

## NASIR UDDIN BISWAS – 2012



Chairman of Nasir Group of Industries

For Nasir Uddin Biswas, the biggest temptation of life was to convert his dream into a masterpiece of reality. The name of such a masterpiece is Nasir Group of Industries.

From a small trader in the 1970s, Biswas now runs a group of nine units, from float glass to energy-saving bulbs, all leaders in the sectors. With nearly Tk 2,000 crore in

annual turnover, the conglomerate has set excellent repayment standards over the years and become a preferred client for banks.

"I always believe in innovation. I look for products that are not being made in Bangladesh but have huge demand among our people," said Biswas.

He also thinks about import substitutes and, accordingly, takes steps to set up his industries.

"I go for the products that are not available in Bangladesh as those will generate employment and save foreign currencies from import payments," he says.

Nasir Group now employs more than 23,000 people. The company is also the country's biggest melamine and float glass manufacturer and has a sports shoe plant.

Its philanthropic wing is also quite big. The company has been spending around Tk 5 crore a year for over four years on social welfare activities through setting up

schools and colleges. Nasir Group also has a modern hospital to help the poor.

But the path to his success was not so smooth. He had to go through many upheavals in life to reach the pinnacle. He has spent a lot of money on research and development to diversify products.

Coming from a farmer's family in Kushtia, Biswas, a commerce graduate, struggled to turn his dreams into a reality despite a long spell of failures at the start of his career, but nothing could stop him.

He got a breakthrough in 1975 because of a good connection with Akij Uddin, founder of Akij Group of Industries. Akij asked him to supply tobacco to his Dhaka Tobacco Factory, one of the largest factories at that time.

"I started supplying tobacco in 1975. He (Akij) treated me like a son."

But the business ties with Akij did not last long. A "misunderstanding" with Akij helped him become an industrialist from a

mere tobacco trader, Biswas says.

He then set up North Bengal Plastic Industry in Kushtia in 1977. The factory was not so successful at the beginning, but he did not give in. His dedication and patience paid off in 1980-81 when he started getting returns from it.

Later, he realised that all his dreams would not come true in a small town. He bought a piece of land in Kanchpur near Dhaka in 1982 and set up his sports shoe factory (Jump Keds).

Since then, he never looked back. Today many consider him as the pioneer of a number of manufactured products in the country.

The visionary businessman says Bangladesh has a huge potential to grow and compete with other countries. But three things – corruption, energy crisis, and high bank interest rate – are the biggest challenges.

"Corruption is eating into our potential.

The energy crisis is also holding us back," he says.

Biswas set up two factories in Mirzapur under Tangail district to make energy saving bulbs and glassware. He invested nearly Tk 700 crore, including bank loans, in these factories and finished the work in 2009. But he is yet to get gas connections for the plants.

"I am running these factories with alternative energy, which is pushing my production costs up manifold," he says.

Doing business has become even harder due to high bank interest rates, Biswas says. "It's quite tough to survive with an 18 percent interest rate."

Even so, he continues to march on with his innovative ideas. Now Biswas is forging ahead with an entirely new project – very high-grade glass tableware and glass tubing for fluorescent and energy saving lamps – never made before in Bangladesh.

## ANWAR HOSSAIN – 2011



Chairman of Anwar Group of Industries

Anwar Hossain, the chairman of Anwar Group of Industries, one of the best-known conglomerates in Bangladesh, said that the goal of his early life of creating as many jobs for his countrymen as possible has not changed at all.

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 business. 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 his 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 his wealth 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 machineries from the East Pakistan Small Industries Corporation, which is now Bangladesh 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. He added a number of other companies 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.

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

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

## MAJOR GENERAL (RETD) AMJAD KHAN CHOWDHURY – 2010



Chief Executive Officer of Pran-RFL Group

Amjad Khan Chowdhury, chief executive of PRAN-RFL Group, faced the real test of entrepreneurship when he set up an agro-processing factory at Ghorashal in Narsingdi in 1991.

Before entering into the agro-processing business, Chowdhury travelled in different sectors from real estate to manufacturing

of foundry items, but none of them paid him the best yields.

But Chowdhury did not stop his journey. He pressed on with an innovative idea that transformed a small company into a conglomerate.

The *Wealth of Nations*, a bestseller by Adam Smith, taught him that business takes place mainly due to a gap between supply and demand.

"I observed that there was a huge gap between supply and demand in agro-processing business in Bangladesh. So, I decided to start the entrepreneurial journey in agro-processing business," he said.

A small idea in agro-processing business in 1991 made Chowdhury an employer of more than 30,000 people directly and 64,000 farmers countrywide.

The idea not only made the group a market leader in the segment, but also helped generate gross revenue of Tk 2,600

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crore in fiscal 2009-10, while the target for fiscal 2010-11 was fixed at Tk 4,000 crore.

The group exports products to 75 countries.

Before stepping into agro-processing business, Chowdhury used to cultivate vegetables, fruits, and other agro-products on six acres of leased land in Ghorashal, Narsingdi to supply to major markets in Dhaka. But it was not paying him good dividends.

He set up the company's first agro-processing factory in Ghorashal with machinery purchased on auction and started processing pineapple, mango, papaya and other fruits to make juice, pickles, jam, and jelly.

Later, when the business clicked, Chowdhury went big in manufacturing and set up six plants in Narsingdi, Gazipur, Bhairab, Mymensingh, Rangpur, and Sirajganj, producing more than 400 products ranging from plastic to jelly.

A relentless entrepreneur, Chowdhury started his business career in 1981, after retiring from the Bangladesh Army in the same year, through setting up a small company, Rangpur Foundry Ltd, in Rangpur to make irrigation pumps.

But his foundry venture did not pay off well enough, which prompted him to diversify his business.

Chowdhury went into real estate as demand for apartments was going up among the rising middle-class in Dhaka and its adjacent areas. That is why Property Development Ltd came into being.

Creating jobs through setting up businesses is the best practice of corporate social responsibility, he said. "I have seen a lot of unemployed women gathering at the gate of PRAN factories in Rangpur."

"Later, I employed them at my factories and now many of them are self-reliant," Chowdhury said.

Born in Natore in 1940, Chowdhury started his education at St Gregory's School in Old Dhaka.

He joined the Pakistan Army in 1956 and was commissioned in 1958 before his assignment in Sargoda in Pakistan. He returned to Bangladesh during the Liberation War in 1971.

## MD SAIFUL ISLAM – 2009



Chairman of Western Marine Shipyard

Trained as a mariner, Md Saiful Islam retired from his job at Bangladesh Shipping Corporation in 1986 to bet his fortunes on business.

The same year, he set up a small office at Motijheel in Dhaka to render technical services to ocean-going ships and supply

spare parts for vessels. But the venture did not augur well initially.

It was the Gulf War of 1990 that presented a window of opportunity, as the turbulence shifted overhauling and technical works of ocean-going vessels to his company. He never looked back since then.

In 1990, Islam established Al-Islam Apparel Group under a joint venture. Seeking more value-added businesses, he established a German-Bangladesh joint venture, Picard (Bangladesh) Ltd, in 1997 to produce leather goods under the brand name of Picard.

It was in 1994 when Islam launched his most successful venture so far: shipbuilding. Western Marine Shipyard Ltd is one of the largest shipyards in Bangladesh. It began its own journey in 2000.

The company is in action in the global arena, exporting new ships.

Md Saiful Islam, on winning *The Daily Star's* Business Person of the Year award

said: "It is a big achievement and great recognition."

"Even if it is not at the state level, people not only in Bangladesh but also foreigners who have trade relations with Bangladesh value *The Daily Star* in a different way."

"As a result, this broadens exposure of the awardees. It also acknowledges our sincerity and honesty," he said.

Islam won the award due to his outstanding contribution to the growth of the company that now employs 4,200 people and generates over USD 70 million in annual turnover.

The company that started as a small shipbuilder in 2000 has now over 66 vessels, including six that were exported, to its name. It exports to Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, and Denmark.

Islam said: "The award also encourages us in personal life. When someone bags recognition of this stature, the awardees try to bring in more accuracy and

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perfection to their work."

"From that sense, the responsibility of the awardees to the society and clients grows further. This award is given not only because you have performed well, but also because you have to keep up the momentum."

The noted businessman said the award has also increased their social responsibility.

"We will definitely enjoy the recognition. But we have to perform better to prove that *The Daily Star* and DHL Express made the right judgment."

He said the award has also boosted his exposure. "It will not only help me in direct

sales, but also will help in social life."

As the exposure grows, his comfort level also rises, said Islam.

"The most important aspect of the award is that the awardees are chosen not on the basis of the recommendations of *The Daily Star* or DHL Express, but it is done through an independent evaluation agency. It shows that it is a neutral process," he said.

On his shipbuilding business, Islam said: "The business is good but moving a bit slowly as the recovery from the global economic crisis is not that fast in the sector compared to the pace in other sectors."

"But I think there is no need for us to worry as we make small and medium vessels, and the demand for this type of ship is still encouraging."

Western Marine is now in negotiation with different parties for offers worth USD 120 million. The company hopes to bag at least 80 percent of the offers.