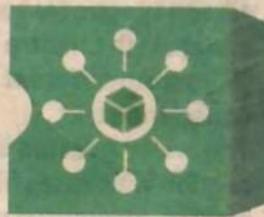


Not market, scant export basket troubles Bangladesh: Experts Free trade access to largest market mostly missed, remedies overlooked

China offers Bangladesh zero-tariff entry for enormous 8,930 products

REZAUL KARIM

Bangladesh miserably fails to avail the enormous opportunities the world's largest market, China, has offered, mainly due to a deep-seated crisis in product diversification, competitiveness, and inept strategic execution, experts say. China has granted Bangladesh zero-tariff entry for 98 per cent of its tariff lines or 8,930 products-- a bonanza of benefit in effect since September 1, 2022, under WTO provisions. Yet, this diplomatic victory has failed to translate into commercial success, leaving a yawning bilateral trade gap worth US\$16 billion, they note to expose export sector's look-west craze and government's lacking in guiding



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Emphasis on promptly signing any agreement or FTA with China to secure long-term market access, favourable terms post-LDC



Chinese FDI needed to be attracted to boost domestic production capacity, leverage duty-free access

targeted production and marketing. The hiatus between imports and exports persists over time--largely unattended--raising critical questions about Dhaka's preparedness for the upcoming graduation of Bangladesh from least-developed country (LDC) status, trade sources and experts deplore.

Approximately one-fourth of Bangladesh's total commodity imports come from China--a country that dominates global supply chains of basic products, including chips for the western economies.

According to data from the Bangladesh Bank and Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), the bilateral trade volume surged to approximately \$17.3345 billion in the last 2024-25 fiscal year (FY) from \$3.5 billion in FY 2008-09.

However, the growth happens to be entirely one-sided. Imports from China hit \$16.64 billion, while exports from Bangladesh fetched a mere \$694.49 million. Export volume is stagnating well below \$1.0-billion mark.

Experts pin the blame on a confluence of strategic and structural failures, arguing that the country's weak competitiveness is negating the duty advantage.

Bangladesh's reliance on ready-made garments (RMG) proves to be a liability on the Chinese market.

Professor Mustafizur Rahman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) states unequivocally, "We have failed to diversify products to match the diverse and high-quality demands of the Chinese consumers."

He notes that RMG, Bangladesh's core strength, is not what China imports extensively.

Trade-specialist Dr Mostofa Abid Khan reinforces this, explaining that major garment buyers are big Western retailers, and few, like Walmart, are top players in China

suggests as a remedial measure.

The zero-rated tariff benefit is conditional upon meeting 40-percent local-value-addition requirement under the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA). This often disqualifies products heavily reliant on imported raw materials.

Dr Khan points out that the actual competitive edge is marginal, with the duty concession translating to only a 6.7-percent margin of preference, which is insufficient to outcompete rivals like Vietnam and Italy.

The "lack of necessary agreements, the slow pace of taking initiatives, and the inability to understand the market demand" further undermine export growth to China.

The most devastating critique focuses on the domestic environment, which chokes off the investment necessary for diversification and quality improvement.

"The loss of competitiveness stems from the existing environmental constraints on business and investment within the country," mentions Professor Mustafizur Rahman.

These constraints act as massive deterrents, despite Chinese net foreign direct investment (FDI) rising to \$1686.24 million as of the FY2024-25.

He also underlines some internal issues, including shortages of gas and

failure of the 'Single Window' system.

Experts, including trade specialists and business leaders, have put forward several steps for Bangladesh to leverage the Chinese market.

They have suggested expanding exports beyond RMG into sectors like pharmaceuticals, light engineering, leather goods, shipbuilding, seafood, ICT services, and high-quality diversified non-RMG products and promptly signing any agreement or FTA with China to secure long-term market access and favourable terms beyond LDC graduation.

Also recommended developing a long-term action plan to recognize and understand the sophisticated and diverse demands of Chinese consumers and the dynamics of the market.

As another major measure the experts mention is attract Chinese foreign direct investment to boost domestic production capacity and leverage the duty-free access aggressively. Dr Khan stresses the urgency of enhancing product quality and standards, and focusing targeted marketing by contacting top Chinese retailers.

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Bangladesh's exports to China is strategic product diversification and producing goods in alignment with the demands of the Chinese market. He firmly states, "It is difficult to expand the export market in China by focusing on RMG."

Mr. Mridha highlights an immense potential of marine resources on the Chinese market, saying, "We must extract more of our Blue Economy resources. This move will bring down the price of such items. We will be able to export to China at a competitive price."

Additionally, he has identified the leather industry as an important player for China trade and urges local traders in this sector to work aggressively to capture the market of around 1.5-billion-strong population.

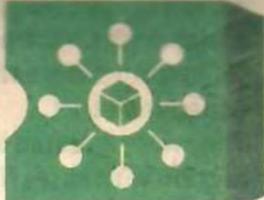
A senior official of the commerce ministry bills the Chinese market access as a generous gift that is currently being squandered. "Without drastic and immediate action to address the structural flaws at home, Bangladesh risks entering its developing-country status with a major trade relationship defined by chronic dependency."

Mentioning a wide-scale demand for Bangladeshi pharmaceuticals in China, Al Mamun Mridha believes that government-to-government (G2G) initiative will further accelerate

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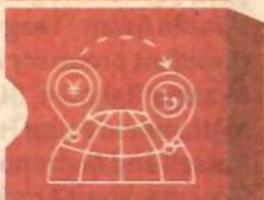
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rezamumu@gmail.com



Vegetable, fruit, spice exports exceed \$100m in Jul-Oct

Exporters optimistic about the earnings increasing in the near future

FHM HUMAYAN KABIR

Bangladesh's vegetables, fruits, and spices are showing a strong performance in foreign exchange earnings, having already crossed the \$100 million export mark in the first four months of this fiscal year, say analysts. According to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), the three promising agricultural products secured \$102.48 million in export earnings during the July–October period of FY26, 64 per cent higher than that in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year. Analysts and exporters are very optimistic about the earnings increasing in the near future as the demand for made-in-Bangladesh products in the Middle East and European markets is growing.

During the reporting period in FY25, Bangladeshi exporters shipped \$62.35 million worth of vegetables, fruits, and spices, EPB data shows.

The earnings were \$77.06 million and \$27.47 million in the same period of FY24 and FY23, respectively.

Among the trio, the export income from fruits is showing a big prospect as it is growing at a faster pace. Although vegetable earnings were volatile over the last four years, fruit exports maintained a steep rise. Exporters earned a record

AGRI TRIO EXPORT HOLDS PROMISE



Jul-Oct exports of veg, fruit, spice (Million \$)

- FY26: 102.48
- FY25: 62.35
- FY24: 77.06
- FY23: 27.47

Jul-Oct veg exports (Million \$)

- FY26: 31.94
- FY25: 21.70
- FY24: 55.95
- FY23: 15.26

Jul-Oct fruit exports (Million \$)

- FY26: 50.08
- FY25: 21.35
- FY24: 5.06
- FY23: 0.18

Jul-Oct spice export (Million \$)

- FY26: 20.46
- FY25: 19.30
- FY24: 16.05
- FY23: 12.03

\$50.08 million by shipping different types of fruits, including mango and jackfruit, in the July–October period of FY26.

From only \$0.18 million between July and October of FY23, fruit exports in that period went up to \$5.06 million in FY24, before jumping to \$21.35 million in FY25.

Meanwhile, vegetable exporters during July to October of FY23 shipped products worth \$15.26 million, which soared to \$55.95 million in that period of FY24.

However, the earnings dipped

to \$21.70 million in the same period of FY25, before rising to \$31.94 million in that of the current fiscal year.

Spice export earnings in the July–October period were recorded at \$12.03 million in FY23, \$16.05 million in FY24, \$19.30 million in FY25, and \$20.46 million in FY26.

Mohammad Monsur, general secretary of the Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables and Allied Products Exporter Association (BFVAPEA), tells The Financial Express exports have increased this fiscal year due mainly to the enhanced capacity of supply to overseas markets.

"Over the last couple of years, air freight charges remained higher. This year, it decreased to some extent. That has become a boon to exporters," he says.

"The overseas markets are ready. There is a huge demand for Bangladeshi fruits and vegetables in the European and Middle Eastern markets. If we get

government facilities for air freight charges, our exports will rise further," he adds.

He requests the government to procure cargo aircraft for Biman Bangladesh that could facilitate the shipment of export goods.

Mansur also urges the formulation of an air freight policy so that every airline can carry Bangladeshi products at reasonable rates.

Additional Director of Research at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Towfiqul Islam Khan tells The Financial Express that Bangladesh needs to expand its agricultural productivity to boost export earnings. If productivity rises, the local demand will be fulfilled and the export basket will widen, he says.

Bangladeshi agro producers as well as exporters should maintain quality and standards for export goods, he also says.

"If we can grow our agricultural product exports, the country as well as our local farmers will benefit," he adds.



15 NOV 2025

WTO to continue support for Bangladesh post-LDC graduation

ECONOMY - BANGLADESH

BSS

Bangladesh will continue to receive support and technical assistance after its graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status in 2026, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has said.

"Access to the WTO's technical assistance will continue for Bangladesh even after graduation," said WTO Deputy Director-General Xiangchen Zhang in an online interview with BSS.

He said Bangladesh currently benefits from a wide range of activities offered under the WTO's Technical Assistance and Training Plan.

The organisation also works with other international bodies to strengthen trade capacity in developing economies.

On the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), he said Bangladesh is a major beneficiary of the programme, which is designed to help LDCs participate more actively in global trade. The EIF is transitioning into its third phase, he added.

FROM PAGE 3
Bangladesh will have five years to continue accessing EIF benefits after graduation, he said.

With support from the EIF, Bangladesh has strengthened its food processing capacity and developed a strategy to diversify its garment sector and move up the value chain, he noted.

On financial assistance, he said Bangladesh has been a significant recipient under the WTO's Aid for Trade Initiative, which helps developing economies build their capacity to trade.

Bangladesh is among the top ten recipients of the initiative, having received \$23 billion between 2006 and 2023.

Domestically, he said Bangladesh maintains strong institutional engagement with the WTO, including operating a WTO Reference Centre at the Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute to provide access to documents and trade-related information.

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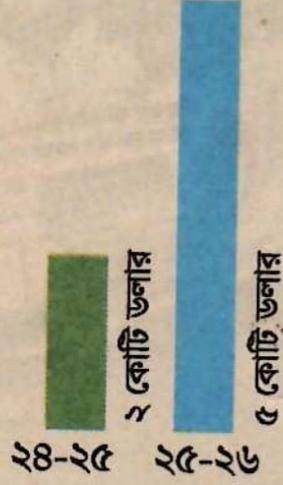
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Following graduation, he said, Bangladesh will have to focus on building strategic coalitions with other WTO members across different levels of development.

Bangladesh has been a member of the WTO since 1995. The country is preparing for its LDC graduation in 2026, which will bring both challenges and opportunities for its trade policy.

ফল রপ্তানি

জুলাই-অক্টোবর



- অক্টোবর মাসে রপ্তানি বেড়েছে ৫২০%
- অর্ধবছরে চার মাসে বেড়েছে ১৩৫%
- ৩০-৩৫ ধরনের ফল যায় ৪০ দেশে

‘পণ্যের মান ও প্রক্রিয়ার ক্ষেত্রে আন্তর্জাতিক মান নিশ্চিত করা এখন সম্ভব হচ্ছে। এতে ইউরোপেও ফল রপ্তানিতে আর সমস্যায় পড়তে হচ্ছে না। মূলত এ কারণে ফলের রপ্তানি বেড়েছে’

■ আব্দুল কিয়াম
ফল রপ্তানিকারক

ফলে আশাজাগানিয়া রপ্তানি

সমকাল প্রতিবেদক

স্বাদ, পুষ্টিগুণে দেশি ফলের ভালো বিকল্প এখনও কেবল দেশি ফলই। এটি হয়তো দেশে থেকে অনেকে বুঝতে পারেন না। সে কারণে আনারস না কিনে আপেল কেনেন। পেঁপেলার পরিবর্তে চেরি। দেশি ফলের গুরুত্বটা ঠিকই বুঝতে পারেন প্রবাসীরা। বারো মাসই দেশের মৌসুমি ফলের অপেক্ষায় থাকেন তারা। বিদেশে প্রবাসী বাংলাদেশীদের দোকানে খোঁজখবর রাখেন। অতিমারি করোনার পর এই প্রবণতা অনেক বেড়েছে। তথ্য-উপাত্তও সে কথাই বলছে। প্রবাসী বাংলাদেশিরাই দেশ থেকে রপ্তানি করা ফলমূলের প্রধান ভোক্তা। বিদেশিরাও বাংলাদেশের সুস্বাদু ফল খেতে পছন্দ করেন।

রপ্তানি উন্নয়ন ব্যুরোর (ইপিবি) সর্বশেষ তথ্য-উপাত্তে দেখা যায়, গত অক্টোবরে বিভিন্ন ধরনের ফলমূলে রপ্তানি বেড়েছে ৫২০ শতাংশ। অবশ্য রপ্তানি পরিমাণে খুব বেশি নয়। দুই কোটি ডলারের মতো। টাকায় যা আড়াইশ কোটির মতো। গত বছরের অক্টোবরে রপ্তানির পরিমাণ ছিল ৩০ লাখ ডলারের কিছু বেশি। আগস্ট মাসের চেয়ে অক্টোবরে রপ্তানি বেশি হয়েছে ৫৭ শতাংশ। অন্যদিকে চলতি ২০২৫-২৬ অর্ধবছরের জুলাই থেকে অক্টোবর মাস পর্যন্ত গত চার মাসে গড়ে রপ্তানি বেড়েছে ১৩৫ শতাংশ। এই চার মাসে বিভিন্ন ধরনের ফলমূল রপ্তানি থেকে আয় এসেছে পাঁচ কোটি ডলার, অর্থাৎ ৬১০ কোটি টাকা। গত অর্ধবছরের একই সময়ে ছিল দুই কোটি ১৩ লাখ ডলার। গত ২০২৪-২৫ অর্ধবছরে রপ্তানির এ পরিমাণ ছিল ছয় কোটি ৭৫ লাখ ডলার।

কৃষিপণ্য ক্যাটেগরির আওতায় ফল রপ্তানি হয়ে থাকে। এই ক্যাটেগরিতে ১০ ধরনের কৃষিপণ্য রপ্তানি হয়। এর মধ্যে চার মাসে ছয় ধরনের পণ্যের রপ্তানিই কমেছে। ফলমূলের রেকর্ড ৫২০ শতাংশ রপ্তানির পরও কৃষিপণ্যের গড় রপ্তানি ইতিবাচক নয়। ইপিবির তথ্য-উপাত্তে দেখা যায়, ১০ উপখাত মিলে গত চার মাসে কৃষিপণ্যের রপ্তানি আয় কমেছে প্রায় ২ শতাংশ।

জানতে চাইলে ফল রপ্তানিকারক সানসারইজ ইন্টারন্যাশনালের স্বত্বাধিকারী আব্দুল কিয়াম সমকালকে বলেন, প্রবাসী বাংলাদেশিরা বাংলাদেশের ফলের প্রধান ভোক্তা। বিভিন্ন দেশে স্থানীয় বাংলাদেশি দোকানগুলোতে সব সময় মৌসুমি ফলের অপেক্ষায় থাকেন তারা। বিশেষ করে বয়স্কদের এই প্রবণতা বেশি দেখা যায়। এ কারণে বাংলাদেশি চাহিদা ভালো। তবে প্রক্রিয়ায় আন্তর্জাতিক মান অর্জন করতে না পারা দীর্ঘদিন ফল রপ্তানিতে একটা বড় চ্যালেঞ্জ ছিল। সেই জটিলতা কেটেছে। সরকারি ব্যবস্থাপনায় শ্যামপুরে একটি সেন্ট্রাল প্যাকিং হাউস এবং একটি পরীক্ষাগার হয়েছে। এখান থেকে ফল ও সবজি রপ্তানির বিভিন্ন প্রক্রিয়াকরণ, যেমন- ধৌতকরণ, শীতলীকরণ, শুকানো ও মোড়কজাতকরণের সুবিধা দেওয়া হয়। এর ফলে রপ্তানিতে পণ্যের মান এবং প্রক্রিয়ায় আন্তর্জাতিক মান নিশ্চিত করা সম্ভব হচ্ছে। এতে ইউরোপের মতো দেশেও রপ্তানিতে এখন আর সমস্যায় পড়তে হয় না। মূলত এ কারণেই ফলের রপ্তানি বেড়েছে। আগামীতে রপ্তানি আরও বাড়বে বলে আশা প্রকাশ করেন তিনি।

জানা গেছে, আম, কাঁঠাল, লিচু, মাল্টা, আনারস, পেয়ারা, ড্রাগন, লেবু, নারকেল, আমড়া, জলপাইসহ ৩০ থেকে ৩৫ ধরনের ফল রয়েছে রপ্তানি তালিকায়। মধ্যপ্রাচ্যই ফলের প্রধান রপ্তানি বাজার। তবে ইউরোপের বিভিন্ন দেশ, জাপান, কানাডাসহ ৪০টি দেশে রপ্তানি হয় বাংলাদেশের ফল। রপ্তানিকারকরা বলেন, রপ্তানির জন্য ভালো মানের ফল উৎপাদনে উত্তম কৃষিচর্চা অনুসরণ, জমি থেকে ফল সংগ্রহ, আন্তর্জাতিক মানে প্যাকেজিং, সংরক্ষণ এসব প্রক্রিয়া জটিল। সাধারণ চাষির পক্ষে এ প্রক্রিয়াগুলোতে আন্তর্জাতিক মান ঠিক রাখা প্রায়ই সম্ভব হয় না। এ ছাড়া আকাশপথে পরিবহনে সময়মতো বিমান শিডিউল পাওয়া, অতিরিক্ত পরিবহন ব্যয়, মান সনদ প্রাপ্তি ও রপ্তানির প্রায় সব পর্যায়ে নানান দাপ্তরিক জটিলতা রয়েছে। এ বিষয়ে প্রয়োজনীয় পদক্ষেপ নিলে রপ্তানি আরও অনেক বাড়ানো সম্ভব।

