

## QAMRUN NAHAR ZAHIR - 2019



Proprietor of  
Ananta Apparels

Visionary entrepreneur Qamrun Nahar Zahir has led Ananta Group from the front to help its annual turnover to cross USD 300 million.

Under her leadership, the group's export increased by nearly 100 times since 1993 when she took charge of the conglomerate after the sudden death of her husband and founder Humayun Zahir.

However, the early years were not smooth for Qamrun Nahar.

It was a tough task for her after the passing of her husband to decide whether to take care of the budding business or focus only on the family of four school-going minors.

"It was a nightmare for me. I was senseless for a few days after the unusual death of my husband," said Nahar who was only 41 then.

But the strong-willed Qamrun Nahar

managed both the family and the business and achieved immense success.

Humayun Zahir had a small garment factory with only 500 workers and a few machineries on Elephant Road in Dhaka.

From only a few millions of exports in 1993, Ananta now employs 28,000 people across its global footprint and has an annual turnover exceeding USD 300 million.

Qamrun Nahar hopes her group will be able to export USD 305 million worth of apparel items now as it has been doing business with renowned international retailers and brands.

The company has the privilege of working with over 20 global giants, including H&M, GAP, NEXT, Jack & Jones, Levi's, Zara, Marks & Spencer, and Primark.

Qamrun Nahar completed her BSc in biochemistry from University of Karachi in Pakistan and her MSc on the same subject from Dhaka University.

She had been a teacher in Dhaka Women's College, which was in fact established by her husband and by herself at Dhanmondi in Dhaka.

Along with her teaching profession, Qamrun Nahar started garment business with a few work orders at a small factory in Dhaka's Elephant Road and made a little profit.

By this time, she sent her children abroad for higher studies and she continued her

business with the help of her father and brothers.

In 1998, the moment came for Qamrun Nahar when she bought an old garment factory in Ashulia, which later changed everything in her life.

"Buying the old factory and making it functional was a turning point of my life."

The former owner of the old factory was failing to pay some 1,600 workers as he had

the-art garment factories.

Qamrun Nahar, also the chairman of Ananta Properties and Ananta Energy Resources, has a plan to set up a model town on Madani Avenue on 13 acres of land in Dhaka.

Work of the Tk 2,500 crore mega real estate project will come to an end in the next seven years. Nine towers will be built which will be up for sale.

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Qamrun Nahar renovated the production unit and the US retailer GAP started placing work orders.

"I didn't need to look back as I had a handful of work orders and the factory was running well," she said.

In 2000, Sharif Zahir, now managing director of Ananta Group, joined her mother Qamrun Nahar to take the group to its current position.

Now, Ananta Group has eight state-of-

The chairman of the group has a plan to employ 3,000 people in different units every year till 2025, by which the company targets to export USD 1 billion worth of garment items.

The company has already purchased 150 acres of land in Mirsarai to build another industrial village at a cost of USD 450 million to produce diversified garment items like sportswear, lingerie, and knitwear. The construction work of the village will start by December next year.

She also has a plan to go for a joint venture with Chinese or Sri Lankan companies for the operation of the Mirsarai project.

Qamrun Nahar has the plan to make two of her garment companies public by next year. She will float initial public offering of Ananta Denim and Ananta Apparels at the end of this year.

She has already signed agreement with global hotel chain management Marriott to operate a five-star hotel also on Madani Avenue.

She also aims to open a mixed-use type five-star hotel by 2025 at a cost of USD 250 million.

Her youngest child Asif Zahir, now a director of the group, joined the company after completing his studies from Harvard University and Stanford University.

Two of her daughters are staying abroad. One of them has been practising gynaecology in London and another one has been employed in a multinational company in the US as a consultant.

Social activist Qamrun Nahar is also a director of Janata Insurance and a former vice-chairman of the United Commercial Bank.

The first vice district governor of Lions Club, Dhaka and a life member of Gulshan Society, Qamrun Nahar also loves reading, travelling, and sports. She was born in Noakhali in 1952.

## AFSANA ASIF SHOMA - 2017



Managing Partner  
of Asix

Designing saris with her mother was a childhood passion for Afsana Asif Shoma. That knack for creativity along with perseverance helped her to become one of the most successful jute goods producers in the country.

Shoma's company - Asix - now generates some USD 1.5 million in exports every year. But the journey was not all plain sailing.

Shoma used to manage her own pocket money by decorating clothing for people around her and offering in-home tutoring for students while studying finance at Dhaka University.

With some savings and mortgaging a pair of gold earrings at an Old Dhaka shop, she

made her entrepreneurial debut by opening a boutique shop with a neighbouring aunt.

But she had to start anew after getting married in 1994 and shift to Chattogram with her husband. She opened a workshop in Pahartali to make women's clothing and paint saris.

Shoma named her brand - Dalsanea - after a beautiful woman she had read about in school.

At one point, her husband was transferred to Pakistan. But the determined entrepreneur decided to stay put.

She started teaching at Sunshine Grammar School and took a loan of Tk 25 lakh from the Micro Industries Development Assistance and Services (MIDAS) in 2000 to expand her business.

Another hiccup came in the form of a surgery which her 26-day-old newborn had to go through. She then put the business on hold and gave undivided attention to the child's recovery.

Shoma's worries eventually came to an end and she focused on running the business in full swing in Dhaka.

Thanks to her husband's posting she started travelling to India and Pakistan to collect decorative materials such as stones and beads.

Soon Shoma found that similar clothing concepts were circling the subcontinent

because of the similarities in cultures.

She then tried her luck by exhibiting some jute goods in Pakistan as per the suggestions of some top officials of MIDAS in 2007 and 2008.

After getting a good response, Shoma started producing jute goods on a small scale for local corporate houses. Eventually she got the scope of sending a consignment

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to Malta through Alibaba in 2015.

This discovery of export potential encouraged Shoma to gather all her savings and avail a bank loan to invest Tk 50 lakh to set up her jute product factory - Asix - at Khilkhet in Dhaka in 2016.

She became the managing partner of Asix, which focuses on both the national and international markets.

Asix mainly designs and makes home

textiles such as cushion covers, bed linens, bed runners, aprons, pot holders, oven mitts, tea towels, bar mops, napkins, place mats, coasters, table runners, towels, bath robes, and bath mats.

Shoma now employs 50 people, spending Tk 5 lakh in salaries and managerial costs, Tk 50,000 as rent for the 5,000 square-foot factory and Tk 25,000 as electricity bill on an average every month.

Her local customers include corporate houses, banks, and the Institute of Business Administration under Dhaka University, helping to bring in some Tk 5-6 lakh a month.

Customers from Canada, Japan, Italy, and France also take jute products from Shoma.

She also goes on regular visits to Narsingdi and Rajshahi to place work orders with local design makers alongside going to global trade fairs, including Messe Frankfurt in Germany, to enlighten people about her business.

Shoma learnt a lot from a big loss of Tk 35 lakh in her business career when a Japanese customer rejected a consignment for a "small mistake."

She says Japanese customers are very choosy and they spare neither small mistakes nor anything low in quality. "Finally, I am recovering the losses as I

corrected many things to do business with Japanese customers."

While doing all this, Shoma did teach for a period of time at Scholastica, an English medium school in Dhaka. She is also the chairman of Gangchill, a music company of her husband.

Shoma believes that the most difficult part of doing business in Bangladesh is not finding capital but people with the proper skills.

The entrepreneur now plans to set up a fashion designing school in Dhaka alongside a fabrics company to reduce her cost of doing business.

"Only making money is not my motto. I want to contribute to the economy. I want to do better for the country and for the people."

She believes that people remember and cherish an individual's deeds only when that person brings welfare to the people year after year.

She sees a bright future for business, jute, and Bangladesh, as more and more people are tending to disapprove of artificial plastic goods for the sake of green development across the world.

"This change of habit has been and will create opportunities for Bangladesh," Shoma said.

## LUNA SHAMSUDDOHA - 2016



Founder and  
Chairwoman  
of Dohatec New  
Media

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 borrowed 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 on 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 build Bangladesh's reputation, she added.

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

Luna also shared her experience about another development of Dohatec - 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

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

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 (IUB).

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 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 as a director of Janata Bank from June 2016. Earlier, she served as director of Agrani Bank from 2009 to 2012.

"Without discriminating against 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."