

BANGLADESH SUSTAINABILITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2023

BATA SHOE COMPANY

Best CSR in Education

Bata Children's Programme is a global sustainability project of the company, for which Bata has spent \$104,944 so far in Bangladesh.

Through the programme, Bata brought improvements to the Ashraf Textile Mills High School located in Tongi, Gazipur, near its corporate office.

Bata funded a new school building, toilets, a drinking water area, classroom furniture, fans, lights, CCTV cameras, and a new school gate.

The playground was renovated, and a drainage system was installed to keep the school from becoming flooded after rain. A new library and science laboratory were built to help students improve their reading habits, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) knowledge, and prepare them for the present 4IR world. More than a thousand students are benefitting from the programme.



UNILEVER BANGLADESH

Best CSR in Environment

As the first and biggest public-private partnership for plastic recycling in the country, Unilever partnered with Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Chattogram city corporations and NGOs UNDP, YPSA, and Garbageman to build capacities of waste-pickers and drive up collections of thousands of tonnes of single-use plastic (SUP) waste.

The first initiative of the project was launched in Narayanganj, where the project now manages 33 percent of the total plastic waste generated. Since October 2021, 470 tonnes of plastic waste have been collected, 112 tonnes of which were recycled there.

Unilever teamed up with the NGO YPSA to create a circular value chain in 41 wards in Chattogram. Here, the focus was on incentivising the waste traders to buy SUP and training the waste-pickers to segregate SUP. To date, 1,011 tonnes of plastic waste have been collected from Chattogram.



GRAMEENPHONE

Best CSR in Financial Inclusion

Grameenphone Accelerator aims to provide start-ups, developers, and innovators with the resources they need to grow and thrive.

Sheba xyz, CMED Health, Dhakacast, Cramstack, Doctorkoi, Airwork, iPage, Onnow, and Barikoi are some of the start-ups that came through the platform.

Early-stage tech start-ups get grant funding, expert mentorship, training, curated access to GP assets, investor access, and more during the 4.5-month-long programme.

Over the last nine years, the platform has helped more than 50 businesses to grow and provided 31,600 e-certifications.



LAFARGEHOLCIM

Best CSR in Community Engagement

Located next to the cement factory in Sunamganj's Chhatak, LafargeHolcim's Community Development Centre has a primary school, a medical centre, and a skill development training centre, all of which provide services free of charge.

Children from the local community, who previously did not have access to education, can study up to class five, while the local community has access to primary healthcare services such as consultations, medications, vaccinations, and health counselling.

The skill development centre provides locals with training in tailoring, embroidery, candle-making, solar power panel installations, and mobile phone repair. It also provides seed money to local women to set up their small enterprises. Besides, the company installed 10 rainwater harvesting facilities to ensure safe drinking water for the community.



SHANTA HOLDINGS

Best CSR in Healthcare

Set up by Shanta Holdings in 2004, the Ashulia Women and Children Hospital provides high-quality healthcare services at 50 percent of the price and subsidised medicines for garment workers and their families living in Ashulia, Savar, and Gazipur, as well as to the neighbouring communities.

So far, at least 20 lakh individuals have taken treatment at the state-of-the-art hospital, which cost a total of Tk 125 crore.

Since 2016, the hospital has facilitated approximately 18,000 childbirths, with a remarkable 63 percent of the deliveries being natural births.

The hospital also participates in the government's immunisation programme for infants and toddlers.

To combat the tuberculosis epidemic in garment factories, the hospital has conducted comprehensive health screening and provided those diagnosed with free medications.



BANGLALINK

Best CSR in Rapid Response

Banglalink Community Resilience Building Initiatives are aimed at providing people during crises with reliable communication, support, and inclusive relief efforts.

At the core of the initiative are the toll-free emergency numbers that serve as a crucial lifeline, enabling individuals and communities to access essential services, including emergency blood donation and assistance.

The programme provided aid and support to over 250,000 families, while a million individuals benefited from the emergency response initiatives.

Of note is its early warning system for people trapped in the path of Cyclone Mocha and live coverage of the cyclone's trajectory on the MyBL app.

The company deployed 4G resources and ground employees to ensure uninterrupted connectivity during Mocha.



YOUNG HUMANITARIAN OF THE YEAR

MD ARIFUR RAHMAN

Valo Kajer Hotel

Md Arifur Rahman is the founder of Valo Kajer Hotel, a social initiative that provides meals for good deeds to the homeless, helpless, and rootless people in Bangladesh.

The initiative was started in 2009 by a group of volunteers who wanted to help the needy and inspire them to do good deeds for society.

Valo Kajer Hotel operates in six locations in Dhaka and Chattogram, where the volunteers serve free food daily to 1,000-1,200 hungry people on the footpath. The only condition is that the people have to inform the volunteers of a good deed they have done that day.

To date, the initiative, which runs on donations from the Daily Ten Members and well-wishers, has distributed a million meals.



LAMEA TANJIN TANHA

TransEnd

Lamea Tanjin Tanha is the co-founder and chief executive officer of the non-profit organisation TransEnd, which aims to equip the transgender, hijra and gender-diverse communities with education, training, healthcare, employment, and entrepreneurship.

So far, TransEnd has managed to get 735 marginalised hijra people skilled in the English language, handicrafts, communication, and digital literacy, while 373 transpeople have joined mainstream jobs scoped by the platform.

As a result of her advocacy for the trans community, the government has declared a 5 percent tax rebate for companies that hire transgender people.

The platform also conducted awareness-building campaigns and sensitisation programmes centred around the trans community.



ARIAN ARIF

Mojar School

Arian Arif, is the founder and executive director of Odomo Bangladesh Foundation, also known as Mojar School, which aims to ensure a Bangladesh free of street children.

Mojar School provides education based on the national curriculum from pre-primary to class 8 to 1,050 students in four permanent branches located in Dhaka and Manpura.

In total, it teaches 2,300 students across 20 branches, including the six "Under the Sky Mojar Schools" located in Dhaka's most vulnerable areas, including rail and bus stations, as well as launch ghats.

Through Odomo Bangladesh Better Stories, the families of more than 200 street children were provided with financial support, rickshaws, vans, employment, and sewing training.





"Five years ago, design, capacity and payment terms were important to foreign buyers. Now, sustainability has become important."

SYED MANZUR ELAHI
Chairman of Apex Group



"Now you have built your beautiful city on the bank of a river and then you pollute the water of the river that you give you water to drink. What sort of logic is that? What sort of development is that?"

MAHFUZ ANAM
Editor and publisher of The Daily Star



"ESG [Environmental, social, and corporate governance] commitments are driving consumer purchases and employee engagement. Companies in Bangladesh are pursuing ambitious ESG targets."

SHEHZAD MUNIM
Managing director and CEO of British American Tobacco Bangladesh

Sustainability stalwarts crowned

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"When we talk to our foreign buyers, we just want to show off that we have so many machines and we have so many export orders. They just wave at me and tell me to shut up literally. They are not interested in any of this. What is important to them is what we are doing about sustainability and what we are doing to reduce our carbon footprint."

And it is not just lip service: the buyers do their own auditing to see whether the promised sustainability measures were actually being followed through, said Elahi, also a former advisor to a caretaker government.

The word sustainability should be compared with the word survival, said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

"When we talk about sustainability, we talk about sustainability not only of processes and products but also of the planet. If the planet does not exist, our children and grandchildren will cease to exist. I wish the best for my grandchildren. But am I leaving the best future for them?"

All the biggest and the most famous cities were built on the banks of rivers.

"Now you have built your beautiful city on the bank of a river and then you pollute the water of the river that you give you water to drink. What sort of logic is that? What sort of development is that?"

Anam went on to request the corporates to examine how they can make their products and the markets sustainable.

While he appreciated the initiatives by corporates to appoint sustainability officers, he wanted to know if the officials were empowered enough.

Shehzad Munim, managing director and CEO of British American Tobacco Bangladesh, presented a keynote while there was a panel discussion at the event.

"ESG [Environmental, social, and corporate governance] commitments are driving consumer purchases and employee engagement. Companies in Bangladesh are pursuing ambitious ESG targets."

An effective and inclusive committee and incentive for ESG adopters are needed to drive the sustainability agenda forward, Munim added.

The government should incentivise sustainability issues, said Shamima Akhter, director of Unilever Bangladesh's corporate affairs, partnerships and communications.

Huawei's win marred by controversy

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"At the same time, to protect our right to attend the financial offer opening meeting, we request you to issue a minimum 7-day notice for financial offer opening as per ITT clause 53.1 declared in the tender document, which was added as per standard tender document issued by CPTU. Otherwise, it will be a breach of terms of conditions stated in the tender document and result in infringement of our right given in the tender document," the letter said.

ZTE said that its representative was not in Bangladesh and it was not possible to fly the executive in on less than two days' notice.

It even requested the BTCL to not open the financial offer on the day that was scheduled and without the presence of their delegated authorised person.

However, the BTCL did not pay any heed to the request and went ahead and opened the financial offers on November 8.

By not giving the stipulated time to the bidder, the BTCL went against the rules that it articulated in its own tender document, said the former CPTU DG Karim.

"It's an international tender and the officials of the foreign companies just can't walk into the financial opening meeting on less than two days' notice," he added.

The irregularities in the tender process did not stop here: the notification of award of tender to Huawei -- which offered the lowest of Tk 326 crore -- was sent out at an 'unprecedented' speed.

In just two working days -- or four days if the weekend is counted -- the BTCL board completed all assessments and submitted the report on November 12.

According to the steps outlined in the tender document, even before the evaluation begins, the committee will have to take the necessary clarifications, correct arithmetical errors and convert all bidders' prices to a single currency.

Then they have to evaluate as per tender terms and compare to determine the lowest evaluated bidder and finally carry out the post-qualification assessments by obtaining up-to-date information on technical and financial qualification requirements of the tender.

Evaluation of financial offers requires a substantial amount of time, according to Karim.

"It is impossible to complete the evaluation of all documents in just two working days because documents must be thoroughly checked and verified."

The very next day, on November 13, during the BTCL's 216th board meeting, Huawei's purchase proposal was approved.

The following day, the notification of award or work order was issued to Huawei.

The meeting agenda should be issued to the board members at least 72 hours in advance unless the meeting is called on an emergency basis. And if there is a purchase order, the evaluation report must be provided to the board members 72 hours in advance to understand what they are going to approve, according to several BTCL officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

A board member told The Daily Star on the condition of anonymity

that he received the notice of the board meeting on November 9 but it carried the signature of the BTCL company secretary dated November 8.

"I haven't received any meeting agenda for the 216th board of directors meeting with the invitation," the board member said.

It is very unusual to present the final report for a tender to the board that got the green light from the evaluation committee just a day earlier, said a former official of the BTCL who was involved in different tender processes.

It takes a few days to get the minutes prepared by the company secretary. The minutes then go to the managing director and are ultimately corrected and signed by the chairman. The whole process takes a minimum of 3 to 4 days.

"It is very surprising that the board has passed it and the notification of the award was issued the next day of the meeting. This seems like a staged awarding of an important project to a specific company," he said.

Md Anwar Hossain, managing director (current charge) of BTCL, could not be reached for comment. Project director Ahmed declined to comment.

AKM Habibur Rahman, managing director of Teletalk and chairperson of the tender evaluation committee, said they had followed all the public procurement rules in evaluating the financial offers.

"The malpractice is obvious in every step of this project. It is surprising that the Anti-Corruption Commission has not taken any action yet," said Abu Saeed Khan, a senior policy fellow at LIRNEasia.

AL assures allies of seat-sharing

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constituencies to vie for with AL's electoral symbol of a boat.

Currently, AL partners have eight MPs.

But the ruling party intends to give fewer than 11 seats to the partners this time around, according to AL sources.

Negotiations over the matter will be held in the presence of AL President Sheikh Hasina and decisions would be made there, said veteran AL leader and coordinator of the 14-party alliance Amir Hossain Amu.

Sources say the negotiations would be held by December 10.

According to sources, the Workers Party made a list of 10 constituencies, and it may settle for seven; the Tarikat Federation made a list of 13, marking five as priorities; the JSD listed six; and the JP (Manju) listed five, and may settle for two.

Sources said some top leaders of the 14 parties were scheduled to hold a meeting yesterday afternoon about the tension between the AL and its allies over the share of seats. But as Amu contacted them, the scheduled meeting was called off.

Only 4.71pc of candidates are women

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the Trinamool BNP has fielded seven. Trinamool BNP Executive Chairman Antora Selim Huda will run for Munshiganj-1.

Among the candidates from Bangladesh Supreme Party, an Islamist party, six are female and one is transgender. Urmi, the lone transgender nominee, will compete for Gazipur-5.

The highest three female candidates will vie for Rajshahi-1. Actor Sharmin Akter Nipa, better known as Mahiya Mahi, will run as an independent as she failed to secure an AL ticket. The two other MP aspirants are NPP's Nurunnesa and independent Shahnewaz Ayesha Akhter Jahan.

Bangladesh Nationalist Movement has nominated singer Doly Shaontoni for Pabna-2 as its lone female candidate.

Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said women don't feel safe contesting the polls as the current political situation is not stable.

"A conducive environment should be created first to increase women's participation in polls. No institutions, including the Election Commission, come forward to create such an environment," she said.

Fauzia said the EC should scrap the registrations of those political parties that fail to ensure 33 percent representation of women in all their committees.

Total candidates	2,713	
Male	2,585	
Female	128	
DIVISION-WISE CANDIDATES		
DIVISION	SEATS	CANDIDATES
Dhaka	70	656
Chattogram	58	555
Rajshahi	39	369
Khulna	36	321
Rangpur	33	279
Mymensingh	24	201
Barishal	21	173
Sylhet	19	160
AWAMI LEAGUE MPS RUNNING AS INDEPENDENTS - 27		

SOURCE: EC