



Wooden and plastic-made furniture and decorative items might be present everywhere, both indoor and outdoor, but cane-made alternatives easily replace many of them and offer more variation. The photo was taken from the Sehora area in the Mymensingh city recently.

PHOTO: MD AMINUL ISLAM

Japanese suppliers face price cut requests

ANN/THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

Many small suppliers in Japan have received requests for price cuts from their clients despite rises in raw materials and other prices, according to a survey by a major labor group.

The survey of 477 companies by the Japanese Association of Metal, Machinery, and Manufacturing Workers, or JAM, highlights the severe situation surrounding small and midsize suppliers.

If such companies remain unable to pass the higher costs on to their clients, they would not be able to raise salaries for their workers. Employees of small and midsize companies account for about 70 pct of Japan's labor force.

According to the survey, conducted for about two months from late November 2022, 36 pct of respondents said their clients requested them to lower prices.

Of those asked to lower prices, 63 pct said they partially met the requests, while 15 pct acted on the requests almost entirely. Only 22 pct said they declined.

Sixty-one pct of those
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Cheap and durable, cane products hold huge potential

MD AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Though plastic, plywood and board furniture have captured the market, the demand for those made from cane has not disappeared completely.

Rather, the consumption of furniture items and showpieces produced from the natural fibre is growing as customers are increasingly becoming aware of its eco-friendly feature.

"We regularly make around 20 items, including sofa sets, easy chairs, bookshelves, trays, room partitions, tables, stools and cradles. We also supply items as per designs sought by customers," said Md Sohel Mia, proprietor of Mymensingh Cane House in the divisional city. He has been running the business for 20 years.

Canes are also used to make show-pieces and they have high in good demand. People buy them as gift items, said Md Rashed Mia, also a furniture maker.

Zohir Khan, another manufacturer, says the demand for show-pieces goes up on various occasions.

A sofa set is sold between Tk 8,000 and Tk 20,000. "Such a set sofa can easily be used for 10 to 12 years. And after small repairing and varnishing, it could be used for another 10 years."

Local furniture makers collect canes from Pabna and Khagrachhari. The raw material is also imported from Myanmar and Bhutan.

The price of cane has increased by 50 per cent within a span of a year, said Sohel.

"But we have not increased the price accordingly since customers might respond negatively."

If the supply of locally produced quality cane can be increased, the profit would go up,

said industry people.

Imported canes are mainly used for making items such as sofas, chairs and tables since the quality of canes is better and they last long.

Sales are good but the profit is less as the price of cane is higher, said furniture makers while talking to this correspondent in the city's Sehora area.

Customers belonging to the middle class make up the largest base of customers of cane-made furniture and decorative items.

"We regularly make around 20 items, including sofa sets, easy chairs, bookshelves, trays, room partitions, tables, stools and cradles. We also supply items as per designs sought by customers."

Also, people who work at government offices and non-government organisations and see transfer on a regular interval are among the clients since the light-weight furniture can easily be shifted from one place to another, said industry people.

The making of furniture and showpieces from cane has also created jobs.

On average, a worker earns Tk 600 a day, said Al Amin, a worker.

"Earnings are reasonable," he said, adding that workers can find jobs outside of the city as well.

Md Abdus Salam, deputy general manager of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) in Mymensingh, said items made from cane had

a very high good demand among the well-off in the past.

"But with the flooding of cheap plastic and plywood-made products, the overall demand has gone down."

He said cane products could grow as an industry. "And it can create jobs for thousands of people, mainly in the rural areas."

If the BSCIC receives any proposal to promote cane-made products, the government agency will work on it, said the official.

M Sirajul Islam, a former professor of the agricultural economics department at the Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), said the promotion of cane as a small and medium industry can surely enrich the country's rural economy.

"Cane products are sophisticated items for many who prefer organic products compared to those made using iron, steel and plastic. Cane is grown on non-agricultural land. The promotion of its cultivation can support small and marginal farmers as a bonus crop."

In the past, mats that were widely available in almost all households in Bangladesh were made from the cane by the rural people, especially women, said Prof Sirajul.

There is a huge potential for cane production in Mymensingh, Sylhet, Rangpur and the hilly regions, according to AHM Saiful Islam, a professor of the agricultural economics department at the BAU.

"Due to global climate change, people are showing more interest in recyclable jute and cane items."

Both Sirajul and Saiful urged the authorities to take initiatives for the promotion of cane products since these products have high demand in overseas markets as well.

Building an organisation that promotes learning

MAMUN RASHID

In today's rapidly changing business environment, organisations that fail to adapt and evolve run the risk of becoming obsolete. As the management guru Peter Drucker said, "The only sustainable competitive advantage is an organisation's ability to learn faster than the competition."

Indeed, to stay ahead of the curve, organisations must be able to quickly acquire new knowledge and skills, and continuously improve their processes and practices. Building a learning organisation is key to achieving this. It enables companies to create a culture of continuous learning and improvement and to develop the capabilities needed to thrive in an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

Organisations need to foster a culture of learning where they encourage employees to learn, experiment, and share knowledge openly. Leaders should model the behaviours they want to see in their employees. They should prioritise learning, openly share their own knowledge and experiences, and encourage their employees to do the same.

Collaborative work environments facilitate learning as employees can share their knowledge and experiences and learn from each other. Failure is often an important part of the learning process. By encouraging employees to take risks



and experiment with new ideas, and providing a supportive environment where failure is seen as an opportunity to learn and improve, organisations can provide necessary room to learn and grow.

A learning organisation needs to provide access to resources such as books, online courses, and industry events, and encourage employees to use them to further their learning and development. Leaders should recognise and reward employees who demonstrate a commitment to learning and development and create a culture where learning is seen as a valuable and necessary part of the organisation's success.

Technology can play a critical role in aiding to build a learning organisation. A learning management system can be used to manage, deliver, and track learning and development programmes. Online training programmes can be used to provide employees with access to training that may not be available in person and can be a cost-effective way to deliver training.

Technology can provide tools for collaboration, such as video-conferencing and virtual meeting software, which can facilitate knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning. Knowledge sharing platforms, such as intranets and wikis can be used to capture and share knowledge, and to provide employees with access to the information they need to perform their jobs effectively.

Technology can also be used to collect data on learning and development activities, such as completion rates and learner satisfaction, and generate reports that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities.

To develop a learning culture and build for the future, organisations can start by assessing their current learning and development practices, including what is working well and what needs improvement. Collecting data on the learning needs and preferences employers can help better develop a learning strategy.

Developing a learning strategy that is aligned with organisation's goals and objectives is imperative for the success and effectiveness of the strategy.

Building a learning organisation takes time and effort, but the benefits are worth it. As Einstein once said, "Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death."

Performance should be backed by consistent learning and knowledge seeking. Only with a commitment to lifelong learning can organisations aim to achieve greatness and unlock their full potential.

The author is an economic analyst

World Bank promises 'concessionality' in debt restructuring

REUTERS, Bengaluru

The World Bank will "provide as much concessionality to the debt treatment" for distressed economies as possible, its president told a meeting with the International Monetary Fund, India, China, and other creditor nations on Saturday.

The remarks come amid calls by China, the world's largest bilateral creditor, that global lenders should take haircuts on loans extended to developing nations hurt by the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The United States, meanwhile, has repeatedly criticised China over its "foot-dragging" on debt relief for dozens of low and middle-income countries. "The World Bank is committed to providing net positive flows in a way that maximizes concessionality in the restructuring process," David Malpass said at the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable in India's Bengaluru city on the sidelines of the G20 financial leaders' meet.

Malpass also said that he noted "constructive remarks" by a deputy China central bank governor at a G20 meeting on Friday that "gave room to move forward" on settlement of debt issues.

Reuters reported earlier this month that India, the current president of the G20 bloc, is drafting a proposal for G20 countries to help debtor nations by asking lenders to take a large haircut on loans.

On Friday, Chinese Finance Minister Liu Kun told the G20 financial leaders that international financial institutions and commercial creditors should follow the principle of "joint action, fair burden" in debt settlements.



Tourists pose for picture on Mai Khao Beach as a plane lands at Phuket International Airport in Phuket province in Thailand on February 13. Thailand's economy is expected to grow 3.8 per cent this year, helped by a rebound in the vital tourism sector, while inflation should cool to its target range, its finance minister said yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Germany seeks to deepen business ties with India

AFP, New Delhi

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz arrived in India on Saturday seeking to deepen business ties between the world's number four and five economies and push for progress on an EU trade deal despite differences over Ukraine.

"We want to further strengthen our bilateral relationship with India and our cooperation on global issues, such as mitigating climate change and transforming our economies in a just, green and sustainable way," Scholz told the Times of India in an interview.

"There is huge potential for intensified cooperation, in sectors such as renewables, hydrogen, mobility, pharma, digital economy, and many more," Scholz told the paper.

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