

SPOTLIGHT

Before we get to know these exciting startups, their owners and their work, let's delve a little into how it all began.

SD ASIA began its journey as a crowd funded documentary titled Startup Dhaka. This project ended up raising over US\$9000 from 56 backers from around the world. The film's objective was to create awareness about the thriving startup community in Dhaka. After being positively received and gaining encouragement for the film, the team pivoted to make an online content site to promote local ideas and businesses and to keep the story going. They now create content about startups, entrepreneurs and business in Bangladesh by connecting with the audience here in Bangladesh and tapping into a larger audience abroad.

A popular initiative of SD Asia is Innovation Xtreme (IX). The event is the premier digital media and event platform for startups, businesses & investors. It weaves together the entire entrepreneurial ecosystem—bringing in investors, experienced entrepreneurs, corporate professionals, media and everything in between, to showcase the potential of innovators and entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. It aims to eventually become the leading event for access to opportunities, whether that is for scale, investment, knowledge, or anything else a

\$10,000) and FbStart packages worth approximately US \$50,000. They, now FBStart members, will get access to free tools and services, ranging from Facebook credits, to free tools and services from 23 different third party partners including Adobe, GitHub, Hootsuite, MailChimp, UserTesting and others.

The six starts-ups that won the competition are all, in their own way, pioneering, zealous, and when implemented as desired, can change the face of not just the nation, but the whole world. Let's take a look at these ground-breaking ideas, and how they came to be.

**Tripooly**, founded by Rafi Mustafa, who lived abroad for most of his life, aims to become the 'One Stop Travel Shop' for travelers in Bangladesh. Tripooly provides clients the ability to choose travel deals from multiple travel agencies. Tripooly's

companies like Amazon.com and Groupon." But Rafi's thirst for traveling remained even after his return to Bangladesh. "I realised how difficult it is for someone to go places. I wanted to make traveling, which I consider one of the best parts of life, easier for those who have a knack for it. That's how Tripooly came to be." Tripooly has become the one single platform to satisfy anyone's travel needs- starting from booking deals, to comparing prices, and everything in between. Around 20 travel agents are linked to Tripooly.

M Sazzad Hossain, Assistant Vice President of **LightCastle Data**, talks about how after studying BBA and working in the mainstream field in places like HSBC and BAT, he realised, like many other thriving startup owners, that this was not what he had a passion for. "What I

wanted to do was change lives, have an impact. I found minds like my own in Bijon Islam, Ivdad Khan Mojlish, Saifur Rahman and Zahidul Amin," says Sazzad. Together, with 20 more employees, they made LightCastle Data what it is. LightCastle Data, the latest product from the LightCastle Partners, is an online platform which allows companies to conduct consumer research in real time and take fast business decisions. If you have a new/existing business idea, and want consumer feedback on your product, concept, brand elements or pricing then register your company on LightCastle Data. "This kind of work usually takes 2 months. We get it done in 7 days. We added a little spunk to the work like offering something to the customer in return for filling out surveys. When we just started our project, within 2.5 minutes, we

# EU REKA!

## CHANGING THE NATION, ONE IDEA AT A TIME

NAZIBA BASHER

PHOTOS: COURTESY

founding team members have strong networks in this industry and 26 years of experience, which gives them the access to affordable deals, ranging from leisure, business to honeymoon and Visa Assistance. Customers will be able to compare various travel packages, pick and pay in local currency, USD or Euro - online and offline. So how did such an amazing idea come to be? "I traveled a lot myself," says Rafi. "I worked in Australia, went to Bangalore, the UK, the Netherlands, albeit all for different jobs in



business may need at any stage in its lifecycle. The presenting sponsor of the event is Grameenphone, gold partner is Microsoft, and silver partners are topofmind and IPDC.

This year, the over 300 attendees had more than 3 hours of guided 'networking' time throughout the day, maximizing opportunities. The preceding events also gave startups a chance to delve into their products with experts. Not knowing who the judges were, the owners had to pitch their products with the exact same enthusiasm each time someone came to their stall. According to the participants, the event was like 'a start-up goli (street) or mela (festival)', with booths lined up, containing the most mind-blowing ideas and unmistakable passion. Twenty five start-ups participated in this year's Innovation Xtreme, and six startup companies won, receiving Microsoft's BizSpark/YouthSpark packages (worth



Speakers Panel of Investors in Bangladesh.

Speakers' Panel of Funding Trends in Bangladesh.



had 2500 responses. It was unreal! We already have 80+ clients including Telenor, and we're thinking about going global."

Adnan Imtiaz Halim was an engineer looking for a little zest in life. When he ventured into the business world, things didn't look quite the way he had hoped. "But I didn't give up. I kept going. I kept trying. I think that is the key to entrepreneurship- to never give up," says Adnan. After a couple of bumps on the road, Adnan relentlessly searched for a problem to solve. And then it just clicked. "What is the one problem that every household in Dhaka city faces?" he asked himself. "Home services!" And then **SHEBA** came into existence. SHEBA is a service platform for solving day-to-day

household problems. It aims to make your daily life hassle-free by ensuring services from skilled professionals, providing services such as electrical repair, home appliance repair, plumbing, security solutions, Wi-Fi solution, and more. "My aim was to fix the little problems that harass people in their daily lives-- little things that cause big worries. We've even teamed up with other big companies. We've asked security companies to train people for household help and supply to us, we've asked Fortuna group to train people to repair genuine leather shoes and supply to us, and so on. So there are many companies working to solve problems together in the homes of Dhaka."

**Let's Eat!** is a startup that can attract a hoard of customers just by the name. Known to be a nation of foodies, a common problem faced by Bangalis is finding the right place to eat, the right food, and the right prices. Let's Eat! solves these problems not just for the customers but for the restaurateurs themselves. Arifur Rahman, CEO, studied Finance and Accounting, but always had the knack for something a little different. He worked in mentoring startups before he came across a startup called Foodies. "It was new, it was fresh. I seemed like they needed some help, and it was something that I saw a lot of potential in. I dived right into it," says Arifur. Let's Eat! is an international restaurant directory platform which has been recently launched in Bangladesh in 2015 as a part of their 5-year expansion plan. Their aim is to become the world's largest restaurant directory and make their users' experience most memorable. Along with a directory, you can compare prices, cuisines, and also pre-order. "Why must eating ever be a bother?" he asks.

With increasing problems, we have increasing solutions. And with such stellar innovations, the passionate work, such determination and zeal, there is no doubt that Bangladesh is at its peak of development. With a little patience, understanding, and a lot of motivation, there is nothing that can stop you from changing the world in your own special way. Tripooly's Rafi said, "After returning to Bangladesh, it was the very spunk and passion of the people that inspired me to do something big. There is no reason for us to wait. Inspiration is everywhere in this country."

Istiyak Sheyam one day asked his headmaster at school what the scientific name of the dragonfly was. His headmaster, unable to answer, asked him why he wanted to know. His response was, 'if you, being the headmaster of our college, don't know this. Why do I need to?' That began his wonderment on what education we need, what education we want, and when we want it. "Our education system is flawed. It feeds us a lot of unnecessary information, which we will never need in the future. And yet, if we fail at these unimportant matters, so many things are in jeopardy!" In GP Accelerator, Istiyak found Faez Mahdi, a student of WABASH, USA, who had similar ideologies and believed that learning should be done through experiences and passion. Istiyak and Faez, as founder and co-founder respectively, formed **REPTO Education Center**. REPTO - Education Center is an Online Course Marketplace, where anybody can create courses with state of the art course creation web tools and sell their courses. It is open for all instructors, and hence REPTO has huge collection of paid and free courses. Therefore, in this platform anybody can learn whatever they like and boost their career and knowledge through text and video tutorials. "Our education is for anyone, at any time, on anything they would love to study. At the end of the day, if you don't have the passion for the subject, education will never appeal to you the way it is supposed to," says Faez Mahdi.

Another very common problem we face in Dhaka city is of commuting. Getting from point A to point B is the start to all worries. It's the only issue that can nag you day and night. Dewan Shuvo came back from San Francisco with his family to solve this problem. His startup, **CHALO**, provides on-demand car services in Bangladesh with highest level of customer service, safety and comfort. The mobile app allows passengers to get cars in 10 minutes, pay fare by credit /debit card and bKash, give service feedback, and give driver reviews, check cars location in maps and many more. CHALO Technologies Ltd. is associated with Desh Ventures Inc. San Francisco, California, USA (A Silicon Valley Venture Firm). While at the moment CHALO offers sedans to the customers, soon they will launch 'CHALO Bondhu' which will offer a motorbike for faster and easier traveling. "It also contributes to decreasing traffic jam, as none of the cars have to wait. They pick up, drop off, and leave. There is no stagnant car anywhere," says Shuvo.

So what are YOU waiting for?™