

Get ready for global halal food market: minister

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday called upon local entrepreneurs to produce halal foods to meet the growing global demand in the segment.

"We are yet to focus on an area and that is halal food. The market size of halal foods globally is bigger than that of garments at nearly \$500 billion," said Kamal at a roundtable at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka.

Bangla-language business daily Bonik Barta organised the discussion on the role of the livestock sector in poverty alleviation. Its Editor Dewan Hanif Mahmud moderated the discussion.

"You can form joint ventures with foreign firms in countries that have made strides in the halal food segment," Kamal said.

The global halal market is estimated at \$2.3 trillion with 67 per cent of the market, or \$1.4 trillion,

consisting of food and beverages, according to Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

Citing cattle sales worth Tk 19,229 crore ahead of Eid-ul-Azha every year, he said this is a huge market.

Kamal also called upon businesses to go for ventures under public-private partnership to develop the country's livestock sector.

Analysts said an inadequate supply of vaccines and improved breeds, dearth of field level staff at the Department of Livestock Services, absence of cattle disease diagnostic centres and inadequate financing are major barriers to livestock development.

"We are yet to evaluate the importance of the livestock sector. We can get more benefits than other countries by considering it as an industry," Kamal said.

Bangladesh has more than 2.5 crore cattle and is producing more than 60 lakh tonnes of milk a year.

However, the country has to

import powder milk to meet its domestic requirement.

Kamal said 56 per cent of the local requirement for milk and milk products is met through imports. "We can reduce import by giving priority to the sector."

The government recently approved some projects to promote development of the livestock sector, he said. The sector will not only provide nutrition but also generate jobs and boost export, he added.

Kazi Abdul Fattah, a former director general of the Department of Livestock Services, said strengthening the department with adequate manpower is needed immediately. Capacity building is also necessary, he said.

FH Ansarey, executive director of ACI Ltd, stressed the need to increase productivity in cattle rearing to reduce costs of production.

Pasturelands are not essential for cattle farming as cattle can be reared in a confined environment,

he added.

"We see a frequent occurrence of diseases. The extent of diseases will decline if farmers are trained on hygiene practices," he said.

He also called for giving soft loans to establish disease diagnostic centres for cattle in the suburbs.

Moshiur Rahman, convener of Bangladesh Poultry Industries Coordination Committee, said the government's permission to import vaccines enabled the poultry sector to remain free from the avian influenza in the last couple of years.

"Suddenly, the livestock department has stopped giving clearance to import vaccines, although imports have not been banned," he said, adding that no permit was given to import vaccines in the last four months.

Fazle Rahim Khan Shahriar, managing director of Aftab Bahumukhi Farms, and M Anisur Rahman, chief operating officer of Pran Dairy Ltd, also spoke.



Faruq M Ahmed, additional managing director of City Bank, and Md Nazrul Hasan, managing director of Dhaka Power Distribution Company, attend the signing ceremony of an agreement at the bank's head office in Dhaka. The bank will provide automated utility bill collection through its selected branches and internet banking platform for DPDC.

EU will 'lurch in wrong direction' if UK leaves: Hammond

AFP, London

The European Union will "lurch very much in the wrong direction" if Britain votes to leave in an in/out referendum, Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond warned Sunday.

The British minister predicted that negotiations with other European leaders to secure a reform deal for the bloc "would go

to the wire" at a European Council summit on Thursday and Friday.

British Prime Minister David Cameron is trying to force changes in four main areas, the most contentious being limiting access to welfare benefits for EU migrants for their first four years in the country.

"There isn't a deal yet," Hammond told BBC's Andrew Marr Show. "We have to make progress, there are blanks in the text."



Tofail Ahmed, commerce minister, opens a showroom of German kitchen brand Nolte at Jamuna Future Park in Dhaka on Saturday. Thomas Prinz, German ambassador to Bangladesh; Selim H Rahman, chairman of Hatil Complex, and Selva Kumar, managing director of Nolte FZE, were also present.



Masud Uddin Chowdhury, chairman of Picasso Hospitality and Entertainment, and Md Tabarak Hossain Bhuiyan, deputy managing director of Prime Bank, pose at the signing of an agreement at the bank's head office in Dhaka. The bank's cardholders will enjoy 15 percent discounts on food at Picasso.

Germany wants to introduce random emissions tests on cars

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany wants to carry out unannounced emissions tests on all carmakers, Transport Minister Alexander Dobrindt said on Sunday, aiming to reinstate confidence in the industry that was shattered by the Volkswagen cheating scandal.

"There will be controls on vehicles in the style of doping tests (for athletes)," Dobrindt told the newspaper Bild. "Unannounced and every year."

Mini Mart celebrates 20 years in business

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This prompted her to come up with the idea of setting up a chain shop so that women could display and sell their products easily and get better prices.

The first Mini Mart was set up in a rented building and MIDAS financed 18 women who supplied their products to the chain store. Initially, MIDAS helped women entrepreneurs in quality control and management. Later, full control was handed over to them.

Thanks to the success of the initiative, more branches were set up in Uttara, Gulshan and Bailey Road. In 2010, Mini Mart made a foray into the port city of Chittagong.

Currently, 35 women entrepreneurs are selling their products, such as garments, handicrafts and food through the five outlets. Every producer in the chain shop has a unique code, which helps each entrepreneur to get information about sales.

Speaking at the ceremony at MIDAS Centre in Dhanmondi, MA Mannan, state minister for finance and planning, said initiatives such as Mini Mart have become successful because of the hard work and efforts of the entrepreneurs. "All of you deserve plaudits from the society and the government," he added.

Reminiscing the days leading to the establishment of Mini Mart, Rokia said women doing business had to share a percentage of their profits with middlemen.

"So, we wanted to establish a system where the entrepreneurs will run the business, thus eliminating the role of the middleman. Today the Mini Marts are a huge success and bring profits for its sponsors."

She said many women entrepreneurs borrowed money from MIDAS Financing even 10 times and no one ever defaulted on their loans.

"The Mini Marts have helped entrepreneurs build a network among themselves as well as become leaders."

Hosne Ara Begum, co-chairperson of Dhanmondi Mini Mart, said women entrepreneurs were inexperienced but were able to ride out the challenges because of the support.

"The collateral-free loans gave us a lot of courage."

Shafique-ul-Azam, managing director of MIDAS Financing, said Mini Mart is a history of dedication of the entrepreneurs. "They have set up a model for others to follow."

Since inception, MIDAS Financing has lent Tk 222 crore among 1,500 women entrepreneurs, said Azam.

Women who started with Mini Mart have emerged as successful entrepreneurs in the country, he added.

Nasrin Ruba, an entrepreneur, said she along with some others has set up a resort in Gazipur, which is doing good business. Roushan Ara Mahmud, another entrepreneur, said she now supplies homemade food items to major department stores in Dhaka.

Aman Group to set up economic zone

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Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) will award a prequalification licence to Aman Group today to let it invest \$267 million or around Tk 2,100 crore to set up an economic zone in Narayanganj.

It will be the sixth economic zone to be built by a private sector entity.

Aman Economic Zone will be developed on a 150-acre plot, though the licence is for 90 acres, BEZA officials said.

Another licence will be given later for the rest 60 acres, when the company meets the remaining conditions of Beza.

In the economic zone, Aman Group will set up factories for various industries such as cement, packaging, shipyard, food and beverage, steel manufacturing and power generation.

The economic zone, which will be well-connected with Dhaka and Chittagong, will create jobs for some 15,000 in the next four years, BEZA officials said.

Employment opportunities for another 10,000 people will be created in next phases.

BEZA earlier awarded prequalification licences to four private sector companies to set up five economic zones -- one each to AK Khan and Company, Abdul Monem Ltd, Bay Group, and two to Meghna Group.

The government is also setting up four economic zones under the public sector: Mirsarai Economic Zone in Chittagong, Mongla Economic Zone in Bagerhat, Srihatta Economic Zone in Moulvibazar and Sabrang Tourism Park in Cox's Bazar.

These 10 economic zones are part of BEZA's plan to develop 100 such zones over the next 15 years.

Banglalink shuts offices over labour protests

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A group of current and former employees and outsiders blocked the entrance to Banglalink's corporate office last Thursday.

Senior officials of the operator said Islam was engaged in activities that were not permitted under his employment contract with Banglalink. Banglalink did not explain what his fault was.

Ahmad said VimpelCom, Banglalink's Amsterdam-headquartered parent company, is currently undergoing restructuring and Islam's termination was part of the process.

Islam's termination was not because of this active participation in employees' union, he added.

"As we reshape Banglalink, we have

implemented a voluntary separation scheme and will begin consultations with the staff who may be eligible," said Banglalink, the second largest mobile operator in Bangladesh after Grameenphone.

Ujjal Pal, president of Banglalink Employees' Union, said: "We will continue the demonstration until Shariful Islam is reinstated."

Earlier on Thursday, the agitated employees confined Perihane Elhamy, chief technology officer of Banglalink, to the headquarters in Gulshan over Islam's dismissal.

Elhamy, an Egyptian, was released nine hours later, after the police and the management assured the employees of looking into the matter. Subsequently, the union withdrew the demonstration.

Govt to cut prices of OMS rice, wheat to clear stocks

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The amount of subsidy would be much higher if the rice rots in warehouses, the food ministry official said.

The government has allocated Tk 1,863 crore for food subsidy in fiscal 2015-16, up from Tk 1,620 crore a year earlier, according to the finance ministry.

"We are afraid the market price will slump if the government sells rice at this rate," said Layek Ali, general secretary of the Bangladesh Auto, Major and Husking Mills Association, which has around 17,000 members.

Millers who have stocks will incur losses, while farmers will have to sell their produce at low rates. "Many millers will become bank loan defaulters."

The price of the Swarna variety of paddy has declined from Tk 650 per maund to Tk 610 because of the speculation of price cuts by the government.

"If the government wants to reduce the prices for everyone's benefit, it should extend support to millers in the form of subsidy," Ali added.

However, officials of the Directorate General of Food said there would be no impact on the market as a result of the price cut as only coarse rice would be sold through OMS.

"The main consumer of coarse rice is poor people and we do not have medium and fine quality rice that is produced mostly in the country. So, there will be no impact on the market," the food ministry official said.

The prices of coarse rice were between Tk 32 and Tk 34 a kg last week, down 8.33

percent on the same day a year ago, according to Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

So far, the food office bought 1.31 lakh tonnes of rice from aman harvest against the contract of 1.99 lakh tonnes with millers.

"So, we have no other option but to slash the price of rice and expand the OMS to clear stocks ahead of boro procurement," he said, adding that the DG Food plans to run the OMS operation for two months.

The DG Food bought 10.69 lakh tonnes of boro rice last season and plans to buy about 10 lakh tonnes in the coming season.

Officials said part of the stock could have been cleared had there been no option of cash payment under the TR and FFW programmes.

The government brought changes to the TR and FFW programmes in fiscal 2014-15: half of the payment for the programmes in exchange for work would be made in cash.

Previously, the sole mode of payment for the programmes was grains.

In December last year, the finance ministry approved cash payment of Tk 1,181 crore for the TR and FFW schemes, which is equivalent to the purchase price of a total of four lakh tonnes of grains.

Subsequently, DG Food revised down its wheat import target to 5.7 lakh tonnes from 9.5 lakh tonnes.

Contacted, Foiz Ahamed, director general of Directorate General of Food, acknowledged the plan to reduce prices.

"We are considering reducing prices. We want to expand OMS operation in district, upazila and municipality levels."

BB orders tighter security for ATMs

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Installing anti-skimming devices is not enough; the banks will have to monitor the video footage regularly, the statement said.

The latest incident has forced many banks to switch off their national payments switch, the common platform through which electronic payments originating from different channels like the ATMs, points of sales, internet and mobile devices, take place.

Consequently, many cardholders failed to withdraw money from ATMs in the past two days.

Meanwhile, Eastern Bank Ltd issued a statement pledging full reimbursement of the money to the

affected cardholders of EBL, subject to an investigation report.

The bank said it received complaints on Friday from some of its cardholders through their contact centre that their cards were being used at other banks' ATMs for cash withdrawals.

"As soon as these unauthorised transactions were reported to us, we blocked the reported 21 cards. Moreover, to protect customers, we blocked all the cards that were used in the suspected two ATM booths in Gulshan area," said Ziaul Karim, head of communication of EBL.

The bank said fraudsters copied cardholders' data by using skim-

ming devices.

EBL claimed that it has anti-skimming devices at all of its ATM booths.

Kazi Saifuddin Munir, managing director of IT Consultants Ltd that owns Q-Cash, the country's biggest payment processing consortium, said the incidents that took place on Friday were not the first ATM frauds in Bangladesh.

"Often, banks do not report the fraudulence. As the banks are now connected to the national payment switch, the issue has come to the knowledge of the central bank and the public as well."

He said these frauds are happening mostly due to banks' negligence.

There is nothing wrong with the central bank's NPS platform, Munir said, adding that the banks should take measures to protect their customers' PINs.

"Though anti-skimming devices are available in the country, many banks are yet to install those, making their clients vulnerable to frauds."

Q-Cash has 43 banks and financial institutions as its clients, meaning that cardholders of these banks can use Q-Cash ATM booths for transactions.

There are around 7,000 ATMs around the country, through which 2 to 3 lakh transactions take place per day.



M Akhter Hossain, deputy managing director of Shahjalal Islami Bank, and Mohammad Ibrahim Bahar, president of Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh, shake hands after signing a memorandum. The bank can now collect pilgrims' Hajj and Umrah registration fees at its 93 branches across Bangladesh.