

ABRAR A. ANWAR

CELEBRATES WITH CELEBRATING LIFE

As a Bangladeshi, Abrar A. Anwar is the first appointed CEO as well as the first Bangladeshi CEO of a foreign SCB branch. He has 26 years of experience as a banker both in the corporate and the investment sectors of many countries, and is responsible for facilitating successful transitions in power, export, infrastructure and telecom-based industries. Starting from 1st November 2017, he begins his new role as the managing director and CEO of Standard Chartered Bank Malaysia. In the successfully completed 10 years of Celebrating Life, the last 3 years was under his tenure. In this exclusive interview, this successful banker talks about his accomplishments, the current economical state of Bangladesh and tips on how young entrepreneurs can find success as well.



A CEO from Standard Chartered Bangladesh being appointed as the CEO of a foreign branch is an unprecedented feat. How did you achieve this success?

I don't think anyone can achieve anything alone. My success was made possible by the combined effort of the staff, client and customers. I was just supporting my team and leading them with directions. My team deserves a lot of credit for this success. Currently I have 22,000 team members in SCB, and they are the bankers who are taking this country forward.

There's a common belief that Bangladeshis are individualistic in nature. Do you think that belief is true, or did you overcome such a belief by working in a multinational company? I actually think our biggest challenge is leadership, which needs to be built at every level of our organizations. In the past people used to believe that a new and more capable leader is a threat to the existing leader. Our philosophy is the opposite. We want to find more capable new leaders who will replace the current leaders. Only then will productivity increase. As a leader it is important to notice how your team members are

growing. Nobody in this world is indispensable. Everyone has to be given a chance to grow and prosper. So I advise all leaders everywhere to give their team members opportunities to grow and succeed, because at the end of the day, you can't really achieve anything on your own.

In your 26 years of banking career, what is your take on Bangladesh's current state of economy?

I think Bangladesh is in a good economical state right now. We have macro-economical stability and the GDP growth of Bangladesh remains at an impressive percentage every year. We are receiving improvements in infrastructure, power, energy generation, domestic consumption, per capita income, etc. But in order to move forward we also need to further improve institutional governance. To overcome the global geopolitical changes, we need to be resilient. There are quite a number of challenges in the horizon, like bad loans in the banking sector, export and remittance, and export diversification. If these challenges can be overcome, the younger population can bring Bangladesh forward.

How do you think Bangladesh can improve its

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economy?

Focus on deploying the younger population in the global work force. Even though the ones who go abroad as migrant workers contribute to the revenue of employment, we need to give scope for the younger generation to find work in this country as well. Bangladeshis are capable of strenuous work, but we need more opportunities for our own people so they can become successful here. I wish I was born 25 years younger, because there are already unbelievable opportunities waiting for the current generation.

They need to be looking forward to any and all opportunities, and keep moving forward with courage and fortitude. **Despite being a banker by profession, you are known to have interest in culture. What is your take on that?**

I have always been a fan of culture, songs and serials. I don't think a human being is just all work. A man is a combination of culture and community as well, without which we would have been machines. I always support and practice culture, and without nurturing it, a society cannot be sustained.

Celebrating Life 2017 marks the 10-year iteration of the collaboration between The Daily Star and Standard Chartered Bangladesh. What do you think of Celebrating Life?

Since the moment I heard of it, I have thought of it as a fantastic idea, and I have always deemed this initiative to be a much-needed one. There are hidden talents in this country that did not have a platform to express themselves; Celebrating Life took care of that problem. Our motto is “Here for good”, and alongside our market commitments, we have always tried to be integrated into the

community. Celebrating Life is one of the most important initiatives for us, because it reaches out to people's hearts. The theme this time, diversity in Bangladesh, also happens to be a centre focus of SCB.

What are the necessary steps in order to be a successful banker?

The first step is continuous learning; you must never stop learning and gathering information. Alongside, you have to be sincere and focused. You must treat your team with respect, take them along and ensure they find success as well. You also have to treat stakeholders, clients and customers with respect as well. Emphasize on the collective success by assisting the progress of each team member. For newcomers, I will say this: Focus on your development. Try to be satisfied with what you have. Young entrepreneurs also need to keep in mind that starting a new initiative is difficult and can lead to frustration, but never let disappointments affect your health. Be simple and dedicated, and you will find success soon enough.

Interviewed by Rafi Hossain