

Ctg women entrepreneurs keen to make a mark

SHAHENOOR AKTHER URMI, Ctg

Women entrepreneurs in the country have been on the rise over the last few years, thanks to women becoming more confident of their potential to contribute to the economy.

Women in Chittagong, the second largest city in Bangladesh, are no different, with the number of women entrepreneurs having increased by manifold in the last five years.

"When I launched my business six years ago, it was the most difficult time of my life. Nobody accepted me as I am a woman. The social system is responsible for that," said Nazma Noushad Mita, owner of FS Logistic and Services.

She said Chittagong Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CWCCI) is one place in Chittagong where women can talk freely about their problems and limitations, but it is not enough of a support.

"Every woman faces difficulties in raising capital at the onset of her business," she added.

Mohammad Masum Kamal Bhuiyan, the general manager of Bangladesh Bank's Chittagong office, suggests the contrary.

"Chittagong is a commercial area and women can make a big contribution in our economy and BB helps them in all sectors," Kamal said.

He said the Bangladesh Bank (BB) offers small and enterprises (SME) loans all throughout the country, particularly keeping women entrepreneurs in mind.

BB launched the SME loans service in 2010, with 1118 women receiving loans amounting to Tk 120.58 crore that year.

The numbers have been on the rise since: in 2011 4975 women received loan sum increased to Tk 175.13 crore, and in 2012 8791 women obtained loans worth Tk 173.05 crore.

"Even a few years ago, women workers did not contribute directly to formal economic activities. But we are witnessing a remarkable change."

Monowara Hakim Ali, CWCCI's president, said: "Chittagong is a

conservative area and it is not easy for women to do business as they want."

In 1999 Monowara formed an organisation called 'Women Entrepreneurs Chittagong' with the aim to provide training and institutional support to interested women.

Monowara, also a director of the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said although the government has undertaken many schemes to increase women's contribution to the economy, it is important to ensure these schemes are implemented properly and that women are benefitted.

"Government initiatives should be strong and easy for all women so that they may establish themselves as entrepreneurs in Chittagong," Monowara added.

Sajeda Begum, the owner of 'Janani Botique House', said: "I started my business with a capital of three thousand taka some 20 years ago."

"Now is the time for more women to join in business," she said, while adding that institutional support is imperative for

Stage set for World Tourism Day

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) will celebrate World Tourism Day on Thursday to create awareness about tourism in Bangladesh.

"We are working to promote tourism of the region globally," Akhtaruzzaman Khan Kabir, chief executive officer of BTB, said.

He spoke at a programme on World Tourism Day organised by the board at its auditorium in the city.

This year's celebrations will be themed "Tourism and Sustainable Energy: Powering Sustainable Development".

With its rivers and the largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, Bangladesh could be an ideal tourist destination in Asia, he said.

"We will organise an international campaign to promote Bangladesh,"

Kabir said.

Japan and China will be major sourcing countries for Bangladesh, he said.

"If we can work together to promote tourism, the sector will create huge employment opportunities."

BTB will organise a rally, roundtable discussions, talk-shows and publish supplements in newspapers to mark the day, he added.

He said a colourful rally will be taken out on Thursday at 8:00am from Dhaka University.

A debate competition will be organised on tourism by BTB at TSC cafeteria at Dhaka University with support from Dhaka University Tourist Society on Thursday.

The rally will be inaugurated by Faruk Khan, civil aviation and tourism minister, and AAMS Arefin Siddique, vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, will be a special guest.



Humayun Rashid, managing director of Energypac Power Generation Ltd, attends the launch of Energypac's sole distributorship of JAC vehicles in Bangladesh at a recent ceremony. Jina Kang, regional manager of JAC International, was also present.

New top brass for Janata Insurance

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Begum Sultana Hashem has recently been elected as the chairman of Janata Insurance Co Ltd, the company said in a statement yesterday.

She is also the chairman of Partex Group, according to the statement.

The Janata Insurance board also elected Belal Ahmed as its vice chairman. He is also the managing director of Golden Son Ltd and established the



Mining crisis rattles South African labour movement

AFP, Johannesburg

The violent crisis that has shaken South Africa's mines shows workers' distrust for traditional trade unions, up to now the guardians of social peace despite the country's deep inequality.

Miners this week clawed record salary increases of 22 percent from the Lonmin platinum mine operators after a near six-week wildcat strike that killed 46.

Having rejected major player the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), miners appointed their own representatives at the negotiations.

The unprecedented agreement may upend the whole mining industry, a fifth of the GDP of Africa's largest economy, analysts said, and bodes ill for the country's powerful trade union federation COSATU, and NUM, its main member.

Wildcat strikes have already spread to other gold, platinum and chrome mines, including world number one Anglo American Platinum and Gold Fields.

"Marikana holds the potential for an era in South African labour relations where violent strike action forces the hand of weakened management as opposed to historical collective bargaining promoted by COSATU and its affiliate unions," said independent analyst Daniel Silke.

The country's labour movement has been formalised for decades, and representative unions have exclusive negotiation rights with employers in an extremely structured process.

Unions also formed a formidable opposition to the white minority regime during apartheid. Since its inception in 1985, COSATU was affiliated with the African National Congress.

This alliance helped to avoid major social unrest when the ANC took over government in 1994 after the first all-race elections, and COSATU only gained in power through the deal. But now the partnership threatens to taint the federation.

"COSATU has moved away from its roots to become a political organisation, while its supposed to be a labour movement," economist Dawie Roodt told AFP. On the ground, mineworkers say they live in hell, pointing to shacks without electricity, water or sanitation.

Runner plans to export motorcycles next year

FROM PAGE B1

"We need a long-term policy support from the government for the growth of motorcycle industry in the country," said Khan.

The newly-appointed State Minister for Industries Omor Faruk Chowdhury said the country needs more than one industrial policy.

"We also need regional industrial policy," he added.

Liu Botao, chief executive officer of Dayang Motorcycles, said the agreement heralds a new era of cooperation between the two companies.

Runner Automobiles started its business as a distributing company of Dayang Motors with only Tk 1.5 crore paid-up capital in 2000.

In 2011, the company won recognition from the government as a full-fledged manufacturing plant

Govt lifts ban on fish exports

FROM PAGE B1

The government had banned fish exports ahead of Ramadan to tackle the profiteering sellers' attempts to create an artificial scarcity of fish.

Exports of frozen fish, excluding shrimp, rose to 19,000 tonnes in fiscal 2011-12 from 16,743 tonnes a year earlier, according to data from Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association.

About 20,000 tonnes of white fish are exported a year, which is less than 1 percent of total annual production. Fish exports fetch the country Tk 1,000-1,200 crore a year.



Md Nazrul Islam, chairman of Fareast Islami Life Insurance Company, speaks at the closing ceremony of an ICT training course organised by the company at its office in Dhaka yesterday. Md Hemayet Ullah, managing director, was also present.



Dilip Barua, industries minister, speaks at a workshop on "income tax return submission and VAT payment system" organised by the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) in the capital yesterday. Asif Ibrahim, DCCI president, was also present.

Spain to overshoot crucial deficit goal

AFP, Madrid

Spain has staked its financial survival on cutting its budgeting deficit, but analysts warn it will miss its key 2012 target, undermined by the very measures taken to try and meet it.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has promised Spain's European neighbours to cut the public deficit -- the shortfall of revenues to spending -- to 6.3 percent of output in 2012, after they let him relax an earlier 5.3 percent goal.

But a recession aggravated by budget tightening and widening holes in the finances of Spain's big-spending regional governments have undermined his promise, as warnings have increased that Spain will need a full bailout.

"Nobody now believes it will be able to fulfill the target," said Alberto Roldan, an analyst at Spanish brokerage

How financial lawsuits muzzle free speech

RODDY BOYD

Imagine some political group runs an advertisement accusing a politician of misleading statements and covering up his true voting record. Instead of denouncing the attack or countering with a favorable ad, however, the candidate sues the political group for billions of dollars, launching a six-year, scorched-earth legal and public relations campaign.

Even though the legal battle collapses and the candidate spends about \$100 million, the gambit works: The politician's future elections are assured, because no rival or reporter dares publicly criticize the candidate lest they be sued.

An absurd example, no? Everyone knows it couldn't happen here, in the home of the First Amendment and a free press. Yet a publicly traded company using its working capital to battle critics in court is an increasingly regular occurrence in the capital markets. Substitute a Canadian insurance conglomerate called Fairfax Financial Holdings for the politician, and you have an excellent

example of the above scenario.

In July 2006, Fairfax sued a group of hedge funds and analysts over what it alleged was a conspiracy to drive down its share price. On Sept. 12 the last remnant of its once far-reaching suit was effectively tossed out of New Jersey Superior Court (though Fairfax has said it plans to appeal).

The courtroom debacle was ultimately an aside: For an estimated \$100 million in legal and public relations fees over six years, Fairfax's efforts drove its share price up, forced shorts to cover their trades and, save for a few reporters, ceased virtually all media investigation into the company's operations. (To be fair, Fairfax's share price was helped by a turnaround in the firm's insurance businesses and billions of dollars in profit from a remarkably timed 2007 bet against subprime financial companies.)

I am not a passive observer to this situation. It was my reporting that Fairfax said prompted its lawsuit, and several months ago I published a story disclosing new documents that, I maintain, prove the company still has sub-

stantial liability for some tax moves it made in 2003. I also reported extensively on another Canadian company, Biovail Corp, which launched a nearly identical suit in 2006. Biovail met an ignoble fate, eventually admitting to fraud and paying hundreds of millions of dollars in settlements and penalties.

Although Fairfax has much crow to eat, its lawyers at Kasowitz, Benson, Torres & Friedman and its outside PR firm, Sitrick & Co, were relentless in promoting the erstwhile victimhood of Fairfax and Biovail, also a client, to media, regulators and politicians the numbers make clear that suing critics can bear fruit.

Unsurprisingly, Fairfax does not agree with the notion that its lawsuit was primarily designed to stifle critics. Approached for comment, Michael Bowe, the Kasowitz Benson partner directing the litigation, emailed the following statement:

Fairfax sued not for "criticism," but because people were spreading false claims that Fairfax was an insolvent, Enron-like fraud in order, in defendants' own words,

to "kill" the company. The Court found that there was "absolutely no question" that this intentional conduct caused Fairfax to "suffer ... massive pecuniary/economic loss." The Court's ultimate conclusion that the law provided no legal redress for such massive losses is unfortunate and incorrect and will, we are confident, be reversed on appeal.

Nonetheless, let's look at the math: The hedge funds sued in the Fairfax case each spent \$3 million to \$4 million per year on legal fees. They were able to absorb it because they were large. But a small hedge fund likely does not have an extra \$4 million in cash flow to pay lawyers and fund investors are loath to invest in smaller funds with ongoing litigation. That creates a powerful disincentive for small-fund managers to speak publicly, even if they believe their research has uncovered significant fraud.

Financial journalists, too, have incentives to keep quiet. The financial media's ability to play a meaningful watchdog role has declined as rapidly as its economic health.



Ali Ispahani, a director of MM Ispahani Ltd, poses with participants of a workshop organised jointly by Ispahani and Advance Supply Chain Solutions BD Ltd, at a hotel in Chittagong recently. Pavan Sharma, a supply chain expert, was also present.



Badiur Rahman, chairman of Al-Arafah Islami Bank, inaugurates the bank's 97th branch on Sonargaon Janapath Road in Uttara of Dhaka yesterday. Ekramul Hoque, managing director, was also present.