



## Japan keen to invest in the agriculture sector

Japan's Ambassador to Pakistan Matsuda Kuninori has said that Japanese firms are willing to invest in Pakistan's agriculture sector. Pakistan exports fruits and vegetables to Japan in limited quantity despite increasing demand especially for mangoes, Ambassador Kuninori said during a meeting with Minister for National Food Security and Research Syed Fakhr Imam.

He said that Japan is already working in Pakistan on various projects, and the ongoing locust situation is the biggest threat to food security. Towards that, Japan is willing to help Pakistan acquire pesticides and other essential products to contain the locust threat.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Imam said that Pakistan and Japan should increase collaboration in the transfer of technology and information in the agriculture sector. Emphasizing Japan's role in agricultural machinery, he said that Pakistan can increase production with help from Japan's crop seeds technology.

The minister further said that the government wants to enhance floriculture in the country and assistance from Japan's government will be highly valuable. During the meeting, it was discussed that Japan will facilitate Pakistan in controlling

locust, value addition of fruits and vegetables, and floriculture especially tulip and roses. Collaboration in fishery, livestock, and poultry sectors should also be enhanced.

## Pakistan, China sign two MOUs, four letters of exchange for cooperation S&T, agriculture: FO

Pakistan and China recently signed two memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and four letters of exchange for enhanced bilateral cooperation in the areas of science and technology, agriculture, and combating the coronavirus (COVID-19).

President Dr. Arif Alvi and President Xi Jinping witnessed the signing of documents at a ceremony held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing after a bilateral meeting between the two leaders, a Foreign Office statement here said.

According to the statement, the MoU on Establishing Joint Working Group on Science and Technology and Agriculture between China and Pakistan would lead to the establishment of two separate joint working groups, one on science and technology, and the other on agriculture, under the overall rubric of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

While the "MoU between the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs



of China (MARA) and the Ministry of National Food Security and Research of Pakistan (NFS&R) on Strengthening Cooperation on Plant and Disease Control" would help in monitoring and control of major pests and diseases, and improve agricultural productivity, it added.

The letters of exchange signed at the ceremony would play an important role in combating Covid-19 in Pakistan, the statement mentioned. President Dr. Arif Alvi visited Beijing, China, from March 16 to 17 at the invitation of President Xi Jinping.

### PM seeks proposals for agriculture package

Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that the government is taking effective steps to deal with coronavirus challenge and sought recommendations from the Special Committee on Agricultural Products to provide special relief to the agriculture sector. In a meeting with National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser, who is also the chairperson of the 31-member special committee, the prime minister said the government is considering relief for the agriculture sector in

budget, besides the introduction of effective policies.

The prime minister said that parliament is representative of the people's aspirations and it is important to keep the institution functional even during the situation of coronavirus. Asad Qaiser, who is also the head of Parliamentary Committee on COVID-19, apprised PM Imran of proposals of the body, including the convening a virtual session of the National Assembly.

He said given the prevailing situation of coronavirus, the meetings of the parliament's standing committees are being held through video-link. The prime minister lauded the efforts of Asad Qaiser in maintaining religious harmony among different segments.

Prime Minister Khan said, "We can never forget all of you far away from Pakistan who continue to do us proud and are our greatest asset, playing a critical role in Pakistan's development through remittances and charity work." The Prime Minister expressed grief over reports of the death of Pakistanis abroad due to COVID-19, including those serving as the front line in the global war against the pandemic.

### Food dept ordered to increase the number of wheat procurement centers

Punjab Food Minister Abdul Aleem Khan has directed the food department to increase the number of wheat procurement points across the province to meet the growing need. During a meeting, the senior minister was informed that overall 382 procurement points were functional across the province.

Provincial Food Secretary Zafar Nasrullah Khan informed the minister that Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO) was purchasing wheat from 12 districts in Punjab.

The food department had started the procurement drive on April 14 at the fixed price of Rs1,400 per 40 kilograms. According to District Food Controller Amjad Ali Khan, the price of 100 kilograms of wheat had been fixed at Rs3,900. Khan also directed the authorities dealing with the matter to consult with public representatives to ensure the smooth execution of the project.

The senior minister further directed to put in place all the precautionary measures amid the coronavirus pandemic. "Make sure to prevent large crowds at the procurement centers," he said. "Ensure hand sanitizers, safe distance, and clean drinking water to facilitate farmers at the centers," Khan added.

Aleem Khan directed the officials to stay vigilant during the process, adding that it was the responsibility of the department to meet the procurement target, besides ensuring the protection of the commodity. "Wheat and flour are the most important food items so negligence would not be tolerated," he said.

### Govt procures over 830,619 tons of wheat

More than 830,619 metric tons of wheat has been procured so far under the government's procurement campaign for the current fiscal year of 2019/20 against the set target of 8.25 million tons to fulfill the domestic and export requirements, an official said.

Food Security Commissioner in the



Ministry of National Food Security and Research Imtiaz Ali Gopang said the Economic Coordination Committee of the cabinet approved wheat procurement targets of the public sector for tackling the local needs and keeping the strategic reserves. Gopang told APP that about 10.07 percent of the procurement target has been achieved so far whereas the drive is in full swing all across the wheat-growing areas of the country.

Punjab has so far procured about 345,228 metric tons of wheat as against the set target of 4.5 million tons, he said, showing that 7.67 percent of the set target was achieved. Sindh completed 22.38 percent of its procurement target as it procured about 313,323 tons of wheat, he added. The commissioner said the procurement campaign was not yet started in Balochistan, whereas the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa procured about 27,000 tons of wheat. The Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Service Corporation (Passco) also procured about 170,831 metric tons of wheat and achieved about 9.48 percent of its set task, he added. Gopang further said sufficient wheat stocks of about 0.761 million tons are available in the country to tackle the domestic consumption whereas new crop has also started to arrive in the local markets.

According to data of wheat stocks provided by the provincial food ministries and allied departments to the ministry of national food security and research by the end of last week, wheat reserves in the country stood at 0.761 million tons.

Around 0.290 million tons of wheat was available in Punjab and 0.255 million tons in Sindh for fulfilling the local needs, the commissioner said. He said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has about 0.065 million tons of wheat, whereas Balochistan has 0.0070 million tons of wheat in their stocks. Passco has 0.174 million tons of grains for local consumption, he added.

Gopang said wheat consumption at the national level was estimated at 26.91 million tons. Therefore, the current wheat stock of the public sector at the level of 0.761 million tons is sufficient to cater to the national consumption for 10 days. "The procured quantity will be accounted

for after the end of Food Year as on 1st May 2020."

Besides, 1,162 wheat purchase centers were established across the country to facilitate the growers for selling their products on official fixed rates. The minimum support price was approved at Rs1,400 per 40 kg to provide better rates of return.

### Govt urged to allow export of perishable items

The fruit and vegetable dealers have expressed concerns over the closure of the Torkham border and demanded of the government to allow the stranded containers of perishable goods to enter Afghanistan to protect the business community from huge financial losses.

At least 300 containers loaded with different items including vegetables were stopped from entering Afghanistan at 9 pm on April 15 despite clearance from relevant departments, All Pakistan Agriculture Produce Traders Federation President Malik Mohammad Ali Sohni told to media.

He said that the government had allowed movement of the trucks across the border till midnight of April 15 but it was stopped three hours before the stipulated time and as result 300 trucks and containers could not enter Afghanistan. Mr. Sohni said that many of the trucks loaded with meat and poultry returned to Peshawar but the vehicles carrying fruits and vegetables were still stuck at Torkham.

He said that the government should open the border for three hours only to allow the vehicles, which had acquired prior permission, to enter Afghanistan.

Mr. Sohni feared that in case the border was not opened immediately, the prices of vegetables in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would rise further particularly in Ramzan as the business community would prefer to export the items via the Chaman border.

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Similarly, he said, in routine Pakistan had to import different fruits from Afghanistan during that season including watermelons, grapes, and pomegranates but the restrictions would cause a shortage of those fruits. He said that the government should strictly maintain its SOPs to stop the spread of coronavirus and allow the only driver and one conductor with each truck to continue the supply of essential goods only.

Mr. Sohni said that at present, the vehicles were allowed under the transit trade agreement, and transportation of all other goods from both sides was stopped. The local exporters, he said, had spent millions of rupees to buy tomatoes, okra, and other items in Sindh and Punjab for export to Afghanistan. If the supply was not allowed, they would face huge financial losses, he added.

### Food security plan promised by SAPM Zafar Mirza

Islamabad: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National Health Services Dr. Zafar Mirza has said a comprehensive food security plan will be formulated to avoid food shortages in the coming weeks and months.

In tweets in the backdrop of the decisions taken by the National Security Committee meeting to deal with coron-



avirus, Dr. Mirza said the ministry of food security and research will lead this effort. He said the steps taken by the National Security Committee were necessary to protect Pakistan from the coronavirus. "We all have a role to play to fight this disease," he said.

### **Punjab Food Dept ensuring flour availability at a fixed rate: minister**

Punjab Food Minister Samiullah Chaudhry has said that the provincial food department has taken various steps to ensure the availability of flour at a fixed rate. According to media, the minister said that a 33 percent increase is noted in flour supply. He said that the supply of 20kg flour bag daily had been increased from 776,000kg to 1,035,000kg.

Chaudhry said that flour release percentage daily has also been increased from 25,894 metric tons to 30,154 metric tons. Punjab Food Department has also set up a dedicated helpline for the facility of people, he added.

The minister said that fair price shops have also been established to ensure the availability of flour to the masses. He further said that wheat release to flour mills daily has also been increased from 25,680 metric tons to 30,000 metric tons.

### **Pakistan fears the trade crisis**

Exporters expect huge losses over the coming months, as borders close and transport limited due to coronavirus

Pakistan's fruit and vegetable association (PFVA) fears the impact of coronavirus, which has seen Pakistan close its borders and international airlines suspend services, could cost the industry up to US\$150m. PVFA head, Waheed Ahmed, indicated things could get worse before they get better.

"If the present situation prevails for the next two months, it is anticipated that the overall export of fruits and vegetables from Pakistan will sustain a massive loss of over US\$150m," said Ahmed.

"Transportation of food items via sea route is experiencing problems and under these circumstances, only those countries

that have a strong agriculture sector along with adequate food for their local population can avoid such a crisis."

A report published suggested the country's fresh produce exports to Europe, the Far East, and the Middle East were under threat as a result of coronavirus related closures. "Mega super-stores are shutting down as preventive measures against the deadly virus, and this is having a pronounced negative impact on the export of fruits and vegetables," added Ahmed.

Mango exports, which are expected to commence in June, could also be seriously affected, according to Ahmed. "If the pandemic is not fully controlled, exports will be affected, leading to huge financial losses to the exporters as well as the agriculture sector."

### **SC moved against the export of fruit, vegetables**

A petition had been moved to Supreme Court (SC) on seeking a ban on the export of fruit and vegetables from the country in wake of COVID-19. The petition stated that the fruit and vegetables were being sold against exorbitant prices due to the lockdown and export of these items to the other countries.

It further stated that the treatment of coronavirus disease was only a strong immune system in a human body that could be increased by consuming fruit and vegetables.

The petition said that oranges were being sold against Rs250 around per dozen, adding that it was useful against this disease. It further said that the poor population of the country couldn't buy fruit and vegetables while staying at home.

The petition prayed the court to impose a ban on the export of these eatable items to make them accessible for the downtrodden against the cheaper rates in current circumstances. ♦