

From catering to coding, jobs help survivors of slavery to rebuild lives

REUTERS, London

With modern slavery emblazoned in headlines around the world, a growing number of companies and charities are stepping forward to help survivors get something they desperately need: jobs.

From making clothes and furniture in India to cooking, catering and even coding in the United States, such work opportunities are helping former slaves to rebuild their lives.

"Survivors of slavery see their own value and worth through work and their expectations change," said Paula Haines, executive director of Freedom à la Cart, a catering and box lunch company that trains and employs trafficking survivors.

While no data exists on the number of victims who are freed, rescued or escape from slavery, more than 40 million people were estimated to be trapped as slaves worldwide last year, in forced labour, sexual exploitation and forced marriages.

With the lucrative crime - worth \$150 billion a year - ever-evolving and spreading, countries and charities are ramping up efforts to catch traffickers and provide support to survivors.

But such help must go beyond just shelter and counselling, according to

Hasina Kharbhih, founder of the anti-trafficking charity Impulse NGO Network, based in northeastern India.

Impulse helps girls and women trafficked from India to reintegrate into society by equipping them with the skills needed to enter the local job market or set up businesses.

"If you don't provide rescued girls with skills and opportunities right away, they get frustrated and may end up being re-trafficked," Kharbhih said ahead of speaking at the Thomson Reuters Foundation's annual two-day Trust Conference.

"They come home and say: 'This is not what we expected - we need skills, we need jobs, we need money,'" said Kharbhih, whose charity helps dozens of survivors each year find work in fields from cooking to clothing, in marketplaces, and as entrepreneurs.

However, for many survivors of slavery, the road from freedom to employment is long and arduous, campaigners say.

They often suffer stigma, discrimination and trauma, and struggle to access counselling, healthcare and housing.

Such hardships can put former slaves at risk of being re-trafficked, or even turning to criminality and enslaving others.

"People look down at survivors," said Jessica Graham of U.S.-based non-profit Survivor's Ink, that helps victims branded by traffickers get decorative tattoos to cover up their marks.

"They are victims," Graham added. "Survivors need more help, more support ... to find out how to lead a normal life."

And gaining a job does not signal the end of a survivor's recovery, said Phill Clayton of the British charity City Hearts.

"In reality, it is just the start," said Clayton, whose charity in March partnered with British supermarket Co-op to launch a first-of-its-kind employment programme which aims to offer jobs to 30 victims of trafficking and slavery this year.

"Some people are at first very overwhelmed at work ... they may have panic attacks or mental health issues and have to take a break and seek help," he said, stressing the importance of providing survivors with constant support around their jobs.

While many charities and companies seek to guide survivors through their first foray into the workplace, General Assembly, a U.S.-based organisation offering coding and data courses, wants to help those aspiring to go beyond entry level jobs.

Standard Bank's new additional managing director



Md Tariqul Azam

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Md Tariqul Azam has recently joined Standard Bank as additional managing director, the bank said in a statement yesterday.

Prior to joining the bank, he was the additional managing director of United Commercial Bank.

He started his banking career at Sonali Bank in 1980.

Azam holds an MBA degree from the Institute of Business Administration under Dhaka University.

SHAHJALAL ISLAMI BANK
Khandaker Sakib Ahmed, vice president of Shahjalal Islami Bank, opens the bank's 107th branch on Sadar Road in Joypurhat yesterday.

Opec, allies unlikely to delay decision on oil cut extension

REUTERS, Abu Dhabi

Opec and non-Opec oil producers are moving towards deciding at their Nov. 30 meeting whether to extend a global agreement to curb oil supply further into 2018, two ministers said on Monday, a quicker time frame than previously indicated.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, plus Russia and nine other producers, are cutting output by about 1.8 million barrels per day until March in an attempt to eradicate a glut, and are considering extending the deal for longer.

Reuters reported last month, citing Opec

sources, that producers were leaning towards prolonging the agreement until the end of 2018, though the decision could be postponed until early next year depending on the market.

But United Arab Emirates Energy Minister Suhail bin Mohammed al-Mazroui said on Monday he saw no need for the decision to be delayed beyond the Nov. 30 meeting in Vienna. His Omani counterpart voiced confidence there would be an agreement this month.

"I don't see the need to delay the decision until March ... We are not going to meet in that quarter unless it is extraordinary," Mazroui said at an energy industry conference.



Officials of JMC, a global commercial vehicle brand, and Rancon Automobiles Ltd, the local distributor of JMC, attend a vehicle fair jointly organised by JMC and Rancon in Khulna on Sunday.

Walton gets nod for mobile assembly plant

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Walton has also received permission from the regulator to assemble 51,000 3G-enabled smartphones in three models and has imported equipment for the sets, said a senior executive of the company.

Uday Hakim, a director of Walton, said the group has a full-fledged industrial park in Gazipur so it will not need to make a huge investment. However, the company has set aside Tk 100 crore for handset assembling.

Aamra Holdings plans to start test production of smartphones in its assembly plant in the capital's Mirpur in the first week of December.

The company plans to start commercial assembling from mid-December and exports from the plant will begin in the middle of next year, said AM Ehsan-ul Haque, chief operating officer of the smart solutions division at Aamra Holdings Ltd.

After the planned presentation on

Thursday, the company expects to obtain a demand note from the BRTC. Then the ICT service provider will have to complete some formalities to get the licence, according to Haque.

Market leader Symphony and some other players are also looking for opportunities to establish assembly plants, said Ashraful Haque, director for marketing of Edison Group, the parent company of Symphony.

Last year, Bangladesh imported 3.1 crore units of handsets at Tk 8,000 crore, according to Bangladesh Mobile Phone Importers Association.

Besides, about 50 lakh handsets enter the country illegally every year, according to the telecom watchdog.

The government said the scope to set up manufacturing or assembly plants will provide local entrepreneurs the scope to invest in technology which will create jobs and open up export opportunities.

Uber launches bike sharing service in Dhaka today

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To use the service, users will have to select MOTO app on their smartphones, enter pickup location and payment method, and request a ride. They will receive the drivers' details: name, photo and details of the motorbike.

Riders can pay by cash, credit or debit card and receive an electronic receipt via the app.

UberMOTO is the second venture in Dhaka that is rolling out the motorcycle taxi-hailing service.

Pathao, a local venture, has gained huge popularity after it inaugurated the service in July last year.

Analysts said in cities like Dhaka where traffic jams cost its inhabitants dearly in wasted time, fuel and energy, bikes have become very popular as they help weave through the congestion cutting travel times.

Now it has become the most preferred and cost-effective transportation mode in Dhaka, evident from the surge of almost 40 percent in motorcycle sales in the past one year, according to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

Last year Uber introduced its car-based ride-sharing service in Dhaka.

Uber launched UberMOTO service in India and completed two million trips in the first year of the operation. It also had similar success in several cities of Indonesia and Vietnam.

PM receives tax ID card

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The taxpayers who visited the tax fair during the first week of November had also been provided with the card.

Khandaker said the NBR has been organising income tax fairs at different tax zones from November 12 so that individual taxpayers can submit tax returns within the deadline, November 30.

From November 20, all the taxpayers will get the tax ID cards from the field offices by showing the receipt of return submissions, he said.

Farm, manufacturing sectors need continuous support: MCCI

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"Therefore, export, import and remittances can be expected to increase."

The MCCI said the foreign exchange reserves would fall somewhat in November due to the payment to the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) against imports.

As of September, Bangladesh Bank's gross foreign exchange reserves stood at \$32.82 billion (with ACU liability of \$0.56 billion).

"The current reserves will help keep the taka stable against the US dollar and provide a more favourable economic environment."

The rate of inflation is likely to go up in October estimate because of the probable rise in the prices of some essential commodities and then the prices may go down,

according to the report.

The chamber also touched upon the foreign direct investment issue, saying the inflow to Bangladesh is low compared with many countries at similar levels of economic development.

Though Bangladesh's low labour costs are generally attractive to foreign investors, they hesitate to make fresh investments because of factors such as underdeveloped infrastructure, shortage of power and energy, and lack of consistency in policy.

The government needs to address the impediments to attracting more FDI into the country in order to achieve the target of becoming a middle-income country, the report added.

BIFC on the verge of collapse

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BIFC has been making net loss of Tk 6.40 crore every month and could not maintain the required Statutory Liquidity Ratio and Cash Reserve Ratio, facing continuous penalty from the central bank, according to the report.

The firm saw its default loans spiral in the last five years: from 12.21 in December 2012 to 90 percent in December 2016.

The NBFI's total default loans stood at Tk 780 crore at the end of last year in contrast to Tk 84.28 crore in 2012.

At the end of last year, its total deposits stood at Tk 508.62 crore, down 13.25 percent from a year earlier.

Its loan portfolio shrunk to Tk 876 crore at the end of last year from Tk 1,063 crore the previous year.

BIFC has submitted a recovery plan

containing three options to the central bank.

One option involves taking Tk 500 crore from the BB to pay off the bank loans such that BIFC's normal activities can be resumed.

Another option is to inject fresh equity by raising the paid-up capital.

The third option is to block the bank loans for 10 years and reschedule the payment with a year's grace period.

"The central bank is studying the proposal," an official of BB said.

Listed on the Dhaka Stock Exchange in 2006, BIFC became a "Z" category stock eight years later.

BIFC's shares traded between Tk 10 and Tk 12 in the last two years and closed yesterday at Tk 10.80.

BB move fails to cool down dollar

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In the first three months of the fiscal year, imports soared 28.38 percent year-on-year to \$12.19 billion.

The import of food grains, capital machinery and industrial raw materials continues to rise, the BB official added.

"The current account balance posted a huge deficit in the first quarter of the fiscal year. This reflects the existing foreign currency shortage," said another BB official.

Between the months of July and September, the current account deficit

stood at \$1.79 billion, in contrast to \$539 million in the surplus a year earlier, according to data from the central bank.

During the period, the trade deficit widened to \$3.65 billion from \$1.56 billion a year earlier.

Inflation will accelerate if the taka depreciation trend continues, said AB Mirza Azizul Islam, a former caretaker government adviser. The government should take initiatives to increase the export earnings and remittance with a view to halting the depreciating trend of the taka, he added.

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Marco Agnolin, CEO of Bershka, a brand of Spanish apparel retailer Inditex Group, and Pablo Mato, commercial director, pose with ASF Rahman, chairman of Beximco Group, and Syed Naved Husain, CEO of Beximco Textiles, during their visit to Beximco Industrial Park in Gazipur on Sunday.



Noor E Alam Mina, Chittagong district superintendent of police, receives a Mitsubishi L200 pickup truck from Syed Nazrul Alam, general manager of KSRM Steel Plant Ltd, at a ceremony on Sunday. The company also donated six motorcycles as part of its corporate social responsibility.

KSRM