

# 176 differently abled get jobs at ICT fair

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Some 176 differently abled people got information and communication technology (ICT)-centric jobs at some companies through a specialised job fair at the ICT division in the capital on Monday.

There were 215 others registered in a waiting list by the 17 companies and organisations that took part in the daylong fair, said its organisers.

Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC) organised the fair's fourth edition to offer ICT-related job opportunities for the physically challenged.

"We have a target to employ around 3,000 differently abled people over the next three years," Junaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT, said after inaugurating the fair.

The government is trying to give a boost to the physically challenged through the process, he said.

The government is also running a project to train the differently abled in seven centres of the country.

BCC organised the fair's first edition in 2015 when 10 organisations participated and 32 physically challenged persons were employed. In 2016, 60 differently abled people got jobs and last year another 115.



Rasheda Sultana, head of financial services at Grameenphone, and Jayanta Kumar Sikder, company secretary of Dhaka Power Distribution Company Ltd (DPDC), sign a deal at Bidyut Bhavan in Dhaka recently. Prepaid meter users will be able to purchase electricity through their smart cards at the mobile operator's authorised agent points. Ahmad Kaikaus, DPDC chairman, was present.

GRAMEPHONE

# Life is really difficult: Tehranis share economic grievances

AFP, Tehran

The streets of Iran's capital have been relatively quiet as protests hit much of the country, but Tehranis still have plenty to complain about and demand action from the government.

"Life is really difficult. The high prices really put me under pressure. My husband is a government worker but his salary is no way enough for us to make ends meet," said Farzaneh Mirzaie, 42, a mother of two.

She said much of her family worked in a carpet factory in Kashan, a town 250 kilometres (150 miles) south of the capital, but they have all recently lost their jobs.

"The owner of the factory cannot afford to buy thread for carpets and so he sacked everyone. How should they survive?"

It is a story heard up and down the country as Iran struggles to recover from years of poor economic management and crippling international sanctions.

On Sunday night, Tehranis listened to President Hassan Rouhani address the mass protests that have spread across Iran since Thursday, in which he said people had the right to protest but should not engage in violence.

"He says it's free for people to protest but we're scared of speaking. Even now, I'm scared of talking to you," said Sarita Mohammadi, a 35-year-old teacher.

"If it's free to speak out and protest, then why have they deployed so many forces out there in the streets?"

Many people are nonetheless put off by the violence they have seen from protesters who

have attacked banks, government buildings and symbols of the regime.

Sara, a 26-year-old student in conservative dress, agreed with the government line that the protests were being "guided from abroad", but even she felt the protests began over "people's economic hardship".

"I'm not at all for demonstrations in which public property is vandalised. When some break windows, then we'll have to pay for it later," added Shiva Daneshvar, a 55-year-old housewife.

But everyone understands the frustration seething under Iranian society.

"I think people don't like to vandalise and set fire to places, but this is the only way to make their voices heard," said Nasser Khalaf, 52, who works for an oil company, adding that he has two unemployed sons in their twenties.

Many feel the nation has not been rewarded for enduring decades of hardship -- the tumult of the 1979 revolution, eight years of brutal war with Iraq in the 1980s and recent US sanctions.

"After 40 years they have realised that all the hardship... was in vain," said Arya Rahmani, a 27-year-old nurse.

"I'm working in this society but I always have the stress of whether I'm going to be sacked tomorrow."

"Mr Rouhani says 'protest in a proper way', but what is the proper way? If I come and say 'Mr Rouhani, I'm an educated person but I'm unemployed'... well, he wouldn't give a damn."

There was typical derision regarding US President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly tweeted his support for the protests in recent days, saying Monday that it was "TIME FOR

CHANGE!"

"Verbal support is of no use," said Rahmani. "He's living in his palace and here I'm arrested. What can Trump do?"

"It would be better if he didn't support the protests," added Khalaf, saying that external support from opposition groups was also unwelcome.

Many harbour a deep mistrust of Trump after he barred Iranians from visiting the United States as part of his ban on "terrorist" nations.

"The government should improve the people's situation to a level where Trump won't dare say such a thing," said Mirzaie, the housewife.

Underlying it all is a deep-seated frustration that their country has failed to capitalise on its huge potential.

"Our country is really like gold. Whatever you can think of, you can find in Iran. But we are not benefiting at all from the things we have in our country," said Mirzaie.

It remains unclear where the protests will go from here.

Without a clear leadership structure, the protests may struggle to stay focused, particularly if authorities decide to crack down more firmly than they have so far.

Khalaf, the oil company employee, said that may be tougher than during the last mass protests that followed allegations of election-rigging in 2009.

"In 2009 when people took to the streets it was only in Tehran and so they easily managed to suppress it," he said.

"When it is widespread, then less forces can be sent."

# Nasrul Hamid wins 'Visionary Leader of Change' award

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, has won "Visionary Leader of Change" award.

World HRD Congress, an India-based organisation, selected Hamid for the award for organising the youths of Bangladesh and making great contribution



to increasing their financial opportunities, according to a power division statement issued yesterday.

World HRD Congress usually recognises individuals or organisations for contributing to effective development by creating a platform for quality development.

The award will be handed over at a function in Mumbai on February 15.



ATM Mahbubul Alam, chairman of Intech Limited, presides over the company's 17th annual general meeting at Raowa Club in Dhaka on December 28. The company approved 10 percent bonus share.

# Dollar starts 2018 in doldrums

Reuters, London

The ailing dollar fell to its lowest in over three months on Tuesday, while surprisingly upbeat Chinese manufacturing data ensured there was no serious new year hangover for world shares despite a groggy start for Europe.

Sentiment was also helped by news that North Korea had offered an olive branch to South Korea, with Kim Jong Un saying he was "open to dialogue" with Seoul.

MSCI's broadest index of world shares climbed 0.15 percent, having set scores of record highs and risen by one-fifth in value last year alone.

The driver had again been Asia and its emerging markets.

Shanghai blue chips climbed 1.4 percent and MSCIs 24-country EM index jumped over 1 percent after the Caixin index of Chinese industry rose to a four-month high of 51.5 in December, confounding forecasts for a decline.

The reading pointed to resilience in the world's second-largest economy even as Beijing cracks down on industrial pollution and engineers a cooling property market.

"Manufacturing operating conditions improved in December, reinforcing the notion that economic growth has stabilized in 2017 and has even performed better than expected," said Zhengsheng Zhong, director of macroeconomic analysis at CEBM Group.

In currency markets, the dollar remained out of favour having already hit a three-month low against a basket of its peers on Friday. That brought its losses for 2017 to 9.8 percent, its worse performance since 2003.

Its pain was the euro's gain though, with the single currency enjoying its strongest year against the dollar in 14 years.

On Tuesday, it jetted to a three-month top of \$1.2045 as data showed that euro zone manufacturers had ramped up activity last month at the fastest pace in more than two decades.

It had already sliced through major resistance on the yen in Asia too, reaching highs not seen since late 2015 at 135.45 yen.

"Forward-looking indicators bode well for the new year," Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit which compiled the manufacturing data, pointing to a near record pace of new orders and job creation.

The pound, Swiss franc and Scandinavian currencies were also up solidly against the dollar.

That combined with a two-month high in bond yields in Germany and Italy, two of the euro zone's biggest debt markets, pushed stock markets in London, Frankfurt and Paris 0.3-0.6 percent into the red. A major hurdle for the US currency will be Wednesday's release of minutes from the Federal Reserve's December meeting when it raised interest rates. Two policymakers voted against the move amid doubts inflation would accelerate as hoped.

With the market now pricing in a 68 percent chance of a March hike and two hikes for 2018, there will be close inspection to assess just how shaky their confidence is for any pick-up in inflationary trends said Chris Weston, chief markets strategist at broker IG in Sydney.

# Asian factories end robust 2017 on mixed note

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Asia's factories ended a strong 2017 on a mixed note, with activity at multi-year highs in Taiwan and India and surprisingly picking up in China, but contracting in some places in a sign regional interest rate hikes likely will be gradual.

A trend of synchronised global growth that became apparent over the course of last year looked set to continue, with activity surveys in the euro zone and the United States later in the day expected to post strong readings.

"Robust external demand and accommodative domestic monetary policy should help keep Asian manufacturing sectors in good shape," said Krystal Tan, Asia economist at Capital Economics.

In China, manufacturing growth unexpectedly picked up to a four-month high in December amid a surge in new orders, suggesting continued strength in global trade. The Caixin/Markit Manufacturing

Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose to 51.5 last month, from 50.8 in November, and far outpaced economists' expectations for a dip to 50.6. The 50-mark divides expansion from contraction on a monthly basis.

Tuesday's survey, which pushed Asian shares to their highest in a decade, was somewhat at odds with a much larger official China PMI survey on Sunday. It showed a slowdown in growth amid a crackdown on pollution and measures to curb risky financing and cool the housing market.

Analysts say the difference stems from the fact that the Caixin/PMI index tracks smaller, private firms, more sensitive to exports.

China is expected to have grown by close to 7 percent in 2017, but the world's second largest economy is likely to slow in the new year on the back of those measures, highlighted as policy priorities at October's key Communist Party congress.

Beijing is expected to target 2018

growth at around 6.5 percent.

"We believe a moderate growth slowdown to be more visible in the first half of 2018, especially on the investment front, due mainly to the tight financial conditions and a cooldown of the property market," BofA Merrill Lynch economists said.

China's slowdown means that for the rest of Asia, the pace of rate increases is unlikely to match that of the US Federal Reserve, which is seen hiking 2-3 times in 2018.

There will likely be "only a few rate hikes here and there across the region over the coming two years," HSBC analysts said in a note, even as they expect Asian economies to keep chugging along in 2018, led by tech and trade. In November, the Bank of Korea raised interest rates for the first time in more than six years, becoming the first major Asian central bank to hike since 2014. Malaysia and the Philippines could hike early this year, then Australia and New Zealand later on.



Syed Alamgir, managing director of ACI Consumer Brands, and Md Quamrul Hassan, business director, attend the launch of "ACI Sandal Soap" at ACI Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

# China targets 2018 rail investment of \$113b

REUTERS, Shanghai

China's national railway operator said on Tuesday that the country plans to invest 732 billion yuan (\$113 billion) in rail fixed assets in 2018, its lowest target since 2013.

China Railway Corp. made the comments through its news publication, People's Railway Network. The country, which invested 801 billion yuan in rail fixed assets in 2017, has for the last four years set an annual target of 800 billion yuan. Its target for 2018 was 660 billion yuan.

The railway operator also said that it aimed to build 4,000 kms (2,485 miles) of new lines this year, 3,500 kms of which will be high-speed rail tracks.

# DSE discloses Delta Life's fine

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Delta Life had announced to buy 10 lakh shares of DBH and a sudden increase in demand pushed DBH's share price up by 15 percent following the declaration.

Later, the regulator found that Delta Life purchased only 331,500 shares of DBH.

Delta Life's share lost Tk 0.3 or 0.28 percent to close at Tk 106 yesterday, according to the DSE.

# Inflation eases in Dec

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But in November, non-food inflation went up by 49 basis points compared to that in October.

Non-food inflation went up by 17 basis points to 3.61 percent in October from 3.44 percent a month ago, according to the BBS data. Non-food inflation in December fell in both rural and urban areas.

Inflation decelerated to 5.44 percent in the last fiscal year, aided by prudent monetary management and weak aggregate demand. The government has set the inflation target at 5.5 percent for fiscal 2017-18.

# Over Tk 1,200cr lying unused

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Mobile operators have also repeatedly requested the government to use the fund and establish a superhighway of fibre optic cable network to help increase data use at a faster speed.

Mobile operators said they have so far covered 99 percent geographical areas with mobile network, but for better data service, especially 4G, fibre optic cable connectivity is a must.

The ICT division and state-run National Telecom Monitoring Cell also sought allocations from the fund; but their proposals failed to get positive response because of the opposition from the telecom division.

The posts, telecom and ICT ministry comprises of two divisions: Tarana leads the posts and telecom division while Zunaid Ahmed Palak takes care of the ICT division.