



Although these tomatoes seem ripe for picking, the fruits have been left hanging from their vines as farmers are unable to get adequate prices due to oversupply amid the ongoing peak season. The picture was taken from Rupsha upazila of Khulna recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

**BASIS SoftExpo** kicks off on Feb 23

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

BASIS SoftExpo 2023, the largest digital and ICT sector exhibition of Bangladesh, will begin on February 23 at Bangabandhu Bangladesh China Friendship Exhibition Centre at Purbachal in Dhaka.

The Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) is organising the four-day mega show, which is funded by the private sector to highlight the latest technological innovations and ICT capabilities of Bangladesh to the world.

The capacities of Bangladesh's information technology sector will be highlighted through various programmes in this information technology exhibition.

BASIS President Russell T Ahmed shared the information at a press conference at Sheraton Dhaka at Banani in the capital.

Convener of BASIS Softexpo 2023 Abu Daud Khan was also present at the briefing.

Speaker of Bangladesh

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# Tomato farmers face peak season plight

Prices plummet as supply soars

DIPANKAR ROY and JAGARAN CHAKMA

Tomato farmers, particularly those in the southwest division of Khulna, are facing steep losses as prices for the fruit have come down drastically due to oversupply, as is the case around this time each year.

As a result, many growers are being forced to sell their tomatoes for less than Tk 2 per kilogramme (kg) at the field level while the crop is going for up to Tk 30 per kg at retail in Dhaka.

The returns are so low in fact that the transport cost outweighs any potential gains for some farmers, leaving them to either dump the fruit or distribute it for free for use as cattle feed.

Omar Md Imrul Mohsin, director general of the Department of Agricultural Marketing in Khulna, said they cooperate with farmers to help ensure good prices for their crops through proper marketing.

But as most farmers lack a good business plan and also do not follow the diversified crops system, they end up cultivating abundant amounts of the same crop and prices come down as a result, he added.

Mohammad Jahangir Alam, a professor of the agribusiness and marketing department at Bangladesh Agriculture University, said tomato farmers get better prices when they harvest the fruit early in the season.

"But there is oversupply against demand during the peak season, leading to lower prices," he added.

Citing his research on tomato cultivation, he said a total of 4.48 lakh tonnes of the fruit

was produced across the country in 2021 while consumption was only 4.26 tonnes that year.

In the past few years, farmers in the region started growing tomatoes on a commercial basis in the "ghers" or enclosures of fish farms, even in the saline prone areas of Bagerhat, Satkhira and Khulna.

At the beginning of the season, tomatoes were sold at Tk 2,500 to Tk 3,000 per maund (37 kgs). Now, the price has come down to Tk 170-200 per maund.

Md Kuddusur Rahman, a farmer of Tilak village under Rupsha upazila of Khulna, said he cultivated tomatoes on 22 decimals of land this season.

According to him, tomatoes are now selling for Tk 1.5 to Tk 2 per kg while it was Tk 30 to Tk 40 per kg just one month ago.

"During the last four days, no buyer came to my field to buy the crop, which is now rotting," he added.

Like Rahman, growers in other villages of the same upazila are facing similar losses.

Sheikh Ali Imam, a farmer of Mulghar union in Bagerhat, said he sold the tomatoes he grew on two bighas of land for Tk 70,000, which was quite a loss for him.

Many farmers are unable to even meet their labour costs by selling the crop at this rate, he added.

Hasanul Banna, who owns a retail outlet at the truck terminal wholesale market in Khulna city, said traders like him are unable to offer better prices to farmers as there is low demand in the market.

Md Rafiqul Islam, deputy director of the

Department of Agricultural Extension in Bagerhat, said 1,850 hectares of land were brought under tomato cultivation this year with a production target of 40,700 tonnes.

However, the total acreage was exceeded by more than 100 hectares while some 58,500 tonnes of the fruit were produced.

Local agro-processors such as Pran, Square Food and Beverage Limited, BD Foods Limited and Ahmed Food Products (Pvt.) Ltd procure tomatoes from farmers to make ketchup, tomato paste and other food items.

Of them, Pran, the leading agro-processor in the country, set a target to procure 20,000 tonnes of tomato this year.

The company has already started collecting tomatoes at its Barind Industrial Park in Rajshahi. Pran also collects the fruit at its other factory in Natore.

Sarwar Hossain, general manager of the Barind Industrial Park, said they are collecting tomatoes from the Rajshahi, Natore, Chapainawabganj, Dinajpur, Pabna and Naogaon districts.

Some 10,000 contracted farmers of Pran have cultivated tomatoes on 2,200 bighas of land in these areas, he added.

Kamruzzaman Kamal, marketing director of Pran-RFL Group, said sauces are very popular in Bangladesh and many other countries.

"Pran is the market leader in this sector, and we have capacity to produce 18,000 tonnes of sauces every year," he added.

Officials of Pran say they are collecting tomatoes from farmers at the going market rate.

## New platform to thwart fraud in e-commerce

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The commerce ministry yesterday launched a Central Complaint Management System (CCMS) in order to protect consumers from fraud while purchasing goods and services from e-commerce firms.

The platform will also provide scope to the consumer to file complaints against deception by the sellers in the digital sphere, said the commerce ministry in a press release.

"We are introducing the system to ensure safe purchase and prevent irregularities in the e-commerce transaction. We expect to see its benefit," Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said after inaugurating the system at the ministry office.

The commerce ministry said the CCMS platform will act as a bridge between the consumers, regulators and the e-commerce stakeholders.

The consumers will be able to file complaints through the Directorate of National Consumers Right Protection (DNCRP) against frauds by online sellers.

The authorities launched the system amid rising complaints against many e-commerce sites filed by the consumers.

In the last two years, thousands of consumers lost money because of embezzlement of their funds by a number of digital commerce companies namely E-orange, and Evaly.

Md Hafizur Rahman, director general of the WTO Cell and chief coordinator of e-commerce cell at the commerce ministry, said the decision of a CCMS was taken against the backdrop of e-commerce scams.

"The idea of having an online platform is to resolve complaints quickly," he added.

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## Confidence Cement's profit down 20% in Q1

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Confidence Cement Ltd reported a Tk 22.51 crore profit in the October-December quarter of the current financial year.

The profit was, however, down nearly 20 per cent from the Tk 28.09 crore the cement manufacturer made in the first quarter of the previous financial year of 2021-22.

Thus, the consolidated earnings per share (EPS) were Tk 2.74 in October-December of 2022-23 against Tk 3.42 in the same quarter a year earlier, according to the unaudited financial statements.

The EPS decreased due to a higher raw material price in the international market and the foreign currency fluctuation loss at home, said Confidence Cement in a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange.

The profit fell to Tk 36.39 crore in the July-December half of FY23, which was Tk 47.15 crore in the identical period of FY22, a year-on-year decrease of 22.83 per cent.

The consolidated net operating cash flow per share of Confidence Cement was a negative Tk 4.98 in the first half of FY23 against a negative Tk 5.25 in the same half of FY22.

"The net operating cash flow per share increased due to a rise in the selling price and lower payments to suppliers," said the filing.

The consolidated net asset value per share fell to Tk 76.22 on December 31 from Tk 72.24 on June 30, driven by a hike in profit portion from associate companies.

Shares of Confidence Cement closed unchanged at Tk 89.00 on the DSE yesterday.

## Luxury sector eyes reopening of China

AFP, France

After a year of record sales and profits despite slowing global growth the luxury sector is looking to the reopening of China to deliver further expansion in 2023.

The world's largest luxury group LVMH posted a 23-per cent jump in sales to a record of 79 billion euros (\$86 billion) in 2022 and saw profits climb 17 per cent to 14 billion.

The company's chief executive, Bernard Arnault, wants to continue along that path in 2023, "at the risk of becoming boring". LVMH's rivals also managed blistering growth in sales and profits last year.

Sales at Hermes jumped 29 per cent to 11.6 billion euros and profits soared 38 per cent to a record 3.4 billion.

Kering, despite a tough time for its flagship brand Gucci, still managed a 15 per cent increase in sales to 20 billion euros, while profits rose 14 per cent to 3.6 billion.

Ferrari also saw sales race to a new record of five billion euros, delivering 13,221 vehicles last year.

The 2022 results were barely dented by the disruption in China linked to end of its coronavirus-related travel restrictions and their progressive lifting at the end of the year, with LVMH calling the month of December an "air pocket". Only Hermes escaped unscathed.

"There was no drop in traffic in our stores," said Hermes chief executive Axel Dumas.

The company's sales rose 30.7 per cent in its Asia-Pacific region excluding Japan.

The gradual reopening of China – which abandoned the last of the draconian travel restrictions of its zero-Covid policy on January 8 – should help its economy expand by 5.2 per cent in 2023, according to the International Monetary Fund's latest forecast.

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Tourists visit the Angkor Wat temple complex, a Unesco World Heritage Site, in Siem Reap province in Cambodia. The kingdom has recently launched a tourism pilot programme for 20 nations in a bid to revive the sector from the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic.

PHOTO: AFP

## Reckitt reports 18% earnings drop

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Reckitt Benckiser (Bangladesh) PLC made a profit of Tk 65.91 crore in the year that ended on December 31, down 18.44 per cent year-on-year.

The maker of Harpic, Mortein and Dettol raked in a profit of Tk 80.81 crore in 2021. Thus, Reckitt Benckiser reported earnings per share of Tk 139.50 for last year against Tk 171.03 a year earlier.

The net asset value per share of the local operation of the multinational company slipped to Tk 176.80 in 2022 from Tk 200.65 in 2021. The net operating cash flow per share, however, rose to Tk 271.66 from Tk 134.90 during the period.

The board of directors of Reckitt Bangladesh recommended a 980 per cent final cash dividend for 2022, according to a posting on the Dhaka Stock Exchange. This is the lowest cash dividend in four years.