

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.

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 reinvigorate 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.



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But now, they have been replaced by the Amrapali, or BARI Mango-3, variety.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

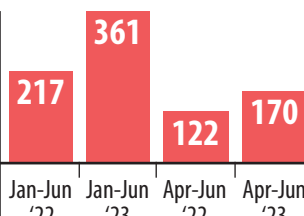
The author is founder and managing director of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd



NET PROFIT OF LAFARGEHOLCIM

In crore taka

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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