

# Northern milk farms in the red

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

The price of milk has dropped fast in the past four months in the south-western districts, leading milk farmers to count losses.

Traders in Jhenidah and other neighbouring districts said they sold a kilogram of milk at Tk 27-28 in April last, while the same amount is now selling at Tk 18-20.

There are 439 registered dairy farms in six upazilas in Jhenidah -- 124 in Jhenidah sadar, 82 in Shaikupa upazila, 14 in Harinakundo, 157 in Kaliganj, 30 in Kotchandpur upazila and 32 in Moheshpur upazila.

There are 1,34786 milking cows in 439 farms in Jhenidah, statistics from the district live stock office said.

In addition, there are innumerable cows belonging to village farmers who also sell milk to milkmen.

The milk producing districts in Bangladesh are Jhenidah, Kushtia, Rajbari, Faridpur, Magura and Chuadanga.

Milk markets sit in front of shops in Jhenidah town, Shaikupa upazila town, Garaganj Bazar and Katlagari in Shaikupa upazila.

Milkmen collect milk from village farmers and farms at low prices and sit in the local markets with milk stored in pots and buckets. They also sell to Brac and some hotels. Brac supplies this milk to Arong in Dhaka.

Santosh Ghosh of Subitpur village under Kaliganj upazila said hoteliers make curd with lower quality Indian powdered milk. They prefer purchasing Indian powdered milk to cow's milk because 13 to 14 kilograms of milk can be made from a single packet of Indian milk.

The milk from foreign cows costs more and consequently, the price of local cow milk is higher than other cows, including 'jersy'.

Milk markets largely depend on sweetmeat makers and curd factories. The price of milk soars if the demand for curd and sweetmeat goes up.

Poor villagers, who rear a cow or two, sell milk at lower prices as they do not bear the high costs of rearing, despite the fact that there is enough green grass in the open fields around them to feed the cows. However, it is becoming difficult for milk farms to bear the low prices for their produce.

At present, the price of buffalo milk is Tk 25 a kilogram in Kushtia.

Rashedin, a cow farm owner of Modhuganj Bazar under Kaliganj upazila, said he incurs losses worth Tk 200 a day. He has to purchase 7 kilograms of 'khud' for Tk 105, bran for Tk 140, oil cake for Tk 70, hay for Tk 35, molasses for Tk 35, green grass for Tk 70 and labour cost of Tk 105. He spends Tk 560 a day for seven cows, while he sells milk worth Tk 400.

He also added that veterinary doctors do not



Milk sellers queue up at a market in Jhenidah. The price of milk marked a sharp decline in the last four months in the south-western districts, causing milk farmers to count heavy losses.

visit without fees and so cows do not receive proper treatment. Consecutively, they do not produce much milk.

Altat Hossain of Enayetpur village under Kaliganj upazila said he gets only two kilograms of milk from two cows, which he sells for Tk 32.

Another cow farm owner Daud Hossain of Gha-gha Talshar village under Kotchandpur upazila said it is tough to operate a cow farm, as the price of milk is low. In the rainy season there is plenty of green grass available and the cows produce more milk. At such times, villagers sell milk at any rate they get and incur greater losses.

Binoy Ghosh, a milk supplier of Bijoy Nagar, said the price of milk falls when there is an abundant supply of fruits, as people crave less milk and purchase fruits instead. In addition, hotel owners are making curd with milk powder instead of cow milk, he said.

Milk Vita and Pran do not purchase milk from

Jhenidah, he added.

Makorando Biswas, sadar upazila live stock officer, said the price of milk fell as the price of fish and meat has risen. People have limited purchasing power and can afford to buy any one variety, he explains.

Along purchased good quantities of milk from Brac a few years back, but not any more, he added. Recurrent losses also shoved several cow farms out of business in Jhenidah, he said.

Md Abul Kalam, chilling-in-charge of Brac, said they bought milk for Tk 28-30 a kilogram four months back. But now they buy it at Tk 22-24.

Saleh Uddin Gazi, district live stock officer of Jhenidah, said the price of milk in the district is comparatively low. Non-government organisations have the ability to remove these acute problems by establishing a dairy plant in the region.

He said milk farm owners could receive higher prices for milk if they sold directly to Dhaka.

## Declaration of milk sector as a thrust one soon

### Minister says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government is going to declare milk as the thrust sector in a bid to make it self-sufficient and hasten poverty alleviation in rural Bangladesh, State Minister for Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives Jahangir Kabir Nanak said yesterday.

"We will decide on the matter prior to consulting with the industries ministry," he said.

He was speaking at the 32nd annual general meeting of the Bangladesh Milk Producers' Cooperatives Union Limited (Milk Vita), a cooperative under the LGRD ministry, at the Institution of Diploma Engineers auditorium in Dhaka.

Under a 15-year strategic plan, the government will help Milk Vita with budgetary allocation in setting up milk cooling centres at every upazila in the country, Nanak said.

Milk Vita is the largest milk producer in the country. In 2008-09, it collected over 6.56 crore litres of milk from 1,82,974 members. It produces and markets various dairy products, recording a net profit figure worth Tk 15.75 crore last fiscal year.

Nanak, also the organising secretary of Awami League, said the government will help Milk Vita to set up plants for pasteurisation, producing milk powder, ice creams and baby food in divisional towns and other potential points.

Concerned authorities would also be notified of imposing higher taxes and other strict rules on the import of foreign milk powder and dairy products, to help develop the milk sector, he said.

"We will soon activate the Bangladesh Dairy Development Council to promote the milk sector," the state minister said.

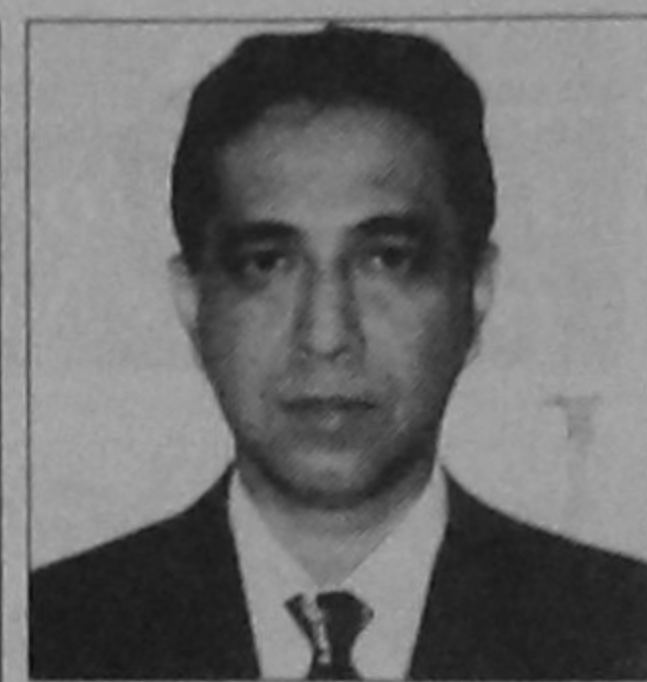
Many members of Milk Vita present at the meeting placed demands on the government to keep anomalies of the cooperative unions under check and ensure the interests of its primary members.

"In the face of corruption, the parliamentary standing committee will go there and, if necessary, take legal action to combat it," said Advocate Rahmat Ali, chairman of parliamentary standing committee on LGRD and cooperatives ministry.

Milk Vita's Acting General Manager Dr MA Barik in his report said it would set up 16 milk factories this year and take initiatives to import developed species of cows from Australia and the US to increase yield.

He proposed that the government provide assistance worth Tk 100 crore under the 'One Home One Farm' programme to Milk Vita, to increase milk production in the country.

Rural Development and Cooperatives Division Secretary Samar Chandra Pal and Department of Cooperatives Registrar Surayia Begum also spoke.



Ferdous Amin

## Prime Ins chairman re-elected

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Insurance Company Ltd has re-elected Ferdous Amin as its chairman, the insurer said in a statement yesterday.

Mizanur Rahman Mostafa and Md Shah Alam have been elected vice chairmen.

Amin is a former director of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Mostafa is the chairman of Capital Elevators and managing director of Capital Leasing.

Alam is a director of Western Marine Group and the managing director of Ruhul Amin and Brothers Group.

## Citibank ranks highest in internet banking

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Global Finance, an international finance magazine with a circulation in over 158 countries, has branded Citibank NA, Bangladesh as the Best Internet Bank for a second year.

The win follows the virtual clean sweep by Citi Asia Pacific in the Global Finance Magazine Internet awards.

## Minister suggests solar power for rice-parboiling

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Local agriculture scientists should consider local realities in innovating ways to improve rice-parboiling systems and save energy, said the agriculture minister yesterday.

"The government is trying to find ways to set up new plants and use renewable energy to meet energy demand. As we are facing an energy crisis, we have to try save energy," said Matia Chowdhury.

"Local agriculture scientists should come up with safer ways to save energy. They need to consider local realities, including income levels and relations between farmers and rice millers in making new systems," she added.

Matia was speaking at a roundtable on 'Environment and Energy Friendly

Rice Parboiling Systems', co-organised by the fortnightly magazine Energy and Power in association with German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) at the Cirdap auditorium in Dhaka.

"The systems should be economically feasible to make it worthwhile for rural farmers. Local scientists must improve on the conventional rice-parboiling system, which eats up energy sources," she said.

"We would provide policy and legal support in the case of good initiatives," she said, suggesting integrated by-products that could help produce electricity and edible oils from rice husk and bran. "It will help rice millers to be more solvent."

Matia suggested using solar systems for rice parboiling, instead of using rice husk and bran.

She said Bangladesh Bank has undertaken a liberal credit policy for the agriculture sector. "Rice millers could benefit from the policy and utilise the loan."

She stressed efficient management in the agriculture sector, the most important sector of the economy that employs a major segment of the population.

The agriculture minister assured the government's support to appropriate agro-processing technologies that would benefit the national economy, help save energy and protect the environment.

Advocate Mustafizur Rahman, state minister for land, said the government would support a technology that makes low emissions and would not pollute the environment.

Khandkar Ibrahim Khaled, chairman of

Bangladesh Krishi Bank, urged scientists and rice millers to come up with technically feasible proposals to take bank loans.

After the formation of new systems, those could be demonstrated at certain spots to introduce it to the millers. "It would encourage them to adopt the new technology."

Rice millers from across the country attended the roundtable and demanded easy term loans to facilitate installation of the new technology in their mills.

Mohammad Mustafizur Rahman, senior adviser of GTZ, presented the keynote paper.

Mozammel Hossain, deputy editor of Daily Samakal, and Dr MA Baqui, former director general of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), were also present.



Morshed Alam, chairman of Bengal Group of Industries, introduces the company's exclusive household products at a ceremony in Dhaka recently.

## Utilise duty-free access to Australia: Minister

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan yesterday called upon exporters to explore more opportunities in Australian market by utilising duty-free access, which the country allowed for all products from least-developed countries (LDCs) since July 2003.

However, trade imbalance between the two countries remains highly in

favour of Australia as Bangladesh's exports to the country did not rise compared to imports.

After getting the duty-free facility, Bangladesh exported goods worth \$36.71 million to Australia, whereas its imports were worth \$188.81 million in fiscal 2002-03.

In fiscal 2007-08, the country exported products worth \$43.36 million, and

imported \$369.66 million worth goods, leaving a whopping trade gap of \$326.30 million.

"Bangladesh has scope to boost trade in Australia," the commerce minister said at a luncheon meeting of Australia-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Dhaka.

Australian High Commissioner Justin Lee, among others, spoke.

## Sylhet traders protest chick price hike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Poultry traders of Sylhet yesterday stopped buying broiler chicks from hatchery owners protesting a sudden rise in price of the chicks.

They also threatened with tough agitation if the price was not reduced in five days in between next Saturday.

The businessmen took the decision at an emergency meeting Monday, and warned that the hatchery owners and the authorities concerned would be responsible for any consequences.

Leaders of Sylhet Poultry Distributors' Association at the meeting said the hatchery owners in a sudden move raised the broiler price to Tk 50-Tk 55 from Tk 25.

## Correction

The news item headlined 'Dhaka tourism fair begins today', published on this page yesterday, has inadvertently mentioned yesterday (August 11) the beginning date of the fair. Actually, it will kick off today (August 12). We regret the mistake.

## Food safety management pays dividends

### Says Intertek official

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Safer food means better business. So goes the slogan in food safety management.

Investment in food safety management brings greater benefits to businesses as it helps win consumer confidence and a wider market access, experts said yesterday.

"The implementation of international standards reduces customer complaints and rejections and increases confidence among buyers," Ashish Gaur, head of certification for food services at Intertek, India in a briefing on Food Safety Management System in Dhaka.

"Ultimately, it's a business decision. Food safety management systems may add costs but benefits are larger," he said.

Intertek, a global provider of management systems auditing and certification, organised the programme to raise awareness on the benefit of adopting global standards in businesses with a focus on ISO 22000 food safety management systems and on BRC (British Retail Consortium) food safety standards.

Set by the International Organisation for Standardisation, ISO 22000, a new standard for food supply chain, specifies requirements for a food safety management system where an organisation in the



Ashish Gaur, head of certification for food services at Intertek, India, briefs on food safety management system at a programme in Dhaka yesterday.

food chain will have to demonstrate its ability to control food safety hazards and ensure safe food for humans.

Auditing and certifying agencies said the latest ISO standard encompasses all stakeholders in the food chain from crop-feed producers to transport and storage operators to processors.

The ISO 22000 integrates the principles of HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point). Compliance is required for Bangladeshi companies which are engaged in exporting foods such as frozen fish.

BRC food safety standards, followed by most large retailers in the UK, assure customers that the company has attained a high level of competence in all

critical areas. BRC-certified companies -- considered compliant with legal aspects -- ensure consumer protection.

"Complying with ISO 22000 and BRC food safety standards, you can demonstrate that you are close to meeting other global standards in food safety management," Gaur said.

The certifying and auditing body arranged the programme to tap business potential in the backdrop of increasing demand for safe food in the globalised trading system.

Attempts by countries, especially by developed economies, to safeguard domestic products from imported ones have also encouraged various standards for foods to be in effect.

These standards in most cases act as non-tariff barriers to trade as economies such as Eurozone, UK or USA follow their own set of standards, which in turn force market seekers to adopt different standards.

Gaur however said the implementation of ISO 22000 food safety management system will help manufacturers get a wider access to global market as the standard is close to SQF 2000 (Safe Quality Food) standard followed by countries including the USA, and IFS (International Food Standard) by Germany.

"There are benefits," he said, citing that many multinational and local food-processing companies are implementing the ISO 22000.



Labour and Employment Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain sits for a meeting with the new office-bearers of the Bangladesh Employers Federation, led by its President Rokia Afzal Rahman, in Dhaka yesterday.