

Cashing in on cashew nuts

Nilphamari-based Jackpots aims to hit it big with diversified products and exports

EAM ASADUZZAMAN and MOSTAFA SHABUI

Jackpot Cashew Nuts Industries started producing an assortment of cashew-nut based foods earlier this year in a bid to cash in on the growing demand for heart-healthy snacks.

Since January, the company has made salted cashews, honey covered cashews, cashew nut oil and cashew nut butter at its factory located in Nilphamari sadar upazila.

"We first started producing fresh cashews in June 2016 and now we have opted to introduce these new items," Managing Director Ibnul Arifuzzaman.

The company also started producing an additional 12 tonnes of cashews per month at its second unit in Chinirkathi bazar of the upazila on October 4 this year.

Seven workers are employed by the two units, where 90 per cent of the workforce is female, said Arifuzzaman.

Faridul Islam, a worker at the first unit, said he had worked in different cashew nut industries in India's Kerala and Chennai for seven years.

"But when I heard about this factory, I returned to Bangladesh and joined here and now get Tk 20,000-Tk 25,000 per month," he added.

Another worker of the same factory, Khadiza Begum, said there were about 35 to 40 female workers at the unit, which paid them Tk 10,000 per month.

"We sell our products to various super shops like Shwapno, CSD and in the local markets in Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet and Joypurhat," she added.

"We received orders from Spain and Germany to export 30 tonnes each month at a price of \$7.5 per kilogramme and we will hopefully begin making shipments from next January," said Managing Director Arifuzzaman.

The company buys raw cashew nuts for Tk 2,600-4,000 per maund (around 37 kilogrammes) from the Chattogram hill tracts. After processing, the cashews are sold for Tk 750-Tk 1,100 per kilogramme.

"Our cashew nut oil is being sold for Tk 6,000 per litre to the cosmetic markets as it's a product of beautification," he added.

Khondakar Jobayer, assistant manager of product development and logistics at Fairy Consumer Products, said they buy 200 to 300 kilogrammes of cashew nut products yearly from Jackpot Cashew.

"After starting export, our target is to produce 100 tonnes of cashew nut products per month at our two factories but we are facing a shortage of raw materials," he added.

Between 1961 and 1962, during the Kaptai dam's construction, the government brought some cashew nut plants from South Africa for the people who were being relocated to Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban areas, said Dr Mehedi Masood, product director of the Year-Round Fruit Production for Nutrition Improvement project of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

In 2019 and 2020, just 1,323 tonnes of cashew nuts were harvested in total from the hill



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Export of cashew nuts and its derivatives has emerged as a lucrative mode of earning foreign currency. However, the associated local industry is currently limited to processing raw nuts imported from Vietnam, Cambodia and India since just around 2,500 tonnes are expected to be harvested from the Chattogram hill tracts in the upcoming year.

tracts.

"But since the government is now giving importance to

cashew nut production, we are hoping to get around 2,500 tonnes of cashew nuts from the

hill tracts areas in the upcoming year," Masood added.

Md Ayub Ali, a local trader

NBR opens probe into ZTE

Searching for evidence of tax evasion, sources say

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has launched an investigation into ZTE Bangladesh, a subsidiary of the China-based ZTE Corporation, to ascertain whether the organisation is involved in tax evasion.

As a part of its investigation, the NBR has already issued separate letters to the different companies with which ZTE Bangladesh was engaged, sources said.

The standing committee on the finance ministry has also received documentation in this regard.

With a view to uphold the country's laws, the NBR launched a probe into ZTE's Bangladesh operations as it seemed to show intention for tax evasion, they added.

The ZTE Corporation is a major provider of advanced telecom systems, mobile devices and enterprise technology solutions to consumers, operators, companies and public sector customers worldwide.

Listed with the Hong Kong and Shenzhen bourses, ZTE sells its products and services in more than 160 countries.

According to data from the Shenzhen Stock Exchange, the organisation's total revenue in 2019 stood at 90.74 billion yuan.

Currently, it has both equipment and service contracts with the public and private ICT, Telecom and power sector in Bangladesh.

The company has had business transactions worth \$500 million with different entities in Bangladesh over the last few years.

This Chinese telecom equipment maker also constructed Bangladesh's first national data centre, located in the Kaliakoir hi-tech park in Gazipur.

The Bangladesh Telecommunications Company and Power Grid Company of Bangladesh are major service receivers of the ZTE Corporation.

The NBR has sent separate letters to these organisations to send related information concerning ZTE.

ZTE has been working in Bangladesh since 1998 and has showcased its dominance by aiding the country's technological advancement. ZTE was also involved in implementing 2G/3G/4G network in the country.

The ZTE office in Dhaka was contacted for a comment on the issue but did not provide a response by the time this report was filed.

ZTE

Experts suggest effective beneficiary selection process for govt relief

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The beneficiary selection process for the government's relief supports should be based on the vulnerable proportion of the population, not the entire population, experts told a virtual dialogue yesterday.

Titled "Relief supports and agricultural incentives in response to Covid-19 and flood: the effectiveness of public service delivery", the event was jointly organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Oxfam in Bangladesh, Manab Mukti Sangstha (MMS) and Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh.

It stemmed from a project titled "Enhancing the participation of community-based organisations (CBOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) in democratic governance in Bangladesh", being implemented by the CPD and the Oxfam with European Union's support.

The project aims to contribute to the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by the government.

Delivering a keynote presentation, CPD Senior Research Associate Muntaseer Kamal highlighted a flood loss scenario in Sirajganj and an assessment of the associated relief delivery process, underlining an insufficiency of government relief supports.

There is a lack of awareness among the locals regarding government hotline services and the beneficiary selection process oftentimes was not participatory for a lack of promotion, he said.



CPD

One of the participants in the CPD-Oxfam dialogue shares his thoughts from the event's Sirajganj venue yesterday.

The government has provided a number of supports and incentives to recover from agricultural losses due to the recent floods and to avail it, people have to travel to the upazila level, which adds to the pre-existing list of challenges, he said.

The CPD recommended creating a detailed database of beneficiaries so that a clear picture of the requirement of the relief support and agricultural

incentives can be found.

Joining as special guests, lawmakers Md Habibe Millat and Tanvir Shakil Joy highlighted that though Sirajganj's topography made it highly vulnerable but the government relief support allocations were insufficient compared to needs at local levels.

Joy said the focus should be on creating employment opportunities for the vulnerable people rather than solely

on relief measures. The lawmakers should be involved more actively in the relief distribution process, said Millat.

Around 120 community leaders, representatives from the Chauhali upazila and Sirajganj sadar upazila shared their observations at the dialogue.

The participants from Sirajganj also shed light on timely distribution of the relief packages.

The participants with direct grassroots experience shared that many people were yet to receive the Tk 2,500 cash support despite being enlisted.

It was also mentioned that the people of Sirajganj, particularly those in remote char areas, were unable to access various government hotline services due to poor telecommunication facilities.

Moderating the session, CPD Distinguished Fellow Mustafizur Rahman suggested that the telecommunication such char areas could be improved by providing government incentives to telecommunication companies to broaden their network.

Mohammad Soeb Iftekhar, head of economic inclusion and justice at Oxfam in Bangladesh, gave the introductory remarks and Md Habibullah Bahar, executive director of MMS, vote of thanks.

Citizens and representatives from community-based organisations from Sirajganj, government officials, academicians, development workers and NGO representatives were also present.

Alibaba's \$10b buyback plan fails to halt stock slide

REUTERS, Beijing/Hong Kong

Alibaba shares slumped 9 per cent to their lowest since June on Monday, as the firm's upsized \$10 billion buyback programme failed to ease concerns about a regulatory crackdown on co-founder Jack Ma's e-commerce and financial empire.

A sharp sell-off over two sessions has knocked almost \$116 billion off the tech giant's Hong Kong-listed shares.

The downward spiral intensified when Chinese regulators announced on Thursday the launch of an antitrust investigation into Alibaba and said they would summon its Ant Group affiliate to meet. Alibaba's US shares sank more than 15 per cent during the day.



Alibaba Group co-founder Jack Ma

"The antitrust investigation into Alibaba has yet to specify the penalties, which is worrying investors a lot," said Zhang Zihua, chief investment officer of Beijing Yunyi Asset, adding a probe outcome could "greatly change" the company valuations.

Putting investors more on edge was news over the weekend that China's central bank had asked Ant to shake up its lending and other consumer finance operations.

These developments are part of a crackdown on monopolistic behaviour in China's booming internet space in general, but Ma's business empire in particular after he publicly criticized the regulatory system for stifling innovation.

Japan factory output growth stalls

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan's industrial output growth stalled in November after rising for five months, underscoring the fragile nature of the global economic recovery due to a recent resurgence in COVID-19 infections.

The world's third-largest economy recovered sharply in the third quarter from its worst postwar contraction, but lockdown measures in some major economies in response to a new wave of coronavirus infections threatens to hurt demand.

Official data released on Monday showed factory output was flat in November from the previous month, as declining output of cars and plastic products offset strength in production and general machinery output.

The flat reading was much slower than the prior month's final 4.0 per cent gain, and below the median market forecast

of a 1.2 per cent rise in a Reuters poll of economists.

"The recovery pace is slowing a little more than expected," said Takumi Tsunoda, senior economist at Shinkin Central Bank Research Institute.

Tsunoda still expected the positive trend in output to continue largely because of underlying strength in Japan's exports, which are heavily focused on Asia.

"Demand for high-tech and IT-related products is currently expanding, so I think that will provide support," he said.

Manufacturers surveyed by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) expected output to decline 1.1 per cent in December and see a sharp 7.1 per cent rebound in January.

The government kept its assessment of industrial production unchanged, saying it was picking up.