

DRIVE AGAINST FOOD ADULTERATION

Bangladeshi dried food sales drop in US

SHARIEF KHAN from New York

The Bangladesh government's drive against adulterated food, watched widely on the Bangladeshi TV channels in New York and other big cities of the US by the Bangladeshi community, has severely affected sales of Bangladeshi dried foods in the last three to four months.

A number of Bangladeshi retailers say the demand for Bangladeshi dried foods that saw a phenomenal rise in the last three years, has plummeted so much that most of the items are now rotting in their stores and waiting to be dumped.

Four months ago, some 30 plus Bangladeshi food importers in New York used to import 50 to 60 containers of dried foods. This figure has now dropped to around 20 containers, the retailers say.

"People who preferred buying Bangladeshi foods are now buying only Indian and Pakistani eatables," says Zahangir Alam of Bangla Town Supermarket in Brooklyn area of New York city. Alam is involved with grocery business for more than a decade.

Like that in Bangladesh, the 100,000 strong New Yorker Bangladeshis purchase bigger quantity of Bangladeshi food items during Eid season. But this year, they are buying goods from vermicelli to onions imported from India and Pakistan.

"When I grew up in Dhaka, I never bothered about the things I ate," says Monzurul Islam, a businessman, "but after seeing on TV how they adulterate food, I cannot buy Bangladeshi vermicelli."

There are more than 100 Bangladeshi grocery stores in New York, proudly selling Bangladeshi vegetables, fish and dried foods. The vegetables market remains unaffected while the fish market is suffering due to low quality.

Bangladeshi fish started coming to the New York market from 1988-89 and remained as a slow item until 1997-98, when the Bangladeshi community grew to a significant size. As the community became stronger over the years, the demand for Bangladeshi edible oil, spices, soap, chanachur,

ghee, puffed rice, ready-parata, and biscuits started growing rapidly.

While this is good news for Bangladesh, the exporters from Dhaka did not seem to realise that the consumers in the US would be less tolerant of the low quality products, observe the retailers.

"I am sorry to say that we are receiving a lot of rotten fishes. Some fishes have lead inserted in their stomachs so that they weigh more," says shop owner Zahangir Alam who also imports fish.

According to him, lead is often found inside hilsa and shrimps.

However, other popular fishes such as koi, chital, pabda and boal are not much adulterated. "In these cases, we often prefer fishes, which seemed to have been originated from Myanmar or Thailand. As a result, the public trust in Bangladeshi goods has declined," he added.

Md Siddik Manik, manager of Shapla Supermarket in Brooklyn, adds that the anti-food adulteration drive has stopped unloading of more than a 100 Bangladeshi food containers for

the US market. He said these containers were on their way to the US when the TV channels started broadcasting the anti-adulteration drive.

"The (Bangladesh) government must do something about it because the country is being deprived of foreign exchange earning," observed Manik, who's involved with grocery market for two decades.

Masud of Progoti Grocery Inc of the same area notes that Indian and Pakistani items were very strong in terms of sales before the Bangladeshi items made their way in. Indian and Pakistani spicy foods have once again become the high demand items among the community.

"We love Bangladeshi foods. But we surely don't want to eat adulterated food," comments Bakhtiar Uddin, a businessman. "Whatever Bangladeshi imports we consume now, we do it amid suspicion."

Bangladeshi food items are also imported and consumed in notable quantities by the Bangladeshi communities in the UK, Middle East, Europe and Canada.

Int'l confce on micro, SME finances begins today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In a bid to explore the potential and address the challenges of micro-finance and SME finance, a two-day international conference begins today in Dhaka.

South Asia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF), a subsidiary of the World Bank Group, is organising the conference titled 'Bridging the Gap between Micro-Finance and SME Finance' at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Local and international business entrepreneurs, financial institutions, non-government organisations (NGOs), micro-finance institutions, regulators and donors from across the world will participate in the conference.

Grameen Bank Managing Director Prof Muhammad Yunus, Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, PlaNet Finance President Jacques Attali, IFC Director Lawrence Carter will attend the conference, SEDF Programme Manager (Finance Markets) Gilles Galludec said yesterday at a press conference.

He said, in order to bridge the gulf between the micro-finance and SME finance, stakeholders concerned need to put concerted efforts.

"We see a huge wave of micro-finance graduates who are gradually becoming the new generation of small and medium entrepreneurs. But challenges remain to bring micro-finance from the informal sector to formal one," Galludec added.

He said the conference would focus on how to address the problems of micro-financing and SME financing in both traditional and non-traditional sectors.

'Market and Market Needs', 'Strategies to Build the Bridge', 'the Institutional Perspective', 'Necessary Steps to Manage the Change', 'Women Entrepreneurship and the transition from Micro to SME finance', 'Solutions, Instruments and Technology to Improve Operations' and 'Pillars of Conducive Regulatory Environment for Non Traditional Sectors' are the main topics to be discussed at the conference.

SEDF Financial Market Specialist Rehan Rashid, Business Development Officer Anushe A Khan also spoke at the press conference.

Pak textile makers keen to launch joint ventures with Beximco

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Pakistani entrepreneurs have expressed keenness to launch joint venture textile projects with Beximco Textiles Limited, a company of Beximco Group.

The intention was made known when a Pakistani textile delegation visited Beximco Textiles factory, South Asia's largest cotton-to-garment vertical textile complex, recently at Beximco Industrial Park at Kashimpur in Gazipur.

Chief Executive Officer of Beximco Textiles Syed Naved Husain welcomed the delegation led by Shabir Ahmed, chairman of Pakistan Bedwear Exporters' Association. Chief Operating Officer of Beximco Textiles Sardar Ahmed Khan was also present.

The Pak textile delegation saw around the spinning, weaving, dyeing, finishing and stitching units, and particularly the design and product development centre catering to globally reputed brands and retailers.

The Pakistani businessmen appreciated Beximco Textiles' operations, production quality and the technical edge it enjoys. They also visited Bone China Ceramic Plants at the industrial park. "The Pakistani delegates are eyeing avenues to go for joint venture with Beximco Textiles," Naved Husain said adding that they showed keen interest to invest in Bangladesh's textiles sector in general.



PHOTO: STAR

Moyeen Khan, science and ICT minister, inaugurates the five-day 'SoftExpo 2005', the largest software fair organised by Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (Basis), at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

Bangladesh should not fear digital divide

Says minister as Basis software show kicks off

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

As the country's largest software fair began in Dhaka yesterday, the science and information and communication technology minister said Bangladesh should not be afraid of the so-called digital divide, rather the country can see new technologies as an opportunity.

"During the industrial revolution, our country was left behind. This doesn't have to happen again," he said at the inauguration of the five-day SoftExpo 2005 at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Endorsing the main theme of this year's fair 'more IT, more growth', the minister said new technologies are a catalyst for national economic advance.

Khan also talked about 'the problem of limited resources we need to overcome, while implementing new technologies.'

On a more critical note, Danish Ambassador in Dhaka Niels Severin Munk, also speaking during the inauguration, picked up the issue of the submarine fibre optic cable the country is still waiting for.

"At last year's Softexpo 2004 we were talking intensely about the

importance of the fibre optic cable finally reaching Cox's Bazar and Chittagong. We are still waiting for it to arrive. I just cannot understand, what is taking so long?"

He went on to point out, just how much cheaper communication and access to broadband internet would get, if Bangladesh was finally linked up to the fibre optic cable.

Munk was speaking as a representative of a delegation of 30 IT experts from Denmark. The experts are visiting this year's Softexpo with the intent of establishing offshore development and production centres in co-operation with Bangladeshi IT companies. They have scheduled over a hundred meetings with 50 local companies to evaluate each other's possibilities.

With more than 125 companies present at the fair and 100,000 visitors expected, the SoftExpo 2005 promises to be extensively larger than last year's fair. Only 50,000 attended the fair in 2004.

Organised by Basis (Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services) and funded by GrameenPhone with Microsoft, Sun Microsystems and Intel as co-sponsors, the show offers a platform for buyers and sellers to meet and establish or maintain business relationships.

Dayly seminars and an IT-job fair organised by Bdjobs.com, an online job site, will feature in the fair, which remains open to visitors from 10am to 8pm.

NZ pledges Vietnam's early entry into WTO

ANN/VIETNAMNEWS

New Zealand would actively support Vietnam's entry into the World Trade Organisation and work to boost friendly relationship between the two countries, New Zealand Governor-General Silvia Cartwright said in Ha Noi recently.

The Governor-General was speaking at a Nov 24 meeting with President Tran Duc Luong at which measures to strengthen co-operation in the spirit of the Joint Statement signed during Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's visit to New Zealand last May were discussed.

Singapore route now off AirAsia's radar

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

After a long campaign to secure landing rights in Singapore, Malaysian budget carrier AirAsia has said it is no longer interested in the lucrative short-haul route.

"I am not interested in that route. We are going to other places," AirAsia's chief executive Tony Fernandes told AFP over the weekend.

"Even the people in Singapore are getting frustrated" with the fact that AirAsia has not been given rights to fly there, he added.

AirAsia currently serves Singapore from the southern Johor state on the Malaysian side of the causeway linking the two states.

In October, the airline accused Singapore of discrimination after it awarded the long sought-after landing rights to a rival Indonesian carrier.

Fernandes previously said that Singapore was "a country that is supposed to welcome open competition, but they are scared of us" because the city-state's own budget carriers are struggling.



PHOTO: STAR

Tipu Munshi, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BGMEA), speaks at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

Allow yarn import thru' land ports

BGMEA once again urges govt

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Readymade garment (RMG) manufacturers once again sought government permission to resume yarn import through land ports to ensure smooth supply of yarn.

"The price of local yarn is increasing gradually and in last one month the price increased by 30 to 45 cents per kilogram," said Tipu Munshi, who took over as president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BGMEA) on November 16, addressing a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

In India, he said, the price of same quality yarn increased by 10 to 15 cents while in the international market it increased by only 10 cents.

"Moreover, the spinners are also failing to supply yarn as per our requirement, although they receive advance payment," Munshi said adding that earlier the spinners took five to seven days to supply yarn but now they are taking 25 to 45 days.

Although the volume of apparel export is increasing, production of yarn by the local spinners is not matching the domestic demand, Munshi said.

Prior to the MFA (multi-fibre arrangement) phase-out, he said, it was predicted that Bangladesh apparel industry would collapse. "But, we are now free from the fear mainly due to the US safeguard measures under WTO against China."

However, he said, the garment exporters are facing the compliance issues, although the non-compliant garment units are not getting export orders.

The BGMEA set up a Compliance Cell in 2003 to help the non-compliant garment units and so far the cell has supported around 200 garment units to become compliant.

But, the cell has not enough financial support to assist the small and medium garment units to be compliant. "So we urge the government to allocate a special fund for the small and medium garment factories," he added.

BGMEA First Vice-president SM Abu Tayyab, Second Vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy, vice-presidents Shahidul Haq Sikder Litu and Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury Arun and Director SM Fazlul Hoque were present at the function.

ReadyCash Raffle Draw Winners

The latest ReadyCash Raffle draw was held at ReadyCash Bangladesh office at Dhanmondi in Dhaka Saturday, says a press release.

| Prizes | Name of Winners | Card No. |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Kamal General Store-Free Gift Box | Chowdhury M Hoque | 504780010036301 |
| Lifestyle Super Shop-Free Gift Box | Md Ohidul Islam | 5047980010036280 |
| Rainbow Free Lunch/Dinner for Two | Md. Akhtaruzzaman | 5047980010036287 |
| Monorom Free Gift Box | Haji Rafique Uddin | 5047980010036288 |
| Step & Shop Super Store-Free Gift Box | Zia Ul Haque | 5047980010036295 |

Winners can collect their prizes from the Executive, Promotion of ReadyCash within 30 days of this news circulation by producing their ReadyCash card transaction vouchers. ReadyCash encourages its cardholders to read The Daily Star and the Daily Prothom Alo on every Sunday or call our Customer Service at: 8123850, 8130497, 8125294-7.