

# 3,000 women entrepreneurs to get digital, financial literacy training

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A workshop on basic digital and financial literacy was launched yesterday to enable 3,000 female entrepreneurs of a UNDP marketplace to efficiently operate and expand their business online.

Anondomela, the online marketplace of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for entrepreneurs, launched the 40-day event encompassing the participants from 40 districts.

Planning Minister MA Mannan inaugurated the associated project, being implemented by the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI) and funded by the UNDP, at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

“Those who bear a different quality, they are entrepreneurs. And there is a kind of joy in being an entrepreneur. Especially in being able to earn money and spend it yourself. And they are now involved in diversified businesses with many innovative ideas,” said Mannan.

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Bangladesh has undergone a lot of changes in the past 12 years and improvements in digital economy and online businesses are one of the best examples, said State Minister for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Zunaid Ahmed Palak.

Access to internet has already been expanded up to remote areas of the country and there will hopefully be significant changes in the sector by January 2022, he said.

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## KEY POINTS

- 40-day workshop from Nov. 21
- 3,000 women entrepreneurs selected from 40 districts
- Will be trained on basic digital, financial literacy
- BWCCI will implement the project funded by UNDP
- Bangladesh has 7m SMEs involving 25m people

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also avail a one-time grant of Tk 50,000, Palak added.

Anondomela was formed amidst the pandemic and successful completion of the pilot phase will be a good start to cover more areas, said Sudipto Kumar Mukherjee, country representative of UNDP Bangladesh.

He said Bangladesh’s United Nations status graduation from a least developed country to a developing one was underway, so women empowerment has become essential.

He also gave importance on digital and economic equity.

The UNDP wants to set an example of its support to government initiatives and hopefully Anondomela will be like Joyeeta but online, said Nazneen Ahmed, country economist of the UNDP.

Joyeeta is a government venture where products made by creative

women from across the country are displayed and sold under the supervision of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

“I have no idea how to sell products in the online market. How to deal with it,” said Cynthia Bhuiyan, an entrepreneur from Khilgaon in Dhaka.

“Hopefully through this training I will be able to acquire that knowledge. That would add a new dimension to my business product sales,” she said.

Shamima Sultana Shilu, another entrepreneur from Khulna, said, “I have been doing business for a long time. But I have not gone online.”

“Through this initiative, the whole of Bangladesh is there. Besides, buyers from other countries will be able to know about my products. And they can buy as well,” he said.

Selima Ahmad, president of the BWCCI, also spoke.

# Build your own brand



MAMUN RASHID

I take pride in sharing with my readers that I was taught branding at Kellogg School of Management by a certain Professor Philip Kotler. At the same time, my piece on “Branding Bangladesh” drew the attention of Simon Anholt, known to be a guru of this subject, who subsequently wrote a piece on nation branding in the local newspaper.

However, the session that intrigued me most was a lecture on “Build Your Own Brand” by a business school senior some 25 years ago.

Proper branding that communicates what an organisation offers has now become the focus of all successful organisations the world over.

PwC’s focus on building trust in society by solving important problems underlines its promise as an organisation of problem-solvers creating value in society. Apple’s brand promise is one of innovation and a superior user experience. These brands have become synonymous with these values.

While corporate branding is widely known and practiced in Bangladesh, personal or individual branding as a concept is something that professionals have largely failed to capitalise on.

Personal branding is the representation of an individual. While professionals are judged on the reputation of the company they work for or their designation, increasingly the work they do, or the brand promise they communicate about themselves is becoming important. For some professionals, especially those in the professional services industry, personal branding is a crucial tent of the reputation that differentiates them in a crowded marketplace.

Why is personal branding important?

What you do, the way you do it, who you do it for, the people you do it with, and the way people perceive of what you

have done all combine to determine what your personal brand is. When people know what you represent and you can build trust in the quality of work that you put forward, you are defined less by the role you occupy and more by what you can offer. This results in far greater autonomy than a world where professionals were dependent on being recognised by their superiors in an organisation and hoped that their work would be recognised.

In the job market, companies vie to attract the most talented professionals. Once you have a brand that people trust, people would choose to work with you, even at a premium, rather than with someone who does not have a strong brand and therefore can’t be trusted to deliver high-quality work.

The benefits compound over the course of your career as you build up a strong network, which can be leveraged for greater opportunities, which, in turn, create a self-reinforcing cycle further improving your value as a resource. Those who have a strong brand become invaluable for anyone trying to grow their business, and in a growing economy like Bangladesh, it acts as a major differentiating factor.



## OPINION

How to brand yourself properly?

The most important thing that must be remembered when engaging in personal branding is to be authentic. Anyone who tries to “fake it till they make it” will get found out very quickly in a corporate setting. Therefore, the crucial tenet of personal branding is competency. However, competency by itself is going to only take you so far unless people know that you are competent and can be trusted with important opportunities.

There are a few ways to begin branding yourself and the work you do properly:

Determine what it is you offer: A major mistake that people make is trying to be everything at once. You have a limited amount of time and what you are worth as a resource will depend heavily on what the expectations from you are.

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## GLOBAL BUSINESS

# Sri Lanka ends farm chemical ban as organic drive fails

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka abandoned its quest to become the world’s first completely organic farming nation on Sunday, announcing it would immediately lift an import ban on pesticides and other agricultural inputs.

The island country has been in the grips of a severe economic crisis, with a lack of foreign exchange triggering shortages of food, crude oil and other essential goods.

Authorities had already walked back restrictions on fertiliser imports last month for tea, the country’s main export earner.

But ahead of planned farmer protests in the capital, Sri Lanka’s agricultural ministry said it would end a broader ban on all agrochemicals including herbicides and pesticides. “We will now allow chemical inputs that are urgently needed,” ministry secretary Udith Jayasinghe told the private News First TV network.

“Considering the need to ensure food security, we have taken this decision.”

Vast tracts of farmland were abandoned after the import ban, first introduced in May.

Shortages have worsened in the past week, with prices for rice, vegetables and other market staples having doubled across Sri Lanka.

Supermarkets have also rationed rice sales, allowing only five kilograms (11 pounds) per customer.

Farmers’ organisations had planned to march on the national parliament in Colombo on Friday to demand the import of essential chemicals to protect their crops.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa had justified the import ban by saying he wanted to make Sri Lankan farming 100 percent organic. The policy was introduced after a massive hit to the cash-strapped island’s economy in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, with tourism earnings and foreign worker remittances drastically falling.



A tea picker works on a plantation in the southern district of Ratnapura on July 31, 2021.

# UK inflation could be elevated for longer: BoE

REUTERS, London

Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey said his concern on the inflation outlook is that it could be “elevated for longer” but there is also a chance that inflation does not prove as persistent as feared.

Earlier this month the BoE forecast inflation would reach around 5 per cent in the second quarter of next year, more than double its official target, due to surging energy prices and supply bottlenecks as the world emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic.

You’re in a fairly febrile world ... [the inflation picture] is two-sided,” he said in an interview with the Sunday Times.

“There are risks both ways. Obviously, our concern would be that if it gets into second-round effects, it could be elevated for longer.

The second-round effects Bailey is particularly concerned about are wage bargaining and the labour market.

“If the economy evolves in the way the forecasts and reports suggest, well have to raise rates. Which, by the way, is entirely consistent with what I said in October,” he said.

The governor said this week he was very uneasy about the inflation outlook and that his vote to keep interest rates on hold on November 4 had been a very close call.

The BoE wrong-footed many investors when it did not lift interest rates from their record low 0.1 per cent, following comments from Bailey in late October which markets interpreted as a signal that a rate rise was very near.

# India police charge Amazon execs over online drug sales

AFP, New Delhi

Indian police have charged executives from Amazon’s local arm over claims the US retail behemoth’s online portal was used to smuggle and sell marijuana.

Two men were arrested last week with 21 kilograms (46 pounds) of the drug in central Madhya Pradesh state and told officers they were using Amazon’s India platform to ship their goods elsewhere in the country.

They admitted to shipping their crop by falsely marketing it as stevia leaves, a natural sweetener, according to a police report seen by AFP on Sunday.

Executives from Amazon’s India unit had been included in the charges because of contradictions between evidence collected in the police investigation and responses received by the firm, the report said.

Neither police nor Amazon gave any

indication of how many employees were facing charges.

Amazon said it was investigating the case and pledged full cooperation with police in a Sunday statement to AFP.

“We do not allow the listing and sale of products which are prohibited under law to be sold in India,” a company spokesperson said. India is a key market for Amazon with local investments worth \$6.5 billion in the country since its 2013 debut.

The drugs case is the latest legal headache for the online marketplace’s Indian arm, which is also facing an anti-trust probe along with Walmart subsidiary Flipkart.

Both firms are being investigated by competition watchdogs over claims they gave preferential treatment to some sellers.

Amazon also launched an internal probe after reports in September that one or more of its Indian employees had bribed government officials.

# Australian fruit farmers face harvest headache

AFP, Nashdale

In near-perfect conditions, thanks to abundant rain and healthy trees, Australian fruit grower Michael Cunial’s cherry orchard looks set to yield a bumper crop. He has just one problem: the harvest.

Like many farmers in Australia, during harvests he relies on seasonal workers, many of whom have been shut out of the country since its international borders closed in March 2020 to halt the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Even if he can find workers for the cherry harvest, he may have to pay them more than he has in previous years.

In common with most Australian fruit growers, Cunial has paid seasonal workers for what they can pick. But the system has left many workers earning less than the minimum wage, so the rules may be about to change.

“The system of a piece rate tends to make sense,” the fruit grower said at his 50-hectare (120-acre) farm, Curinya Orchards, in Nashdale -- about four hours’ drive from Sydney.

“If you want to have a go, you can actually

make really good money. And if you’re hopeless, you don’t.” Cunial said he expects “really big” cherries this year, which will probably be ready for harvest in early- to mid-December.

He hires about 50 seasonal workers for the annual harvest and pays them piece rate.

But the system has been condemned by the Fair Work Commission, Australia’s industrial relations tribunal.

Ruling on a complaint by the Australian Workers Union, it said seasonal farm workers should get the minimum hourly wage of Aus\$25.41 (US\$18.50).

“The totality of the evidence presents a picture of significant underpayment of pieceworkers in the horticulture industry when compared to the minimum award hourly rate,” the commission found.

Farming federations, which oppose the finding, have until November 26 to appeal.

According to a 2018 study of more than 8,000 horticultural farms by the Fair Work Ombudsman, 56 per cent of them underpaid a proportion of their workers.

Working hard is not always enough.

Victor, a young Frenchman who preferred not to be identified by his full name to protect his employment prospects, had to work 88 days in farming to be allowed to stay a second year -- a condition of the working holiday visa.

“I have worked in the vineyards. I had to wrap the branches around wire. We were paid 11 cents a branch. I was among the top 10 per cent and I still only got Aus\$9 an hour, less than half the minimum wage,” he said.

Cedric Gestin, another French worker who is in his third year in Australia, says he has always preferred farms that pay by the hour.

After three years working full-time in Cunial’s cherry orchard, Remy Genet manages the seasonal workers.

“I have got guys who can fill 60 lugs (fruit crates), earn Aus\$700 in a day, and others who can only fill nine lugs in the same field. The difference is the motivation,” he said.

“Of course, there are farms where even the good ones never earn enough money because there is not enough fruit or the farm is badly run. But where some people can make money, everyone can make money.”