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PHOTO: COLLECTED

# South Asia, Bangladesh talent factory

Says Unilever South Asia HR vice-president

SOHEL PARVEZ and MD ABU TALHA SARKER

Unilever is operating in the South Asian markets of Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. And each of the markets, including Bangladesh, has talents who are very attractive.

In the case of Bangladesh, it is very clear.

Unilever has been running a global competition for young students under a programme, Unilever Future Leaders League, for the last 10 years. And Bangladesh has been in the final round for five years, more than any country.

The participants from Bangladesh emerged as the global champion twice, including this year.

"It really speaks volumes of the fact that the time of South Asian talents, Bangladeshi talents is here. And with that awareness of opportunities and what global exposure can give you, there is no stopping our talent," said Anuradha Razdan, vice-president for human resources at Unilever South Asia, during an interview with The Daily Star.

She calls Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal talent factory.

Razdan, also a member of the management committee of Hindustan Unilever Ltd as the executive director for human resources, visited Dhaka last month.

During the conversation, she talked about Unilever's business operation during the onslaught of the coronavirus pandemic, which, to her, was probably the

most testing time.

The company tied up quarantine and telemedicine for its employees and became flexible to work to continue operation and supply its products, a number of which are related to personal and household hygiene needed to fight the rogue virus.

She also talked about the importance of work-life balance and ensuring gender parity in Unilever, including Bangladesh where the ratio of women employees increased to 40 per cent from 10 per cent four years ago.

"The road to 50 is very clear," said Razdan.

She believes that people have more potential than they realise.

"Therefore, when you get the right opportunity and support, you can light that spark. I have benefited from it in my career and that is what I want to do in my career every day."

Razdan began her career as a management trainee at Hindustan Unilever Ltd in 1999.

She said the multinational company has created a work culture and atmosphere in its overall human resources management with a view to ensuring that an employee has the totality of experience.

With a 52-billion-euro turnover in 2021, the fast-moving consumer goods maker has 148,000 employees worldwide. And because of its process of

identifying talents, Unilever has become the employer of choice in South Asia. In Bangladesh, Unilever has been the employer of choice over the last decade.

"I think that is the very fulfilling moment in my life because being an employer of choice and having that blind product win when you launch a brand," said Razdan.

There are a lot of things that Unilever does to attract talent.

"It is not any one thing. It is like a sauce that has a lot of ingredients that make it magical," she said.

"The important thing is how we keep a relationship with talent even before they join Unilever."

It has programmes like Sparks. In Bangladesh, it has competitions like BizMaestros.

"These are household names amongst university students because they give them the opportunities to understand and interact with the organisation even before they come," Razdan said.

The FMCG company, having 400 brands worldwide, does this because it wants to ensure that young talents make the right choice.

"We want talents who join us to be passionate and truly brought into what we stand for as an organisation just as much as we want to make the right choice and selection," she said.

"Unilever selects those youths who bring in the best functional competence

and domain expertise and who have leadership capabilities."

The multinational company, which has been operating in Bangladesh since 1964, globally runs the management training programme named Unilever Future Leaders Programme, which is now in its sixth decade.

"It is also about consistency. We don't compromise on the rotations. We don't say that we have a vacancy in business and let's take a trainee out of their rotation. It's just consistency, making sure that they get feedback, they have a framework of coaches, mentors who support them and then get on with their career."

According to Razdan, international experience is an important part of growing leaders, and eight out of 10 people in the management committee of Unilever Bangladesh have international experience.

"So, it is a combination of a number of things that really give us the edge," said Razdan, who worked at the Unilever headquarters in London in various positions from executive assistant to a former chief human resource officer and the head of Unilever homecare business globally.

She also led Unilever's talent attraction agenda globally.

Today, in the world of social media, LinkedIn and Glassdoor, where a person works and what type of organisation it is are easily available, she said.

"You can't fake it."

Unilever focuses on building a great

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## First-ever food, chemical lab expo today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The first ever Food and Chemical Lab Exposition is going to be held at the Bangabandhu International Convention Centre in Dhaka today.

The Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA) and the United States Department of Agriculture-funded Bangladesh Trade Facilitation (BTF) Project made the announcement at a press conference at the auditorium of the Capital Market Journalists' Forum yesterday.

The objective of the expo is to highlight the strong capacity of the network of food and chemical laboratories in the country in a bid to build public trust in them and ensure safe food for all.

Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder is expected to inaugurate the expo.

"The exposition will target to create an effective network between public and private sector laboratories so they can be more actively engaged in food safety management for local consumers and contribute to exports," said Md Abdul Kayowm, chairman of the BFSA.

He emphasised that the BFSA is working relentlessly to ensure food safety by coordinating among the government, the private sector, and testing institutes.

"The exposition will be a platform to share knowledge and experiences about technologies, best practices, and international standards in food safety issues."

Michael J Parr, director of the BTF Project, said the BTF is supporting laboratories to develop their capacities in order to strengthen their roles and give a boost to their contribution to the cross-border trade of farm produce.

Despite having immense potential, laboratories in Bangladesh are underutilised due to a lack of knowledge and access to information on the capacities and services they provide, he said.

"The expo will attempt to raise awareness of the services provided by various public and private laboratories. Building trust in private laboratories is another objective that the expo is trying to achieve."

The event will be attended by 38 public and private laboratories and six machinery suppliers.

A scientific session styled "Ensuring Food Safety, Promoting Trade: The Role of Accredited Laboratories" will be organised during the expo, which is open to visitors from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Md Rejaul Karim and Monzur Morshed Ahmed, both members of the BFSA, and Quamrun Nahar, technical adviser of the BTF Project, were also present at the press conference.

## US forges Asia trade framework

AFP, Los Angeles

The United States and a group of Asian allies on Friday agreed on a set of negotiating targets, notably on trade and supply chains, as Washington looks to offer an alternative to the economic might of China in the region.

At the first ministerial for the Indo-Pacific Economic Prosperity Framework (IPEF), officials sketched the basis for common standards on key pillars, which also include green energy and the fight against corruption, in 14 countries accounting for 40 per cent of the global economy.

"I feel very confident saying that IPEF will create jobs in the United States and will create jobs in other IPEF countries," US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said at the conclusion of the meeting.

"We were able to finalize all four of the ministerial statements, which lay out the full scope of the framework and provide a roadmap for future discussions."

The initial meeting offered little flesh on the bones of the plans, which come several years after former president Donald Trump yanked the United States out of a much more comprehensive and hard-won regional trade block.

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## India's rice curbs to lift prices

Stoke food inflation worries

REUTERS, Singapore

India's decision to curb rice exports is expected to lift world prices of the staple and trigger a rally in rival wheat and corn markets, deepening concerns over food inflation.

Rice prices in key exporters India, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar are set to rise, traders and analysts said, hitting food importers already suffering from higher costs due to adverse weather and the Russia-Ukraine war.

India banned exports of broken rice and imposed a 20 per cent duty on exports of various grades of rice on Thursday as the world's biggest exporter of the grain tries to augment supplies and calm local prices after below-average monsoon rainfall curtailed planting.

"There is going to be substantial stresses on food security across many countries," said Phin Ziebell, agribusiness economist at National Australia Bank. "Global fundamentals could see further upside across the grains complex."

Chicago wheat prices rose on Friday, poised for a third straight weekly gain, as India's move and talk about Russia's restrictions on Ukrainian grain shipments underpinned the market.

"This is an inflationary move for food prices," said Ole Houe, director of advisory services at agriculture brokerage IKON Commodities in Sydney. "This could trigger a rally in wheat and corn prices." India accounts for more than 40 per cent of global rice shipments and competes with Thailand, Vietnam, Pakistan and Myanmar in the world market.

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A woman carrying a basket walks through a rice field in south Kashmir's Tral town in India.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

## Russian economy shrinks 4.1pc

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia's economy shrank 4.1 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter of 2022, data from the federal statistics service Rosstat showed on Friday, revising the contraction assessment from the previously reported 4.0 per cent.

Russia encountered unprecedented Western sanctions in the second quarter, the first full quarter of what Russia calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine, after Moscow sent its armed forces into Ukraine on February 24.

In the first quarter, the economy grew by 3.5 per cent in annual terms but shrank 0.4 per cent in the first half of 2022, according to Rosstat data.

Retail and wholesale sales together with repair work for vehicles showed in the second quarter the largest year-on-year contraction of 14.1 per cent among other parts of gross domestic product.