

Grameen Intel takes up project to improve maternal health

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

GRAMEEN Intel has developed a state-of-the-art smart bangle, especially designed for pregnant women, that can play a revolutionary role in improving maternal health, said a top official of the company.

This is an innovative and absolutely new concept not only in Bangladesh but also in the rest of the world, Kazi I Huque, chief executive of Grameen Intel Social Business Ltd, told The Daily Star in an interview recently.

Grameen Intel soon plans to go for large-scale marketing of the bangle that has been named Coel; it will be available at a price of Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,200, said Huque, who is also the finance director for Intel Corporation.

silicon in it."

Coel is a water resistant bangle made of high quality durable plastic. The device lasts for 10 months, the entire pregnancy period, without charging and is also programmed to deliver about 80 pregnancy related wellness messages.

The messages have been taken from an UN Foundation initiative called MAMA-Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action, which are used by 7.5 million women through 160 institutions in 54 countries. Grameen Intel has translated the short messages on -- proper diet, vaccination, when to see a doctor, and preparations for delivery -- into Bangla and installed in the bangle.

The device does not require internet connectivity to function. It is crucial that a pregnant woman gets the right information at the right time, making



Kazi I Huque

this device and found positive feedback, with some recommendations. Currently, they have only one size, which fit around 60 percent of all women.

"This is too big or too small for some women, so we need to work on it."

The country's leading social business company plans to market Coel directly and in some cases, they will join hands with a few non-governmental organisations that are working on health issues.

A graduate from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Huque has 16 years of experience with Intel in their finance division and has led many worldwide investment projects. Prior to Intel, he worked as a technology consultant for EDS, now a division of HP.

Grameen Intel is also working on e-agro solutions and some other software that helps

increase crop productivity.

The company has developed different software for use in other countries as well. From Bangladesh, they run business in two other countries -- India and Cambodia.

In India the company has a partner and they joined hands with IFAD, a UN organisation in Cambodia.

"We are currently running a project in India that is similar to the one in Bangladesh. We are using new technologies there and trying to find solutions to reduce their cost of agro production and help increase productivity."

The company is developing a portable digital soil testing kit that will automatically test soil conditions and recommend necessary fertilisers.

"On average, this kit will help increase production by around 30 percent, though it also depends on weather and rain-

fall," Huque said.

In 2008, Craig Barrett, then chairman of Intel Corporation, and Nobel Peace laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus announced to create a social business along with Intel and Grameen. They signed a memorandum of understanding and started the company next year.

On Bangladesh's prospects in the digitisation process and investment in high-tech industries, Huque said it needs to establish huge infrastructure and connectivity like roads, power generation, and internet accessibility.

At the same time, it needs to increase government investment in developing quality manpower.

"If we can develop infrastructure properly and ensure high quality human resources, investment will not be an issue." And only then, global giants will show their interest in investing here in Bangladesh, he added.

RBI to lift all cash withdrawal limits from March 13

REUTERS

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it would remove the cash withdrawal limit from automated teller machines (ATMs) and savings accounts from March 13.

Cash withdrawal limit from savings bank accounts will be relaxed to 50,000 rupees (\$743.27) a week between Feb. 28 and March 13, after which it will be removed, RBI Deputy Governor R. Gandhi said after the monetary policy meeting on Wednesday.

The RBI had imposed these limits in November after the government announced a ban on old high-value currency notes, and began to replace them with new notes.

Fire at Samsung SDI China plant caused by faulty batteries

REUTERS, Hong Kong/Seoul

A minor fire that broke out at a Samsung SDI Co Ltd factory in China on Wednesday was caused by waste products including faulty batteries, the Korean company and local emergency services said.

The fire broke out at the Samsung Electronics Co Ltd affiliate's factory in the northern Chinese city of Tianjin earlier on Wednesday and has been extinguished, a Samsung spokesman said, adding that there were no casualties or significant impact to the plant's operations.

The fire broke out not on the production line itself but in a part of the facility used for waste, including faulty batteries, said Samsung SDI spokesman Shin Yong-doo. He added that most of the factory was running as normal.

The local fire department, however, said on its microblog that the fire was caused by batteries inside the facility.

"The material that caught fire was lithium batteries inside the production workshops and some half-finished products", the Wuqing branch of the Tianjin Fire Department said in a post on its verified Sina Weibo account. It added it had sent out 110 firefighters and 19 trucks to put out the fire.

SDI is set to start supplying batteries for Samsung's upcoming flagship smartphone Galaxy S8 in the first quarter of this year.

The S8 replaces the Galaxy Note 7 mode, which suffered a global recall last year due to battery defects. Samsung said last month that SDI and China's Amperex Technology Ltd, the two battery suppliers for the Note 7, were to blame for the product failure that cost it \$5.3 billion in operating profit.

The Tianjin plant is one of five production centers by SDI in China and a major one for small batteries used in phones.



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The smart bangle, especially designed for pregnant women, can play an important role in improving maternal health.

A unique feature of the bangle is that it can detect and alert the presence and level of indoor air pollution, particularly carbon monoxide, during daily activities like cooking that often involves burning wood, charcoal or animal dung, said Huque.

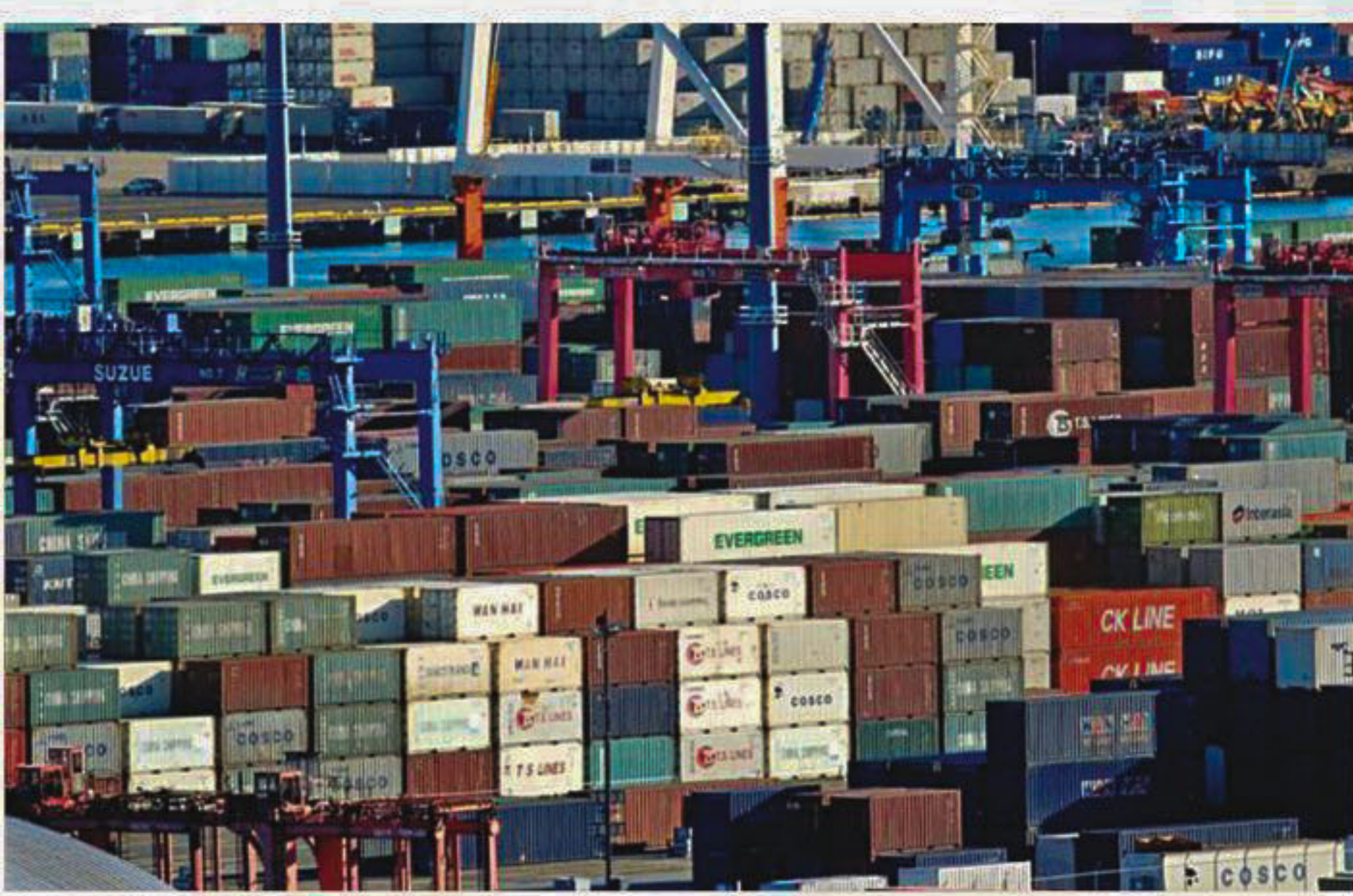
"We developed and designed the bangle in Dhaka, and took help from Intel to install the

Coel the right device to meet such advisory needs.

This device can be set up according to the pregnancy dates and it will provide the pregnancy related messages accordingly -- around two messages each week -- to ensure the good health and wellness of the mother and the child.

Huque said they have piloted

Japan logs biggest current account surplus since 2007



REUTERS/FILE

Containers are seen at an industrial port in Yokohama.

REUTERS, Tokyo

JAPAN attained its second-biggest current account surplus on record in 2016, Ministry of Finance data showed on Wednesday, just days before the U.S. and Japanese leaders meet for talks with trade surpluses and currency valuations expected to be high on the agenda.

The 20.6 trillion yen (\$183.63 billion) surplus reflected the trade balance swinging into surplus on cheaper oil, rising foreign tourists arrivals creating a record travel surplus, and hefty foreign income from overseas investments.

Trade surpluses and currency valuations are in focus as U.S. President Donald Trump pursues an "America First" campaign in which he has accused big exporters such as China, Germany and Japan of deliberately weakening their currencies to gain a competitive advantage.

For the whole of 2016, Japan posted a trade surplus of 6.8 trillion yen (\$59.95 billion) with the United States, down 4.6 percent from 2015, with U.S.-bound car shipments rising for a second straight year, the Ministry of Finance said.

Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe are scheduled to meet for talks later this week. Trump said he and Abe would play a round of golf, with Abe as his partner in the game, rather than a competitor.

Wednesday's data showed the vast bulk of Japan's current account surplus was generated by Japanese direct and portfolio investment abroad, accounting for 18.1 trillion yen of the 20.6 trillion current account surplus for 2016.

The trade surplus was 5.6 trillion yen in 2016, from the 630 billion yen deficit seen in 2015, earned in part as declining oil prices curbed import costs.

The travel balance logged a record 1.3 trillion yen surplus last year as a record number of foreign tourist visits took Japan's services deficit to the smallest on record.

Japan's current account surplus was 1.11 trillion yen in December, a seventh straight month of annual increases, the ministry data showed.

That compared with economists' median forecast for a surplus of 1.29 trillion yen seen in a Reuters poll.

Out of pocket, Italians fall out of love with the euro

REUTERS, Rome

WHEN the Italian central bank's deputy governor joined a radio phone-in show last week, many callers asked why Italy didn't ditch the euro and return to its old lira currency.

A few years ago such a scenario, that Salvatore Rossi said would lead to "catastrophe and disaster", would not have been up for public discussion.

Now, with the possibility of an election by June, politicians of all stripes are tapping into growing hostility towards the euro. Many Italians hold the single currency responsible for economic decline since its launch in 1999.

"We lived much better before the euro," says Luca Fioravanti, a 32-year-old real estate surveyor from Rome. "Prices have gone up but our salaries have stayed the same, we need to get out and go back to our own sovereign currency."

The central bank is concerned about the rise in anti-euro sentiment, and a Bank of Italy source told Reuters Rossi's appearance is part of a plan to reach out to ordinary Italians.

Few Italians want to leave the European Union, as Britain chose to do in its referendum last year. Italy was a founding EU member in 1957 and Italians think it has helped maintain peace and stability in Europe.

And the ruling Democratic Party (PD) is pro-euro and wants more European integration though it complains that the fiscal rules governing the euro are too rigid. But the three other largest parties are hostile, in various degrees, to Italy's membership of the single currency in its current form.

The PD is due to govern until early 2018, unless elections are called sooner. The PD's prospects



REUTERS/FILE

A bank clerk counts lira banknotes before they are due to be destroyed in Banca d'Italia in Palermo, Italy.

of victory have waned since its leader Matteo Renzi resigned as premier in December after losing a referendum on constitutional reform, and polls suggest that under the current electoral system no party or coalition is likely to win a majority.

Italians used to be among the euro's biggest supporters but a Eurobarometer survey published in December by the European Commission showed only 41 percent said the euro was "a good thing", while 47 percent called it "a bad thing."

In the Eurobarometer published in April 2002, a few months after the introduction of euro notes and coins, Italy was the second most pro-euro nation after Luxembourg, with 79 percent expressing a positive opinion.

Italy is the only country in the euro zone where per capita output has actually fallen since it joined the euro, according to Eurostat

data. Its economy is still 7 percent smaller than it was before the 2008 financial crisis, and youth unemployment stands at 40 percent.

The right-wing Northern League, the third biggest party, is the most critical of the euro. Party leader Matteo Salvini calls it "one of the biggest economic and social crimes ever committed against humanity."

The party has promised to pull Italy out of the euro if elected but it only has about 13 percent of voter support.

The anti-system 5-Star Movement may pose a bigger threat to Italy's membership of the currency club. Polling roughly level with the PD at about 30 percent, 5-Star says it will hold a referendum on euro membership.

But Italy's constitution forbids referendums on matters that are governed by international treaties such as euro zone membership. 5-Star says it could organize a non-

binding "consultative" ballot to gauge public opinion.

A post last week on its official mouthpiece, the blog of founder Beppe Grillo, was headlined "A referendum on the euro before it's too late".

"I would vote to leave the euro as it stands," lower house deputy Luigi Di Maio, who is widely expected to be 5-Star's candidate for prime minister at the election, told Reuters.

"We should return to a sovereign currency or, if there is an agreement with the other countries, form a new common currency with new rules."

Italy's other significant party, Silvio Berlusconi's center Forza Italia, is not pushing for outright euro exit, but he has argued that Germany should leave instead, or that Italy should use the euro and the lira at the same time, an idea that many economists say is unworkable.