19TH BANGLADESH BUSINESS AWARDS

The Paily Star



Incepta has established well-designed factory to manufacture products of global standards.

BUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR It's all about quality

AHSAN HABIB

The market was not developed, skill workforce was not in abundance in the country and finance was tight, but Abdul Muktadir was unfazed when he decided to set up a pharmaceutical company two decades ago.

His courage stemmed from the growth potential of the industry in line with an economy ready to embark on higher GDP growth and the determination to deliver highquality medicines that are available in developed markets but not in Bangladesh.

"Uniqueness and quality are key to success for entrepreneurs. These have been the two pillars of our success," said Muktadir, managing director and chairman of Incepta

Set up in 1999, Incepta Pharmaceuticals became the second-largest drug-maker in Bangladesh in just eight years, a rare feat for a company in a small market with many competing companies.

"Doctors and healthcare providers and consumers welcomed the company from the very beginning. We have always focused on the products that are important for the people but are not available in the market. This helped us

grow steadily. The annual turnover for the company stood at Tk 2,755 So far, Incepta has rolled out about 175 new generic

drugs, which were not included in the portfolio of other drug-makers

The company's factory and products were all designed in the model of international standard. "We have done everything possible to maintain product

quality at global standard," Muktadir sai "When we found that some of our products were

grabbing the market very fast, we analysed the reason and found that its quality is far better than competitors." For instance, some of its products are being sold around 4 lakh units per month, way higher than 10,000 to 11,000

units of sales clocked by its nearest competitors. In the late 1990s, Bangladesh's economy started to post growth of more than 5 per cent. This led Muktadir, then the

chief operating officer of Beximco Pharmaceuticals, to be convinced about the potential of more companies. Subsequently, he decided to form a company and talked to many others to forge a partnership. In the end, the best match came from Impress Group, which has businesses in

garments and media. Entrepreneurs of Impress Group were his friends from his time at the University of Dhaka where he studied

pharmacy "So, before launching the venture, I felt better and comfortable with them," Muktadir said.

According to the entrepreneur, the main hurdle faced by entrepreneurs is accommodating the right people in the right place.

"When a company begins its journey, the hurdle gets even tougher because efficient people don't want to join a new company

Incepta faced the same difficulty. It received a blow when two of its top officials, who were heading up the production and marketing teams, were hired by

competitors. "We were in a growing position, but suddenly things became very difficult.

Muktadir and his wife Hasneen Muktadir doubled down their efforts. He went to expand the market share while his wife worked both as a pharmacist in the factory and a manager in the head office to put the company on a firm footing.

She took care of the whole business strongly with daily long hours of work for eight or nine months. "Family support is crucial for an entrepreneur,"

Muktadir said Mobilising funds were not easy for Incepta as well. It received sufficient bank loans after three years of its

successful journey and becoming a familiar name in the pharmaceutical fraternity National Bank was the first lender to have extended loans to it thanks to the involvement of Impress Group.

Mutual Trust Bank and HSBC followed suit. "When we became a good borrower, others came to us," Muktadir said. Since then, the company has had no

problems in securing bank loans. Muktadir also talked about the challenges Bangladesh's pharmaceuticals industry is going to face in the coming

The 2015 decision on the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights of the World Trade Organisation says a least-developed country will no longer enjoy the patent waiver if it ceases to be an LDC prior to the chemists, engineers and doctors have joined the industry expiry of the transition period.

This means that Bangladesh will not benefit from the pharmaceutical waiver once it graduates out of the LDC group in 2024, although the waiver has been granted until 2032

"New products will no longer be available at a lower cost because of the patent protection," Muktadir said.



PHOTO: INCEPTA

Managing Director and Chairman of Incepta

Uniqueness and quality are key to success for entrepreneurs. These have been the two pillars of our success

For instance, people in Bangladesh buy the medicines to treat Hepatitis C spending just \$5-7, but it may cost them \$1,000

'We will talk to the government to register all new products so that we can supply the medicines at a lower cost for at least the next five to six years.

"But people will have to pay higher prices for the new medicines after five to six years. By this time, peoples' income will grow, so most people will be able to afford it." If local drug companies ramp up production facilities

to produce medicines based on their research, they will be able to supply medicines at a lower cost. "Our export will not be affected as we ship only generic

medicines," he said. Muktadir sought the government's assistance to help the

industry reach its potential. When it comes to foreign currency rules and trade policy, the country is much conservative. "We face

challenges during international trade." He said scientific information is regularly updated by

international organisations. "We have to buy books on a regular basis to remain updated." The technical guidelines are valued at \$600 to \$1,200 and are purchased using credit cards. But, the Bangladesh

Bank has ordered that one can't spend more than \$300 to buy books online in a single transaction. "So, we need to take several approvals to buy the

books," said Muktadir, who studied industrial pharmacy at the Long Island University in the US. He called for policy support on import of solvents, acids, alkali and other reagents to grow the API industry.

"We will certainly set up a robust API industry. The business of pharmaceutical companies fell by 30

to 35 per cent because of the coronavirus pandemic. The major blow came during the April-June period, the peak of the pandemic in Bangladesh. "People were confined to homes and did not visit

doctors. Our sales were largely limited to fever, cold and sanitisation-related products. Employees gave unprecedented support during the

pandemic, so Bangladesh did not see any disruption in drug supply, Muktadir said. We continued to export during the pandemic that

brightened our reputation. We hope we will bounce back once the pandemic is over. Muktadir is bullish about the potential of the industry.

There is no pharmaceutical industry in most of the economies that are at the similar stage of development like in Bangladesh. Some developed countries are dependent on imported drugs. "We will continue our export after meeting the local

demand. So, the industry will continue to grow in the foreseeable period. For us, the sky is the limit." The pharmaceutical industry is based on skill and knowledge. In the last 30 years, many pharmacists, and have contributed with their skills.

"Our industry is now strengthening its capacities to make active pharmaceutical ingredients. As we are making basic raw materials along with final products, we will be able to compete with other countries." Incepta exports medicines to 67 countries and employs about 10,000 people.

OUTSTANDING WOMAN IN BUSINESS Leading the way with resolve

KHONDOKER MD SHOYEB

If women want their voices to be heard and supersede all the impediments that come their way, they have to be confident enough to express themselves articulately

Confidence grows only in those who continuously learn new skills, sharpen their existing ones and stay well-aware of the innovations and changes that are happening not only within the country but also across the globe.

Now, anything a woman aspires to learn is available at her fingertips. Alongside reading materials on management and other relevant subjects, browsing online articles, blogs, and social media content are indispensable tools for a woman to stay ahead of the competition.

This is what Rupali Chowdhury, managing director of Berger Paints Bangladesh, believes a woman needs to become successful.

She shed light on different phases of her life and career while talking to The Daily Star after receiving the "Outstanding Woman in Business -2019" award at the 19th DHL-Daily Star Bangladesh Business Awards 2019

She credited her successful career to the strong foundation she built during her childhood. "I was raised in a small town in Chattogram called Patiya. In the post-liberation period, a renaissance was going on in Bangladesh, and I also felt its effect," she said

Chowdhury emphasised on extra-curricular activities while growing up

"That period of my life taught me how to break the shackles and prejudices. My extremely supportive mother, Shalinata Chowdhury, also encouraged me to explore my true potential.

Rupali Chowdhury strongly believes people who remain engrossed with cultural and other extracurricular activities in their childhood eventually excel in life.

"At our home, we had access to an eclectic collection of books. We actually inherited the habit of reading different types of books from our father, the late Priyadarshan Chowdhury, who was a doctor by profession, was an avid reader and subscribed to foreign magazines, including Newsweek, Times, Readers' Digest and Desh."

"The cultural activities I was involved in helped me know new people, constantly grow, become compassionate, and hone my interpersonal skills."

After completing honours in chemistry from Chattogram University, Chowdhury did her MBA from the Institute of Business Administration under Dhaka University

"My brother Shyamal Bikash Chowdhury and my husband Abdul Haque inspired me to complete the MBA programme. I believe that was a turning point in my career. That MBA programme really helped me learn how to be successful in the business world."

She started her career with a Swiss multinational pharmaceutical and chemical company called Ciba Geigy (Bangladesh) in 1984. She moved to the port city of Bata Shoe Company (Bangladesh) and Linde after marriage and joined Berger Paints in 1990 as a planning manager

She worked in various departments of the multinational company, including marketing, sales, distribution, planning and systems in different supervisory capacities, which made her one of the finest leaders not only in the paint industry but also all other sectors in the country.

The entry to the corporate world was not smooth, she said. "Once you start working, people will only see how

well you can deal with critical situations. Gender doesn't get that much focus then."

She became the director for operations of Berger Paints in 2004 and managing director in 2008. Chowdhury served the Foreign Investors' Chamber

of Commerce and Industry as president for two terms (2013-2015 and 2015-2017) and was elected again for the 2019-21 term Berger reached several milestones under her

leadership, including the formation of two

international joint ventures -- Berger Becker Bangladesh in 2012 and Berger Fosroc in 2018. During her tenure, Berger has diversified to a number of business segments, including adhesives, textile

emulsions and printing ink, brought new technologies to the industry and launched environment-friendly, lead-free and odourless paints. She considers people management skills along

with functional expertise as the fundamentals of her leadership strengths.



Rupali Chowdhury Managing Director of Berger Paints Bangladesh

how well you can deal with critical situations. Gender doesn't get that much focus then

"I wanted to lead Berger by building an organisational structure based on meritocracy." Chowdhury said her parents, siblings, husband and

in-laws had played a vital role in her path to glory. "Credit also goes to my colleagues and stakeholders in the companies for their splendid support. I want to express my gratitude to our former managing director Masih-Ul-Karim and our former regional director KR Das

She said she is also indebted to the company's board of directors and majority shareholders, who gave her the opportunity to work in different capacities.

"I prefer women to be self-dependent first before getting married," said Chowdhury, also the chairman and managing director of Jenson & Nicholson (Bangladesh), a subsidiary of Berger Paints Bangladesh.

What surprises Chowdhury the most is the absence of women in the top positions in the financial sector. Many women are now working in the top posts in multinational companies, but heartbreakingly, many of

them might have to give up the job for family reasons just before taking the leadership roles, she said. For a successful company, the leaders should believe in putting the right person in the right place, said the philanthropist, who is also an independent director

Bangladesh. The seasoned corporate leader said she now wants to give back to society by working with the regulatory bodies and global entities to increase foreign

nvestment in Bangladesh As the number one company in the paint industry, Berger Paints Bangladesh has been consistently trying to diversify its product range, she said.

2020 had been a tough period for Berger Paints Bangladesh due to the Covid-19 outbreak. The deadly coronavirus slashed the company's sales

228.5 crore from the previous quarter. Chowdhury emerged as a great leader and led the company to provide its painters with over Tk 1.75 crore to help them recover fast from the fallouts of the

pandemic. She also made it possible for Berger Paints Bangladesh to achieve 81 per cent of last year's sales in the April-September period of 2020. Chowdhury thanked The Daily Star and DHL Express

Bangladesh for selecting her for the Outstanding Woman in Business award. "Any recognition is a matter of great joy. I am delighted to receive the award. I believe that the award

will encourage other women to do better in life," she said "But I don't consider myself as a finished product. I consider myself a work in progress. This award is

going to inspire me to move further beyond, inspire Bangladeshi people and create jobs."



Rupali Chowdhury has helped every entity she has been associated with to achieve new heights of success.

AWARDING EXCELLENCE IN BUSINESS SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT • SUNDAY JANUARY 10, 2021, POUSH 26, 1427 BS

Once you start working, people will only see

by almost 50 per cent in the April-June quarter to Tk

BEST FINANCIAL INSTITUTION A trailblazer in banking

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Dutch-Bangla Bank has become a pioneer in introducing both digital banking means and financial inclusion programmes in order to cater financial services to both tech-savvy youths and underprivileged people. The bank has never sought instant profit from its banking businesses, rather it had given efforts to the untapped arenas in advances to attract commoners to the banking system, Abul Kashem Md Shirin, managing

director of DBBL, told The Daily Star in an interview recently. Dutch-Bangla was the first among local banks to introduce automated teller machine (ATM) service in Bangladesh in 2004.

The lender has built the largest ATM network, setting up around 5,000 units from rural to urban areas. Fast track, which is comprised of a bunch of ATMs, has

been set up by DBBL in every upazila, giving a boost to the country's financial inclusion. The fast track offers clients the opportunity to withdraw

and deposit money, open new account, collect bank statement and secure many other financial facilities. DBBL is also the pioneer in rolling out debit card in 2004.

The lender has so far provided nearly 80 lakh debit cards, becoming the largest card issuer among local banks. EMV chip-based debit card was also issued by the lender for the first time in the country in 2008.

EMV chip technology is the latest global standard for card payments in order to secure the clients' information. EMV is an acronym for Europay, Mastercard and Visa,

who developed this technology. The lender is also a pioneer in introducing e-commerce in 2010 among banks when the digital platform was

largely absent in the country. Initially, it invested Tk 12 crore to roll out the service, but now it is earning huge return from the business. In the arena of mobile financial services, the lender is also a torchbearer by embracing the branchless and digital

banking model in 2011. A tremendous success has been bagged by the lender in the field of agent banking as well.

DBBL, which started the digital banking operation two and a half years ago, is the second lender among banks to start the live operation of banking module. The bank has already set up 4,500 agent outlets, the

highest in terms of volume of the shops among the lenders that have had the digital banking window. Clients now settle financial transaction to the tune of Tk 400 crore per day through agent banking of DBBL.

The majority of outlets have been set up in the remotest part of the country such that the unbanked people get financial services in an easy manner. The bank rolled out NexusPay - a mobile application -

two years ago and 36 lakh clients have already embraced the digital mean. Clients have so far opened 3 crore accounts with the bank riding on its financial inclusion programmes and

digital banking services. The lender, which commenced its banking operation in 996, now manages a large number of accounts by way of using the automated banking tools.

The tremendous success in different banking operations achieved by the bank helped it bag the DHL-The Daily Star Bangladesh Business Awards in 2019 in the category of the best financial institution.

The lender also got the same award in 2006 due to its immense effort to materialise automation process in its banking operation Shirin said that DBBL has recently rolled out a number

of banking programmes, which are not considered as profitable ventures at this moment DBBL clients, who are using NexusPay, are now

allowed to use fast-track lanes of five bridges by way of giving toll digitally. Only DBBL among banks now provides such service

to its clients and it will also try to add other bridges in

The bank is now trying to ink agreements with the owners of petrol pumps such that drivers can refill fuel tank on their own responsibility by way of swiping debit or credit card.

DBBL has already started a pilot project with a petrol pump in Dhaka city in order to popularize the services.

2010

2011

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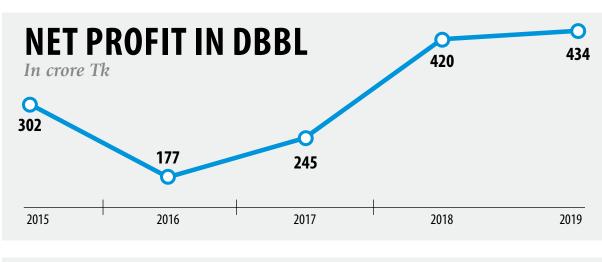


Abul Kashem Md Shirin Managing Director of DBBL

> The bank has never sought instant profit from its banking businesses, rather it had given efforts to the untapped arenas in advances to attract commoners to the banking system

"But owners of petrol pumps are showing reluctance to adopt the automated service. But, all pumps will have to accept the digital means if they want their businesses to survive in the days to come," Shirin said. The lender will also operate the ticketing system of

- Dhaka Metro Rail project. Commuters will have to collect a prepaid card from the
- bank to use the rail. They will recharge the card for the purpose of travelling from one spot to another by metro rail.
- DBBL's outstanding performance in the digital banking arena helped it win the tender to cater the service. Shirin thinks the bank has gone forward a lot since 2006 when it achieved the DHL-The Daily Bangladesh
- Business Awards The number of branches stood at 195 at the end of last year in contrast to 30 in 2006.
- But, the bank now no plans to expand its branch banking, rather it has adopted branchless banking by way
- of introducing diversified digital banking model. As much as 80 per cent of deposits were mobilised by the bank in the form of fixed deposit receipts in 200 and the rest was kept in the current account and savings account (CASA)
- But, the structure of the deposits at the bank is now completely reversed, meaning that its cost of fund has decreased to a large extent.
- A CASA account pays no interest—or, in some cases, low interest—on the current account and an aboveaverage return on the savings portion.
- Based on its extraordinary financial services, the bank now sees returns on those initiatives. The bank's net profit stood at Tk 434 crore in 2019, up
- from Tk 420 crore the year before. The bank has recruited 10,000 employees to operate its
- banking operation. In addition, it has appointed more than 10,000 employees through the third party.
- This means the bank has a total of 20,000 employees, which is one of the largest human resource volumes among lenders.
- The lender has also been giving emphasis to corporate social responsibility programme for years. It has so far donated Tk 900 crore, which is the highest







Honesty has played a vital role for Snowtex to achieve consistent growth in apparel business.

ENTERPRISE OF THE YEAR A snowballing venture

MAHMUDUL HASAN

SM Khaled, managing director of apparel exporter Snowtex Group, has always abided by two things in life: honesty and commitmen

These virtues, in his words, prompted him to take up a seven-day walk from Dhaka to Chattogram in his teenage years with seven schooltime friends as part of an antismoking campaign, which eventually got him a certificate right from the then president himself. These principles also paid great dividends later in a

career in apparel manufacturing. After short stints at a garment factory and buying houses and three nearly botched attempts at forging partnerships, he established Snowtex in 1998 to supply

accessories and trims to local clothing manufacturers. "At first, Snowtex had one employee...and I used my home as an office. However, we gained limited success and started our own buying house and getting small orders," said Khaled.

In 2000, Snowtex got some orders from Berne Apparel, unlocking a mystery box of astronomical growth and success. Three years on, the US clothing brand made a partnership offer to establish a factory. "In a few years Snowtex earned a few crore taka but

it was not enough to establish a garment factory on our own," Khaled. "But impressed with Snowtex's commitment and

quality of products, Berne helped us with money to establish our first factory, Snowtex Apparels, in 2004," he And this partnership led to the group owning three

more factories, employing 16,000 people and generating an annual turnover of \$250 million.

The second factory, Cut N Sew Ltd, was also established jointly with the Berne in 2009 in response to growing work orders. Adopting modern, green and sustainable manufacturing

concepts, Snowtex Outerwear was founded in 2014. Then came the group's wholly owned Snowtex Sportswear in 2019.

Products now range from a variety of jackets, purposebased wear, vests, overalls, coveralls and bottoms. The company lists some 50 countries as export destinations and buyers such as Decathlon. Columbia Sportswear Company, VF Corporation and BESTSELLER.

Dedicated to the task is an 11.50 lakh square-feet production floor sitting on over 20 acres of land in Dhamrai making use of 11,000 machines in 180 production lines.

A 2D and 3D computer-aided design section collaborates in cutting, printing, embroidery, welting, sewing and finishing, all with other technologically advanced machinery

To ensure shipments make it out smooth, the company has its own inspection, clearing and forwarding (C&F) firm and logistics support Khaled also credited his success to trustworthy

employees. "We never paid January's salary in February (till date)," he said.

He said his very first three employees were still there alongside a majority of his first factory's 800 staff. His employees view the company as an extension of their own family, he said.

Treating each employee well, providing privileges, being respectful, paying salaries on time and sharing company problems have been brought into practice. Establishing his two Dhamrai factories necessitated

loans of a few hundred crore taka. "We never missed any deadline in repayment of loans. Snowtex still does business with the same bank with which it started dealing in 2004 and it's our only bank," said Khaled

"We don't have to go to the bank and ask for anything because of the on-time payments. The bank itself wants to give us money and support. I have visited the bank only four or five times in the past 16 to 17 years," he added. Snowtex Outerwear, a LEED (Leadership in Energy and

Environmental Design), has been certified as a "Green Factory" by United States Green Building Council. Adopting eco-friendly manufacturing principles, Snowtex uses a state-of-the-art 290kW rooftop

photovoltaic power station, reducing its carbon emissions by approximately 85 per cent or 970 kilogrammes a day. Other machinery in use reduce electricity consumption by up to 56 per cent annually.

"Every member is entitled to our medical care centre, day care centre for children, free lunch, attendance bonus, zero defect operator reward, maternity benefits, reward for best line, support for new employees, sanitary napkin, skill development training, sports and co-curriculum activity," said Khaled.

The company identifies employees suffering mental stress at the workplace utilising a happiness survey machine that makes the assessment through a couple of

simple questions. It received "Occupational Health & Safety Good



amount given by a company in the private sector.





Managing Director of Snowtex



Practice Award-2017" from the Ministry of Labour and Emplovmer SaRa Lifestyle Earmarked for Future

At first glance Khaled seems a bit taciturn, but according to his associates he is proactive in command and has deep nsight about the garment industry around the world, helping him to adopt transformations. True to this, Snowtex launched retail clothing brand

SaRa Lifestyle in 2018. Khaled said France had garment factories in the thousands about 40 years ago which eventually shut down. In the past 20 years, many Taiwanese factories gradually shifted to China, when the sector was booming

in 2010.

Now, China's garments factories are slowly closing down and moving to Bangladesh and other countries. Many of Snowtex's buyers once had garment factories but they are now only clothing brands. Had this shift not been adopted, they would have gone out of business. Keeping this in mind SaRa Lifestyle has been launched to provide quality products at low prices. It has witnessed 100 per cent annual growth and now has five outlets while another five were due by 2021.

"Our next plan is to establish SaRa as a multinational clothing brand and roll out its stores across the globe," added Khaled, who worked as a journalist at an English daily during his student life and worked at Bishwa Sahitya Kendra for several months after graduating from the University of Dhaka.

Fighting the Pathogen Snowtex, like its peers, started feeling the pandemic's pinch since mid-January last year, when importing accessories from China turned difficult. "We know that gloomy days are ahead," said Khaled.

.. buyers were cancelling orders. One turned bankrupt and faced a Tk 20 crore liability. A few months later the orders rebounded. But it will be much less than the profit we were supposed to make this year," he said. However, the company pivoted to making face masks

and personal protective equipment (PPE). "After March, PPEs became the most sought-after product and there is a scarcity of it everywhere," he said. "Then we saw Marks & Spencer, Buet and BGMEA trying to make PPEs. We saw that we have all the machinery and raw materials that they were using to make it," he said. Snowtex diverted 100 operators into making PPEs during the lockdown.

It gave away 17,000 PPEs worth Tk 1.36 crore in late March and beginning of April among hospitals, doctors, media houses and others in the frontline. Snowtex has tested 10 types of fabric combinations to

attain quality face masks. One reached an effectiveness of 72 per cent whereas most in the local market provide 20 per cent protection.

It has so far sold over 2 lakh face masks in the local market and exported 2.10 million pieces. Now it has come about a three-layer washable mask providing 86 per cent protection against pathogens.