

SPOTLIGHT

Let's look at how Facebook helped us in 2015 alone:

Thanks to social media, the peaceful protests of the private university students reached the right people, when the government suddenly imposed a 7.5 percent Value Added Tax (VAT) on private university education, earlier this year. Because of the pressure created, especially through social media, the government withdrew the decision. Even though the protests had begun in July, 2015, it was in September when students, parents and professionals not only took to the streets to carry out their rallies, but also used the social media platform to get their voices heard, point out the truth, carry on debates and get their points across to the other side of the table. "Facebook played a huge role in connecting parents and students, during the No VAT protests," says Mahrukh Khan, an interior designer and mother of two university going sons. "My sons were active on social media, expressing themselves, doing research and posting their statements online. The good thing about Facebook is that it gets your message through loud and clear. We were clear on the idea that there cannot be a VAT placed on education! It's ridiculous! The idea of a private university had

emerged more than a decade ago because the public universities could not accommodate many bright young people -- either because of space or for the antiquated system of accepting students. If the state believes that private universities are mere business houses, they must make the public university admissions system better, approachable and accepting," adds the University of Dhaka graduate (Class of 82).

One of the horrors that came to life in 2015 was the Rajon case. The 13-year-old was beaten to death for a so-called 'petty crime' which still remains unclear. To add to it all, the whole incident was recorded and released on the social media

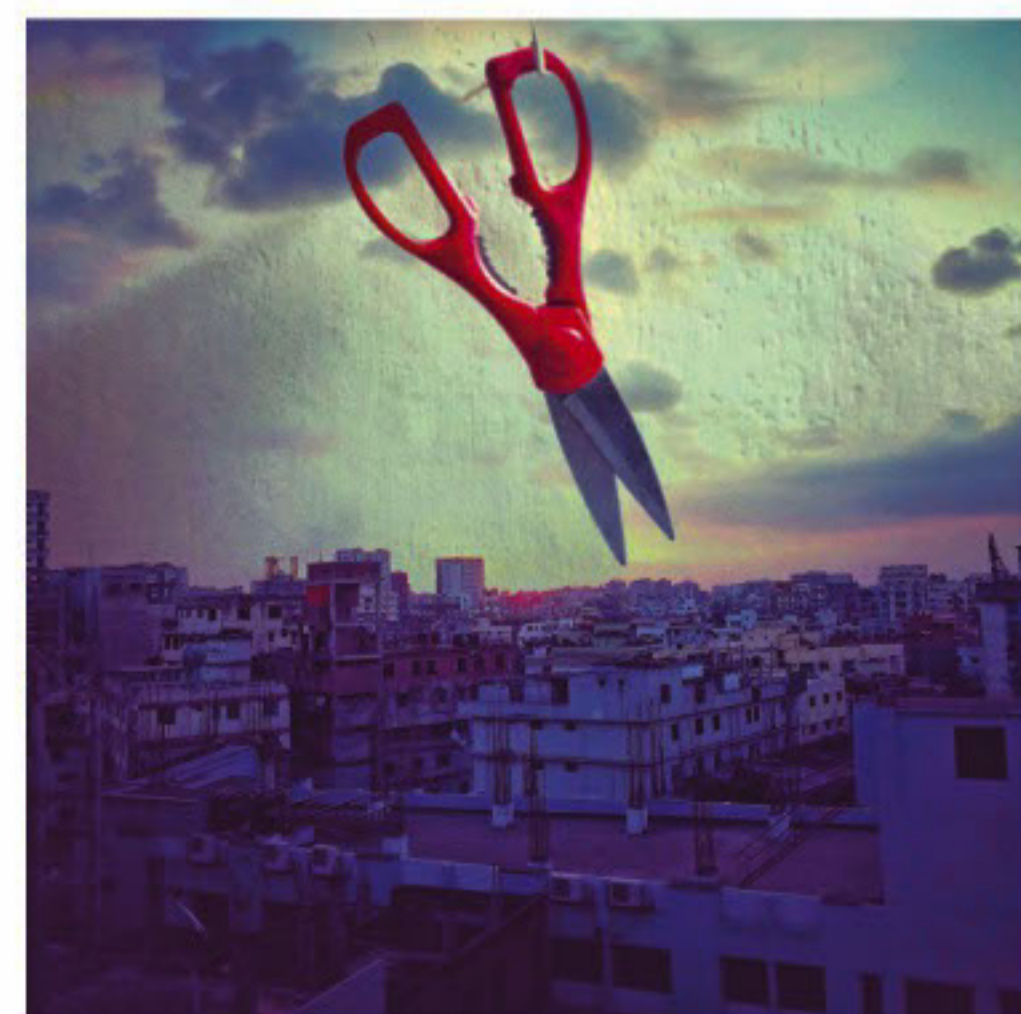
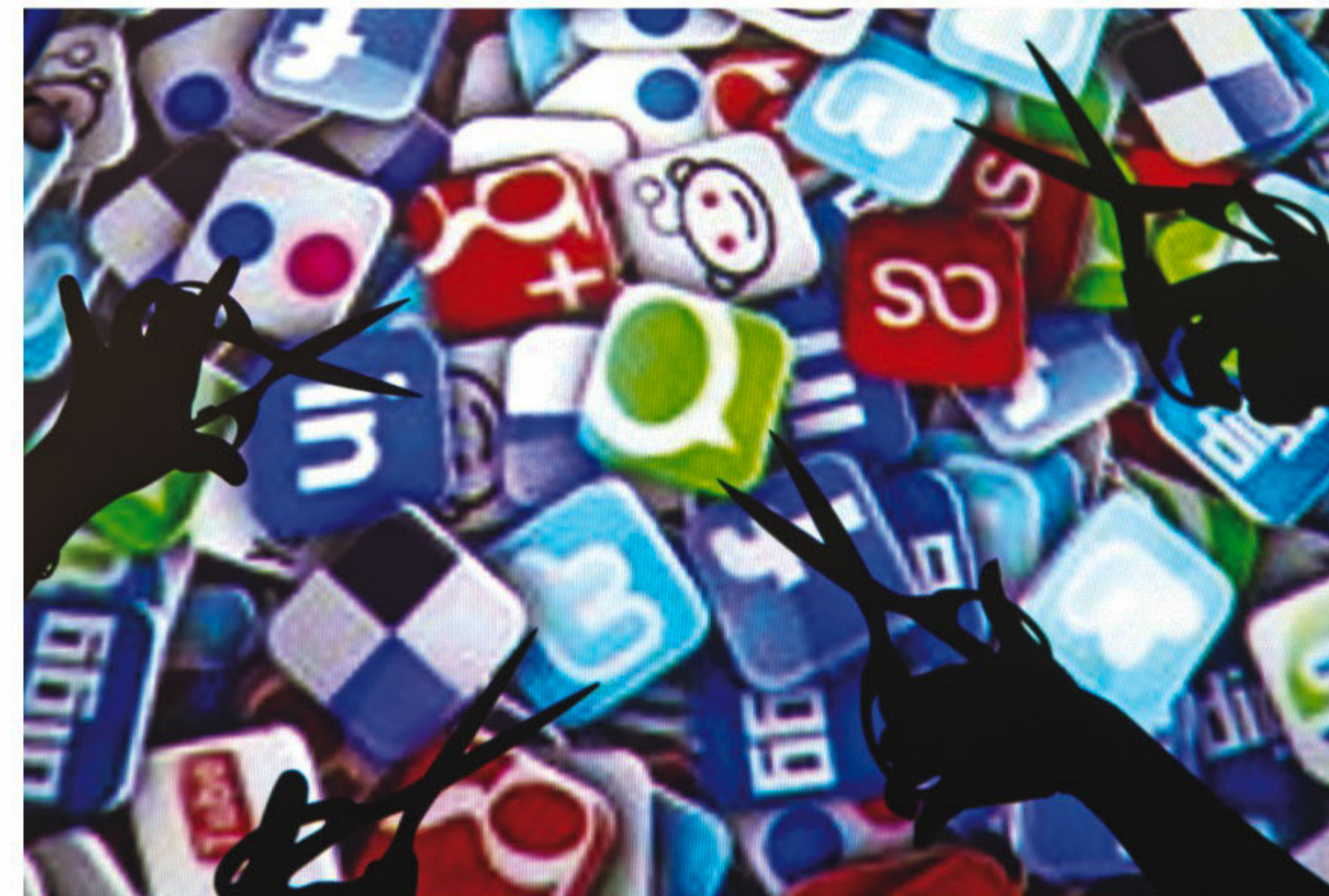
THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

ELITA KARIM

PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO



PHOTO: COURTESY



platform, where his murderers were gleefully beating him up and enjoying the whole process of recording. This video went viral on social media like wildfire and the perpetrators were recognised and eventually arrested. In fact, the idea of bringing worlds closer through Facebook and other social media platforms was proved to be true, when Bangladeshi expatriates in Jeddah, the western

province of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, helped to look for Kamrul Islam, one of the killers of Rajon, and finally get him arrested in the kingdom. Within a few hours of Kamrul fleeing to Jeddah, he was caught and handed over to the Saudi authorities, thanks to the strength of social media, in this case, Facebook. It was not until the heartfelt Facebook status written by Ashif Entaz Rabi that the

authorities felt it necessary to look seriously into the issue of the four young activists, arrested on charges of child trafficking, from the offices of Mojaar School, an initiative of their registered company Odommyo Bangladesh. Stuck behind bars for more than a month, Arian Arif, Zakia Sultana, Hasibul Hasan Sabuj, and Firoz Alam Khan Suvo, Founders of the non-profit organisation, Mojaar

School, were arrested and sent to jail in September this year. Though the accused, the volunteers and the donors of the organisation repeatedly claimed that they were not involved with child trafficking, the officials and the authorities would not listen. "Our mobile phones were taken from us, as soon as we entered the police station," says Arian Arif. "We were not given any chance to speak up for ourselves. We were just sent to jail." Shockingly enough, the family members of these young founders were not informed by the officials. "My parents identified me while watching the news on television," says Zakia Sultana. "We were lined up in front of the media. They were snapping away with their cameras while we stood their like criminals." Cries of protests and outrage had begun on social media immediately after the arrest of the founders. But the status message written by Ashif Entaz Rabi moved social media users so much, that within a few hours, it was shared 6,000 times. The write up finally reached young members of the ruling party who are also quite active on facebook. The message finally hit home and in less than a week, the founders were given bail. "Social media has the power to engage the young and old for numerous benefits and useful causes," says Waseqa Ayesha

Khan, MP from Reserved seat, Chittagong. "But we have to be aware of the inherent risks too. So let's be patient with the temporary ban of few mediums as it is for the greater good. My personally preferred medium is Twitter anyway!" The last few years witnessed an upsurge of digital media companies, operating in Bangladesh. Establishing the idea of content being all powerful, digital marketing in all kinds of fields, starting from promoting hardboards to statements made by politicians, celebrities and cricketers is a popular business structure. The user is king when it comes to controlling, liking and also disliking digital content. "Some of the most popular social media sites visited in Bangladesh are Facebook, Youtube and Twitter -- and in that very order," says Kamal Hosen Rony, the CEO of a popular digital media company Greymatter Communications. "From Facebook alone, the government would earn at least 10 million US dollars every month, as remittance from Google AdSense." Rony further adds that in the last couple of weeks, the government has lost maybe millions of dollars in remittance, because of no Facebook. "See, Facebook is not only for 'Hello's and 'How are you's," he adds. "I think we have gone beyond that era. Facebook is a part of this economy, and the last two weeks