

## MoFA for relaxing fumigation test of cotton imported from USA

REZAUL KARIM | Thursday, 16 January 2020

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has favoured relaxing the provision for fumigation test of imported cotton from US at the port of entry.

Foreign minister Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen has requested agriculture minister Dr. Muhammad Abdur Razzaque to take necessary steps for partially amending the provision of the Plant Quarantine Rules-2018.

Such provision has been hampering the import of the key natural fibre from that country, he viewed in an official letter to the agriculture minister on January 01 last, a copy of which was obtained by the FE.

"Country's RMG sector is not witnessing desired export growth in recent time. So, special initiative should be taken in this regard," he mentioned in the letter.

Cotton imported from American region requires additional fumigation at the port of entry after arrival as per rule 14 of the Plant Quarantine Rules-2018.

However, sources said, the agriculture ministry is stick to its stance to continue carrying out fumigation on import of cotton from the USA.

At the 4th council medium-term meeting of Bangladesh-US Trade & Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement (TICFA), the US side requested Bangladesh to withdraw mandatory fumigation checking in importing cotton into Bangladesh's ports, they added.

The Bangladesh side assured the US side of taking required actions after discussion with stakeholders concerned, they said.

In July 2019, Bangladesh Tariff Commission (BTC) had recommended the government not to stop applying fumigation rules to avert possible harmful impact of an infamous insect 'boll weevil' on the local crops.

Senior officials at the agriculture ministry said there is no alternative to the fumigation process to avert possible harmful impacts of the insect.

According to the agriculture ministry, 'boll weevil' remains alive for 11 months and flies up to five miles. It is very harmful to local crops including cotton and ladies fingers.

Investigation reveals, there is no presence of infamous insect in US cotton. The price of US cotton is less than many other countries, Dr. Momen argued in the letter.

The minister explained in the letter that more cotton will be imported from USA if we apply rules by amending the existing provision while importing US cotton at the port of entry like other countries.

As a result, "We will be able to bargain decreasing import duty or duty with the United States," the foreign minister added.

Earlier, the cotton importers and spinners had urged the authorities concerned to leave the age-old provision of performing fumigation in importing raw cotton from the USA to save time and money.

Besides, American cotton industry leaders called for lifting the fumigation rules on import of the US commodity into Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is the only country, which imposes fumigation requirement of American cotton at the port of entry, although related rules of Pakistan show that it also maintains same requirement for cotton.

Seemingly, since Bangladesh is one of the biggest importers of cotton, American cotton exporters are

focusing on Bangladesh market.

Bangladesh sources cotton mainly from Africa, India, CIS countries and the United States, according to BTC.

Bangladesh, one of the largest importers of cotton in the world, imports cotton from different countries.

The volume of cotton import was US\$ 5.85 billion in the 2018. Country meets 10 per cent of its requirements with the US cotton.

Bangladesh produced 1.65 lakh bales of cotton in the last fiscal year (FY), which is less than 02 per cent of the annual demand of 10 million bales, according to BTC.

As per Rule 3(7) of Plant quarantine Rules, 2018, any cotton imported into Bangladesh must carry the SPS certificate from the competent authorities of the exporting country.

The then Pakistan government had prepared the 'Destructive insects and plants' rules in 1966 to give incentive to the cotton farming of West Pakistan, according to the minister's letter.

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