



In the Kholash village under Dupchanchia upazila of Bogura, 150 families are engaged in making toys, which are sold at the village-level fairs organised on various occasions, including Pahela Baishakh. PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Crafting a living out of making toys

MOSTAFA SHABUJ, Bogura

Nearly 700 women artisans in a village under Dupchanchia upazila of Bogura have been making tomtom and other toys from bamboo, papers, earthen pots, and colours for decades, changing the economic conditions of their families.

In the Kholash village, 150 families are engaged in the making of toys, which are sold at the village-level fairs organised on various occasions, including Pahela Baishakh.

During a visit to the village recently, it was found that almost every village woman was making hand-made toys as Pahela Baishakh, the first day of the Bangla calendar, is approaching.

Some are busy making designs on paper with colours, some are making various parts of a tomtom toy, a wheeled carriage drawn by a single horse, and the rest are putting them together and making a finished product.

Artisans make around 1 lakh tomtom toys every month worth Tk 10 lakh.

Women make up the majority of the toy-makers. There are four to five women in every household who remain engaged in the trade throughout the year, excluding the rainy season, according to Babu Pramanik, an entrepreneur.

Each woman makes 300 to 350 tomtom toys a day. At Pramanik's house, six workers produce 15,000 to 20,000 tomtom and car toys a month.

It costs Tk 6 to make a tomtom toy and Tk 10 a car toy. Pramanik gets Tk 20 for a tomtom toy and Tk 30-40 for a car toy when he sells them at fairs on his own.

"I can earn Tk 30,000 a month. We



are doing well. I have two kids who are going to school."

Each of his workers takes home Tk 300 to Tk 350 a day by making toys after finishing their household chores.

Abu Bokkor Siddik, a sixty-eight-year-old villager, recalls one of the villagers named Kurano went to Bihari Palli in Saidpur in the Pakistan era and learnt how to make toys. Subsequently, he became the first person in the village who initiated a toy-making business.

"Over the years, this business has spread throughout the village. Now, toy-making is the main source of income," he said.

Deoara Bewa, a 55-year-old toy-maker, says toy-making has become a profession for many women and they can earn money to support their families.

"The most important thing is we don't have to leave our house to make a

living."

Anowar Hossain, an artisan, makes 5,000 to 10,000 tomtom toys each month and rakes in Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000 in profit.

The business is not without challenges.

Artisans say although they are making handicraft products, they have never received any training to run their business properly. Besides, the handicraft business is shrinking as plastic toys wash across the market and dominate every village fair across the country.

"We have to compete with imported Chinese toys. But we are not getting any training or low-cost loan facility to upgrade our business," said Lutfar Mollah, another entrepreneur.

The higher prices of raw materials are another headache for entrepreneurs. For example, before the pandemic,

they used to buy 1,000 earthen pots for Tk 500. Now, the same number of pots costs Tk 1,800.

In the last two years, both artisans and entrepreneurs in the village in the northern part of Bangladesh suffered losses due to the pandemic as village fairs were banned owing to Covid-19 restrictions. As a result, many were forced to move to other professions to survive.

As the pandemic receded thanks to the sharp drop in infections, they have returned to the village's five-decade-old profession.

Since there had been no income during the peaks of the pandemic, each family engaged in toy-making took out loans from banks and non-governmental organisations.

"If you come to this village early in the morning and stay throughout the day, you will find a lot of NGO workers who are collecting installments," said Md Redowan, a 25-year-old toymaker.

As fairs are being organised everywhere after a lull, the demand for tomtom and other handmade toys has gone up, so every entrepreneur is taking up a higher amount of loans to expand their production.

Siddik has secured loans amounting to Tk 2.5 lakh from a bank and three NGOs recently. He pays Tk 6,000 to Tk 8,000 every month in installments.

AKM Mahfuzur Rahman, acting deputy general manager of the Bogura BSCIC (Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation), says he did not know about the village artisans and entrepreneurs.

"Now I will go and visit the village. If they really need training and loans, we will arrange them as per our capacity."

FALSE DECLARATION

Ctg customs seize export consignment

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Custom House Chattogram yesterday seized a consignment of Sagar Jute Diversified Industries containing just a sixteenth of the value of products it had declared to be exporting, in what appears to be a fraudulent incentive claim attempt.

The export-oriented Narayanganj-based company declared that the consignment comprised jute goods worth Tk 4.07 crore but customs found it to be of only Tk 25 lakh. "The exporter declared around 82,000 pieces of jute goods, but we found around 30,000 pieces. A departmental case will be filed against the company soon," said Md Ahasan

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Stocks fall for 4th day

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka stocks have extended its losing streak for a fourth consecutive day yesterday.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange, went down 21 points, or 0.31 per cent, to end the day at 6,641.

However, turnover, an important indicator of the market, rose to Tk 515 crore, 5 per cent up from the previous day's Tk 490 crore.

Risk-averse investors continued with their selling spree on sector-specific issues to avoid further losses, said International Leasing Securities in its daily market review.

The recent rise of call money rate indicates that the real economy is using much more money for paying bills due to inflation, it said.

That slowed down the flow of funds to the capital market. Besides, the banking sectors' earning disclosures failed to meet expectations of some investors, it added.

At the DSE, 99 stocks advanced, 230 declined and 52 remained the same.

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AGGREGATE BUSINESS

LafargeHolcim gets SC go-ahead

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Supreme Court's Appellate Division has allowed LafargeHolcim Bangladesh to continue production and sale of aggregates in the open market until the government forms a related policy.

Aggregate is a broad category of coarse particulate material used in construction, including sand, gravel, crushed stone, slag, recycled concrete and geo-synthetic aggregates.

LafargeHolcim Bangladesh terms its aggregate as graded limestone chips having uniform size and shape conforming to international standards.

It commenced commercial production of aggregates in January 2021 setting up a crushing unit with ancillary equipment on the premises of its existing integrated clinker and cement manufacturing plant in Chhatak, Sunamganj.

The company said it had the approval to bring in limestone through a cross-border conveyor belt from India for the purpose of manufacturing cement and clinker.

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Lankan president asks experts to plan debt restructure

Forex reserves drop to \$1.93b

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's beleaguered president has appointed an expert panel to organise a debt restructure to claw the country out of a crippling economic crisis that has sparked huge protests demanding his resignation.

Scarce supplies of food and fuel, along with record inflation and regular blackouts, have inflicted widespread misery in the country's most painful downturn since independence from Britain in 1948.

Rating agencies have warned of a potential default on Sri Lanka's \$51 billion foreign debt, and authorities have been unable to raise more commercial loans because of credit downgrades.

Meanwhile, the country's foreign exchange reserves dropped 16.1 per cent to \$1.93 billion in March from a month earlier, the central bank said on its website on Thursday, according to another report.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office said late Wednesday that the three-member advisory panel had been tasked with guiding Sri Lanka through a "sustainable and inclusive recovery".

His government is preparing for bailout negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, and finance ministry officials told AFP the trio will prepare a programme for sovereign bond holders and other creditors to take a haircut. "What Sri Lanka is keen to do is avoid a hard default," a source from the ministry, who requested anonymity, told AFP.

"It will be a negotiated restructuring of the debt with the help of the IMF," Parliamentary Speaker Mahinda Yapa

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People stand in a queue to buy liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders in Rathgama, Sri Lanka on March 27. Scarce supplies of food and fuel, along with record inflation and regular blackouts, have inflicted widespread misery in the country's most painful downturn since its independence. PHOTO: AFP

Oil rises from 3-week low

REUTERS, Melbourne/Beijing

Oil prices rose on Thursday from a three-week low touched in the previous session after consuming nations announced a huge release of oil from emergency reserves, as worries over tight supplies still clouded the market outlook.

Brent crude futures climbed \$1.42 or 1.4 per cent, to \$102.52 a barrel at 0651 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures rose \$1.55, or 1.6 per cent, to \$97.78 a barrel.

Both benchmarks plunged more than 5 per cent in the previous session and hit their lowest closing levels since March 16.

International Energy Agency member countries on Wednesday agreed to release 60 million barrels on top of a 180 million-barrel release announced by the United States last week to help drive down prices in a tight market following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.