

# Carpet-making brings hope to disabled women in Mymensingh

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**H**ANDLOOM items made by disabled women in Mymensingh are turning out to be hot properties among the discerning customers at home and abroad.

Wall mats, carpets and floor mats produced at a carpet workshop in the district sell at plush stores in Dhaka and are exported to the US, the UK, France, Australia, Luxembourg, Thailand and Japan.

The prices of wall mats range from Tk 3,000 to Tk 10,000, while those of carpets from Tk 2,000 to Tk 20,000, and floor mats from Tk 1,000 to Tk 15,000.

The workshop is a project of the Protibandhi Community Centre, a platform for the disabled.

"Many tourists come to visit the workshop and buy items off us straight," said the workshop's supervisor Shefali Akhtar, also a disabled woman.

The Japanese and American visitors are particularly keen on the wares, she said.

Brother Eric and Akhtar are credited for the eye-catching designs that the workshop churns out on a regular basis, while the materials, all of the highest of quality, are sourced from Dhaka's New Market and Sadarghat.

The workshop was started in 1997 by the women's club of Protibandhi Community Centre, with five disabled workers.

Currently, the number of workers at the workshop is 13, and around 15 to 20 items worth around Tk 2 lakh are produced at the workshop a month.

The centre has so far trained 200-odd disabled women -- and all of them can now provide for themselves financially and lead a respectable life.

The workers are paid on a production basis and they earn, on average, Tk 2,000 to Tk 2,500 per month.

The wheelchair bound Napali, 22, said she has been at the workshop for five years and have been able to support her family with her income. She hails from



Left, a disabled woman is busy at the workshop. Right, some carpets produced in the workshop are piled up. Bottom, colourful threads to make wall mats, carpets and floor mats.



Durgapur of Netrokona.

Babli Akhtar, 20, another disabled from Bansbari Colony of Mymensingh, said: "The workshop has managed jobs for many disabled women, but this facility should be extended to others as well."

"Since the items are exported, the workers deserve to be paid better salaries, which is much needed to run their families," said Shima Akhtar, 21.

"In many cases, due to a lack of customers we have to wait for months to sell our products. Common people cannot

buy the costly items produced at the workshop," said Rajon Das, a coordinator of the Centre.

The workshop fulfilled a huge order from Luxembourg three months ago, and it looks like they were impressed as they placed another significant order to be delivered in November, said Rajon.

"We got an order for Tk 1 crore from an Australian buyer last year -- but we could not accept it due to funding and manpower constraints," he said, adding that the workshop is run by the income it

generates.

There are 11 handlooms at the workshop now, but, according to Rajon, more can be accommodated to create jobs for the disabled.

"If the work area can be increased with financial and technical support from the government, it will be able to expand the business prospects," he said.

"There are more than 3,000 disabled people in the district. The government should take steps to create jobs for this helpless group," said Rajon.

## LG unveils Optimus G phone

Reuters, Seoul

LG Electronics Inc unveiled its latest high-end smartphone packed with powerful hardware upgrades on Tuesday, as the struggling South Korean firm tries to win market share from Apple Inc and Samsung Electronics Co Ltd in the crucial holiday quarter.

LG's handset business, which was slow to move into smartphones and has largely failed to win consumers from sector leaders Apple and Samsung, hopes the new 'Optimus G' will also help it compete against Google's Motorola, Taiwan's HTC Corp and China's ZTE 000063.SZ and Huawei HWT.U.L.

LG's Optimus G, which uses Google's Android platform, will go on sale next week in South Korea for 1 million won, and later in Japan and the United States.

The Optimus G boasts a 13 megapixel camera which a user can instruct to take snaps by talking to it, plus a 4.7-inch screen with a sharper picture quality than both the iPhone and Samsung's Galaxy S III.

Powered by Qualcomm's quad-core Snapdragon processor, the Optimus G will work on superfast mobile networks and be able to carry out several functions at once, such as showing a television broadcast and simultaneously sending text messages or searching the web.

Among its rivals are the Droid Razer models unveiled by Google's Motorola earlier this month, and Lumia 920, a flagship handset made by Nokia and Microsoft Corp which uses the latest Windows Phone operating software.

Apple unveiled its iPhone 5 last week, and said on Monday it had booked orders for over two million iPhone 5 models in the first 24 hours it was on sale, evidence of stronger than expected demand for the new model ahead of the October-December holiday quarter.

Reflecting expectations that the new model will help LG turn around its money-losing smartphone business, LG Electronics stock has risen 20 percent in the past three months, beating a 7.8 percent rise in the wider market. KS11 and Samsung's 8 percent rise.



Park Jong-Seok, centre, head of LG's mobile unit, and South Korean models show the company's new smartphone "Optimus G" during a launch ceremony in Seoul yesterday.

## Why the UK must reverse its economic course

LAWRENCE SUMMERS, For Reuters

**I**T is the mark of science and perhaps rational thought more generally to operate with a falsifiable understanding of how the world operates. And so it is fair to ask of the economists a fundamental question: What could happen going forward that would cause you to substantially revise your views of how the economy operates and to acknowledge that the model you had been using was substantially flawed? As a vigorous advocate of fiscal expansion as an appropriate response to a major economic slump in an economy with zero or near-zero interest rates, I have for the last several years suggested that if the British economy -- with its major attempts at fiscal consolidation -- were to enjoy a rapid recovery, it would force me to substantially revise my views about fiscal policy and the workings of the macroeconomy more generally.

Unfortunately for the British economy, nothing in the record of the last several years compels me to revise my views. British economic growth post-crisis has lagged substantially behind U.S. growth, and the gap is growing. British GDP has not yet returned to its pre-crisis level and is more than 10 percent below what would have been predicted on the basis of the pre-crisis trend. The cumulative output loss from this British downturn in its first five years exceeds even that experienced during the Depression of the 1930s. And forecasts continue to be revised downward, with a decade or more of Japanese-style stagnation now emerging as a real possibility on the current course.

Whenever policy is failing to achieve its objectives, as in Britain today with respect to economic growth, there is a debate as to whether the right response is doubling down -- perseverance and intensification of the existing path -- or recognition of error or changed circumstances and a change in course. In Britain today such a debate rages with respect to the aggressive fiscal consolidation that the government has made the centrepiece of its economic strategy. Until and unless there is a substantial reversal of course with respect to near-term fiscal consolidation, Britain's short- and long-run economic performance is likely to deteriorate.

An effective policy approach to Britain's economic problems must start with the recognition that the principal factor holding back the British economy over both the short- and medium-term is the lack of demand. It is certainly true that Britain faces important structural issues, ranging from difficulties in promoting innovation to deficiencies in the system of worker training. But it is apparent from the relatively low level of vacancies, the reluctance of workers to leave jobs, the pervasiveness across industries and occupations of increased unemployment and the testimony of firms regarding the formation of their investment plans that it is lack of demand that is holding the economy back



British Prime Minister David Cameron (C) is shown around by General Manager of Sony UK Natasha Tyrell (L) and Sony Enfield Head of Operation Mike Stopher (R) inside the Sony Digital Audio Disc Corporation warehouse in London, during a visit to reopen the warehouse on September 14.

from producing as much as it could.

Keynes writing during the Depression compared Britain's economic problems to a "magneto" problem, referring to the fact that a car might have many infirmities, but if its electrical system did not work, the car would not go, and if it were fixed, the car would go even with other problems. So it is today. Moreover, to an extent that is greatly underappreciated in the policy debate, short-run increases in demand and output would have medium- to long-term benefits as the economy reaps the benefits of what economists call hysteresis effects. A stronger economy means more capital investment and fewer cutbacks to corporate R&D; it means fewer people lose their connection to good jobs and get addicted to living without work; it means that more young people get first jobs that put them on ladders to success; and it means more businesses choose leaders oriented to expansion rather than cost-cutting. The most important structural program for raising Britain's potential output in the future is raising its actual output today.

The objection to this view comes in many forms, but it is in essence that "reversing course on fiscal expansion now would undermine credibility, backfire with respect to growth by risking a spike in capital costs, and risk catastrophe down the road as debts became unsustainable." This line of argument is profoundly flawed. First, the behaviour of financial markets suggests that it is economic weakness rather than profligacy that is the main source of concern about credit problems down the road. Why else would the tendency be for the costs of buying credit insurance on

the UK to rise overall as interest rates fall? In similar vein, a strong tendency has emerged in both the UK and US for interest rates to rise and fall together with stock prices, implying that it is evolving optimism and pessimism about the future, not changing views about fiscal policy, driving market fluctuations. Second, the reality is that the primary determinant of fiscal health in both the US and UK over the medium term will be the rate of growth the economy achieves. An extra percentage point of growth maintained for five years would reduce Britain's debt-to-GDP ratio by close to 10 percentage points, whereas austerity policies that slowed growth could even backfire in the narrow sense of raising debt-to-GDP ratios and turning the unsustainability of debt into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

A change in the pace of fiscal consolidation is necessary for Britain to have a chance to avoid a lost decade of economic performance. It is, to be sure, not sufficient. Rather than starving public investment today, now is the time to add to confidence by making plans for structural reforms to contain the growth of public consumption spending over time. It is also time to take overdue measures to promote exports and, after years of appropriately low investment, to restart housing investment. But at a time when demand is needed for growth and the private sector is hanging back, the first priority must be for the public sector to stop exacerbating the contraction.

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