

# Interior design brand KC aims to go global

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Creativity takes courage, according to Henri Matisse, a famous French artist from the 1800s known for both his use of colour and fluid and original draughtsmanship.

This quote rings true for interior fashion designer Kawsar Chowdhury, also the managing director of Green Furniture, who has an unquenchable thirst for innovation and the use of cutting-edge technologies to make a range of home décor products.

Fastidious about minor details, passionate about design and with a keen interest in the juxtaposition of art and décor, Chowdhury has already won the hearts of the local clientele.

Now though, he has turned his sights to the international arena and aims to bring his products before the global audience through KC, a couture brand for home décor and interior design solutions.

"Many renowned architects from around the world used to send me their designs, which I would make. So all credit goes to those guys but still, I was the man behind the scenes

established KC, named after his initials, one and a half years ago to bring the best and latest technologies and develop his designs in line with international standards.

KC is a trademark of Eco Wood, the brand's manufacturing hub which was established about 14 years ago in Kanchpur. It is a complete factory with over 120 workers.

"If there was no coronavirus pandemic this year, I would have already announced KC's first exports through an exhibition," Chowdhury added.

However, KC will only ship its products to select clients after locally manufacturing their customised orders. This means that foreign buyers cannot retail the company's products under their own brands.

As an aesthete, Chowdhury is highly sensitive to the beauty in all things and believes that humans have a heightened sense of wellbeing when in the presence of something truly exquisite.

"I am passionate about creating exquisite homes and making bold statements. I take inspiration from my



Kawsar Chowdhury

facilities.

"I noticed on my travels to places such as the UAE that just the walls and ceilings at landmark hotels like the Burj Khalifa were enough to dictate a room's environment," the managing director added.

In a bid to attain similar results, Chowdhury and his team obsess over every detail, spending months on end to finish a project as they tirelessly strive for the unexpected.

KC offers three varieties for its kitchen units: classic, modern and double luxury.

Classic kitchen cabinets have a vintage American look and with a satin finish, they are a nostalgic throwback to his days studying in the US.

They are custom made using Italian technology and come in an elegant white.

"For modern-day kitchens, I pioneered the European high-gloss look 12 years ago and have innovative materials that can create seamless curves and designs to my heart's content," he said.

Meanwhile, KC's doubly luxury kitchen cabinets are sandwiched units with both sides covered in an acrylic and special lamination coat for a sparkling finish.

All panels are framed with a sleek aluminium profile and clients can also order them with a custom pattern or textured finish.

"I was inspired by Italian kitchen styles and spent at least 3 months doing R&D before perfecting it for our clients, who want full protection in their kitchens," Chowdhury said.

Besides, the brand retails bathroom sinks, centre-piece pillars and colour changing bedroom cupboards as well.

"A much loved item is our custom design walk-in closet. A KC walk-in closet is the epitome of luxurious living. They are completely bespeaking in design, materials and finish while tailored to the customers taste," he added.

KC floor panels are made of oak, mahogany or teak. They come in

matte, natural glossy wood or rough surface finishes and according to Chowdhury, these wooden floors are not just a thing of beauty, but are also scratch-proof and durable due to the special multi-layer coatings and finishing.

"We use premium down feathers of 700 Fill-Power. A-class raw materials and the rich and opulent overtones, make each piece a bold statement," he said.

Chowdhury has already designed 250 rooms of the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka Hotel and many other sophisticated buildings, including the lobby of Le Méridien Dhaka, another five-star hotel in the capital.

His family used to make building materials. Later, when he returned after completing his study from the US in 1995, Chowdhury started manufacturing marble with a plant. About 14 years ago, he established the furniture and home décor brand: Green Furniture.

However, not everything has been on the up and up for the managing director.

As a complete turnkey for custom interior designs, KC makes wall, floor, ceiling and door panels alongside kitchen cabinets, closets, various furniture and home automation facilities

When the coronavirus broke out in New York in February, several of his acquaintances, including some friends died of the disease.

"From then on, I started researching how the coronavirus spreads as I always strive to learn new things and for that I study, travel and do a lot of research," Chowdhury said.

In March, he was convinced that the coronavirus was airborne and that it was more powerful and fast spreading in enclosed areas.

"Since I work inside the building, I have extensive knowledge and experience of working with airflow and lightings," he added.

And so, he is now working on an innovative approach to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in confined spaces.

"I have given presentations to a few organisations and they have shown interest in my solutions. I am not doing this for profit, but rather on humanitarian grounds as I have lost some of my close ones during these hard times," Chowdhury said.

He also plans to introduce Far-UVC lights, which scientists believe would be a new tool to control the spread of Coronavirus.

A wavelength of ultraviolet light, known as far-UVC, can safely kill superbugs such as the coronavirus and influenza without penetrating people's skin, according to radiation scientist David Brenner, the director of the Center for Radiological Research at Columbia University.

Chowdhury himself became infected back in May and after battling Covid-19 for over a month, during which he spent an extraordinary 12 days in the hospital, he recovered in late June.

Now, he regularly donates plasma to helping coronavirus patients that are undergoing treatment have a better chance at survival.

"My whole perspective on life has changed after my near death Covid-19 experience. So I am doing as much as possible to prevent its spread from my end," he said.

## Govt finalises draft of PTA with Bhutan

The preferential trade deal may be signed next month

REFAJET ULLAH MIRDHA

The government has finalised a draft of a preferential trade agreement (PTA) to be signed between Bangladesh and Bhutan within the next month.

The commerce ministry will place the final draft of the proposed agreement at the cabinet meeting, to be held tomorrow, for final approval, Commerce Secretary Jafar Uddin told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.



### KEY POINTS

- » This is the first bilateral PTA of Bangladesh
- » Bhutan may offer duty-free access to **100** Bangladeshi goods
- » Bangladesh agreed on duty-free access to **34** Bhutanese items
- » Bilateral trade was **\$57.9** million in fiscal 2018-19

If the deal goes through, it would be the first formal PTA for Bangladesh with any country.

The signing of the PTA with Bhutan indicates that Bangladesh is pro-active in trade negotiation, said MA Razzaque, research director of the Policy Research Institute (PRI).

The signing of PTA with Bhutan has dual significance, including a historical legacy, as both members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) have trade links between the two, he said.

In June, the ministry sent the terms and conditions of the PTA to the law ministry for vetting.

"With the cabinet's go-ahead, we can sign the deal anytime time soon, preferably within a month after the completion of

all formalities," the commerce secretary also said. Commerce ministers of the two nations will sign on behalf of their respective countries.

Under PTAs, some select goods enjoy duty benefits whereas under free trade agreements or FTAs, almost all do.

The rapid increase in PTAs has been a prominent feature of international trade policy in recent times.

PTAs constitute an exception to the general most-favoured nation (MFN) provision of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), where all WTO members impose on each other the same non-discriminatory tariff.

All WTO members, sans Mongolia, have signed at least one PTA. The interest in negotiating PTAs appears to have sustained despite the global economic crisis, the WTO also said.

Bhutan agreed to provide duty benefits on the export of 100 different Bangladeshi goods, including garments, processed agricultural goods and electronics.

On the other hand, 34 Bhutanese products, including fruits, will enjoy the same benefit in Bangladesh.

Being members of Saarc, trade between Bangladesh and Bhutan is on the rise as both countries have demand for each other's products.

Trade between Bangladesh and Bhutan, which amounted to \$26.52 million in fiscal 2012-13, reached \$57.90 million in fiscal 2018-19, according to data from the commerce ministry.

Currently Bangladesh has been negotiating with few other countries to finalise FTAs in order to enjoy duty free benefits even after its graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category, Uddin said.

For instance, a joint study is going on to sign the proposed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between Bangladesh and India.

Bangladesh needs to sign a CEPA with some countries as only signing the PTAs or FTAs will not work, he added.

The CEPA is a comprehensive partnership between the two countries, which also includes investment, whereas the PTAs and FTAs cover tariff issues.

So, the signing of a CEPA between Bangladesh and India can ensure more trade and investment between the two neighbours, he said.

READ MORE ON B3

## Good governance, digitalisation can charge up stock market: analysts

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Good governance, digitisation, earnings growth of listed companies and supportive macro-economy are the key to a sustainable stock market, analysts said yesterday.

Their comments came in a webinar -- Towards a sustainable capital market: the drivers of growth -- jointly organised by Bangladesh Merchant Bankers Association (BMBA) and Capital Market Journalists' Forum (CMJF).

The stock market should be healthy and

properly governed because only then people will come to the market, said Prof Shibli Rubayat Ul Islam, chairman of Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC).

"Who will come with their hard-earned money in an ill market?"

"We are working on restoring good governance but we need stakeholders' active participation to reach the goal," he said at the event as the chief guest.

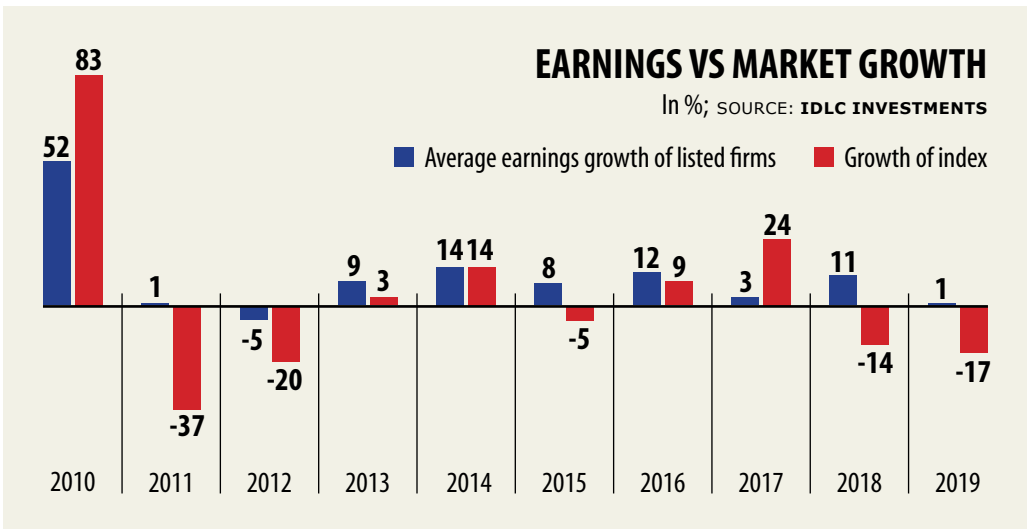
The BSEC wants to stop looting, cheating and all types of fraudulent activities in the stock market, but the commission alone cannot do it, he said.

"To diversify products of the market and make the market debt-based rather than equity-based, we approved many bonds," he said.

After taking over in May, the new commission led by Islam approved zero coupon bonds worth Tk 850 crore, subordinated bonds worth around Tk 3,500 crore and local bonds of Tk 100 crore.

The commission will allow stock brokers to open digital outlets abroad in order to attract non-resident Bangladeshis and foreign investors to the market, Islam said.

READ MORE ON B2



## Workers halt container movement at Ctg port for 12 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Container transport to and from Chattogram port remained suspended for 12 hours yesterday as workers running articulated lorries went on a sudden work abstention demanding appointment letters and protesting sacking of fellows from a private company.

The resumption came at about 6pm after a meeting was agreed upon today at 11am at the office of the assistant superintendent of police of Sitakunda to discuss the matter and reach consensus.

Fouzderhat-based MNM Transport Agency sacked 36 workers in the past couple of weeks, Md Abu Bakkar Siddiquee, general secretary of Chattogram Prime Mover-Trailer Sramik Union, told The Daily Star.

Moreover, the 18 private inland container depots (ICDs) in and around the port city and the port's six berth operators have not issued appointment letters even after signing relevant agreements with the union six months ago, he claimed.

However, Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association (Bicda) President Nurul Qayyum Khan said they had started issuing appointment letters in March.



COLLECTED

Prime-movers are seen waiting idle at a private inland container depot in Chattogram yesterday.

READ MORE ON B2