

# Training in hospitality sets off in Dhaka



Trainees pose with Gabriel H Bordado, a technical adviser of the International Labour Organisation's Dhaka office, and Rubina H Farouq, managing director of the Institute of Hotel Management & Hospitality, at the launch of a pilot programme in the capital yesterday. The project will produce skilled workers for the hospitality sector.

**STAR BUSINESS REPORT**

A training programme in the hospitality sector was rolled out in Dhaka yesterday to produce skilled workers that meet the skills requirements of hotels and restaurants in Bangladesh and create entrepreneurs.

The Institute of Hotel Management and Hospitality (IHMH), a leading organisation in the sector, will train the first batch of trainees -- 20 students -- in food and beverage production.

The institute has been chosen as one of the three organisations in the private sector by Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) to run the pilot programme, in order to assist growth of the hospitality sector.

The Canadian government is funding the project, while the

International Labour Organisation (ILO) is implementing the initiative in association with BTEB and the Industrial Skills Council on Tourism and Hospitality.

"The training programme is aimed at creating decent work for the disadvantaged groups," said Gabriel H Bordado, a technical adviser of ILO's country office, at the launch of the training programme.

Decent work would mean creating dignity at work, equal access to work, fair income and safe working conditions, he added.

Once the trainees complete the programme, they would be able to find jobs in hotels and restaurants as well as set up their own businesses, he said.

Under the programme, attendants will receive the training free of cost, at the IHMH for 360 hours

and at hotels and restaurants for another 160 hours. At the end of the training, BTEB would assess their skills level.

The trainees, half of whom are women, were chosen through tests and interviews, and come from different parts of the country.

Md Serajul Islam, a programme officer at the ILO Dhaka office, said there is a dearth of skilled workers in the hospitality sector in Bangladesh, and the hotels and restaurants have to develop the skills of their workers on their own.

"The module of the training has been developed such that they meet industry requirements."

The entry level programme will help the trainees learn to cook, as well as basic mathematics, English, workplace hygiene and hygiene procedures and guest services, said

Rubina H Farouq, managing director of IHMH.

"Everyone has some skills. Through the initiative, we will identify the skills and make them employable," she said.

The training is part of an ILO initiative, which will produce 600 skilled workers in the tourism and hospitality sector, and 27,000 in a total of five sectors in the next five years. The other four sectors are furniture, agro-food processing, pharmaceuticals and ceramics.

Set up in 2004, the IHMH is a registered training organisation under the BTEB, and is affiliated with UK's City & Guilds, a global leader in skills development.

So far, the institute has churned out 3,500 students who have found jobs in hotels and restaurants at home and abroad.

# Fenox Venture Capital begins operations in Bangladesh

**STAR BUSINESS DESK**

FENOX Venture Capital, a Silicon Valley-based firm, launched its Bangladesh operations on Sunday.

The venture capital firm can contribute a great deal to developing an IT investment culture in Bangladesh and fuel long-term growth in the ICT sector, Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT, said at the launch at Westin Dhaka.

"I hope Bangladesh can leverage this significant network (of Fenox) to its benefit in terms of economic diplomacy and get better deals in negotiations with other countries," said Md Shahrir Alam, the state minister for foreign affairs.

Fenox will work to promote innovative and promising entrepreneurial endeavours, said Anis Uzzaman, co-founder and chief executive of the firm.

"We have been trying to bring a world-class venture capitalist to Bangladesh for

over a decade now. So, we are very excited to finally have a top-tier company like Fenox entering Bangladesh," said Shameem Ahsan, general partner of the company and president of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services.

Fenox is currently working to invest \$200 million in the IT, internet, and media segments of Bangladesh.

Fenox also wants to contribute to building a platform to connect the top academic institutions like Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology and Dhaka University to the top-tier universities in Europe and America, it said in a statement.

Starting in 2011, Fenox operates in the USA, Europe, Japan and Southeast Asia. It has invested some \$1.5 billion in more than 50 start-ups globally.

Abul Nuruzzaman, partner of Fenox, also attended the programme.



Md Shahrir Alam, state minister for foreign affairs, and Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT, attend the launch of Fenox Venture Capital in Bangladesh at the Westin hotel in Dhaka on Sunday. Anis Uzzaman, chief executive of Fenox Venture Capital, was also present.



An employee assembles an electric car along a production line at a factory in Qingzhou, China.

## Ambani towers pact sets up Indian telco comeback

UNA GALANI

Anil Ambani's telecom ambitions are almost credible again. The Indian tycoon's Reliance Communications is in exclusive talks to sell its mobile phone towers and other assets to US investor Tillman Global and private equity firm TPG Capital. The deal could at least halve RCom's \$6 billion net debt, leaving it ready for future battles.

The group, which has a market value of about \$3 billion, is the last of India's big telecom groups to raise cash by hiving off its towers. The three biggest operators Bharti Airtel, Vodafone, and Idea Cellular combined their towers into one privately held company, Indus Towers, which has been around since 2007. In October, American Tower picked up 51 percent of rival Viom Networks -- which owns slightly fewer towers than RCom -- for around \$1.2 billion.

By selling and leasing back its 43,379 towers, which it would then lease back, RCom could raise around 21.5 billion rupees (\$3.2 billion), the Business Standard reported on Dec. 5. The acquirer can boost returns by increasing the number of operators that use each location. RCom might pocket another 75 billion rupees (\$1.1 billion) by offloading the nationwide optic fibre that forms the backbone of its fixed-line business, the newspaper added.

The disposals will help repair a balance sheet battered by high spectrum costs and cut-throat competition. RCom's net debt stands at more than 5 times its EBITDA, based on annualised earnings for the six months to September. Around half its borrowings are due over the next two years, according to CLSA.

Deleveraging will allow RCom to focus on increasing its market share.

Indeed, the number four player in the Indian wireless market could become a much more formidable opponent. It recently bulked up its spectrum by buying the Indian unit of Russia's Sistema. That deal prepares it for a plan to share airwaves with Reliance Jio, which will soon roll out fast data services. The start-up happens to be backed by Anil Ambani's richer, older -- and no longer estranged -- brother Mukesh. An industry price war is likely to follow. Raising cash now will better prepare RCom for the battle to come.

The author is a Reuters Breakingviews columnist.

## China forecast to become world's biggest electric car market

REUTERS, Beijing

China is forecast to become the world's biggest electric car market this year, with sales estimated at 220,000 to 250,000 vehicles, the official news agency Xinhua said on Sunday, quoting the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Worldwide electric cars sales are expected to increase to 600,000 this year, association deputy secretary-general Xu Yanhua told an industry conference. China is tipped to surpass the United States as the world's biggest electric car market, she said, putting the US market at an estimated 180,000 vehicles.

China's electric-car industry is developing rapidly, but quality and not just quantity should be the focus for the development to be sustainable, Xu said.

Safety and the quality of batteries should be carefully supervised, she added. The industry saw explosive growth in the past two years, thanks to supportive government policies, including subsidies and tax cuts.

# Wave of young Afghan migrants seen hurting economy they leave behind

REUTERS, Kabul

AFGHAN software entrepreneur Farshid Ghyasi, chief executive of the Netlinks company, is struggling to keep his best employees, as more plan to join a wave of migrants leaving for Europe that risks causing long-term damage to the country and its economy.

He is not alone in bemoaning the mass exodus, triggered by poor job prospects and worsening security as Taliban insurgents grow more powerful after the bulk of NATO troops withdrew at the end of 2014.

Many of those going are young city dwellers who should be spending their productive years at home as their country struggles to emerge from war, and nearly 15 years of international support, to build a self-sustaining economy.

"It's a huge loss," said Ahmed Siar Khoreishi, an economist and chief executive of Ghazanfar Bank. "The majority of these people are under the age of 30. This is really scary, we have very limited qualified, specialist people."

There are no accurate figures for the number of Afghans who leave each year in search of a better life abroad, but more than 160,000 have gone to Europe this year, UNHCR data show. The majority of those have been in the last few months.

"It's not necessarily everyone with master's degrees, but you have a large number of youth, the most dynamic, potentially productive strata of society, who are leaving," said Richard Danziger of the International Organisation for Migration.

The exodus has put pressure on the Afghan currency, the central bank says, but Khoreishi says that's not the problem.

"The most important factor is the workforce. The brains are leaving," he said.

A 30-year-old Kabul University law graduate seems typical of those heading off.

"I know it isn't good for the country, but I've got my own life," said the man with a trim beard



Afghan women queue up to apply for passports at a passport department office in Kabul.

and Western clothes, who declined to be identified.

He has a good job in a law firm but said he has been threatened because of an old job with NATO forces. He hopes to set off overland to Europe within days.

"I know the difficulties I'll face, but it's a final decision."

The government has urged young people to stay, but such calls ring hollow for many Afghans who know children of the elite are mostly abroad. President Ashraf Ghani said last week rich children who study overseas should pursue careers at home.

"If they live abroad they become dishwashers. They don't become part of the middle class," he told German broadcaster Deutsche Welle in an interview.

While many take the overland route to Europe, some better-off Afghans fly out on visas to study or go to conferences and don't come back.

Esmat Gulistani, director of a marble industry organisation, said his sector had been hit by the disappearance of up-and-coming

professionals.

"Those new managers were the hope for the future, not only of the industry but the country. They know computers, they know languages, they know the new system, how to do business," Gulistani said.

"They are fleeing and that's really a problem. Replacement isn't impossible, but a very difficult and lengthy process."

Gulistani said he regularly turns down people asking to go to trade shows abroad because he fears they will not return.

Netlinks' Ghyasi said four employees had gone and another 20, including some of the best in his 160-strong workforce, were planning to go. He said he could only wish them luck.

"Whoever gets an opportunity leaves," Ghyasi said in his Kabul office.

With job opportunities waning as big aid projects are wound up, Ghyasi said he had no trouble finding replacements.

"Twenty people going means 20 opportunities for new people."

The government does not have reliable unemployment data but economists estimate the rate has risen to about 40 percent.

One advantage of the departures, economists say, is that in future Afghans overseas are likely to send remittance payments back home, helping to stabilise the country's finances.

The government was trying to stem the flow with a jobs programme and information campaigns, said Deputy Minister of Labour Ahmad Shah Salehi.

"They should trust the government, they have to be patient," Salehi told Reuters.

But for Kabul University student Nisar Ahmed, it was not trust, but a job in an up-market food shop paying \$170 a month, that persuaded him to put off his departure, at least for now.

"I was not sure about the future. No one knows what will happen tomorrow. But the most important reason is I was jobless," Ahmed said.

"If I can't find good work, maybe I'll think again."