

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES				
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY	
▼ 0.26%	▼ 0.01%	\$2,024.10	\$44.78	▲ 0.37%	▼ 0.39%	▼ 0.53%	▲ 0.75%	BUY TK	83.95	98.02	108.87	11.84
4,533.05	7,800.59	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	38,182.08	22,329.94	2,545.51	3,379.25	SELL TK	84.95	101.82	112.67	12.45

এসআইবিএল ডেবিট কার্ডের মিন ২০,০০০ টাকা পর্যন্ত বিকাশ করে পরিণেপ করে উপভোগ করুন। ১৫ ইনস্ট্যান্ট কাসব্যাক, সর্বোচ্চ ২০০ টাকা পর্যন্ত অফারটি চলবে ৩১ আগস্ট, ২০২০ পর্যন্ত।

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The cool head steering Unilever Bangladesh through the tempest

ZINA TASREEN

We are sailing through the most extraordinary times in living memory, with every facet of what we knew as normal life upended. So, one would expect the man heading the Bangladesh arm of a multinational behemoth like Unilever to be fidgety.

But not Kedar Lele, the youthful-looking 40-something chief executive officer of Unilever Bangladesh. He is simply the picture of calm amidst the economic storm that is blowing up.

Unassuming, reflective, honest-to-goodness and with a 500-watt luminous smile of a game show host, Lele did not skirt around any of the polemical questions thrown at him during a freewheeling interview with The Daily Star recently and in fact, spoke with a candor that was rather refreshing for a high-flying C-suite persona.

For instance, when quizzed on the suspect timing of Unilever's announcement of dropping the word 'Fair' from its iconic brand 'Fair & Lovely', he took the question head-on.

He said it was just sheer coincidence that the announcement came in the middle of the Black Lives Matter movement that was blazing across the US and other parts of the world, sparked off by the killing of African-American George Floyd in Minneapolis in May in the hands of white law enforcement agents.

The protests, which took place disregarding the social distancing measures demanded by the raging coronavirus, made many re-evaluate their views on colourism and pile on the pressure on brands whose products are deemed to carry racist connotations.

And some companies like Colgate, Pepsico, Mars Inc., Johnson & Johnson paid



Kedar Lele

heed to the legitimate grievances, reassessing their businesses and marketing for signs of discrimination.

Lele says the June announcement was a culmination of years-long planning to shift the brand communication away from equating fairness with beauty, achievement, potential or worth.

"Over the last decade, Fair & Lovely's advertising has evolved to communicate a message of women empowerment, and to a more inclusive vision of 'Positive Beauty'. Our vision is to adopt a holistic approach to beauty that cares for people, and that must be inclusive and diverse -- for everyone, everywhere."

Accordingly, in early 2019, the brand's communication moved away from the benefits of fairness, whitening and skin lightening and towards glow, even tone, skin clarity and radiance, which are holistic measures of healthy skin, he said.

"We have removed any visuals or words on Fair & Lovely's packaging that could indicate a fairness-led transformation, including the removal of two-faced cameo showing shade transformation, as well as the shade guides. We are now taking the next step in this journey towards a more inclusive vision of beauty, by changing the

brand name."

The new name of Glow & Lovely, Lele says, was arrived at after thorough market research. "And those things take time. It can't be done overnight."

In a similar vein, when prodded on Unilever's notorious carbon footprint, he was not dismissive of the charges.

He pointed at the direction of the website, which states in detail the company's sustainable initiatives.

"We are constantly working to ensure that we are using less packaging materials and bringing innovation so that our consumers can use less water or energy to use these products."

The conversation then veered towards the pandemic challenges, and it is then that Lele came into his own.

Unilever Bangladesh has not stopped production at its plants for a single day or an hour since coronavirus arrived on these shores in March and took over the national discourse.

"When the crisis struck the country, we

decided to implement the highest level of behavioural protocols -- it was tier 3 & 4, while Bangladesh was at Tier 1 & 2 -- in our manufacturing and sales operations. And to my knowledge, there was no contagion among the staff."

All staff were trained on hygiene measures to keep coronavirus at bay and handwashing facilities were installed at many points. They were provided with personal protective equipment and certain points in the factories had UV sanitisers installed. Their health and wellness were tracked daily.

For desk-based employees, they were asked to work from home.

"This is not because we needed to run our business but to protect the people of this country. The products we produce are in great need at this hour as this helps to prevent the spread of the virus."

A single bar of soap can help lower-income people to steer clear of the rogue virus that originated from Wuhan, China.

Plus, it was essential to sustain the supply

KEDAR LELE AT A GLANCE

CURRENT ROLE:
CEO and MD of Unilever Bangladesh

LAST STINT:
VP for customer development at Unilever

JOINED UNILEVER IN:
2004

ACHIEVEMENT:
picked by the company as 'New Face of Leadership'

CLAIM TO FAME:
Took over the smallest branch of Hindustan Unilever and made it the fastest growing and crossed a turnover of Rs 5,000cr

EXPERIENCE:
advertising, FMCG marketing and sales, customer development

EDUCATION:
MBA from Indian School of Business in 2004, among others

PASTIMES:
photography, golfing

of hygiene products such as soap, handwash, hand sanitisers, washing powder and toilet cleaners for the benefit of millions of Bangladeshi consumers.

A lack of availability of these essentials would have caused havoc and the personal hygiene levels would have sharply fallen, allowing the pandemic to expand further.

"Hence, to support Bangladesh in this challenging situation we needed to keep our production going. By ensuring the supply of the products, we not only managed to sustain the livelihoods of thousands of people directly involved within our operations but millions of others who are part of the larger eco-system."

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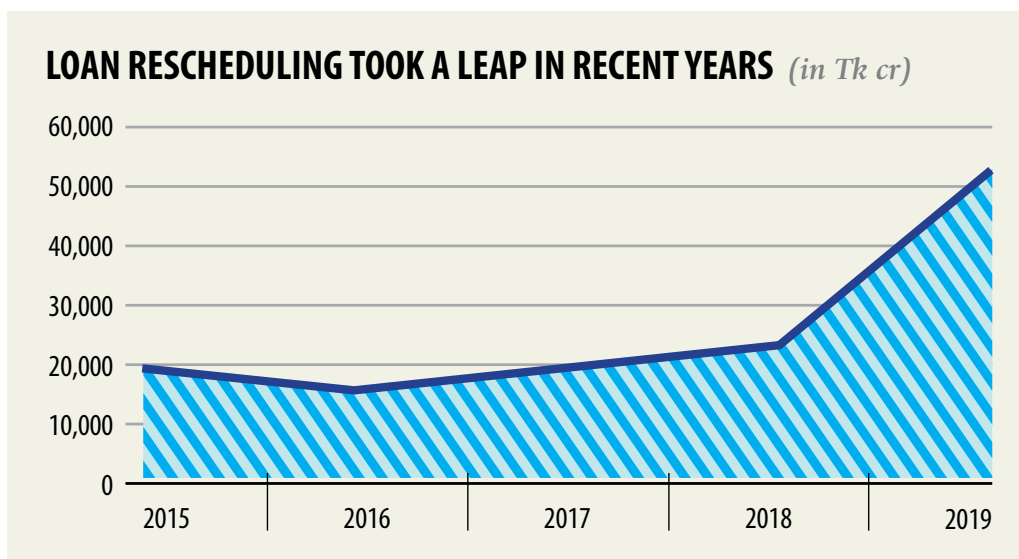
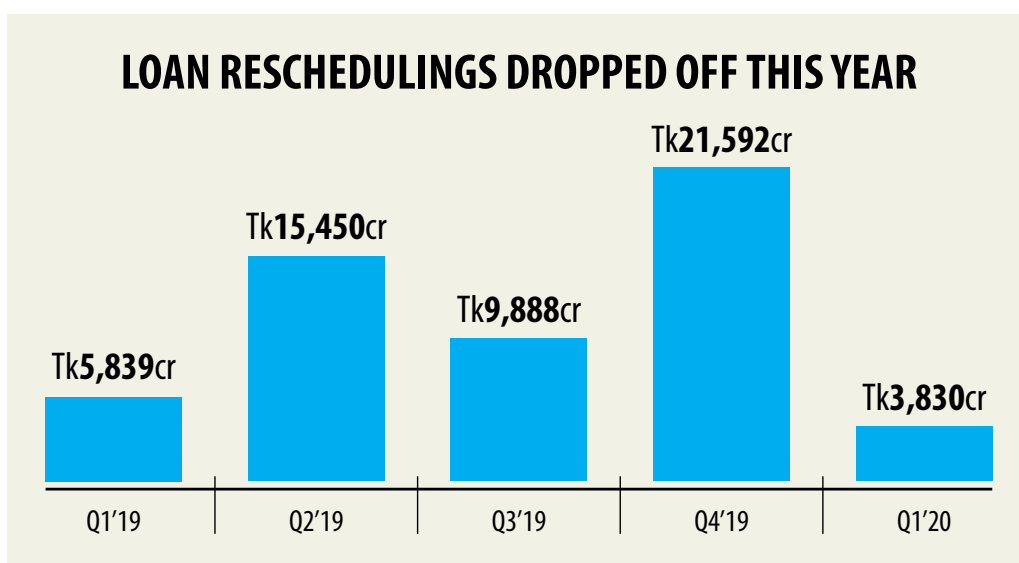
Appetite for loan rescheduling shrinks dramatically

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Loan rescheduling in the banking sector declined to a great extent in the first quarter, a curious development given that defaulted loans also dropped.

Between January and March, banks rescheduled loans amounting to Tk 3,830 crore, down 82.26 per cent three months earlier and 34.40 per cent from a year earlier, according to data from the central bank.

Historically, high loan rescheduling helps banks contain default loans, but it is rare that both rescheduled loans and default ones come down simultaneously in a particular quarter.



Banks that rescheduled the most loans in Q1'20

Pubali	Tk208cr
Trust	Tk319cr
Janata	Tk378cr
SBAC	Tk572cr
DBBL	Tk557cr

Default loans in banks stood at Tk 92,510 crore at the end of March, down 1.93 per cent from three months earlier.

The central bank had asked lenders on 19 March not to consider businesspeople as defaulters if they fail to repay instalments until 30 June. This is responsible for the incredulous indicator for the banking sector, said two central bankers who are directly involved with the loan rescheduling process.

The deadline for not considering the borrowers as defaulters was later extended to September to help businesses tide over the economic hardships brought on the global coronavirus pandemic.

Both the central bank and banks, on the whole, complete the rescheduling process of the major amount of defaulted loans in the last

month of a quarter, the central bank officials said.

The rescheduling process of the default loans was just stopped when the central bank declared the moratorium facility for all types of borrowers irrespectively, they said.

Defaulted loans amounting to Tk 52,770 crore were regularised last year -- the highest in a single year -- riding on relaxed loan rescheduling rules offered by the central bank.

Under the policy, defaulters were allowed to reschedule their defaulted loans for 10

years by way of paying a 2 per cent down payment.

The move helped banks bring down their defaulted loans in 2019, when the amount stood at 9.32 per cent of their total outstanding loans, down from 10.30 per cent a year earlier.

But Bangladesh Bank officials said banks now await dire consequences as both loan rescheduling and defaulted loans dropped due to the central bank's instruction not to classify any loans until September.

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Air travel to become costlier from next week

SOHEL PARVEZ

Airline passengers will face higher ticket prices from next week onwards as the aviation authority has imposed new fees aimed at funding airport development and strengthening security, according to a notice from the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB).

The new fees were levied on ticket prices and will vary depending on the traveller's destination. All airlines operating in Bangladesh will begin to collect the fees from 16 August, according to the notice issued last month.

Passengers departing for SAARC nations will have to pay an additional \$5 as development fees and \$6 as security fees for each ticket.

Tickets for other international destinations will carry a \$10 charge for a per fee while domestic travellers will face Tk 100 each and Tk 70 as development and security fees respectively.

On top of the fees, fliers will now have to pay 15 per cent as value-added tax (VAT), according to a notice issued by the National Board of Revenue (NBR) at the end of July.

Various airline executives said the measures will only increase the overall cost of air travel at a time when the aviation sector is struggling to recover from the financial crisis that resulted from a global effort to keep the coronavirus outbreak in check by closing international borders.

In June, the International Air Transport Association forecasted that the aviation industry would suffer one of its biggest losses in human history -- more than \$84 billion in 2020 and nearly \$16 billion in 2021 -- due to the ongoing pandemic.

Previously, airlines lost about \$31 billion due to the Global Financial Crisis and oil price spike in 2008 and 2009, they said.

Similar fees are collected at other international airports, said Mofizur Rahman, managing director of Novoair, a local airline.

"But the question is timing. It has been imposed at a time when travel is very limited. Now, the flow of travellers is very low and we are offering reduced rates to encourage their return but the added burden of the new fees and taxes will ultimately fall on passengers," he added.

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Contactless payment for Uber rides now possible thanks to bKash

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Uber customers can now breathe a sigh of relief as contactless transactions have again been enabled amidst the ongoing coronavirus pandemic in the form of automatic trip-end payments through bKash.

In November last year, the Bangladesh Bank had instructed banks to block payment for the purchase of goods and services originated and sold in Bangladesh through international credit cards. Subsequently, banks barred their customers from paying for Uber rides with their credit cards as the ride-hailing service debits the fund from the foreign currency quota of the card.

This left Uber customers with no other option but to make payments in cash.

Even during the pandemic when handling cash is deemed to be risky because of the highly contagious nature of the coronavirus, Uber customers could not



go cashless.

But now, Uber's partnership with bKash, a first-of-its-kind for the global ride-hailing giant in Bangladesh, is solving a part of the problem.

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