

Jatra

The Journey of Unilever in Bangladesh



Unilever

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A scene from a busy bazar at Sadarghat, Dhaka,
Bangladesh from the 1980s

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The story of Unilever in the Land of Red and Green.

Spanning over six decades, Unilever Bangladesh's journey in the Land of Red and Green has been eventful and momentous, to say the least. As the world rapidly moves into the cognitive era, it is the perfect moment to reflect on the company's history and legacy. This reflection reminds us of our past successes and reinforces our connection to the spirit and values that have guided the organisation to where it is today.

From shaping the lives of consumers through its high-quality, world-class products and superior brand experience to empowering small-hold retail businesses to help new industries kickstart their journeys, from producing generations of business leaders to introducing systems and processes that continue to inspire the industry, Unilever Bangladesh has left a strong imprint on the country and its people, a legacy we can all be proud of.

This is the story of their Jatra (journey) in the Land of Red and Green.

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Port Sunlight to the Land of Red and Green

**How a British
Company became
Bangladesh's very
own.**

3.4 billion people in 190 countries use Unilever brands every day to look good, feel good, and get more out of life. This puts Unilever in a unique position—to significantly contribute to the lives of many people around the globe and improve their lifestyle and livelihood. That is why Unilever has a simple purpose—to brighten everyday life for all, everywhere. This simple purpose places their consumers at the heart of everything they do—from delivering best-in-class performance with market-making and unmissably superior brands to leading in the next era of corporate sustainability through our initiatives.

Unilever has been doing this since their inception over a century ago. The company has been at the forefront of change, keeping their consumers' wellbeing and convenience needs in mind—from Lord Leverhulme innovating the first mass-market soap and revolutionising factory workers' lives to Dove transforming the entire beauty industry with its campaign for Real Beauty.

Unilever began its journey in 1885 with William Hesketh Lever, the founder of Lever Brothers, developing the Sunlight soap to promote health and hygiene in Victorian England. In 1917, the company began to diversify into foods—acquiring fish, ice cream, and canned food businesses. In 1930, when international mergers were rather

unusual and considered risky, Lever Brothers merged with the Dutch margarine producer Margarine Unie to form Unilever. Today, Unilever is a 60 Billion Euro turnover company with 400 brands in 190 countries. Unilever has a rich heritage of innovating, manufacturing, and selling products worldwide, including in Bangladesh.

| *Lever House, London, UK (1922, Pre Unilever House Construction)* |



The first link between Unilever and Bangladesh dates to the 1850s, when Colman of Norwich, the founder of Knorr, sent trading agents to Bengal. During the height of the Industrial Revolution in Victorian England, many British manufactured products became available in the Indian Subcontinent. One significant shipment arrived in 1888 at Kolkata Harbour, featuring crates full of Sunlight soap bars embossed with the words "Made in England by Lever Brothers." This event marked the beginning of Unilever's remarkable journey in the region.

Soon, Unilever products, mostly soaps, were sold by visiting large wholesale markets, and then the company appointed Resident Representatives in Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai. Sales grew fast, leading to the creation of a subsidiary in England, Lever Brothers India Limited, in 1913. This subsidiary did business in the Indian Subcontinent on cash payments in Pound Sterling. By the 1930s, Lever Brothers' soaps—such as Lifebuoy, Sunlight, and Pears—gained significant traction in the local market. Their widespread popularity led to the decision to start local production, highlighting the considerable influence of Lever's products in the area. Around the same time, the predecessor of Margarine Unie, Antoon Jurgens United, began producing Dalda Vanaspati Ghee in 1918, which also gained popularity throughout the Indian Subcontinent, including Bengal. The business was officially launched in the Indian Subcontinent on October 17, 1933, with manufacturing operations beginning in Mumbai, followed by Kolkata.

After the Lever Brothers Pakistan Limited was founded in 1948 with a factory in Rahim Yar Khan (RYK), locally known as the 'Unilever Estate'. Soon the company decided to expand its operations in the then East Pakistan and started building another soap factory in Chattogram in 1962. Thus, the journey of Lever Brothers in Bangladesh started with a relatively small factory at Kalurghat.

Following the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the company was incorporated as Lever Brothers Bangladesh Limited (LBBL) on July 5, 1973. It would remain so for many years until 2004 when it officially changed its name to Unilever Bangladesh Limited (UBL). The events for this final name change were grandiose, with a separate programme for employees and another for external stakeholders, held at Hotel Intercontinental, Dhaka. A mesmerising performance by Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, an award-winning Indian sarod player, was the highlight of the musical segment of the show.

The Chairmen of the initial years were functional experts, knowledgeable in their areas, and keen on system building. In this developing stage, it was exactly the kind of leadership that the company needed to flourish. In the absence of a refined corporate culture in the country, these corporate pioneers helped groom the management of the future while laying the foundations for the work culture. J. H. Kempster (1982 – 1987), was a tough taskmaster. After dropping his briefcase in the office every morning,

he began the day with a round about the factory, always returning with his shirt drenched in sweat. A part of his daily routine, the daily rounds helped keep the factory on high alert.

In sharp contrast, H. J. Hemmen (1987 – 1990) was a soft-spoken Dutchman with a gentle demeanour. While continuing the tradition with the occasional trip to the floor, he would always alert the managers of his visits ahead of schedule. However, his successor, I. S. Sangster (1990 – 1995), was more akin to Kempster. He was demanding and occasionally made for good fun, especially alongside the then Marketing Director, Jeff Lee, the Australian.

Unilever Bangladesh (UBL) began its operations in Chattogram in what is now the Kalurghat Heavy Industrial Area, establishing both the factory and the corporate office there, focusing on producing

soaps. At the time, there was only one major distributor to speak of. Still, by the turn of the 1970s, there were more Unilever Bangladesh distributors than the number of administrative districts in the country. A steady year-on-year increase in distribution, coupled with the beginning of a small Personal Product (PP) plant in 1982, would provide a base for future growth. Brands like Sunsilk, Closeup, Clear, and Glow & Lovely (GAL) began entering the market.

Along this journey of growth and expansion, UBL also faced its fair share of challenges. The two episodes that would shape the company we see today struck near simultaneously—the workers' unrest of 1996 and the Lux Debacle in 1997. The company's culture and spirit would come to be redefined in this era as everyone united to help the company overcome the tough times and return to glory.

| LBBL stall at a Trade Fair (1997) |



| The Global Unilever Compass Award won by UBL (2010) |



It was around the 1990s that UBL went beyond its Kalurghat Factory (KGF) borders, simultaneously innovating on two fronts—manufacturing detergents and doing it in a third-party facility (3P). As both sides set aside from initial fears about the product and the process, the venture would be a landmark moment in UBL's history, as laundry would become the biggest category in the business within a few short years.

With confidence in the business picking up, it was soon time to take another step forward. 'Project Sangkalp' would create a large and modern Personal Product plant in KGF, a sizeable change from the small room of the 1980s, which churned out shampoos manually. The new facility would provide the base for diversification by introducing new brands and localising products across the portfolio. Underlining this business growth was a reinvention in how the business would operate.

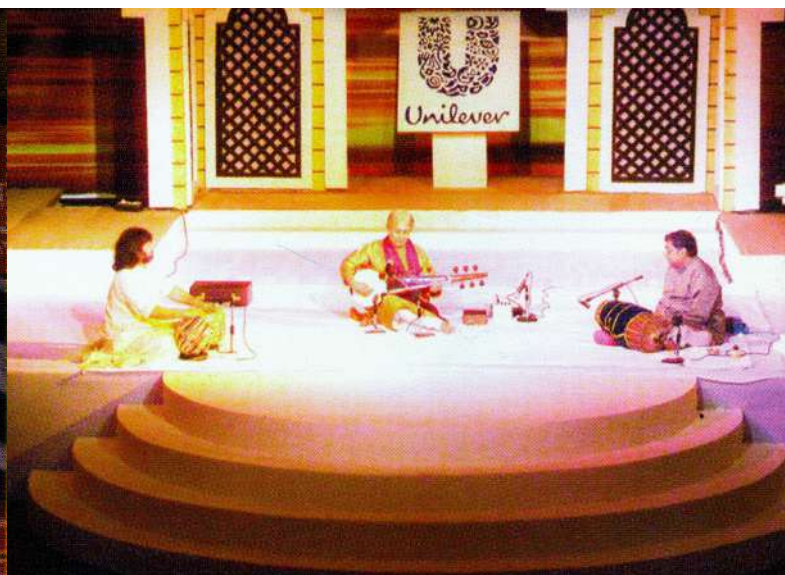
The company would change its business model to begin operating with negative working capital, freeing up cash to invest. At the same time, a considerable focus was brought into the cost models and systems across the value chain to drive savings, ensuring healthy profitability for the company.

The turn of the millennium would also see the Corporate Office shift to Dhaka from Chattogram, helping mitigate some of the company's challenges in managing stakeholders and attracting new talent. It would be a bittersweet farewell, as many of the managers of that era had spent their whole lives in Chattogram. It would also be a marker of the company's culture, evolving from a small, close-knit group of managers to a modern, performance-driven organisation. Nowhere would this be better reflected more than in the

| LBBL to UBL Name Change Ceremony (2004) |



| Ustad Amjad Ali Khan performing at the Name Change Ceremony (2004) |



development of its IT Systems. UBL unveiled a series of new systems which ushered in a new era of digitalisation for the company. More importantly, the vast majority of these systems were made in-house and highly regarded throughout the Unilever world, with many other countries adopting them.

The turn of the new millennium also brought in changes to UBL industrial practices as the company went on to implement Total Productivity Management (TPM). By implementing global standard safety and environmental practises, UBL soon become a poster case and earned global recognition by winning Unilever's prestigious "Sustained Innovation Performer" award for four years in a row from 2001.

The growth of the company would not have been possible had it not been for the innovative marketing and sales strategies that the company has developed over the decades. From outstanding campaigns like 'Amar Desh, Amar Wheel' and 'Lifebuoy School of 5' to launching groundbreaking activation projects like 'Uthan Baithaks' and 'Mobile Film Units (MFUs)' to help drive consumer awareness in rural areas and launching affordable packs like the 1-Taka sachet, Unilever has undertaken countless initiatives to win the hearts and minds of consumers around the country and brought about dramatic changes in their lifestyle. Unilever Bangladesh has created several engagement platforms like 'Lux Superstar'. All of the initiatives have helped to discover hidden gems in the country and have encouraged creativity.

Along with growing our business, we also believe in creating a sustainable future for all, which would benefit our business in the long term. That is why we have supported communities and made sustainability the core focus of our activities since the launch of the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) in 2010. When Unilever introduced the Global Compass in Action Award in 2010 as the apex recognition for all Unilever businesses, UBL was the first company to win this prestigious award for consistent all-round performance. This recognition inspired the company to move forward the global sustainability agenda and purpose in Bangladesh. Throughout the journey, UBL has reached out to school children to teach them about proper handwashing and toothbrushing techniques and provided healthcare to 1.5 million people living in remote chars of Bangladesh through Lifebuoy Friendship Hospital (LFH). Since 2014, Unilever has been a Zero Landfill Company, and UBL aims to completely decarbonise their supply chain by 2030 by achieving the net zero carbon emission goal. They are currently working to build a sustainable future for Bangladesh through their initiatives, as they strongly believe that whatever is good for Bangladesh is also good for Unilever Bangladesh. Their sustainability and community support activities have impacted over 120 million Bangladeshis since 2020.

With the launch of their global Growth Action Plan in 2023, they are more confident than ever

that it is the right time to focus their sustainability efforts on the four key priorities where they are best placed to drive impact: climate, nature, plastics and livelihoods.

It is no wonder that with such a pioneering culture in place, the company contributed to the growth of Bangladesh's corporate sector by producing some of the best business leaders in the country, many of whom have gone on to serve in significant roles in different industries in Bangladesh and around the world. Most of them regard the company as the best 'school' they have ever been to, and the company has established its own brand as the 'School of Leaders'.

The colossal success of Unilever Bangladesh did not happen in one day—establishing a progressive organisation with brands in the hearts of people around the country took perseverance, time, and an unwavering commitment to pursue excellence at every step.

This book narrates the story of the glorious journey of Unilever in Bangladesh through the eyes of those who have created and witnessed history and serves as a testament to the passion, dedication, and hard work that thousands of people have contributed to building one of the most successful and largest multinational corporations in Bangladesh.

| UBL Employees at the Inauguration Celebration of new corporate office at Shanta Forum, Dhaka (2022) |



The Makers of Kalurghat

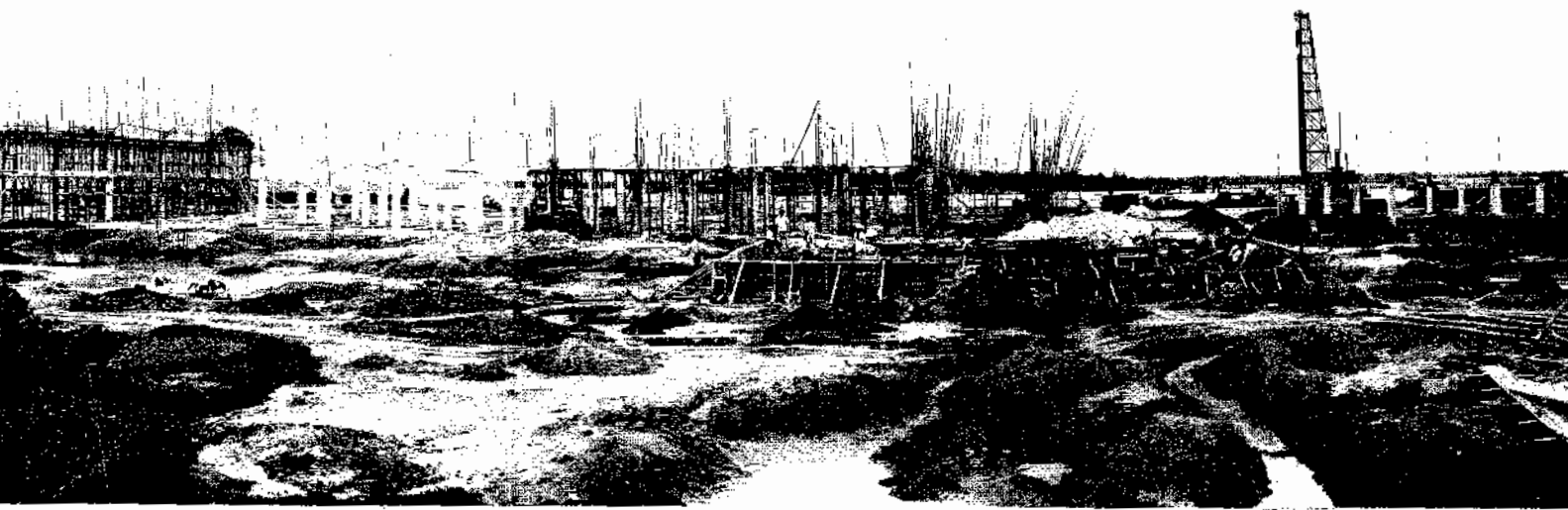
Journey of Unilever Bangladesh's Manufacturing and Supply Chain Excellence.

Unilever Bangladesh Limited (UBL), formerly known as Lever Brothers Bangladesh Limited, was traditionally a company associated with soaps such as LUX and Lifebuoy, along with the detergent bar Wheel. It has grown over the years, surpassing its competitors along the way by expanding its product lines in numerous categories.

The journey from a small semi-automatic soap unit to a full-fledged, round-the-clock operation that produces over 200 different products is indeed a story of Manufacturing and Supply Chain excellence that has many milestones of its own. With the efforts of a strong and united Supply Chain team, Unilever Bangladesh has successfully maintained a competitive edge through development in different aspects—by restructuring the manufacturing practices, adopting new management structures and systems, and the adaptation of new technologies.

Kalurghat Factory (KGF) has indeed come a long way, and during this journey, it has had to deal with its own share of perilous challenges, tackling them with professionalism and confidence.

| Kalurghat Factory (KGF) during construction along with Site Plan (1963) |



VISIT OF SITE LOOKING WEST

21st June 1963

CAMPUS

M.O. BUILDING

BOILER
(P&L Room)

BOILER HOUSE

CHANGING ROOM
CHANGING ROOM

SEWER AND CHANGING ROOM



| KGF after completion (1965) |

Humble Beginnings

Unilever's journey started in the subcontinent by marketing its products by appointing sales agents. However, gradually, the company, assessing the demand, bought and set up several factories throughout the Indian Subcontinent, which used to manufacture Dalda and Soap. After the partition of the Indian Subcontinent, the company also distributed its assets among the two newly formed countries, India and Pakistan.

Before the partition, Unilever had manufacturing sites in Mumbai and Kolkata. After the partition,

Lever Brothers Pakistan started its production operations in 1954 at Rahim Yar Khan. However, due to the geographical distance, meeting the product demands in East Pakistan, which is modern-day Bangladesh, was not very easy. Evaluating the market potential, the Unilever Overseas Committee, based in London, made several visits to explore the possibility of establishing a factory in East Pakistan.

After an extensive search for a suitable site, construction began in Kalurghat, Chattogram, for a new soap manufacturing facility for Lever Brothers Pakistan in 1962. 15 acres of land was



purchased, and it was covered with 5 feet of landfill to tackle the low-lying nature of the land and its susceptibility to flooding. It was undoubtedly the largest facility, with a setup costing over 10 million Pakistan Rupee (PKR) and an annual capacity of 10,000 tonnes of household and 5,000 tonnes of toilet soap. Messrs. Gammon Limited of East Pakistan, a colonial-era construction company, was the project's main contractor. It was regarded as one of the most advanced soap-making facilities in the then East Pakistan.

Today's Kalurghat Heavy Industrial Area was mainly an agrarian locality by the Karnaphuli River

in the early 1960s. Lever Brothers Pakistan was one of the first companies to establish its factory there. It was chosen for its proximity to the Chattogram port and suppliers like Karnaphuli Paper Mills.

Initially, the factory had a simplistic setup, with just the Pan Room and Soap Finishing Line—a very different outlook from its current formidable structure. The factory began its journey on a sizeable plot with just two production lines. It proudly marked its first trial production in September 1964, featuring beloved brands LUX, Umbrella, and Sunlight. For the first year, LUX and Lifebuoy saw the most significant volumes, with 485 and 257 tonnes, respectively.

INAUGURATION OF
THE NEW FACTORY OF
LEVER BROTHERS PAKISTAN LIMITED
AT KALURGHAT, CHITTAGONG
PERFORMED BY
Mr. ABDUL MONEM KHAN H.Pk.
GOVERNOR OF EAST PAKISTAN
ON THURSDAY, 25th FEBRUARY, 1965
ADDRESS BY
Mr. G. M. BROCK
CHAIRMAN LEVER BROTHERS PAKISTAN LIMITED

| KGF Inauguration Ceremony Invitation Card (1965) |

| First Soap Line (1965) |

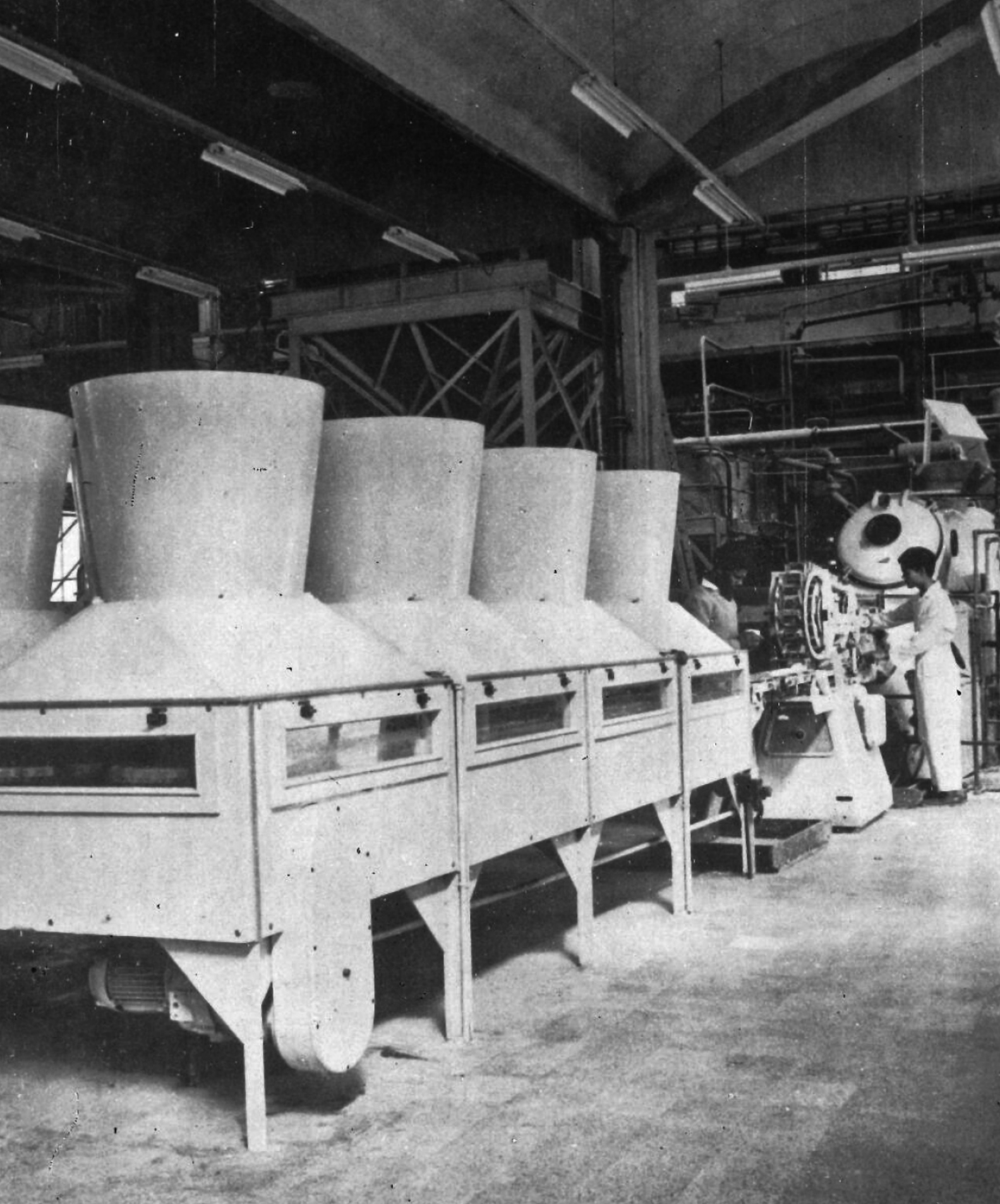
The inauguration ceremony was held on 25 February 1965 by the then Chairman of Unilever Pakistan, G. M. Brock and the then Governor of East Pakistan, Abdul Monem Khan. By the time of the inauguration, the glycerine recovery plant was already up and running, with some going to local industry and the rest being exported.

This humble beginning came with challenges, as operations were exceedingly manual and resource-intensive. The pan room or the soap mixing room, had no windows and was stiflingly hot. There were no conveyors, so workers had to carry materials and finished products by hand.

Interestingly, a large part of the factory premises was used to grow paddy, which employees used

and shared among themselves, with some sold in the market. Several people were deployed to assist the paddy production, and over time, they were aided by up to a dozen buffalos. Even the production amount and the sales proceeds used to be reported to Unilever Overseas Committee. It was a simple yet spirited start, full of hard work and heart, laying the groundwork for the factory's incredible journey ahead.

During these early days, the factory rules and regulations were quite flexible, and there used to be double manning for everything. The atmosphere was quite relaxed. The vast majority of the pool of around 400 workers were on daily short-term contracts (also called the 'casual employees'); they came in for work daily and left after taking the payment.



“After joining, I saw workers making Doi (curd).
Once I asked them, they told me that they had a
long tradition of making Doi from the buffalo milk
that were there for paddy cultivation.
They even gave me curd for me and my family.”

Mashiud-Duza

Joined in 1995

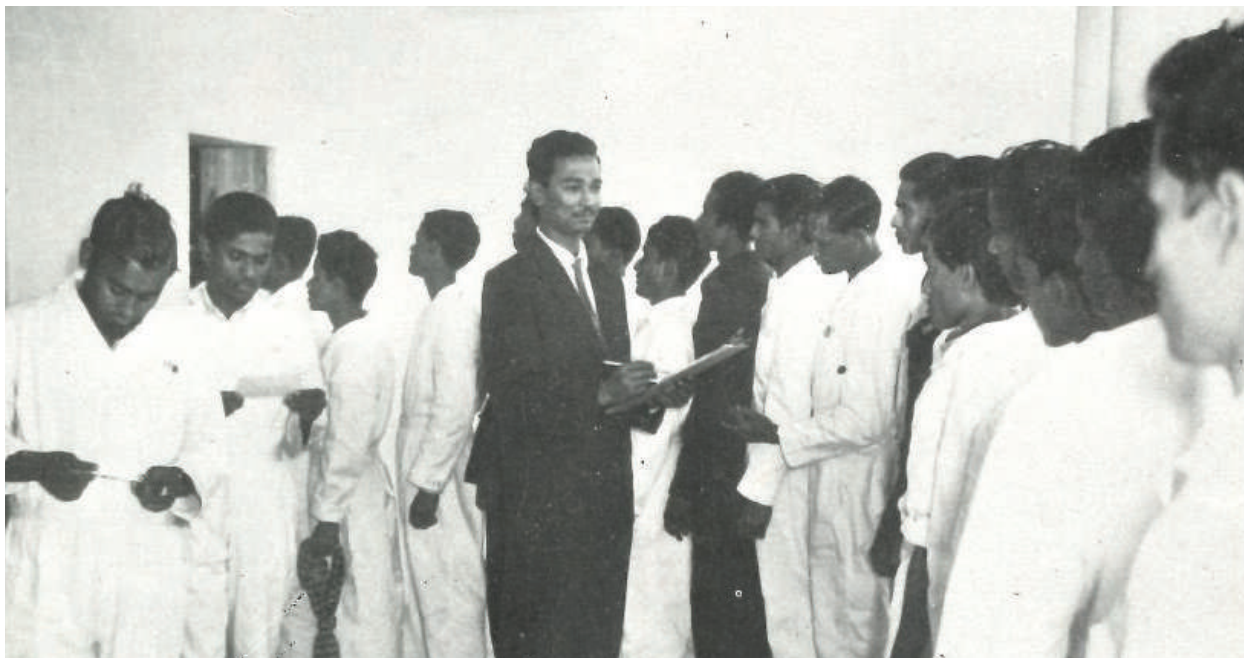
They were paid through a third-party contractor who had an abundant supply of workers. Elias Brothers of Khatunganj, Chattogram, was the sole distributor of Unilever in the early days. Goods produced at the factory were directly sold from the factory gate. The cash obtained through

this transaction was used to pay the workers' daily wages and keep the company afloat. 1968 marked the introduction of a proper Finance and Sales Office in the Kalurghat Factory (KGF), and 1970 saw the arrival of the first Chairman and CEO, J. P. Newling.

| *Workers giving Daily Attendance at KGF using a Manual Clock system (1965)* |



| *Workers' Salary Payday (1965)* |





| *Bangladesh Field Hospital, Agartala, India (1971)* |

New Nation, New Beginning

The company's relaxed and steady beginning was soon disrupted, not because of any internal issues but because of the broader political situation in the country. During the 1971 War of Liberation, Kalurghat emerged as a critical location at the onset of the war.

At that time, Kalurghat was just starting to develop as an industrial area. Aside from the Unilever factory, a radio broadcast station was another vital infrastructure. During this period, radio was the primary medium for broadcasting information. Kalurghat became historically significant as the site of the first public broadcasts of the War of Liberation, including the historic speech by Major Ziaur Rahman, who later

became the President of Bangladesh. This speech was recorded and broadcast from Kalurghat Radio Station, which has since been renamed Sadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Radio Station of Independent Bengal).

Major Zia's broadcast was heightened because it was captured and re-transmitted from ships anchored at Chattogram port and the outer anchorage and relayed to global media. Unilever played a crucial role in this critical historical moment. According to researcher Mr. Shamsul Alam, one of the Unilever electricians, Abu Taheer Chowdhury, was a key technician who helped set up the power system required for the transmitter.

When the Kalurghat Radio Station was attacked, the radio transmitter and broadcasting team needed to be evacuated to a secure location. Unilever donated a microbus to transport the

“The army used to come to the factory regularly and check the register for the missing workers. Though it was risky and illegal, I used to make sure that all the missing workers, who went to fight, are soon present in the register.”

Md. Yunus

Joined in 1967

broadcasting team safely. This microbus was later repurposed as an ambulance for the Bangladesh Field Hospital.

The Unilever factory was consistently under pressure, and the Technical Manager at the time, Mr. Yunus Ali (who later retired as Technical Director), played a crucial role in protecting the workers and their families, particularly those who went missing due to joining the War of Liberation.

After the Liberation War of 1971, there was confusion about the company's operation due to a nationwide shortage of raw materials. Nearly all raw materials had to be imported, which was challenging due to the country's non-existing foreign reserve situation. The operation was frequently shut down, often for weeks at a stretch, and workers did not know if they would return to work the next day. At this point, a joint delegation of managers and workers went to

Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury, the then Minister of Labour and Social Welfare.

Farid Ahmed, a former union leader, shares, "We approached the Labour Minister, who then contacted the President, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Thanks to the President's direct intervention, the embargo on importing raw materials was lifted specifically for Unilever, which allowed production to restart."

Despite progress, certain materials, such as ink for label printing and capital machinery, remained in short supply. However, necessity is often referred to as the mother of invention. For instance, Lifebuoy wrappers were temporarily changed from red to black to conserve ink. The factory continued to thrive through ongoing upgrades and the use of local resources. On many occasions, UBL engineers even designed and locally produced various machine parts themselves.

“We approached the Labour Minister, who then contacted the President, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Thanks to the President’s direct intervention, the embargo on importing raw materials was lifted specifically for Unilever, which allowed production to restart.”

Farid Ahmed

Joined in 1964

Start of the Personal Product Plant

During the 1970s, UBL, capitalising on its superior production efficiency and process innovation, became the undisputed market leader in the toilet soap category. The late 1970's saw a new trend of personal consumer products that were mostly imported. During that period, Unilever wanted to reduce its dependence on soap and diversify its portfolio. It began with the arrival of Sir David Lawrence as the Chairman, a man whose knighthood was ingrained in South Asia, as one of his ancestors had run several campaigns for the British Raj.

In 1979, the company began its journey in Personal Product (PP), and the man they put in charge was Rabiul Alam who climbed through the ranks to become the Deputy Chief Engineer. Rabiul shares, "After joining Unilever Bangladesh,

I went to Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and India, to see their personal product plants and operations, gained experience, and applied it at home". The designing department did all the layouts for the placements of the machines and the necessary pieces of equipment. But the project was delayed by eight to ten months, with the first shampoo bottles coming into production on 10 October 1982. Over time, UBL introduced brands like Sunsilk (1982), Sparkle (1985), Closeup (1987), Glow & Lovely (1988), and Clear (1989) in the Personal Product line, and began the production of Vim Bar as well in 1985, marking the launch of the household-care category.

However, while these brands are household names today, the journey originally started with a very different product: shaving cream. The brand Gibs was quite a success in other Unilever countries but failed to make a dent in Bangladesh. The reason was the formulation of the product itself. The weather in Bangladesh

“The hygiene policy and regulation started with the start of the PP line. The workers were initially provided with hair caps, aprons and gloves when working on the PP line.”

Amal Dey

Joined in 1974

was not favourable and reduced its shelf-life drastically. By the time it reached the consumers, it was a very different product from the one that exited the factory gates. Gibbs served as an important lesson for UBL, a company still in its formative years.

Akhteruzzaman was among the first four people who started working on the plant, with Rabiul Alam as the Project Head. A single-headed Aerofill machine, a 500 kg shampoo mixer and a 250 Kg toothpaste mixer were all they had at the plant in the beginning. For the initial six to seven months, only sample products used to be produced for testing and sampling formulation sets of different countries. Initially, the workers faced several difficulties controlling the airspeed of the semi-automatic Aerofill machine, resulting in re-filling the bottles repeatedly—something that continued for the first year or two. They used a labelling machine from England, called the Newman Labelling machine, and faced technical difficulties with that as well. The initial PP production was very limited. However, with time, the workers gained hands-on expertise and overcame the issues.

The journey towards a safer and more hygienic workplace also started with the PP plant. “Our internal safety and hygiene protocols were much more relaxed back then. These systems began to develop in the early 1980s. A supervisor would come every two to three months from Turkey to see if everything was running smoothly.

The hygiene policy and regulation started with the start of the PP line. The workers were initially provided with hair caps, aprons and gloves when working on the PP line,” says Amal Dey, a veteran of the Quality Management team of UBL.

Acquisition of Fisons and the Rebirth of PP

During the 1980s, UBL had faced a consistent challenge for market share from Fisons, a pharmaceutical company. On top of that, against all expectations, the personal product portfolio as a whole was not delivering consistently. It lacked drive, focus and resources, resulting in a complacent culture settling in within a decade of its initiation. Soaps retained the status as the company’s cash cow and remained a major business driver. The entire situation was a vicious cycle feeding into itself. A prime case in point prevalent of the apathy in PP was shampoo. The grammage of the sachets was very inconsistent. The filling was done manually, and the sealing machine would seal the sachets randomly. Shampoo bottles were labelled only one bottle at a time, making the job tedious. This prompted the eventual revival of two key events, which would shape the future of the PP categories.

As fate would have it, Fisons was not doing particularly well financially, and Unilever

would end up acquiring its toiletries business in 1992, including Peps Gel toothpaste, which had given Unilever brands like Sparkle and Closeup a run for their money. All the machinery from Fisons' factory in Tongi was moved to Kalurghat in a span of just 16 days.

"I set up the newly acquired machines in Kalurghat. I was a Fisons employee then, but of course over time, I ended up building a solid relationship with Unilever. Since I was one of the few who could operate the equipment, I was offered a job in the company", says Atiqur Reza, who joined UBL after the acquisition was completed.

The acquisition was the first of two stepping stones. It proved to be a golden opportunity for UBL as Fisons' equipment and machinery were relatively advanced, as were their processes. Following the successful acquisition of Fisons,

some of UBL's currently famous brands like Pepsodent, were launched. After buying Fisons, Sunsilk was given the utmost priority, and it took off in the market. Before the Fisons acquisition, it used to take 2 days to manufacture 500 kg of shampoo, in sharp contrast, today production managers and planners speak only in tonnes. This growth in production was brought about through gradual improvement over a long period of time.

The turnaround story of the tiny PP Plant is narrated by ex-Supply Chain Director, Imran Momin, who, upon completing his probation, was given the reins of the PP Plant. Along with his job description document, he received a handwritten message on a small piece of paper from the Chairman himself. Although that is not an unusual occurrence per se, the message itself was intriguing, simple and concise. It read "Turn it around or shut it down", the 'it' referring to the PP

"As a Fisons' employee, I set up the newly acquired machines in Kalurghat. I ended up building a solid relationship. Since I was one of the few who could operate the equipment, I was offered a job in the company."

Atiqur Reza

Joined in 1993

plant of course. The question was about turning it around. UBL believes in inspiring people to embrace challenges, and allowing them to rise up to it. The accounts of outline UBL's history are lined with many such anecdotes.

The PP plant lacked efficiency, and this resulted in a massive waste of resources. However, the situation improved quickly, and PP started to flourish. These new teams were successful in reducing raw material wastage down to 1 to 3 percent from a staggering 15 to 20 percent. Also, batch processing time went down from 8 to 10 hours to less than 4 hours. But this would not have been possible were it not for the manpower reengineering and revision of capacity. The team

brought in a focus that had hitherto been missing. Their approach revolved around the use of production data—a new concept in those days.

The number of computers in KGF was limited, and those were mostly used by the marketing team. It was only after the end of the day, when everyone had gone home, that the PP team could sneak in to use the computers to crunch the data that would aid their decision-making. Once this salvage operation was completed, the PP plant was finally ready for bigger tasks. Both the major segments of the business were on an upswing, a major competitor had been acquired, and UBL was going strong. But before it could continue its victory march, UBL was brought to its knees.

| *Closeup Tube Production Line at KGF Personal Product Plant (2019)* |

| *Rakesh Mohan visiting KGF (2000s)* |





Labour Unrest of 1996

Nothing great is ever achieved without trials and tribulations. For UBL, striving to attain the highest possible quality of production, and hence the best possible factory conditions were marred by several obstacles. Being one of the oldest organisations in the country meant that over time, there would be changes that were commensurate with time. But what if the very workers who formed the heart and soul of the factory become the roadblocks themselves? Unfortunately, that is exactly what happened. In 1996, brimming with confidence, UBL decided it was time to shake things up and venture into a new journey. What it did not know was those changes would come at a heavy price. To put things into perspective, it is important to travel back in time towards the beginning when things were done differently.

In those years, a quota system was in place at KGF, which allowed workers to nominate family members to replace them in UBL upon their retirement, regardless of qualifications (or lack thereof). While it benefitted the workers' families, it left the factory with inefficient workers, a large wage bill, and inconsistent output. The nominees would often be lacking the required skill set for the tasks assigned, thus requiring an additional worker to be employed to perform the job. Over time, the manpower had increased dramatically, while productivity took a nosedive. The obstacles

towards striking the right balance in the factory policies were dogged by various other issues. Several practices like the card-based entry, control of the gate, double manning and excessive overtime-billing had become regular in the factory over the decades.

With the existing card-based entry system, one incident apparently rendered a dead person alive! As it so happened, a worker had left work, and on his way home, had an unfortunate accident and passed away. When police investigated the matter, they naturally found their way to KGF and uncovered that he was still in fact, on duty. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that he had left his card to his friends to punch it on their way out when the shift ended, having taken an early leave himself. Dead men tell no lies; it was clear that the card system was flawed. On top of that, the lack of any control at the gate was also evident.

| Worker-Management Tug-of-War during Annual Picnics (1980s) |



On a less sombre note (however, equally astounding) was the 'double manning system' prevalent at KGF. Two employees would be associated with manning any single location for every job. This was especially prevalent in the soap finishing area, where there was machine-wise manning. While it would require only one person at a time to run a machine, two persons would always get involved. The rationale behind two persons for a single task ranged from prayer breaks to meal times, and even a trip to the washroom. This process of course also allowed leisure hours for either one of the workers, when they could attend to their personal activities. It was very easy to maintain the line as the other employee would take over when one was missing.

| UBL union members at training activities, Long Service Award (1970s) |



The loopholes were exploited, with 'mid-day naps' becoming a favourite practice. Each pair would have a mutual understanding that each one of them would be working for 4 hours at actual per shift, whereas each of them was being paid for the whole 8-hour shift by the company. To make things worse, the workers improvised their ways of claiming payments of 16 hours a day, including 8 hours of regular shift and 8 hours of overtime shift, whereas they would be working only for 8 hours in total per day, including 4 hours in a regular shift and 4 hours in overtime shift. The repercussion was clear on the wage bill—almost every employee was enjoying up to 150-200 hours of overtime bills every month!

The management decided to put up a seven-point charter of demands to address the issues. As expected, these changes were met with serious resistance. It began one fine day when the gate-control and card punching system was overhauled in favour of stricter rules,



with records being maintained by tougher scrutiny to keep track of the workers. The men leading the charge were Kamran Bakr from Supply Chain, and Abu Abdullah and Saleh Ahmed from the HR Department. The company knew what they were heading into; and went ahead anyway. It resulted in more than six months of continuous protest. Workers slowed down the production to a crawl. Protest marches became a regular phenomenon at the end of every shift. The situation reached a point when the workers, in their frenzy, lost all self-control, leading to undignified behaviour in the quest for their own advantage. Against all sense and good judgement, a dozen workers resorted to violence. They attacked a manager in his office, inflicting severe injuries, and causing him to be hospitalised.

For UBL, a line had been crossed, and the Chairman, J. L. W. Noal stood his ground in

support of his team. All the workers involved were immediately suspended. This added fuel to the fire, aggravating the situation with even more protests. The union, supported by key external influential stakeholders, requested the workers to be re-appointed. The Chairman was resolute in his belief that these workers no longer represented what UBL stood for; and could never return because of what they did. Soon after, disciplinary actions were taken against the workers who were involved, with the entire group losing their jobs.

With time, the issues between the two parties were settled peacefully, and all the demands of management were fulfilled, with the company evolving in the process. The 'casual worker system' through which the company was operating in its early years was finally abolished. After strict scrutiny, about a hundred technically sound workers were recruited to drive the measures home; and breathe new life into the workforce.

| *Another traditional Tug-of-War activity between Management and Workers (1990s)* |



The LUX Debacle

While the company was still reeling from the unrest, it hit another low point when the market condition turned on its head for its favourite, LUX. For over two decades, LUX's performance in the market meant that UBL was a dominant force in the still-budding FMCG industry. But when new competitors with superior products arrived at the scene, and capitalised, UBL finally faced a real threat.

Key to this was a new challenger, Aromatic, in 1997. Aromatic branded itself as the only Halal soap of the country, implying the use of sacrilegious items in the formulation of other brands. LUX was directly affected, being the market leader. Consumers were led to believe pork fat had been used -

a baseless allegation, as the company had always used tallow (beef fat) before switching to vegetable oils long before this incident.

While it would have been easy to blame Aromatic for the fall, the company held itself accountable for the decline. Over the years, it had become complacent and saw no reason to innovate or do new things with its classic brand. As the saying goes, "Don't fix it if it isn't broken". Even the most ardent LUX fan would admit the superiority of Aromatic's products. With backs against the wall, UBL had no choice but to adapt. Over a period of two years, the company rolled out several changes in formulation, continuously improving the shape, perfume and packaging of LUX until it reached perfection. Production processes were refined to ensure quality, and within two years, the recovery was complete.

| LUX Print Advertisement starring actress Moushumi (1998) |



| International LUX Packaging (1998) |



3P Manufacturing

The episode with LUX had resulted in a deeply reflective moment for the company, with the self-realisation about the risky dependency on a single brand. It was at this time that the management decided to expand to new categories, settling on detergents as the new go-to area. But before it could do so, its rival in India, Nirma Powder, pre-empted the move, arriving in Bangladesh. Unilever initially retaliated by importing Hero washing powder from India. This, however, failed to gain any traction. It was finally compelled to look into opening a detergent factory in Bangladesh instead of importing from abroad.

For the longest time, Dhaka city had been served by a single distributor—SMAH Limited. Asif Chowdhury, whose father was a part-owner of SMAH, had proposed to open a third-party manufacturing facility as far back as 1993, but the idea was not taken seriously. Now, the opportunity was up for grabs. Here again, Imran Momin was tasked in 1996 with setting up a new factory for laundry in Dhaka. The company sensed that Dhaka was the demand centre and this investment would futureproof the company. The catch was to find someone else willing to invest.

After some searching, it was decided to hand over to Messrs. ARC, a long-time business partner of UBL. They put Raziq Chowdhury, Asif's younger

brother, in charge. Given their history of working together the choice was easy. The family had been a long-time partner of the company, operating a distribution point and a depot. One could say they went a full circle by launching a factory. They settled on a plot in Tongi, close to their base, where they had been operating the depot and the distributorship, to set up a small plant, initially for Pond's Talcum Powder in 1995.

While Tongi is an industrial hub today, in those days, the entire country was fixated on Tejgaon. A location on a major highway at a very low rate was too much to resist, and Tongi is where the foundation for UBL's biggest category was laid.

The early struggles were real. The team had little know-how about how to build a factory, much less about manufacturing or detergents. Experts were brought in from India to help guide the new team. Soon, mixers began to arrive, but most of the operations remained completely manual. From laying the foundation stone to setting up new equipment, the entire setup was completed in six months—a commitment made when the project was first taken aboard. They had an installed capacity of only 20 tonnes per shift, reaching 30 tonnes on a good day—but they quickly realised how wrong their forecasts had been. Within months, introducing new shifts was not enough; production capacity had to be doubled and even tripled. Besides Eid, the production team was practically forbidden from switching their machines off! Soon, they were

| 3P Factory (1996) |



| Sanjiv Mehta visiting KGF (2000s) |



producing thousands of tonnes per month—a feat which was implausible back then. A point to note, using detergent powder was not common in Bangladeshi culture at that period. To penetrate the market, mini packs were introduced by modifying unused tea-filling machines. UBL was experiencing in real time a new product being sold in massive volumes which was not a soap. While they made the occasional mistakes—including setting the mixers to 4 minutes instead of the recommended 1, which resulted in a muddy output as their first product; they learned important lessons along the way, and both Raziq and Asif Chowdhury were grateful for the increase in volumes. Not only did it provide them with the scale to expand and eventually set up today's powder giants of ARCS (1999) and ARCE (2008), but their learning and development curve took on the same shape as their volumes—exponential to say the least.

The second product which was a huge success, was the household Vim Bar. There was a white space in the consumer's lifestyle and the market for replacing ash to washing household dishes. UBL brought some samples from India to test the waters and promising potential was found. The company wanted to explore the white space with minimum CapEx. With this philosophy, Vim Bars began to be produced. 1 million pieces of 100 gm bars were sampled. It was anticipated by one of the brand managers of Vim, Mr. Rajib Bhattacharya that one day, Vim Bar would be a ten thousand tonnes brand. Today, it is a 20,000+ tonnes brand.

Coming on the back of the LUX debacle, it was a bold step by UBL to venture into a new category, albeit a necessary one. It was even more courageous for the partners. Not only were there concerns about where UBL was headed in those times of crisis, but they had little knowledge of what they were venturing into. What they did have was an incredible degree of trust in UBL, believing that the venture would succeed with UBL by their side. In a broader context, it was the advent of third-party manufacturing in Bangladesh. Soon after, the concept was stretched further to include several new factories like Samuda, Astech, Lily and Diverse—all factories that today form a part of the manufacturing backbone of UBL.

Safety in the Workplace

As mentioned before, when Unilever started its operation in 1960s, the culture was relaxed, and the safety regulations mostly remained as documents and policies. Prior to the 1990s, workplace safety was not as stringent as it is today. By 1990s, UBL had begun a journey of modernising KGF, which meant bringing in advanced technology, and with-it increased awareness of safety in the factory environments; the rules and systems in KGF had to be updated. Thus, the post of safety manager came into being at the end of 1998, beginning with Mashiud-Duza, who was the man tasked with embedding the safety culture we have today at UBL.

| Kamran Bakr presenting the Global Safety Award trophy to the KGF team (2000s) |



| J. L. W. Noal handing over the Safety Award to Panroom Cirde (1998) |



The rules regarding safety were detailed and applied to every possible scenario. Just to exemplify the depths to which Unilever went, workers had to be secure if they were working at or above a height of 6 feet. Risk assessments were carried out on a regular basis. In some cases, engineering controls had to be implemented to ensure safety too, including power isolation during maintenance. The most basic changes included introducing traffic rules, speed limits, and defining office decorum such as a ban on smoking inside the factory. Many of the elementary things that we take for granted today were considered revolutionary back then. "We

even defined the technical specs for any truck that wanted to enter KGF. The truck drivers' union were not fans but sooner or later they complied. By modest estimates, our rules forced 4,000 trucks around the country to shape themselves up; one person even took the opportunity to set up a small truck workshop in Kalurghat to fix any truck that was heading into KGF but wasn't up to the mark," says Mashiud-Duza.

When workers refused to comply with safety rules, the repercussions were severe. In one of the memorable incidents, the workers resisted the new safety policies and rebelled against wearing

“We even defined the technical specs for any truck that wanted to enter KGF. The truck drivers’ union were not fans but sooner or later they complied. By modest estimates, our rules forced 4,000 trucks around the country to shape themselves up.”

Mashiud-Duza

Joined in 1995

safety shoes. The Chairman, Jean Alfonsi, summoned the leader of the union and asked him to bring his toolbox. "Let's do a simple test: I'll wear my safety shoes, and you keep your basic footwear, and we both drop the toolbox on our feet and see what happens". Nothing further needed to be said, and from then on, everyone entering the factory floor was happy to wear the safety shoes, even if they were not all too fashionable. Further moves in light of safety concerns led to the creation of weekly safety talks that would raise awareness among workers. A certain degree of fear-mongering and tough tactics had to be applied initially, but slowly and surely, safety became more than a set of rules and integral to their way of life. Over a three-year span between 1999 and 2002, the face of the company transformed completely. Every employee who begins their career today at Unilever starts it with a Safety induction.

Today, Bangladesh still faces numerous workplace accidents each year involving falls from heights. However, the widespread adoption of scaffolding practices, influenced by Unilever's safety training for supply chain managers, has undoubtedly helped prevent many such incidents across factories nationwide. Between 1999 and 2001, Unilever Bangladesh achieved the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards in successive years, going several million hours without an accident.

কর্মীদের সেফটি কুইজ প্রতিযোগিতা

সঠিক উত্তরটি চিহ্নিত করুন। কাগজটি কেটে আপনার নাম, টোকেন নং, ডিপার্টমেন্ট লিখে আপ্যামী ৭ই এপ্রিল ১৯৯৯ইং তারিখের মধ্যে HRDM এর নিকট জমা দিন। বিজয়ীদেরকে পুরস্কৃত করা হবে।

সেফটি কুইজ

নাম :
 টোকেন নং/সিফ :
 ডিপার্টমেন্ট :

১. LTA কি ?
☐ কারো মৃত্যু ☐ বড় দুর্ঘটনা
২. ১৯৯৮ সালে LBBL-এ কয়টি LTA হয়েছে ?
☐ ৬টি ☐ ৮টি ☐ ২টি ☐ ৫টি
৩. ১৯৯৭ সালে LBBL-এ কয়টি LTA হয়েছে ?
☐ ১৫টি ☐ ১৮টি ☐ ২৪টি ☐ ১০টি
৪. ১৯৯৮ সালে দীর্ঘতম LTA টিতে কত ঘন্টা Loss হয়েছিল ?
☐ ৪৫২ ☐ ৩৩৬ ☐ ২২৮ ☐ ১৯৮
৫. ফ্লোর কিংবা মাটি খুঁড়ে গর্ত করার দরকার হলে কি কি বিপদ হতে পারে।
☐ সাপ বের হবে ☐ বিছুঁ কামড়াবে ☐ বিদ্যুৎ লাইন থাকতে পারে ☐ হাত কেটে যাবে।
৬. মোটর ও পাম্প চলছে, এ অবস্থায় কি কি নিরাপত্তা বিষয় থাকা দরকার।
☐ আর্থিং ☐ কাপলিং গার্ড ☐ মোটর কভার ☐ সব ক'টি।
৭. ১৯৯৮ সালে সর্বশেষ মারাত্মক নিয়ার মিস কোথায় হয়েছিল।
☐ ক্যান্টিন ☐ এস.এফ.ডি. ☐ প্যান রুম ☐ পি. পি.।
৮. গুয়েন্ডিং কাজে সবচেয়ে বড় নিরাপত্তা যন্ত্রাংশ কোনটি
☐ সঠিক চশমা ☐ ফায়ার এক্সটিংগুইশার ☐ ফ্লাশ ব্যাক এবেকটর ☐ হোসপাইপ।
৯. কলার ছোলা ফ্রোর বা রাস্তায় পড়ে আছে। এটা কি ধরনের বিপদ
☐ কোন বিপদ নাই ☐ ছোট দুর্ঘটনা হতে পারে ☐ মারাত্মক LTA হতে পারে ☐ সৌন্দর্য বৃদ্ধি।
১০. সেফটি কার স্বার্থে
☐ ম্যানেজিং ডাইরেক্টর ☐ কোম্পানীর ☐ সেফটি ডিপার্টমেন্টের ☐ আমার ও আমার সহকর্মীর।

| Safety Quiz Competition from LBBL in-house Magazine 'Oikotan' (1999) |

New beginning for PP: Project Sankalp

With the post 1990s economic boom, the domestic demand for Personal Products was increasing day by day. Through the Strategic Planning Exercise of 2000, it became evident that the current plant would not be enough for the growth aspirations of the future, hence, an initial proposal for expanding the plant was prepared by Aminur Rahman, the then PP Production Manager.

At that point, Sanjiv Mehta, who was the Commercial Director back then, summoned Mr. Rahman to discuss if they could make a new factory altogether. The choice was easy given a minor cost differential. Within hours, the proposal had been approved 2 decades into the launch of PP, and UBL was finally getting a new PP Factory. A major factor that gave an advantage to this plan was a tax holiday from the government for its investment, thus ensuring a payback within one and a half years.

Before 2001–2002, UBL had an agriculture farm on its premises, including a paddy field, a small pond to get a supply of fish, and a good number of buffalos, whose offspring and milk used to be sold. While initially, the project team had given thought to following the laundry model and setting up beyond KGF, they ultimately chose to have the PP plant in the paddy field area.

The groundbreaking was done by Jean Alfonsi in February, and the team was handed a 9 month timeline to deliver—a daunting prospect for sure, but surprisingly, they delivered it within 6 months. This was especially impressive given that many of the machines had long lead times, being imported from the USA, while others required refitting with parts from Europe. More importantly, the entire project was delivered without any incidents and in full compliance with safety rules and regulations. The first production run happened on 7 September 2001, and invoicing began immediately. What was unique, given the times, was that the factory was built on a steel structure, as opposed to concrete. The practice was new in the country but offered a good, cost-efficient option.

| Sankalp PP Plant Site before construction (2000) |



“Our plan was closing at 5,000 tonnes in 2005. We designed the factory with 6,500 tonnes keeping in mind. But in reality, it turned out to be 8,000 tonnes and we took it to 12,000 tonnes with just a few machine adjustments.”

Aminur Rahman

Joined in 1981

| PP Plant under-construction Site Inspection (2001) |



| Sanjiv Mehta inaugurating Sankalp PP Plant (7th September 2001) |



| Sankalp PP Plant after completion (2001) |



Applying Ingenuity

KGF started making soap using the latest soap-making technology available at that time. However, in the 1970s, the company struggled to upgrade its manufacturing technology due to the country's foreign reserve situation. After the Liberation War, importing capital machinery and spare parts became extremely hard. This process required a lot of paperwork, justifications, and

explanations, leading to long queues and delays. These delays caused a shortage of essential spare parts, which often disrupted factory operations significantly.

To address this issue, the company encouraged its workers to devise local solutions. Factory employees became resourceful and found creative ways to keep production going. This focus on innovation created a workplace culture where problem-solving and creativity were valued.

| TPM Audit Visit at KGF(2000s) |



Atul Paris, known by the name of worker-teacher, would train other workers and handle the extremities to set an example. He recalls, "Once a Norden machine broke down. A slide bearing was malfunctioning. The replacement would take at least a week since it would come from Sweden. So, I was asked to see if anything could be done. I observed it for 15 to 20 minutes, and concluded that maybe I'll need some time, but I could get it

done. I needed three hours to fix it. For those three hours that I invested, we ended up running it for six more months. The bearing worked in the meantime, and later it was replaced".

By adopting these practices, the company cut costs and built a culture of excellence. This environment motivated employees to avoid complaints and continuously seek solutions.

"Once a Norden machine broke down. A slide bearing was malfunctioning. The replacement would take at least a week since it would come from Sweden. So, I was asked to see if anything could be done. I observed it for 15 to 20 minutes and concluded that maybe I'll need some time, but I could get it done. I needed three hours to fix it."

Atul Paris

Joined in 1979

| TPM Audit Visit at KGF (2000s) |



| A team from KGF visiting the Unilever Factory at Minburi, Thailand, for experience and knowledge sharing (2005) |



Ushering in the New Millennium: Vision 2006 & TPM

The dawn of the new millennium brought with it not just new factories, but a shift in our ways of working altogether. The 'Save Kalurghat: Vision 2006' project was launched in 2001, led by the then Technical Director, Kamran Bakr. It had become clear that KGF was at risk of becoming unsustainable because of many poor practices across production, productivity, quality, and maintaining the natural environment. Something needed to be done.

A major step in this episode was the introduction of a biological and extended aeration anaerobic Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP). Unilever was ahead of the curve in Bangladesh, as it proved to be highly effective and efficient for UBL for its portfolio, with a capacity of seventy thousand tonnes.

Total Productive Maintenance or TPM brought about the technological and cultural transformation of the factory. Beginning in 2003, over a six-year journey, Kalurghat factory bagged two prestigious manufacturing excellence certificates in TPM Level-1 and Level-2—a great feat in the entire South Asia region. Following the TPM, the company also

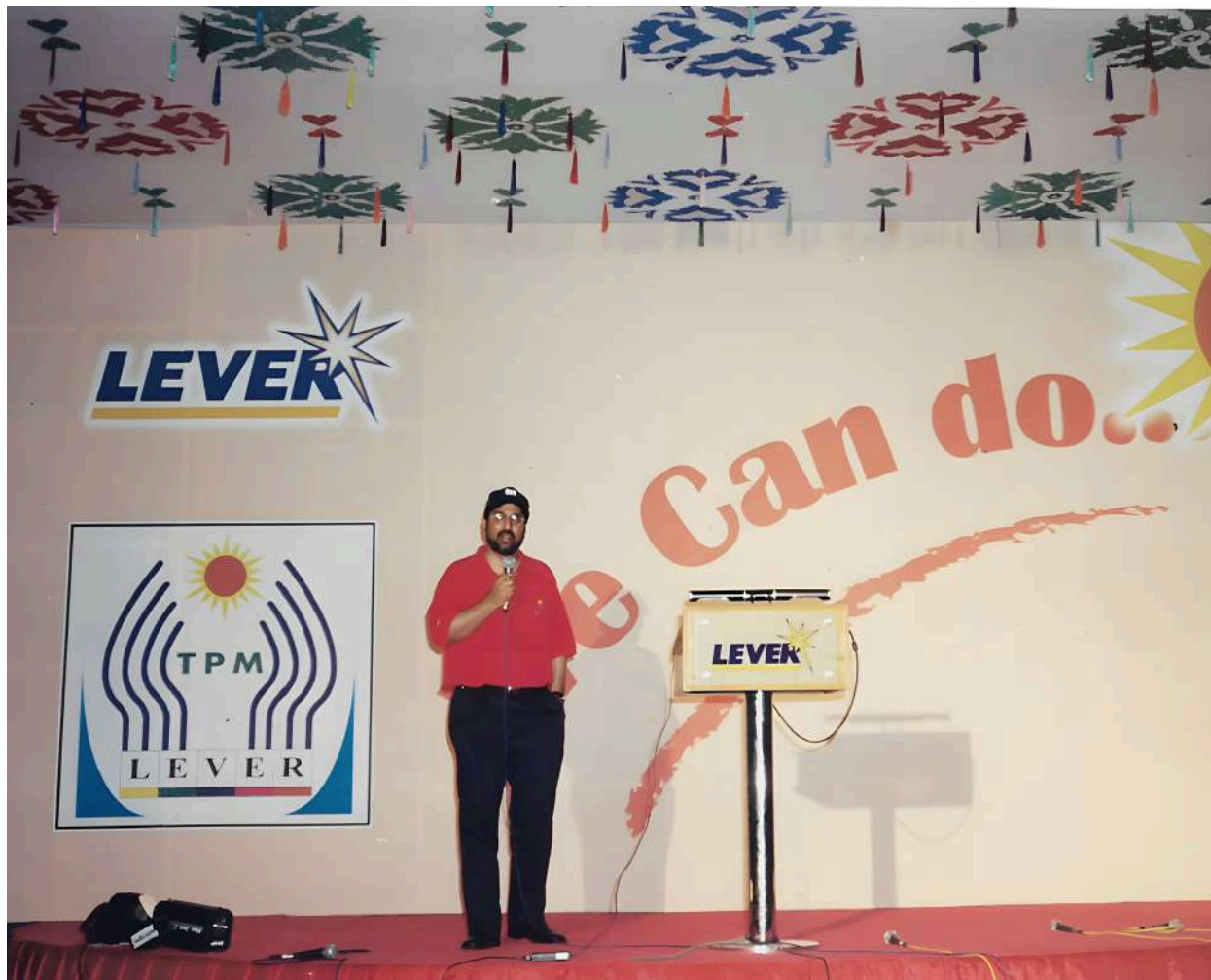
| TPM Consultants with KGF Team (2000s) |



adopted the Manufacturing Excellence Concept and World Class Manufacturing (WCM) concept to enhance the functional workflow of the factory and bring cultural shifts within the organisation such as the shift from overtime culture.

UBL introduced new systems at KGF, with high-speed wrappers, integration of ERP with factory machinery, shifting from conventional to continuous saponification, and logic-driven machines being the highlights of this era.

| Kamran Bakr delivering a speech during the TPM Launch Event at KGF(2003) |



UBL's Role in Wider Industry

Being one of the oldest and the largest multinational companies in Bangladesh, Unilever has played a major role not only in the local FMCG industry but also the wider economy, helping to grow and develop organisations throughout its value chain. When Unilever started its operation in Bangladesh back in the 1960s, majority all of the raw materials, including paper for packaging, were imported. One of the major reasons for establishing a factory at Kalurghat was its proximity to the port. Although, over time, it began to source materials locally. By and large, one of the biggest beneficiaries of this strategy was the salt industry.

Back in the early 2000s, imported sodium sulfate was one of the key raw materials used in detergent production. Though salt was a basic commodity and it had historically been produced in Bangladesh for many years, the industry was highly unstructured. Since the 1990s, the Government has been trying hard to regulate the industry by encouraging producers to refine their products to include more iodine in the final product. However, even at the turn of the millennium, the situation had not improved significantly.

It was around this time that the detergent powder category began to grow at a rapid pace. It was important to maintain the momentum, and two

factors would be critical in the upgradation of consumers from laundry soap to powder: the quality of the product, and its affordability. UBL correctly identified locally produced salt as an alternative to imported sodium sulfate.

Unilever went into that area, selected one plant for producing the salt that was needed, and it provided a spark into the industry and the locality. Seeing UBL's success, many other corporations and NGOs invested in the salt processing industry at Napitkhali. In a span of a few years, the plants started to manufacture salt in the thousands of tons. The face of the entire area was changed, and it is now thriving with economic activity.

Unintentionally, the development of this new industry also created a different challenge for the company. Around 2002-2003, the salt operations were brought under suspicion by the border officials, who alleged that the salt being manufactured was, in fact, being smuggled in from Myanmar. A case was filed against UBL, with the Chairman, Finance Director, and Technical Director being charged. Even their passports were impounded, and the team had to visit the courts in Chattogram and Cox's Bazar every few weeks. Rather than resorting to a quick fix, the company decided to fight the case, while it dragged on for a couple of years and cost the company several million in legal expenses, eventually, it was decided in UBL's favour. The event was a defining moment for UBL and would serve as a marker in its dealings with the authorities.

“At the time, there were a few processing plants in Narayanganj, Khulna, and Cox’s Bazar, but they were all struggling. The condition of the area that we selected, Napitkhali in Cox’s Bazar was grave, to say the least. Our efforts breathed new life into what was once a dead and deserted economic zone, generating employment for hundreds of people in the area. It was startling to see the change we were capable of bringing in. I have seen that area go from being a remote and impoverished area to a vibrant economic zone.”

Pulak Barua

Joined in 2000

On a lighter note, when the case was filed, a manager of the legal team was sent on very short notice to Cox’s Bazar to represent the company in court. At the end of the case, when the expense claims were submitted, there amongst all the receipts was the cost of the new suit. The manager’s argument was simple: he hardly had any time to prepare himself, he could not appear in the court without a suit, so he had one made

during his stay. While he was given a short summary of the situation before his departure, he was told that while the company would reimburse all expenses, he better not claim any cost for tailoring a new suit. The Finance Director was angry, but given the magnitude of the case that had just been settled and the splendid work being done, it was decided that a new suit was the least the manager deserved!

Another remarkable example was Rhymer Chemicals. Back in 2013-14, UBL was struggling with the supply of LABSA (Linear Alkylbenzene Sulphonic Acid), which was a key ingredient for detergents. With the advent of new competitors, there was significant pressure to deliver superior products at a lower cost. UBL identified that there were massive differences in costs and duties between LAB (Linear Alkylbenzene) and LABSA, and this was an opportunity to generate significant savings. The challenge was to manufacture LABSA locally from imported LAB. Here came Rhymer Chemicals.

Rhymer Chemicals had been supplying LABSA to the local market for many years. It started its operation in 2006-07 but was not in good shape due to the high investment and low volumes. By 2013, it had virtually stopped production and was on the verge of bankruptcy. Rhymer Chemical was a supplier of Unilever but they could not supply more than 15%- 20% of the requirement. However, they had the capability of converting LAB to LABSA.

Unilever helped turn around a company that had slow operations into an efficient supplier. A cross-functional project team was formed, and given the high savings potential, the project was aptly named 'Project Drool'. It was decided that Unilever would import LAB, and Rhymer Chemicals would convert it to LABSA. The project team worked tirelessly with the Rhymer management team to improve their production efficiency, quality, and logistics, along with

managing their finances to ensure operations run smoothly.

The results were astonishing. Unilever saved over BDT 250 million in a single year while ensuring the availability of materials; Rhymer never looked back thereafter. The collaboration not only resulted in the biggest cost-saving project for Unilever Bangladesh but also helped another company grow into a consistent and reliable local supplier.

UBL as a company understands the importance of promoting local backward integration by giving support in scale and technology. Locally, it is now sourcing around two-third of its raw materials. As for now, the company has put up a robust plan to explore its opportunities in localising some of the raw materials by pushing boundaries in the near future and carving a path for expanding its scale for more sourcing such as soda ash. However, scaling up requires industry affiliation and collaboration to create a minimum required demand for a modular factory. The company envisions adding up another 9% in its locally sourced raw material score by 2025.

Along with developing local sourcing capabilities, Unilever Bangladesh has also helped to develop and implement industrial practices and techniques that helped the Government to ensure consumer safety and collect taxes. One such incident was when the

company ensured a level playing field in paying tax for skin cleansing products. Back then, Unilever used to pay full tax including a special charge of supplementary duty. From market research data, it was determined how much market share there is and how much tax the company is paying. The rest of the companies were waiving 85% of the tax. This not only put UBL in an unfair position but the government was also not receiving the whole amount of revenue it should receive.

The NBR then cut down the supplementary duty and the company was still looking for solutions to establish a level-playing field. One of the brightest solutions that came from one of the meetings was to introduce a tax stamp at the end of the flap of soaps just like it is on the pack of cigarettes and that will reduce the tax evasion significantly. The solution was presented to NBR

and the government suggested that we implement it in soaps. But there were still challenges as the local companies started going against this decision. It was very difficult to implement and the reason for the local companies not cooperating was the cost of installing a tax stamp machine would be so high that the local companies would go out of business. UBL then again started looking for a better solution and the development team worked for three months straight to innovate a cost-effective prototype of a tax stamp machine for soap packaging. This machine was presented to the NBR office saying that the proposition of the machine being costly could be otherwise and Unilever is willing to pay for all the companies including the competitors for this machine - and this is how Unilever Bangladesh introduced the tax stamp regime in Bangladesh and established a level-playing field.

“We arranged a meeting with the chairman of NBR. I remember that Jean Alfonsi and I were staying at the old Sheraton hotel. The day of the meeting, hartal was declared. Alfonsi and I had to go to the NBR office for the very important presentation. We had to take a rickshaw to reach NBR on time. Our presentation was compelling, and we were able to make the government understand that the government is suffering because many companies are reaping the benefits of tax evasion. The only way to break the capitulating loop is by reducing taxes.”

Sanjiv Mehta

Joined in 1996



New Logistics Horizon: Exploring Waterways

A corporate brochure was published during the inauguration ceremony of KGF, and the brochure had a specific statement- 'Lever Brothers try to make their products available to remote villages also (through waterways where the area is inaccessible by land)'.

However, the company took some time—almost five decades—to use waterways as a major logistics route! Though the idea was often discussed, it just did not happen.

Mahfuzul Karim was one of the people who took the initiative. He recalled that he would often be nudged to break with the age-old system of using trucks to transport products to our distributors. The leadership team would ask, "Mahfuz, wouldn't it be better and cheaper to ship by barge?" He decided to have a go.

"I personally visited the port to see how this could be done and decided to give it a try—we would sail a ship from Chattogram to Khulna. When the time came, there was just one small problem: someone from UBL needed to be on the ship.

I asked one of my team members, and he was happy to oblige. Two days later, I got a phone call from his family saying they hadn't heard from him for almost a full day! I was very worried, but fortunately, his mobile phone network had (naturally) gone off in the middle of the sea, and we were soon able to re-establish contact", shares Mahfuz.

The experience would be helpful, as barges were used to ship goods in bulk during the national crisis before the 2014 national elections when highways were regularly shut down or closed off.

| Loading crates of UBL products onto barge (2010s) |



Packaging: From Foreign to Local

UBL has changed the landscape for plastic and packaging manufacturers in Bangladesh in the early 2000s being the first ones, among MNCs, to switch from importing packaging to facilitating local production. This industrial transformation in UBL was seeded with the LUX wrapper, initiated by Mr. Inam and continued with Lifebuoy and other products. Marchent, Shetu, and Famous-

companies as such collaborated with UBL on this journey. The initial challenge was to bring the right quality, but with continuous effort and the help of global expertise, it was done in no time because there was enormous scope and potential and growing demand. Innovations ranged from 7 layers of colour to 9 layers of colouring, pearlisatation, multi-colour layering, metalisation etc. Converting the Lux wrapper from 2 layers to 3 layers was done with metalisation. Premiumisation of the wrappers was also explored with a limited edition

“Back then we had a soap with a transparent wrapper. It required more advanced machinery. However, acquiring new machinery was not an option as it would have required 3.2 Million BDT investment and it was a kind of packaging not present even in India. Eventually, we changed the sprocket frame of the existing machinery and managed to solve the dilemma by spending just BDT 1900.”

Ruhul Quddus

Joined in 1996

transparent wrapper of soaps using only the machines from the factory. The philosophy at that time was getting the right product using the right technology and the right investment. Philosophies like this made the company Unilever is today.

Eventually, packaging development took a new height with other products such as Glow & Lovely soap, Ponds lotion, etc. To produce the packaging of Glow & Lovely soap required an adjustment to an existing machine for which Japanese and Chinese suppliers asked for around 3.2 Million BDT. But that adjustment was only done with 1900 BDT at that time. Such innovation and creativity were also seen in developing the cap of Ponds lotions with only one sample cap that was cut in half to develop the design.

Initially, for Lifebuoy, packaging would be imported from India. Local manufacturers were not developed as much and did not offer the same quality, which made imported packaging so competitive. In 1994 UBL empowered its suppliers to live up to its own standards. And in doing so, took a risk that paid off.

A generation of supply chain managers, including the current Supply Chain Director, Ruhul Quddus, would spend hours at the

suppliers' offices to perfect the packaging. They developed the latter's quality systems to ensure that the cylinders, ink sourcing, lamination process, curing system, and end-to-end processing were in line with the global standards of Unilever, alongside ensuring the premiumisation of packaging. Back then, the focus was on securing maximum returns from minimum investments. So, investing directly in acquiring expensive machinery was not the primary option. In the modern day, the priorities are pinpointing the right technology and investing in the right design.

UBL held the belief that process adjustment and skill development were the keys. And so, the company worked closely with suppliers to ensure this, and even provided hands-on training to use the coating device and lamination machine that had been installed. 'UMA'— UBL compliance standards had to be maintained. The end result was that UBL managed to pioneer localisation. The company considered the suppliers to be partners whom it helped develop at every step of the way. And it helped the partners to innovate and elevate the quality of their products that ultimately ensured that the packaging provided was perfect. The partnerships that were fostered—led to the development of companies such as Polycon, Shetu, Astech, and Premiaflex.

| UBL Packaging Production (2000s) |



| H.J. Hammen visiting KGF(1990s) |



Launch of Round-the-Clock Factory Operation

A lot can happen in 7 days, and an operation infused with passion and determination, to bring about stability, can only lead to success. Rakesh Mohan, UBL's Chairman in 2010, proved just that. In the intricacies of unionisation, it can be difficult to properly run and operate factories. But Rakesh epitomised the very essence of resilience in the face of all challenges and rose to the occasion to embody the true spirit of UBL.

7-Day Manning is a concept turned into reality in the UBL factory. It essentially means that the factory remains open 24/7 gaining 1/7th of the additional productivity. For this concept to work, the workers needed to be given days off from work, staggered off-days, and required more workers. Implementing the 7-day manning concept was a huge challenge because the workers had to be given days off on different days, but the factory and the machines would run continuously, only shutting down for maintenance purposes.

The then factory manager and current Supply Chain Director, Ruhul Quddus, with his leadership team, had to work relentlessly to change the workers' mindset for this concept to work efficiently. A significant amount of government approvals were required to be ensured by UBL to implement this process. The team closely worked

with every member of the workforce for over five months to land the concept and break the mental barriers engraved by the age-old 6-day work practice and the disbelief in the new proposed process. In spite of all this, there was still strong resistance from the Union and some sections of the workforce resisted accepting and embracing the positive change.

Then came the final hour on the 6th month of this journey when it was time to switch over, along with the last bit of resistance from the Union in the form of litigation. However, the company—with active support from the Legal team—was able to prove to the court the necessity and benefit of this change and was able to vacate the legal obstacle. The Union lost the legal battle, and thereafter there has been no looking back on this subject from any side, a true collaboration in the end.

| KGF during Line 5 Inauguration (2005) |



| Jean Alfonsi at KGF (1990s) |



| Kamran Bakr and Sanjiv Mehta at KGF Line 5 Inauguration Ceremony (31st August 2005) |



Navigating through Storms

KGF has faced many threats and challenges during its six-decade journey, including war, natural disasters, political turmoil, and even a global pandemic. One of these challenges was due to one of the deadliest cyclones of modern times. The 1991 Super Cyclonic Storm BOB 01 (Cyclone Marian) was one of the deadliest cyclones ever to hit Bangladesh. The aftermath of such a cyclone was one of despair.

Still, it also united the people and brought out a fighting response like no other. Unilever Bangladesh's reaction to the grave calamity epitomised this very fighting spirit.

Back then, the storm alert systems were inadequate, and few were prepared for such a natural disaster. The then Chairman, Ian S. Sangster, hardly spared a thought and was quoted as saying, "You all are too worried. I would like to see what this storm does!" from his hilltop residence.

“The company was completely shut down for four to five days. During that time, all the employees, regardless of what they were supposed to do on a given day, came to help the factory resume its activities. People worked together day and night with minimal food and water. We tore entire machines apart to clean them of mud. Cash bank notes from the treasury were left in the open and baked in the sun to dry.”

Mohammed Shahabuddin

Joined in 1979

| *Temperature Scanning during COVID-19 at KGF (2020)* |



The following day, the Chairman was distraught to find the factory badly damaged, with a large fishing trawler from the sea breaking the gate and welcoming him to the factory yard. Up to four feet of water inundated the entire city of Chattogram. The difficult situation and the extent of the adversity compelled help to fly in from around the globe. The entire American 7th Fleet, returning from the Gulf War, was redirected to help the cyclone-struck people of Chattogram.

As for KGF, the entire inventory was destroyed, and the factory premises were turned into a swamp; every item of machinery had to be set up from scratch. As the office block was located inside the factory premises, the cyclone had a disastrous impact on documents as well. All files and folders, including personnel files, were washed away and left in ruins. Extra effort had to be made to organise the documents as they were.

The company had faced a similar challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 27, 2020, Bangladesh went into a complete stop as the government announced the closure of factories to curb the spread of COVID-19. However, as soap became a critical weapon in combating the virus, Unilever had to keep production running to meet the nation's needs. This posed a significant challenge: ensuring the safety of our people while maintaining operations. Guided by global protocols, the team swiftly implemented rigorous safety measures, including regular health monitoring, emergency

treatment, and strict adherence to hygiene practices, which became part of the daily routine.

Initially the workers were slightly afraid and reluctant to continue working in the face of an invisible enemy that no one knew how to tackle. It was here that the on-site team worked closely with the workers' union to persuade them to continue working, emphasising the fact that it was important to answer the nation's call and continue providing them with life-saving items. While the team kept the factory running, the hygiene practices inside the factory were taken up a notch to ensure everyone's safety—starting from the correct usage of PPE, making hand wash and social distancing a matter of habit, and also driving awareness to practise the same at home as well. KGF became one of the first factories in Unilever South Asia to provide full medication and free consultancy to all, facilitated by the in-house medical team. Anyone who displayed symptoms would immediately be brought under close supervision with continuous monitoring of their vitals. If the symptoms aggravated, they would be admitted to a hospital. Social distancing came into play, not just on the shop floor but in the canteens as well. The entire factory would be disinfected over a 2-hour span every Friday, while the canteen crews would have a thorough health check-up every day.

All employees were provided with a shuttle bus service to and from the factory, while temperature screening and sanitation throughout the day

became a regular feature. The buses operated at a third of their capacity to ensure social distancing, even as they were being disinfected at regular intervals. The one constant, however, was education and communication, with multiple sessions being conducted even on the production floor itself.

“We were glad that we were protected during the pandemic as production continued at the factory. No other company would be able to do so because of the way the company took care of us. We were safe at the factory; if it were closed, we would have to go out for other purposes and increase the possibility of getting affected,” shared one of the workers, reflecting the collective resilience and care that defined this challenging period.

In spite of all this, KGF managed to achieve several feats. Not only did it deliver its highest ever output in April, it also managed to break the

same record again in July, with the single highest delivery in a day also being achieved in the same month. When the demand for Lifebuoy was at its pinnacle, the factory team improvised and actually converted other manufacturing lines to produce Lifebuoy in the shortest possible turnaround time, unlocking capacity to a previously unheard-of level.

The logistics team also went through similar challenges. Thermal scanning facilities were installed at every depot. Trucks were sanitised and cleaned every time they entered depot premises and were marked with emergency signs. The depot provided accommodation, food and other necessities to the workers so that they did not have to travel at all. This allowed the Logistics team to deliver their ever-highest daily invoice plan—at a time when the rest of the country was shutting down. This was not a one-off achievement but rather became a recurring event.

Best-in-class Customer Service

Since 2018, the Logistics team has experienced a massive turnaround with the development of new depots in and around Dhaka and Bogura. The new facilities can lay claim to being among the best in South Asia, designed to maximise

efficiency and provide supreme customer service. The mindset was to improve customer service, and ensure zero complaints. Modernising and expanding the depots were essential to that. The teams involved, spent sleepless nights building the depots up brick by brick. At times, the Sales Professionals themselves would be supervising the constructions. Eventually, both facilities were up and running within a year.

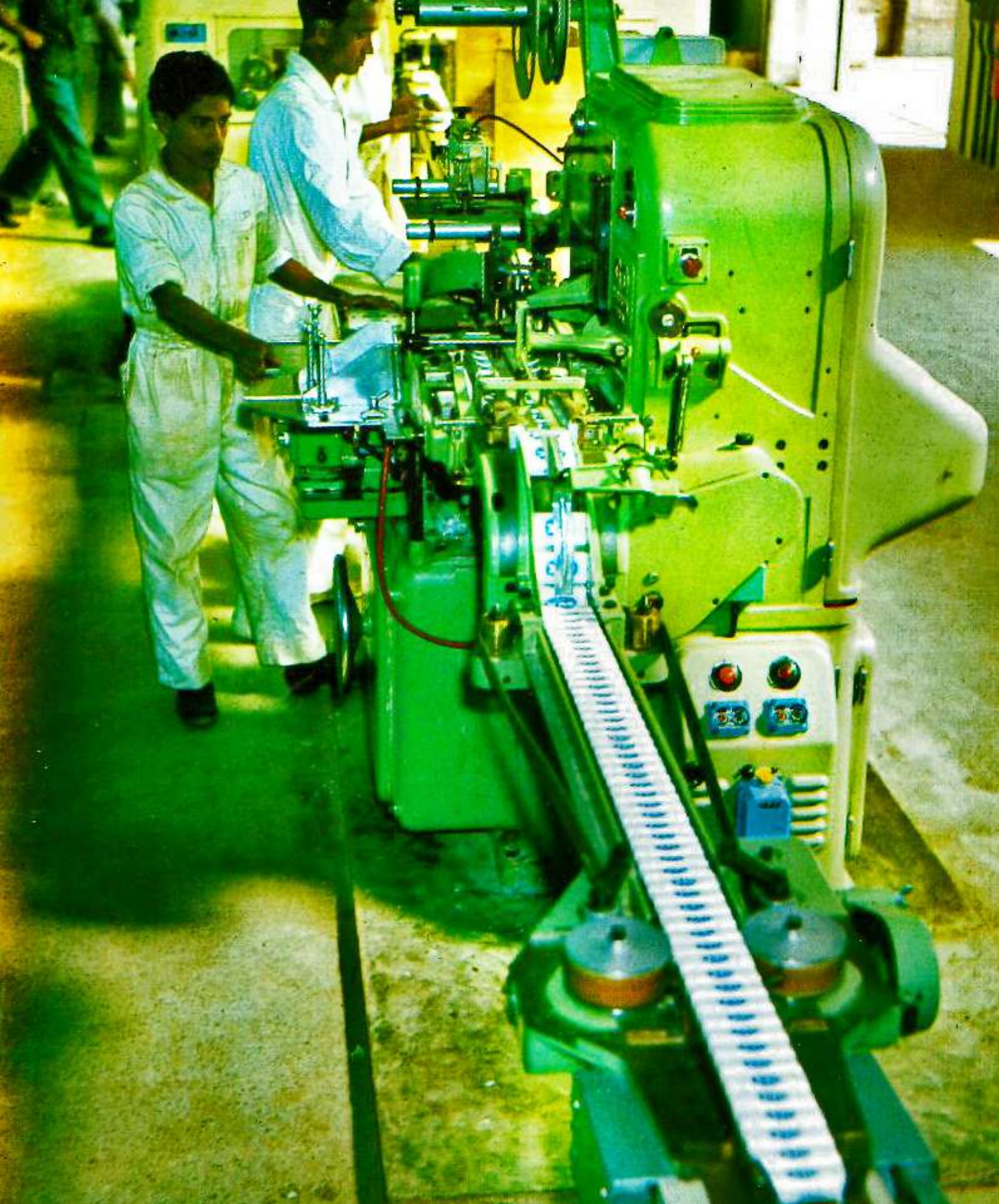
From the Pan Room to a Modernised KGF

Before and around 1979, the Pan Room was a little unit filled with commotion, tension, and enthusiasm. The lye came from one side, and the soap came through the other. The containers (or pans) where the soap would boil were closed. With only some ventilators above the wall, it was hot with temperature and tension. In the machines, the panel board would sometimes refuse to work due to the heat. There were fewer people, yet much to do.

From that time, Kalurghat and the entire supply chain team have come a very long way. From introducing bots in the new PP plant to tracking efficiency in soap manufacturing through data analytics, much has happened since the early

days, but the philosophy of excellence in manufacturing has remained. Capacity unlocks on all fronts have allowed the team to constantly support the company in launching new products at an unprecedented speed. As KGF has grown, so too has the ETP facility, while the water recycling has doubled. The transformation is not limited to KGF—the 3P partner factories of UBL have also been revamped, while the entire customer ordering has been transformed to allow for better response to market realities and automated allocation through an algorithm-based tool.

From hiring and paying workers on a day-to-day basis to producing everything from soaps to soups, the walls of KGF are filled with innumerable stories. The roots of Unilever Bangladesh were settled there before it branched out across the country. The story of this journey of growth beyond these walls is where we turn to next.



Reaching Millions of Homes Everyday

Creating a Powerful Network.

Bangladesh is a densely populated country characterised by a strong communal retail culture. Consumers prefer to purchase essential products conveniently from nearby stores. This situation presents significant challenges for FMCG companies, as they must ensure their presence in many outlets with the appropriate product assortment. Many of these outlets are located in geographically remote areas or face issues related to working capital, further complicating the situation.

Unilever Bangladesh has consistently led the way in business innovation, particularly in Customer Development (CD). The core of CD is ensuring that the right product is available at the right place and the right time. As the backbone of any FMCG company, Unilever has devoted significant thought and effort to enhancing the CD operation over the years. This ongoing commitment has resulted in a distribution network that guarantees unparalleled product availability, setting Unilever apart from its competitors.

| DFF taking orders from a rural Retailer using the Lever Bazar mobile app (2024) |



It Began with Just One

Unilever products have been available in larger cities like Dacca (now Dhaka) and Chittagong (now Chattogram) since the early 1900s. In the early days wholesalers from Chawkbazar and Moulvibazar would collect Unilever products from larger wholesalers in Calcutta (now Kolkata), and from there, smaller traders would collect. After the partition, Unilever began appointing sales representatives, marking the beginning of the company's sales operation story, which evolved into what is now known as the CD operation. By the 1960s, even before the factory operations officially started, Unilever had established a presence throughout the country with sales representatives. With the commencement of operations at KGF, the sales process became more structured.

Messers Elias Brothers (MEB), a legacy trading company based in Khatunganj, Chattogram, served as Unilever's sole distributor in the initial years. During this time, products were sold directly from the factory gates, with cash from sales being deposited into the accounts department. This straightforward system worked well to meet demand, as operations were small and primarily focused on soap products.

In the beginning, production was lower than demand, so the Consumer Distribution (CD) operation mainly focused on managing demand.

Wholesalers would send demand orders (DOs) to MEB, which would then supply the products to them. Over time, these nationwide wholesalers established connections with the company through the sales representatives, allowing them to place DOs more efficiently and make payments through the bank (TT).

This network, however, was different from what we see today. Some of these wholesalers later became Unilever Distributors, and some are doing business with Unilever even after 60 years.

However, this Hub and Spoke model went on to continue for quite some time. It worked like this through the early years, until the need for expansion became evident.

| A typical rural retail outlet selling LBBL products (1960s) |



“Back then, there was no distribution house to speak of; the products went straight to our store in Pachani Bazar from the Tongi station road, where it used to arrive from the factory. We used to distribute products to the smaller retailers from our store. The relationship was very warm and even a few Chairmen used to visit us sometimes. Once, Sir David Lawrence visited our store while my father was taking a nap after lunch. He was not particularly pleased and gave us a tough time.”

Madan Mohon Paul
Distributor

| Typical Bangladeshi retail outlet with LBL products (1960s) |



A Period of Steady Expansion

After the Liberation War in 1971, Unilever Bangladesh explored the possibility of increasing the number of distributors, and by 1977 it had 45 distributors all over the country—almost double the number of districts in existence at that time. The superior coverage made it possible for UBL to increase its reach and serve the smaller districts, and even the remote sub-districts. It continued the expansion, and within a span of just 10 years, the number of distributors had doubled along with wider retail coverage.

By 1990, UBL was present in approximately 90% of the FMCG outlets through direct and indirect distribution. The main force behind this success

was the dedicated service and efforts of the Territory Sales Representatives (TSR). TSRs were the ancestors of today's CD Field team. In those days, the number of TSRs was limited, and they were far away from each other, often having to look after 7-8 distribution houses located over a widespread geographical area. Given the lack of road infrastructure, this presented a considerable challenge to the pioneers of CD. Visiting a town would often mean spending up to 3 days away from their homes, and travelling in perilous conditions—hanging on to the edge of their seats on bumpy roads, coupled with long river ferry journeys.

TSRs would be visiting each of their towns in their territories only once over a 28-day Journey Cycle (JC). Once they arrived at a distribution house, the most important task was to take stock of the

“If your trousers weren’t a little messy and roughed up, you weren’t doing your job. We had to go door-to-door, visiting the market every day. Come rain or shine, we would be distributing the products with our own hands, and putting them up on the shelves ourselves.”

Enayet Kabir
Joined in 1969

| Product shipment from KGF (1960s) |



sales trends, and the available inventory to place orders with the company. Letters took up to 3 days to reach KGF, and delivery took a further week to reach the distributor. Initially, the requisitions were placed by the company, and the role of the distributors was limited to making the payment. The TSRs eventually took over the responsibility, having to write and submit 4 copies of their orders to the company. These orders would have to be placed for a period of up to 28 days—the equivalent of a JC, and until the next time they visit. Imagine this for a moment: having to place the order for your town, knowing full well it could take a week to reach, and that the next time you will be placing another order is a month away. The TSRs of that era needed a predictive capability that could challenge the most sophisticated algorithms.

During those early days, there were several other prevalent practices which would seem completely out of place today. Spot selling was the norm, with salesmen carrying products in vans through the market and selling them to outlets as per the demand. The company used to maintain customer cards, where item-wise details of the orders and stock for each outlet were recorded and tracked to keep a check of stock levels. Pool Representatives were also commonplace, with recruits being brought in, trained and placed wherever they were required depending on temporary openings. This was either because the man in place had left the business or had taken a personal leave. Back

then, only one TSR could take leave over a 28-day JC, which is where the Pool Representative would be pulled in. Those who worked in these roles were privileged to travel across the country, “I knew the local cuisine of every district better than those who called that place home. I could even double up as a tour guide if needed—I had gone to every nook and cranny of the country”, says one such recruit. In spite of all these challenges, the dedicated field force used to strongly maintain discipline and punctuality.

During the 1980s, the country began to see considerable infrastructural improvements, especially on road connectivity. Earlier on, it was difficult for distributors to go beyond the town in which they were based. Road infrastructure was not well developed, but by 1990s, the development of the infrastructure network had turned a new page.

At around the same time, the function was split into two parts—Sales Operations and Field Sales. The role of the former was centred around the development of an overarching strategy for the function and the execution of the annual operation plans. Habibullah Ahad, who was among the first Management Trainees recruited by UBL, was the Sales Operations Manager of the time and was part of the team that shifted the focus from increasing the number of distributors to increasing the size and scale of distributors’ operations. UBL leveraged the infrastructural improvements by convincing its distributors to

invest in Mechanised Vehicles (MVs), enabling increased mobility and rapid increase of coverage. While distributors were initially reluctant, a revised business model was rolled out to convince them. With close attention being brought to the distributors' infrastructure, the desired efficiency in distribution was now starting to take shape.

A significant challenge was transforming the market from a wholesale service-based market to a more dynamic retail service-based market. To make this vision a reality, a comprehensive 3-day-long reorganisation meeting was held in 1992, which carefully outlined the new retail outlets and established ambitious sales targets.

“My briefings to the new recruits were straightforward- Your briefcase is your life support. You'll be travelling a lot, so here's some cash—go buy a good sturdy briefcase. And while you're at it, buy a pair of pump shoes—you'll have to visit lots of outlets and fix the displays. Best of luck!”

Swadesh Gupta

Joined in 1996

| H.J. Hemmen at a functional meeting (1990s) |



| A typical functional workshop (2000s) |



Building of a new Function

Since its inception, CD has always been a part of the larger marketing and sales (or commercial) function. Till the late 1990s, the entire country was divided into 3 sales areas. TSRs, who were at that time non-managerial staff, reported to the Area Managers, who acted as a liaison between KGF-CO and the larger field team. However, by the mid-1990s, the function began to be restructured, starting with TSRs being upgraded to Territory Managers (TM). Even so, the field team retained a strict regimen. The TMs had to submit a JC plan for the entire month to their Area Managers, outlining where they would be travelling and when. Additionally, they had to submit monthly reports on their territory

performance to the Company Sales Manager and the Marketing Controller, who were effectively the leaders of the function. It is important to bear in mind that this was the Analog era, devoid of computers and Excel reports, everything was handwritten and submitted in a neat envelope with a Unilever seal on it.

Market visits by top bosses were frequent, and often unannounced. “Your briefcase is your life support”, advised Swadesh Gupta, the legendary Sales Administration Manager to a new TM who had joined the company in 1996. He continued, “You’ll be travelling a lot, so here’s some cash—go buy a good sturdy briefcase. And while you’re at it, buy a pair of pump shoes—you’ll have to visit lots of outlets and fix the displays. Best of luck!”

“During the political turmoil of 1997, I was posted to Khulna territory for my induction. I had to stay there for a month but we could not work during the hartals. But we never missed showing up at the distributor’s house for a single day, although we used to find the house closed.”

Arshad Manjur

Joined in 1996

For the CD team, the biggest event to look forward to was the monthly JC Meeting, an event held at the best hotels in Chattogram. The entire CD Field team was brought in from across the country for a formal two-day event, marked by a speech by the Chairman to begin the ceremony and a gala dinner and musical performance to close. Members of the management team used to join the event to review the performance, and share new product launches.

No one was spared—TMs and AMs would have to present the performance reports of their own areas, while Brand Managers in turn would have to present the same for their brands. Representatives from the partnering agencies would also join the JC Meetings to grab insights of the market for effective strategy building for

activation and other communication means. Questions were asked, praises and criticisms were dished out in equal measures, all for the final objective of discovering ways to deliver stronger performance. Bringing the company together under one roof worked to unite and align everyone's compass. It was also through these JC Meetings that the first Sales Training Manual was developed over time, with individual topics being presented and discussed during the monthly meetings. The topics were also translated in Bangla for the benefit of Distributors' Sales Representatives (DSR), who we today refer to as Distributor Field Force (DFF) .

With the appointment of Ata Safdar in 1998 as the first Customer Marketing Director, the team expanded with more Area Managers, and a new

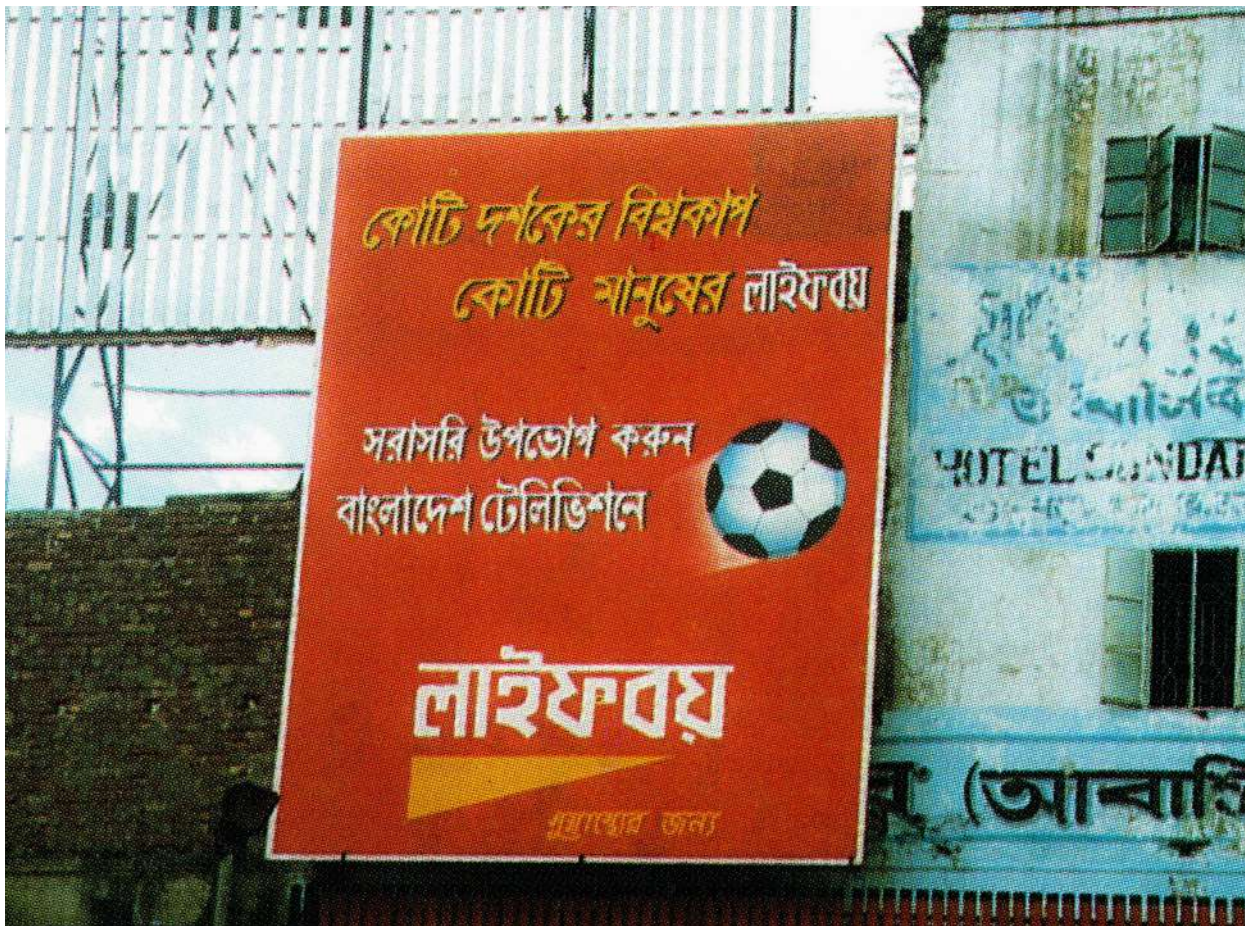
| *Distributors' Meet with Sir David Lawrence (1980s)* |



layer of Regional Managers was introduced to bring focus to individual towns while also ensuring the right span of control. The biggest change, however, was the cultural shift. With the upgradation to managerial ranks, the role of TMs was significantly reshaped, and the face of the function started evolving, with strong recruits

coming in to form a solid leadership pipeline. Mr. Safdar, coming in from the Marketing team himself, also introduced a learning and training culture into the function. Focusing on developing soft skills and leadership for his managers, he rolled out a 'Train the Trainer' module which is followed even today.

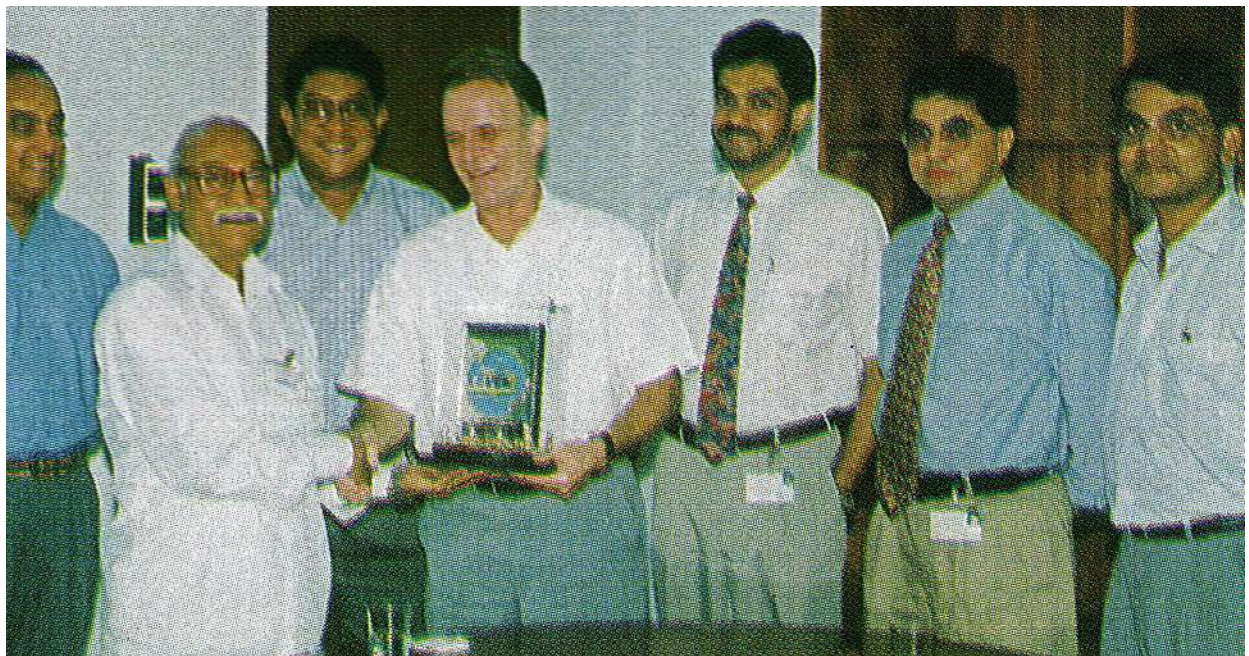
| Lifebuoy Outdoor Advertisement during FIFA World Cup (1998) |



| LBL stall at a Trade Fair (1990s) |



| J. L. W. Noal honouring Distributors for Outstanding Performance (1997) |



Transforming the Retail Landscape

In mid 1990s and late 1990s, UBL brand trade promotions was sporadic through some activities like sampling, discounted selling and 'Haat' (Village Market) storming. In the late 1990s, UBL faced significant challenges from competitors. The first major hit came from Halal Soap, particularly the Aromatic Beauty soap. Other competitors, such as Keya, Tibet, Saaj, Angelic, and Meril beauty soap, also eroded the market share. During this period, UBL's another brand, Lifebuoy, saw a decline in its share. The Company's core business was heavily reliant on Glow & Lovely (GAL). Additionally, a local player, Henolux Cream, was rapidly gaining market share. To counter this, in 2000, the company had taken a comprehensive approach of Consumer Promotion, Trade Promotion and Below The Line (BTL) activities or Rural Activation. Rural Activation started with the four brands - Lifebuoy, Wheel, Sunsilk and Pepsodent in the Brahmanbaria and Bogra areas as a pilot project. The activations were then later rolled out in many folds and extending to other brands such as: LUX, Closeup, GAL and Clinic Plus.

However, post - 2001, LBBL experienced a remarkable turnaround under the new leadership of Sanjiv Mehta. The company undertook several innovative initiatives across various functions. In Customer Management, UBL introduced the Channel strategy and the Dosti programme for wholesalers.

Quarterly Purchase Schemes for wholesalers and retailers were also implemented, and Pallydul was launched to reach remote, untapped markets.

In the Brand Development function (BDD), the introduction of activations was a pioneering effort at the time. UBL led category-building efforts through various activation programs tailored to different brands. Calculating the statistics from consumer insights, along with ensuring product visibility, product line width and depth, and hand-to-hand product delivery—all of these factors were kept in mind while designing the activation initiatives.

From 2002 onwards, these strategic initiatives began to yield success across the brand portfolio, marking a period of sustained growth and market leadership for UBL.

| Unilever South Asia President Doug Baillie during a Market Visit (2000s) |



Taking CD to New Heights: Retail Census and Channel Insights

By the early 2000s, Unilever Bangladesh became a veritable powerhouse of the FMCG industry, with a direct coverage of approximately 200,000 outlets across the country—certainly a solid number in that era, but not enough to deliver the next wave of growth. The quest for elevating CD by building an end-to-end system began at this time, ushering in a new era for the company.

One of the biggest milestones in CD operations was the retail census project, which laid the foundations for Unilever to become a more data driven company. This was initiated in 2003 when the CD and market research teams chalked out an outline for the biggest research project in the history of Unilever Bangladesh. The aim of the project was to profile every outlet that was served by Unilever and other FMCG firms. A massive investment was needed, which had proved to be an insurmountable barrier to similar attempts in the past. The combined team managed to convince top management to go ahead with a proposal from SOMRA, one of the leading

| Product Display at a typical retail outlet (2020s) |



research firms of Bangladesh. Particularly influential here was the new leadership of UBL—the then CD Director (CDD) Reazul Chowdhury, and Mizanur Rashid, the then Trade Marketing Manager who would succeed him as the Head of the Function in 2008.

The team collected an array of basic data for every outlet across the entire country. A search-engine-like software was built that not only kept track of the outlets, but was also able to apply the pareto rule to identify the top outlets which contributed to the bulk of sales. It was also able to define FMCG supply and stocking needs by analysing both Unilever's and the competitor's products. Overlapping stocking patterns were scrutinised with precision, which played a major role in identifying supply patterns—both in terms of quantity and timing. The census also provided the base for future outlet mapping, route planning, territory demarcation and reorganisation across the country for the next decade and a half. It served as the foundation for all initiatives of coverage expansion in the future.

Today, it is a generally accepted fact that the retail universe of Bangladesh consists of over 2 million outlets. This fact is rooted in the retail census of 2003. While there were many sceptics within the company questioning the project's effectiveness, especially considering the investment needed, the results certainly spoke for itself. In fact, the programme was so successful that it was replicated in several other countries in Asia.

While the retail census helped gather the basic information of all the outlets in Bangladesh, it did not define the numerous channels that we have today. The next initiative, the Channel Insight Programme, was brought about in 2004-2005 to do just that. Prior to this, all channels were treated in the same manner, as there was limited understanding of the concept of channels in the company.

Over 50 different outlet types were initially identified which were later narrowed down to six key channels along with three emerging channels. UBL gained an understanding of the shoppers' behaviours and occasions to appreciate their needs and expectations in each channel. It helped to identify the priorities of each channel, and revamped the data management of the company as well. The company started to roll out customised offers based on category, channel, and regional priorities, instead of a national scale. In lieu of cluttering all outlets with an ever-expanding portfolio, UBL now emerged with a greater sense of clarity, and began prioritising certain items in a channel above others. Whenever UBL introduced a new product, these channel insights provided valuable inputs on what needed to be done, and how to succeed.

The retail census and channel insight programme together provided UBL with a massive influx of data. While UBL was applying its learnings from both initiatives to scale new heights, it now took the ambitious step of introducing technology at the front end.

| Unilever South Asia President Doug Baillie at a retail outlet (2000s) |



| A typical retail outlet with UBL Point of Sales (POS) material (2000s) |



Automation in CD

In the 1990s, Unilever's distribution strategy was largely secondary-centric, relying heavily on wholesalers to reach the market. As the company's portfolio grew and market dynamics shifted, the need for a more direct approach through primary channels became evident. This required a renewed focus on digitisation to streamline operations. With the rising popularity of mobile and digital devices in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Unilever seized the opportunity to introduce Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) for better inventory and information management. This marked the beginning of Unilever's journey toward automation, and by 2003, the company began investing heavily in digital technologies to optimise retailer and partner activities. Starting with handheld devices and mobile printers, Unilever continuously upgraded its digital capabilities, simplifying processes and enhancing customer reach.

With the introduction of a larger PP Production Capacity and 3P laundry manufacturing, Unilever, by the mid-2000s, began operating in several large and rapidly expanding categories. Unilever's expansive portfolio required the need for automation to better handle the operational challenges at the front end. The manual ordering system was not cutting it anymore; gone were the days of selling just soaps. From the insights gained from market research, there was now an opportunity and need to create automated processes across the value chain.

Distributor Management System (DMS) was first initiated with the goal to achieve automation in the ordering process, a first in Bangladesh. Asif Bhuiyan, then Regional Manager of Dhaka Metro where the project was piloted, shares, "DMS helped roll out the technological upgradation process with distributors. The national rollout took place in 2005. At first it was difficult to train people to use the handheld device to work with the DMS system, but these devices soon became a social status symbol for the distributors and their field force. They were excited to use the technology."

The move to install DMS to increase the level of automation was a path-breaking initiative for the industry. It included the 'Durbin' project in which UBL introduced Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs). Small screen PDAs equipped with a graphic user interface were used by the Distributor Field Force (DFF) for order collection at the retail outlets. The data was stored in the PDA and then downloaded onto the PCs at the distribution houses. The order data was checked by DMS against inventory data, followed by invoice printing and delivery.

The new system was initially met with resistance. The distributors not only needed to invest their funds, but were also concerned with the possibility of devices getting stolen. The DFF was not really convinced with the technology either. The digitisation eliminated opportunities for stock pilferage and data manipulation by the DFF, and as many as half of the field force in some

“DMS helped roll out the technological upgradation process with distributors. The national rollout took place in 2005. At first it was difficult to train people to use the handheld device to work with the DMS system, but these devices soon became a social status symbol for the distributors and their field force. They were excited to use the technology.”

Asif Bhuiyan

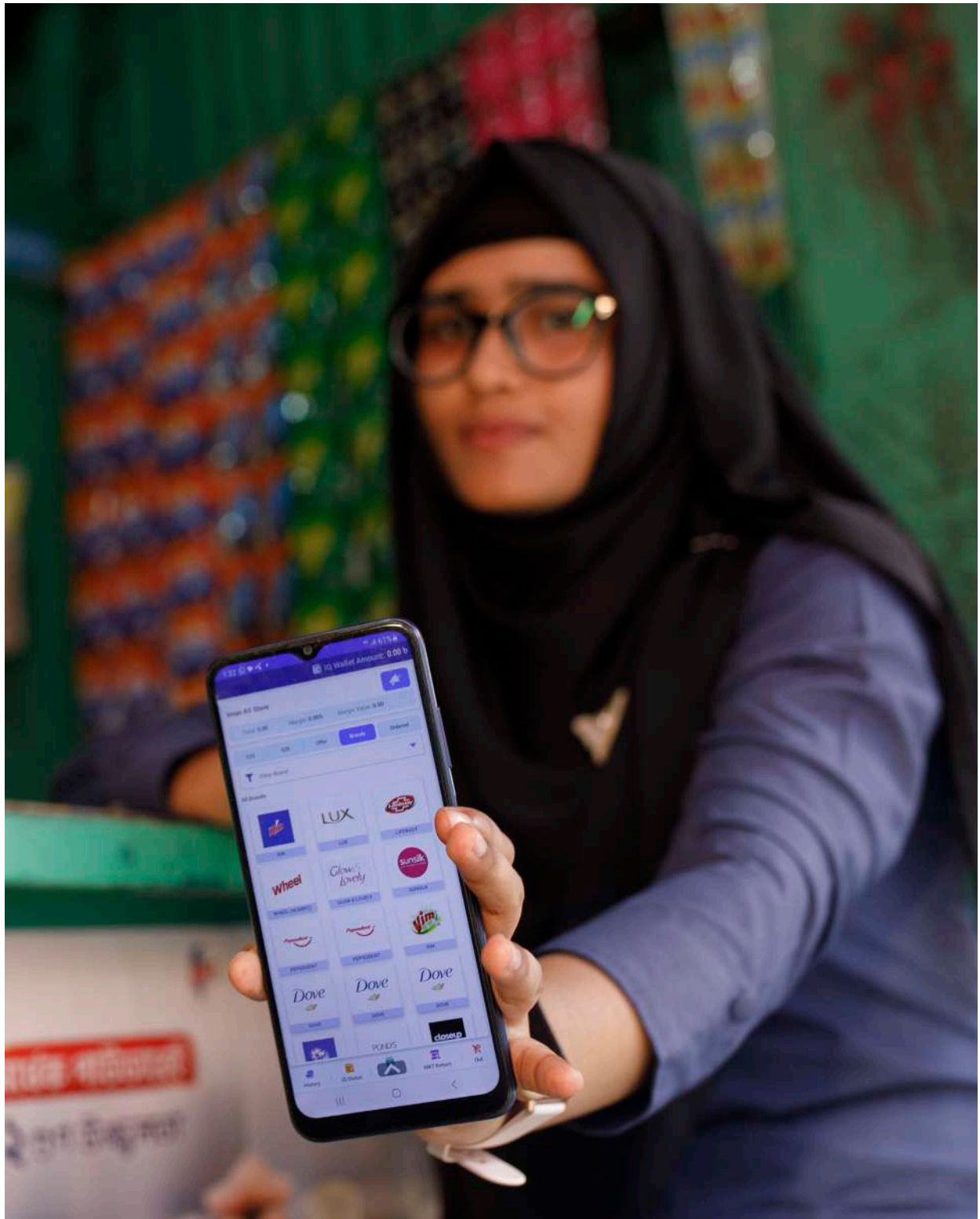
Joined in 2002

houses left because of it. This initially posed a significant problem, but the resulting influx of data allowed for superior performance in tracking and delivery.

With technological updates and advances in the quality of the devices, the system was continuously improving. From 2009–2010, Windows phones were used as the device of choice. However, they had inherent flaws, such as compatibility issues with UBL's own systems and applications. The Samsung Tab 4.0 was a better option with its larger screen and enhanced software capabilities based on the

android platform, and it has been in use since 2014. In July 2015, Bangla memos were introduced, localising the content to adapt to the users.

The final leg of applying DMS effectively came with Continuous Replenishment System (CRS) and Bank Financing in 2008, allowing DMS to automate the entire ordering and delivery process not just for the distributors, but also for the company. In conjunction with CRS, it was able to automatically calculate the indent based on inventory levels and stock norms. There was resistance in this process too. Until then, distributors had full control over what to order,



habitually prioritising preferred items like soaps and detergents over smaller categories. Agreeing to apply CRS would be equivalent to surrendering their independence. When UBL went ahead with it, they faced issues with distributors unwilling to make payments for stocks they had not agreed to order in the first place. The bank financing system served as a tool to mitigate these problems. The idea was to collect the payment from a bank based on the CRS-generated indent, and leave the money handling to the bankers. The problem was that no one wanted to do it. Only BRAC Bank expressed interest, while even they had concerns, as their systems would have to be integrated with that of UBL. It was after much persuasion by the then Finance Director, Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, they agreed to it. The efforts of a creative IT team led to a successful integration. The final hurdle remained at the front end, as the distributors refused to submit the full array of documents needed for opening an account with BRAC Bank. The project lead, Hedayet Ullah shared, "I personally went to each distributor and filled up all the required forms myself after much persuasion. Many of them refused to be of assistance. We started off with a few solvent distributors, before expanding to the rest."

The critical aspect here was the fact that BRAC Bank would make the payments without any collateral from the distributors unprecedented by any standards. It was a massive accomplishment for UBL, as it removed a potential barrier to its implementation.

With its core distributor operations evolving over time before reaching a position of stability, UBL turned its focus towards building firm relationships at the final mile.

Dosti and Perfect Store

UBL has always valued its relationship with its trade partners, who in turn appreciate the connections they have built with UBL's employees over time. Being the market leader in most of its categories, Unilever has always enjoyed a solid relationship with the traders. The talented pool of employees that UBL deploys in the market have played an important role in developing and maintaining these relationships. UBL deployed several initiatives to help build relationships and grow sales. Most notable of which were the 'Dosti' programme, designed for wholesale and the Perfect Store programme, later Top Gun for best retailers.

Wholesale comprised a sizeable chunk of the UBL business. It played an even critical role in the larger distribution piece—helping to indirectly disburse products to remote areas which were difficult to serve on a regular basis, thus allowing consumers of rural Bangladesh to experience UBL brands. Thus, in 2003, UBL launched the 'Dosti' programme. As the name implies, the objective was to help build relationships with wholesale outlets by offering rewards and recognition based on their performance. The launch of the annual Dosti programme was grand, with a large

number of customers being invited to distributor houses for a celebration, where they enjoyed a great feast alongside the requisite information on how the programme would work. Often, they had the opportunity to earn consumer durables as rewards, and the top performers would even enjoy trips abroad. The programme continues even today, playing a role in the market development through indirect distribution. In 2011, Unilever launched the 'Perfect Store' programme for its top retailers. These were typically the biggest outlets of a town aside from wholesale, and they were selected by Unilever because they garnered the highest number of shoppers. The goal was to ensure the visibility and availability of products at these outlets by occupying hotspots in the shelves. Big outlets

would be adorned with Unilever product branding in the form of display banners and point-of-sale merchandising. Unilever had different templates of portfolio and shelf-spacing for different outlet categories, and the retailers were given a choice to choose from the templates. They were then given sales targets to help drive further growth.

While these programmes provided strong sales growth, they also helped to build on the relationship that Unilever enjoyed with traders. It created a loyal customer base, which was crucial for any FMCG company, and it continues to aid Unilever's progress even to this day, with more customised programmes now under way for various channels.

| Dosti Programme Award Ceremony (2005) |



Rural Coverage Expansion: Pallydut and Aparajita

Unilever had a strong presence in stores up to a sub-district level through direct distribution. At this point, UBL decided to move deeper in the market, and tap into the ultra-rural territories of Bangladesh. The company recognised the immense potential in rural markets, home to over 86,000 villages and more than 100 million people. Despite facing significant media challenges, as television reached less than 50% of the population

and literacy rates were below 30%, FMCGs were purchased by 80% of the population. These areas often lacked essential amenities such as paved roads, electricity, gas and water supply.

However, 73% of the national population resided in these rural areas, encompassing almost 40% of the country's middle class and about 50% of the nation's disposable income, contributing to 56% of the UBL business. Despite this, rural populations were frequently underserved, even though brands desired robust distribution and visibility in these regions.

“Rural women frequently face challenges in getting economic freedom and empowerment, which they aspire to achieve. Even with the availability of microfinance, women and their families had difficulty in managing their subsistence. The sheer nature of Unilever’s fast-moving business allowed project Joyeeta to come to their rescue, as the cash would rotate very quickly, with a sizeable profit.”

Aman Ashraf Faiz

Joined in 1993

With the core agenda of capitalising on growth opportunities, Unilever Bangladesh focused on the rural market, which was four times larger than the urban market and predominantly young. This young population represented the future workforce and a sizeable market with the financial capability to consume our brands.

In the early 2000s, the rural market was largely untapped, with distribution heavily centred around wholesale markets. Between 1996 and 2000, efforts were made to gradually cover 25% of all national retail outlets (those selling FMCG products) by expanding the width and depth of our product offerings. Subsequently, Unilever Bangladesh implemented initiatives to reach marginal outlets, ensuring broader and deeper market penetration.

While the wholesale had been playing its part, UBL decided to make a direct intervention to support its activation efforts in rural areas. This led to the initiation of the 'Pallydut' project in 2004, starting with a successful pilot programme before expanding to over 1,300 individuals at its peak.

The Pallydut programme operates with a simple concept—under each distributor a few individuals would take the products to the markets which were either beyond the distributors' logistical reach or which would be financially unviable to service. This was a project for rural youth who barely had a high school degree, and were unable to find employment in

their areas. Unilever helped them to kickstart their business, and turned them into small rural entrepreneurs. The chief virtue of the Pallydut was that they managed to reach the toughest markets, places no distributor had gone before, places no other company could reach. Yet, here again, Unilever was successful. This increased coverage immensely helped to develop the markets too. But just as important as the business dimension was the fact that Unilever was able to provide employment for many rural youth.

Today, it is still an important part of Unilever's business, and remains a major driver of rural availability and growth.

Though Unilever penetrated the rural market through the Pallydut programme since 2004, there was little or no participation of women there. Hence, UBL decided to engage rural women in its operations with the introduction of Project 'Joyeeta'. It helped to empower women by essentially making them the brand promoters of Unilever products. In doing so, these women were able to sell the products in their own areas by going door to door in remote villages. The project started with a small group of only 23 women, then expanded to empower hundreds of women over time, transforming their lives by allowing them to develop their families through education, healthcare, and lifestyle changes.

Project Aparajita was an extension of the Joyeeta initiative through a partnership with Cooperative

for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), and in due time, the project received attention on a global scale. The project received further encouragement and accolades when the Harvard Business Review published an article on it, and it was replicated in several other countries

across South Asia and South-East Asia. It ran for just a decade, but the lives it changed in the process were truly countless. It not only gave economic freedom to women, but also taught them to dream, break barriers, and inspire future generations.

| *Pallydut delivering products to remote rural areas via van (2024)* |





Change Maker: Ali Hossain

Countless stories align with the journey of UBL, especially from rural areas where project Pallydut has managed to change many lives. Upon arriving as a TM in Cox's Bazar, Sabbir Raihan, who later looked after Rural Business Development, encountered Ali Hossain. Here was a man who, with one leg, used to make his way to the distribution point to pick up products to take back to his village. Often, he used to return empty handed, in spite of the long and expensive journey he used to make.

Sabbir gave his word to him, assuring that he will be given priority in service. After spending four years as a Pallydut, Ali went on to fulfil his dreams, becoming an elected official in his local administrative council, while also becoming a proud businessman and the owner of several rubber plantations in his locality. It is truly an inspiring story of resilience, where a person did not allow his special-ability to get in the way of fulfilling his dreams, and Unilever Bangladesh was proud to have helped him along the way.



| Pallydut Ali Hossain (2010s) |

Success Story of a Joyeeta: Firoza

Firoza, a mother of 5 children from Dinajpur's Parbotipur thana, Daglaganj village came to know about Joyeeta project from a staff of Eco-Social Development Organisation (ESDO-a local NGO of Thakurgaon) in the beneficiaries meetings and became interested. The Instructional Assistant (IA) coordinator of Joyeeta project went to her house and described the project objectives and modalities of becoming a Joyeeta, as well as the profit mechanism with

realistic examples. Firoza expressed her willingness to become a Joyeeta, but also shared her challenges to arrange initial capital to start the business. The IA coordinator managed to get a financial loan for Firoza and she enlisted her name as Joyeeta. Firoza received training on the operations and functions and it boosted her confidence at the age of 40. She could independently run the business. Her family was her biggest support and the community also encouraged her to go on. Firoza represents her career as a success as she gained the confidence of changing the socio-economic condition of her family.

| Dyuti with instruction manual at her home outlet (2023) |



Building through Relationships

Creating a positive culture within the organisation revolves around fostering positivity with the Distributors and their Field Force (DFF). There were certain unwritten rules to ensure that DFF morale would remain high throughout the day, such as not reprimanding them at the start of the day when they go out to the market. Even at work, there was joy to be found. Merchandising in a gang was as much a duty as it was a team building exercise, whereby the entire team would go to a location, and set up all sorts of visibility in the outlets. With everyone working together to do their bit, it hardly felt like work.

Sports tournaments were occasionally organised on Fridays, and the distributors would take the full team out for a full day picnic. This practice not only helped maintain a healthy relationship among the DFFs but also helped restore personal relationships, and bridge the distance among team members. The distributors played a major role throughout the process. When the monthly target was achieved at the distribution houses, it sparked celebrations where everyone rejoiced together; even the sales officers who had not achieved their targets joined in. Everyone used to celebrate that day like a family, irrespective of their designations or roles. Asif Chowdhury and Raziq Chowdhury who built the 3P facility to produce detergents, were second generation businessmen who had seen their father and uncle

“A very personal moment close to my heart was when one of my Pallyduts invited me to his sister’s wedding. The Pallydut had fought through a storm to deliver the invitation card, and there was no way I would miss this moment.”

Tafizul Islam Pial

Joined in 2006

| Kedar Lele honouring the first female Distributor of UBL (2020s) |



| A Female Territory Manager conducting a DFF briefing session (2024) |



“This one time a retailer refused to take any products, even after three attempts. The next time he saw me, he was quite upset, and did not even want to look at me. I told him I had not come for an order, but rather I wanted to have lunch with him. He was so surprised that he immediately began scurrying around his store to set his best table out. While he was prepping the food, I browsed through his shelves and made some space, and gently asked if I could have the privilege of putting our latest Lifebuoy variant there. He immediately agreed.”

Enayet Karim

Joined in 1966

run a distributorship for UBL. It was that special relationship with UBL that sparked their interests to begin their own ventures with UBL. Often, the distributors would go out of their way to help their TMs, be it waking up at dawn to work the market with them or using their influence to pull them out of the occasional tough spots with the customers.

But the relationships did not stop at the distribution house. "A very personal moment close to my heart was when one of my Pallyduts invited me to his sister's wedding. He personally requested my presence several times, perhaps he wanted to showcase his connections with big officials to his sister's in-laws, and I was the big official in discussion. After wrapping up my work on Thursday evening, my house manager and I undertook a 4 hour journey by boat at dawn on Friday morning to attend the wedding. The Pallydut had fought through a storm to deliver the invitation card, and there was no way I would

miss this moment", says Tafizul Islam Pial, a newly arrived TM in Barisal in 2004, now leading Sales Operations for UBL.

Another important bridge to build was the trade relationships. It was almost a personal responsibility of the field team members to develop this, often through the occasional adversarial moments. Enayet Kabir shares, "This one time a retailer refused to take any products, even after three attempts. The next time he saw me, he was quite upset, and did not even want to look at me. I told him I had not come for an order, but rather I wanted to have lunch with him. He was so surprised that he immediately began scurrying around his store to set his best table out. While he was prepping the food, I browsed through his shelves and made some space, and gently asked if I could have the privilege of putting our latest Lifebuoy variant there. He immediately agreed".

'৯০ এর
দশকে
অব্যাহত জয়যাত্রা



**The
Winning March
Through The '90 s**

কনফারেন্স	সংগীত
কোম্পানী আর ডিষ্ট্রিবিউটর	আমরা এক পরিবার,
অব্যাহত জয়যাত্রা মোদের	অঙ্গীকার, অঙ্গীকার।
আমরা লিভার পরিবার,	আমরা লিভার।
শহর থেকে গ্রামের পথে	ছড়াবে লিভার সঙ্গার
অঙ্গীকার	এইতো মোদের
অঙ্গীকার	এই দশকের, অঙ্গীকার।
আমরা লিভার পরিবার,	আমরা লিভার।
এক পরিবার, আমরা লিভার	চলছি, চলবে এক সাথে,
অব্যাহত জয়যাত্রা মোদের	অঙ্গীকার
এই দশকের, অঙ্গীকার	আমরা লিভার পরিবার,
আমরা লিভার	আমরা লিভার।



CD's Vision for the Future

CD has evolved significantly over the last few years. One of the biggest changes has taken place in how UBL develops capability. In the past, it was limited to classroom sessions, but now, training sessions have been digitised into focused video modules that DFF can access anytime and anywhere on their tabs. UBL has increased the coverage significantly in recent times, and at the same time, has shifted to a model of optimum size of distributors to ensure more focused service in their respective geography, driven by data in the entire process. The geographic coverage, market servicing capability, investment and profitability were analysed to develop a win-win model for the partners, which shares KSM Minhaj, who served as CD Director for 6 years before becoming the CEO and Managing Director of Unilever Consumer Care Limited (UCL), earlier known as GSK Bangladesh Limited.

The achievements of UBL CD in the context of Bangladesh and the greater Unilever world were immense. The sheer number of outlets served directly and indirectly in such a small country is a feat to be celebrated, and is a shining example for the rest of the world where Unilever operates. Initiatives like retail census remain some of the biggest achievements of Unilever. The automation of CD and the march towards digitisation continues rapidly today, with technology touching virtually every leg of the process.

Technology plays an integral part in everyone's day-to-day lives and the same holds true for the UBL CD team as it strengthens its ability to capture data and apply advanced analytics to perform even better. Historically, the items purchased by an outlet would heavily depend on what the retailer wanted, and what the sales officer could recommend in the few precious minutes they would spend in the outlet. The Hand-Held Terminals (HHT) of today are not only easier and simpler to use, but by analysing sales trends they are able to play a proactive role by suggesting potential items of purchase for each outlet, and thus assist the sales officers perform at a higher level. In the past, outlets would have to wait anywhere between two to seven days before the sales officer would return to their area. Now, through the development of a smartphone app, they can submit their orders directly to the distributor any time they want. At the same time, CD has not forgotten the initiatives that have brought it thus far, with an ever-expanding reach through more distributors and retailers remaining an integral part of the CD operations. Even more customised programmes are under way to develop new and emerging channels.

Ensuring availability and visibility has always been the priority for CD. However, the journey of the product does not end there; this is merely the second step. The third and final step is when it is picked from the shelves by the customers. The story of how Unilever has won the hearts and the minds of its consumers awaits us next.

| *CDMeet (2018)* |



Winning Consumer Hearts through Magic

Story of Unilever Bangladesh's Brand Building Legacy.

Like any other company that deals with consumer goods, connecting the consumers and making them love your product is the key to success. If you ask Bangladeshi consumers to give examples of brands, most will answer with names like LUX, Wheel, Lifebuoy, Sunsilk, Rin, or Horlicks. Even in rural households, you will find women using Vim bars to wash their utensils. Many of Unilever's brands are considered category-defining, meaning that consumers often do not know the names of the product categories and simply refer to the brand as the product itself. Despite this, they have a strong affinity for these products, which contributes to Unilever's success. That is why Unilever is often recognised as a pioneer in unlocking value through brand building in Bangladesh.

The expansive story of a soap-making company transforming into a house of brands is not just about launching successful campaigns and winning hearts. It is a roller coaster ride of navigating challenges and competition,

innovating to solve consumer problems, and continuously identifying the right consumer needs to transform them into product demand. Unilever brands have consistently led the way by embracing consumer insights and delivering meaningful offerings with purpose. This journey

reflects the inspiring evolution from traditional shop posters to vibrant, immersive digital platforms and beyond. This journey also highlights the creativity, passion, and hard work that form the cornerstone of every successful Unilever brand.

| *Unilever branded monument at Kawran Bazar, one of the busiest intersections in Dhaka (2010s)* |



আ মা দে র মে য়ে র বি য়ে তে ...



... খাবার লোক হয়েছিল অনেক !

সত্যি বলতে কি খরচটা আমাদের

ভাবিয়ে তুলেছিল—যদি ডাল্‌ডা বনস্পতি আমাদের না

বাঁচাতো। ডাল্‌ডা রান্না খরচও কম পড়ে—

খাবার খেতেও হয় চমৎকার! আর ডাল্‌ডা

বায়ু-রোধক শীল-করা টিনে বিক্রী করা

হয় বলে, তা যে সর্বদা বিশুদ্ধ ও

স্বাস্থ্যকর পাওয়া যায় সে বিষয়ে

আপনি নিশ্চিত থাকতে পারেন। প্রতি-

দিনের রান্নাতেই হোক বা বড় রকম

ভোজের ব্যাপারেই বলুন, সর্বদা

ডাল্‌ডা ব্যবহার করবেন।



বিষয় ভোজের উপযোগী হিষ্টায়
তৈরী সদায়ে বিনামূল্যে উপদেশের
অঙ্গ লিখুন:

দি ডাল্‌ডা

এ্যাডভাইসারি সার্ভিস

ইণ্ডিয়া হাউস (বি. পি. ও'র সামনে)

বোম্বাই ১

ডাল্‌ডা বনস্পতি

রান্নাতে ভালো—খরচ কম

১/২, ১, ২, ৫ ও ১০ পাউণ্ড টিনে ভারতের সর্বত্র পাওয়া যায়।

Rooted Legacy

When the first crates of Lifebuoy soap arrived in Kolkata, the region was already lagging behind economically due to its failure to adapt to the Industrial Revolution. For many, even the simple act of using soap was a luxury, because most relied on cottage-made alternatives. Meanwhile, factory-made, perfumed soaps were cherished for special occasions like religious festivals and weddings. This is how iconic soaps such as Lifebuoy, LUX, and Pears began to find their way into Bangladeshi households in the 1930s and 1940s. LUX, in particular, captivated hearts with its divine fragrance, glamorous image, and

attractive packaging, inspiring a sense of elegance and celebration in everyday life.

“Along with my wedding saree, I also received a LUX soap from my in-laws as a gift. I still remember the fragrance.”—mentioned Ms. Hazera Khatun, a consumer from Bogura.

However, Dalda, a key Unilever brand, was more recognised among the masses. Dalda was a cost-effective alternative to ghee (traditional premium clarified butter, which is integral to Bangladeshi or South-Asian cuisine). Though LUX and Dalda had more recognition, the first Unilever (the then Lever Brothers) product that reached and won mass consumer hearts was Lifebuoy.

“We grew up seeing LUX and Lifebuoy as part of family celebrations. Without LUX, any celebration like Eid or weddings was unthinkable.”

Faridur Reza Sagor

Managing Director, Channel I



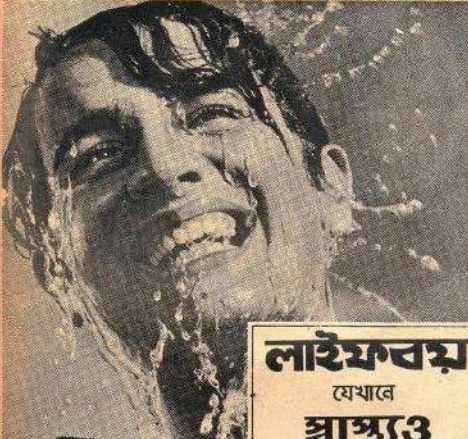
**KEEPING Beauty
IN THE FAMILY**

"She was just as beautiful as her picture," says Mother, "and her skin was as soft as satin, much more beautiful than any portrait can show." Mother wants to see that same beauty, that was her Mother's, kept through the years by her daughter as by herself and has wisely passed on the family secret of beauty-care—Pears Soap and clear water. This lesson will keep that pictured beauty alive, as generation learns from generation.

Pears Soap has been the choice of the great ladies—the great beauties—of India for over forty years. Its natural fragrance and silky lather place it apart from ordinary soaps.



Pears Soap
IN THE SERVICE OF BEAUTY



লাইফবয়
যেখানে
স্বাস্থ্যও
সেখানে

LIFEBUOY
for health

লাইফবয় সাবান যেখান যেন পড়ল অংশনি
শবে উইয়েন অংশ নিশ্বাস, গোধ নরনর...
এন স্বস্থ সন্তোষ অমুভূতি। হৃদ্য কীভাবে
জগত লাইফবয়। যেন গাধবন...

লাইফবয়
মুলোময়লার স্লোগানবীজমর্
ধূয়ে দেয়

০৫৫১৮-৭৬১০ ৪৫

লিভারের সাবানের মূল্য

কাঁচা মালের বর্তমান মূল্যবৃদ্ধির দরুণ হিন্দুস্তান লিভার
লিমিটেড, তাঁদের অনিচ্ছাসত্ত্বেও নিম্নোক্ত সাবানগুলির
খুচরা দাম বৃদ্ধি করতে বাধ্য হয়েছেন।

	পুরাতন দাম টা.আ.পা.	নতুন দাম টা. আ. পা.
সানলাইট	০-৫-৩	০-৫-৬
লাইফবয়	০-৫-৯	০-৬-০
লাক্স টয়লেট সাধারণ সাইজ	০-৬-৩	০-৬-৬
লাক্স টয়লেট বড় সাইজ	০-৯-০	০-৯-৩
লাক্স ফ্লেকস্ মধ্যম সাইজ	০-১১-৬	০-১২-০
জাইল্ বার	১-২-৬	১-৩-০

সানলাইট এবং লাইফবয়ের ছোট সাইজের দাম
ও আনা থেকে বেড়ে ৩ আনা ৩ পাই হয়েছে।

যে সব সাইজ অথবা সাবানের কথা এখানে উল্লেখ করা হয়নি সেগুলির
দাম অপরিবর্তিত থাকবে।

যে সব দামের কথা এখানে উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে,
সেগুলি নগর শুদ্ধ এবং অক্লান্ত স্থানীয় করা বজ্জিত।

Saving Lives with the Humble Soap

When KGF started its trial production, LUX and Lifebuoy saw the highest volume for the first year. This inspired the company to focus with Lifebuoy as there was a stronger need for hygiene soap in the country. Lifebuoy was an affordable soap to fight preventable diseases, mainly diarrhoea, which was a major cause of death during 1960s and 1970s. Lifebuoy, due to its hygiene heritage, was perfectly fit and that is why the company associated the soap with protection and good health.

The company also took bold moves. For the launch of the soap, the company sampled the soap using helicopter.

Unilever effectively promoted Lifebuoy through targeted communication strategies. In rural areas, where soap and handwashing were essential, the company distributed Lifebuoy using helicopters during floods and natural disasters, offering leaflets with instructions on proper use. This innovative approach raised awareness and made Lifebuoy a standard item in emergency relief packs.

Lifebuoy's unique marketing strategy helped build its long-term brand value. It was the first brand in Bangladesh to use a tagline, introducing the well-known slogan, 'Lifebuoy jekhane shastho

shekhane' (Health is where Lifebuoy is) as early as 1967. This quickly made Lifebuoy a household name with strong demand nationwide.

Lifebuoy also linked hygiene to an active lifestyle by using sports figures to promote behaviour change. In the 1970s, it made Salauddin, the legendary captain of the Bangladesh football team, its Brand Ambassador, followed by other sports stars like Monem Munna and Shakib Al Hasan.

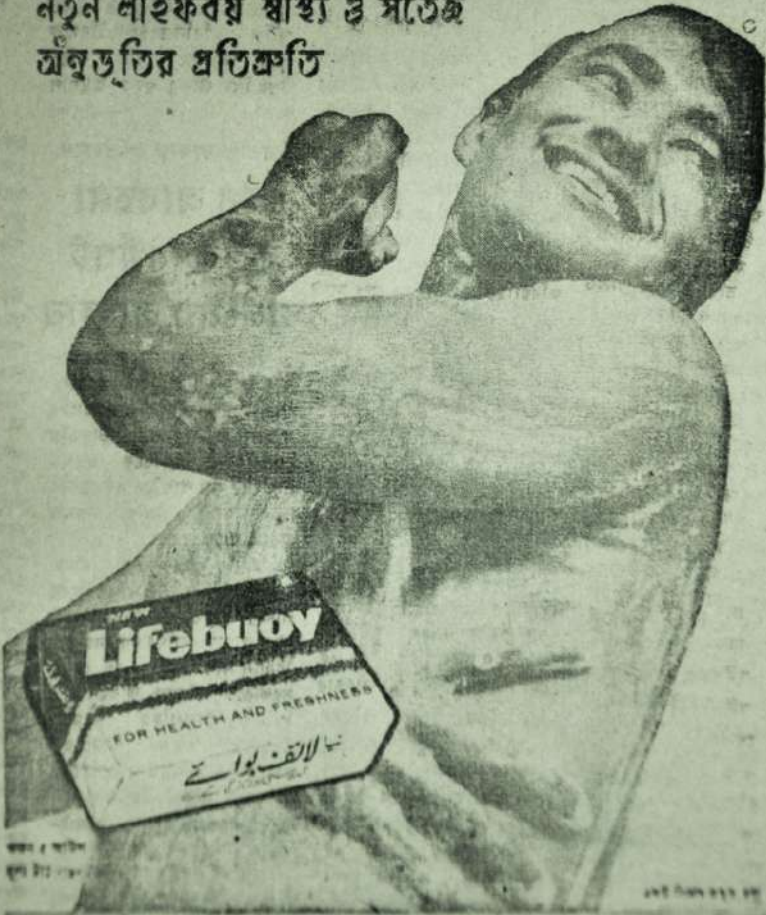
| Lifebuoy's wrapper change due to ink shortage Print Advertisement (1972) |



নতুন লাইফবয় দিয়ে গোসল করুন এবং স্বাস্থ্য ভালো রাখুন

নতুন যুগের নতুন লাইফবয় সবারই পছন্দ। আর পছন্দ হাবই তা না কেন ?
যেমন এটা নতুন ডিজাইনের মারাম মোড়ক তেমনি এটা নতুন মন ডোলালা গড়ন।
আর তাছাড়া এটা ওলাবলী আপনর মতই অকুর রাখা।
নতুন লাইফবয়ের প্রচুর ফেলা সব ময়লা ওরু বীজাশু
মুয়ে মুয়ে লিয়া আপনাক এক অরুগে সতেজ অরুভুতি
দিয়ে যায়। সঠি, স্বাস্থ্য ও সতেজ অরুভুতি কান।
নতুন লাইফবয় দিয়া গোসল অতুলনীয়।

নতুন লাইফবয় স্বাস্থ্য ও সতেজ অরুভুতির প্রতিশ্রুতি



নতুন লাইফবয়
LIFEBOUY
FOR HEALTH AND FRESHNESS
سوالاقت بولاست
LIFEBOUY SOAP
MADE IN INDIA

Soon, consumers started to associate Lifebuoy with life-saving soap. The demand surged quickly, and it rapidly became a necessity. As Lifebuoy experienced steady growth, the company recognised a vast, underserved market

brimming with potential. Seeing this opportunity, they boldly ventured into new territory, creating a differentiated product and entering the laundry category with Wheel, offering a solution for everyday laundry needs.

“To attract attention, helicopter was used to sample Lifebuoy soap. Soaps with usage instructions and benefit communications used to be dropped. This got the attention of the people and also generated talkability.”

Farid Uddin Ahmed

Joined in 1964

Crafting the Laundry Market

Before the advent of laundry bars and washing powders, the laundry market thrived on the ingenuity of homemade 'ball soaps.' For nearly fifty years, UBL has pioneered the revolutionisation of laundry soap and detergent, transforming how people approach their laundry. The journey began with Wheel, launched in 1972

as the first laundry soap brand in a market dominated by cottage soaps. It quickly became popular for its ability to care for fabrics and hands. The brand name became a symbol of trust and quality, synonymous with UBL.

As the first packaged laundry soap in Bangladesh, Wheel has experienced tremendous growth since its launch. Many long-time users speak of it passionately, saying, "We had such confidence in the brand that even if the company

| *Wheel Print Advertisement starring actor Riaz (2000s)* |



decided to sell exclusively from its front door, every retailer in the country would come rushing to buy it—such was its popularity."

Due to the high demand for the soap, the main challenge was counterfeiting. The company opted for cost-effective yet difficult-to-replicate packaging. However, such a technical solution was not readily available.

"Wheel was a big hit. We thought if we could package the product, it would be less likely and more difficult for counterfeiters to copy it. However, it was not possible to pack them

individually. I visited England, Brazil, and India to find a solution. After much research, a Japanese company finally managed to give us a solution, and we began packing six tablets together.", said Mr Serajul Haque, a veteran of the Supply Chain team who retired as Chief Engineer of the company.

The iconic six-tablet pack gave Wheel a massive advantage and soon the company had a very strong dominance over both toilet and laundry soap market. This gave the company confidence to venture into the more value added, beauty soap segment.

“Once a batch of Wheel had a production issue. It was darker compared to the standard colour. We were thinking of scrapping the entire batch and informed the Sales Manager about the production issue. He simply said that the Wheel stamp was good enough to sell.”

Serajul Haque

Joined in 1964

| LUX Celebrities through the years (1980s to 2020s) |



The Soap of Stars, for every Star

The word 'LUX' means light in Latin. But for the brand, it was taken from the word luxury and stuck to its aptitude for naming. LUX embodies a remarkable legacy as the quintessential choice for special occasions and aspirational beauty since its introduction in the Indian Subcontinent in the 1930s. The evolution of LUX from a British luxury soap brand into a beloved local beauty icon is genuinely inspiring. This image was further elevated by associating with renowned regional celebrities as Brand Ambassadors since 1941. Starting with the pioneering ambassador, Leela Chitnis, LUX connected with the deep-seated desire of many to attain the beauty of film stars. Iconic regional film stars such as Nargis, Suraiya, Meena Kumari, Saira Banu, Sharmila Tagore, Rekha, Zeenat Aman, Rozina, and Shabnam have all played a pivotal role in crafting the brand's glamorous essence.

As a popular brand, UBL started manufacturing LUX in Bangladesh in 1964. It was manufactured as the standard variant and performed moderately. After the first wave of liberalisation in the Bangladeshi economy during the late 1970s, there was a surge in economic activities and a shift in consumer demand. That is why the introduction of the International LUX in 1979 is regarded as a significant milestone for the brand in the country. This innovation offered consumers a high-quality product with either a pink or a white variant. Initially, this product did not receive as much appreciation as the other variant, which consumers preferred, despite the International LUX's superior quality.

To elevate International LUX, the company embraced the rising media landscape in Bangladesh—television. With Bangladesh Television (BTV) launching colour transmissions in 1980, Unilever boldly selected Bangladeshi actress Farhana Amin Nuton as their inaugural local Ambassador, paving the way for a new era

“I was really excited, and I did my makeup myself. The shooting took place in the garden, on the lawn, and in a room. This was a unique and special memory for me.”

Farhana Amin Nuton

Actress and LUX Brand Ambassador



“বিশুদ্ধ স্নিগ্ধ, লাক্স আমাদের
দক-সৌন্দর্যের সম্মেহ
যন্ত্র নেয়” —*নামসিদ্ধি*

বিশুদ্ধ, স্নিগ্ধ লাক্স। সুরভিত লাক্স। লাক্স যা আপনার ত্বককে
মসৃণ ও মৌল্যায়িত রাখে। লাক্সের ছাপের মত সাদা। ফেঁটা
আপনার ত্বকের সার্বভূমি নিয়ে। তাতে নিয়ে আসে এক উজ্জল
সৌন্দর্য। সুরভিত লাক্স দায়িত্ব প্রতিদিন আপনার সৌন্দর্য পরিচর্যা
করুন।



লাক্স—চিহ্নভারতবর্ষের সৌন্দর্য সাগর



উপর তির প্রতিমার
“নিদ্রায়ে মহাশয়”
শুশ্রূষা ভারত

শুশ্রূষা দেবী বলেন “লাক্স টয়লেট
সাবানের সুরভি এই বিশুদ্ধতার পরিচয় দেয়।”

শুশ্রূষা দেবী হুঁসিয়ার বেশন কিন্তু অর্ধশিশু-আয়োজনের কর্তৃক
“সুন্দরী” লিখিত হয়েছেন। এই ওয়ে “লাক্স”
নিদ্রায়ে এমন। কিন্তু তবুও শুশ্রূষা দেবী, ওয়ে “লাক্স” হুঁসিয়ার
সৌন্দর্য, মাংস, যার জেতে তিনি “লাক্স” চিহ্নের সৌন্দর্যের নখে
লাক্সের কর্তব্য করেন।

এই লাক্স শুশ্রূষা দেবীর নখে সবে বসে।
বিশুদ্ধ এবং শুশ্রূষা টয়লেট সাবানের মাধ্যমে হুঁসিয়ার হুঁসিয়ার।
এই বিশুদ্ধ, শুশ্রূষা টয়লেট সাবানের সবে মত সৌন্দর্যের এবং
শুশ্রূষা দেবীর মাধ্যমে “লাক্স” হুঁসিয়ার হুঁসিয়ার।



লাক্স টয়লেট সাবান
চিহ্ন ভারতবর্ষের সৌন্দর্য সাগর।

সুগন্ধিনী সৌন্দর্যের ভাষে—
বড় দায়িত্ব কিনে দায়িত্ব।

LTS-128-X02 B0

TELL US - LEELA CHITNIS—
WHAT IS YOUR BEAUTY SECRET ?



“MY BEAUTY SECRET IS A VERY SIMPLE
ONE. I RELY ON THE GENTLE CLEANSING
OF LOVELY LUX TOILET SOAP. THIS MILD
SOAP KEEPS MY SKIN BEAUTIFULLY
SOFT AND SMOOTH, AND ITS PERFUME
IS SO REFRESHING AND ATTRACTIVE.”



LUX TOILET SOAP
THE BEAUTY SOAP OF THE FILM STARS

Give your skin the regular gentle
care of Lux Toilet Soap. Every
day, bathe your hands, your face
in its rich, active lather and soon
your skin will be soft, smooth,
attractive.

LTS-128-X02 B0

of connection and inspiration. This was the first television commercial for LUX produced in Bangladesh. The commercial's advertising agency was Asiatic, directed by Aly Zaker and Asaduzzaman Noor. The filming took place at the Sheraton Hotel, now known as InterContinental Dhaka.

The television commercial was a significant success. LUX introduced the concept of celebrity endorsement, transporting consumers to a world of fantasy and illuminating black-and-white TV screens with glamour. This also had a socio-economic impact. At that time, most bathing occurred in ponds or rivers, and women often had to bathe after sundown to ensure more privacy. After a long day of work, using LUX became their form of entertainment and self-pampering. Women preferred LUX for its long-lasting, soothing fragrance and insisted it be included in their shopping lists. For them, this soap was more than just a personal care product; it symbolised empowerment and the right to indulge in self-care.

Entire generations of Bangladeshis grew up watching LUX advertisements featuring the most popular female celebrities of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Celebrities such as Suborna Mustafa, Gulshan Ara Akter Champa, Shakila Zafar, Shamim Ara Nipa, Moushumi, Afsana Mimi, Sadia Islam Mou, Bipasha Hayat, Shomi Kaiser and Aupee Karim have all represented the brand over the years. The roles played by these leading

ladies enabled LUX to be viewed as an aspirational brand and a soap for the stars, which inspired millions of women to feel irresistible and confident in their own skin every day.

The second LUX TV commercial (TVC) featured Doyel and focused on a change in packaging. This ad was shot in Nepal, which was quite unimaginable for many at the time and captured the country's imagination. The concept of 'Soap of the Stars' was further enhanced by Ms. Suborna Mustafa and Ms. Gulshan Ara.

When International LUX was relaunched in 1988, a survey was conducted to assess consumer preferences for the new perfume. The majority of participants preferred strong fragrances, leading to the decision to use a strong-scented formula for the pink variant of the product. This became a widespread success, and various fragrances became synonymous with LUX and its many variants. The world's top perfume experts worked to elevate the brand to its current status. In the early 1990s, LUX decided to leverage the fame of singer Shakila Zafar and dancer Shamim Ara Nipa to give the brand a more sophisticated image. However, the 'Soap of the Stars' concept remained present in 1992 when Shakila endorsed the brand.

Subsequently, LUX introduced the first-ever consumer categorisation by advising customers to choose soap based on their skin type. This approach continued with endorsements from

Moushumi, Afsana Mimi, and Mou. During this period, LUX began featuring proper bathing scenes with celebrities instead of just facial cleansing shots, which was a bold move considering the conservative nature of Bangladeshi society. As a result, LUX paved the way by offering consumers multiple variants of

soap, each distinguished by a specific combination of colour, fragrance, and ingredients tailored to different skin types or moods. By the 1990s, LUX had become the country's most popular and aspirational brand, and people began referring to Unilever as the 'LUX Company.'

| LUX Print Advertisement featuring actress Olivia Gomez (1970s) |



| LUX Print Advertisement featuring actress Farhana Amin Nuton (1980s) |



A Turnaround Story

As the 1990s approached, UBL became increasingly dependent on its brand, LUX, for business success. At this time, LUX emerged as the company's key cash cow and driving force. However, this reliance led to a culture of complacency, with years passing without any changes or innovations. There were no updates to LUX's product, designs, formulations, or production processes. LUX was the best product on the market and far ahead of its competitors, which caused the company to become overly reliant on this single brand.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, a new local brand called Aromatic entered the market with a campaign claiming it was the only "halal" soap in the country, implying that other brands were not. This controversy arose from the perception that other soap makers used pig fat as a raw material. Aromatic quickly captured consumer interest and proved to be a strong competitor. Consumer research indicated that Aromatic excelled in various attributes, boasting an excellent fragrance, an attractive wrapper, and a pleasing shape. Furthermore, the Aromatic soap tablet weighed 10 grams more than LUX while being priced similarly, offering better value to consumers. The advertising prominently highlighted the 'halal' aspect, which resonated with a market of consumers who are religious and sensitive to matters of faith.

As the market leader, LUX took a significant hit. Within a year, its market share plummeted drastically, sending the company on a challenging roller coaster ride. Coupled with labour unrest during this period, the company faced the risk of a steep decline. For the first time in decades, Unilever Bangladesh experienced a fall in growth and ended up posting a loss. The company had to take out bank loans to cover wages and salaries, leaving business partners anxious about its ability to survive the ordeal.

In evaluating a counter-strategy, it was agreed, in line with Unilever's principles, that UBL would not capitalise on religious sentiments. Part of the initial strategy involved launching a new brand, "Breeze," which had a strong floral perfume priced lower to recapture the bottom of the market and halt the decline. Although the brand was launched at breakneck speed, an intervention from the regional head, Jeff Razor, during his visit brought the focus back to reestablishing LUX as the premier soap brand it once was. According to company lore, the Breeze brand was launched shortly before Mr. Razor's visit, and those leaving the board room were bombarded with questions about the situation. Within an hour of the start of the presentations, Breeze had officially been discontinued, with all the products handed out for free to employees. The guidance was clear: LUX is the core brand, so fix it first—introducing a new brand would not resolve the underlying issues.

UBL quickly initiated a massive project to revive LUX, primarily focusing on providing the high-quality product that consumers expected. The first step was updating the manufacturing process by replacing some of the old equipment, which dated back to 1964, with modern machinery that allowed for higher levels of automation and consistency in quality, which took some time. Additionally, efforts began to better understand consumer needs, translating into a revamped marketing mix featuring attractive bar shapes, new colours, enticing fragrances, modernised packaging designs, and improved formulations.

However, these changes only raised the floor, not the ceiling. The next step was to make more

significant improvements to the product. The strategic decision was not to invoke religious sentiments to regain market traction for LUX. This decision sparked heated debate but ultimately aligned with Unilever's overall philosophy. Traditionally, the soap wrappers featured three city names—New York, London, and Paris—to showcase the brand's international heritage. Cairo was added to the wrapper to highlight the product's acceptance in the Muslim world. The company invested heavily in media to promote this change. It even produced a short film highlighting LUX's popularity in other Muslim-majority countries.

In a bold initiative soon after the crisis struck, the team brought samples of LUX from several

| LUX Boldly Beautiful campaign celebrating the Superstars (2020s) |



“We have not made any technological upgrades in our production process for years. We had the same manual perfume dosage process. Sometimes, our shop-floor employees would say they had forgotten to add perfume to a specific batch. Yet, it passed quality inspection due to the previous residue of perfume. The process was the same as in 1964, not fitting the requirements of the changing times.”

Mashiud-Duza

Joined in 1995

countries with Muslim-majority populations to the Bishwa Ijtema—the most significant Islamic congregation in Bangladesh and the second largest in the world. They set up a makeshift stall at the gathering to display these samples, aiming to counter the accusations that LUX soaps were haram. Additionally, sales officers were trained and educated on the production processes and materials used in making the soap, enabling them to effectively convince retailers. These initiatives were somewhat successful in regaining consumer trust. Yet, the recovery was only complete after the complete overhaul of the brand, from product to promotion. Over the next

four years, Unilever Bangladesh launched and relaunched LUX several times, bringing out new variants, colours, sizes, fragrances, and communications every time. The overarching objective was to deliver a product to win back consumer confidence. There was considerable pressure to go with a two-tier strategy by introducing a more premium version of LUX. However, the relevant team fought to maintain only one brand, aware that the move could backfire by causing confusion among consumers and worsening the situation. They stuck with the heritage brand and instead developed a new formulation locally while changing the packaging.

New advertisements were made to promote these improved versions, combining the best faces of the industry in Shomi Kaiser and Bipasha Hayat. While the core Marketing and Research & Development team was behind the steering wheel on this one, the entire company rallied and united like never before, determined to overcome the crisis together. This experience had a profound impact on the culture of the organisation.

Eventually, LUX would begin to revive and live up to its vintage image, returning right on top after spending 4 years in the dark – a remarkable turnaround story.

The incident highlighted the risks of complacency and the need for diversity in UBL's portfolio. It catalysed the rapid expansion that led to the broad portfolio we see today.

| LUX Print Advertisement starring Suborna Mustafa and Sadia Islam Mou (1980s and 1990s) |



| Finalist participants of LUX Superstar (1997) |



| Actress Shomi Kaiser visiting consumer homes as part of a LUX Activation (1997) |



Expanding the Laundry Horizon

Since its inception in 1972, Wheel has been the undisputed market leader in the Laundry category, and it used to grow organically. Consumers used to love the smell and superior washing ability. Many rural households even used it for bathing. In general, the laundry business was stable. However, the brand had its fair share of challenges. When, in the early 2000s, the Wheel laundry soap was moved to individual packs, a unique problem quickly started surfacing. The soap was experiencing a breakdown after the slightest use. An audit found that after production, laundry soaps needed an extended period to cool down, during which they released moisture from within. However, when it was packaged, there was no room for the internal moisture of the soap to be released, thus resulting in a much softer and mushier soap which would dissolve and break down quickly. To solve the issue, they had workers in the assembly line who would pick a hole into the package with a pin. The backlash from this was so intense that a new commercial was released to address the fact that they had resolved the issue.

Wheel was the dominant leader in the laundry soap market; however, Bangladesh experienced significant economic and social changes in the 1990s due to increased economic liberalisation. With greater access to international media, such

as cable TV, people became more aware of alternative laundry products like detergent. In a small detergent market in urban centres, Unilever launched its premium detergent, Surf excel, in 1993, establishing it as the gold standard for washing powders. Surf excel was well-loved by consumers for its effectiveness in removing tough stains while being gentle on fabrics, leading the market in the premium segment. However, Unilever recognised that the mass market, primarily dominated by bar soap, was on the brink of transformation. Additionally, market research indicated that a strong Indian detergent brand, Nirma, was planning to enter the Bangladeshi market. In anticipation of this potential threat from Nirma's detergent powder, Wheel expanded into the detergent powder segment.

The launch of Wheel Washing Powder (WWP) represented a significant milestone as a new product and in communicating the launch. An innovative advertising approach was employed, utilising wall paintings to promote the brand with the aim of 'Painting Bangladesh Green' in Wheel's colours. Additionally, Wheel was among the first brands to conduct activation campaigns in high-traffic areas and extensively sampling the washing powder along the Dhaka-Chattogram highway to enhance the launch's impact.

Initially, when the Wheel Washing Powder was launched, it faced a unique problem. By the time the product reached the market, the branding on the pack would deteriorate to the extent that it

“The plan was to paint the country green – the trademark color of Wheel. Thus, the culture of wall-painting for product marketing began in Bangladesh. Initially it was free of cost. All one had to do was to convince the property owner to let them maintain it and clean it in return for using it to market their products. It was a good trade-off.”

Khalid Alvi
Joined in 1997

| *Wheel Print Advertisement (1990s)* |



would be unrecognisable. Chemicals in the washing powder would react with the particular shade of colour and ink being used. Even then, the virtually faceless pack continued to sell like hotcakes—the colour and fragrance of the product inside were unmistakably Wheel!

Within a couple of years, Wheel had successfully established the detergent powder market, and it was around this time that Aromatic tried to ambush Unilever again. Aromatic was planning to launch its own detergent, and learning from the LUX debacle, the company was alarmed. The two packaging of the two brands were clearly different because Wheel had a two-colour toned packet. In contrast, Aromatic had a very vibrant colour palette. The company had learned its lesson with LUX, though. When it tried to make new four-toned designs, they hit another glitch. The designs that the agency proposed were not coming out on the packets: apparently, the printer was trying to save some production cost by not using white colour. It did not execute the design as it was supposed to be. They were sent to the packaging factory and instructed not to return until they had fixed the problem.

This time, Unilever wanted to create something vibrant and bold on TV as well. The first thematic advertisement for Wheel was based on Wheel's connection with Bangladesh and our culture, as the competitor was trying to pitch itself as a local brand. The campaign tagline was decided to be 'Amar Desh, Amar Wheel' (My country, my Wheel).

Khaled Alvee, the then Brand Manager, was very precise about the jingle as well, and his instruction to the musician was simple: bring me a jingle that will bring tears to my eyes and give me goosebumps. At the time, it was the most expensive TVC ever made, with a cinematography team and gear coming from England. Through the 'Amar Desh, Amar Wheel' TVC campaign in 2002, the true spirit of Wheel was upheld: customer-oriented and patriotic. Though the brand had initially lost some shares to Aromatic, it eventually managed to win back the shares. It cemented its stature as the market leader.

| Rin Pobela Boishakh Communication (2010s) |



For the next five years, UBL expanded its laundry business with Wheel in the economy segment and Surf excel in the premium segment. By 2008, the powder market had tripled. UBL was comfortable in this category but was now faced with another challenger in Tide washing powder from P&G. Beginning in 2009, it specifically targeted the middle-income class – a growing segment in Bangladesh that was growing and perfectly sandwiched between Wheel and Surf. To counter this, Wheel Power White (WPW), a premium version of Wheel with added whiteness, a feature desired by this segment, was launched and promoted. This premium product gained consumer traction, and soon Tide folded off the game.

However, internal challenges arose in managing the two distinct propositions under the Wheel brand. As Tide was off, WPW was gradually deprioritised, hovering around the 100 tonne per month mark for ages. That is when it underwent a unique change. It was rebranded as Rin.

A little-known fact about Rin is that it was first launched in Bangladesh as a Non-soap Detergent (NSD) bar in 1986. The NSD Bar plant was built in KGF to help diversify the portfolio from its existing toilet & laundry soap base. Consumer research suggested that the market was ready for the product and willing to pay a 50% premium over regular laundry soap. For once, though, UBL was too far ahead of time. Consumers did not see the value of the new Rin

NSD Bar, nor was the company successful in teaching them how to use and preserve it. Within 5 years, the product was delisted, and the plant shut down. After almost 20 years, UBL felt that Rin has the potential to carry the rebranding of Wheel Power White.

The new name retained "Power White" to facilitate the brand transition, and an aggressive media campaign was planned. However, a key strategy that contributed to the brand's success was the pack-in-pack promotion, where consumers would open a pack of WPW only to discover a second Rin Power White (RPW) inside.

Along with the branding, the price was drastically reduced from BDT 200 to BDT 100. Launched on April 1, 2012 with an ambition of 1000 tonnes, the entire volume was sold out in less than 15 days. Rin was on its way to becoming the perfect mid-tier laundry brand the company sought. Rin achieved significant success as UBL heavily invested in the brand. Over the next five years, 'whiteness' emerged as the top consumer need, moving from the sixth position on the list. This shift was part of a more significant transformation in the market, which transitioned from a mass to a mid-tier focus, primarily driven by Rin Power White's (RPW) success.

"Project Half was one of those initiatives we occasionally undertake to rationalise operations and improve efficiency. It was launched around the same time we were facing challenges with

Tide. Wheel Power White was struggling, and I was asked to delist the brand since it was small and relatively easy to eliminate. However, I fought for it and secured an additional week from the Chairman to assess our options. We thoroughly analysed the brand, eliminated unnecessary features, and reduced prices. We broke several industry norms by lowering the price and relaunching it under a new brand name, defying convention at every turn. This bold approach paid off; we successfully turned the brand around within six months. Today, Rin Power White is our largest brand and has reshaped the laundry market. Previously, the market was structured like a pyramid, with most of the volume at the bottom. Now, it resembles a diamond, with a significant volume concentrated in the middle. We have Rin Power White to thank for this transformation," says Nafees Anwar, the category head for Laundry at the time.

The final stage of developing the laundry market involved activating Surf excel, the gold standard of washing powders. Surf excel has consistently improved its performance with its 'Dirt is Good' campaign. Activation was crucial, particularly with the Surf excel Protibhar Lorai initiative. Teams organised mud ponds where children could race, hunt for treasures, and engage in

creative games—learning and playing while getting dirty, all in good fun, knowing that Surf would clean the stains. Initially launched at a large stadium in Dhaka for its first season, the event expanded to various parts of Dhaka city and nearby districts, eventually becoming a national event nationwide. Surf excel never focused on the technical aspects of its cleaning capabilities; instead, its message was simple: let children be themselves, enjoy their activities, and not worry about getting dirty. Surf excel would take care of that.

The next stage of UBL's journey in the laundry market is already underway. To meet the more demanding needs of today's consumers, UBL has introduced liquid detergents and fabric softeners to the portfolio. With these new products added to the category, UBL's laundry category is becoming increasingly future-ready, moving toward another industry revolution and providing greater convenience to help ease the often tedious task of Laundry.

However, UBL's success in the laundry category gave the company enough confidence and capability to take bolder, aggressive market development initiatives to create and popularise new categories.



Revolutionising Hair Care

Taking care of hair is an integral part of beauty regimens for Bangladeshi consumers. Their aspirations are diverse, including desires for dark, voluminous, bouncy, healthy, manageable, frizz- and dandruff-free hair. With its diverse portfolio of hair care brands and bold market development initiatives, UBL has made these aspirations achievable for consumers across all socioeconomic classes, from affluent urbanites to those in rural and economically limited areas.

However, the scenario was quite different even in the 1980s when Unilever launched Sunsilk shampoo as their first-ever Personal Product (PP). Initially, Sunsilk was launched as a pilot without much aspiration. Consumers used to wash their hair with soap; the first task was to make them aware of the superior product format. However, the game changer for the category was popularising sachets or minipacks. Since their launch in the 1980s, Sunsilk sachets have existed

at various price points. Still, they have not managed to lower consumer barriers to entering a new category. In the late 1990s, realising the size of untapped potential, UBL brought down its Sunsilk sachets to the accessible price point of BDT 2 under the auspices of Project Wildfire. The brand was growing yet not encashing the market's potential. However, after the commissioning of the new PP plant, UBL focused on expanding its personal product portfolio. An ambitious target was set: bringing the sachet price even lower to BDT 1.

But much more research and thought went behind it than is known. Before its launch in 2003, it was researched for two years, with consumer home visits and sampling done to determine its chances of success through purchase frequency. By the time UBL concluded that this particular pack was necessary, several local competitors had already entered the market with their 1-taka sachets. In contrast, global competitors had introduced more premium packs. UBL was now in

“The shampoo penetration numbers went from 7 to 27 percent within a year. That was when the sachet boom happened.”

Aman Ashraf Faiz

Joined in 1994

a tough spot. When the time came for the decision, there was a fierce debate over its launch. Initially, UBL launched the Clinic Plus sachet, which never took off. Things had come to an impasse, and the same format was proposed to launch on Sunsilk. Many on the team disagreed, fearing downgrading the consumers and hurting Sunsilk's brand equity, which had built over many years. However, it was concluded that Clinic Plus would have to be delisted, with the realisation that by itself, the brand had no equity, and as a veteran marketer said at that point, "A brand cannot stand on a price point

alone." Eventually, it was given the go-ahead, with the biggest Hair Care brand in the country, Sunsilk, all guns blazing, and the company never looked back, with continued success for the next decade and a half.

This success was not just based on magical price points, though. A potent combination of product accessibility and bold market development initiatives laid the foundation for success. This success was replicated in other categories as UBL started its remarkable activation and market development journey in Bangladesh.

| Sunsilk Print Advertisements through the years (1980s and 1990s) |



Conquering Rural Bangladesh

Although Unilever Bangladesh entered the Personal Products category as early as the 1980s, this sector largely remained overlooked during its initial years. At that time, the urban affluent class constituted the primary consumer base; however, they did not represent the broader population. For much of Bangladesh's history, the majority of people lived in rural areas, where brand penetration was in the single digits. Even in early 2000s, about three-quarters of the population resided in rural regions, with fewer than 1 in 10 families using Unilever Bangladesh's brands. The main challenge was not only selling the products but also convincing people of the relevance of unfamiliar categories. It was clear that to unlock growth, Unilever Bangladesh needed to increase its rural brand penetration.

To explore the growth potential of its portfolio, Unilever Bangladesh targeted the untapped rural markets, becoming a pioneer in rural marketing. Two key priorities emerged: reaching areas that could not be accessed through traditional above-the-line communication channels and demonstrating the usage and benefits of Unilever products to significantly improve people's lives. Before 2002, activation activities were small and basic, primarily involving product sampling from 1995 to 1996, along with wall paintings and door-to-door initiatives to engage the rural market.

As the company expanded its efforts, it created a dedicated activation team responsible for establishing effective rural go-to-market plans that could be executed quickly and at scale. The growth model was straightforward: first, drive penetration by being present in people's homes, and then encourage consumption. Two significant developments initiated this venture: the rollout of extensive activation efforts and the introduction of affordable product packs.

Until now, UBL has focused on reaching its consumers through mainstream media, i.e., Television. But in that era, whole villages remained in the dark, with little provision for electricity and only one Television for thousands of people. It was a small wonder that the nascent categories were not growing fast enough. The advent of the Activation team in the late 1990s and early 2000s would change that. While it had been operational in earlier years, its power would be unleashed at the turn of the millennium, with Uthmaniyah Baithaks & Mobile Film Units (MFU) becoming the main drivers, amongst many other creative initiatives.

"In rural, there was no media. So we had to innovate the media which would carry the message", says one veteran Activation Manager. One such example was when, during a visit to rural areas, the team realised that people would often wash their clothes first and leave them on the river bank to dry before going in to bathe themselves. The team handed out branded cloth

“We marched like an army from village to village, taking our products to the doors of the consumers, demonstrating the difference of using soap versus shampoos, sampling Glow & Lovely sachets in millions, showcasing toothpaste to the primary school children, amongst so many other initiatives. We used to specifically reach out to remote areas where mass media couldn't reach, stepping in with Mobile Film Units (MFU), which combined brand communications in an entertainment package.”

Naushadul Karim Chowdhury

Joined in 1989

hangers called Lifebuoy Pond Sign, mini-billboards with a hanger in between. The idea was to capitalise on the moment when consumers would realise that their soap had finished and they needed to buy a new one; the message was that the brand was at the people's service, that it cared; the results were beyond what the team had anticipated. Not only did it drive Lifebuoy towards growth, but when there were incidents of individual villagers taking apart

the hanger for personal use, the entire village would come forward to stop them. The Pond Sign had become a collective property for the good of the people, and it had started with a simple idea on a rural market visit when a few managers were sitting by a pondside taking in the view.

The biggest success stories of the early activation days were the Uthan Baithaks and Mobile Film Units. Both served similar purposes: bringing the

| Rural Jatra (Stage Drama) by Lifebuoy and Wheel (2000s) |



| LUX rural Courtyard Session (2010s) |



products to the consumer and engaging them in gatherings. In Uthan Baithaks, the consumers would mostly be taken through live product demonstrations, with groups of 50-100 people being reached, with the occasional drama played on TV to accompany the show. With MFUs, the teams would be setting up to entertain the consumers with movies & TV serials and, in the process, show many of the commercials that had hitherto remained beyond reach. Large-scale sampling was done to multiply the impact. Up to 56 MFUs were rolling nationwide at its peak, showcasing UBL products. In their first year, they managed to touch a shade less than a third of the country's population and, over a span of 3 years, would eventually reach almost everyone in

the country. Before the activations, advance teams would hit the area, creating a buzz about the incoming show, and news would be spread far and wide to ensure solid turnouts.

These sessions were not only functional but also very emotional. For example, Hair wash demonstrations at rural Uthan Boithoks and urban shopping malls engaged directly with young consumers to make them aware of the benefit of shampooing and demonstrated the noticeable difference that it brought vis-à-vis washing hair with soap. To demonstrate this, shampoo was applied to one side of the hair. Other innovative concepts, such as the hairbrush test, were also used to demonstrate smoothness.

“These activation sessions were magical. When the activation team used to finish shampooing hair, and the ladies would see their wrinkle-free, silky hair- they would become emotional. These are experiential moments, and they remember them for their entire lives. How can that lady choose other brands if they connect so strongly with our brand!”

Zaved Akhtar
Joined in 2000

| *Activation team heading towards a village (1990s)* |



While these projects were highly effective, executing them was challenging due to the sheer scale and complexity of landing them efficiently. They required rigorous planning and auditing to ensure efficacy over time and geographies. Close ties had to be maintained at the grassroots level, with Upazila Nirbahi Offices, NGOs and other entities in the area needed for collaboration and reach, with no two districts being the same. "I would spend up to half a month out in the field and visiting 59 or 60 districts. I would go to the furthest corner wherever I visited because our work was in deep rural areas. It wasn't just me either—managers were bored with regular

market visits, so the activation visits became the new fad. It was fun and something people had never seen or done before", says Shaheed Zubair, ex-Activation Manager, who oversaw much of the expansion in the operations.

Often, the teams would have to procure numerous resources from different vendors. Balancing the control factor with the need for speed was always tricky. It made for a difficult beginning, but once it began rolling, there was no stopping it. The focus shifted to determining which products to sample, which also required intense collaboration with the Sales function.

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Shaheed Zubair
Joined in 1996

| *Pepsodent DentiBus Activation with school children (2010s)* |



Driving Sunsilk in an area where the Sales team was focusing on the distribution of Clear was not going to benefit anyone. Hence, both teams would spend hours huddled together to work out which areas to target and with what. Before reaching out to any village, it would have to qualify first. The criteria were based on its population and access to mainstream media – it made little sense to reach out if the village was too small or they were already aware of the products and brands. The team would maintain solid connections with all the Upazila Nirbahi Offices (UNO or Sub-district administrator's offices) and NGOs in the area, cross-checking data to determine the best places which would deliver the biggest bang for the buck. They then had to decide which products to sample and showcase, especially since the contact with the consumers was interactive and personal.

Through its initiatives, UBL dramatically changed the lives of rural people around the country, managing to build a bridge between consumers and the brand. Such activations sowed the seeds for future rural penetration initiatives like the sachet revolution. A new consumer segment was created, and a new bond of commitment was formed between UBL and the 'Polli Bangla'. With the help of several leading agencies, UBL sent brand promoters to these areas to demonstrate the use of several products, including Wheel Washing Powder, Sunsilk Shampoo, Lifebuoy Handwash, Pepsodent Toothpaste, Closeup, Glow & Lovely Cream, and later with Vim Bar,

Glow & Lovely Facewash, and Sunsilk Conditioner. The impact of activation was such that by the end of the 2000s, virtually every Bangladeshi household had become a home for these brands, and the 'Activation Industry' was established in Bangladesh. UBL immensely benefitted from this challenging work by introducing and popularising several categories that would later become pillars of the business.

| Pepsodent toothbrushing awareness programme for Imams (1990s) |



| MoU Signing Ceremony between Pepsodent and BDS (1999) |



Brightening the Nation's Smiles

The Oral Care category was but a small contributor to the overall Unilever Bangladesh portfolio. Oral hygiene awareness and toothpaste penetration in the country itself was very poor and Bangladeshi consumers used Charcoal for the most part to clean their teeth. The strategy up till that point was to bring consumers into the category through Pepsodent before upgrading consumers to Closeup over time. The fundamental need for Bangladeshi consumers was actually freshness because they consumed Paan (betel leaf) several times a day, and hence the need for a product that would give them fresh breath at an affordable cost was critical. Not only was the toothpaste more expensive, but the associated cost of buying a toothbrush made it difficult for consumers to step up. An attempt to introduce a sachet in Pepsodent failed, as the product would become hard as a rock by the time it reached the consumers.

Within a few short years, the company would end up turning the entire market upside-down. Understanding and then acting on the consumer insights here was absolutely pivotal. Two initiatives taken around this would be critical to turning things around. "The old Pepsodent Toothpowder was, quite literally, sold in a tin can. We were selling 57 tonnes in a year. It had not gone anywhere for many years and we decided to

turn things around. We found a plastic bottle design in India and adapted it locally. We also prepared a new TVC to highlight how the charcoal left a stain on our teeth vs. our toothpowder which was flawlessly clean. It was a huge hit and we ran it for 9 months. The sales team did a great job in driving it too and we never looked back.", shares Zaved Akhtar, who joined as the Senior Brand manager for Oral Care.

The second initiative focused broadly on the toothpaste market. One of the renowned campaigns in the company's history, Pepsodent's 'Dishoom Dishoom' TVC was launched in 2003. Coupled with the Pepsodent DentiBus launched in 2002, it generated massive awareness around Oral hygiene in the country. As important as the product was, the habit of brushing one's teeth twice a day was even more critical, and this is what needed to be developed. UBL kicked off the Pepsodent DentiBus campaign.

The DentiBus would visit urban neighborhoods, specifically schools, providing free dental check-ups to the participants. As one ex-activation manager described it, "We built the bus almost from scratch – all we had was the outer shell. We fitted it with all the dental equipment, including a water tank on the roof which almost put the bus off-balance, and a power generator to support it." The bus generated quite the buzz and helped improve overall awareness of oral health and hygiene, which in turn drove category growth.

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Arshad Manjur

Joined in 1996

| Dental Check-up inside Pepsodent DentiBus (2010s) |



Alongside the DentiBus, the team also activated the Closeup Carnival, which moved from village to village generating huge buzz around the brand and brought the fun spirit of Closeup to life. The entry ticket was simple and easy: attendees were handed a Closeup sachet and a toothbrush and asked to brush their teeth. The lines to enter the Closeup world would stretch as far as the eye could see – an unexpected delight for everyone involved. The Closeup sachet, which had been present for long, was now driven hard

by the Sales team and was widely distributed. Its presence would provide a convenient and affordable access pack for the masses and would help upgrade consumers from toothpowder, while the latter competed with great effect against Charcoal. The rollout of large activation programmes which helped build the identity of the brands, coupled with the brilliant communications would help turnaround the oral care category and change the face of the entire market.

| *Pepsodent Little Brush Big Brush School Activation (2010s)* |



As the category matured and consumer needs changed over time, Pepsodent and Closeup have evolved in their respective roles as well. In recent years, consumers have become more aware and conscious about higher order oral care needs like relief for sensitive tooth and gum care. Pepsodent's initial strategy of addressing these need spaces by adding variants to the core brand met with limited success. Realising the need to

offer consumers a specialised line of products to address these needs, the Sensitive Expert by Pepsodent range was introduced on the World Oral Health Day in 2019. Within a very short time, supported by a revamped Dentist Contact Programme (DCP) and innovative consumer engagement activities, Sensitive Expert has become a significant player in the fast-growing advanced care segment in the oral care market.

| Closeup Engagement Event (2003) |



Making Beauty More Than Skin Deep

In the 1980s, Bangladesh faced significant challenges as a newly independent republic, experimenting with various development reforms that yielded mixed results. The volatile global geopolitical climate, influenced by the Cold War, further exacerbated the country's economic instability. However, economic liberalisation in the late 1970s continued throughout the 1980s. Previously, industries and overall economic activities were heavily controlled by the public sector. The further liberalisation during the 1980s encouraged entrepreneurship and private investment, gradually transforming the economic landscape. This shift laid the foundation for emerging sectors, such as ready-made garments, which later became a cornerstone of the economy.

The 1980s were also characterised by the rapid expansion of development initiatives led by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). These efforts helped reduce maternal mortality rates, increase women's school enrolment, and promote female empowerment. These changes became more visible in the early 1990s when many women began to join the workforce.

However, these women were the pioneers who challenged the age-old societal norms. Their lives were complicated and hectic as they had to balance maintaining a family and working outside. They needed an easy and effective solution to protect their skin from harsh conditions and portray her confidence. Glow & Lovely (GAL) was designed to meet this consumer need, and this was the first mass skincare product in the country. When GAL was introduced in Bangladesh (1986) as Fair & Lovely, skincare

| Sanjiv Mehta at the GAL Uttorone Nari initiative Launching Ceremony (17th October 2003) |



“All women face different obstacles and challenges only due to their gender. But Glow & Lovely teaches women that they can be feminine, take the night shift, and still be good mothers while following their dreams and living life on their own choices. Women who were empowered had a standing in society, and women in this country needed to believe that.”

Geetiara Safya Chowdhury
Chairperson, AdComm

| Dove Day Celebration (2016) |



products available in the country were mainly luxury, seasonal or occasional make-ups. GAL was the first skin cream in the world to use a patented combination of safe ingredients known to reduce inflammation and hyperpigmentation and smoothen skin texture.

With GAL, UBL focused on developing the market by changing consumer behaviours and leveraging its brands to challenge social norms and reshape societal expectations. For many years, Glow & Lovely has been relentlessly working to change society's enormous expectations of women. In the 1980s, when arranged marriages were the norm, the brand's

advertisements promoted a woman's right to choose her partner. In the 1990s, it inspired women to pursue an equal partnership in relationships. Even in the 2000s, when society believed that a woman's place was at home, GAL encouraged her to choose her own career. Through every generation, the brand has put women's needs at the forefront of its message and pushed boundaries to open up opportunities for them.

Today, it is the most popular skincare brand in the country, used by more than 80% of households, but it stands for much more. Glow & Lovely has worked relentlessly to change society's enormous

| Vaseline Mosquito Defence Packaging (2022) |



expectations of women and has acted as a bellwether for progressive changes.

When the activation programmes began to be amped up in the early 2000s, GAL was one of the major brands at the forefront. Around this time, Bangladesh's Ready Made Garment (RMG) industry boomed, with women workers leading the way. GAL had all their requirements- affordability, convenience, and care- covered by the product offering. Unilever Bangladesh rolled out a massive activation programme to build awareness around GAL, and the focused message of women empowerment resonated strongly with this consumer segment. By the early 2000s, GAL was the undisputed category leader with over 80% household penetration. Its story of encouraging and helping women overcome barriers has made it one of the most loved brands in the country.

Over the last decade, the brand's advertising has evolved to communicate a more overt message of women's empowerment. In early 2019, its communication moved away from the benefits of fairness, whitening, and skin lightening towards glow, even tone, skin clarity, and radiance, which are holistic measures of healthy skin. Words indicating a fairness-led transformation were removed from its packaging, such as the cameo with two faces showing shade transformation and the shade guide. In June 2020, UBL announced the next step in evolving its skincare portfolio, rebranding its flagship. In its journey

towards a more inclusive vision of beauty, the iconic brand would change its name and become Glow & Lovely!

When GAL was dominating the mass segment, the post-2000s economic boom and urbanisation created a demand for specialised skincare products in Bangladesh. UBL had Vaseline and Ponds to cater to the needs of this growing market. Vaseline and Ponds have been in Bangladesh since the 1950s as luxury skincare products despite low volume demand. Since the 2010s, the category has started to show an increasing trend. Ponds focused on the specialised care needs of the skin and dedicated their efforts to building equity through engagement platforms such as 'My Second Honeymoon' TV show or 'Skininfluencer'.

At the same time, Vaseline was positioning itself as a caregiver and innovative brand. Since 2016, Vaseline Bangladesh has donated winter essentials like Vaseline Petroleum Jelly, blankets, winter clothing, etc., to over 800,000 underprivileged people in Northern Bangladesh under the umbrella of the Healing Project. Through this activation, the healing efficacy of Vaseline is established by amplifying the activation and encouraging consumers to donate Petroleum Jelly to people who live in vulnerable conditions. Additionally, the brand invested in formulation innovation and developed Vaseline Mosquito Defence, the first UBL product designed and formulated in Bangladesh.



Easing the Burden of Household Chores

The best example for category creation by Unilever in Bangladesh is probably Vim in utensil cleansing. Commencing in 1987, when Vim was first introduced, it was only offered in the liquid format and had to fight its way into the consumer's psyche. This was especially a challenge in rural areas where ash was viewed as a more economical and convenient option than anything else. Even after Vim Bar was launched in 2001, it was difficult to gain a foothold in the market, particularly in rural. The company then went back to the drawing board and kicked the door down with Vim Powder. The affordability of

the powder and the familiarity in product format made it considerably more relatable for consumers. Once the concept of using an alternative to ash had been established with the identity of Vim, it became much easier to upgrade consumers to different formats.

One campaign that truly helped deliver the message was the 'Vim Bar Challenge' (2004-2005), which led the households across the country adopting the bar as the preferred daily cleaning solutions. Later, rural activation was put into effect. To reach people, a show called 'Vim Smart Grihini' was created that starred the popular actor Sohana Saba in a rural setting to make the message more relatable. The drama, made in partnership, not only created a powerful

visual impact but also complimented the campaign. Touching every corner of the country, teams of brand promoters were split up to reach over 3 million households. They held 5 gatherings per day, with each one consisting a range of 30 to 50 rural women. The activation would involve not just the practical demonstrations but also some entertainment with quizzes. Vim's efficacy would be proven beyond doubt through the use of the oil split demonstration: the oil covered with red dye would be poured over a plate full of water and when ash was applied to this surface, nothing would happen. But when a small portion of Vim came into contact, the oil would immediately split. Not only was it a visual representation of Vim's prowess, but it also created huge consumer confidence in the new category.

In the process of creating this category, UBL inadvertently built a market and an industry for

scrubbers. Using the bar required scrubbers, and soap cases to keep them together. In the early 2000s, there were hardly any to be found in the country. What was available was in small cottage industries in shady corners of Old Dhaka. From there, with the help of Procurement team, UBL began buying scrubbers in the hundreds of thousands, going door-to-door to demonstrate the efficacy of Vim Bars. The scrubbers were not given out for free but with a minimal price of BDT 5 charged. This may seem insignificant but at a time when scrubbers were non-existent, it helped consumers assess the items for what they're worth – solid value for money. Even today, the scrubber with Vim promotion remains popular amongst consumers. The efforts paid off, as Vim enjoys strong market shares; the market has multiplied over several times, cementing Vim's strong share position to the point where category of Household Care is recognised by the brand.

| *New Vim Bottle Communication (2020s)* |





Building Engagement Platforms

Brands constantly seek new ways to communicate with their consumers in memorable ways, aiming to forge emotional connections beyond simply experiencing the product. In Bangladesh, until the mid-1990s, the options for reaching consumers were limited. However, after 1995, the situation began to improve with the emergence of several new private satellite television channels, which provided a fresh avenue for engaging with audiences. Despite this

progress, a lack of quality content still hindered efforts to attract viewers. During this period, some of UBL's brands collaborated with media outlets to create innovative and groundbreaking content, establishing a partnership that has stood the test of time.

LUX Superstar

LUX was the first brand to recognise the need for a platform that showcased talent. In 1989, LUX partnered with the periodical Anandadhara to launch the Miss Bangladesh Photogenic competition. This initiative evolved over time, with LUX Superstar becoming the brand's

“I decided to go with LUX Superstar because it seemed more challenging, and this show had a lot of potential. As we launched the show, it was a massive hit. Unilever could bind the produced artists for their brand promotions, but they never did that. Instead, they were more eager to make a profound career for the girls, and that's the beauty of a brand like LUX.”

Faridur Reza Sagor

Managing Director, Impress Telefilm and Channel I

flagship activity, featuring nine editions. The show aired on television and enjoyed massive popularity, achieving record viewership. The top three contestants also embarked on cross-country tours to generate excitement around the brand.

LUX Superstar (LCSS) gained significant traction in 2006 when the campaign aimed to discover Bangladesh's next big film star. The communications focused on finding the lead actress for 'Daruchini Dwip', a popular novel by the legendary Bangladeshi author Humayun Ahmed. The competition sparked tremendous excitement across the country, as it was the first of its kind. This was also a time when televisions were becoming common in Bangladeshi households, and the star appeal of the event played a crucial role in establishing LUX as a glamorous brand.

The focus on nurturing the stars of tomorrow extended beyond the gala night. For the first full year of their careers, UBL took on the responsibility

of training these fresh talents to conduct themselves with the media while providing professional development opportunities. Many LUX Superstar winners and podium finishers have achieved successful careers in fashion, film, and television, collaborating with notable directors like Humayun Ahmed and Toukir Ahmed.

LUX Superstar searched the country for talents who would become the following icons of glamour and acting, including personalities like Azmeri Haque Badhon, Bidya Sinha Saha Mim, and Mehazabien Chowdhury. Through the LUX brand, UBL pioneered the nation's talent development. Thus, LUX was not just another soap brand for the young Bangladeshi girl; it was a way to reach for the stars.

Closeup 1 & Kache Ashar Golpo

Closeup aimed to connect with youth demographics and identified a gap for a platform that would inspire young people to explore their talents and creativity. With this vision in mind, Closeup 1 Reality was designed and launched in

**“Brands are a force for change and transformation,
and when you connect it to your own culture,
it significantly transforms the time.”**

Zaved Akhtar

Joined in 2000

2004. The initial version of Closeup 1 featured four segments: Music, Architecture, Performance Arts, and Fashion Design.

After a year, Closeup focused its engagement strategy solely on music, recognising it as a common interest that resonated with young people. In 2005, the idea of transforming Closeup 1 into a nationwide singing contest faced several rejections due to its high costs. Ultimately, the team partnered with the TV channel NTV, which helped reduce expenses while expanding its reach. What followed was unexpected: participation soared to 40,000, far exceeding initial projections, and the entire budget was depleted within the first few weeks. This initiative became the most extensive campaign for a UBL brand then, with one-third of the television viewing population in Bangladesh tuning in for the grand finale.

The most significant outcome of this campaign was the emotional connection that young people and the general public established with Closeup. The brand experienced remarkable growth, surpassing all brand health goals, which were mere by-products of this deep connection."

In 2010, Closeup launched a new platform called "Kache Ashar Golpo" (KAG). This initiative allowed real people to share their stories of love, often highlighting relationships that went against societal norms. KAG aimed to reduce the stigma surrounding unconventional relationships and

encouraged individuals to feel more confident in their choice of partners. The approach resonated strongly with the youth, resulting in tens of thousands of story submissions and millions of views and engagements. Over the years, KAG has enabled Closeup to claim Valentine's Day in a way few brands can only aspire to achieve.

TRESemmé Fashion Week

TRESemmé projects its enduring connection with fashion with the Bangladesh Fashion Week. It is called the "Runway of Life" and invites women from different walks of life to walk on the ramp because the brand believes that one does not need to be a model to walk on the runway of life. Professionals who walked on the runway included football team captains, pilots, doctors and news anchors. TRESemmé has also launched an online campaign called '#doitforyou' that inspires people to be unapologetic about putting effort into presenting the most stunning version of themselves.

| *TRESemmé Fashion Week Event (2020s)* |



| Zaved Akhtar crowning the winners at LUX Superstar Gala (2014) |



| A Closeup Gala Event (2014) |



The Evolution of a Marketing Company

During its journey over the past six decades, the courage of UBL's marketing team to push the boundaries of conventional wisdom, willingness

to learn from both successes as well as failures, and openness to change and adapt have served it well. UBL has come to be known as a leading marketing company, and many of its alumni who perform in leading roles across the globe have cited it as the best 'school' they have ever been to, crediting its invaluable lessons.

| Pepsodent sponsoring the Bangladesh National U-19 Cricket Team, who won the first-ever ICC Trophy for Bangladesh (2020) |



People, Process, Progress

Nurturing the Potential of Our Teams through Culture, Process and Technology.

The story of an organisation is written by its people, more so than by its products, brands, machines or systems. Since its inception, the corridors of Unilever Bangladesh have witnessed an organisation that grew from a small soap manufacturer in a corner of Chattogram to one of the largest FMCG companies in the country. At the core of this success are its people, who strive every day to deliver better for themselves, their teams, and for the organisation.

Over time, the organisation has evolved significantly from its initial days. It is impossible to imagine that the Kalurghat factory was once home to buffaloes herded for agriculture inside the premises. Fast forward to the twenty-first century, the livestock and paddy fields are long gone; in its place stands an organisation that has become a 'School of Leaders', a pioneer in industry practices, and a leading force for good in the market. Some of the best business leaders in the country learnt their trade and built their careers by delivering outstanding results. This is the story of how they were groomed and enabled to deliver their best and be the best versions of themselves.

| UBL Employees at Annual Conference (2019) |



Kalurghat Diaries

While modern-day Bangladesh was a thriving economic centre in the 16th and 17th centuries, its golden days faded in the 18th and 19th centuries. It fell significantly behind in mechanised industrialisation and remained primarily an agricultural region focused on jute production. Even after the partition, the industrial transformation was slow, and Unilever was one of the first multinational companies to start its direct operation in the country.

In the initial period, the organisation exemplified the quintessential hierarchical culture, characterised by a strong emphasis on formal structures and established protocols. This environment prioritised clear lines of authority and rigid procedures, reflecting a traditional approach to management and communication. For most of its existence, UBL retained this culture. Having had a run of Chairmen from Europe, this culture and style was firmly embedded. In the early days of UBL, corporate attire strictly meant suits and ties, reflecting a workplace steeped in tradition.

Even in late 1990s and early 2000s, office decorum was defined by formal wear, hierarchical canteens, and unique practices like monogrammed towels. Shah Masud Imam, who joined as a Marketing Management Trainee in 1993, recalls, “After six months of confirmation,

you would receive a personalised towel—a true symbol of status in the company!” Tea was served in elegant sets on special trays, and even chairs varied based on seniority, with armrests reserved for managers. These customs highlighted the deep-rooted formal culture of UBL in its earlier years.

The worker-manager relationship was formal as well with dress-codes, logbooks and timestamps. A marker of that era was the lunch meal, consisting of a multitude of items. As per the norm, there were designated canteens for the Senior Managers, the Junior Managers and the Non-Management Staff. There used to be a fixed lunch hour for the senior managers, who along with the Chairman, would attend a seven-course meal.

“I still remember those meals. All the suited managers eating together. With your European and Australian colleagues, sometimes it was hard to believe that the location was Kalurghat! And there were special meals on various occasions. The most memorable one was the one I had on my interview day though”, shared Tariq Ahmed, a member of the first Management Trainee (MT) batch in 1979.

The recruitment process was a unique experience for candidates based in Dhaka, and Unilever would go to great lengths to attract the right applicants. Dhaka-based candidates were provided air tickets along with accommodation

“I am a second-generation Unilever employee, following in my father's footsteps as he also worked for the company. Their lives were very formal and structured, with specific dress codes and schedules for various activities. They even had designated attire and routines for going to clubs. After returning from the office, it was common for them to visit the Chattogram Club.”

Yusuf Islam

Joined in 1987

| *Family Day at KGF (1970s)* |



“It was a full day affair. After an initial interview, I was taken to the facility, and shown the equipment. After that, I was taken to a room where the senior managers were sitting with manuals and books on a circular table—a rather intimidating sight for a fresh graduate. The last stage would be a one to one interview with the Chairman.”

Imran Momin

Joined in 1993

to attend the interview. The selection process remained robust. “It was a full day affair. After an initial interview, I was taken to the facility, and shown the equipment. After that, I was taken to a room where the senior managers were sitting with manuals and books on a circular table—a rather intimidating sight for a fresh graduate. The last stage would be a one to one interview with the Chairman”, shares Imran Momin, who joined in 1993 as a Management Trainee (MT) in Supply Chain Management.

The culture of Kalurghat would be heavily influenced by the transition of many of its managers from their lives in Dhaka to a new scene in Chattogram. They left behind their

families and friends in Dhaka, and would form new bonds with their colleagues. “When I joined as an intern, we were given an apartment, and received every form of assistance imaginable”, recalls one employee, who joined as an intern soon after graduating. After joining, employees who were relocating would receive an allowance to buy a refrigerator and 2 ceiling fans for their new home. But that was not all—employees would receive low-interest loans as well from banks arranged by the company to help them buy property in Chattogram, and settle down. Being a manager of Unilever also carried with it a certain prestige in Chattogram, as the name was instantly recognisable in what was still a relatively small city.

“After Confirmation (six months of working in UBL), one would receive his or her own very own personalised towel to use at the office. That towel was a symbol of your status in the company!”

Tariq Ahmed
Joined in 1979

| I.S. Sangster's Farewell Event (1995) |



In most instances, the absence of close kin was made up with the colleagues who lived together in the same building complex. As the company began revving up for expansion and rapid growth, a whole generation of managers began filing in, forming a more youthful, close knit and family-oriented culture. The city was small, and there were not many options of entertainment, so trips to Cox's Bazar, Rangamati and Kaptai were the go-to-places for the UBL managers. Regardless of which department you were in, even if you spent the entire day fighting over some issue or the other, as soon as you exited the factory gates, all hostilities would be put aside over a meal at Meridien or Bonanza, with efforts diverted to planning the next weekend escapade. The bonds of friendship were firmly established, so much so that they withstood the test of time, with reunions frequently held.

Even with the family-like culture, it was still a competitive and hardworking environment. This was particularly true when the company faced one of the most difficult periods during the Lux debacle, when virtually the entire company burrowed down to dig itself out of the abyss. Regardless of whether it was at work or even outside. Kalurghat had a life of its own. It was defined by the camaraderie shared by the UBL

employees over endless stories. "The work culture was always positive. During work breaks, the Chairman used to come to our room, and the four of us would sit together, put our feet up, and chat and laugh away. We would work hard but there was always an element of a personal touch because it was a small family in the office", shares one ex-employee.

The Chairman stayed in a hilltop bungalow in Khulshi, Chattogram, and would invite the small troop of managers over for dinner. The small parties were quite something to look forward to, and one would always try to look their best. The Chairman set the trend, and the team would follow, as there were frequent parties and get-togethers at everyone's homes. Their families would come to be closely associated, with the children growing up together, and everyone was known on first name terms.

The Chairman's bungalow in Khulshi often came to be of great help, especially in the politically charged climate of the 1990s. During the strikes, the MC members were not permitted to travel at all. As such, the Chairman's dining room would often double up as the board room for the MC meetings, as managers would make their way to his home to keep the business alive and running.

“Throughout my career at Unilever, I’ve been lucky enough to live on four different continents, but my wife and I both agree that our best experience was in Chattogram. The atmosphere there was so warm and welcoming that we instantly felt at home. The culture is incredibly vibrant and powerful! I still remember how during strikes or hartals, all the senior managers would hop into rickshaws to head to the office. It was such a unique and memorable experience!”

Akhter Mateen

Joined in 1993

| *Lever Cricket Club (1990s)* |



“My father was the one who motivated me to join UBL, and live life on my own. When he passed away, the then Chairman wrote a letter to my mother offering his condolences for our family’s loss, and praised me for my work. My mother still has the letter, and to this day tells me my job at UBL was the best I ever had.”

Shah Masud Imam

Joined in 1993

| A grand Farewell Ceremony at KGF (1990s) |



| Career Session at IBA, University of Dhaka (1990s) |



| A moment from Annual Picnic (2000s) |



The Road to Dhaka: Project Telescope

The colleagues staying together in Chattogram had become a surrogate family. Kalurghat had been the core of UBL's activities since its inception, and likewise, the headquarter of the company was also situated in Chattogram from the very beginning. Chattogram life, despite the fond memories, had its share of drawbacks though. Attracting and retaining talent was always a challenge. Against the backdrop of expanding its market reach and soaring to new heights, holding on to talent became a necessity.

Most multinationals were based in Dhaka, making talent acquisition and retention a challenge for UBL, which operated from Chattogram. Centralised operations in Dhaka often created logistical hurdles, particularly with advertising agencies, all of which were Dhaka-based. Creative materials had to be sent via courier, with frequent back-and-forth trips causing delays of up to a week for simple design changes. To minimise disruptions, UBL and agency managers would take the last flight out, work overnight, and return on the first flight. Even the Chairman faced frequent trips to Dhaka for government meetings. Recognising these inefficiencies, Chairman Jean Alfonsi, upon his arrival in 1998, made the decisive move to relocate UBL's corporate headquarters to Dhaka.

The move was strategic, dictated by the natural course of the expanding business. The shift itself was a massive operation, starting with finding the right property to conduct construction. The project was led by Ata Safdar, then Customer Marketing Director and Abu Abdullah, the then HR Director. They knew the owner of the plot of ZN Tower, a property in Gulshan, Dhaka from their time in Chattogram, and made an agreement with him to develop the property. UBL paid for the construction of the building, and managed to secure a fixed rent for 15 years! Kamran Bakr, who would later become the first Bangladeshi Chairman of UBL, supervised the operation, known as Project Telescope—an apt title given how the shift to Dhaka proved to be prepared for future expansion.

On a lighter note, Jean Alfonsi had planned to unveil Project Telescope in his presentation at one of the monthly Journey Cycle meetings. With a single mistaken click, he had skipped ahead in the presentation by a single slide and prematurely unveiled the grand plan. The entire hall had already caught a glimpse of the slide before he could change back, and there was a feeling of surprise and awe in the room, as the room erupted with a mix of joy, shock and awe! Jean handled the situation as best as he could though, passing the moment off as if it were a footnote in his presentation, having had his thunder stolen away by the slide changer!

| Unilever CEO Paul Polman visiting rural market (2010s) |



| A celebratory event at UBL ZIN Tower Office (2000s) |



Many local managers, having built their lives in Chattogram, were hesitant to relocate to Dhaka. However, Chairman Jean Alfonsi, known for his strict adherence to deadlines, was resolute about the move. Determined to shift by November 2001, he packed his bags one morning and moved to Dhaka, even though the office was not fully ready. His decisive action prompted the Management Committee to follow suit the very next day. Within weeks, ZN Tower was bustling with activity, despite unfinished air conditioning, dangling wires, and shaky internet. Many believe that without Jean's unwavering determination, the move might have been delayed by another year.

It was a while before the company finally settled down in its new home at ZN tower on Road 8, Gulshan 1. It may sound funny today, but the project team found it difficult to justify taking up four floors, small as the organisation was back then, and so Jean Alfonsi decided to take up the top floor as his personal residence. Managing to get the right kind of resources was a Herculean task, and each activity brought with it its share of bumps and hiccups. "I had to travel to Kamalapur rail station on the night of Shab-e-Barat to pick up a generator. Finding a way to fit it into the building was a different challenge because of our safety rules and regulations", Kalimur Rahman, the then project lead, shares.

The relocation discussions centered on deciding which teams to move first. In Kalurghat, proximity had made decisions quick and collaborative, but

with 250 kilometres now separating the offices, the change was significant. For many, the move was an upheaval—generations of managers had built their careers and lives in Chattogram. Dhaka's rise as a megacity made the transition challenging, though UBL supported employees by helping them find suitable homes. Jean Alfonsi initiated the move but handed over leadership to Sanjiv Mehta shortly after the November 2001 transition. Under new leadership, UBL's evolving systems and culture set the stage for even greater achievements.

| Alan Jope (CEO, Unilever) at UBL office (2020s) |



Driving Efficiency: A Well-Oiled Machine

At the turn of the millennium, UBL exhibited many of the features which would have not seemed out of place even a decade ago. As recently as 1996, there were only a half dozen computers in the entire factory, one of which was reserved for the Chairman. Prior to that, telephone (landlines) used to be the fastest mode of communication, with letters being sent to make things official and to maintain records; fax communication was used for a speedy exchange of documents. Typewriters were used for word processing, and the cyclostyling machine was used for multiple copies. “I still remember how we organised in those days before sending the Annual Plan to Unilever Global in London. Once the drafts were approved and the plan write-up finalised, stencils were cut, and cyclostyling was done for multiple copies. We used to lock ourselves in the conference room to assemble the copies one by one into 18 to 20 sets, which were then carefully transported to Signet Press for binding into books. DHL courier was used to dispatching the books to Unilever Global”, shares one senior manager of that era.

Computers began to be introduced slowly in the late 1980s. The company made arrangements with Computer Land, a local training center, then located on Asian Highway near O.R. Nizam Road, Chattogram for short courses to train the managers and staff on using computers.

The internet revolution had not yet made its way to Bangladesh; instead, there existed a basic internal network system connecting the computers. CC Mail was popular back then—a poor predecessor to today’s Microsoft Outlook. When Sanjiv Mehta arrived in 1998, the company was about to enter a dark phase. LUX’s share loss was beginning to gain momentum, although detergents were beginning to take giant leaps forward. It was around this time that UBL would take a series of initiatives to ensure it would not only survive, but thrive.

One of the very first initiatives Mr. Mehta took, was to optimise the working capital. This was a massive step change in the ways of working for the company. The Commercial team was the driving force behind this project, working on two specific levers, inventory and payables, to ensure that the company had ample cash available to run its operations effectively even in the most difficult of times. It was a practice to keep high levels of safety stock of virtually every item in the company’s inventory. The first step was to make operations lean, and cut down on the buffer levels that were habitually maintained. An ABC classification (a method for organising items into three categories based on their value and importance to a business) was then applied, bringing in to affect the Pareto principle—the focus given on maintaining a healthy level of stock for the most critical and high-value items.

The absence of a proper planning system was a major inhibitor in the creation of negative working capital, and this now became an area

of strength. The harmony of supply and demand improved. It became easier to predict the lead-times, and the ideal timing of ordering, since the inventory and the status of arrival of individual items were now clearer. The same applied for finished goods, as the production runs began to revolve around the inventory levels to be maintained for each item. However, the biggest factor was, of course, the change in behaviour that needed to be brought about. It had been the norm to maintain more than what was needed, just in case, and this now began to change. The status quo began to be challenged, and people were pulled out of their comfort zone. It was also customary to make payment to suppliers immediately. UBL was successfully able to negotiate and manage its payments, either installing 30-day terms or discount modules in exchange for immediate payment. Credit lines were extended without any increase in costs whatsoever.

The next focus area would be the cost lines. While savings projects were present, now was the time to think big, and make a visible impact on the bottom-line. The headliner item was the transition from sulphate to salt for the manufacturing of detergents. This required the creation of a salt manufacturing supplier in Cox's Bazar, and is indicative of the lengths to which the company went to support the creation of a new industry in the country. Importing sulphate was expensive, and the creation of local salt allowed for a considerably more cost-efficient alternative, and thus, CEPs (Cost

Efficiency Programmes) became an integral part of the profit delivery. The introduction of Standard Costing modules enabled everyone across the company to gain clarity on the cost structure of every product. These costs then began to be challenged, scrutinised and reduced continuously. There was a continuous focus on driving costs down, and developing alternative materials and suppliers.

Collectively, these measures helped ensure that the company always had a healthy line of cash at its disposal, and a certain degree of profitability during a difficult time. It formed a part of the larger Financial Growth Model that began to be rolled out: a virtuous cycle of growth whereby you generate savings through economies of scale to invest in your brands, and drive growth. Against the backdrop of the crises of the late 1990s, these initiatives did not merely help the company stay afloat but also allowed it to make the key investments which would ensure its long-term business sustainability. A key example was the fact that the price of LUX, despite massive investment and improvements in quality, did not experience any increase for the better part of a decade. The only reason the company was able to afford this was because of major CEPs. It made the competitor's products unviable, and soon they were forced out of the market. Internally, it began to introduce a shift in thinking, and brought about innovation in work processes, setting a precedent for what would be an overhaul of the existing systems and ways of working.



Towards Automation and Digitisation

If you asked most UBL employees where they were on 31st December 1999, Kalurghat would be the last answer you would expect. However, for many, that was the truth, as they huddled in their offices waiting for the incoming Y2K bug to hit. Preparations had been building for months, with data backups in several locations, leading to this night where everyone waited with bated breath for systems to crash, and the world to collapse due to technology's inability to process the changeover from '99 to '00. As the clock struck midnight though, in what was a letdown of epic proportions, things held firm, and the world marched on as if the dawn of the new millennium was a matter of significance only for the humans who inhabited it. The entire cluster of people who had locked themselves in went home, and took the next day off, hoping it had all just been a bad dream.

Even 20 years ago, every morning began with a National Sales Report, that would outline the sales for the past 24 hours. The only difference now is that these reports are virtually a single click away, and the reports back then would take three days to prepare. To end this inconvenience, it would bring about the implementation of MFG-Pro—an end-to-end ERP system; it was a landmark moment for the company in its journey towards the digital age. This project was led by

Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, who would go on to become the National Finance Director for UBL. This transformation was rolled out over several years beginning in the mid 1990s, it would slowly incorporate the different parts of the business operations, and bring them under one umbrella.

Two critical developments would serve as highlights. In 2003, the Sales Order and Accounts Receivables (SOAR) system was implemented across all the depots, connecting them together, and replacing the standalone system that existed for invoicing sales to distributors. This was a significant change as it replaced the paper based ordering, driving efficiency for the company and its distributors. Considering the lack of internet coverage in that era, this was a phenomenal achievement for the time. The second significant development was the creation of a business data warehouse, by the name of Eureka in 2002. Before the automation, data was mostly available in sporadic files in half a dozen computers or in hand-written reports. This project helped massively to analyse and plan.

The next stage was to integrate the separate systems under a centralised Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platform. A cross-functional team of Marketing, Finance and IT worked together to develop the system over a period of six months and this innovative system was called IBP. The implementation of IBP allowed the business to assess all expenditure through a single platform. This system became exemplary and a good

dozen countries followed suit by adopting the IBP module in their businesses. The person in IT who rolled it out, Anowarul Azim got busy implementing it in different countries. The key to the rollout was Mr. Mehta's outright refusal to revert to old ways by approving things on paper or any other means—until there was a system in place, and everyone would have to abide by it. Another area where IT had a big impact was Zero Day Closing. It almost seems laughable today, but in the past, monthly accounts and financial reports were done on a quarterly basis. Given the manual nature of recordkeeping in those days, it was a gargantuan task to tally the data and prepare the accounts. To do so monthly, would have been torturous on any individual since the task would take weeks to complete.

Between 2005 and 2007, with the gradual enhancement of MFG-Pro, zero-day closing slowly became a reality. It was not achieved overnight, but with dedicated effort combined with the astute skills of the Finance and IT teams. The result was a flawless consistency in financial and management reporting for the UBL finance team. The joke going around was that the Bangladesh team would be closing their books before most other countries had even begun. However, the final milestone in this journey would take on an unprecedented scale.

It was the implementation of the Global ERP system. The U2K2 project was launched in 2010.

It was a global initiative to bring all Unilever companies aboard the same ERP platform of SAP. The first workshop was held in March 2010, and 28 people from across the company were dedicated to working in U2K2, even being provided with a separate office along with representatives from 18 other countries. Multiple workshops took place to incorporate views from both sides, and gain a shared perspective on developing and implementing the system effectively. The last workshop was the most notable one, with the entire Sonargaon hotel booked for UBL and its partners in the project—for an entire month!

Within 18 months, the project was completed, with the final leg being a 5-day blackout during which company operations were brought to a halt. The system went live on 5th August, 2011, and to meet this deadline many employees spent several nights in the office to ensure Bangladesh would not be the first country to miss the global SAP timelines.

The implementation of SAP has ushered in a transformative era of digitalisation at UBL. In recent years, the company has redefined the interplay between technology and business, setting industry benchmarks while simplifying life for both retailers and consumers. This journey began with a singular vision: to harmonise innovation with convenience, empowering businesses and revolutionising the retail landscape in Bangladesh.



Digitalisation has profoundly enhanced the Customer Development (CD) function, especially through the Data-Driven Customer Marketing and Insights (CMI) team. Retailers now order via an app equipped with predictive data capabilities that suggest optimal stock levels. This breakthrough ensures shelves are never empty and provides shop owners with vital insights into inventory and customer preferences, fostering business growth.

Further advancements include the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Optical Character Recognition (OCR) that transforms ordinary handwritten shopping lists into structured data. AI-powered tools optimise and monitor

point-of-sale activities that turn images of retail shelves into actionable insights. Retailers can now effortlessly grasp display performance, shelf share, and store-specific trends. This data-driven strategy empowers brands and store owners to make informed decisions, driving remarkable growth and efficiency.

Through these bold innovations, UBL continually reinvents itself, exemplifying that technology transcends mere numbers; it crafts inspiring narratives of progress for millions of small retailers across the country. With every new idea, UBL reaffirms its commitment to empowering businesses, enhancing lives, and reshaping the retail landscape, step by step.

| *DFFengaging with rural Retailer (2024)* |



Where Leaders are Groomed

The underlying revolution in ways of thinking and working, combined with a culture that drives rigor and performance, would engender an environment that bred some of the best business leaders in the country. UBL had effectively become, (or commonly referred to in Bangladeshi corporate sector as) a 'School of Leaders'. The culture at UBL is a driving force behind securing the best talents the country offers. One of the main reasons UBL attracted and managed to scoop the most capable youngsters of the country was the culture that it fostered. "The time, effort, and resources that Unilever deploys to develop its human resources make it different from any other company. Even today, I still apply many of the things that I learned during my time there", says Sania Mahmood, who joined UBL in 1996.

Understanding the requirements of new ideas, and for grooming future leaders, Unilever started its Management Trainee Programme in 1979. Three individuals—Tariq Ahmed, Yaminul Islam, and Habibullah Ahad were recruited as the first batch of Management Trainees (MT). Even in that era, the recruits did short attachments in several departments, and were rotated across functions even after graduating from the programme. Since its inception, the Unilever MT Programme as it was known in the past, became one of the most desirable places to work in the country. Till date, it has produced countless leaders for Unilever Bangladesh and the wider business community

of the country. Currently, three of the Unilever Bangladesh Management Committee members are alumni of this programme, with many others in numerous senior roles. Through various assessment rounds that UBL deploys, the Unilever Future Leaders Programme (UFLP) has gone on to become a benchmark for the recruitment processes of the industry.

"I was placed in the Buying Department as a Local Buyer. One day a PR (Purchase Requisition) arrived which read 'One truckload of good quality cow dung'. Having read that I don't remember what emotion immediately struck me—Startled? Amazed? Bemused? I do remember telling myself though, after obtaining an MBA from the Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka, here I was, having to buy cow dung? And that too 'of good quality'? And 'one truckload'? Then the practicality of it all dawned on me—where do I find so much cow dung? How do I tell its quality? Do I have to follow the local buying norms of getting at least three quotations, and select the one with the best value? Eventually, we managed it through unconventional means, and this incident coupled with some others, eventually led us to restructure the buying department into its current shape, and clearly outlining what fell under our purview", shares Habibullah Ahad, a member of the first MT batch of UBL.

Unilever invests heavily in its people. Both senior and junior managers receive regular and rigorous training. "In my Unilever Career, I was

“The time, effort, and resources that Unilever deploys to develop its human resources make it different from any other company. Even today, I still apply many of the things that I learned during my time there.”

Sania Mahmud

Joined in 1994

exposed to countless training. I was sent to different regional locations for these. I was also encouraged to share the learnings from the training with my teammates”, shares Shah Masud Imam. Similarly, global exposure and grooming that Unilever provides are unprecedented.

Due to this culture of grooming, Unilever has produced corporate leaders who have contributed immensely towards the growth of not only Unilever but also the wider industry. Similarly, Waqar Kazi, previously the Finance Director of UBL shares, “They asked me to go to England, and I was made the Controller for the plantations and plant science group. We had numerous tea, palm oil, coconut, coffee, and peas operations based everywhere from Colombia to Malawi to the Solomon Islands—completely different from what the FMCG world was for me, and it was an

incredible learning experience. Unilever throws you in the deep end to test you—you will either learn to swim or you drown”. UBL soon became a regular source of top-class talents for the larger Unilever world.

Zahidul Islam Malita, who later served as the Finance Director of UBL, spent several years in Pakistan, helping to turn around the Ice Cream business there. The Ice Cream category had historically been at a loss, and was draining cash from the business. By rationalising the process, identifying new opportunities in the market, and driving efficiency across operations, it soon became a star performer for Unilever Pakistan—a big swing from almost certain closure a few years prior. However, the impact of this well-rounded development of talents would be felt strongest at home, where it came to be known as a School of Leaders.

“In my Unilever Career, I was exposed to countless training. I was sent to different regional locations for these. I was also encouraged to share the learnings from the training with my teammates. Unilever throws you in the deep end to test you—you’ll either learn to swim or you drown.”

Waqar Ahmed Kazi

Joined in 1994

| *Unilever Bangladesh Team winning Unilever Future Leaders' League (2016)* |



“I was sent to work in the Global Corporate Audit Team, and initially I was totally a fish out of the water. I had worked in CD my whole career, but now I was asked to audit different functions. However, the environment not only facilitated my learning, but I also soon became equipped to work with functional experts as well. These learnings helped a lot in my career later.”

Asif Bhuiyan

Joined in 2002

Grooming future leaders has always been at the heart of UBL's mission. The flagship Unilever Future Leaders Programme (UFLP), evolved from the pioneering Management Trainee programme, stands as a testament to this commitment. Through this platform, the brightest minds are nurtured, equipping them with holistic development opportunities and accelerated growth paths. Over a 15-month journey, trainees immerse themselves in diverse functions, gaining a well-rounded

understanding of the business while honing versatile leadership skills. This legacy of excellence is reflected in the fact that many of the current Management Committee (MC) members began their careers as management trainees, embodying the transformative promise of UFLP. By investing in their people, UBL is not only building leaders for themselves but also contributing to the broader ecosystem, creating a legacy of talent that continues to inspire and shape industries.

| UBL Employees at an Employee Volunteering Event (2024) |



Diversity and Inclusion

UBL has long championed equity, diversity and inclusion (ED&I), embedding these values into its culture and business practices. The journey began over a decade ago with systemic measures to build a robust pipeline of female leaders across all levels of the organisation. While early efforts laid the foundation, UBL's commitment to D&I truly accelerated from 2016 onwards, setting benchmarks for the corporate sector in Bangladesh.

One of UBL's defining milestones was the introduction of operational crèche facilities—first at the corporate office and later at the Tongi Depot—offering childcare support to working mothers. Recognising the challenges faced by women returning to the workforce, UBL launched the STRIDE initiative in 2017, providing opportunities for women on career breaks to reintegrate into corporate roles. The establishment of a Diversity and Inclusion Council brought cross-functional leadership together to create an environment where all employees could thrive. This focus on building an inclusive workplace extended to breaking stereotypes in traditionally male-dominated sectors. UBL introduced female managers to the factory floor and became the first organisation in Bangladesh to appoint a female Regional Manager in Field Sales. At the Kalurghat Factory, a groundbreaking step was taken to enable female shift officers to work night shifts, a rarity in the industry.

The company's initiatives were not confined to its internal workforce. In 2019, UBL spearheaded the 'Balance for Better' campaign, bringing together leading organisations to collaborate on creating more employment opportunities for women. This effort led to the formation of INSPIRIT, an external council of diversity advocates from eight prominent organisations. Together, they tackled challenges such as ensuring personal safety and well-being for female managers working in outstation locations, creating a ripple effect across industries.

In recent years, UBL has deepened its ED&I commitment by broadening its focus to include persons with disabilities (PwDs). Collaborating with organisations like the Bangladesh Business and Disability Network (BBDN) and Sightsavers, UBL has implemented sensitisation programs, safety protocols, and mentorship opportunities to support and empower employees with disabilities. By 2023, the company had recruited nearly 50 PwDs and aimed to have 5% of its workforce composed of PwDs by 2025.

UBL's journey has also been marked by the adoption of innovative strategies to challenge gender biases and foster inclusion. The company identified gaps in women's participation in field sales and factory operations, proactively addressing barriers through targeted capability-building programmes. By 2024, over 300 women were working in sales roles across the country, and more than 250 women were

employed in factory operations in Chattogram. The Gender-neutral performance metrics, unconscious bias training, and flexible working policies further reinforced UBL's dedication to empowering women and ensuring equality. Leadership diversity remains a hallmark of UBL's success. Female representation in senior leadership grew from 10% in 2016 to an impressive 32% by 2024, with women occupying key positions in traditionally male-dominated functions like finance and corporate affairs. The Management Committee now boasts 40% female representation, a remarkable achievement in Bangladesh's corporate sector.

The recognition of UBL's efforts extends beyond the organisation. In 2023, UBL was honoured with

the FICCI Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Champion Award, highlighting its pioneering role in fostering an equitable workplace. This accolade is a testament to the company's unwavering commitment to setting new standards for diversity and inclusion.

By integrating progressive policies, fostering a culture of empowerment, and collaborating with like-minded organisations, UBL has not only transformed its workplace but has also inspired broader change across Bangladesh's corporate landscape. With its vision of equity, diversity, and inclusion as the cornerstone of its growth, UBL continues to set an example of how businesses can drive societal progress while building a future-fit organisation.

| IWD Celebration at UBL office (2019) |



| Zaved Akhtar with UBL PwD employees (2023) |



Becoming the Employer of Choice

As with most categories it operates in, Unilever Bangladesh has been a pioneer in the Employer Brand arena in Bangladesh as well. For more than two decades, it has been engaging students at campuses, be it through its legacy business competition, BizMaestros, its robust Management Trainee Programme (Unilever Future Leaders' Programme —UFLP) or the Unilever Leadership Internship Programme (ULIP), that provides corporate experience to recent graduates. In the last few years, Unilever Bangladesh has tapped into the open talent economy with some of its newer initiatives such as BizLearners that offers students with gig working opportunities, and SPARKS Ambassador Programme that allows students to be the liaison between UBL and their respective universities. Students who engage with UBL through these programmes get an early experience of corporate life, and in turn, Unilever develops a robust talent pipeline for itself. Many of the brightest talents today at UBL are the outcomes of these campus opportunities.

BizMaestros has over the years not only provided students with the thrill of real business, but also put Unilever Bangladesh on the global map. The winners have time and again made Bangladesh proud with their stellar track record in appearing among the top teams

in the global platform of Future Leaders' League many years in a row, claiming the title in 2016, finishing as runners-up in 2018, and finalists in 2020, along with numerous other awards.

UBL's consistent, purposeful and high impact presence at campuses throughout the years, along with various initiatives to build employability for the youth of Bangladesh through yearlong campus-connects and sessions has helped it build a great rapport with the students and academia in the country. It has established the organisation as an aspirational and reputable organisation to work for, a place that promotes learning and growth of its people, and a culture that unleashes the true purpose and potential of its employees in its diverse and inclusive work environment.

| UBL #1 Employer of Choice Print Advertisement (2018) |



Expanding Territories

Since the early 2000s, Bangladesh has witnessed a remarkable economic transformation characterised by mass urbanisation and economic growth that has fueled an expanding demand for food and beverage products. Although Unilever boasts a strong global portfolio in food and beverages, UBL's food and beverage category remained relatively small in Bangladesh despite its potential. While UBL could reach consumers, it lacked a diverse product portfolio. Interestingly, another established multinational company, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), had an impressive range of health food drinks, including Horlicks, Bangladesh's most popular Health Food Drink (HFD).

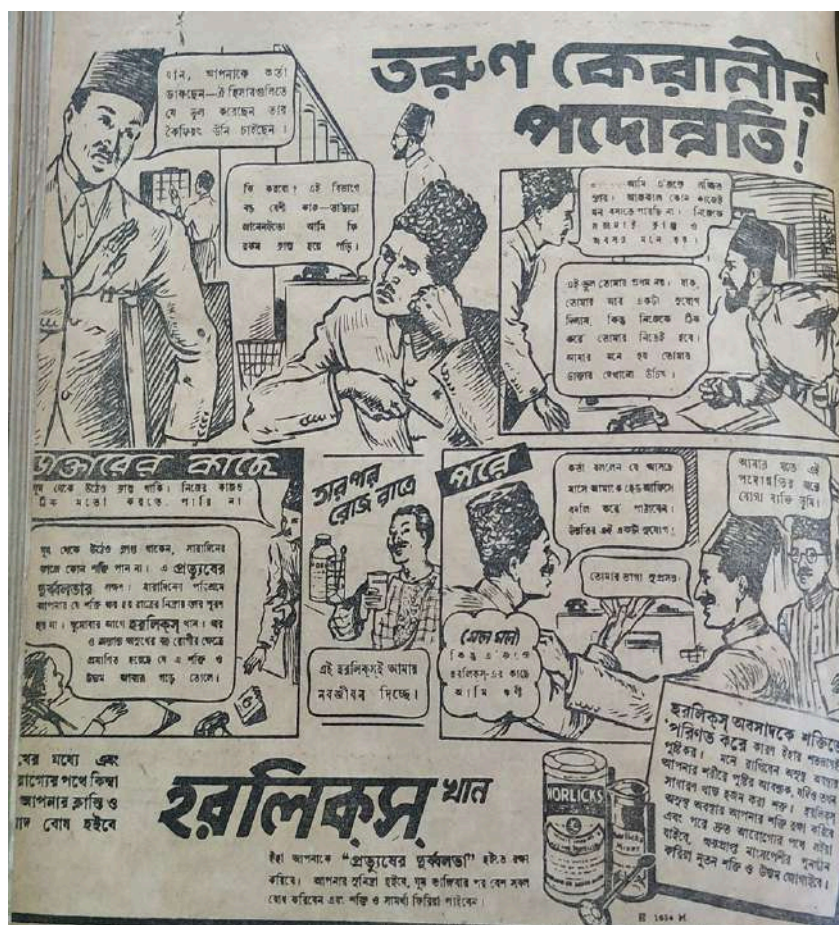
Horlicks has a strong legacy among Bangladeshi consumers. However, GSK has not been able to reach consumers due to a lack of scale. Additionally, they were realigning their global strategy to focus more on their pharmaceuticals business, so they decided to divest their HFD portfolio.

The process was initiated in late 2018 when the call for a bid arrived. A 2-man army was put together to lead this highly confidential work – Zahidul Islam Malita (the then Finance Director) and Rashedul Quayum (Legal Director), which was interestingly named 'Project Maldives'. Unilever was not alone in the run for this acquisition – several other renowned organisations had their

eyes on this HFD business of GSK. Like the other interested companies, Unilever had to undergo a long and gruelling process of detailed financial valuation analyses and due diligence for several months before they could finally place their binding offer. With the help of the Global Merger and Acquisitions team, they spearheaded the entire process leading up to the bidding and ultimately winning the bid. It was sometime after placing the offer that news finally arrived that Unilever had won the bid! Coincidentally, Kedar Lele, Chairman and Managing Director of UBL, along with Zahid and Rashed, were in Mumbai for the Investor Conference when they learned the global bid was secured, they did not miss this golden opportunity to announce the big news to the forum!

The integration process began in April 2019 following Unilever's successful bid. A cross-functional team of eight members was assembled to facilitate a seamless integration. For GSK, some activities related to the integration had begun earlier, as their pharmaceuticals unit was closed in October 2018. In December 2018, it was officially announced that GSK's Consumer Healthcare Business would be sold to Unilever. The integration process was nothing short of a stressful, exciting, and head-spinning rollercoaster! It was highly complex, riddled with uncertainties and new challenges.

The integration process brought new and unique challenges every other day. In retrospect, the



"We were on the verge of announcing that the deal would not come through, and then, we got this particular approval from the bank that changed the game. More than 8-10 parties were involved in this deal, and I remember having to sit down to resolve issues at 3-4 AM."

Zahidul Islam Malita
Joined in 2003

team agrees that the journey tested their grit and perseverance and that the entire experience was a steep learning curve.

"I remember how I had to enter the mainframe rooms at Dhaka Stock Exchange to oversee the transaction. DSE's technology and infrastructure were incompatible to manage a transaction of such volume - their mainframe had a maximum limit of BDT 10 billion. In contrast, our transaction was valued at BDT 20 billion! This was a first-time feat in the entire history of Bangladesh", shares Rashedul Quayum, Legal Director of UBL.

While a crucial part of the integration was about the transition of processes, systems, and transactions, the more sensitive and complex aspect was the integration of people. It was vital that while all other elements ran smoothly, the people aspect of the integration was dealt with the utmost care. It took time, mutual understanding, and constant reinforcements from top leadership to reassure everyone and comfort their anxiety around the integration. Active communication with the people from both UBL and the erstwhile GSK's leadership teams helped remove doubts and gave them confidence.

| Kedar Lele and KSM Minhaj right after installing company signage (2020) |

| GSK to UCL Name Change Print Advertisement (2021) |



**GlaxoSmithKline
Bangladesh Ltd.**

is now



**Unilever
Consumer Care
Limited**



Brighten Everyday Life for all

**Growth, Progress,
and a Sustainable
Future for all.**

Over a century ago, when Unilever began its journey in British Bengal, the eastern part (known as East Bengal) faced considerable economic challenges. At that time, East Bengal was underdeveloped and regarded as one of the least developed areas in the world. Since then, East Bengal has come a long way and evolved into the independent country of Bangladesh. Throughout this transformative journey, this country has made remarkable strides, achieving significant economic advancement and social progress. Unilever has played its role in this transformation, contributing to the nation's and its people's progress, and paving the way for a promising future.

Over the decades, this company has woven itself into the fabric of Bangladeshi households, not merely providing everyday essentials but also actively driving transformation for the greater good.



Rooted Legacy of doing good

Unilever's story began in the late 19th century, rooted in small family businesses that evolved into the purpose-driven company it is today through partnerships, brand innovations, and technological breakthroughs.

The journey of the company accelerated with Lifebuoy, created by William Hesketh Lever, who was recognised during the Victorian era for his significant contributions to health and hygiene. As one of the world's first hygiene soaps, Lifebuoy has a rich legacy of saving lives. Known as the

"Royal Disinfectant Soap" in Victorian England, it was crucial in combating life-threatening diseases such as typhoid, smallpox, cholera, and diphtheria. Despite its effectiveness in preventing these deadly illnesses, Lord Lever ensured it remained affordable, emphasising health and wellbeing, which became vital to the company's DNA. This thought process is now recognised as 'sustainable business practice', reflecting sustainability in those earlier times.

The inception story of mass produced, factory-made soaps in this region, or the Indian subcontinent is also similar. As the Industrial Revolution spread to Bengal, European soaps began to be imported. Lifebuoy was introduced in

| Kalurghat area old photo (1960s) |



1895, promising to provide hygiene to the masses. It quickly gained popularity in Dhaka (Dacca) and Chattogram (Chittagong). This growth had a compelling reason behind it. Bengal is a tropical riverine floodplain where floods are frequent and so are water-borne diseases.

Even in the 1960s, approximately one in ten children did not reach the age of five due to diseases related to diarrhoea. A significant factor contributing to this was the lack of access to and affordability of health soaps. High-quality hygiene soaps were neither widely available nor affordable for the rural population at that time, forcing them to rely on informal, cheap alternatives. The high cost and limited availability

of soap were primarily because most quality soap manufacturing facilities were in Mumbai (Bombay) or Karachi. To increase availability and affordability of soap for the mass people, Unilever started building its first soap factory in Chattogram (Chittagong) in 1962. The first bars of Lifebuoy rolled out from Unilever's Kalurghat Factory (KGF) production line in September 1964. The introduction of hygiene soap was a game-changer for the people of Bangladesh. Unilever's efforts to make soap accessible and affordable saved countless lives and significantly improved quality of life. Lifebuoy soon became a symbol of hygiene and freshness among Bangladeshis as well. Lifebuoy was the first mass-produced soap in the country. After the War

| LBBL relief efforts for flood victims (2004) |



of Independence in 1971, when raw materials became scarce, Lifebuoy produced soaps with black-and-white packaging to conserve ink. The soap was rationed, and a magistrate used to be present at dealer points to ensure no one could buy more than two bars. After any natural disaster, Lifebuoy was included in the emergency supply packs. Gradually, Lifebuoy started to

become an important part of people's everyday lives, both urban and rural. As its brands grew, the company also took innovative and responsible actions to benefit society. Along with benefitting the society, the company initiated good industrial practices that would later become industry norms in terms of ensuring workers' rights and wellbeing.

“There was a policy to prioritise locals, and after retirement, appointing family members of retired workers was the norm. The Chairmans were really worker- friendly. There is a story that once a Non-management staff was assaulted by locals over some petty issue. This happened around evening, and somehow, the Chairman, Sir David Lawrence, learned about it. He went out of the factory with his licensed gun to find the goons. He searched for the goons till midnight as he considered that it was his responsibility to protect his workers.”

Rabiul Islam
Joined in 1978

Pioneering Responsible Industrial Relations

As mentioned before, Kalurghat was selected as the site for Unilever's soap making factory after extensive assessment. Kalurghat, which today is known as a heavy industrial area and one of the industrial hubs of Bangladesh, was an agrarian community in the 1960s. However, KGF transformed Kalurghat's locality. Unilever was one of the first companies to set up a factory at Kalurghat. When the factory operation started, the response was mixed and the initial leadership was keen to help the community, mainly the local workers.

Local people were employed at the factory as workers, and this gradually started to transform the locality, and soon it began thriving with business activities. Many other companies followed Unilever and selected Kalurghat as their factory site as well, and soon it became Bangladesh's most prominent industrial hub. Unilever has heavily invested in developing local infrastructure, especially healthcare facilities.

The company has always prioritised the needs of the community. It has regularly held an annual Mezban (feast) for locals and donated to the education and healthcare needs of the workers' families. These practices later became industrial culture for other companies.

In addition to taking care of the employees, the company also made generous philanthropic

contributions to Maa O Shishu General Hospital in Chattogram. The Maa O Shishu General Hospital was set up in 1979 and is a popular reference in Chattogram for treating mothers and infants. However, due to insufficient resources, it could not cater to all the requirements of the patients - despite the executive committee's best intentions. This is where UBL came in as a sponsor and, besides financial help, extended the personal involvement of UBL managers in ensuring the speedy completion of the project. UBL also worked with hospital management to enhance the skills and capabilities of hospital staff and management and to provide better health care to patients. UBL also supported several Eye Camps at Islamia Hospital Chattogram for the underprivileged.

Unilever's charitable activities were not only limited to hospitals; during any national emergency like cyclones or floods, Unilever was always one of the first companies to respond.

The company has also encouraged employee volunteerism. In early 2000s, Unilever used to support Shathee Samaj Kalyan Samity (SSKS) to run a school for underprivileged children at Karail Slam, Banani, Dhaka and Unilever employees used to visit the school and take sessions.

Over the years, Unilever has also supported institutions that focus on children with special needs, such as William and Marie Taylor School by Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP), Amar Joti Special School by Niketan Foundation and Alok Nibash by Bangladesh Cancer Welfare Trust (BANCAT).

| Sanjiv Mehta inaugurating hospital ward (2000s) |



| Cheque Handover Ceremony at Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) (2022) |



Impacting Lives with the Floating Hope

As the brand is associated with health, Lifebuoy has a legacy of contributing to the health and wellbeing of the consumers. Like during World War I, those who were not at the forefront of the battle were encouraged to distribute the red soap among the soldiers to help them ward off diseases and stay healthy. And when World War II broke out, Lifebuoy sent vans equipped with hot showers, towels, and soap to some of the most affected areas in Britain to help locals who no longer have access to sanitary facilities.

This legacy inspired Lifebuoy to start something unique and remarkable in Bangladesh. Over 5 million people live in remote chars (river islands) in Bangladesh, and it is challenging for them to access essential health services, especially during the monsoon months. The only way to access these remote localities is with waterways. Lifebuoy wanted to do something for this community, and thus, Lifebuoy Friendship Hospital (LFH) started its journey in 2002.

LFH is an innovative approach to delivering essential healthcare services to the people living in these remote chars. In 1994, French sailor and aviator Yves Marre sailed a river barge from

“We were very excited as only on rare occasions would any commercial organisation get the opportunity to host the President of a country. However, it was a nightmare. We had to make a 5-star hotel arrangement at Pagla Ghat to host him. It was the experience of a lifetime as we had many adventures- such as filling up entire ponds to make a makeshift road to the event successful and start our legacy project – The Floating Hope.”

Zaved Akhtar
Joined in 2000

| Dr. A. Q. M. Badruddoza Chowdbury (President of Bangladesh) during the Lifebuoy Friendship Hospital Inauguration Ceremony (13th March 2002) |



France to Bangladesh to donate it for use by the people of Bangladesh. Friendship, a little-known NGO then, converted the barge into a hospital. Unilever supported the transformation and the hospital was launched in 2002 at Pagla Ghat, Narayanganj. The hospital ship was inaugurated by the President of Bangladesh, Professor Dr. A.Q.M. Badruddoza Chowdhury. This was a unique moment in the company's history.

However, the ship served its purpose. It has become a beacon of hope for around 50 million people living in those chars. Since its inception on March 13, 2002, the ship has served over 1.5

million patients. The ship has become a hub for the health and wellbeing activities of the people living in those remote chars.

LFH has remained in operation for over 20 years. Starting with just two doctors, the hospital ship extended its activities to run specialised medical camps for the villagers. Doctors and volunteer groups worldwide visit the hospital and conduct surgeries. The initiative has also bagged multiple global recognitions, including the Asian CSR Award 2016. Even today, this iconic initiative is considered an exemplary community support activity in Bangladesh.

“To the people of the chars, this ship symbolises hope and problem-solving. These villagers believed that this ship could solve all their problems, and whenever they faced any difficulty in life, they would tend to come to us.”

Dr. Iqbal Ahmad

LFH Physician

| Robert Chatterton Dickson (the then British High Commissioner to Bangladesh) visiting the LFH along with Zaved Akhtar (2023) |



| Patients waiting for post-surgical examination at the Eye Camp by LFH (2022) |



Making Sustainable Living Commonplace

The global business community has seen rapid changes in philosophies and principles since the 1990s. Alongside technological advancements, there has been a growing emphasis on environmental preservation and community impact. Following the 1992 Earth Summit, many businesses prioritised sustainability in their business practices.

As a leading global consumer goods company, Unilever has always been an international pioneer in adopting policies and principles to protect the environment. The company has been a Dow Jones Sustainability Index sector leader since the early 2000s. However, this became more prominent and

structured when the company announced its first-ever Sustainability commitment, the Unilever Sustainability Living Plan (USLP).

USLP was launched in London, Amsterdam, New Delhi, and New York simultaneously on November 15, 2010, following 12 months of research. This ambitious plan focused on doubling the business while reducing carbon emissions by half. As the USLP was launched across all markets, the waves of change soon reached Bangladesh. The first function that actively drove the strategy was the supply chain. KGF's resource optimisation journey started in 1998 with the installation of its first waste water treatment plant, the first of its kind in the existing industrial chain. After USLP launched, priority was given also to energy consumption. The journey started with energy conservation in 2010 by

“We are a Zero-Landfill company since 2014, one of the first Bangladeshi companies to ensure proper production waste management and recycling. We recycle most of our waste at KGF.”

Ruhul Quddus

Joined in 1996

installing the first-ever solar panel at our Kalurghat Factory (KGF). In 2010, UBL initiated green energy certification process with the Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC). The IREC certification involves obtaining carbon credits to offset the carbon footprint created by our energy production. At the same time, we started to ensure raw material sourcing from certified sources. The process has gradually evolved through continuous process improvement, redesign, and green technological investment. For example, after establishing the Water Treatment Plant (WTP) in 1998, UBL enhanced their waste treatment capabilities by introducing a Reverse Osmosis plant in 2014 and upgrading it further with biological treatment plant in 2020. These process reengineering and production efficiency driving initiatives have significantly increased UBL's water savings from its manufacturing operations.

Since 2008, Unilever have reduced the volume of water used per tonne at their manufacturing sites globally by approximately 50%. In Bangladesh, UBL have focused on systematically redesigning the products, packaging, and production

processes to minimise water consumption. In 2008, UBL had to use 4000 litres of water against per tonne of production, which had been decreased to 3800 litres per tonne by 2022 through operational optimisation. As a result of these savings, KGF have saved 2.2 billion litres of water, which is enough to meet the drinking water needs of 62,000 households for ten years since 2010. Along with water savings, the supply chain team also ensured zero waste production.

All these continuous and long-term efforts have yielded significant results, with a 24% reduction in energy consumption and a 21% decrease in CO₂ emissions compared to a 2010 baseline. These actions have saved approximately 1.4 million GJ of energy, equivalent to planting 3.5 million mature trees. KGF have reduced company's carbon emissions by 1.1 million kg since 2022 and 7.6 million kg since 2010. These achievements are a testament to the positive impact of UBL's sustainability initiatives, instilling optimism for a greener future. However, USLP was not only for decarbonising the business, rather it also equipped UBL brands to have a social purpose.

| Waste Recycling Facility at KGF(2024) |



| WTP at KGF(2024) |



Clean Hands Save Lives

Unilever's journey began with a simple mission: to provide a cost-effective solution for illness prevention. In 1894, Lifebuoy soap was created to combat diseases prevalent in Victorian England, especially during the cholera epidemic, offering communities an affordable way to protect themselves. This is still relevant today as, according to UNICEF, a child dies every 30 seconds from pneumonia or diarrhoea, leading to over 1.2 million deaths annually among those under five. Handwashing with soap remains the most effective and economical way to prevent these child fatalities even today.

For over 100 years, Lifebuoy has been trusted worldwide to fight germs and prevent infections. Starting as a health soap in Bangladesh in the 1960s, it became the country's leading hygiene brand and remains a symbol of protection today. One of Lifebuoy's key efforts to improve health and wellbeing in Bangladesh is its initiative to promote handwashing.

Handwashing has proven to be a successful way of reducing death due to public health benefits. Lifebuoy has a legacy school awareness programme which was launched in Great Britain in the 1930s and spread throughout the world later by Lifebuoy in the coming decades. Since the 1980s, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has also considered promoting handwashing this as a

national strategy to reduce child mortality, which was about 100 deaths per 1,000 births in the 1990s. Under this backdrop, UBL introduced Lifebuoy's Handwashing programme in Bangladesh.

Initially, UBL focused on creating awareness on rural communities. The company used to deploy teams of trained personnel to visit neighbourhoods, marketplaces, schools, etc., and communicate the importance of a healthy lifestyle through flipcharts and leaflets. This was then followed by demonstrating the use of Lifebuoy soap, which, by then, have been made available in sachet packs for people of all income groups.

Based on field experience and research-backed insights, UBL gradually transformed their initiative into a more methodical behaviour change programme. After the launch of the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP), the hand hygiene initiative was renamed as 'Lifebuoy School of 5', and adopted a more systematic execution approach incorporating a research-backed 21-day model. Since 2011, the Lifebuoy School of 5 has focused on five non-negotiable priorities to ensure proper habit formation.

The initiative featured many smart and creative executions. For Global Handwashing Day (GHD) in 2017, Lifebuoy created the largest human image of a hand, involving 11,157 participants and setting a Guinness World Record. This initiative raised awareness about the importance of handwashing in the media and among consumers.

Lifebuoy improved its School of 5 initiative further inspired by UNICEF's research on early childhood development in 2020 with a broader advocacy objective- to include handwashing in the school curriculum as part of the "H for Handwashing" movement.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, Lifebuoy could not fully execute the renewed initiative in 2020 and 2021.

But when schools started regular classes, the need for handwashing awareness was felt more

as Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) reported a 13% decline in access to soap and water for 2021, despite extensive media promotion on awareness. In response, the government issued a directive through the Ministry of Education for schools to ensure the availability of proper handwashing facilities. The government also emphasised the importance of partnerships to achieve WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) goals as outlined in the sector strategy.

To understand the situation, BRAC conducted an assessment immediately to evaluate the

| *Lifebuoy School Activation (2010s)* |



handwashing behaviour and preparedness in schools throughout Bangladesh in 2022. The assessment concluded that urgent measures are needed to address the declining handwashing practices in schools, particularly in remote and underprivileged areas. Furthermore, the assessment underscored the pivotal role of peer groups, teachers, and parents, in promoting proper hand hygiene within the school environment. That is when Lifebuoy partnered with BRAC to provide them necessary assistance. "BRAC felt that the situation demanded a methodical intervention that would give fast result and Lifebuoy has the proven, right-fit model to promote and form handwashing habits at vulnerable schools in hard-to-reach, media-dark areas. That is why we partnered with Lifebuoy to use their knowledge and expertise."- mentioned Mr. Hossain Ishrath Adib, Director for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene and Integrated Development Programme at BRAC on the backdrop of the collaboration.

The collaborative effort of BRAC and Lifebuoy reached over 750,000 school children in 2022. Lifebuoy also conducted the 'Lifebuoy Handwash

Everyday' campaign at peri- urban schools and madrasas in 2022, reaching approximately 250,000 schoolchildren that year. Additionally, to address post-COVID-19 complications and information gaps regarding healthcare, Lifebuoy partnered with a leading telemedicine service provider to offer free digital healthcare consultations to consumers. Since 2022, over 2 million people have utilised Lifebuoy's free helpline to receive doctor consultations.

With over 125 years of experience in personal health and hygiene, Lifebuoy have steadfastly combated preventable infections and saved lives. UBL takes pride in the transformation of Lifebuoy's initiative from a basic handwashing programme in the 1990s to a holistic mission aimed at enhancing hand hygiene and promoting better hygiene practices that it is today. Lifebuoy has instilled crucial handwashing techniques, empowering over 16 million school children since 2011 to safeguard themselves and their communities. Lifebuoy's success has also inspired and set an example for many other Unilever brands to have a strong social purpose and design their activities around this purpose.



Brands with Purpose Grow

Whenever anyone hears the term 'Brand,' they associate it with flashy commercials and promotional activities. However, brands are more than that—rather, a brand is a promise to add superior functional and emotional value to the lives of its consumers. That is why successful, lasting brands try to build deeper emotional connections with consumers. Sometimes, connecting with consumers, especially in Bangladesh, where many people have limited affordability and opportunity, means having a strong social mission or purpose.

Along with promoting consumers' health and hygiene, Unilever brands, especially personal

product brands, felt that these brands needed to stand up for social causes. This became more prominent in the late 1990s, and early 2000s when the country was going through an economic transition and more women were coming out of their homes. This transition had to be facilitated by developing their skills and confidence, and Glow & Lovely (GAL) was there to support them.

Geetiara Safya Chowdhury, Chairperson of Adcomm, a long-time advertising agency partner of Unilever, recalls that the brand was designed to give women confidence and stand for their rights.

Along with bold communication, GAL took several initiatives to develop women's skillsets.

“Normally, coming far from home for this NIIT course would have been a problem. If I had not been selected for this course, I would never have had such a chance. Since this is a prestigious scholarship, my parents are letting me come this far and attend the classes.”

Raunak Jahan
Participant

“We believed it is necessary that women, who are half of the country's population, be progressively brought into the mainstream of economic activities to bolster development. That is why we started to promote their skill building through GAL.”

Geetiara Safya Chowdhury
Chairperson and Founder, Adcomm

| GAL honouring female sportspersons of the country (2016) |



Uttorone Nari was the first such initiative. Initiated in 2003, it selected meritorious female students, primarily valedictorians from secondary schools, for computer education at a world-class training institute with branches in various districts nationwide. Over 1,500 girl students were nominated nationwide to participate in this training programme.

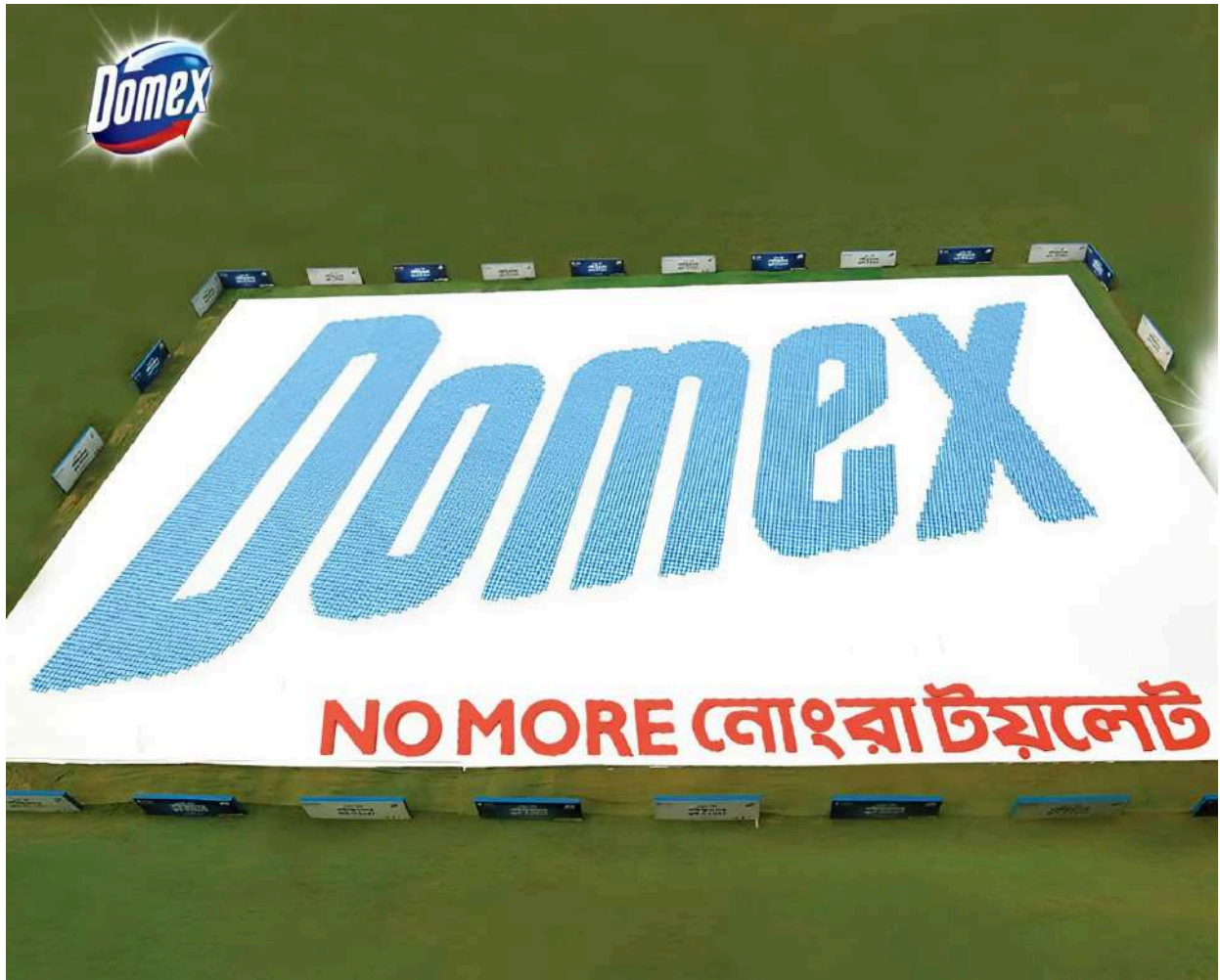
Following the success of the IT training, GAL identified that the women lacked access to information and guidance regarding career choices. So, to bridge the career information gap for women, GAL thought of using television to raise awareness. A 13-episode TV series was launched on Channel I in 2004, with each episode highlighting a specific career, detailing its prospects, paths, and an inspiring success story. The careers featured included Law, Banking, Advertising, Defense, Graphic Design, Engineering, Fashion Design, Merchandising, IT, Architecture, Journalism, Medicine, and Business.

The show generated significant viewer interest and inquiries. In addition to the TV series, the 'WEALTH' initiative was launched across nine districts. Initially, women with small businesses or those aspiring to start their ventures were selected for training. The 11-day programme was divided into two parts: the first five days focused on business management, while the next six days provided practical hands-on training. Many participants from the initiative are operating their successful businesses even today.

Inspired by the success of the WEALTH initiative, GAL later initiated a vocational training programme in urban areas in 2005. This initiative offered a 15-day workshop for selected candidates chosen from thousands of applicants. Ultimately, 450 participants received hands-on training in various fields, including Beauty & Makeup, Bakery & Confectionery, Food Processing, Flower Arrangement, Handicrafts, Block Printing, Batik, Chinese & Mughlai Cuisine,

“Growing brands with a purpose not only helped us to build brand equity and contribute to social causes, but it has also helped us to penetrate new markets and create new segments.”

Zaved Akhtar
Joined in 2000



“Our USLP vision was to transform all purpose-driven initiatives to be competitive and create advantages. These purpose-driven initiatives have not only impacted and empowered people, but also helped our brands to grow and perform better.”

Tanzeen Ferdous Alam

Joined in 2005



and Tailoring. These efforts aimed to reinforce the brand's true purpose, which was not merely about beauty but rather about building confidence—a key component of the brand's positioning.

These brand purpose works had been at the brand's core for many years, but this took an interesting turn after the launch of USLP in 2010.

During the 2010s, UBL's most significant sustainability initiatives were water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). UBL mirrored the ambition of the Government of Bangladesh in this area. It partnered with the GoB to change behaviour aimed at improving personal hygiene, sanitation practices, and access to safe drinking water through its brands like Lifebuoy. While Lifebuoy methodically scaled up its hygiene initiative, Domex, since its launch in 2019, focused on promoting clean toilets, another key requirement for improved sanitation.

Since its inception in Bangladesh, Domex has operated to initiate action against poor sanitation and encourage schools to improve the conditions of their toilets. On World Toilet Day 2019, Domex brought stakeholders to discussion sessions and a pledge ceremony and invited people from all walks of life to set a Guinness World Record—to raise awareness about improving sanitation for school children. The Guinness World Record for the Largest Sachet Product Word comprised 13,774 Domex powder

sachets, later distributed to over 200 schools nationwide. Lifebuoy and Domex led UBL's WASH agenda, while other brands supported the USLP mission in different avenues. For example, Pepsodent has been enhancing oral hygiene awareness, reaching over 10 million children since the early 2000s through initiatives like the Little Brush Big Brush (LBBB) campaign. Little Brush Big Brush are characters developed by Pepsodent to make learning about oral hygiene fun for children. It helps to establish good oral habits in children from a young age so that nothing gets in the way of smiling. These characters take children on a 21-day adventure to build good oral habits by teaching them to brush day and night.

Similarly, Vaseline Healing Project, launched in 2016 with Direct Relief and later through Thengamara Mohila Sabuj Sangha (TMSS), is a social initiative that provides skin treatment, free doctor consultations, and Vaseline petroleum jelly to underprivileged communities in Bangladesh. The project also aimed to educate people about skin health and dermatological problems. Since 2016, Vaseline has donated winter essentials like Vaseline Petroleum Jelly, blankets, winter clothing, etc., to over 800,000 underprivileged people in Northern Bangladesh.

Through these initiatives, Unilever advanced the global USLP agenda in Bangladesh. These experiences were essential launchpads for the next corporate sustainability era, the Compass.

| Public Handwashing Station with Lifebuoy and Unilever branding during COVID-19(2020) |



Towards a Sustainable Future for Bangladesh

The Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) had profoundly transformed Unilever's business approach globally since 2010. It drove brand growth and innovation while reducing costs through improving water and energy efficiency and minimising waste. Moreover, sustainable sourcing enhanced Unilever's supply chain globally and mitigated risks, allowing the company to attract and retain top talent. A significant achievement of the USLP has been its positive impact on the world through the company's multi-stakeholder model. Drawing from these experiences, all strategic discussions of the company emphasised continuity, which led to the announcement of Unilever's next global strategy: Compass.

The Compass outlined Unilever's vision to become the global leader in sustainable business, encompassing sustainability in the broadest sense: socially, environmentally, and economically. Through Compass, Unilever aimed to become the leader in sustainable business, so the organisation mobilised its resources to meet pressing issues such as reducing our plastic footprint.

Plastic is a very useful packaging material for consumer goods companies like Unilever. It is versatile, more lightweight than alternatives like glass, and more durable and waterproof than alternatives like paper.

However, globally, a large amount of plastic packaging is mismanaged and ends up in the environment. Unilever recognised that we are a part of that problem, so we have to be a part of the solution, too. That is why Unilever has identified plastic as one of the global sustainability priorities.

Mashiur Rahman, currently Senior Packaging Development Manager, who joined in 2013 as a Production Shift Officer at KGF recalls, "As a manufacturer of consumer goods, Unilever was always aware of the effects of the 'take-make-dispose' model of plastic, in which goods are produced, purchased, temporarily used, and then discarded. As a responsible company, Unilever wanted to switch from this linear perspective to one that emphasises resource reuse and closed-loop systems. We started working to change how our packaging is sourced, designed, used and disposed. We focused our efforts where we can have the most impact, such as reducing virgin plastic and finding solutions for hard-to-recycle flexible packaging, like plastic sachets. Our ambition was to reduce plastic pollution through reduction, circulation and collaboration."

For reducing virgin plastic use, Unilever started designing lighter packaging and switching to alternative packaging materials, formats and models worldwide, including in Bangladesh. These design innovations in Bangladesh have saved 1,174 tonnes of plastic since 2018. The goal

was to raise consumer awareness and encourage the use of refill packs, which are cost-effective and environmentally friendly. UBL initiated this effort in the 2000s with the Lifebuoy Handwash Refill Pack, followed by the Vim Dishwashing Liquid Smart Pack, and most recently, the Sunsilk Refill Pack in 2023. By promoting refill packs, the company have achieved a 60% reduction in carbon footprint per pack. Since 2020, UBL started to experiment with retail refill technology that can operate within the limited space of a traditional Bangladeshi retail outlet.

However, the major challenge in Bangladesh had been post-consumer use plastic waste. Bangladesh, like many other developing nations, experienced a massive surge in post-consumer plastic waste particularly in its growing urban centres. These wastes are often left uncollected in the environment, causing urban problems like water clogging.

“In Bangladesh, urban plastic waste is collected and processed locally, and there is no standard, uniform system. The entire value chain, starting

| Plastic waste worker at Chattogram with UBL branded safety kit (2023) |



“Our work at Narayangonj was one of the pioneering municipal-backed waste management initiative of the country and we had a very steep learning curve. The on-ground realities and pilot test gave us great insights.”

Shamima Akhter

Joined in 2019

from collection to recycling had been informal. Everyone understood that the problem is massive, yet no organisation was ready to take initiative due to the scale and complexity.”- mentions Dr. Ijaz Hossain, a retired Professor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) who is one of the leading national experts on Plastic Waste Management. However, UBL decided that they were up for taking this challenge. Despite having any sort of technical expertise or understanding, UBL decided to start collecting and processing post consumer use plastic waste in 2019.

Globally Unilever had set an ambitious target of collecting more plastics than it puts in the market as product packaging. Initially, UBL had no experience regarding the waste plastic value chain. However, it was identified that the problem

cannot be approached alone. So UBL decided to explore suitable partners to develop a sustainability model, by now, which has become multi-stakeholder engagement model.

In 2019, Unilever partnered with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Narayangonj City Corporation (NCC) to design a pilot project. Narayangonj was selected as the location as this is a major mid-size urban centre near Dhaka. Narayangonj was also facing a severe water clogging challenge due to mismanaged plastic waste. However, the initiative had to be halted for quite some time due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Since 2020, on-ground activities started, and several waste collection models were piloted. All the models involved engaging the value chain

“We identified waste workers (waste pickers) and traders (Bhangariwalas) as the key stakeholders of this entire value chain. We designed our intervention to strengthen the value chain, supporting these individuals and uplifting their condition. We gave over 3,000 waste workers livelihood support, trained them to use safety equipment and inspire waste workers and citizen for source segregation.”

Dilruba Ahmed

Joined in 2010

actors, such as the Waste Collectors (pickers), the informal waste aggregators, Recycling Businesses and more importantly consumers.

Based on the learnings from the pilot project, UBL was ready and confident to scale up the initiative. In 2022, UBL partnered with Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) and Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), an NGO based in Chattogram, to scale up the collection model city-wide. Chattogram was selected as UBL is historically associated with the development of the city

through its rooted legacy of KGF. A tri-party Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed among UBL, CCC and YPSA to implement systematic change, develop institutional capacity, empower the value chain actors, and mobilise the community to establish Circularity. In 2023, for the first time, UBL successfully collected and processed 10,028.171 tonnes of plastic waste, more than the amount of plastic used in packaging in the entire country, making Unilever Bangladesh the first plastic-neutral consumer goods company of the country.





Taking the Fight to Pandemic

Like the rest of the world, COVID-19 pandemic halted the life and livelihood of the people of Bangladesh. Nobody in the world was prepared for what was coming in the form of a pandemic. There was no instruction-manual on how to cope with it, and no one had really experienced such a situation before.

Bangladesh, being a developing country, was hardly any better prepared for the crisis. Just as the nation rallied to come together, and pull through the crisis, Unilever Bangladesh stood by the nation to help it through—with the power of its brands and products, leveraging its partnerships to reach out to those in need. UBL's commitment truly shone through various heartfelt initiatives, such as providing essential safety equipment for frontline workers, delivering CareKits to those in need, and partnering with hospitals to facilitate testing.

Lifebuooy was the first brand to respond, and that was done even before the pandemic reached Bangladesh. It became the first brand to create awareness about COVID-19 beginning in January 2020 when the virus began to spread mostly through China. While it was the first brand to communicate a 99.9% efficacy against the coronavirus, it informed and educated the consumers of always using soap to wash their

hands, and that any soap would suffice. This message earned the brand tremendous goodwill among the consumers, as it was apparent that their health was the top priority for the brand.

When a general holiday was announced in 2020, most companies stopped their production. However Unilever realised the urgency of soap and hygiene products' availability at that time to fight the virus. That is why the company worked with the Government for special authorisation to continue production as people needed soap to fight the pandemic. After much persuasion, Unilever was given permission to continue production and UBL continued producing its trusted brands and serve the nation with utmost care and safety. The company even came up with new products, such as Lifebuooy Hand Rub and Hand Sanitiser.

However, managing production and also the supply to the stores had to be done by taking extreme precautions. The organisation was ready to commit anything to protect the employees and invested over 125 Million BDT on COVID-19 related safety measures. This was executed so efficiently that no worker or field employee was lost during this time. UBL not only excelled at supplying critical products to the country but also utilised their network to support the country. "It was a defining moment for the organisation as no one knew what to do, but everyone felt that we need to use all our available resources to help the country fight. Everyone was stressed, yet we all

were committed to do something.”- recalled Shamima Akhter, who joined in 2019.

As the whole organisation was committed and motivated, miracles started to happen. It started with immediate response to UNICEF’s call to help 25 Government Hospitals with Hygiene products. Gradually, other organisations such as UNDP, UN WOMEN, Sena Kalyan Sangstha (SKS), Bangladesh Police and BRAC was also supported with hygiene products and care packs. However,

UBL’s efforts were not limited to products only, rather the whole organisational capability and network were utilised to help the nation. This even extended to completely unrelated activities, such as importing COVID-19 Test Kits.

During the early days of COVID-19, the nation suffered due to test kit shortage. Using the strength of the global supply chain, UBL sourced and imported essential testing kit and donated 50,000 testing kits to ICDDR,B.

| *Oxygen Concentrator Machine donation to DGHS during COVID-19 (2020)* |



"We utilised our network and got hold of the testing kits. The operation was very challenging as we had to offload the cargo from the aircraft, arrange a freezer truck and reach the storage facility only within a few hours. But it was very fulfilling as we successfully reached the ICDDR,B facility within time. It was a proud moment as we felt that we did our national duty and gave our best effort." – recalls Abdul Alim, who was part of the Sourcing team during 2020.

UBL brands also came forward. Lifebuoy also developed and leveraged partnerships to contribute products and financial support to help prevent the spread of the virus, and educate people around the country. Through BRAC, the world's largest NGO, Lifebuoy was able to deliver handwash products to 500,000 vulnerable people through a door-to-door campaign, mainly in rural Bangladesh.

Unilever also partnered with BRAC through the global Hand Washing Behaviour Change Coalition (HBCC) and mobilised 40 million Euro global fund in Bangladesh. With Unilever's support, BRAC helped the government to raise nationwide awareness, deploy mobile handwashing facilities nationwide and distribute health and hygiene products. Handwashing facilities were also installed across all 64 district commissioner offices in collaboration with Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, while the Lifebuoy team worked with Bhumijo to install no-touch wash facilities in Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.

Along with Lifebuoy, other brands were also fulfilling their purpose, and helping the nation at the same time in their own unique ways. For example, Dove launched the 'Courage is Beautiful' campaign to bring focus to the efforts of frontline health workers. As a part of a larger global campaign, the idea was to feature doctors for the communication that was set up. "We highlighted the frontline workers in a real-time working environment and showcased their stories of perseverance and struggle during COVID-19. The goal was to send an underlying message that these selfless acts of courage are indeed something to behold and acknowledge, and we received some deeply emotional responses from the doctors. They were genuinely appreciative of this campaign, and called up our Brand Manager and shared how special it made them feel. It was not just a case of brands-say, rather we walked the talk. For example, Dove made a donation to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital, as part of Unilever's COVID-19 response initiatives. All the doctors of these two institutions also received goods and gift baskets from Dove. We also donated ventilation machines as well.", shares Shabit Shafiullah, who joined in 2015 as a Management Trainee.

At the same time, Pepsodent also launched a platform to connect doctors with patients to allow them to avail dental care—something that was off-limits in that challenging time. A webinar to educate consumers on the fundamentals of dental care was also conducted.



Along with the brands, UBL, as an organisation, also contributed to fight the pandemic. During the second outbreak of COVID-19 in 2021, Bangladeshi hospitals were struggling due to a shortage of oxygen concentrators. UBL imported the machines using their own supply chain and donated 100 Oxygen Concentrator Machines to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). Along with equipment, UBL also contributed towards improving the facilities of two hospitals operated by SAJIDA Foundation, a Bangladeshi NGO during the 2021 outbreak.

“We felt that every moment was crucial as people were losing lives every hour due to the shortage of Oxygen Concentrators. We wanted to take these concentrators to the patients as soon as

possible so that we could save some more lives. So instead of donating the concentrators to a central location, we decided that it would save some more lives if we could deliver it to the hospitals throughout the country. We engaged our field teams, and they enthusiastically volunteered. Just within 3 days, we managed to deliver 100 concentrators across 63 districts. We only could manage this due to the passion of our people.” recalls Tafizul Islam Pail, who was in charge of the distribution.

Even while maintaining physical distance, the bond among team members remained unbreakable. Those working in factories and distribution centers understood the vital role they played in supporting the community, while their

colleagues at home reached out in meaningful ways — whether by allocating resources thoughtfully or simply offering words of encouragement to uplift spirits. This deep sense of unity fostered a powerful narrative of courage and resilience.

“During the pandemic, our employees were socially distanced yet emotionally connected. It was a defining moment for the organisation and we felt that protecting our people and their families should be the highest priority of the organisation. We knew that, if we could take care of our people, they will take care of the business.”, recalls Sakshi Handa, who was the Human Resources Director of UBL during the pandemic

and contributed to the wellbeing of the employees despite being separated from her family.

COVID-19 was a defining time for the generation which came with many challenges. Navigating the pandemic was a cause the importance of which nobody doubted, but everyone honoured by holding themselves to the highest standards and always going the extra mile in whatever way they could. In the process, they forged a story—one of courage, resilience, and perseverance.

In these extraordinary times, it became clear that, together, UBL employees could face any challenge that would come their way and would remain steadfast to the mission.

“COVID-19 was a defining moment for the organisation as no one knew what to do, but everyone felt that we need to use all our available resources to help the country fight. Everyone was stressed, yet we all were committed to do something.”

Shamima Akhter

Joined in 2019

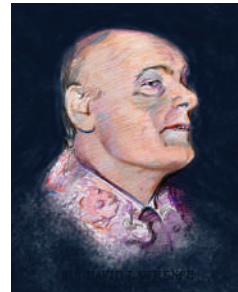
Stewards of Success: Unilever Bangladesh Chairmen



J.P. Newling
1970-1974



P.F.A.S.T.C. Wilson
1975-1979



Sir David Lawrence
1979-1982



J.H. Kempster
1982-1987



H.J. Hemmen
1987-1990



I.S. Sangster
1990-1995



J.L.W. Noal
1995-1999



Jean Alfonsi
1999-2002



Sanjiv Mehta
2002-2006



Rakesh Mohan
2007-2011



Kamran Bakr
2012-2017



Kedar Lele
2018-2020



Zaved Akhtar
2021-Now

Witnesses of the Journey

Abdul Alim

Abdul Hamid

Abdus Salam

Abu Abdullah

Aditya Kankaria

Adnan Karim

Afzal Hasan Khan

Ahsan Habib

Akhter Mateen

Akhteruzzaman

Amal Cabral

Amal Dey

Aman Ashraf Faiz

Aminur Rahman

Amitava Halder

Anowarul Azim

Arshad Manjur

Asadul Hashem

Ashikur Rahman

Ashraf Ull Bari

Asif Bhuiyan

Asif Chowdhury

Ata Safdar

Atqiur Raza

Atul Paris

Babul Saha

Delwar Hossain

Dinesh Bidhappa

Ehsanul Karim

Enayet Kabir

Faizur Rahman

Fakhrul Islam

Farid Uddin Ahmed

Faridur Reza Sagor

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Ferdous Yusuf

Geetiara Safya Chowdhury

Habibullah Ahad

Hasne Ara Loma

Hedayet Ullah

Iftekharul Alam

Imran Ali Sarkar

Imran Momin

Inam Ahmed

Jobedur Rahman

Kalimur Rahman

Kazi Amirul Hoque Shiblee

Kazi Saiful Islam

KSM Minhaj

Lutfor Rahman

Madan Mohon Paul

Mahtab Uddin Ahmed

Mashiud-Duza
Masud Imam
Mazhar Hasan
Md. Tarikul Islam
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Mizanur Rahman
Mohammad Sanaullah
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