



A swarm of betel leaf growers and traders are seen at a local market in Brittipara village under Kushtia sadar upazila. This is the biggest betel leaf market in the region, where cultivation of the crop has been picking up for the last three years.

PHOTO: AMANUR AMAN

Betel leaf cultivation creeping up as exports expand

AMANUR AMAN from Kushtia

Betel leaf grown in Kushtia is not only popular across Bangladesh, but also beyond the country's borders with increasing exports in the last several years encouraging more farmers to cultivate the crop.

As such, betel leaf was cultivated on 2,230 hectares of land in fiscal 2021-22, up by some 4 per cent compared to 2,140 hectares the year before, according to sources at the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Kushtia.

Although the crop is grown throughout the district, three upazilas — Kushtia sadar, Mirpur and Bheramara — are the top producers.

Abdullah Al Mamun, agriculture officer of Mirpur upazila, said his region exports the most betel leaf with 20 tonnes of the crop having been shipped to countries in the Middle East as well as England in the previous fiscal.

Meanwhile, Kushtia sadar upazila and Bheramara upazila exported 22 tonnes and 27 tonnes respectively but unlike Mirpur, the leaves were collected from various other regions as well.

On average, Tk 35 crore worth of betel leaf is exported from the three upazilas each year.

Kushtia has always been a betel leaf growing district but farmers had once turned away from its cultivation in the

face of constant losses.

However, earnings from betel leaf have risen in the past three years and as a result, many farmers are once again inclined to grow the crop.

The local farmers now use organic pesticides, which has enabled healthier and safer cultivation while also boosting yields.

“Kushtia Paan has great potential in earning foreign currency. So, it can be considered whether any big project can be undertaken for betel leaf growers in the district,” said Ramesh Chandra Ghosh, director of the Sustainable Agricultural Development Expansion Project in Jashore

Several local varieties of the plant are being cultivated alongside high yielding and disease resistant species, such as Bari Paan-1, 2 and 3.

Among them, Bangla Paan and Mitha Paan the most popular among farmers for their resistance to rot, leaf burn and other diseases.

Local agriculture officials say they have trained farmers in the modern methods

of betel leaf cultivation and conservation in addition to the correct way of applying pesticides.

As a result, betel leaf growers in the district are earning up to Tk 1.5 lakh per bigha.

Even just a few years ago, many farmers were engaged in tobacco cultivation in hopes of better profits but now, they are turning back to betel leaf for a quick path to self-sufficiency.

Among them is Hashem Ali Khan, a youth of Hazrahati village in Mirpur upazila, who achieved solvency through his two-and-a-half bigha betel leaf plantation.

Hashem expects to earn more than Tk 3 lakh from the crop this year.

Shahidul Islam, a farmer from the Kuchiamora area of Bheramara upazila, said he has been cultivating betel leaf instead of tobacco for the past two years. Islam grew Bangla Paan on one bigha of land last year, when he earned around Tk 1.5 lakh from his harvest.

This year, Islam is cultivating Bangla Paan on three bighas of land as this variety of betel leaf has high demand in different parts of the country.

Abdur Rahman, another grower from Bheramara upazila, said he has been sending betel leaf to Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet for a long time now.

“In the past, profits were low as only expensive and inaccessible modes of transportation were available,” he added.

But after the launch of Padma Bridge, Rahman has been able to bring his betel leaf to various markets by himself, saving both time and money.

As such, Rahman's profits have almost doubled.

Officials of the Kushtia DAE said betel leaf growers in the region use non-toxic organic pesticides, including combinations of mulberry, lime and water, that produce good results while also keeping costs comparatively low.

Saidul Islam, a farmer from Brittipara village in Kushtia sadar upazila, said growers in the region would previously use conventional pesticides but have since switched to organic cultivation after getting good results.

Ramesh Chandra Ghosh, director of the Sustainable Agricultural Development Expansion Project in Jashore, said farmers in Kushtia are getting more profit than ever by cultivating betel leaf.

“They are earning Tk 1 to Tk 1.5 lakh per bigha by cultivating betel leaf in a modern way,” he added.

Ghosh went on to say that even a few years ago, farmers were leaning towards tobacco cultivation considering its higher profits.

“Kushtia Paan has great potential in earning foreign currency. So, it can be considered whether any big project can be undertaken for betel leaf growers in the district,” he said.

Stocks continue to decline

But turnover rises

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks continued to drop yesterday while turnover rose as some investors were active in the block market.

The block market is a platform of an exchange where a large number of stocks are traded in a single transaction at a negotiated price without affecting the index.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), dropped 6 points, or 0.10 per cent, to 6,238 points.

The DS30, the blue-chip index, went down 0.10 per cent to 2,201 points while the DSES, the index that represents Shariah-based companies, fell 0.15 per cent to 1,366 points.

As the block market allows stocks to be traded at a value 10 per cent lower than that in the main market, some investors tried to buy stocks from the former, said a stockbroker.

Stock investors are apprehensive over making investments amidst the present economic situation, so the index is falling while turnover has also remained low, he pointed out.

Turnover, an important indicator of the market, rose 34 per cent to Tk 456 crore from that on the previous day.

Now institutional investors should come forward and play their proper role and support the market so that general investors can regain their confidence, he added.

Among the companies to undergo trade, 30 advanced, 54 declined and 241 remained the same.

Dhaka stocks extended their bearish trend for a fourth consecutive session as investors were reluctant to make fresh investment amid macroeconomic uncertainty, said International Leasing Securities in its daily market review.

Following a price fall in the previous two sessions, the market started off on a negative note and witnessed a sharp fall early on, it said.

The trend continued till the end of the trading day in spite of bargain hunters turning buoyant late in the session, it added.

The apprehensive investors opted to liquidate their investments, especially those in IT, resulting in its drop by 1.6 per cent.

However, the enthusiastic investors took a liking to jute and ceramic sectors, resulting in rises of 3.1 per cent and 1.6 per cent respectively.

The turnover increased by 34.2 per cent as the block turnover of Beximco Sukuk worth Tk 100 crore was executed.

Based on the turnover, investors' activities were mostly centred on pharmaceuticals (20.9 per cent), ceramics (13 per cent) and fuel and power (12.8 per cent).

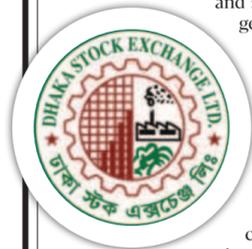
Monno Ceramic Industries posted the highest appreciation, rising 9.97 per cent. Bangladesh Autocars surged 9.91 per cent while Islami Commercial Insurance, Aziz Pipes and Northern Islami Insurance rose by more than 7 per cent.

Advent Pharma suffered the biggest fall, sliding 4 per cent. Kohinoor Chemical Company (Bangladesh) dropped 4.33 per cent, aamra technologies 3.55 per cent and Fine Foods 3.11 per cent.

Monno Ceramic Industries was the stock to be traded the most with shares worth Tk 36 crore changing hands. Intraco Refueling Stations, Orion Infusion, Genex Infosys and Monno Agro & General Machinery also saw significant transactions.

The Caspi, the all-share price index of Chittagong Stock Exchange, fell 41 points, or 0.22 per cent, to end the day at 18,404 points.

Of the securities that underwent transactions, 14 advanced, 49 declined, and 81 did not show any price movement.



BB moves to help use undisbursed farm loans

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank has decided to form a fund using the undisbursed portion of agriculture and rural loans and utilise them to accelerate farm production.

The central bank has moved to constitute the Bangladesh Bank Agricultural Development Common Fund (BBADCF), according to a circular yesterday.

Under the initiative, banks would deposit money equivalent to the undisbursed amount of farm and rural loans to the fund. The BB would give 2 per cent interest on the deposits.

The funds of the BBADCF would then be distributed among banks in proportion to their capacity. Banks would pay back the loans to the BB, along with 2 per cent interest, within 18 months of the fund release.

Banks can charge 8 per cent interest on the loans given to farmers using the money from the BBADCF. The loans have to be

disbursed using banks' own network, not through microfinance institutions, said the notice.

Private banks are usually allowed to attain 70 per cent of their annual farm loan disbursement target through microfinance institutions.

The notice said banks would be allowed to transfer 4 percentage points of the interest to their income segment on the loans made from the fund.

The latest move from the BB came a month after it asked private banks to speed up their farm loan disbursements to enhance the country's food security.

As such, lenders have been asked to give out 30 per cent more loans instead of sticking to the annual disbursement target set by the central bank.

The BB set a loan disbursement target of Tk 30,911 crore for the current fiscal year. Of the target, banks lent 31 per cent between July and October, showed data from the central bank.



The central bank has moved to constitute the Bangladesh Bank Agricultural Development Common Fund using the undisbursed portion of agriculture and rural loans in a bid to accelerate farm production.

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