



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

Mimi, nostalgia and new bites

The local chocolate market has come a long way, from simple childhood favourites to exciting new flavours. Local and global brands now offer the treat for all budgets, and young people are driving the demand

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Children from the 1980s and 1990s share one clear memory: Mimi chocolate.

Back then, Mimi came wrapped in simple black paper, printed with the pictures of a cow or orange slices. Chocolate was a rare treat, often arriving only when relatives abroad brought some home.

Cherished by people of all ages, Mimi marked both the beginning and the peak of their local chocolate experience for many.

With Bangladesh Television (BTV) as the only channel then, Mimi commercials captured the imagination of youngsters across the country. A bar might arrive on special occasions, during visits from relatives, or when grandparents treated them on shopping trips.

It was found mostly in large city

segment, while local producers meet the rest of the market. Pran-RFL Group, Olympic Industries, and Well Food dominate, carrying forward the legacy Mimi began.

As a Millennial, I remember a time when chocolates were hard to get in Bangladesh. One had to ask friends and family abroad to bring a bar or two – or make do with Mimi or Aziz Milk Chocolate, which left a layer of fat on your palate,” said Zina Tasreen, a private service holder.

“Now, chocolates from all over the world are available in supermarkets at fair prices. I am happy I can satisfy my cravings for dark chocolate whenever I want,” she added.

A BITTER BEGINNING

In “The True History of Chocolate”, anthropologists Sophie D Coe and Michael D Coe trace chocolate back to ancient Mesoamerica. The Olmec, Maya, and

“Bangladesh has shown resilience in this category, even during broader economic slowdowns,” Taj said. “Urban consumers are moving towards premium chocolates, with demand growing for dark and sugar free varieties.”

Demographic and lifestyle changes play a key role in growth of the local market.



Nearly 40 percent of the country's population is under 24. This youthful consumer base is fuelling demand for indulgent and trendy snacks. Festivals such as birthdays, Eid, Pahela Baishakh, and Valentine's Day also increase seasonal sales.

According to Taj, their challenges include a sharp rise in global cocoa and dairy prices. The spikes have pushed retail prices up by 30 to 60 percent over the past year.

He said that new import valuation thresholds and limited cold chain infrastructure also affect the distribution of temperature-sensitive premium chocolates.

“Our aim is to bridge the gap between high-end imports and local affordability,” Taj said. “Innovation and accessibility will shape the future of Bangladesh's chocolate market.”

MADE TO MELT HERE

Local chocolate manufacturers dominate most of the domestic market, with Pran-RFL Group, Olympic Industries, and Abul Khair accounting for about 80 percent of this confectionery segment.

Kamruzzaman Kamal, marketing director at Pran-RFL, said they have been producing chocolates since 1999 using European machinery. Pran's plants in Narsingdi, Habiganj, and Natore can churn out 36,000 tonnes annually.

“Our portfolio ranges from Tk 1 candies to Tk 60 bars, making chocolate accessible across different income levels,” Kamal said. Divino, Mango Candy, and Treat Bars are quite popular across the country.

Pran also exports chocolates to over 80 countries across Asia, Europe, and Africa. Those export items are usually pricier than the products for the local market.

At big supermarkets in major cities like Dhaka and Chattogram, some of those premium products are also available.

Aztec civilisations consumed cacao not as a sweet, but as a sacred, bitter drink used in royal ceremonies and even warfare. The Maya called it kakaw, a divine gift.

European colonists encountered cacao in the 16th century and changed it forever. Sweetened with sugar and cinnamon, it transformed from a ritual beverage into a luxury indulgence.

Chocolate arrived in the Indian subcontinent during the British colonial period as a European import, initially reserved for the colonial elite. After independence, access widened. While India began cultivating cacao in the south, Bangladesh became a consumer market, relying on imported supplies.

Bangladesh's chocolate and wafer market grows at 6 to 8 percent annually, according to Ashraf Bin Taj, managing director of International Distribution Company Bangladesh PLC (IDC).

IDC distributes major brands like Cadbury, Snickers, M&M's and BitLit. The local company offers premium quality at accessible prices.

Taj said that imported chocolates and candy account for around 30 percent of the market, while local producers dominate the low and mid-price segments.

confectioneries, never taken for granted.

Even today, many shoppers still scan shelves hoping to spot the familiar black wrapper and the two beloved flavours of their youth in vain. Mimi slowly vanished from the market, being unable to survive the flood of imported brands and colourful new wrappers that reshaped the market.

But chocolates are no longer rare, and the treats are not only reserved for children these days. Those are now part of everyday life, thanks to industrialisation, rapid urbanisation, and rising incomes that have driven the growth of the local chocolate market.

Supermarkets now stock treats for all ages, from Pran's Treat Bars to imported Ferrero Rocher and Lindt. Nestle's KitKat, Classic, and Milkybar are widely available.

While Mimi used to earn a few lakhs of taka a year, the local chocolate and wafer market is now valued between Tk 3,000 crore and Tk 3,500 crore.

Imported brands target the premium

market, while local brands like Pran, Olympic, and Well Food offer more affordable options.

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health-conscious consumers.

“People are now looking for high-quality chocolates made with natural ingredients, innovative flavours, and multi sensory experiences that go beyond just taste,” he said.

Chowdhury said chocolate distribution channels are expanding through supermarkets, convenience stores, and e-commerce platforms.

However, several challenges, including high import duties and maintaining a reliable cold chain, continue to affect the segment.

“High import duties on essential ingredients raise overall costs, impacting pricing strategies, particularly for imported and premium chocolates,” he said. “Maintaining an uninterrupted cold chain also remains a significant hurdle.”

In response, Nestle has adapted with a mix of classic and premium offerings. “KitKat, Classic, and Milkybar continue to delight consumers. We are also introducing premium and artisanal options to meet demand for quality and variety,” Chowdhury said.

THE NEXT BITE

Beyond traditional bars and candies, new trends are shaping the local chocolate market. The demand for healthier options, portion-controlled snacks, and premium packaging is rising.

Brands are responding with sugar-free and dark chocolate lines, along with recyclable packaging.

E-commerce is expanding reach, with platforms like Pran's Othoba or PriyoShop improving distribution in remote areas. Predictive analytics now help brands manage inventory more efficiently during peak seasons.

According to industry insiders, the mid-tier chocolate segment presents the biggest untapped opportunity. Urban and semi-urban consumers are willing to trade up but remain price conscious. Smaller packs, combo deals, and single serve formats are proving effective in winning this crowd.

Yet the local chocolate market is moderately fragmented, offering scope for consolidation while supporting innovation. Local brands benefit from reach and affordability, while global players bring R&D expertise and sophisticated marketing.

Multinationals like Nestle, Mars Wrigley, and Perfetti Van Melle are investing more in brand visibility, while domestic giants are doubling down on affordability and scale. The mix is creating a dynamic market with room for both established names and ambitious newcomers.



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