

BUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR

The man in the lead

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

Anwar Hossain, 74, cannot think of retiring anytime soon as stopping working will mean the fall of the curtain on his long and distinguished career.

The chairman of Anwar Group of Industries, the country's one of the best-known conglomerates, said the goal of his early life of creating as many jobs for his countrymen as possible has not changed at all.

Today, the company has business interests in areas such as garments, textiles, crockery, spinning, tins, cement, jute and jute products, sweater, plastic, tea, automobiles, education, and real estate -- employing more than 14,000 people.

"I always wanted to create jobs for my countrymen. I am not happy with 14,000 workers. I want to make it 25,000," he said.

Although he now employs thousands of people, he learnt the basics of the business from a friend of his elder brother, working for him for around six months.

Anwar used to divide his time between Islamia High School and the family businesses. He attended school up to 1pm. From midday he concentrated on the business at Chawkbazar, where he also used to have his lunch and take private tuition in the evening.

It took only five years for Anwar to understand the nitty-gritty of the business. "I always thought how I can better the business. I was a child but I worked better than an adult."

In 1953, he started garments business -- Anwar Cloth Store -- in Chawkbazar.

In 1956, he set up Sunshine Cable and Rubber Industry, the first Bengali-controlled industry in Pakistan.

Later he quit the business leaving it in the hands of his uncle and brothers.

He did a good business and earned a lot of money until 1958, when General Ayub Khan declared martial law. Anwar made a declaration of



Anwar Hossain

Small and Cottage Industries Corporation. In 1966, he set up a factory, Anwar Silk Mills, in Tongi to make banarasi saris.

He produced "Mala Sari" which was an instant hit. Since then, he never looked back. A number of other companies added to his name.

Later he bought machines to manufacture cutlery spoon and crockery from enamel at Monowar Industries Private Ltd in Tejgaon, his first venture in the independent Bangladesh.

"I worked day and night since 1962," he said.

Anwar initiated the process to set up the country's first private bank. He along with a group of businesspeople from Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry was able to convince the then government in 1978 that the country needs private banks.

A former director of the DCCI, Anwar later set up The City Bank Ltd and City Insurance Ltd.

Anwar, who won a parliamentary seat in the 1988 polls as an independent candidate, said he is happy as he has been able to prepare his three sons to run the Group. Responsibilities have been equally distributed among them.

He still attends office at Baitul Hossain in Motijheel, the headquarters of the Group, until 5pm and visits factories later. He regularly talks with workers to know how they are doing.

The Group spends generously as part of its corporate social responsibility. It has set up eye hospital, maternity centre, daycare centre for 250 children, orphanage, madrasas, primary schools and high schools.

The Group finances about 95 charities. Anwar now plans to set up a diabetes hospital in his locality, as there is no such facility in Old Dhaka.

Anwar thanked his mother and his wife for standing beside him all the time.

his health and opened an income tax file. He was only about 20 years old at that time, which raised eyebrows from many.

He also took help from a visually challenged person, Mohammad Hafiz, one of the top businessmen at that time. Hafiz had jute and textile mills in both West and East Pakistan.

Anwar used to buy yarn from his factory and sell those in Narayanganj and other places.

By the time he met Hafiz, Anwar had nine shops. Hafiz asked him to set up a factory instead of relying on shops.

Anwar bought a power loom and many other associated machinery from the East Pakistan Small Industries Corporation, which is now Bangladesh



Business leaders and other guests attend the ceremony of Bangladesh Business Awards at Sonargaon Hotel on May 18.

LIFETIME CONTRIBUTION AWARD, POSTHUMOUS

Pioneer of private insurance

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

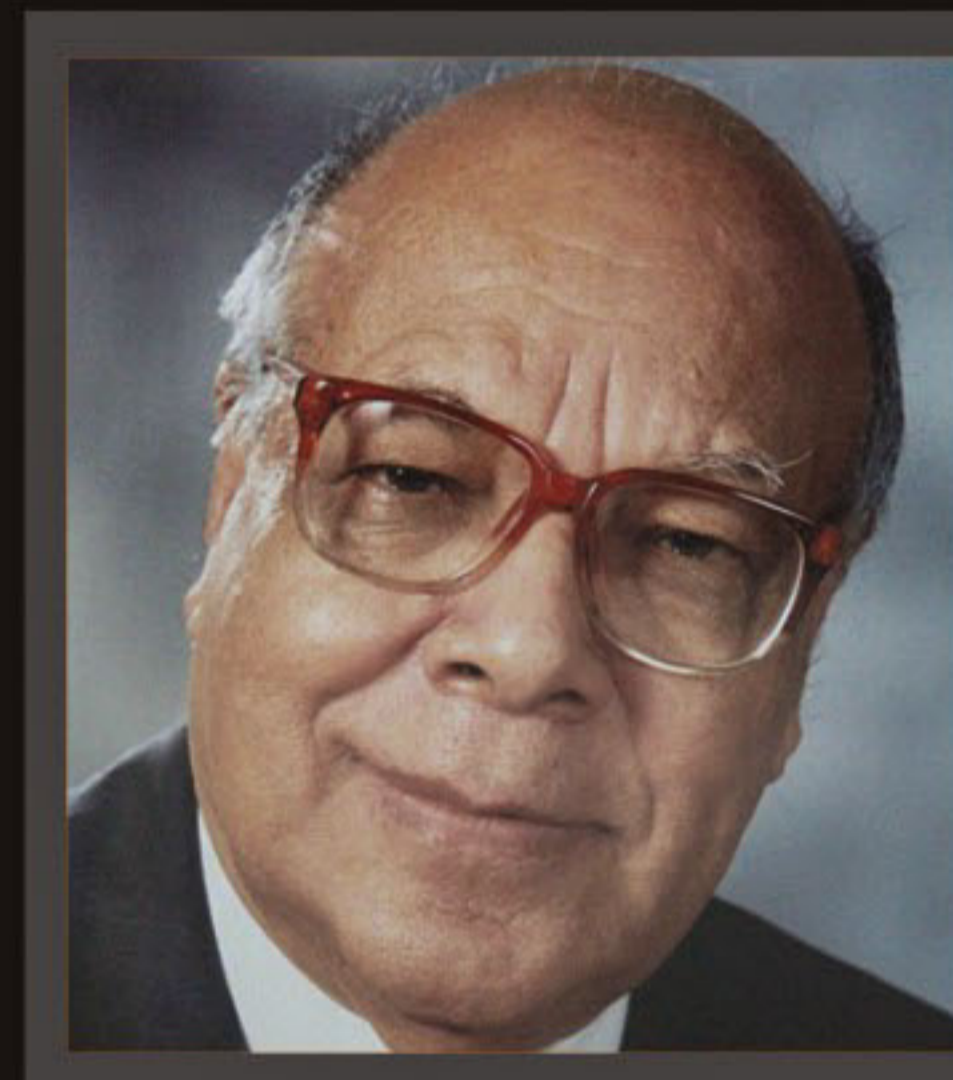
Private sector insurance, as we enjoy in our lives, would not have been possible without the inspired leadership of the late MA Samad, founder of the first private sector insurance company, Bangladesh General Insurance Company Ltd.

It was in 1984 when the visionary Samad retired from the post of managing director of state-owned Jibon Bima Corporation to start a private insurance company. Before long, a number of entrepreneurs bought into his idea and on July 29, 1985, he along with his partners started the company that paved the way for many in the years to come.

The company now boasts 27 branches with more than 500 employees and a 20 percent year-on-year growth. A remarkable feat -- and Samad was in the driver's seat all the while, in his capacity as the managing director and then as the chairman, until his death in October 2005.

Born in 1923 to a respected family from Sylhet, Samad went on to receive BA Honours in history from the Presidency College of Calcutta in 1945, scoring highest marks in the history of the university along the way.

His extraordinary academic career gave way to an equally brilliant insurance career that spanned six decades. Starting off at the British-owned Prudential Insurance Company, he offered his services and ideas to five other insurance giants, all the while climbing the stairs of success.



M A Samad

His ultimate goal was customer satisfaction, which, coupled with his unflinching self-belief, led him to constantly seek out innovative products and schemes -- and eventually made him the pioneer of the country's insurance sector.

His relentless quest for knowledge and the immense desire to pass it on provide further proof of his dedication to Bangladesh's insurance sector. He attended Chartered Insurance Institute training courses in London and many annual conferences of the Federation of Insurance Institutes of India. He visited many important insurance training institutions and departments of universities in the UK and US under UNDP Fellowship Programme.

The upshot of all this experience is four highly-regarded books on insurance in the most lucid and simple language -- two in Bangla and two in English.

Not only that, Samad was the founder director of Bangladesh Insurance Academy, the state-owned institution for insurance education and training in the country, and established the Bangladesh Insurance Association, the apex body of insurance in the country.

He has been enlisted as an international expert in the technical assistance programme on trade and development of the United Nations.

In acknowledgement of his unparalleled professional achievements, The Daily Star and DHL Express have honoured the insurance icon posthumously with Lifetime Contribution award.

OUTSTANDING WOMAN IN BUSINESS

The rise of a quiet woman

SUMAN SAHA

Even as recently as 2008, Sharmin Hossain was a full-time homemaker, with no plans whatsoever of starting a business of her own.

Then the random use of harmful chemical for ripening and preserving fruits and vegetables became rife in Bangladesh, which led the protective mother of four with a degree in agriculture to grow fruits and vegetable on a shared family patch for her family's consumption. And there was no looking back.

Motivated by good yields and overwhelming requests from friends and neighbours, Sharmin started considering cultivation on a commercial scale and soon immersed herself in research and development.

Then in 2010, with a group of professionals she formed Fresh and Safe Agro Ltd (FASAL) with the aim of supplying chemical-free products.

"We have established the company to address the issue of scarcity of pesticide-free fruits and vegetables," said the 51-year old Sharmin.

"It is a safe fruits and vegetables producing and marketing company with the ambition of becoming the key fresh vegetable producer, processor and marketer."

Sharmin, who mainly manages the technical aspects of the company, said by and large farmers use varieties of pesticides, which are extremely harmful.

Most of these unsafe and adulterated produce end up in the capital where they are consumed by unsuspecting consumers including children, said the wife of a senior police official.

FASAL's fruits and vegetables are grown under safe conditions following global standards like Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).



Sharmin Hossain

"We have started to work as a bridge so that the consumers get fresh and safe fruits and vegetables directly and to ensure that farmers get fair price," said Sharmin.

She said handpicked fruits and vegetables are washed using safe water to eliminate soil and dirt, sorted to make those free from rotten and decayed ends, graded to different sizes, shapes and weights and packed with environment friendly materials to keep them fresh and safe.

Sharmin said the company has contract growers of fruits and vegetables located in Manikganj, Narsingdi, Bogra and Dhaka and currently works with more than 12,000 trained farmers.

All the contract growers are involved in regular

training and auditing system, using IPM and GAP standards.

"These training and audits ensured that all FASAL branded products meet the required safety regulations," Sharmin said.

She said farmer's training is one of the company's core business activities and they select farmers after several screening process. The chosen farmers are then given several days of training.

The FASAL field officers, who have diploma on agriculture, work with the farmers and teach them on how to farm fresh produce by using safer chemical-free inputs.

The company collects the agro commodities from the contract farmers at higher prices compared to the local market prices, according to Sharmin.

"We generally pay Tk 2 more per kilogram over the local market price to the farmers to encourage them." Many farmers are keen to join the company's network to get fair prices for their produce. "Farmers want to join our network as it will give them a guaranteed market to sell their produce."

A venture of around Tk 2.5 crore, the company currently employs around 100 employees.

But the requirement of labour varies according to seasons. For example, in winter the company hires extra workers to handle the additional output arising from winter vegetable harvest.

Currently, the company sells around 50 kitchen and food items through its eight sales centres in Mirpur, Mohammadpur and Banani areas, with monthly receipts of around Tk 20 lakh. It also sells the agro-products through mobile vans in Uttara and Dhannondi.

"It aims to start another 20 outlets in prime location of the capital by December," said Sharmin.

"If we can serve only one percent people of the Dhaka city, we are looking at figures of Tk 100 crore a month."



Dancers perform at the awards ceremony at Sonargaon Hotel.



A dance ensemble at the awards ceremony, the flagship event of The Daily Star and DHL Express.

ENTERPRISE OF THE YEAR

Secret of ACI's success



M Anis Ud Dowla

SOHEL PARVEZ

The story of ACI dates back to 1992 when a multinational pharmaceutical company ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries) sold its business units in Bangladesh to local management headed by M Anis Ud Dowla.

The newly acquired company was renamed to ACI, while retaining the multinational culture and management style of ICI. This step allowed ACI to not only flourish but also diversify to agribusiness, food processing and organised retailing.

Today, ACI has 13 subsidiaries along with two companies listed in the stock exchange, with its profit having increased by 20 percent over the years. Joint ventures with foreign companies like Tetley, Dabur and Godrej Agrovet remain its other noteworthy accomplishment.

In 2010, ACI posted Tk 216 million net profit, a 70 percent increase from 2000, according to Dhaka Stock Exchange.

"Product quality is always at the forefront of our business strategy. We also ensure we have sound management practices and operating systems," said Dowla, chairman of ACI, sharing his views behind the successes of ACI.

He believes the focus on continuous improvement of its already superior products and the ambition to attain leadership in each of its businesses have helped ACI gain 'customer trust and brand loyalty' over the years.

But the pursuit of quality had sometimes caused the company to give up its desire to grow fast.

"I want that we will give whatever is declared and whatever the claim we make in the label. If that reduces my rate of growth, I am okay with it," said Dowla.

When ICI sold its unit in Bangladesh the company made 30 stock keeping units (SKU). In 20 years, the product line increased to 200. Apart from constant focus on making quality products, Dowla also hired executives to market drugs and introduced new generic drugs in his bid to achieve the top position in domestic pharmaceutical market.

Once ACI has consolidated its foothold in the pharmaceutical market, it looked to branch out its business.

"It automatically takes us to the agriculture sector," said Dowla.

Beginning with crop care chemical, ACI gradually entered hybrid seed, production of vegetables seeds, selling soil nutrients, power tiller and machinery for mechanised cultivation. With the vision to grow fast, the company did not hesitate to take bigger risks.

Seven years ago it signed up for making iodised salt, a move which turned out to be a huge success. Later it began processing flour, spices and other processed snacks to tap both domestic and international markets.

Dowla has delegated much of his authority to executives and has relaxed his grip on the company by allowing them to

take decisions.

The possibility that wrong decisions might be taken by the employee always lurks in the background but, by and large, the flexibility has paid off.

Dowla feels such decision making authority boosts confidence of executives and gives them a sense of ownership and belonging.

He said the board also consults with higher management executives before taking any major decisions. "We debate before we take any major decision," said Dowla.

To further motivate employees, ACI has introduced an employee evaluation system, the 'balanced scorecard' which looks into performances.

"It has prevented favouritism and my employees do not feel disheartened," he said.

Other practices include welcoming ideas from executives, holding meetings every six months as well as rewarding those whose decisions help the company save costs and bring about improvement in processes.

Today, ACI employs more than 7,000 people directly. Two decades ago, total employment was 150.

Dowla, who has already handed over the keys of ACI to his successor Arif Dowla, wants to see the company grow in line with country's economic growth and also be of help to country's development.

BEST FINANCIAL INSTITUTION OF THE YEAR

A bank that puts service first



Ehsan Khasru

SAJAJDUR RAHMAN

Success is simply a product of excellence.

Prime Bank Ltd (PBL) with a slogan of 'a bank with a difference' has proved it over the years.

"We believe that by serving our clients well and creating employment opportunities, our own success will follow," said Ehsan Khasru, managing director of PBL.

Khasru has a point. PBL, in less than 20 years of its formation in April 1995 by a group of local entrepreneurs, has gone on to become one of the top-tier banks of Bangladesh, thanks to its superlative customer service, extreme professionalism, innovation and strong corporate governance.

"Though Prime is a second generation bank, it has played a key role in the development of products that better meet people's demands," said Khasru who joined the bank in September 2011.

He said the first generation private commercial banks were not innovative in designing of products and services, and were only replicating the products of nationalised commercial banks -- Sonali, Janata, Agrani and Rupali.

"The first generation banks were serving the supply side only. Second-generation banks like Prime shifted in the mid-1990s and concentrated on the demand side," said Khasru.

Prime Bank focuses on a wide range of financial products and services that include commercial banking through both conventional and Islamic mode, merchant and investment

banking. It has a big presence in SME and retail banking, credit card and off-shore banking.

It plays leading role in syndicated and structured financing. It has expertise in corporate credit and trade finance and made extensive market penetration with continuous growth in corporate, commercial and trade finance sectors.

To cater to customers' needs PBL has always been moving with the latest technology to strengthen its IT infrastructure. Technological development helps the bank select ideal clients and their strengths and weaknesses, said the managing director.

"Presently, we analyse balance sheets of clients every year and we've the plan to do it on weekly basis," said Khasru.

PBL's assets, deposits, loans and advances grew by 29.55 percent, 28.29 percent and 20.12 percent respectively in 2011 compared to 2010. The growth of assets and deposits is 7 percentage points higher than the industry average, although loans and advances were nearly 5 percentage points lower than the market average.

The bank's net profit grew by over 18 percent to Tk 366.2 crore in 2011. PBL's capital adequacy ratio, which is very important in today's banking business, now stands at 12.5 percent, well ahead than the regulatory requirement of 10 percent. The bank's non-performing loans came down to only 1.37 percent.

Also, the bank is different from many other banks in terms of philanthropic contributions. It has spent 4 percent of its profit for corporate social responsibility in 2011.

Though all the banks (48) operating here have expanded its products and services over the years, there is a lot of scope in business, consumer, SME and mass banking, according to the Prime Bank boss.

Internet and mobile banking are two other areas, which will come up in big scale in the years to come, said Khasru. He also talked on remittance, export, import, farm loan and the central bank's pro-active role in bringing unbanked people into the banking services.

"If unbanked remitters are brought into banking channel, remittance will grow significantly," he said. Prime Bank has fully owned exchange houses in Singapore, UK and a fully owned finance company in Hong Kong to remit expatriate Bangladeshis' income into the country.

The bank plans to enter Malaysia, the Maldives and Africa to expand its efforts to get more remittances, Khasru said.

He thanked Bangladesh Bank for its pro-people role that has encouraged private commercial banks to give credit to farmers and rural entrepreneurs in recent years. He also believes banks now need to come out of traditional concept of collateral-based credit.

"Banks must have a nationalistic sort of feelings," he said citing example of spending for non-productive imports. "If non-productive imports are stopped, around \$4 billion will be saved," he pointed out. Khasru said the central bank has started this paradigm shift.

"It is a money philosophy."