



Districts in Focus

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Mango means money in Rajshahi

ANWAR ALI, *Rajshahi*

THE daily income of 45-year-old rickshaw puller Abdur Rahim nearly doubles in the mango season.

He usually earns Tk 250 to Tk 300 a day. But in June-July, he stops pulling rickshaws and works instead at a mango market in Shalbagan in the city. His income increases to Tk 500 or more a day.

He helps in packing the mangoes, sewing the mango baskets and loading these baskets onto trucks that the fruit to markets all across the country.

Rahim's employer, Md Habibur Rahman Habib of Ekota Fol Bhandar, waits for this season to buy and sell apples, oranges, grapes and pineapples. During mango harvests, he invests around Tk 5 lakh and ropes in double the amount in profits in just about two months.

At this time of the year, Rahman always takes in a partner because business is abuzz. This season, Mohammad Alam is helping him out. Together, they hired six labourers, including Rahim, all from different professions.

In addition to retail and wholesale sales, Rahman sells mangoes to people who buy in bulk for their friends and families outside Rajshahi.

In a particular season, Habib needs around 3,000 baskets of different sizes made up of bamboos sticks. This creates an opportunity for the basket-makers as well.

The basket makers start weaving the baskets two months before the start of the mango season that is in late May, to meet demand.

At the same time, another form of employment is seen in the mango orchards, where the plantation owners employ more people to look after the trees.

To boost business, Rahman managed the commission agency of a courier service so that his buyers can readily send mangoes to different destinations. Habib says some 150 baskets have been booked on the courier daily from his shop alone.

Like Rahman, the small Shalbagan mango market in Rajshahi city has some 25 businessmen. They in turn hire over 100 labourers, like Rahim, who work in the market daily.

Other than the two main mango markets at Baneswar of Rajshahi and



ANISUR RAHMAN

A market in Rajshahi is full of activity as the mango season has begun in full swing.

Kansat of Chapainawabganj, there are many other small mango markets scattered around the towns and villages where many seasonal businessmen join the trade. Mango trees carry much value to the local people as each can fetch Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000 in a year. The mango is an integral part of the economy of the northern districts.

According to rough estimates by the business community, a mango season deals business worth more than Tk 1,000 crore. A minimum of 400 mango-laden trucks worth Tk 10 crore each travels to several destinations, including Dhaka, from the two districts. Some 5,000 maunds of mangoes are sold in Rajshahi city alone.

About 1 lakh tonnes of mangoes are likely to be produced on 8,667 hectares of land in Rajshahi this season, according to government data.

Producers are likely to spin Tk 404 crore when the mangoes are selling at Tk 1,600 a maund.

Some 1.85 lakh tonnes of mangoes are expected to create Tk 740 crore worth of business from some 17.63 lakh mango trees on 23,070 hectares of land in the Chapainawabganj district.

This year, it can be seen that mangoes are being sold at prices higher than last year in the local markets -- between Tk 1,600 and Tk 3,000 a maund.

Nazrul Islam, a mango trader of Baneswar Bazaar, said some 100 or 150 trucks take mangoes from the markets to other retail markets across Bangladesh. Some seven to eight tonnes of mangoes are loaded on each truck, he said.

A lot of people find temporary work at this time of the year, while many

seasonal businessmen also profit by investing small amounts of money, he added.

"It is difficult to make ends meet for my family with Tk 200-300 a day. But earning Tk 500 during this mango season is not difficult at all," said Shafikul Islam, a day labourer at the market.

Even though many make good money from baskets and other packaging materials, the use of plastic crates is increasing. Traders say the fruit stays fresher for longer in the plastic crates. The crates that carry 30 kilograms of mangoes cost Tk 120 a piece, while a basket costs Tk 80 a piece at most.

The mango frenzy was also seen in the other large mango market of Kansat. The difference is the mango traders there are more professional and the mangoes are sweeter.

Mango markets have been set up at Shaheb Bazar, Masterpara, Court Bazar, Laxmipur Bazar, and Binodpur Bazar.

There more than a dozen courier services in the mango producing zone, including the main two ones; Sundarban and SA Paribahan. They are making brisk business now.

In response to growing demand to carry mangoes, the courier service providers have stopped their regular home-delivery services this season.

However, some courier services are taking home-delivery parcels of mangoes at an extra cost of Tk 200 to Tk 250 per parcel.

Traders feel that the mango business could do even better if the authorities paid more attention to the sector. "If properly looked after, there could be a big boost in mango production," said Rahman.

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Focus on training for mango growers



ANWAR ALI, *Rajshahi*

MANGO business has been a big source of earning for many in Rajshahi region for years. But the authorities concerned are indifferent to the sector that has generated employment for a lot of people.

Mango producers and businessmen have several times urged the government to take proper measures to ensure an increased production of the fruit, creating more employment opportunities to people.

A mango tree can help earn Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000 a season. Around 40 percent of the produce gets wasted due to a lack of proper care, while a huge amount gets rotted due to insufficient preserving system.

The authorities can provide massive training and take up motivational programmes to create awareness among the growers so that the perishable fruit is dealt with properly to avoid waste and keep it safe from toxic chemicals, said a businessman.

Due to a lack of knowledge, many mango traders use chemicals profusely to preserve the fruit for a long time, posing severe health risks.

Dipendra Mohon Saha, an expert at the Department of Agricultural Extension, said the government's initiatives are not enough to help mango business flourish.

Saha said the government promotes



"hot water treatment" to check perishability, colour and taste of mangoes.

A treatment plant with a capacity of processing two tonnes of mangoes a day has been set up at the Mango Research Centre in Chapainawabganj, while, following it, an individual of Bhaolihat has also built a similar plant for preserving mangoes in the area.

At the plants, mangoes are dipped in hot water under 55 degrees Celsius for five minutes, Saha said. Then those mangoes, after drying up properly, can be preserved easily for 15 to 20 days without any variations to their taste and colour, he

added.

"Individuals can also follow the method to preserve mangoes at home."

He said, although at a negligible scale, the government also provides trainings on mango preservation.

Most of the mango trees in Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj districts do not belong to the mango growers, industry insiders said. The orchard owners sell the fruits to other businessmen who actually look after the trees.

These businessmen use excessive chemicals on trees and fruits for making heavy profits. Some businessmen use so much chemicals that kill the trees.

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