

# Not just at home, explore opportunities beyond national boundary

Grameenphone CEO Yasir Azman urges the young generation at The Daily Star's The Chief Executive Show powered by Marico

Yasir Azman became the chief executive officer of Grameenphone on February 1, 2020, the first Bangladeshi to hold the position at the country's largest mobile phone operator. On Saturday, he spoke about his journey to the top, leadership qualities, importance of purpose, passion, ethical standards and values, and opportunities for the next generation at the first episode of the Chief Executive Show.

DS: How was your childhood? You may not have found a role model to follow the footprint compared to the current generation.

Azman: There was nothing like whether we had dreamed to become the CEO and whether I set out and prepared myself keeping that goal in mind. An important thing was to

develop values as a human being and develop myself. My parents paid more attention to that.

My father was a journalist. From the very childhood, I got the lessons on how to speak the truth, behave well with people and be humble and respectful.

We had to study. But at the same time, there was an emphasis on sports although I was not deeply involved in sports. To prepare, we were told, one has to become a good human being first. When I look back, I can understand that the concept of being respectful and humble and to be curious to know and reading books were sowed in a bigger way in my childhood.

One can't advance without education and learning. I did not succeed in getting admission in the first batch of the BBA at the Institute of Business Administration under the University of Dhaka.

I was frustrated. But I did not give up. I planned to pass the bachelor of commerce first and then go for the MBA programmes at the IBA. The preparation for the BBA admission helped me a lot. So, after I passed the Bcom, I quickly got admission to the MBA programme at the IBA.

At our companies, I did not see many Bangladeshis at the top positions who I could follow. But many people were at the senior positions and I learnt a lot from them. The contribution of my organisation and my efforts played a major role in my journey.

DS: Now current generations can look up to you and feel that they can strive and achieve what you have achieved. What are the steps they can take?



Yasir Azman

Azman: Bangladesh is set to celebrate its 50 years of Independence. I am about 45. People my age are the new generation of Independent Bangladesh and they have achieved various responsibilities at various companies. This is something that was very much expected and we are on the right track. Now, the success of the people like us would depend on if the next generation gets similar opportunities and their confidence builds up.

Apart from Bangladesh, I worked in India, Pakistan and Europe. When I was in Europe, I used to work with nine European and Asian countries.

It never came to my mind that Bangladeshis can't climb the ladder and reach the top at multinational companies. If I talk about education and hard work, we have plenty of resources and people with that resources should come to this stage.

People from neighbouring countries are leading major companies on a global scale. They are working as a model and idol for the new generation. We have the same responsibility.

As we move forward, we have to nurture our leadership. Performance alone can't bring you to this position.

We have to look at the values and ethical standards as a human being and see how personal development takes place, how networking will be done, relationship will be built and leadership culture would develop.

I don't see why Bangladesh's talented people can't move to leadership positions not only in Bangladesh but also outside of Bangladesh. There is a lot of scopes to work in this area.

DS: There is a trend among mid-level managers to migrate to other countries such as the US, Canada and the UK. They are leaving behind good positions and settling at a far lower position. What do you say about this?



Azman: Why should Bangladesh be a factory to supply only unskilled labourers? The unskilled workers are contributing immensely towards our GDP. I have full respect for them. But there are 72 million youth population in our country. Why should we worry about the brain drain?

Our education system, corporate culture and grooming of the next leaders should be such that we should have thousands of people out there working for different organisations. When they leave the country, they should move to higher positions, not to lower positions. They should go, become successful, inspire others to

join them and lead organisations. If they get opportunities, they should come back and serve the country.

If they move to other countries but skill development does not take place in Bangladesh, then it would be a problem for us. There should be a pipeline.

Why does an organisation hire somebody from outside of the country to lead its company in Bangladesh? Some kinds of expectation of the board or shareholders of the organisation work behind this. We have moved to today's positions and this happens when the capability grows to meet the expectations. When we can meet the expectations, this question will not surface.

I hear that many expatriates are working in Bangladesh. There are not many expatriates at Grameenphone like it used to be in the past. Expatriates are working in many other organisations. We have to be prepared for this. We can't be emotional.

It is not the fault of the expatriates. We have to nurture our resources so that they can take up these responsibilities. I think it is possible and it will happen.

DS: Local talents will migrate if enough opportunities are not created. The general people complain that enough opportunities are not being created. Do you agree?

Azman: In the current fourth industrial revolution, the way the world is transforming driven by digital connectivity, the skills that are being required, the way working culture is changing, the new generation should not just look for enough opportunities in local boundaries. We have to prepare ourselves to compete globally.

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## US-Bangla officials to talk investment, trade tomorrow

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Due to its strong consumer base, Bangladesh is considered a major investment and trading destination for many US companies, some of which are interested to invest in a few key sectors such as agro-processing and pharmaceuticals, according to a senior official of the US embassy in Dhaka.

Besides, representatives of the US and Bangladesh are set to hold a high-level meeting tomorrow to discuss investment and trade related issues, the official said on condition of anonymity while sharing his views on the matter at the American Centre in Dhaka.

For Bangladesh to regain its trade privileges under the Generalised System

of Preferences (GSP), it will have to apply to the United States Trade Representative (USTR) once the US congress adopts a new GSP scheme either at the end of this year or early next year, the official added.

The existing GSP facility has been suspended for all countries as its tenure is set to come to an end this year.

The USTR, the chief trade negotiator for the US government, suspended Bangladesh's GSP status after the nation's deadliest industrial accident -- the collapse of Rana Plaza building in June 2013 -- citing poor workplace safety and labour rights in the country.

The USTR had also outlined 16 conditions to be improved upon by both the government and private sector in order for the country to regain its GSP status.

Since then, Bangladesh has fulfilled all the required conditions and even applied to the USTR twice for the reinstatement of the status.

However, the USTR continues to say that more improvements need to be made, especially in terms of labour rights and unionisation in the garment sector.

During the discussion to be held tomorrow, officials from the US and Bangladesh will discuss how to improve their economic ties, especially amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

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## AUTOMOBILE WORKSHOPS REGAINING WORK

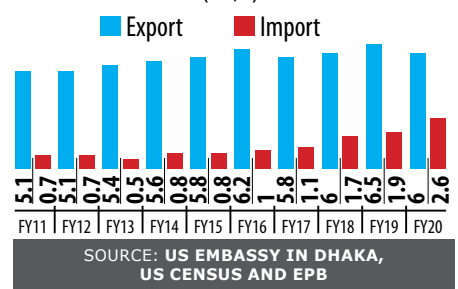


PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

As more vehicles roll out onto the streets following the easing of the pandemic lockdown, servicing and repair centres have started regaining work orders that had been put on hold. Currently, there are about 20,000 small, medium and large workshops across the country, generating more than 5 lakh jobs for skilled and semi-skilled mechanics and several thousand crores of taka in revenue. According to industry people, the sector has achieved double-digit growth in the last couple of years. The photos were taken at Swamibagh in the capital yesterday.

### Bangladesh's trade with US

(in \$b)



JAGARAN CHAKMA

Samuda Food Product and Samuda Chemical Complex, two sister concerns of the TK Group of Industries, will invest Tk 1,744.80 crore at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Shilpa Nagar (BSMSN) to produce consumer goods and chemicals.

"We aim to attract the regional consumers of Chattogram with new products," said Mohammad Mustafa Haider, managing director of Samuda Food.

Initially, Tk 650 crore will be invested, which will hit Tk 1,744 crore or \$205.28 million in the next three years, said Haider, also a director of TK Group.

The group yesterday signed an agreement with the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (Beza) to take 60 acres of land on lease inside the BSMSN to set up the new production units.

The fresh investment will be used to produce crude soybean oil, soybean cake, refined edible oil, caustic soda, chlorinated

paraffin wax, hydrochloric acid, chlorine, sodium hypochlorite and hydrogen peroxide.

"We will be able to create around 1,560 jobs in the two units, the construction work of which will hopefully begin in next January." The consumer goods unit will go into



### AT A GLANCE

Total investment:  
Tk 1,744.80cr

Initial investment:  
Tk 650cr

Jobs to be created:  
1,560

Investment plans for: consumer goods, food processing and chemical industries  
Consumer goods: crude soybean oil, soybean cake, refined edible oil, caustic soda

Chemical products: chlorinated paraffin wax, hydrochloric acid, chlorine, sodium hypochlorite, and hydrogen peroxide

TOTAL LAND: 60 ACRES

operation within the next one-and-a-half years and the chemical unit within two-and-a-half years, Haider said.

The market has surplus production of these two types of products as a number of manufacturers are already there in the business, he said.

"But most manufacturing units are situated outside of Chattogram, which creates a good scope for us to occupy the regional market. It would be cost-effective for us considering the geographical location and the presence of strong distribution channel."

The regional market will grow in the days to come, keeping pace with the spiralling purchasing capacity of consumers in the port city, he said.

The manufacturing units will be benefited with the logistics facilities, particularly the transport services available in the city, he noted.

Haider said they will mobilise funds from foreign banks and preliminary negotiation for financing the factories has been completed.

TK Group is one of the largest and diverse business conglomerates in Bangladesh with 43 active business units and more than 12,000 employees.

In the last four-and-a-half decades, the group has invested in edible oils and fats, steel, board, paper, textile, packaging and containers, tea plantation, ship building, consumer products, trading shares and securities.

Beza encourages the food processors to ensure quality products for consumers, said Paban Chowdhury, executive chairman of Beza.

Investments in the country's economic zones are quite secured and are a result of Beza's hard work, he said.

Not only local companies, but also the foreign ones are investing in the food processing sector, Chowdhury added.

Beza has created a welcoming atmosphere for the investors in the economic zones and it is ready to help them to do business smoothly, he said.