

THE DAILY STAR ICT AWARDS 2021

Bangladesh has made notable progress in ICT sector over the last several years riding on the entrepreneurial spirit of IT professionals, entrepreneurs. Today, a large number of youths, IT experts, and engineers are working in the sector to serve local and international markets through their innovations, creativity and excellence. To encourage innovation that positively impact society, The Daily Star has been recognising and celebrating extraordinary achievements by IT entrepreneurs since 2016. This year, six trailblazers in the ICT sector were honoured with The Daily Star ICT Awards for their extraordinary achievements and contribution to the development of country's IT sector.



MAHMUDUL HASAN SOHAG
Chairman of Rokomari.com

Category: Digital Commerce
of the year 2021
Winner: Rokomari.com



MOHAMMED E RAHMAN
Founder and CEO of Ulkasemi Pvt Ltd

Category: ICT Solution Provider of the year
2021 - International Market Focus
Winner: Ulkasemi Pvt Ltd



MIR MONUWAR IQBAL
Founder & CEO of Pridesys IT Ltd

Category: ICT Solution Provider of The Year
2021 - Local Market Focus
Winner: Pridesys IT Ltd



SINTHIA SHARMIN ISLAM
Co-Founder of Shajgoj Ltd

Category: ICT Startup
of the year 2021
Winning company: Shajgoj Ltd



SYED MAMNUN QUADER
MD & CEO of Southtech Group

Category: ICT Pioneer
Winner: Syed Mamnun Quader
MD and CEO, Southtech Group



KAMAL QUADIR
CEO of bKash Ltd

Category: ICT Business Person
Winner: Kamal Quadir
CEO, bKash Limited

Nowadays, it has become easier to purchase books straight from one's home and, for many, Rokomari.com is the ideal online bookstore – with a variety ranging from creative fictions to academic reads.

However, even a decade ago, such an opportunity was not available for readers. Rokomari.com is one of the platforms that changed the landscape of the book market since its inception in 2012.

Starting with a small team, about 10,000 books, and a handful of publishers, today Rokomari has over 200,000 books on its platform and works with a large number of publishers in order to reach readers throughout the country.

The completely locally-owned and managed company with no external investment, Rokomari grew overtime through its services.

It delivers to customers in Dhaka within 2-3 days and, with the help of the Bangladesh post office, delivers to customers outside the capital in seven to nine days.

Rokomari also maintains a reputation of having a strong customer service team, who work in three shifts, 24/7.

Its entry in the digital marketplace has helped the book industry take off by creating momentum for the publishing industry and fostering a new reading culture.

While the number of website visitors was relatively low when the company began, today, it has around 15 lakh visitors per month.

Ulkasemi signed up for providing services for semiconductor designing while the field was still new for IT professionals in Bangladesh.

Beginning in 2007, on an 800-squarefoot space in Dhaka with four engineers, Ulkasemi had a turbulent beginning due to the 2007-08 global financial crisis.

Thanks to its indomitable spirit and conviction that good days would come, the company started hiring again from 2011.

It then expanded its services to global firms that develop mobile devices, complex routers or switches, consumer products, storage, microprocessors and graphics processors.

In 2014, it got support from the government-formed Equity Entrepreneurship Fund, which, according to a top official, was vital for the company to expand operations.

Ulkasemi hit its growth spurt in 2017.

It joined Texas Instruments, a global semiconductor company that designs, manufactures, tests and sells analog and embedded semiconductors, along with Qualcomm and GlobalFoundries.

In 2019, Ulkasemi began providing services to Apple.

With its operations, its capacity also grew. In 2021 alone, it hired 100 engineers taking its total workforce to more than 275.

Today, Ulkasemi has four offices, including one in the USA's Silicon Valley, Canada's Toronto Canada, India's Bangalore, with operations in Dhaka. It is also connected with Facebook, Google and TSMC.

When many companies were struggling to recover from damages caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and were at risk of suffering losses due to cancellation of orders, Pridesys IT Ltd, one of the leading ERP solutions providers in Bangladesh, helped them bounce back.

With a secure, scalable on-demand application system and data access solutions, the IT service provider has been helping its clients improve their business performance with Pridesys ERP, an integrated software that provides all solutions under a single umbrella, since the beginning of its journey in 2013.

Pridesys is working on improving efficiency of companies to save their cost by providing solution for product planning and real-time monitoring, and increasing profit margin.

Pridesys ERP has been successfully implemented at Teletalk Bangladesh Ltd. Besides, it has been implemented at 16 companies in the garment sector to help them turn around from the impacts of the pandemic.

Currently, Pridesys is providing support to Mahmud Group, Vision Group, Sams Attire Ltd, Ananata Group, IDS Group, Nipa Group, AL Muslim Group, Nassa Group, Dysin Group, Dong Bang Group, Voyager Apparels Ltd, Prefex, Teletalk Bangladesh Ltd, and Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority.

With the increase in internet penetration and social media users, three entrepreneurs realised that there was no good Bangla content available about beauty and personal care in the virtual world.

This was the gap the three filled up by creating Shajgoj.com. In 2013, they opened a blog with the name in order to create awareness among people on beauty and personal care.

Two years later, Shajgoj opened two physical stores in the capital – one in Jamuna Future Park and another at Shimanto Shambhar Shopping Complex – to cater to their buyers.

As its customer base expanded, Shajgoj launched an e-commerce platform in 2018 with products that were mostly imported from abroad.

As it grew, the company also got investments from a local firm as well as a Singaporean company.

Initially, Shajgoj would receive perhaps 20 orders a day.

Now, Shajgoj gets at least 4,000 orders daily and delivers products throughout the country. With an increase in demand, the firm multiplied its manpower to ensure better customer service, resulting in most of their customers being returning ones.

The company that began with only a Tk 50 lakh capital by the three partners, now registers a Tk 9 crore monthly turnover. It has 200 employees now with 65 percent of it being female.

Syed Mamnun Quader started his career in 1983 as a bank management trainee in London.

He also worked for Banque Nationale de Paris Plc in London, Banque Paribas in London and Investcorp Bank EC in Bahrain and thus acquired well rounded experience of retail, commercial and investment banking in his 25 years of career in the ICT industry.

His last assignment at Investcorp was as risk and controls manager of the Proprietary Trading Group of their Bahrain, London, and New York offices.

Quader's heavy involvement with technology eventually led him to think about setting up a software house in Bangladesh. In late 1995, he decided to come to Bangladesh and that was the beginning of his long entrepreneurial journey.

An MBA from Cass Business School, London, Quader is also a founding member and a former senior vice president of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS).

He founded Southtech Limited in 1996 at a time when there was very little in terms of software development in Bangladesh.

Southtech Group now comprises six entities, two within Bangladesh and four overseas.

Quader is an iconic figure and a pioneer in the Bangladeshi tech industry. He inspires startups and a number of his former employees are now successful entrepreneurs in their own rights.

Kamal S Quadir is a Bangladeshi-American entrepreneur and artist best known for introducing e-commerce in the country through founding CellBazaar, an online marketplace.

CellBazaar, acquired by Norwegian telecommunications operator Telenor in 2010, has currently 4 million users.

With more than 15 years of experience in the ICT sector, Quadir is currently heading bKash, which provides financial services through a network of community-based agents and existing technology, including mobile phones.

bKash is the world's second largest and fastest growing mobile financial services company.

Quadir is also a founding member of Open World Initiatives, a Lausanne, Switzerland-based organisation of young thinkers.

He is involved with Anwarul Quadir Foundation which recognises innovations in developing countries. He is a First Mover Fellow of the Aspen Institute.

Quadir was selected as TED Fellow by TED, a nonprofit organisation devoted to spreading ideas usually in the form of short, powerful talks. He was honoured as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum in 2009.

For his contributions to the technology sector and business industry, Quadir was honoured with MIT Ideas Award in 2005, Tech Award for "Applying Technology to Benefit Humanity" in 2007, Global Mobile Award of the GSM Association in the category of "Best Use of Mobile for Social & Economic Development" in 2008.

PM returns from Maldives

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina returned home yesterday from the Maldives wrapping up her six-day visit to the island nation.

A special VIP flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines carrying the PM touched down at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka at 5:30pm, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told UNB.

Earlier, the aircraft departed Velana International Airport, Male at 1:20pm (local time).

Hasina went to the Maldives on December 22 at the invitation of the country's President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

\$500m economy

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fiscal 2021-22, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension. In fiscal 2019-20, crop production was 430.35 lakh tonnes.

During economic transformation, agricultural growth slows down. But that was not the case in Bangladesh, even during the pandemic.

On the other hand, the overall production of medium and large industries saw 19 percent growth in August 2021. The growth rate was 4.38 percent in the last year.

Among others, the leather industry witnessed a giant 125.24 percent growth while the textile 29 percent and other non-metallic minerals 30.72 percent.

The state of the pandemic as well as the ongoing vaccination campaign were also discussed in the meeting.

The daily infection rate has dropped under five percent from October and no impact of Omicron is visible in the country.

As of December 21, more than 11.7 crore doses of vaccines were administered, according to a presentation of the finance division.

The finance division estimated Bangladesh's total population to be 169.8 million in 2020. About 41 percent of the total population and 63 percent of the population aged over 15 have received the vaccine for Covid-19.

So far, the government has secured 30 crore doses of vaccines and targets completing both doses by the first quarter of next year.

From December 19, the Directorate General of Health Services has begun booster doses. As of yesterday, 54 persons have received the booster shot.

The government aims to administer Pfizer as booster jabs, which will be procured for \$250 million provided by the World Bank, according to finance division officials.



AHM Hasinul Qudus, chief corporate affairs officer of Daraz, second from left, Syed Almas Kabir, president of BASIS, fifth from left, Gowher Rizvi, international affairs adviser to the prime minister, sixth from left, Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, sixth from right, Md Sabbir Hossain, deputy managing director and COO of Brac Bank, fifth from right, Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan, Pro-VC IUB, fourth from right, pose for a photo with the award winners.

PHOTO: STAR

Digital doers lauded

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enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions providers in Bangladesh, received the ICT Solution Provider of The Year (Local Market Focus) award.

Shajgoj Limited, a growing beauty and personal care e-commerce and content platform, won the ICT Startup of the Year award. Mohammed E Rahman, founder and CEO of Ulkasemi; Ahteshamul Shams Rakib, co-founder of Rokomari; Sinthia Sharmin Islam, co-founder of Shajgoj Limited; Kamal Quadir, bKash CEO; Mir Monuwar Iqbal, founder and CEO of Pridesys IT Ltd; Syed Mamnun Quader, managing director and CEO of Southtech Group; and bKash CEO Kamal Quadir received the awards from Dr Gowher Rizvi, international affairs adviser to the prime minister.

Deputy Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer of Brac Bank Sabbir Hossain, Pro-vice Chancellor of Independent University Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan, BASIS President Syed Almas Kabir and Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam also headed the awards with Gowher Rizvi.

The Daily Star introduced the awards in 2016 to promote the sector's development and highlight the frontrunners who can become a benchmark for others.

The awards are also aimed at recognising the excellent work in the ICT sector, encouraging the ICT community and to strengthen the ICT ecosystem, creating an environment that sustains entrepreneurial spirit, and supporting the young ICT entrepreneurs to utilise their potential.

Yesterday's programme began with a video presentation highlighting Bangladesh's progress in the ICT sector.

In his address, Gowher Rizvi said the ICT sector is developing in a manner that today's education will become outdated tomorrow. "We need to develop the attitude to become lifelong learners."

He said although IT is eradicating poverty, it is also creating inequality.

"If we do not address it, many will be left behind. We will have to take it very, very seriously."

Despite all the progress, only 13 percent of the workforce are female, he said, adding that the government must provide necessary support to

increase participation of women in the ICT sector.

Syed Almas Kabir, president of BASIS, said the Covid-19 pandemic could not stop the economic wheel of the country thanks to the infrastructure

"We've already entered the fourth industrial revolution. But without skilled human resources we'll not be able to progress," he said.

He also said there is a gap between academic and industrial knowledge. The government needs to pay attention to bridge the gap.

Underscoring the need for broadband connectivity across the country, he said internet service has reached remote areas of the country, but it is mainly mobile internet. "We need broadband connection so that people can start outsourcing from home."

Expressing his gratitude to The Daily Star, Kabir said motivation is always good. "The award will motivate us to excel further. I hope The Daily Star will continue this initiative to motivate us further."

Building and uplifting trust of consumers is the main task of

e-commerce, said Tajdin Hassan, chief marketing officer of Daraz.

An e-commerce firm should build trust of consumers and use their experience to survive in the industry, he said.

People learnt and embraced more digital activities during the pandemic and customers are also now using more digital tools, said Sabbir Hussain, COO of Brac Bank.

"ICT and digital services are now becoming part of our life," he added.

"It brings convenience to our life as, from transferring money to buying medicine, all services are now at the tips of our fingers. Brac Bank is playing a role in promoting the ICT sector."

The ICT sector is performing a great role for the country and it needs to be recognised, said Niaz Ahmed Khan, pro-VC of Independent University. The university is working towards that by launching related programmes, he added.

Sonia Bashir Kabir, managing director of SBK Tech Ventures, congratulated the winners saying, "You are contributing to the economy." Bangladesh's GDP is growing and

rising in an unstoppable manner, and technology is contributing to that, she said.

Technology is not just an enabler, it is an equaliser, she added.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, echoed Almas Kabir saying the industry needs to be matched in university education.

"We have a big human resource but they are not appropriately trained. So, Bangladesh should focus on knowledge," he said.

Digitalisation is not just to do with technology; it is now a way of life, he said.

Innovation in digital services touches all from the agricultural sector to the industrial sector, he added.

"If we can digitalise our whole process of government activities, then accountability will come and efficiency will be higher," Anam said.

The government should start giving opportunities to local ICT industries to contribute to the mega projects.

Some technology should come from the local entrepreneurs to boost them, he added.