iPhone retakes top spot in China

AFP, *Beijing*

Apple reclaimed its position as the top smartphone seller in China after six years, clocking a record market share in the final quarter of 2021 as US sanctions hit rival Huawei, according to researchers.

A surge in sales saw the iPhone maker account for 23 per cent of the highly competitive market in October-December, industry analysis firm Counterpoint said in a report released Wednesday.

That put the US giant in pole position for the first time since the final three months of 2015, toppling China's Vivo. Vivo and another local brand Oppo were not far behind, driven in part by their "strong offline penetration", Counterpoint said.

But smartphone sales in the country also dropped nine percent on-year in the period. Apple's stellar performance was driven

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by a mix of its pricing strategy and gain from Huawei's premium base," said Counterpoint research analyst Mengmeng Zhang.

"Apple rose to first place in China right after the iPhone 13 was released in September," she added, noting it had a lower starting price than its rivals.

The shift comes as Chinese telecom giant Huawei was caught in the crosshairs of Beijing and Washington's trade and technology standoff.

The United States has barred Huawei from buying crucial components such as microchips, and forced it to create its own operating system by cutting it off from using Google's Android operating system.

In December, Huawei said its annual revenue fell nearly a third from the previous year to 634 billion yuan ($99.5 billion).

China is a key market for Apple, with sales in the Greater China region -- including the mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan -- surging 70 per cent in the year to September.

A handloom lies idle at Mahisamuri village in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila. The region's once bustling weaving industry is on the verge of collapse due to a lack of working capital and government support. The picture was taken recently. PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Lack of demand forcing weavers to leave profession

S DILIP ROY

Abdus Sattar, a resident of Mahishamuri village in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila, was a weaver by profession like his father before him, the late Amir Chand.

Sattar, who was involved in weaving since childhood, has been earning a living as a day-labourer for the last two years as he was forced to sell his handloom at a low price to make ends meet.

Still though, he hopes to raise enough capital one day to start weaving again.

Like Sattar, Alim Uddin of the same village now earns a living as a mason as he cannot maintain his expenses by weaving.

As such, his handloom is tucked away in storage but if given enough capital support, Uddin plans to return to his ancestral profession.

Uddin's late father Haran Ali taught him all he knows about weaving, a profession which once brought prosperity to his family. Now, he has to live with his wife, two sons and a daughter in extreme poverty.

Like Uddin and Sattar, many traditional weavers have been unable to hold on to their ancestral professions due to a lack of working capital.

Some sold their handlooms while others stored them away and are now earning money by joining various professions.

Some work as agricultural labourers, day labourers and on ferries while others drive rickshaws and the like.

The weavers told The Daily Star that the clothes they made were popular a decade ago, when demand.

Now though, the demand is decreasing day by day as machine-made fabrics look brighter than woven fabrics, making them the preferred choice among buyers.

However, woven fabrics are still more comfortable than their machine-made counterparts.

About 9 to 10 years ago, weavers of Kakina union would make blankets for sale year-round. In winter, these blankets were often bought by the government as well as non-government organisations (NGOs) for distribution among the cold-stricken poor people.

But ever since these blankets started being made in factories, weaved blankents are no longer being bought and now, only a few retailers buy and sell them in local markets.

Another weaver, Meher Ali, told The Daily Star they used to sell more than four lakh pieces of blankets and bedsheets every year during winter.

At the time, each weaver could sell up to 6,000 of these products. Each blanket would cost between Tk 80 to Tk 100 to make while they would sell for about Tk 200 to Tk 250.

"The capital crisis is our biggest problem. Secondly, the market advantage is not available as the value of weaving cloth is declining in the market. The number of users of weaving cloth is also decreasing day by day," Ali said.

"But weaved cloth is still being sold satisfactorily to low-income people as our fabrics are available at relatively low prices. If we get the capital and market advantage, we will be able to rise as before," he added.

Khorshed Alam, a local NGO representative, told The Daily Star that 8 to 10 years ago, he used to buy 10,000 to 12,000 pieces of weaved blankets to distribute among the poor during the winter every year but now, he distributes factory-made blankets.

Like Alam, many NGO representatives used to buy the blankets made by handlooms from weavers.

"Blankets are also available at a lower price," he said.

Weaved bedsheets can be used for a few years at least but the blankets can be used for a maximum of two years.

"So, I think weaving sheets are much better than blankets but we are getting allocations for blankets," Alam added.

Fazlal Ali, president of the Lalmonirhat Weavers' Association, told The Daily Star that there were about 1,500 handlooms in the district 10 years ago.

Now there are just 250 to 300 handlooms, all of which are in Mahishamuri village of Kakina union, but only a few of these are in operation.

Weavers have been unable to keep their handlooms running due to the lack of capital support.

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Apex sees higher profits despite lower sales

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Profits of Apex Footwear rose in the first half of the current financial year (FY) compared to the same period in FY 2020-21 despite a drop in net sales.

The shoemaker logged sales of about Tk 566 crore in the July-December period of FY 2021-22, down 13 per cent year-on-year from Tk 652 crore.

Meanwhile, the company's profits rose to Tk 4.78 crore in the same period, up 16 per cent from Tk 4.12 last year.

Apex was able to register higher profits thanks in part to a drop in its net finance cost for bank loans, which fell 4 per cent to Tk 28.57 crore.

Apex is a leading manufacturer and retailer of footwear in Bangladesh, and also exports its products to the EU, North America and Japan.

The global footwear industry slowed in 2020, when footwear production and exports fell 15.8 per cent and 19 per cent respectively compared to the year before.

"The plight of the footwear industry in Bangladesh started in early 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic," the company said in its annual report for FY 2020-21.

This is because owners were forced to close factories, outlets and malls by official order in order to contain the virus, it added.

Stock indices dip slightly

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks listed with the Dhaka bourse dropped by the end of yesterday's trading session despite opening on a positive note.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), dropped 4 points, or 0.06 per cent to 7,027.

At the DSE, 142 stocks advanced, 184 fell and 55 remained the same.

The market witnessed a flat session amid choppy trading, International Leasing Securities said in its daily market review.

Trading opened on a positive note amid a cheery vibe in the morning which reversed later as investors maintained a cautious approach amid rising Covid-19 cases, it added.

The top ten traded stocks captured around 31.7 per cent of the day's turnover with Beximco Ltd alone contributing 5.1 per cent of the total amount.

Turnover, an important indicator of the market, shot up 9.32 per cent to Tk 1,219 crore

During the session, the textile sector took the market lead considering the upcoming quarter declaration.

Turnover, an important indicator of the market, shot up 9.32 per cent to Tk 1,219 crore.

Bangladesh Building System topped the gainers list, rising 10 per cent, followed by Union Bank, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, Union Insurance, and BD Thai Food.

Beximco Ltd traded the most, worth Tk 61 crore, followed by Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, Queen South Textiles, Malek Spinning, and RAK Ceramic Industries.

Premier Cement eroded the most, dropping 7.13 per cent, followed by Eastern Insurance, Beacon Pharmaceuticals, Square Textiles, and Heidelberg Cement.

The Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) also slid yesterday. The CASPI, the main index of the port city bourse, fell 11 points, or 0.05 per cent, to 20,586.

Among 312 traded stocks, 122 rose, 147 fell and 43 remained unchanged.

China can slap duties on $645m of US imports: WTO

AFP, *Geneva*

The World Trade Organization on Wednesday handed a fresh victory to China, permitting it to slap duties on $645 million worth of US imports per year, in a long-running anti-dumping dispute with Washington.

The United States, which is unable to appeal against the decision, branded it "deeply disappointing" and said it reinforced the need to reform the WTO's rules, saying they were being used to "shield" China.

"In light of the parties' arguments and evidence in these proceedings, we have determined that the appropriate level... is $645.12 million per annum," a WTO arbitrator ruled.

The WTO green light does not mean China will automatically impose the tariffs, in whole or in part, on US imports.

The figure was revealed in an 87-page decision by a WTO arbitrator on the level of countermeasures Beijing could request in its dispute with Washington regarding US countervailing duties (CVD) on certain Chinese products.

The dispute stretches all the way back to 2012, when the WTO set up a panel of experts to try to settle a complaint filed by China over what it said were unfair duties imposed by the United States.

Washington had justified the additional tariffs on products ranging from paper to tyres and solar panels, arguing they were being dumped on the market to help Chinese companies grab business.

The WTO Dispute Settlement Body ruled in China's favour and the ruling was upheld by its appeals judges in 2014, paving the way for China to retaliate.

A cargo ship loaded with containers leaves a port in Haikou of Hainan province in southern China on May 17, 2021. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Brexit hurts EU-UK trade

AFP, *Paris*

Brexit hurt two-way trade between the European Union and Britain, with the auto, textile and aviation sectors the worst hit, the French economy ministry said Thursday.

The ministry released data on the sidelines of an EU ministerial meeting in Paris dedicated to reviewing the fallout from Britain's departure from the bloc a year ago.

EU exports to Britain fell by 15 per cent in the first 10 months of last year compared to the same period in 2019, before the pandemic, according to the French economy ministry.

EU imports from Britain sank by 30 per cent over the same period. The Covid-19 pandemic has also had a major effect on trade flows between the two sides.

But the EU's total imports and exports exceeded 2019 levels during the first 10 months of last year, according to data from the bloc's Eurostat agency.