

Safe food brings accolade to KFC

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

KFC, operated in Bangladesh by Transcom Foods, won this year's best brand award in recognition of its growing popularity among food lovers.

Bangladesh Brand Forum, in association with Millward Brown Bangladesh, honoured KFC Restaurant along with the most-loved brands in the country at a gala event at Radisson hotel in Dhaka recently.

Transcom Foods started its journey as a franchisee of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) in 2006 and received rapturous reception from the food lovers in the capital immediately. Since then it grew its wings.

At the heart of its success lies the continuous efforts of delivering high quality food produced in the best possible hygienic and compliant environment and served in a manner that gives families a thoroughly satisfying eating experience, said Akku Chowdhury, managing director of Transcom Foods.

"Our motto is good and safe food in every bite."

Transcom Foods, which is the franchisee of Yum! Restaurants India Pvt Ltd, a subsidiary of Yum! Brands Inc, also runs the Pizza Hut brand in Bangladesh.

Yum! Brands Inc is an American fast food company and a Fortune 500 corporation.

In Bangladesh, there are 16 KFC outlets, eight Pizza Hut outlets and four Pizza Hut delivery points where about 1,200 people work.

The outlets give utmost importance to hygiene in preparation of food, said Sheikh Zahir Ahmed, a recognition specialist at Transcom Foods, while showing this correspondent around the outlets of KFC and Pizza Hut in Gulshan-1.

All the employees, working in kitchen or waiting tables, have to wash their hands every half an hour, and if they touch their hair, they have to wash hands instantly, he said.

For example, the company does not allow its employees to come in and work when they are affected by communicable diseases. They are allowed to join office only when they are fully recovered, Ahmed said.

"Sanitary, health and labour inspectors



An employee of KFC receives this year's best brand award from Khandaker Samina Afrin, country manager of Millward Brown, at an event at Radisson hotel in Dhaka recently. Akku Chowdhury, managing director of Transcom Foods, the local franchisee of the fast food restaurant chain, is also seen.

check all the outlets annually," said Masud Alam, a deputy manager for quality assurance.

Chowdhury said Transcom Foods runs the outlets mostly on imported items. In case of sourcing locally, the suppliers have to maintain international standards.

"Sometimes, we try to reach out to the farmers who grow the vegetables and spices we use," he said.

KFC is known for offering chicken meals and items, but Transcom Foods was able to convince Yum! Restaurants India to allow it to sell beef items as the red meat is popular in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Transcom Foods, however, imports processed beef from Saudi Arabia to ensure the quality of its burgers.

The outlets also offer an excellent career opportunity, said a number of employees. Almost all outlet managers started out as a team member, the lowest tier.

Recognition specialist Ahmed also started his career in 2007 as a team member.

Most of the employees at KFC and Pizza Hut outlets are young. Many are students. Of them, Rakibul Hasan is studying architecture at a private univer-

sity and Faruk Hossain is studying chemistry at a government college.

"We have to prove that we are better than others, not just in Bangladesh, but also any other restaurant or food company in the US or the UK. So, we just do not strive to maintain compliance in our kitchens, but the highest standards of service and food quality and delivery," Chowdhury said.

When asked why the word 'restaurant' has been added to the name KFC, Chowdhury said this is because one gets a whole range of foods and facilities available only in restaurants.

"These restaurants do not operate like those take-way and drive-through KFC outlets in the US. And this has not only happened in Bangladesh. It has happened in KFC outlets in many Asian countries," he said.

He said many think that KFC and Pizza Hut are very expensive place to eat in. "This is not true. We charge less than others."

The annual turnover of Transcom Foods is more than Tk 100 crore, but its profits are not too much as it has to spend hugely on maintaining compliance and food and service quality, Chowdhury said.

"We want to open more Pizza Hut and

KFC outlets," he said, adding that the company plans to open 100 outlets across the country by 2020.

"We want to open more outlets as soon as possible. The unavailability of compliant space is the main constraint."

He said KFC has started to offer 'value meal' in its efforts to reach out to as many people as possible. "If we can reach more customers, profit will follow ultimately."

He said employees can continue their education, and receive in-house and overseas training while working here.

"For example, the outlet managers are responsible for running the outlets, losses and profits. They are running these outlets as a business. In fact, this practice is nurturing the qualities of a businessperson or entrepreneur in them."

"The environment is turning them into businesspersons and entrepreneurs," said Chowdhury, also a freedom fighter and trustee of the Liberation War Museum.

Transcom Foods paid about Tk 20 crore in import duties, VAT, supplementary duties and income taxes in 2014.

The company is owned by Transcom Group headed by Latifur Rahman, who won the Oslo Business for Peace Award in 2012 for socially responsible and ethical business practices.

'Made in Ghana' cars go on sale

AFP, Accra

Japanese Toyotas, German Mercedes and BMWs, GM cars and trucks from the USA are driven in countries around the world. But in Ghana an inventor and church leader who started out trying to make voice-controlled television sets is telling the auto giants to move over.

Kwadwo Safo Kantanka -- nicknamed the "Apostle" because he also runs a network of churches -- has finally realised his dream of developing and marketing cars "Made in Ghana".

"It's been in the pipeline since 1971," Kwado Safo junior, one of the inventor's sons, told AFP. "It started with the old man, so it's been a long time coming."

Kantanka's range of sports utility vehicles and pick-up trucks have got Ghana talking on social media, thanks in part to an advertising campaign using local movie and music stars.

The sticker price of the vehicles run from \$18,000 to \$35,000 -- out of range for most people in Ghana. But a cheaper saloon car is expected to go on sale next year. The locally made vehicles are entering a tough market, going up against established brands in a country that sees about 12,000 new and 100,000 second-hand cars imported every year.

But the inventor's son, who is chief executive of the Kantanka Group, is confident the demand is there and the firm can hold its own in the competition.

"Already we have certain companies in Ghana who have come to make certain outrageous orders for huge numbers that we have to meet. So, we are working," he said, without giving any specifics.

Ghana's President John Dramani Mahama has been pushing his compatriots to buy locally to boost a stuttering economy hit by inflation, a depreciating currency and high public sector debt.

In 2014, he showed off a pair of Ghana-made shoes during his annual State of the Nation address and criticised the lack of appreciation of locally made goods and over-reliance on imports.

He noted that some \$1.5 billion was spent in foreign currency on items such as rice, sugar, cooking oil, tomatoes and fish -- all money "which could have gone into the pockets of Ghanaian entrepreneurs", he said.

"Any import items we buy as Ghanaians constitutes an export of jobs in this country, especially in respect of the items for which we have comparative advantage to produce," he said at the time.

For Kantanka some key components such as glass, tyres and brake callipers are imported, AFP was told on a visit to the company's technology research centre west of Accra last year. But local sourcing is a key component of Kantanka's vehicles, whose radiator grilles feature Ghana's five-pointed star emblem.

Wood from Ghanaian forests is used to make dashboards while the cream-coloured leather seats in the black SUV were made in the country's second biggest commercial city, Kumasi.

Gold trades at discount in India as jewellers delay purchases

REUTERS, Mumbai

GOLD prices in India swung to a discount for the first time in a month on Monday as jewellers and dealers in the world's second biggest consumer postponed purchases ahead of an expected hike in U.S. interest rates later this week.

Jewellers and dealers are expecting a correction in prices and will start restocking after the Federal Reserve policy meeting on Dec. 15-16, industry officials said. The U.S. central bank is widely expected to raise interest rates for the first time in nearly a decade.

Higher rates could dent demand for non-interest-paying bullion, while boosting the dollar. Gold has already slid nearly 10 percent for the year, its third straight annual decline, in anticipation of a rate hike.

Dealers were offering a discount of up to \$1 an ounce to the global



A saleswoman arranges a gold necklace inside a jewellery shop in India.

spot benchmark for the first time since Nov 9. Last week, traders were quoting a premium of up to \$1.

"People have funds in banks. They need gold, but they want to see how market reacts to the Fed's meet-

ing," said Harshad Ajmera, proprietor of JJ Gold House, a wholesaler in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata.

"Right now even if I offer discount, buyers are not ready to make purchases," Ajmera said.

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Shell says to cut 2,800 jobs following BG takeover

AFP, London

Royal Dutch Shell on Monday said it planned to cut 2,800 jobs following its mega takeover of smaller rival BG Group.

"Shell currently expects an overall potential reduction of approximately 2,800 roles globally across the combined group, or approximately three percent of the total combined group workforce," Shell said in a statement.

Shell said the cuts were in addition to previously announced plans to reduce its own headcount and contractor positions by 7,500 worldwide.

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