



A virtual view of Panam Nagar.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF VIRTUAL MUSEUM BANGLADESH

NURTURING DREAMS

Preserving Bangladesh's heritage sites in virtual reality

"So far, Sonjib and I have been funding the project from our own pockets, but I do not know how much longer just the two of us can continue doing so," explains Auni.

AKHLAKUR RAHMAN

Ahamed Jaman Sonjib is the Founder and Project Head of Virtual Museum Bangladesh, and Ashek E Elahi Auni is its Co-founder. They started working towards the initiative in 2017.

The museum lets visitors experience the essence and history of different heritage sites of Bangladesh with virtual reality headsets and computers.

Sonjib got the idea for it after a visit to Panam Nagar in Sonargaon with his family. "The city has already lost a lot of its originality. If this goes on, our future generations will lose the chance to see these masterpieces of history. The unique structures of several of our heritage sites are giving in to the tides of time," he adds.

As of now, the museum offers virtual tours of six famous heritage sites of Bangladesh, including Panam Nagar, Shat Gombuj Mosque, Eleven Shiva Temple Complex, and Choto Sona Mosque, among others, free of charge.

Sonjib and Auni presented a virtual tour of the Shat Gombuj Masjid as a pilot project in the Digital World 2018 contest, where they



Key team members of Virtual Museum Bangladesh. PHOTO: NAYEM SHAAN

received the second prize.

"Lack of data is one of our major challenges. Our team visits the sites and manually gathers information about them,"

adds Sonjib.

They also have to compare the data with experts, historical records, pictures, and simulate data into the game engine to present authentic versions of each site.

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Virtual Museum Bangladesh is created to allow students to closely observe the history of the nation. It holds great educational value.

"Each historical site has its own story," says Iftekhar Alam Khan, a young 3D artist of the project. "This work brings me immense joy, and closer to my heritage every day."

The founders intend to welcome every school in Bangladesh to this experience. They are hopeful that the government and financial institutions will come forward to help them with the project.

The beta version of Virtual Museum Bangladesh will be released on March 1. The team is collecting new data on a daily basis, and soon, they will have characters in the virtual tours as well.

YOUTH IN ACTION

Helping the underprivileged with medical support

ZAREEN NAWAR

Dip Medical Services & Dipasha Foundation, founded by Dr Farzana Rahman, started its journey in 2015 to provide medical treatment and support to underprivileged and low-skilled people, especially women and girls of Singra, Natore.

Initially, it was a small diagnostic centre, which is now a full-fledged clinic, dedicated to the treatment of women and young girls. As part of an awareness campaign, Dip Medical Services & Dipasha Foundation organised free medical camps in different villages, high schools, and colleges to educate young girls on preventive measures to reduce risks of various complications and life-threatening diseases. The clinic shares knowledge with rural women and young girls to reduce possible gynecological diseases and maternal illnesses.

Dip Medical Services & Dipasha Foundation provides financial leniency and in many cases, services for free, to those in need.

Amid the pandemic, the team of the clinic surveyed selected areas to find out the ratio of pregnant women, and educated them about the procedures that need to be followed throughout pregnancies. Special sessions were conducted to



Dr Farzana Rahman at a free medical camp for ethnic minority groups on Durga Puja. PHOTO: COURTESY

teach women about ways to stay clean and healthy as a family. "We have collaborated with NGOs, and hope to continue working towards bettering circumstances for pregnant women, alongside taking measures to ensure improvement of children's physical and mental wellbeing," said Dr Farzana Rahman.

Throughout 2021, Dip Medical Services & Dipasha Foundation helped with Covid-19 vaccine registrations, and conducted sessions related to mental health. The clinic also ran winter clothing drives for those in need.

Dr Farzana Rahman has involved minority groups in several of her projects. Among other accomplishments, she won the Joy Bangla Youth Award in 2020, as well as the Inspiring Women Award and IVD Bangladesh Volunteer Award in 2021, for her earnest efforts.

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INTERVIEW

Reimagining interior designing in Bangladesh

SHANIZ CHOWDHURY

Sarjeena Maodud is the CEO and Co-founder of Sheraspace, a tech-based home improvement company. After completing her Master's in London, she moved back to Dhaka in 2017. She founded Sheraspace along with her colleague Nizam Farid Ahmed, in 2019. Sarjeena is one of the entrepreneurs in the Dhaka Hub Global Shapers 2021 Cohort. The Global Shapers are a community of young leaders and change makers aged between 20 and 30, curated by the World Economic Forum. The Dhaka Hub was founded in 2014. In a candid chat, Sarjeena shares her aspirations, and more.

Sheraspace merges creativity with functionality and technology. How did you come up with the concept?

My personal experience of finding an interior design company for my new home in Dhaka led me to discover a gap in this market. So, I carried out extensive research on it and tried to find the pain points of consumers. Eventually, my colleague Nizam and I came up with the concept for Sheraspace.

What were the challenges along the way?

In the early days, it was simply difficult to get recognised in the male-dominated field of interior design. A year after we

started out, the world plunged into a pandemic. Instead of focusing on growing the company, we had to come up with strategies to adapt to the changes. We developed and introduced a new service for the first time in Bangladesh, online interior design consultation. It has been a great learning experience so far.

How is Sheraspace different from other interior design companies?

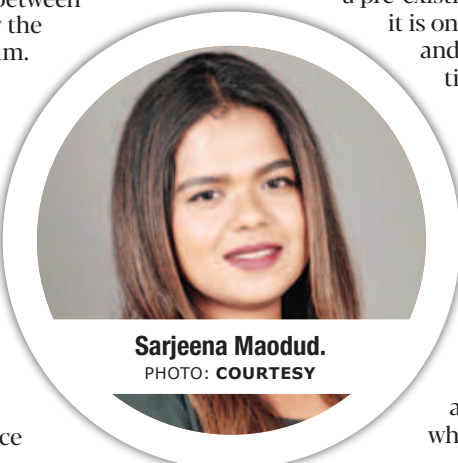
When it comes to interior design, there's a pre-existing consensus that it is only for the affluent and requires too much time and money.

This is exactly what we challenge at Sheraspace. We democratised interior design to make it more inclusive. Our online service is affordable, short-term, and hassle-free. Anyone can avail it, regardless of where they are located.

What are your future plans for Sheraspace?

Instead of being rigid with our strategies, we are determined to be responsive to changes in the external environment. Going forward, we want to integrate technology such as virtual and augmented reality, to deliver our services more efficiently.

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Sarjeena Maodud. PHOTO: COURTESY

YOUNG ACHIEVER

Siblings Arbin and Larissa determined to cross the Bangla Channel

AKHLAKUR RAHMAN

While 10-year-old Syeda Larissa Roseanne swam across 8 kilometres (km) of the 16.1 km Bangla Channel in the Fortune Bangla Channel Swimming competition in December 2021 in four and a half hours, her brother, 15-year-old Syed Arbin Ayaan, conquered 9 km of the Channel in the same time span.

They participated in the competition along with their father, Syed Akhteruzzaman.

Larissa and Arbin first started swimming in 2017 under the mentorship of noted swimmer Fazlul Kabir Sina, also a coach at Gulshan Youth Club.

The siblings had a long break from swimming from 2017 to 2021. However, after getting vaccinated, they resumed their training under their father, also a swimming instructor, who rented various pools around Dhaka for their practice.

"For the Fortune Bangla Channel Swimming competition, we were trained to eat food while floating in



Syeda Larissa Roseanne.

water. 40 flags were stretched across the Bangla Channel for our navigation," adds Arbin.

Boats were stationed after every 300 metres to help navigate and provide the swimmers with food and clean water at regular intervals.

"I had no fears while swimming because my father and brother were swimming

with me and my mother was cheering for us from the boats," shares Larissa.

However, Arbin vomited while swimming, and as a result, felt exhausted. "Naturally, I fell behind the group. But I fought on. We gave up because of the high tides," he adds.

The weather got dangerous for the young swimmers. As a result, the rescue team pushed them to stop. Although they did not successfully cross the Bangla Channel, their parents are immensely proud of them.

Arbin and Larissa inherited their father's dream of crossing the Bangla Channel.

They have not given up just yet, and are preparing for the Bangla Channel Swimming Marathon, to be held this March.

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Syed Arbin Ayaan.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF FORTUNE BANGLA CHANNEL SWIMMING 2021