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Tariffs steer US synthetic shoe orders to Bangladesh

Exports reach $523m in FY25 as American buyers look beyond China

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Amid global supply chain volatility and higher tariff pressure on China, US buyers are showing fresh interest in Bangladesh's non-leather footwear and synthetic leather products.

Industry insiders say the shift, though triggered by short-term import duty disruption, could open a long-term window for Bangladeshi exporters aiming to widen their global footprint.

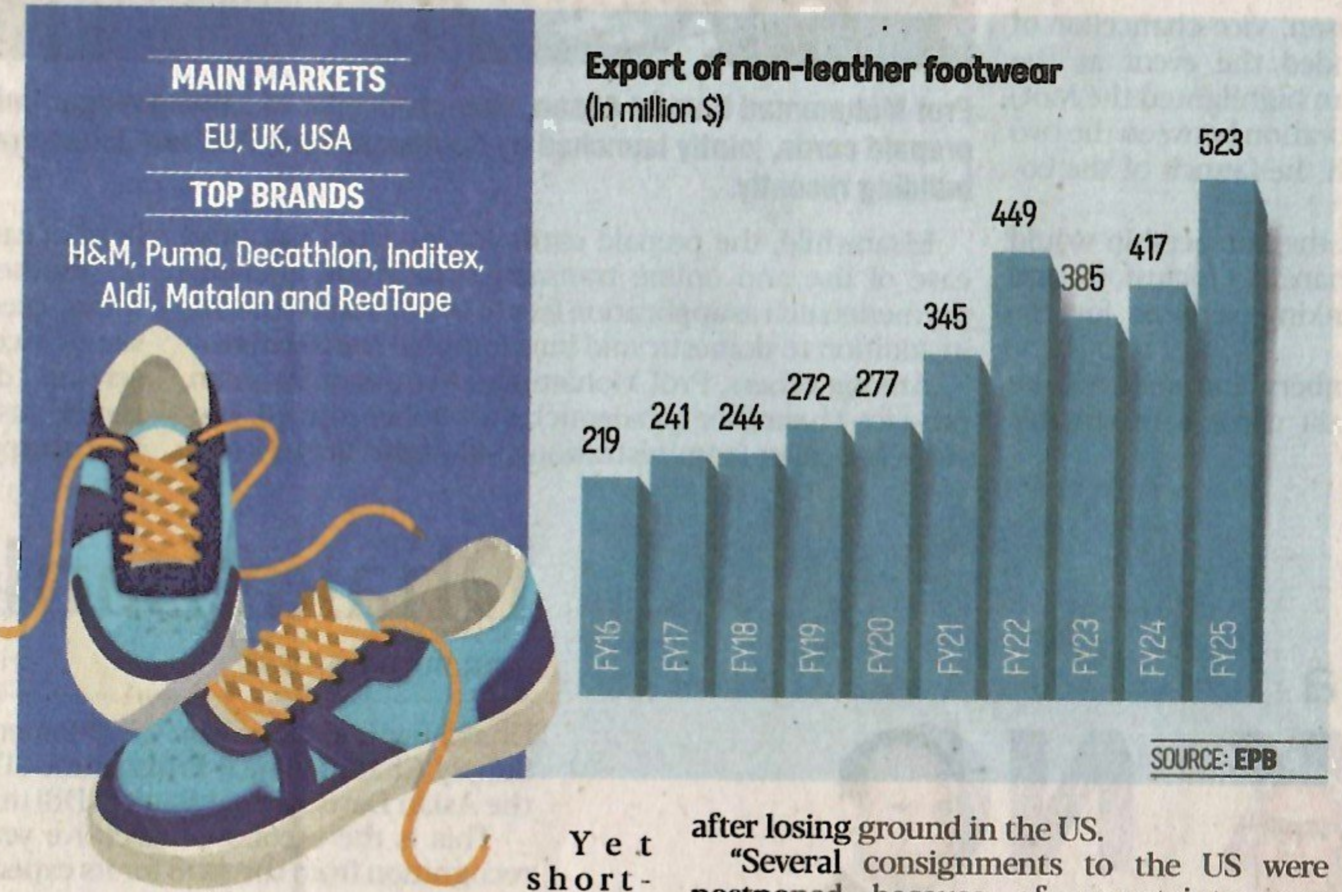
For local non-leather footwear manufacturers, Europe remains the biggest destination, taking almost 90 percent of synthetic shoe exports.

While the US share is still small, companies such as RFL Group, Bling Shoes, Shoeniverse Footwear and Jennys Shoes reported a stable rise in American orders.

The companies say buyers are being drawn by the country's growing capacity and competitive costs.

The synthetic leather footwear industry has grown rapidly, more than doubling exports in seven years. This segment earned $523 million in fiscal year (FY) 2024-25, up from $244 million in FY2017-18.

Synthetic shoes are becoming more popular globally than leather for comfort and style. Besides, synthetic materials are less expensive to produce than real leather, making synthetic footwear more accessible to a wider consumer base.



Yet short-term strains amid the US tariff uncertainty on synthetic items are visible. Shipments fell to $42 million in August from $45 million a year earlier, a 7 percent drop.

Domestic manufacturers blame shipment delays and aggressive discounting by Chinese rivals, who diverted excess stock to Europe after losing ground in the US.

"Several consignments to the US were postponed because of uncertainty over reciprocal tariffs. That threw our production schedules off balance," said Hasanuzzaman Hassan, chairman of Bling Shoes.

He said that it may take up to three months to restore regular flows.

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SOURCE: EPB

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He pointed to American footwear brand Wolverine as an early returner after Washington imposed a total 47 percent tariff on Chinese footwear.

For Shoeniverse Footwear, which has manufacturing units in Tongi and Bhaluka, the European market still dominates.

"About 90 percent of our exports go to Europe. But once Chinese manufacturers lost US orders, they flooded Europe with cheaper products. Some of our regular buyers switched back to them," said Shoeniverse Managing Director Riad Mahmud.

He said the price war has unsettled exports to Europe, contributing to around 8 percent fall in August.

Even so, Mahmud remains optimistic about the outlook.

"The market is settling. We are adding capacity, and with new factories we expect exports to grow at least 6 percent a month, provided there are no fresh shocks," he said.

He added that small but steady US orders are already coming in, suggesting sourcing patterns are gradually shifting.

Nasir Khan, chairman and managing director of Jennys Shoes, believes the new US tariffs have opened the door for Bangladesh.

"American brands are exploring new sourcing hubs, and Bangladesh is firmly on their radar," he said.

Khan said that monthly figures do not always capture the industry's real performance, as orders are seasonal.

"We are processing winter shipments now, and bulk consignments to the US are already underway," he said.

Jennys Shoes exports mainly to Japan and Europe, but in the US market it specialises in non-leather sports shoes, with Skechers and Steve Madden among its buyers.

RN Paul, managing director of RFL Group, said their synthetic leather division is receiving US demand for the first time, in both apparel and footwear. "The interest is not entirely new, but the consistency and scale are on a different level," he said.

RFL began producing synthetic leather with a water-based polyurethane process in 2021. The eco-friendly method has proved attractive to international brands on both compliance and sustainability grounds.

"We are in discussions with H&M and Zara. Our integrated production system gives us an edge," Paul said.

To meet rising demand, RFL has joined hands with a Chinese firm to expand capacity. "That helps us fill the gap left by China's reduced exports to the US," he added.

The company has also extended synthetic leather use beyond footwear to jackets, handbags, wallets and other items previously dependent on imports. "We now make them locally, which adds more value at home," Paul said.

Despite August's setback, exporters remain convinced Bangladesh is on the brink of a new growth phase in non-leather footwear and synthetic leather.

"There are short-term bumps, but the long-term opportunity is real and getting bigger," said Mahmud of Shoeniverse.

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Bagerhat ranks second in shrimp production

BAGERHAT, Sept 8 (BSS): Nestled at the edge of the Sundarbans in the country's southern coastal belt, Bagerhat has emerged as Bangladesh's second-largest producer of shrimp, popularly known as "white gold", contributing 27 percent of the national output.

Although brackish water is naturally more suitable for shrimp cultivation, the use of modern technology has expanded farming into freshwater areas, opening up new economic opportunities.

Once fallow lands are now being leased by educated unemployed youths, who are increasingly turning to shrimp aquaculture for livelihood.

Bagerhat's famed Bagda shrimp has gained global reputation as a delicacy. Its major markets include the United States, European Union countries, particularly the United Kingdom, France, Italy and the Netherlands along with the Middle East, India, Canada and Australia.

Locally, Bagda has become a must-have item at weddings and festive occasions.

In the 2023-24 fiscal year, Bagerhat district produced a total of 20,940.30 metric tons of Bagda shrimp from 55,159.27 hectares of land, generating sales worth Tk 20.94 billion (Tk 2,094 crore).

Alongside shrimp, the district also sold Rui, Katla and Mrigel fish worth Tk 4.21 billion (Tk 421 crore), further strengthening its fisheries economy.

In terms of upazila-wise production, Bagerhat Sadar topped the list with 6,899 metric tons of shrimp harvested from 7,673 hectares across 4,480 enclosures.

Kachua upazila produced 757 metric tons from 1,333.5 hectares in 2,856 enclosures, while Morelganj contributed a remarkable 7,424 metric tons from 12,800 hectares in 8,750 enclosures.

Chitalmari upazila reported 1,453 metric tons of production from 969.77 hectares and 2,493 enclosures, whereas Fakirhat upazila yielded 1,595.6 metric tons from 1,061 hectares of farmland. In Mollahat, 1,187 metric tons were harvested from 513 hectares through 1,814 enclosures.

Meanwhile, Rampal produced 1,201 metric tons of shrimp from 13,129 hectares and Mongla registered 1,467 metric tons from 13,611 hectares.

Sharankhola, though comparatively smaller in scale, contributed 23 metric tons of shrimp from 51 hectares and 76 enclosures.

Speaking to the news agency, Kachua Fisheries Office Field Assistant Sumana Saha said that cultivating Bagda shrimp on one acre costs about Tk 0.1 million (Tk 1 lakh), while the market return is Tk 0.23 million, leaving farmers with a net profit of Tk 0.13 million.

Kachua Marine Fisheries Officer Dipankar Kumar Chakraborty explained that using bleaching powder to purify water and stocking enclosures with virus-free SPF fry can prevent disease.

Nursing the fry for 30 to 45 days reduces mortality, while maintaining pond depth between 3.5 and 5 feet enhances growth. Bagda thrives best in salinity levels of around 12 ppt and is ready for harvest within 90 to 120 days, he added.

Bagerhat District Fisheries Officer Dr. Abul Kalam Azad told the news agency that Bangladesh is now among the world's safest shrimp-producing countries. With Bagda shrimp recognized as a Geographical Indication (GI) product, he said it is rightly considered "white gold," fetching premium prices and driving economic empowerment.

প্রথম আলো

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দুর্গাপূজায় ভারতে ১২০০ টন ইলিশ রপ্তানির অনুমতি

বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রণালয়ের সিদ্ধান্ত

বিশেষ প্রতিবেদক, *ঢাকা*

দুর্গাপূজা উপলক্ষে এ বছর ভারতে ১ হাজার ২০০ টন ইলিশ মাছ রপ্তানি করবে বাংলাদেশ। গতকাল সোমবার বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রণালয় এ-সংক্রান্ত আদেশ জারি করেছে। শর্ত সাপেক্ষে ইলিশ রপ্তানির নীতিগত এ সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয় বলে জানা গেছে।

দুর্গাপূজা উপলক্ষে প্রতিবছরই ভারতে ইলিশ রপ্তানি করে বাংলাদেশ। বিশেষ করে পশ্চিমবঙ্গে বাংলাদেশের ইলিশের ব্যাপক চাহিদা রয়েছে।

বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রণালয়ের আদেশে বলা হয়, ১১ সেপ্টেম্বর অফিস চলাকালে হার্ড কপিতে আবেদন করতে পারবেন আগ্রহী রপ্তানিকারকেরা। আবেদনের সঙ্গে সংশ্লিষ্ট রপ্তানিকারক প্রতিষ্ঠানের হালনাগাদ ট্রেড লাইসেন্স, ইআরসি, আয়কর সার্টিফিকেট, ভ্যাট সার্টিফিকেট, বিক্রয় চুক্তিপত্র, মৎস্য অধিদপ্তরের লাইসেন্সসহ সংশ্লিষ্ট দলিলাদি দাখিল করতে হবে।

বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রণালয়ের আদেশে আরও বলা হয়, প্রতি কেজি ইলিশের ন্যূনতম রপ্তানি মূল্য সাড়ে ১২ মার্কিন ডলার নির্ধারণ করেছে সরকার। ইতিমধ্যে যাঁরা আহ্বান ব্যতিরেকেই আবেদন করেছেন, তাঁদেরও নতুনভাবে আবেদন দাখিল করতে হবে।

তবে গতবারের চেয়ে এবার অর্ধেক ইলিশ রপ্তানির অনুমতি দিয়েছে। গত বছর দুর্গাপূজা উপলক্ষে বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রণালয় প্রথমে ভারতে তিন হাজার টন ইলিশ রপ্তানির অনুমতি প্রদানের সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছিল। পরে এ সিদ্ধান্ত থেকে সরে এসে ২ হাজার ৪২০ টন ইলিশ রপ্তানির অনুমতি দিয়েছিল। এবার এর অর্ধেক ইলিশ রপ্তানির অনুমতি দেওয়া হলো। গতবার সব মিলিয়ে ৪৯টি প্রতিষ্ঠানকে ইলিশ রপ্তানির অনুমতি দেওয়া হয়েছিল।

অনুমোদিত পরিমাণের চেয়ে বেশি ইলিশ রপ্তানি না করা, অনুমতিপত্র কোনোভাবেই হস্তান্তর না করা এবং অনুমোদিত রপ্তানিকারক ছাড়া ঠিকায় (সাব-কন্ট্রাক্ট) রপ্তানি না করার শর্তও থাকছে। বলা হয়েছে, সরকার যেকোনো সময় রপ্তানি বন্ধ করতে পারবে। সব সময়ই এসব শর্ত থাকে।