

Time for ‘Made in Bangladesh’ tag to shine bright

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

There was a time when mobile handset buyers were used to searching for ‘Made in Finland’ or ‘Made in Korea’ for good quality devices. Later, ‘Made in China’ took the mantle, followed by ‘Made in Vietnam’.

Now, the time is for the ‘Made in Bangladesh’ tag line to dazzle. People are now purchasing good-quality locally finished smart devices without any hesitation, in what can be viewed as a proud moment for the country.

Two years back when Bangladesh was getting on the handset manufacturing bandwagon,



there was hesitation among buyers. But the time has changed. The clouds engulfing the buyers' mind then have now cleared away.

Personally, I did not see any great effort to drive home the message of ‘Made in Bangladesh’ branding on the devices save for the odd media reports here and there. And yet, consumers took to the products from their heart.

The same fascination was also observed in 2005, when Teletalk had set off on its journey in the sea of largely foreign-owned carriers. But unfortunately, the state-owned operator could not make the most of people’s affections

and now, they are struggling.

But here, in the device manufacturing industry, everyone is observing an excellent and favourable environment for the local manufacturers and the manufacturers themselves have gotten a good sense of the situation.

Here, we are also observing that the common users are playing the crucial role of brand ambassadors. Those who already bought the locally made devices are spreading the word, out of their own volition, on the superlative quality.

That’s where the real work is done; and

in fact, only within two years Bangladesh is close to self-dependency on smart device production.

Statistics can be helpful to understand the situation.

Of the total smart gadgets sold in the country last year about 62 per cent were locally assembled, and for the current year the plant owners are gung-ho about being able to meet the whole country’s smartphone demand.

It is certainly a spot of great news for the nation -- and especially for the Digital Bangladesh vision.

Over the past few years, it has been seen

that about 80 to 90 lakh units of smartphones were sold in the country in a calendar year.

And last year, the local mobile plants churned out about 54 lakh units of smartphones, while another 20 million were either imported legitimately or sneaked in illegally. The local manufacturers are confident that they can pull off such a number this year.

Personally, I fell the just-concluded decade of digitalisation will be remembered for stepping into the path of gadget manufacturing in 2017, when local tech group Walton established the country’s first mobile assemble plant.

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Hearing and speech impaired can now take customer service from GP

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Grameenphone, the country’s leading mobile operator, yesterday launched a sign language tutorial platform as part of its efforts to enable those with hearing and speech impairment to get customer service.

“Now we are a family of 76.5 million and it is our responsibility to serve everyone in our network, which includes the hearing and speech impaired community,” said Yasir Azman, chief executive officer of Grameenphone, at the event held The Westin hotel in Dhaka.

A part of Grameenphone’s ‘Kothagulo Hariye Na Jak Shobder Obhabe’ campaign, the the Sign-Line digital care service enables interested individuals to learn the basics of gesture-based communication through a tutorial video by sign language expert Arafat Sultana Lata. The tutorial is available on

Grameenphone’s website, self-service digital care app MyGP and YouTube channel.

The service is dedicated to and operated by hearing and speech impaired individuals.

The integration of ‘Sign-Line,’ a sign language based video tutorial service will help serve millions to that end, Azman said.

“The benefits of communication technology must reach and include everyone in our society,” he added.

The month of February signifies sacrifice and achievement with February 21 being commemorated as ‘International Mother Language Day.’ However, sign language, the primary medium of communication for the hearing and speech impaired, lacks the validation it deserves, said the operator in a press release.

This initiative taken by Grameenphone will bring this essential skill to the forefront of

mainstream society.

Although Bangladesh has a tremendous number of hearing and speech impaired individuals, the opportunities to learn sign language are inadequate. As a result the impaired are unable to properly communicate with the general population.

It is time to widen digital inclusion, which will in turn empower our society and contribute to the journey to become ‘Digital Bangladesh.’

The digital platform is committed to minimising the language barrier and reduce inequalities just before the country observes International Mother Language Day on February 21, Azman said, adding that the internet provides easy access for learning such skills.

A team of sign-language experts led by Arafat Sultana Lata also sang Ekusher Gaan ‘Amar Bhai Er Rokte Rangano’ on the occasion.



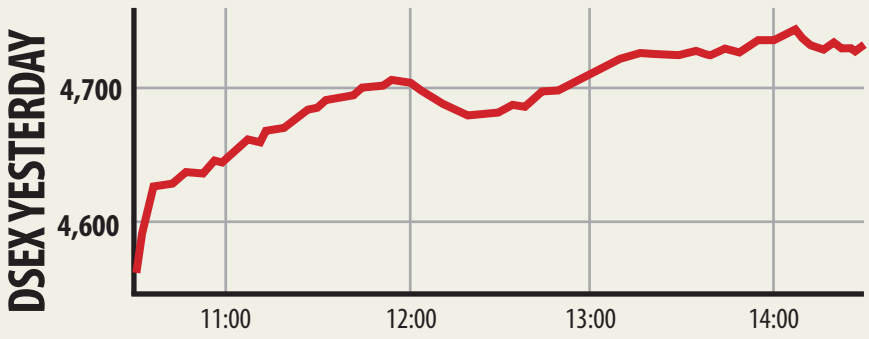
GRAMEENPHONE

Grameenphone CEO Yasir Azman gestures along with other officials and guests at the launch of the telecom operator’s new initiative themed “Kothagulo Hariye Na Jak Shobder Obhabe” to encourage people to learn sign language to communicate with the hearing and speech impaired people, at a programme at The Westin Dhaka yesterday.

BOURSE FINALLY UPBEAT

DSEX, the benchmark index of the premier bourse, has been on the ascent since the announcement of the Bangladesh Bank’s liquidity support package for the stock market on February 10. The index gained in the last four consecutive days. Turnover, another important indicator, touched Tk 916 crore yesterday, which is the highest since February 3 last year. The BB package and the interest rate slash on fixed deposits of Post Office paved the way for fresh investment in the market.

DSEX rose to 4,734.15 points (up 169.54 points, or 3.71%)	Daily average turnover rose to Tk 916.25 crore (increased Tk 185.68 crore, or 25.43%)																								
TOP FIVE GAINERS	TOP FIVE LOSERS																								
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‘BAT Bangladesh wants to work in partnership with the government to get the best results for the country’

In conversation with Jonathan Cressey, Head of Tax, Asia Pacific & Middle East, British American Tobacco

Please share a few words about yourself and your career.

I’ve been with British American Tobacco (BAT) for 18 years now, and have always been within the tax function. However, my background was not in Accounting. I have a PhD in Chemistry and always felt, that was my point of interest until a couple of years later, when I re-envisioned my life and retrained as an accountant. One great aspect of the UK education system is that certain universities allow you to build a career outside of the field you studied in, and so I grasped that opportunity. My career started in Price Waterhouse Coopers, and I later joined BAT in 2001 and have been working here ever since. BAT has been a fantastic place to work at. I have spent 13 years of my career in London, and then I’ve been posted in Hong Kong in my current role since 2014.

How are you liking Bangladesh? What has been your first impression of the country and its people?

Bangladesh has been in my juristic responsibility for five years now. I had always wanted to come here and work closely with the team. Throughout my time here, I have gotten to know the team really well and do wish to stay here longer.

My first impression is that the team here consists of exceptionally vibrant people, who are very energetic. It’s a young bunch with a lot of potential and a desire to learn and improve, in search of a better future.

In Bangladesh, there are several mega projects going on that will help the country become fully functional. I am certain the metro rail and the new road systems being built will bring major improvements and sustainable revenue contribution from BAT Bangladesh will definitely help all the projects come into actualization. In my visit to Kushitia & Cox’s Bazar, I have witnessed how strong the economic factors there are and how BAT Bangladesh can further contribute towards its journey in becoming a middle-income country soon.

Bangladesh relies on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to continue its growth. What, in your opinion, should be the areas of focus for Bangladesh?

FDI is critical for Bangladesh. FDI has

improved over the last couple of years, particularly in the last 12 months, as it has seen a dramatic increase of 67.94 percent since 2017. It is fantastic to be able to attract that much investment. I think the challenge for Bangladesh is that in order to sustain that level of foreign investment, you need to possess a very stable and reliable regulatory tax environment that companies can rely on. They are all keen to invest in Bangladesh but when companies invest, they want some certainty over those investments. They want to make sure that there is some stable return over a sensible period. Bangladesh should try and create that certainty, and stick to the principles that it sets out when trying to attract FDI.



Jonathan Cressey

BAT Bangladesh just received the best taxpayers award. What does this mean for BAT Bangladesh?

It’s a superb award and we are honoured to have received it. On receiving the award, you obviously have to recognise that we have a very high degree of compliance; compliance is absolutely critical and fundamental to how we operate. It’s not just our results, but what is more important is how we achieve them. We try to obtain results in the most sustained, professional way. Being a high tax payer in Bangladesh comes with a lot of responsibility to behave in the right way, and we are committed to do so. We completely ensure that we fulfill all the obligations to support the government in that role as well.

Since I have been here for over five years now, I have seen different levels of taxation and slightly different levels of tax systems. Being recognised as the Higest Taxpayer in

Bangladesh is eye-opening There’s an income tax of 47.5 percent and one of the highest tobacco taxes in the world of 81 percent has put the industry under pressure. There is no long term taxation policy for sustainable revenue growth. This impacts both local and international operators.

We understand the government’s need for revenue is very crucial to their growth, and their ambition to become a middle-income country in the future. BAT Bangladesh wants to work in partnership with the government to get the best results for the country and it is in our interest to grow further in order to be able to contribute sustainably. New sector needs to be included for sustainable revenue journey.

You have worked with a lot of Bangladeshis. How are Bangladeshi talents performing both here and abroad?

I think Bangladeshi people and BAT Bangladesh have done fantastically well outside of Bangladesh as well. I have been able to meet a number of intelligent, committed and energetic people and because of that, Bangladesh has been a big exporter of talent for BAT. I have met over 50 Bangladeshi people working throughout the organisation outside the country, in countries like Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Japan. It is fantastic to see their energy integrated into the other countries that they work in. They are welcoming of different cultures and are quite open-minded, which makes them easier to work with.

You have a lot of experience in global business compliance standards. How well is Bangladesh doing in that metric?

BAT Bangladesh is doing great in that metric. It has some of the best compliance practices in BAT globally. Because BAT Bangladesh is a large listed company in the country, it is under a lot of scrutiny all the time, so the importance to be 100 percent compliant is very important. At BAT, we have the highest standard of business conduct and this has led the company to achieve a number of accolades like the ‘Top Employer’, ‘Best Corporate’ and many more. Even from my tax specific perspective, it is absolutely fundamental to make sure our compliance goal is clear to all of the tax, laws and regulations and every territory that we operate in. They have demonstrated that they go above and beyond to make sure that they achieve that.

The interview was taken by Maureen Nawer of The Daily Star.