



Flowers being harvested for sale at Trilochonpur village of Jhenaidah's Kaliganj upazila. Growers have high hopes of recouping from the pandemic's downturns through big sales tomorrow on Valentine's Day, one of the biggest seasons for the flower trade. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Flower growers eye higher sales ahead of festivals

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Flower growers look to turn around from the pandemic-induced losses by making higher sales as demand is rising ahead of Valentine's Day, Pahela Falgun, the first day of the spring season, and International Mother Language Day.

For example, farmers in Jhenaidah say they will sell flowers worth Tk 3.5 crore this month.

Some 199 hectares of land have been brought under cultivation in four upazilas of the district this year, up from 170 hectares a year ago, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Various types of flowers such as tuberose, gerbera, chrysanthemum, marigold and rose are being cultivated in Jhenaidah, the second-largest flower producing region in Bangladesh after Gadkhali in Jashore.

SM Tipu Sultan, vice-president of the Dhaka Flower Cultivation Cooperatives Association, says growers suffered huge losses as demand plummeted in the last two seasons due to the coronavirus pandemic.

But farmers are optimistic about registering higher sales this month on the back of Valentine's Day and Pahela Falgun, both to be celebrated tomorrow, and International Mother Language Day, to be observed on February 21.

"Flower growers will get good profit as the weather is favourable and the market is open," said Asgar Ali, deputy director of the DAE in Jhenaidah.

Around Tk 3.5 crore worth of flowers



will be sold in the district in February, said Ali and Sultan.

Sultan has been cultivating flowers for five years. This year, he has grown flowers such as tuberose, gerbera, chrysanthemum and marigold on nine bighas of land.

A few days back, farmers sold each piece of rose at Tk 10 to Tk 15 but at present, they are getting Tk 20 to Tk 25. As the festivals get closer, the price will go up to Tk 30 to Tk 35.

Each tuberose stick is being sold at Tk 10, gerbera at Tk 15-20 and chrysanthemum at Tk 10.

Sultan expects that he will sell flowers worth Tk 10 lakh this month.

Nur Mohammad, who hails from Noakhali but lives at Trilochonpur village under Kaliganj upazila, has cultivated flowers on 20 bighas of land, of which roses are being grown on 10 bighas.

"The demand for rose has increased to a great extent," he said. He expects to earn Tk 20 lakh ahead of the festivals.

Similarly, Belal Hossain, who also hails from Noakhali but has settled in Jhenaidah in order to cultivate flowers, has cultivated flowers on 15 bighas of land, of which he has grown roses on six bighas.

Flower trader Hafizur Rahman says farmers will get better prices this year

than the previous year as the pandemic situation has improved.

"The higher sales will allow farmers to recoup the losses incurred in the last two years."

In Gadkhali, the price of all kinds of flowers has gone up ahead of Pahela Falgun and Valentine's Day, and farmers hope to sell flowers worth Tk 25 crore in the run-up to these festivals.

Anwar Hossain, a grower, says each piece of rose is being sold at Tk 15 to Tk 20, way higher than the Tk 1 to Tk 3 it was priced at a month ago.

Gerberas are being sold at Tk 8 to Tk 12 apiece while marigolds are fetching Tk 500 to Tk 600 per 1,000 pieces, up from Tk 200 to Tk 300 previously.

In Faridpur, Liakot Hossain, a farmer, says he lost a lot due to Covid-19 in the last two years. He plans to make a comeback ahead of the festivals.

With the help of one of his elder brothers, Hossain started cultivating gerbera by spending Tk 21 lakh. He has planted 7,000 seedlings.

The 31-year-old planted 7,000 saplings of rose of a Chinese variety on 30 decimals of land spending Tk 15 last year. Now, he can harvest 4,000-5,000 roses a week.

He sells a piece of rose at Tk 10 to Tk 20 and a gerbera at Tk 10-15.

During a visit, it was found that the farmer is plucking gerbera. His field also contains thousands of chrysanthemum and other flowers.

Hossain expects to sell flowers worth Tk 5 lakh from February 10 to February 20.

"I hope I can stand on my own feet again," he said.

Single-digit interest comes to the aid of industries

SOHEL PARVEZ

The single-digit interest rate on bank loans has helped industries in Bangladesh tremendously as the cost of finances has gone down sharply, allowing them to navigate challenges during the coronavirus pandemic smoothly, said a top entrepreneur.

Aameir Alihussain, managing director of BSRM, the largest steel maker in the country, says they are delighted because of the single-digit interest rate.

"Hadn't the rate been brought to single-digit, the impact would have been far deeper in terms of cost. It helped us in that context."

"If the government ensures this level of cost of finances, it will be helpful for all industries," he told The Daily Star in a phone interview yesterday.

A lower interest rate environment will also boost investment, according to Alihussain.

"Had the cost of finances been high, many projects would have been unviable."

"The cost of funds has gone down significantly. We are savings crores of taka every year."

Before the single-digit interest rate was put in place in April 2020, the cost of funds averaged 12 per cent. For the good clients of banks, it is now much below 9 per cent.

Alihussain says the government's stimulus packages are also supporting industries. "It was a timely move on the part of the government."

He says the price of scrap, the main raw material for steel products, has increased further in the past week along with all other ingredients needed to produce steel products.

Globally, raw material prices have risen owing to persisting supply chain disruption, unprecedented shipping cost and demand recovery.

"But we have been slowly raising the price of the products in the local market. And the prices have not risen in proportion to the global market prices," Alihussain said.

"Prices have to be increased further in the coming days," he said, adding that the prices should go up by about Tk 4,000 to Tk 5,000 per tonne.

"Prices will go up ultimately. But we want to keep the increase in prices reasonable because any spike affects everyone. This is because everyone has a budget, whether it be for building a factory or house"

BSRM has been trying to improve efficiency for the last year and has cut the cost of production. "The cost-cutting does not mean that we will lay off workers though," Alihussain said.

The steel maker has been able to cut costs in the case of power and gas consumption by enhancing operational efficiency. This has helped it lower per tonne power and gas consumption.

The company has also paid attention to the proper maintenance so that no machines fail as part of the efficiency drive throughout the organisation, he said.



Oil soars 3pc to 7-yr highs

REUTERS

Oil prices ended 3 per cent higher on Friday at fresh seven-year highs as escalating fears of an invasion of Ukraine by Russia, a top energy producer, added to concerns over tight global crude supplies.

Russia has massed enough troops near Ukraine to launch a major invasion, Washington said, as it urged all US citizens to leave the country within 48 hours.

Britain also advised its nationals to leave Ukraine as Prime Minister Boris Johnson impressed the need for NATO allies to make it absolutely clear that there will be a heavy package of economic sanctions ready to go, should Russia invade Ukraine.

Brent crude futures settled \$3.03, or 3.3 per cent, higher at \$94.44 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude rose \$3.22, or 3.6 per cent, to \$93.10 a barrel. Both benchmarks touched their highest since late 2014, surpassing the highs hit on Monday, and posted their eighth consecutive week of gains on growing concerns about global supplies as demand recovers from the coronavirus pandemic.

Trading volumes spiked in the last hour of trading, with volumes for global benchmark Brent climbing to their highest in more than two months.

"The market doesn't want to be short going into the weekend ... if an invasion appears to be imminent and you know that there will be retaliatory sanction that will result in a disruption in natural gas and oil supplies," Andrew Lipow, president of Lipow Oil Associates in Houston.

The International Energy Agency raised its 2022 demand forecast and expects global demand to expand by 3.2 million barrels per day (bpd) this year, reaching an all-time record 100.6 million bpd.



Crude oil storage tanks are seen from above at the Cushing oil hub, in Cushing, Oklahoma in the United States of America.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Exxon expands oil futures

REUTERS, London

Exxon Mobil is injecting new cash into oil trading in Europe after a retreat on its ambitious expansion plans last year, three people with knowledge of the matter said.

Exxon slashed funding for its trading division in 2020 as part of wider cuts, leaving traders without the capital they needed to take full advantage of the volatile oil market during peak Covid-19 lockdowns.

The company's cautious strategy during the pandemic sparked the exodus of some senior level recruits from the previous couple of years, along with Exxon veterans, after they were restricted to routine hedging and deals.

Among the senior departures Reuters reported last year, Paul Butcher was due to leave in September but then stayed after Exxon decided to allocate more financing, the sources said, without providing further detail.