

## Investors bet on GP profit in downbeat market

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In spite of a continuous bear run of the stock indices, stocks of Grameenphone have risen thanks to its first quarterly earnings disclosure being better year-on-year.

This was the 12th consecutive quarter of growth for the company.

The stocks rose 1 percent to Tk 235 at Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) yesterday for the mobile phone operator having the largest subscriber base in Bangladesh.

The prime index of the DSE has fallen on all but one of the last nine days.

The telecom company, having the most valued scrip in Bangladesh's stock market in terms of market capitalisation, made a disclosure on the DSE website yesterday morning that the profits had surged 72 percent.

Market capitalisation refers to the value of a company calculated by multiplying the total number of shares by the present share price.

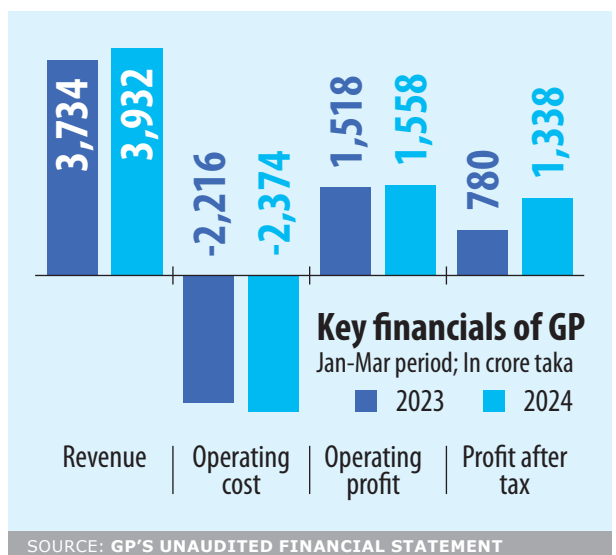
Grameenphone logged a Tk 1,338 crore profit in the first quarter of this year, riding on reduced net finance costs and higher foreign exchange gains.

Another reason was a reduction in income tax expenses, according to its unaudited financial statement posted on its website late Wednesday.

The development has come about a couple of days after Robi Axiata, the country's second-largest mobile phone operator, reported a 153 percent jump in profit to Tk 106 crore for the identical three-month period.

Grameenphone said its revenue grew 5 percent year-on-year to Tk 3,734 crore in the first quarter. But the operating profit grew only 3 percent because of an increase in the overall cost.

Yet, the mobile phone operator could post increased earnings for its shareholders by reducing finance costs by 13 percent to Tk 108 crore.



On the other hand, the company posted a 180 percent gain through foreign exchange transactions.

Alongside, Grameenphone reported a 78 percent decline in income tax expenses and all these helped the company post increased earnings in the January-March period.

In the January-March period, earnings per share grew to Tk 9.91 from Tk 5.77 a year ago.

The mobile phone operator, which reported Tk 3,306 crore in profits in the last financial year, provided a 125 percent cash dividend for that year.

In the first three months, the company acquired 10 lakh new subscribers, taking its total to 8.3 crore subscribers. Of them, 55.8 percent subscribers, or 4.63 crore, are using internet services.

Macroeconomic headwinds continued to pose as challenges but the company remained focused on its strategy and forged ahead with investment plans to support growth opportunities that contributed to the great results, said CEO Yasir Azman.

"We ought to build a digital infrastructure to transform from a telco to telco-tech company and in the process, we are diligently building digital assets and making strategic partnerships with digital players," he said.

Grameenphone rolled out more than 500 new 4G sites in the last 3 months, including new coverage sites.

## Rural women make hay out of naturally available leaves



Mymensingh's Phulbaria upazila has become a hub for the manufacture of traditional handicrafts from a variety of leaves, offering women a chance to work at their own pace and earn a steady income. Artisans make a range of items, including shopping baskets, tissue boxes, and floor mats, from the comfort of their homes and can earn upwards of Tk 10,000 per month. The photo was taken last week. PHOTO: AMINUL ISLAM

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Thousands of women from several villages in Mymensingh's Phulbaria upazila are now becoming self-reliant by making an earning through the production of traditional handicrafts from a variety of leaves.

The artisans make a range of items, including shopping baskets, kitchen baskets, tissue boxes, floor mats, and showpieces from the comfort of their homes.

They then supply the products to BD Creation, a non-government export organisation, which started its journey in Mymensingh in 2013 after similar initiatives in Noakhali, Pabna, Kishoreganj, Barishal and Bhola.

Over 10,000 men and women are now engaged in this business across Mymensingh, including in places such as Koyarchala, Nishchintapur, Sreepur, Panibhita, Keshorganj, Naugaon, Kushmail and Baruka.

Motalab Hossain, operation manager of BD Creation in Mymensingh, said palm leaves, called "hogla pata" in Bangla, date leaves, bamboo, cane, and hyacinth were readily available in nature and they preferred to work with such inputs.

He added that the finished products were exported to 82 European countries, including England, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain.

This opportunity serves as a beacon of hope for many women as it offers them a chance to earn money while staying at home and allows them time to complete household chores.

Over 10,000 men and women are now engaged in this business across Mymensingh, including in places such as Koyarchala, Nishchintapur, Sreepur, Panibhita, Keshorganj, Naugaon, Kushmail and Baruka.

Anjuman Ara, a 50-year-old from Bakta Kumarchala village, said she makes different types of handicrafts from ropes made from various leaves.

The rope is supplied by local entrepreneurs so she only needs to make the finished item, which can range in price from Tk 10 to Tk 120 according to the size and design.

Anjuman's neighbour, 25-year-old Farida Khatun, said she has been working for four years in this business and it has significantly reduced the financial burden on her husband, an auto-rickshaw driver.

Farida, a mother of two, said she can now earn around Tk 7,000 per month.



Rokshana Begum, a young woman, added, "It depends on one's capacity to work. Many workers earn up to Tk 10,000 per month."

Md Sumon Mia, an entrepreneur from Bhalukjan village, said he has been involved in this profession for a year and has already forged a path in this business.

Sumon, proprietor of SM Handicraft, said more than 100

women in the village were involved in the production of handicrafts and the number increases in tune with the volume of work orders.

Sumon said he worked at a handicraft shop in Dhaka for three years and that the experience proved to be very helpful when it came to starting his own business.

He added that he mainly sources raw materials from Noakhali and Barishal.

Prof Dr Mohammad Saidur Rahman of the Department of Agricultural Economics at Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) said the demand for handicrafts was increasing at home and abroad.

"People are now more interested in consuming organic food and using handicrafts made from natural materials. The sales of such handicrafts at traditional fairs, including during Pahela Boishakh, are also reasonable," said Dr Saidur.

Dr Saidur added that a lot of handicrafts were produced in India, the Philippines, Cambodia and Thailand, earning those nations good amounts of foreign currency.

He added that Bangladesh has a lot of potential in this sector as well.

"If handicrafts can be turned into a proper industry, more job opportunities can be created in rural areas, which will serve in bridging the gap between rural and urban economies," he said.

The government should come forward and provide financial support to artisans in order to foster more employment opportunities, he added.

## Boss-beating services: the workplace solution

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

A former colleague shared one of the most bizarre local news about an employee who hired a goon to severely beat up his boss for being the cause of excessive stress in the workplace.

These "goons" are allegedly catching up with the trend by offering tailored boss-beating services. They are introducing innovative product portfolios offering services that fit the desires of individual clients. This product portfolio may further extend to "digital goon" with cyber-attack features!

I have often written about bosses because the art of managing them remains a critical part of our professional success. Physical altercations involving bosses are not very uncommon. They are more likely to occur in highly stressed environments or due to extreme workplace tensions. While such events are relatively rare, they highlight the severity of workplace conflicts.

Many of us have directly or indirectly witnessed similar incidents. It reminds me of a story I heard of a diplomat who had punched his ambassador hard on the nose. The latter had sent a blood-stained handkerchief by the diplomatic bag to the headquarters as evidence to prosecute the offending diplomat. Beating up by labour leaders is something common in Bangladesh.

Getting physically aggressive with the boss results from an ultimate sense of revolt that offers no salvation from irreversible disaster. The subordinate, who is usually the perpetrator, takes this last resort with full knowledge that it is his/her last day at work but derives a deep satisfaction from the likely defamations of the boss that will result from it.

Bosses play a significant role in shaping the work environment and influencing employee stress levels. Their leadership style directly impacts workplace harmony. Excessive workload, lack of support, micromanagement, negative feedback, and preferential or unfair treatment can contribute to stress.

Conversely, bosses whose style provides clarity, recognition, and fair treatment foster a healthier workplace. If the boss is suffering from personal or work-related stress, it is bound to cascade down to the employees.

A recent survey conducted by The Harris Poll in the US found that the issue is universal. Here are some key findings:

Over two-thirds of American workers have experienced a toxic boss. The most prevalent toxic boss behaviours include setting unreasonable expectations (51 percent), micromanaging (49 percent) and credit-stealing (48 percent).

About 53 percent of American employees confess to working on weekends, holidays, or days off because of their bosses. Toxic work environments are endured primarily due to financial reasons (72 percent). Moreover, 41 percent of employees have sought therapy to cope with the toxicity of their current or past bosses.

Despite the severe consequences, toxic bosses are not only tolerated but also promoted, with 60 percent of American workers witnessing their ascent in leadership roles despite their toxicity.

To unlock employees' best potential, fostering a positive work environment by respecting employees is essential. This could significantly enhance productivity (85 percent) and greater responsibilities (81 percent). Bangladesh's scenario will not be different.

Handling toxic bosses requires resilience, assertiveness, diplomacy, and a commitment to self-interest. The best practices are self-assessment, setting boundaries, seeking support, and documenting incidents. Additionally, focus on solutions, know your rights, and confront calmly. Toxic employees can also be sources of stress in the organisation and they surface strongly when the leaders are weak.

It is essential to address workplace issues constructively to prevent escalations that can harm not only the individuals involved but also the organisations. Physical altercation can't simply be an option.

Both parties must exercise restraint to avoid such incidents. If it becomes a battlefield, let us plant seeds of kindness. A smile, a supportive word, can have a rippling effect in the office.

Bosses, beware! Treat your subordinates fairly. Either you get fixed, or "goons" with their innovative products will fix you!

The author is founder and managing director of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd.

## BB restricts journalists' access to its offices

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In a rare move, the Bangladesh Bank has restricted the entry of journalists to its offices, drawing criticism from a group of journalists.

Recently, the central bank instructed its security management department and other departments verbally not to allow media professionals to enter its offices. As a result, they have not been able to cover the key beat properly in the past one month.

This is the first time such a restriction has been imposed. The journalists had previously free access to the central bank.

The banking regulator took the decision at a time when the economy is facing several challenges, including growing irregularities in the financial sector, higher inflation, and exchange rate mismanagement.

A group of journalists working in the economic and banking beats have condemned the entry ban.

They said that journalism is not a crime and the central bank has taken a stance that goes against independent journalism by imposing the restriction. The decision will hinder the free flow of information and will eventually impact the economy, they added.

To resolve the issue, Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) President Refayet Ullah Mirdha and General Secretary Abul Kashem met with central bank Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder at the latter's office on the day. However, the issue has not been resolved completely.

After the meeting, BB Spokesperson Md Mezbaul Haque told reporters that media professionals can only meet the spokesperson using an entry pass.

"Besides, if any official provides a pass to journalists, they can also meet him or her. However, they will not be able to visit other departments freely like they did in the past."

In a statement after the meeting, the ERF said it requested the central bank to restore the free entry for journalists.

Reporters have been gathering news and information from the central bank for the past 53 years without any restriction. Suddenly, they are facing the entry restriction. This is not acceptable, it said.

## Reckitt's revenue down 3pc

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Reckitt Benckiser (Bangladesh), whose brands include Dettol, Mortein and Harpic, witnessed a drop in revenue of around 3 percent year-on-year in the last January-March period, citing that it was due to a decline in sales.

The sales amounted to Tk 132.67 crore in the three months, the company disclosed after a meeting of its board of directors yesterday.

It was Tk 136.63 crore in the same period of the previous year.

As a result, its profit slightly declined to Tk 15.16 crore this time around from Tk 15.20 crore last year.

Meanwhile, the company's earnings per share (EPS) reduced to Tk 32.10 from Tk 32.18 in the respective periods.

"The reduction of the sales volume is a significant one but it would not impact the running of the business," said a senior official.

Stocks of the company were traded at Tk 4,692.10 at Dhaka Stock Exchange on Wednesday. It was not traded yesterday for it being the record date, meaning the day stockholders are eligible to receive dividends.

The board of directors had earlier recommended a 550 percent cash dividend for 2023.

## Bata stocks drop despite record dividend

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks of Bata Shoe Company (Bangladesh) dropped yesterday despite the company announcing that it would pay a record dividend.

The multinational shoe-maker's stocks dropped 1 percent to Tk 969 at the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) at the end of the day.

This is despite the fact that yesterday morning, the company said in a disclosure on the DSE website that it would provide a 435 percent cash dividend to its shareholder for 2023.

This is highest-ever dividend provided by the company.

However, according to a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange, the company's profit dropped 2 percent year-on-year to Tk 40.09 crore in 2023 from the previous year's Tk 41.01 crore.

The decline in profit led to a reduction in its earnings per share, which fell to Tk 29.31, down from the previous year's Tk 29.98.

The company's net operating cash flow per share declined to Tk 93.80 compared to Tk 107.84 the previous year.

Bata started operations in Bangladesh 1962. It has 261 retail outlets and 13 wholesale depots in the country, according to its website.

## MTB to buy land worth Tk 108cr for head office

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mutual Trust Bank (MTB) yesterday said that it plans to construct its corporate head office on a three-bigha (approximately 1 acre) plot of land, which it will purchase for Tk 108 crore.

The head office will be located in Beraid located in the capital's Badda area, as approved by the MTB board on Wednesday.

The cost of each katha (20 katha equals 1 bigha) of land will be Tk 1.8 crore.

The bank said that the decision was pending approval from relevant authorities.

MTB, which reported increased earnings during the January-March period of this fiscal year, said earnings per share rose to Tk 0.78 in the first quarter, up from Tk 0.68 a year ago.

MTB's profit surged by 21 percent year-on-year to Tk 286 crore in the financial year ending in December 2023.

The bank also experienced growth in its net operating cash flow during this period.

MTB shares gained 2.72 percent to Tk 15.10 yesterday on the Dhaka Stock Exchange, which slumped for the third consecutive day.