

Women's role in tech sector rising fast

Says Microsoft Bangladesh chief

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

WOMEN'S enrollment in technology and other sectors is increasing fast in Bangladesh, said Sonia Bashir Kabir, managing director of Microsoft Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, women's main challenge is to stand on her own feet with confidence, she said.

"If someone fails to prepare her to face the challenges, none can give her confidence and she cannot blame the society only."

International Women's Day is the time to celebrate the achievements of women, she said.

Kabir studied and worked for 20 years in Silicon Valley, a home to many start-ups and global technology companies. It is located in the southern San Francisco bay area of



Sonia Bashir Kabir

California.

She returned to Bangladesh in 2006 and joined Aamra Technologies. Kabir later joined Dell Bangladesh as country manager and finally took charge of Microsoft Bangladesh as the

chief in 2014.

She also won the Microsoft Founders Award in 2016. The award is the highest honour a Microsoft employee can win, and 15 people among 100,000 employees won the award last year.

Kabir replaced Pubudu Basnayake, who had been serving the company since 2012.

"Sonia's leadership experience at Dell and her work with enterprise technology providers makes her a great fit for delivering Microsoft's 'mobile first, cloud first' vision in Bangladesh," César Cernuda, president of Microsoft Asia Pacific, said about Sonia Bashir Kabir.

"At the same time, her passion for making a difference through technology will be key in our commitment to raise the national competitiveness of the country."

It's time for women to show their capability

Says senior official of Bank Asia

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

WOMEN still prefer to keep themselves in their own boundary, but now is the time for women to show their capability to compete with men, said Humaira Azam, deputy managing director of Bank Asia.

"I did not face difficulties in reaching this position as I was a hard worker," said Humaira, suggesting women should work hard and develop their communication skills to be successful in their career.

"We should not treat ourselves as women only. We are just another player in the market. We will be judged by our capability, intelligence and responsibility," she said. "If I can perform equally and even better than men, then I can secure a higher post."

She said qualities such as hard



Humaira Azam

work, communication skills and confidence can help women reach a top position.

"We have a lot of opportunities, but women are not preparing themselves properly to enjoy those." Bank Asia always promotes

women employees. "We employed a significant number of female officers in corporate banking. We also encourage female employees to be in higher positions," she said, adding that women lead the bank's card division, trading division and many of its branches.

"We provide transport services to all female employees," she said.

"There is no wage inequality in our organisation rather I enjoy several benefits and advantages."

Prior to joining the bank, Humaira was managing director and chief executive officer of IPDC of Bangladesh.

She earned her master's degree in social science and started her career as a management trainee at ANZ Grindlays Bank. She also worked for HSBC and Standard Chartered in Dhaka in different significant capacities.

Swiss firms set goals to get more women into top roles

REUTERS, Zurich

SWISS firms from food and beverage giant Nestle to banking groups UBS and Credit Suisse pledged new goals on Tuesday to support and promote women.

While Switzerland has Europe's second-highest proportion of women in the workforce, it trails global standards on gender diversity in boardrooms and in management positions.

Consultancies EY, Deloitte and PwC and staffing agency Adecco all committed to increase female leadership in their Swiss businesses to between 20 and 35 percent by 2020.

This follows a recent survey by EY which found Swiss firms with at least 20 percent women in top management rated their financial situation as better, while studies by UBS have found companies

nity leave to two months.

Switzerland was the second-to-last European country to embrace women's suffrage in 1971, more than half a century after Norway, Germany, Canada and the United States. And it took two decades more for the Swiss supreme court to force one canton to let women take part in local votes in 1990.

IKEA Switzerland head Simona Scarpaleggia, one of just four female CEOs out of 78 in Credit Suisse's study, helped found Advance in 2013 and says the Swiss system needs to change to make things more straightforward for working mothers.

"Either you give up your time — which happens most often — or you get private support, which is very expensive. It wouldn't be so complicated to change this system, as many other countries are doing," Scarpaleggia, who also co-chairs the UN High-Level Panel on Women's Economic



REUTERS/FILE

with greater gender diversity consistently outperform.

Women represent just 6.7 percent of Swiss executives, according to Credit Suisse, compared to a global average of 13.8 percent and European average of 12.6 percent. They occupy one out of eight board seats, half the European average.

Swiss women-in-business initiative Advance has spearheaded the move, with Credit Suisse's domestic business saying it would strive for equal hiring in campus recruitment, while Nestle committed to grow the proportion of women in management positions worldwide every year.

Siemens Switzerland pledged to reach equal pay in the next three years, while IKEA Switzerland improved its paid pater-

Empowerment, said.

The Swiss government hopes women will help fill a growing shortfall of skilled labour, but eschews many policies — like quotas and more parental leave — that promote women elsewhere.

It is among the handful of developed countries that give new fathers no time off, meaning infant care falls largely on women.

High daycare costs mean many new mothers opt out of their professions or return part-time, generally working part-time until children reach the age of nine, statistics show.

Many women step off the ladder later in their careers, tired of being pigeonholed and passed over for promotions.

Online shopping delivers strong 2016 for Deutsche Post

AFP, Frankfurt Am Main

Online shopping helped boost profits last year at German logistics group Deutsche Post, while the owner of the DHL express delivery firm said Wednesday that improved efficiency should ensure further gains this year.

The Bonn-based firm increased net profit by 71.4 percent to 2.6 billion euros (\$2.75 billion), on slightly lower revenues of 57.3 billion. Operating, or underlying profit increased almost 45 percent, to 3.5 billion euros, meeting its own and analysts' forecasts.

Although Deutsche Post anticipates only "moderate growth" in the world

economy this year, it hopes to increase earnings "significantly" as it continues with an efficiency drive.

"We are in an excellent position to maintain our profitable growth" thanks in large part to online shopping, chief executive Frank Appel said in a statement. With its DHL division competing against American firms like FedEx and UPS, Deutsche Post continued to reap the benefit of consumers' love of online shopping and expanding appetite for its express delivery services.

Over the year, the eCommerce and parcels unit saw double-digit revenue growth of 11.2 percent, while express delivery added 6.3 percent.

Trump slump? At least some foreign tourists put off US travel

AFP, New York

DONALD Trump and his travel bans are dissuading some foreigners from vacationing in the United States, but a decline in visitors is also linked to the dollar and may be limited, experts say.

Although solid data is not yet available, the Republican president's first travel ban sent a jolt through the world tourism industry when it came into effect in late January.

Besides travelers from the seven Muslim-majority countries initially targeted, anecdotal shows evidence of a knock-on effect further afield. The online tour operator Kayak saw a 23 percent decline in flight searches from Europe to the United States the day after the ban was enacted.

And worldwide bookings to the country of the Statue of Liberty, Hollywood and Disney World fell 6.5 percent in the week after the restrictions took effect, industry analysts ForwardKeys found.

Twenty-nine percent of Britons — who make up the largest number of foreign visitors to the United States after Canadians and Mexicans — said in mid-February that they were less likely to visit the country now Trump is in power, a Cheapflights survey reported.

Still, even though the US president signed a revised travel ban on Monday to take effect on March 16 — with the White House hoping this one avoids the legal challenges that blocked the first attempt — the picture is not all bleak.

If British holiday bookings to the United States for the summer are down year on year, a spokesman for the British Travel Agents Association (ABTA) said, that's "always the case when sterling falls in value against the dollar."

That's been the case since shortly after Trump's election in November, when his plans to slash regulations along with corporate taxes boosted the dollar.

"It may be that the election of Donald Trump has changed the travel plans of some customers, but it needs to be remembered that



AFP/FILE

Tourists take photos of flags around the Washington Monument in Washington DC.

he has supporters as well as detractors in the UK," the spokesman said.

Bookings from Germany also dropped when the euro-dollar exchange rate fell in 2016 with Barack Obama still in power, a spokesman for the German Travel Association (DRV) said. But the exchange rate doesn't explain everything, according to the CEO of the French travel association Voyageurs du Monde, Jean-Francois Rial.

"We prefer to go to Mexico or Canada because of Trump," he said. "We still have people every week who tell us that."

New York braces for fewer visitors - Mexico — so often in Trump's firing line — may benefit from the US president's poor image: Cheapflights has also seen a rise in Mexico-related searches.

The first ban had "a broad chilling effect" on international travel demand to the United

States, the US Travel Association said.

It expressed regret that the Trump administration did not take advantage of its revised ban to assure those not affected that they are welcome in the United States.

"If undecided voters need to hear certain things to be motivated to get out and vote, then the same is true for undecided travelers," it said.

NYC & Company, the official marketing organization for New York, expects 300,000 fewer international visitors in 2017 "in light of the recent travel ban and related rhetoric," it said.

If confirmed, it would be the first decline since 2008, the start of the global financial crisis. That's especially significant for the economy because if foreign tourists number fewer than American visitors to New York — 12.4 million compared to 49.3 million expected this year — they spend an average of four times more per visit, the organization says.

Japan's economy grows revised 0.3pc in Q4

AFP, Tokyo

JAPAN'S economy expanded by a revised 0.3 percent in the last quarter of 2016, government data showed Wednesday, as company investment and a weaker yen propped up growth.

The latest GDP figure was marginally higher than an initial estimate of 0.2 percent growth in the October-December period, but lower than market expectations for a 0.4 percent expansion. It marked the fourth straight quarter of expansion in the world's third-largest economy.

For 2016, the Japanese economy grew 1.0 percent, unchanged from the initial estimate, after posting 1.2 percent growth the previous year, the Cabinet Office said. Government stimulus measures and capital spending were key growth drivers.

A weak yen also helped prop up the economy by driving exports, but inflation and consumer spending remain weak as cautious firms avoid big pay hikes.

"Private non-residential investment was revised up significantly as we'd expected, and so overall there is little surprise" to the revised figures, said Taro Saito, senior economist at

Tokyo's NLI Research Institute.

"The Japanese economy is on track for moderate recovery and we expect (the Bank of Japan) will keep the current policy for the time being," he added.

Japan's economy contracted in the last three months of 2015, before bouncing back last year although the recovery has been wobbly.

That is putting Japanese officials under increasing pressure as more and more economists write off Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's bid to cement a lasting recovery, dubbed Abenomics.

The plan — a mix of aggressive monetary easing and huge government spending along with reforms to the economy — stoked a stock market rally and fattened corporate profits, but the effect on the wider economy has been less dramatic. While Japan's job market is tight, individual spending — which accounts for more than a half of the country's GDP — has remained in the deep freeze.

The Bank of Japan (BoJ), aiming to create two-percent inflation as part the growth bid, now expects to reach that goal by March 2019 — four years later than planned.

Government and central bank officials have blamed external factors, such as falling energy prices and uncertainty related to emerging economies, for that failure.

Fresh data for this year have been underwhelming so far, with Japan's factory output unexpectedly slipping 0.8 percent in January, the first fall in six months. Consumer prices picked up in January for the first time in almost a year, but a 0.1 percent rise in a key inflation index remains way off the BoJ's target.



Cars are driven out of a cargo ship at a pier in Tokyo.

AFP