



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receives a crest from Frozen Foods Exporters Association President Mohammad Musa Miah at the premier's office in Dhaka yesterday.

PM pledges protection of frozen food exporters

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon industry owners to increase the processing of frozen fish and vegetables and export the food items to meet growing demand for Bangladeshi expatriates the world over.

Hasina said if the local fish and vegetables could be frozen with high standards, a huge market of millions of Bangladeshi expatriates could be captured.

The delegation of Frozen Foods Exporters Association led by its President Mohammad Musa Miah and Senior Vice-president Kazi Shahbaz met Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office to apprise her of the problems and prospects of the industry.

Hasina asked the authorities to look into why the frozen-food exporters have not been given yet the cash incentives though there was an allocation for them in the budget, even after seven months of its approval.

In 1997, the European Union countries had stopped importing Bangladeshi shrimps, but Hasina as the then prime minister had arranged a cash incentive of Tk 40 crore for them to update the factories, exporters said.

Following that bailout, within only four months, the shrimp exports to the EU market started in

a full swing, they added.

Hasina assured the frozen-food exporters of providing necessary support from the government to protect their industry and exports from any negative impact of the global recession.

She observed that leather and frozen foods are the two sectors, which have been directly affected by the economic meltdown.

The prime minister also asked all stakeholders of the frozen-food industry, including shrimp cultivators, to take care of the natural environment and biodiversity of the respective areas.

She said many shrimp-hatchery owners caused damage to the embankments in coastal areas by cutting these open for setting pipes to bring brackish seawater for shrimp farming.

Damage from Cyclone Aila was high because the embankments were made vulnerable for bringing in the seawater for shrimp culture.

"Such practice should not go on anymore. There must be an alternative mechanism for collecting seawater for shrimp cultivation which will not harm the embankments," said the prime minister, concerned about the downside of the fore-earner.

Hasina said her last government had created cemented canals for irrigation purposes, a mechanism which can also be used for shrimp

farming. She suggested thinking about the creation of such a mechanism when the rivers will be dredged and the embankments be raised higher than the present altitude.

Hasina said the technology would be incorporated in the shrimp farms on the basis of joint contribution both of the government and farmers.

She emphasised inspiring the agricultural farmers into cultivating salinity-tolerant paddy in coastal areas.

The frozen-food exporters apprised the prime minister that Bangladesh is expected to increase earnings from exporting frozen shrimp and foods up to Tk 10,000 crore by 2015 from Tk 4,000 crore now.

"To reach that goal, the government will have to help the sector with cash incentives," said Musa Miah, the association president.

The prices of shrimps in the markets of the USA and the European nations came down by 50 percent following the global recession, he said.

Musa demanded the government offer bank-loan facility for the frozen foods' processors.

The exporters further asked the government to give them Tk 425 crore from the government incentive package of Tk 5,000 crore for long-term rehabilitation of food-processing factories.

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STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A 3-day fair, Sylhet Housing Fair 09 will begin in London from December 27.

Organisers from the Real Estate Association of Sylhet told a press conference at Sylhet Press Club yesterday that the event targets the non-resident Bangladeshis in London. Creative Events is the event manager.

Twenty-six reputed real estate companies, including 3 from Dhaka, and financial institutions have already expressed their interest to participate in the fair, scheduled to be held at Brady Centre on Hanbury Street in London city.

Such a fair was first organised in 2005 with a very good response from the NRBS.

Minister seeks Japanese investment

UNB, Dhaka

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan yesterday sought Japanese investment in shipbuilding, textile and solar energy sectors.

The call for investment came when Japanese Ambassador Tamotsu Shinotsuka met the minister at his office.

Earlier local businessmen used to import onion from India through different land ports at a rate of \$270 per tonne. But the price has been fixed at \$355 from October 6. In the last 8-9 days 1,612.72 tonnes of onion were imported through Benapole port.

Massive flood and excessive rainfall in Indian southern states have damaged onion crop and supply.

Indian commerce ministry and its affiliated body have reportedly started discouraging export of onion to Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi traders apprehend that the price would not become normal before Eid-ul-Azha although Indian exporters say the situation is normal.

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