

THE DEFINITIVE  
**YOUTH**  
MAGAZINE

# SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 19, 2020, CHAITRA 5, 1426 BS

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IS DROPPING A SEMESTER  
WORTH IT?

**PG 4**

REFUSE TO  
DEFUSE

**PG 7**



# WHAT DO STUDENTS EAT?

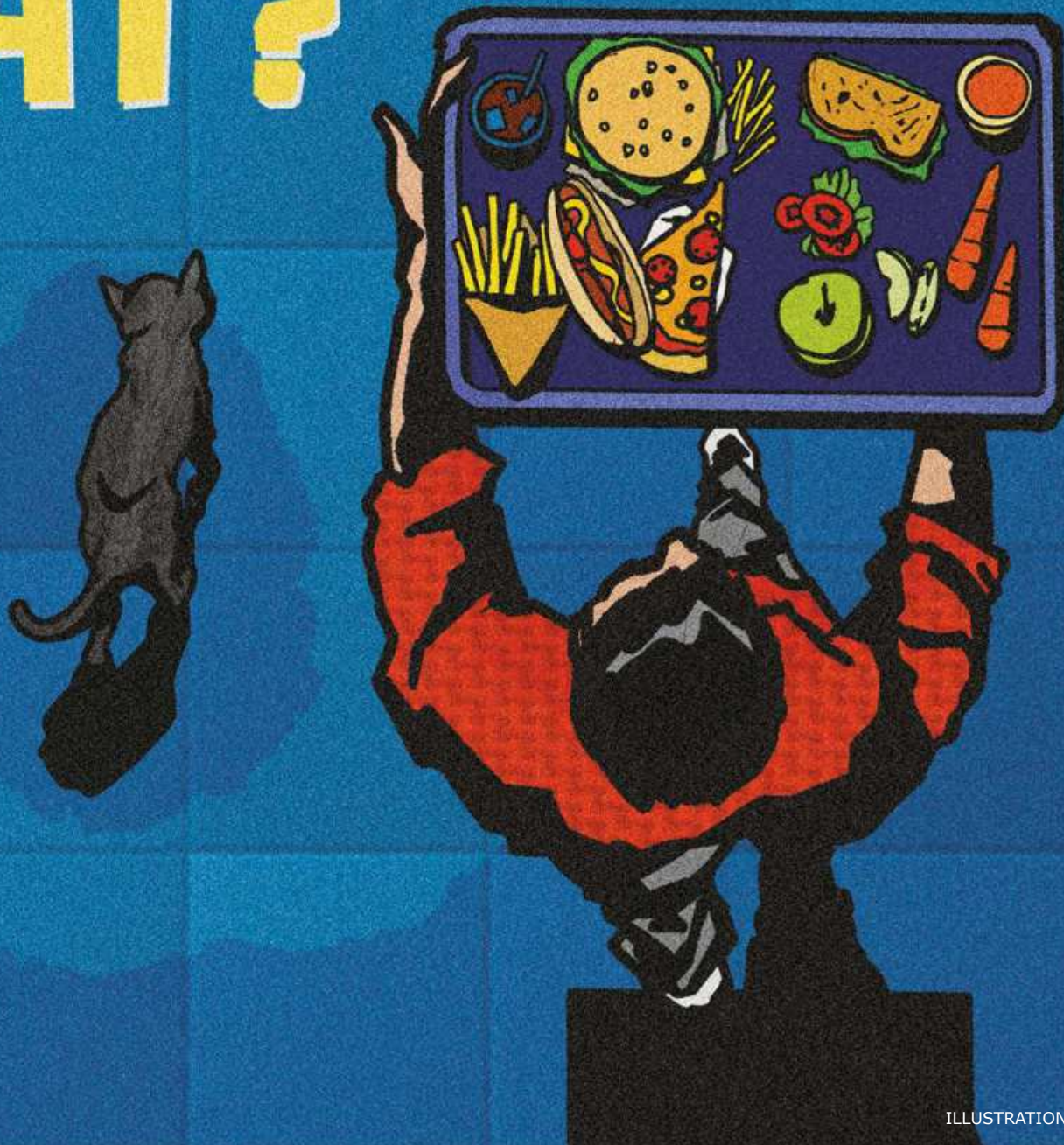


ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

# EDITORIAL

The world is at a standstill.

With the coronavirus outbreak affecting countries and people all around the world, everything else is cancelled. In the midst of it all, however, we can take solace in stories that very rarely make the news. People in quarantine are singing from their balconies; sincere organisations are producing and distributing medicines for the masses. This only goes to prove that even in chaos, there is a silver lining and we need to find that and hold on to it.

The hour is upon us to stay united and look after one another. Stay updated through authentic sources of news and information, follow instructions by those who know about the matter, and most importantly—have hope.

And soap.

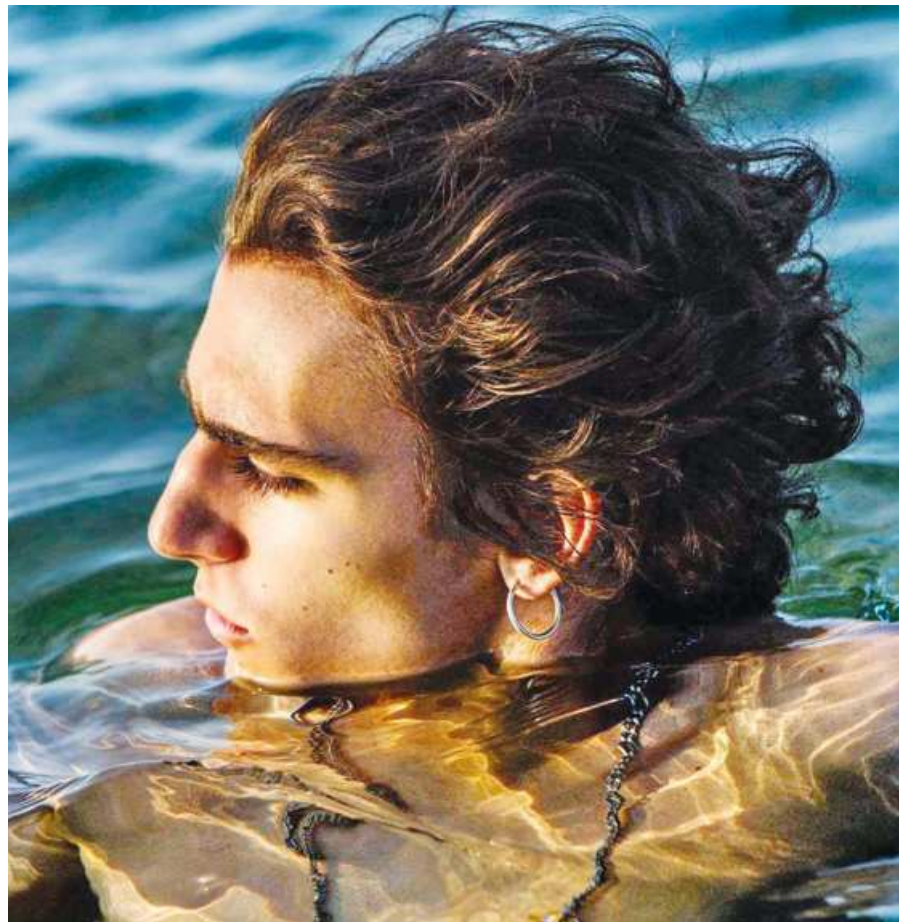
– Kazi Akib Bin Asad, Sub-editor, SHOUT



## PLAYWATCH

### ARTIST PROFILE

# THE MARVELLOUS CASE OF TAMINO



#### ADHORA AHMED

Have you ever found something extraordinary yet obscure? You wish to make it known and keep it a secret at the same time. Most of all, you want to cherish it, like trapping lightning in a bottle. That's what happened to me late last year.

One night, I watched an interesting music video for a song called "Cigar" by Tamino, a Belgian singer-songwriter of Egyptian descent. In it, a skeleton comes back to life for one night of fun as a sweet voice croons away about death and the meaning of life. The song felt soothing, so I decided to delve deeper into his music.

My foolish heart was unprepared for what was to come; the next song I listened to, "Habibi", secured the deal. The intense longing curled around every note felt like gut punches to the soul. The rest of Tamino's back catalogue is replete with such musical gems—songs about love, loss, and mysticism. He has the power to break your heart and mend all the cracks in such a way that you end up thanking and forgiving him. His voice has moved me so much that discovering him was probably the best thing to have happened to me in 2019.

Named after the protagonist of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, it is a no-brainer that Tamino was meant to win and break hearts with his magical voice. His heritage is prominent in his work, from effortlessly tweaking Arabic quarter-tones to featuring an Arabic orchestra in his debut album, *Amir*. Apart from having a lovely voice, Tamino is great with words as well. His lyrics echo the romantic imagery found in the works of Kahlil Gibran. The music videos of his singles, directed by his brother Ramy, are crafted to complement the aesthetics of the songs perfectly, and deserve equal praise as the music.

Tamino's soulful voice has drawn critics to compare him to the likes of Radiohead's Thom Yorke, Muse's Matt Bellamy, Jeff Buckley, and Leonard Cohen. Speaking of Radiohead, their bassist Colin Greenwood tours with him and is featured in the album. They have also tried to pigeonhole him into the alternative/indie niche. However, I believe that Tamino is unique in his own way. His music feels timeless and ageless, hence it would be unfair to try to put him in a box.

*Adhora Ahmed daydreams too much. Send her reality checks at [adhora.ahmed@gmail.com](mailto:adhora.ahmed@gmail.com)*

# The Adventures of a Teaching Assistant

MRITTIKA ANAN RAHMAN

*Last semester, yours truly decided to be an undergraduate teaching assistant. She didn't exactly realise what she was in for.*

After passing multiple stages of the recruitment process and finally landing the job, I was elated at getting to re-use my dusty red pen from a previous teaching job.

Previously, I only pitied students (including myself) who had to stay up all night writing assignments. Little did I know there were TAs staying up all night crying, equally miserable having to check the entire section's work.

The TA experience humanised faculty members to me as I couldn't believe the things they have to read on a regular basis. It isn't apparently uncommon for people to start writing essays without so much as fully reading the topic. People also get carried away with plagiarising as the chances are astronomical that students sitting beside each other both had the same near death experience seven years ago when asked to write about "An Incident that Changed My Life".

Another feat which I never fully appreciated teachers for



is maintaining objectivity when grading. Sometimes, when checking copies, I was in a fabulous mood and in other times, I was half passed out at three in the morning, starving and swatting mosquitoes with one hand while checking copies with the other. After giving minimum pass marks to six consecutive copies, I realised I clearly wasn't doing my

job right. Needless to say, the marks we provide are never final and are always scrutinised by faculty members and edited before they are handed out.

The entire semester was a learning experience running around the department, lots of late nights and pulling my hair out at the incalculable number of ways an APA citation can be done wrong. This all culminated in me proctoring while students sat for their final exams, when suddenly, a name on a student's paper caught my eye.

I had been checking copies of nameless, faceless students the whole time but here was the name of the person whose scripts tormented me the most and made me lose sleep for an entire semester. She was right in front of me. I wanted to do many things at that point; it took every bit of strength in my body as I calmly and professionally walked past. The role of a TA varies greatly between departments let alone between universities but my experience is based on working for the English department.

*Mrittika Anan Rahman is a daydreamer trying hard not to run into things while walking. Find her at mrittika.anan@gmail.com*

*Please use good, legible handwriting. A neat paper rewards more marks.*

## "I HATE POETRY."

MATILDA

Do you, fellow reader, read for fun? Do you enjoy going over the words of your favourite author at a speed of your choice, getting wholly immersed in a world that you do not physically inhabit? Do you feel touched by a piece of writing and feel that it has fundamentally changed you in some way?

All these feelings may disappear five minutes into an advanced English class requiring you to analyse, and (depending on which course it is) write poetry. Allow me to explain. Poems are fun, and sometimes easier to remember than most of the other texts you normally go through. They certainly require less time to read than novels and short stories. However, there comes a time when the thought of poems might make you want to curl up and hide under

your bed.

You will know the feeling too, when the placement of a dash, comma, and colon have essays written on them, when you learn that splits between stanzas aren't splits but enjambments, and when a cup isn't a cup but a metaphor for human existence and alludes (don't you dare say "refers") to the idea of both an ancient philosopher and a philosopher who was alive even ten years ago. I have come across 11-page poems that have had people writing books critiquing the books critiquing the poems; I've come across shorter poems that require you to count the syllables in each of the line for you to understand what the poem is about. Teachers will tell you that you need to have knowledge of the Bible, the author's life and ideas, and the political scenario at the time the poem was written.

It only gets worse. You don't just have to read and re-read poems, you have to sound it out so you get a sense of the rhythm—see if it's cacophonous or harmonious. Think similes, metaphors and alliteration is enough? Think again. Here comes assonances, consonances, metonymies, synecdoche, dactyls, and the iambic pentameter. Rhyming doesn't just happen at the end of a line anymore: introducing "internal rhyme". You further learn that there is something called an iamb, and it consists of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one, and the opposite of an iamb is for some reason called a trochee instead of a reverse iamb.

Now you may think that maybe somewhere deep down I really do enjoy poetry, and you wouldn't be wrong. But then you come across lines like "I have measured

out my life with coffee spoons" and you realise that that this is you with your inane existence.

I can go on. But I'll just leave you with one of my own poems.

roses are red,  
violets are blue.  
i hate poetry  
and I hope you do too.

— matilda



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# Is dropping a semester worth it?

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Let's say you're in need of a break because you're having to deal with a lot more than what you can cope with. However, this break will need to last longer than a day or two. The break you need needs to run the length of an entire semester of your university. The question now is whether or not taking a semester gap is worth it.

We reached out to two undergrad students – Zarin Rayhana (Information Technology, Griffith University, Australia), and Sakib Shadman (School of Business, Independent University, Bangladesh), who have previously dropped a semester each in order to cope with certain things, and asked them to share their thoughts and experience regarding the matter.

## WHAT COULD BE THE REASON FOR DROPPING AN ENTIRE SEMESTER?

As mentioned earlier, stress is one of the main reasons you should go on a break. However, it's not necessarily the only reason to make that decision. Zarin took a break due to her lack of motivation from studies which resulted from stress, while Sakib decided to do the same strictly for professional reasons.

"I had recently started a business and I needed some time to bring it into shape," said Sakib. "Another reason I took the break was to get an appointment letter from the place I worked at by giving them 3 months' worth of full-time hours."

Many students have the misfortune of not being able to start the semester due to financial reasons. Hence, they're forced into dropping the semester. This scenario is more common in private universities in comparison to the public ones. Some of these students go on to do different types of jobs so that they can save up money for their next semester.

There are also cases where students find themselves starting the semester a bit too late, and fail to catch up. For instance, if they have to travel away from home or go abroad for a long period of time, such that they end up missing two-three weeks of classes, they'll have to face a lot of difficulties when they try to catch up. Under such circumstances, many of these students would prefer dropping that particular semester instead of risking a bad GPA.

Besides, students have to deal with various other issues, which can take up a lot of their time as well as affect their mental or physical well-being. These cases may include personal problems like the passing away of a loved one, as well as different health problems. Under such circumstances, it is natural to assume that they will not be in a state to bear the burdens of the semester ahead.

Everyone will have their own reasons for dropping the semester. It's a huge decision to make that comes with its own benefits as well as repercussions. Hence, do a thorough risk assessment before you go ahead with the drop.

Explain the situation to your parents or guardians, and ask them for their input into the matter as well. Given how they might tend to be sceptical of the idea or oblivious to your problems, you should make sure that you are presenting your case backed with proper justification, as well as the expected consequences of carrying on with the semester anyways. Consult with your on-campus counsellor if you need to for this purpose.

## WHAT CAN I DO DURING THE BREAK?

Given that your break will last the entire semester, it can be assumed that you'll be spending a total of 4-6 months away from day to day academic activities. Hence, you can spend the time doing what you like. If you want to be productive, you can try working on your existing skills or go ahead and learn something completely new. If necessary, enrol yourself in different online and offline courses. You could even get a part-time job.

"Dropping a semester helped me find new hobbies that I otherwise wouldn't have time for, like painting and photography," says Zarin. "At the same time, it allowed me to revisit my old ones, such as reading and writing. I even got a part-time job that not only helped me save up

for my wish list and a small vacation, but also reinforced my resume."

In case you just want to give time to yourself, you should spend time doing the things you think will help you relieve your stress. Give yourself the time to re-think some of your decisions as well as plan new ones, something Sakib did that eventually helped him with his professional life. "I got some alone time to relax and figure out what I wanted, which direction I wanted to go towards, and plan my next moves accordingly," says Sakib. "It helped me with work, sort out my personal affairs, and even get a promotion. I also got composure, and am not in contempt with life."

## WHAT ARE THE DRAWBACKS OF DROPPING A SEMESTER?

The primary drawback of dropping a semester is the constant feeling that you're going to fall behind in your academics. But even this is an abstract thought that'll in no way affect you if you don't let it. "The only drawback I found is the small nagging at the back of your head that you're falling behind," says Zarin. "However, the fact that you get to learn things outside of academics and get new perspectives on life overshadows the anxiety of falling behind."

There is also the concern that dropping a semester will cause a delay in graduation. Many students are afraid about the fact that if they can't complete all the credits required for their graduation in due time, it will hamper their flow or future plans of enrolling in a post-graduation program, getting into a job, or leaving for abroad—which is true. As you take a semester gap, you're forced to push back your graduation. To add to that, there is also the societal pressure to get done with

your university so that you can move on to do the other important things in life.

Besides that, you may be stripped of your scholarship or any other academic privilege you're enjoying if you take such a semester gap, depending on your university policies. If such policies are in place at your institution, it's recommended that you try and avoid such a gap, or present your problems to the respective authorities and ask them to make an exception for your case.

## WHAT IS THE END RESULT?

At the end of the day, dropping an entire semester to recollect your composure or work on your professional skills is not a bad idea. In fact, it's a trade-off that can only work in your favour, IF you can make the most of it.

"After taking a semester off, I went back to university with way more vigour to do better in studies because of my renewed happy energy and changed perspectives," added Zarin. "The key is to utilise the time properly, either by learning or just focusing on yourself. Otherwise, you might regret dropping the semester in the first place."

Taking a semester gap may not be the only way to deal with whatever circumstances you're having to go through. However, at times, it may be the most reasonable way to deal with them. If you are in a situation where dropping the semester is the only viable option and you have the privilege to do so without having to face any adverse consequences, you should consider taking the gap.

*Faisal wants to be the very best, like no one ever was. To survive university is his real test, to graduate is his cause. Send him memes and motivation at [abir.afc@gmail.com](mailto:abir.afc@gmail.com)*



ILLUSTRATION: JUNAID IQBAL ISHAMM



PHOTO: RAFAT ISLAM

# WHAT DO STUDENTS EAT?

RABITA SALEH

*You go out to have lunch with your friends. Checking the menu, you spot a "Student Meal" which, fortunately for you, is the cheapest item. It's always a nice touch when you see such measures taken by restaurants because it feels like they are being considerate towards your budget. You smile and order the beef cheese burger with fries and a Coke. Life is good.*

*Except, it isn't. You have not had a properly nutritious meal in a long time. You don't think you have the time, or the resources, to truly worry about having balanced meals. You're young. You think it'll be ok. But will it really?*

"Student meals" in Bangladesh is synonymous with unhealthy food. In the fast-paced nature of student life, proper nutrition can't always keep up. We asked several students what their daily meals looked like, and this is what they said:

"Most of the time I have my meals outside campus because I don't like the food in our cafeteria. I mainly have burgers, pizzas, or rice meals. However, if I am short on time and have to pick from the canteen, I prefer desserts like *kheer* to suppress my hunger. When I don't feel like having dessert, then dry foods like sandwich or patties work fine for me," says Dawood Yaseen, fourth-year CSE student at North South University.

"On most working days, lunch is the most neglected and inconsistent meal for me. I often find myself skipping lunch altogether. But usually, I snack on whatever is cheap and accessible, mostly, fast food like fries and *shingara* to suppress my hunger. I rarely go to the university cafeteria as I don't prefer the food," says Abdullah, a senior at BRAC University.

The most important reasons for this situation are the tight budget which most students have to live on, and the sheer lack of healthy options. Considering the regular university cafeteria meals available, an alarming pattern becomes apparent: the food mostly consists of carbohydrates, very often of the fried variety, fats, and some proteins, which are also not prepared in a hygienic environment. If a vegetable is ever spotted, there is almost always a generous batter of the ever-fried carbohydrates to lather it in. Trying to find a moderately filling healthy meal becomes an uphill battle from the get-go.

"On some days to kill hunger I choose to have *jhalhuri*. There indeed is variety of food at canteens throughout the campus but not everything is reasonably priced. The closest canteen to my department has Chinese vegetable on their menu but is not healthy. They sell fruit juice but some of

them cost 80 taka a cup," comments Anika Anjum, second-year student of Sociology at University of Dhaka.

When asked about what's advertised as "student meals" in restaurants, and whether they are balanced meals, this is what they had to say:

"Our meals aren't exactly very balanced. Majority of the food products available for us students at restaurants are carbohydrates and fatty foods," says Mashiyat Binte Sharfuddin, final-year Marketing student at Jahangirnagar University.

"Student meals usually come cheap and easy. That usually means set fast food meals. In fact, many corners are cut in terms of balance and quality when it comes to student meals in order to make the pricing more competitive," states Abdullah.

What is subjecting our bodies to this kind of unbalanced consumption doing to us? Shamsun Naher Nahid, Principal Nutritionist and Head of Department, BIRDEM, reveals the very real consequences that prolonged continuation of such a diet between the ages of 18 to 25 has on us at present, and in the future.

"After turning 18, 'hall life' becomes very common for the youth of our country. In halls, the food they have is not of very high quality. For breakfast, they usually provide *khichuri* or *porota*. Those living in halls who come from outside Dhaka usually consume these high-calorie foods and it slowly leads to obesity. Some students, especially those who are from Dhaka, tend to avoid these foods but a lot of them end up going to classes without any breakfast at all, leading to low glucose levels in their brain, and lack of concentration."

"The quality of food at halls for lunch and dinner is equally low. Sometimes to avoid these foods students go to eat street food, or dine at hotels. However, unhealthy foods at hotels end up causing acidity and ulceration."

"Students with unhealthy diets experience low energy levels. They cannot muster up the energy required to focus on their studies after classes. This affects their academic lives as well."

"Foods available at halls provide very little vitamins and minerals, leading to a decrease in immunity. Furthermore, calorie-dense food leads to obesity, which is why we are also seeing early on-sets of diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and heart conditions these days, especially in the student population," she states.

It's blatantly obvious that we should not continue on this unhealthy path if we wish to live longer, more prosperous lives. There are certain steps that must be taken to

enable students to lead healthier lifestyles.

Universities should have subsidised, healthy meals that include fresh juices, fruits, salads, and vegetables in their options, and make these foods just as cheap, if not cheaper, as the unhealthy options.

Restaurants should also have nutrition/health information on their food. This is a common practice in many countries. The only reason we have not been able to establish such practices in our country yet are because of our attitudes, and lack of concern regarding our health in general. However, attitudes need to change if we are to become healthier as a people. Many people in our country still cannot fathom the concept of a salad being a stand-alone meal, and as Bangladesh moves towards becoming a more developed nation such ideals will have to evolve.

One particular attitude we have regarding food options is that only the affluent have the luxury of being health conscious. Having a salad for lunch is sometimes even perceived as being "pretentious" or "snooty". We have to stop branding "health consciousness" as a mark of wealth. It may be difficult for many people to make healthy choices, but with the bountiful land that we have, our attitude should be "how can we make healthier options more affordable for the masses, and how can we make them think more about their health?"

Making people more concerned about health needs to be emphasised because in conversations with the students regarding the culture of food, a concept of particular interest arose.

"The food culture in our country is usually not the best in terms of balanced diets. Sources of fibre and vitamins like salads and fruits are extraordinary and not often consumed on a regular basis," says Abdullah.

"No one wants to spend money on a vegetable platter outside home. Fast food is cheap and tasty," mentions Sajid.

This brings us to the final piece of this sad puzzle. At the end of the day, even if the authorities take all possible measures, choosing to lead a healthier lifestyle is upon our own shoulders, and we need to make sure that if affordable, we personally choose the healthier options more often than we do the unhealthy one. Unhealthy food that tastes good should be an occasional indulgence, not a regular habit. We need to work in unison towards a solution that makes this choice affordable for the youth.

*Rabita Saleh is a perfectionist/workaholic. Email feedback to this generally boring person at [rabitusaleh13@gmail.com](mailto:rabitusaleh13@gmail.com)*

## EDU holds Inter-University Engineering Day

East Delta University (EDU) organised a two-day "Inter-University Engineering Day 2020" at EDU in Chattogram on March 14, 2020. Former minister Abdullah Al Noman, founder and Chairman of EDU was the chief guest.

More than 50 teams from 25 universities participated in the festival. Eminent scientist Dr. Mohammad Kaykobad inaugurated the programme. EDU VC Prof. M. Sikandar Khan and Sayeed Al Noman, Founder Vice Chairman of EDU were present.

The special guests were Prof. Tasmin Ara Noman, Vice Chairman of EDU and Pranab Saha, CEO of Super Petro Chemical.

Besides, CUET professor Dr. Shamsul Arefin; Grameenphone product manager Zakaria Haider; general secretary of Bangladesh Mathematics Olympiad Munir Hassan; Chief Technology Officer of Samsung Bangladesh Zuberul Islam; and Automation Engineering and Controls Director Tauhidul Islam shared their experience and ideas at Tech Talk.

## VH celebrates 10th anniversary

Vertical Horizon (VH) celebrated its 10th anniversary on March 7, 2020.

The celebration began with all the current students receiving gifts and tokens of appreciation. In the programme, VH members shared their memories and reminisced on their journey so far. New goals were set and a cumulative aspiration was made to ensure the finest quality of education. Further programmes included discussion and dinner with other key members of the relevant community to ascertain a positive growth in the field.

The success story of VH is evident from the long line of high achievers on both national and global levels. Moreover, VH has proved to be the fostering ground and inspiration for many fresh graduates to step into the role of a teacher and mentor the next generation.

## MDIC hosts Mujib Shoto Borsho Intra-Class Handball Tournament (Girls)

Manarat Dhaka International School and College organised Mujib Shoto Borsho Intra-Class Handball Tournament (Girls) on March 11-12, 2020 to celebrate Mujib Shoto Borsho. Girls from Class 3 to Class 6 took part in this tournament. Chief guest Fatima Jemaima Rahman, Vice Principal of MDIC, inaugurated the programme.

Class 6 Section-B clinched the champion's trophy and Class 5 Section B became the runners-up. Sania Sahar from 6B, Abida Islam from 5B, Kazi Tafida Kabir from 4B, and Lammi Tasfiya Hasan from 3C were declared best players.

Among others, senior faculties Tahmina Yeasmeen (Co-ordinator, Girls), Tahera Tasneem, and Ayesha Begum were present on the occasion. Alina Sultana, coach of MDIC and Nazmunnahar, the manager of the tournament were also present.



## IUB students participate in EWUCRT Research Fair

Independent University, Bangladesh participated in the 1st EWUCRT Research Fair organised by the East West University Center for Research and Training in its campus on March 5, 2020.

Participants and guests from 20 private and public universities and educational institutions, media personnel, eminent scholars, graduate and undergraduate students attended the Research Fair.

Three Schools of IUB showcased their research in the fair. The School of Business and Entrepreneurship (SBE) presented their annual research journal, the School of Engineering, Technology and Sciences (SETS) highlighted their journal publications, and the School of Environmental Science and Management (SESM) showcased a scaled-down model of the soilless farming hydroponic system. The IUB team was comprised of Dr. Ikramul Hasan (SBE), Sheikh Mohammad Fauzul Azim (SBE), Saquib Ahmad Khan (SESM), Md. Rejwan Uddin (SETS), and Saiful Kabir (DoSA).

The inaugural event started with a plenary discussion. Participants and guests from private and public organizations and educational institutions and media personnel, faculty members, graduate and undergraduate students visited the IUB stall and showed keen interests in IUB's research work. The event ended with a panel discussion where Prof. Zakir Hossain Raju, Professor and Head of the Department of Media and Communication, IUB, delivered his speech as a discussant.

## NSU YES organises NMCI'20

NSUers Meet Corporate Icons 2020 by NSU YES took place recently, in association with Meilleur décor.

The first speaker was Sharif Zahir, Managing Director of Ananta Group. A lively presentation focusing on the ins and outs of the RMG industry and entrepreneurship combined with many personal learning experiences of the speaker made his session one of a kind. Second session by Afreeen Huda, HR Director Bangladesh-Sri Lanka cluster, Reckitt Benckiser Ltd proved to be extremely interactive as she was quick to pick members of the audiences to join her during speeches.

Abeer Rajbeen, Category Head of Marico Bangladesh kickstarted the second day with session on "Route to Marketeer", successfully managing to keep the auditorium filled with students hungry to be enlightened on their seat's edges. Tanvir Husain, Chief Human Resource Officer, Grameenphone took the final session of NMCI'20 about "Networking for Professional Development". Husain talked about how crucial it was to sustain and develop relationships for networking.

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খাওয়াবে?  
আমি তো নিজেই খাই!**

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# REFUSE TO DEFUSE

NOX

In the Principal's office, Mr. Chowdhury was pacing back and forth in front of his desk. His secretary, Miss Luna, was nervously tapping her clipboard, while they waited for Raihan Rashid to turn up.

In a few minutes there was a knock on the door. Mr. Chowdhury hurried to open it himself, and let Raihan in, while asking Belal, the school caretaker, to stand outside.

"Good afternoon Mr. Chowdhury," said Raihan, "I was told you wanted to see me immediately."

"Yes Mr. Rashid," said the Principal, "You see, we have found ourselves in a tight spot, and frankly..." he stopped, and then sighed before continuing. "Frankly, we think you are the only one who can get us out of this embarrassing situation."

Raihan Rashid was the school's "prodigal child". He was a genius by every measure of the word, and the school practically counted their blessings just to have him there. Upon hearing Mr. Chowdhury's words, Raihan's eyebrows immediately drew together. He looked around the room to see Miss Luna looking harassed, her frizzy hair particularly on edge. Mr. Chowdhury was sweating bullets, his shirt collar rapidly dampening. The office was otherwise unremarkable, except for one thing. There was a strange looking device sitting on the Principal's desk.

"I don't follow Sir. What is this 'situation'?" asked Raihan.

Mr. Chowdhury walked towards the device on his desk. Raihan followed him, and saw that it was some kind of electrical apparatus with a digital clock face on it. The timer on it was counting down, and currently read "0 Days 1 Hours 20 Minutes 37 Seconds". It looked like some kind of bomb, but Raihan quickly realised that there could be no way that Mr. Chowdhury would speak so casually about such a thing. The logical conclusion was that this device was counting down to something else. Raihan instantly had a hunch what that might be, given the particular time of the school year, but he decided to wait for Mr. Chowdhury to reveal it. Sure enough, in a few seconds his suspicions were confirmed.

"You see, we received this device on my office's doorstep last week. It came with this note," said the Principal, handing it over. "It seems the graduating batch of this year has decided to take the senior prank tradition one step further," said Mr. Chowdhury, before reiterating the diabolical plan that was written in the note.

Mr. Chowdhury continued, "The senior prank is one of our oldest traditions, and as such I have taken it in stride to just let them get on with it every year. I braved through it the year that the doors of every single room in the building were glued shut. I endured it the year they decided to shut off the main power switch of the campus. I even turned a blind eye to the

chickens running through the halls last year.

"However, this year I cannot condone it. This threat seriously endangers the reputation of the school! And to top off the prank, they have sent this ticking timer, no doubt to have me agitated all week, dreading their plans coming to fruition!"

Raihan was secretly impressed. The seniors had seriously outdone themselves, he thought, as he read through the detailed plans outlined in the note. If they did indeed pull off this prank it would become an absolute school legend. Why Mr. Chowdhury had called him here was plain as well. The note said that if Mr. Chowdhury could find the way to stop the timer, without damaging the device, the seniors would surrender and the plans would be called off. Clearly Raihan was supposed to be the Principal's bomb disposal squad.

Raihan approached the device. He examined it carefully. After five minutes he said, "Hmm."

"What? Have you found something?" asked Mr. Chowdhury excitedly.

"No, no... Nothing," said Raihan, continuing to turn the device this way and that.

Half an hour passed. Miss Luna brought in some water for them, which they both ignored. Mr. Chowdhury was going redder by the minute, his veins visibly pulsating. "Have you found anything at all?" he kept asking Raihan every few seconds. Raihan simply shook his head every time and continued with his quiet examination.

An hour passed. Nothing changed except the atmosphere in the office, which was escalating to a silent but deadly tension. With ten minutes to go, Mr. Chowdhury lost all sense of propriety. He stopped pacing and wrenched the ticking device out of Raihan's hands, raising it high above his head.

"Mr. Chowdhury!" shrieked Miss Luna, "What are you doing sir?! Please

calm down!"

"No! I can't take it anymore! This whole week I've been on edge! I'm having nightmares about countdowns! Wherever I go the ticking of this timer seems to follow me. I see it in my sleep. I see it when I'm awake. I see it in front of the school, when I'm watching TV, even when I'm on the streets! I can't escape it!"

Mr. Chowdhury had a crazed look in his eyes now. He looked like a man possessed.

"Sir, please calm down!" said Raihan, now trying to wrestle the device out of his hands with the aid of Miss Luna.

"Let me go!" yelled the Principal, "If I can't win against them I'm not going to let them rob me of my sanity any longer! I might lose, but it will be on my terms!"

And with that proclamation he chucked the countdown device to the ground with all his force. Instantly it cracked and the screen, which was previously reading "0 Days 0 Hours 6 Minutes 20 Seconds", now went blank. Instantly, all three of them seized up. They waited, straining their ears for any noise. A few extremely tense seconds later, Mr. Chowdhury breathed a sigh of relief.

"Hah! I knew it! They were bluffing!" he said with gusto, as though he hadn't been losing his mind over this just a few minutes ago.

Raihan was disappointed. He had wished the seniors had found a way to actually set the prank up, impossible though it seemed, rather than it just being an empty threat.

"Sir, can I go back to class now?" he asked.

"Yes yes," Mr. Chowdhury said distractedly, before turning to Miss Luna and telling her to draft up a

speech about this whole incident which he could proudly deliver at tomorrow's morning assembly.

Just as Raihan was stepping out of the office though, he heard an ear-splitting bang coming from the north side of the building. As Mr. Chowdhury and Miss Luna pushed him aside in their hurry to leave the office, Raihan immediately turned around. He couldn't resist. He needed to know. Raihan went back to the timer and fiddled with the wires for a bit, and soon enough he had it running. It showed "0 Days 0 Hours 6 Minutes 20 Seconds" again and the countdown had resumed.

Now was the real test. Raihan turned the device and performed a complex manoeuvre switching a few different wires with each other. When he turned it back up to face him the dial had stopped flashing the time. The solution he had come up with in the first five minutes of examining the device had worked. Raihan smiled. Being right was just the best.

*Nox endlessly worries about hostile alien surveillance. Increase this paranoid person's online footprint with feedback at [nox.thewriter@gmail.com](mailto:nox.thewriter@gmail.com)*



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

# The Kokra Chul Fix

IZMA ANWAR

The thing about having curly hair is that you never know if you love it or hate it.

Most days you settle for bottles of hair oil as your best friend. You are fighting constant battles with the humidity, you break a hairbrush or two, and continuously get berated by aunts who want you to tie your hair up. The neglect that curly hair receives is almost comic to the point where instead of wallowing in disappointment, many just roll with it. I was not keen to join either club so I decided to get to the root of it.

Similar to the skin-whitening regime, the straightening of naturally curly/wavy hair is another attempt to homogenise the way people look, tailoring to socially constructed beauty standards. Most people hold bias towards young women and men based on their hair—the curly kind painting a sloppy first impression whereas traditionally straight hair would make one seem more “put together”. If I got 100 taka for every time I have had a hairdresser examine my hair and utter “rebond

kore felen”, I’d actually have enough money to do it.

Furthermore, the sense of insecurity sparked by such pressure often pushes people into taking rash measures, most commonly keratin treatment and rebonding—methods that actually damage hair in the long run—without having the sufficient knowledge of what may be best for their curls. Also, the lack of availability of products designed for curly hair add to the already negligent attitude towards individuals of the respective hair type, creating the misconception that maintaining their natural hair is an extremely demanding ordeal.

The cultural stigma we have with non-straight hair might seem trivial, but this affects the way young people view themselves, especially in a time where there is immense pressure to look good. Learning to love curly hair comes with learning to take care of them so promoting hair diversity in its natural style, colour and shape is a topic definitely worth discussing.

*Izma Anwar has a talent for spraining her ankles. Send prayers at [izmaanwar@gmail.com](mailto:izmaanwar@gmail.com)*



ILLUSTRATION: NOOR US SAFA ANIK

SONGS TO WASH YOUR HANDS TO

ITYADI THEME

MR. BRIGHTSIDE

*The Killers*

TIK TOK

*Ke\$ha*

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*Backstreet Boys*

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