

# Bangladesh can be an alternative BPO hub

## ServicEngineBPO chairman talks about their future plans

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

**B**ANGLADESH can be an alternative destination for business process outsourcing (BPO) with its young and dedicated IT talents, said ASM Mohiuddin Monem, chairman of ServicEngineBPO.

The Dhaka-based BPO company has already proved that it is possible to compete with other regional countries such as India and the Philippines that are the pioneer in the industry.

ServicEngineBPO, an entity of conglomerate Abdul Monem Ltd, has been recognised as one of the top 100 global outsourcing companies by the International Association of Outsourcing Professionals or IAOP for the third consecutive year.

It is the only Bangladeshi firm that has been securing a place on the list of "The Global Outsourcing 100" as a "Rising Star" since 2014 for its excellence in the IT industry.

Rapid growth, corporate social responsibility activities and excellent client referrals are the key reasons behind the emergence of the company.

"By now, it is proven that we can perform at global standards and compete with countries like India and the Philippines," said Monem.

Bangladesh can definitely reach the \$5 billion export target of the ICT ministry by 2021, he said, while sharing his company's achievement as well as his experience in an interview with The Daily Star recently.



ASM Mohiuddin Monem

"IT outsourcing can work as a major catalyst to achieve the export target and help materialise the government's dream of digital Bangladesh by 2021," he said.

But to make the sector more competitive the prerequisites are proper marketing support for branding Bangladesh as an alternative BPO hub and export incentives from the government, he said.

The company started its journey with only six people in 2006 and now has a team of more than 500 young talents working 24/7. Their service mantra is "better people, better service and better results".

One of the unique features of ServicEngineBPO is that around one third of its staff members are young, educated

and empowered females.

ServicEngineBPO is also actively engaged in CSR activities in the areas of education, nutrition, wellbeing and environment that has given the company a competitive edge in securing a place on the Global Outsourcing 100 or GO100 for three consecutive years.

"This is not only an achievement for ServicEngineBPO but also for all the IT professionals and Bangladeshis," said Monem.

The GO100 is an annual listing of the world's best outsourcing service providers compiled and announced by the IAOP, which released the latest version in June this year.

The IAOP prepares the list by evaluating each company in five areas: size and growth, customer references, awards and certifications, programmes for innovation and CSR.

"We are proud that the IAOP has recognised us as one of the top 100 outsourcing companies in the world. We will continue to flourish in IT and IT-enabled services and help establish Digital Bangladesh through employment generation, export diversification, technological innovation and digitisation," he said.

"Employees are the hero of our story and we believe that better service is better business," said Monem, also the deputy managing director of Abdul Monem Ltd. ServicEngineBPO specialises in back office processing, digital advertising operations, web and software development, data aggregation and analysis, quality assurance and testing and call quality assurance for top US and global companies.

The continuous growth momentum of the industry, global and local recognition and demographic dividend of young talents in Bangladesh have encouraged ServicEngineBPO so much that the company plans to double its workforce and open multiple centres in near future.

Currently it is providing business solutions to more than 30 global clients. It has offices in Bangladesh and the USA. Its future plan is to open more offices in Bangladesh and internationally to attract more global firms. It also expects new work contracts and plans to employ more and more IT talents from Bangladesh.

# GE to merge oil and gas business with Baker Hughes

REUTERS

General Electric Co, banking on a recovery in oil prices, said on Monday it would merge its oil and gas business with No. 3 oilfield services provider Baker Hughes Inc (BHI.N).

GE will own 62.5 percent of the new company, which will have combined revenue of \$32 billion, while Baker Hughes shareholders will own 37.5 percent.

Shareholders of Baker Hughes, which had a market value of about \$26 billion as of Friday, will get a special one-time cash dividend of \$17.50 per share after the deal closes.

The deal comes after Baker Hughes's planned merger with bigger rival Halliburton Co fell through in May due to opposition from regulators. That deal was valued at \$34.6 billion when it was announced in November 2014.

GE and Baker Hughes said last week they were in talks over potential partnerships but did not disclose details.

The companies said on Monday the deal was expected to add 4 cents to GE's earnings per share by 2018 and 8 cents by 2020.

GE scaled back expectations for its full-year revenue and profit earlier in October as low oil prices hurt sales of the company's oil and gas infrastructure equipment.

The Wall Street Journal first reported on Thursday that GE and Baker Hughes were in talks.

Baker Hughes shares were up 5.7 percent at \$62.50 in premarket trading on Monday. GE's shares were up 0.9 percent at \$29.48 in light trading.

# Gold little changed; market eyes US Fed meeting



A woman tries a gold earring at a jewellery showroom in Mumbai, India.

REUTERS

**G**OLD prices held steady on Monday amid a firm dollar, with markets anxiously awaiting the upcoming Federal Reserve meeting for insight on the timing of a potential U.S. interest rate hike.

Several of the world's top central banks' meetings are due this week, including the Federal Open Market Committee meeting, which will be closely monitored for directions on a much anticipated interest rate hike.

"Basically investors are staying on the sidelines before all these key announcements and gold prices should naturally turn higher," said OCBC Bank analyst Barnabas Gan.

Gold still remains to be a safe haven asset owing to a sense of uncertainty and risk aversion in the markets right now, he said.

Spot gold was unchanged at \$1,276.16 an ounce by 0650 GMT, while US gold

futures were little changed at \$1,277.10. The dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of major currencies, held steady at 98.467.

Gold rose more than 1 percent at one point on Friday after the FBI revealed it reopened an investigation of U.S. Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's use of a private email system, sparking fresh tumult in markets, just days before the Nov. 8 presidential vote.

Federal investigators have secured a warrant to examine newly discovered emails related to Hillary Clinton's private server, a source familiar with the matter said on Sunday.

"Investment demand for gold should pick up towards the US presidential elections given the higher suspense ongoing in the issue," Gan added.

Speculators raised their net long positions in COMEX gold for the first time in four weeks in the week to Oct. 25, and cut it slightly in silver, US Commodity Futures Trading Commission data showed on Friday.

# New York's bitcoin hub dreams fade with licensing backlog

REUTERS

**N**EW York's financial regulator had sights set on becoming a global hub for innovations like bitcoin when it adopted trailblazing virtual currency rules last year. But the state lost that momentum when the agency's chief left, putting a licensing process in limbo and allowing rivals to catch up.

Since June 2015, New York has required virtual currency firms doing business there to get a "BitLicense" to hold customer funds and exchange virtual coins for dollars and other regular currencies.

Benjamin Lawsky headed the Department of Financial Services (DFS) when it developed those rules, acting as an early advocate of virtual currencies when other regulators were still skeptical.

Although it remains unclear whether such currencies will ever gain mainstream acceptance, they are now part of a broader, rapidly-growing industry that blends finance and technology, and which leading financial centers are keen to attract.

For companies, a stamp of approval from a tough regulator offered a chance to win over customers who remained dubious about the product. For New York, it was an opportunity to get ahead of rivals around the world that were also trying to woo "fintech" business.

Yet just after the regulations came into force, Lawsky left the agency. Some senior staffers with BitLicense expertise soon followed him out the door.

Since then, DFS has issued just two BitLicenses. Another 15 appli-

cations are still pending, with four others withdrawn and four denied, a spokesman said. Two more virtual currency companies have received trust charters, which treat them more like traditional banks.

"By putting the regulations together and having key staff members leaving almost thereafter, they really put the industry behind the eight-ball in terms of competing with traditional service providers," said Patrick Murck, a lawyer and fellow at Harvard University's Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society.

Most companies that were operating in New York when the regulations took effect can still do business there while waiting for a license. However, start-ups may face trouble raising money or expanding their business, Murck said.

The virtual-currency industry is minuscule compared to traditional finance, but it has grown rapidly since bitcoin's launch in 2009.

There are now other virtual currencies, and broader uses for underlying technologies that create and distribute them.

The bitcoin market is now worth about \$10.7 billion, compared to less than \$1 billion just three years ago, according to the information site CoinDesk.

LIGHT VS TOUGH

As the market has grown, financial centers around the world have competed aggressively to attract new business. While some have relied on light-touch regulation, the appeal of New York's BitLicense was that it offered a clear legal framework.

However, the slow licensing process and strict requirements are driving some companies away.



A customer feeds cash currency into a bitcoin ATM located in New York's West Village, US.

REUTERS/FILE

An application costs \$5,000 to file, and once completed, can run 500 pages - including everything from compliance manuals to executives' fingerprints, lawyers said. Regulators then drill deeper, asking for details of business models, organizational charts or ownership information.

BitLicense forces companies to "extract personal, private information" from users, creating a target for hackers, Erik Voorhees, chief executive of Switzerland-based virtual currency firm ShapeShift.io, said in an interview, explaining the company's decision not to do business in New York.

GoCoin CEO Steve Beauregard told Reuters securing a New York license was not worth the effort: "It's too overreaching and burdensome, especially for the smaller companies," he said.

Marco Santori, who heads the

digital currency practice of law firm Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP, said at least 15 firms were shunning New York. He has advised clients to focus on states like California, where, he believes, regulators are unlikely to take aim at digital currency companies any time soon. State lawmakers there recently withdrew a second proposal to regulate digital currency companies.

Other states are developing rules and awarding licenses at a faster clip.

Washington State, for example, has issued seven licenses to virtual currency companies since 2013 under its longstanding law for money transfer businesses. North Carolina has licensed two. A uniform virtual currency law that any state can opt into is also in the works, and there has been talk of a possible federal charter.

# ANZ Bank offloads Asian assets to Singapore's DBS

AFP, Sydney

**A**NZ Bank Monday announced the sale of its retail and wealth management arms in five Asian countries to Singapore's DBS as it repositions for the future.

The businesses affected are in Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and Indonesia with the transaction, subject to regulatory approvals, expected to be finalised by early 2018.

ANZ did not list the value of the assets but said the bank would take a Aus\$265 million (\$200 million USD) net loss due to writedowns and various other costs.

Chief executive Shayne Elliott said the company was working to become simpler and better capitalised, allowing it to focus on



ANZ Bank's CEO Shayne Elliott poses after an interview in Hong Kong, China yesterday.

REUTERS

corporate and institutional clients in Asia.

"Asia remains core to ANZ's strategy," he said.

"By focussing our resources in Asia -- whether that is capital, technology or people -- on institutional banking, we can continue to build a world-class, capital efficient business by strengthening our network and the support we provide to our key institutional clients.

"In retail and wealth, although we have grown a profitable business in Asia, without greater scale ANZ's competitive position is not as compelling."

The announcement came ahead of ANZ's annual profit result on Thursday, with all Australia's big banks battling higher funding costs, lower interest margins and rising bad-debt charges.



TNT has selected Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd. (BANEX) as a new service provider in Bangladesh from November 01, 2016, for its international range of services to and from more than 200 countries worldwide. BANEX is a privately owned company founded in 1991 and is one of the leading express service providers in Bangladesh.

Customers in Bangladesh can now call BANEX at +88-09604891189, +88-09638666666 and +88-02-55041816 or email [contacttnt@bdexpress.com](mailto:contacttnt@bdexpress.com) or [salestnt@bdexpress.com](mailto:salestnt@bdexpress.com) for their international shipping requirements. Customers can also visit [www.tnt.com/express/en\\_bd.html](http://www.tnt.com/express/en_bd.html) for more information.