

# Star BUSINESS

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## In his passing, a business icon touches souls

**SOHEL PARVEZ**  
In the corporate world, Bangladesh will rarely see someone who has the same impact on people as Samson H Chowdhury.

Samson will inspire people for generations -- to build a business empire from scratch, to innovate and change the world for the better. Samson set an example that "Made in Bangladesh" can be something to be proud of. That is his legacy. Samson, chairman of Square Group that generates more than Tk 6,000 crore in annual turnover and employs around 33,000 people, passed away at a hospital in Singapore yesterday. He was 86.

"His passing is a huge loss to Bangladesh and he will be sorely missed by many of us," said Latifur Rahman, former president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI).

"He was a principled gentleman who believed in values. At the same time, he was a very warm and friendly person," said Latifur Rahman, who had worked with Samson in MCCI and International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh (ICC-B) for years.

"He was an icon in the Bangladesh pharmaceutical industry and built Square into the foremost pharmaceutical company in the country," said Latifur, also chairman and managing director of Transcom Group.

Samson was a great human being, a business leader and nationalist. That was the reaction of a second-generation businessman Syed Nasim Manzur after the death of the iconic entrepreneur, who has turned Square into a giant enterprise that began its journey in the northern district of Pabna five decades ago.

The death of the industrialist, who had combined his vision to succeed with the principles of integrity and honesty, spread a pall of gloom over the business community. Many of his friends described his departure as 'a great loss' to the nation.

For Nasim, Samson was a 'living example in every aspect' of his business and personal life.

"Bangladesh has lost a role model

of integrity and vision which can take a person to the highest level of success," said Nasim, managing director of Apex Adelchi Footwear Ltd, where Samson was an independent director.

Samson's friends in business community, who had worked with him for the cause of developing entrepreneurship in Bangladesh, expressed almost the same reactions.

For many, Samson was an example of honesty in business and a role model for young entrepreneurs that integrity and vision can take a person to the highest echelon of success in business.

Samson was an outspoken but polite man, who believed that Bangladeshi companies can compete globally by making quality products.

"He (Samson) had unwavering commitment to quality," said Nasim, recalling a board meeting with Samson. At the meeting, Samson suggested buying a better quality machine even after the price of the machine was four times higher than the inferior one.

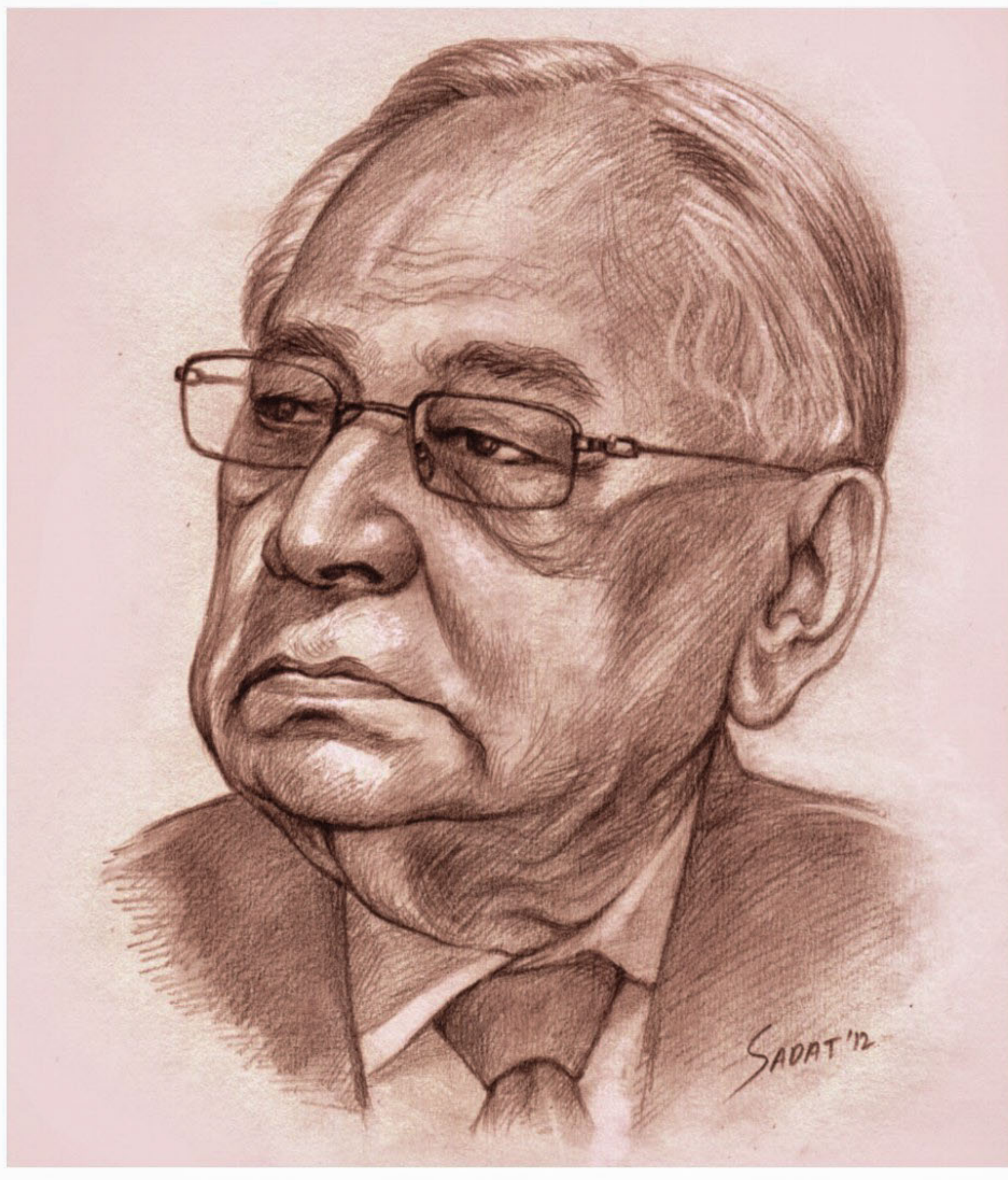
Above all these, one of the biggest contributions of Samson is the courage he showed to inspire his predecessors to invest and build a vibrant pharmaceutical industry, ruled by local firms.

Anis Ud Dowla, chairman of ACI Group, said the man behind Square helped the government frame the Drugs (control) Ordinance, which supported manufacturing of generic products by local entrepreneurs.

The law enabled Bangladeshi companies to create a strong foothold in the domestic pharmaceutical market which was earlier dominated by foreign companies, said Anis, a close friend of Samson.

Now, Bangladesh meets 95 percent of its medicine requirement through domestic production with firms, including Square, he said.

"The country has lost a great entrepreneur." Recalling his memories with Samson, Anis said, "Whenever we sat with the top policymakers in the government, he argued boldly with them because he had honesty as his



strength to speak out." The ACI chairman, whose firm also competes with Samson's Square on many fronts such as medicine, praised fair business practices of the industrialist.

"He is a role model for the young entrepreneurs who can see in him the innovative leadership and perseverance to create a market, and by sheer hard work to make it a success," he said.

Mahbubur Rahman, president of ICC-B, said: "We consider him as the only business legend of our time. He has performed with full honour and dignity throughout his career."

"In his success, he was ethical and uncompromising about the principles of business."

"He was down to earth in his own business and asked the young generation to be down to earth to achieve success and glory in life," said the

ICC-B president. "Samson was one of those very rare individuals who touched many hearts and souls," he said.

"Among his friends and colleagues that he came across, they may not find a replacement for him."

He was involved in various other social organisations. Many of his social contributions are unknown even to his family members, said the ICC-B president.

"More importantly, he was a great human being," said Mahbubur, wishing his sons to carry on his mantle and take Square to the next level.

Former caretaker government adviser Akbar Ali Khan said the departure of Samson is a national loss.

"He was very sensible and always considered the interest of the nation rather than personal business interest," said Akbar, sharing his past experience as the chairman of the National Board of Revenue.

"Whenever we took any decision, we had to convince him that the decision was taken considering national interest," said the former bureaucrat.

"There is a lot to learn from Samson Chowdhury who has turned a micro-enterprise into an empire. He has shown ways on how to do business without compromising."

Amjad Khan Chowdhury, managing director and chief executive of Pran-RFL Group, honoured Samson as a great entrepreneur.

"He had created many industries in the country. His foremost and most significant contribution was to the pharmaceutical industry and employment generation."

"I note especially that he had made his succession plan in such a way that his business will only flourish under the able leadership of his sons," said Amjad, also president of MCCI.

Amjad said Samson was hard working, focused and a good organiser. "I always admire his ability to lead his group by setting a personal example," Amjad said, referring to Samson's punctuality.

The companies that he led are best managed in the country, he said.

"I had learnt a lot from him. I am indebted to him."

**MORE ON B2, B3**

- Samson: a patriot apart
- Samson memories play out in Pabna
- Ethics in entrepreneurship
- Deep respects for Samson

## BB raises policy rates

Overall inflation eases a bit in Dec, non-food inflation rises

**REJAUL KARIM BYRON**

The central bank yesterday increased its policy rates by around 50 basis points at the beginning of New Year when non-food inflation has been rising alarmingly.

Food inflation always increases more than the non-food inflation. But in December, non-food inflation crossed food inflation for the first time on a point-to-point basis and reached 11.38 percent as diesel and electricity prices went up.

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) yesterday released the inflation data for December, which shows food inflation stood at 10.40 percent.

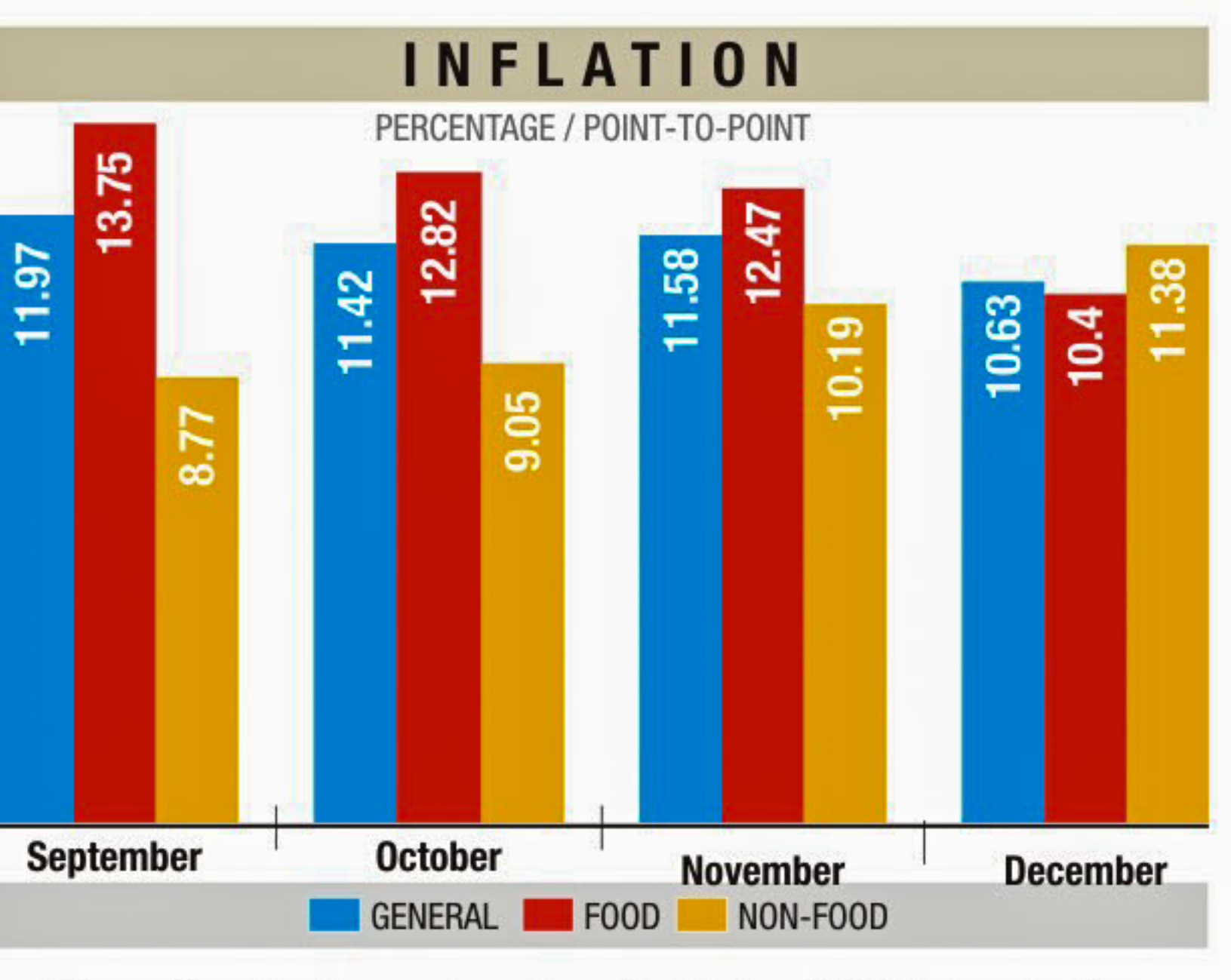
In December, food inflation fell by 2.07 percentage points while non-food inflation went up by 1.19 percentage points in November.

The BB increased the repo rate from 7.25 percent to 7.50 percent and hiked the reverse repo rate to 5.75 percent from 5.25 percent.

The repo rate is an interest rate at which the central bank lends money to commercial banks. The reverse repo rate is the return banks earn on excess funds parked with the central bank.

In recent times, non-food inflation has been on the rise, and to cut back such inflation the repo rate was increased, said a central bank official.

The IMF mission that visited Bangladesh last month also advised to increase repo rate.



credit costlier by increasing the policy rates so that high credit growth takes place.

He said only a fall in private sector borrowing will not work. Government credit has to be cut at the same time, he added.

The central bank last year increased the policy rates four times.

According to the BBS, the overall inflation rate decreased by 0.95 percentage point from November and stood at 10.63 percent in December due to a fall in food inflation.

A good aman harvest and a fall in the prices of winter vegetables brought down the food inflation, said BBS Director General

Shahjahan Ali Mollah yesterday. Mollah said a hike in power prices increased the non-food inflation rate.

An official of the finance ministry said fuel prices were hiked in four phases last year, and power tariff was raised twice which impacted on the rise of non-food inflation. He also blamed fuel price hike on such inflation.

House rent went up by about 16 percent last year, according to the statistics of Consumers' Association of Bangladesh (CAB).

Besides, the taka was devalued by about 17 percent against the US dollar in last one year which also fuelled non-food inflation.

## Square: the rise of a giant

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Square is not just a brand name in Bangladesh. It is an icon in business. But could anyone imagine it would be a leading business conglomerate when four like-minded people in Pabna with Tk 80,000 capital each started a pharmaceutical company 54 years ago, in 1958?

Whether anyone had thought it or not, the four were on the right track with dedication, hard work and vigour to do something for people's welfare that led their company to today's position.

Square is now a group of pharmaceuticals, toiletries, garments, textile, information technology, health products, food products, hospital -- with an average annual turnover of more than Tk 6,000 crore and a workforce of around 33,000 people.

And we might have not seen Square Group in today's position unless the idea of manufacturing life-saving drugs had come out from Samson H Chowdhury, the founder chairman who had conceived the idea from a tiny dispensary at Ataikula in Pabna.

There is a long story behind Square Group's success. A technical collaboration with Belgium's Janssen Pharmaceutica, a subsidiary of Johnson and Johnson International of USA, in 1974

added a new dimension to Square's journey, helping it maintain a good manufacturing practice for its products.

Square clinched the first position in the pharmaceutical market of Bangladesh among all the national and multinational companies in 1985 and became a pioneer in pharmaceutical export from Bangladesh in 1987.

One year later, Square Toiletries Ltd started its operations as a separate division of Square Pharmaceuticals.

Square Pharmaceuticals, which also received the best enterprise award in 2010 from The Daily Star and DHL Worldwide Express, became a public limited company through initial public offering (IPO) in 1994, in a bid to share the company's business with general public.

The same year, Square Toiletries Ltd became a private limited company.

In 1995 the company reached a new height, as it started producing pharmaceuticals in bulk, commonly known as API (active pharmaceutical ingredient). From 1996, it started full-fledged production of API and is now supplying to all the top pharmaceutical companies within the country.

The API unit in 2007 started manufacturing finished pharmaceutical pellets. Square won the national export

trophy for exporting pharmaceuticals in 1997.

In the same year, Square Textiles Ltd started its journey, and one year later the second textile unit was set up. Square Textiles was listed on the stock exchanges in 2002.

In 1998, the agro-chemicals and veterinary products division of Square Pharmaceuticals started its operations.

Square Spinning Ltd started its journey in 2000, while Square Knit Fabrics Ltd was set up in 2001.

In the same year, Square Fashions Ltd and Square Consumer Products Ltd commenced their operations, while Square InformatiX and Square Hospitals Ltd were also incorporated.

Square Pharmaceuticals built a factory in 2001 under the supervision of Bovis Lend Lease, UK.

In 2006, Square Hospitals Ltd started its journey. The hospital is an affiliate partner of Methodist Healthcare of the USA; SingHealth of Singapore; Bangkok Hospital Medical Centre of Thailand and Christian Medical College of India.

Share prices of Square Pharmaceuticals and Square Textiles fell by 0.62 percent and 1.9 percent to Tk 241.90 and Tk 123.70 respectively yesterday.