

The art of giving

The PHP Family chairman says the meaning of his life is rooted in the spirit of giving back to society

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Chittagong

A passion for helping others developed early in his life. Although a job holder initially, he later began his business and successfully turned it into a giant company. With time, his giving back to society grew more and more. There was no stopping to Sufi Mohammed Mizanur Rahman's passion for social responsibility.

"In fact, the spirit of living is the spirit of giving. It is the purpose of human life," said Rahman, chairman of PHP Family, one of the country's largest conglomerates, sharing his beliefs in an interview with The Daily Star.

His efforts to contribute to social welfare earned PHP recognition at the sixth Standard Chartered-Financial Express Corporate Social Responsibility Awards this year.

The group has been contributing to different sectors, including education and health sectors, by setting up schools, colleges, madrasas, a university and hospitals.

Its total CSR expenditure stood at Tk 15 crore in 2015.

Rahman is a businessman with intense moral sense and his deep religious convictions inspire him to dedicate his wealth to the welfare of society and mankind.

"The more you give, the more you will be benefitted. You will get manifold in return," said Rahman.

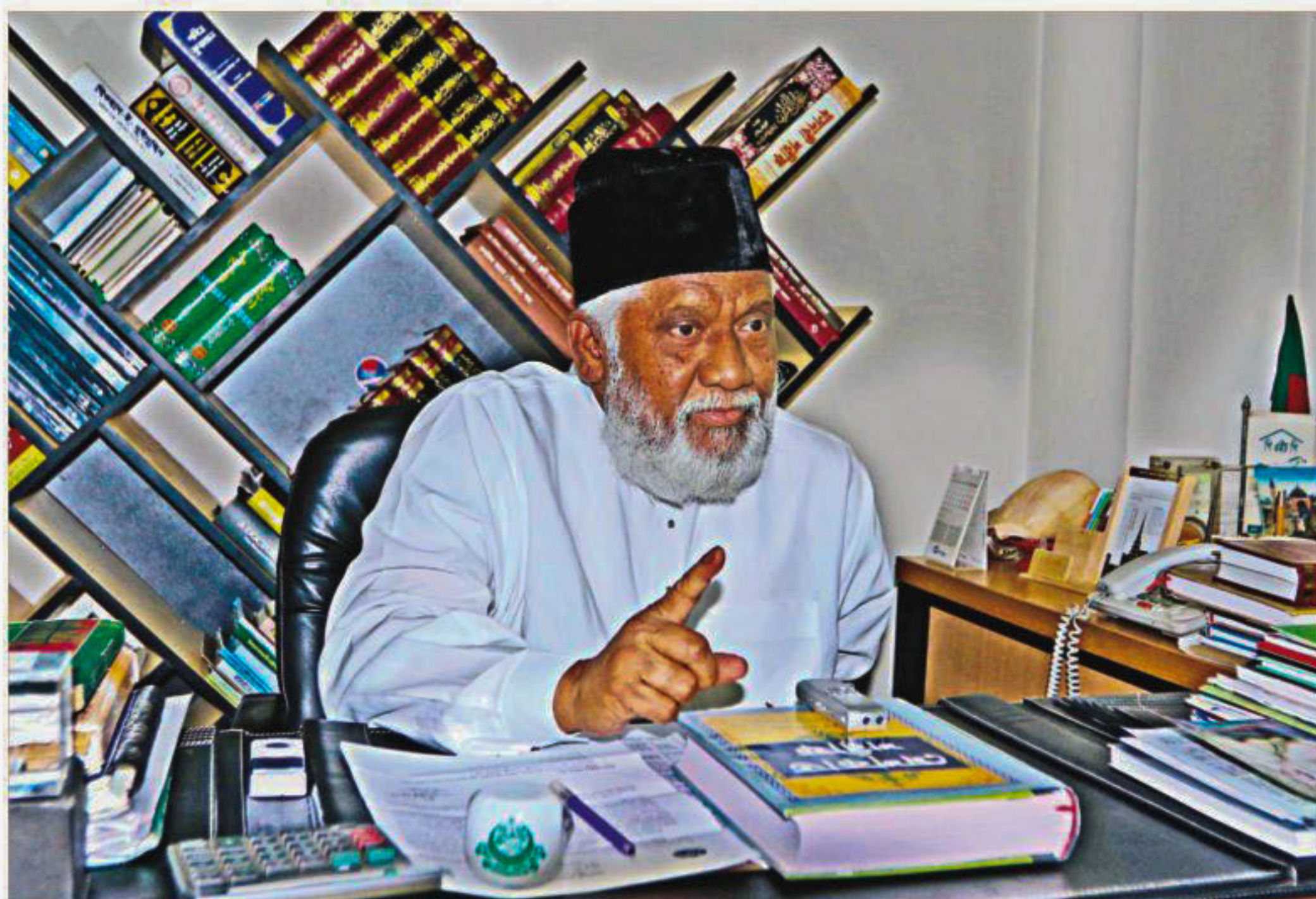
"But we have to start by first giving what we have. It should not be that you ask the Almighty to give you Tk 10 crore and then you will donate Tk 5 crore out of it."

Referring to the teachings of Mother Teresa, Rahman said: "Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway."

"But if we have nothing to give, we should give distressed people a big smile."

For Rahman, the practice of giving, gratitude for abundance, good association and hard work were the secrets of his success.

Born to a pious Muslim family in Kanchan in Ruppangj of Narayanangj in 1943, Rahman started



Sufi Mohammed Mizanur Rahman

his career with a private company with a monthly salary of Tk 100, after passing his intermediate exams. He later joined Sonali Bank in Chittagong in 1965 with a salary of Tk 163.

He inherited the practice of giving from his father, who always helped the distressed people in the village, he said.

During his first job, he used to donate Tk 5 to Tk 15 every month to relatives after sending half of his salary to his father, he said.

After the country's independence, he quit his job and started a business importing commodities in bulk with a capital of Tk 1,483.

In the span of his long and lustrous journey, Rahman established 34 successful businesses in different sectors, including ship-breaking and recycling, flat and long steel, float glass, aluminium, power, textile, asphalt, petro refinery, shipping, stocks and securities, insurance, property management, news media, latex and rub-

ber, agro, cold storage, fisheries, education and healthcare.

PHP Family's annual turnover is about Tk 4,000 crore.

As part of its CSR activities, PHP has established a 30-bed hospital 'Mount Hospital' to provide free medical treatment to its employees and another modern hospital in Ruppangj.

In 2015, it donated Tk 3.6 crore to the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit of Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

The group's total contribution to construction and development of different schools and madrasas was Tk 37 crore in the last two years. It also provides Tk 18 lakh a year in scholarships to students of Asian University for Women in Chittagong.

Rahman wants to ensure habitation and transportation facilities for each of the employees of his group in his lifetime.

Germany slows pace of green energy transition

AFP, Berlin

GERMANY Wednesday moved to slow the rapid growth of subsidised renewable energy to cap rising costs, drawing fire from environmentalists who charged it is betraying its ambitious climate goals.

To boost competition in the clean-energy sector, wind and solar projects will from next year be put out to tender, rather than automatically launched with generous state subsidies and guaranteed returns.

Under its energy transition plan, Europe's top economy is phasing out nuclear power by 2022 and reducing climate-harming carbon fuels while boosting clean energy sources to meet 80 percent of power needs by 2050.

State support has helped raise the share of wind, solar, biogas and other renewables to about one third of electricity production last year.

But those subsidies are financed by households and many companies as they are passed on as surcharges on power bills.

Large power companies including EON, REW and Vattenfall have meanwhile suffered as the price of wholesale electricity has plummeted amid the surge in green energy output, making many conventional power plants unprofitable.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's government hailed its reforms as a "paradigm shift" to make the energy transition more economically viable, but environmentalists charged it torpedoed Germany's ambitious clean energy and climate goals.

The opposition Greens party -- historically the driving force on Germany's nuclear exit and clean energy revolution -- sharply criticised the reforms.

"By putting the brakes on renewable energy, the government is imperilling a central future project of our country," said its chairwoman Simone Peter.

OECD lead indicator flags first signs of growth stabilisation

REUTERS

SIGNS are emerging that a downturn in the United States and China, the world's two biggest economies, may have bottomed out, the OECD's monthly leading indicator showed on Wednesday.

The Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development said its leading indicator (CLI) for the United States improved to 98.95 in April from 98.93 in March, the first increase in the reading since July 2014.

The indicator, meant to flag early signals of turning points in economic activity, remained below the long-term average of 100, however.

The index for China rose to 98.41 in April from 98.38 in March, its second

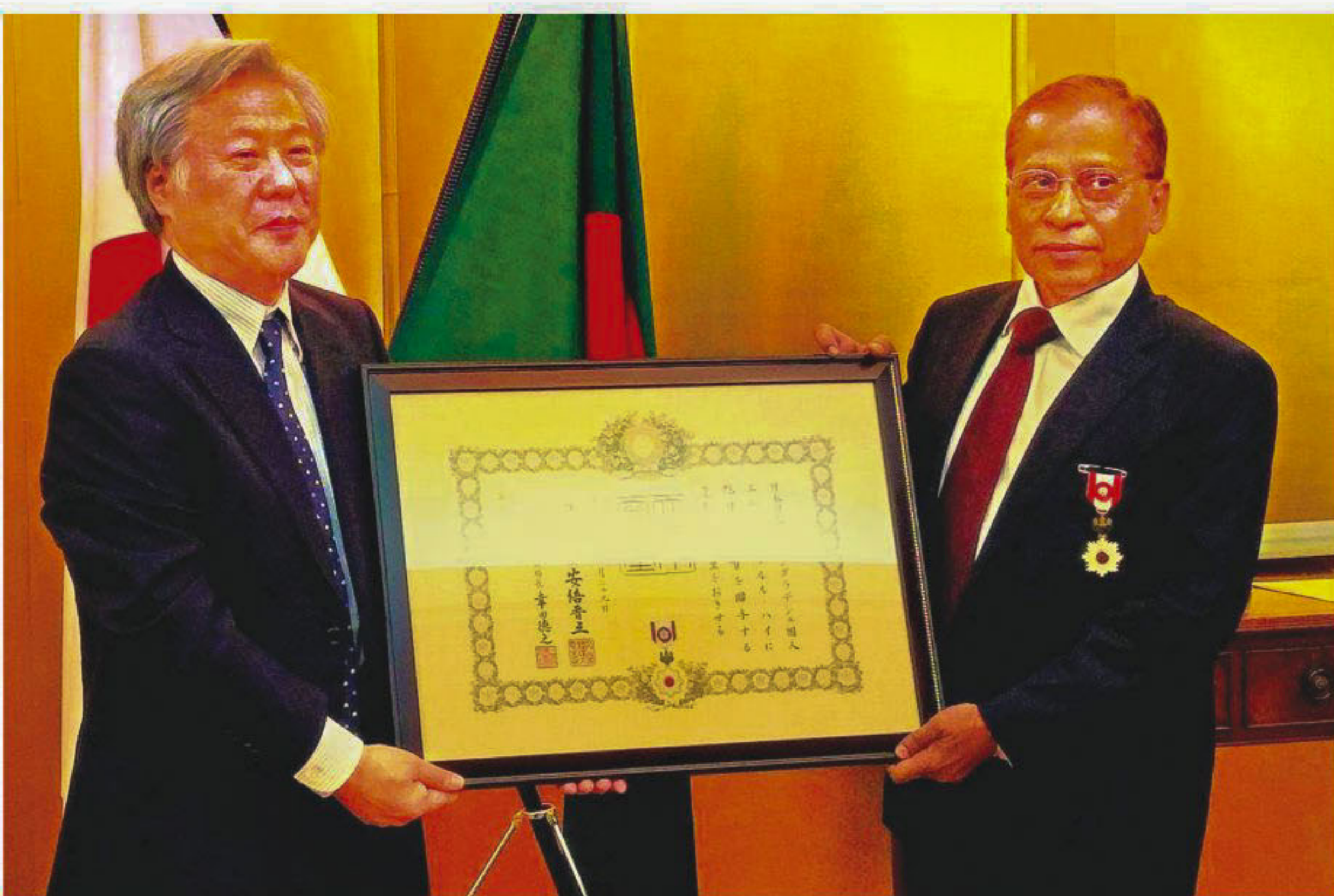
consecutive monthly increase. The reading fell below the 100 mark in October 2014.

The OECD said its indicators showed stable growth momentum in the euro zone as a whole, including Germany and France, while the reading for Britain pointed to easing growth.

The index for the euro zone fell to 100.38 in April from 100.42 in March but has been above its long-term average of 100 since October 2013.

The OECD was also positive on the outlook for Brazil and Russia, which have suffered from a sharp downturn driven by a collapse in commodities prices.

"Amongst major emerging economies, CLIs for Brazil and Russia confirm the signs of positive change in growth momentum flagged in last month's assessment," the OECD said.



Jalalul Hai, right, a former director of Board of Investment, receives Order of the Rising Sun, a national decoration awarded by the Japanese government, from Masato Watanabe, ambassador of Japan, at a ceremony on June 2. Hai was recognised for its contribution to strengthening economic relations between Japan and Bangladesh.

World Bank slashes global growth forecast to 2.4pc

AFP, Washington

A worried World Bank slashed its growth forecast for the global economy Tuesday, saying advanced economies are rebounding more slowly than expected and low commodity prices continue to hurt other countries.

The Bank said that the global economy should grow at just 2.4 percent this year, the same lethargic pace of 2015 and much slower than the 2.9 percent it predicted in January.

It said that the slow growth in advanced economies is holding back developed countries, with world trade and investment both depressed, and called for

Prospects for a pickup "remain muted," the Bank said, in a report especially downbeat for countries dependent on commodity exports

like oil.

It said risks to growth have risen since the beginning of the year, particularly the high level of borrowing by companies in developing countries, which has left them vulnerable to credit crises as growth stagnates.

It also includes the rise in doubts that the aggressive monetary easing in developed countries, with negative interest rates in several, is doing the intended job of firing up economic activity.

"Economic growth remains the most important driver of poverty reduction, and that's why we're very concerned that growth is slowing sharply in commodity-exporting developing countries due to depressed commodity prices," said World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim.

"This sluggish growth underscores why it's critically important for coun-

tries to pursue policies that will boost economic growth and improve the lives of those living in extreme poverty."

The report comes as the main developed country drivers of global growth -- Japan, Europe and the United States -- struggle for traction.

A sharp deceleration of the US economy since the beginning of the year is not helping carry the rest of the world, and the World Bank has cut its expectations for the world's largest economy by 0.8 percentage point to 1.9 percent in 2016.

The Euro area will achieve only 1.6 percent growth, and Japan, fighting off deflationary pressures, will manage just 0.5 percent.

In all three, the bank said, investment remains soft amid doubts about the efficacy of policies, particularly those of central banks holding interest rates at extraordinarily low levels.

Rosneft profits tumble by 80pc

AFP, Moscow

Russian oil giant Rosneft said Wednesday that low oil prices in the first quarter of the year had haemorrhaged its profits, with tumbled by 80 percent.

The company reported a first-quarter net profit of \$200 million, after having recorded profits of \$1 billion during the same period last year.

Rosneft's total revenue suffered a 32.6 percent drop, falling to \$14.5 billion, slightly exceeding the expectations of analysts quoted by Russia's Interfax news agency.

The company said its earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA), a measure of underlying profitability, also fell by 26 percent to \$3.7 billion.

Oil prices hit in January a low of nearly \$25, a level not seen since 2003 and sending shockwaves through the global oil industry, which has been forced into massive layoffs and numerous bankruptcies.

While prices have recovered to rise above \$50 this week, they are still far below the \$100-plus level of just over two years ago, when a global supply glut sent prices on a downward slide.

Rosneft head Igor Sechin said in a statement that the company was focusing on "business efficiency" by reducing extraction costs amid rampant inflation and "negative market conditions."

Sechin added that the company had nevertheless maintained a "stable level of operating cash flow" to pay for all planned investments and fulfil its financial obligations.

Amazon's Jeff Bezos bets on India with \$3b investment

AFP, New Delhi

AMAZON chief executive Jeff Bezos has pledged to invest \$3 billion in India, in a big bet on the growth of online shopping in the fast-growing South Asian economy.

Speaking in Washington DC as India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits the United States, Bezos told a gathering of business leaders that he saw "huge potential" in India.

The investment, announced Tuesday, comes on top of \$2 billion Amazon invested in India in 2014, and will boost Modi's campaign to attract foreign cash to create much-needed jobs.

"We have already created some 45,000 jobs in India and continue to see huge potential in the Indian economy," Bezos said at the US-India Business Council meeting, according to a statement from the group. "Our Amazon.in team is surpassing even our most ambitious planned milestones," he said.

Amazon has made steady inroads in India since entering the cut-throat, rapidly growing e-commerce market in 2013.

But it faces stiff competition from local rivals Snapdeal and Flipkart, which have attracted billions of dollars in overseas investment.

E-retailers in India, including Amazon, typically adopt a "marketplace" structure, acting as technological platforms that connect buyers and sellers rather than stocking their own products.

The government in March set new rules for foreign investment in online marketplaces, including allowing up to 100 percent foreign ownership.

India's e-commerce market was worth about \$23 billion in 2015, according to business body Assocham.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, left, presents the Global Leadership Award to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos at the US-India Business Council's 41st annual leadership summit in Washington on Tuesday.