

# Lack of financing hampers growth of women-led SMEs: analysts

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The reluctance of banks and financial institutions to provide women with easy loans is one of the major barriers to the growth of women-led small and medium enterprises, analysts said yesterday.

Banks now offer up to Tk 10 lakh as collateral-free loans only for three years to such SMEs, but they need long-term loans to keep the amount of repayment instalments low, they said.

They spoke at a seminar titled "Women entrepreneurs breaking the barriers" at Lakeshore Hotel in the capital.

A dearth of capital and lack of knowledge about the refinancing schemes also hamper growth of the women-led enterprises, said Nazreen Ahmed, senior research fellow of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

Banks should simplify the credit system to ensure easy loans for women entrepreneurs, she suggested.

Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), Women Entrepreneur Association of Bangladesh (WEAB), The Asia Foundation-Bangladesh, and European Union funded

PRISM Programme-Technical Assistance to BSCIC jointly organised the seminar.

Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu attended the seminar as the chief guest.

The government has taken various measures to increase the financial access of women entrepreneurs but still lack of financing remains the major barrier for them, the minister said.

The policymakers will have to change their mindset to create a level playing field for women entrepreneurs, he said.

Women will have to raise their voice to overcome the barriers, said Mustak Hassan Md Iftekhar, chairman of BSCIC.

Women should highlight the loopholes, if there is any, in the loan disbursement procedure to the authorities concerned to break the barriers, he said.

The services women entrepreneurs get in government organisations are not good at all, Iftekhar said. The state-owned service providers should be more ethical, he said.

The WEAB aims to bring all women entrepreneurs under a platform, help them identify their challenges and solve their problems, said Nasreen Fatema Awal, president of the association.

# Apex Footwear gets two CEOs



Abdul Momen Bhuiyan



Rajendran Chandran Pillai

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Apex Footwear has recently appointed two chief executive officers (CEOs).

Appointed deputy managing director and CEO for unit 1, Abdul Momen Bhuiyan joined the company in 1995 and has been leading the export wing, Apex said in a statement yesterday.

He is also currently serving on the board of directors of Blue Ocean Footwear, Landmark Footwear and Apex Investments and is the senior vice president of Leather Goods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh.

Bhuiyan attained an MBA degree from the Institute of Business Administration under the University of Dhaka.

Meanwhile, Rajendran Chandran Pillai, appointed CEO of retail unit 2, had been serving as the chief operating officer.

A retail professional with over 25 years' experience in India, the Middle East and Bangladesh, Pillai holds an MBA degree in international business from the Indira Gandhi Open University, India and has served as president of Indian retail chain Being Human.

# In Africa, scant data protection leaves internet users exposed

REUTERS, Nairobi/Lagos

In Kenya, which has a large and fast growing population of internet users, there are no specific laws or regulations to protect the privacy of those individuals.

Kenya is not alone in Africa, which as a region has clocked the world's fastest growth in internet use over the past decade. Unlike in Europe and the United States, where data-privacy laws provide a level of protection to consumers, many Africans have little or no recourse if a data breach occurs because often legal and regulatory safeguards don't exist.

Recent revelations about British analytics firm Cambridge Analytica, which Facebook says improperly accessed personal data of about 50 million of the social networks users in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, have also touched the African continent.

Cambridge Analytica or its parent company SCL Group worked on the 2013 and 2017 campaigns of Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta. The company was also hired to support the failed re-election bid of then-president Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria in 2015, according to Britain's Guardian newspaper.

A spokesman for the Nigerian president said on Monday that the country's government will investigate allegations of improper involvement by Cambridge Analytica in the 2007 and 2015 elections.

Kenya's ruling Jubilee party told Reuters that it had hired SCL for "branding" in the 2017 presidential election but did not elaborate on the precise nature of the work.

Cambridge Analytica didn't respond to a request for comment. The company has suspended its chief executive pending what it said would be a full, independent investigation.

Growth of internet use in Africa, a continent of 1 billion people, has been fuelled by rapidly expanding mobile broadband networks and ever more affordable phones.

That presents a major growth opportunity for internet companies such as Facebook, which currently sees some 123 million people across sub-Saharan Africa accessing its social network platform monthly.

While some governments on the continent have responded to these rapid changes - rights campaigners welcomed a data-protection law passed by South Africa 2013 - many have not.

Privacy advocacy groups say that is leaving a lot of Africans, many of whom are accessing the internet for the first time, with little or no protection.

More than half of Africa's 54 countries have no data protection or privacy laws, according to London-based rights group Article 19. And, of the 14 countries that do, nine have no regulators to enforce them, the group says.

# Five top Islami Bank officials resign

FROM PAGE B1

The latest change in the management is a continuation of the previous restructuring process of the bank, said an official of the bank upon conditions of anonymity.

The officials are: Md Shamsuzzaman, who worked as an additional managing director; Md Habibur Rahman Bhuiyan, Abdus Sadeque Bhuiyan and Mohd Mohon Miah, all deputy managing directors; and Amirul Islam, senior executive vice-president.



Tofail Ahmed, commerce minister; Thomas Prinz, German ambassador to Dhaka, Sarazeen Kazi, managing director of SS Solutions, and Erwan Philippe, head of SAP's business in Asia Pacific and Japan, a German-based software company whose local partner is SS Solution, attend an event on "Digital the Economic Growth Engine for Bangladesh" at The Westin Dhaka on Wednesday.

SS SOLUTIONS

# Policymakers should get to the bottom of low FDI

FROM PAGE B1

Bangladesh Investment Development Authority Executive Chairman Kazi M Aminul Islam said budgetary measures should focus on promoting investments.

"I do not see the NBR as a revenue collection agency. It is a very important institution and it has important role for the development of Bangladesh." Vietnam fares better than Bangladesh in terms of business climate, infrastructure and skills, he said. "We want a tax system where processes are simple, transparent, fair and affordable."

Citing the high corporate income tax rate, Islam said it is necessary to know whether the high rate helps the country to attract FDI. "Corporate tax rate should be attractive in comparison with our competing countries in terms of foreign investment," he said.

In response, NBR Chairman Md Mosharrar Hossain Bhuiyan said the revenue authority will try to frame fiscal measures by providing sufficient incentives to attract investments. An investment promotion team will be formed with representations from BIDA, BEZA, NBR and other related agencies and suggestions from the panel would be incorporated in next year's fiscal measures.

Representatives from Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority, Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority and Business Initiative Leading Development also shared their views at the event.

# Optimistic investors cheer up stocks

FROM PAGE B1

Among the major sectors, engineering increased 1.47 percent in market capitalisation, followed by life insurance 1.45 percent, textile 0.96 percent, bank 0.71 percent and financial institutions 0.68 percent. No sector declined in market capitalisation. Beximco was the day's best performer with an 8.30 percent gain followed by Renwick Jaineswar, EBL NRB Mutual Fund and Monno Jute Stafflers.

Shyampur Fund was the worst loser, shedding 4.32 percent followed by Nitol Insurance, Sonargaon Textile and Republic Insurance. Chittagong stocks also rose yesterday with the bourse's benchmark index, CSCX, advancing 107.17 points or 1 percent to finish the day at 10,891.73.

Gainers beat losers as 156 advanced, 49 declined and 27 finished unchanged on the Chittagong Stock Exchange.

The port city bourse traded 1.04 crore shares and mutual fund units worth Tk 39.11 crore in turnover.

# Eliminate middlemen from paper trade

FROM PAGE B1

"A section of mill owners have been making money through monopoly." The carton makers also urged the government for bringing back the previous prices as soon as possible to protect the industry and to save the jobs of 100,000 semi-skilled and unskilled workers across the country, he said.

"If the government does not take action to save our industry, we will call for a greater movement as our backs are against the wall. We are not big industry owners, we are small and our capital is also very small."

# Correction

In a caption published on Wednesday, Bengal Group of Industries mentioned that Hangers Plus Bangladesh is a subsidiary of the group. Actually Hangers Plus Bangladesh is a separate entity.

# Embrace technology to increase productivity

FROM PAGE B1

They said the government needs to adopt a policy on technology and innovation immediately and ensure effective collaboration between businesses and universities for better performance.

The fourth industrial revolution is knocking at the door and if Bangladesh fails to match the technological development the country will fail to keep pace with the world, speakers said.

Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, vice-chancellor of the University of Asia Pacific, said the country is very slow on adoption of technology which is pushing the country backward. "We are requesting the government to formulate a separate policy on technology uses and innovation with an action plan," he said.

Choudhury urged the government to rely on local innovations and change the bureaucratic mentality of obtaining technological support from external sources.

In 2001, he along with a group suggested a model in order to develop hi-tech park but more than one and half decades have passed but the park is yet to be developed, he said.

Mustafa Jabbar, post and telecom minister, said the country has failed to develop an innovation culture and there is no value for innovation as everything is copied.

"To make use of the optimum potential, we need to change this culture and ensure the value of innovation," he said.

Jabbar said Bangladesh is a unique country where people only value physical property which is one of the main barriers to flourish a knowledge-based society.

The minister emphasised improving

educational quality and ensuring digitalisation of the education system.

"More and more advanced technology will hit the market. So, if the youth fail to adapt to this new trend they will have no clear goal and the whole country will suffer as a result." Jabbar said the government has created an environment where digital devices are being assembled in the country.

These devices will hit the export markets within next two years, he said, adding that software exports stand at \$800 million a year. Sonia Bashir Kabir, managing director of Microsoft Bangladesh, said the country needs to focus on edu-tech, agrotech, fin-tech, and health-tech to reach the next level of development with the help of the fourth industrial revolution.

Kabir said Bangladesh is a huge market and developers and business entities need to think of buying software from local firms. Nihad Kabir, president of the MCCI, urged the government to change the taxation policies as there are taxes on imported digital products which are used to promote digitalisation in the country.

M Anis Ud Dowla, chairman of ACI Ltd, said they cannot show their innovation funds as expenses. As a result, the businesses have to pay taxes on such expenditure, he said. "We need to cope with the fourth industrial revolution. There is nothing to be afraid of. We should adopt this technological advancement."

Anir Chowdhury, policy adviser to the a2i Programme under the Prime Minister's Office, said the private sector needs to take some initiatives to set up incubation centres in order to develop technology and solutions.

# Muhith for developing specialists for export sectors

FROM PAGE B1

Muhith was addressing an annual general meeting of the board of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in Tunis, Tunisia.

In 2011, the government drew up an umbrella project to inspire individual programmes of relevant divisions and subordinate organisations to develop their own projects for appropriate workforce training, according to Muhith.

He said as technology was developing worldwide, the emerging phenomenon was predicted to eliminate low-skilled jobs and augment the scope for highly skilled individuals.

"In the face of this evolving atmosphere, there is an urgent need for youth development and vocational training and higher skills formation," Muhith said.

The finance minister sought assistance from the IDB in skills formation.

Muhith also said that Bangladesh has achieved the required threshold of all the three indicators for graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category.

He said Bangladesh would be the first country to meet all the criteria together at the next triennial review meeting of the United Nations Committee for Development Policy (UNCDP).

He said the UNCDP in its policy note of 2017 recognised the Bangladesh government's "unique, unorthodox and replicable" development policies as the reason for the graduation.

Muhith, however, is aware of the chal-

lenges that the graduation entails.

"Despite all these lofty and almost incredible achievements, we can in no way deny the fact that graduation into a developing economy will pose significant challenges ahead."

The challenges include inaccessibility to concessionary loans, losing the duty-free, quota-free market access, diminishing trade facilities as LDC, diminishing good governance, institutional reforms and human resources development, tackling climate change, combating natural disasters, and creating new jobs, he said.

Muhith also presented the Rohingya crisis in details at the meeting.

He said Bangladesh, having the experience of the 1971 Liberation War, has made it a policy to stand by refugees and work for stopping such operations in a peaceful manner.

He urged all the IDB member countries to raise awareness internationally and keep exerting pressure on the Myanmar authorities for the sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Rakhine state.

Muhith said it was likely that opening of the gateway office of the bank in Dhaka would start its full-fledged operations in Bangladesh from this June.

"I believe that the establishment of this office will definitely be a giant step forward in further consolidating the relations and enhancing economic interaction and partnership between Bangladesh and the IDB."



Mohammad A Moeen, chairman of Lanka Bangla Finance, presides over the company's 21st annual general meeting at MIDAS Centre in Dhaka on March 29. The company approved 7.5 percent cash and 7.5 percent stock dividends for 2017. Khwaja Shahriar, CEO, was present.



Mohammad Masum, chairman of Supreme Seed Company, and Srinivasa Kumar Karavadi, managing director of Bayer CropScience Bangladesh, attend a deal signing ceremony in Dhaka recently for distribution of Bayer's Arize® AZ 7006, a variety of submergence tolerant hybrid rice seed.