Maize demand may hit 1.7cr tonnes by 2050

Experts call for stronger domestic production and seed systems as import dependence and climate risks threaten future supplies

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's annual maize demand could rise from around 70 lakh tonnes currently to 1.7 crore tonnes by 2050 under a high-demand scenario, highlighting the need to strengthen domestic production amid growing import dependence and climate risks.

Population growth and urbanisation will drive demand for agricultural commodities, while maize consumption will rise mainly because of its use as animal feed, said Pieter Rutsaert, a market research specialist at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), Kenya.

He spoke at the National Consultation on Emerging Needs and Strategic Investments for Sustainable and Resilient Agri-Food Systems in Bangladesh, organised by CIMMYT at the BARC Auditorium in Dhaka yesterday.

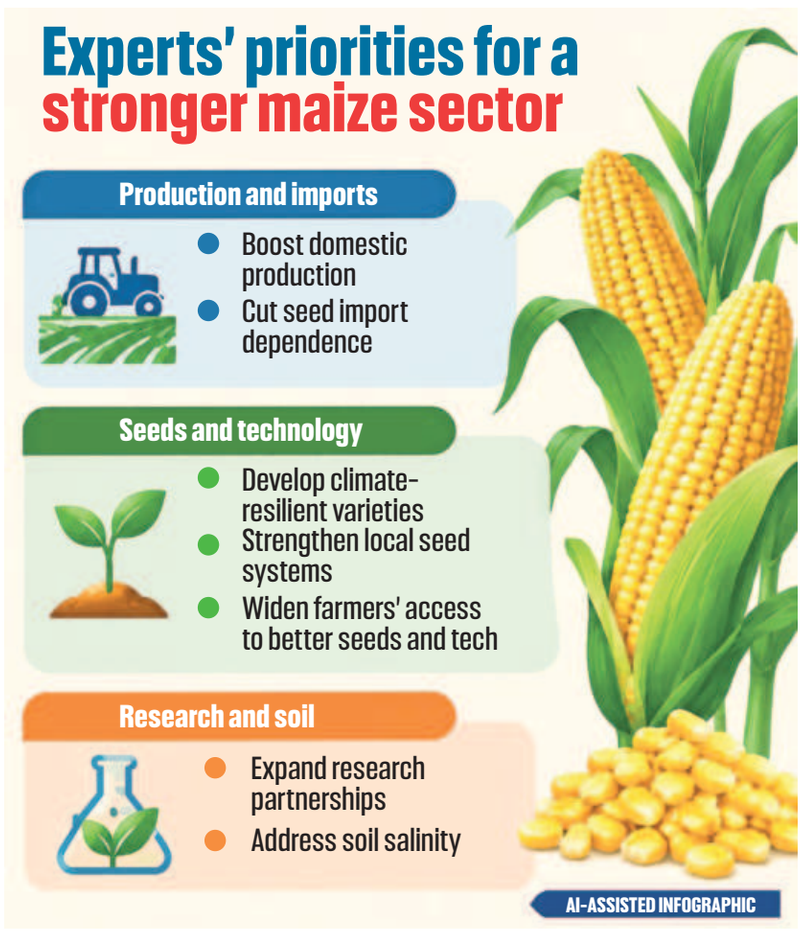
Bangladesh needs to boost domestic maize production, strengthen seed systems and invest in climate-resilient agriculture to meet future demand, as import dependence, soil degradation and climate vulnerability threaten agricultural supplies, experts said at the consultation.

Presenting global and regional demand projections, Rutsaert said meeting the additional demand through imports could become more challenging as major exporting countries face rising domestic consumption, potentially reducing their exportable surpluses.

India, traditionally an important source of maize for Bangladesh, is also expected to see higher domestic demand, which could reduce its exportable surplus.

Meanwhile, Brazil and the United States have emerged as major suppliers to Bangladesh's growing feed industry as imports from India have declined, according to a recent report by the US Department of Agriculture.

Bangladesh imported nearly 15 lakh tonnes of maize in the first 10 months of the 2025-26 marketing year. Brazil supplied 78 percent of the total, while the US and India accounted for 11 percent each.



Pieter stressed the need to develop improved crop varieties and ensure that new technologies reach farmers. He also called for long-term planning to meet rising wheat and maize demand.

Climate change, soil degradation and shrinking productive land pose further challenges to agricultural expansion.

Md Abdus Salam, executive chairman of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, said Bangladesh ranked as the 13th most climate-vulnerable country in the world, according to the Germanwatch 2023 report.

Temperatures could rise by 1 to 3.7 degrees Celsius by 2100, while soil salinity could increase by 17 to 24 percent, he said.

The salinity-affected area expanded from around 8.3 lakh hectares in 1972-73 to 11.56 lakh hectares in 2024, according to the Soil Resource Development Institute.

Abdus Salam said feeding a growing population with diminishing agricultural land was a major challenge for Bangladesh.

Md Mahfuz Bazzaz, director general of the Bangladesh Wheat and Maize Research Institute, said wheat productivity had gradually increased, but the area under cultivation had declined. In contrast, maize cultivation was expanding because of its higher productivity and profitability.

However, growing dependence on imported maize seeds remains a concern, he said.

Mahfuz identified climate-resilient varieties, stronger seed systems, sustainable production practices and research collaboration as key priorities for developing the wheat and maize sectors.

Wais Kabir, former executive chairman of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, said declining soil fertility, low organic matter and micronutrient deficiencies were undermining agricultural productivity. Rising fertiliser costs and weaknesses in market organisation were adding to the challenges.

GKM Mustafizur Rahman, vice chancellor of Gazipur Agricultural University, said maize had become the country's second-largest grain crop after rice and was playing an increasingly important role in farmers' livelihoods and the livestock sector.

He urged CIMMYT to strengthen collaboration with national research institutions and facilitate access to dual-purpose maize varieties that provide both grain and fodder.

Dyutiman Choudhary, country representative of CIMMYT Bangladesh, said the organisation's work was increasingly moving beyond individual crops towards transforming the broader agrifood system through sustainable, inclusive and science-based solutions.

Women left out of our growth plan

SHAMIMA AKHTER

Every annual business planning meeting I have attended began with the economic outlook and came down to one question: how much money will people have in their hands? When the outlook was weak, we looked at every cut: men and women, income group, region. The data showed where the next growth could come from. Bangladesh's growth ambition now needs the same kind of look. The World Bank projects 3.4 percent growth this fiscal year, the IMF 3.2 percent and the Asian Development Bank 4 percent, against a budget target of 6.5 percent.

The UN General Assembly's three-year deferment of least developed country graduation gives us more time, and it has to be used well. The planning should cover every critical growth factor, and the women cut is essential.

Women are 50.8 percent of the population, and their labour force participation fell from 42.8 percent in 2022 to 38.4 percent in 2024. Almost 96 percent of working women are in the informal sector. For every Tk 100 a man earns, a woman earns about Tk 38 (World Economic Forum). With private credit growth below 5 percent, investment is slow. Only one in five of the 630,000 net new jobs expected this year is in industry, so the formal jobs women have left are unlikely to return on their own. High child marriage is a growth problem. Married women spend 7.5 times as much time on unpaid care work as men, and 3.8 times as much as unmarried women. If nearly half of girls still marry before 18, much of the youth dividend will not reach the labour market.



Bangladesh's growth will not return unless women's jobs and earnings get a clear goal, tracked like any other economic target

Amid today's geopolitical turmoil, the review must identify where plans for women fell short and where none existed. FY27's gender budget is the largest so far, at 4.8 percent of GDP. But analysts note it is a classification of existing spending, not a fresh allocation. Actual spending stayed below the allocation in each of FY23, FY24 and FY25. Bangladesh Bank's target is for 15 percent of small business loans to go to women entrepreneurs, but their share stood at 7.28 percent in March.

The new five-year plan aims for one crore jobs by 2030 on the way to a trillion-dollar economy by 2034. It mentions special attention for youth and women, but sets no target for women's participation or their share of the new jobs. There are encouraging steps too. The Family Card pays monthly cash in women's names to 41 lakh female-headed households this year, with plans to reach 1.61 crore families under the five-year plan. The budget reserves 80 percent of one lakh new health posts for women, and the government has promised skills training with microcredit for rural women.

But execution is the challenge. If the Family Card is not delivered efficiently, women will lose support set aside for them. The jobs target needs specifics: how many jobs for women, in which sectors, and how a pipeline of qualified women will be built. All this needs support: social protection designed for women, safe transport, childcare and women's health services. Without these, we will prepare qualified women and then lose them from work.

For growth to return and last, women must earn equally with men and take decisions on household saving and spending. Women's economic empowerment cannot be viewed only through a social lens. The growth plan needs a clear call-out for it, nurtured and tracked like any other growth target. In a planning exercise, no business would overlook half of its growth source. It would give it equal attention and care, because that ensures growth.

The writer is a corporate affairs and sustainability professional

UK to expand jobs guarantee scheme for young people

REUTERS, *London*

The British government announced on Saturday that it would expand a programme to provide guaranteed jobs to young people and extend it nationwide as part of measures to address the problem of youth unemployment.

Britain had 981,000 people aged 16-24 not in employment, education or training in the second quarter of this year, accounting for 13 percent of the age group as a whole.

The Department for Work and Pensions said a trial scheme to provide guaranteed jobs for every eligible 18 to 24-year-old on Universal Credit welfare would roll out across Britain from the end of November, helping more than 90,000 young people.

Britain had 9.81 lakh people aged 16-24 not in employment, education or training in the Q2 of this year

From April, the scheme will be extended to support those eligible after only 12 months on Universal Credit rather than the current 18 months.

The programme offers 25 hours a week of paid work for six months, funded by the government. It will now be available across all areas of England, Scotland and Wales.

"The longer someone is out of work, the harder it is to get back in, and no young person should be left waiting on a scrapheap for an opportunity," Work and Pensions Secretary Pat McFadden said.

Announcement comes ahead of a report next week by former minister Alan Milburn, a Labour Party ally of Prime Minister Andy Burnham, which will detail causes of rising youth inactivity and give recommendations for helping more young people into work.

Trump's minerals push has yet to loosen China's grip ahead of Xi talks

REUTERS, *Shenzhen, China*

US President Donald Trump meets Chinese President Xi Jinping this week with a key part of his trade strategy unfinished: securing a homegrown supply of critical minerals to counter Beijing's dominance.

Many US mining projects remain years from production despite billions of dollars in federal investment by the Trump administration, leaving American manufacturers dependent on Chinese materials essential to semiconductors, robotics, weapons systems and the artificial intelligence boom.

That dependence puts Trump in an awkward position for trade talks. He can press Xi only so hard on tariffs and export controls without risking access to metals, magnets and chemical compounds that the US does not produce in sufficient quantities, according to half a dozen analysts interviewed by Reuters.

Xi has used China's position as the world's top rare earths miner as leverage in negotiations. Last year, Beijing restricted exports of the minerals and magnets, disrupting work at Ford Motor and other US manufacturers. Washington negotiated for continued access.

The gap between Trump's minerals ambitions and the slow pace of execution reflects the difficulty of rebuilding an industry the US nearly abandoned at the end of the 20th century, said Samir Kapadia, head of trade at the Washington-based business advisory firm Vogel Group.

"Right now there are more PowerPoint decks than permits, so the question is how many of these projects exist only in PDF form and how many are shovel-ready," Kapadia said.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

A TEST OF WASHINGTON'S NEGOTIATION LEVERAGE

The meeting with Xi, expected on Thursday, will test Trump's strategy.

Trump and Xi may agree to extend their existing trade truce, which is due to expire in January and includes export-control waivers for certain critical minerals.

"The Chinese have been using the critical minerals choke collar on the US when they feel like it," said Rich Nolan, head of the National Mining Association trade group.

China has said it restricted the minerals to prevent their use in war. It has also accused Washington of abusing export controls by blocking semiconductor exports to China.

Meanwhile, the US has lagged in production. Its manufacturing capacity for neodymium-iron-boron magnets, used in electric vehicles and military equipment, was roughly 4,500 metric tonnes annually in 2025. That compared with about 210,000 metric tons in China, according to the International Energy Agency.

Beyond mining, China has spent decades building the processing and refining facilities, technical expertise and manufacturing infrastructure needed to turn raw materials into industrial components.



In this file photo, US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping watch a military demonstration from a balcony of the White House in Washington, DC on September 24, 2026. PHOTO: **REUTERS/FILE**

"Where are we now? Exactly where the Chinese want us: screwed up beyond belief," said Jack Lifton, an analyst with Technology Metals Research.

While the Trump administration has moved to accelerate mineral projects, much of the infrastructure remains years away, with mines, refineries and processing facilities requiring a decade or more to come online.

A $7.4 billion Tennessee refinery for copper, zinc and other critical minerals backed by South Korea's Korea Zinc is not expected to open until 2030. Rio Tinto and BHP aim to build North America's largest copper mine – but it wouldn't open until next decade. Last year, Trump's administration agreed to take an equity stake in Trilogy Metals, which plans to produce copper in Alaska starting in 2031.

Vulcan Elements has begun making rare earth magnets in North Carolina, although its customers have not yet approved them for use.

Some projects are further along. MP Materials is expanding magnet production in Texas under a multibillion-dollar Pentagon partnership. Nevada's Thacker Pass mine – North America's largest lithium source – is under construction by Lithium Americas. Production is expected in 2028. Perpetua Resources plans to produce antimony – used to make bullets and armor – in Idaho by 2029.

Trump's minerals strategy also faces a political test at home. Democrats' midterm victories will give them control of Congress next year, and some have questioned the administration's investments in private companies.

US Energy Secretary Chris Wright, whose department funded multiple minerals projects, said last week he is "happy to explain everything we've done."

Russian economic growth slows to 1% in Q3

AFP, *Moscow*

Russia's growth rate slowed to one percent in the third quarter, preliminary official data showed Friday, as the war in Ukraine held back the economy.

The 1.0 growth in the three months to the end of September compared to the same period last year, as calculated by the official statistics agency Rosstat, beat the 0.6 forecast made by the economy ministry last month.

But that was less than the 1.3 percent expansion the Russian economy managed in the second quarter.

The Russian economy had contracted 0.2 percent in the first quarter, its first quarterly contraction in three years.

The Kremlin has spent heavily to wage war in neighbouring Ukraine.

At first this boosted Russia's economic growth.

But it also set off inflation, caused a lack of labour in non-military sectors and led to a slump in private investment, which has hobbled growth.

Western sanctions and Russian measures against foreign firms also held back private investment and economic activity.

The surge in oil prices following the US-Iran war provided Russia financial respite by bringing in additional revenue for its petroleum exports, but Ukrainian attacks on energy infrastructure forced the Kremlin to restrict exports to ensure sufficient domestic supplies.

The war has also strained Russian government finances.

Every year since the start of the offensive in 2022 Russia has posted a budget deficit.

Over the first 10 months of the year it ran a deficit of 2.3 percent of GDP, according to finance ministry estimates published at the start of the week.

While it initially spared ordinary Russians from the financial burden of the war, the government increased the value added tax (VAT) rate by two percent this year.

Nevertheless, Russia remains one of the lowest indebted developed countries in the world with debt equal to around 19 percent of annual economic output in 2026, according to IMF estimates.

Moscow also has a sovereign wealth fund with nearly $46 billion in liquid assets and worth around $157 billion overall.