

star BUSINESS

Millers won't buy jute for over Tk 3,000 per maund

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jute millers and spinners have collectively decided that they will not buy the natural fibre for more than Tk 3,000 per maund from January 20 onwards in the face of rising costs.

The Bangladesh Jute Mills Association (BJMA), Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association (BJS), and Bangladesh Jute Association (BJA) took this decision at a joint meeting on Sunday.

In their words, the decision was taken to protect the industry.

The prices of raw jute recently hit Tk 3,300 to Tk 3,800 per maund (37 kilograms), up about 26 per cent compared to that of a month ago, according to various traders.

In the meeting, millers said raw jute prices are high as supply declined due to stockpiling by middlemen.

The prices of raw jute recently hit Tk 3,300 to Tk 3,800 per maund. Millers alleged that middlemen illegally stockpile a major portion of raw jute, creating an artificial crisis

And considering the high prices, production costs have risen to such an extent that the rate of work orders cannot compensate.

As a result, millers are incurring huge losses and are being compelled to shut down their factories, they said.

Millers also alleged that middlemen illegally stockpile a major share of the raw jute, creating an artificial crisis in the market to make extra profit.

At the same time, foreign buyers are shifting their attention away from jute products to alternative items after failing to buy the goods at their stipulated prices, they added.

While speaking with The Daily Star yesterday, Ganash Changra Shaha, READ MORE ON B3



The poster reading "A" above the cashier denotes that the eatery is of "good" quality. Bangladesh Food Safety Authority runs this grading system, helping customers make informed purchases. But three years past being initiated, just 150 restaurants and bakeries have been brought under the initiative. The photo was taken at Cafe Baishakhi Restaurant opposite the National Press Club in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

GRADING EATERIES loses appetite

SUKANTA HALDER

Plans to bring the country's restaurants and bakeries under a grading system according to their standards have seen little progress in three years.

In early 2019, Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA) initiated the move by displaying stickers of the standards initially at 56 establishments in Dhaka as a review for customers to make informed purchases.

Till date, only 150 restaurants and bakeries have been brought under the system.

Regular monitoring of food quality and hygiene is also in a limbo.

The BFSA said the grading system was new for businesspeople, so most did not show interest in joining the initiative.

Most have no capacity to maintain standards, which is another reason behind the slow progress, it said.

According to the BFSA officials, the establishments were graded in four categories – the best getting A+, the "good" A, the "average" B and the "very poor" C alongside a one-month's notice for improvements.

The 150 establishments were all in and around Dhaka and the BFSA has set a target to bring 10,000 in 64 districts under monitoring this year, said Imran Hossain Molla, a BFSA monitoring officer.

Similar ratings exist in London, said journalist Mostafa Yousuf recalling a visit in 2019.

"I saw roadside shops selling fast food, all having a three-star hygiene rating out of five. This grading system helps customers get an idea about the shop and the food they sell," he said.

The BFSA was established in February 2015 under the Food Safety Act 2013 to prevent food adulteration and ensure food quality.



The agency has the jurisdiction to conduct mobile courts and punish those violating the rules pertaining to the production and sale of food.

According to the BFSA data, 1,530 mobile courts were run in fiscal year 2020-21 by the authority's own executive magistrate alongside district magistrates.

During this time, 2,870 cases were registered, Tk 5.10 crore in fines imposed, 2,199 rule violators penalised and 131 jailed.

According to Bangladesh Restaurant Owners Association, there are about 60,000 restaurants in the country, including around 10,000 in Dhaka.

GROUND REALITY

Cafe Baisakhi Restaurant, located opposite National Press Club in the capital, has been graded A by the BFSA. During a visit on the evening of January 15, food was found kept in dishes in the kitchen without any lid, with flies buzzing over two of them.

The kitchen itself was damp while the floors dirty.

Wearing clean clothing had gone out the window for kitchen staff. Though the two persons serving food were wearing distinguishable clothing, none had face masks on.

"We want to run the restaurant according to the rules. But we cannot always follow the rules. Moreover, the number of customers has come down after the metro rail project started," said Manager Tanvir Ahmed.

"When grading activities were initially undertaken, there was a lot of monitoring. But I can't recall when was the last time any official came to monitor our restaurant," he said.

According to the BFSA, in the last three years, a number of restaurants received C grade. One of those is Vikrampur Mistanno Bhandar located in Kalabagan.

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High import duty hinders furniture export

JAGARAN CHAKMA

High import duties on raw materials are dampening price competitiveness of Bangladesh's furniture industry, a major drawback to tapping into international markets.

Though manufacturers have been into exporting furniture for the past decade or so, the annual sales figure is yet to cross \$100 million, a scenario warranting consideration since the government is already trying to diversify the export basket.

Bangladesh earned \$79.47 million from furniture exports last fiscal year and \$90 million in fiscal year 2019-20, according to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

According to the EPB, Bangladesh's furniture exports have increased by about 267 per cent in the last decade.

"Import duty is the main barrier to increasing furniture exports from Bangladesh as the sector is quite dependent on imported raw materials," said Selim H Rahman, chairman and managing director of Hattil Furniture, a leading exporter.

"We the furniture manufacturers have to import most of the raw materials including wood, lacquer and all hardware," he said.

"The import duty of raw materials, including value added

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FURNITURE MARKET AT A GLANCE



Total market size:
Tk 25,000cr



Total entrepreneurs:
71,034 (including small, micro and medium)



Market share of brands: 20%



Employment: around 18 lakh



Share of non-branded furniture makers: 80%

Export earnings in FY21:
\$79.47m

SOURCES: EPB AND INDUSTRY PEOPLE

Ctg customs foil bid to launder Tk 1.6cr

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Chattogram

Chattogram Customs House has seized a consignment on charges of laundering Tk 1.6 crore by exporting 22 times more goods than the declaration.

The consignment of RM Sourcing Bangladesh, a Dhaka-based buying house, was seized just before leaving from Chattogram port to Venezuela on Monday, customs officials said.

According to the documents, the company has opened a letter of credit (L/C) of \$7,486 with IFIC Bank for the purpose of exporting 6,086 pieces of T-shirt, short set and short pants to Royal Drone International Trading OPC of Venezuela.

In the bank documents, the US dollar's exchange rate against the Bangladeshi taka has been shown at 96.7.

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