



Although these large, ovate fruits may seem like melons, they are actually a type of citrus berry called Citron. Popularly known as "Jara" in the regions of Sylhet where it is grown, this fruit can go for as much as Tk 1,000 per piece depending on size. PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## Sylhet's citrus getting popular at home and abroad

DWOHA CHOWDHURY

What is the maximum amount of money a person would be willing to spend on a single citrus fruit? If you guessed between Tk 15 and Tk 40, you would be dead wrong.

There is one distinct citrus fruit, called citron, which is so popular in Sylhet that a single piece weighing around two kilogrammes can cost as much as Tk 1,000.

Popularly known as "Jara", this large, ovate and highly fragrant variety of citrus berry has been enjoyed by the people of Sylhet for centuries now for its unique flavour.

The locals seem to have a taste for the tangy as they have developed other varieties as well, such as a cardamom flavoured smaller version of the citron called "Shashni", and the most famous type of wild orange called "Shatkora".

Besides, they also developed the "Ada Jamir", or ginger lime, which is highly fragrant but inedible unless used as an ingredient.

Over the years, the varieties of citrus fruit have gained popularity not only in Sylhet, but all over the country and abroad.

At Lalbazar in Sylhet city, each Jara gets sold for between Tk 200 and Tk 1,000 depending on size while Shashni goes for Tk 140 to Tk 350 per piece.

Meanwhile, Ada Jamir is sold for Tk 100 to Tk 200 per hali (four pieces) while the same number of Shatkora are priced at Tk 200 to Tk 400.

Jayed Ahmed, a purveyor of citrus fruits at Lalbazar, said he normally registers sales of around Tk 5,000 to Tk 8,000 every day during normal times.

"But when expatriates visit Sylhet, my sales reach Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000 daily," he added.



Ahmed explained that expatriates tend to buy copious amounts of these fruits upon their return to the country as each variety costs at least three times more in kitchen markets abroad.

According to data from the Export Promotion Bureau, Bangladesh shipped \$17.35 lakh worth of citrus fruit and \$20,000 worth of citrus peel in fiscal 2021-22.

In the greater Sylhet region, Citrus fruits are mainly grown in hilly areas of the Sylhet and Moulvibazar districts.

Some 27,032 tonnes of citrus fruits were grown on 1,702 hectares of land in Moulvibazar while another 9,934 tonnes were produced on 1,390 hectares of land in Sylhet last season, as per data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Md Faruk Hossain, additional deputy director of the DAE in Sylhet, said citrus fruits from Sylhet are being exported to European and middle eastern markets.

However, all shipments take place through the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka as the Osmani International Airport in Sylhet does not have the facilities needed.

"For this, local farmers are not getting good prices and the export is not increasing," he added.

The Citrus Research Centre (CRC), a subsidiary of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), in Sylhet's Jaintiapur upazila has been working on the research and development of citrus fruits since 1960.

Over the decades, the centre evolved a total of 21 varieties of citrus, including three types of mandarin, three types of sweet orange, six pomelos, one Shatkora, one Jara, one sweet lime, one key lime and six lemons.

While citrus species like Jara and Shatkora are quickly gaining popularity, there are fewer hybrid varieties available and

so, Shatkora is mostly imported from Assam of India to meet the demand in Sylhet.

MHM Borhannuddin Bhuyan, scientific officer of the CRC, said Shatkora is a very delicate and wild species found on a very slow growing tree.

"That is why farmers are not interested in growing it despite the high demand. On the other hand, Jara and other citrus fruits have become more popular among farmers over the years," he added.

At present, the CRC is producing 10,000 mother saplings of different varieties of citrus and distributing them to private farms that are multiplying these plants for commercial production.

Dr Shah Md Lutfur Rahman, principal scientific officer of the CRC, said the organisation is planning on developing hybrid varieties of Shatkora and other citrus fruits.

To facilitate the advanced research, four laboratories – Molecular Biology, Pomology, Tissue Culture and Plant Physiology – recently received advanced equipment.

"We are very hopeful to see a huge change in the research and production," Rahman added.

Tahmin Ahmed, president of Sylhet Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the demand for citrus fruits is increasing in the UK, US, EU and middle eastern markets.

"But due to a lack of warehouses, packing stations and certification centre at Sylhet airport, we struggle as we are being forced to export via Dhaka," he added.

Ahmed went on to say that they handed over a letter to the agriculture minister at a conference on February 14, demanding these facilities.

"But after all these months, there is no ray of hope," he said.

## Driving transformation in good or bad times

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

We all know about the funny story of Nasiruddin Hojja and his donkey.

Once Hojja was going through financial difficulty and he was struggling to feed his own family, let alone his donkey. In the first month when he reduced his donkey's feed by 25 per cent, he was surprised to find the donkey showing no major signs of weakness.

Impressed by the donkey's resilience, he reduced its feed by another 25 per cent on the second month, observing only some minor difficulties in the animal in carrying goods. Then Hojja decided to further cut down the feeds by another 25 per cent. But

this time the hapless donkey dies. The moral of the story – don't drive transformation in your bad time!

At the beginning of this year, I was talking to one of the largest family-run businesses in Bangladesh to get some understanding of their needs or lack of them, to bring about some transformation in their company.

Interestingly, one of its directors explained to me how their company has been growing in leaps and bounds since the independence of Bangladesh, with the profits multiplying and how they have earned a high degree of business repute and social status as a result. Then he went on to add: Why on earth would they want a transformation in the organisation and rock the boat!

My personal learning is that transformation is a continuous process. It works better when business health is good. During good times, if the transformation drive fails for some reason, the company can sustain the pressure just like the shock absorber of a car.

Contrarily, if transformation is driven during bad times, the result may be similar to the Hojja story. Any transformation requires time to execute and there is simply no shortcut to it! Any attempts at cutting the corners may cause serious damage to the entire effort.

Statistics indicate that most transformation drives fail, and global companies are also no exceptions. In fact, the rate of failure is as high as 84 per cent if it is a digital transformation, as per Forbes assessments.

According to McKinsey, Boston Consulting Group, KPMG, and Bain & Company, the risk of failure falls somewhere between 70 per cent and 95 per cent. Obviously, the rate of failure is way less in the case of traditional, cultural or business transformation, if it is done with a thorough understanding of the severity of the problems.

In order to make any transformation successful, don't drive transformation by looking at the rear-view mirror, understand the severity of the problems, and focus on the cultural elements of organisations.

Family businesses in Bangladesh are experiencing success with relative ease due to the abundance of economic opportunities in the country at present. However, we should not forget that nothing remains static. There will come a time when our businesses will have depleted these opportunities, which will reach a saturation point.

Moreover, the new generation is emerging with fresh new skills and mindsets, which are significantly different from the current or older generation. It is very important to bridge this gap, and in order to do so, business transformation is unavoidable.

The growing trend of the economic success of Bangladesh depends on the long term sustainability of the existing businesses, which have the potential to become global players like Walton and Pran.

The author is a telecom and management expert.



## RUNAWAY INFLATION

### ECB lifts rates by whopping 75 bps

REUTERS, Frankfurt

The European Central Bank raised its key interest rates by an unprecedented 75 basis points on Thursday and signalled further hikes, prioritising the fight against inflation even as the bloc's economy is heading for a likely winter recession.

With inflation at a half-century high and approaching double-digit territory, policymakers are worried that rapid price growth could become entrenched, eroding the value of household savings and setting off a wage-price spiral.

Following up on its July rate hike, the ECB raised its deposit rate to 0.75 per cent from zero and lifted its main refinancing rate to 1.25 per cent, their highest levels since 2011, with further moves anticipated in October and December.

"We have more journey to cover going forward," ECB President Christine Lagarde told a news conference, adding that there had been unanimous agreement among policymakers about the need for a 75-basis point hike to "frontload" the move towards rates consistent with bringing inflation to its 2 per cent mid-term target.

Policymakers had for weeks oscillated between a 50 and a 75 basis-point increase, but another jump in both headline and underlying inflation appears to have settled the debate as figures indicate that price growth is now seeping into the broader economy, making it even harder to root out.

Indeed, the ECB raised its inflation projections once again, lifting the 2023 outlook to 5.5 per cent from 3.5 per cent.

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The headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB) is pictured prior to the news conference of the bank's governing council following their meeting in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Importing Russian oil to manage inflation

India says

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's finance minister said on Thursday that importing Russian oil was part of the country's inflation-management strategy and that other countries were doing something similar.

Despite Western pressure, India has not condemned Russia's February invasion of Ukraine, instead calling for a diplomatic solution to the crisis and an end to violence. Russia has for decades been India's biggest foreign supplier of defence hardware.

India's crude oil shipments from Russia have jumped to between 12 per cent and 13 per cent of imports from all sources since February from about 2 per cent before then,

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