

Sheltech Ceramics raises Tk 150cr

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Sheltech Ceramics, a ceramics manufacturing company and a concern of Sheltech Group, has raised Tk 150 crore by issuing non-convertible cumulative preference shares.

The management took this step as a proactive measure to minimise future financial risks, the company said in a press release.

Starting commercial production in February 2019, Sheltech Ceramics is capable of producing 420,000 sqft of tiles per day with the help of modern European technology.

It manufactures a wide variety of world-class wall and floor tiles, both interior and exterior, with the designs, sizes and textures based on an analysis of current market trends and styles preferred by customers.

India to allow edible oil imports at lower duty

REUTERS

India will extend the import of edible oil at a lower duty by another year until March 2025, the government said in a notification issued late on Monday as the world's biggest importer of vegetable oil moves to limit local prices.

The lower import duty structure on crude palm oil, crude sunflower oil and crude soybean oil was set to expire in March 2024.

"The decision was expected as the government is keen to keep prices in check ahead of elections," said Sandeep Bajoria, CEO of Sunvin Group, a vegetable oil brokerage.

India's annual retail inflation rose at the fastest pace in four months in December, driven by a rise in prices of some food items.

To bring down prices, the government banned wheat exports in 2022 and last year, prohibited overseas shipments of non-basmati white rice. New Delhi has also halted mills from exporting sugar this year.

India will continue with its export curbs on wheat, rice and sugar for now, trade minister Piyush Goyal said on Saturday.

"The notification is not changing the current duty structure. So, there won't be any impact on local prices or import patterns," Bajoria said.



PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

What seems to be a parking lot at first glance is actually a weekly market for used bicycles. Sellers from Khulna and adjoining areas bring their two-wheelers at the Anjuman Eidgah in Daulatpur thana every Friday for sale at reasonable prices. The photo was taken recently.

Annual import of consumer-oriented products rises to \$2b

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's import of various consumer-oriented products such as dairy products, fruits, tree nuts, spices, and soup is growing, driven by growing demand from middle-class consumers, urbanisation and lifestyle changes.

The South Asian nation spent US\$2 billion to import consumer-oriented products in 2022, compared to \$1.5 billion in 2018, according to a report by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) released earlier this month.

Dairy products, fresh fruits, spices, fresh vegetables, soup and other food preparations as well as tree nuts were the top imported items in 2022 among consumer-oriented products, accounting for roughly 90 percent of total imports of such products.

"Urban consumers are increasingly spending more on imported food items and are changing their eating habits to consume more international foods," the US agency said in its report.

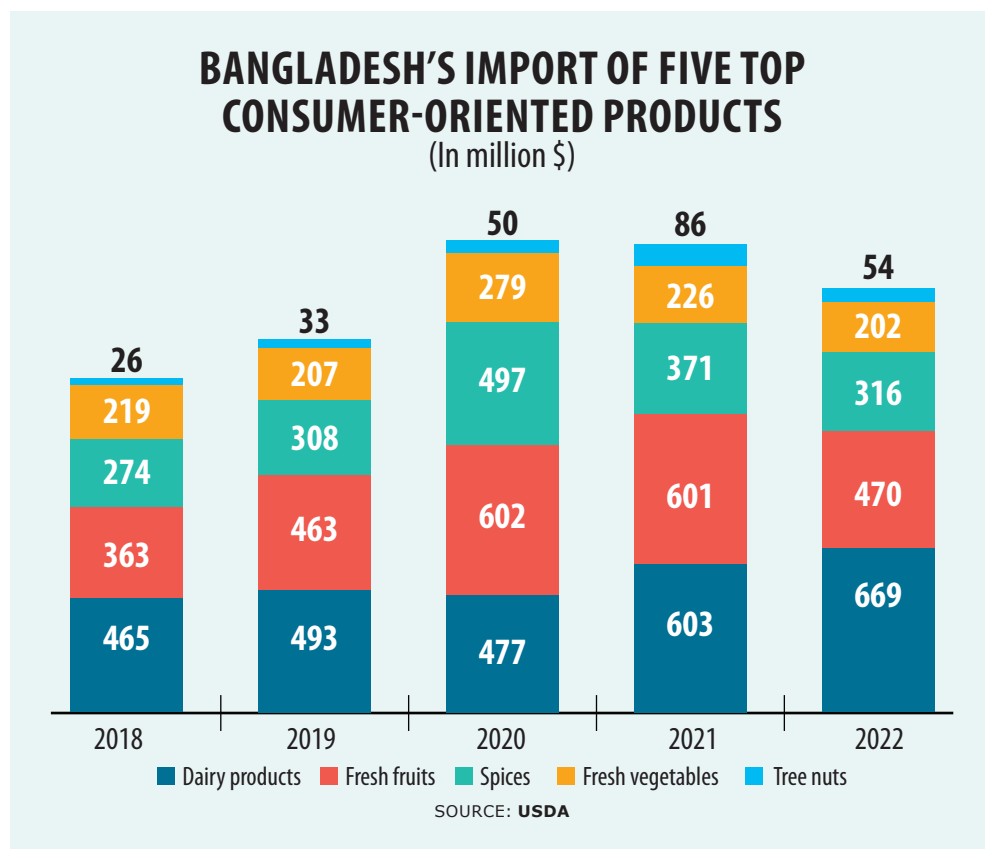
The organisation said there is a good prospect that consumer-oriented products would grow steadily in Bangladesh, the world's 41st largest economy. With a population of 17 crore, the country is poised to graduate from least developed country status in 2026.

The report said rising per-capita income, increased urbanisation, increasing female labour force participation, and the resulting lifestyle changes had been augmenting the demand for processed dairy products, bakery products, ready-made meals, confectionery items, breakfast cereals, baby food, beverages and sauces.

"Ingredients for the bakery sector and confectionery food industry, a growing number of quick service restaurants, and e-commerce food delivery to meet the demand for Asian and Western cuisines are driving import demand," said the agency.

The country imports most of its consumer-oriented products from India, New Zealand, China, South Africa, Singapore, the US, and nations in the European Union.

The USDA report listed tree nuts, food preparations, dairy products, processed vegetables, condiments, fresh fruits, spices, and fresh vegetables as products that saw



major growth.

Bangladesh has a growing demand from middle-class consumers while modern retail stores such as Shwapno, Agora, Meena Bazar and Unimart are expanding. Some 50 companies with more than 250 outlets are currently operating here.

"An increasing percentage of upper middle to upper class consumers are shopping at modern retail outlets due to greater convenience. Consumers in higher income brackets prefer international brands, including products from a specific country of origin, which they believe indicates safety and quality." The US agency, citing tree nuts, said higher

purchasing power and increased health-consciousness had been fuelling demand.

Bangladesh imported tree nuts worth \$53 million in 2022, almost double from four years prior, according to the report. It added that almonds, walnuts, and a variety of prepared, mixed, and preserved nut items made up most of the import of tree nuts.

India and Indonesia dominate the market for tree nuts, accounting for 22 percent and 23 percent of Bangladesh's imports of the fruit. The US exports of nuts to Bangladesh surged 179 percent in four years to \$3.5 million in 2022.

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Building ethical foundations in a challenging terrain

KAMRAN BAKR

In a business world plagued by unethical practices, adhering to ethical standards may seem idealistic to most - due to deeply ingrained practices. They leverage the unethical system for personal gain, acclimating it as a "pragmatic survival strategy". However, pursuing wealth and fame through unethical practices often lands them in prison.

Such actions can lead to devastating consequences for everyone. Subpar drugs and adulterated food can endanger lives of our dear ones. Poor construction can bury our loved ones in the rubble of unsafe buildings. Loan defaulters may build villas abroad, leaving us to foot the bill through higher taxes.

Avoiding responsibilities is easy. But avoiding its consequences is impossible. So, we must all unite, speak up, and take action - now!

I share my thoughts below for creating the necessary ethical environment requiring collective efforts from everyone, in addition to the roles of employees, senior management and boards.

Family: Family is the bedrock of ethical values. But parents' pursuit of careers, wealth and power limits valuable family interactions. Parents should revive spending quality time with their children to infuse spiritual values, prioritise moral values alongside economic success, instil courage and sacrifice to act against wrongdoing, and shape peer interactions and mindful use of technology.

Educational institutions:

Educational institutions must integrate ethics into the curriculum by instilling the value of "Performance with integrity" over "Performance at any cost".

Simple ethical concepts, spiritual values and real-life examples should be introduced early.

In university, ethics should focus on teaching students how to make principled decisions in real-life professional ethical dilemmas.



Civic organisations: Ethical leaders from all walks of life must unite to rekindle moral values, honour and dignity. By raising awareness, they must combat malevolence with courage and sacrifice over greed. Otherwise, we risk descending into a jungle ruled by the survival of the fittest.

Society also needs collective vigilance. After all, millions of eyes are far more potent than a few regulators. Finally, consumers wield far more market influence than they realise. Citizens must be educated about their rights and to demand ethical conduct from businesses by voicing disapproval via boycotting.

Media: The media, including social platforms, must refrain from honouring unethical business houses and leaders.

Corporate malfeasance occurs behind smokescreens. Hence, journalists need to be well-trained and collaborate with experts to analyse financial and business matters comprehensively.

Many initially reported incidents float into oblivion during the lengthy investigation and judicial process. The media must consistently track and report updates even if there is "no progress" to facilitate closure.

Verified crowd-sourced information enhances investigations. However, vigilance against potential disinformation is crucial.

State oversight organs: Government bodies must collaborate to strengthen oversight frameworks, especially due to technology's growing influence.

Officials must avoid mixed messaging and perceived leniency towards ethical misconduct which emboldens the rich and powerful to act with impunity.

Given the increasing sophistication and complexity of business, highly skilled investigative and enforcement units must be established. They must harness technology, like AI-generated exceptions lists from financial statements, to detect potential malfeasance.

Laws should ensure the independence and diligence of auditors and independent directors and sharply define their responsibilities and liabilities for negligence.

Rules and directives alone cannot replace character or ensure the right values. As such, we must integrate all the levers mentioned above to ensure that the head, heart and hands are aligned to counter the temptation of corporate malfeasance and uphold ethics.

The author is former chairman and managing director of Unilever Bangladesh Ltd.

RED SEA ATTACK

LNG shipments will be affected

AFP, Davos

Liquefied natural gas shipments will be affected by tensions in the Red Sea, Qatar's prime minister said on Tuesday, warning that military strikes on Yemen risk aggravating the crisis.

"LNG is... as any other merchant shipments. They will be affected by that," Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani told the World Economic Forum in Davos, referring to the increasing exchanges with Yemen's Houthi rebels.

"There are alternative routes, those alternative routes are not more efficient, they're less efficient than the current route," he added.

Rather than use the key route between Asia and European markets, which normally carries about 12 percent of global maritime trade, some shipping companies are now taking a major detour around southern Africa.

Bloomberg reported on Monday that at least five LNG vessels operated by Qatar had stopped en route to the Red Sea. Sheikh Mohammed said the "central issue" of Gaza, where the Israel-Hamas war has been raging since October, must be addressed to calm the situation in the Red Sea.

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Fears disrupt global trade patterns

REUTERS

Japanese shipping operator Nippon Yusen suspended sailings through the Red Sea on Tuesday after Yemen's Houthi movement vowed to step up attacks on vessels in the region.

The Iran-allied Houthi group has threatened to expand its targets to include US ships in response to American and British strikes on its sites in Yemen.

Attacks by the Houthis on ships in area since November have impacted companies and alarmed major powers, in an escalation of Israel's more than three-month war with Hamas militants in Gaza. The group says it is acting in solidarity with Palestinians.

As well as disrupting supply chains, there are fears that the attacks could make it more difficult for policymakers to keep global inflation in check.

British and American ships had become "legitimate targets" due to the strikes launched on Yemen last week, Nasruddeen Amer, a spokesperson for the Houthis, told Al Jazeera.

The Houthis had previously said they would attack only Israeli ships or those



A container ship sails across the Gulf of Suez towards the Red Sea before entering the Suez Canal in the east of Cairo.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

en route to Israel.

Underlining concerns, Nippon Yusen, also known as NYK Line, has instructed its vessels navigating near the Red Sea to wait in safe waters and is considering route changes, a company spokesperson said on Tuesday.

In the latest apparent attack, the US Central Command said Houthi forces in Yemen struck the US-owned and operated dry bulk ship Gibraltar Eagle with an anti-ship ballistic missile on Monday. There were no reports of injuries or significant damage.

Container vessels have been pausing or diverting from the Red Sea that leads to the Suez Canal, the fastest freight route from Asia to Europe. Many ships have been forced to take the longer route via South Africa's Cape of Good Hope instead.

The US-led coalition meant to safeguard commercial traffic in the Red Sea is weak because regional powerhouses Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt did not take part, Yemen's vice president said on Tuesday.

"This Bab al-Mandab corridor is of interest to the whole world and to the region, so regional intervention is key," Aidarous al-Zubaidi told Reuters in an interview, referring to the narrow strait at the entrance to the Red Sea.

Zubaidi's separatist Southern Transitional Council is part of an alliance that opposes the Houthis in Yemen.

Also speaking in Davos, Chinese Premier Li Qiang said it was important to keep global supply chains "stable and smooth".

About 12 percent of world shipping traffic transits the Suez Canal via the Red Sea.

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