

Separate industrial city for Ctg salt producers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

The Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) has taken an initiative to develop a separate industrial city for salt producers in Chattogram.

BSCIC Chairman Mostaque Hassan announced the move yesterday during the organisation's half-year review meeting with the salt mill owners of Chattogram region, according to a press release.

The meeting, held under the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (CIDD) project, was jointly organised by the BSCIC and Nutrition International.

After the salt mill owners declare their demands regarding plots, the BSCIC authority will run a feasibility study before developing a separate industrial hub for salt production, Hassan said.

Considering the losses incurred by the salt industry amid the ongoing pandemic, the BSCIC would reduce the price of potassium iodate by Tk 500 per kilogramme in January, he said.

Potassium iodate is currently being sold at Tk 2,500 to Tk 3,000 per kilogramme.

Under the CIDD project, the BSCIC has been importing potassium iodate for distribution among the country's salt refineries.

This is done by dividing the country's salt mills into eight zones, as iodization of edible salt is mandatory.

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The humble farmer who made Tk 2.5cr off her onion seeds

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Sahida Begum was busy arranging lunch for her 10 farm hands when this correspondent went to her house on Friday around 11:30am.

There was little to give away the fact that this humble 43-year-old farmer of Faridpur's Gobindapur village had accomplished a remarkable feat: attaining a profit of Tk 2.5 crore selling onion seeds.

"This year I got 200 maunds of onion seed from 30 acres of land spending Tk 1 crore," she said explaining that each maund sold for Tk 2 lakh.

"Onion growers from different parts of our country came to buy our seed. Demand has been good...even if I had 500 maunds, I could have easily sold it," she added.

This achievement did not come about overnight. It was back in 2004 that she took up onion seed cultivation on 20 decimals of land. That year she got only two maunds which she sold for Tk 80,000.

Next year it was 13 maunds, each selling for Tk 40,000. This perked her interest, as the profits were good. The next year she took lease of more land and attained 32 maunds. And this practice continued for the following years.

"Last year I cultivated on 15 acres of land and got 150 maunds. Every year I try to cultivate new varieties so that farmers can get bumper production," said Sahida Begum.

"Now I am producing different varieties, including Rajshahi Tahripur, Superking, Sukhsagar, Nasirking and also hybrid ones," she said.

"The seed production has already started. After sorting, the onion bulbs have been taken to the field to be planted. The November-December period is the proper time to plant bulbs for onion seed," she said.

She packs her products in her own home under the brand "Khan Seed" and even offers delivery service to customers.

"Onion growers of our area do not cultivate anything other than with her



SUZIT KUMAR DAS

Sahida Begum, right, seen with her husband Md Bakhtar Hossain on her onion field joins farm hands in preparations for packing, done in her home in Faridpur's Gobindapur village under her brand "Khan Seed". Her endeavours towards ensuring quality made her onion seeds a favourite among local farmers while enabling employment for some 50 people during harvests.

seeds. Her onion seeds are excellent," compliments onion grower Md Habibur Rahman of Kalipur village under Mashpur upazila in Jhenaidah while talking to this correspondent over the

phone. Praises also came from Laboni Begum, one of the 50 or so locals she employs during onion seed harvesting period.

"Sahida is an excellent woman. She works with us at her field. She takes her meals with us. She cooks for us as a family member," she said. Losing her job at a local cotton mill

in the fallouts of the pandemic, Laboni Begum was offered to work on the fields by Sahida Begum for Tk 400 a day. "It was really a great offer for me to run my family," she said.

Amidst all this, Sahida Begum has gone on to raise two daughters, one currently a banker and the other studying in class nine at Faridpur Government Girls' High School.

Her husband Md Bakhtar Hossain, also a banker by profession, was supervising workers on the planting of onion bulbs during this correspondent's visit.

He said he always tried to help her on the weekends at the fields, four acres their own and the rest taken on lease.

"My wife works early morning to late night for this onion seeds. Onion seeds have to be nurtured like a child, otherwise its quality is lost. She has been doing this work alone with the workers for years," he said.

"My wife is now a competent farmer just like any other man could be. I am very proud of her," said Hossain.

"Many young and educated men and women became interested in cultivating onion seeds seeing my work. They come to me to know how I cultivate onion seed," said Sahida Begum, now an icon for farmers in Faridpur sadar upazila.

"Sahida is our listed onion seed producer. The quality of her seeds is excellent. So, onion growers from different parts of our country buy her seeds," said Ashutosh Biswas, assistant deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension.

"Faridpur is in second position in terms of onion production and supply all over the country. Besides, 60 to 70 per cent of the demand of onion seeds in the country is fulfilled from Faridpur," he added.

"Onion seeds were cultivated on 1,415 hectares of land in Bhanga, Nagarkanda, Saltha and Faridpur sadar upazilas last year. A total of 849 tonnes of onion seeds were produced," he said.

Sahida Begum suggests the government build cold storages, saying it would generate more interest among people to cultivate onion.



GLOBAL BUSINESS

Nissan joins GM in exiting auto group backing Trump

REUTERS, Washington

Japanese automaker Nissan Motor Co on Friday joined General Motors Co in exiting a group of automakers that had backed US President Donald Trump in his bid to prevent California from imposing its own vehicle emissions rules.

GM last week reversed course in an ongoing court fight and abandoned the outgoing Republican president, winning praise from Democratic President-elect Joe Biden, who takes office on Jan. 20.

"We are confident that productive conversations among the auto industry, the Biden administration and California can deliver a common-sense set of national standards that increases efficiency and meets the needs of all American drivers," Nissan said in a statement.

GM had joined Nissan, Toyota Motor Corp, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV and other automakers in October 2019 in support of Trump effort's to bar California from setting its own fuel-efficiency rules, or zero-emission requirements, for vehicles - separate from federal requirements.

Others still backing Trump include Mazda Motor Corp, Hyundai Motor, Kia Motors Corp Mitsubishi Motors Corp, Subaru Corp and the National Automobile Dealers Association.

The industry still remained split on how to move forward after it held a meeting Tuesday.

Biden has made boosting electric vehicles a top priority and pledged to spend billions of dollars to add 550,000 charging stations for such vehicles. He also supports new tax credits for purchases of electric vehicles and retrofitting factories for their production.

Ford Motor Co, Honda Motor Co, Volkswagen AG and BMW AG in July 2019 struck a voluntary agreement with California on reducing vehicle emissions that is less stringent than rules previously adopted under President Barack Obama but higher than the Trump administration's rollback.



REUTERS/FILE

The logo of Nissan Motor Corp is seen in the company's showroom in Tokyo.

US labour market losing steam as Covid-19 pandemic rages

REUTERS, Washington

The US economy added the fewest workers in six months in November, hindered by a resurgence in new COVID-19 cases that, together with a lack of more government relief money, threatens to reverse the recovery from the pandemic recession.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report on Friday also showed 3.9 million people have been out of work for at least six months, with many giving up, a sign of a lack of confidence in the labor market. The report, which only covered the first two weeks of November, when the current wave of coronavirus infections started, underscored the challenges facing President-elect Joe Biden when he takes over from President Donald Trump on Jan. 20.

Biden called the report "grim" and urged Congress and Trump to provide additional fiscal stimulus. "Americans need help and they need it now," the president-elect said in a statement.

The economy has recouped only 12.4 million of the 22.2 million jobs lost in March and April. Even with a vaccine on the way, economists are warning of a bleak winter. US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Friday there was momentum behind talks on a coronavirus relief bill.

Nonfarm payrolls increased by 245,000 jobs last month after rising by 610,000 in October. That was the smallest gain since the jobs recovery started in May and the fifth straight monthly slowdown in job growth. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast payrolls would increase by 469,000 jobs in November. Hiring peaked at 4.781 million jobs in June.

"The recovery is stalling and fragile at best," said Sung Won Sohn, finance and economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "The onset of winter and resurgence of the virus could knock the economy into another dip before the vaccine and more stimulus from Washington come to the rescue."

Job growth last month was held back by further departures of



REUTERS/FILE

Hundreds of people line up outside the Kentucky Career Center, over two hours prior to its opening, to find assistance with their unemployment claims, in Frankfort, Kentucky, US.

temporary workers hired for the 2020 Census. Local governments shed more workers, especially at schools, causing overall government payrolls to drop by 99,000 jobs, the third straight monthly decline. The private sector added 344,000 jobs.

The retail sector lost 35,000 jobs, reflecting weak seasonal hiring amid the pandemic. But hiring in transportation and warehousing increased by 145,000 jobs, accounting for nearly three-fifths of the payroll gains. Employment also increased in the professional and business services, financial activities and health care industries. Construction payrolls rose by 27,000 jobs and manufacturers added 27,000 positions.

The smaller-than-expected job gains added to reports on consumer spending, manufacturing and services industries in suggesting that the recovery from the worst recession since the Great Depression was ebbing.

"At this rate, complete stagnation or job losses in December would not be a huge surprise," said Beth Akers, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. "It's hard to imagine that the remaining jobs we lost early this spring will return until we've

successfully distributed a vaccine that would allow businesses to return to normal operations."

Wall Street's main indexes jumped to all-time highs on hopes for additional fiscal stimulus. The dollar dipped against a basket of currencies. US Treasury prices were mostly lower.

At least 213,830 new COVID-19 cases and 2,861 deaths were reported in the United States on Thursday, according to a Reuters tally of official data.

More than \$3 trillion in government COVID-19 relief approved earlier this year helped millions of unemployed Americans cover daily expenses and companies keep workers on payrolls, leading to record economic growth in the third quarter. The uncontrolled pandemic and lack of another rescue package could result in the economy contracting in the first quarter of 2021.

While the unemployment rate fell to 6.7 per cent from 6.9 per cent in October, that was because 400,000 people dropped out the labor force. It was also biased down by people misclassifying themselves as being "employed but absent from work." Without this misclassification, the jobless rate would have been 7.1 per cent.

NEWS In Brief

Regulator fines Bank of China over loss-making product linked to crude oil

REUTERS, Shanghai

State-owned Bank of China (BoC) has been fined 50.5 million yuan (\$7.73 million) over irregularities in a loss-making product linked to crude oil, the banking regulator said on Saturday.

The China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission began an investigation after BoC settled trades for its product at negative prices following April's crash in US crude futures, leaving many retail investors facing losses.

The regulator levied penalties on the bank and some of its branches for what it called the bank's irregular product management, imprudent risk management, incomplete internal controls and non-compliant sales management.

In a statement on its website, the regulator added that it had issued warnings and fines to four people in the bank's global markets department, and suspended "access for Bank of China's relevant business and branches", but did not elaborate.

In response, BoC said in a website statement it was "determined to accept the penalties" and take relevant regulatory measures.

Tesla says Black people hold just 4pc of its US leadership roles

REUTERS

Black employees make up just 4 per cent of Tesla Inc's American leadership roles and 10 per cent of its total workforce in the country, the electric carmaker has disclosed in its first US diversity report.

Women comprise 17 per cent of the company's US leadership roles - directors and vice presidents - and 21 per cent of the overall workforce, according to the report. The figures for Asian, Black and Hispanic people combined are 33 per cent and 60 per cent.

The carmaker noted, though, that leadership roles were a "very small cohort", or less than 0.4 per cent, of its workforce.

Elon Musk's Tesla, whose meteoric rise has seen it become the most valuable auto company in the world and worth about \$550 billion, acknowledged the lack of representation.



REUTERS/FILE

Tesla Inc CEO Elon Musk speaks onstage during a delivery event for Tesla China-made Model 3 cars at its factory in Shanghai, China.