

# Teatulia brings pride gaining foothold in US, UK

JAGARAN CHAKMA

**A** Bangladeshi tea brand has gone global with successful business, expanding to the United States and the United Kingdom after several years' of efforts.

Teatulia, pronounced the same as the country's northernmost region but with a twist in the spelling, is a brand of Kazi & Kazi Tea, a concern of Gemcon Group.

"Teatulia is the first tea brand being sold in more than 100 food chain stores in the US," said Linda Appel Lipsius, co-founder and chief executive officer of Teatulia Organic Teas (TOT), during a recent visit to Bangladesh.

Among the stores are Whole Foods, Kroger, Wegmans, Natural Grocers, Harmons and Earth Fare, she told The Daily Star at Gemcon's corporate office in Dhanmondi, Dhaka recently.

Teatulia has also been made available inside the Ohio State University, Yale University, UMass Amherst, Colorado State University, Brown University, the University of Michigan and other educational institutions.

Lipsius said Teatulia was also available in renowned restaurants such as Jose Andre, Tokyo Joe's and Garbanzo.

She plans doubling the US market size of this unique variety of the tea company every year, saying American consumers, particularly the young generation, are getting familiar with it.

The brand offers "Hot Teas", "Iced Teas" and "Tea Soda", all made from tea leaves grown on a 4,000-acre garden in Panchagarh district.

"This year we have set a target to export 1.5 lakh kg of tea from Bangladesh to the US," said Lipsius.

She refrained from disclosing what it translates to in currency, reasoning that she rather likes to give priority to the quality of products.

"We offer the best-quality teas of premium category," she noted.



A tea bar of Teatulia Organic Teas in Denver of Colorado in the USA.

About the brand name, she explained that it promotes Tetulia upazila and in a broader sense Bangladesh among global consumers.

TOT started with Kazi & Kazi Tea exporting to the US in 2010 by promoting their grade of teas. Now it has more than 15 diversified organic teas available in its product basket to offer to consumers.

Teatulia in the US market comes in packets of 16 tea bags having a net weight of 32 grammes, usually costing \$8-\$9 per pack.

Another form of packaging has 30 tea bags inside and it is priced at \$6.5-\$7 per pack.

The "Tea Soda" was recently launched in the US market and got very good feedback from consumers. A 355-millilitre costs \$1.99-\$2.99.

Teatulia also has its own "tea bar" in the US and the UK serving the best quality of tea from Bangladesh.

Lipsius started selling teas of TOT in Denver, Colorado around a decade ago when very few people were aware of this

organic produce of Bangladesh.

"We do cultivate tea without using chemical pesticide in the tea state in Panchagarh. We only use biopesticides, which are not harmful for the human body," she said.

However, she said tea garden traditionally needed a lot of chemical pesticides which directly ended up in the body through the consumption of tea.

In 2017, Bangladesh's total tea production stood at 78.9 million kg, of which 2.5 million kg was exported.

## Tech, green features, power mix to boost luxury car sales

AFP, New York

**U** S auto sales may be slowing, but carmakers have high hopes for luxury vehicles, which are imbued with increasingly sophisticated gadgetry and sex appeal to seduce a new generation of millionaires.

Luxury car companies brought their "A" game to the New York International Auto Show, which opened Friday with a mix of new models, some featuring envelope-pushing technology and others pitched as green vehicles, to grab attention of new customers who grew up with technology



People walk through the New York International Auto Show in New York City.

and are sensitive to climate change. In both cases, these are luxury models with price tags to match.

Mercedes-Benz' new generation of sport-utility vehicles has voice command and answers to "Hey Mercedes" as its artificial intelligence programs adapt to its user's habits.

That feature brings to life something like the experience from the 1980s hit television show "Knight Rider" when David Hasselhoff's character addressed his vehicle as "KITT."

"Voice recognition is absolutely something customers want," said Dietmar Exler, chief executive of Mercedes-Benz USA.

"It's much more convenient. The cars can read your emails or texts and you don't need to take your hands from the steering wheel," he added. "It's safer. You don't look down and try to find some-

thing, you can just say it and you control it."

Although many millennials still face

heavy college loans, the US economy is also churning out adults who make seven figures and up who were born in the 1980s and 90s.

So far this month, there have been successful initial public offerings by tech companies Lyft, Pinterest and Zoom, all led by (now-rich) millennials. And more youth-led ventures are expected to go public soon, including Uber.

Eyeing this rarified niche population, the Italian company Pininfarina stands

## In trade battles, China manufacturers deploy every weapon they can

REUTERS, Guangzhou, China

**M**ANUFACTURERS in China facing trade barriers are deploying an array of moves to try to keep foreign customers - giving discounts, tapping tax breaks, trimming workforces and, occasionally, shifting production overseas to skirt tariffs.

Tit-for-tat tariffs from the China-United States trade war have been costly for many. Adding to the strain on Chinese manufacturers have been European Union duties on Chinese products ranging from electric bikes to solar panels.

March brought some encouraging news for manufacturers. Industrial output rose at its fastest rate since mid-2014 and exports rebounded more than expected, while first-quarter growth was better than expected.

Still, some manufacturers who depend on US sales are struggling. At the Canton Fair in southern China this past week, they put on a brave face, but feared they will need to take more measures to survive if Beijing and Washington fail to seal a trade deal.

Boutou Golden Integrity Roll Forming Machine Co lost some US customers when tariffs pushed up prices for its machines making light steel girders and bars for building frames, according to Hope Ha, a saleswoman.

It now offers an 8 percent discount as a sweetener.

"We have to give discounts because they pay high tariffs," said Ha.

Ball bearing maker Cixi Fushi Machinery Co gave long-term customers a 3-5 percent discount, according to representative Jane Wang.

But that was not enough, so the company suspended a product line generating \$30,000 monthly revenue, she said.

"We will wait for the agreement and then we will see again," she said. Now, the focus is on its main market, the Middle East.

Some have been able to pass along increased costs.

California-based ACOPower has increased prices about 10-15

percent on some of its made-in-China, solar-powered refrigerators, said founder Jeffrey Tang.

"We have no choice," he said.

"We must increase the price."

Tang says his portable fridges cannot be made affordably in other countries. But if there's no trade agreement, and tariffs rise, the equation could change.

Shenzhen Smarteye Digital Electronics Co, a maker of surveillance cameras, which are not on

rebates for exports.

"Things like this give us some protection or else we would suffer losses," said Willy Yuan, a salesman at Ningbo Yourlite Import & Export Co in Shenzhen, which produces LED lights.

Shenzhen Smarteye Digital Electronics Co, a maker of surveillance cameras, which are not on

January. Many have started assembling some bikes in Europe; Zhejiang Enze Vehicle Co does so in Poland and Finland.

"We take the battery, frame, and the other parts, package them up separately and send them over to be assembled by partners," said sales rep Dylan Di.

Anhui Light Industries



Employees work on the production line of a factory manufacturing fashion accessories in China.

"Maybe I'll just ship all the components to Vietnam to do the assembly."

Aufine Tyre rented and filled a warehouse last year in California in anticipation of anti-dumping duties, which were later imposed. In another move to circumvent tariffs, it will soon open a plant in Thailand to make tires.

Jane Liu, a sales manager, said Aufine plans to send 50 containers a month from Thailand, with 220-240 tires in each, and later expand.

Some companies at the fair cheered Beijing's move to trim China's value-added tax to 13 percent from 16 percent at the start of April, and its pledge of tax

the US tariff list, was able to drop prices because of the tax break, according to sales manager Simple Yu.

"We save a lot on costs, so we can sell at a low price," he said.

But Smarteye has worries, including increasing rent and labor costs that led it to trim its workforce.

Yu said he's also concerned about the trade war's potential effect on the yuan-dollar exchange rate. "Before it was 6.9 per dollar, now it's 6.7 per dollar. We worry that it will go to 6.5."

Electric bike makers have reacted nimbly to European anti-dumping duties of between 18.8 and 79.3 percent imposed in

International Co, which makes products ranging from plastic protractors for math to movie theater popcorn cups, says it has lost more than 1 billion yuan (\$149.2 million) after US President Donald Trump raised import taxes.

Still, company representative Han Geng is optimistic the trade war will get resolved.

"It's not good for America, not good for China," he said, expressing the view that Trump knows the trade war is hurting business and "he will end it."

When that day comes, Han said, "we will sell to America again... We need to make money. Everybody loves money."

## Chinese workers demand release of labour rights activists

AFP, Beijing

Some 100 Chinese workers suffering from a work-related disease have signed a petition demanding the release of three prominent activists in southern China amid a crackdown on labour activism.

Wei Zhili and Ke Chengbing, editors of a labour rights news site that reported on the workers' cases, were arrested last month for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" -- a broad charge that Chinese authorities often use to sweep up activists and dissidents.

Yang Zhengjun, editor-in-chief of the iLabour news site, has been in police detention since January.

"They're not guilty -- they have caring hearts and because of that they face pressure from the government," said Gu Fuxiang, one of the workers who signed the petition.

"I've been thinking, this isn't what my country is about. They should look after us," he told AFP.

Hundreds of migrant workers, mainly from central Hunan province, protested last year for compensation in Shenzhen after contracting silicosis, a deadly lung disease, when they helped transform the southern city from a fishing village into one of China's biggest tech hubs.

When workers were ignored by the government and pressured to stop protesting, the three labour activists were there for support, said Gu.

Their petition, which is posted online, urges the Shenzhen police to release the three labour activists and is addressed to the government-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions.

"The iLabour editors' care and support for us, and their kindness and righteousness, is genuine," read the letter, which was signed and fingerprinted by the workers last week. Many said they were surprised and confused when they heard news about the arrests.

"I really sympathise with them, I don't understand why they were arrested for helping us," said Wang Haijun, another worker who has late-stage silicosis.

Last week, the workers attempted to travel to Shenzhen by train to hand the letter to authorities but were stopped at train stations and prevented from boarding.

Gu said he has had police visits in recent days, noting the sensitivity of the issue.

According to family members of Wei and Ke, citing local police, the two activists were moved on Saturday to "residential surveillance at a designated location" (RSDL), a form of detention that allows authorities to hold people for serious crimes, such as endangering national security.

Authorities "are using RSDL to continue to hold them," said Wei's wife Zheng Churan, who is also a prominent feminist activist.