Unilever Consumer Care profit up 15pc in Q3

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Unilever Consumer Care Limited posted 15 per cent higher profit in the third quarter of 2022 compared to a year earlier.

The multinational company made a profit of Tk 18.72 crore in the July-September period, up from Tk 16.28 crore in the identical period in 2021.

Its earnings per share were Tk 15.54 in July-September, against Tk 13.52 for the same period in 2021, showed the unaudited financial statements of the multinational company.

The EPS was Tk 44.86 in the January-September period, up from Tk 32.10 during the nine-month period last year.

Despite a significant increase in raw and packing material costs, the EPS rose due to the improvement in trade spending amounting to Tk 2 crore, the efficiency in operating expenses amounting to Tk 10 crore,

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Bangladesh Lamps' profit jumps 72pc

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Lamps Limited posted a 72 per cent year-on-year increase in profit in the financial year that ended on June 30, driven by higher sales of LED products and the optimisation of operating expenses.

The company reported earnings per share of Tk 8.78 in 2021-22, which was Tk 5.10 in 2020-21.

Net asset value per share fell to Tk 90.99 from Tk 95.16 in 2020-21, owing to a decrease in the fair value adjustment of the company's investment in shares of various companies.

Net operating cash flow per share was a negative of Tk 5.52, against Tk 8.65 in the previous year. The NOCFPS has decreased due mainly to the increase the payments to suppliers, according to a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.

The board of directors has recommended a 20 per cent cash and a 7 per cent stock dividend for 2021-22.

Bangladesh Lamps Ltd was incorporated in 1960 as a subsidiary of Philips, Holland. In 1993, Philips sold its entire shares to Transcom Ltd, one of the largest enterprises in the country.

The company manufactures electric

READ MORE ON B2

The Keramat Rice Mills situated on two plots inside the BSCIC industrial estate in Rajshahi seems more like a ramshackle apartment complex than an industrial unit as its owners have long been renting it out as such. Following repeated warnings from the estate authorities, the residents have set up small-scale light engineering units to allay concerns. PHOTO: ANWAR ALI

Misuse of industrial plots spotted at Rajshahi BSCIC

ANWAR ALI, *Rajshahi*

Abdul Malek was allocated a plot inside an industrial estate of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) in Rajshahi back in the 1970s.

Since then, he has managed to lease an additional six plots totalling 18,000 square feet in area to expand his food, textile and dying units, the latter two of which deal with producing Rajshahi silk.

It was not always smooth sailing for Malek though as his business began to crumble when the comparatively pricey Rajshahi silk started to lose out to cheaper alternatives in the 1980s.

In order to survive, he handed over one of his plots to a fellow businessperson, and closed his textile and dying factories while continuing with his food industry in a small scale.

However, Malek's luck turned around when he happened to become general secretary of the BSCIC Industry Owners Association.

He allegedly started misusing his authority to illegally sub-let industrial plots, at least one of which was used to establish a light engineering workshop.

In addition, he has been using a plot as a residence with his family, which goes against regulations in this regard.

Malek is not alone though as earlier this year, authorities of the BSCIC industrial estate in Rajshahi found that at least 14 other businesspeople have been using their plots for residential purposes or renting them out illegally for the past three decades.

Upon being warned thrice, nine of those businesspeople eventually moved away but the remaining five, including Malek, have never paid any heed.

The five units that continue to flaunt rules are: Keramat Rice Mills, Raj Metal industries, Rasa Bakery and Shamim Engineering Workshop.

"They [the five industrialists] want to stay at the estate at any cost and argue they have no alternative," Zafar Wazed, deputy general manager of the Rajshahi BSCIC said.

Wazed was head of the committee that spotted the illegal activities of plot owners for the first time in the last 35 years.

He said their investigation revealed that the estate was developed in 1962 mainly focusing on the thriving silk businesses.

"Authorities insisted that businesspeople who receive these industrial plots engage in the silk businesses," he said.

Later, when the situation changed and business methods were transformed, many plot owners failed to adapt and ultimately succumbed to bankruptcy, Wazed added.

On the other hand, Malek has other views.

"The BSCIC authorities collect a yearly service charge of Tk 3,500 for each 1,000 square feet but they don't provide any service," he said.

Asked about his illegal residence at the industrial plot, Malek said he is staying there for security reasons.

"Incidents of theft are occurring almost every night due to the lack of security," he added.

However, BSCIC officials says there should be no plea for flouting the rules as most plot owners are abide by them.

Some other plot owners also reported various crises at the estate, including mismanagement, and said that industries there cannot not grow due to the lack of facilities.

For example, there is no boundary wall at the estate while most roads are damaged and the drainage system is in dire condition.

Besides, uninterrupted power supply remains a challenge while the gas supply is costly, making it difficult for industry owners to maintain a low production cost.

Industries at the Rajshahi industrial estate have long been demanding a separate power line but to no avail, and several industries have had to manage gas connections on their own initiative.

Most factories are not applying for gas connections considering the high connection costs and so, they demand the installation of a common gas pipeline to reduce this expense.

Liaqat Ali, president of the Rajshahi BSCIC Industry Owners' Association, said the transportation of raw materials is another problem due to the lack of direct railway, waterway or air cargo facilities.

"We have been raising our demands in different forums for a long time but we don't see any improvement," he added.

Rajshahi BSCIC Deputy General Manager Wazed said the authorities have started implementing some development projects to improve the roads, drainage and other facilities.

As the demand for industrial plots has increased, the authorities have initiatives to identify sick projects, providing them support and handing over vacant plots to promising entrepreneurs, BSCIC officials said.

Keramat Rice Mills was allotted two plots in the 1970s but after the introduction of auto rice mills in the late 1990s, older units like this one have stopped operations.

When its owner Keramat Ali died, his nine inheritors started living at the plots instead of doing any industrial production.

Later when the BSCIC authorities sent them notices, they stopped staying at the plots but rented them out to three other families who installed oil, chanachur and plastic factories in a small scale.

BSCIC officials said they have proposed cancelling the plot allotments to those who have been violating rules despite repeated notices.

A decision on the proposal is likely to come in a couple of weeks, they added.

Fourth industrial revolution and our financial sector

JENATH RAHANA

It is very true that, with the passing of time, mankind has searched for new and better ways to live, and as a result, three industrial revolutions have taken place, drastically altering our way of life.

The fourth industrial revolution (4IR), which has arrived, is based on innovations in artificial intelligence (AI), digitalisation, robotics, augmented reality (AR), genome editing, 3d printing, and other fields.

The financial sector of Bangladesh has already felt the considerable but varied effects of the 4IR. Blockchain, AI and other innovations have had an impact on the financial sector as well.

THE IMPACT OF 4IR ON OUR FINANCIAL SECTOR

4IR will have a major impact on the financial sector in Bangladesh. A complete transformation of banking and financial institution technology has resulted in more transactions being processed in a given time period and more services being provided.

Properly implemented AI can make risk management easier and more effective. In addition, the combination of these technologies will allow us to perform better analytics, making forecasts easier and more accurate and we can provide services at low cost.

Digital currency is one of the parts of the 4IR though the central bank of Bangladesh does not allow crypto trading as it violates the country's financial regulations. With many developed and developing countries recognising its potential, blockchain technology has become the future of the world in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

CHALLENGES

There are many challenges in our financial sector because of the 4IR. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of technical skills in developing countries like Bangladesh.

Before embarking on the revolution, it is necessary to prepare a large number of skilled workers. The need for highly qualified workers is also increasing.

Cybersecurity is the main concern of the financial sector. Since data is stored on servers, adequate security is required. Banks and financial institutions must, therefore, implement sufficiently secure systems before embracing the revolution.

The 4IR poses a significant threat to unskilled and low-skilled workers who may lose their jobs as technology may replace them. Therefore, there is a need to create alternative employment opportunities.

Young people are open to technologies and innovations. However, there are people in their 40s and 50s who do not want changes. When witnessing such tremendous changes in this field, they may not be ready to accept them immediately and some hurdles have been created.

Competition among financial institutions in Bangladesh is fierce. Customers always expect better service, on demand support, and more. However, it is true that the 4IR and its technologies can have not only negative but also positive impacts on society.

Therefore, when deploying these new technologies, we must also prepare for adverse consequences. However, since the technology is still in its infancy, significant technical and regulatory risks and hurdles will need to be resolved before it can be widely adopted.

The author is a researcher at the University of Bolton, UK

Trials under Indo-Bangla transit deal end

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Vessel Trans Samudera left the Chattogram port yesterday, carrying containers from the Indian state of Meghalaya, a trial run of Bangladesh being used as a transit.

It marks the completion of all trial runs on all approved routes under an agreement signed between Indian and Bangladesh in 2018 to use the Chattogram and Mongla ports for the transit of goods, according to a statement of the Indian high commission.

The trial run was undertaken by Tata Steel and CJ Darcl Logistics on the Dawki–Tamabil–Chattogram route.

Necessary permanent standing orders or notifications will now be issued by Bangladesh for operationalising regular movement of goods under this agreement.

This is a step forward in realising the commitment reiterated during Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina's visit to India in September 2022, said the high commission.

There are eight approved routes for transit of goods under the agreement.

They include the Chattogram/Mongla port to Agartala via Akhaura, Chattogram/Mongla port to Dawki via Tamabil, Chattogram/Mongla port to Sutarkandi via Sheola, Chattogram/Mongla port to Srimantapur via Bibirbazar and vice versa.

During Hasina's visit to India in 2019, a standard operating procedure was signed to operationalise the agreement.

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Trading Corporation of Bangladesh has been selling edible oil and other essential commodities such as sugar, lentil and onion at subsidised rates among low-income families. PHOTO: STAR/FILE

TCB to buy Tk 189cr soybean oil from Meghna

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Meghna Edible Oil Refinery has won a Tk 189 crore contract to supply soybean oil to the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB), according to a decision of the cabinet committee on government purchase yesterday.

The company, a concern of the Meghna Group of Industries, will supply 1.10 crore litres to the TCB, which has been selling edible oil apart from sugar, lentil and onion at subsidised prices among one crore low-income families.

The TCB sells soybean oil at Tk 110 per litre which is much lower than the current market prices. As per yesterday's price update of the trading corporation, a litre of bottled soybean oil was being sold at Tk 185.

The state-owned corporation's intervention in the market for essential commodities has grown in recent years amid government focus to cushion the marginal people from the onslaughts of current inflation.