

# Fear of low production grips onion seed growers in Faridpur

*Drought, pests and low pollination are the reasons, farmers say*



A total of 1,711 hectares of land across nine upazilas in Faridpur are being used for onion seed cultivation this year while it was 1,400 hectares last year.

PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

## DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

SUZIT KUMAR DAS, Faridpur

Onion seed producers in Faridpur fear a lower than expected harvest this time as droughts, swarming caterpillar attacks and low pollination have hampered cultivation this year.

Farmers in Faridpur made significant profits from onion seed production last year, when they sold each maund (37 kg) for Tk 80,000 to Tk 2.5 lakh.

One such farmer was Shahida Begum, who earned Tk 4 crore by selling onion seeds in 2020. For her achievement, Begum received the

Channel I Agro Award.

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Farmers are cultivating various varieties of onion seed, including Rajshahi Tahirpur, Superking, Sukhsagar, BARI-4, Nasik King and also the hybrid ones.

But during a visit to Vachanchar and Gobindapur village of Faridpur Sadar upazila on Friday, this correspondent found that most of the onion shoots sticking out of the ground had dried up.

Some sprouts also showed signs of swarming caterpillar attacks while others failed to flower at all due to a lack of pollination.

"I cultivated 50 decimals of land last year and

got 50 kilogrammes [kg] of onion seeds. For this reason, I cultivated the seeds on 120 decimals this year by spending Tk 1.2 lakh," said Nazir Uddin Mandal, a farmer of Vachanchar village.

"But since the presence of bees has declined this year, the pollination process did not properly take place. Now I doubt whether I will get even 80 kgs of seeds from my land," he added.

Echoing the sentiment, Mithun Mollah, another farmer in the area, said onion seed production would not be more than 30 to 40 per cent of the expected level this year due to drought, insect infestations and a lack of pollination.

Mollah alleged that the local agriculture department office did not provide any detailed advice or research on onion seeds.

READ MORE ON B3

# No shortage of sugar in Ramadan

*Govt officials say steps have been taken to build stock for additional demand*

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has taken steps to meet the additional demand for sugar and ensure unadulterated products during the upcoming fasting month of Ramadan, according to officials.

"Currently, we have 44,000 tonnes of sugar in stock that can be supplied to the markets through dealers and open sales," said Md Arifur Rahman Apu, chairman of the Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC).

Apu made these comments while addressing a virtual press briefing on a "special programme of the BSTI to control product quality during Ramadan and keep the price of sugar stable in the market," organised by the Ministry of Industries.

"We will supply loose sugar at Tk 63 per kilogramme [kg] and packaged sugar at Tk 68 per kg. There is no scope to sell our sugar for over Tk 75 at the retail level," he added.

However, a Trading Corporation of Bangladesh report on the price of daily essentials shows that sugar sold for around Tk 70 in Dhaka yesterday.

As per BSFIC data, Bangladesh needs around 18 lakh tonnes of sugar annually,

of which around three lakh tonnes are consumed during Ramadan.

Of the total demand, BSFIC provides just 50,000 tonnes per year while private sector operations account for the remaining 17.5 lakh tonnes.

While addressing the briefing, Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun said the government will take strict measures to prevent adulterated food or fake and low-quality products from entering the market during Ramadan.

Mobile court drives will continue while the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI) will strengthen its market monitoring to this end.

The industries minister also said that there will be no shortage of essential goods during the month of fasting.

"We have adequate stocks of sugar and salt."

If anyone tries to increase the price of goods by creating an artificial crisis through manipulation, then strict action will be taken against them.

"We will adopt a zero-tolerance policy against this," Humayun added.

Kamal Ahmed Majumder, the state minister for industries, and Md Nazrul Anwar, director general of the BSTI, were also present.



STAR/FILE

Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation currently has 44,000 tonnes of sugar in stock that can be supplied to the markets through dealers and open sales, an official said.

## GLOBAL BUSINESS

# China's antitrust regulator bulking up as crackdown on behemoths widens

REUTERS, BEIJING/HONG KONG

China's competition watchdog is adding staff and other resources as it ramps up efforts to crack down on anti-competitive behaviour, especially among the country's powerful companies, people with knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

Beijing's plan to bulk up the State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) comes as China revamps its competition law with proposed amendments including a sharp increase in fines and expanded criteria for judging a company's control of a market.

On Saturday, the watchdog slapped a record \$2.75 billion fine on Alibaba after an antimonopoly probe found the e-commerce giant had abused its dominant market position for several years.

The fine underscores the challenges ahead for companies, including global firms with operations in China, mainly in a tech sector that thrived during years of relatively laissez-faire market

regulation. It also mirrors the increasing activism of U.S. and European antitrust authorities in recent years.

The Beijing-headquartered agency plans to expand its antitrust workforce by around 20 to 30 staff, up from about 40 now, two people with direct knowledge of the matter said.

The watchdog also plans to delegate case reviewing power to its local bureaus

and source additional manpower from other government bodies and agencies to handle cases that require extensive investigation, four other people said. Budgets allocated for antimonopoly investigations, daily operations and research projects will also be increased, said three of the people cited above and one more person with knowledge of the matter.



AFP/FILE

A woman jogs in front of Alibaba headquarters in Hangzhou, China.

# Bitcoin above \$60,000 again on talk of reduced supply

REUTERS

Bitcoin rose above \$60,000 to approach record highs on the weekend, breaking out of a two-week tight range and propelled by talk of constrained new supplies against evidence of wider adoption.

The world's biggest and best-known cryptocurrency hit \$61,222.22 on Saturday, its highest in nearly a month. It was slightly lower at \$59,907 at 0500 GMT on Sunday.

Bitcoin (BTC) is up 116 per cent

from the year's low of \$27,734 on Jan. 4. It crossed the \$60,000 mark for the first time on March 13, hitting a record \$61,781.83 on Bitstamp exchange, just after US President Joe Biden signed his \$1.9 trillion fiscal stimulus package into law.

Justin d'Anethan, sales manager at digital asset company Diginex in Hong Kong, said investors had turned their attention to stock markets and other cryptocurrencies in the past couple of weeks, leaving Bitcoin idling in the upper 50-thousand dollar levels.

"That changed just yesterday when we pierced through 60K. With miners not selling recently minted coins, on-exchange reserves hitting multi-year lows and an incessant stream of corporates, funds, large and small investors piling into BTC, we punched through," he said.

Bitcoin's stunning gains this year have been driven by its mainstream acceptance as an investment and a means of payment, accompanied by the rush of retail cash into stocks, exchange-traded funds and other risky assets.

# Infrastructure wars: Competitive plays in US, Asia and what drives them

ANN/THE STRAITS TIMES

The big infrastructure plan unveiled by President Joe Biden last week is meant to do more than revive America's decaying infrastructure and create jobs.

The United States would like to prove that democracies can do big projects and challenge Beijing's all-but-official stance that the West is in a long-term decline.

Other countries around the world are also looking to ramp up spending to steal a march on their competitors. The Straits Times takes a look at competitive infrastructure plays around the world and the political and economic calculus driving them.

US President Joe Biden's American Jobs Plan is not only notable for finally attempting an ambitious injection of funds into America's decaying infrastructure.

It has an ideological agenda as well - to demonstrate, as China looms in the rearview mirror, that democracies are better than autocracies in renewing themselves and delivering for their people. The plan is also not just about lead pipes, roads and bridges or even high-speed Internet.

The pandemic has put a kink in President Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as supply chains are disrupted and countries battered by the outbreak delay and even suspend projects.

The havoc wreaked by Covid-19 and the bad press surrounding this ambitious modern-day Silk Road - linking Asia, Europe and Africa via land and sea routes - have forced Beijing to re-strategise, positioning the BRI as a "Green Silk Road", "Health Silk Road" and "Digital Silk Road".

Data tabulated by the Green Belt and Road Initiative Centre at the Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing showed Chinese investments in Belt and Road countries last year were US\$47 billion

(S\$63 billion), 54 per cent less than the year before.

Infrastructure cooperation in third countries will likely be on the agenda when Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga becomes the first world leader to meet United States President Joe Biden at the White House on April 16.

The two security allies are working together - under the umbrella of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision

motorists on Indonesia's Sumatra island after the first highway there opened last September.

Travelling 360km on a completed stretch of the highway - between the busy Bakauheni seaport in the southernmost province of Lampung and Palembang city - took 10 hours, or six hours shorter than on normal roads.

"Our rides are smoother now. We no longer have to experience sharp turns, and go up and down steep



REUTERS/FILE

A construction worker scales the northeast cables of the George Washington Bridge, which is undergoing a multi-year reconstruction in New York City.

- to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that is seen as a strategy for Beijing to expand its diplomatic and economic influence.

Japan's Yomiuri newspaper, citing sources, said Mr Biden and Mr Suga will likely discuss the export of next-generation infrastructure such as 5G telecommunication network and green technology, as well as the development of smart cities.

Steep inclines and sharp turns have become a thing of the past for

slopes," Mr Andika, who goes by one name, told The Straits Times. The 45-year-old owns a fleet of trucks transporting industrial equipment between the two locations.

It may have passed with little fanfare, but Indonesia inaugurated its first commercial project in March to deliver piped water to households, reflecting the country's growing ease with relying on private companies to deliver services on behalf of the government.