

## Pockets



## of Change

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## A man apart

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

**D**ILIGENCE coupled with judicious decision and right investment has always paid dividends for aspiring entrepreneurs. Montu Adhikari has proved the magical chemistry right once again.

Adhikari, a 36-year-old businessman from Satkhira, a southwestern coastal district, credited his success to his courage to take on difficulties, and turned himself from nobody to a successful entrepreneur in just a decade.

His road to success was not smooth.

When Adhikari completed the eighth grade in school, his education faced a serious setback, as it became impossible for his hawker father to bear his academic expenses along with providing for a six-member family.

Then, a local settlement official -- the father of one of his friends -- appeared as his saviour. He offered to take Adhikari to India where his son was studying. There was one condition for Adhikari: if he takes care of his son, he will get a chance to study there too.

Adhikari, 15 at that time, had no other option but to agree and a few days later, he was in India to study in school in West Bengal. He completed the secondary school exam from an institution in Hasnabad and, later, a higher secondary exam from Barasat Govt College.

However, life in India was no less tough than in Bangladesh. "At that house, I had to look after my friend and do every-

thing from cooking, washing clothes and keeping the house. I worked hard to keep my study going," he said.

New difficulties caught up with him when his friend's family permanently moved to India. One day, Adhikari was told that his services were no longer required.

Despite facing new hardships, he displayed immense courage although his grades suffered. "I had to leave the house six months before my exam. I had to work at roadside shops and stayed there at night to make a living. I sold newspapers in the locality," he said. "As a result, I failed to gain good results in the exam."

After five years in the neighbouring country, he came back to his home district and started a business, a small grocery shop.

He also started selling branded edible oil, flour and other basic commodities with financial assistance from an acquaintance. The small venture gave him the initial capital to go into other business.

The father of one also began selling sweetmeats, but the business did not click. But he did not lose his heart.

Initially, Adhikari started his business with a cosmetics shop in 2000 after receiving a loan of Tk 5,000 from a local microfinance institution. He later took another loan of Tk 50,000 from the same microlender, which was also a stimulus.

In 2007, telecom became his other business interest, selling telecom gadgets such as handsets, chargers and batteries.

The thriving business gave him



Montu Adhikari, extreme left, works at his telecom shop in Satkhira.

the much-needed breakthrough to make a turnaround.

He repaid the last instalment of Tk 5 lakh loan recently. Now he hopes to get more loans to expand his existing business.

"The loans were very helpful. I used the money in an appropriate manner, so my business expanded," he said. "My family and people of my village have helped me a lot in

my early period of struggle."

He said he could make his own future thanks to hard-work, wise thinking and timely microfinance loans. Now he owns four stores selling electronics, telecom, footwear and cosmetics items in the main business centre at Kaliganj in Satkhira.

He also partly owns a grocery shop in front of his house nearby.

Adhikari said one has to be industrious, should have the knack for understanding the market demand and use the money available as much appropriate as possible to be a successful entrepreneur.

"Many of my contemporaries just could not make a comeback as they were not willing to put extra energy into work. They did not understand market, nor could they use their

money sensibly," he said.

The businessman, who has employed 10 people at his four shops, said the government should do more to tap the entrepreneurial skills of people like him. "We should also be given easy credit as we are the ones who always pay back."

Now Adhikari logs Tk 2 lakh in profit every month.

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## Entrepreneur's shiny trade

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

**R**OKHSANA Akter Shova, an award-winning entrepreneur, has kept herself busy in producing modern bathroom fittings from fibreglass for a long time, but now her business acumen prompts her to put the acquired experiences in manufacturing waterbuses and boats using the same durable and less expensive materials.

Shova, who was honoured as a 'Creative Women Entrepreneur of the Year' last year by SME Foundation, said she has already moved to a new factory to increase the capacity of Kashem Fibreglass Composite Industry, which she runs as its managing director.

She said her factory in Dakshin Khan in the capital used to produce bathroom fittings such as shower tray, corner tray, large bin/boxes and bonsai tubs from fibreglass, catering to the demands of sanitaryware traders and realtors.

She said modern bathroom fittings are a must for new buildings or flats nowadays. New buildings are being made in increasing numbers. As a result, the scope for utilising fibreglass composite fittings and fixtures is growing.

She plans to manufacture water tanks, waterboats and waterbuses from the same material. Preparation of moulds for the purpose has already been accomplished at the new factory in Maona, Gazipur, which is expected to go for production by the end of February.

She said she has shifted the factory to Maona, as she plans big for her venture, buoyed by increasing prospects of fibreglass products. The new



Rokhsana Akter Shova

factory is spread over five bighas of land, fully owned by her.

Unlike many women in the patriarchal society, the 28-year-old received immense support from her family. She never had to worry about crossing

the family boundaries.

Shova, who hails from Brahmanbaria, said she and two of her friends had launched the first venture in 2004 to produce bathtub, shower tray, enclosure, jakuzzi and

tubs and baskets for bonsai. In 2006, she had to start anew when her two partners left.

"While living in Canada for a period, I promised to myself that I would learn a trade which could be replicated in my country. I worked for two years at a Canadian fibreglass company," said the entrepreneur while talking to The Daily Star.

Bangladesh now imports various products made of fibreglass mainly from China and South Korea. But Shova claimed she could supply similar products at much lower prices.

She said there is a huge potential for making waterbuses in Bangladesh, as the country is crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers and water channels. Besides, the prospects for marketing fibreglass boats and water tanks are also bright.

She also plans to manufacture fishing boats from fibreglass. "Unlike traditional boats currently used by our fishermen, our products will be much more durable, and there will hardly be any maintenance cost."

"The country's forest resources are also depleting fast as we still rely heavily on our already scanty natural resources. The environment friendly fibreglass can replace many of our wooden products."

Shova, a graduate, said her products would be cheaper than those imported from China. Her factory could offer fibreglass products at prices nearly 35 percent less than the imported stuff. She imports raw materials from India and Malaysia, she said.

She said the government should come forward and help them export fibreglass composite.

Shova, however, has not yet been able to export her products. But she hopes to go global in near future.

Her factory now produces 200 pieces of bathtubs and 350 of other items a month. She said the capacity will be higher at the Maona factory, but she would not be able to achieve it immediately, as other businesses like the realtors are struggling to hand over flats to the buyers because of nationwide shortages of power and gas supplies.

Now employing about 35 people, Shova said she will have to recruit up to 300 workers once she goes for producing waterbuses.

She said training a worker was not easy. "It takes between three to six months to learn the trade. I had to struggle a lot to train people when we started the factory."

The mother of two agreed that her nine-year-old son and one-year-old daughter remain deprived of quality time due to her engagement in business.

"My family including the in-laws supported me a lot. I would not have come this far if they had not stood by me."

Shova said although the country's policies on small and medium entrepreneurs stipulate that women entrepreneurs would be entitled to take up to Tk 25 lakh in mortgage-free loans, she has so far failed to receive such loans from any bank.

As a result, she had to mortgage a piece of land to get a loan, she said and called upon the authorities to look into the issue and ensure proper implementation of the policies to help the deserving SMEs flourish.

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