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## A Planet in Crisis

OUR WARMING EARTH IS AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT. THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK—OR THE NEXT ONE—COULD BE TOO. HOW BUSINESS IS COPING WITH THE CHALLENGES OF AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD.

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# SIKDER GROUP –

## Driving for Positive Change in Bangladesh



In Bangladesh, near the northwestern border of the capital, Dhaka, the proposed Bangabandhu Tri-Tower Complex will be the centerpiece of the gleaming Purbachal New Town central business district. “If everything goes according to plan, the finishing touches to a project that promises to become an icon of Bangladesh’s spectacular economic growth will be applied in 2025,” says Ron Haque Sikder, Board Director of the Sikder Group of Companies (SGC), a diversified Bangladeshi firm leading the project.

**T**he complex, which symbolizes Dhaka’s growing importance as a financial and commercial hub for the Indian subcontinent and East Asia, will be built by a consortium led by SGC subsidiary PowerPac Holdings Ltd. along with Japan’s Kajima Corporation. The master plan, designed by Korea’s Heerim Architects & Planners, will include three towers of 52, 71, and 111 stories (the 96th floor is dedicated to the Honorable Sheikh Hasina), each intended to commemorate watershed moments in Bangladesh’s history: 52 stories represents the language movement of Bangladesh in 1952; 71 stories represents the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971; and the 96th floor of the 111-story tower represents the start of the Honorable Sheikh Hasina’s first term as prime minister in 1996. This project seems certain to become a fitting flagship for the prime minister’s Vision 2021 national plan.



SGC was founded as a real estate development business back in the 1950s, and the broad diversification of the group began in 2009 under the pragmatic leadership of Rick Haque Sikder and Ron Haque Sikder. Purbachal New Town may be the most eye-catching of the Sikder Group’s projects, but there is much more to SGC’s range of activities than high-end real estate.

Today, SGC has a presence in just about every major segment of Bangladeshi business and has grown into a diversified group with interests ranging from healthcare, hospitality, energy, and aviation to the development of ports and special economic zones.

As well as carrying a torch for Bangladesh on the international stage, SGC has set the gold standard for the implementation of quality-driven, goal-oriented business practices, and has almost single-handedly raised the quality of large public-sector infrastructure projects in Bangladesh.

“We believe in our values, and we believe in being fair,” say Rick and Ron Sikder, who serve as the main board directors of SGC, and are Chairman and Managing Director of several SGC subsidiaries.

The group’s transition from a successful real estate entity to a significant player laying the physical foundations of 21st-century Bangladesh



**RICK HAQUE SIKDER,**  
CHAIRMAN

started a decade ago, when SGC and PowerPac Holdings became involved in development of the large infrastructure projects that Bangladesh so badly needs, particularly in the areas of power generation and infrastructure construction of everything from highways and bridges to ports and economic zones.

PowerPac Holdings' breakthrough moment came in August of 2010, when SGC secured its first contract with the Bangladesh Power Development Board. PowerPac owns two fully operational power plants and another two under development, with an eventual combined capacity of 460 MW; two are located in Keraniganj, to the southwest of Dhaka, one is in Jamalpur, in the north, and another is in Khulna, in the southwest. The electricity they generate flows into the national grid, and PowerPac is now looking to diversify into renewable energy.

SGC's move into the power sector was the beginning of an impressive journey that has seen the group develop into an indispensable contributor to Bangladesh's infrastructure framework and growing export capacity.

Developing the Port of Mongla, the country's second-busiest seaport, was at the top of the list of the country's priorities, and PowerPac has built Mongla into a credible alternative for the global shipping industry, as punctuality and productivity have become increasingly curtailed by congestion at the Port of Chittagong. In 2016, the government gave SGC's new subsidiary, PowerPac Ports, the contract to develop and operate river port facilities in the Port of Mongla, and that year PowerPac was awarded the license



**RON HAQUE SIKDER,**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

from the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) to develop and operate the Mongla Economic Zone (MEZ).

The MEZ, which stretches across 205 acres adjacent to the port and Mongla's Export Processing Zone, is Bangladesh's first public-private economic zone, and is expected to create jobs for 25,000 locals as well as significantly increase the country's export and import capacity.

Rick and Ron Sikder are confident that the MEZ will attract inward investment, and so far, that confidence seems well-founded; Unilever Bangladesh was one of the first multinationals to establish an operational plant in the zone.

In 2017, BEZA awarded PowerPac the phase 1 contract to develop and operate a special economic zone in Mirsharai, Chittagong.

**THE SHEER DIVERSITY OF THE SECTORS IN WHICH SGC IS ACTIVE IS STRONG EVIDENCE OF BANGLADESH'S COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL; SGC SUBSIDIARY R&R AVIATION SPECIALIZES IN DOMESTIC AND PREMIUM CHARTER AND EMERGENCY SERVICES, AND SGC PUBLISHES THE HUGE INFLUENTIAL ENGLISH-LANGUAGE BANGLADESH POST.**

SGC's media interests extend beyond Bangladesh's boundaries, and it owns shares in CNN Money Switzerland, the Swiss-based

English-language TV business channel, which reaches most of Europe.

While ready-made garment (RMG) manufacturers and textile producers still dominate the Bangladeshi economy, several other sectors with considerable untapped potential are making headway, including tourism.

Here again, SGC is paving the way and developing the upscale Sikder Resort & Villas complex that overlooks the pristine white-sand Kuakata Beach on the Bay of Bengal. This promises to be just the start, as global hotel chains including Marriott seek to expand their presence in Bangladesh, and SGC is increasingly their first call in their search for local partners.

The projects being developed by Sikder Group will bring sustainable and positive socioeconomic changes to Bangladesh. These projects will not only create job opportunities for around 2 million people, but will also ensure a higher quality of life for 9 million inhabitants.

Thanks to a business philosophy that prioritizes investment in human capital, SGC is also helping to improve the quality of the country's labor pool. "We are not a labor-intensive company," says Ron Sikder. "We are much more intellectually oriented. The majority of our 6,000 employees are highly skilled, and we take a lot of time and effort to train them up to the requisite level. We regularly partner up with international brands and invite their senior managers to come and have strategic meetings." This, he believes, is not just beneficial for the company, but for the country as a whole.

Regarding the company's growth strategy for the next 3–5 years, the Purbachal CBD remains SGC's top priority. "We are determined to make the CBD a success," says Rick Sikder, "and we will be as innovative as necessary to achieve that. We are also open to anybody with innovative ideas who wants to be part of the CBD project." However, Sikder Group is always ready to discuss new projects on one condition: "Wherever we work, we only work with the best."



**POWER PAC HOLDINGS LTD.**