Seed crisis deals setback

FROM PAGE 12

vegetables on two bighas. "But the high demand for onion inspired me to cultivate onions on all seven bighas this year," he said.

But he was only able to buy 2kg onion seeds from the local market, at a cost of Tk 14,500. "I need 4-5kg seeds for cultivating

the entire land. If I don't manage to get it in the next one or two weeks, I may miss the season.

Babu had to borrow money in order to buy the seeds, which he got last year for Tk 1,200, as he didn't anticipate needing so much money for seeds.

The seed crisis in local markets has now led to rocketing prices, which has reached the highest ever level in the country -- and farmers are bearing the brunt.

Seed traders are taking advantage of the lack of fixed-price seeds and charging excessive prices, farmers alleged, due to the lack of monitoring by the government.

ÚNSTABLE SEED MARKET

Amidst a scarcity of local seed, Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) has also stopped selling fixed-price seed to farmers, sources said, badly affecting the onion seed market.

Talking with The Daily Star, Md Abu Rayhan Tarek, manager of seed marketing at BADC, said the corporation usually supplies some onion seeds every year but farmers mostly depended on local markets and seeds marketed by private companies.

BADC was unable to reserve sufficient onion seeds this year, he added.

vear, BADC supplied five "Last tonnes of onion seeds but this year only has a reserve of 3.4 tonnes," Tarek said

"BADC, however, could not sell any onion seeds to farmers at the government fixed rate [Tk 3,500 per kg] because we have supplied all the seeds available to the Department of Agricultural Extension [DAE] for their departmental projects.

Most of the farmers did not preserve seeds last season due to the high price of onion, which in turn caused a price hike of onion seeds this year, he added.

The current retail price of local onion is Tk 75 per kg, although the price at one point exceeded Tk 200 during the past few months.

DAE Director General Md Asadullah told The Daily Star that seed trader syndicates were destabilising the seed market -- so, the DAE is planning to give seed aid to small farmers.

"Due to the seed crisis, we plan to distribute seed aid among 50,000 farmers in 21 high onion-cultivating districts. Each farmer will get 250g onion seed per bigha," the DG said.

The yearly demand of onion is approximately 32-33 lakh tonnes but annual domestic production has been

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25-26 lakh tonnes in the last few years, leaving a shortage every year that causes the crisis, the DAE DG added.

Imported onions -- largely from India -- make up the shortfall, and prices leapt when India banned onion exports earlier in September. A total of 25.6 lakh tonnes of

onion were produced last year across the country, cultivated on 2.38 lakh hectares, according to the DAE. This season, the DAE has targeted a

total of 2.50 lakh hectares of land for onion cultivation -- of these, 1.85 lakh hectares for seed onion cultivation and 65,000 hectares for bulb onion production, said Khandaker Md Rashed Iftekhar, control room incharge of DAE (Khamarbari).

This season's onion production target is 29.5 lakh tonnes, he added.

Bulb onion, known locally as "kondo peyaj", has already been cultivated and is expected to be harvested from mid-December, Rashed told The Daily Star, and farmers are also preparing to cultivate seed onion from this month.

A total of 1,142 tonnes of seeds are needed to achieve the onion cultivation target, he added.

PRODUCTION COSTS UP BY 30PC Meanwhile, farmers said onion production costs have risen by around 30 percent due to the price hike of onion seeds as well as higher labour costs.

Where last year he spent Tk 25,000-30,000 for cultivating each bigha of onion, this year he needs Tk 35,000-40,000, Md Jowadul Islam Montu, a reputed onion trader from Manikhat village in Sujanagar upazila, told The Daily Star.

Labour costs went up too, he said, where last year he paid day labourers Tk 400 per day, he paid Tk 600 this time.

Montu added that onion seeds from the retail market are of poor quality, so he is unsure about onion yield in the coming year.

DAE DG Md Asadullah said despite the scarcity of good quality seeds, he expects the cultivation target will be achieved.

"Although we do not have sufficient quality seeds this year, we have still taken a large target for onion production as an additional yield of two lakh tonnes of onion is expected this year."

The DG claimed, despite the high seed price and other costs as well as quality concerns, farmers will manage to get the necessary seeds and cultivate their fields as targeted.

"Seed crises provide a good lesson for the agriculture department. We have a plan to increase production of quality seeds to bring up the capacity of the department so that farmers are not harassed in this way in the future," the DG said.



A Buddhist monk paddles a boat down a flooded street in Nakon Si Thammarat province in Thailand yesterday. Six days of heavy rain caused widespread flooding in the province, affecting hundreds of communities and inundating large swaths of farmland. PHOTO: REUTERS

35 more die, 2,316 infected

FROM PAGE 12

16.72 percent. At the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak, the daily positivity rate was comparatively lower, but it rose to 25 percent of those tested in late May.

Until the third week of August, the positivity rate was over 20 percent, which came down to 10 percent in October.

Since the beginning of November, the positivity rate started rising again and rose to the highest 16.43 percent in the last two months.

Meanwhile, a total of 2,593 Covid-19 patients have recovered in

the last 24 hours.

recoveries reached at 388,379 and the recovery rate at 82.33 percent. Among the 35 dead, 23 were males.

All of them died in hospitals. One of them aged between 11 and

20 years, one between 21 and 30, five between 41- and 50, five between 51 and 60, and rest 23 above 60 years,

Barishal divisions, three each were from Rangpur and Chattogram, five were from Mymensingh and 22 were from Dhaka division.

As of yesterday noon, a total With this, the total number of of 2,955 Covid-19 patients were undergoing treatment at general beds while 334 were at ICU beds in the Covid-19 dedicated hospitals across the country.

> Of all dead so far, 5,164 -- more than 76 percent -- were males.

And a total of 3,598 or more than 53 percent were above 60 years old while 1,752 or nearly 26 percent were

aged between 51 and 60 years. So far, Dhaka division saw the highest number of casualties due to Covid-19 followed by 1,269 or nearly 19 percent from Chattogram division.

New mysterious monolith FROM PAGE 12

outside the small town of Atascadero, San Luis Obispo County, in central California.

According to local newspaper Atascadero News, the monolith was spotted on Wednesday at the top of Pine Mountain. Several people have already rushed to the site to see the mysterious structure and take photos with it.

The report said the structure appeared to be made of stainless steel, 10-feet tall and 18 inches wide and

weighing about 200 pounds. As with other monoliths sighted in

recent weeks, there is no information about who installed the structure or why.

The object appeared welded together at each corner, with rivets attaching the side panels to a likely steel frame inside.

Unlike its Utah sibling, the monolith in California wasn't strongly attached to the ground and looked like it could be easily knocked over, the local media report stated.

This is the third sighting of a monolith in less than 20 days after the first metal structure was spotted in Utah on 18 November, leading to speculations about why it was installed and by whom. Almost as mysteriously as it appeared, the structure was removed on 27 November by five men who told witnesses to "leave no trace". The pilot who first spotted the Utah structure said he believed it could be

an artist's installation, while many rival theories also cropped up, some inevitably involving aliens.

They're also Moscow vaccination centres FROM PAGE 12

hackers targeting companies critical to People in Moscow will be able to the distribution of Covid-19 vaccines, a register for the jab online from today, sign that digital spies are turning their Sobyanin said in a statement on his attention to the complex logistical work involved in inoculating the

Bhutto threatens FROM PAGE 12

five-day working tour of the coastal areas and the Sundarbans. The prime minister has seen for himself the coastal embankments for the conservation of forest resources of the area during his tour. He is also learnt to have had extensive discussions with the local leaders and people about the problems of the coastal areas and the ways and means for their solution. The prime minister also issues an order during his trip to the relevant authorities to expedite the survey work of unexplored islands in the Bay of Bengal, including Manpura in Barisal district.

AUSTRIAN ENVOY CALLS ON BANGABANDHU

Austrian Ambassador Dr Saller, accompanied by Otto Santer, Austrian expert on tourism, calls on Bangabandhu at the Gono Bhaban today. The Austrian Ambassador says they will visit some tourist spots in Bangladesh and prepare a survey report to see what Austria can do for the development of tourism in Bangladesh.

BANGLADESH TEAM VISITS FARAKKA

A five-member team of Bangladesh experts led by BM Abbas, adviser to the Bangladesh prime minister and chairman of Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission, visits Farakka today

After visiting the Farakka project, the team will proceed to Patna and from there will go by a special plane to see the Kosi Barrage and other river protection works in that area. After these visits the team will go to Delhi for the third meeting of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission to be held from December 11 to 13.

SOURCES: December 5, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.

Madhu's bust

FROM PAGE 12

'I left the university campus in [Wednesday] the evening and everything was fine. But after hearing the news around 7:30pm, I returned to the canteen and found an ear of my father's sculpture broken," said Arun Kumar Dey, eldest son of Shaheed Madhusudan Dey, and the canteen's owner.

Arun said he informed the VC, proctor of the university, Shahbagh Police Station and Chhatra League president and secretary of the matter. The university authorities sent a proctorial team and police visited the spot. Around midnight, they called a repairman and put the ear back in place, he added.

Contacted, DU Proctor Prof AKM Golam Rabbani told The Daily Star that it could not be known yet whether the incident was intentional or unintentional. The people concerned have been asked to probe the incident, he added.

The sculpture was first inaugurated by then DUVC Prof Emajuddin Ahmed in 1995. After the reconstruction of the sculpture in its present location, it was opened in 2001 by then VC AK Azad Chowdhury.

Its sculptor was Toufiq Hosen Khan.

২য় পুনঃ নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

সবি নিযোগেব লক্ষ্যে প্রকত যোগতে

তারিখঃ ০২/১২/২০২০ briefing.

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FROM PAGE 12 Khan Menon, president of Workers Party, told the "All democratic and

website.

added the release. One each was from Rajshahi and

বাংলাদেশ শিপিং কর্পোরেশন

বিএসসি ভবন, সল্টগোলা রোড, চট্টগ্রাম

Website: www.bsc.gov.bd

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					১২ বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা।
08	মহাব্যবস্থাপক	গী<	8¢	<u>68000-66660-</u>	প্রথম শ্রেণীর কম্পিটেন্সী (ডেক) সার্টিফিকেট
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- চাকুরীরত প্রার্থীকে অবশ্যই যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের মাধ্যমে আবেদন করতে হবে; কোন অগ্রিম কপি গ্রহণযোগ্য হবে না এবং হাতে হাতে ob কোন আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে না;
- উল্লিখিত পদে ইতোপর্বে যে সমস্ত প্রার্থীগণ আবেদন করেছেন তাদের পুনরায় আবেদন করার প্রয়োজন নেই ০৯
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সতর্কীকরণঃ

জিডি-১৯২৭

নিয়োগ	সংক্রান্ত	বিষয়ে	কোন	পক্ষের	সাথে	কোন	প্রকার			
যোগাযোগ এবং আর্থিক লেনদেনের আলামত পাওয়া গেলে তা										
প্রার্থীর	অযোগ্যত	া হিসে	ব গণ্য	করা	হবে এ	বং তাণ	ংক্ষণিক			
প্রার্থীর আবেদনপত্রটি বাতিল হিসেবে বিবেচিত হবে।										

খালেদ মাহমুদ সচিব, বিএসসি সদস্য-সচিব, নিয়োগ সংক্রান্ত বাছাই কমিটি-১ বিএসসি ভবন, সল্টগোলা রোড, চট্টগ্রাম ফোন নং ০৩১-৭২৪৪৭৯/৭২৪৮৩২

patriotic forces will have to be united to resist these fundamentalists," he added. The press conference was held to affirm the party's stance against the

recent ongoing movement of some Islamist outfits including Hefajat-e Islam, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish and Islami Andolan Bangladesh against sculptures.

In recent times, Hefajat top leaders including its newly-elected amir (chief) Junayed Babunagari and joint secretary general Mamunul Haque have been staging showdowns against the government's move to construct a sculpture of the Father of the Nation in the capital. In yesterday's press briefing, Menon called upon the government to handle fundamentalists with an iron hand. He said Islamist outfits are trying to turn "Bangladesh into another Pakistan".

Fazle Hossain Badsha, general secretary of the party and also a lawmaker, criticised the government for its "soft stance" against those who were opposing Bangabandhu's sculpture. "This strategy of the

government will not bring any good result," he said. Workers Party leaders called upon the ruling Awami League to make the AL-led 14-party alliance more active and stronger

to tackle Hefajat and other Islamist outfits politically. About Babunagari and Mamunul, they said through speaking

against Bangabandhu and the constitution, those two have violated the constitution.

They also said they were shocked that Babunagari and Mamunul were yet to be arrested.

At the event, party leaders also raised questions about the logic of banning political programmes in the capital without prior permission.

Russia, which has resisted imposing stringent lockdown measures, reported a record 28,145 new infections earlier yesterday, including 7,750 in Moscow.

The virus has killed at least 1,495,205 people worldwide since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP vesterday.

The United States is the worstaffected country with 273,847 deaths from 13,925,350 cases.

US deaths from the pandemic have surged past 2,000 for two days in a row as the most dangerous season of the year approached, taxing an overwhelmed healthcare system with US political leadership in disarray.

The toll from Covid-19 reached its second-highest level ever on Wednesday with 2,811 lives lost, according to a Reuters tally of official data, one short of the record from April 15.

Nearly 200,000 new US cases were reported on Wednesday, with record hospitalisations approaching 100,000 patients.

The sobering data came as the head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Wednesday warned that December, January and February were likely to be "the most difficult time in the public health history of this nation.

CDC Director Dr Robert Redfield told an event hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce that the United States could start losing around 3,000 people - roughly the number that died in the attacks of September 11, 2001 each day over the next two months.

"The mortality concerns are real and I do think unfortunately before we see February, we could be close to 450,000 Americans that have died from this virus," Redfield said.

US hopes to have immunised 100 million people by the end of February, with priority given to the elderly, health care workers, and first responders.

In Iran, coronavirus infections surpassed one million cases yesterday, as the authorities consider easing restrictions in many parts of the Middle East's hardest hit country.

The Islamic republic has recorded 1,003,494 infections since announcing its first cases in February, ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on state television.

The coronavirus has killed 49,348 people in Iran over the same period of time, according to official figures. **IBM WARNS**

IBM is sounding the alarm over

world's population against the novel coronavirus.

The information technology company said in a blog post published yesterday that it had uncovered "a global phishing campaign" focused on organizations associated with the Covid-19 vaccine "cold chain" - the process needed to keep vaccine doses at extremely cold temperatures as they travel from manufacturers to people's arms.

The US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency reposted the report, warning members of Operation Warp Speed - the US government's national vaccine mission to be on the lookout.

Facebook Inc yesterday said it would remove false claims about Covid-19 vaccines that have been debunked by public health experts, following a similar announcement by Alphabet Inc's YouTube in October.

The move expands Facebook's current rules against falsehoods and conspiracy theories about the pandemic.

The social media company says it takes down coronavirus misinformation that poses a risk of "imminent" harm, while labeling and reducing distribution of other false claims that fail to reach that threshold. World Health Organization European director Hans Kluge said yesterday the promise of Covid-19 vaccines is "phenomenal" and "potentially game-changing".

Britain approved Pfizer Inc's Covid-19 vaccine, developed with Germany's BioNTech, outpacing the world in the race to begin the most crucial mass inoculation programme in history.

Speaking from Copenhagen, Kluge said vaccine supplies would be very limited at first and that countries must decide who gets priority, though the WHO also cited "growing consensus" that first recipients should be older people, medical workers and people with other diseases, as Britain plans.

The coronavirus still had the potential to do "enormous damage", Kluge said, but "the future looks brighter" as other vaccine candidates, including from Moderna and AstraZeneca, have also delivered positive trial results.

"The more candidates we have, the more opportunities for success, Kluge told a news briefing. "Vaccines, combined with other public health measures, bring the end of an acute phase of the pandemic and the rebuilding of economies within reach."

Israel behind

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the Mossad. While Iran has provided no evidence of Israeli involvement, Israel has neither denied nor claimed responsibility for Fakhrizadeh's death.

The New York Times first reported that a US official said Israel was behind the attack over the weekend.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Israel less than two weeks before the attack was carried out, part of a regional trip that included the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, all places where he discussed Iran with his counterparts.

President Donald Trump has given Pompeo carte blanche to continue carrying out the administration's "maximum pressure" campaign over the next two months, the official said, adding that there will be more US sanctions on Iran this week and next.

The threat level to Americans in the region has not increased since the attack, particularly because Iran is blaming Israel for the assassination, the official said. But the US believes the Iranians have not yet retaliated for the killing of General Qassem Soleimani, the leader of Iran's elite military force and the country's second most powerful leader, and that is the area the US intelligence community is watching right now, the official said.

The US government expects possible Iranian retaliation around the January 3 anniversary of the Soleimani strike, but the official explained that Iran's options are constrained because President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration will be about two weeks after that date.

An Iranian move to take kinetic ction against the US -- particularly killing Americans -- would make it harder for Biden to lift sanctions on Iran when he gets into office in order to jumpstart diplomacy, the official said. If Iran does not do anything, their retaliation threats would look hollow at home and by players in the region, the official said.

During a foreign policy speech last year, Biden said he would rejoin the 2015 Iran nuclear deal if Tehran starts complying with the pact, a move that advisers say will require close work with allies and a near immediate start of new negotiations.

After the Trump administration left the pact and launched its maximum pressure campaign, Iran announced that it would no longer limit itself to the deal's restrictions.