangladesh Army would have to take Hasina back, either by air or land, as she had arrived in India aboard a Bangladesh military aircraft. India was also prepared to make the

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3

'I fired at your house today, you'll be next'

Ctg businessman threatened over extortion demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

Gunmen opened fire at a businessman's house in Chattogram's Bayezid Bostami area early yesterday after he refused to pay Tk 20 lakh in extortion money.

The incident took place around 12:30am at businessman Zafar Ahmed's residence in Shahidnagar. The gunshots shattered a windowpane, but no one was injured.

Zafar alleged that associates of Mohammad Raihan, a close aide to fugitive criminal Boro Sazzad, targeted his house over the unpaid demand.

He said Raihan first demanded the money around 10 months ago while Zafar was in India with his wife for medical treatment. He informed police at the time. Raihan renewed the demand and threatened him last Wednesday, he added.

Zafar said Raihan called him after the shooting and threatened to kill him,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3