

No challenge, no growth

Mashrur Arefin, managing director and CEO of The City Bank Ltd, says at The Daily Star's The Chief Executive Show powered by Marico

DWOHA CHOWDHURY

Every leader has his time in the sun, and it is all about reinventing the sunlight when it is gloomy. Eclipse comes from complacency, and people suffer from inertia if there is no challenge in life.

This is the takeaway for Mashrur Arefin, managing director and chief executive officer of The City Bank Ltd, from his 26-year-long career in the banking industry, at home and abroad.

According to him, a value-driven culture is vital for the entrepreneurial spirit of a company to glow.

"In such a company, being result-driven, courageous and bold are parts of the culture so that people can participate in the decision-making process."

On the other hand, internal bureaucracy slows down a company, and it must be cut down to keep the spirit alive.

"After a successful period, there come inertia and senselessness of purpose. And in bad company culture, come disrespect and non-recognition that eat up the entrepreneurial spirit."

Arefin believes a democratic, participatory leadership framework is important and says during tough times, every decision must be participatory and never be dictatorial.

"This way, everybody will own the decision. In a team, if everyone fights together, no challenge is challenging," said Arefin, who's been leading the fast-growing private commercial bank since January 2019.

After completing MA in English from the University of Dhaka, he started his career with ANZ Grindlays Bank in 1995 as a management trainee.



Mashrur Arefin

He worked at Standard Chartered, American Express, Citibank N.A. and Eastern Bank Ltd in senior roles before joining City Bank in January 2007 as a senior executive vice president.

He played a key role in City Bank's transformation. He became a deputy managing director before appointed to the top job more than two years ago.

Arefin said difficult times might come today or tomorrow, and there's no panacea to them, as every challenge was unique in its own time and space.

He advised young corporate executives to remain calm during challenging times, consult with

seniors, and think inside what one is getting and losing.

"The rest is your courage. Without courage, one takes the wrong decision. Also, fear eats up one's soul."

Arefin believes that there is an acute crisis in the country's cultural maturity level where everyone wants to become a boss, not a leader.

"A good institution must have an institutional framework so that no one can become a powerful boss. A leader is always compassionate towards his people, and there must be transparency in performance assessment."

If there's no compassion and care, one will become a boss and explore



himself in the dustbin of the corporate world someday, he said.

"It's easy to build a good bank, but it is tough to build a good institution."

For him, creating shareholder value lies at the core.

The right decision-making process is essential through cost-benefit analysis from all angles, as some decisions help earn revenue and some build brand equity, he said.

"If the desired return is not attained due to the lack of business discipline, there raises the question of accountability."

Founded by 12 young businessmen in 1983, City Bank has 132 branches and serves 18 lakh customers.

The bank has thrived over the years. But Arefin believes the banking environment in the country is tough.

One of the challenges facing the banking industry stems from the capping of the interest rate at 9 per cent on loans just before the pandemic

hit the country.

"It affected around Tk 350 crore worth of business for City Bank."

During the pandemic, the government has introduced a loan holiday, which has continued. Banks are suffering due to non-payment of instalments.

"When everything comes to normal, will people get back to their repayment habit?" he asked.

The pandemic has affected City Bank's card business, where it holds the majority of the market share, at 38 per cent.

"The card business is slowly picking up as people are moving to e-commerce," said Arefin, who is credited for the launch of American Express cards in Bangladesh.

The pandemic has brought on many changes, but the noted banker is hopeful because of the initiatives such as real-time cash machine and the country's first digital loan through bKash app.

"We're trying to counter the challenge through innovation and stay connected with people. We have done well during the pandemic."

Arefin is a poet, writer and translator, as well.

He started writing in the early 1990s, and his first poetry book,

Ishwardi, Mayor O Mule er Golpo, was published in 2001.

His translation titled 'Complete Stories of Franz Kafka' won the 'Brac Bank-Samakal Literary Award' in 2013 and was adjudged the year's 'Best Publication' by the Bangla Academy. His translation of Homer's epic 'The Iliad' was also well-received.

His other literary works are the translation of the novels Althusser and Underground and poetry books Prithibi Elomelo Shokalbelay and Poristhiti Jehetu Agun Hoyo Achhe.

After his day's job, he steps into his library and spends around four hours a day. On weekends and holidays, he would devote 10-12 hours.

"If there is passion, everything possible," Arefin said.

"One should think about the key purpose of life. If you want to be something, ask whether it is for yourself or the community? Try to see it from the bigger space."

He says banking and writing were way too different, and hard to keep them aligned.

"But banking gives me financial stability so that I can buy a lot of books and don't feel the financial stress."

Arefin, who completed an MBA from Victoria University of Australia and higher management courses from INSEAD in France, asks the young generation to take care of three aspects if they want to succeed.

"One must know the difference between a job and a career. Understand the purpose that defines you and makes you relevant. Finally, remember that good institution doesn't hire people for knowledge, but based on aptitude, attitude, hunger for learning, zeal, bravery, and character traits."

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GLOBAL BUSINESS

African nations gear up to polish image at Dubai Expo

AFP, Dubai

African nations are attending this year's Dubai Expo 2020 in force, hoping to project an image of a modern and ambitious continent and shed stereotypes of conflict and underdevelopment.

The six-month mega-event, delayed by the Covid pandemic, is a milestone for the wealthy Gulf emirate. It has spent some \$8.2b transforming a barren stretch on the outskirts of the city into an eye-popping site bristling with high-tech pavilions.

As the huge project nears completion ahead of the scheduled October 2021 opening, African delegates touted their ambitions to generate trade and investment at a high-level meeting this week.

With nearly all African states represented for the first time, Expo provides a stage to advertise a "continent that is ready to move forward" and "a secure place to do business," Levi Uche Madueke from the 55-member African Union told AFP.

"The time has come for us to actually reach out to the world, and for the world to understand us, and also see how they can collaborate with us," said Madueke, the AU's head of strategic partnerships.

Since the first World Expo was held in London in 1851, global fairs have been used to showcase innovations and as a branding exercise for participating countries.



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Merkel urges US to export Covid vaccines

AFP, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Saturday urged the United States to export coronavirus vaccines made on its soil, as she rejected a patent waiver call from Washington for the jabs.

"Now that a further part of the American population has been vaccinated, I hope that we can come to a free exchange of components and an opening of the market for vaccines," she said, adding the EU has exported a big chunk of jabs made in the bloc and that should "be the rule".

Speaking at a press conference after talks with EU leaders, Merkel reiterated her opposition to calls for pharmaceutical companies to drop their intellectual property protection for the vaccines.

"I do not think that a patent waiver is the solution to make more vaccines available to more people," she said. "Rather, I think

that we need the creativity and the power of innovation of companies, and to me, that includes patent protection.

"The leader of Europe's biggest economy underlined the importance of spurring innovation, saying it must not be "weakened such that no rapid adaptations for virus variants can be found". Vaccines were "highly sensitive" products, she said, adding that manufacturers were already working at high speed to ramp up capacities, including through licensing partnerships.

"The problem is not that people are sitting on their patents and not taking action," she said. Germany is home to BioNTech, the company which co-developed with Pfizer the first Covid vaccine to be approved for use in the West late last year.

Another German company, Curevac, is in the final stages of clinical trials and eyeing authorisation for its Covid jabs in the EU in the coming weeks.

Cyber attack shuts down US fuel pipeline network

REUTERS, New York

Top US fuel pipeline operator Colonial Pipeline shut its entire network, the source of nearly half of the US East Coast's fuel supply, after a cyber attack on Friday that involved ransomware.

The incident is one of the most disruptive digital ransom operations ever reported and has drawn attention to how vulnerable US energy infrastructure is to hackers. A prolonged shutdown of the line would cause prices to spike at gasoline pumps ahead of peak summer driving season, a potential blow to US consumers and the economy.

"This is as close as you can get to the jugular of infrastructure in the United States," said Amy Myers Jaffe, research professor and managing director of the Climate Policy Lab. "It's not a major pipeline. It's the pipeline." Colonial transports 2.5m barrels per day of gasoline, and other fuels through 5,500 miles (8,850 km) of pipelines linking refiners on the Gulf Coast to the eastern and southern United States. It also serves some of the country's largest airports, including Atlanta's Hartsfield Jackson Airport, the world's busiest by passenger traffic.

The company said it shut down its operations after learning of a cyberattack on Friday using ransomware.

"Colonial Pipeline is taking steps to understand and resolve this issue. At this time, our primary focus is the safe and efficient restoration of our service and our efforts to return to normal operation," it said.

While the US government investigation is in early stages, one former official and two industry sources said the hackers are likely a professional cybercriminal group.

The former official said investigators are looking at a group dubbed "DarkSide," known for deploying ransomware and extorting victims while avoiding targets in post-Soviet states. Ransomware is a type of malware designed to lock down systems by encrypting data and demanding payment to regain access.

Colonial said it had engaged a cybersecurity



REUTERS/FILE

Holding tanks are seen at Colonial Pipeline's Linden Junction Tank Farm in Woodbridge, US.

firm to help the investigation and contacted law enforcement and federal agencies.

The cybersecurity industry sources said cybersecurity firm FireEye was brought in to respond to the attack. FireEye declined to comment. US government bodies, including the FBI, said they were aware of the situation but did not yet have details of who was behind the attack.

President Joe Biden was briefed on the incident on Saturday morning, a White House spokesperson said, adding that the government is working to try to help the company restore operations and prevent supply disruptions.

The Department of Energy said it was monitoring potential impacts to the nation's energy supply, while both the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the Transportation Security Administration told Reuters they were working on the situation.

"We are engaged with the company and our

interagency partners regarding the situation. This underscores the threat that ransomware poses to organizations regardless of size or sector," said Eric Goldstein, executive assistant director of the cybersecurity division at CISA.

Colonial did not give further details or say how long its pipelines would be shut.

The privately held, Georgia-based company is owned by CDPQ Colonial Partners L.P., IFM (US) Colonial Pipeline 2 LLC, KKR-Keats Pipeline Investors L.P., Koch Capital Investments Company LLC and Shell Midstream Operating LLC.

"Cybersecurity vulnerabilities have become a systemic issue," said Algride Pipikaite, cyber strategy lead at the World Economic Forum's Centre for Cybersecurity.

"Unless cybersecurity measures are embedded in a technology's development phase, we are likely to see more frequent attacks on industrial systems like oil and gas pipelines or water treatment plants," Pipikaite added.

Ford recalls nearly 617,000 US Explorer SUVs

REUTERS

Ford Motor Co is recalling nearly 617,000 Explorer sport utility vehicles in the United States at the request of regulators because retention pins could loosen and allow roof rail covers to detach from the vehicle.

The recall covers 2016 through 2019 model year vehicles. Dealers will install push-pins and replace any damaged rail clips and roof rail covers, as

necessary.

The second largest US automaker said in documents posted Sunday the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in April had requested Ford conduct a safety recall after first inquiring about the issue in early 2020 following 11 reports of roof rail cover detachment.

Ford in November approved a onetime repair extended coverage action for 10 years or 150,000 miles to address the issue.



People visit the stand of Ford during the 17th Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition, also known as Auto Shanghai. REUTERS/FILE