



Onion farmers are forced to erect bamboo lofts such as this outside their homes in order to store their produce year-round due to a lack of modern facilities. However, the rudimentary design of these shacks means that the bulbs stored inside are susceptible to adverse weather conditions.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Bumper onion yields going bad for lack of storage

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Bumper onion yields earlier this year gave farmers in northern parts of Bangladesh reason to cheer but the lack of adequate storage facilities has soured their prospects of profiting from the cash-crop as adverse weather conditions continue to wreak havoc on their produce, according to market players.

Md Kamruzzaman, a farmer and trader of Durgapur village in Pabna's Sujanagar upazila, cultivated onions on 82 bighas of land to produce more than 5,000 maunds of the crop.

He then kept about 3,000 maunds of onion in his homemade bamboo-loft storages in March with a view to selling them year round. However, he is now worried about being able to save even half the crop.

"The scorching heat and untimely rains are causing rampant damage to the onions in my storages," Kamruzzaman said.

Farmers expect around 10 kilogrammes (kgs) of their onions will be damaged when kept in homemade storages but the prevailing bad weather has raised the margin to between 15-18 kgs this year, he added.

Md Chand Miah, another onion farmer from the same village, told The Daily Star that around 30 per cent of his produce has gone rotten and he is now concerned about recovering the production cost.

"It cost more than Tk 1,200 per maund to grow onions this year but the market price was Tk 800 to Tk 900 per maund during the harvesting period," he said.

"And even though each maund is currently selling for Tk 1,300, the damage to my crops means that I have to count



losses of Tk 200 per maund," Miah added.

The onion farmer went on to say that farmers are forced to keep onions in homemade storages due to the lack of modern facilities in the region.

Besides, farmers cannot control the temperature and moisture levels inside a bamboo-loft and so, the stored onions are at risk of being destroyed as they remain at the weather's mercy, Miah said.

However, Shoilendronath Majumder, chief scientific officer of the Spice Research Center in Bogura, informed that there are no designated storage facilities available for onions as they have yet to refine the required technology.

He then said that a test cold storage is being built in Bogura at cost of Tk 4 crore. "After establishing the storage, we will

go for more research," Majumder added.

According to data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), more than 9 lakh tonnes of onions are damaged every year due to the poor preservation system, forcing the government to import roughly the same amount in order to meet domestic demand.

In 2020-21, onions were cultivated on a total of 2.53 lakh hectares of land to produce 33.562 tonnes of the kitchen staple.

"Of the amount produced that year, 8.5 lakh tonnes were damaged and we had to import around 8 lakh tonnes to make up for the dearth in supply," said Md Jahidul Amin, director of DAE's crop wing.

Onion imports usually take place during the harvesting season in early

March to ensure that there is no supply crisis in local markets.

This year, onions were cultivated on 2.59 hectares of land to produced 36.4 lakh tonnes, of which approximately 10 lakh bulbs have been damaged.

"If we were able to reduce these losses, then we would be able to strengthen onion production," he said.

"So, we need specialised cold storages for onion as developing such facilities in Pabna, Faridpur and other cultivating areas would help save the crops and subsequently reduce imports."

Farmers say that another reason for their losses is the lack of proper planning as they fail to get their expected prices even though huge amounts of foreign exchange are spent on importing the bulbs every year.

"I produced over 6 maunds of onion this year but we did not sell them after harvesting considering the poor price," said Liton Mondol, another onion farmer.

As is the case with others, more 30 per cent of Mondol's stored onions have gone rotten and he is now worried about being able to sell the remaining portion in time.

In addition, it costs him an extra Tk 100 to Tk 150 in labour to pack one maund of fresh onions after separating them from the rotten ones in storage.

"So, it costs about Tk 1,250 to prepare each maund of onion but as market prices are the same. I have to face 20-25 per cent loss this year," Liton said, adding that similarly affected farmers are losing their interest in cultivating the crop.

However, the DAE's Majumder said farmers could develop sufficient storage systems by themselves.

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Padma Bridge to woo foreign investors

Nordic chamber chief says

PORIMOL PALMA

Foreign investors will be increasingly interested in considering Bangladesh as a better place for investment, with the Padma Bridge expanding connectivity both within the country and beyond and improving supply chains, said the Nordic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) in Bangladesh.

Padma Bridge is a transformative initiative implemented by the government with its own fund. Therefore, the government will not have to make any foreign currency payments or as debt service, said NCCI President Tahrin Aman.



"This is of immense importance, especially now, with the pressure of devaluing taka and of inflationary impact globally," he said in an email interview with The Daily Star.

The 6.51-kilometre bridge, which cost \$3.6 billion, over the Padma river connects the southwestern region to the capital and the Asian Highway Network and Trans Asia Railway Network.

"This will drastically reduce lead time for transportation of goods, both ways, resulting in increased access to market (especially perishable and agricultural products)," said Aman.

Additionally, he said, access to the Mongla port would be a game changer in reduction of lead time for both import and export of goods once the port became fully functional in its operations and was operating at the optimal capacity.

"Keeping all these factors in mind, we can confidently argue that there will be an increased interest from the foreign investors to consider Bangladesh for their investment," Aman said.

More than 50 companies of the Nordic countries, mainly Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland, operate in Bangladesh.

Foreign investors consider several factors such as ease of doing business, a level playing field, regulatory support and predictable policy climate

Some of the major ones are Arla Foods, Dan Foods, Grammeenphone, Nokia, Ericsson, Novo Nordisk, Maersk, DSV, Volvo, Scania and H&M.

The trade volume between Bangladesh and Nordic countries is close to \$2 billion.

Nordic companies put special emphasis on green solutions. Given climate change is a reality, Bangladesh seeks more investment from these countries.

The NCCI said the Padma Bridge would have multi-layered benefits that would draw investors from home and abroad.

Foreign investors will consider several additional factors, including but not limited to the ease of doing business, a level playing field, regulatory support and predictable policy climate, Aman said.

He said it was pertinent that the Bangladesh government continues to strengthen its institutions and support business, while it was responsive to foreign investors and creates a congenial environment for regular discussions with all stakeholders that benefit overall trade and commerce.

"The government will now need to promote the south and southeastern region and incentivise investors to consider this region. In an economy like Bangladesh, trade and commerce will play a central part to reduce inequality and improve quality of life," he said.

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India on course to become fastest-growing economy

Central bank says

REUTERS, Mumbai

India's economy has remained resilient in the face of global headwinds and with inflation coming off its recent peak is expected to stay on course to become the world's fastest-growing economy, the Reserve Bank of India said on Saturday.

The recent revival of the southwest monsoon and renewed planting raised expectations that rural demand will soon catch up with urban spending and consolidate a recovery, the RBI said in a bulletin.

"Knock on effects of geopolitical spillovers are visible in several sectors, tapering the pace of recovery," the central bank said.

"In spite of this overwhelming shock, there are sparks in the wind that ignite the innate strength of the economy and set it on course to becoming the fastest growing economy in the world, though besieged it might be by fears of recession."

It did not give a time frame.

RBI said if the commodity price moderation witnessed in recent weeks endures alongside the easing of supply chain pressures, the worst of the recent surge in inflation will be over. India's annual consumer inflation remained painfully above the 7 per cent mark and beyond the central bank's tolerance band for the sixth month in a row, data last week showed.

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Indian janitors clean the facade of a highrise in Mumbai. India's economy has remained resilient in the face of global headwinds, the country's central bank said on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Unrealistic energy policies to fuel inflation

Saudi Arabia says

REUTERS, Jeddah

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said on Saturday more investment was needed in fossil fuel and clean energy technologies to meet global demand, and that unrealistic emission policies would lead to unprecedented levels of inflation.

The prince said Saudi Arabia had announced raising its production capacity to 13 million barrels per day by 2027 from a nameplate capacity of 12 million now and "after that the Kingdom will not have any more capability to increase production".

He was addressing a US-Arab summit in Jeddah attended by President Joe Biden, who is eager to see Saudi Arabia and its OPEC

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