



PHOTO: KM HABIBUR RAHMAN

After seeing their businesses stagnate in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, bat-makers across Baldia union of Nesarabad upazila in Pirojpur have begun operations in full swing ahead of the next month's ICC Cricket World Cup. This has caused an upsurge in employment, with each factory expecting sales to cross Tk 20 lakh.

Indonesia's rice imports spike

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia recorded a large increase in rice imports in the first eight months this year compared to the same period last year, the statistics agency said Friday, as Southeast Asia's biggest economy seeks to boost stocks of its staple commodity.

Global rice prices rose to a 15-year high last week after top producer India's decision in July to ban exports of non-basmati rice, citing several factors including soaring domestic prices and "extreme climatic conditions".

Indonesia imported 1.59 million tons of rice from January to August this year, Statistics Indonesia head Amalia Adininggar Widayanti said, while more than 429,000 tons of rice were imported for the whole of 2022.

Most rice imports came from Southeast Asian neighbours, with Thailand sending 802,000 tonnes and Vietnam exporting 674,000 tonnes of the commodity over the period

"Rice imports from January and August 2023 experienced quite a high increase compared to the same period last year," Widayanti told reporters, without disclosing the import figure for the same period last year.

Most rice imports came from Southeast Asian neighbours, with Thailand sending 802,000 tons and Vietnam exporting 674,000 tons of the commodity over the period.

READ MORE ON B2

Cricket bat-makers hope to cash in on World Cup fever

KM HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Cricket bat-makers in Pirojpur's Nesarabad upazila have gotten to work ahead of schedule with next month's Cricket World Cup just around the corner, and they are hopeful of good sales during the showpiece event in neighbouring India.

Normally, bat-makers start operations around October, when the dry season begins and grounds are suitable for cricket.

But with the World Cup also starting from October 5, sales expectations this year are heightened and bat-makers have started full-swing production more than a month ahead of their usual schedule.

"All year round we prepare cricket bats through a slow process, aiming to start sales during the dry season, targeting the peak season in October. But this year, our business has increased. We expect good sales during the World Cup," said bat-maker Rafikul Islam, adding that buyers from different areas were already in contact with him.

"We expect to have the cricket bats available on the market within ten days," said bat-maker Md Saiful Islam.

Bat-makers said their businesses had remained suspended for the past two years in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, with only a handful of the 200-plus factories in the area remaining operational.

"During that time, many factories were forced to shut down," said factory

owner Md Jahangir Hossain.

This had forced more than 2,000 people involved in the business into unemployment, he added.

But even those shuttered factories have resumed production ahead of the World Cup, hoping to make up for a portion of their losses over the past couple of years by cashing in on the hype surrounding the event.

As a result, factory owners have had to employ even more workers as they look to

With the World Cup also starting from October 5, sales expectations this year are heightened and bat-makers have started full-swing production more than a month ahead of their usual schedule

scale production to meet demand. This has led to a labour shortage in the sector as full-swing production has begun at nearly every factory.

Different sizes of cricket bats, ranging from those for small children to those for adults, are produced at Uribuniya, Binna, Khejurbari, Jilbari and Katakhal villages in the Baldia union of the Nesarabad upazila in the southwestern district.

Boldia is a well-known hub of bat-makers and has been meeting a great portion of the demand for cricket bats across the country for the past three decades.

Collectively, factories used to churn out 20 lakh bats during the main season running from October to March before the pandemic. Their clients included sports accessories wholesalers and retailers across Bangladesh as well as corporate offices.

Factory owner Atikul Islam said that all factory owners had collected raw materials after taking loans from different lenders, including local NGOs. "Now it's time to prepare cricket bats alone."

After preparation, cricket bats are transported to different parts of the country, including Dhaka and Chattogram by trucks, before retail outlets package them as required.

"This year, each factory expects sales of cricket bats to cross Tk 20 lakh," said factory owner Kamrul Hasan.

Owing to increased factory activity, workers do not have a single moment to spend idly.

"We work on a piece-rate basis," said worker Md Nurul Haque, adding that workers would come early in the morning and continue working till late in the evening.

Apart from hosts India, the teams that will compete at the showcase event are Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, England, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and the Netherlands.

Why are professionals leaving Bangladesh?

MAMUN RASHID

In recent times, we have observed a notable trend in Bangladesh's professional landscape: an increasing exodus of skilled individuals seeking opportunities abroad, be it higher studies or better careers. Despite facing multiple hardships across living and professional development, this phenomenon is growing. One can easily ask: what are the intricate factors underpinning this migration?

Those who are migrating are mostly people who joined the job world after their under-graduation for two or three years and are now going for their higher studies or the people who have been in jobs for five to seven years, the newly married, expecting a child in the family soon, or even with young children. These people mostly come from humble backgrounds but globally compatible upper chambers.

Foremost among the drivers propelling Bangladeshi professionals towards foreign shores is the alluring prospects of superior career opportunities. International job markets frequently boast higher remuneration packages, comprehensive benefits, and unparalleled avenues for professional advancement.

In addition, perceptions of skill recognition and the value placed on qualifications abroad significantly influence the decision-making process. Some professionals believe that their expertise and experience receive greater appreciation and financial remuneration in international job markets. The pursuit of diversified experiences and exposure to distinct cultures and work environments ranks high among professionals' motivations, which further encourages them.



An integral facet of the migration equation is the pursuit of an enhanced quality of life. Bangladesh, while rich in culture and history, still faces challenges in providing access to top-tier healthcare, education, and living conditions. The lure of countries that excel in these domains has proven compelling as professionals yearn for an elevated quality of life for themselves and their families.

For professionals with families, foreign countries often provide access to prestigious educational institutions, attracting parents who aspire to offer their children the highest quality education. This aspiration frequently necessitates relocation to countries with renowned educational systems even though the parents may experience difficulties in establishing their careers abroad.

Economic factors exert a substantial influence on relocation decisions. Favourable currency exchange rates and disparities in the cost of living have significantly impacted professionals' financial outlook. Professionals often find that their earnings abroad afford them greater purchasing power and financial security.

Moreover, Bangladesh's socio-political landscape has, at times, exhibited fluctuations and uncertainties. Such unpredictability can disrupt not only the business environment but also personal lives. In response to these concerns, some professionals opt for the perceived stability and security of nations where political stability is a cornerstone.

Thus, the decision of Bangladeshi professionals to seek international employment hinges upon a nuanced interplay of personal, professional, and economic factors. While motivations may exhibit individual variances, the overarching themes of pursuing improved career prospects, elevated quality of life, access to superior education, perceived skill recognition, diversification, intellectually challenging work environment, and economic incentives resonate prominently.

As we navigate the ever-globalising world, it is prudent to anticipate the sustained growth of Bangladeshi professionals' interest in international job markets. This also necessitates contemplation of the long-term implications on the domestic workforce, quality of education and more importantly, a better workplace with the availability of civic amenities.

The author is an economic analyst

EU unafraid of trade war with China

AFP, Santiago De Compostela

The EU insisted on Friday that its economy could survive any retaliation from China, after Beijing warned that Brussels' probe into Chinese electric car subsidies would harm trade relations.

Europe put itself at risk of a trade war when European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen announced the anti-subsidy investigation on Wednesday, accusing China of keeping car prices "artificially low by huge state subsidies".

The investigation could see the European Union try to protect European carmakers by imposing punitive tariffs on cars it believes are unfairly sold at a lower price.

The day after von der Leyen's announcement, the Chinese commerce ministry hit back at the EU's "naked protectionism", and said the measures "will have a negative impact on China-EU economic and trade relations".

Trade with China makes up around 2.5 percent of eurozone GDP, but economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni appeared to be unfazed by the warning when asked about whether the bloc's economy could survive any tariffs.

"I'm confident, but we have to address this issue very seriously. I think there is no specific reason for retaliation but retaliation is always possible," he said, before a meeting of eurozone finance ministers in the Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela.

The probe comes after France pushed Brussels to take stronger action to defend European industry against growing threats from China and the United States.

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire made a passionate defence of the EU's strength as he rejected

READ MORE ON B2



A customer shops for fruits at a market in Beijing on August 9. China's retail sales -- the main indicator of household consumption that is closely followed by markets -- jumped 4.6 percent year-on-year in August, the National Bureau of Statistics said.

PHOTO: AFP

China retail sales surge in August

AFP, Beijing

Chinese retail sales jumped last month, data showed Friday, beating expectations and fuelling hopes that consumers are helping kickstart the world's second-biggest economy.

Sluggish domestic consumption, an embattled property sector and soft overseas demand for China's exports have complicated the country's post-Covid recovery after restrictions were lifted last year.

The retail data, which also revealed a better-than-expected rise in industrial output, is the latest pointing to a stabilisation and follows a number of stimulus measures by the government.

Retail sales -- the main indicator of household consumption that is closely followed by markets -- jumped 4.6 percent year-on-year in August, the National

READ MORE ON B2