

CELEBRATING SOCIAL BUSINESS

Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, chancellor of Glasgow Caledonian University, poses with the third batch of students of Grameen Caledonian College of Nursing at a graduation ceremony in Dhaka last year.

YUNUS CENTRE



The institute that produces world-class nurses

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

GRAMEEN Caledonian College of Nursing, a social business initiative, is forging ahead, developing professionals for the healthcare service providers in Bangladesh and abroad.

Since its inception in 2010, a total of 127 students have graduated from the college to become nurses, and most of them got jobs at top hospitals in the country like Apollo and Square. One graduate was employed by a globally renowned airline.

"All the students are well-paid and in senior positions, as they are highly skilled," said Tareq Md Ashaful Chowdhury, senior manager of the college.

The college is a successful partnership between the Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) of Scotland and Grameen Healthcare Trust, set up by Nobel Peace laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, with financial support from Nike Foundation and GCU. The vision was to create an institution of

global standards for high quality nursing and midwifery education in Bangladesh.

The college is following the Bangladesh Nursing Council curriculum, which was developed to educate students with internationally accepted competencies and standards of practice.

The national curriculum is in English and as a result, by the time students finish diploma, they will be competent professionals as well as proficient in English.

At present, the college has 166 diploma students and 40 Bachelor of Science students. Four students have already graduated from GCU on scholarships, while two more are currently enrolled; four more will go soon.

Initially, admission to the college was limited to the daughters of Grameen Bank members. Now, the BSc course has been made open to all; the three-year diploma course might follow suit.

Chowdhury said the nursing college is doing so well that it is the hospitals that contact the

college to supply them with nurses. "None of our nurses had a problem getting a job."

The college aims to become sustainable by 2016 and increase the quality and quantity of health education and deliver a step by step rise in the number of well educated health professionals.

Its goal over the next three years is to accommodate 500 students and move to a new purpose-built college. It plans to open 10 more colleges of nursing across the country in future.

In Bangladesh, 87 percent of mothers give birth without professional medical support and just 23,000 registered nurses serve 160 million people.

The nursing college's impact on healthcare and education was recognised last year at Business in the Community's Responsible Business Awards, when GCU became the first university to win the prestigious Unilever International Award for its work with Grameen to establish and support the college.

Building auto-mechanics for future

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A social business has been launched to train youths from the country's poorest backgrounds to become auto-mechanics of international standards so that they can earn good incomes for their families.

The vocational training centre is the brainchild of SK Dream Japan, an NGO, Grameen Shikkha, a non-formal school programme for slum children, and Rangs Workshop. It started operations in January.

Ten students, all of whom are children of Grameen Bank members, have been selected for training at the Japan Automechanic Training Centre, which is based at the Rangs Workshop in Tejgaon.

The students will take a two-year Japanese diploma standard course in auto mechanics, and in the last three months of their two-year course they will take part in a three-month practical course in an auto-mechanic workshop in Japan.

Side by side, they will be taught basic English and Japanese.

After the course is completed, they will

have two options: either work at a Rangs Workshop or abroad in the Middle East, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia or Japan.

"We have contacts in many countries abroad. So, we will definitely be able to help them find jobs. But wherever they work, they will get higher wages," said Duncan Power, general manager of Japan Automechanic.

About 37,000 reconditioned cars hit the streets of Dhaka each year and there is a chronic shortage of qualified mechanics in the city.

As a social business, Japan Automechanic will earn income to support further expansion of the school from repairing cars, student fees paid by a loan from Grameen Shikkha and additionally, offer short courses to commercial mechanics to become more proficient in their trade.

The school will hire 15 more students in 2016, with plans to hire up to 200 students a year once the capacity and facilities to provide training improve.

"We don't want to rush to increase the number of students as we want to focus on quality training," Power said.



The first batch of students of Japan Automechanic Training School poses with Prof Muhammad Yunus at Grameen Bank in the capital recently.

YUNUS CENTRE



REUTERS

Lei Jun, centre, founder and chief executive officer of Xiaomi, uses a selfie stick to take pictures of himself and sales assistants at a Xiaomi Home store before the sales launch of one of its top smartphones, in Beijing, China on May 12.

Xiaomi tests online European market with small accessories

REUTERS

Xiaomi, China's largest smartphone maker, is testing the European market with its online store offering fitness bands, headphones and power banks in France, Germany and the UK.

Xiaomi, whose products on Mi.com start at \$10, said it does not plan to sell major items including smartphones and tablets in Europe and the United States yet, as "smartphones are a lot more complex to introduce to a new market."

"It requires much more time to localize smartphones at the hardware level, and carry out certification processes," a Xiaomi spokesperson told Reuters on Wednesday.

Xiaomi, which started an online store in the United States earlier this month, will announce the website's launch in Europe in the near future, the spokesperson said.

The company's Mi devices, which scored with Chinese users because of their low costs and Xiaomi's heavy reliance on user interaction and feedback, are now sold online across Asia, including most recently India.

Rising worker activism in 'world's workshop' challenges China

AFP, Panyu, China

AS workers gathered around a table in a cheap restaurant to discuss strike action against their shoe factory bosses, Chinese police barged in and dragged away their leaders.

More than 2,000 employees at the plant -- which counts foreign brands including Coach among its customers, according to workers -- had downed tools, camping out on brightly coloured mats to demand unpaid benefits.

"They burst through the door and told us not to move," a female worker told AFP. Several said police had beaten them, and one woman wore a large bandage covering injuries on her back.

The organisers were held for less than a day, but the walkout by the whole staff last month paralysed production -- and weeks later the workers claimed victory.

Once renowned for their cheap wages and docility, the protest at the Taiwanese-owned plant is an example of how employees in the workshop of the world are increasingly standing up for greater benefits.

"Ten years ago we didn't have any conception of the law or defending our rights," said a male worker, who like others asked not to be named for fear of reprisals.

Low-cost labour has been key to China's decades-long economic boom, and the new-found activism has authorities worried.

The grey Lide facility in Panyu city is one of tens of thousands of factories in the southern province of Guangdong producing everything from denim jeans to smartphones.

Finance minister Lou Jiwei last month warned that China risks falling into a "middle income trap" if high wages make manufacturing less profitable before the country can shift to less labour-intensive, more value-added industries.

He called legislation promoting bargaining between workers and employees "scary", and blamed excessive "union power" for the multiple bankruptcies in the US auto industry.

There were 1,379 protests by workers in China last year, more than tripling in just three years, according to data from the Hong Kong-based China Labour Bulletin (CLB).

That included China's biggest strike in decades, when tens of thousands of employees at Yue Yuen, another Guangdong factory that makes shoes for Nike and Adidas, won concessions despite worker arrests.

The Communist Party fears an independent labour movement, and only allows one government-linked trade union federation -- that claimed 290 million members at the end of 2013 -- which tends to side with employers.

But campaigners say employees have been empowered by a labour shortage and recent laws giving them greater rights.

"They are not only aware of their rights but understand that they are part of the working class, a class that increasingly has the strength and ability to forge its own destiny," CLB said.

When activist Wu Guijun arrived in the manufacturing hub of Shenzhen 13 years ago, strikes were almost unheard of, despite his meagre monthly wages of just a few hundred yuan.

"Workers struggled individually, and rarely spoke of defending their rights," he said.

Now migrants from the countryside to China's cities who make up the bulk of factory labour, have seen their average monthly

earnings reach 2,864 yuan (\$464) last year, up 10 percent on 2013.

The rise has been driven by both growing prosperity and supply and demand -- China's working-age population is shrinking.

Workers have been emboldened, Wu said. "As their living standards improved, they have started to pursue the respect and status they deserve from society."

Wu turned to activism after leading his co-workers in protest when his furniture factory faced sudden closure in 2013.

Despite striking or organising walk-outs not being illegal, Wu was detained by police for more than a year until prosecutors dropped charges of "gathering a crowd to disturb public order".

Given a compensation payout of more than 70,000 yuan for unwarranted detention, he founded his own labour rights organisation -- the 100 Million New Labourers Centre.

In a borrowed office stocked with pamphlets on Chinese labour laws, Wu advises young workers on strike tactics and how to use social media, despite the constant threat of police harassment and detentions.

"The government is still very nervous about workers' activism," Wu said.

Authorities face a dilemma between raising living standards for ordinary people, a key part of their claim to a right to rule, and ensuring healthy profits for local industries -- often with close official connections.

At the same time they consider social unrest anathema and want to see economic growth, but China is facing increasing labour



AFP/FILE

Police (in blue uniform) stand guard during a strike by workers from a shoe factory run by Taiwanese firm Yue Yuen in Dongguan, south China's Guangdong province.

cost competition from elsewhere in Asia.

In the face of rising inequality, China's government over the last decade passed landmark laws establishing employee rights including social insurance payments from employers, and compensation when factories relocate.

But the Lide shoemakers had no doubts where the authorities stood.

"The government here just pressures us workers. It speaks on behalf of the bosses," said one worker of more than a decade.

None of the companies involved, or the police, would comment when contacted by AFP. After the six-day stoppage, employees went back to work, saying they had won sufficient concessions.

"We basically got what we wanted," said one female worker. "But our pay is still low. How can we be satisfied?"

Japan nuclear regulator clears first reactors after safety checks

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan cleared the way on Wednesday for a resumption of nuclear power, four years after the world's worst atomic disaster in two-and-a-half decades led to the shutdown of all the country's reactors and fuelled public opposition to the industry.

Regulators said Kyushu Electric Power Co's two-reactor Sendai nuclear plant had cleared safety hurdles introduced after a huge earthquake and tsunami triggered meltdowns and explosions at the Fukushima Daiichi plant in 2011.

The Sendai plant, in southwestern Japan, still needs to go through operational checks before a restart but these are expected to be completed without major hitches.

The plume of radiation caused by the Fukushima disaster forced about 160,000 people from their homes, many of them never to return, in the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

The resulting closure of Japan's reactors caused tens of billions of dollars in losses at utilities as they resorted to importing fossil fuels for power generation and paid for upgrades to meet tightened safety rules.

Some utilities decided to scrap older plants, leaving Japan with 43 operable reactors against 54 before the disaster. More may be scrapped, according to a Reuters analysis last year.

The resumption of nuclear power is likely to be unpopular with the public after the catastrophe highlighted cosy links between utilities and the previous regulator.