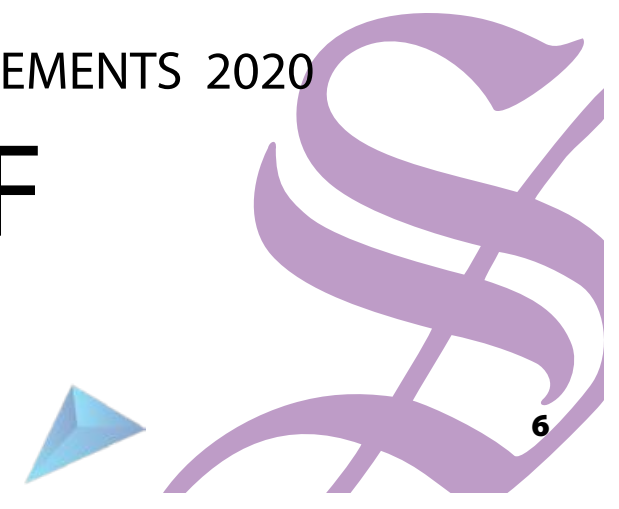




THE YOUTH IN THE ERA OF DIGITALISATION

DHAKA THURSDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2020, FALGUN 7, 1426 BS



The story of an anxious generation growing up in a fast-changing world

ABIDA RAHMAN CHOWDHURY

"Environment, climate crisis, Facebook, Instastories, Snapchat, social media influencers, relationships (lack thereof), and a world obsessed with being connected and updated constantly."

It may just seem like a string of words, but they happen to be some of the most pertinent worries that came up when I asked a bunch of young adults, aged between 20 to 26, what makes them anxious.

I asked them if they have ever sought help, and just how difficult it is to navigate a society that is always loaded up on information. It can sometimes be overwhelming to say the least, and is veering fast towards individualism. We talked about careers, relationships, therapists in Dhaka, the climate crisis and the subsequent eco-anxiety, and some more miscellaneous worries.

"I've been struggling with anxiety for a long time now, but I've learnt to handle it myself, as best as I can. I get anxious about everything, from having to introduce myself to new people in a meeting, to the impending doom of climate change," says 25-year-old Raha, who is growing up and building a career in Dhaka, a difficult city to live in. "I also get incredibly anxious when it comes to the future and

the uncertainty of it. It's ridiculous because I'll sit and cry for hours about things I cannot control, like my loved ones dying someday. As for social media, it definitely makes things worse. Quite recently I got out of a six-month social media break, but I had to start using it again because of study and work purposes."

Raha is not alone in her worries. Kamal U A Chowdhury, an associate professor at the Department of Clinical Psychology at University of Dhaka, stated that more and more young adults and adolescents are

coming to the university authorities with generalised anxieties about the current state of affairs, addictions, loneliness, and depression. Professor Kamal also offers therapy. He highlighted that young people in particular are having trouble with social media and the constant flow of information.

"The news on television makes me feel terrible. There's even more upsetting information on social media, which can be very triggering. For instance, rape cases and stories of abuse make me feel angry and paranoid, thinking about how cruel

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people can be. Even the news reports on Australia's bushfires and the animals were incredibly upsetting," shares Raha.

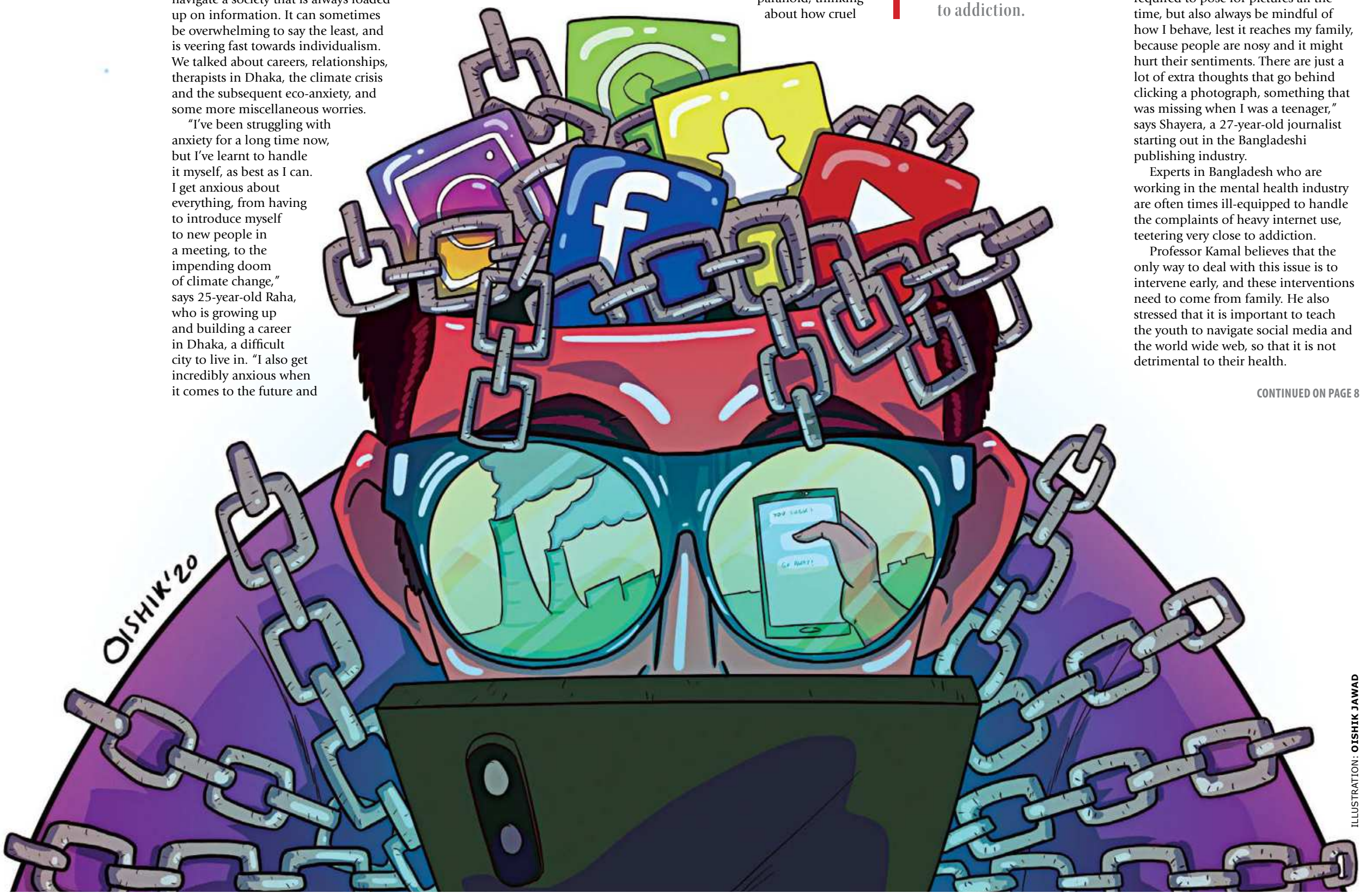
But it is not just about the content that social media and the news bombards us with. There are also certain expectations of how we are to behave and be on social media. It is as though we are maintaining a separate digital media presence, while living through our daily lives, which can be exhausting for many.

"People's obsession with social media makes me incredibly anxious. I feel suffocated by how much I am required to pose for pictures all the time, but also always be mindful of how I behave, lest it reaches my family, because people are nosy and it might hurt their sentiments. There are just a lot of extra thoughts that go behind clicking a photograph, something that was missing when I was a teenager," says Shayera, a 27-year-old journalist starting out in the Bangladeshi publishing industry.

Experts in Bangladesh who are working in the mental health industry are often times ill-equipped to handle the complaints of heavy internet use, teetering very close to addiction.

Professor Kamal believes that the only way to deal with this issue is to intervene early, and these interventions need to come from family. He also stressed that it is important to teach the youth to navigate social media and the world wide web, so that it is not detrimental to their health.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



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