



PHOTO: COURTESY



Iraj Islam



Asif Rahman



Shafqat Islam

Reinventing News

NAZIBA BASHER

NewsCred, an online news portal, was a concoction of ideas blended together from three different young Bangladeshis— Iraj Islam, Shafqat Islam and Asif Rahman. In this day and age, marketers are becoming publishing powerhouses, depending on shareable content to build their brands and engage customers. Likewise, publishers are innovating on social platforms. The traditional division between marketers, publishers, agencies and consumers has dissolved, and require them all to reassess their content ecosystems. NewsCred is leading this change by growing on powerful tech-

nology, creative content strategies and world-class editorial curation.

"At the time, we didn't know how big a business it could be, but we all knew it was important," says Iraj. With the three young men working on three corners of the planet (Asif in Philadelphia, Iraj in Dhaka, Shafqat in Geneva), they quietly went about building a consumer facing news site that gave readers the ability to rate, tag, comment and vote on the quality and credibility of news.

Their product suite includes end-to-end content solutions: the technology essential to sort out and curate appropriate content; the publishing tools

needed to invent and put together campaigns with pace and scale; and the editorial teams needed to bring legitimacy to every content understanding. At their core, NewsCred is about associations. Over the past four years, they have built partnerships with over 2500 publishers including The New York Times, The Economist, The Guardian, Getty Images, and more. In fact, they have built the largest publisher's network in the world, giving businesses unparalleled access to quality journalism. "We founded NewsCred in 2008, and this is a story of perseverance. The initial idea for NewsCred was seeded in Dhaka where we came up with our vision that has guided us ever since:

finding a way to surface high quality journalism," says Iraj.

By sourcing and licensing trusted content across a broad range of subjects and perspectives, NewsCred delivers millions of dollars of revenue back into the news ecosystem, offering a crucial industry the means to not just to survive, but thrive. The world's leading publishers, including The Chicago Tribune, LA Times, Forbes and Huffington Post, depend on NewsCred to grow traffic, attract advertisers and build new revenue. Functioning in three different locations, London, Manhattan and Dhaka, NewsCred considers itself more of a new agency than anything else.

Preserving history

ANIKA HOSSAIN

In 2004, a 400 year-old-building situated in Shakhari Bazaar in Old Dhaka collapsed. This marked the beginning of one man's journey on the road to architectural and cultural preservation of a long neglected heritage. Architect Taimur Islam discovered that the reason for the collapse was not age related dilapidation, as the government claimed, but a 10 ft deep ditch being dug for building construction in an adjacent plot. He was appalled when the government labelled 90 other buildings in the same area as vulnerable and dangerous and

photo exhibitions featuring buildings from the Mughal and Colonial times. In 2008 they started organising Heritage Walks through Old Dhaka and surrounding areas which were essentially guided tours through Shakhari Bazaar, featuring the historically significant Boro and Choto Katras, the Ruplal House, Armanitiola, ancient mosques, an Armenian Church, and much more. USG also promoted the craftsmanship of the locals to the National Arts Council to help them with their livelihood.

In 2007, Taimur Islam was selected as an Eisenhower Fellow. "This fellowship gives you an opportunity to visit



PHOTO: KAZI TAHNIN AGAZ APURBO

planned to demolish them to build modern apartment complexes for the residents.

"Shakhari Bazaar happens to be the oldest living street in Dhaka," says Islam, "Of all the ancient communities of crafts people, carpenters and weavers, this is the only one that has survived. My wife Humaira Zaman and I, along with some fellow architects got together to form a committee called Urban Study Group (USG), and started a campaign we called Save Pura Dhaka."

The USG and their volunteers began to raise awareness about the importance of these structures in 2006-07 through

15 to 16 cities in the US to learn more on your field. His biggest achievement however was a grant USG received from the American Embassy in 2009 (Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation) to help his cause.

In the past ten years, the efforts of Islam and USG, who faced much resistance from the locals and political entities, led to the forming of a Heritage Committee by the government and a Heritage List in 2009. This names about 93 sites in four areas of old and new Dhaka as heritage sites, and therefore, protected property. Islam still continues to promote his cause today.



PHOTO: KAZI TAHNIN AGAZ APURBO

NAZIBA BASHER

After finishing his A' Levels from Scholastica, Adnan MS Fakir joined Grinnell College in Iowa, USA to pursue Liberal Arts. However, he then returned to Dhaka and completed his undergraduate degree in Economics at BRAC University, following a Master's degree in Economics at the University of Sussex, United Kingdom, on scholarship. Through the nurturing of his education, Adnan experienced much more than he could have ever dreamed of. And that was only the beginning of his journey.

Adnan's work stretches beyond the imagination of the ordinary. "While working for Rising Stars, The Daily Star, almost a decade ago, I carried out a survey amongst the youth," says Adnan. "It had very basic questions regarding our history -- whether they knew the difference between our Independence Day and Victory Day. Sadly, 34 percent of the answers were wrong." Motivated to change the statistics and learn more himself, he created a team of 14 people and started 'Finding Bangladesh,' a documentary team capturing and learning history of Bangladesh.

Finding Bangladesh released their first documentary, covering historical sites and stories of Dhaka and Rajshahi, and won The Celebrating Life award for best documentary in 2008, along with an award for best debut documentary at the Iowa Film Festival in 2009. Adnan himself takes care of the cinematography and editing. In

2008, Adnan received the John Young Fellowship Grant which helps in preserving historical sites. He used the grant money for the reconstruction of historical temples in Puthia, Rajshahi.

Finding Bangladesh 2 will be released in May, 2014. The second part of the award winning documentary covers Barisal and Khulna. Furthermore, there are plans of making a third and final part highlighting the histories of Chittagong



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and Sylhet. "After releasing the final part, we plan on making a booklet that archives everything from the documentaries," adds Adnan.

After a two-week-long session with the Indian Economist and Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, on Poverty Analysis in 2010, Adnan is now planning to do a PhD in either Conflict Economics or Historical Economics. Apart from teaching and docu-

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mentation, Adnan has more talents that have earned him a name as an inspiration. His experience at Rising Stars combined with his love and passion for writing has earned him three published books- 'My Solitude, My Words', published in 2005 by BRAC Publications, 'Whispers', published by Mawla Brothers in 2006 and 'Canvas' published by BRAC University Publications in 2013, as further testament to his versatility.