



A farmer is seen carrying a portion of his harvest from a Kataribhog paddy field in Dinajpur sadar upazila. Demand for the aromatic variety of rice rose recently, ensuring better prices for growers this year. The picture was taken recently.  
PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

## Rice farmers delighted at Kataribhog's price hike

**"Seeing this year's success, I am now willing to increase Kataribhog rice cultivation next season," said Ratan Roy, a farmer of Kougaon village under Dinajpur sadar upazila**

KONGKON KARMAKER

Farmers in Dinajpur who cultivate aromatic Kataribhog rice are now delighted at prices having substantially increased recently as demand has gone up.

While this is a blessing for growers, consumers are expected to feel the pinch in their grocery budgets.

Dinajpur Kataribhog is recognised as a Geographical Indication (GI) product of Bangladesh.

According to World Intellectual Property Organisation, the GI is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.

Depending on quality, each kilogramme is now retailing for between Tk 98 and Tk 110, according to traders in Bahadur Bazar and Rail Bazar Hat, the two largest wholesale rice markets in Dinajpur town.

Kataribhog rice can only be grown in specific areas of Dinajpur's Sadar, Chirirbandar and Kaharole upazilas once a year, according to officials of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in the district.

Farmers and the DAE officials in Dinajpur claim that the district has been producing Kataribhog rice for over a century, although no reliable

data was available.

And even though Kataribhog is a highly sought-after variety of rice, farmers often opt to cultivate other crops for various reasons.

This includes price fluctuations in the market, low production levels and slow sales, farmers said, adding that Kataribhog rice cultivation was on the decline as growers do not always get adequate prices for

but now, the cultivation area has fallen to 1,500 hectares.

This year though, the price has bounced back, renewing hopes among farmers for better things to come.

At least 2.61 lakh hectares of land in the district were brought under Aman paddy cultivation this year, say the DAE officials. Of the total land, 83,851 hectares is being used to grow aromatic varieties of rice but Kataribhog



their produce.

Still though, a handful of farmers have been growing the rice for generations and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

About a decade ago, farmers from all over Dinajpur collectively took up around 5,000 hectares of land in the district to grow Kataribhog rice

was cultivated on just 1,400 hectares.

During a recent visit to different paddy markets, including Gopalganjhat, Farhat, Panchbarihat and Ambarihat, this correspondent found that a 75 kg bag of Kataribhog paddy was being sold for between Tk 5,000 to Tk 5,200 depending on quality, including moisture

content.

Last year, each 75-kg bag of the rice cost just Tk 3,000 to Tk 3,200.

"To get the current rates is rare," Hatem Ali, a farmer of the Fasiladanga area in Dinajpur sadar upazila, told The Daily Star.

Abdul Zabbar of Mukundapur village under Chirirbandar upazila, said he and other farmers have been growing Kataribhog rice on their land for generations but were deprived of even modest rates in most seasons.

So, the cultivation area gradually declined but the current season was much more profitable for farmers that stuck around as they got a better rate, he added.

"Seeing this year's success, I am now willing to increase Kataribhog rice cultivation next season," said Ratan Roy, a farmer of Kougaon village under Dinajpur sadar upazila.

Habibul Islam, joint secretary of the Dinajpur chapter of Bangladesh Economic Association, said farmers in the district were reducing the cultivation area.

"But the sudden price rise increased farmers' confidence in the crop," said the official of the body of economists which makes recommendations on major

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## Jazeera Airways eyes expansion in Bangladesh Says its vice-president

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Jazeera Airways plans to keep expanding its footprint in Bangladesh, particularly in its second-largest city of Chattogram, as it targets to serve a huge number of expatriates from the region currently living and working in Kuwait.

"Though we started operations in Dhaka right in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, we saw a very good demand as there are 200,000 Bangladeshi nationals living and working in Kuwait," said Bharathan Ravindran, vice president for sales of Jazeera Airways, during an interview with The Daily Star.

He was in the port city yesterday, along with Andrew Ward, vice president for marketing and customer experience of the airline, to launch a direct service between Chattogram and Kuwait.

An inaugural ceremony was held at the Radisson Blu Chattogram Bay View Hotel.

Kuwait's leading low-cost private airline launched its direct service to Dhaka in October 2020.

The new service with three flights a week -- on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays -- between the two destinations offers a chance to Kuwait-bound migrant workers and other passengers to avail themselves of direct flights from Chattogram after a long gap.

The inaugural flight arrived at the Shah Amanat International Airport at 8:45am with fully loaded with 156 passengers and departed at 9:45am with the same number of passengers.

The airline started its operations on the Dhaka-Kuwait route with three flights a week. It is now running daily operation.

Ravindran says the demand has been very steady since the beginning of the service. "We have been able to manage a very high load factor in Dhaka."

The success of the Dhaka-Kuwait route prompted the airline to roll out its second service in the country.

"In fact, it has exceeded our expectations in terms of seat factor. We were able to achieve a success that we predicted could have taken three to four years. We managed to achieve that in a year time and that has encouraged us to fly into Chattogram as well," Ravindran said.

Chattogram is the second-largest city of Bangladesh. And there are a lot of people from this part living and working in Kuwait.

"So, we see a huge opportunity here and we would like to seize that being the only operator between Kuwait and Chattogram," said Ravindran. Andrew Ward says the Kuwait-Chattogram route was not served before.

"So, it now really makes a lot easier for Bangladeshis to get into Kuwait or those who in Kuwait to get back home rather than going through an indirect route which could take up to nearly 15 to 20 hours of travelling because the connectivity is very poor."

The travel time would be five and a half hours to six hours, according to Ward.

Ravindran says the market in Chattogram is big enough for them to run two flights daily.

"Currently, it is about 200 passengers a day on the route, but there is potential that it can go over 300 passengers a day."

**"Though we started operations in Dhaka right in the middle of the pandemic, we saw a very good demand as there are 200,000 Bangladeshis living and working in Kuwait."**

## Euro zone recovery weakens further amid Omicron curbs

REUTERS, London

The euro zone economic recovery weakened further this month as renewed restrictions imposed to contain the Omicron coronavirus variant put another dent in bloc's dominant services activity and as prices continued to soar, a survey showed on Monday.

With the variant sweeping across Europe governments have been encouraging citizens to stay home and avoid socialising or meeting in groups.

IHS Markit's Flash Composite Purchasing Managers' Index, seen as gauge of overall economic health, dropped to 52.4 in January from 53.3 in December, its lowest since February and below the 52.6 predicted in a Reuters poll.

That headline number was affected by the services PMI, which dropped to a nine-month low of 51.2 from 53.1. Although above the 50-mark separating growth from contraction it was well below the Reuters poll estimate for 52.2.

"The Omicron wave has led to yet another steep drop in spending on many consumer-facing services at the start of the year, with tourism, travel and recreation especially hard hit," said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit.

With customers staying home, growth in demand for services almost dried up. The new business index sank to 50.8 from 52.5, its lowest reading since April last year just before parts of the economy reopened after a stricter lockdown.

Consumers were also hit by rocketing prices. The composite output prices index matched November's survey high, and comes after inflation hit a record last month, likely adding pressuring on the European Central Bank to tighten policy.



A sculpture depicting the euro currency symbol by German artist Ottmar Hörl is seen in front of the former European Central Bank headquarters building in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on December 22, 2021.

PHOTO: AFP

## Philips sales hit by Covid, respirator recall

AFP, The Hague

Dutch health technology firm Philips posted big drops in fourth quarter sales and profit Monday, as a faulty respirator recall and supply chain issues weighed on the company.

The Amsterdam-based firm, which last year sold off its domestic appliance arm to focus on medical equipment, said sales came in at 4.9 billion euros (\$5.5 billion) in October through December, a 10 percent drop compared to a year earlier. Fourth quarter profits fell from 607 million euros to 151 million euros.

"Sales were impacted by several headwinds," Philips chief executive Frans van Houten said in a statement.

These were "supply chain challenges, postponement of equipment installations in hospitals related to Covid-19, and the consequences of the Respiration field action," Van Houten said.