

TECH TRAILBLAZERS HONOURED



Innovators provide sources of inspiration to one and all, and Bangladesh has a few IT organisations and individuals that have shown the path for thousands to follow. Some of these tech gurus have had an impact in ways that affect our lives every day. But these heroes often remain unnoticed as the people at the helm have hardly any time to recognise them, and this is where The Daily Star ICT Awards come into the picture. This is the third edition of the newspaper's flagship event, where it has conferred recognition to four organisations and a person for their extraordinary contribution to the country's digital progress.



SYEDA KAMRUN AHMED
CO-FOUNDER, BAGDOOM.COM

Category: **Digital Commerce**
Winning Company: **Bagdooom.com**

Bagdooom.com is a digital marketplace where businesses can sell their products in various categories including electronics, handicrafts, lifestyle and groceries.

What makes it different from others is that it reaches out to local women entrepreneurs and artisans with the opportunity to sell their handicrafts directly on the site, minimising third-party involvement.

"This is giving them the chance to earn fair money," said Syeda Kamrun Ahmed, co-founder of Bagdooom.com.

Businesses in Bangladesh have long been built on foreign products -- choking local industry.

To make this process more efficient, Bagdooom.com has introduced a section, Krishiti, where rural women entrepreneurs can sell their products under one roof.

Customers can get those at the lowest price as they would be buying directly from the maker herself.

Being an e-commerce pioneer in Bangladesh, Bagdooom.com is always working to bring innovation to the sector, Ahmed said.

"We are working tirelessly to make e-commerce a force for higher economic growth of Bangladesh."

Established in 2011 under the name of akhoni.com, the company was logging in revenues in the region of Tk 3 crore by 2016.

In 2017, the company hit Tk 7 crore in revenues and has been maintaining the growth trend.

For instance, in the first nine months of 2018, the company received 57,000 orders, in contrast to 27,000 in the whole of 2017.

In 2016, Bagdooom.com's total order number was 19,500.

"We have very positive brand equity and the driving force behind it is our team," said Mirajul Huq, chief executive officer of bagdooom.com.



GEETARA SAFIYA CHOUDHURY
CHAIRMAN, GRAPHICPEOPLE LIMITED

Category: **ICT Solution Provider - Int'l Market Focus**
Winning Company: **GraphicPeople Limited**

GraphicPeople provides innovative branding solutions to globally-renowned companies from all over the world from its headquarters in Dhaka.

The company, which is a joint venture between local Adcomm and a Danish company, counts household names like Dell, Microsoft, HSBC, Johnson & Johnson, Citibank, Volvo, Vodafone, Cricket Australia, GlaxoSmithKline, Nike, Pond's, Colgate, Starbucks, Verizon and Pfizer as clients.

"We can produce direct mail campaigns, traditional newspaper advertisements, brochures or outdoor billboards within time-to-market targets and at the region's most competitive costs," said Imtiaz Ilahi, managing director of GraphicPeople.

Whether anyone needs a dynamic branded web presence or is looking for an enterprise solution, GraphicPeople's specialised project teams have the know-how to deliver.

Established in 2004 with just eight people, the company today employs over 250 studio professionals as it works as an off-shore production studio for advertising agencies and brands.

As a leading production hub for international agencies, the company is also happy to take the collaborative approach, especially when volume and cross-geographical timelines become a challenge.

"The client is not a matter for us -- just their marketing strategy is."

Because of its centralised setup and 24-hour studio, GraphicPeople can offer low cost, high-quality productions that reduce traditional time-to-market windows, irrespective of location, time zones and clients' operating hours. The company's revenue in the last three years was more than Tk 130 crore, the major chunk of which came from the developed market.

"We are now working to diversify our services and adopt new trends and changes of the market," Ilahi said.



SHOHORAB AHMED CHOWDHURY
MANAGING DIRECTOR, SYNESIS IT LIMITED

Category: **ICT Solution Provider - Local Market Focus**
Winning Company: **Synesis IT Limited**

Synesis IT is a leader in creating large scale ICT solutions for the local market, with credits of delivering software for various ministries.

The company has developed the National Health Helpline "Shastho Batayon 16263" for the health ministry, a round-the-clock medical advice and consultation service.

The helpline has been a huge benefit to citizens: it has already served 31 lakh, receiving about 6,000 calls a day.

Through the helpline, citizens can easily seek advice on any health-related queries, get information on ambulance and nearby hospitals, place complaints against any hospital or clinic.

Synesis IT's another landmark project is the e-TIN registration system for the National Board of Revenue.

The system has so far served more than 38 lakh taxpayers, said Shohorab Ahmed Chowdhury, managing director of Synesis IT.

The company has also established the central biometric information verification and monitoring platform, automated the postal department, created a platform to register complaints or get information on the various services provided by Dhaka WASA, and set up Tenderbazaar.com, a portal for tenders of both the public and private sectors.

"We have established the company to serve the country and change the society with our great inspiration," he said, adding that the company is now working with a wide range of verticals like education, health and agriculture.

Established in 2006 with very limited manpower, its workforce now stands at upwards of 250.

Its revenue in 2017 was Tk 17 crore, up from Tk 8 crore in 2016 and Tk 6 crore in 2015.



MALIHA M QUADIR
FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, SHOHOZ.COM

Category: **ICT Start-up**
Winning Company: **Shohoz.com**

Shohoz.com is one of the fastest-growing tech companies in Bangladesh with its ride-hailing and e-ticketing services.

Through its website and mobile app, the company provides ride-hailing services for commuters, sells bus and launch tickets, and also offers passes to cinema, events and cricket matches.

"The meaning of shohoz is 'easy' and our idea was to make people's lives easy with the help of technology," said Maliha M Quadir, founder and managing director of Shohoz.

The company started out in 2014 with the mission to make long distance travel in Bangladesh easy and convenient.

"We have started our journey in the travel domain simply because in a densely populated country like Bangladesh it is a big hassle to move around."

In its early days it provided just bus and launch tickets and then branched into ride hailing.

Today, more than 10 lakh people are using Shohoz rides for their daily commuting, according to Quadir.

In the ride-hailing business, Shohoz's focus is on the bike segment, but it recently rolled out car service too as demand for such services is on the rise.

The online ride-hailing and ticketing platform has also managed to raise a good amount of foreign investment from the developed market to expand its business, Quadir said.

The company is now working to introduce insurance services for both riders and passengers.

The company is also entering the food delivery market and financial technology amid rising demand.

"We are moving ahead with the target," Quadir added.



MD SABUR KHAN
FOUNDER OF DAFFODIL FAMILY

Category: **ICT Businessperson**
Winning Person: **Md Sabur Khan**

An iconic figure in the country's ICT business, Md Sabur Khan worked silently for the sector's development since the early years of ICT's orientation in Bangladesh.

Khan started his career as an IT entrepreneur in the very beginning of the 90s as he could foresee the booming demand for skilled IT personnel in Bangladesh and abroad.

He set up Daffodil Computers, which sold computers and provided ICT training.

Khan then moved on to assembling computers, and in 1995 Daffodil introduced the concept of computer superstore in Bangladesh. His Daffodil Group has gone on to establish 35 companies and was involved in more than a dozen large scale projects.

In his three decades in the ICT field, Khan also implemented lots of new ideas.

In 2002 Daffodil became the first ICT company to get listed on both the Dhaka and Chattogram stock exchanges, a milestone Khan is proud of.

"At that time it was unthinkable."

In the same year, Khan merged his knowledge and vision with the country's orthodox education system to come up with Daffodil International University (DIU), an ICT educational institute that equips youths to become self-sufficient.

Today, Daffodil is also has footprints in the health and the e-commerce sectors.

Khan was elected the president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2013, and is also a former president of the Bangladesh Computer Samity.

He also holds the position of director of the World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA), a consortium of associations from the ICT industry around the world, and chairman of WITSA's Global Trade Committee.

Fed nods to concerns but still sees US rate hikes

REUTERS

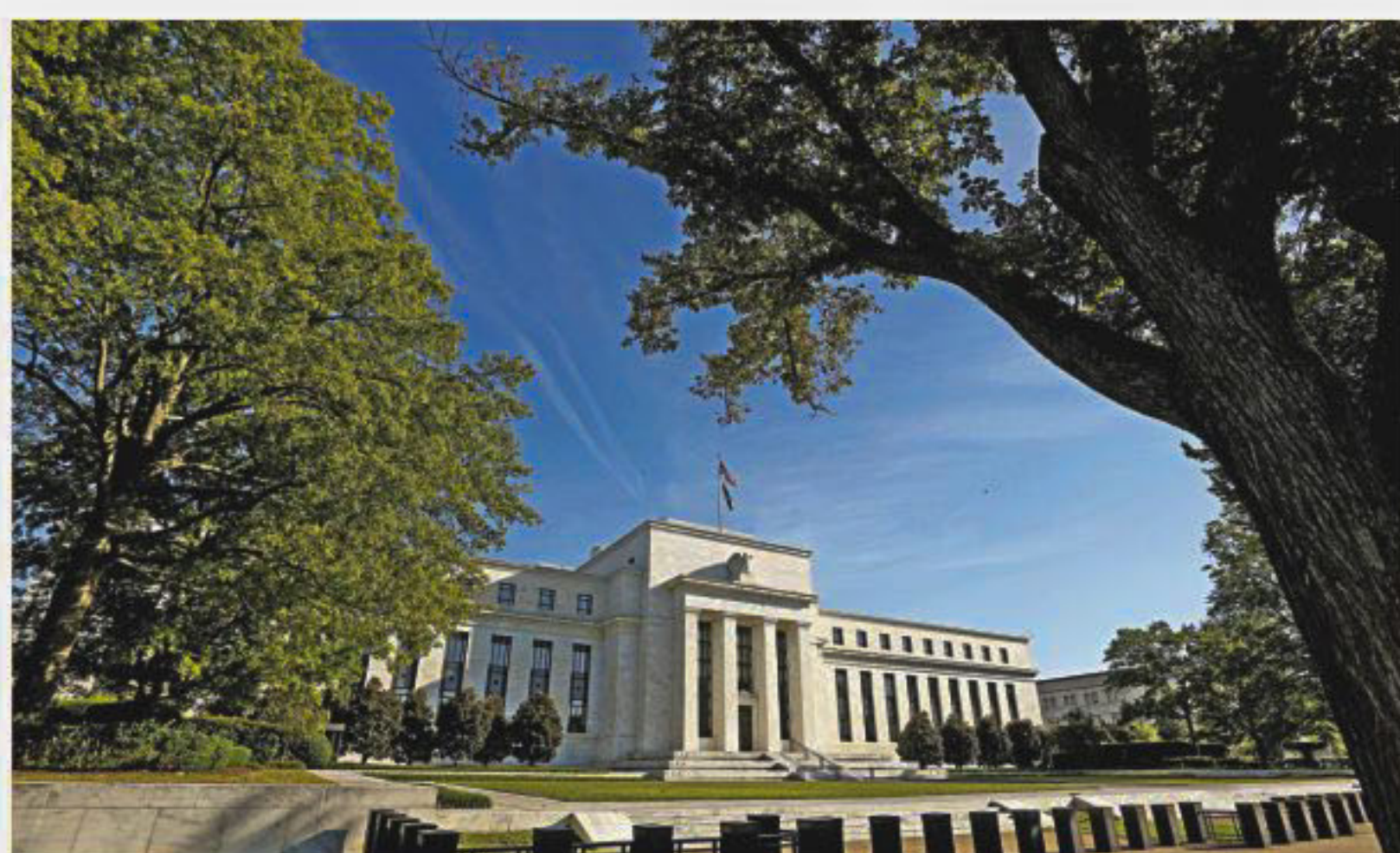
FEDERAL Reserve policymakers on Friday signalled further interest rate increases ahead, even as they raised relatively muted concerns over a potential global slowdown that has markets betting heavily that the rate-hike cycle will soon peter out.

The widening chasm between market expectations and the interest-rate path the Fed laid out just two months ago underscores the biggest question facing US central bankers: How much weight to give a growing number of potential red flags, even as robust US economic growth continues to push down unemployment and create jobs?

"We are at a point now where we really need to be especially data dependent," Richard Clarida, the Fed's newly appointed vice chair, said in a CNBC interview. "I think certainly where the economy is today, and the Fed's projection of where it's going, that being at neutral would make sense," he added, defining "neutral" as the policy rate somewhere between 2.5 percent and 3.5 percent.

Such a range implies anywhere from two to six more rate hikes, and Clarida declined to say how many he would prefer.

He did say he is optimistic that US productivity is rising, a view that suggests he would not see faster economic or wage growth as necessarily feeding into higher inflation or, necessarily, requiring tighter policy. But he also sounded a mild warning.



REUTERS/FILE

The Federal Reserve headquarters in Washington. The Fed raised interest rates three times this year and is expected to hike its target again next month.

"There is some evidence of global slowing," Clarida said. "That's something that is going to be relevant as I think about the outlook for the US economy, because it impacts big parts of the economy through trade and through capital markets and the like."

Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas President Robert Kaplan, in a separate interview with Fox Business, also said he is seeing a growth slowdown in Europe and China.

"It's my own judgment that global growth is going to be a little bit of a headwind, and it may spill over to the United States," Kaplan said.

The Fed raised interest rates three times this year and is expected to raise its target again next month, to a range of 2.25

percent to 2.5 percent. As of September, Fed policymakers expected to need to increase rates three more times next year, a view they will update next month.

Over the last week, betting in contracts tied to the Fed's policy suggests that even two rate hikes might be a stretch. The yield on fed fund futures maturing in January 2020, seen by some as an end-point for the Fed's current rate-hike cycle, dropped sharply to just 2.76 percent over six trading days.

At the same time, long-term inflation expectations have been dropping quickly as well. The so-called breakeven inflation rate on Treasury Inflation Protected Securities, or TIPS, has fallen sharply in the last month.

VW embarks on \$50b electrification plan

REUTERS, Wolfsburg, Germany

VOLKSWAGEN expects to become the most profitable manufacturer of electric cars thanks to a multi-billion euro expansion plan to mass produce battery driven vehicles, Chief Executive Herbert Diess said on Friday.

VW will spend almost 44 billion euros (\$50 billion) on developing electric cars, autonomous driving and new mobility services by 2023 and explore further areas of cooperation with US automaker Ford.

Diess said he hoped to have an outline agreement on cooperation with Ford fleshed out by the end of the year, with the initial focus on commercial vehicles. He added that a merger with Ford was not on the agenda and also said there were no plans to take a stake in the American company.

Mass producing electric cars will help the carmaker reduce the cost to the same level as current diesel vehicles, Diess said at a news conference in Wolfsburg, VW's home town.

"Very emotional vehicles, high economies of scale, I think we will be the most profitable company in electric vehicles," Diess said, responding to a question in English.

The supervisory board of Europe's largest carmaker voted on far reaching capital spending plans to begin mass production of electric vehicles in Europe, the most radical strategy shift since VW's diesel cheating scandal in 2015.

Volkswagen will retool three of its



REUTERS/FILE

A mechanic works on the production line of Volkswagen e-Golf in the Glaeserne Manufaktur plant in Dresden, Germany.

German plants to build electric cars and to explore alliances with battery partners and rival carmakers.

VW plans to increase productivity of its factories by 30 percent by 2025 by building more vehicles from different brands on the same production line. It wants to lower the carmaker's research and development ratio at the group's automotive division to six percent of revenues from 2020 onward.

"Volkswagen must become more efficient, more productive and more profitable in order to finance the high expenditure in the future and stay competitive," Diess said.

Labor unions, who control half the seats on Volkswagen's supervisory board, need to sign off on the plan to create global production capacity for 1 million electric vehicles by 2025 amid their concerns that assembling

battery driven cars will require fewer workers. Around 436,000 industrial jobs in Germany are tied to building petrol and diesel engine vehicles.

Jobs are under threat because a combustion engine car has 1,400 components in the motor, exhaust system and transmission, while an electric car's battery and motor has only 200 components, according to analysts at ING.

Volkswagen's management this week outlined plans for converting car plants in Zwickau, Emden and Hannover to build electric cars, providing job guarantees to workers until 2028.

The first ID electric car is due to roll off the production line in Zwickau in 2019, as the plant ramps up to a production capacity of 330,000 electric vehicles. Zwickau currently builds the VW Golf and the Golf Estate.