

# Calls for quality seeds to boost harvests

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Policymakers and experts yesterday called upon private companies to supply quality seeds to farmers who count losses from using substandard seeds.

"Act responsibly and do not fall for the temptation to make quick profits," said Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury. "Farmers will not touch your seeds again once they are cheated by your second-rate seeds."

According to Chowdhury, the agriculture ministry sits with seed suppliers whenever there are reports of crop losses due to dodgy seeds.

The prevalence of substandard seeds is due to the pull for windfall gains from imports of cheap, second-rate seeds, she said.

"The farmers suffer."

"The government's vigilance and monitoring will be there, but responsible behaviour

from suppliers is necessary as well," she said.

Chowdhury also called upon the private sector to establish research centres to concoct better varieties of seeds, such that Bangladesh becomes a food exporter.

Food Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque said many farmers missed out on good yields due to the substandard seeds supplied by some private sector companies.

"We have to rigorously monitor seed quality before they go out to the farmers," Razzaque said. "We will have to verify the claims the companies make on the labels of packages."

The use of seeds supplied by companies -- both private and public -- has increased over the years. It is now 23 percent of total seeds used by farmers. Five years ago, it was 13 percent, Agriculture Secretary Monzur Hossain said.

The annual requirement of seeds including cereal, pulses,

oil and potato was 11.72 lakh tonnes but the supply of quality seeds was 2.06 lakh tonnes in fiscal 2009-10, according to data from the agriculture ministry.

Md Nazmul Huda, president of Bangladesh Society of Seed Technology, has an explanation why poor quality seeds make its way to the farmers.

Packaging of seeds takes place in as many 144 different places and most of them do not have the facility to undertake quality checks before packing them up.

Anwar Faruque, additional secretary of the ministry of agriculture said the demand for quality seed is rising as they can increase yields by 15-20 percent.

FR Malik, president of Bangladesh Seed Association, therefore urged the government to improve the infrastructure to make it more conducive for research and development of superior quality seed varieties.

# Jetro stresses formation of study group for FTA

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The chairman of Japan External Trade Organisation (Jetro), Hiroyuki Ishige, yesterday suggested Bangladesh and Japan form a study group to begin the process of a free trade agreement (FTA) or an economic partnership agreement (EPA) between the two countries.

He spoke at a meeting with Dipu Moni, foreign minister, who is now in Tokyo on an official visit.

Dipu Moni stressed the action plan, as enshrined in the joint statement, to work out the framework of an economic zone exclusively for Japanese investors in Bangladesh.

She also said the governments of the two countries should pursue the EPA or FTA processes expeditiously, according to a foreign ministry statement.

During the meeting held at Jetro Headquarters, Ishige said their regional office in Dhaka has emerged as one of the busiest Jetro regional offices receiving equal number of business queries compared to its regional office in New York.

According to a Jetro study of 2010, 87 percent Japanese entrepreneurs responded positively to choosing Bangladesh as their desired destination, either for business or investment, the minister said.

Ishige said an investment mission of Jetro, after visiting Bangladesh last February, estimated rise of Bangladesh apparel industry soon as the leading apparel maker in the world.

The investment mission also praised the emerging electronics and IT industries of Bangladesh.

Dipu Moni hoped Ishige would have an opportunity during his upcoming visit to Bangladesh to explore the state-of-the-art technology in the fields of pharmaceuticals, ceramics, textiles, garments and leather products.

Ishige reiterated the support of Jetro to promote more Japanese investment in Bangladesh, while Dipu Moni urged the Japanese side to continue funding, in particular the Padma Bridge project under a separate framework, and to initiate the metro rail project in Bangladesh.



CONCORD  
Anup Kumar Sharkar, general manager for marketing of Concord Entertainment Co, receives the highest taxpayer award for 2011 by Chittagong Customs and Excise and VAT Commissionerate from Abul Kashem, lawmaker, at a recent ceremony. The National Board of Revenue gave the award.

# Western Union's agents form largest network in Bangladesh

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Western Union's agents now form the largest international remittance network in Bangladesh by exceeding a record 12,000 agent locations across the country.

Four leading banks -- Agrani, Islami, NCC and Uttara -- have recently become Western Union's agents, bringing a total of 2,000 additional locations to the network, said a statement.

Consumers in Bangladesh can now receive Western Union's money transfer facilities from abroad across all 64 districts and 509 upazilas in Bangladesh, from Teknaf to Tentulia.

Some agent locations are open beyond traditional nine-to-five business hours and on weekends.

"Through our 12,000 locations operated by 20 principal bank agents in Bangladesh, Western Union serves the Bangladeshis who receive money from family and loved ones working and living overseas," said Patricia Riingen, senior vice president (East and South Asia) of Western Union.

"Western Union has been bringing the world to Bangladesh for 18 years, connecting it with a global network of 500,000 agent locations in more than 200 countries and territories, providing coverage of countries popular with the six million Bangladeshis abroad."

Riingen said: "Over the years, we have enabled and participated in the growth of overseas immigration and the change in Bangladesh's economy by offering convenience, reliability and speedy transfers of monies -- majority of which are funds for regular financial support and living expenses."

In 2011, Western Union transferred money into Bangladesh from 165 countries, up from 61 in 2004.

Western Union also launched a new mobile phone-based money transfer service early this year with Dhaka Bank and Banglalink, enabling consumers in Bangladesh to receive money directly and instantly into their mobile wallets.

Globally Western Union recorded revenue of \$5.5 billion in 2011, an increase of 6 percent compared to



BRAC EPL  
Mohammed Rahmat Pasha, managing director of BRAC EPL Stock Brokerage, attends the company's branch managers' meeting in its new branch at Dhanmondi in Dhaka recently. Mizanur Rahman, chief operating officer, was also present.



WESTERN UNION  
Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman, along with senior officials of Western Union and its principal agents, poses for photograph at a programme to mark the money transfer company's 12,000 agent locations in Bangladesh, at a hotel on Tuesday.

# House Building Finance posts Tk 128cr in profit

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bangladesh House Building Finance Corporation (BHBFC) has provisionally posted a net profit of Tk 128 crore for the year 2011-2012, said a statement yesterday.

The corporation's profits rose by 14.02 percent from Tk 112 crore in the previous year.

Loan recovery improved significantly, bringing down the current rate of classified loans to 12.93 percent.

The BHBFC disbursed Tk 300 crore of the Tk 366 crore that it had sanctioned in the year. Growth in sanctioning was 41.31 percent.

The corporation paid Tk 42.50 crore in income tax.

The targeted sanctioning and disbursement for the next fiscal year are Tk 400 crore and Tk 350 crore respectively.

# Experts back mine-specific method to coal extraction

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh should adopt a mine-specific method to extract coal to produce electricity as any single method might not suit all the mines in the country, experts said yesterday.

They said the open pit mining method could suit mines in Boropukuria and Phulbari in Dinajpur to reap maximum economic benefits, while the underground mining could fit other fields.

Tawfiq-E-Elahi Chowdhury, energy adviser to the prime minister, said a panel is working to suggest mine-specific extraction strategies.

Their comments came at a roundtable, "Coal Mining Challenges in Bangladesh" at the CIRDAP auditorium in Dhaka. Energy & Power, a fortnightly magazine, organised the programme to mark its 10th anniversary in publication.

High-quality bituminous coal mines have been discovered at Khalashpir of Rangpur, Boropukuria, Phulbari and Jamalganj of Joypurhat in the north-western zone of Bangladesh.

The total reserve is around 2,797 million tonnes and the heat generation capacity is equivalent

to about 37 trillion cubic feet of gas, according to official estimates.

Of the five coal mines, Boropukuria began commercial production in 2005 and uses underground mining to extract 10 lakh tonnes of coal a year. The coal is used to run a 250-megawatt powerplant.

Presenting a keynote paper, Prof Ajoy K Ghose, a mining expert and editor of the Indian Journal of Mines, Metals & Fuels, said coal's contribution to the future energy systems of Bangladesh would be vital.

But it is unfortunate that despite discovery of substantial good quality coal reserves in north-west Bangladesh, development of the domestic coal reserves has been mired in controversy and political wrangling, he said.

Ghose supported the open pit mining method for the Phulbari coal mine.

Badrul Imam, a geology professor at Dhaka University, said socio-political problems, rather than technological, are holding back the country from taking a decision in coal extraction.

"The issue has become a football game for the country's two main political parties."

Shubid Ali Bhuiyan, chairman

of the parliamentary standing committee on the power, energy and mineral resources ministry, said Bangladesh would have to go for open pit mining for maximum extraction of the natural resources.

AK Azad, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said Bangladesh must go for coal-based power plants so that the country does not need to spend thousands of crores of taka on subsidies to run oil-based electricity stations.

"There is no alternative to coal-based power plants, whether we run them with internal resources or import coal from outside."

Benu Gopal Dey, a member of the government-sponsored national coal extraction policy committee, said the government would have to engage all stakeholders in every stage of the process to successfully extract coal.

Nehal Uddin, a director of Bangladesh Geological Survey, said the Phulbari coal field should go for open pit mining as its geological structure will not support underground mining.

Khandaker Saleq Sufi, an energy expert and an energy adviser to the Afghan government, said the extraction method

has to be mine-specific.

He suggested the government go for public private partnership in extracting coal from Phulbari.

Annisul Huq, former president of FBCCI, said politics is creating a problem in reaching a decision on coal extraction. "The world is benefiting from coal."

Md Mosharrar Hossain, a former chairman of Petrobangla, said Boropukuria is an ideal place for open-pit mining and the country has to take a decision quickly.

Yunus Akand, a former director of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, said Bangladesh cannot afford to delay developing mines any longer, as the social and environmental costs for developing mines would be higher in the future.

He also said the country should not worry about the challenges it will face in extracting mines as there are ways to manage them.

Mushfiqur Rahman, who teaches part-time at Jahangirnagar University, said coal cannot be extracted with an open pit or underground method in all the mines. So, the debate over the mining should be solved, he added.

Mollah Amzad Hossain, editor of Energy & Power, presided over the roundtable.



PIZZA INN  
Mohammed Foods and Allied Pvt Ltd, a concern of RAK Group, organises a press meet to launch Pizza Inn at its Gulshan branch in Dhaka on Monday. Mohammed Foods is the master licensee of the American pizza chain in Bangladesh.



HSBC  
Md Khairul Islam, country representative of WaterAid in Bangladesh, and Andrew Tilke, chief executive officer of HSBC Bangladesh, attend the launch of the Bangladesh part of HSBC Water Project in Dhaka yesterday.

# Vocational training for disadvantaged women

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

European Union, the government and the private sector in Bangladesh have joined hands to contribute to the skills development of disadvantaged groups through technical and vocational education and training.

Disadvantaged women, including people with disabilities, will be provided training at the vocational training institute of the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) at Ganakbari in Savar.

The Centre of Excellence for Leather in Savar will give off-the-job training with on-the-job work during which the apprentices can earn while they learn.

A statement of the EU yesterday said both the centres are examples of larger portfolio of trials tested through the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Reform project.

The reform project is a Tk 160 crore initiative of Bangladesh government, funded by the European Union, and is being implemented by the ILO in partnership with government agencies.

William Hanna, ambassador and head of the Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh, and André Bogui, country director of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), yesterday visited the two skills development pilot initiatives.

# United Airways to resume Bangkok flights

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The airline will use MD-83 aircraft, which is a safe and speedy aircraft with comfortable seats, Islam said.

In 2011, 70,000 Bangladeshis visited Thailand, according to the Thai embassy in Bangladesh.

The trade between Bangladesh and Thailand has increased by 40 percent, while it was worth \$1.2 billion during 2011-12.

At present, United Airways operates flights in international routes from Dhaka to Jeddah, Dubai, Muscat, Kuala Lumpur, Kathmandu and Kolkata, and also from Chittagong to Muscat and Kolkata.

The airline also operates flights to all major domestic destinations from Dhaka.

Now United has nine aircraft -- two DASH 8-100, two ATR-72, three MD-83 and two Airbus-310 -- in its fleet. The company is also set to procure four Jetstream aircraft by September 2012 with an aim to expand its domestic routes.

"We are going to start passenger flights to Barisal from next month. We have plans to fly to Karachi, Doha and Yangon also by the end of this year," said Islam.

United Airways completed its first five-year journey yesterday. The company's authorised capital is Tk 1,000 crore, while paid-up capital is Tk 441 crore,