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Betel nut cutters enjoy high incomes

By Win Nyunt Lwin

DEMAND for cut betel nut is providing a lucrative income for some workers in Bahan township, the centre of the industry in Yangon.

Ma Tin Tin Aye, 30, who has more than three years' experience in the industry, said she earned more than K30,000 a month.

Ma Tin Tin Aye, who works at home, cuts an average of 20 viss of betel nut a day, for which she is paid K50 a viss (3.6 pounds).

She enjoys the freedom of working at home - and the money she makes. "Most company employee earn about K20,000 a month," she said.

However, it can take time before newcomers to the industry can match the daily output of experienced cutters such as Ma Tin Tin Aye.

A 17-year-old woman who has been cutting betel for two months said she could manage only six viss a day. She predicted it would take another six months before she could cut 20 viss a day.

Most of the cutters are employed at small businesses where their daily output averages about 15 viss, for which they are paid K750.

The workers have to pay close attention to the work to avoid cutting their hands.

Each worker needs to invest about K4800 in a cutting tool that can be used for about four years.

There are more than 20 betel nut shops along U Chit Maung Road in Bahan township.

Cut betel nut is available at shops at Theingyi market in Shwe Dagon Pagoda Road.

The businesses process about 80 to 200 bags of betel a month, depending on the size of their workforce.

The minimum profit on cut betel is K100 a viss, including K50 for the cutters.

Daw Nwe Nwe Oo, who owns a shop in Bahan township, said they buy the 60 viss bags from Bayintnaung market. The bags cost between K40,000 to K60,000, depending on the quality of the betel nut.

The main betel nut supplying areas are in Ayeyarwaddy, Tanintharyi and Bago divisions, and Mon State.

Daw Eik Thin from Kyaw Trading said best betel nut is grown at Yay and Myeik in Tanintharyi Division.

Betel nut is also exported to India, with about 80 per cent shipped across the border, Daw Eik Thin said. Betel nut prices rise from August to October when it is out of season.