

Effective supply chain a must for safe food

Speakers tell DCCI webinar

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Effective supply chain and commercialisation of agriculture products is a must for availing a safe food value chain as the marketing of perishable items is a big challenge in the country now, stakeholders said at a webinar yesterday.

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) organised the virtual programme titled "Ensuring Food Safety and Supply Chain in Pandemic".

Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque said there was no problem in production but marketing of perishable goods was a big challenge, especially amid the pandemic.

"If the big companies do not come forward in agricultural processing, it will not be possible to build a fair and sustainable marketing system in this sector," he said while addressing the programme as chief guest.

Stating that ensuring safe food in Bangladesh is another big challenge, he said, "We are committed to giving people nutritious and safe foods as well as prioritising commercialisation and modernisation."

He also underscored the importance of coordination between the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and the safe food authority.

He also mentioned that a project worth Tk 156 crore has been approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) recently to modernise a "Central Packing House" at Shyampur in Dhaka.

DCCI President Rizwan Rahman said the Covid-19 pandemic has hampered food safety and supply chain activities, resulting in food inflation of 5.45 per cent in June.

"We have to focus on relevant regulations like GAP (good agricultural practices), GMP (good manufacturing practices) standards, safety net, health-hygiene and e-commerce, so that we can create a friendly ecosystem to face the challenges of any pandemic or disaster," he said.

He also urged the government to withdraw a 15 per cent VAT on e-commerce, saying that this VAT would be detrimental



Muhammad Abdur Razzaque

Agriculture Minister
Muhammad Abdur Razzaque said there was no problem in production of perishable goods was a big challenge

for this sector.

Mosammat Nazmanara Khanum, secretary to the food ministry, said public-private partnerships (PPP) could be useful for ensuring safe food in the country.

"Motivation of all concerned in the food value chain is important. There are a lot of problems. However, we have to overcome all constraints gradually," she said.

Md Nazrul Anwar, director general of the BSTI, said they have developed a software with a QR code system which would be available for consumers in the next three months to prevent duplication of the BSTI logo.

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Railway getting popular among importers

Bangladesh Railway sees record revenue; users demand better facility

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Sirajganj

Bangladesh Railway, which operates and maintains all railways in the country, registered remarkable earnings in the last couple of years as the comparatively cheaper and hassle-free mode of transport is gaining popularity among local importers.

But despite the handsome revenue, the state-owned rail transport agency is yet to upgrade the services and facilities available.

And although this causes problems for the importers, they still prefer to carry goods by train instead of road transport since it is more cost effective.

However, most railway stations do not even have the necessary facilities for unloading goods.

During a visit to different unloading stations in the railway's west zone, it was found that most of them lacked weighing scales, parking space for trucks, and yard facilities for storing imported goods.

Bangladesh has been importing food grain from various Indian states by train for the past few years, according to Toimur Alom, site manager of AR Group, a trading firm.

The imported goods are taken to different areas of the country on trucks loaded from the Bangabandhu Bridge West Railway Station.

"But we don't have the minimum facility for handling imported goods here at the station," Alom told the Daily Star.

"After unloading goods from the train, we need to take them by truck to Sirajganj town for weighing, which is a 15-kilometre journey, since there are no weighing scales at the rail station," he said.

Shahin Habib, a truck driver, told The Daily Star that due to a lack of proper connectivity with adjoining areas and parking space at the station, they often have to load their trucks on marshy lands, which was a major hassle for



AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Imported food grains are seen being unloaded from a train at the Ishwardi Railway Station, a major unloading point in the country's west zone. Inadequate parking, roads, and other facilities at the station greatly slow the unloading process. The photo was taken recently.

vehicle movement.

While visiting the Ishwardi Railway Station, a major unloading station in the west zone, it was found that there was insufficient space to accommodate trucks at the station. Only two trucks can be loaded at a time while huge wagons were found stranded at the station for days.

"If we get the facility for unloading goods with 5 to 6 trucks simultaneously, then we can easily unload 50 wagons within 3 to 4 days," said Md Manik Hossain, representative of RRP Feed, an agro-goods importer.

"Currently though, we need 10 to 12 days to unload goods," he

added.

Although there are vast swathes of unused space around Ishwardi station, land grabbers have occupied most of the area, creating huge hassles for loading and unloading goods.

So even though Bangladesh Railway has established a platform for unloading goods at the station, there is no space for trucks to be loaded at these platforms, Manik said.

"If the relevant authorities take the initiative to remove grabbers from railway land and establish yards for truck movement at the newly built platform, then the unloading of goods will be

fast possible," said Md Tohurul Islam, leader of a railway workers association.

Md Nasir Uddin, the divisional commercial officer of the railway's west zone, said goods were being loaded and unloaded at 17 stations in the west zone while five or six more are getting ready to do the same.

"We know there are some limitations for unloading goods with the existing facilities of the stations but Bangladesh Railway has taken the initiative to improve stations by introducing more facilities for importers and exporters," Uddin said.

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Samsung announces \$205b investment plan



AFP/FILE

Samsung Electronics, the flagship subsidiary of the Samsung Group, is the world's biggest smartphone maker.

AFP, Seoul

Samsung Group unveiled a \$205 billion investment blueprint on Tuesday aimed at making the company a leader in a range of technologies from semiconductors to robotics and creating 40,000 new jobs.

The tech giant is South Korea's largest conglomerate and its overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national gross domestic product. Samsung Electronics, its flagship subsidiary, is the world's biggest smartphone maker.

The plan will "help Samsung strengthen its global standing in key industries while spearheading innovation in new fields", the company said in a statement, adding that it will also pursue corporate acquisitions.

On the semiconductor front, the firm said it will seek to enhance cutting-edge technologies to meet "long-term demand rather than short-term changes".

It is also looking to expand its biopharmaceutical business run by Samsung Biologics and Samsung Bioepisit.

The conglomerate said it would build two new manufacturing plants on top of three currently in operation with a view to tapping into the manufacturing of vaccines. Of the 240 trillion won (\$205 billion) it plans to spend, it will commit 180 trillion won to South Korea.

The domestic investment is expected to create another 10,000 jobs on top of 30,000 already planned. It could also induce as many as 560,000 new hirings in related industries, it said.

The announcement comes just days after Lee Jae-yong, the de-facto leader of the conglomerate, walked out of prison on parole after completing only about half of his jail term.

It was the latest instance of the country's long tradition of freeing business leaders on economic grounds after imprisonment for corruption or tax evasion.

Lee was serving a two-and-a-half year sentence for bribery, embezzlement and other offences in connection with a corruption scandal that brought down former South Korean president Park Geun-hye.

Slow vaccination to cost global economy \$2.3tr: study

AFP, Paris

The slow rollout of coronavirus vaccines will cost the global economy \$2.3 trillion in lost output, a report released Wednesday found.

The Economist Intelligence Unit's study found that emerging and developing economies, whose vaccine rollouts are far behind those of wealthier countries, will bear the brunt of those losses.

The report comes as advanced nations move towards providing booster shots to their populations while the international effort to provide vaccines for poorer nations remains inadequate.

The study calculated that countries which fail to vaccinate 60 per cent of their populations by mid-2022 will suffer the losses, equivalent to two trillion euros,

over the 2022-2025 period.

"Emerging countries will shoulder around two-thirds of these losses, further delaying their economic convergence with more developed countries," the EIU said.

It warned the delayed rollout of vaccines could fuel resentment, increasing the risk of social unrest in developing economies.

The Asia-Pacific Region will be the worst hit in absolute terms, accounting for nearly three-quarters of the losses.

But as a percentage of GDP, sub-Saharan Africa will suffer the worst losses.

Around 60 per cent of the population of higher-income countries received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine as of late August, compared to just one per cent in poorer nations,



according to the study.

Two doses are required to be fully vaccinated for most shots.

"Vaccination campaigns are progressing at a glacial pace in lower-income economies," it said.

The report's author, Agathe Demarais, said the international effort to provide coronavirus vaccines to poor nations, Covax, has failed to live up to its even modest expectations.

"There is little chance that the divide over access to vaccines will ever be bridged" with rich countries providing only a fraction of what is needed, she said in a statement.

"Finally, the focus in developed economies is shifting towards administering booster doses of coronavirus vaccines, which will compound shortages of raw materials and production bottlenecks," she added.

The EIU said its study was conducted by combining its in-house forecasts for vaccination timelines in around 200 countries with GDP growth forecasts.

US approves licences for Huawei to buy auto chips

REUTERS

US officials have approved license applications worth hundreds of millions of dollars for China's blacklisted telecom company Huawei to buy chips for its growing auto component business, two people familiar with the matter said.

Huawei, the world's largest telecommunications equipment maker, has been hobbled by trade restrictions imposed by the Trump administration on the sale of chips and other components used in its network gear and smartphones businesses.

The Biden administration has been reinforcing the hard line on exports to Huawei, denying licenses to sell chips to Huawei for use in or with 5g devices.

But in recent weeks and months, people familiar with the application process told Reuters the US has granted licenses authorizing suppliers to sell chips to Huawei for such vehicle components as video screens and sensors.

The approvals come as Huawei pivots its business toward items that are less susceptible to US trade bans.

Auto chips are generally not considered sophisticated, lowering the bar for approval. One person close to the license approvals

said the government is granting licenses for chips in vehicles that may have other components with 5g capability.

Asked about the automotive licenses, a US Department of Commerce spokesperson said the government continues to

consistently apply licensing policies "to restrict Huawei's access to commodities, software, or technology for activities that could harm US national security and foreign policy interests."

The Commerce Department is

prohibited from disclosing license approvals or denials, the person added.

A Huawei spokeswoman declined to comment on the licenses, but said: "We are positioning ourselves as a new component provider for intelligent connected vehicles, and our aim is to help car OEMs (manufacturers) build better vehicles."

Citing threats to US national security and foreign policy interests, the US has gone to great lengths to slow the growth of Huawei's key communications-related business.

After placing Huawei on a US Commerce Department trade blacklist in 2019, which banned sales of US goods and technology to the company without special licenses, the US last year ratcheted up restrictions to limit the sale of chips made abroad with US equipment.

It also campaigned to get allies to exclude Huawei from their 5G networks over spying concerns. Huawei has denied the allegations.

Huawei reported its biggest ever revenue drop in the first half of 2021, after the US restrictions drove it to sell a chunk of its once-dominant handset business and before new growth areas have fully matured.



The logo of Huawei Technologies is pictured in front of the German headquarters of the Chinese telecommunications giant in Duesseldorf, Germany.

REUTERS/FILE