

Citi awards microentrepreneurs

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The winners of the eighth Citi Microentrepreneurship Awards (CMA) were formally announced at a programme at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the capital on Saturday.

Atiur Rahman, governor of Bangladesh Bank, handed over the awards to the winners in each of the five categories of the event sponsored by Citi Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Citigroup.

The award winners are: Rabeya Begum from Latifpur, Kishoreganj as the "Best Microentrepreneur of the Year", Shahida Begum from Moheshpur, Jhainadah as the "Best Woman Microentrepreneur of the Year".

Najma Begum from Delduar, Tangail won the "Best Microentrepreneur of the Year in Agriculture" award while the "Best Microfinance Institution of the Year" went to the Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service from Rangpur.

Society for Social Service from Tangail bagged the "Most Innovative Microfinance Institution of the Year", the bank said in a statement yesterday.

The winner of the Best



From left, economist Wahiduddin Mahmud, Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman, CEO of Citi Asia Pacific Stephen Bird, and Citi Country Officer Rashed Maqsood pose with the winners of eighth Citi Microentrepreneurship Awards, at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in Dhaka on Saturday.

Microentrepreneur of the Year received Tk 5 lakh while the Most Innovative Microfinance Institution received Tk 6 lakh. The remaining three winners received Tk 3.5 lakh each.

Wahiduddin Mahmud, chairperson of the eighth CMA Advisory Council; Stephen Bird, chief executive officer of Citi Asia Pacific; Abdul Awal, chairperson of the

eighth CMA Screening Committee and executive director of Credit and Development Forum; and Rashed Maqsood, managing director and citi country officer, Bangladesh, attended the programme.

Microentrepreneurs from different districts, representatives from microfinance institutions, ministries and the central bank were also present.

The Citi Microentrepreneurship Awards has been supported by Citi Foundation and implemented by Citibank, NA Bangladesh with support from the Credit Development Forum as the local partner.

Channel i and The Daily Star were the media partners of the programme in Bangladesh while Ruposhi Bangla Hotel was its venue partner, according to the statement.

Star economist takes over India's central bank amid crisis

AFP, New Delhi

India's new central bank chief Raghuram Rajan takes over the helm this week as the nation grapples with its worst financial crisis in decades, sparked by a plunging rupee, a record trade gap and a sharp economic slowdown.

Rajan, a high-profile former IMF chief economist renowned for predicting the 2008 global financial collapse, moves into the Reserve Bank of India's office on Thursday, replacing his retiring predecessor Duvvuri Subbarao.

The appointment of the informal, outspoken diplomat's son -- described by the Times of India as an "economist with rock star appeal" -- comes as some analysts fear the once-booming economy could be heading for a meltdown.

India's economy has gone dramatically downhill since the so-called "Indian Summer" -- the heady noughties when growth regularly exceeded eight percent and the country was a global investor favourite.

Rajan, who qualified as an engineer at the Indian Institute of Technology and later did a management doctorate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, faces a virtually impossible "trilemma" in his new job, analysts say.

He inherits an economy with a record current account deficit -- the broadest measure of trade, a currency which has lost 16 percent against the dollar this year and annual growth at its weakest in a decade at five percent.

He's "in an unenviable situation," said DK Joshi, chief economist of leading credit rating agency Crisil.

The 50-year-old Rajan cautioned against expecting too much from his appointment -- saying there are no "quick fixes".

"No one can doubt the country's promise," the economist said after being named in early August to the post, but added, "there is no magic wand to make the problems disappear instantaneously".

Analysts have raised fears India could face a crunch of the sort it suffered in 1991 when a foreign exchange-strapped government had to pawn its gold for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout.



Raghuram Rajan

Friday's first-quarter figures showing the economy posting an unexpectedly low growth of 4.4 percent offered no cheer.

"Given the ongoing turmoil, economic conditions look likely to get worse before they get any better," said Capital Economics economist Daniel Martin.

For the time being, Rajan, a staunch economic reformer and withering critic of "rampant" Indian corruption and suffocating bureaucracy, will have his hands tied, analysts say.

He will be forced to focus on stabilising the currency by keeping interest rates high at the expense of spurring expansion of Asia's third-largest economy, analysts say.

Meanwhile, the government will have to concentrate on reining in the current account gap which has prompted foreign investors to race for the exits and put pressure on the rupee.

Rajan is known as a "creative, out-of-the-box thinker" which should stand him in good stead, said Deepak Lalwani, head of India-focused financial consultancy Lalcap.

But there is scepticism whether Rajan, even with his strong credentials, can do much to boost the economy. As veteran Indian financial commentator Swaminathan Aiyar remarked: "Great jockey. Pity he doesn't have a better horse."

Rajan won fame as one of the few economists who warned of the global financial crisis before it hit in 2008 when he said subprime lending could lead to calamity.



Md Touhidul Alam Khan, head of corporate assets and client origination at Bank Asia, and Md Bashir Uddin Ahmed, chief financial officer, pose at a sustainability reporting training on 'G4 bridging module course' coordinated by Stan Rodgers under GRI method at Kuala Lumpur, organised by SHEMSI, Malaysia recently.

Hasina pledges to stand by garment workers

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday assured garment workers of all measures to provide them with a better life and urged them not to do anything detrimental to the garment sector.

She said the government has already decided to constitute a wage board for increasing the salaries and allowances of garment workers and asked the owners to give adequate salaries to them according to the recommendation of the board.

She spoke at a function to lay the foundation of the country's first dormitory for female garment workers at Ashulia on the outskirts of the city.

The premier said the preparatory work to form a wage board and increase wages and allowances of the garment workers is progressing fast.

In the hostel building to be constructed by the Department of Women and Children Affairs, the female garment workers will get residential and dining facilities at low cost, free furniture, healthcare services, recreation and sports facilities, and day-care services for their children.

The prime minister said the government has taken initiatives for construction of the dormitories so that the female garment workers can live in a healthy and good atmosphere. The government would provide same facilities for the garment owners if they are ready to create same facilities for garment workers, she said.

The government has selected land at Bipal for construction of garments colony with better housing facilities for several thousand garment workers, she said.

The country is earning valuable foreign currency owing to hard labour of the garment workers, entrepreneurship of the owners and supportive government policies, the prime minister said.

Emirates offers 'special' fares

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Emirates is offering up to 30 percent discounts for Bangladeshi travellers to over 70 destinations, the airline said in a statement yesterday.

Customers can fly to destinations, including London, Manchester, Paris, Milan, Madrid, Istanbul, Geneva, New York, Houston, Washington, Toronto and Dubai at reduced fares.

Two-way tickets to London and New York, for example, start at \$1,276 and \$1,613 respectively, inclusive of all applicable taxes.

"These special fares have been launched in response to high demand from Bangladeshis wishing to travel abroad," said Ismail Bhuiyan, Emirates' sales manager in Bangladesh.

The offer is valid for purchases of tickets between September 1 and September 10 from any travel agency in Bangladesh or online at www.emirates.com/bd.

Tickets can also be purchased from Emirates offices in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet.

Emirates offers 30kg baggage allowance for economy travellers, and 40kg for business class, according to the statement. Emirates passengers from Chittagong and Sylhet enjoy complimentary air-conditioned bus services to and from Dhaka.

Passengers must start travel between September 15, 2013 and January 31, 2014 for the reduced fares to be applicable. The airline runs 21 weekly flights from Dhaka.

HC asks govt why Jasmine's bail should not be cancelled

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In the petitions, the ACC said the court had granted the bail to Jasmine 'illegally', as investigations were underway and there were serious allegations of money laundering against her.

Conditional bail to an accused is always illegal, the commission said.

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka on February 19 sent the Hall-Mark Group chairman, wife of Hall-Mark's Managing Director Tanvir Mahmud, to jail after she surrendered before it in connection with the cases.

The ACC on October 4 last year filed the cases against 27 top officials of Sonali Bank and Hall-Mark Group for their involvement in the scam.

According to a Bangladesh Bank investigation in May 2012, Hall-Mark and five other companies with the connivance of some bank officials had taken out loans of Tk 3,547 crore from the Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch of Sonali Bank using forged documents.

Of the amount, Hall-Mark alone took around Tk 2,600 crore.

Etihad Airways expands BusinessConnect

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Etihad Airways, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates, has extended BusinessConnect, its loyalty programme for businesses, to 11 new markets including Bahrain, Belarus, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nepal, the Netherlands, Oman, the Philippines, Qatar and Thailand, says a statement.

The mileage earning programme is targeted at the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector, offering opportunities and benefits for companies who fly with the airline.

As part of the programme, registered BusinessConnect customers are able to earn Etihad Guest Miles every time one of their employees takes a flight. Etihad Guest Miles can be earned on all Etihad tickets booked on etihad.com, through Etihad Contact Centres, or by appointed travel agents.

There are also no blackout periods when redeeming miles against upgrades, free flights, or the thousands of products from the Etihad Guest Reward Shop. The points can even be converted to cash via PointsPay to spend a thirty million outlets worldwide.

Etihad Airways' Chief Commercial Officer Peter Baumgartner said, BusinessConnect is the smartest and most rewarding loyalty scheme for SMEs. "It's a fantastic way for companies to optimise their travel spend, while adding convenience and value to the business and corporate travel experience. In short, it makes business sense all round."

BB tightens rules for mobile banking

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Money cannot be deposited or transferred from one agent's account to another, the notice says. A customer can deposit highest five times a day into his account and 20 times a month. The customer can withdraw cash three times a day and 10 times a month.

The BB has permitted 25 banks to provide mobile banking services that transact Tk 112 crore a day.

Banks provide mobile financial services to 50 lakh people through a network of 7,000 agents across the country.

Corporate sector should hire women drivers: analysts

Brac Driving School hands certificates to 15 new graduates

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The corporate sector should employ women drivers in their organisations, said SN Kairy, chief financial officer, Brac and Brac International.

He spoke at an event yesterday on "Four wheels to freedom for women" to discuss the issues relating to the employment opportunities of the woman drivers coming out of the Brac Driving School.

Brac in collaboration with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) organised the programme, as part of its project launched in September 2012 -- women steering forward -- to create 600 trained women drivers, at Uttara Brac Learning Centre in the capital.

Seventy five students of the school have completed their training, but only 18 have

so far been employed, Brac said in a statement yesterday.

Brac Driving School is a part of Brac's road safety programme that began in May 2012.

Fifteen fresh graduates of the driving school were also handed certificates on the occasion.

Rokiya Afzal Rahman, adviser to a caretaker government and member of the Brac's governing body; and Md Nazrul Islam, chairman of BRTA, attended the ceremony.

Fifteen percent of the driving jobs in the government pool are reserved for women drivers, but BRTA does not receive any applications from such drivers, said Islam.

Brac is spending approximately Tk 80,000 for each of the graduates, who will have ample opportunities of employment after their graduation, said Kairy.

He also mentioned that there are plans to send these drivers abroad for employment.

New dates for FIs' half-yearly reports

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday asked all financial institutions to submit its half-yearly statements on net asset value by July 25 and January 25 to assess the institutions' exposure to call money market properly.

terday asked all financial institutions to submit its half-yearly statements on net asset value by July 25 and January 25 to assess the institutions' exposure to call money market properly.

The report must be sent online instead of using the previous manual system, the banking regulator said in a circular.

Financial institutions could borrow from the call money market up to 15 percent of their net assets, and they used to send half-yearly reports on it to the BB by July 31 and January 31.

"We have found that some financial institutions violated their borrowing exposure limit. BB issued the circular to monitor the issue strictly," said a BB official.



Nazmul Hassan, managing director of Beximco Pharma, receives Asia's Most Influential Leader award at the Asian Brand and Leadership Summit 2013 in Dubai on Tuesday.

Jute takes a hit from Middle-East crisis, rupee slide

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"Our market for Syria and Iran is closed. And now Indian importers are not taking delivery of old orders, let alone place new orders," Yusuf, also the managing director of Faridpur Jute Fibres Ltd.

"It has been a month now that we could not make any shipment. Buyers in India are offering too low a price to accept," said Gopi Kishan Sureka, chief executive of Fiber 'N Fibre, adding that most jute companies are now running on losses.

Other than the cutback in orders, the depreciation of Indian rupee has created another source of worry for the exporters, he said.

"India is our main competitor in the world market, and the Indian exporters are exploit-

ing their currency's fall in value by cutting down the prices for their exports. It is worrying we may lose those markets, where we had been exporting for a long time now."

Yusuf, also a former chairman of Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association (BJS), echoed Sureka's views, adding that the Indian exporters have got a 30 percent price advantage. Shahidul Karim, secretary of BJS, quoting the association's chairman Muhammad Shams-uz Zoha, said fresh enquiries have almost come down to nil.

Although exports of jute and jute goods grew by 2.52 percent year-on-year to \$80.15 million in July, raw jute, jute yarn and twine, the main export earner of the jute sector, dropped significantly, according to Export Promotion Bureau.

GSP comeback unlikely through December review

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The official said they have made progresses in some of the areas.

The government has already reformed the labour law, withdrawn the cases against labour leaders Kalpona Akter and Babul Akter and published advertisements in newspapers seeking information on the killers of labour leader Aminul Islam, Shipar said.

The government also restored the licences of two NGOs -- Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity, and

Social Activities for the Environment, in line with a condition in the plan.

The secretary also said he will sit with the two inspection committees of the US and EU retailers on September 7 to prepare a common checklist for factory inspection.

The committees will inspect 1,750 factories across the country, but are yet to disclose the names of the plants.

"I hope they will share the names in the September 7 meeting," Shipar said.