

Garment sector to get much-needed female leaders

Discussants hope at a dialogue after HSBC-AUW School of Apparel was launched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The HSBC AUW School of Apparel and Retail Management would not only prepare female leaders required for the country's apparel sector but would also help replace thousands of foreigners employed in the mid- and top levels of factories, discussants said recently.

The school, in collaboration with the industry and academia of international standard, would create a homegrown talent pool of women equipped with the expertise who will lead the country's largest export-earning industry, they said.

They shared their views during a dialogue at the Radisson Blu Chattogram Bay View recently. The event was organised on the occasion of the launch of the school. The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam moderated the dialogue.

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) and The Asian University for Women (AUW) announced the launch of the "HSBC-AUW School of Apparel and Retail Management" on January 21.

The school will offer a one-year master of science degree in apparel and retail management.

The programme is expected to prepare young female professionals with expertise



Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, former prime minister of Denmark, Rubana Huq, vice-chancellor of the Asian University for Women (AUW), Md Mahbub Ur Rahman, CEO of HSBC Bangladesh, Amanda Murphy, head of commercial banking at HSBC for South and Southeast Asia, Kamal Ahmad, founder of AUW, and Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, attend a dialogue at the Radisson Blu Chattogram on January 21. It was organised after HSBC and AUW launched the "HSBC-AUW School of Apparel and Retail Management".

PHOTO: STAR



Poul Nyrup Rasmussen



Amanda Murphy



Md Mahbub Ur Rahman



Rubana Huq



Mahfuz Anam



Kamal Ahmad

in fashion, merchandising, supply chain management, brand management, and occupational health and safety issues and they would be able to fill up the dearth of female leadership in the sector.

Under the programme, 13 courses will be offered to the students of AUW and 30 students will be enrolled in the inaugural year.

The courses include marketing management and research, financial accounting and managerial accounting, financial management, apparel manufacturing technology, textile science, industrial engineering, operations management, advertising

and brand management, merchandising, fashion product development, supply chain management, and sustainability.

HSBC will help set up the school and provide support for curriculum, faculty, IT and class infrastructure, and education materials.

Speaking at the dialogue, HSBC Bangladesh CEO Md Mahbub Ur Rahman said the apparel industry has played a major role in helping the country achieve remarkable economic growth.

"We have realised that what has brought us here may not take us where we want to be," he said, adding that since the dynamics of the industry have changed,

there is a need for skilled leadership.

AUW Vice Chancellor Rubana Huq said there is a dearth of female leaders in the garment industry.

"We always feel the acute need for women in mid-level management. We need female merchandisers and we need female marketing heads."

She said AUW encourages entrepreneurship and hoped that the HSBC-AUW School of Apparel and Retail Management would give birth to the leaders who will be able to replace the 35,000 foreigners currently working in the industry.

"We literally pay a lot of salary to these expatriates. It's because they have a better grip over communication and understand the trade well," said Rubana, also a former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

The courses have been designed in a manner that will cover sustainability, workers' issues and industrial relations along with everything and anything that students need to know about accounting and management, she said.

"I think with so many conscious and very confident women graduating from AUW, they will be the perfect candidates for the master's programme. They will be innovators and will make their own rules, rather than following instructions."

Former Prime Minister of Denmark Poul Nyrup Rasmussen underscored the need for proper development of women's capability for the progress of Bangladesh's apparel and textile industry.

When women will the leadership roles, something new will happen, he said, adding that Bangladesh's apparel industry needs to develop capability in terms of proactivity and productivity.

"It's not about doing the same things quicker than you did yesterday. It's about doing things in a new way than you did and having new creativity."

Rasmussen recalled when he was younger, there was a textile industry making shirts. But later it had to discontinue operations as it couldn't compete with Bangladesh since the first

generation of women employees was getting old.

But the daughters of the women employees opted to enter into design schools and their design is now one of the best in the world, he informed.

"Now, we just design the products and big international companies are using the Danish designs and creativity. So, you see, in a sense, the culture has stayed, but the thinking has been renewed with new creativity."

The creativity factor should come to the apparel industry in Bangladesh in a more dynamic way than seen before, he said.

Amanda Murphy, head of commercial banking at HSBC for South and Southeast Asia, said the garment industry itself is changing rapidly and hugely.

If local companies can't respond to those changes and adapt themselves accordingly, there is a risk that others will move up the value chain, leaving them behind, she said.

She said HSBC joining hands with AUW was not driven by any business cause.

"We have been driven by our commitment to the community in Bangladesh."

AUW Founder Kamal Ahmad said the master's programme allows to build on a liberal arts and science curriculum that instills the sense of creativity of trying to think differently with a set of technical skills.

He hoped the graduates would display such a high level of competence that "you will make a notice of that and do something with that."

According to Ahmad, there is no scope for a thinking person in the process of an old traditional garment factory.

"But when a thinking person can be introduced in that process, ideally there will be changes and suggestions for changes. But if management is not interested in thinking differently, it is unlikely to be productive."

"In order to face the future, we will have to think of research and creativity. We will have to think of bringing in other elements that can really propel the industry to be competitive."

Square Pharma's profit up, Square Textiles' down

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Square Pharmaceuticals saw higher profits year-on-year in the first half of the current fiscal year of 2022-23 though the growth was lower. Meanwhile, profits of its sister concern, Square Textiles, declined.

The listed drug maker registered a profit of Tk 1,062 crore, up 10 per cent, according to the company's financial report.

In the same period of the previous year, it was Tk 964 crore, up 19 per cent year-on-year.

The company's sales advanced 10.8 per cent to Tk 3,752 crore in the July-December period of fiscal year 2022-23.

The company had a large inventory and the local currency's depreciation against the greenback pushed up spending behind raw materials, which in turn impacted the profits, said a top official of the drug maker, preferring anonymity.

If the current restrictions on opening letters of credit and the local currency's depreciation continues, profits will suffer a bigger hit, he said.

The increase in costs cannot be passed onto customers at the moment as government permission was required, he said.

The company's cost for raw materials was 41 per cent of its total turnover in the six-month period

READ MORE ON B2

BSRM posts over 52% fall in profit

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Steel Re-Rolling Mills Limited reported a more than 52 per cent decline in profit in the first half of the ongoing financial year owing to the higher cost of production amid tighter market conditions.

The country's largest steel manufacturer made a profit of Tk 54.34 crore in October-December of 2022-23, down from Tk 114.06 crore it clocked in the identical quarter in the previous financial year.

So, BSRM Ltd reported consolidated earnings per share of Tk 1.82 for the first quarter of FY23. It was Tk 3.82 in the same three months of 2021-22.

In a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange, the company said the economic situation at home and abroad was volatile during the period.

The foreign currency conversion rate sharply increased which raised the import and production costs. Moreover, there was a shortage in power supply which forced to cut production.

"As a result, the cost of production increased. On the other hand, the market of steel products was under severe pressure," said the post.

READ MORE ON B2

ACI profit drops in spite of sales growth

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

ACI, one of the country's leading business conglomerates, saw lower profits year-on-year during the July-December period of fiscal year 2022-23 despite securing higher sales.

The profit plunged 70 per cent to Tk 17.93 crore whereas the sales grew by 24.5 per cent to Tk 5,706 crore.

Meanwhile, ACI's earnings per share (EPS) stood at Tk 1.79 in the negative in the period. It was Tk 5.25 in the same period of the previous year.

Though the company's profit remains in the positive, its EPS was downed because some subsidiaries which logged better profits are co-owned by foreign shareholders, explained Pradip Kar Chowdhury, chief financial officer of ACI.

The foreigners were provided their part of the profit and the remaining was used to calculate the EPS, for which it was in the negative, he added.

READ MORE ON B2

Access to finance main barrier for businesswomen

Speakers say at a seminar

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Access to finance is still the main barrier for women-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Bangladesh, according to various experts.

Although the country's growing number of women entrepreneurs have mostly kept good payment records over the past decade, their share of the total loans disbursed still remains low, said M Abu Eusuf, a professor of development studies at the University of Dhaka.

Eusuf made these remarks at a seminar, styled "Expanding Economic Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in Bangladesh", at Pan Pacific Sonargaon in Dhaka yesterday.

The SME Foundation and The Asia Foundation jointly organised the event.

In the second phase (July 2021 to May 2022) of a government stimulus package geared towards helping SMEs overcome the Covid-19 pandemic, a Tk 20,000 crore fund was formed to this end. Of this amount, just 2.65 percent was disbursed to women entrepreneurs, he added.

Quoting a study conducted by The Asia Foundation, Eusuf said more than 75 per cent of the surveyed respondents cited a lack of financing as a challenge for adapting their businesses to comply with Covid-19 restrictions.

READ MORE ON B2



Visitors crowd the Dhaka International Trade Fair at Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Center in Purbachal on the concluding day of the monthlong show yesterday. Some 30 lakh to 35 lakh visitors came to the DITF this year -- a 37 per cent rise than that in the previous version, according to Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

DITF ends bagging Tk 300cr orders

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Defying all odds, purchase orders worth Tk 300 crore were placed with exhibitors of the annual monthlong 27th Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF)-2023 at Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Center in Purbachal.

Moreover, there were some 30 lakh to 35 lakh visitors, up 37 per cent year-on-year, said Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi in a commerce ministry press statement.

Goods worth Tk 100 crore were sold at the fair, which featured some 351 local and foreign stalls, pavilions and mini pavilions. There were 225 in the previous year.

Some 11 lakh entry tickets were sold, with adults being charged Tk 40 and minors Tk 20.

READ MORE ON B3