



Customers flock to a KFC outlet in Dhaka, as the food chain restaurant celebrated its ninth anniversary on Sunday. Latifur Rahman, chairman of Transcom Group, was also present during the celebrations.



KFC

Yunus opens headquarters of Grameen Koota in Bangalore

The microfinance organisation has over one million women members in India

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus opened the new corporate headquarters of Grameen Koota (GK) in Bangalore on Saturday.

GK is one of the largest microfinance organisations in India with over one million women members in five states of the country.

The organisation began its journey in 1998 with the inspiration of professor Yunus and with initial seed funding and training from Grameen Trust, Yunus Centre said in a statement yesterday.

Grameen Koota is poised for massive expansion in its next phase to reach millions of poor women with microcredit.

The organisation is widely regarded as highest quality microfinance institution, which has maintained commitment to Yunus philosophy with its social focus and client-centred approach in its 18-year history.

Founder Vinatha M Reddy, Board Director Suresh Krishna, CEO Udaya Kumar and hundreds of Grameen Koota staff greeted the Nobel laureate at their new multistoried facility, where they shifted their head office to coincide with Yunus's visit.



YUNUS CENTRE

Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus poses in front of the entrance building of Infosys Global Development Centre while visiting its training facility in Mysore, India on Saturday.

He addressed a large group of newly recruited staff to set the motion of expansion in place.

Earlier in the day, K Dinesh, one of the founders of Infosys Global Development Centre, invited Yunus to visit their centre in Mysore.

Professor Yunus was given a guided tour of the 317-acre magnificent training centre where 15,000 trainees can be trained at a time.

Each batch of 15,000 new recruits goes through training for six months. They get full residential facilities on site with entertainment and sports facilities.

The complex includes one of the largest laundry facilities in India with the capability of washing 10,000 bed sheets a day. The Mysore centre is the most elaborate of 13 such Infosys Development Centres all over India.

Recently, three batches of 300 students from Bangladesh and their IT trainers were trained at the Mysore facility.

Infosys has been a key player in building a global new economy for India and has made Bangalore a global city, the officials of the centre said.

The administrators of Infosys explained to Yunus their training strategy and future global plans.

KFC celebrates nine years in Bangladesh

Transcom Foods, local franchisee, renews its pledge to serve customers better

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

WHEN KFC opened its first store in Bangladesh nine years ago many doubted whether the local franchisee would be able to maintain international standards the global fast food restaurant chain demands.

"Our staff proved them wrong through service, quality of food, values and customer-mania," said Akku Chowdhury, managing director of Transcom Foods Ltd, the local franchisee of KFC.

"The people who are associated with KFC in Bangladesh are very passionate about what we do. We really want to make a difference."

On September 6, KFC completed nine years of operations in Bangladesh after Transcom Foods opened its first outlet in Gulshan in 2006, in an effort to bring the world-class brand of foods made of chicken to Bangladesh.

"Since then, it has been a continuous journey for us," Chowdhury, who has been working with it from the very beginning.

From Gulshan to Adabor, KFC has so far opened 15 stores inside and outside Dhaka to give access to more consumers.

Transcom Foods plans to open three to four more outlets this year as the market is growing, riding on the expansion of the middle class.

Transcom Foods is the franchisee of Yum! Restaurants India Pvt Ltd, a subsidiary of Yum! Brands Inc, an American fast food company and a

Fortune 500 corporation.

Chowdhury, a valiant freedom fighter, said Transcom Foods does not just give importance to well-decorated outlets, but also to the quality of foods, attitude of the staff and the value it adds.

"From the very first day, we have been promoting customer-mania among our staff, meaning they are there to serve them. I think through this we have been able to change the culture of serving customers."

Catering to the popular choices and consumer demand, KFC in Bangladesh is bringing in food variations from time to time

Variation in the menu, bringing in new flavours such as the Fiery Grill'd and Tom Yum, having a whole range of burgers to choose from stands for KFC's constant endeavour to remain on a par with the changing consumer market.

Catering to the popular choices and consumer demand, KFC in Bangladesh is bringing in food variations from time to time.

Keeping in mind the local taste, KFC Bangladesh has created history when it introduced beef burger in a store that specialised in chicken only.

"If the experiment in Bangladesh succeeds, many international operations of KFC, especially in the Middle Eastern countries, may introduce it."

Transcom Foods, however, imports processed beef from Saudi Arabia to ensure the quality of the burgers.

Transcom Foods promotes the country's culture and heritage. "With a lot of efforts, we have been able to convince the management of the KFC International to provide us permission to promote the country's culture and heritage through the decoration of the outlets."

Chowdhury said all outlets strive to give customers the value for their money.

"For example, we get chicken from our vendors at a discounted rate as we buy in large quantity. It allows us to provide cheap deals to customers."

"All of this stands for KFC's commitment to give the very best to Bangladeshi consumers and at great value -- always."

At KFC's Bangladesh outlets, 1,000 people work, mostly students and part-timers.

"We hire the students because we can train them to our specifications. They are also eager to learn to get ready for upward mobility."

KFC's revenue in Bangladesh is growing at 10 percent annually.

Transcom Foods is owned by Transcom Group headed by Latifur Rahman, who won the Oslo Business for Peace Award in 2012 for socially responsible and ethical business practices.



The 21-year-old building India's largest hotel network

BBC News

ONE night, 18-year-old Ritesh Agarwal was locked out of his apartment in Delhi. It was an unfortunate minor incident that was to change his life.

Forced to check into a hotel he found himself in a situation he had already experienced several times while travelling in India.

"The receptionist was sleeping," he says.

"Sockets did not work in the room, mattresses were torn apart, the bathroom was leaking, and at the end they wouldn't let me pay by card."

"I felt if this was my problem, this had to be a problem for many travellers. Why can't India have a good standard of hotel rooms at a reasonable price?"

Four years later, at the age of 21, Agarwal is now the founder and chief executive of Oyo Rooms - a network of 2,200 hotels operating in 100 cities across India - with monthly revenues of \$3.5 million and 1,500 employees.

The firm works with unbranded hotels to improve their facilities and train staff, rebrands them with its own name, and from then on takes a percentage of the hotel's revenues. The owner of the hotel benefits from a higher occupancy rate, thanks to Oyo's branding.

And as part of the business, Agarwal has also developed an app, which guests can use to book rooms,

get directions to the hotel, and once they have arrived, to use the hotels amenities, for example to order room service.

Despite such rapid growth, he says the early days were "extremely difficult".

"No one would believe that this could be a technology business in the future," he says.

But some people did believe in him. A similar idea - which eventually evolved into Oyo Rooms - won him a coveted Thiel Fellowship - a programme sponsored by PayPal co-creator and early Facebook investor Peter Thiel - which pays for 20 teenagers each year to stop studying and try to set up a business instead.

He used the funding from the fellowship to start the business.

The firm launched in June 2013 with just \$900 a month, working with one hotel in Gurgaon near Delhi.

"I used to be the manager, engineer, receptionist for this one hotel and also deliver stuff in hotel rooms," says Agarwal. "At night I would write codes to develop our app and improve our website."

But alongside this I was also building strong teams because I knew I wanted to scale this up."

But the only way he could persuade investors that it was a worthwhile idea was to show them just how bad some budget hotels in India were.



Ritesh Agarwal is still the youngest person in his own company.

"I took our first investor to the hotel we had developed and the other hotels where there were many problems. He saw the conviction in us and felt good about investing in something which he saw could make a difference," recalls Agarwal.

Now the business has grown, it has become much easier to attract investors, and the firm recently secured \$100m from Japan's Softbank.

Nonetheless when Agarwal started the company, lots of people told him he was crazy. "But because it was crazy, it was doable. It's true: if you think crazy stuff that is when it becomes a lot more doable."

The journey from college dropout to business owner may appear smooth, but he says starting a business at 17 was not easy. Agarwal says normal things like getting a bank account or hiring staff were more

challenging. Plus some people saw his age as a chance to take advantage.

"There were some people who took me for a ride to achieve their short term goals. But I also met some very good people and experiences with them far superseded all the other problems," he says.

Agarwal was always ambitious, even from a young age.

He grew up in Rayagada a small town in the eastern Indian state of

Orissa, and started writing computer code at the age of eight.

"I used my brother's books, and it was the first time I saw stuff happening on the computer, because of the things I had done. That is when I first felt the excitement of creating stuff from scratch and it never stopped."

By the time Agarwal was 13 he started helping people in his town design websites.

He also wrote a book on engineering colleges in India when he was 17 years old, aimed at helping students choose the right course and college in India.

Now his ambition shows in his plans for the firm, which Agarwal wants to expand overseas. He hopes to create the world's largest network of hotel rooms.

But he admits it won't be easy, saying recruiting the right people when it is growing so rapidly is tough.

Currently, his focus is on making improvements based on customer feedback, and he remains optimistic about expanding the company at home, saying India's increasing smartphone and internet penetration offers "huge potential".

For those keen to emulate his success, his advice - perhaps unsurprisingly - is to "start early". "Start really fast and, if you fail, you will learn and the chances of success in the next venture will increase," he says.