

## Clean tech minerals market surges to \$320b: IEA

AFP, Paris

The market for the minerals key to the clean energy transition soared to \$320 billion last year but faces challenges including volatile prices, supply chain snarls and geopolitical tensions, the International Energy Agency said Tuesday.

The market for minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel and copper doubled between 2017 and 2022, fuelled by the record deployment of clean technologies such as solar panels and electric car batteries, according to the IEA.

"Rapid growth in demand is providing new opportunities for the industry," the Paris-based agency said in its first annual IEA Critical Minerals Market Review.

"But a combination of volatile price movements, supply chain bottlenecks and geopolitical concerns has created a potent mix of risks for secure and rapid energy transitions," it added.

The IEA, which advises developed nations on energy policies, said the "affordability and speed of energy transitions" will depend on the availability of critical mineral supplies.

Prices rose in 2021 and early 2022 as the Covid pandemic caused bottlenecks across supply chains and Russia's invasion of Ukraine wreaked havoc in commodity markets.

Most prices began to moderate in the latter half of 2022 and into 2023, but they remain well above historical averages, the IEA said.

## Rupee gains for second day

REUTERS, Mumbai

The Indian rupee rose for a second straight session against the US dollar on Tuesday, mirroring similar moves in Asian peers, as risk appetite in the region rose on fresh bets of the Federal Reserve nearing the end of its rate tightening cycle.

The rupee ended at 82.3650 against the dollar compared with 82.5650 in the previous session. The currency gained 0.25 per cent on the day, adding to Monday's 0.2 per cent rise.

Tuesday's gain is the local currency's best daily performance since June 16.

The rupee is likely to find some resistance near the 82.00-82.20 levels, said Jigar Trivedi, senior research analyst - currencies and commodities at Reliance Securities.



Workers are seen harvesting kathkachu for sale between Tk 25 and Tk 35 per piece, depending on size and quality. Farmers are pleased to be getting good yields and prices for the crop this year. The picture was taken recently from Lalmonirhat sadar upazila.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

# Kathkachu farming bringing profit to farmers

S DILIP ROY

Farmers in Bangladesh are pleased to be getting good yields and prices for kathkachu, a variety of taro root native to South Asia, as demand for the crop has risen this year.

Kathkachu is mainly grown across five northern districts, namely Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Rangpur, Nilphamari and Gaibandha, in the greater Rangpur region.

Farmers say they are selling each piece of kathkachu directly from the field for between Tk 25 and Tk 35 depending on size and quality while it was Tk 15 to Tk 20 last year.

Vegetable traders from all over the country come to buy the crop, which was cultivated on 1,200 hectares of land in greater Rangpur this year compared to 1,100 hectares in 2022.

Farmers can produce 4,500 to 5,000 pieces of kathkachu from each bigha of land at a cost of up to Tk 15,000.

With each kathkachu weighing roughly three to four kilogrammes, most of the crop is usually cultivated in

Lalmonirhat and Kurigram.

Mobarak Hossain, a farmer based in the Mandolerhat area of Lalmonirhat sadar upazila, said kathkachu is cultivated in low lying areas, where floodwater can accumulate.

"There is no damage to this crop in flood water," he added.

**Farmers say they are selling each piece of kathkachu directly from the field for between Tk 25 and Tk 35 depending on size and quality while it was Tk 15 to Tk 20 last year.**

Hossain cultivated 15,000 pieces of kathkachu on three bighas of land this year at a cost of Tk 40,000.

He has already sold 6,000 thousand pieces of the vegetable for Tk 30 per piece.

"I'm being highly benefited by kathkachu farming this year,"

Hossain said.

Subhas Chandra Das, a farmer in Rajarhat upazila of Kurigram, said he has been farming kathkachu for the last 20 years.

Das cultivated kathkachu on eight bighas of land this year and already sold 15,000 pieces of the crop for Tk 30 per piece.

"We regularly eat this vegetable in our family as well," he added.

Nur Islam, a vegetable trader based at Kurigram Poura Market, said only poor people would buy kathkachu just a few years back but now, this item has become popular nationwide.

"The demand for kathkachu has increased compared to previous years," he added.

Hamidur Rahman, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Lalmonirhat, said the vegetable is cultivated in flood prone areas, where other crops do not fare well.

"And as the price of kathkachu has doubled or more, farmers' interest in growing the crop has increased too," he added.

## Robi launches tourist SIM

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Robi, the second largest mobile network operator in Bangladesh, today launched tourist SIM for travellers visiting the country.

The dedicated SIM card offers a wide range of services, including local and international calls, SMS, and data usage, supported by Robi's robust 4.5G network coverage, the company said in a statement.

The operator said considering the diverse needs of tourists, it has carefully designed the tourist SIM package to provide a range of attractive benefits, ensuring a seamless and convenient travel experience from the moment they arrive in Bangladesh.

The exclusive product range covers various duration options, allowing subscribers to choose from validity periods of seven days, 15 days, or 30 days.

The flexible plans enable tourists to select the most suitable plan based on their specific requirements, it added.

## UK jobless rate rises amid high inflation

AFP, London

UK unemployment rose back to four per cent in the three months to the end of May, official data showed Tuesday, as the economy struggles with stubbornly high inflation.

The unemployment rate increased from 3.8 per cent in the three months to the end of April, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

The rate was back at four per cent for the first time since the start of 2022. Analysts' consensus had been for unemployment to remain at 3.8 per cent.

Despite the rise, finance minister Jeremy Hunt said Britain's "jobs market is strong with unemployment low by historical standards".

The ONS added that pay excluding bonuses had risen at record levels.

"Due to high inflation, however, the real value of weekly earnings is still falling, although now at its slowest rate since the end of 2021," noted Darren Morgan, director of economic statistics at the ONS.

In a keynote speech late Monday, Hunt insisted there could "be no sustainable growth without eliminating the inflation that deters investment and erodes consumer confidence".

UK annual inflation has eased in recent months but remains close to nine per cent.

This is far above the Bank of England's two-per cent target, triggering numerous interest-rate hikes from the central bank.

"UK inflation is already running far hotter than policymakers had hoped, and price pressures will struggle to abate any time soon so long as earnings continue to grow at the current scorching pace," said Matthew Ryan, head of market strategy at Ebury.



Md Shahriar Alam, state minister for foreign affairs, Pranay Verma, high commissioner of India to Bangladesh, and Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director of Eastern Bank, inaugurate a dedicated "India Business Desk" opened by the bank at its head office in Gulshan, Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: EASTERN BANK

## Eastern Bank opens India business desk

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Eastern Bank Limited (EBL) yesterday launched a dedicated "India Business Desk" to facilitate cross-border business transactions between Bangladesh and India.

Md Shahriar Alam, state minister for foreign affairs, inaugurated the desk at the bank's head office in Gulshan, Dhaka yesterday, said a press release.

The setting up of a dedicated "India Business Desk" by Eastern Bank Ltd will boost bilateral trade and investment between the two friendly countries, Alam said.

"We are thrilled to launch the EBL India Business Desk, which reflects our commitment to strengthening the trade relations between Bangladesh and India," said Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director and CEO of the bank.

The bank also launched a co-brand card with the India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IBCCI) at the same event.

## Threads surges to 100m users in five days

REUTERS

Meta Platforms' Twitter rival Threads crossed 100 million sign-ups within five days of launch, CEO Mark Zuckerberg said on Monday, dethroning ChatGPT as the fastest-growing online platform to hit the milestone.

Threads has been setting records for user growth since its launch on Wednesday, with celebrities, politicians and other newsmakers joining the platform that is seen by analysts as the first serious threat to the Elon Musk-owned microblogging app.

"That's mostly organic demand, and we haven't even turned on many promotions yet," Zuckerberg said in a Threads post announcing the milestone.

The app's sprint to 100 million users was much speedier than that of OpenAI-owned ChatGPT, which became the fastest-growing consumer application in history in January about two months after its launch, according to a UBS

study. Twitter had nearly 240 million monetizable daily active users as of July last year, according to the company's last public disclosure before Musk's takeover, although data from web analytics companies indicates usage has dropped since then.

Twitter's web traffic was down 11 per cent from the year prior in the days after the Threads launch, compared to the 4 per cent it was down year-over-year as of June, according to Similarweb.

Matthew Prince, CEO of internet infrastructure firm Cloudflare, shared a graph showing a similar trajectory in a tweet on Sunday and said Twitter's traffic was "tanking."

Twitter CEO Linda Yaccarino tweeted on Monday that the platform last week had its "largest usage day" since February, without providing details. "There's only ONE Twitter," she tweeted.

Musk tweeted "I think we may hit an all-time record this week."

## Top business leaders welcome

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Plummy Fashions also exports products to India, alongside other countries.

Hoque raises some questions.

"What will be the effective dollar rate in Bangladesh to determine the exchange rate of the Indian rupee and the taka? The question comes as we have different rates for exporters, importers and remitters. This needs clarification," he said.

He said importers have to pay in dollars even when they buy raw materials from local sources.

"Will we be able to buy the raw materials in the rupee or taka?" he asked.

"A lot of things have remained unclear."

Overall, he said, the settlement of the INR may not bring significant benefits to exporters.

Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman of Pran-RFL Group, describes the beginning of trade settlements in the rupee as a great initiative.

"This is a step in the right direction."

"This will give more comfort to my customers and take us closer to our customers and eliminate wastage and currency conversion loss. India is a big market and it is a big opportunity for us."

The group ships products to India.

Chowdhury said Pran-RFL group will try to settle import bills in the INR equal to the amount of its export earnings from the country.

"Let's try. If it is not beneficial, we can always come back," he said.

MA Jabbar, managing director of DBL Group, a garment exporter to India, says the new initiative will benefit both exporters and importers of Bangladesh and India as the process will be simplified and the cost of currency conversion will reduce to some extent.

He also thinks trade settlements should also be carried out in the taka.

Mohammad Hatem, executive president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters

Association, said the move will deepen bilateral ties.

"The over-reliance on the US dollar will reduce to some extent. This will cut the cost of doing business as well."

Mohammad Ali Khokon, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, said trade volumes worth \$2 billion might be settled in the rupee initially.

The balance of trade heavily tilts towards India, with the neighbouring country exporting goods worth more than \$12 billion to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh ships goods worth \$2 billion to India annually.

"So, Bangladesh's benefit will be low," Khokon said.

Abdul Matlub Ahmad, president of the India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry, said the dual-currency card to be introduced in September will reduce the exchange rate loss stemming from the conversion of US dollars.

"The taka-rupee card would be useful for travellers of both countries."

## Floor price will be lifted

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The seminar was on "Economic challenges for Bangladesh Capital Market: Possible Remedies" organised by Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) on its premises.

It is possible for institutional and retail investors to separately conduct trade on the stock markets for better performance, said Hafiz Muhammad Hasan Babu, chairman of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE).

A new programme will be launched under the Capital Market Stabilisation Fund (CMSF) called "Investors Stabilisation Fund" (INSAF) so that more facilities can be provided to investors, said Md Nojibur Rahman, chairman of the CMSF.

The small and medium enterprise board has been formed in the capital market so that small investors can avail money for investments, said Asif

Ibrahim, chairman of Chittagong Stock Exchange.

Expatriates should be encouraged to make long-term bond purchases, said SM Parvez Tamal, chairman of NRB Commercial Bank Limited.

Banks are enablers of short-term investments while bonds long-term ones. But in Bangladesh, banks are used for long-term investments, he said.

The slowdown in the stock markets may continue for the next six months but their revival may begin afterwards, said Hasan Imam, president of the Association of Asset Management Companies and Mutual Fund.

Mohammad Mufazzal, a member of the ERF and a staff reporter of The Financial Express presented a keynote paper. ERF President Mohammad Refayet Ullah Mirdha also spoke.

## Taka-rupee debit

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The use of the card will allow travellers to reduce exchange rate losses twice. The governor earlier put the exchange rate loss at as high as 6 per cent.

The card may allow Bangladesh to save a significant amount of US dollars since a lot of people travel to India for health, tourism and religious purposes.

The Indian High Commission in Bangladesh issued 15 lakh visas to Bangladesh last year.

The idea of the taka-rupee card comes as the foreign currency reserves in Bangladesh have continued to face pressures amid higher import bills against moderate export and remittance receipts.

The reserves stood at \$31.16 billion on July 5, down from \$41.88 billion on the same day a year ago, a decline of more than 25 per cent, BB data showed.