

Potato output hits historic high, raises concerns of surplus

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh produced 1.15 crore tonnes of potatoes, the highest in history, in the last harvesting season, raising fears that a good portion of the tuber is likely to remain surplus this year as demand is far below the output, according to estimates by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

An expansion of cultivation area and a higher yields owing to favourable weather boosted the overall production of the popular vegetable this year, said the BBS, releasing its estimate early this month.

Farmers grew the tuber on land of 4.92 lakh hectares in the fiscal year 2024-25, up 8 percent year on year. Overall production increased 9 percent year on year from 1.06 crore tonnes the previous year, it added.

"We are going to see a surplus this year," said Matiar Rahman, director of Tuber Crop Research Centre (TRC).

Including around 10 lakh tonnes of potatoes used for seeds, the country requires just over 90 lakh tonnes of potatoes for domestic consumption, according to estimates by the TRC and the Bangladesh Cold Storage Association (BCSA).

With roughly 80 lakh tonnes being consumed, a portion of the vegetable is used by processors to make chips and crackers. Apart from this, just over 62,000 tonnes of potatoes were exported in the fiscal year 2024-25.

"It appears that many people will not show interest in buying potatoes at the end of the year, causing losses for farmers," he said.

Transplanted from mid-September to November, the main harvesting season starts in mid-January and continues until March every year. However, early varieties of the vegetable start coming to the market from December, and demand for old potatoes declines amid an increased arrival of winter vegetables.

Stakeholders said potatoes harvested in the January-March period will be consumed in the three and a half months of this year.



Potatoes are selling at Tk 14-Tk 15 per kilogramme whereas production and other costs are Tk 25-Tk 27 per kg, according to Bangladesh Cold Storage Association.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Mostofa Azad Chowdhury Babu, president of the BCSA, said cold storages have 29 lakh tonnes of potatoes now as only 4 lakh tonnes have been released so far.

"Now, there are no potatoes at the farmers' end," he said.

"As we have only three and a half months of the season, a good amount is likely to remain surplus," he said, adding that the price of the vegetable remains much lower than the overall cost.

Potatoes are selling at Tk 14 - Tk 15 per kilogramme (kg) whereas production and other costs are Tk 25 - Tk 27, he added.

At retail, the vegetable is selling at Tk 25 - Tk 30 per kg in Dhaka, which is 48 percent lower than the same period a year ago, according to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

"The amount of export is not significant," he said.

To increase consumption, the BCSA

earlier urged the government to include 10 kilogrammes of potatoes per household in the social safety net schemes, including the Food-Friendly Programme.

He said mostly farmers' stored potatoes in the cold storages and if the government takes the initiative to distribute potatoes under social safety net programmes, farmers will be saved from losses.

"We have not seen any decision from the government," he said.

OpenAI rolls out cheapest ChatGPT plan in India

REUTERS

ChatGPT maker OpenAI on Tuesday launched ChatGPT Go, a new India only subscription plan priced at 399 rupees (\$4.57) per month, its most affordable offering yet, as the company looks to deepen its presence in its second-largest market.

Global companies often offer cheaper subscription plans for India's price-sensitive market, targeting the nearly one billion internet users in the world's most populous nation.

The plan allows users to send up to ten times more messages and generate ten times more images compared to the free version, while also offering faster response times. Message limits increase with higher-tier subscription plans.

ChatGPT Go is designed for Indians who want greater access to ChatGPT's advanced capabilities at a more affordable price, the Microsoft-backed startup said in a statement.

The top-tier version of ChatGPT - ChatGPT Pro - is priced at 19,900 rupees/month in India, while ChatGPT Plus, its mid-range plan, costs 1,999 rupees/month.

Earlier this year, CEO Sam Altman met with India's IT minister and discussed a plan to create a low-cost AI ecosystem.

Google agrees to \$36m fine over Android search deals

AFP, Sydney

Google has agreed to pay a Aus\$55 million (US\$36 million) penalty for striking "anti-competitive" deals to pre-install only its own search engine on Android mobile phones sold by two leading Australian telecoms firms.

Australia's competition authority said it had launched proceedings in the Federal Court and jointly submitted with Google Asia Pacific that it should pay the fine.

The court would now decide whether the agreed penalty and other orders were "appropriate", the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission said in a statement released on Monday.

"Conduct that restricts competition is illegal in Australia because it usually means less choice, higher costs or worse service for consumers," said the commission's chair, Gina-Cass Gotlieb.

Google had cooperated with the competition commission and admitted reaching the deals with telecoms firms Telstra and Optus, which were in place from December 2019 to March 2021, the body said.

In return for only installing Google's search engine, Telstra and Optus had received a share of the resulting advertising revenue, the commission said.

"Google has admitted in reaching those understandings with each of Telstra and Optus it was likely to have had the effect of substantially lessening competition," it said.

Google said it was pleased to have resolved the regulator's concerns over the provisions, adding that they had not been in its commercial agreements for "some time".

"We are committed to providing Android device makers more flexibility to preload browsers and search apps," a Google spokesperson said.

Nvidia working on new AI chip for China

REUTERS, Beijing/Singapore

Nvidia is developing a new AI chip for China based on its latest Blackwell architecture that will be more powerful than the H20 model it is currently allowed to sell there, two people briefed on the matter said.

US President Donald Trump last week opened the door to the possibility of more advanced Nvidia chips being sold in China. But the sources noted US regulatory approval is far from guaranteed amid deep-seated fears in Washington about giving China too much access to US artificial intelligence technology.

The new chip, tentatively known as the B30A, will use a single-die design that is likely to deliver half the raw computing power of the more sophisticated dual-die configuration in Nvidia's flagship B300 accelerator card, the sources said.

A single-die design is when all the main parts of an integrated



circuit are made on one continuous piece of silicon rather than split across multiple dies.

The new chip would have high-bandwidth memory and Nvidia's NVLink technology for fast data transmission between processors, features that are also in the H20 - a chip based on the company's older Hopper architecture.

The chip's specifications are not completely finalised but Nvidia hopes to deliver samples to Chinese clients for testing as early as next month, said the sources who were not authorised to speak to media

and declined to be identified.

Nvidia said in a statement: "We evaluate a variety of products for our roadmap, so that we can be prepared to compete to the extent that governments allow."

"Everything we offer is with the full approval of the applicable authorities and designed solely for beneficial commercial use," it said.

The US Department of Commerce did not respond to a Reuters request for comment.

FLASHPOINT

The extent to which China, which generated 13 percent of Nvidia's revenue in the past financial year, can have access to cutting edge AI chips is one of the biggest flashpoints in US-Sino trade tensions.

Nvidia only received permission in July to recommence sales of the H20. It was developed specifically for China after export restrictions were put in place in 2023, but company was abruptly ordered to stop sales in April.

Fewer fake firs, higher prices

China tariff delay does little to save the holidays

REUTERS, New York/Shanghai

US shoppers looking for fake Christmas trees and holiday decor this year will have fewer choices and face higher prices as tariffs on Chinese imports force retailers to scale back orders as they assess how tight customer budgets are.

A 90-day extension to a tariff reprieve - agreed to by Washington and Beijing on August 11 - will allow retailers to rush in some last-minute shipments, but most holiday purchases are already done. Retailers typically import seasonal goods in advance because many products need six month lead times.

"We're going to have a lower supply year," said Chris Butler, CEO of National Tree Company, a New Jersey-based artificial tree importer supplying Walmart, Home Depot, Lowe's and Amazon.

The company, which sources roughly half its trees from China and the rest from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand, will hike prices by 10 percent to 20 percent on its Carolina pine, Nordic spruce, and Dunhill fir trees, Butler said.

China is the biggest exporter of Christmas decorations to the US, accounting for 87 percent of such imports last year, worth roughly \$4 billion, according to United States International Trade Commission data.



People shop for Christmas trees at AA Christmas Trees in Brooklyn. China is the biggest exporter of Christmas decorations to the US, accounting for 87 percent of such imports last year.

percent in April, then cutting them to 30 percent a month later - because they are unwilling to buy trees at elevated prices, said Harman. He sources trees from around 80 suppliers, half of which are in China.

Still, the latest pause has netted Balsam Hill some \$2.5 million in savings, he said.

A Walmart spokesperson said the company was confident in its inventory position heading into the holiday.

Home Depot and Amazon declined to comment, while Lowe's did not respond to a Reuters request for comment.

The reduced demand for fake trees, a key Christmas purchase, signals a muted shopping season. Higher prices on essentials like diapers and dish soap have already strained budgets. Denim maker Levi Strauss said last month it will offer a leaner holiday selection.

Isaac Larian, CEO of MGA Entertainment that makes Bratz dolls, said a 30 percent tariff on toys "is still too much." The company has raised prices, he said.

Only goods shipped by air would benefit from the delay in higher tariffs, said Chris Rogers, head of supply chain research, S&P Global Market Intelligence. Companies including Apple that have upcoming product launches will gain from the certainty that there will be a 30 percent tariff, he said.

Grounded in the AI race

MAMUNUR RAHMAN

In Rajbari, the shuttered doors of Salina Akter's jute workshop tell the story of how artificial intelligence is reshaping global trade and leaving Bangladesh's small businesses stranded. For five years, she stitched eco-friendly bags for European buyers. Then the orders stopped. Her clients now demanded AI optimised production schedules, predictive inventory systems and delivery timelines that only automated supply chains can provide. Salina's modest factory could not keep pace.

This is not an isolated case. SMEs employ 80 percent of the non-farm workforce and generate roughly a quarter of GDP. Yet while other developing economies are rolling out targeted AI adoption programmes for small businesses, our policy response remains trapped in strategy papers and consultation rooms. Even flagship documents such as the Task Force Report 2025 and other national policy blueprints barely acknowledge the AI shockwave hitting these enterprises. The threat is real. Competitors are building SME-focused AI pipelines, while we continue to debate paper-based loan forms as if it were 1990.

Consider the ingenuity of Dholakhal's light engineering workshops. During the darkest days of Covid-19, I connected my own network at MIT, where ventilator innovation had been open-sourced for global adaptation, with Abdul Kader and a group of machinists and fabricators in Dholakhal. Together, we reverse engineered the MIT process and built a fully functional mechanical ventilator prototype. The core mechanical design was ready, but the project stalled because we could not integrate an electrical control system that met regulatory standards. There was no government-backed technical assistance, prototyping support or fast-track testing facility to bridge that gap. What could have been a homegrown life-saving device became just another workshop prototype gathering dust. If we could not scale a ventilator in a health emergency, how will SMEs scale AI adoption in the midst of a trade war?

Other nations are already turning their ambition into action. India's Drone Didi trains rural women to operate agricultural drones, raising yields by 30 percent and cutting pesticide use in half. Vietnam earmarks 1 percent of GDP for SME tech upgrades, delivering plug-and-play AI tools with minimal paperwork. Kenya's Ajira Digital connects SMEs to global AI enabled service markets, backed by microfinance.

Bangladesh's AI Policy does mention investment through government funding, tax incentives and public-private partnerships. Yet the criteria are tied to broad categories such as R&D, infrastructure and education. There is no ring-fenced allocation for SMEs, nor a mandate for ministries to embed AI adoption targets into sectoral budgets. The ambition to nurture a skilled workforce is welcome, but the scale is modest. Training tens of thousands will not suffice when millions will need reskilling.

Without targeted mechanisms, AI readiness will concentrate in large firms and urban start-ups, leaving rural and manufacturing SMEs locked out. The risk is not abstract. The Dholakhal ventilator showed how quickly ingenuity can rise to meet a crisis, and how easily it can be stranded without systemic support.

Bangladesh's economic rise owes much to SMEs. To sustain that rise in an AI-driven world, policymakers must turn the promises of the AI Policy into concrete SME programmes: a dedicated adoption fund worth 1 percent of GDP, subsidies for basic automation tools in manufacturing and agriculture, vocational training in machine vision and robotics, and tax holidays for SMEs that invest in AI.

Right now, India's Drone Didis and Vietnam's tech-enabled SMEs are already airborne. Bangladesh's entrepreneurs remain on the tarmac, engines idling, waiting for clearance that never comes. The race has begun. We cannot afford to stay grounded while others take flight.

The writer is a former research fellow at MITD-Lab