



Workers are seen bunching litchis into bundles for sale at a farm in Shahpur village under Ishwardi upazila of Pabna. With the harvesting season still in its early stages, farmers are seeing a bumper production of the fruit that may eclipse all previous records. The photo was taken on Monday.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Litchi production to hit record high

Farmers expect Tk 500cr business this season

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Litchi cultivation is on the rise in Pabna, where the seasonal fruit now plays a vital role in agro-economics as farmers in the district are likely to get record production due to the favourable weather conditions in early summer.

As such, local litchi farmers are expecting to do business worth about Tk 500 crore this year, according to various sources.

As per data from the regional Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), a total of 4,731 hectares of land in Pabna has been brought under litchi cultivation for an expected yield of 42,579 tonnes of the fruit, which is the most ever produced anywhere in the country.

However, the actual amount produced may even reach 50,000 tonnes as evinced by the current progress in harvesting.

"A minimum of 12,000 to 15,000 litchis are produced by each middle-sized tree while big trees can produce even more amid this suitable weather," said Md Mizanur Rahman, deputy director of the Pabna DAE.

"If the targeted litchi is harvested, farmers will get at least Tk 500 core business in the next one month," he added.

But despite the bumper production, local farmers claim they are yet to get their expected prices.

Sonju Pramanik, a litchi farmer of Silimpur village in Ishwardi upazila



who runs an inherited orchard, bought five more orchards to expand litchi cultivation this year in hopes of getting bumper profit.

"Each thousand litchi [local variety] is being sold for Tk 1,200 to Tk 1,500 this year even though I sold the same amount for Tk 2,200 to Tk 2,300 last year at the beginning of harvesting," he said.

Pramanik went on to say that he got 7,000 to 8,000 litchis from each tree last year but this year, he is getting a minimum of 15,000 litchis from each tree, which is the highest on record in the last few years.

"As there were no storms in early summer that could have damaged the litchi trees, the orchards are seeing bumper output this year," he said.

"And although a long drought did destroy a few of the fruits, we will

continue to get bumper production for the next few days barring any massive natural disaster," Pramanik added.

Although Dinajpur is considered the most popular district for litchi production due to the region's fertile soil and suitable weather, cultivation is now increasing in Pabna, local DAE officials said.

Farmers in Pabna have been growing the local variety of litchi, called the Ati litchi, for many years now. With profits rolling in every year, more farmers in the region were inspired to cultivate hybrid varieties of the fruit that offer better returns, especially the China-3 and Bombay litchi varieties.

"But everything was made possible by the suitable soil and weather," said Pabna DAE Deputy Director Rahman.

Harvesting of the local variety of the fruit began in early May but the peak

harvesting period starts from the middle of the month, he added.

Seasonal job opportunities other than producing litchi

Bumper litchi production not only brings happiness to the farmers, but also there are many new job and business opportunities created in Pabna centring the seasonal fruit.

Md Mirajul Islam, a vegetable trader of Shahpur village, did not have enough land to cultivate the fruit until he bought two litchi orchards in hopes of earning extra profit through the seasonal business.

"Every year I used to buy some trees from land owners, this year I have bought two orchards with 50 trees for Tk 2 lakh expecting to get at least 6 lakh pieces of the fruit," he said, adding that litchi output is better now than in previous years and so, farmers may exceed the DAE's production target.

Islam informed that he spends about Tk 5 lakh on fertilisers, pesticides, and workers for harvesting and processing.

"After that I sell the fruit for about Tk 8 lakh in each month of the season," he said.

Like him, fellow litchi grower Golzar Sardar of the same village bought 250 trees at a cost of Tk 5 lakh and expects to earn a minimum Tk 8-10 lakh through the seasonal fruit business.

As the litchi harvesting season begins, many unemployed men and women find work at litchi orchards.

"At least two labourers are needed to

READ MORE ON B2

UPCOMING BUDGET

Offer roadmap for post-LDC challenges

Says BIDS Research Director Monzur Hossain

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

The government should unveil a roadmap in the upcoming budget to deal with the challenges that the country might face following its graduation from the group of the least developed countries (LDCs), said Monzur Hossain, research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

The graduation is set to take place in 2026 as the country has comfortably met all three criteria.

One of the downsides of graduation is Bangladesh will lose preferential market access in the export destinations. The duty-free export facility has allowed the country to ship goods without any tariff since its inclusion in the LDC group in 1975.

"So, Bangladesh will have to take important steps, domestically and internationally, to retain the trade privilege after graduation," said Hossain.

He said the government should outline a four-year roadmap to deal with LDC graduation-related challenges and it should be started from the upcoming budget.

"This will help the private sector understand what is going to happen in the next four years," he said in a phone interview recently.

According to the economist, the budget for the upcoming fiscal year can be neither expansionary nor contractionary. It should be a balanced one.

"Although time warrants an expansionary budget to strengthen the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, the government should be cautious in budgetary expenditures considering the current global situation and the Russian-Ukraine war."

"The budget should not be expanded in a bigger way since it may affect fiscal discipline."

He called for further strengthening of fiscal discipline, by way of cutting unnecessary expenses, prioritising implementation of ongoing projects, remaining cautious in initiating new projects, and becoming selective in taking up external debt.

Hossain urged the government not to allocate funds to unproductive sectors since the economy is under pressure.

He recommended imposing tariffs to rein in soaring imports in order to prevent the foreign exchange reserves from sliding further.

The reserves, which stood at \$44 billion on April 30, may decline to less than \$42 billion shortly once the central bank adjusts the import payments.

In the face of falling foreign exchange reserves, the Bangladesh Bank on Tuesday instructed banks to take up to 75 per cent of import payments in advance from businesses to open letters of credit for luxury and non-essential goods.

"Import growth has to be cut," said Hossain. Revenue collection has to be increased since the current tax-to-GDP ratio is very low in

READ MORE ON B2



China's consumer inflation picks up

AFP, Beijing

China's consumer inflation rose at its quickest pace in nearly half a year, official data showed Wednesday, reflecting the growing costs of the country's zero-Covid curbs and high commodity prices.

The damage from Beijing's strict zero-Covid strategy has been increasingly reflected in economic data, as lockdowns in key cities such as Shanghai snarled supply chains and pushed up transportation prices.

April's consumer price index (CPI), a key gauge of retail inflation, rose more than expected at 2.1 per cent on-year, picking up from levels seen the month before, said the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

This was due to "factors like the domestic epidemic and continued rise in international commodity prices," the bureau's senior statistician Dong Lijuan said in a statement.

Since April, China's biggest city Shanghai had been almost entirely sealed off.

Most of its 25 million residents have been confined to their homes, while goods piled up at its port as authorities rush to stamp out the worst Covid resurgence since the early days of the pandemic.

Dong said that "due to the rise in logistics costs during the pandemic and increase in demand for stockpiling," prices of potatoes, eggs and fresh fruits ticked up.

The latest figures also showed that after four consecutive months of contraction, food prices overall rose for the first time on-year in April.

Meanwhile, the producer price index (PPI) -- which gauges the cost of goods at the factory gate -- came in at 8.0 per cent, higher than expected but down slightly from in March.



A customer shops for vegetables at a supermarket in Hangzhou, China's eastern Zhejiang province yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Biden says inflation top domestic priority

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden on Tuesday acknowledged the pain felt by Americans from the highest inflation in four decades but said it is his "top domestic priority" and being addressed by the Federal Reserve.

"The Fed should do its job and it will do its job," Biden said in a speech at the White House.

"I believe that inflation is our top economic challenge right now and I think they do too."

Price rises are at their steepest rate since the start of the 1980s, dampening economic optimism as the United States emerges from the Covid pandemic shutdown and badly denting Biden's approval ratings.

Biden said the price surge is primarily caused by gaps in the global supply chain for manufacturing goods as different countries restart their economies at

READ MORE ON B2