

Sonia governing board member of Unesco MGIEP

STAR BUSINESS DESK



Sonia Bashir Kabir, managing director of Microsoft for Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan and Laos, has recently been nominated member of the Unesco Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development's (MGIEP) governing board.

She will take on the role for the next four years, determining the institute's general policy and nature, adopting its work programme and annual budget and ensuring that its activities respond to member states' needs.

"It is an honor for me... We will work towards sustainable development of making socio-emotional learning as part of the education system in the world," said Kabir in a statement.

The board consists of 12 members, including seven from the Unesco member states, all chosen for their competence.

The research institute is situated in New Delhi and was established in 2012. It contributes to attaining Sustainable Development Goal 4.7, which is education for peace and sustainable development.

Huawei to spend \$2b over five years in cybersecurity push

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Huawei Technologies on Tuesday said it would spend \$2 billion over the next 5 years to focus on cybersecurity by adding more people and upgrading lab facilities, as it battles global concerns about risks associated with its network gear. The typically secretive Chinese technology giant made the comments at one of its most in-depth press conferences at its Dongguan offices, after welcoming about two dozen international journalists into its new campus in the southern Chinese city.

Huawei has been in the news these past weeks for the arrest of its chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou - also the daughter of its billionaire founder Ren Zhengfei - in Canada at the request of the United States.

This has exacerbated the woes of the Chinese firm, which has already been virtually locked out of the US

market and has been prohibited by Australia and New Zealand from building 5G networks amid concerns its gear could facilitate Chinese spying.

"Locking out competitors from a playing field cannot make yourself better. We think any concerns or allegations on security at Huawei should be based on factual evidence," its rotating chairman Ken Hu said. "Without factual evidence we don't accept and we oppose those allegations."

Huawei has been communicating with governments worldwide regarding the independence of its operation, he said. He added that Japan and France had not formally banned its telecom equipment. Recent media reports have indicated moves by these governments to shun the company's equipment.

Sources have told Reuters that Japan planned to ban government purchases of equipment. Other media reported that the country's three top operators

planned not to use current equipment and upcoming 5G gear from Huawei, and that France was considering adding items to its "high-alert" list that tacitly targets Huawei.

Huawei has repeatedly said Beijing has no influence over it.

At the tour of Huawei's Shenzhen headquarters on Tuesday, journalists glimpsed some of Huawei's most advanced R&D labs housed in a three-storey building with a white facade and four columns, referred to by insiders as the "White House".

Wu said Huawei had secured more than 25 commercial contracts for 5G, slightly above the 22 the Chinese technology giant had announced in November.

The company has shipped more than 10,000 base stations for the fifth generation of mobile communications, he said, adding that Huawei expects revenue to exceed \$100 billion this year - up 8.7 percent from last year.

Huawei is the world's largest supplier of telecommunications network equipment and second-biggest maker of smartphones and unlike other big Chinese technology firms, derives half its revenue from overseas.

Wu said on Tuesday Huawei was looking forward to "a just conclusion" in the case of Meng, who was arrested in Vancouver on Dec. 1 after US officials alleged Huawei was trying to use banks to evade sanctions against Iran and move money out.

She is awaiting possible extradition to the United States in a case that has roiled global markets amid concerns it would exacerbate tensions between the United States and China, which are already strained over trade matters.

Meng, the 46-year-old daughter of Ren, has said in a sworn affidavit she is innocent and will contest the allegations against her at trial if she is surrendered to the United States.

Bank Asia gets new independent director



STAR BUSINESS DESK

Ashraful Haq Chowdhury has recently been elected as independent director of Bank Asia.

He is the managing director of Star Infrastructure Development Consortium Ltd. He also served in top management positions at Grameen Telecom, Telekom Malaysia Bangladesh and Bharti Airtel for 21 years.

He has also served Commonwealth Secretariat, London as trade adviser.

Chowdhury obtained honours and master's degrees in economics from the University of Chittagong.



ROMANIA FOOD & BEVERAGE

Humayun Kabir Bablu, managing director of Romania Food & Beverage, launches four variants of Romania Lexus biscuits at a programme in Dhaka. KM Ali, CEO, was present.



STANDARD BANK

Mamun-Ur-Rashid, managing director of Standard Bank, opens the bank's 129th branch at North Chashara area of Fatullah union in Narayanganj yesterday.

AL recognises banking crisis

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Default loans stood at Tk 22,482 crore in 2009 when the party came to power in the first of its two last consecutive terms. The default loans increased by Tk 77,000 crore to around Tk 100,000 crore as of September this year, according to BB data.

The BB will take necessary steps to examine loan approvals, disbursement and banks' accountability to clients, said the manifesto.

The party pledged to formulate a bankruptcy act and implement it.

Massive irregularities and political intervention by an Awami League lawmaker led the new generation Farmers Bank to almost bankruptcy last year. The bank is now breathing by taking capital support from some government banks.

The numerous loan scams in the sector in the last decade also caught the attention of other political parties and alliances, which have pledged to take action against fraudsters in their election manifestos.

The BNP vowed that it would stop political interference in the banks if voted to power. It promised to close the banking division of the finance ministry in order to empower the BB and increase its control on the state banks.

The party pledged to publish the probe report on the reserve heist.

The heist of \$81 million from the central bank's account with the New York Federal Reserve in February 2016 was one of the most discussed issues globally in the year. Three years on, the investigation report of the biggest-ever cyber heist has not been made public.

The Jatiya Oikyafront, an alliance of the BNP and some other parties, promised to bring the fraudsters who looted money from banks to book and empower the BB.

"It is a good sign that political parties are giving priority to the banking sector in their manifestos," said Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, a former deputy governor of the BB.

"Political parties always make commitments but they don't implement the pledges in reality," he said, adding that discipline will be established in the banking sector if the promises are materialised.

App-based service to make calls cheaper

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The generation of such calls would affect the government's revenue earnings from the incoming international calls, said the department.

In the context of rapidly falling international incoming calls, allowing the IPTSP operators to run the service might lead to a further decline.

Sabir said customers who are currently using WhatsApp, IMO, Viber or other communication channels to make calls would switch to their applications as the latter is convenient and free.

The five service providers have been allowed to run app-based calling service subject to compliance with 14 conditions.

They will have to submit Tk 5 crore in security deposit. In case of any violation of the conditions, the commission will take the full amount or a portion of the deposit to its account considering the level of the violation.

The operators will have to ensure that none can misuse the technology to generate local or international calls to deprive the government or any other entity of any revenue.

International call termination must be completed through international gateway operators and interconnection exchange operators.

Besides, the IPTSPs will have to take prior approval from the commission to offer value-added services.

Cut cost of business to boost exports

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The commerce ministry and the Export Promotion Bureau jointly honoured 178 business persons with the CIP status for 2016.

Of the recipients, 137 persons received the CIP card in export category while 41 ex-officio members or the directors of the FBCCI were awarded in the trade category.

Officials of many regulatory bodies in Bangladesh even do not know what happens in the industries when the gas is not supplied with adequate pressure," Mohiuddin said.

The regulatory bodies are oblivious of the fact that the whole lot of dyes in a spinning mill can get wasted if an adequate gas pressure is not maintained, Mohiuddin said.

However, the domestic entrepreneurs are very resilient and they are continuing business in this anti-business friendly environment.

The government should ensure accountability to make the one stop service centres effective in different Bangladeshi embassies abroad along with assigning them with time-bound activities and export targets, he said.

We want quality supply of electricity and gas in the industries. No fluctuation in the supply can take place there."

At the event, Commerce Secretary Md Mofizul Islam said the govern-

ment has taken different short and long-term projects to boost gas and power supply, improve ports' efficiency and establish new economic zones.

Projects have also been taken to provide cash incentives and low-cost bank loans to expand the trade opportunities in the country, he said.

In 1972, Bangladesh exported 25 types of products to 65 countries worth \$348 million, which hit \$36.66 billion last fiscal year, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed said.

The export target for the current fiscal year has been fixed at \$44 billion, he said.

However, the target will be exceeded at the end of this year as the shipment value of goods has already touched \$17.73 billion in the first five months of the current fiscal year, registering a 17.24 percent year-on-year growth, he said.

The export target for the five-month period was set at \$15.23 billion and the export will exceed \$46 billion at the end of the year, he said.

The country's merchandise export will reach \$60 billion by 2021 and \$100 billion by 2030, he said.

Bangladesh has already fulfilled all three criteria to be eligible to be a developing country by 2024, he said.

Last year, earnings from the gar-

ment export stood at \$30.61 billion and this year the target has been set at \$32 billion.

Last year, export to the European Union stood at \$21.33 billion and it will grow further, he said.

Bangladesh will be benefited from the US-China trade war, Ahmed said.

The minister said the prices of Bangladeshi garment items did not increase although he himself lobbied different international groups and local apparel units spent billions of US dollars to strengthen workplace safety.

"We do not need the Accord anymore as the number of green factories has been growing here. Out of the top 10 greenest factories in the world, seven are in Bangladesh and 270 factories are waiting to be certified as green."

The CIPs will enjoy some benefits like entry to the secretariat with the cards and receive invitation letters on a priority basis in different national and municipal events.

The CIPs will also enjoy priority in reservation of seats in airlines, rail and waterway transports.

The CIPs will also be given the letter of introduction from the foreign ministry for visa purposes. They can use the VIP lounges at the airports.

Tea workers deprived of proper wages

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It is the "next generation" of what slavery was, he said.

The British created the practice of slavery among tea workers and though their situation slightly developed, it is still far behind that in other professions, he added. "This is a serious, concerning thing," he said. The research shows that no garden had set up tube wells or any permanent system for availing drinking water as well as an adequate number of toilets for workers.

Some 60.9 percent of tea workers set up tube wells for themselves using their own money or with assistance from non-government organisations or union parishes.

According to the research, 72.5 percent of tea workers drink water from tube wells and 16.1 percent from ring wells.

Moreover the management does not provide any cup at the wells in the garden and so the workers make-do with their hands. When it comes to electricity, some garden owners do not even make connections available in workers' houses. The 48.4 percent that do so refrain from bearing the bills.

The situation prompted 27.9 percent of workers to depend on kerosene to light their houses. Regarding healthcare, the research says 11 of the 64 gardens did not set up any health centre or dispensary. Around 61.7 percent of workers said they had to purchase medicine from outside the gardens while 79.1 percent said owners did not provide the money.

The TIB found that 11.6 percent of permanent workers were left out of the provident fund facility while only seven out of the 64 gardens had day-care centres for workers' children.

The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments is supposed to conduct investigations to ensure labour rights but they are involved in corruption and so deprivation of tea workers continues, said Dipu Roy, documentation associate of the TIB. Presenting the research paper, she said the government should take steps to ensure that the wages were adequate alongside quality healthcare and education.

In an email to The Daily Star yesterday, Bangladesh Tea Association said 90 percent tea workers are being paid in cash and kind about Tk 11,367 per month (those who work in the fields) and 10 percent tea workers are being paid about Tk 10,407 per month (those who work in the tea factories).

Lofty promises, real challenges

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Rising unemployment among educated people is another concern for the economy, which is on track to graduate to a lower-middle income country by 2021.

Out of 28 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, Bangladesh has the second highest educated unemployment rate. The International Labour Organization's Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2018 revealed that youth unemployment in Bangladesh doubled between 2010 and 2017, in a span of only seven years.

The business climate, which reflects a country's general economic environment and governance situation, is in a sorry state, according to a number of international reports published this year.

Bangladesh ranked 176th out of 190 countries in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business index, the lowest ranking among South Asian nations. Even war-torn Afghanistan and troubled Myanmar were ahead of Bangladesh.

The two major parties, AL and BNP, have not promised anything significant that would help improve the business climate.

Moreover, Bangladesh this year has

come down one spot in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index to 103 among 140 countries. According to the Global Innovation Index 2018, Bangladesh is the least innovative country. Similarly, because of pollution, Dhaka is the second least livable city in the world.

On the other hand, Bangladesh has topped the list of countries that saw the quickest growth in the number of ultra-wealthy people between 2012 and 2017, according to a report from New York-based research firm Wealth-X. The number of ultra-high net-worth individuals rose by 17.3 percent during the period.

All these reports necessitate the next government to address the bottlenecks if it wants to put the country on a sustainable growth path.

So, an election manifesto, which is a list of promises made to citizens, should not be limited to rhetoric only. In an era dominated by digital and social media, the growing awareness of voters, especially young ones, will hold political parties accountable for their promises.



Shamima Nasrin, chairman of Evaly, and Mohammad Rassel, CEO, cut a cake to launch shopping platform www.evaly.com.bd at Le Méridien Dhaka on December 16.