



A denim fabrics manufacturing unit of Envoy Group in Bhaluka, Mymensingh.

PHOTO: ETL

BUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR

Fortune favours the brave

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Kutubuddin Ahmed always had the burning desire to become a businessman, even though he studied mechanical engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology and started his career by joining Janata Bank.

But he cherished a belief -- entrepreneurship was his predestination. In 1983, he resigned from the bank while at a high position, and went to his near and dear ones for seed money to start a business but in vain. Yet, it could not lessen the strength of his convictions. He took a loan from a bank -- putting his father's home as collateral.

In 1984, together with Abdus Salam Mursbedy, then a famous footballer of Mohammedan Sporting Club, and capital of Tk 10 lakh, Ahmed started his garment business, which is today known as Envoy Group. At the beginning, the small factory at the capital's Khilgaon area relied solely on sub-contracting orders from other garment factories.

The orders, though, were not substantial. For long spells, the 4 sewing machines and 200 workers would be sitting idle.

"Those days were really very bad for us," said Ahmed, chairman of Envoy Group. It was difficult to manage even Tk 1 lakh to pay the salaries of the workers. "We paid them by borrowing money from banks."

But, fortune favours the bold, as the Latin proverb says, and the two brave entrepreneurs' watershed was just around the corner.

One day, an Indian national named Akbar Lakhani walked into the small factory, who turned out to be an agent of international retailers.

On the spot he placed a work order for 6,500 trousers for a Swedish retailer, in what turned out to be the turning point for Envoy Group.

"Lakhani appeared before me as an angel, the ones they speak of in fairy tales," Ahmed said. By working round-the-clock, Envoy Group could ship the orders timely -- and Lakhani was very impressed with the attitude of Ahmed.

Lakhani placed more work orders and that too in bulk quantity.

Ahmed grew further in Lakhani's estimation when he showed up at the latter's hotel suite with commission in hand -- a rare gesture for a garment maker then.

After that, Lakhani started treating Ahmed as his son and continued to place as much work orders with Envoy Group as he could.

In the following 16 months, Envoy Group logged in profits of Tk 1 crore, with which they bought two garment factories and paid off all bank loans.

Today, Ahmed presides over 27 garment, textile and other related businesses under Envoy Group. The group employs 32,000 workers and logged in export earnings of \$210 million last year.

Association. He is currently a member of the International Chamber of Commerce, Bangladesh. He is also a member of BGMEA University of Fashion and Technology Trust and a chairman of the advisory board of Prothom Alo, a leading Bengali newspaper.

His other passion, sports, did not fall by the wayside as he pursued his business ambitions. He served as the secretary-general of the Bangladesh Olympic Association and the Bangladesh Badminton Federation and is a former president of the Mohammedan Sporting Club, Dhaka.

A commercially important person and a national export trophy winner for several times, Ahmed is a well-known figure for his philanthropic activities as well. Among many, he has helped establish an intensive care unit for paediatric patients at the burn unit at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. He runs several clinics where the poor are treated and provided with medicines free of cost.

He has established a technical institute at Narsingdi to produce skilled workforce. At the institute, unskilled workers are imparted training on sewing and computer operation so that they can enter to the job market with confidence.



Kutubuddin Ahmed

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OUTSTANDING WOMAN IN BUSINESS

The wonder woman in IT

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

To even own a computer was rare in Bangladesh a quarter of a century ago, as most people did not know much about the modern technology.

But Luna Shamsuddoha had a very clear idea when she began a business dependent on technological advancement as a young entrepreneur in 1992.

Today, Luna's Dohatec New Media is a leading software company in Bangladesh that has fetched worldwide glory. Since then, she has established a few more companies that have all grown from strength to strength.

Dohatec began its journey as an outsourcing company, mainly doing business with clients in the US. It is now building the e-procurement system for Bhutan, competing with leading global IT solution providers. It is expected to be inaugurated later this month.

"I feel proud to be developing software of global standards that spreads the reputation of my country worldwide," said the chairperson of Dohatec New Media.

"Technology always attracted me and I love to face new challenges," Luna said, narrating her entrepreneurship journey.

The leading lady has been honoured with the Bangladesh Business Awards 2016 in the Outstanding Women in Business category.

Keeping in line with her attitude towards innovation, Luna formed Executive Centre in 1985, which mainly made presentations for executive purposes. It was also a new idea at that time.

"I lend some money from my husband and started the presentation business; but changed my mind in 1992."

At that time, she established Dohatec and began content management for US companies. She moved into database management later.

"When we started 25 years ago, the opportunity was tremendous and we tried to capitalise it."

In 2007, Dohatec developed Bangladesh's voter identity registration and biometric matching system for eight crore people.

The company also provided Bangladesh army with voter enrolment and identification software. The prototype comprised digital voter entry forms, including photos and fingerprints.

Now the software is widely used for identification, which has also helped building Bangladesh's reputation, she added.

In every step of life, people need their NID cards, meaning, Dohatec's creation is in every hand, she added.

Luna also shared her experience about another development of Dohatec -- e-electronic government procurement (e-GP). It has digitised the country's procurement system; nearly one lakh tenders have already been awarded through the online system.

These two creations of Dohatec have helped establish accountability and bring transparency in the country, and "no one can ignore it", the iconic lady in IT said.

The firm has also participated in a tender to develop Uganda's e-GP system, which is currently being evaluated. Dohatec also provides software solutions and services to institutions, government agencies and corporations in the US, Canada, Germany and Switzerland.

It has e-commerce and e-government solutions, and the World Bank, the World Health Organisation and the US Postal Service are on its list of clients.

The company currently employs around 200 engineers.

"I am extremely proud of the country's young talents and I am sure they will establish Bangladesh as a digital country before our expectation," said Luna, also the vice-chair of the board of trustees at Independent University, Bangladesh.

There was a misconception that Bangladesh cannot do well in tech related innovations, but now, that mindset has changed. The new generation of entrepreneurs are thinking for the country, which is a positive change, she added.

The company supports the government's birth and



Luna Shamsuddoha

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death registration projects as well.

In 2001-02, Dohatec developed the United States Postal Service's online mail-tracking system with Harte-Hanks Inc, which is another milestone for the company. It is a fully web-enabled database capable of handling millions of records in a barcode system.

Dohatec is a certifying authority and issues digital certificates, including identification certificates.

The company also won the Bangladesh Machine Readable Visa Project in India that processes 200,000 visas annually.

ICT is absolutely the best medium for work for women to be successful, said Luna, who is serving Janata Bank as a director from June 2016. Earlier, she served Agrani Bank as director since 2009 to 2012.

"Without discriminating any gender, I can say there is no alternative to learning and becoming capable."

She was also the founder and president of Bangladesh Women in Technology, a forum to empower women through technology and encourage girls to study and pursue a career in technology.

Luna has given importance to combating violence against women, especially through ICT. "Without the development of women, nothing will sustain; that's for sure."



Luna Shamsuddoha along with the officials of the finance ministry of Bhutan poses after a knowledge-sharing programme on e-government procurement at the Royal Institute of Management in Thimphu.

BEST FINANCIAL INSTITUTION

City Bank transforms through innovations

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Merely four private banks were in operation in Bangladesh in 1983, when 13 visionary entrepreneurs jointly set up a commercial bank with paid-up capital of Tk 3.4 crore.

The bank, which was christened City Bank, ran up losses of about Tk 1 lakh in its first year of operation. The losses did not continue for long, with the bank logging in profit of Tk 1.2 crore the very next year. There was no looking back since.

Today, City Bank is the fourth largest private commercial bank in the country in terms of profit after taxes, which stood at Tk 359 crore at the end 2015 -- the last available data. Its capital base stands at about Tk 2,500 crore.

In its journey, the bank underwent two major transformations. The first change took place in the 2000s, when the second generation of sponsors entered the scene.

"The bank's progress got pace after the second generation of sponsors took charge," said Sohail RK Hussain, managing director of City Bank.

The sponsors are well-educated and appreciated the use of technology in providing financial solutions.

"Better technology, better practices and better services started coming in during their time," Hussain said.

For instance, City Bank was the first private sector bank to introduce an international system -- core online banking platform -- in 2001.

"It was a major shift," Hussain said, adding that the move ushered in a regime of compliance, data management, customer services and transparency.

Going forward too, the bank wants to focus on technology to better serve its customers and shareholders.

"We have a digital agenda in our mind. We want to be able to grow very fast as the most IT-driven financial institution. We also want to maintain transparency," said Mohammed Shoeb, chairman of the bank.

Its modern banking facilities, superior customer services and excellence in management banking facilities led to its recognition as the 'Best Financial Institution' at this year's Bangladesh Business Awards.

"We are proud to have received this award. It's a much sought-after reward in the banking industry," said Hussain, who began his banking career in 1990.

The bank witnessed another transformation in 2007, when it took a step in changing the management and organisational structure, segmenting its businesses.

The first-generation bank now provides a wide range of financial products, including large corporate banking, commercial banking for mid-size corporations, consumer banking, trade services, priority banking, investment banking, merchant banking, portfolio management, SME, and stock broking and dealing.

Moreover, it is one of the major channels for sending in remittance by the millions of migrant workers thanks to its established relationships with major exchange companies in the Middle East, Europe, the Far East and the US. One of the most popular products of City Bank is the American Express credit card and American Express Gold credit card.

City Bank manages the operations of the brand in Bangladesh by issuing new cards, billing, credit management and marketing. Through the bank, consumers can enjoy savings on retail and dining and other facilities in Bangladesh and across the globe.

It is the top player in the credit card segment, holding a 30 percent market share.

Although City Bank is one of the oldest banks in the country, it undoubtedly has the most modern outlook in terms of product innovation, technology and management style.

It is one of the few banks that do not follow the traditional and geographically managed branches.

Instead, it runs its business and operations vertically from the head office through five strategic units on business, branch banking, risk, operations and support.

It uses a real-time online banking platform and the five distinct units are based on the foundation of a smart IT backbone, robust service delivery and operations. This model has enabled the bank to ensure specialised service to its different customer segments.

The bank currently operates 120 branches that



Mohammed Shoeb

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include 99 online branches, an Islamic banking branch, a SME service centre and 11 SME and agri branches across the country.

City Bank is driven by results. Its return on equity stood at 17 percent at the end of last year, while the return on assets grew 2 percent, credit 22 percent, deposits 22 percent, e-commerce transaction 545 percent and earnings per share 9.75 percent.

The bank spent Tk 5 crore in 2016 as part of its corporate social responsibility, up from Tk 3 crore a year earlier.

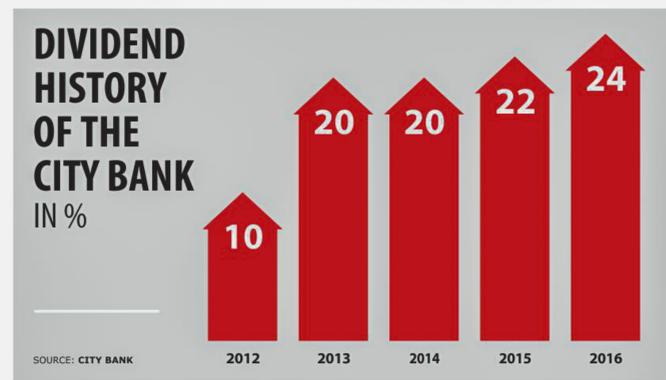
Hussain said when City Bank first began its journey, the nationalised banks had a market share of 75 percent, private banks around 20 percent and foreign banks the rest.

Now, private banks account for 70 percent of total market share, which depicts the sector's contribution to the development of the country.

"We are one of the oldest banks, and we will lead the market with innovations."

Listed on the stockmarket in 1986, City Bank's net profits more than doubled from a year earlier to Tk 359.31 crore. It is one of the two banks in Bangladesh that is rated BA3 by global credit rating agency Moody's.

Sponsors hold a 30.91 percent stake in City Bank, institutions 18.79 percent, foreign investors 8.08 percent and general public 42.23 percent, according to data from the Dhaka Stock Exchange.



Workers at a factory of Monno Group.

PHOTO: STAR

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

A beacon for entrepreneurs

SOHEL PARVEZ and ZAHANGIR SHAH

When West Pakistan-based businesses dominated trade and investment in the 1950s and 60s of the country, very few Bangladeshis could dare to take risk of chasing their dream to become industrialists.

But Harunar Rashid Khan Monno took that risk in the early 60s.

"I had just completed my chartered accountancy course and was offered a job with monthly salary of Tk 1,200-1,500," recalls Monno in his book 'My Life History', which was published in February this year.

But he turned it down, a decision that greatly disappointed his wife and parents.

"It was inconceivable for many that I would walk away from such a lucrative offer."

With Tk 350 in pocket, he set out to pursue his childhood dream, which began after he could manage an appointment of Noor Mohammad Adamjee at his office in Dhaka.

Adamjee, also known as Sheth, offered Monno a job, but the 26-year-old expressed a desire to do business.

"Noor Mohammad looked at me carefully. He inquired how much money I had and I admitted that I had none. After sharing this I became afraid as I thought he would send me away," Monno went on.

Adamjee did not rebuff. He called the head of the mills purchase department and directed him to give Monno some orders.

Minutes later, Monno left the Adamjee office to find out the costing for making a register book.

He submitted a quotation by consulting with one of his relatives, who had printing press. His quotation satisfied Adamjee Lute Mills' head of purchase, who asked him to make 25 register books.

Monno made a profit of Tk 75 from the contract. "This way, my business started," he recalled.

As the quality of works supplied by Monno started getting acclamation at Adamjee, one of the officials of the jute mills suggested him to supply spare parts of machinery used by the factories.

"To do the job, Monno opened a firm named Rashid Trading and started supplying spare parts.

"This initiative marked the beginning of my business independently in real sense, and also sowed the seed for what I am today," said Monno, who was born in 1933 in Nababganj under Dhaka district.

He went on to found 19 entities, including the flagship Monno Ceramic Industries Ltd.

He set up Monno Ceramic Industries in 1984, encouraged by high demand for the products at home and abroad. A year later, he started exporting ceramics to Europe and the US.

Today, the company's annual turnover stands at Tk 100 crore and its wares found in about 100 countries.

The company branched out into jute products, textile, readymade garments and power generation. But he did not confine himself only to the business world.

Monno set up a medical college, a nursing college, a nursing institute and a school and college. He also established a charity to carry out social development works. He helped set up many schools, madrasas, mosques, graveyards and temples.

Apart from engaging in activities for social welfare, Monno also joined politics.

He was elected as lawmaker from Manikganj thrice: in 1991, 1996 and 2001. He became a minister during the BNP's last tenure.

On May 5, Monno won the DHL-Daily Star's Bangladesh Business Awards in the lifetime achievement category.

He said he took the risk to become an entrepreneur in order to benefit more people through job creation and industrialisation.

"My success in business is the result of my hard work, integrity, devotion and commitment," Monno



Harunar Rashid Khan Monno

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told The Daily Star in an interview, sitting on a wheel chair at his residence in Manikganj last month.

The 84-year-old, who suffers from age-related illness, has handed over the task of running the business empire to his daughter Afroza Khan Rita.

Now, he aspires to set up a technical university to develop human resources, the application for which has already been filed.

In his preface of the book My Life History, Monno said he has no lack of fulfilment. "What I have got is more than what I had wanted."

"If my life history inspires anyone to love his own work and makes his position stronger, that would be my achievement."

Monno has prepared Rita in a way that she can emulate him while running the group's companies and other activities.

"She will keep them fully functional and will also take them to new heights."

Rita has learnt the various aspects of businesses soon after completing her education.

"I have noticed a passion in her to work for the welfare of the people. So, I am convinced."

Rita is now the managing director of Monno Group of Industries.