



A farmer of Sharialjoth village in Tentulia upazila is seen happily tending to his tulip plants. The high-value flower is being planted in the region on a large scale in a bid to boost the local economy through the sale of such flowers when people visit the popular tourist destination. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

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QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT,
Thakurgaon

Tulips are being grown all over Sharialjoth village in Tentulia upazila of Rangpur's Panchagarh district in a bid to increase tourism and boost the regional economy, according to local officials.

The Eco Social Development Organisation (ESDO) initiated the pilot project with financial backing from the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation and International Fund for Agricultural Development, said Dr Muhammad Shahid Uz Zaman, executive director of ESDO.

Agriculture experts expect the flowers to reach full bloom by the last week of January as they have grown well so far.

Eight marginal farmers, who are beneficiaries of ESDO services, are involved with the experimental cultivation of the high-value flower.

The farmers collectively contributed about 40 decimals of land in three separate spots, where around 40,000 bulbs were planted on January 1 in what was the largest tulip cultivation drive in the country.

During a visit on Friday, this

correspondent saw the plants are taking shape well under nets.

Zaman went on to say that it costs a maximum of Tk 70 to grow one tulip and that he expects to sell each stalk for between Tk 150 and Tk 200 among visitors in Tentulia while buyers in Dhaka's flower markets would face steeper prices.

At present, the tulips, which are used as ornamental or decorative pieces at different programmes, are mostly imported.

Morsheda Begum, Hosne Ara, Monowara Begum, and Khadija Begum, who collectively cultivated 20,000 tulips on 20 decimals of land in the upazila, told The Daily Star that cultivation has been successful so far as the plants grow very well.

Md Jahangir Alam, upazila agriculture officer of Tentulia, said the country's weather is generally not suitable for tulip cultivation but Tentulia's temperature in the winter season stays at around 20 degree Celsius in day time, showing promise of successful cultivation.

Delwar Hossain, a flower grower who was the first to bloom Tulip flowers on Bangladeshi soil last year, told The Daily Star that acidic, sandy-loamy soil with a pH of



between six to seven is ideal for growing tulips, which require a day-time temperature of within 20 degree Celsius and night-temperature of five to 12 degree Celsius during the growth period.

Direct sunlight in the mornings and evenings is also beneficial for improving the flower's quality while partial shades, such as nets, are required during mid-day.

Limited use of chemical fertilisers along with enough organic manure is needed for preparing soil to cultivate Tulip.

Besides, Panchagarh's weather is suitable for its prolonged winters, Hossain added.

Replying to a query, Hossain

said the bulbs were brought from the Netherlands at a cost Tk.61.80 per piece (including VAT and tax).

Hossain cultivated 24,000 bulbs in his village, supplying 1,000 bulbs in Rajshahi and 5,000 bulbs in Jashore's Gadkhali in 2021.

So far this year, he has cultivated 3,000 bulbs in tubs that contain three bulbs each, aiming to sell them among people as they can keep it in their houses or offices.

Hossain said the demand for tulips is growing fast in the country's flower markets.

"The higher quality flowers are currently imported but If we can continue cultivation, local currency would be saved," he

added.

Hossain called for government cooperation for the expansion of such high-value flower cultivation, adding that if the government comes forward in this regard, it would create employment opportunities for youths.

The ESDO's Dr Zaman went on to say that in recent years, a good number of visitors from different parts of the country hit Tentulia to catch a glimpse of the peak of Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest mountain.

If the Tulip cultivation gets as planned, it would add additional attractions for tourists and promote the northern region's tourism sector, which would play a vital role in improving the lives of locals.

As winter prevails for about four months each year in Tentulia, the temperature is almost the perfect level for Tulip cultivation.

"So, ESDO decided to take the initiative," said Dr Zaman, who expects different government departments and private entrepreneurs to come forward with such projects in the future after observing the success of the pilot project.

"If we see success in the project this year, we will work on marketing and other issues," he added.

China's digital yuan wallets swell but usage lags

REUTERS, Shanghai

China's digital currency has debuted on app stores with fanfare, with online wallets for the electronic yuan seeing mass adoption in the two weeks since a public launch, yet its actual use in transactions has been far less impressive.

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) is ramping up testing of the digital currency, dubbed e-CNY, ahead of next month's Beijing Winter Olympics. But use of e-CNY is still limited to 10 major "pilot" cities, and hampered by people's preference for Ant Group's Alipay and Tencent's WeChat Pay, which dominate China's online payments.

The e-CNY is one of the first sovereign digital currencies to be launched, putting the PBOC at the fore of a global race to develop central bank digital currencies.

On January 4, PBOC released its e-CNY wallet application on mobile phone app stores, triggering intense public interest.

The digital wallet became the most downloaded free app on China's Apple iOS app store on January 8, staying in the spot for five consecutive days, and has been downloaded more than 2.5 million times, according to research consultancy Sensor Tower. Previously, e-CNY wallets could only be opened via select banks.

Still, e-CNY use is limited to the 10 major cities where pilot schemes are launched, such as Shanghai and Shenzhen, as well as the Winter Olympics site, where China hopes to showcase the digital yuan's clout to the event's foreign visitors.

Howard Mao, a university student in Shanghai, said he has downloaded the wallet, but hardly uses the electronic money.

"There are still not many application scenarios for e-CNY in daily life, and many merchants don't accept it," said Mao, who still relies on Alipay and WeChat Pay.

The discrepancy between busy wallet downloads and lukewarm acceptance is also captured by official data.

During July-October last year, the number of individual e-CNY wallets nearly jumped seven-fold, to 140 million, equivalent to one-tenth of China's population.

In contrast, cumulative transaction value grew 80 per cent to 62 billion yuan (\$9.77 billion). Alipay's monthly payment transaction value averaged nearly 10 trillion yuan, Ant disclosed in 2020.

"It takes time for people to start accepting e-CNY, given entrenched payment habits," said G. Bin Zhao, senior economist at PwC China.

But authorities have many ways to promote mass adoption, such as prioritising the use of e-CNY in the payment of water, electricity and medical bills, he said.

"A small push by the government will make a big difference."

The e-CNY is currently accepted by internet giants, including JD.com, Meituan and Trip.com, and can also be used online to buy plane tickets or pay mobile phone bills. A Chinese central banker said in November that 1.55 million merchants could accept payments using e-CNY wallets, including utilities and catering.

"Digital yuan development has reached critical mass," said Zou Chuanwei, chief economist of Wanxiang Blockchain.

Application scenarios of e-CNY, which are mostly in the retail space, will be gradually expanded to include financial asset transactions, trade, and cross-border payment, and "the room for innovation is huge," Zou said.

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Omicron surge roils US small businesses

REUTERS, Lubbock

Phillip Howard pointed toward a stack of black ski pants piled atop a counter in his winter sports shop as evidence of the hurdles small business owners still face as the pandemic drags on.

The pants were supposed to arrive by August at Troy's Ski Lubbock shop in west Texas - well before his five-month hot season of selling that kicks off in October. Instead, they came from China the first week of January, delayed by supply-chain failures.

"Late-arriving product really kills us," Howard said this week, noting that several other items had also arrived late, missing his pre-holiday sales season.

"I've been in this business for almost 20 years, and I've never encountered anything like this."

As the pandemic enters its third year, many small businesses across the United States are besieged on three fronts: deepening supply chain issues; periodic staffing shortages; and fewer customers showing up in some areas, fearing the Omicron spike in Covid-19 cases.

This week the Federal Reserve released its latest collection of anecdotes about the state of the economy from businesses, labor groups and others nationwide, showing that the fast-spreading Omicron variant was exacerbating difficulties, especially for hiring and inflation. US retail sales fell 1.9 per cent in December amid the shortage of goods and surging infections, the Commerce Department said on Friday.

Though federal aid and the economy's overall recovery have kept failure and bankruptcy rates for small businesses far lower than expected, day-to-day management has become a challenge.

Census surveys show concerns steadily shifting from dwindling cash reserves and a hunt for financing to challenges with supply chains and rising costs.



Phillip Howard, a small entrepreneur, poses for a photo inside his Troy's Ski Lubbock shop in Lubbock, Texas on January 14. Howard says supply chain woes are making life extremely difficult for small business owners like himself.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russia fines Google for not deleting banned content

REUTERS, Moscow

A Moscow court on Tuesday fined Alphabet Inc's Google a total of 14 million roubles (\$190,398) for violating Russian rules on banned content, the penalty coming amid a wider stand-off between Russia and Big Tech companies.

Russia has routinely fined social media giants for failing to remove prohibited content and is seeking to compel foreign technology companies to open offices in the country.

Moscow's Tagansky District Court said Google had been handed five administrative fines of 4 million roubles, 1.5 million roubles, 5 million roubles, 1.5 million roubles and 2 million roubles respectively. A spokesperson for Google confirmed the first two fines, but gave no additional comment.