

Jute bags mandatory, in practice a different story

SOHEL PARVEZ

The use of jute sacks to package 19 commodities remains a far cry 13 years past the enactment of the Mandatory Jute Packaging Act 2010.

The law was enacted to protect the interests of jute growers and millers and limit the use of environmentally harmful plastic bags.

But a large number of businesses are packaging commodities ignoring the law amidst a lack of enforcement by the authorities in recent times.

Take the case of rice packaging.

Millers started using jute bags to package rice for marketing in the face of enforcement of the law by the government in the last quarter of 2015.

However, a good number of millers and traders gradually began to shift to plastic bags for packaging in tune with the arrival of rice imported from India in similar bags.

Jute bags are not also used fully for packaging 18 other commodities.



Jute and jute goods exports slumped 24 per cent year-on-year to \$610 million in the July-February period of the current fiscal year, showed data from the Export Promotion Bureau

"Despite having the jute packaging law, we are experiencing inaction on the part of the law-enforcing agencies in implementing it on a mandatory basis," said Abdul Barik Khan, director-general of the Bangladesh Jute Mills Association (BJMA).

"Therefore, the jute sector is suffering from irreparable losses. The mandatory use of jute bags can bring back the golden days of the sector."

Jute and jute goods exports slumped 24 per cent year-on-year to \$610 million in the July-February period of the current fiscal year, showed data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

Khan said a full implementation of the law would create more employment opportunities and give a boost to the rural economy.

"It will improve the quality of life and livelihoods of four crore to five crore people, keep our environment clean and help the country advance towards sustainable development."

The government initially mentioned six commodities, including staple rice, wheat, fertilisers and sugar under the law. Later, it added a number of items to the list.

The BJMA said the law has not been fully implemented. In the domestic market, products are being sold, transported and imported in violation of the law.

Md Abdur Rauf, secretary to the jute and textiles ministry, admitted that jute bags were not being used as intended. "We are working on it," he said.

As imported rice is coming in plastic bags, a section of millers and traders are taking advantage of it, said Rauf.

"Only enforcement will not work. We will sit with businesses regionally to increase the use of jute bags for packaging."



Plastic bags are still being used to pack rice although a Mandatory Jute Packaging Act-2010 stipulates that 19 commodities, including paddy, rice, wheat, maize and fertiliser, are supposed to be packed in jute bags not only to protect the interests of the jute growers and mills but also to limit use of the environmentally harmful plastic bags. The photo was taken at Boro Bazar, a rice market in Khulna city, yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Real-time monitoring of imports, national supply for key commodities needed

Says IFPRI Director General Johan Swinnen

SOHEL PARVEZ

Bangladesh should conduct real-time monitoring of imports and national supply chains for critical commodities to forecast and respond in a timely manner to policy challenges and tackle the impacts of the dragging Russia-Ukraine war, said Johan Swinnen, director-general of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

"This should be accompanied by efforts to reduce post-harvest loss and enhance access to transportation, processing, and storage services. Policymakers should also expand low-interest agricultural and SME loans to help improve access to food and enhance the agricultural sector's resilience."

He said the situation is getting worse for the poorest of the poor in Bangladesh.

"Studies from Bangladesh and the IFPRI suggest that remedial measures must be taken as soon as possible to address the issue, such as targeted nutrition and social protection interventions, especially in urban areas."

Swinnen shared his observations in an online interview with The Daily Star recently.

Washington-based IFPRI has carried out a study on the impacts of the war on poverty and food security in 19 countries, including Bangladesh. It has found negative impacts on Bangladesh's GDP, poverty, food security and diet.

The war has negatively affected commodity prices, trade, and supply chains across the globe, leading to inflation, financial difficulties, and food crisis in several countries.

Bangladesh, like many other



Johan Swinnen

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Building on progress in food security with evidence-based policies
- » Putting in efforts to reduce post-harvest loss and enhance access to transportation
- » Expanding low-interest agricultural and SME loans
- » Adopting more efficient and resilient land management practices
- » Improving diets
- » Enhancing social protection programmes to protect food security

increased as a share of total calories and about 25 per cent of wheat imports came from Ukraine before the war.

With a significant portion of its imports coming from Russia and Ukraine, the war has posed a significant threat to wheat supplies, said Swinnen.

"While the global price of wheat has stabilised, it remains high by historic standards and will continue to impact prices in Bangladesh. We are also seeing impacts on fertiliser, fuel, and several other commodities as a result of the conflict."

The former president of the International Association of Agricultural Economists said it is impressive to see how Bangladesh has progressed in feeding its growing population with domestic agricultural production.

In the early 1970s, Bangladesh was a food-deficit country with a population of about 75 million. Today, the population is 165 million, and the country is now self-sufficient in rice production, which has tripled over the past three decades.

Seed, fertilizer, and irrigation technologies known as "Green Revolution technologies" have played a major role in the growth of rice production in Bangladesh.

Growth in incomes, as well as more stable rice prices, have enabled more people to afford more nutritious foods. Social safety nets have played an important role in supporting the poorest populations.

Still, there are many challenges that may undercut progress in food and nutrition security in Bangladesh, Swinnen warned.

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11 individuals, entities to be awarded on National Jute Day

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Eleven individuals and organisations will be awarded on National Jute Day to be observed tomorrow.

Textiles and Jute Minister Golam Dastagir Gazi made the announcement at a press conference arranged on the occasion of National Jute Day 2023 at the ministry yesterday.

The award will be given for their contribution to the achievement of the government's development targets through research activities in the development of the jute sector, reduction of dependence on jute seed import, achieving viability in jute seed production, increasing the production and export of conventional and versatile jute products, he said.

Seven felicitation mementoes will also be given to the stakeholders involved in jute, he added.

The ministry is celebrating the day with the theme of "Contribution of Jute Industry - Building Smart Bangladesh" in order to create interest among farmers in jute cultivation, increasing the use of jute and jute products in domestic and international markets.

To observe the day, the ministry has chalked out various programmes, including exhibitions, seminars, meetings and other promotional activities.

The main event of the day will be held in Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka and the exhibition and sales centre of multi-purpose jute products will be inaugurated at Karim Chamber in Motijheel.

Industry Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun will be present as the chief guest and State for Labor and Employment Begum Mannujan Sufian and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Textiles and Jute Ministry Mirza Azam will be present as special guest.

Jute and jute products exhibitions and fairs will be organised in every divisional city of the country as well as on the beach of Cox's Bazar and in the jute-rich Faridpur district.

Besides, a five-day multipurpose jute exhibition and fair will be organised at Shilpakala Academy on March 12-16.

WE Colourful Fest for women entrepreneurs begins in Dhaka on March 10

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Women entrepreneurs are going to showcase their products at Jamuna Future Park in a two-day fest from March 10 to celebrate the International Women's Day.

The Women and e-Commerce Trust (WE), a Facebook-based community marketplace for women entrepreneurs, is organising the fest titled "WE Colourful Fest".

Over 160 female entrepreneurs will exhibit their products in over 80 stalls, Nasima Akter Nisha, president of the WE, told The Daily Star.

On the sidelines of the fest, several seminars will also be held, where local and international guests will deliver speeches on how women can develop their skills and sharpen their business acumen.

The titles of some of the seminars are "My dream—my Identity", "How to Develop Your Skill Digital Marketing", "Focus on Branding", etc.

At the same time, a masterclass on WE's signature entrepreneurship programme will be held on March 11, where 1,500 women from across the country will take part, said Nisha.

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Poultry farmers urge govt to fix egg, chicken prices

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The country's poultry farmers yesterday urged the government to set chicken and egg prices for the local market claiming that they were currently incurring losses even though consumers were paying high prices for the two.

The government should take into account production costs to fix the prices, giving them a profit margin of Tk 15 to Tk 20 on each chicken and Tk 0.25-0.45 an egg, they said.

The leaders of Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association (BPIA) came up with the demands at a press meet at Dhaka Reporters' Unity in the capital.

The poultry industry had never seen such price

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Poultry farmers have urged the government to take into account production costs to fix poultry and egg prices, giving them a profit margin of Tk 15 to Tk 20 on each chicken and Tk 0.25-0.45 an egg. The photo was taken at Gollamari Bazar in Khulna city at the end of last month.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

UN development chief sounds alarm over debt distress

AFP, Doha, Qatar

A top UN official has warned that "urgent" measures are needed to help 52 countries facing debt repayment problems that put some at risk of default.

Achim Steiner, head of the United Nations Development Programme, told AFP that 25 of the 52 were spending more than a fifth of government revenues servicing external debt.

"The situation right now for developing countries when it comes to national debt is indeed very, very serious," Steiner said in an interview on the sidelines of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) summit in Doha on Saturday.

The UN agency estimates that "52 countries are either in debt distress or one step away from debt distress and potential default," he said.

Steiner did not name the countries involved but the UNDP last week released a report which called for a 30 per cent write-off of external debt for 52 countries at 2021 values.

The 52 included Argentina, Lebanon and Ukraine alongside 23 countries from sub-Saharan Africa, 10 from Latin America and the Caribbean, and eight from East Asia and the Pacific.

Steiner said "the financial markets are not paying enough attention" as the 52 account for only three per cent of global external debt, but one sixth of the world's

population.

Twenty-five countries spending one fifth of government revenues on debt servicing is "not sustainable", he added.

"Therefore, we have called very clearly for urgent ways to inject liquidity while also restructuring and rescheduling debts, because otherwise we may see country after country falling into that territory of debt distress."

On Saturday, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres slammed the world's rich countries and energy giants for burdening LDCs with "predatory" interest rates.

Poor nations' debt has multiplied over the past decade because of the coronavirus pandemic, high food and fuel bills and financial crises.

Several have defaulted over the past two years.

Steiner said that African countries such as Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso have lost up to 20 years of development progress amid a rise in political violence and government failures to provide basic services, security, health and education.

He said total debt was difficult to establish as more than 60 percent is owed to private creditors.

"Now you have the war in Ukraine, you have the impact on the global food and energy prices and particularly when it comes to debts, the impact of inflation is driving interest rates up," he said.

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