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Shaira Saleem – a fierce advocate for women entrepreneurs and SMEs

By Iyath Adam Shareef

Ms. Shaira Saleem, the owner of Sheri Salons & Spas and the Chairperson of the Women Entrepreneurs Association Maldives (WEAM), spoke with bizTIMES about the current business landscape for women entrepreneurs, how things have changed, the pandemic, and the secret to business success.

Ms. Shaira expressed concern about the current state of affairs for female entrepreneurs, stating that while the industry has advanced, more improvements are still required. "A lot of work is being done to strengthen the role of women entrepreneurs and help them make an impact, but we don't see it happening in a timely manner. The progress made is insufficient in comparison to how long we have been discussing it."

Ms. Shaira, on the other hand, acknowledged the positive changes that have occurred over the years. "When I first started working, it was unusual for women to be business owners. There was a lot of criticism, but I believe that people are



more aware now and believe that women are just as capable in the workplace as men. There are numerous opportunities available now for women seeking to enter the business world. There are numerous loan programs available. Previously, there were few, if any, programs available to assist female entrepreneurs."

Small home-based businesses, particularly those run by women, have found it difficult to navigate the emerging new post-COVID landscape. Ms. Shaira has been a staunch supporter of these businesses throughout

this time. As a result, it was only natural for us to ask Ms. Shaira about her thoughts on how the pandemic has affected small businesses.

"Small businesses are the backbone of the economy, and the pandemic had a significant impact on many of these home-based businesses." Women's small-scale businesses were the hardest hit. Many of them were unable to work during the lockdowns and were forced to close their doors as a result. Many people were forced to return home with their extended families, and

those who lived in Male' were forced to return to their islands," Ms. Shaira explained.

"I believe the Maldivian government made an effort to assist small businesses – perhaps more than many other neighboring countries. When I look at the government's COVID-19 assistance loan schemes, I don't think many of them were designed with small-scale businesses in mind. For these types of small businesses, the available assistance is ineffective, and I believe they were underserved during the pandemic's peak. Right now, we need to keep this in mind, talk about it, and try to come up with a solution or plan to combat it in the future."

When asked about the foundation of her success as an entrepreneur, Ms. Shaira listed four key points. "Commitment, faith, patience, and dedication to your work will enable you to be successful in your work." In my case, I had a lot of help from my friends and family, as well as my team. But, in the end, I believe it was my confidence, will, and determination to succeed that got me here.

The Greater Male' connectivity project signed

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The EU provides grant of € m to help recover Maldives' SME tourism sector

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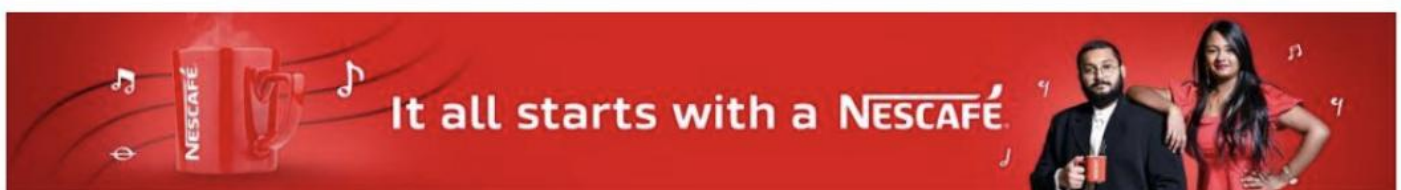
The Maldives is considering introducing home-stay tourism

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BAAZAARU – An innovative approach to online selling

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Ms. Shaira had a similar message for aspiring Maldivian entrepreneurs; perseverance. "No one ever reaches the pinnacle of success in a single leap. You must be prepared for setbacks and willing to persevere in the face of setbacks until you reach your goal. When you start a project, believe in your abilities and persevere. It is possible that you will not be successful at first, but if you persevere, you will. I believe you will succeed if you keep your head up."



BAAZAARU – An innovative approach to online selling

By Iyath Adam Shareef



Purchasing and selling items online has become the new norm in recent years; particularly with the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, online companies and marketing have soared on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and even Viber and WhatsApp. BAAZAARU is one such online business platform.

BAAZAARU is a two-year-old public Viber community. According to the group's name, 'baazaa-ru' – which translates as 'market' in Dhivehi - the group operates as an online marketplace where vendors can list their products and connect directly with customers. According to one of the network's founders, Moosa Saeed, the BAAZAARU Viber

platform was designed only to assist individuals in expanding their existing businesses and finding a more convenient approach to reach a big audience and sell things.

On the BAAZAARU platform, any member may publish images of the things they wish to sell, albeit the maximum number of posts per member is ten. Anything more than that will result in the posts being deleted by the administrators. Members are urged to publish their products at various times throughout the day, including morning, noon, evening, and/or night, to maximize their visibility.

On the platform, you can sell anything that is legal to sell in the Maldives. The group advertises a variety of products ranging from food, clothing, and footwear to electronics, furniture, and even automobiles and vessels. On any given day, the community receives over 100 product listings from sellers from all across the Maldives. BAAZAARU operates in a similar manner to online purchasing

sites such as Amazon, Carousell, or eBay, but with a considerably easier interface.

However, there are obstacles. Moosa mentioned one such issue as the lack of detailed information on product posts. "Occasionally, people forget to include their phone number with their posts, which causes buyers interested in purchasing to contact the administrators. It's also tough for us to determine who sells what products. Therefore, if you wish to sell your products, it is critical to include your contact information. This simplifies and streamlines the process for both sellers and buyers."

Moosa also had one additional request for the members of BAAZAARU – to focus on growing the community's follower base. "If you are using the platform for business purposes, please endeavor to grow the group's membership, since this will benefit everyone. For instance, increasing the number of followers from 10,000 to 25,000 will undoubtedly benefit the firm. The larg-

er the audience, the more people become aware, and the more people would purchase the marketed products," Moosa explained. "This community is not exclusive to the administrators; it is inclusive of every single seller on the marketplace. As a result, it is also your obligation to grow the audience." Currently, the BAAZAARU community has over 11,000 members, although this figure is lower than it was prior to the epidemic, when the group numbered well over 12,000.

Moosa's goal for BAAZAARU is to grow the group's membership and expand the platform on which people can sell their products. "Our goal is to grow the BAAZAARU community to over 50,000 members. Insha Allah, we can accomplish our goal as long as new members are added and encouraged to join."

To locate the group, simply put BAAZAARU into the Viber app's search bar. Then invite your family and friends to sell and/or purchase products!

Peoples Profile

Sajna Ibrahim - professional makeup artist & beautician

By Iyath Adam Shareef



Sajna Ibrahim – as Sajna to her friends – is a seasoned makeup artist, hair stylist, and beautician with over ten years of expertise.

When Sajna was working as a flight attendant for Maldivian, she

developed an interest in cosmetics and skin treatments. Following that, she decided to pursue a career as a beautician and enrolled in a beauty school abroad. She returned to the Maldives shortly after finishing

the school and began working as a freelance cosmetics artist and hair stylist.

She presently works as a beautician at SKIN CANDY – The Beauty Store, but during the course of her decade-long career, she has also worked at other salons and freelanced occasionally. The main disadvantage to freelancing, according to Sajna, is the lack of fixed income; otherwise, she finds that setting her own hours and taking on work as she sees fit suits her well. “Prior to the pandemic, finding freelance work was simple and provided a steady income. However, since the pandemic, freelance

work has become substantially less common and difficult to come by,” Sajna explained. She charges MVR 700 for makeup and hair, MVR 500 for makeup and hijab styling, and MVR 400 for makeup on a freelance basis. Children’s rates vary depending on the type of hairstyle and cosmetics required.

Sajna does makeup and hair styling for music shows, ads, and TV shows in addition to her regular clientele of brides and event attendees. For two seasons of Maldivian Idol, she was the manager in charge of the cosmetics and hair styling staff. She’s also done hair and makeup for a number of international models and celebrities who’ve visited the Maldives.

The only thing Sajna requires prior to a makeup and styling appointment is to see the dress. “I usually ask to view the clothing —

the color and kind of dress – before the actual styling session. From there, I can construct a whole appearance by forming an idea of how the makeup and hairstyle should be,” Sajna explained.

Sajna’s lifelong ambition is to open her own salon, equipped with a variety of beauty services. She aims to combine this into her own salon to give well-rounded services for clients, as her major focus has always been in the whole treatment and attractiveness of skin, rather than just makeup or hair style.

Contact SKIN CANDY at 9111617 to get your beauty treatments from Sajna right now.

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Pyramid launches Today's Taste 4K TV promotion

By Iyath Adam Shareef



Pyramid has just launched a new campaign called Today's Taste 4K TV. Pyramid imports and distributes Today's Taste, a popular tea brand in the Maldives.

Three lucky buyers will receive a 55-inch 4K TV as part of the campaign. All you have to do is purchase a 100-teabag pack of Today's Taste and look for the coupon inside to see if

you've won a prize and, if so, what it is. Simply visit any Pyramid shop to use the coupon and collect your prize! Customers can also win customized Today's Taste teacups or masala chai mugs in addition to the three 55-inch TVs.

According to Mohamed Sobah, Pyramid's Marketing Manager, this is the company's first consumer advertising since

the COVID-19 outbreak began. "Tea has achieved widespread appeal in the Maldives as a result of the pandemic. People are becoming more aware of the health benefits of drinking tea. So, while enjoying some delicious tea, we wanted to give back to the community and give people a chance to win some great prizes," Sobah explained.

Pyramid previously had a similar campaign, but it was only open to restaurant chains and the coupon was only given out with the purchase of a Today's Taste tea case. The present campaign, on the other hand, is open to all of their retail customers. This promotion will run till December 31st of this year.

With the purchase of a Today's Taste pack of 100 teabags at Pyramid stores in Male' or Hulhumale', you can win a lucky coupon. Keep an eye out for the promotional sticker on the outside of the pack!