

Pathway built to achieve food security

Govt officials say at workshop

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has prepared a national guideline to achieve food security and meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), officials said yesterday.

The national pathway document has been framed keeping in mind the issues of food security, hunger-free population, availability of nutritious food, safe food, reducing waste, and sustainable food production.

The guideline will be presented at the UN Food System Summit 2021 to be organised by the United Nations in New York on September 23.

The information was revealed at an event styled "Media Sensitisation Workshop on Participation of Bangladesh in the UN Food System Summit" at the Information Building in Dhaka.

Bangladesh is developing a standard food system to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

An action plan has been formulated to take effective steps to sustain food production, from producers, production processes and supply chains to addressing adverse environmental effects, according to a paper distributed at the workshop.

At the summit, the UN will present separate action plans on the food system development. However, all countries will prepare their respective action plan.

"Now people who go to markets to buy rice don't return empty-handed," said Food

Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder, while speaking at the workshop.

"We have also made advancement in terms of nutrition in the fish and meat sectors. It has to be replicated in the other sectors as well."

"No matter how many national pathway documents we prepare, they will not matter much if ordinary people don't benefit from them."

The United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) have convened the summit to set different levels of the food system transformation to achieve the SDGs.

"We have talked to the rural people. Their opinion has been incorporated in the action plan," said Food Secretary Mosammat Nazmanara Khanum.

"There is no deficiency in our plan. We will have to work to make sure that we don't destroy the environment while increasing production. Then our development will be sustainable," she said.

Robert D Simpson, country representative of the FAO, Shahiduzzaman Faruki, director-general of the Food, Planning and Monitoring Unit under the food ministry, Rudaba Khondker, country director of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition Bangladesh, Mohammad Monirul Hasan, market and trade policy adviser of the FAO Bangladesh, and Mokbul Hossain, information and broadcasting secretary, also attended the programme.

Pabna's sugarcane farmers decry closure of nearby mill

Many are switching to other crops to make ends meet



Sugarcane carrying trolleys are seen rusting away on a lot outside the Pabna Sugar Mill in Ishwardi upazila as the sugar processing unit has remained inactive since December last year following a government order. The photo was taken recently.

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Afsar Ali, a marginal farmer based in the catchment area of Pabna Sugar Mill in Ishwardi upazila, grew sugarcane on three bighas of land last year with an aim to sell the crops at the nearby processing plant.

However, due to the government's sudden decision to shutter six loss-making sugar mills across the country, including the one in Pabna, Ali was forced to sell his crops to the North Bengal Sugar Mills in Natore at the last moment.

After facing these difficulties, Ali decided to leave sugarcane cultivation and instead planted various vegetables this year.

However, he laments the loss of the once highly profitable crop.

"Sugarcane brings more profit than any other crop because the price of sugarcane never

DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

falls. Vegetable cultivation is comparatively not profitable enough," Ali said.

Md Ansar Ali Dilu, another sugarcane farmer, cultivated sugarcane on 15 bighas of land this year compared to 25 bighas the year before. He leased out the remaining 10 bighas of land to other farmers.

Earnings from each bigha of sugarcane are approximately Tk 40,000 to Tk 50,000, while sugar mills also provide cash aid, seeds, fertiliser, and insecticide to help enhance production.

Dilu expects to get around 6,000 maunds (one maund equals 37 kilograms) of sugarcane this year to earn a minimum of Tk 8 lakh.

Making matters worse, though, he has no marketing facility for the crop, he added.

"Pabna Sugar Mill denies taking responsibility for our crop this year. We don't sell sugarcane in typical haats or other markets, so if the mill authority does not take the crop, we have to destroy them in the field," said Dilu, also the secretary of the Pabna Sugar Mill Farmers Association.

According to the Bangladesh Sugar & Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC), sugarcane cultivation fell drastically in the 2021-22 season after six state-owned sugar mills were shut.

In the 2020-21 sugarcane crushing season, 1.27 lakh acres of land were brought under cultivation to produce 16.43 lakh tonnes of sugarcane, according to the BSFIC's annual report.

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BANGABANDHU EDUCATION INS

No transaction fee for school banking: BB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank yesterday asked banks not to charge students any fee for carrying out transactions related to Bangabandhu Education Insurance through their school banking accounts.

The initiative to implement the Bangabandhu Education Insurance, with support from the Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority, has begun to mark the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

State-run Jiban Bima Corporation will act as the insurer for the insurance policy, said the central bank in a circular.

All transactions related to the insurance can be carried out through the school banking accounts. But students cannot be charged any fee for such financial transactions, said the BB.

Students also have to be encouraged to open school banking accounts and continue carrying out transactions, it said.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

Critics warn of Apple, Google 'chokepoint' repression

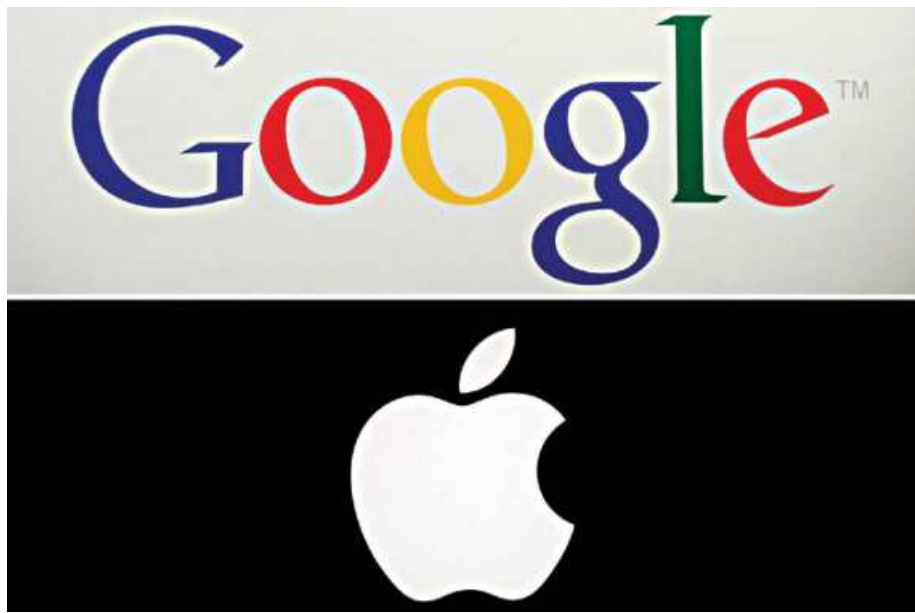
AFP, Washington

The global dominance of tech giants serves as a convenient online chokepoint for authoritarian governments to crack down on dissent or rig elections, critics of Apple and Google said Friday.

The companies were facing international outrage after pulling a Russian opposition voting app off their online marketplaces in response to authorities' escalating pressure, including arrest threats.

Google and Apple, whose operating systems run on 99 percent of the world's smartphones, have a stranglehold on the markets for the applications that allow users to do everything from watch movies to hail a ride. "The app stores are the new frontier for censorship," Natalia Krapiva, tech legal counsel at rights group Access Now told AFP. "We're witnessing a new stage of assault on digital rights. The companies face a growing pile of new legislation, legal trouble and regulators scrutiny over worries their dominance is a competition-killing monopoly.

Concerns recently had been about consumers' choice and app developers' ability to avoid paying Apple an up to 30 percent cut on purchases made via its App Store. But after an app advising opposition supporters on how to vote out Kremlin allies in Russia's parliamentary election was removed from the app stores of both Apple and Google, advocates warned of



another threat. "As long as Apple maintains a stranglehold over what software millions of people (use)... the App Store will continue to be a convenient chokepoint for government censorship and crackdowns on dissent," said Evan Greer, director of digital advocacy group Fight for the Future.

The digital world has been an incubator for opposition from the Arab Spring to Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests by

giving people a way to communicate and organize movements rapidly.

Yet that same technology can be turned against people, as was demonstrated by the scandal around Pegasus, a hugely invasive spyware that can essentially turn a phone into a pocket listening device.

Allegations that the software has been used by governments worldwide to eavesdrop on human rights activists,

business executives and politicians sparked a global uproar in July.

In the case of Russia, pressure has been building after Moscow accused the US tech giants of election interference and demanded they remove the app. "This demonstrates the limits of Big Tech to resist crackdowns with regards to dissent, in Russia and elsewhere, during elections and outside them," said David Levine, an election integrity fellow at think tank Alliance for Securing Democracy.

Sources close to the decision to pull the opposition app said both companies faced threats of criminal charges or the jailing of staff and general "bullying" from authorities. Levine noted this type of escalating pressure could become a "page in the playbook" for repressive governments.

The firms are for-profit, yet because of their global reach and key role in mass communication, can end up being called on to combat hate, lies and repression on their devices or platforms.

As a result, Big Tech can and will get entangled in these type of fights on delicate matters with the governments of places where they do business. "Giant IT companies are going to have to think about how they operate in these markets, like how far they'll go in terms of complying and cutting off the freedom of people to see things," said Kathryn Stoner, a Stanford political science professor.

US probes possible insider trading at Binance

REUTERS

US officials are examining possible insider trading and market manipulation at Binance, Bloomberg News reported on Friday, potentially adding more heat to the cryptocurrency exchange that has become a target of regulatory scrutiny in many countries.

Authorities are looking into whether Binance or its staff profited by taking advantage of its customers, Bloomberg reported, citing people with knowledge of the matter.

"At Binance, we have a zero-tolerance policy for insider trading and a strict ethical code related to any type of behavior that could have a negative impact on our customers or industry," the world's biggest crypto platform said in a statement.

The company has faced warnings and business curbs from financial watchdogs from Britain and Germany to Japan, who are concerned over the use of crypto in money laundering and risks to consumers. read more The exchange, whose holding company is registered in the Cayman Islands, has scaled back its product offerings and said it wants to improve relations with regulators.

The review involves Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) investigators, who in recent weeks have been reaching out to potential witnesses, the Bloomberg report said, adding that Binance has not been accused of wrongdoing and the investigations may not lead to any official action.

Shanghai encourages 'duty-free economy'

REUTERS, Beijing

The Shanghai government will support companies applying for approval to sell duty-free goods, and encourage duty-free shops to be set up at airports, hotels, malls and other commercial venues, municipal authorities said.

The development of a "duty-free economy", which will encourage spending on imported products, including heavily-taxed luxury goods, was outlined in a 2021-2025 consumption plan released on Saturday.

Presently, duty-free spending in China is largely concentrated in the southern island province of Hainan, where the annual limit on individual duty-free spending was hiked to 100,000 yuan (\$15,467) last year from 30,000 yuan previously.

Tariffs on imported consumer goods vary in China, with taxes on some luxury items such as perfumes and watches exceeding 30 per cent.

Lured by the substantially lower prices, millions of domestic tourists flock to Hainan's malls each year, and the numbers have been boosted by restrictions on overseas travel resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fed to stay cautious as economy sends mixed signals

AFP, Washington

With the United States on the upswing from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Federal Reserve is expected to weigh in next week on whether the economy is healthy enough to begin withdrawing stimulus measures credited with aiding the revival.

But the two-day meeting of the central bank's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) beginning Tuesday ultimately may be a static event, like many others in recent months.

Analysts do not expect the Fed to immediately begin the much-expected slowing of its massive bond purchases, and while the committee will release updated economic forecasts, few

big changes are expected from previous estimates released three months ago.

The FOMC "likes to prepare markets for any major change," said Joe Brusuelas, chief economist at RSM US. When he addresses the press after the meeting, Fed Chair Jerome Powell "may choose the opportunity to signal that the tapering is coming, which would likely be a November announcement with a December start," the economist said.

The Fed took several emergency measures starting in March 2020, acting quickly as the pandemic caused the world's largest economy to collapse.

In addition to slashing the benchmark lending rate to zero, the Fed began buying



The Federal Reserve Board building on Constitution Avenue is pictured in Washington, US.

REUTERS/FILE

massive quantities of bonds and other securities to ease lending conditions and ensure the financial system would not seize up.

Powell has said the bank could begin drawing back on those purchases by the end of the year, but experts expect them to take their time. "I think the tapering train left the station last meeting already," said Roberto Perli, founding partner and head of global policy research at Cornerstone Macro, who also expects the bank to begin slowing its purchases in the last two months of the year.

The FOMC will convene as the economy sends mixed signals about two of the central bank's top priorities: employment and prices.