

# Islamic branding: Is Bangladesh ready to cash in?



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MISHU RAHMAN

THE world is slowly but surely realising the importance of the "halal" branding as major companies around the world move in to capture a global Muslim community, where the "ummah" brings together nearly 1.8 billion people around the world.

The majority of those people are in Asia, particularly South and East Asia. It's also a

very young demographic -- 52% are under 24. This means a trend-setting, ambitious, and internationally connected market is at hand here.

"The third one billion market" after China and India has attracted a lot of attention given its economic potential. The gathering momentum is obvious with leading international banking giants creating HSBC Amanah and Standard Chartered's first "saadiq" Visa gold card to Ogilvy and

Mather's May 2010 launching of Ogilvy Noor, "offering expert, practical advice on how to build brands that appeal to Muslim consumers, globally."

This all shows how the western world and a global audience are taking the Market of Islam seriously.

The Saïd Business School, Oxford University, will host its inaugural Islamic branding and marketing forum in July 2010. The forum aims to bring together over 250 business leaders, branding and marketing experts and thought leaders to discuss the key issues that face this growing market.

According to the Pew Research Center a comprehensive demographic study of more than 200 countries finds that the market for Shariah-compliant products or services totals \$2 trillion annually and is growing by \$500 million annually.

Only 20% of the 1.8 billion Muslim population belong to the Arab world, with the majority in growing Asian economies that carry Muslim values and are open to adopting hi-tech lifestyles at par with any western country.

No wonder, therefore, that there is massive interest amongst non-Muslim owned companies about how to enter and penetrate this global market, which spans many industries, including finance, food and beverage, cosmetics, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, logistics, tourism, fashion, and others.

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At the 6th World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF) in Malaysia this month, leaders of a diverse political, economic and ethnic arena agreed on the strength of the Islamic branding and the need to cash in on the significant interest it is generating in the world today.

Bahrain's Ethmaar Bank's vice-chief pointed out that when the Islamic finance history will be written in the future, two non-Muslim names will be featured as its biggest drivers, instead of any Muslim individual.

One individual is Britain's former Prime Minister Gordon Brown who pioneered plans to make Britain the most Islam-friendly nation in the world and London a global centre for Islamic finance.

The other is French finance minister Christine Lagarde who announced France's intentions to make Paris the capital of Islamic finance.

Islamic countries have always worked more than conventional banking counterparts in regulating and tightening the industry specially after a crisis, and in today's global economy reeling from finan-

cial meltdown, the relevance of Islamic finance has gone up in leaps and bounds.

Even the Duke of York Prince Andrew, speaking at the WIEF said that there is no scope to stay aloof and not share ideas and best practices of Islamic finance with a global audience to avoid another meltdown in future.

He also said that the new UK Islamic Finance Secretariat (the first Islamic finance trade body in the UK), was launched at the end of March to promote and develop Islamic finance in the UK further, with 22 Islamic banks already operational, 20 Sukuk issues in the London Stock Exchange and 20 law firms in London providing specialist services on Islamic finance in London.

Bangladesh has seen how the "halal" branding can appeal to our local market when in the mid 90s the halal soap concept threw a leading international soap brand into dire straits.

Islamic finance started off in the early 90s in Bangladesh. However, the industry suffers from a lack of unified Shariah rulings, absence of an Islamic inter-bank money market, absence of courses in universities on Islamic financial products, shortage of skilled personnel who are well-versed in the complexities of this specific sector, and difficulty in identification of Shariah-compliant production and service chains are holding back potential of local financial institutions, local manufacturers, and service providers from signing up on this new economic wave.

Bangladesh has been working with Malaysia's Halal Development Corporation and other partners of the D-8 (eight developing Islamic countries) for a few years now, without much result.

A halal certification board, whether locally set up or integrated with OIC standards, could bolster our access to export markets. Bangladesh is frequently cited in global summits for its success in micro-finance and the success of economists from Bangladesh in changing the way the global economy will be shaped in the future.

Yet we are failing to set more such success milestones in bringing about great case studies in halal products and services production, marketing and distribution, while Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, China and India are fast setting up infrastructure, guidelines and facilitative bodies to cash in on the Islamic branding potential.

Surely, the local market and export market combined, and with eager non-residents waiting for investment opportunities that build bridges, our economy needs to arm itself with all necessary platforms and guidelines immediately to move on to "greener" pastures.

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## Greek debt: Instant briefing

INVESTORS are panicking in the belief that the Greek debt crisis could hurt the world economy, according to the headlines. What's this all about? Here's a briefing.

Q: Two thousand years ago, Greece was the home of some of the cleverest men who ever lived, Aristotle, Plato and Socrates. What happened?

A: They died.

Q: Oh. So did all the brains disappear with them?

A: Well, put it this way. The math in the current Greek government's account books turned out to be all wrong.

Q: Other countries have debt problems. Why panic over Greece?

A: Most countries have debts, but Greece sold its debts to its neighbours.

Q: Hey, that's actually pretty smart.

A: That decision was probably taken by the last descendants of Aristotle, Plato and Socrates.

Q: Did I buy any of it?

A: If your investments or currency holdings have European bits, yes.

Q: Bother! Does Greece have natural resources?

A: Yes, it has massive deposits of the letter O, which it exports all over the world. A typical Greek name is: Apostolos Papadopoulos-Tzortzopoulos (Score: nine Os.)

Q: Is a cooked mouse an element of the famous Greek dish moussaka?

A: It depends where you order it.

Q: What ever happened to the British-Greek singer George Michael?

A: He changed his name back to Georgios Kyriacos Panayiotou and focuses on his other hobby, which is being arrested in toilets.

Q: What about Hercules and Zeus and all those immortal dudes? They're Greek, right? Can't they fix things?

A: Hercules is a super-powered mythical hero who is loved by millions, but could not possibly exist in real life, like Superman and Barack Obama.

Q: Does the Greek dessert "Baklava" contain real lava?

A: Only if you cook it for a really long time.

Q: So, what happens next?

A: Other Eurozone countries will lend Greece cash if Greek workers will tighten their belts and work out how to increase earnings from their main skill-sets: playing the bouzouki, drinking ouzo, and smashing dinner plates.

Q: Are they cooperating?

A: Greek workers have expressed their enthusiasm by going on strike, rioting in the streets and throwing rocks at police officers.

A: That doesn't sound good.

Q: It's normal. Europeans are passionate people. If you say "Good morning," a European will kiss you on both cheeks, perform a folk dance, and spit three times over his left shoulder, or more if an American is standing behind him.

Q: Do I have to ask any more questions?

A: Yes, because this posting needs to be just a little bit longer.

Q: So, what else do you want to tell me about Greeks?

A: Greeks have a great sense of humour. The word "comedian" is Greek. Greek comics joke that there are three questions which will reveal if someone is Greek.

1) Does your father leave his shirt buttons undone to reveal thick chest hair and a massive gold cross?

2) Have you or a family member ever been photographed with a donkey?

3) Do you have to shave twice a day? Or, if you are male, three times?

Q: Can we please stop now?

A: Okay, done. Let's go eat baklava.

For more background on world economic crisis visit our columnist at: www.vittachi.com.

## Keeping it real

Why do those traders use chemicals to ripen fruit? People generally have a tendency to taste their favourite fruits early in the season. Dishonest traders take advantage of that.

KSHIRODE C. ROY

IT is good news that the High Court has issued directives to the government to stop the use of chemicals for ripening fruit. The court also directed the deputy inspector general of police in Rajshahi to deploy police forces at commercial mango gardens of the area to stop the use of chemicals in fruits.

The court also directed the respective authorities to file cases against the offenders under the Special Powers Act. Accordingly, on May 17, a mobile court headed by Dhaka district executive magistrate and representatives from Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institution (BSTI), department of environment, police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel destroyed 9.4 tons of calcium carbide-treated mangoes worth Tk.0.75 million from five warehouses of Karwan Bazar wholesale market. Cases have been filed against those five wholesalers.

Why do those traders use chemicals to ripen fruit? People generally have a tendency to taste their favourite fruits early in the season. Dishonest traders take advantage of that. They use calcium carbide for ripening mangoes. It reacts with water to produce acetylene gas, which is similar to ethylene, the fruits natural ripening agent.

After treatment, the colour of the fruit changes uniformly even though it is not

properly ripened -- some get too soft and some remain raw inside.

Calcium carbide is colourless, but most samples have a colour ranging from black to grayish-white, depending on the grade. It is obtained by heating pulverised limestone or quicklime with carbon and is used to generate acetylene gas used in welding, as a dehydrating agent, and in the manufacture of graphite and hydrogen.

In developed countries, ripening chambers are set up at processing plants, where fruits are treated with controlled purified gases -- usually artificial ethylene. All safety precautions are observed and there is no question of harmful residues since the fruit does not come in direct contact with any chemicals. The permissible residue limit is controlled stringently in fruits and vegetables. These are harvested when they mature.

A banned ripening chemical agent in many countries, calcium carbide is openly and commonly used for ripening fruit in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Only 100 gm carbide is required for 50 kg of fruit. The cost of treatment of 1 kg of fruit is about 25 paise only.

Calcium carbide-treated fruits are extremely hazardous as they contain traces of arsenic and phosphorous. When the carbide is dissolved in water, it produces acetylene gas, which may affect the neurological system by inducing prolonged hypoxia and can cause headache,

dizziness, mood disturbances, sleepiness, mental confusion, memory loss, cerebral oedema and seizures.

Calcium carbide is mixed with oxygen to act as a sedative and has been used in anaesthesia. Consumed of too many calcium carbide-treated fruits can cause intoxication.

One study of a medical faculty in Turkey reported that a five-year-old girl had to be transferred to the emergency department of a hospital with an eight-hour history of coma and delirium. She had eaten calcium carbide-treated unripe date.

Dr. Samrina Hashimi, General Secretary of the Pakistan Medical Association, Karachi, commented: "Regular intake of the chemical may cause irritation of the digestive system, diarrhoea, jaundice and liver failure. Free radicals from carbide play a major role in the ageing process as well as in the onset of cancer, heart disease, stroke, arthritis and perhaps allergies."

A few years back, a colleague of mine and his family were struck by diarrhoea after eating mangoes brought from the market

Previously, fruits used to be covered with straw or gunny bags or newspapers to generate heat for ripening. It would take three to four days for the fruit to ripen, but wholesalers don't want to wait that long. With chemicals, fruits can ripen in a day, and develop a uniform bright colour. Chemicals are used indiscriminately in Bangladesh for ripening mango, banana, tomato and pineapple.

After harvesting, mangoes start rotting in a few days due to stem-end rot and anthracnose diseases. In laboratory tests, it has been proved that if



Beautification of fruits at the cost of our health.

mangoes are treated in water at 55±1 degrees Centigrade for 5 minutes, the rotting can be avoided and shelf-life can be extended to 2 to 3 weeks.

Based on this, scientists of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (Bari) developed a hot water treatment plant a few years back. A few plants have been given to mango growers of Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi districts. Mangoes are treated in the

plant before packing for shipment to Dhaka.

Mangoes are packed in plastic crates; is the post harvest loss of mangoes is reduced to 1 to 2 percent. In the traditional method, the post harvest loss is about 20 to 30 percent. When mangoes are treated in hot water, carotenoid pigment under the skin of fruits turns yellow.

The same treatment is carried out for bananas. The colour becomes more

attractive than the chemically treated bananas available in the market. As the government has banned the use of chemicals for ripening fruits, it is expected that mangoes and bananas will be treated in hot water treatment plants, and consumers will get chemical-free fruits in the market.

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