

BANGLADESH BUSINESS AWARDS 2000

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Bangladesh Business Awards
DHL
The Daily Star

The Daily Star

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Special Supplement

A salute to the business heroes

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STAR BUSINESS REPORT

It was a completely new experience for the country's business community. For long, businessmen of this country have been reprimanded for profiteering, siphoning off bank money and evading taxes. No one actually talked about a private sector, which also works honestly, maintains high ethical standards and yet makes profits.

With the intention to recall and recognise the contributions of a responsible private sector, The Daily Star and DHL Worldwide Express organised a gala event at Sonargaon Hotel on January 3 to give the Bangladesh Business Awards for the first time in the country.

Hundreds of top businesspersons of the

country, chief executives, academicians and government officials gathered at 7 pm at the hotel's Ball Room to salute the unsung heroes who are building the country's economy and have generated thousands of jobs.

The curiosity was there right from the beginning. Many wanted to know off the record the name of the people who had bagged the Bangladesh Business Awards introduced by The Daily Star and DHL.

But more than that, the guests were full of appreciation about the innovative approach to honour the builders of the economy.

"So far, only the singers, poets and writers have been recognised for their contributions to the society," said International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh

President Mahbubur Rahman. "And we, the businessmen, had been ignored as the creatures of the mundane world. The Bangladesh Business Awards will give us due recognition."

Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) President Wali Bhuiyan was also upbeat about the introduction of the awards.

By 7.45 pm, the foyer of the hotel was almost full. Name any of the economic and business giants, and he or she was there. The audience was in a festive mood - they laughed, talked and drank soft drinks. It was a Saturday night and their spirits were high.

Finally, the programme began and guests took seats at dinner tables. Lights were put off and a spotlight brought a nicely decorated dais in view. Then with a high

drumbeat, a curtain of smoke engulfed the podium and a spectrum of lights danced upon the dais with the music.

The anchorperson said, "Today we have gathered here to recognise the successes of the people who have made their fortune in the tough world of business with high ethical standards."

And it was exactly the ethical standards and business successes that were honoured at the ceremony.

Mahfuz Anam, the Editor of the Daily Star, read out the citations highlighting the achievements of the award winners before the announcement of the names.

Amidst pin drop silence, the names were read out. And then the audience broke the silence and showed honour to the winners with cheers and claps.

As they received their awards, their faces beamed with pride and, under the spotlight, they talked of their successes and the odds they had to brave to make the flagship companies for the country.

An emotion-choked Samson H Chowdhury, who won the Business Person of the Year award, found it hard to express his feelings in words. He could only say a few words. "I love work. I believe that no one can sleep in business if he or she wants to be ahead of everybody."

Outstanding Woman in Business award receiver Salina Akther, who in fact stole the show, said: "I am very happy because the honour is not bestowed only on me, but also on the whole women community."

A delighted Feroz Rahim, Managing Director of Rahimafrooz (BD) Ltd, which

jointly won the Enterprise of the Year award, said: "Today's evening teaches us to attain business heights through integrity, excellence, commitment and new initiatives."

While expressing his feeling, an excited Chairman of Concord Engineers and Construction Ltd which also won the Enterprise of the Year award, SM Kamaluddin said: "This kind of recognition will bring about a positive awareness about the country's business community."

Earlier, Finance Minister SAMS Kibria who was the chief guest of the function said the country needs a shift from negative mindset to positive trends so that the country can move forward.

DHL Bangladesh Country Manager Desmond Quiah thanked everyone for taking part in the awarding ceremony.



Samson H Chowdhury takes a break during his work

A sail thru' thick and thin

SAMSON H CHOWDHURY

BUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR 2000

INAM AHMED

Along the dusty roads of Ataikhola village, a young man cycled his way to Pabna town everyday. Sometimes, when the bicycle broke down, he availed himself of a bus to his 12-kilometer destination. People would also see him going to market, buying raw materials for his 'plan' and then walking back home, carrying huge jerry cans. His back bent with the overhead, which almost killed him. That was in 1958.

Today, the same man sits in a plush office in a multi-storied tower. He rides the most expensive car one can afford in the country. The grey line of his hair speaks of his age. But the same determination is still there on his face. His eyes still glitter with hope and vision. Ethical and moral standards still help him walk tall. Yes, he is Samson H Chowdhury (75), Chairman of the country's top conglomerate, Square Group.

Samson Chowdhury is a totally self-made man who had fought his way through. He broke new grounds for the country's pharmaceutical sector, making his company the market leader by any count.

The turning point of his company was in 1975. Until

then, Square was a promising company, doing its best to get up the ladder. It had products, some of them selling pretty good.

But in 1975, a Belgium pharmaceutical company targeted Square. Officials of Janssen Pharmaceuticals, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson International Ltd, came to Bangladesh and went all the way to Pabna. They saw for themselves the operation of Square Pharmaceuticals and finally chose it as a licensee of their products. Thus, Square received the permission to produce seven Janssen products under its own brand name.

"It was a turning point in the sense that we came across new technology. We got the firsthand experience of what global pharmaceutical giants were doing, how they maintained quality and excelled in their business. We could then quickly adapt ourselves to this new world of high-tech medicine production. So, when the government made the drug policy in 1982, we could convert any chemical to formulation.

Samson Chowdhury has his own motto in business and it is targeted towards excellence and challenge.

"I believe that you can never stop in business, nor can

you slow down, or else you will be taken over by your competitors," explains Chowdhury. "I remember a big poster I saw in Germany. It shows thousands of cyclists hurtling by. And below it was written: If you stop, you will be run over. This in essence tells the success story of any company."

It is often an intriguing tale how Chowdhury became the country's leading entrepreneur. His father was a doctor who had a small medicine store in Pabna town. He also used to practice there.

"My father was my role model in every sense," says Chowdhury, adding "he gave us moral teachings, set our ethical standards and inspired us in reaching our goals."

So, Samson Chowdhury also wanted to be a doctor. At the age of seven, he was sent to a school in Mymensingh. Living in hostel, he learnt to be independent and to perceive work as a logical outcome of life.

"I even learnt to cook and once I stood first in our cooking class," says Chowdhury with a smile.

After completing his matriculation, Chowdhury went to Kolkata for further studies. He then completed Junior

SEE PAGE 19



Salina Akther, a symbol of success, poses with the Outstanding Woman in Business award

Braving all odds to hit the acme

SALINA AKTHER

OUTSTANDING WOMAN IN BUSINESS OF THE YEAR 2000

SHAHRAR KARIM

Flashback 1979. Playground of a girls' school in Dhaka where the annual sport is going on. A young girl of class five clad in a lungi, a typical deshi fatua and a gamchha wrapped around her head is shouting: "Do you need pickles?" She was a participant in the 'Dress As You Like' event. And that young girl chose to play the role of a pickle seller. While mimicking the role of a pickle seller, she sold pickles worth Tk 250.

Her decision to play the role of a pickle seller was not merely a grade-five girl's wishful thinking. Before taking the decision, she gave it

a good thought, even at that age, and came to the conclusion that she should play the role of a person who has to have some sort of entrepreneurial skills.

To some extent, that was the beginning of a 'to be woman entrepreneur'. Now in 2001, that very young girl runs a business enterprise of her own. Her company, Aakor that produces and sells handicrafts, sold products worth Tk 17 lakh last year. But she started the company with a few thousand taka in August 1998.

Her relentless efforts made her the Best Woman Entrepreneur of the Year 2000 awarded by JOBS. However, things could have been

SEE PAGE 19