



Retail prices of imported fruits have gone up by 15 per cent to 30 per cent year-on-year although sales have gone down for people prioritising only necessities amidst the economic downturn, apparently owing to a reduction in imports and rise in price of the US dollar and transportation costs. The photo was taken in front of New Market in Khulna city on Monday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Argentina keen to boost trade with Bangladesh

Two countries sign MoU

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Santiago Andres Cafiero, Argentina's minister of foreign affairs, international trade and worship, yesterday expressed his country's interest to boost economic relations with Bangladesh.

Citing how medical goods made in Bangladesh have a good reputation abroad, Cafiero said Argentina is interested to invest in local export-oriented industries.

He made these comments during a views exchange meeting with Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi at the Secretariat in Dhaka, after which the two signed a



memorandum of understanding (MoU) to boost bilateral trade and investment.

While addressing the following press briefing, Cafiero said football is a great channel for uniting the people of both countries despite the geographical distance between them.

At the meeting, Munshi urged Argentina to set up edible oil factories at any of the special economic zones in Bangladesh as local production would ensure lower prices.

Argentina supplies huge quantities of soybean oil and sugar to Bangladesh each year, making it an important trading partner for the country, he added.

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Fruit imports down 38% for strict LC measures

SUKANTA HALDER

The ongoing dollar shortage has limited the number of letters of credit (LC) which fruit importers can open, reducing inbound shipments.

While prices have gone up and importers warn that a continuation of the situation could lead to a crisis, a walk around Dhaka's popular kitchen markets however reveals shops with stocks aplenty.

Fruits worth \$157.38 million were imported during the July-January period of the current fiscal year, according to data from Bangladesh Bank.

Year-on-year, it has gone down 37.79 per cent.

Of the most common ones, apples come from South Africa, Brazil, China and Australia, pomegranates from India, pear from Pakistan, sweet orange from Egypt, tangerine from China and India and grapes from India and Pakistan.

Importers said the demand for imported fruits stay high from September to January due to a reduction in supplies of locally grown ones.

The costly US dollar has raised import costs, so retail prices are up at least 15 per cent to 30 per

cent year-on-year, said importer Sirajul Islam.

This has reduced sales as the current economic situation is making people prioritise only necessities and so businesspeople are just trying to survive reducing profits, he said.

The American greenback has appreciated by about 25 per cent against the taka in the past one year as the foreign currency reserves of

Fruits worth \$157.38 million were imported during July-January of FY23, down from \$252.97 million in the same period a year ago

Bangladesh have depleted owing to escalating imports.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) imposed regulatory duties on the last week of May 2022 to discourage fruit imports due to the dollar shortage.

Later, Bangladesh Bank also stopped providing loan facilities for fruit imports.

On May 24 last year, the NBR raised regulatory duty from 3 per cent to 23 per cent to discourage the import of all types of fruits along with other non-essential and

luxury goods.

About 40 per cent of the country's demand for fruits is met locally while the rest have to be met through imports, said Rakib Hossain, office secretary of Bangladesh Fresh Fruits Importer Association.

The Russia-Ukraine war has raised oil prices, increasing transportation costs, said Sirajul Islam, the association's president.

Tackling such increases in operational costs requires investments and bank loans and all in all the situation has turned difficult, he said.

Though sales of fruits produced abroad have halved, sale of those grown locally have slightly increased, said Mohammad Akbar Hossain, a retailer at Mirpur II.

Daily sales have gone down from Tk 40,000 a year ago to Tk 20,000 to Tk 22,000 nowadays, said another fruit trader, Mahfuzur Rahman, in Karwan Bazar, one of the biggest kitchen markets in Dhaka.

"I don't know when I will be able to get out of this critical situation. Due to the decrease in income and the increase in the cost of living, I cannot fulfill many wishes of my wife and children. That's why I often quarrel with my wife," he said.

Take up new challenges for perfection

Says first Bangladeshi CEO of LafargeHolcim

SOHEL PARVEZ

One should never be complacent and never be happy with his or her current role, rather the person should take up challenges, which will help in achieving perfection, said Mohammad Iqbal Chowdhury, the first Bangladeshi CEO of LafargeHolcim Bangladesh Limited (LHBL).

Chowdhury believes this has been the story behind success in the recent years for LafargeHolcim Bangladesh, a joint venture of Holcim Group, a global leader in innovative and sustainable building solutions.

"None should restrict himself or herself within the periphery of his or her educational and other background," said Chowdhury, who is the seventh CEO of the company.

"Seek opportunities outside the box, expand your thinking and expand your horizon," said the top boss of LHBL, which incorporated in Bangladesh in 1997 and has headquarters in Switzerland and Cementos Molins of

Spain.

Chowdhury is also the first Bangladeshi to lead any multinational cement company operating in Bangladesh.

In a brief interview, he said: "CEO may be just another designation but it comes with an enormous responsibility."

Leading a cement company in Bangladesh has always been challenging due to the imbalance of production capacity and demand.

"Higher dependency on imported raw materials is another challenge, but we have a very good and talented team which have proven their strengths in the past. We have maintained sustainable growth despite many external challenges in the previous years," he added.

"None should restrict himself or herself within the periphery of his or her educational and other background," said Chowdhury, who is the seventh CEO of the company

Chowdhury then said LafargeHolcim Bangladesh has maintained positive quarter-on-quarter growth since 2018 thanks to the innovative and sustainable building materials the company came up with.

"This has set LafargeHolcim Bangladesh apart from others in the market," he added.

LHBL has also made the highest foreign direct investment in the cement industry of Bangladesh having one fully integrated cement plant in Chhatak, Sunamganj and three grinding stations in Narayanganj and Mongla.

"I want to work with all to learn the best practices and carry out my responsibilities with utmost sincerity," he said.

Chowdhury, who has an MBA in finance and was a fellow member of the Institute of Chartered Secretaries Bangladesh, took charge as LafargeHolcim Bangladesh's CEO in February this year.

He has also worked for Marico Bangladesh, Berger Paints Bangladesh and Avery Dennison in his 22-year-long career.

"Being a Bangladeshi CEO, I have to fulfil the responsibilities given to me by the company and take it to the next level. It is an additional responsibility to show that Bangladeshis can excel everywhere," Chowdhury added.

Stocks rise for second day

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The key indices of the Dhaka and Chattogram stock exchanges rose for the second consecutive trading day yesterday.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), added 17 points, or 0.28 per cent, to close the day at 6,216.

The DS30, the blue-chip index, gained 0.09 per cent to 2,220 while the DSES, the shariah-compliant index, advanced 0.24 per cent to 1,359.

Turnover, a key indicator of the market, surged about 60 per cent to Tk 420 crore. Of the securities traded, 106 advanced, 56 declined and 146 did not show any price movement.

"Shares on the DSE sustained their upward momentum for the second straight session riding on the regulator's assurance that it would not withdraw the floor price until the secondary market gets back its due momentum," said International Leasing Securities Ltd in its daily market review.

All the sectors achieved price appreciation except jute, which fell 0.03 per cent. The IT sector gained 3 per cent, the paper sector rose 2.4 per cent and the general insurance sector was up 1.8 per cent.

Investors' activities were mainly focused on the IT sector, accounting for 19.3 per cent of the day's total turnover. The pharmaceuticals sector represented 9.4 per cent and the life insurance sector made up 9.1 per cent of the turnover.

Bangladesh General Insurance Company made the highest gain with an increase of 9.8 per cent. Emerald Oil Industries, City General Insurance, Pragati Life Insurance, and Metro Spinning were among the top gainers.



A shopper walks next to a photographic depiction of tomatoes on a Tesco supermarket as Britain experiences a seasonal shortage of some fruit and vegetables in London on February 26. UK food price inflation has soared to a record peak as Britons suffer under a cost-of-living crisis, a survey said yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Fu Wang Foods posts 55% profit growth

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Fu Wang Foods Ltd posted a 55 per cent increase in profit to Tk 1.55 crore in the July-December half of the current financial year.

This compared to Tk 99.76 lakh profit the food manufacturer made in the same half a year ago.

The company reported earnings per share of Tk 0.14 for the first half of 2022-23, up from Tk 0.09 in the July-December of 2021-22, according to the audited financial statements.

The net operating cash flow per share of Fu Wang Foods fell to Tk 0.08 in July-December of FY23 from Tk 0.40 a year earlier.

The net asset value, however, rose to Tk 3.74 on December 31 from Tk 3.46 on June 30.

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