

Concord – thriving on innovation



ENTERPRISE OF THE YEAR 2000

INAM AHMED

Sheikh Mohammad Kamaluddin does not believe in challenging the existing business with a me-too product. His success lies in forays into new areas before anyone gets there, pioneering a venture and always looking for new avenues. And that is how Concord has come to making those pavement blocks, beautiful and artistic, one often can think of being imported.

Kamal is a different breed of entrepreneur. He loves to dream and then make his dreams come true. Whatever he does be it education, services or pioneering a new field he puts in his heart and soul in the job. When he passed out from the Civil Engineering Department of BUET in 1964 with a distinction, Kamal joined the university as a lecturer. But then he decided that teaching did not fit into his temperament.

"I have a lust for creativity, for entrepreneurship. I want to create things and then fine tune it to perfection. So, I quit my teaching career within 13 days of joining the university and joined Engineers' Ltd, the best engineering firm of that time."

The company immediately recognised his talent and made the best use of him talents in all its difficult projects. Kamal also enjoyed the challenges enormously and the resultant successes made him more confident about himself.

But then came the War of Independence. During the war, the infrastructure was badly damaged and there was hardly any expertise to repair these. This offered a new scope for work and Kamal formed his own company in 1972 in the name and style of Concord Construction Company. The first job he got was to repair six war-damaged bridges on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway. But the job was a gigantic one and Kamal did not have the capital to go for it. So, he borrowed money from a relative and completed the repair work.

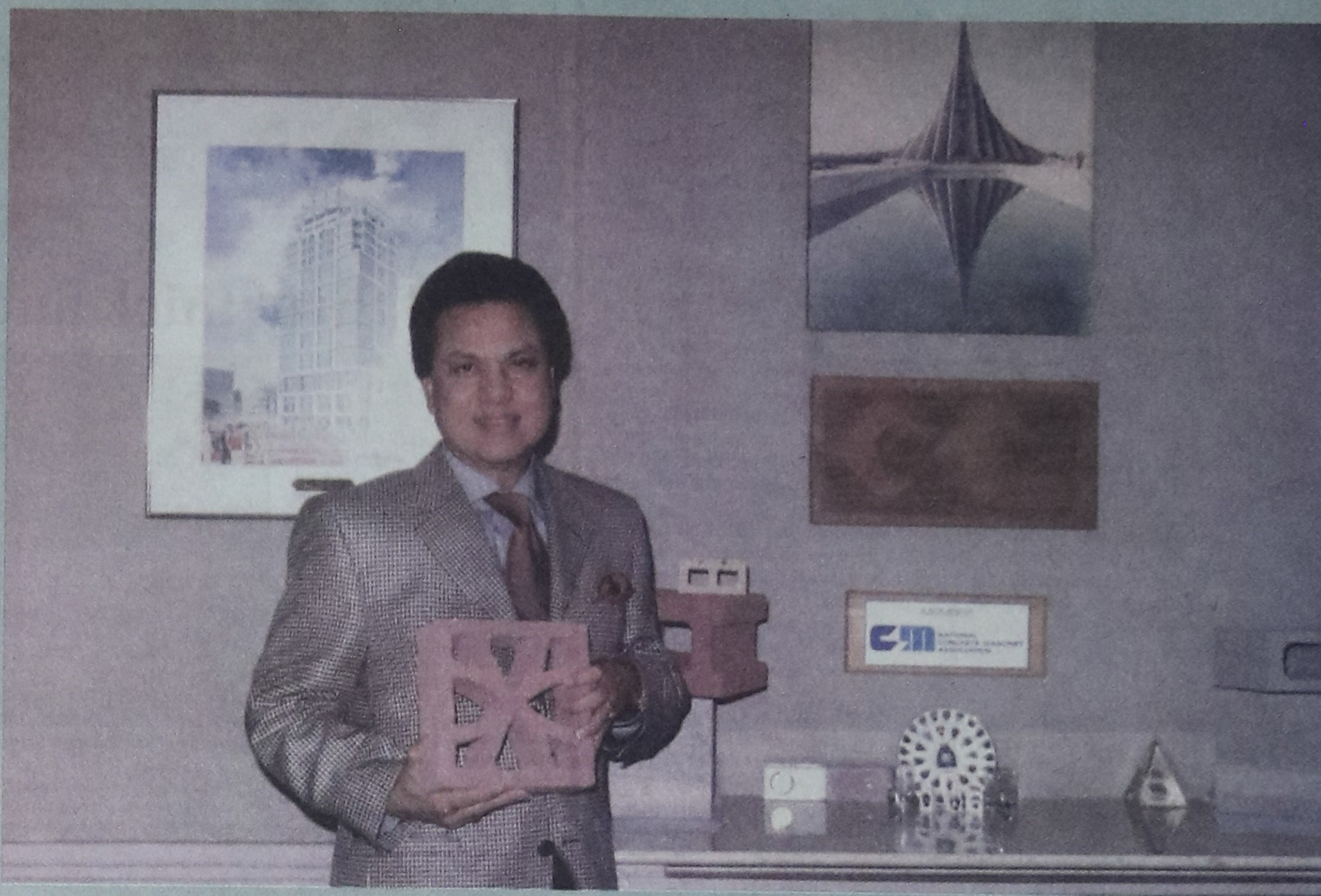
By the time he was through with the bridges, there was a tough competition for the infrastructure repairing jobs. Kamal's hunches then said he should switch to a less-competitive field. So, he foraged into repairing jobs of the war-damaged industrial plants. Then he switched to the port and built warehouses there.

By this time, Concord had acquired enough experience in construction and Kamal with his farsightedness knew that high-rise buildings would be the country's next big thing.

"So we pooled expertise and built the country's first high-rise the Naval headquarters," said Kamal. "Later, Concord built a number of other high-rises like the Janata Bank head office, Shilpa Bank Bhaban, Bangladesh Steel Engineering Corporation head office and Petrocentre."

But as more and more firms got into the high-rise business fray, Kamal felt the need for more diversification. It is then that he opted for interior designing and did a number of international standard works at the Bangabhaban, International Conference Centre, Prime Minister's Secretariat and ZIAVIP terminal.

All these happened in 1980s. In the 1990s, Kamal once again felt the need for change. He had that urge to do something for the common people swelling inside him. So, he set his eyes on the



SM Kamaluddin proudly displays one of Concord's many innovative products

real estate sector. So far only a few developers had been trying to build cheap and low-standard apartments around Dhaka city. There had not been any up-market endeavour.

"So, I came to the conclusion that there was a premium real estate market which Concord could tap," he smiled with his eyes fixed on an artist's view of Concord. "It's not a demand-push thing, it's a market we have to create. Against all skepticism, we launched a number of projects in Gulshan and Banani. We created the feeling among the rich that staying in a Concord luxurious apartment is as prestigious as living in an independent house, and finally we succeeded well in that very effort of ours."

As the premium projects succeeded, Kamal did not lose his sight of the commoner's market. He was driven by two things here one, he knew he needed to do something for the

commonman's housing problem and second, today or tomorrow the market will shift there.

But what stood in the way is the exorbitant construction material cost. Buildings become costly because of high-cost bricks, cement and other materials. So, Kamal deployed a research and development (R&D) team to find out ways to reduce construction material costs, which he thought would be a key strategy to entering the commonman's market.

A big blow below the belt in 1991 also spurred Concord's diversification.

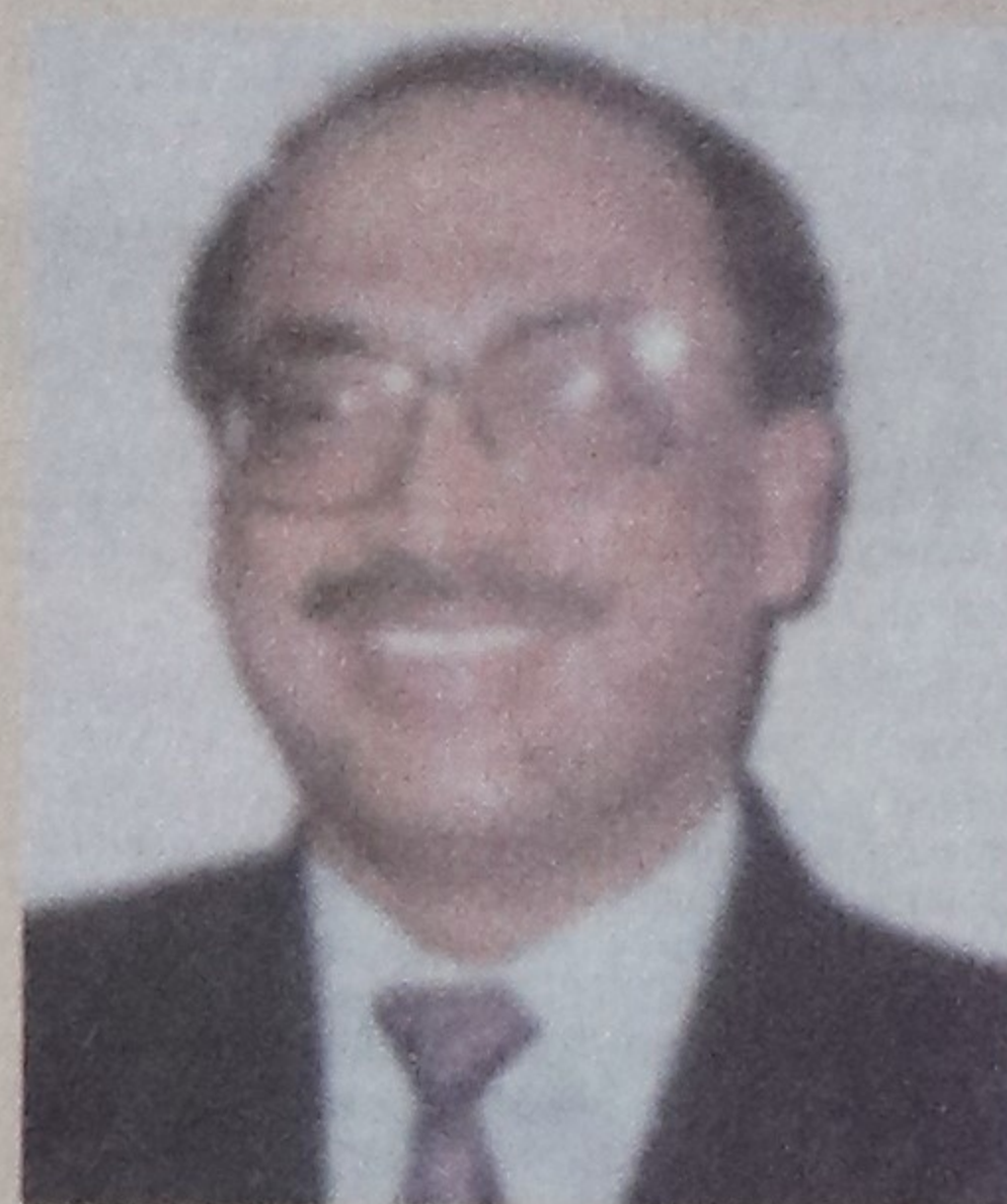
"Failure is where the road to entrepreneurship really starts," is how Kamal describes the fall and rise of his company.

Concord was then engaged in constructing fly-overs in the city to smoothen the traffic system.

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Afroz Rahim whose perseverance lifted Rahimafrooz to a dizzying height



Feroz Rahim (L), Niaz Rahim (C) and Mohammed Ismail (R) – the other men behind the company



Revolutionising the field of energy



ENTERPRISE OF THE YEAR 2000

MONJUR MAHMUD

SELLING a Bangladeshi product abroad was not an easy task in early nineties and it was not only a challenge for a local company but also a question of its survival.

The company—Rahimafrooz—had no alternative but to raise the production volume to reduce cost for facing competition from foreign products at home after liberalisation of the economy as well as finding new markets abroad for selling its increased production. The company had to look for alternative use of batteries to create new customers at this stage.

After liberalisation of the country's economy from 1991 onwards, the number one challenge for the company was to find ways to survive.

Despite all odds, the company succeeded in its efforts by going ahead and taking new measures. And now, it has its presence in 17 countries all over the world with its own Volta brand automotive battery having strong goodwill and now most of its activities are in the unconventional fields.

Introducing alternative energies like turbo, fuel cell generators, solar photo voltaic power systems for the rural people, Rahimafrooz added power backup systems for facing load shedding and extended its activities in abrasives and textile weaving. And the company is now going to launch battery-driven electric vehicles,

the first of its kind in the country.

When Abdur Rahim founded a small trading company Rahimafrooz & Co in Chittagong in 1954, he had little idea that it would one day be regarded as a pioneer in the very specialised field of energy. At the initial stage, the company was mainly involved in trading and some other contractual jobs in the Public Works Department (PWD).

In 1954, some English entrepreneurs wanted to set up an automotive battery industry in Dhaka and they were looking for local partners, particularly who had land for the factory here.

The entrepreneurs reached an agreement with Abdur Rahim that they would set up the factory on his land and they awarded him the distributorship for products. Within 20 years (1960-79), Rahimafrooz (Pakistan) Ltd became the distributor of Lucas Service (Pakistan) Ltd for its battery.

Directors of Lucas Service (Pakistan) Ltd in 1979 found that the company was not a lucrative one for them. They lost interest in it, and decided to sell it off. Finally, Abdur Rahim was able to acquire the company and renamed it as Rahimafrooz Batteries Limited in 1979.

From the very beginning, the new owners tried to follow more customer-friendly policies. During 1984-85, they initiated major restructuring of the com

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