



Farmers in Naogaon and Jhenaidah have started using a special growing method involving fruit bags to ensure high quality mangoes for export. However, lower yields compared to that of the 2021 season coupled with increased carrying costs could dash their hopes for higher earnings. The picture was taken from a farm in Sapahar upazila of Naogaon recently.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Naogaon emerges as major mango export hub

Local traders aim for higher exports despite lower yields

MOSTAFA SHABUJ and AZIBOR RAHMAN

Naogaon has joined the ranks of Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Dinajpur as a major export hub for mangoes with locally grown varieties of the fruit now making their way abroad after satisfying domestic demand.

As such, mango growers and exporters in the district are eyeing bigger shipments this year despite registering lower yields compared to that of 2021 due to unfavourable weather conditions alongside spiralling global inflation amid the Russia-Ukraine war.

Naogaon is now the top mango producing district in the country followed by Chapainawabganj and

The average quality of mangoes grown through traditional methods in the region are selling for Tk 2,000 to Tk 3,000 per maund (roughly 37 kilograms) while the best quality mangoes are selling for Tk 3,000 to Tk 4,500 per maund, according to local farmers.

They also informed that it costs between Tk 30,000 and Tk 40,000 to produce the fruit on each bigha of land.

Md Sohel Rana, owner of the Rupgram Agro Farm in the district's Sapahar upazila, cultivated mangoes on around 150 bighas of land, including the Amrupali and Langra varieties.

Rana, who also provides agro-tourism services at his farm, said he used fruit bags on the mangoes grown on about 50 bighas of land in order to ensure higher quality for export.

The special method of growing

mangoes inside multi-layered bags with wax on the outer surface protects the fruit from pests, rain and even hailstorms with their ability to withstand wind speeds of up to 65 kilometres per hour before being blown away.

"I have already shipped five tonnes of mangoes this year through various exporters, including North Bengal Agro," he said.

"We need to use the bagging method to grow export quality mangoes but the process is expensive — almost double the normal cost."

Rana had exported a total of eight tonnes of mangoes to England, the Netherlands and Sweden in 2021.

"We need to use the bagging method to grow export quality mangoes but the process is expensive as it costs Tk 30,000 per bigha, which is almost double the normal production cost," he added.

Rana went on to say the import duty on fruit bags is more than 50 per cent.

"But farmers would be more interested in using the method to produce quality fruits without using pesticides if the government reduced this charge," he said.

Farmers in Naogaon typically export mangoes through exporters as they lack the financial capacity, expertise and

facilities to make direct shipments.

However, this means that exporters enjoy the 25 per cent government incentive on outgoing shipments rather than the farmers.

"If the government can distribute the 25 per cent export incentives among exporters and farmers, then we would be more interested to grow safe fruits for earning foreign currency," Rana added.

Hafizur Rahman, another farmer of Sapahar upazila who cultivated mangoes on 70 bighas of land, said he has sent three tonnes of the fruit to the UK so far this year.

"I contacted the Fresh Food Trading Corporation to export more of mangoes but they are yet to ask for a good amount," he added.

Md Moniruzzaman, agriculture officer of Sapahar upazila, said there are currently around 20,000 farmers growing mangoes on 9,250 hectares of land collectively.

Many of them are producing export quality mangoes but some have lost hope in this regard as the related expenditure of growing high-quality varieties is too high to turn a profit.

Rajib Bose, additional deputy director of the district's Central Pack House under the Plant Quarantine Wing of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), said nearly 14 varieties of mangoes, including Gopalbhog, Langra, Himsagar and Fazli, are being cultivated in the region.

"Around 800 tonnes of mangoes were exported to the UK and European Union last year while about 435 tonnes

have been exported to the same destinations so far this year," he told The Daily Star.

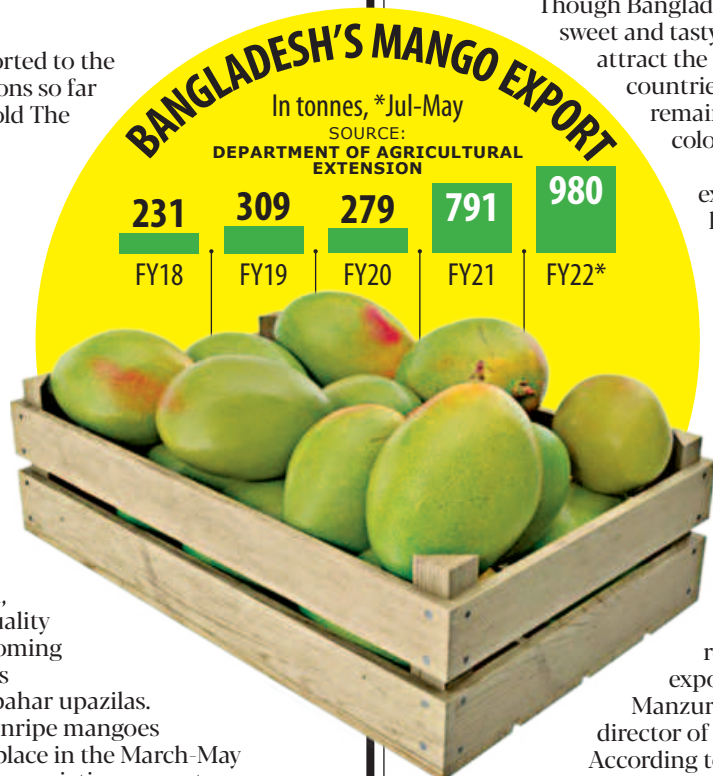
There are around 20-25 seasonal exporters who previously collected mangoes from the Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Jhenaidah, Jessore, Satkhira and Mujibnagar districts.

Now though, most export quality mangoes are coming from Naogaon's Porsha and Sapahar upazilas.

Exports of unripe mangoes normally take place in the March-May period while ripe varieties are sent abroad between June and August.

"Exports seem slower this year as prices are high in local markets due to low yields for bad weather while the increased carrying costs resulting from global inflation generated by the Russia-Ukraine war are also to blame," Bose said.

The Covid-19 situation was so bad in India last year that they could not export mangoes amid a nationwide economic shutdown.



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Mango exports hit five-year high

SOHEL PARVEZ

Mango exports from Bangladesh touched a new high in the outgoing fiscal year thanks to increasing interest among growers and exporters to ship the juicy fruits abroad, official figures showed.

Between July and May of 2021-22, exporters air-shipped 980 tonnes of mango, up 24 per cent year-on-year, according to data from the Plant Quarantine Wing (PQW) of the Department of Agricultural Extension.

The volume is the highest in five years and officials said the total amount would grow further since mangoes are shipped abroad.

Mango exports stood at 790 tonnes during the entire fiscal year of 2020-21.

"We expect the overall shipment of mangoes to surpass last year's total," said Md Rezaul Karim, deputy director of the PQW, which issues plant health certificates for exports.

The overseas sales of the popular fruit have gone up in recent years as the agriculture ministry has been encouraging exporters to sell it in the international markets. It has taken several measures, including providing training to farmers to produce quality mangoes.

There is a lot of demand for the summer fruit grown in Bangladesh among the consumers in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Philippines apart from the Bangladeshis abroad, said Mohammed Mansur, general secretary of the Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables and Allied Products Exporters' Association.

"The taste of mangoes produced in Bangladesh is unparalleled. So, the consumers who get the taste of our mangoes look for it again. Our mangoes have selected customers. Nowadays, we see that Arabs are consuming Bangladesh's mangoes."

Mansur mainly exports fruits and vegetables to the Middle East. His firm has exported 100 tonnes of mangoes this summer.

A good quantity of mangoes is exported from Bangladesh to the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, France, Sweden and Canada.

Mango exports are not without challenges. Though Bangladesh's mangoes are sweet and tasty, the fruit does not attract the nationals of other countries since ripen fruits remain largely green in colour.

"We could have exported huge quantity had the colour of our mangoes been yellowish once they ripened," Mansur said, urging agriculture scientists to do research on developing varieties that will turn yellow on maturity.

The quality of mangoes in Bangladesh has improved because of public and private sector efforts,

reflecting in increasing export earnings, said Md Manzurul Hannan, managing director of Hortex Foundation.

According to him, some farmers have begun farming export-quality mangoes. There is also the entry of new exporters in the segment in the last two to three years. Improvement has also taken place in packaging as well.

Hortex is a government-sponsored agency working to facilitate the export of fresh produce.

Hannan is optimistic that the export of the summer fruit will increase in the coming years as the government plans to set up two vapour heat treatment plants to improve the quality of mangoes and eliminate fruit flies.

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Indian company paying for Russian coal in China yuan

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's biggest cement producer, UltraTech Cement, is importing a cargo of Russian coal and paying using Chinese yuan, according to an Indian customs document reviewed by Reuters, a rare payment method that traders say could become more common.

UltraTech is bringing in 157,000 tonnes of coal from Russian producer SUEK that loaded on the bulk carrier MV Mangas from the Russian Far East port of Vanino, the document showed. It cites an invoice dated June 5 that values the cargo at 172,652,900 yuan (\$25.81 million).

Two trade sources familiar with the matter said the cargo's sale was arranged by SUEK's Dubai-based unit, adding that other companies have also placed orders for Russian coal using yuan payments.

The increasing use of the yuan to settle payments could help insulate Moscow from the effects of western sanctions imposed on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine and bolster Beijing's push to further internationalise the currency and chip away at the dominance of the US dollar in global trade.

The sources declined to be identified as they are not authorised to speak to the media. UltraTech and SUEK did not respond to a request seeking comment.

"This move is significant. I have never heard any Indian entity paying in yuan for international trade in the last 25 years of my career. This is basically circumventing the USD (US dollar)," a Singapore-based currency trader said.

The sale highlights how India has maintained trade ties with Russia for commodities such as oil and coal despite the western sanctions. India has longstanding political and security ties with Russia and has refrained from condemning the attack in Ukraine, which Russia says is a "special military operation".



People queue along a street to buy LPG cylinders near the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle, Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka economy shrinks 1.6pc in Q1

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's economy shrank 1.6 per cent in the first quarter of this year as an unprecedented financial crisis began to impact commercial activity, according to official data.

The island nation's painful downturn has seen months of lengthy blackouts, runaway inflation and severe shortages of vital consumer goods.

A shortage of foreign currency needed for the import of fuel, fertiliser and other essentials had a devastating effect on the economy just as the coronavirus pandemic was receding.

The January-March contraction was worsened by the "adverse effects" of inflation and Sri Lanka's crashing currency, the statistics department said.