

Malaysia to import Halal meat, rice from Pakistan

Finance Minister Asad Umar said Malaysia would import Halal meat and rice from Pakistan. Umar's statement came following delegation-level talks between Pakistan and Malaysia led by the Prime Minister Imran Khan and Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

The talks encompassed diverse areas which included cooperation in trade, automobiles, agriculture, tourism, and food processing, particularly Halal meat. According to the finance minister, Pakistan and Malaysia signed MoUs in five sectors and agreed to open branches of local banks in their respective countries.

Earlier, Prime Minister Imran Khan and his Malaysian counterpart Mahathir Mohamad held a one-on-one meeting at the PM House. The two leaders emphasized on taking effective measures to cement relations at the people-to-people level, besides encouraging their businessmen to initiate joint ventures.

Prime Minister Imran Khan said Pakistan and Malaysia enjoyed the brotherly relationship and stood by each other in difficult times. He termed Mahathir Mohamad an inspirational personality whose vision made Malaysia a developed and modern country.

FAO-SDC sign agreement for improving food security in Pakistan

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) signed an agreement to develop the first national State of Food Security and Nutrition in Pakistan (SOFI) report.

This will be the first national-level SOFI report prepared along the lines of FAOs annual flagship report on a global and regional level. The report will provide timely and accurate data that will enable the government to make informed and evidence-based decisions by monitoring food supply, demand and other key indicators for assessing the overall food security situation.



Thanking the SDC for its support, FAO Representative in Pakistan Ms. Mina Dowlatchahi said the strategic partnership between FAO and SDC will strengthen national capacities for managing and utilizing food security-related information. She added that the national SOFI report is in line with the government of Pakistan's development agenda and will support decision and policy makers in designing their efforts to reduce poverty and improve food security and nutrition in Pakistan. Mr. Daniel Valenghi, Head of Cooperation SDC stressed on the importance of implementation of effective policies to improve food security in Pakistan. Agriculture contributes 19.8% of Pakistan's GDP and employs 42% of the workforce.

However, the country's growing population and adverse climatic conditions place increasing pressure on national food production. 20.5% of the population is undernourished. This is driven by high poverty rates and rising food prices.

Poor physical infrastructure, particularly in the remote rural areas throughout Pakistan is also a limitation on access to food and influences market prices. This is also linked to inadequate water and sanitation, education and health service delivery, which together with the lack of awareness of appropriate dietary intake contributes to greater food insecurity and malnutrition. FAO, in collaboration with WFP, UNICEF, WHO and the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform and Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

will support the preparation of this analysis and publication, building on the work already undertaken with Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on the localization of SDG 2 indicators Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) and Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity in population based on Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES). This report will provide elements to better inform investments and public finance allocations.

It will support the advancement of quality data collection, analysis, and dissemination as essential to evidence-based decision-making and resources allocation.

Agricultural cooperation with China to be enhanced under CPEC

Planning, Development and Reform Minister Makhdoom Khusró Bakhtiar said that the government was focused on developing the agriculture sector on modern lines in order to improve the livelihoods of small farmers and to enhance the sector's contribution to the national economy.

"In this regard, agriculture cooperation with China will be enhanced under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework," the minister said while talking to National Food Security and Research Minister Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan. Planning Secretary Zafar Hasan, National Food Security Secretary Dr. Muhammad Hashim Popalzai and CPEC Project Director Hassan Daud were also present on the occasion.

The planning minister said efforts were underway to initiate joint ventures with leading Chinese agriculture companies so as to enhance agricultural output and value addition of agricultural products.

He highlighted that there was a lot of scope for cooperation between the two countries, particularly in areas of live-stock, fisheries, citrus, mango, rice, potatoes, and horticulture sectors. Bakhtiar said that a CPEC Business Advisory Council has been constituted which would have representation from leading companies dealing in various sectors, including agriculture. The purpose of the council would be to identify new areas for future collaborations with China under CPEC, he added.

French business delegation expresses interest to invest in Pakistan

A delegation of MEDEF (Movement of the Enterprises of France) called on Prime Minister Imran Khan and evinced interest in investing in various sectors of Pakistan including the manufacturing sector, agriculture, energy, and others. The prime minister welcomed the interest of MEDEF, which was the largest association of French entrepreneurs with 750,000 members.

PM Khan highlighted Pakistan's investment potential and business-friendly policies of the government. He highlighted the potential of agriculture, industry, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and tourism including mountain tourism, religious tourism, coastal and beaches, and religious tourism. Premier Imran Khan also highlighted steps taken by the government to reduce the cost of doing businesses and improving ease of doing business in the country.

President Dr. Arif Alvi said Pakistan was focused to strengthen its bilateral ties with France and explore new avenues of collaboration in realms of trade and investment for the mutual benefit of both the countries. He was talking to Chairman of Pakistan-France Business Council of MEDEF International and President of Total Global Services Thierry Pflimlin, who

along with his delegation called on him in Islamabad.

The president underscored that Pakistan offers various investment opportunities for French investors especially in the sectors like food and agriculture, manufacturing, housing, tourism, communications, and road infrastructure.

Govt working on laws to revive the dairy sector

The government is working to rationalize taxes on the milk supply chain to incentivize the sector in order to expand collection and processing units across the country, said Advisor to Prime Minister on Commerce and Investment Razak Dawood in a meeting with the delegation of International Finance Corporation. The meeting was held to discuss policy options to revive the growth of Pakistan's dairy sector. Dawood said the tax incentives will transform dairy farming into a formal sector.

He added that the taxation policy for dairy supply chain must be re-aligned for the government's broader socio-economic objectives with the nutritional requirements of the population. An official statement issued after the meeting said it was discussed that processed milk, being an essential commodity, remained under the zero-rated sales tax regime from 2006 till 2016. However, the incentive was withdrawn in 2016 and sales tax was reapplied.

As the demand for packaged milk highly prices elastic, the imposition of sales tax led to a decline of the domestic market by 30 percent and the formal processing units registered a drastic 80pc decline in profitability. These policies forced manufacturers to cut down costs and close milk collection points across the country as farmers starting shifting back to the informal market.

The advisor informed the meeting that unprocessed milk poses a health hazard due to a high degree of adulteration and contamination and is a major cause of malnutrition and stunted growth among children.

The delegation informed that despite huge potential in the dairy sector, only 5pc of milk sold across the country is processed and packaged while 95pc of the consumed milk is unprocessed. The delegation also highlighted issues of taxation and pointed out the need to pass pasteurization law which would reduce the health risk from unprocessed milk sold in the market.

The advisor emphasized the need to reverse this trend and bring the dairy farmer back into the formal eco-system where the farmers can work in partnership with companies to improve yield and livestock health. He also stressed the need for a holistic approach to reviving the sector by focusing on reducing the regulatory and tax burden, improving productivity and supply chain management.



20 percent Mango crop affected by climate change

Estimated 20 percent mango crop has been affected by gusty winds, including recent dust-storm and rains. Further losses may occur if such weather situation continued. The country may get late arrival of the crop in Punjab and Sindh with less production.

“Pakistan is assessed to be one of the vulnerable countries to climate change. This vulnerability is mainly due to its geographic location, demographic and diverse climatic conditions. To reduce losses, Technology Needs Assessment (TNA) is one of the important steps towards identifying and assessing climate change adaptation challenges for Pakistan in order to align its adaptation needs and opportunities with goals and objectives of its sustainable development,” according to Economic Survey of Pakistan.

A growers' community leader and agriculture expert Noor Muhammad told the media that estimated 20pc mango crop had been affected across Sindh as unripe mango fruit had fallen due to gusty winds and recent dust-storm & rains, while Punjab has also faced same extent of mango crop losses due to such weather situation. He suggested that the government should facilitate growers in the use of new technologies to save mango crops.

“Mango crop in south Punjab is likely to arrive late in the market due to



weather changes. In this season, mango's maturity crop will be less due to ongoing rains and more gusty winds that may affect the exports of Chaunsa variety of mango, FPCCI Standing Committee on Horticulture Exports' former chairman Ahmad Jawad said.

In the past, mango growers were not taking too much interest in improving the mango cultivation area because they were not highly paid. Now they are ambitious to enhance cultivation area as they are earning a handsome amount by exporting this fruit. The mango orchards were located at an area of 117,000 hectares in the province during the year 2011-12 while the cultivation area increased to 180,000 hectares in 2015-16.

“The mango crop is turning into the industry and offering handsome returns to growers. To a query about the

enhanced area of mango, the MRS in-charge informed that different programmes, including Australia Pakistan Agriculture Sector Linkages Program (ASLP), USAID, and Punjab Agriculture Department provided much-needed facilitation for quality fruit, imparted training to growers how to manage orchards and follow export standards. The income of growers has increased manifolds and this is the basic reason behind the increase in cultivation area,” he added.

The mango is the national fruit of Pakistan. The main mango growing districts in the Punjab province are Multan, Bahawalpur, Muzaffargarh, and Rahimyar Khan. In Pakistan, 250 varieties of mango are found while most important commercial cultivars of Pakistan are Dasehri, Anwar Ratul, Langra, Chaunsa, Sindhri, Maldha, and Fajri.

18 projects worth Rs 290 billion to be launched in agriculture sector

The government will launch 18 projects, worth Rs 290 billion, in five different areas of agriculture sector in financial year 2019-20 on cost sharing basis between the federal and provincial governments.

While briefing media persons on the Prime Minister's Agriculture Package, Secretary National Food Security and Research (NFS&R), Muhammad Hashim Popalzai said that for the first time after the devolution of agriculture sector, the share of the federal government in 18 projects of five key areas of agriculture during the next five years will be Rs 92.5 billion.



He said that the five areas include conservation and increase productivity of water, increase in yields of major crops including sugarcane, rice and cotton, live-stock initiative for small and medium farmers, transformation of agriculture produce market, and increased access to finance.

The share of the federal government in development of water sector will be Rs 71 billion; crops, Rs 16.50 billion; fisheries, Rs 3.51 billion; and livestock, Rs 1.32 billion. The development of markets would be fully funded by Punjab since the markets will be developed in the province.

He said that the development of water sector includes improvement of watercourses in Pakistan and enhancing command areas of small and mini-dams in the arid (barani) areas. In water sector, the total investment will be Rs 218.5 billion; in crops Rs 44.82 billion; development of markets, Rs 11.50 billion, fisheries, Rs 9.28 billion; and livestock, Rs 5.60 billion, he said.

The secretary NFS&R said that before the devolution of the agriculture sector to provinces, the allocation to the sector by both federal and provincial governments was used to be around Rs 40 billion while after devolution the allocation reduced to between Rs 20 to Rs 22 billion. He said that his ministry has set up special cell for ensuring speedy implementation of these projects and is also holding regular meetings with the provincial governments.

To a question about fixing of cotton indicative or support price, he said that discussion is underway with relevant stockholders regarding the matter. He said that the country is likely to achieve wheat production target of 25.572 million tonnes. About the current wheat stock, he said that total wheat stock with provinces and Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation Limited (PASSCO) is 4.4 million tonnes.

Seafood exports down 6.8 percent to \$293.8 million in July-March

Pakistan's seafood exports declined 5.07 percent to 130,830 tons in the first



nine months (July-March) of the current fiscal year (2018/19) compared to 137,819 tons during the same period of the last fiscal year, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) data showed recently.

In terms of dollars, value dropped 6.88 percent to \$293.8 million against \$315.6 million in the corresponding period last year, according to the PBS numbers.

Pakistan's fish and fish preparations' exports decreased to 20,412 tons in March 2019, down 16 percent against 24,288 tons exported in the same month last year. However, on a month-on-month basis, exports were up 31.7 percent in March 2019 against 15,499 tons in February 2019.

China remained one of the largest importers of Pakistan's fish and fish preparations, followed by Hong Kong, Indonesia, Egypt, Middle East, UK, Thailand, South Korea, Bangladesh etc. A stakeholder told The News that quality seafood stocks were depleted in Pakistani waters because of overfishing and unlawful fishing practices.

He added that Pakistan mostly exports seafood to China at lower rates, while European Union (EU) had lifted a ban it imposed on two factories without inspecting them on ground, only due to the political pressure.

"Revival of exports to EU had no significant impact over Pakistan's total seafood exports," the exporter said.

Faisal Iftikhar, former president Pakistan Fisheries Exporters Association told The News that Pakistan's fish and fish preparations export were fetching \$2.27 to \$2.5 per unit, which is the lowest in the region's average of around \$7/unit.

"Our prices show that we export more fish meal and our prices are lower than quality fish meal price, which fetches \$3/unit. We are going behind low quality exports," Iftikhar said.

Pakistan's seafood export to EU have resumed, but only one factory, out of approved two factories, is exporting to EU, he said adding, only two factories were approved by the authority; however, prices offered by the EU member states were low.

Captain (Retd) Akhlaque, who owns the only factory that is exporting seafood to EU, said, "These prices are similar to China, which are very low". "We are not in a bargaining position. India is controlling the prices, whose 200 factories export to EU."

According to Marine Fisheries Department, there are around 150 fish and seafood exporting firms in Pakistan, of which 35 operate in the premises of Karachi Fisheries Harbour.

Akhlaque further said that commercial fish stocks were not depleted completely and hoped that fish stocks would develop again as a ban placed on fishing during the breeding season last year had been implemented fully. ♦