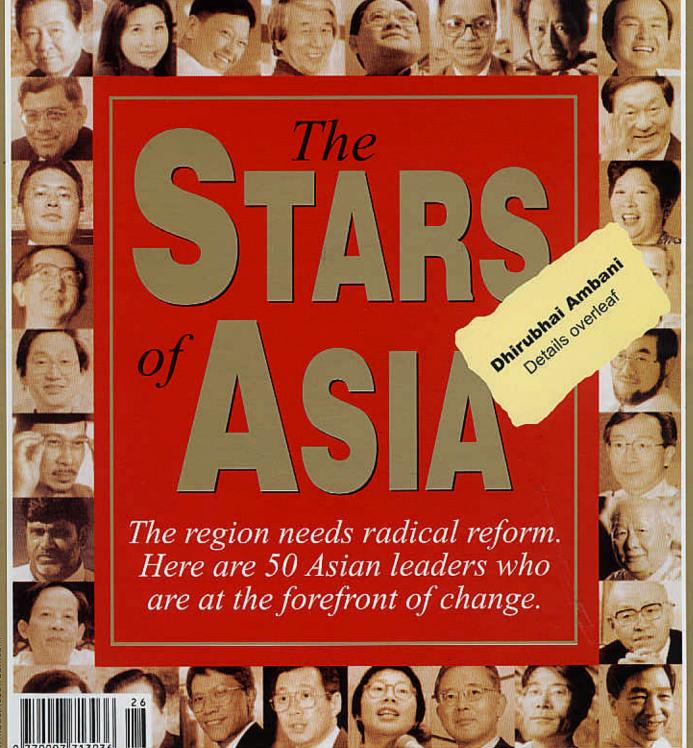
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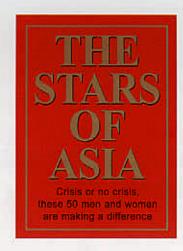
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t may be the worst economic crisis in half a century. But even in the midst of turmoil, there are men and women stepping forward to help Asia reinvent itself. We call them Asia's stars. Some are making gutsy bets on expansion during the downturn. Others are pushing Asia toward greater accountability — to shareholders or to voters.



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DHIRUBHAI AMBANI

D hirubhai H. Ambani remembers when he was a small producer of synthetic textiles in Bombay in the 1960s, snubbed and dismissed by India's established textile barons and local bankers. Today, he is India's showcase entrepreneur. His Reliance Industries Ltd. is a petrochemical giant that earned \$418 million last year on sales of \$3.4 billion. Reliance shares are among the most widely held in India.

Unlike most other Indian industrialists, Ambani was not a child of privilege. At 17, he was pumping gas in what is now Yemen. After returning to India in the 1960s, he started Reliance as a trading company and then plowed into synthetic fibers and oil refining. Ambani's knack for maneuvering around India's bureaucracy and his tendency to "think big, think fast, and think ahead" meant he was ready when reforms began in 1991. By 2000, he hopes Reliance will have \$10 billion in annual sales and be a world-class,



low-cost producer. He has already adopted international standards to make Reliance stock more appealing to foreign investors.

While the day-to-day management is handled by his sons Anil and Mukesh, Ambani, 65, remains chief strategist and visits the office everyday dressed in his customary white-cotton shirt. He also says he harbors no grudge against those who slighted him. "I still call them 'Sir,' because I can't forget my old days," says Ambani.