

যুক্তরাজ্য থেকে মুহুর্তেই টাকা পাঠান

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Processed foods to watch out for

Many of them have no licence

SOHEL PARVEZ

How safe it is to consume processed foods remains up in the air due to government's negligence, with many of the items having no quality certification from government agencies.

Of the hundreds of processed food products, Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI), the standardisation and certification body, stipulates certification for only 59.

Certification requirement for the rest of the items are 'optional', meaning manufacturers are free to decide whether they will seek licences from the BSTI and comply with its standards.

Conversely, it is the processors themselves who deem whether the items are safe for consumption or not -- and not the government's standardisation and certification body.

Consumers and analysts expressed concerns over the matter and wanted the BSTI to bring all processed food items under the umbrella of compulsory certification.

"All food products must be standardised and brought under the BSTI's mandatory licensing regime," said ABM Faroque, a pharmacy professor at Dhaka University.

Referring to the recent cancellations of optional licences of Pran and some other processors of fruit drinks, Faroque said consumers do not want to hear the difference between drinks and juice.

Fruit drinks contain a minimum of 10 percent fruit pulp, while fruit juices contain 88 percent pulp.

"People do not understand this sort of

distinction. They buy and consume processed foods in good faith that these products are made of natural ingredients and are safe," said Faroque, also a campaigner for consumer rights.

He said no food item can be traded in the US without the approval of its Food and Drug Administration.

"But companies here are selling many food items through misleading advertisements and using artificial ingredients. It is a crime," said Faroque, who represents Dhaka University at a committee at the BSTI.

The BSTI, however, said it lacks the manpower and laboratory support to bring more products under the compulsory licensing requirement.

"Our surveillance is better if the list of products under the compulsory certification category is kept small," AK Fazlul Ahad, director general of BSTI, told The DailyStar recently.

"Our volume of work will rise. It will be tough for us to carry out surveillance activities properly if we increase the number of products under mandatory licensing requirement," he said.

The BSTI chief said the Pure Food (amendment) Act 2005 empowers agencies such as the local government authorities to take action against food adulteration.

So far, the BSTI has developed standards for 348 processed food items, but none for many of the popular items such as the 'mango bar'.

Officials said the agency makes certification of a product compulsory based on directives from policymakers and demand from consumers and processors.

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Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman speaks at a programme to inaugurate the operations of 'large-loan monitoring software' of the central bank, at the regulator's headquarters in Dhaka yesterday.

BB launches software to monitor large loans

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The central bank has introduced a system for direct and close monitoring of big loans in the backdrop of various cases of embezzlement including that of the Hall-Mark Group.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman yesterday inaugurated the operations of 'large-loan monitoring software' at the Bank's headquarters in Dhaka.

"In the existing system, it is not possible to get an idea about the nature, evolution and future of loans taken by a borrower, but under the

new system almost all large borrowers will be kept under strict monitoring," Rahman said at the function.

Banks will have to maintain a database of the large borrowers and make the data available online for the central bank.

The data to be submitted include the borrowers' debt-equity ratio, profitability, loan concentration in a sector, and the amount of non-funded facility converted to funded facility.

About 25-30 percent of the banks' total loans are in the hands of large borrowers, according to BB statistics.

Sonali Bank's Ruposhi Bangle Hotel branch gave Hall-Mark and five other companies a total of Tk 3,547 crore in loans and a large part of the loans was non-funded through bill purchase.

These loans created a big liquidity crisis in the entire banking system.

The BB has so far taken various steps to prevent the recurrence of such scams, and monitoring large loans using the new software is one of the steps.

The governor said the BB has taken multipronged programmes to bring strategic changes in its

monitoring. He said the central bank has been monitoring the overall situation in the banking sector through various measures.

Rahman said the new system will allow the BB to know how the non-funded loans turn into funded loans, their continuous evolution and the amount.

Due to non-funded loans, the loan portfolios of the banks become risky and it is a major cause of increase in default loans.

The software will enable BB to forecast on any liquidity crisis and advise the banks to take corrective measures, Rahman said.



Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Queen Gyaltsuen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck meet Managing Director of Incepta Pharmaceuticals Abdul Muktedir while visiting the manufacturing facility of Incepta in Savar recently.

Foreign investment in stocks on the rise

SARWAR A CHOWDHURY

Foreign investment in the capital market is on the rise, as was evident in the first half of the current month.

In January, some Tk 100 crore was received in foreign investment by the premier bourse, but as of February 14, around Tk 76.46 crore flew in.

Foreign investors bought shares worth Tk 143.06 crore and sold shares worth Tk 66.59 crore between February 1 and February 14.

Local stockbrokers, who trade on behalf of the foreign investors, said a revival is being seen in the last one month after two years of descent.

The single-day turnover rose to

Tk 550 crore in the middle of February, from Tk 150 crore a month ago.

There is a correlation between the turnover and foreign investor participation.

The higher the turnover, the greater the transaction from foreign investors, said the stockbrokers.

The benchmark price index, DSEX, also increased by more than 100 points during the first half of the month.

The upcoming corporate reporting season, and possible dividend declarations are fuelling optimism among the investors including the foreign ones, the stockbrokers said.

They also expect more foreign investment in future, as the cen-

tral bank recently allowed local stockbrokers to share profit on trading commission with the foreign stockbrokers, who trade from abroad on behalf of the foreign investors.

Previously, profit-sharing on trading commission was not allowed, which discouraged foreign stockbrokers from participating in the country's capital market.

"Apart from the liquidity flow, the country's economic indicators such as inflation, remittance, export and import are in a good position, meaning this is an ideal time for investment," said Mohammed Rahmat Pasha, chief executive director of BRAC-EPL, a leading stockbroker for foreign investors.

Brick-kiln pollution threatens farming in Chittagong

UDAY SANKAR DAS, from Chittagong

With brick kilns sprawling all over the places in Chittagong, sometimes in utter disregard to the law, there is a growing concern over its negative impact not only on the environment but also on the agricultural output in the region.

In a recent investigation, it has been revealed that out of more than 400 brick kilns in Chittagong, nearly 200 are operating illegally, and these do not have the required environmental clearance certificates.

Bricks are being manufactured using the age-old 'drum chimney' method, and the Department of Environment (DoE) is totally incapable of taking any corrective action.

The DoE had given a notice in local newspapers in November last year, asking all brick kiln owners to convert their kilns into modern environment-friendly kilns as required by law.

Although the initiative was taken by the DoE to modernise the kilns within June this year, it has been alleged that the initiative was limited to the newspaper notice only.

Zafar Alam, a director of the DoE in Chittagong, said they had conducted drives and also shut down a number of kilns. But, the owners of these kilns subsequently take the matter to the court and manage to operate the kilns again.

Alam also said they have been able to close 11 more kilns that were set up near residential areas.

A recent report on brick kilns in Chittagong also found that soil from river banks and also from agricultural lands is being used in these kilns because of a shortage of soil required to manufacture bricks. This has resulted in enormous damage to agriculture in the

region.

Prof Dr Mohammed Jashimuddin, a director of Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science at Chittagong University, said the soil that is used for this purpose is called 'top soil', which is very fertile. Continuous uses of this soil in brick kilns lead to fertility deficit in the arable lands and with the passage of time, these lands lose their agricultural usefulness totally.

Particular damage is done to the production of boro crop, said Dr Alak Pal, an associate professor at the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Chittagong University.

Damage is also inflicted on the soil as its micro-organism is getting destroyed and the water-table is also being adversely affected, Pal said.

It is also illegal to set up brick kilns within three kilometres of any residential area, upazilla headquarters and fruit gardens, but this law is flouted rampantly.

Jashimuddin said the fuel regulations are not adhered to and the carbon emission is so high that it affects the ozone layer and the local environment as well.

He said carbon gets accumulated in residences and also trees, which affects the productivity of fruit trees in the vicinity.

Pal said the risk of people being affected with respiratory diseases increases because of the type of coal and other fuels used in the brick kilns.

Alam at the DoE in Chittagong said whenever they receive any complaint about brick kilns operating illegally, they carry out drives.

He, however, cited manpower crisis in his department which slows their work in enforcing the regulations.

IP registration rises as firms become savvy

SUMAN SAHA

The registration of intellectual property (IP) rights by local companies is on the rise, with companies becoming increasingly conscious of brand rights and trademarks against piracy.

IP registration is a must for companies to protect their trademarks, logos, patent rights and industrial designs against any piracy.

The Department of Patents, Designs and Trademarks (DPDT), an agency under the industries ministry, issued 759 trademark registrations to the local companies in 2012, up 86.48 percent year-on-year.

"The rate at which businesses sought trademark registration rose drastically in the last couple of years, thanks to a boom in the domestic manufacturing and services sectors due to drop in imports," said AK Azad, former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

"They are trying to capture the domestic market and give brand identity to their products," he added.

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