

Poultry sector on the brink of collapse: farmers

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Nearly half of 115,000 poultry farms have faced closure over the past one and a half years, said a platform of poultry farmers yesterday.

Bangladesh Poultry Khamar Rokkha Jatiya Parishad blamed the government for not doing enough to tackle avian influenza that shut 54,000 poultry farms over the past one and a half years. The body that promises to protect poultry farms complained of inadequate compensation for the disease-affected farms.

"Production in the farms that are still in operation have declined due to supply shortfall of day-old chicks and increased production costs," Khandker Mohammad Mohsin, general secretary of the 8,000-

member platform, told reporters at the National Press Club.

Representatives of poultry farmers from divisions were also present on the occasion. Mohsin said reduced production of eggs and chicken caused the prices of poultry products to go up in recent months.

Mohsin also said the sector which became self-sufficient and started exports before the first bird flu attack in March 2007, is now on the verge of gradual extinction due to 'faulty' policy of the government.

"Although the law prohibits imports of egg and day-old chick from any bird flu-infected country, the government is allowing traders to import eggs from India, where bird flu still prevails," said Mohsin, citing import documents.

"It is a self-contradictory stance of the government, and a violation of international norms," he said.

Mohsin also said as per rule of World Organisation for Animal Health, a member country cannot import eggs and day-old chicks from a bird flu-infected country.

"To reduce the burden on consumers of increased prices, we urge the government to allow imports from bird flu-free countries, and not from any infected country," he said.

To prevent bird flu, the body urged the government to allow domestic production and imports of vaccines.

It also demanded the government increase the amount of compensation for the culled bird of bird flu-affected farms so that farmers can recover their investments and resume farming.

C&F agents call off strike in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents called off their strike yesterday, following negotiations with customs officials that ended a 30-hour stalemate.

Leaders of Chittagong C&F Agents Association said they withdrew their strike as the customs authority met their demands at a meeting.

The meeting also decided to keep activities at Chittagong Customs House open until 11:00pm yesterday.

The agents went on strike at around 12:30pm on Monday protesting a new container delivery rule set by the authorities.

Md Nasir Uddin, a

member of National Board of Revenue, arrived at the Customs House in the morning and held meetings with officials and the C&F leaders to discuss the issue.

From now, the importers, while getting delivery of a partial consignment, will have to sign an undertaking on all the containers of the consignment, Nasir told reporters.

"And the respective C&F agents have to submit a letter endorsing the undertaking," he said.

The agents would not need to clear all containers in one consignment together from the customs, said Altaf Hossain Bachchu, general secretary of C&F Agents Association.



BABYLON TOURS
Gulam Mustafa Khan, chairman of Babylon Tours, and Nahid Tanvir Mustafa, managing director, receive Century International Quality ERA Award-2010 in gold category from Jose E Prieto, president of BID, at a programme at Geneva in Switzerland recently.

Lighting lives of 7,500 people every day

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"To my dismay, the real estate sector has resented the government requirement of 5 percent and worked to lower it to 3 percent. I urged them in various forums that instead of resenting it they should try to factor it in their business model."

"People are interested in buying green building. So, the realtors can incorporate it in their business model. But they seem more interested in not trying to install the system at all."

Like the solar system project, the IDCOL's biogas project also has not created much enthusiasm, admitted Sharif.

IDCOL has set up 25,000 plants so far, and is installing 500 plants a month.

"It is a bit slow for us. Bangladesh is a rainy country. So in two to three months we do not get any production. I am looking at an alternative technology, which will help us offset the three-month production gap."

"We are refocusing our effort. We hope to do well."

He said there should not be any effort to set up biogas plants for free, because that would destroy the market like it had happened in the past. "Our model is inclusive and it is an ownership model."

He said the IDCOL's flagship solar home system programme is recognised as one of the best renewable energy programmes in the world.

"If we remain focused on the quality and the government makes sure that the rooftop installation system as required by the Power Development Board to get new connection is properly monitored then it will not be impossible to reach the government's target on renewable energy."

Bangladesh plans to generate 5 percent of its total electricity requirement from renewable energy sources by 2015.

The IDCOL is adding 2.5MW of electricity per month. By 2014, it would be able to add 160MW.

He said the IDCOL is due to set up a solar testing lab. "We hope the government would mandate the testing of all panels coming into Bangladesh making sure they are at par with global standards."

He urged the government to create a lucrative incentive tariff policy to attract large businesses and private sector players to invest in the business.

Sharif said efforts to introduce renewable energy system and energy-saving initiatives should go hand in hand, as there are many ways one could save energy.

IDCOL's plan is to be a large infrastructure financier in the country. It has got approval from the board to finance \$43million for two power projects.

"We have also financed many other power projects. We are also considering financing a private port. Our infrastructure business also looks good. My only hope is that IDCOL can keep up the speed."

He thanked the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, German Financial Cooperation kfw, German Technical Cooperation GTZ, Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and Netherlands Development Organisation SNV for supporting IDCOL.

Stocks slip back into the red

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks returned to the red yesterday, breaking a two-day rally, as investors sold shares and mutual fund units to pocket profits.

The General Index, the yardstick of Dhaka Stock Exchange, lost 56.41 points or 1.09 percent, to close at 5,126.16.

The weakening of the rally in the bank sector acted as the prime catalyst to the decline. The profit-booking stance of investors drove up the sales pressure that essentially affected all major sectors, an analyst said.

Grameenphone, which represents the telecoms sector, lost 1.97 percent, followed by banks that declined 1.97 percent, non-bank financial institutions 1.62 percent and textile 1.04 percent.

General insurance went up 1.42 percent and life insurance 0.95 percent.



DHL
Md Abdur Rahman Sarker, managing director of Shahjalal Islami Bank, and Desmond Quiah, country manager of DHL Express, exchange documents of a deal at the bank's head office in Dhaka recently. The bank can now transmit its international documents, letters and parcel through DHL.



STANCHART
Abrar A Anwar, managing director of Standard Chartered Bank, Bangladesh, and SM Shamsul Arefin, managing director of Uttara Finance and Investments Ltd, shake hands after signing a deal in Dhaka recently. The bank will provide credit facility and complete cash management solution to Uttara Finance.

Three-day tourism fair starts Friday

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A three-day international tourism fair, Dhaka Travel Mart 2012, is set to begin in Dhaka on Friday, organizers said yesterday.

Faruk Khan, civil aviation and tourism minister, is expected to inaugurate the fair at Sonargaon Hotel, while Atharul Islam, civil aviation and tourism secretary, will be present as the special guest.

The Bangladesh Monitor, a travel and tourism publication, is organising the fair for the ninth time.

Kazi Wahidul Alam, editor of The Monitor and chairman of DTM 2012 organising committee, announced the fair schedule from a press conference in the city yesterday.

"We have been arranging the fair regularly for the last eight years to promote travel, tourism, hospitality and aviation," Alam said. He expects a huge turnout at the fair. Over 20,000 visitors attended the three-day fair last year, he said.

The fair will be open from 10am to 8pm with an entry fee of Tk 20.

Grameen Bank directors want Yunus in MD-search panel

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Later, when the minutes of the 93rd meeting were given to Huq for approval he said he did not think the minutes included what were actually discussed at the meeting. Eight borrower-directors differed with the chairman about the minutes.

On November 22, he reversed the decision apparently due to government interference.

Huq, appointed by the government, later formed a five-member committee and took Yunus' name off the list. The new committee comprised three government representatives and two borrower-directors. Huq made himself head of the committee.

The committee could not be approved by the board after eight borrower-directors differed with the chairman.

Meanwhile, a sudden burst from Finance Minister AMA Muhith shocked members of Grameen Bank, as they thought the thorn in the relationship between Dr Yunus and a section of the government had been removed after the prime minister requested the European Union to nominate him as the president of the World Bank.

"Some members (of the Grameen Bank board) proposed appointment of Dr Yunus as the chairman of the selection committee. But we cannot accept this as a previous MD should not have any role in selecting his successor,"

Muhith told reporters on Saturday.

The post of the managing director of Grameen Bank fell vacant after its iconic chief executive Yunus stepped down in May last year.

The Grameen Bank Employees Union also urged the chairman to make Yunus the head of the selection committee, said a leader of the union.

Shajeda, Rehana Aktar, Sultana, Tahsina Khatun, Saleha Khatun, Parul Begum, Merina, Shahida Begum and Momela Begum are the new members of the board.

Lawyers said the government cannot impose a selection committee on the board.

"The board is empowered to form the committee, and it will be decided by the majority of the board," said a lawyer, who is aware of the situation.

"But here the chairman is not accepting the decision of the majority of the board members. As a result, he is violating the laws. But the government is not taking any step against him," he told The Daily Star, requesting not to be named.

Both the lawyer and a group of supporters of Grameen Bank said if the committee is imposed from outside, ignoring the decision of the majority of the board, it will only reinforce the notion that the government wants to take over the bank.

Meanwhile, the removal of Yunus

from the bank has apparently started to affect profitability of its core business -- a fact that was repeatedly stated by supporters of the anti-poverty activist at home and abroad that his sudden and undignified departure from the bank could risk derailing its success.

The bank made Tk 40 crore in profits from its core business, which is microcredit, in 2010. But it incurred a loss of Tk 24 crore last year.

As of March this year, losses have continued, standing at Tk 59.52 crore, according to Grameen Bank data.

"There is a serious leadership crisis at the field level. The field-level managers cannot give decisions when a problem surfaces," said an official of Grameen Bank.

However, Chairman Huq claimed the bank's business is on the right track.

"We disbursed Tk 2,100 crore in January and February in 2012, which is about Tk 600 crore more than that in 2010," said Huq. "Our profit has also gone up. In 2011 it was Tk 85 crore, which was Tk 76 crore in 2010," he told The Daily Star on Monday.

But an official of the bank said: "That is because the bank is making a huge amount of money from its deposits with the commercial banks following the rise in their interest rates for deposit."

The bank has 83.5 lakh members, 96 percent of whom are women.



NCC BANK
Mohammed Nurul Amin, managing director of NCC Bank, inaugurates an ATM booth of the bank at Osmani Medical College in Sylhet recently. TM Faruque Chowdhury, deputy managing director, was also present.



WEAB
Ghulam Mohammad Quader, commerce minister; AK Azad, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and Nasreen Fatema Awal, president of Women Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh, attend the association's 12 founding anniversary celebration programme in Dhaka recently.



ACCA BANGLADESH
Akbar Ali Khan, former caretaker government adviser, attends a pre-discussion event on "Budget 2012-2013 and our expectation", organised by ACCA Bangladesh, at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in Dhaka recently. Mohua Rashid, country manager of ACCA Bangladesh, was also present.