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El Niño weighs on Bangladesh's agriculture

SOHEL PARVEZ and MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Extreme heat has gripped many parts of the world as June saw the warmest global average temperature on record and the trend continued into July, according to the UN's World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).

Bangladesh, as a country in the eastern and northern hemispheres, also witnessed heatwaves in May and June.

The country saw 16 per cent below average rainfall in June and it is likely to see lower-than-usual precipitation this month as well.

As of the middle of this month, rainfall was 67 per cent below the normal level, said the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD).

Extreme weather events are already affecting the agriculture sector of Bangladesh.



In the absence of adequate rains, a farmer is using an electricity-run irrigation system to water his fields as he prepares to cultivate Aush paddy, meaning his production cost will be higher than in the past. The photo was taken from Bogura's Nandigram upazila on Wednesday. PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

months, according to the WMO.

El Niño events are typically associated with increased rainfall in parts of southern South America, the southern United States, the Horn of Africa and central Asia.

In contrast, El Niño can cause severe droughts in Australia, Indonesia, and parts of southern Asia.

SM Quamrul Hassan, a meteorologist at the Storm Warning Centre at the BMD, said there is a global prediction of lower rainfall and warmer temperature for El Niño in this region.

"We are seeing the impact of El Niño in Bangladesh too."

Recently, Ferdous Alam, a chili grower in Gharia village under Bogura's Shibganj upazila, said leaves of chilis curled and fruits fell before maturing due to lower rainfalls and higher temperatures.

"Hot weather has destroyed us this year," said Khaja Sheikh, a farmer in Biharpur village under the upazila, one of the largest vegetable growing localities.

Md Tajul Islam Patwary, director of the field crops wing at the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), said flowering has been hit by heatwaves.

"Droughts and a lower rainfall have affected Aus crop this year."

The DAE had targeted to bring 13.95 lakh hectares of area

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PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

Lower rainfall spells trouble for jute farmers

SUZIT KUMAR DAS, Faridpur

Though the monsoon is just two months in, there has been lesser rainfall than usual this year, leading to apprehensions among jute growers in Faridpur and Rajbari over finding water sources for retting.

Lying some 120 kilometres or so west of the capital, the two adjoining districts are major hubs for jute cultivation. The crop is planted from early March to early May and harvested from July to September.

Some 7,38,580 bales (one bale equals 180 kilogrammes) of jute were produced in Faridpur while 4,84,135 in Rajbari in fiscal year 2020-21, according to the latest data available from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

This can be better brought into context with the fact that around 77,25,083 bales were produced around the country that year.

This year the expectation from Faridpur is 12,22,280 bales while Rajbari 6,81,250 bales.

But Dhaka division, under which the two district are situated, received 326mm of rainfall in June whereas the usual is around 361mm. July's figures are expected to be around 330mm to 405mm whereas the average is around 376mm.

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India bars non-basmati white rice export

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

India yesterday prohibited the export of non-basmati white rice with immediate effect after late seasonal monsoon rains hurt the crop and raised fears of a production shortfall, reports Reuters.

The late arrival of the monsoon led to a large rain deficit up to mid-June. And while heavy rains since the last week of June have erased the shortfall, they have caused significant damage to crops.

"In order to ensure adequate availability of non-basmati white rice in the Indian market and to allay the rise in prices in the domestic market, the government of India has amended the export policy of this variety," a government statement said.

Retail rice prices have risen 11.5 per cent over the past year and 3 per cent over the past month, it added.

Contacted, Chitta Majumder, managing director of the Majumder Group of Industries, said although the neighbouring country has banned white rice exports, the demand for this type of rice is low in Bangladesh.

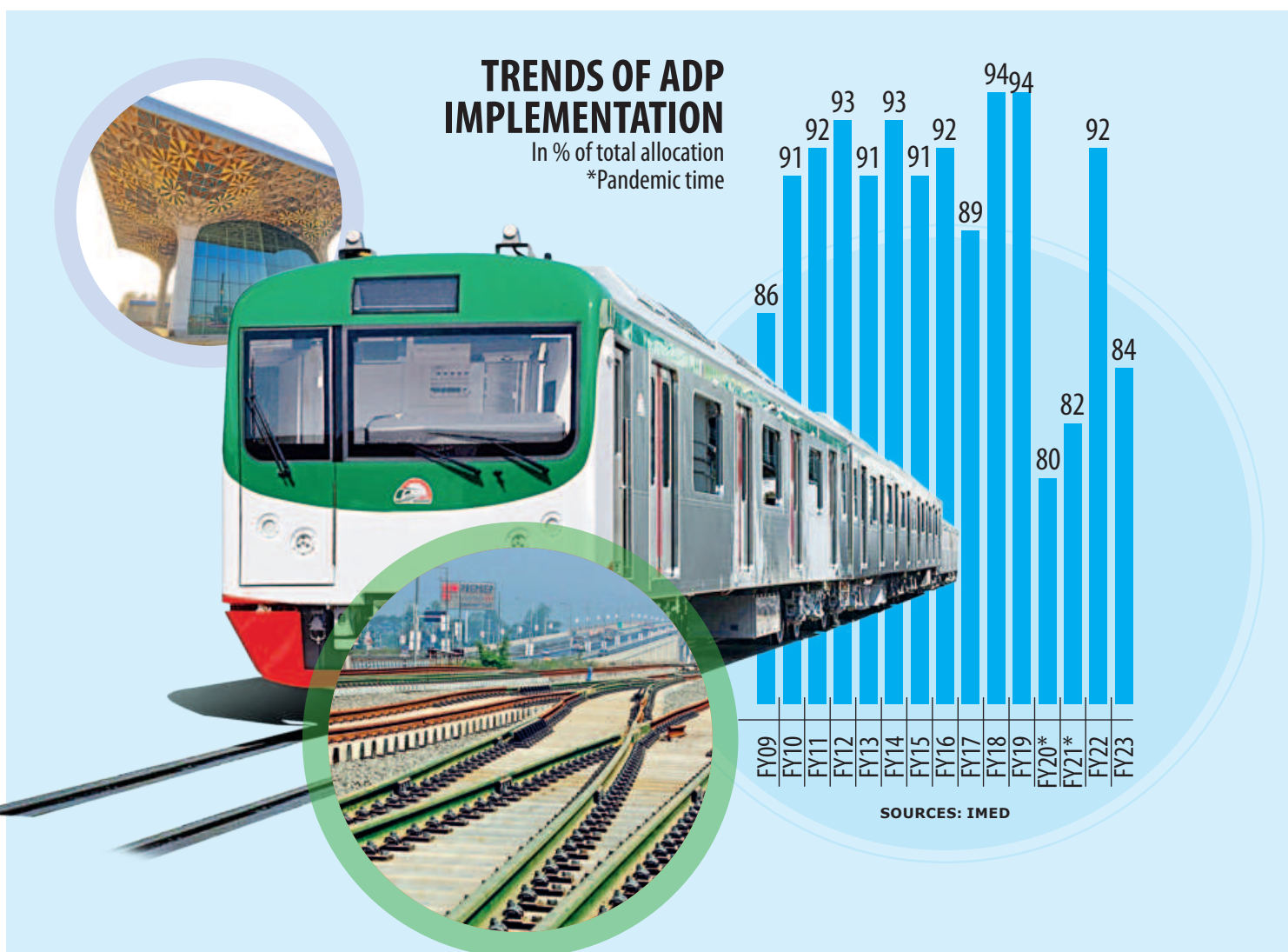
"There is some demand for white rice among people in Sylhet and Chattogram. So, it [the ban on exports]

READ MORE ON B3

Correction

In a report headlined "Furniture sales surprisingly low this Eid" published in The Daily Star on April 21, it was mistakenly mentioned that previously, Hatil would sell at least Tk 3 crore worth of furniture throughout Ramadan, but the company saw sales of just Tk 1.5 crore this time around.

Actually Hatil sold furniture worth at least Tk 47 crore throughout Ramadan in 2022 and sales stood at Tk 37 crore during Ramadan in 2023.



Development spending falls

ADP implementation stood at 84% in FY23

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

The government managed to spend 84.16 per cent of its development budget in the just-concluded fiscal year, way lower than its averages in recent decades, official figures showed yesterday.

The expenditure under the revised Annual Development Programme (ADP) in 2022-23 was even 8.58 percentage points lower than the previous year, according to the data released by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED).

Ministries and divisions spent Tk 199,099 crore from the total revised ADP of Tk 236,560 crore. In FY22, it was Tk 203,648 crore.

If the development expenditure made in FY20 and FY21, when the economy witnessed serious disruptions owing to the coronavirus pandemic, was excluded, the spending in FY23 would be the lowest since the fiscal year of 2007-08.

ADP spending usually hovers around 90 per cent.

A lower development outlay was expected

in the last fiscal year as the government embraced austerity, prioritising projects and cutting allocation, amid the US dollar crisis and limited fiscal space driven by lower-than-expected revenue collection.

However, the inefficiency of ministries and divisions is often blamed for the country's failure to hit the ADP targets.

The implementing agencies expended Tk 125,162 crore, which was 81.77 per cent of the Tk 153,066 crore set aside by the government from its own coffers. This was the lowest in at least 19 years, reflecting the focus aimed at belt-tightening.

Owing to a nearly 30 per cent fall in the foreign exchange reserve, the government had planned to speed up the execution of the projects bankrolled by bilateral and multilateral lenders. Still, the utilisation of external loans fell by 2.66 percentage points to 90.40 per cent.

"Initially, it seems to be the effects of the government's austerity measures," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, while speaking about the fall in ADP spending.

The economist raised the question

of whether the austerity measures were implemented properly.

"The aim of the austerity was to tackle the dollar crisis by keeping the demand under control or moving slowly when it comes to importing raw materials for government-funded projects. It was applicable for government projects, not for foreign-funded projects."

The revised ADP cut the budget for foreign-funded projects in FY23 from the original ones. Still, the government could not reach the target.

"It's a matter of concern," said Hussain.

"So, it's not clear whether the fall in the overall implementation rate is the result of austerity measures or it happened by default."

He said if the lower ADP implementation rate stemmed from the slower implementation of less priority projects, then it could be said that it was part of cost-cutting measures.

According to Hussain, when the implementation of foreign-funded projects falls, the use of domestic financing also

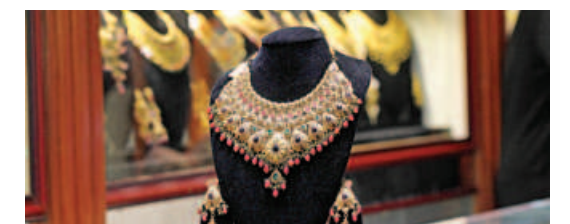
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Prices of gold cross Tk 1 lakh for first time

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The price of each bhoiri of gold has crossed the Tk 1,00,000-mark for the first time in Bangladesh as Bangladesh Jewellers Samity (Bajus) has hiked the rate of the precious metal with effect from today.

With the latest hike, customers will now have to pay Tk 100,776 for a bhoiri (11,664 grammes) of 22 carat gold, up 2.36 per cent from the previous rate.



"We have decided to hike the rate as the prices of pure gold has increased in the local market. Inflow of gold has declined because of new baggage rules by the customs," said Dewan Aminul Islam, vice president of Bajus.

The last time Bajus hiked the price of gold, used mainly for making jewellery, was on June 7.

The standing committee on pricing and price monitoring of Bajus announced the new rate yesterday.

Gold prices have been rising for more than a year, influenced by a hike in the international market and volatility in supplies in the domestic market.

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ASIAN MARKETS			
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▲ 0.71% 67,571.90	▼ 1.23% 32,490.52	▼ 0.03% 3,274.38	▼ 0.92% 3,169.52



Adil Chowdhury, president and managing director of Bank Asia, poses for photographs while inaugurating the new version of "Smart App" at Bank Asia Tower in Karwan Bazar, Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: BANK ASIA

New version of Bank Asia 'SMART App' launched

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bank Asia Limited has launched a new version of its "SMART App" with advanced features to ensure more convenient, secure and state-of-the-art banking services for customers.

Adil Chowdhury, president and managing director of the bank, inaugurated the new version of the app at Bank Asia Tower in Karwan

Bazar, Dhaka yesterday, said a press release.

In the new version of the SMART App, customers can easily sign up and enjoy the latest banking services, including fund transfer, utility bill payment, MFS fund transfer, government fee payment, e-commerce payment, QR pay and other services.

ANM Mahfuz, additional

managing director of the bank, SM Iqbal Hossain and Alamgir Hossain, deputy managing directors, SM Anisuzzaman, company secretary, Alkona K Choudhuri, chief human resource officer, Saiful Islam, chief technology officer, Md Moniruzzaman Khan, head of alternative delivery channel, and other senior officials of the bank were present.



Saiful Islam, executive director of the Bangladesh Bank's Sylhet office, poses for photographs with the participants and various banks' officials at the school banking conference at Aman Ullah Convention Centre in Sylhet recently. PHOTO: DHAKA BANK

Dhaka Bank leads school banking confce in Sylhet

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Some 50 scheduled banks led by Dhaka Bank Ltd recently organised a "School Banking Conference" at Aman Ullah Convention Center in Sylhet to encourage students to start saving money from an early age.

Saiful Islam, executive director of Bangladesh Bank's Sylhet office, inaugurated the conference, which was participated by around 500 students and teachers from 50 schools in the district

along with 200 bank officials, said a press release.

HM Mostafizur Rahman, head of retail business at Dhaka Bank, presided over the conference, where Md Iqbal Mohsin, additional director of the Financial Inclusion Department of Bangladesh Bank, was present as special guest.

Among others, Mohammad Saifur Rahman, head of student banking at Dhaka Bank Ltd, and Abu Syed Md Abdul Wadud, education officer of Sylhet district, were present.



Ryan Cheung, regional head for South Asia at Gree Air Conditioner, cuts a ribbon to inaugurate Electro Mart's sales and display centre at the divisional headquarters of Mymensingh recently. PHOTO: ELECTRO MART GROUP

Electro Mart opens sales centre in Mymensingh

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Electro Mart Ltd, an electronics and home appliance producing and manufacturing company, recently opened a sales and display centre in Mymensingh.

Consumer electronics and home appliances like refrigerators, freezers, LED televisions, washing machines, microwave ovens, blenders, juicers, irons, rice cookers, pressure cookers, air conditioners, air coolers, air curtains, dehumidifiers, and air purifiers from Konka, Gree and Haiko brands will be available in the new display centre.

Ryan Cheung, regional head for South Asia at Gree Air Conditioner, inaugurated the centre, said a press release.

"The Electro Mart sales and display centre will deliver products of the world's renowned brands, interactive and helpful customer services and robust after-sales services," said Mohammed Nurun Newaz, chairman of Electro Mart Group.

Among others, Md Nurul Afser, deputy managing director of Electro Mart Group, Nurul Azim Sunny, director, Mahmudun Nabi Chowdhury, general manager for sales and marketing, and Md Julhak Hossain, senior manager for retail sales, were present.

Dollar steadies

REUTERS, London

The dollar held mostly steady against the euro and the yen on Thursday, but dropped against the Australian dollar after domestic job data beat expectations, and against the yuan, which received a lift from Chinese monetary authorities.

The dollar is heading for its first weekly gain in nearly a month against a basket of currencies, having made most upward headway against the pound. The pound has lost 2.3 per cent in value this week after data on Wednesday showed UK inflation finally appeared to be cooling.

On Thursday, the Aussie dollar was the stand-out performer, rising by as much as 1 per cent at one point, after employment beat expectations for a second consecutive month in June, leaving the door open for more rate hikes from the Reserve Bank of Australia.

Meanwhile, the Chinese yuan rose after monetary authorities in Beijing relaxed a rule that allows companies to raise funds overseas, while China's major state-owned banks were believed to have sold dollars on the offshore market.

The dollar index traded roughly unchanged against a basket of currencies but stayed within sight of this week's 15-month low, although individual currency reactions to data are likely to be volatile for now, according to Societe Generale FX strategist Kit Jukes.

The Aussie dollar was last up 0.9 per cent at \$0.683, while the New Zealand dollar received a boost in sympathy and rose 0.4 per cent on the day to \$0.6286.

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (JUL 20, 2023)	% CHANGES FROM A MONTH AGO	% CHANGE FROM A YEAR AGO
Fine rice (kg)	Tk 60-Tk 75	0	-2.88 ↓
Coarse rice (kg)	Tk 48-Tk 52	2.04 ↑	2.04 ↑
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 50-Tk 52	-4.67 ↓	24.39 ↑
Lentil (kg)	Tk 90-Tk 100	0	-9.52 ↓
Soybean (litre)	Tk 162-Tk 165	-4.39 ↓	-4.11 ↓
Potato (kg)	Tk 38-Tk 40	6.25 ↑	41.82 ↑
Onion (kg)	Tk 60-Tk 65	-13.79 ↓	31.58 ↑
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 46-Tk 50	3.23 ↑	23.08 ↑

SOURCE: TCB



Maj Gen Md Nazrul Islam, vice-chairman of Trust Bank, presides over the bank's 24th annual general meeting, which was held virtually yesterday. PHOTO: TRUST BANK

Trust Bank declares 20% dividends

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Trust Bank declared 20 per cent dividends for the year that ended on December 31, 2022.

The announcement came at its 24th annual general meeting yesterday, said a press release. Maj Gen Md Nazrul Islam, vice-chairman of the bank, presided over the AGM.

Among others, Brig Gen SM Zia-Ul-Azim, Brig Gen Md Kaiser Hasan Malik, Brig Gen Mohammad Moazzem Hossain, Brig Gen Md Nishatul Islam Khan, Brig Gen Md Munirul Islam, Brig Gen Md Sajjad Hossain, Brig Gen Rakibul Karim Chowdhury, directors, and Humaira Azam, managing director and CEO, were present.

ILFSL holds 27th annual general meeting

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The International Leasing and Financial Services Ltd (ILFSL) recently organised its 27th annual general meeting.

Md Nazrul Islam Khan, chairman of the non-bank financial institution, virtually presided over the meeting, said a press release.

Syed Abu Naser Bakhtiar Ahmed and Md Shafiqul Islam, independent directors, Md Mashhur Rahman, managing director (current charge), and Asaduzzaman, company secretary (current charge), joined the meeting.



Md Nazrul Islam Khan, chairman of International Leasing and Financial Services Ltd, presides over the non-bank financial institution's 27th annual general meeting, which was held virtually on Monday.

Lower rainfall spells trouble

FROM PAGE B1

Hence the prospects are gloomy for the rest of the monsoon till September. This is because water is an essential part of the extraction process of jute.

The plants have to undergo retting, a process involving submerging them in stagnant or slow-moving waters for about 8 to 14 days, depending upon water temperature and mineral content.

This lets bacteria and moisture rot away much of the cellular tissues, facilitating separation of the fibre from the stem.

But the lower rainfall has led to a reduction in the number of water bodies available for the purpose.

Farmers have been found to have left their harvested plants on the fields in villages under Sadarpur, Nagarkanda and Saltha upazila in Faridpur and Baliakandi and Sadar upazila in Rajbari.

Those who are opting for water bodies some distance away from their crop fields are having to pay each farmhand Tk 700 to Tk 800 per day,

which is Tk 200 to Tk 300 higher than the usual.

Farmer Hafizur Fakir of Senati village under Saltha upazila said to have invested Tk 75,000 on three bighas of land buying seeds, fertilisers and pesticides and farmhand wages.

"Due to a lack of rainfall, I could not get retting done of plants on one bigha of land," he told this correspondent.

Another grower, Saheb Sheikh, said his jute plants did not grow that well and he harvested just two out of five bighas for the lack of water.

Farmer Babul Sheikh of Khoargam said they were incurring higher production costs for having to use water pumps to source the required water.

"In other years, water enters our land at the end of June. But the situation is totally different for two years as there has been a water crisis," said farmer Promath Chandra Mondal of Bastoputi village under Nagarkanda upazila.

Farmers fear that if the present situation persists, they might incur huge losses as quality fibres cannot be extracted without proper retting.

Due to a lack of water, farmers are having to repeated use the same water bodies, said jute trader Arifurjaman Chan of the Kanaipur bazar.

This leads to a loss of colour and quality and farmers get Tk 400 to Tk 500 less per maund (around 37 kilogrammes), he said. Locally jute is currently selling for Tk 2,600 to Tk 3,000 per maund.

The situation was acknowledged by Md Ziaul Haque, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) of Faridpur.

"We are helping 72 jute famers in our district create ditches so that they can get their jute retting done, although it is not enough," said Md Zahidul Islam, assistant director of the Directorate General of Jute in Faridpur.

"We have asked to adopt the ribbon retting method (which requires less water) but farmers are reluctant as they cannot avail jute sticks which fetch good prices," he said.

"We have held discussions with Bangladesh Water Development Board to open sluice gates. I hope the problem will be solved," he added.

El Niño weighs on Bangladesh's agriculture

FROM PAGE B1

under the cultivation of Aus this year. But the crop was finally cultivated on 10.55 lakh hectares, which were marginally lower than the 10.61 lakh hectares the previous year.

Patwary, however, hopes that the target for rain-reliant Aman is likely to be achieved as farmers have started early transplantation.

The DAE has set a goal to increase Aman cultivation to 56.5 lakh hectares of land this season from 55 lakh hectares the previous year.

Aman is the second biggest crop in Bangladesh, accounting for nearly 40 per cent of annual rice output.

Amid warm weather and inadequate rains, many farmers have to irrigate fields.

Moazzem Hossain, a farmer in Shaharkuri village under Bogura's Nandigram upazila, is one of them.

The farmer would have to spend nearly Tk 10,000 to grow Aus on each

bigha of land, up 25 per cent from a year earlier.

"The extent of pest attacks is higher this year in the absence of regular rainfalls," he added.

Nayeb Ali, a grower in Sherpur upazila, said farmers did not see the rains that were needed to make the fields ready for cultivation after Eid-ul-Azha.

"Croplands are drying out even after irrigation."

Md Shahjahan Kabir, director-general of the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, said the El Niño weather pattern has already begun. "We have entered this phase."

He said there is no analysis on El Niño and La Niña phases and their effects on Bangladesh.

Jatish C Biswas, coordinator of a project on the impact of climate change on agriculture funded by state-sponsored Krishi Gobeshona Foundation, said extreme weather

events such as heatwaves and droughts are occurring almost every year.

"Hailstorms are taking place almost throughout the year. Overall temperature is also rising while the winter is getting shorter. The rainfall is not taking place in a harmonised pattern and we don't get rains when needed."

Annual increment in temperature from 1980 to 2000 was a maximum of 0.031 degree Celsius and it increased to 0.022 degree Celsius in 2001 to 2020, said a paper, co-authored by Jatish, in August 2022.

Annual rainfalls during the two periods increased by 223 millimetres while the relative humidity increased by 1.16 per cent, according to the paper.

"We will be in trouble if we can't make crops capable of withstanding climatic stresses. This is particularly true for wheat which is grown in cold weather," Jatish added.

Made in Russia?

FROM PAGE B4

with vehicle assembly at factories vacated by the likes of Renault and Nissan, Reuters found.

Reuters spoke to two companies and four sources familiar with the matter who said that six factories in Russia that were formerly owned by European, Japanese and US carmakers or assembled their vehicles are now producing Chinese models or have plans to do so.

Overall, the six factories have an annual capacity of around 600,000 cars, Reuters calculations show.

Russia's Industry and Trade Ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

Vladimir Bespalov, an independent expert on the automotive sector, said the growing presence of Chinese carmakers benefits Russia, enabling it to restart production at idled factories and keep workers employed. President Vladimir Putin said in

2020 the industry employed about 300,000 people.

"Some technologies will be transferred, some will be localised, but they will be not the most advanced technologies," said Bespalov. "But, considering there is nothing else, this is already quite a lot."

After a chaotic decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia encouraged Western carmakers to build factories. It offered subsidies to those performing operations such as stamping, welding and painting locally, as well as incentivising them to produce components in Russia.

By 2021, domestic production was running at around 1.4 million passenger cars - around half its installed capacity. That slumped to just 450,000 last year - the industry's worst showing since the collapse of the Soviet Union - as Western firms withdrew in the wake of the Ukraine war.

LafargeHolcim's

FROM PAGE B4

Thus, the EPS stood at Tk 1.47 in the second quarter, an increase of 39 per cent from a year prior.

Shares of LHBL dropped 0.29 per cent to Tk 69.30 on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.

According to the press release, Geocycle, a waste management facility of LHBL, is serving the nation as part of its commitment to a zero waste future, reducing carbon emissions while generating alternate fuel sustainably.

"Most importantly, we have our clear focus on key long-term value creation through de-carbonisation," Chowdhury added.

Operating for almost two decades in Bangladesh, LHBL has invested \$500 million, the largest foreign direct investment in the cement sector in the country, building a fully integrated cement plant and three grinding plants. It is a joint venture of Holcim Group based in Switzerland and Cementos Molins headquartered in Spain.

DBL Lifestyles opens outlet for Nike products

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

DBL Lifestyles, a concern of DBL Group, yesterday opened an outlet to sell products of Nike, a US-based athletic footwear and apparel maker, in Dhaka city.

The outlet at Banani, Road-II of the capital houses a wide range of Nike products and accessories for local customers.

"We are the largest seller of Nike products in the country. We have various apparel accessories at our store," said an official of DBL Lifestyles, a distributor of Nike products in Bangladesh.

The official said DBL does not have any plans to open more stores for Nike products right now.

"We will of course expand if we see a good response from customers," he added.

DBL Lifestyles launched Puma products in Bangladesh in 2019 and it operates five stores of the brand.

DBL Group Chairman Abdul Wahed inaugurated the sales centre, where Vice Chairman MA Rahim, Managing Director MA Jabbar and other senior officials of the company were present.



PHOTO: PROBIR DAS

The country's first dedicated outlet for Nike products yesterday opened its doors in Banani, Dhaka. Operated by DBL Lifestyles, a concern of DBL Group, the shop features a variety of footwear and sportswear products designed by the American brand.

Poverty, inequality still big challenges

But living standards have improved, says planning minister

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Poverty reduction and income inequality are still big challenges for Bangladesh despite its looming graduation from a least developed country in 2026, according to Planning Minister MA Mannan.

"We still face problems such as poverty, lack of skilled manpower, poor healthcare, sanitation and education facilities, despite having achieved 6 per cent economic growth every year over the past decade," he said, citing how the government has long been trying to address these issues.

Mannan yesterday made these comments while addressing a conference on "Shaping the future of work: Navigating employment frontiers through job quality".

The conference, styled "Sustainable Growth and Climate Change", was organised by the International Growth Centre (IGC) and Research and Policy Integration for Development at InterContinental Dhaka.

The planning minister said during the last decade, the government developed

physical infrastructure with people now able to travel anywhere in the country.

Besides, people's living standards have improved, he added.

Mannan thanked the country's development partners, who provide financial support for infrastructure development.

However, he said the private sector also has the responsibility to improve people's living standard as it controls 80 per cent of the economy.

Mannan also expressed regret over the rise of child labour in Bangladesh.

As per the National Child Labour Survey-2022 of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the number of children engaged in child labour increased by 4.5 per cent over the past decade to 17.76 lakh at present compared to 16.98 lakh in 2013.

As such, the number of working children has increased to 35.36 lakh from 34.5 lakh.

Mannan said the government has a lot of plans for developing the country.

He further said democracy and good governance are important for the development of any nation, but creating

"We still face problems such as poverty, lack of skilled manpower, poor healthcare, sanitation and education facilities, despite achieving 6 per cent economic growth every year over the past decade."

sufferings for people through anarchy and blocking roads cannot bring good governance and wellbeing.

Indicating activists of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the minister urged all to abide by the laws of the country as responsible citizens.

Ariful Hoque, director of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), said even amid the global economic recession in 2022, Bangladesh got \$3.4 billion in foreign investment proposals, which was the second highest amount ever received.

He also said till now, Bangladesh got

\$22 billion in cumulative foreign direct investment (FDI).

Hoque added that BIDA has taken a number of initiatives to reform policies and attract FDI.

Mohammed Zahidullah, chief sustainability officer of DBL Group, said they have a diversified business for business sustainability and to generate employment.

"Through diversifying and expansion, we are creating skilled manpower and contributing in improving the living standards of people," he added.

Moderated by Shahid Vaziralli, head of the research programme at the IGC, the session was also addressed by Julia Cajal Grossi, assistant professor of economics at the Centre for Trade and Economic Integration of the Geneva Graduate Institute.

Nina Caroline Buchmann, a PhD candidate in economics at Stanford University of the US, and Neeran Ramjathan, programme manager of labour administration and working conditions at the International Labour Organization, also spoke.

Rangs Motors launches new range of Eicher Skyline Bus

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Rangs Motors Ltd, a concern of Rangs Group, yesterday launched the Eicher Skyline 20.15 Bus in local markets.

This new type of bus is thoroughly tested in Bangladesh and optimised to deliver the best-in-class performance, said a press release.

Its powerful 180HP engine with in-line fuel injection system will help deliver more trips every year for bus operators.

It has features such as a stronger domex chassis, ET70 transmission with 710nm capacity, 395mm drive head and lubricated for life propeller shaft to ensure higher reliability.

The new type of buses come with different variants, including options of weveller suspension and air suspension to deliver segment leading passenger comfort during long distance travel.

"Today, we embark on a new journey, where comfort meets power on the open road," said Ahmed Shahriar Anwar, chief executive officer of Rangs Motors Ltd.

"With great pride and unwavering determination, we present our latest masterpiece, Eicher Skyline 20.15, a bus designed and made in Bangladesh for our own to redefine experiences in this new era of travel," he added.

"These buses are designed for enhanced safety, superior comfort and reliability well suited for the growing intercity travel in Bangladesh," said SS Gill, executive vice-president of International Business at VECV.



Ahmed Shahriar Anwar (first from left), chief executive officer of Rangs Motors Ltd, Sohana Rouf Chowdhury, managing director, SS Gill, executive vice-president of international business at VECV, and Shantanu Srivastav, head of international business, pose for photographs keeping behind an Eicher Skyline 20.15 Bus.

PHOTO: RANGS MOTORS



Debasish Sarker, director general of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, greets Jingyuan Xia, director for plant production and protection division at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations with bouquet at the institute's Kazi Badruddoza auditorium yesterday. Among others, Sabina Yesmin, joint secretary (research wing) of the ministry of agriculture, was present.

PHOTO: BARI

BARI holds workshop

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), Gazipur organised a workshop for the one country one priority product project in Asia and the Pacific at the institute's Kazi Badruddoza auditorium yesterday.

Sabina Yesmin, joint secretary (research branch) of the ministry of agriculture, inaugurated the workshop as chief guest, said a press release.

Senior scientists from different divisions and centres of BARI, FAO officials and university teachers participated in the workshop.

Debasish Sarker, director general of BARI, presided over the workshop, where Dr Jingyuan Xia, director for plant production and protection division at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), was present as special guest.

3,000 factory workers trained in fire safety: FBCCI

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Some 3,000 workers of about 100 factories in Bangladesh have been trained in fire safety with support of International Labour Organization over the past year.

This was shared by Md Jashim Uddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, at a discussion organised by the chamber's safety council at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

About 1,200 members of safety committees of more than 200 factories have been trained on performing their duties, he said.

Businesspeople have to not only do business but also comply with the rules. They must first be responsible in avoiding accidents and health risks in factories, Jashim said.

Just because the responsible authority visited a factory does not mean that the job is over. The owners can avoid potential losses by screening for infrastructure risks, he said.

"It is our job to cooperate with the businesspeople. So, you also have to be sincere in taking help," said Mina Masud Uzzaman, additional inspector general of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments.

Nokia profit slides as US clients slash spending

AFP, Helsinki

Finnish telecommunications equipment maker Nokia reported a sharp fall in second-quarter profits on Thursday, dragged down by a drop in investment by North American mobile phone operators.

The company, which is competing with Swedish rival Ericsson and China's Huawei in the global rollout of 5G equipment, said the deployment in India drove growth for its mobile network business.

But net sales fell in North America as clients continue to review their spending and reduce their inventory levels.

Nokia said its net profit fell by 37 per cent to 289 million euros (\$324 million) in the second quarter compared to the same period last year — well below the two billion euros forecast in a Bloomberg survey of analysts.

Net sales reached 5.7 billion euros, down three percent, though they were flat on a constant currency basis.

Net sales fell by 42 per cent in North America alone while soaring by 333 per cent in India.

Macroeconomic "uncertainty" weighed on sales of network infrastructure.

"Considering the significant decline in major North American operators' investments, our operating margin has proved resilient," chief executive Pekka Lundmark said in an earnings statement.

Nokia was able to deliver an operating margin of 11 per cent "as a result of prudent management of our costs."

India bars non-basmati

FROM PAGE B1

is unlikely to affect prices of the grain in the domestic market," he said.

Majumder, whose firm also imports rice from India apart from operating rice mills here, said rice is available in the local market because of higher domestic production in the previous two main crop seasons.

"Besides, India has not banned shipments of boiled rice that we usually import to sell locally," he added.

Until July 17, retail prices of rice had been steady for nearly a month in Dhaka. Prices of coarse grain, the cheapest among other types of rice, edged up 2 per cent to Tk 48-52 per kilogramme on July 18 from a month ago, according to market data compiled by state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

Reuters said India accounts for more than 40 per cent of world rice exports but low inventories mean any cut in shipments will fuel food prices driven up by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year and erratic weather, said Reuters.

"India would disrupt the global rice market with far greater velocity than Ukraine did in the wheat market with Russia's invasion," BV Krishna Rao, president of the Rice Exporters Association told Reuters.

Rice is a staple for more than 300

crore people, and nearly 90 per cent of the water-intensive crop is produced in Asia, where the El Nino weather pattern usually brings lower rainfall. Global prices are already hovering at their highest level in 11 years, according to Reuters.

"The sudden ban on exports would be very painful for the buyers, who can't replace the shipments from any other country," Rao said.

While Thailand and Vietnam don't have enough inventories to plug the shortfall, African buyers would be most affected by India's decision, Rao said, adding that many countries will request New Delhi resume shipments.

Heavy rain in northern parts of India over the last few weeks has damaged newly planted crops in states including Punjab and Haryana, and many farmers have had to replant.

Rice paddy fields in northern states have been submerged for over a week, destroying newly planted seedlings, and forcing farmers to wait for waters to recede so they can replant.

In other major rice-growing states, including West Bengal, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, farmers have prepared paddy nurseries but have been unable to transplant the seedlings due to inadequate rainfall, reports Reuters.

Development spending falls

FROM PAGE B1

declines since no project is completely bankrolled by external resources.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, a think-tank, said the decrease in the ADP implementation rate is again a reflection of the low capacity of the implementing agencies.

"At a time when we are going through an economic stress, we had expected a higher ADP implementation because public expenditure is needed to create jobs and raise incomes."

The economist said a slower implementation of foreign-aided projects means a lower disbursement of external funds. "This is not encouraging."

Among the 15 highest recipients of

the development budget, the Energy and Mineral Resources Division was the top performer in FY23 as it spent Tk 417,659 crore, which accounted for 103 per cent of the allocation it had received.

The Bridges Division came second as its ADP execution rate stood at 96.67 per cent while Power Division was at the third position with an outlay of 93 per cent.

On the contrary, the Health Services Division was the worst-performer. Its spending stood at Tk 668,539 crore, representing 68 per cent of the budget.

Other low performers include the Secondary and Higher Education Division and the water resources ministry, with expenditures of 71 per cent and 75.88 per cent, respectively.

Crystal Ins to invest Tk 12.5cr in digital bank

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Crystal Insurance Company Ltd has decided to invest Tk 12.5 crore as a sponsor shareholder to establish a digital bank.

SM Shahidullah, company secretary of the insurer, said several names have come up in the proposal as the name of the bank, but it is not final yet.

The company took the decision in a board meeting held on July 18, according to a posting on the website of Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.

The amount of investment is 10 per cent of the total paid-up capital of a digital bank, the company said.

The Bangladesh Bank last month invited applications from entrepreneurs interested in establishing digital banks. The BB will accept applications until August 1 this year.

The BB in its guideline said investors willing to set up a digital bank will have to have a minimum paid-up capital of Tk 125 crore and the capital will have to come from the sponsors.



Some 23.5 lakh tonnes of mango were produced in Bangladesh in fiscal year 2021-22, according to data from the Department of Agricultural Extension.

PHOTO: STAR

Amrapali mango production highest among all varieties

Demand, output rising fast

SUKANTA HALDER and LAITANLIAN PANGKHUA

Just a decade ago, Fazli, Himsagar, Langra and Gopalbhog mangoes were the most popular varieties of the fruit among consumers in Bangladesh.

But now, they have been replaced by the Amrapali, or BARI Mango-3, variety.

One in every four, or 25 per cent, of all mangoes produced in the country are now of the Amrapali variety, the cultivation of which has grown at the fastest clip in the last decade.

According to data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), some 23.5 lakh tonnes of mango were produced in fiscal year 2021-22.

Of this amount, some 600,000 tonnes were of the Amrapali variety, which is being grown in all 64 districts of the country, DAE officials said.

However, Naogaon, Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban are the four biggest producing districts.

Mawiliana Pangkhua, a mango grower in Kaptai upazila of Rangamati, said he started cultivation in 2012.

"At the beginning, I started cultivating mango of the Rangui variety. But after three years, the price of Rangui mango dropped significantly," he said.

"Initially, Rangui mango sold for Tk 600 per maund [37 kilogrammes], but the price later came down to Tk 150 to Tk 200 per maund," Pangkhua added.

It was then that he realised the demand for Amrapali mango was increasing, with the fruit being sold for Tk 1,500 to Tk 2,000 per maund.



After that, Pangkhua only planted Amrapali mango on his 5-acre farm.

"The demand for this mango is high due to its deliciousness. Last year, I sold Amrapali mango worth around Tk 5 lakh. This year, we hope to sell a total of about Tk 3.5 lakh," he said.

However, Pangkhua added that mango production has been lower this year due to less rainfall.

BARI Mango 3 is a popular mango hybrid in India developed by crossing the Dasher and Neelum breeds.

It was introduced in Bangladesh in the 19th century. After research, the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) released it in 1996, said Mohammad Sorof Uddin, a senior scientific officer at the BARI in Gazipur.

This variety has been made widely available in markets since 2009-10. Now, Bari 3 is being cultivated in at least 30 districts, including the Rajshahi region, the major mango-producing belt.

Uddin said the sweetness of mangoes is determined by the brix

percentage. Amrapali's sweetness level is around 26, which is the highest among all mangoes.

Meanwhile, the Gaurmati and Himsagar varieties are close behind.

The second characteristic of Amrapali is that this mango lasts longer than others.

"It doesn't rot easily, meaning this mango is available for a longer time during the season," Uddin added.

Mango is cultivated on 16,000 hectares of land in hilly areas of Bangladesh. Of the total acreage, some 8,000 hectares are used for growing Amrapali mango, as per DAE data.

Sohel Rana, a farmer in Sapahar upazila of Naogaon, has a 150-bigha mango orchard, of which 70 bighas have Amrapali mango trees.

"When commercial cultivation of mangoes started in our area, it was with Amrapali variety and the profit has been good," he said.

Munier Alam, an entrepreneur in Chapainawabganj, said Amrapali is a hybrid variety that bears fruit from the second year of

planting.

Besides, Amrapali mango trees take up less space compared to other breeds, meaning that more trees can be planted on less land.

"Also, there is a lot of demand from buyers. Due to these commercial reasons, there is a lot of enthusiasm among growers to cultivate this mango," he said.

"Currently, the breed is said to be sustainable, but it is not possible to say what will happen in the long run," added Alam, who cultivates Amrapali mangoes on 8 bighas of land.

BARI's Uddin said their BARI Mango-4, Kati and Banana mango varieties are gradually becoming popular as well.

Himsagar, which was second in production in fiscal 2021-22, accounted for 450,000 tonnes that year.

With Amrapali and Himsagar taking the top two spots, Runibhanga, Ashwina and Langra mangoes are other varieties that make up the top five most popular breeds.

Amrapali has been at the forefront of production for several years now.

Currently, Bangladesh is ranked 7th among mango producing countries in the world.

There are more than 72 varieties of mango in the country, about half of which are commercially produced, according to researchers.

Meanwhile, Amrapali mango exports are increasing annually, said Mohammad Arifur Rahman, director of the DAE's Exportable Mango Production project.

Some 2,100 tonnes of mango have been exported so far this year, with about 80 per cent being of the Amrapali variety, he added.

Coaching: the most impactful but mostly neglected

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

A coach was giving a pep talk to his team before a big game.

He said, "Remember, guys, this is the most important game of your lives. You have to play with all your heart, all your soul, and all your guts." Then he paused and added, "And if you don't have any guts, don't worry. I have a bucket full of them right here."

That is the essence of coaching – it gives you the guts to take on challenges with a winning spirit.

Coaching in any sport is undoubtedly critical to a team's success, and no one denies it. In sports, there is not only a coach but also a captain to lead the team, just like a CEO in a company. But why don't most companies have a coach?

Unfortunately, corporates in the sub-continent do not see any immediate or measurable benefits from coaching. However, I have been rather fortunate in this regard thanks to working in organisations like Unilever and Robi Axiata.

At Unilever, I learned how coaching, mentoring, and counselling are distinguished and applied in an effective manner. At Robi, before taking on the CEO role, I was intensely coached by a professional, and I must confess that every session used to be discomfiting and, at the same time, an eye-opener. These sessions threw light on blind spots in areas I thought I had mastered, and there were plenty of them too.

A former Unilever colleague was sharing a story on coaching where the founder of a prominent business group called him to coach his daughter and sons, who are actively involved in the family business. The colleague put a condition that the coaching would have to start with a market visit. But they could not fathom why on earth they would have to go to a market for corporate coaching. And the assignment never materialised.

The first generation will likely differ significantly from the next in a family business. What worked for the first generation will not work for the next generation. Factors such as social and economic context, family members' profiles and mindset change over time, creating conflict between generations. A third person in the coach role can remove conflicts and drive business performance.

As much as 44 per cent of family businesses experience a growth decline in the first generation, 40 per cent survive through the second generation, 15 per cent make it through the third generation, and only 1 per cent survive onto the fourth generation. In the case of Bangladesh, the scenario is likely to be worse.

Coaching is critical in corporate because it can help leaders and employees in multiple ways. It can empower them to take on responsibility, remove harmful conflicts, increase engagement and satisfaction, improve performance and productivity, adapt to change and uncertainty, and develop leadership potential.

Coaching can help individuals develop their leadership skills and styles, such as communication, collaboration, delegation, decision-making, and emotional intelligence. It can also help individuals inspire, influence, and empower others. As it did for me, coaching can prepare individuals for current and future leadership roles and challenges.

A coach is someone who can give correction without causing bitterness. Unless coached, people can't reach their maximum potential. With the right kind of coaching and determination, one can accomplish anything for themselves, the organisation and the country. Coaching is a valuable investment for anyone who wants to grow, learn, and thrive in today's complex and competitive environment.

The author is founder and managing director of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd

Oil prices decline on profit-taking

REUTERS, New York

Oil prices edged lower on Wednesday, as investors took profits following earlier gains on tighter US crude supplies and China's pledge to reinvestigate its economic growth.

Brent futures dipped 17 cents at \$79.46 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude dropped 40 cents at \$75.35 a barrel.

Prices pared gains late in the session after both contracts had risen by over \$1 a barrel. Market participants took advantage of the higher prices and took profits, said Phil Flynn, an analyst at Price Futures Group.

Strength in the US dollar index also weighed on prices. A stronger greenback makes crude more expensive for investors holding other currencies.

Limiting losses, US crude inventories fell by 708,000 barrels in the last week to 457.4 million barrels, compared with analysts' expectations in a Reuters poll for a drop of 2.4 million barrels, Energy Information Administration data showed on Wednesday.



SOURCE: LAFARGEHOLCIM

LafargeHolcim's profit jumps 66%

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

LafargeHolcim Bangladesh Ltd (LHBL) posted a 66 per cent year-on-year higher profit in the first half of 2023 riding on higher sales and prices, the multinational cement manufacturer said yesterday.

The company recorded Tk 361.5 crore in net profit in the six months to June from Tk 217.3 crore in the same period a year earlier, according to its unaudited financial statements.

The earnings per share rose to Tk 3.11 from Tk 1.06. The EPS went up on the back of increased aggregate sales and prices of cement. Sales jumped 35 per cent to Tk 1,525.6 crore in January-June.

"Our diverse product portfolio, efficient route to market, digital footprint, countrywide distribution network, and aggregates business played a significant role in ensuring the healthy growth momentum," said Iqbal Chowdhury, chief executive officer of the cement company, in a press release.

Sales and profit growth were lower in the second quarter compared to the January-March period.

Revenue was up 34 per cent year-on-year to Tk 671 crore in April-June.

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MADE IN RUSSIA? Chinese cars drive a revival of Russia's auto factories

REUTERS

The relaunch of a classic Soviet-era car, the Moskvich, by a state-owned company in November was celebrated by Moscow's mayor as showing the resilience of Russia's auto industry to Western sanctions.

"This is a historic event," Sergei Sobyanin said as the Moskvich was unveiled at a factory the Moscow government took from French carmaker Renault last year for just one rouble (\$0.01). "Many people thought it was the end of the Russian car industry."

But the rebirth of the Moskvich is also a sign of China's growing sway over an important sector of Russia's economy.

The cars rolling out of the vast Moscow Automobile Factory Moskvich in the south of the Russian capital bear no resemblance to the boxy metallic Moskvich models of the Soviet era.

The sleek four-door SUVs featured engine parts and upholstery from China's JAC Motors, clearly visible. Two sources, who asked not to be identified as they are not authorised to speak to the media, told Reuters the Moskvich 3 model is a JAC Sehol X4 assembled

in Moscow using kits purchased from a Chinese partner.

Moskvich said in a statement last month its 3 and 3e models are produced using large-unit assembly - where cars are built at a manufacturing plant

abroad, before being exported and finalised in Russia. The company said it works with a "foreign partner" but did not confirm ties to JAC.

"Production localisation is gradually increasing," Moskvich told Reuters,



People inspect a Jetour Dashing crossover produced by Chinese automaker Jetour at the Keyauto dealership in Lyubertsy, Moscow on July 12.

PHOTO: REUTERS

adding that it hopes to start a second production phase later this year or early in 2024 involving welding and painting at the Moscow plant, incorporating a wider pool of local suppliers with Russian components.

JAC, based in the eastern province of Anhui, did not respond to requests for comment.

Chinese carmakers are seizing market share in Russia, capitalising on the departure of Western players that used to dominate the market before the invasion of Ukraine, auto industry data shows.

Imported Chinese cars now account for 49 per cent of Russia's market, reaching 40,000 units in June, compared with a pre-war share of just 7 per cent in June 2021, according to data from analytics firm Autostat.

It is a lucrative business. Chinese carmakers' exports of passenger cars to Russia in January-May 2023 increased 5.2 times year-on-year to almost \$3.6 billion, according to Chinese customs statistics, including exports worth almost \$1 billion in April alone.

Beyond these figures, Chinese firms are also increasing their sales in Russia

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