

Pran widening global footprint

SOHEL PARVEZ

For around two decades, Swapan Debnath has operated a convenience store called Narayan Varieties in the Keprampara area of Agartala, the capital of the northeastern Indian state of Tripura.

His shelves are adorned with various Indian food and beverage brands but between some of the items on display, one can find mango flavoured drinks, potato crackers, and other goods mainly produced by Pran, Bangladesh's biggest food processor.

"Customers seem to be preferring Pran's mango beverage while the potato crackers are also popular here," Debnath told The Daily Star.

"I once travelled miles away just to collect some potato crackers for my store," he added.

According to Ashish Majumdar, who works at a corner store in Kolkata, Pran's mango drink and potato crackers have turned out to be a hit among local consumers, going as far as to



Products of Pran are on display at a shop in Nepal.



Ahsan Khan Chowdhury

compete with brands such as Real, Maza, Lays, and Haldiram.

And so, Tripura has become one of Pran's main markets in India.

The company's brands are also available in other parts of the country, such as the northeastern state of Assam, West Bengal, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, and Haryana.

However, its expedition abroad is not limited to just India as Pran's products can be found in parts of Africa, Latin America and even Tonga, an archipelago found in the South Pacific.

As such, the subsidiary of Pran-RFL Group has been exporting food items to 144 countries to bring home more than \$300 million annually for the past three years.

The company made its initial foray into the international market by shipping canned pineapple slices, pickle and puffed rice to France in 1997. The value of this first consignment was \$11,000.

But despite the growth in exports since then, Pran holds an insignificant share of the immense global food market, according to Ahsan Khan

Chowdhury, chairman and chief executive officer of PRAN-RFL Group.

"So, there is no room for complacency and we are trying to bring further improvement. We have done well in agricultural production but have to advance in agro-processing," he said.

"There will be a revolution for mango in the future. We only export flavoured drinks for now but in the future, we will ship pulp. For this we need a variety of improvements," Chowdhury added.

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Stocks bounce back led by insurance

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The stock market managed to stay in the positive yesterday thanks to stocks of insurers and banks.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), rose 47 points, or 0.79 per cent, to 6,023.

The movement of the broad index was versatile as the market fluctuated between the positive and negative index to finally close in the positive, said LankaBangla Securities in its daily market analysis.

Insurance stocks led the market which ultimately gave a boost to the market index where banking stocks also contributed, said a stock broker.

All the general insurance stocks rose 7.43 per cent on an average and banking stocks soared 1.54 per cent, according to the LankaBangla data.

Turnover, another important indicator of the market, fell around 1 per cent to Tk 2,065 crore. In the turnover, insurance stocks contributed 26 per cent or Tk 528 crore.

At the DSE, 181 stocks advanced, 145 fell and 43 remained unchanged.

Market analysts are saying that some investors bought shares as many stocks fell in Monday's profit booking session when the DSEX dropped 62 points.

The Islamic Finance & Investment topped the gainers' list that rose 10 per cent followed by the National Housing Finance and Investments, Gemini Sea Food, Asia Insurance and Phoenix Insurance.

Stocks of Beximco was traded the highest, worth Tk 154 crore, followed by Pioneer Insurance, Fortune Shoes, LankaBangla Finance and National Feed Mills.

MI Cement shed the most, losing 4.28 per cent, followed by BD Welding Electrode, First Finance, GQ Ball Pen Industries and Square Textiles.

Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) also went up. The CASPI, the general index of the port city bourse, rose 113 points, or 0.65 per cent, to 17,431.

Among 300 stocks to witness trade, 148 rose, 111 fell and 41 remained unchanged.

Maddhapara Granite posts record sales

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Maddhapara Granite Mining Company earned Tk 256 crore by selling at least 11.12 lakh tonnes of rock in the ongoing fiscal year, the highest sale in three years.

The sales took place between August last year to May 31 this year.

Germania Trest Consortium (GTC), the company hired on contract by Maddhapara Granite Mining Company, produced at least 9.25 lakh tonnes of rock during the same period.

The hired company produced at least 10.47 lakh tonnes of rock in fiscal 2018-19, of which, 7.31 lakh tonnes were sold for Tk 163.41 crore the same year.

Although rock extraction got stalled for four months due to the Covid-19 restrictions in the country, the mine produced at least 8.23 lakh tonnes in the last fiscal year. Of this amount, 8.64 lakh

tonnes were sold at Tk 207.81 crore.

So far, Maddhapara Granite Mining Company sold rock of Tk 627.22 crore since mid-2018. Private companies and government entities, including the roads, highways and bridge authority, railways and water development board, local government and engineering department, power development board and the Rooppur nuclear power plant project in Pabna are using the rock.

Bangladesh's annual demand is around 80 lakh tonnes, which is mostly met locally. Whenever there are shortages, it is met with imports from countries such as India and Bhutan.

Zabed Siddiqui, chief executive officer of the GTC, said over 20 lakh tonnes of rock could have been extracted during the six-year contract tenure if there had been no disruptions for two years for various reasons, including equipment failures.

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Farmers get barely a quarter of what consumers spend: global study

AFF, Paris

Farmers worldwide receive barely a quarter of what consumers spend at the grocery store, and even less for food consumed outside the home, researchers reported yesterday.

Beyond the question of whether farmers get their fair share, the multi-step processing from farm to table may not be compatible with sustainable development, according to a study in the journal Nature Food.

"People do not recognise how much of what we pay for in our meals is not the physical food," Cornell University's Chris Barrett, senior author of the study, told AFP by email.

"Most of the value addition in the global

or lost," he added. "These are all factors that have major public health implications.

"Building on a method originally applied to the US, the researchers developed a standardised approach to estimate the importance of food value chains between farmers and consumers.

They applied this yardstick to data from 2005 to 2015 on 61 middle- and high-income countries that cover 90 per cent of the global food economy.

They found that, on average, farmers receive 27 per cent of what is paid for foods consumers eat at home. The study focused on the three-quarters of food that is consumed in the same country where it is produced.

For the other 25 per cent, "the farmer



Farmers sort out harvested potatoes at a field in the Bardarash district, near the Kurdish city of Dohuk, in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region yesterday.

food economy is not on farm but rather is the processing, manufacturing, distribution and service activities closer to the consumer. "This highly segmented value chain creates employment and provides convenience for the consumer, whether in the form of bagged salads, frozen dinners or a meal at the mall.

But these consumer advantages should also be measured against the impact on health and the environment, the authors argue. "Greenhouse gas emissions is a good example," said Barrett, pointing to the carbon pollution generated by all the steps in the value chain.

"So is water use."

"There is also the question of where desirable attributes of foods -- such as minerals, vitamins, fibre -- and undesirable attributes ('bad' fats, salt, sugar) are added

share of consumer expenditures on imported foods is almost surely even less," said Barrett. The already vast proportion of food dollars going to post-farm activities is only likely to increase, the study concluded.

Farmers in fast-growing economies like China and India will earn more as their populations get richer, but their share of food spending is likely to shrink as demand for convenient consumption grows.

The study points to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) -- adopted in 2015 and set for 2030 -- as a way to measure the impact of the vast and growing food value chain sector.

What happens to food between farm and consumer will be critical to many SDGs including those targeting poverty, hunger and "responsible consumption and production".

GLOBAL BUSINESS

US must work with allies to secure electric vehicle metals: White House

REUTERS, Washington

The United States must work with allies to secure the minerals needed for electric vehicle batteries and process them domestically in light of environmental and other competing interests, the White House said on Tuesday.

The strategy, first reported by Reuters in late May, will include new funding to expand international investments in electric vehicles (EV) metal projects through the US Development Finance Corporation, as well as new efforts to boost supply from recycling batteries.

President Joe Biden's administration will also launch a working group to identify where minerals used in EV batteries and other technologies can be produced and processed domestically. It was not immediately clear what that meant for existing EV minerals projects.

Securing enough copper, lithium and other raw materials to make EV batteries is a major obstacle to Biden's aggressive EV adoption



General Motors assembly workers connect a battery pack underneath a partially assembled 2018 Chevrolet Bolt EV vehicle on the assembly line at Orion Assembly in Lake Orion, Michigan, US on March 19, 2018.

plans, with domestic mines facing extensive regulatory hurdles and environmental opposition.

The White House acknowledged China's role as the world's largest

processor of EV metals and said it would expand efforts to lessen that dependency. "To secure a reliable, sustainable supply of critical minerals and materials, the United States

must work with allies and partners to diversify supply chains away from adversarial nations and sources with unacceptable environmental and labor standards," it said in a statement.

The White House also said the Department of the Interior and others agencies will work to identify gaps in mine permitting laws to ensure any new production "meets strong standards" in terms of both the environment and community input.

The steps come after Biden, who has made fighting climate change and competing with China centerpieces of his agenda, ordered a 100-day review of gaps in supply chains in key areas, including EVs.

Democrats are pushing aggressive climate goals to have a majority of US-manufactured cars be electric by 2030 and every car on the road to be electric by 2040.

As part of the recommendations from four executive branch agencies, Biden is being advised to take steps to restore the country's strategic mineral stockpile and expand funding to map the mineral resources available domestically.

Bank of England launches climate stress test for banks and insurers

REUTERS, London

The Bank of England on Tuesday set out its first comprehensive stress test of the ability of the British financial system to cope with climate change, saying the results will not be used to determine capital requirements.

The test will scrutinise the resilience of the country's biggest banks and insurers to stresses from the shift to a net zero-carbon economy over coming decades as well as the impact of extreme weather.

"The end result will be more robust management of climate related financial risks across the sector," BoE Governor Andrew Bailey said in a statement.

The results of the test are due to be published in May 2022.

The test is based on three



The Bank of England and Royal Exchange are reflected in a puddle as a pedestrian walks past, amid the coronavirus disease outbreak in London, Britain on November 19, 2020.

scenarios that span 30 years: early action by governments to deal with climate change, action that is late, and taking no additional action.

Each scenario will be applied to two main risks: physical such as fires and floods due to temperature changes, and risks from transitioning to a more climate-friendly business that could bring sudden changes in asset values.

"This is the first time we are testing both banks and insurers to allow us to capture interactions between them and understand the risks presented by climate change across the financial system," the BoE said.

The exploratory exercise will not be used by the BoE to set capital requirements, but will shape how regulators do their work and help financial firms to model climate risks better.