

star BUSINESS

Female bankers in top positions on the rise

SOHEL PARVEZ

An increasing number of female bankers are gradually securing top positions at banks thanks to their skills, competence and dedication, according to a Bangladesh Bank report released yesterday.

The ratio of women in senior positions at banks was 9.22 per cent in July-December of 2022. It was 7.57 per cent five years ago, said the BB in its Gender Equality Report of Banks and Financial Institutions.

Similarly, the proportion of female bankers at the entry-level and mid-level posts increased, albeit at a slower pace.

The percentage of women as board members rose to 14.22 per cent in July-December of last year from 13.7 per cent five years ago.

The ratio of women in senior positions at banks was 9.22 per cent in July-December of 2022

The ratio of female bankers also increased. For example, at the end of December 2018, women accounted for 15 per cent of the total bankers at 168,192.

Four years down the line, women comprised 16.29 per cent of the workforce in the banking sector at 196,102 in the second half of 2022, according to the central bank report.

Mohammad Ali, managing director of Pubali Bank, said women's participation in the banking sector is increasing owing to job security and a good working environment. "They can take part in the decision-making process. There is no discrimination in salaries and the banking sector has the best job security among all the sectors in Bangladesh. Their participation will increase in the coming days as well."

Ali credited the efficiency and dedication of women for their rise to leadership roles.

"They have a presence in the senior management team and risk management and other important teams of banks," he said.

READ MORE ON B3



Bangladesh is gradually moving towards days when retail customers will not have to worry about carrying cash to make payments for their day-to-day purchases. Already they can pay vendors such as tea-sellers and roadside shops digitally by scanning QR codes on their phones in some parts of the country as the central bank has stepped up efforts to widen the use of technologies to cut reliance on fiat currencies. The photo was taken from the capital's Dilkusha area yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HUQ

BB sets goal for 75% retail transactions digitally by 2027

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The central bank has set a goal so that at least 75 per cent of retail transactions are settled through digital technologies by 2027, a move that may give Bangladesh's digital transformation a massive fillip and turn the cash-based economy into cashless.

The Bangladesh Bank will heavily rely on Bangla QR, a uniform digital payment system launched by the central bank in January, to reach its goal of cutting cash-based retail transactions significantly.

On a number of occasions recently, Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder has talked about the BB plans to have at least 75 per cent of transactions settled online within four years.

Md Mezbaul Haque, the spokesperson of the BB, said the central bank has set a roadmap so that at least three-quarters of retail transactions are settled through digital methods by 2027. "And an interoperable QR code will play a vital role in implementing the roadmap."

Digital transactions in Bangladesh were largely non-existent two decades ago. The scenario started to change after the present government swept to power in December 2008.

In the following years, the BB introduced the Bangladesh Automated Clearing House, the Bangladesh Automated Cheque Processing Systems, the Bangladesh Electronic Funds

Transfer Network, the National Payment Switch Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Real Time Gross Settlement, the MFS system, and the agent banking operation, building infrastructure for a digital transformation.

Covid-19 turbocharged the transformation as people were forced to use digital tools to

easily be read by smartphones.

Bangla QR is now helping clients pay bills for goods and services through mobile banking applications, mobile financial service (MFS) providers, and payments service providers (PSPs).

The initiative is cost-effective, secured, and cardless and is

one step further as it enables account-holders of any bank, MFS providers and PSPs to make payments if the facility is available at brick-and-mortar stores.

Around 7,000 Bangla QR code facilities have been set up and the number will reach 20,000 within the next couple of weeks, according to Haque.

Now, clients settle 1,500-2,000 transactions using QR codes every day and the amount of transaction volume stands at Tk 20 lakh to Tk 25 lakh. The central banker hopes that both transactions and volumes will go up substantially in the coming months.

"The cashless transaction will receive a boost in the coming days as the QR code-based system is highly user-friendly," said Haque.

Banks and MFS providers have put in place 7-8 lakh QR code facilities at checkout counters of outlets and service providers and even small retail shops. Now, these QR codes will have to be converted into the Bangla QR code system, according to a central bank instruction.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, thinks both the central bank and commercial banks should carry out an extensive awareness programme among clients so that they feel comfortable in settling transactions through the digital system.

READ MORE ON B3



Online courier business rebounds on Eid optimism

MAHMUDUL HASAN

A spike in orders during the ongoing Eid shopping season has brought back a bright smile to online courier service providers, a development that is a sigh of relief for the industry that witnessed a downturn in growth over the past one and a half years.

Online shoppers have been showing enthusiasm since the beginning of this month and logistics companies have witnessed an over 80 per cent increase in orders compared to other times of the year, according to industry people.

The impressive performance of small merchants, mainly women, and customers from social media, mainly Facebook, have paved the way for the increase in demand.

Besides, e-commerce and online platforms of different brands are also contributing to the surge in online deliveries.

Most Facebook-based merchants and e-commerce entities and brands have no delivery mechanisms of their own. They outsource the courier service using apps or websites. Besides, anyone can secure home deliveries by

accepting orders online.

Since massive scams involving e-commerce unfolded in mid-2021, the growth of online logistic service providers had stalled. But industry people expect their market to bounce back riding on the growth this Eid.

Online shoppers have been showing enthusiasm since the beginning of this month and logistics companies have witnessed an over 80 per cent increase in orders

"Demand has picked up in the last couple of days, the number has almost doubled," Fahim Ahmed, chief executive officer of Pathao, told The Daily Star.

Pathao Courier, which serves over 50,000 small merchants, are now making over 1 lakh deliveries per day, up from 60,000 deliveries per day a month earlier.

READ MORE ON B3

Jewellers cut gold prices by 2%

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jewellers yesterday brought down gold prices because of a cut in rates of pure gold in the local market, according to a press release issued by Bangladesh Jewellers' Association (Bajus).

From today, buyers will be able to purchase 22-carat gold at Tk 97,161 each bhoori (11.664 grammes), down by 2 per cent from the historic high of Tk 99,144.

The last time the Bajus hiked the prices of gold was on April 2. On March 18, gold prices hit Tk 98,794 a bhoori. The increased cost of US dollars has also fuelled gold prices, said Dewan Aminul Islam, vice president of Bajus.

According to commerce ministry documents, almost 80 per cent of the local demand is met by smuggled gold and the rest through recycling. Bajus said gold worth Tk 73,000 crore is smuggled into the country every year.



High costs limit exporters' gain from taka's fall

AHSAN HABIB

The business sector in Bangladesh has been going through severe challenges for the past four years, which, for many, have been the toughest period in decades, with the coronavirus pandemic being the dominant factor in the early part before the Russia-Ukraine war broke out. Today, we are running the third report of a series to present how various sectors fared in the face of the two unprecedented shocks.

Though the depreciation of the local currency against the greenback could have massively benefitted exporters, increase in production costs ate away at the profits.

Financial reports of export-based listed apparel makers show that most of these companies' profits have been on the decline over the past year.

Among the 54 listed export-based apparel makers, 26 logged lower profits year-on-year in financial year 2018-19 whereas 52 companies saw a fall in their income in the pandemic-hit financial year of 2019-20.



Utility charges, wages and raw material prices rose at the same time for which many exporters' profit margins did not get a boost

Faruque Hassan
President of BGMEA

They bounced back in 2020-21, with 29 companies raking in higher profits. In 2021-22 the number of companies whose profits increased was 36.

In the first half of 2022-23, the number of companies who made higher profits dropped to 20.

The government depreciated the currency in an export-friendly manner so they were the beneficiaries, said Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

However, utility charges, wages and raw material prices rose at the same time for which many exporters' profit margins did not get a boost.

Had the currency not been depreciated, many companies would have incurred losses and even been forced to shut down their factories, he said.

So, the depreciation saved the day by raising their competitiveness in the global market, Hassan added.

READ MORE ON B3

STOCKS	
DSEX ▼	CASPI ▼
0.20%	0.06%
6,201.55	18,298.13

COMMODITIES	
Gold ▼	Oil ▲
\$2,001.93 (per ounce)	\$80.67 (per barrel)

ASIAN MARKETS			
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▲ 0.02%	▲ 0.42%	▼ 0.18%	▼ 0.37%
59,846.51	27,633.66	3,294.43	3,315.36

READ MORE ON B3