

# AGENTS OF CHANGE

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## Youth-led ventures that thrived during the pandemic

RAFEED ELAHI CHOWDHURY

The Covid-19 pandemic took the entire world by surprise, and shook businesses from variegated industries to the core. Amidst a great number of startups and other ventures suffering during the pandemic, new methods had to be employed to keep things afloat.

In a country riddled with the challenge of coping up with Covid-19's ever-increasing cases, it was out of the question whether a new entrepreneurial ecosystem would burgeon. However, a few young entrepreneurs caught the eye with their dedication and smart strategies, showing propitious growth. Although some of them are operating for quite some time now, their recent performances during the pandemic were inspiring.

E-learning platforms are not a rarity in Bangladesh, with many gaining traction because of the convenience that the consumers receive from them. Among them, Bohubrihi is a venture that is rapidly gaining momentum. The organisation, which has been operating for over a year, saw colossal growth in the timeframe. They have launched 'Career Tracks', a programme consisting of a number of courses to make students ready for the job market. They have collaborated with ULAB to create and deliver Massively Open Online Courses



ILLUSTRATION: RAKEEB RAZZAK



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Well managed female hostels

#### Highlights

**Pharmacy:** 14 laboratories, sterile production unit, high job placement

**Law:** 95% success rate at the last Bar Council Enrollment Examination

**Business Studies:** Strong industry affiliation for employment

**Computer Science:** Regular hosting of highly reputed programming contest

**Public Health:** Curriculum recognized by 'World Education Service'

**Environmental Science:** Pioneer program in Bangladesh

**Journalism:** Studio, media lab and online news portal

**Architecture:** One of the very few IAB accredited programs

**English:** Language Club, one-to-one career counselling

**Food Engineering:** Excellent lab and research facilities

**CDC:** Career planning support services for job placement

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"We eventually adapted to working remotely, and I must say that it has been an amazing experience. We have skilled engineers. Our local technology and imported raw materials are good enough to keep pace with the fourth Industrial revolution," says Mohsinul Bari Shakir, the CEO of Aqualink BD. "We are involved in these types of R&D activities to help Bangladesh prepare for the future, rather than staying dependent on other countries, when it comes to building something innovative." Sterilising with UV light is one of the most effective methods of disinfection. It has also been approved by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, USA.

(MOOCs) on different civic values.

"We are going to introduce 'Bohubrihi Bytes' very soon. It will be a micro-learning platform for mobile users, where one can have access to educational content for a low subscription fee," said Yanur Islam Piash, the CEO and Co-Founder of Bohubrihi.

During the pandemic, the platform made a few of their premium segment courses free of cost for everyone, so that more students can develop their skills without worrying about affordability. The company currently has more than 60,000 registered students, with over 50 courses in total. With a month-over-month growth rate of around 20 percent, Bohubrihi is taking the edtech ecosystem forward with their effort.

Aqualink BD is an IT based company that has built an ultraviolet (UV) janitor to combat Covid-19 in Bangladesh, which can kill over 99 percent viruses, bacteria and fungi in a short amount of time.

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Aadi is a unique fashion-focused cross border e-commerce platform that has served in 29 countries and 413 destinations. In 2020, the company achieved a 159 percent year-on-year growth in revenue, and 460 percent year-on-year growth in order numbers. With more than 12,000 registered customers, over 4,000 orders and esteemed partners and collaborators like EBL, Brac Bank and City Bank, Aadi is making a huge impact in the international arena.

Fatima Begum, the CEO of the company, shared the vision that drives Aadi. "The world knows about our capacity and expertise in the RMG sector. However, in the global market, we still do not have any recognisable brand," she says.

"Through Aadi, we aim to establish reputed Bangladeshi international brands that will rival the popularity of brands like Gucci, Hermes and Prada. One day, people will know Bangladesh through our international brands. We have just initiated our journey by establishing Aadi and testing the market. At present, the RMG sector of Bangladesh is heavily dependent on foreign buyers. We want to make the RMG sector independent by reaching the end consumers directly through our cross border platform."

During the pandemic, shopping malls closed in a hurry, and they stayed that way for quite a while. Aadi decided to keep their employees safe and did not let anyone go to cut costs. Rather, they went for recruitment in their tech department.

The story of Hill Valley Production, a company that works with photography, cinematography and makeover projects, is noteworthy. As the pandemic took a deadly toll, many organisations had to lay off workers to cope up with the finances. Amongst all this, Hill Valley Production did something unique. For the first two to three months of the pandemic, they did not receive any order, but utilised that time by investing in self-development.

The team held virtual meetings, and regularly kept learning new things relevant to their field of work. Although the time in which this business sector gets most work orders is during the November and December wedding season, Hill Valley Production managed to work on 24 events, three music video projects, and two session shoot projects throughout 2020.

Many other youth led businesses stepped up their game during the ongoing pandemic. Nevertheless, these four ventures undoubtedly made a mark through their leadership, adaptation, and contingency for countering the crisis. These courageous young entrepreneurs will continue to stand out and inspire other youth-led ventures over the upcoming days.

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