

# Garlic farmers not getting fair prices

*Struggling with a lack of storage facilities*



Women are seen processing garlic at Sonjoypur village in Atghoria upazila. The photo was taken on April 12.

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPI

## DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPI, back from Chalan Beel

The production of garlic, one of the most essential seasonings, is increasing every year with farmers of Chalan Beel in the northern Natore and Pabna districts this year accounting for around half of that grown in the country.

However, poor wholesale rates are depriving the region's farmers from getting fair prices for their produce, said sources.

Md Bachchu Alom of Korkola village in Chatmohar upazila cultivated the herb on five bighas of land after harvesting Aman paddy.

He expected a good profit from his harvest of around 125 maunds (one maund equals around 37 kilograms) this year.

But his hopes have been marred as the prices could not meet his expectations. Now he is struggling to recover the production cost.

He had invested some Tk 28,000 to Tk 30,000 per bigha and expected to earn a minimum of Tk 50,000 from each.

"I have sold most of the garlic at Tk 1,500 to Tk 1,600 per maund at Chaikola Haat, the biggest wholesale market for garlic in Chalan Beel region, over the last couple of weeks due to a price fall in the wholesale market," said Bachchu.

Around 25 per cent of the yield is of low quality, selling for Tk 600 to Tk 700 per maund.

Some 7.24 lakh tonnes of the herb have been harvested cultivating around 86,499 hectares of land across the country this year, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension.

Around 70 to 80 per cent of the crop has been harvested, it said.

"Last year farmers cultivated 93,655 hectares of land and produced 6.69 lakh tonnes of the

crop," Dr Shamim Ahmed, additional deputy director of the DAE, told The Daily Star.

"Production increased this year all because of good weather," he said.

According to the districts' DAE offices, 25,130 hectares of land were cultivated in Natore yielding approximately 2.38 lakh tonnes of garlic. In Pabna, it was 13,430 hectares and 1.27 lakh tonnes respectively.

Chalan Beel farmers used to cultivate Aman paddy during the monsoon.

After harvesting it, they used to plant garlic in the marshy land removing the floodwater and without ploughing it and covering up the fields with straw, said DAE Deputy Director Subroto Kumar Sarkar.

When the flood water recedes, fields become fertile to have a good garlic production.

Farmers of this part of Natore mostly cultivate garlic rather than other crops, said Sarkar.

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# Strong cybersecurity to build trust in a digital world



MAMUN RASHID

Among perennial issues such as geopolitical, economic, climate and health, one of the biggest challenges for countries today is cybersecurity.

As businesses and individuals become increasingly dependent on technology and digital connectivity, and with Covid-19 exacerbating our dependence, any disruption in our digital progress could be crippling.

And so, a "Digital Bangladesh" is no longer a dream, it is well and truly ubiquitous and has become the foundation of our development journey.

Rising digitisation is increasing the risks posed by cyber threats. If governments cannot ensure secure and trusted digital connectivity in a data driven world, individuals, businesses and the economy will suffer.

To that end, a "Digital Bangladesh" is sacrosanct and cannot be compromised.

However, Bangladesh's cybersecurity was compromised as recently as this week, when over 200 organisations in Bangladesh suffered cyberattacks, attributed to a few international hacker groups from East European and Asian countries.

Cyber and privacy risks are now everywhere, permeating the entire business network.



## OPINION

So, it's no surprise that this resulted in cyber threats becoming the number two concern, as cited by various chief executive officers (CEOs) in PwC's Global CEO Survey 2021.

The pandemic and health related crises topped the list of threats.

Paradoxically, despite their level of concern, CEOs are not proportionately boosting their spending on cybersecurity and data privacy.

Banks and non-bank financial institutions (NBFI) are making it increasingly easy to open accounts or apply for loans. Besides, the addition of new digital services improves the banking experience.

Still though, the standalone digital services that many banks rely on as a key part of their growth strategy pose security challenges.

Regardless of a financial institution's overall objectives, security is inherently tied to these goals. Without security and protection of customer data, it is difficult to achieve other types of growth objectives.

Bangladesh Bank has cautioned all banks to be vigilant against cyber threats and its possible fallout.

Criminals target financial institutions since that's where the money is. However, banks are yet to take adequate measures to tackle cyber lapses and hacking.

So, the banks need to enhance their cybersecurity and fraud controls and integrate cybersecurity programmes starting with assessing cybercrime risk.

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STAR/FILE

The headquarters of Bangladesh Bank in Motijheel, Dhaka. The BB has cautioned all banks to be vigilant against cyber threats and its possible fallout.

# Biden's chip dreams face reality check

REUTERS, San Francisco

To understand President Joe Biden's challenge in taming a semiconductor shortage bedeviling automakers and other industries, consider a chip supplied by a US firm for Hyundai Motor Co's new electric vehicle, the IONIQ 5.

Production of the chip, a camera image sensor designed by On Semiconductor, begins at a factory in Italy, where raw silicon wafers are imprinted with complex circuitry. The wafers are then sent first to Taiwan for packaging and testing, then to Singapore for storage, then on to China for assembly into a camera unit, and finally to a Hyundai component supplier in Korea before reaching Hyundai's auto factories.

A shortage of that image sensor has led to the idling of Hyundai Motor's plant in South Korea, making it the latest automaker to suffer from global supply woes that crippled production at most automakers including General Motors Co and Ford Motors Co and Volkswagen.

And the winding journey of the image sensor shows just how complicated it will be for the chip industry to both ramp up capacity to address the current shortage and re-invigorate US chip manufacturing. For a graphic, click [tmsnr.rs/3dW8nbN](https://tmsnr.rs/3dW8nbN)

US President Joe Biden on Monday convened semiconductor industry executives in Washington to discuss solutions to the chip crisis, the latest move in a broader effort to bolster the domestic chip industry. He's also proposed \$50 billion to support chip manufacturing and research as part of his \$2 trillion infrastructure proposal, which he said would help the United States win the global competition with China.

Much of that money will likely go towards the construction of multi-billion-dollar advanced chip plants by Intel,



US President Joe Biden

Samsung and TSMC. But industry executives say addressing the broader supply chain is crucial, and the Biden administration faces complicated choices on which elements of it to subsidize.

"Trying to reconstruct an entire supply chain from upstream to downstream in a single given location just isn't a possibility," David Somo, senior vice president at ON Semiconductor, told Reuters. "It would be prohibitively expensive."

The United States now only accounts for about 12 per cent of worldwide semiconductor manufacturing capacity, down from 37 per cent in 1990.

More than 80 per cent of global chip production now happens in Asia, according to industry data.

Producing a single computer chip can involve more than 1,000 steps, 70 separate border crossings and a host of specialized companies, most of them in Asia and largely unknown to the public.

The process starts with plate-size discs of raw silicon. At chip factories known as 'fabs', circuits are etched into the silicon and built up on its surface through a series of complicated chemical processes.

The next step - packaging - offers a good illustration of the supply chain challenges.



## GLOBAL BUSINESS

# UK economy advances despite lockdown

AFP, London

Britain's economy rebounded slightly in February despite coronavirus curbs while exports of goods to the European Union recovered a bit more, data showed Tuesday, sparking optimism over the outlook.

Gross domestic product rose by 0.4 per cent in February, after shrinking by 2.2 per cent in January, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement, noting a boost in industrial output and consumer spending.

"The economy showed some improvement in February after the large falls seen at the start of the year," an ONS spokeswoman remarked.

Activity grew despite England's latest Covid-19 lockdown, which was implemented in early January



REUTERS/FILE

A shopper walks down the street in London, Britain.

but partially eased this week on the back of a rapid vaccination drive.

From Monday, pubs were allowed to serve drinks outside -- and non-essential retailers and

hairdressers reopened as well.

The phased reopening, in tandem with speedy vaccinations, has sparked hopes for a rebound in economic activity in the current

# Grab agrees world's biggest SPAC merger, valued at \$40b

REUTERS, Singapore

Southeast Asia's biggest ride-hailing and food delivery firm, Grab Holdings, agreed a merger on Tuesday with US-based Altimeter Growth Corp in a deal that gives Grab an initial proforma equity value of about \$39.6 billion and will lead to a public listing.

The merger, the biggest blank-check company deal ever, underscores the frenzy on Wall Street as shell firms have raised \$99 billion in the United States so far this year after a record \$83 billion in 2020.

Singapore-based Grab's agreement with a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) backed by Altimeter Capital includes a more



AFP/FILE

A 'GrabBike' motorcyclist uses his mobile phone in Jakarta.

second quarter or three months to June. "January was probably the low point of the year as vaccinations and the reopening of the economy will combine to trigger a rapid rebound in activity over the next few months," said Capital Economics economist Thomas Pugh. "Given there was no change in the lockdown restrictions in February, GDP was never going to shoot back up. "Pantheon Macro economist Samuel Tombs added that "the economy continued to adapt to lockdown rules in February".

The Bank of England has forecast that growth will recover strongly this year towards its pre-Covid level owing to the nation's speedy vaccine programme.

The economy had tanked by 9.8 percent last year, Britain's biggest slump in three centuries -- and the worst G7 performance.

than \$4 billion private investment in public equity by investors including BlackRock, Fidelity International, Janus Henderson Investors and Temasek Holdings.

The offering is led by \$750 million from funds managed by Altimeter Capital. The transactions will provide Grab with about \$4.5 billion in cash proceeds.

Grab said its decision to become a public company was driven by a strong financial performance in 2020, despite the pandemic. Reuters earlier reported that Grab would announce the deal on Tuesday.

The deals for Grab, which was valued at just over \$16 billion last year, will be a big win for its early backers such as SoftBank Group Corp and China's Didi Chuxing.