

BD risks losing UK vegetable market over scanner malfunction at HSIA

A Monitor Report

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Dhaka : Bangladeshi vegetable exporters are failing to export produces to the United Kingdom since March 13 with the only scanner at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital out of order.

This has put Bangladeshi businesses in the UK in a tight spot as they are worried about losing the vegetable market as exports halted several times after the scanner stopped working in past few years, said reports.

Bangladeshi expatriates could not buy vegetables at New Spitalfields Market in East London, the largest wholesale vegetable market in the UK, on March 19.

Bangladeshi businesses in the UK said the exporters can send produces worth only GBP 32 million against an annual demand of GBP 100 million. And if vegetables can be supplied to Turkey, Africa and East European businesses in the UK, the market of Bangladeshi produces will be worth GBP 500 million.

Rafiq Haider, President of British Bangladeshi Vegetable Importers Association, said Bangladeshi vegetables over time are losing the market because of the irregular supplies.

In Bangladesh, the exporters are worried over the possibilities of losing their earnings to the lack of scanners.

One of them said the ongoing disruption caused by the scanner trouble is the third

in six months. This is making Bangladesh lose the UK vegetable export market while the European businesses are becoming more reliant on other countries.

President of Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables and Allied Products Exporters' Association, SMA Zahangir Hossain said the UK allows vegetables scanned through machines it has authorised and Dhaka airport had two such scanners. One of them is permanently out of order and the other often does not work.

The airport has an alternative scanner for Europe-bound produces. Qatar Airways transports some vegetables to the UK via the Middle-Eastern country, but only two tonnes of products are allowed through the route at a time. Also, the expensive service has made it difficult for exporters to use the route, added Zahangir.

"The situation has prevailed for two to three years. We wrote to the Civil Aviation Authority, but they are not doing anything. This is damaging the country."

Mansur Ahmed, General Secretary of the Exporters' Association, said 10 to 12 tonnes of produces could have been sent abroad had the scanner been operational and the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh earns 6 cents to scan 01 kg of produce.

"It would be possible to buy four scanners with the money earned in one week," he said, "but the authorities are not taking any measure."

Mansur claimed Salman F Rahman, Prime Minister's Advisor for Private Sector, had visited the airport to settle the issue earlier. "But nothing has worked. The government is taking so many steps to boost exports of agricultural products, but we are stuck at the airport."

Group Captain AHM Touhid-ul Ahsan, then Executive Director of the airport, said, on March 23, that it would take two more weeks to repair the scanner once the necessary parts arrive.

Officials said the parts of the scanner approved by the UK's Department of Transport are not available in Bangladesh.