

Chashibon, a ray of hope for farmers

MD MIZANUR RAHMAN HIMADRI

Chashibon, a concept developed by Kamrunnesa Mira in Natore, has not only added a new dimension to the country's agriculture sector but also eradicated the need for middlemen in the area, ensuring fair trade between farmers and buyers.

Although Bangladesh is an agriculture-based country, many farmers are deprived of fair prices due to the prevalence of middlemen and brokers.

Seeing this, Mira launched Chashibon in December 2019 with an aim to provide solutions for the country's ailing agriculture sector.

As a part of her plans, Mira envisioned a model village in Sadar upazila, where she could teach the farmers about smart agriculture, harvesting and marketing.

She has since bought a few plots across three upazilas of Natore district – Sadar, Noldanga and Lalpur – and started her own agri-business.

Having worked closely with farmers, Mira, a graduate of the media studies and journalism department at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, was able to identify several challenges they face.

This includes investment deficiencies, a lack of insurance facilities, poor relationships with the direct market, climate adaptation and other natural issues such as insects.

Mira also established an agro-training centre, where young horticulturists and other volunteers provide the locals with free training on how to develop



Kamrunnesa Mira, left, is seen speaking with a local of Natore district, where her Chashibon initiative has brought much-needed relief to the region's farmers, who now enjoy fair prices for their produce.

their farms, protect against insects and improve soil fertility.

Under the Chashibon initiative, the 25-year-old entrepreneur collects products like paddy, onion, garlic and mustard from local farmers to sell directly to businessmen in different towns and cities across the country.

Considering the lack of investment and insurance, Mira created a pre-order-based agriculture system, where she takes 60 per cent of a product's value in advance.

This allows the farmers to focus on their farming activities rather than retailing their goods since they already know where their products are going.

And since the product has been paid for in advance, the farmers are ensured enough liquidity to continue production and remain debt free from the local money lenders.

There are now 148 farmers across the district who enjoy the benefits of this initiative.

In turn, the farmers are able to help develop their communities. As such, a non-formal literacy centre has been established in Fultola village of Sadar upazila, where local youths can get a free basic education on agriculture.

Md Sumon Ali, a farmer of Fultola village, said he cultivates mustard on five bighas of land and that Chashibon has supported him a lot in this regard by giving growers their money ahead of cultivation.

"Earlier, we had to struggle a lot to arrange the amount for cultivation from local money lenders," Ali said.

Besides, Chashibon helps farmers

sell directly to buyers and get a fair market price, he added.

Horticulturist Md Parvej of Noldanga upazila said the centre provides training on the proper use of pesticides and the best farming practices.

"They also educate the farmers on seasonal crops," he added.

Apart from Chashibon, Mira started another initiative, the All For One Foundation, on March 26, 2018.

It aims to educate underprivileged women about menstrual hygiene and provide them with sanitary napkins.

In 2019, Mira received the Diana Award for bringing a dramatic changemaker in the lives of disadvantaged girls, who do not learn about the do's and don'ts of menstrual hygiene in their formative years.

"My future plan for this venture is to become a sustainable agriculture finance company, decrease risk factors to provide fair value to farmers, convenient supply chain to eradicate middlemen and introducing AI and Robotics to prognosis future difficulties farmers may face," Mira said.

Farmers play a major role in Bangladesh and cannot be just replaced with technology.

However, it is possible to use their skills alongside advanced artificial intelligence and the internet of things so that they can increase yields and tackle risk factors.

"Chashibon is such a concept that not only believes in business, but also believes in providing education and training to make the farmer's life better," she added.

PAYRA SEA PORT

Belgian firm to do maintenance dredging of Rabnabad channel

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The Payra Port Authority (PPA) yesterday signed an agreement with a Belgium-based dredging company—Jan de Null—for the maintenance dredging of Rabnabad channel at Payra sea port.

The contract is being executed under the Emergency Maintenance Dredging Project at a cost of about Tk 437.30 crore.

The money will come from PPA funds, according to a press release signed by Jahangir Alam Khan, senior information officer at the shipping ministry.

The Rabnabad channel acts as a supply route for coal-based power plants and various other industries across Bangladesh. Therefore, the project's main objective is to maintain the waterway's 6.3-metre depth through dredging.

As per the agreement, approximately 9.75 million cubic metres of silt will be removed from the inner and outer channels with a length of about 75 kilometres and

width of 100-125 metres.

The project is set to be complete within 18 months.

The contract was signed in the presence of Shipping Minister Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, PPA Chairman Commodore Humayun Kallol and Jan de Null's Project Director Jan Moynes.

"Payra Port will act as a pillar to the country's economy by 2035," Chowdhury said.

The benefits of Padma Bridge and Payra Port will spread all over Bangladesh as the country is moving forward under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who's actions are being acclaimed the world over.

"Under her leadership, Bangladesh will enter the developed world before 2041," he added.

The shipping minister went on to say that the construction of Payra port is the prime minister's brainchild.

READ MORE ON B3

Broadband connections skyrocket

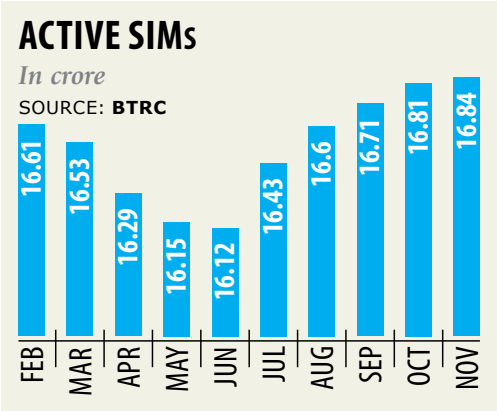
STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The number of broadband internet connections has skyrocketed since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic thanks to the inclusion of rural areas under the service amid the ongoing health crisis which prompted affordable and faster internet consumption across the country.

The internet connections through broadband jumped 50 per cent year-on-year in November to reach 8.6 million, according to data from the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

The number of connections witnessed a leap in March, when Bangladesh first reported its first coronavirus infection, as it added over 23 lakh new subscribers in one month.

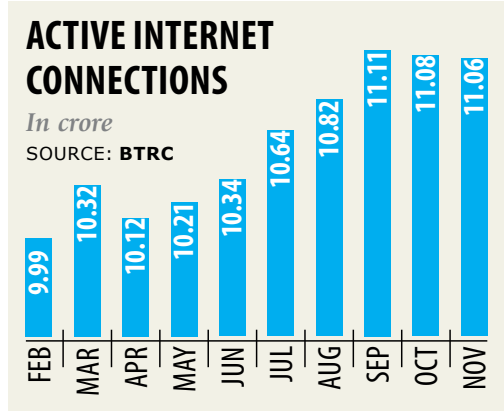
"The main reason for the increase in the number of subscribers is the availability of broadband connections in rural areas. This is due to changes in people's lifestyles during the pandemic," said MA Hakim, president of the Internet Service Providers Association of



Bangladesh

"Now the people of the village also need fast internet," he added.

According to Hakim, over 1,500 internet service providers are providing the service across the country.



The number of mobile phone subscribers rose around 2.5 per cent year-on-year to 16.83 crore in November.

The number of mobile phone subscribers rose to 11.05 crore in November this year, up from 9.90 crore in November last year.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

Global chip shortage threatens production of laptops, smartphones and more

REUTERS, Seoul

Makers of cars and electronic devices from TVs to smartphones are sounding alarm bells about a global shortage of chips, which is causing manufacturing delays as consumer demand bounces back from the coronavirus crisis.

The problem has several causes, industry executives and analysts say, including bulk-buying by U.S. sanctions-hit Chinese tech giant Huawei Technologies, a fire at a chip plant in Japan, coronavirus lockdowns in Southeast Asia, and a strike in France.

More fundamentally, however, there has been under-investment in 8-inch chip manufacturing plants owned mostly by Asian firms, which means they have struggled to ramp up production as demand for 5G phones, laptops and cars picked up faster than expected.

"For the whole electronics industry, we've been experiencing a shortage of components," said Donny Zhang, CEO of Shenzhen-based sourcing company Sand and Wave, who said he faced delays in obtaining a microcontroller unit that was key to a smart headphone product he was working on.

"We were originally planning to complete production in one month, but now it looks like we'll need to do it in two." A source at a Japanese electronics component supplier said it was seeing shortages of Wi-Fi and Bluetooth chips and was expecting delays of more than 10 weeks.

The automotive industry in China, which flagged the issue earlier this month, is anticipating production at some Chinese carmakers to be affected in the first quarter of next year, according to a senior industry association official.

Consumer demand in China, especially for cars, has snapped back unexpectedly quickly from the coronavirus crisis, and

orders for products such as laptops and mobile phones in regions still struggling with pandemic restrictions, such as Europe and the United States, have also picked up.

"Since (these products) all compete for the same fab (fabrication plant) resources the shortage is across all of these sectors and others as well. These are just the most apparent right now," said Kevin Anderson, a senior analyst at Omdia.

Dutch automotive chip supplier NXP Semiconductors has told customers it must raise prices on all products because of a "significant increase" in materials costs and a "severe shortage" of chips, Reuters reported this month.

"Business came back much faster than we expected," NXP CEO Kurt Sievers told German business daily Handelsblatt in an

interview on Dec. 11. "Many customers ordered too late. As a result, we are not able to keep up in some areas." Other short-term triggers for the chip shortage include stockpiling by telecoms giant Huawei ahead of mid-September when its suppliers had to comply with U.S. sanctions, CICC analyst Huang Leping said in a note on Dec. 11.

This was aggravated by Huawei's rivals such as Xiaomi seeking to gain market share by stepping up orders of components, he added. Xiaomi and Huawei declined to comment.

Electronics makers including Panasonic Corp and Yamaha Corp also warn they face some chip shortages that are slowing production of audio equipment and video cameras after a massive fire in October

damaged a chip plant owned by Asahi Kasei Microdevices Corp (AKM), a unit of Asahi Kasei Corp, in southern Japan.

Concerns have surfaced too over strikes in France at chipmaker STMicroelectronics.

Eric Potard, leader of the CFDT union at the group, said the strike resulted in a fall in activity of about 8%. STMico, however, said it had no impact on production.

The surge in demand has meant 8-inch plants, which tend to make older, less sophisticated chips, are under strain, analysts and industry sources said. Taiwan's TSMC dominates the market for contract chip manufacturing, with Samsung trailing a distance second, followed by the likes of SMIC, GlobalFoundries and UMC, according to Trendforce data.

"The problem seems chiefly to be at the foundries," said a European semiconductor industry source, who said TSMC and GlobalFoundries in particular looked to be under pressure.

"It looks like they are pretty much at the limit," the source said, referring to TSMC.

TSMC, which counts Apple and Qualcomm among customers, declined to comment, but referred to comments its chairman made this week that described the firm's capacity as "tight".

A GlobalFoundries spokesman said demand was growing across the board and was accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic. An official at South Korean foundry firm DB Hitek, which makes chips for the likes of Apple to use in its tablets, said its 8-inch plants were running at full capacity at least for the next six months, with tight supply anticipated until the second half of next year.

The United States has also curbed the ability of China's top chipmaker, SMIC, to get U.S.-made equipment and raw materials, exacerbating the supply crunch. SMIC did not respond to a request for comment.



A view of the NXP booth at the 2019 CES trade show in Las Vegas, Nevada, US.

NEWS In Brief

Currencies jump on weak dollar

REUTERS

Emerging market currencies and stocks firmed on Thursday, with the South African rand hitting a 10-month high, as growing signs of a bumper U.S. stimulus package dented the dollar's appeal.

Democrats and Republicans sounded more positive over a \$900 billion COVID-19 aid bill while the Federal Reserve said it would keep pouring cash into financial markets through its bond buying programmes until the U.S. economy was on a more sound trajectory.

MSCI's index for emerging market currencies rose 0.2% and hovered near their highest in more than 2-1/2 years as the risk-on mood weakened the dollar.

"We expect to see an extension in the dollar weakness going ahead on further quantitative easing from the U.S. Fed which will support emerging market currencies going forward," said Cristian Maggio, head of emerging markets strategy at TD Securities.

"But we expect to see some drawback towards the end of the year as a lot of liquidity is generally pulled out of the table," he warned.

UK must cut borrowing to avoid risks from new shock: Sunak

REUTERS, London

British Finance Minister Rishi Sunak said he would tackle the country's coronavirus-inflated budget deficit because of the risks of a future shock to the economy and higher borrowing costs that could hammer the public finances.

"Running a structural deficit years into the future, with debt rising? That's not building up the resilience you need to deal with the future shock that will come along," Sunak told the Spectator magazine in an interview.

"We now have had two of these things in a decade: who knows what the next shock will look like?" After a spending surge authorised by Sunak, Britain is on course to borrow 400 billion pounds (\$543 billion) in the current financial year, equivalent to almost 20% of its economic output, or double the level of the global financial crisis.



British Finance Minister Rishi Sunak