

BUYING FLY ASH No deal yet between Crown Cement, Matarbari Power Plant

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Officials of the Matarbari Power Plant in Moheshkhali upazila of Cox's Bazar recently informed that they have not made any deal for selling fly ash to Crown Cement PLC, a listed cement maker in Bangladesh.

Coal Generation Bangladesh Limited, which is implementing the Matarbari ultra-supercritical coal-fired power project, had issued a clarification in this regard on November 6.

In a rejoinder to The Daily Star, the state-owned energy company said confusion arose after Crown Cement made a price sensitive disclosure indicating plans to buy fly ash from the power plant.

The rejoinder came in response to an article, styled "Crown Cement to buy fly ash from Matarbari power plant", which was published by this newspaper on August 21.

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As per the clarification, an international tender was placed on June 25 for buying fly ash from Matarbari Power Plant, which has two thermal units with an installed capacity of 600 megawatts each.

However, Crown Cement announced its decision to buy the key raw material for making cement ahead of the deadline for placing tenders on September 18, with The Daily Star report coming a day later.

This led to confusion among the company's stock investors and tender participants while also creating complexities in the tender evaluation process, it said.

Asked why the disclosure was made prematurely, Md Mozharul Islam, company secretary of Crown Cement, said being a listed company requires them to disclose all decisions taken by their board.

To participate in the tender, Crown Cement had formed a joint venture consortium with a third party that handled the entire process on behalf of the cement maker, he added.

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PHOTO: AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

Workers load eggs onto a truck for transport in Dhamrai. Poultry farmers are struggling to make ends meet as the price of the protein item dropped by Tk 3-3.5 a piece at the farm level, mainly due to the government's decision to allow imports from India.

Falling egg prices leave poultry farmers in a bind

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH,
SUKANTA HALDER and
KONGKON KARMAKAR

Poultry farmers across Bangladesh are counting losses and struggling to run their business as the price of each egg at the farm level has fallen by between Tk 3 to Tk 3.5 in the span of one month.

Farmers alleged that egg prices fell after the Commerce Ministry decided to allow five farms to import five crore pieces of eggs in order to increase the supply of the protein item and check its prices in the domestic market on October 8.

The Daily Star spoke to nearly a dozen egg growers in Savar and Dhamrai, who alleged that they were making losses ranging from Tk 0.50 to Tk 3 per egg.

Anowar Hossen, an egg grower in Dhamrai's Makhulia area who has 3,300 layers in his farm producing around 3,000 eggs per day, said: "One month ago, I would sell 100 pieces of white eggs to wholesalers for Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,100, but now 100 pieces of white eggs are being sold for Tk 720 to Tk 750," he said.

"We have been facing huge losses since the government permitted the import of eggs," said Anowar, adding that they would welcome a decision from the government to control and reduce the price of poultry feed, medicine and chicks.

"If the government can do that, we can profit despite selling



for lower prices," said Anowar, who has 20 years of experience in this sector.

"If the price of eggs doesn't increase, I will have to close down my farm within a couple of months," he lamented.

Aminur Rahman, an egg producer in Dhamrai's Borochandrail area who has 2,700 egg-producing poultry birds in his farm, said the price of eggs was falling day by day.

"How will I run my farm? It costs Tk 8 to Tk 8.50 to produce an egg and the egg has to be sold at Tk 7.20 to Tk 7.50. One month ago, we were in good condition but now we are counting huge losses," he said.

Abdur Rahman, an egg grower in Savar's Vakurta area, said he had started the business after seeing the potential of the sector but was now watching his losses pile up with each passing day.

Mohammad Barkat Ali Mia,

an egg grower in Pabna, said he would sell each egg at Tk 11 to Tk 12 a month ago, but could now fetch only Tk 8 to Tk 9.

He claimed that it currently costs Tk 10.50 to produce each egg. "I am now selling eggs at a loss to survive in the business and hope to make a profit in the coming days. Profit and loss is a part of business," he said, adding that prices started falling the day the import of eggs was allowed.

In addition, a kind of panic has been created among the traders since the Directorate of National Consumers' Right Protection started conducting raids and punishing traders that were setting higher prices for the protein item. Because of this, many growers are selling at lower prices, he added.

Poultry farmers in Dinajpur are facing similarly severe setbacks after the market price for eggs experienced a significant

and sudden decline. They are now selling eggs for around Tk 8.60 each.

Imtiaz Kawsar, a farmer from the Biral upazila in Dinajpur, expressed deep concern over the sudden drop in egg prices.

He opined that the current market rate fell well below the sustainable threshold for profitability, which he pegged at around Tk 11 per egg.

Kawsar highlighted the challenges faced by egg producers, stating that high production costs make it difficult for them to cover expenses and generate a reasonable income.

The unexpected decline in egg prices has left farmers grappling with the prospect of financial insolvency and potential losses, he said.

Sahdev Kumar Mahto, a farmer at the Bagmara area of Sherpur upazila in Bogura, said that the wholesale price of each egg was Tk 10.50 to Tk 10.70 a month ago. But now each egg is being sold at Tk 8.30 to Tk 8.50.

Experts are urging stakeholders in the industry to take swift action to stabilise prices and ensure that they are remunerated fairly for their efforts.

Md Altafuzzaman, associate professor of the department of poultry science at Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, opined that if it costs Tk 10.25 for a farmer to produce an egg, then he has to get a fair price or he will not be able to survive in the business.

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Talent export: A lousy deal!

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

When a talented group leaves a country, we call it brain drain. And when they stay in a country, we call it brain gain. In the last few decades in Bangladesh, it has become a cultural norm for parents to wish to send their children abroad for higher studies with a plan to migrate. Talent export is not just a loss of talent; it is a loss of hope for a nation.

When cheap labour exits the country, the short-term boon in lower unemployment comes at a much higher price in the long run. I am fortunate enough to engage with people from different groups like schools, colleges, universities, corporations, and various professional fields. Disappointingly, almost all their children are either studying or working abroad or planning to leave the country for a better future.

According to a study by the World Economic Forum in 2017, a staggering 82 percent of people aged 15-29 in Bangladesh expressed a desire to emigrate from the country. Among the 173 countries ranked by the World Bank, Bangladesh holds the 31st position in brain drain.

Studying abroad is costly, but that does not seem to deter the trend. Those who cannot afford it remain behind, hoping to gain eligibility to migrate after some work experience. If we try to collect data from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, medical colleges, professional bodies like CMA, CA, etc., we will find that many have already migrated, with the trend only growing with each passing year.

There is another social angle that has significantly contributed to this growing trend. Often, our females prefer to settle abroad to avoid a life dependent on domestic aid and a restricted socio-environment, and perhaps also to stay away from their in-laws! I personally know a few in Bangladesh with outstanding career potentials who are being forced to migrate because of their spouses. Similar trends were observed in my research on dwindling family businesses.

When talents from the affluent group migrate, the country not only loses the wealth of talent but also the worth of their inherited property through money laundering. This group adds very little, if at all, to the economic development of Bangladesh. However, the brain drains from the middle-class background send back some money to their not-so-rich parents. This forces Bangladesh to import mediocre talent from neighbouring countries at more than \$6 billion annually.

Cheap labour that we export is our most underrated treasure trove, for they contribute immensely to the exchequer and return home too. Foreign remittance in Bangladesh was \$21.5 billion in 2022 alone.

Talent export also deprives Bangladesh of plausible innovation of new products. A simple example is the cost comparison of launching our satellite with that of India. The total cost of Chandrayaan-3, India's satellite that was sent to the moon, was Rs 615 crore while the cost of the satellite launched by Bangladesh was Tk 2,765 crore.

Brain drains occur only when a country fails to offer living conditions that are not at par with others. A better law and order situation, eradication of corruption, and improving infrastructure like providing a world-class education system are some of the long-term measures that would undoubtedly result in retaining our talents. Attracting foreign investment, promoting entrepreneurship, creating more job opportunities are vital to controlling the brain drain. Our regulators are reluctant to allow reputed universities from countries like Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Canada and Australia to operate here but are indifferent to students fleeing abroad for a better education and future.

The author is founder and managing director of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd.



Global smartphone market sees growth after two years

REUTERS

The global smartphone market returned to growth in October after more than two years of slump, helped by a recovery in the emerging markets, according to data from Counterpoint Research.

The data showed that global monthly smartphone sell-through volumes grew 5 percent, making October the first month to record year-on-year growth since June 2021, breaking the streak of 27 consecutive months of negative year-on-year growth.

The global smartphone sales have been under stress for last two years affected by various issues starting with component shortages, inventory build-up and lengthening of replacement cycles, Counterpoint said in its report.

"Following strong growth in October, we expect the market to grow year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2023 as well, setting the market on the path to gradual recovery in the coming quarters," the market research firm said.

The growth, which was last seen in June 2021 coming from a COVID-19 induced pent-up demand, has now been led by emerging markets with a continuous recovery in the Middle East and Africa, Huawei's comeback in China and onset of festive season in India, it added.

Huawei's China smartphone sales grew strongly in the third quarter, surging 37 percent, as shoppers snapped up its Mate 60 series phones.

The developed markets with relatively higher smartphone saturation have been slower to recover, the report said, but it cited the launch of Apple's iPhone 15 series as another factor for the growth.

Sino-US ties to benefit other economies: experts

ANN/CHINA DAILY

Despite multiple geopolitical tensions and mounting uncertainties, China and the United States should work together and rebuild trust to bring about a win-win outcome, as closer economic cooperation between the world's two largest economies will benefit even other economies, experts said.

Jin Xu, chairman of the China Association of International Trade, said he sees huge growth opportunities and great potential for Sino-US cooperation, especially in trade, finance, green development, technology and the digital economy.

"I have a rosy view of the future relationship and cooperation between the two countries," he told China Daily in an exclusive interview recently. "Sino-US cooperation will not only benefit businesses and citizens in both nations but also help stabilise and boost global economic development."

Citing the recent meeting between the presidents of the two countries in San Francisco, Jin said that has sent a positive signal, suggesting stabilisation and improvement in bilateral ties between the two nations. He said he

expects further moves to enhance mutual trust and deepen ties between the citizens and enterprises of China and the US.

Bilateral trade between China and the US hit a record high of \$759.4 billion last year, up 0.6 percent year-on-year,

data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Jin said Sino-US economic and trade ties were impacted by some Western countries' "decoupling" or "de-risking" strategy, adding that such attempts will also harm global trade and investment.



PHOTO: CHINA DAILY

Employees work on the production line of auto components, which are bound for export to the United States, at a company in Huzhou, Zhejiang province of China.