

## Banks can now invest more in stock market

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bonds, debentures and Shariah-based products like sukuk from now on cannot be shown as a component of banks' stock market exposure, according to a circular of Bangladesh Bank yesterday.

The change has been brought about through amendments to Bank Company Act, 1991 this year, said the central bank.

Changes have accordingly been brought about in the way the Statement Regarding Total Investment in Capital Market (TICM) needs to be provided and scheduled banks are asked to take note of it when submitting the TICM to the BB, it added.

This will give scheduled banks the chance to increase investment in the stock market, said a top official of a scheduled bank, preferring anonymity.

There is a regulatory limit to a bank's stock market exposure and with bonds, debentures and Shariah-based products no longer falling under it, more can be directly invested in the stock market, he said.

The current situation of the stock market does not emanate the assurance based on which one can gain the confidence to invest in it. This is the primary reason many banks do not invest in the stock market, he said.

So, their investment will not rise until the confidence grows among them, he added.

## Oil price goes up

REUTERS, London

Oil prices rose on Thursday, boosted by a large drawdown in US crude inventories and production cuts by Opec+, but a slowdown in China's manufacturing activity limited gains.

Brent crude futures for October, expiring on Thursday, rose 45 cents, or 0.5 percent, to \$86.31 a barrel by 1004 GMT. The more active November contract was up 25 cents, or 0.3 percent, at \$85.49.

US West Texas Intermediate crude futures for October rose 29 cents, or 0.4 percent, to \$81.29.

US government data on Wednesday showed the country's crude inventories fell by a larger than expected 10.6 million barrels last week, depleted by high exports and refinery runs.



Farmers are seen harvesting indigo plants from a farm in Kholeya village in Gangachara upazila of Rangpur. The leaves are processed into a natural dye for clothing and other garment items while the stalks and stems can be used as fertiliser and fuel.

PHOTO: EAM ASADUZZAMAN

# Indigo farming moving towards promising future

EAM ASADUZZAMAN

The history of indigo farming under British rule is still cause for indignation among many in Bangladesh as it reminds of the tyranny faced in having to cultivate the plant in place of food crops.

Originating in the Middle East, the indigo plant was once so scarce that the eponymous colour extracted from its leaves became associated with wealth and power, driving up demand among affluent people.

Additionally, the natural dye made from indigo is particularly suitable for colouring cotton garments, making it a profitable industry that helped the British consolidate their hold on the Indian subcontinent.

However, indigo farmers in the main growing region comprising Bangladesh and West Bengal were paid unfairly low prices for the shrub as the European colonists had monopolised its cultivation.

Under these greatly unfavourable conditions, a prolonged famine that claimed millions of lives ensued until the farmers finally rose against their British plantation owners in the Indigo Rebellion of 1859-60.

And although the movement had helped effect positive change in the industry, the advent of synthetic dye coupled with the need for more essential crops effectively put an end to indigo cultivation.

Now though, indigo farming is



showing signs of recovery in Bangladesh as some farmers in Rangpur and Nilphamari are cultivating the plant on a small scale.

Known as Malgas to locals, they use the plant's leaves as compost to increase soil fertility while the stalks and branches are burnt as fuel.

Still, cultivating indigo for its original purpose could help the country tap into a multi-million-dollar business as the use of natural dyes is increasing worldwide amid growing health awareness.

Studies have shown that some synthetic dyes could be health hazardous while natural dyes are non-toxic and environment-

friendly for being made from sustainable sources.

The indigo plant was "rediscovered" in Bangladesh by Indian consultant Tushar Kumar, who came to work in the country under a CARE Foundation project in Rangpur back in 2006.

Inspired by his success at growing indigo, a US-based NGO called the Mennonite Central Committee arranged training for local farmers on how to extract dye from the plant that same year.

Nekhil Chandra Ray, a resident of Horkoli Thakurtari village in Gangachara upazila of Rangpur who received the training, has since emerged as a pioneer in producing indigo dye.

"I set up a dyeing factory on 37 decimals of land along the Dinajpur-Rangpur-Dhaka highway," he said, adding that the industry is facilitating growth in his area by providing employment opportunities.

For example, some 720 farmers from villages in Rangpur and Nilphamari are now contracted by Nekhil's factory to grow indigo on about 1,000 bighas of land.

Moksed Ali of Parhat village in Kishoreganj upazila of Nilphamari said he cultivates indigo on one acre of land to produce 3,000 kilogrammes of leaves, which sell for about Tk 5 per kilogramme (kg).

Abdul Hye, a farmer of Balabari village in Taraganj upazila of Rangpur, said he sowed a kilogramme of indigo seeds in April and harvested the plant in August without any use of fertilisers or irrigation.

Nekhil's factory currently employs about 100 workers, who are paid Tk 250 daily.

He explained that about 300 kgs of leaves are required to produce a single kilogramme of dye at a cost of about Tk 3,000 to Tk 3,500.

The dye is then sold for between Tk 5,000 and Tk 8,000 per kg depending on quality.

The demand for Nekhil's dye has been increasing as its quality was certified by Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) on February 28 earlier this year.

READ MORE ON B2

## DIGITAL DARE Gear up for 3D printed food

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

You're hungry? Not up to preparing a meal? No worries! Just enter your menu choices into a computer and your dinner appears before you.

Yes, that is the future of food and no science fiction. The day is nigh when the developed world would be sending a 3D food machine to a country hit with famine instead of shiploads of grains.

While we chew on such possibilities, 3D printing is already mainstream in the developed world, and making food this way is also starting to be tested.

The origin of 3D printing dates back to the early 1980s. And the first experiment of 3D printed food started back in 2006. Although the technology is still in its early stages, it was well-tested and promises to revolutionise the way we eat.

Some of the potential benefits of 3D printed food include a personalised menu for people with health conditions like allergies or dietary restrictions, catering to individual nutritional and palatable needs. It would be immensely beneficial for people trying to lose or gain weight or improve their overall health.

It would prevent food being wasted as only the exact required amount would be printed. It would also prevent overeating. In addition, it would also be more affordable in terms of offering ingredients with a price range to choose from.

However, there are certain challenges that need to be tackled before 3D printed food becomes mainstream. These challenges include availability of 3D printing machines, materials used to print food and more research to ensure health safety.

Despite the challenges, the future of 3D printed food looks promising, revolutionising not only the way we eat, but also by making food more personalised, nutritious, sustainable, and affordable.

Nasa is already using 3D printed food for astronauts in space with ingredients available in space, such as wheat flour, soy protein, and powdered eggs. Some restaurants in the developed world are using it to create customised desserts and snacks.

The Modern, a restaurant in New York City, offers a 3D printed chocolate chip cookie that is made to the precise specifications of the customer. There are companies that are developing 3D printers that can create food for people with specific dietary needs.

Redefine Meat, an Israeli company, is developing a 3D printer that can create plant-based meat, which looks and tastes like real meat with the Israeli prime minister sampling it with a nod recently. More importantly, plant-based meat is expected to reduce global food shortage in the future without compromising on nutrition and taste.

Food Ink, a company in the UK, offers the best experience of 3D food with everything 3D printed, including the utensils. A Japanese company has created a standardised cube form of food using 3D printers, much like the food eaten by Mr Spock on Enterprise, the starship. And plans are underway for a sushi restaurant that would offer edible cubic printout.

So, could 3D printed food become our food of the future? Only time will say as much of it rests on the plausible availability of affordable 3D printers and the outcome of the ongoing research on its health benefits.

What we eat today has a long history of innovation, collaboration and technology, and would no doubt leave our prehistoric ancestors starstruck. With the galloping advancement in technology, the future of food leaves much to the imagination.

We need to bring together policy-makers, scientists, engineers, farmers, chefs, entrepreneurs, and all other stakeholders together to create a better food system. Adopting to change and being futuristic is key to survive in the rapidly changing world that we live in. Can we visualise a scientist heading the food ministry of Bangladesh?

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## Global rice supplies tighten after India export ban

REUTERS, Singapore

Rice prices in key exporting countries including Thailand and Vietnam have climbed around 20 percent since India, the world's biggest shipper of the grain, banned shipments of a key variety in July, tightening global supplies.

Traders expect similar supply curbs by other exporters needing to ensure domestic food security, which has left importers scrambling to secure shipments.

Last year, India banned exports of broken rice and imposed duty on shipments of various grades, ending the price stability that had lasted for more than a decade.

Following are key events since late July that led to tighter supplies.

\* July 20 - India halts exports of its largest rice category, a move that would roughly halve shipments by the world's biggest exporter, triggering fears of further inflation in global food prices.

\* July 21 - Vietnam, the world's third largest rice exporter, calls on the country's food association to ensure domestic rice supplies are sufficient a day after India announced its ban.

\* July 21 - India's ban on non-basmati white rice exports results in the cancellation of contracts to supply around 2 million metric tons to the world market.

\* July 27 - Prices of rice exported from Vietnam and Thailand soar to their highest in more than a decade as India's export curbs spark worries about supply.

\* July 28 - India restricts exports of deoiled rice bran, used in the cattle feed industry, until November 30.

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REUTERS, Shanghai/Singapore

Chinese exporters are using a complicated currency swap strategy to avoid converting their dollar earnings into yuan for fear of losing out on potential gains in the US currency, official data and conversations with companies show.

China's state banks are counterparties to some of these swap transactions that allow exporters to exchange their dollars for yuan, suggesting the country's currency regulator is comfortable with these trades even as authorities try to curb intense pressure on the yuan in spot markets.

Exporters such as Ding, a Shanghai-based businessman, are holding on tightly to their dollar earnings, reluctant to sell and convert them into yuan, which recently skidded to nine-month lows.

"My fellow exporter friends and I have been discussing if we want to use foreign exchange swap trades to get the yuan," said Ding, who trades in electronics and toys and prefers to go by his last name.

"The key concern is that the price of the dollar keeps going up."

The yuan has lost more than 5 percent against the US dollar so far this year, including a 2 percent drop this month alone, and is being dragged even lower by foreign capital flowing out of the

weakening economy.

The swaps allow exporters to place their dollars with banks and get yuan instead, but through a contract that will eventually reverse the flows and give them back their dollars.



A Chinese bank employee counts 100-yuan notes and US dollar bills at a bank counter in Nantong in China's eastern Jiangsu province.

PHOTO: AFP

## Chinese exporters using currency swaps to retain dollars