

Vows for the New Year

The Daily Star catches up with some young leaders to know about their plans for 2013

SUMAN SAHA

BUSINESSES have begun a new year. It is a time for them to reflect on the past and consider the future plans amid eagerness and passion. They now look into the past mistakes and analyse good and bad aspects of their lives to set their goals for the next 12 months.

The Daily Star spoke to seven young business luminaries in Bangladesh to know about their companies' performances in the outgoing year and their resolutions for the New Year.

The young leaders -- from development organisations to telecom companies, security service providers and online marketers to stock brokers -- all termed 2012 a year of 'ups and downs'.

During the year the country witnessed political upheavals, banking scams, a prolonged labour unrest and a deadly fire at a garment factory that killed at least 112 workers.

They said the year was also challenging as the economy had to combat with a number of negative factors such as a dismal stockmarket, soaring inflation at the beginning of the year, perennial energy shortages and poor infrastructure.

But the young leaders are hopeful that 2013 will bring hopes for the economy and political leaders will reach a consensus to hold a free and fair general election.

Hasan Mehdi, head of mobile division of Samsung Dhaka branch

South Korean electronic giant Samsung has made plans for the New Year to maintain robust growth in handset sales, especially in the smartphone segment.

"We are now a number one brand for 'real' smartphones in the country," Mehdi said.

This year, Samsung Mobile wants to truly inspire and enrich lives of the Bangladeshi consumers by bringing innovative devices, the official said.

"We shall continue to bring innovation to address diverse consumer needs of maximum utility, greater productivity and superior lifestyle," said Mehdi, an MBA degree holder from the Institute of Business Administration at Dhaka University.

In 2012, sales of Samsung smartphones saw significant growth in Bangladesh. It strengthened smartphone portfolio, creating great choices for consumers, he said.

Before joining Samsung, Mehdi worked as the head of business development of the corporate strategy division at mobile operator Robi. He also worked for Nestlé Bangladesh as a brand executive for three years.

Samsung saw 2012 as a year of 'promise-building' for the coming years and 'confidence-building' for the local market, said Mehdi.

It opened a huge number of outlets and introduced two-year warranty for smart devices in the outgoing year.

Samsung will also put constant efforts on a number of areas such as product development, consumer education, experience facility and differentiated service in 2013, said the official.

Eshita Sharmin, marketing manager for Bangladesh at bikroy.com

Bikroy.com, a Dubai-based e-commerce website, has set a target to become the first option in terms of online buy and sales in Bangladesh.

"We would like to familiarise the audience with an online marketplace, the best way to 'Buy, Sell and Smile'," said Sharmin.

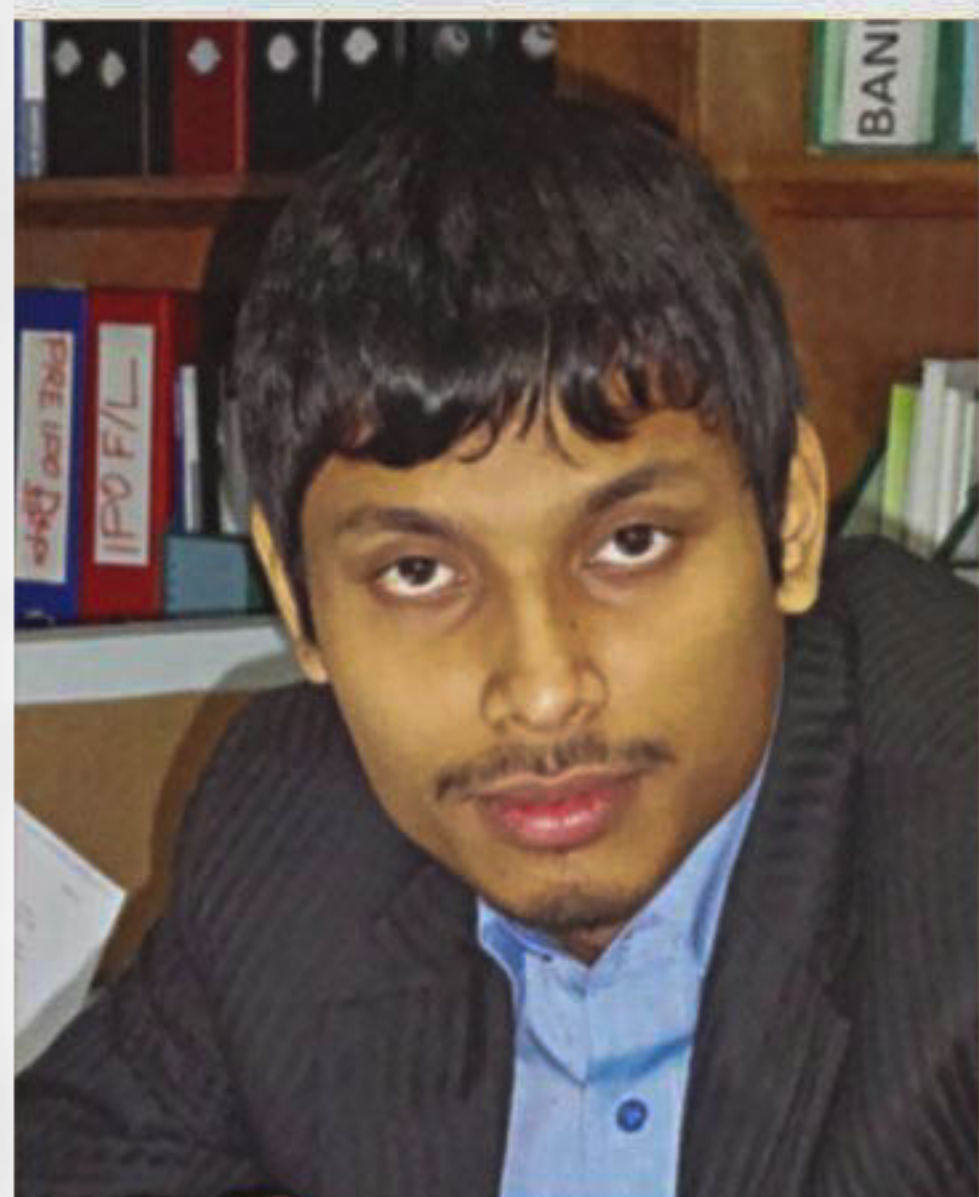
The 2012 was an eventful and exciting year for them as bikroy.com was officially launched in Bangladesh as the first bilingual classified ad website, said Sharmin.

It grabbed the top position among the classified ad sites within six months of its launch in the country, she said.

Online trading websites are not new in Bangladesh, but the launch of bikroy.com will help the country bring a momentum in e-commerce, said the official.



Hasan Mehdi



Md Ashaduzaman Riadh

Before joining bikroy.com, Sharmin worked for Blueberry Technologies LLC in the UAE as a business development manager. She also worked at Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Ltd (Citycell) in different capacities.

In the upcoming year, the company wants to provide best selection ads and improve its service quality for the customers in Bangladesh, said Sharmin.

On her personal resolution, Sharmin said she wants to learn new things everyday in 2013.

"I want to learn something new in my personal life -- may be a new language, or just how to fix my computer -- simply something new," said Sharmin, a BBA degree holder from North South University in Bangladesh.

Md Obaidur Rahman, regional adviser for Asia at Save the Children, Denmark

Save the Children Denmark has set a resolution for this year to help the vulnerable adolescents and youths in Asia get access to decent employments.

"We want to help them get decent jobs by offering education and training," Rahman said.

Around 61 percent of the world's young people live in the Asia-Pacific region, said



Eshita Sharmin



SM Ashraf Abir

Rahman, who runs the 'Education for Youth Empowerment (EYE)' of Save the Children.

The overall vision of the project is to empower vulnerable youths in the rural and urban areas through education and training to help them become active economic, social and political citizens.

The EYE project is operating in a number of

countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

The 2012 was an important year for popularising, creating demand and grounding the theme of EYE in many Save the Children country programmes in Asia, said Rahman.

Around 180,000 vulnerable adolescents and youths in Bangladesh got empowered through education, training and apprenticeship programmes, he said.

"Decent employment and active social and political participation of the youth, particularly vulnerable youth, have become the main developmental challenges in Asia," said Rahman.

He has been working in the fields of education for youth empowerment, corporate social responsibility and child labour for



Md Obaidur Rahman



Sharif Shaham

more than 15 years in Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Somaliland, Ethiopia and Egypt.

Before joining Save the Children, Rahman worked for International Labour Organisation's regional office in Dhaka, and for a UNDP-supported project implemented by the social welfare ministry.



Sadequa Hassan Sejuti

The young business leaders promise to take their efficiency and skills to global standards. They want to inspire and enrich lives of the Bangladeshi consumers by bringing innovative products and services. They set resolutions to bring changes to the lives of their employees and contribute more to the environment. They want to learn new things in the New Year and wish to see actions from the government that will bring about changes the country needs so much.

He obtained master's degrees in development studies from North South University and from the international relations department of Dhaka University.

Expansion to new countries by building networks, fundraising and measuring impact will be the main strategic priority for the EYE project in 2013, he added.

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DITF raises hopes for higher sales

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

THE month-long Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) begins today for showcasing Bangladeshi products to the visitors amid hopes for increased export orders.

DITF for the first time introduced an online shopping option for busy city-dwellers.

The export orders may rise about 5 percent to Tk 45 crore this year, compared to the previous year, organisers said.

The Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and the commerce ministry are jointly organising the mega event that will continue through to January 31 at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to inaugurate the fair at 11 am.

A total of 506 stalls have been set up at the fair that stepped into the 18th year. Thirty-one organisations from 12 countries are participating in the fair along with Bangladeshi organisations.

EPB has taken an initiative to facilitate online shopping of all the products to be showcased at DITF.

"We have developed an e-commerce site -- ditfshop.com -- the first of its kind at the fair to sell all the products to be displayed at DITF," Shubhashish Bose, vice chairman of EPB, told reporters at the fair venue.

Customers from home and abroad can also buy products online through debit or credit cards, bank drafts and mobile payment service.

Speaking as the chief guest, Commerce



Infrastructure for the 18th Dhaka International Trade Fair stands ready. This year's fair allows people to shop online for the first time.

Minister GM Quader said the government decided to construct a permanent venue at Purbachal for DITF.

A Chinese delegation will soon visit Bangladesh to carry a feasibility study for the purpose, he said.

Export orders at the 17th DITF grew 72 percent to Tk 43.18 crore from the previous

year, according to the organisers.

Among the major products, machinery, carpets, cosmetics and beauty products, electrical and electronics, jute goods, leather goods, sports goods, sanitary products, toys, ceramics, fabrics, cables, processed foods, furniture and handicrafts will be showcased on the 12.5 lakh square feet venue.

India's cash-to-the-poor welfare reform starts

APP, New Delhi

INDIA'S government is to roll out Tuesday the first phase of its hugely ambitious plans to hand out cash to welfare claimants in what it considers a "game-changer" policy 18 months ahead of elections.

Finance Minister P Chidambaram, speaking before the start of the direct cash transfers on January 1, said 20 out of India's 629 districts would change over to the new system with a further 23 to follow in February and March.

In all, money for 23 separate welfare schemes -- mostly education funds which were previously disbursed to third parties by the central government -- will now be paid into the bank accounts of an estimated 200,000 beneficiaries.

"This is a game-changer for governance... this is a game-changer in how we account for money, it is game-changer in how the benefits reach the individual," Chidambaram told a press conference on Monday.

For example, scholarships for higher education for low-caste students which were previously paid to a university would instead be transferred directly to the individual who would then pay for

his or her studies.

The advantage is that the government can confirm the money has reached the intended claimant, without them having to pay bribes to secure their due or officials diverting the funds for other purposes.

Critics counter that the government has been too quick in pushing forward a pet project and is bound to face enormous implementation problems because of the complex technology and public administration required.

Chidambaram said that there was no intention at this stage to start handing out cash in place of subsidised food, fuel and fertiliser -- three key benefits for the poor included in India's \$61-billion annual welfare budget.

"There will be glitches. There will be a problem here or a problem there. These will be overcome by our people standing out in the districts," added Chidambaram, who said the cash scheme would be rolled out nationwide.

Mexico and Brazil are considered the world leaders in cash welfare schemes, using their Progres/Oportunidades and Bolsa Familia programmes respectively to target the poor.