

BANGLADESH BUSINESS AWARDS 2001

BRINGING GLOBAL CORPORATE STANDARDS TO BANGLADESH



THURSDAY FEBRUARY 14, 2002

The Daily Star

Page 19

Introducing aesthetics in furniture

Enterprise of the Year 2001

OTOBI LIMITED

M SHAMSUR RAHMAN

He was a man who would hold paint and brush in his hands. But that was long ago. He made a career switch and climbed the height with metal and wood revolutionising the country's furniture industry.

Way back in 1975, there was no precedence that an artist had become a successful entrepreneur. But Nitun Kundu, who never stood second in his life, had no other option but to give it a try as he got married and wanted to settle in life.

For the last 16 years, he had tried his options, but maverick Kundu always found something to be missing, a place where he could dedicate all his time in creating something unique. So, in 1975 he started from his drawing room, making wooden ashtray and flower vase, and selling those to people he

tion, Otobi, employs 100 executives and 800 employees. Otobi also has numerous dealers all over the country.

But during all these past years he had to go through lot of odds to make his organisation successful.

Initially it began with slogan of "Designing for modern living" in 1975, then changed to "Where quality comes first" and presently markets his product under the banner of "World class furniture".

In 1959 Kundu graduated from Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka securing first class first. In the same year, Nitun Kundu started his career as a designer in the United States Information Service (USIS) Dhaka.

He left USIS as chief designer in 1971 and participated in the liberation war. After the war he turned into a free-lance painter.

At the outset, he started manufacturing decoration item at his

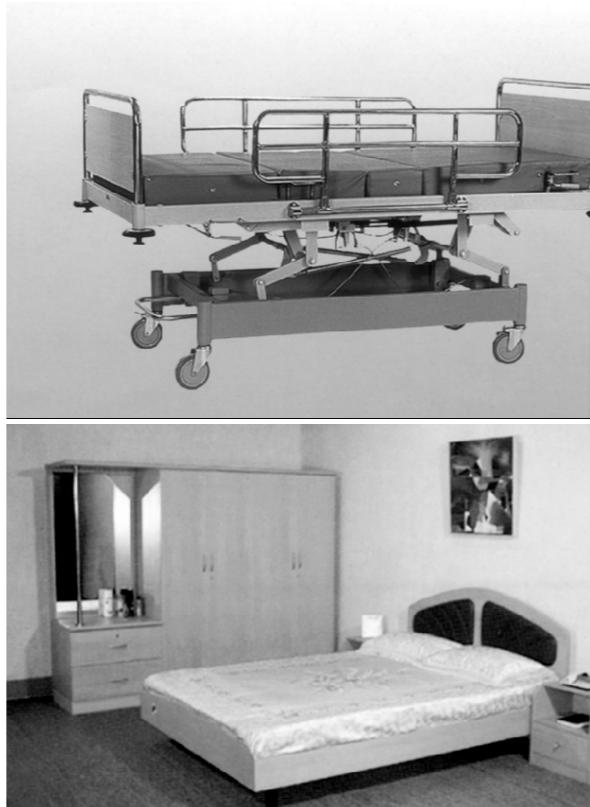
Here, he diversified his products and included new ones in the list of his sales that included coat pin, cup, crest and trophy. He started manufacturing decorative items, table lamp, and various types of metal furniture also.

Bangladeshi customers traditionally use wooden furniture. But forest resources being extremely limited, Nitun Kundu anticipated the market for metal furniture.

Product designing and manufacturing was not a problem for Kundu. But the problem he faced was with marketing those. "I am not a professional man. I enjoy designing innovative products," he says.

With the view to marketing his products in 1978 he opened a show room at 230 New Elephant Road, Dhaka and gradually started marketing all kinds of metal furniture in a proper manner.

During the next few years, he travelled widely all over the East and West gaining sufficient experience and confidence by 1984, when he started commercial production under the brand name Otobi. A great deal of emphasis was



Pictures show hospital, home and office furniture of Otobi.

a heart surgery, Kundu with a pacemaker in his chest, reaches office before others.

Kundu still feels shy when anyone make queries regarding price of a product. "What can I say, how can I say any price ... the product of my company is like my child so how can I charge for my own child," he says.

Currently the company is introducing numerous new products and has brought about qualitative improvement in the existing product line with imported high quality raw materials. It has also introduced a wide range of products of economic series to satisfy the demand of various segments of the society.

In addition to furniture, the company is also doing interior decoration and has a full-fledged service centre for after-sales service.

Currently Ottobi Limited is the largest furniture manufacturing company in Bangladesh.

Based in Dhaka, it has two factories at Mirpur and Shayampur. The factory at Mirpur is housed in a five-storyed building, each floor having 14,000 square feet area while the factory at Shayampur is an under construction 10-storey building each floor having a capacity of 17,000 square feet area.

With the completion of the construction, the production capacity of the company is expected to increase manifold.

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Under construction 10-storey Otobi factory at Shayampur

small handicraft shop to a well managed and professional world class furniture manufacturing company in Bangladesh.

The products include office furniture, household furniture, plastic furniture, hospital furniture, computer furniture, kitchen cabinet, storage rack, decorative items and interior decoration.

Today he plans the future of his company to gain international

journals and interacting with others. His corporate governance is also based on establishing professionalism in all sectors of the company operation.

He believes in quality and views that Bangladeshi companies should strive to manufacture quality products.

Kundu established corporate governance believing that knowledge is power and has given relentless effort to educate himself through reading books, magazines,

and the rest are raw hands.

Rehana feels there are lot of

scopes to expand her business and she has many things to do. "In the early days, I used to produce different dresses and other handicraft items and most of them had good demand in the market. But things are changing very rapidly. People have become more fashion conscious. Now I produce different items keeping in mind the buyers

and the rest are raw hands.

In Rehana's hometown Pabna, there are 400 skilled workers who are adept in different kinds of stitching.

Very fastidious about the quality of her creations, Rehana ensures that designs are properly followed according to her instruc-

tions. Her products are also available at different markets in Sylhet, Chittagong, Jessor, Moulvibazar and Syedpur. Retail selling from her house is still continuing and Rehana's major production goes to some 20 wholesale buyers in Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Rangpur and Moulvibazar.

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