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Star BUSINESS

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Female employees on the decline

BIDS survey finds

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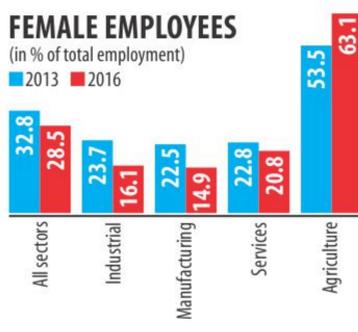
The number of female employees fell 13.10 percent to 5.07 million in Bangladesh last year compared to 2013 mainly because of closure of subcontracting businesses in the garment sector, according to a new survey.

The study of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) showed there were 5.51 million female employees in 2013. Four years ago, 32.8 percent females were employed but their number declined to 28.5 percent in 2016, according to the survey, which was presented at the BIDS Research Almanac 2017 at the Lakeshore Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

One of the major factors behind the declining trend of women employment was the closure of subcontracting in the garment sector after the Rana Plaza building collapse in April 2013, said Md Iqbal Hossain, research associate of the BIDS.

Other reasons are withdrawal of temporary jobs, especially in urban areas, with the rise of family income. For example, a female worker willing to work at a lower grade in a factory quits when the income of the increases, Hossain said.

Another reason is the withdrawal of female workers from part-time jobs for different reasons, including shifting of factories or starting of their own businesses, he said.



However, the number of female workers will rise in the country in the near future, especially in some specialised sectors such as garment, leather and leather goods, ICT, pharmaceuticals and toys as these are growing industries, Hossain said.

"The government should introduce training centres following UCEP model so that an adequate number of skilled workers can be supplied to the growing industrial sectors."

UCEP trainings are sector-specific and can be applied to jobs directly, benefiting both employees and employers, Hossain said after presenting his paper on "labour supply and its changes during 2006 to 2016: focus on gender and regional difference".

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No need for new banks

Says a former finance minister

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Setting up three more new banks will not bring any good for the banking sector as the existing ones are already weighed down by large volume of non-performing loans, said a former finance minister yesterday.

M Syeduzzaman said: "57 banks are too many considering the size of the economy. So, there is no need to allow any more new bank."

He spoke at the inaugural of a two-day conference organised by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies at Lakeshore Hotel in Dhaka.

Syeduzzaman said the central bank's supervision and monitoring system on the banking sector is not well enough which has contributed to the increased trend of default loans.

The ratio of non-performing loans in the state-run banks is much higher than that of private commercial banks because of the former's weak business performance, he said.

"We should pay more attention to the banking sector with a view to strengthening its financial health," said the former finance secretary.

Syeduzzaman also said the flow of foreign direct investment has yet to reach a satisfactory level because of the absence of required infrastructural facilities.



Mashiur Rahman, economic affairs adviser to the prime minister, speaks at the inaugural of a two-day conference organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) at a hotel in Dhaka yesterday. M Syeduzzaman, former finance minister; Mohammed Farashuddin, former governor of the central bank, and KAS Murshid, director general of the BIDS, were also present.

Mohammed Farashuddin, a former governor of the central bank, said the banking sector has expanded significantly but Bangladesh Bank has failed to strengthen its supervisory capability to catch up with the expansion.

He said, "Default loans in the banking sector are still less than those in a number of neighbouring countries. There are many methods to control NPLs."

Mashiur Rahman, economic affairs adviser to the prime minister, said new avenues should be discovered to invest remittance in the productive sector as the hard-earned money sent by the migrant workers is used for consumption.

He also said regulatory commis-

sions have significant role in fixing and resetting the prices of electricity and gas and call rate of mobile phones.

"We should think whether the commissions have acquired skills and quality necessary to take decisions properly in this regard."

KAS Murshid, director-general of the BIDS, presided over the session.

Bangladesh can make robots like Sophia

Says its maker Hanson Robotics as Digital World begins in Dhaka



Sophia, a humanoid robot, along with David Hanson, founder and chief executive officer of Hanson Robotics, is seen at Digital World in Dhaka yesterday. Right, Young people visit a stall at the four-day exposition that began at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre yesterday.

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Bangladeshi developers can build modern robots like Sophia using its software, said the manufacturer of the humanoid robot at a session of Digital World expo in Dhaka yesterday.

"All of our software is placed on open platforms and Bangladeshi developers can use those resources if they want to build robots," said David Hanson, founder and chief executive officer of Hanson Robotics.

The Hong Kong-based robotics company, which also works on artificial intelligence, developed Sophia one and a half years ago.

Capable of chatting, smiling and even telling jokes as per media reports, the humanoid robot garnered attention around the world recently. It is based on state-of-the-art innovations in artificial intelligence, visual data processing and facial recognition.

Saudi Arabia, a conservative Muslim country, even provided citizenship to the robot, which uses voice recognition technology from Alphabet Inc, the parent company of Google, and is designed to get smarter over time.

Sophia's intelligence software was designed by SingularityNET.

Both Sophia and its creator attended a session titled "Tech-Talk with Sophia" and answered questions from a packed audience at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

Sophia expects that Bangladeshi developers would be able to manufacture social robots in the near future.

It said, after more robots are developed in the coming years, there would be new dimensions in the job markets while artificial intelligence would also create new opportunities.

"Some traditional jobs will vanish over time and new opportunities will be created," Sophia responded to a question from Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT.

The robot came wearing a yellow Jamdani kameez and it described the clothing as the most attractive one. "This is Jamdani and I know this is a patent of Bangladesh," said the robot.

Sophia said Bangladesh was very well known for readymade garments and now it was moving towards digitisation.

The programme was to last for two hours but it was closed in half an hour as the organisers were finding it hard to manage the crowd. Around 2,000 visitors were scheduled to attend but over 5,000 arrived. There was also a lot of

commotion.

Hanson, who took three and a half years to build Sophia, said robots would soon be walking around with people.

"Within the next five years social robots will walk around us and robots like Sophia will be our friend," added Hanson, who also developed 13 robots similar to Sophia.

"Designers are now developing robots with an empathetic body movement," he said, adding that the industry was moving to feature technologies that would be helpful.

During the inauguration, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also talked with Sophia. The robot said to have known the premier as a daughter of the Father of the Nation -- Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

About Bangladesh's digitisation process, Sophia said she learned about the vision of Digital Bangladesh and a digitalised Bangladesh would have more developed human resources and ensure better e-governance.

Syed Gousul Alam Shaon, managing director of Grey, the advertising agency that brought Sophia here, anchored the show. Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd sponsored the robot's visit to Dhaka.

Mobile phones help build business networks: survey

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A survey has found that the use of mobile phones in rural areas has enabled households to build smooth business networks across the country, enhancing their income.

The mobile phone improves income by facilitating marketing of products, eliminating travel costs and saving time, according to a research paper for which the survey was conducted.

It was presented at a session of an annual event of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) at Lakeshore Hotel in the capital yesterday.

Monzur Hossain, senior research fellow at BIDS, presented the paper on "Mobile phones, households welfare and women's empowerment: evidence from rural off-grid regions of Bangladesh", at a session of BIDS Research Almanac 2017.

MA Baqui Khalily, former executive direc-

tor of the Institute of Microfinance, chaired the session. Mobile phones also enhanced women empowerment forming a channel for income generation, said Hossain.

As physical communication is cumbersome in rural areas, mobile communication fills the gap, says the research paper.

The ownership of mobile phone by households increased the probability of income generation from fisheries by 6.9 percent to 9.8 percent, the research shows.

The survey comprised over 3,540 households during the second half of 2016. The sample households are taken from off-grid areas like char, river, sea and coastal areas that have little or no rail or road networks.

The sample districts were Sirajganj, Narayanganj, Jamalpur, Kushtia, Manikganj, Noakhali, Patuakhali and Faridpur. The main sources of earning in those areas are farming, small business and salaried employment.

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Women lag behind men in use of mobile money: IFC study

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh has gender inequality in case of access to mobile financial services (MFS), as the female users of such services are almost half their male counterparts in the country, a study finds.

Around 53 percent of men in Bangladesh have used MFS at least once in the past, compared to 27 percent of women, whereas some 19 percent of men have registered MFS accounts, compared to 6 percent of women.

The findings of the study on "Opportunities in the Female MFS Market in Bangladesh" conducted by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) were shared at an event at Le Méridien hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

The IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, organised the programme as part of

the IFC and the central bank's joint initiative to financially include women through increasing MFS adoption.

The partnership project is supported by the World Bank Group's Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality.

As part of the study, 4,000 women were surveyed in all eight divisions. Of them, 2,000 are MFS-users and 2,000 non-users.

Twenty-one focus group discussions took place with the presence of 155 respondents. Some 30 female MFS agents were interviewed.

There has been significant growth in registered female users over the last four years.

While the overall proportion of women with registered MFS accounts remains low, the annual growth rate of MFS registration among women has been high at 124 percent.

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