



# Rumana Rahman: A leader, an inspirer

Rumana Rahman has recently marked her place in the history of the corporate world by becoming the first Bangladeshi to be appointed as the Asia Pacific and Middle-East (APME) Regional Head of Talent, Culture and Inclusion at British American Tobacco Group (BAT).

Not only has she worked tirelessly and reached a position unimaginable for many, Rahman's story also bears witness to how she has pushed herself to be her best version every step of the way.

After completing her BBA from IBA, Rumana joined BAT Bangladesh as a management trainee in 2001. From then to now being the Regional Head of HR, her responsibilities have grown and her journey has been subjected to countless obstacles. When asked how she managed it all, Rumana replied, "I believe in certain things, like your hard work, commitment and passion remain unchanged even when you switch from one role to another. What has really changed over the years is the influence I had on leadership by becoming an enabler to the commercial side through HR interventions."

Having had regional and global exposure in terms of talent development, we asked for her input on how Bangladeshi talent compared to that of other countries.

She said that if you look into our leadership team here at BAT group, there are currently two Bangladeshis occupying leading positions in the APME region, which itself speaks volumes. She also spoke about how having Bangladeshis playing vital roles in various teams of BAT across the globe feels rather rewarding. "Beyond BAT, I see huge potential and Bangladeshi human capital comes off as resilient, intelligent, hardworking and extremely passionate," she added.

We then proceeded to discuss what further work Bangladesh can do on human capital development to ensure a robust talent pipeline, where Rumana stressed on the role of mid level management. Since it is the mid level where the decision-making, risk-taking and creativity expands, a focused structured development as well as investment in leadership skills will eventually help them take up bigger roles on a global scale.

The dynamics of the corporate world are changing continuously and the global HR is expected to match its pace. There is also a growing tendency to promote diversity and inclusion agenda across the world. Of these, which trends can be adapted by Bangladesh with regard to women to ensure gender equality in decision-making positions?

"To me it's not a case of percentage, but the idea that organization demography should represent the profile of its consumers and society. I believe women bring different perspectives to leadership and significantly improve the emotional intelligence of an organization which is crucial for it to develop sustainably," said Rumana Rahman. According to her, Bangladesh is way ahead of many South Asian countries in terms of women inclusion with the country being led by a female and 80% of the workforce of the leading RMG sector being women.

Rumana says, "There is work to be done in terms of women inclusion in the corporate and entrepreneurial sector, but even that has improved a lot over the last decade. It is not only about including women in an organization's structure, but also catering to needs that maybe unique to the gender, and only then can we expect an improvement in the qualitative parameter of an organization."

While discussing women's inclusion in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Rumana talked about BAT Bangladesh's unique program, Supernova, a mentoring platform for aspiring females in STEM which aims at paving a path for them to corporate. Mentored by the Operations Leadership team, Supernova nurtures confidence and provides encouragement to help women grow in leadership roles.

The ongoing pandemic has weighed heavy on our mental health. When asked about the importance of employee wellbeing, this leader smiled explaining how this could be a blessing in disguise. She emphasized how these difficult times let us see the true value of mental health. "In Bangladesh, I see mental awareness facilities now where they can reach out and feel safe to express themselves. In my view, organizations allowing their employees to avail this opportunity are progressive."

Further adding from her experience she said, "The biggest thing to me as a leader is recognizing that a team member maybe feeling down and understanding that they bring not only their work but also their emotions into the organization. By acknowledging this we can build better and fulfilled employees."

Before concluding our discussion with this trailblazer, we asked for her valuable suggestions for young professionals entering the workforce, to which she said-

"I think youngsters now have more resources, technology and more role models to look up to. What they can add to the mix is consistency as well as patience because success does not come overnight."

**By Nusrath Jahan**  
**Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed**

