The Baily Star

Business Person of the Year 2000

Samson H Chowdhury, Chairman, Square Group



started with a few thousand taka investment is now the largselling

"A journey that

pharmaceutical company of the country. At the age of 75, he is pushing still higher with a vision to turn the group into the largest conglomerate Bangladesh." At the age of 75, Samson Chowdhury still

goes to his office before anyone, and he stays till the end. To everybody Square Group, he is regarded as an emblem of energy, vigour

and commitment.

Samson Chowdhury, Chairman of Square Group, is totally a selfmade man. Born on February 25, 1926, he completed Senior Cambridge and then management training course jointly sponsored and conducted by the Dhaka University and the Harvard University School.

He along with his four friends set up Square Pharmaceuticals in 1958 at Pabna. The first proprietary medicine was introduced the following year under the name EASTON's syrup.

It was a small factory with a few thousand taka investment. Today, the plant's annual sales cross Tk 300 erore. The small plant used to produce a cough svrup.

Square was built on Samson's toil who used to go to his factory, a 12-mile bus ride.

It was solely his own vision and efforts that Square has achieved a number of milestones in the country's pharmaceutical industry. It was the first to manufacture and market Metronidazole, Ampicillin and Cotrimoxazole after the expiry of patents. It also pioneered in exporting antibiotics and other ethical drugs overseas.

Square was also the first to achieve an all time industry high record sales turnover of US\$ 25 million. Because of his continuous effort to improve and his colleagues all-out support, Square Pharmaceutical continues to maintain its market leadership for 12 years at a stretch with a present market share of 14 per cent.

Samson's vision is now to turn Square into the biggest conglomerate of the country which would be both a labour intensive and capital intensive company.

With this vision in mind, Samson Chowdhury has gathered a group of high-quality managers whom be treats as family members. Samson is also said to be maintaining a very close relationship with the employees and despite having a huge workforce. Square never faced any labour trouble because of his amicable way of setting issues.

Samson always attends all the conferences of Square Group. "You can never sleep in business to be ahead of everybody," is what he

Samson also had a direct contribution towards the War of Independence. He used to supply medicines from his plant to freedom fighters. He also did not bother to send his son to the war. He was later targetted by the Pakistan army and he fled home for a freedom fighters' camp when the army came to pick him up.

It was Samson Chowdhury who took up the bold decision of going for a huge investment in the pharmaceutical plant to get USFDA for export and also to diversify into cosmetics and textiles sectors.

Samson Chowdhury was the president of MCCI and is an executive member of ICC, Bangladesh. He is also a member of board of trustees of Transparency International-Bangladesh Chapter.

He served the Baptist World Alliance as Vice-President for five years since 1985. He is a life member of Bangladesh Bible Society.

Samson Chowdhury was the President of National Christian Fellowship of Bangladesh for 1996-1999 and is the Chairman of Bangladesh Baptist Fellowship Medical Committee.

Jury Board Members

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Dr Mohammad Farashuddin Governor, Bangladesh Bank

Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud Former Adviser to the Caretaker Government & Professor of Economics, Dhaka University

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Mr Abdul Muyeed Chowdhury Executive Director, BRAC & Former Secretary, Govt of Bangladesh and

Chairman, NBR

Mr Abdul Hafiz Chowdhury, FCA Partner, Rahman Rahman Huq, Chartered Accountants

Ms Rokia A Rahman

Chairperson & Managing Director, R R Cold Storage Ltd, Director, Bangladesh Bank, & Immediate Past President Bangladesh Employers Federation

Mr Moazzem Hossain Editor, Financial Express

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Mr Desmond Quiah Country Manager, DHL Worldwide Express Mr Mahfuz Anam Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star.

Real stars steal the show at Bangladesh Business Awards

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

As they received their awards, their faces beamed with pride and the audience clapped to celebrate their success. Under the spotlight, the Bangladesh Business Awards 2000 winners spoke of their successes, the struggle they had to undergo for it and the fruits they received -

making flagship companies for the country. The award, launched for the first time in the country by The Daily Star and DHL Worldwide Express to recognise the contributions of the business entrepreneurs and enterprises towards Bangladesh's

development, were given at a ceremony yesterday evening. Mahfuz Anam. Editor of The Daily Star, read out citations highlighting the achievements of the winners before the announcement of their names. Munmun Rahman, the anchorperson of the ceremony. then made the show more interesting by asking the audience if they could guess the winners.

And the audience could do that almost pretty smartly. The only time they remained mum was when it came to guessing the 'Outstanding Woman in Business'.

"I feel great... I am so happy, excited and grateful for the honour that has been bestowed upon to my company. I admire The Daily Star and DHL for their vision," said Sheikh Mohammad Kamaluddin, Chairman of Concord Engineers and Construction Ltd., the first recipient of the 'Enterprise of the Year' award. "This kind of recognition will bring about a positive awareness about the country's business community. In Bangladesh, we have so many problems and negative factors. But there are some positive factors too.'

Asked how he defines enterpreneurship, Kamaluddin said: "Enterpreneurship has no definite definition. An enterpreneur must have innovative style, he is a person who can achieve integrity and has positive attitude toward life."

Next came Feroz Rahim, Managing Director of Rahimafrooz Bangladesh Ltd., to receive his 'Enterprise of the Year' award. As his tall figure came through the audience towards the dais, he was greeted with claps and cheers.

"I am absolutely delighted," said Rahim, adding "it is a great initiative which will help businesses to attain international standards. This evening teaches us to attain business heights through integrity, excellence, commitment and new initiatives."

However, it was Salina Akther, Proprietor of Aakor and winner of the 'Outstanding Woman in Business' award, who stole the show.

Immediately after receiving her award, Salina Akther said, "I am very much happy because the honour is not only mine but also of the entire women community. I am so proud that I have been rewarded as an entrepreneur." She observed that there have been many obstacles for a woman

to do business in the country. "Unless a woman earns for herself, she never becomes self-reliant even if her husband or father is a rich man," Salina felt. She said that she was now exporting high-quality handicrafts to

Japan and Thailand and her sales hit Tk 50 lakh last year. The audience listened to her with keen attention as she said that some 900 workers throughout rural Bangladesh were now working

"I am an admirer of quality and quality is the first and last thing I care about. This is why the buyers prefer my products," she said. Expressing his feelings right after receiving the award, Samson II Chowdhury said, "I have lost my words.... It is the most surprising event in my life."

"I love work. I believe that no one can sleep in business if he or she wants to be ahead of everybody," the respected entrepreneur added.



Photo: Star Winners of Bangladesh Business Awards pose for photograph after receiving their awards at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel yesterday evening.

organisation. The company believes in excellence in everything they do by following ethical business practices and adding value to the stakeholders. Rahimafrooz Today

Afroz Rahim

Batteries

Rahimafrooz Batteries Ltd is an ISO 9002 certified company. The largest lead-acid battery manufacturer in Bangladesh and offers the most extensive range of auto-



Mohamed Ismail

Outstanding Woman in Business of the Year 2000

Salina Akther, Proprietor, Aakor



Salina Akther represents the indefatigable spirit of an entrepreneur. Defying all types of family engagements a typical woman can have, she runs a profit able organisawhich tion supplies highquality handicrafts to difbrand ferent shops in the CILV.

Business surely in her blood. When Salina Akther (31) was a student of class seven in 1980, dreamt of becoming an entrepreneur.

She started a poultry farm at her residence in Dhaka. It was a very small endeavour, totally insignificant no doubt with only four chicks in a cage. But Salina had a big dream and with her relentless effort and hard work, she managed to succeed in flourishing her business into a 1500-chick poultry farm by 1992.

But, then she was faced with a number of family difficulties. Her father died, her child was going to school and she had to give more time to the family. It became quite difficult for her to manage medicines, food and also market for the eggs. On top of everything, her college exams were knocking at the door. So, with a heavy heart, Salina had to liquidate her business.

The next three years, she was busy with her studies. After completing her education, she started thinking of doing something productive, that at the same time would give her the scope to earn her livelihood and benefit the society.

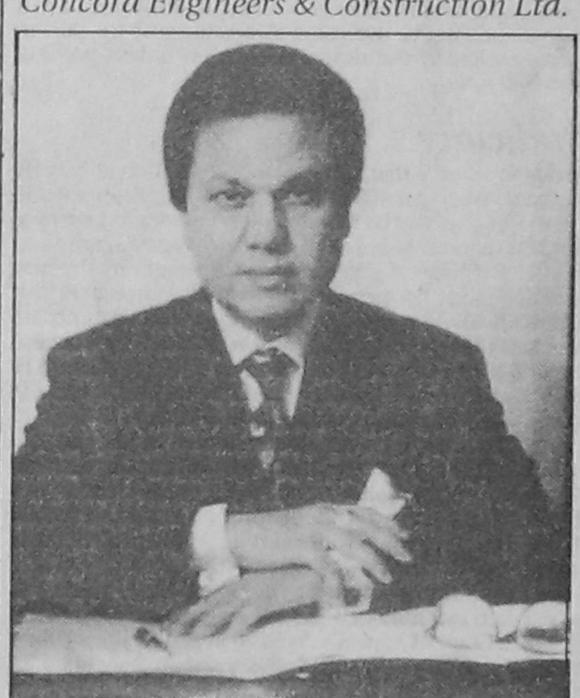
Salina started her entrepreneurship afresh after going through a training course at MIDAS. Under partnership with another lady, she started handicraft business in 1995 with some financial assistance from her uncle.

Salina opted for starting handicraft business as she thought this is one of the areas where she could apply her creativity and innovative ideas. Today, she makes a good business, supplying products to different renowned boutiques in the country.

As her uncle's money proved too little to make a big push, Salina applied for financial assistance from MIDAs and received a Tk 150,000 loan for her venture Aakor, which she has already paid back. Now she has applied for another loan from MIDAS and is also planning to take a loan from Karmasangsthan Bank to expand her business. Now her own capital has reached Tk 10,00,000.

Aakor produces quilt cushion cover curtain, bed cover and sheets, saree, dress and punjabi. The company's total sales in 2000 figured Tk 1,500,000, which is Tk 400,000 up from the 1999 sale-figure. Salina also got an export order last year through the government organisation, BRDB.

Enterprise of the Year Concord Engineers & Construction Ltd.



SM Kamaluddin, Chairman, Concord Group

When real state ventures cannot go beyond thinking of selling apartments, Concord set a new standard in building homes. It innovated materials that are cheap, strong and at the same time eliminate the necessity of environment-destroying brick kilns.

Concord was first set up in 1973 by Sheikh Mohammad Kamaluddin. Kamal, now around 60, and a civil engineer from BUET, first started his career as a teacher of the same university. But after only 13 days of teaching, he left the university and joined Engineers Ltd. The company was then engaged in repairing six war-damaged bridges on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway. It was then a very small company, set up with money borrowed by Kamal from his relatives. Gaining experience from rebuilding damaged infrastructure, Concord then ventured for the first time

in the country into high-rise construction. The country's first high-rise building - the Naval lowed by other high-rises like the Janata Bank Head office, Shilpa Bank Bhaban, Bangladesh Steel Engi-

neering Corporation head office and Petrocentre. But Concord's business strategy is to explore new crore. areas and diversification. So, the company started high-end interior designing and did a number of in- park project in Ashulia where it has already acquired ternational standard works at Bangabhaban, International Conference Centre, Prime Minister's Secre- cord wants to launch this mega project by December

tariat and ZIA VVIP terminal. In the 1990s, Concord first entered the real estate give a touch of poshness to living in apartments.

huge market for the common people. But as high square foot area and not in terms of some vague construction cost was he main barrier to cheap specifications. housing, Concord started research on developing cheap building materials.

mono layer tiles. Its concrete blocks are both cheap and light in against other competitors.

weight. The lightness of structure helped reduce the cost of erecting structures.

Kamal also showed his cleverness in introducing ready-mix concrete which any developer can order. The new products that Concord introduced now save up to 15 per cent in costs against conventional brickbuilt buildings. Moreover, the products have huge beneficial impact on environment as these reduce burning of firewood in brick kilns. According to an estimate of 1993, Bangladesh uses 2 billion bricks a year which consume about Tk 1 billion fuel. The Concord products can save Tk 1.6 billion in fuel cost, thereby saving huge number of trees.

Concord has a 16-member research and development team which works exclusively on new products. The R&D budget of the company is Tk 60 lakh a year.

The research team has pinpointed a number of revealing facts. For one, brick walls are the most expensive ones in the world. Each square feet of brick wall in Bangladesh is about 20 per cent costlier than a concrete wall in the USA while brick walls are 50 per cent weightier as well. The lighter a wall is the more earthquake tolerant it can be. It will also reduce structural costs of a building as beam and column sizes will reduce.

The research works further found that cheap housing critically depends on reducing the cost of concrete, which is the largest part of a building. In Bangladesh, one cubic feet of stones used for making concrete costs equivalent to one cubic feet of concrete abroad. This is mainly because Bangladesh does not have its own stone quarries.

Concord today has four fully automatic plants opcrating at different places of the country burning out some 100,000 pieces of blocks on a 10-hour shift. It has imported its block-making plant from Germany and had its manpower trained in the USA. What advantages these concrete blocks have?

"The block walls are resistant to the everyday abuse that can be inflicted by careless people. They come in permanent colours and so don't need any extra plastering. They keep room temperature low and thereby help save energy."

Using the cheap materials, Concord is now implementing a number of projects, each costing about Tk 160 crore, for small size apartments measuring as small as 400 square foot.

So far, Concord has invested some Tk 32 crore in Headquarters was built by Concord which was fol- its structural block and floor-making plants. It will produce 80,000 pieces of structural blocks a day from February. If the land and machinery prices are taken together, the investment would go beyond Tk 160

> Concord also plans a Tk 60 crore entertainment 30 bigha land. Along with a Canadian company, Connext year.

A big impact that Concord has ushered into the sector with luxurious apartments. It was the first to government's system of conducting construction business is that the government departments are now However, as the market shifted Concord eyed the encouraged to invite construction bids in terms of

The public works department has recently adopted a new bidding system for constructing As a result, it came up with innovative products houses according to floor space. This has saved the like concrete wall blocks, ceiling blocks, pavers, and government money, while Concord with its strong backward linkage industry has competed successfully

Enterprise of the Year

Rahimafrooz.(Bangladesh) Ltd

Building on our past ... to take on the future: Rahimafrooz Over 45 Years of Excellence

Since its inception in 1954, Rahimafrooz has expanded, diversified and consolidated in its quest to enhance corporate value and customer satisfaction. The company is uncompromising in their effort and commitment to supply fier and VRLA Battery with col-

the best products and services. Rahimafrooz is poised for a

different types of battery with excellent export growth record has put us in the leading position as a regional player in South Asia. The Company has also extended its product line to secured power solutions with UPS, Recti-

motive & specialised industrial

battery. Manufacturing over 300

laboration of Invensys - UK Howker Batteries - UK, Eltek new phase of dynamic growth Norway and AEES - France. with its commitment and drive to Renewable Energy be the most admired and trusted Rahimafrooz Solar: Rahimafrooz as a partner of BP Solar pro-

vides solar power products to the rural areas of the country with association of Grameen, LGED. BRAC and many other organisa-Distribution

Rahimafrooz Distribution Ltd operates through the most wellconnected sales network in the country. The company has over 140 dealers across the length and breadth of Bangladesh, who sell Lucas Battery, Dunlop Tyre and British Petroleum (BP) Lubricant and small power back-up-unit -IPS. The leader in the battery and tyre market, we make the lion share of each market segment.



Niaz Rahim

Retail

Rahimafrooz Superstores Ltd (RSL) will open its first chain of super stores in July 2001, at Rifles Square in Dhanmondi. Each Store will have total floor space of 7,000 sft offering 10,000 variety of products from fresh vegetables to meat to dry and canned food to toiletry products. RSL intends to bring excellence in retail experience in all the major metro area of the country.

Energy Services

Rahimafrooz Energy Services Ltd (RESL) is the first private power services company established with clear goal to meet the



Feroz Rahim

country's growing demand for "uninterrupted and clean power" through developing a network of "Distributed power systems" set-ting the standard for efficiency, economy, environmental impact and reliability. RESL intends to take the "Distributed power" concept to the mass market using state-of-the-art technologies from General Electric and Honeywell,

Other Ventures Excel Retread Ltd. - Tyre Retreading

Greyfab (Bangladesh) Ltd. -Weaving Unit Arzed Ltd. - Property Devel-

Super Abrasives Ltd. - Emery

Community Activity -* Endowment in Private University, Newspaper and Zakat

Announcement

Business Awards The Bally Star

The Wednesday publication of The Daily Star will bring out a colour supplement on the Bangladesh Business Awards 2000 launched by The Daily Star and DHL Worldwide Express. The award takes aim at paying tributes to the contributions of the business community towards Bangladesh's development.