



A farmer is seen inspecting a watermelon at his field in the Jahazmara area of Patuakhali's Rangabali upazila. For the past three years, local growers have been planting their watermelon in December to ensure harvests by mid-February, when they get better prices early in the season.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

Watermelon farmers getting good yields, prices

SUSHANTA GHOSH and SOHRAB HOSSAIN

Watermelon farmers in southern Bangladesh are pleased to be getting bumper yields and prices early this season as their produce can now reach markets all over the country thanks to the improved connectivity provided by Padma Bridge.

For the past three years, farmers in more than 100 char areas of Patuakhali, Bhola and Barishal have been planting watermelon in December rather than January in order to begin harvests by mid-February, when prices are typically higher.

Growers say yields are better this year as the weather remained favourable and even though middlemen eat up most of the profit, they are getting good returns based on higher sales.

This is because it now takes less time for wholesalers to carry watermelon from the region to other parts of the country

as the opening of the Padma Bridge facilitated road transport, reducing the fruit's chances of rotting along the way.

Mosharef Mia, a farmer of Bhola sadar upazila, said he planted watermelon on one bigha of land at a cost of Tk 1.2 lakh and has already sold Tk 2.70 lakh worth of the fruit.

Hanif Bepari, a local watermelon trader, said Bhola witnessed bumper production this season. So far, Bepari has sold more than Tk 10 lakh worth of watermelon at a wholesale centre in Gazipur.

Watermelons weighing between eight to 12 kilogrammes (kgs) are selling for as much as Tk 350 per piece while five to seven kg watermelons are going for about Tk 220. Meanwhile, smaller sizes are priced at an average of around Tk 80 per piece.

Wasirul Kabir, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Bhola, said watermelon cultivation has been expanding in the

district for the past three years.

Kabir then said 18,383 hectares of land in the region was used to grow watermelon this year while it was 12,249 hectares last year.

"There were no stormy rains this year, leading to good yields that are fetching better prices," he added.

Elsewhere in Patuakhali, the fruit was cultivated on 28,545 hectares of land this year compared to 22,890 hectares in 2022, according to sources at the district DAE office.

Acreage is highest in the Galachipa and Rangabali upazilas, where some 11,750 hectares and 8,262 hectares of land respectively have been brought under cultivation.

The fruit was also planted on 3,131 hectares of land in Bauphal upazila, 2,370 hectares in Kalapara upazila, 1,850 hectares in Dasmina upazila, 1,197 hectares in Patuakhali sadar upazila, 120 hectares in Dumki upazila, and 65 hectares in Mirzaganj upazila.

Mohammad Nazrul Islam, deputy director of the Patuakhali DAE, said the cultivation and yield of watermelon has been good this year.

Islam went on to say that due to the opening of Padma Bridge, watermelons grown in the district are being easily transported all over the country.

"As a result, wholesalers are buying watermelons at a good price, ensuring

better profits for farmers," he added.

Faruk Hossain, a grower of Galachipa upazila, said only those who managed to harvest their watermelons early are benefitting from good prices at present.

Sources at the Patuakhali DAE say that each hectare is producing an average of up to 45 tonnes of watermelon. About Tk 1,800 crore worth of watermelon are sold in the district each year, making it the backbone of the local economy.

Ganesh Dutta, a watermelon wholesaler in Barishal, said there will be huge demand for the fruit during the upcoming month of Ramadan.

In anticipation of this demand, watermelon prices are already high in wholesale and retail markets, he added.

Kartik Dutta, secretary of the Barisal District Fruit Traders Association, said the price of watermelon is now higher than what it was last year.

Md Harun-Or-Rashid, additional managing director of the Barishal DAE, said watermelon was cultivated on 34,183 hectares of land in the district this year. The total produce is valued at around Tk 7,000 crore at the wholesale level while it is more than Tk 10,000 crore at the retail level.

Farmers have become more interested in watermelon cultivation due to the good prices and as a result, the fruit has become the main cash crop in the region.



DEMISE OF US BANK Why didn't regulators see it coming?

AFP, New York

With hindsight, there were warning signs ahead of last week's spectacular collapse of Silicon Valley Bank, missed not only by investors, but by bank regulators.

Just why the oversight failed remained a hot question among banking experts Monday, with some focusing on the weakness of US rules.

The Federal Reserve announced Monday plans for a "thorough, transparent and swift" review of the supervision of SVB that will be publicly released on May 1, effectively acknowledging that it could have done better.

President Joe Biden promised a "full accounting of what happened," adding that he would ask regulators and banking regulators to tighten rules on the sector.

Banking experts have been among those alarmed at the rapid collapse of SVB, the country's 16th biggest bank by assets and how its demise became a harbinger of Sunday's failure of another lender, Signature Bank.

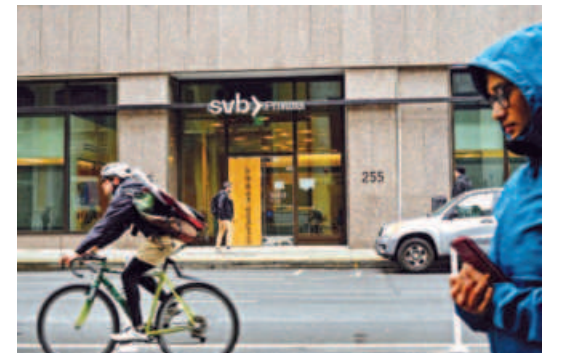
The failures have "exposed the inadequacy of regulatory reforms that have been made since the global financial crisis," said Arthur Wilmarth, a law professor at George Washington University.

A once-over of the bank would have pointed to clear potential red flags in SVB's disproportionate exposure to tech startups, a risky area that can be likened to commercial real estate or emerging markets — areas that have plagued lenders in the past.

Wilmarth noted that SVB grew very fast between 2020 and 2022 and that its exposure to long date fixed interest bonds made it especially vulnerable to the a shift in monetary policy by the Fed.

"That's almost a sure proof formula for failure. If the economy turns you begin to have trouble," Wilmarth said.

"None of those would have been a mystery to the regulators."



Experts pointed as well to the eventual easing of US laws enacted soon after the 2008 crisis.

The original Dodd-Frank law of 2010 imposed higher capital, liquidity and other requirements on banks with at least \$50 billion in assets.

In 2018, with support from former President Donald Trump, this requirement was raised to \$250 billion, affecting fewer banks.

But that shift in law does not excuse regulators for these failures, according to Anna Gelper, a law professor at Georgetown University.

"When regulatory requirement are relaxed either by the premise that those institutions don't pose a risk to the system because of their size or that they are easier to supervise, that puts much more pressure on old-fashioned supervision because you don't have the automatic alarm that goes off with the requirements," she said.

"If this was clearly unsafe and unsound behavior," the banks' official designation in the law "does not excuse a failure of supervision," she said.

Michael Ohlrogge, an associate professor of law at New York University, said regulators as a matter of course assign "very little to zero risk weight" in terms of bank capital requirements for Treasury-linked securities because they are considered safe.

At the same time, regulators are also lenient with banks with regard to depositors with more than \$250,000 — the threshold for federally insured deposits — believing the bank has a meaningful business relationship with such clients.

Sugar price keeps rising though import duty goes

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Sugar prices have maintained an upward trend at both wholesale and retail levels in Bangladesh despite a record cut in import duties to keep the market stable ahead of Ramadan.

On February 26, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) lifted Tk 3,000 specific duty on the import of raw sugar and Tk 6,000 on refined sugar per tonne with immediate effect. It also cut the regulatory duty on the import of sugar to 25 per cent from 30 per cent.

After the reduction, the overall import cost of raw and refined sugar is expected to decline by Tk 6,500 and Tk 9,000 per tonne at the import stage, respectively.

Still, the price of sugar shows no sign of cooling down. Rather, it increased by Tk 130, or 3 per cent, per maund in the wholesale market.

Commodity traders in the Khatunganj-Chaktai wholesale market in Chattogram said sugar was sold at Tk 4,080 per maund (37.32 kilogrammes) on Monday, up from Tk 3,950 a week ago.

The price increase came amid continued supply shortage and a spike in demand for the kitchen item on the occasion of the fasting month when sugar is used in varieties of items.

The hike in the wholesale rate has translated into a spike in the retail market. Loose sugar price has gone up by Tk 2 to 3 per kg and is now retailing at Tk 115 to Tk 120.

The retail price was up 2.17 per cent from a month earlier and 48.73 per cent from a year prior, data from the

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Workers unload sacks full of sugar from a van to carry them to a warehouse at the Khatunganj-Chaktai wholesale market in Chattogram yesterday. The price of the sweetener has maintained an upward trend at both wholesale and retail levels despite a record cut in import duties.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Sea Pearl to buy 30% stake in Shamim Enterprise

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Sea Pearl Beach Resort & Spa Limited is going to acquire a 30 per cent stake in Shamim Enterprise Pvt Ltd (SEPL) at an investment of Tk 33.91 crore.

The board of directors of Sea Pearl has approved the investment in the construction company, according to a disclosure on the Dhaka Stock Exchange.

The company will acquire 33,908,160 shares of SEPL at Tk 10 at par subject to the approval of shareholders in an extraordinary general meeting, it said.

Md Azaharul Mamun, company secretary of Sea Pearl, said SEPL is one of the top construction companies in Bangladesh and it was engaged in the construction of the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway and a flyover project in

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