

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY APRIL 30, 2020, BAISHAKH 17, 1427 BS

A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*



WHAT TO DO WITH OUR
O AND A LEVELS

PG 3

THE SECRET LIFE OF
WOMEN IN RAMADAN

PG 6



FIGHTING THE INFODEMIC



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

EDITORIAL

These are unprecedented times. It really is, I asked my parents and they don't remember a global pandemic. I looked at the history books and the last time this had happened was in 1918, when they didn't have social media to make it all worse. In fact, the only reason they called the 1918 pandemic the "Spanish" flu is because Spain was the only country that allowed its press to run the story that the entire world was dying. Other countries just suppressed the dissemination of information which made everything worse.

So wait, things were made worse back then by lack of information, and it's being made worse now by too much information? Well yeah, humans have the beautiful ability to make things up and that's just a game changer if you give everyone the means to attain a broad audience. Like all things, information dissemination requires balance. Alas! It's a difficult balance, like Atlas carrying the world on his shoulders but on a tightrope. We can only feel bad for Atlas, and the weight that he's carrying.

– Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

WRITING GUIDE



Videos for Aspiring Writers *Part Deux*

AAQIB HASIB

Over a year ago—in February to be exact—I wrote the first part of this article. The entire purpose was to include videos that inspired me and other amateur writers to pick up a pen, or more accurately open a laptop, and start writing their stories.

The current state of the world made me start watching more of this genre of videos, to get my own creative juices flowing, and that's where I thought I'd share it with other aspiring writers out there, who might just need a little motivation to get their own projects underway.

FREE VERSE: NEIL GAIMAN AND DAVE MCKEAN

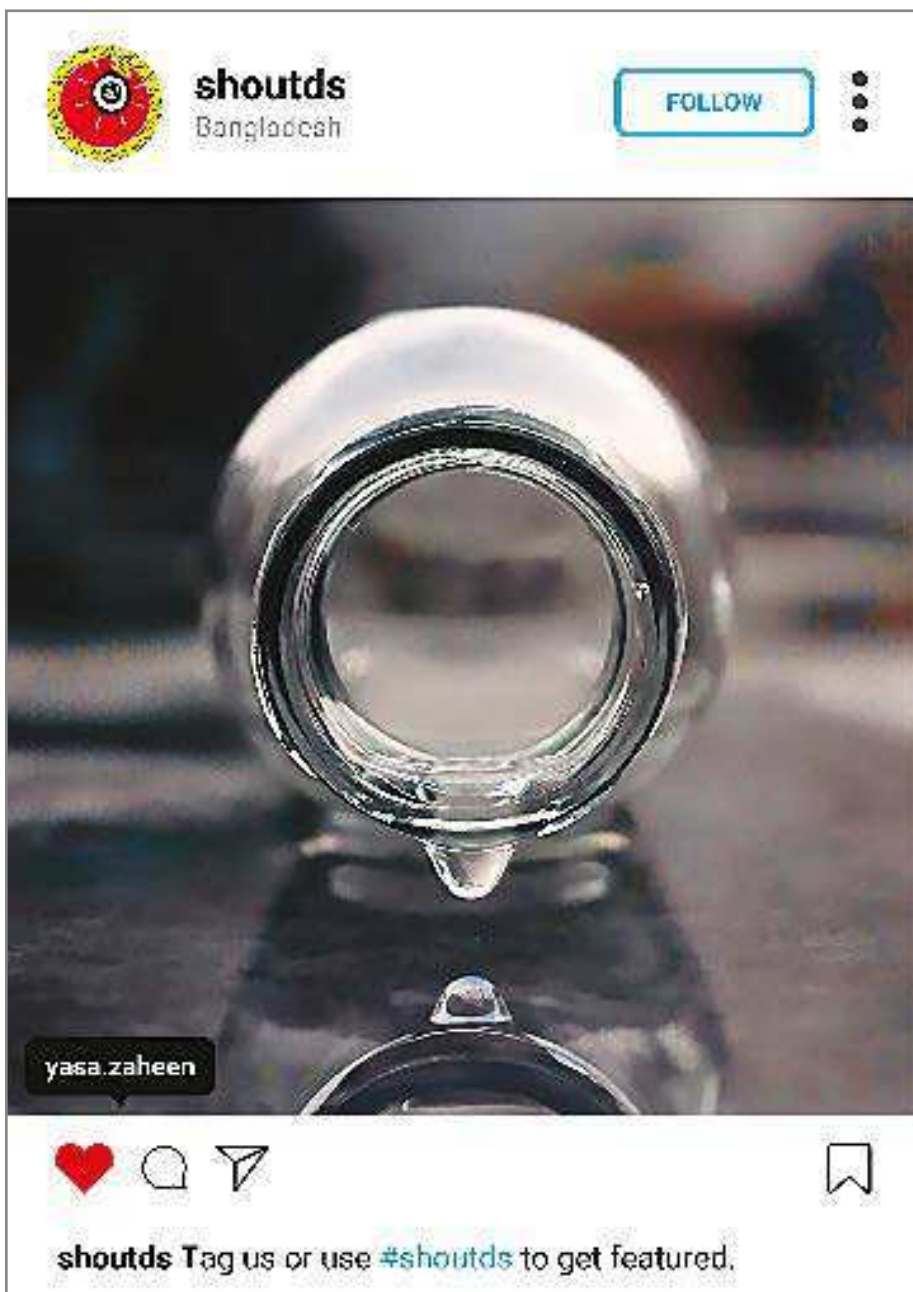
If you go back and read the last one, you'll notice how much of a "fanboy" I am for Gaiman. And usually, the abundance of his presence in such lists happens because of his readiness to adapt to such mediums. However, I selected this particular video simply due to the brilliance of McKean, and the overall synergy between Gaiman and McKean as juggernauts in the 80s comic industry. **CRAIG THOMPSON AT MELTDOWN COMICS**

Thompson is the mastermind behind *Goodbye, Chunky Rice*; *Blankets*; *Habibi*; and many more. What really makes Thompson unique is that he is both the writer and the artist of his books. This particular interview showcases the process behind his initial writing and then

subsequently visualising it in image form. Thompson also talks about fun ways in which artists can set up their storyboards, which I found really interesting. **CONVERSATION WITH MARJANE SATRAPI AND ART SPIEGELMAN** Both Satrapi and Spiegelman have had storied careers in the writing and, its subset, comic industry. However, these two are recognised specifically for their monumental work on *Persepolis* (Satrapi) and *Maus* (Spiegelman). Hearing these two discuss their art form is inspiring, as it almost seems like the creators are the only true version of themselves. They also talk more in-depth about their thoughts during the process of creation. **NEIL GAIMAN AND CHIP KIDD: 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF SANDMAN** People who want to call me a "stan" can now proceed to do so, but this really is a masterpiece. I watched this video long before I ever read *Sandman* in its entirety, and while it does have its fair share of spoilers, hearing about this is also what convinced me to put the iconic series on my reading list. Chip Kidd is also a great interviewer, knowing exactly how to set the stage for Gaiman to talk, and he puts it all out there.

I hope everyone enjoys this list and can use this as some form of inspiration to catapult their next article/story/novel/blog post out there.

Aaqib is stuck in an existential crisis loop. Send help at aaqibhasib94@gmail.com



What to do with our O and A Levels

ABHOY HRIDDO

Covid-19 is one of the biggest crises faced by modern civilisation. It has affected multiple things including travel, social relations and most of all, the world economy. The governments of the United Kingdom and Bangladesh decided to close their schools until the situation improves.

Examination boards like Cambridge and Edexcel have made the decision to cancel O Level, IGCSEs, GCEs and A Level exams and give predicted grades for the session of May 2020. Many teachers and students have expressed their displeasure at this.

Zuhayr Rahman, student at South Breeze School, says, "It is quite disheartening that we won't be able to sit for our exams after so many months of hard work and I don't think the approach exam boards have taken with predicted grades will be able to provide a fair assessment for each and every student." Some students, however, are happy with the decision of predicted grades. Dipro Nishanto from Sunnydale School says, "This is something very good for me because in the booklet they said that the expected grades will be based upon the AS results and also it's a reflection on what you did on O Levels. Following that and as my grades in AS are good, I'm happy with what I'm going forward with."

According to some, predicted grades are unfair, and it won't show the actual potential of the student. A teacher from an English medium school in Dhanmondi, who

requested anonymity, states, "The system is completely flawed. Edexcel has asked teachers to give a predicted grade. Every teacher will be giving the best grade they can and assuming the teachers do it fairly, it will still be unfair for the students who are appearing as the grades will be standardised by the school's previous performance." This means the grades will be based on the past performance of the school and outstanding batches from a school that previously may not have performed that well, cannot live up to their potential, leading to thousands of students getting grades that they don't deserve, be that better or worse. All these factors will lead to an inaccurate assessment of the student, which will later lead to a huge impact on their future.

The question still remains — was there a better option? To be fair, there may not have been. According to Quazi Rafquat Hossain, Edexcel Physics teacher at Think Tank, this is the best anyone could have hoped for. He comments, "It's not like they're forcing anyone. Students and candidates at their discretion can choose to take the center assessment grades or shift to the October session."

Another important factor is the detriment that all of this is causing to an individual student's preparations. "Studying now, right before exams, is most crucial. This is the time where you solve question papers and get more familiar with the type of questions and pattern you'll see when you sit for the exam," says Sarara Azmayeen,



PHOTO: DARSHAN CHAKMA

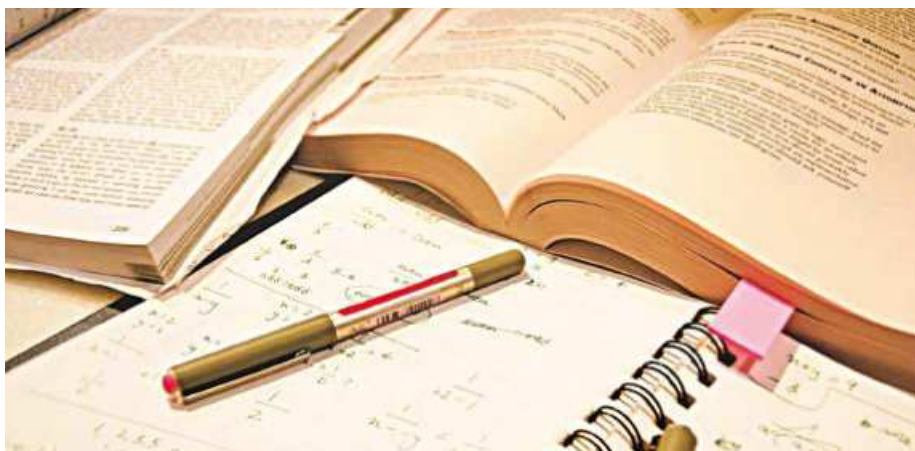
a student at Academica Institute, who was supposed to be sitting for her AS exams this year.

The October session is still in play, giving students a chance to shift their exams to later this year. It's not possible to predict whether Covid-19 will be gone by then, so it's still very uncertain if conditions will prove good enough for exams to be held. For Edexcel, only A Level exams are held in October; IGCSEs have never been held at that time in the past. It may be a possibility that they take IGCSEs in October, but that would have its own difficulties. To prepare for an IGCSE in October, Edexcel needs to do a lot of background logistics, many of which will prove difficult given the short amount of time remaining. I would stick to the predicted grades rather than wait around for relevant boards to cancel the exams again.

The question students still have on their mind — what is the best option going forward? According to Cambridge Physics teacher Mohammad Faisal, "IGCSE students should start studying for their AS while AS students should start studying for their A2 to opt for the best results they can get. A2 students should keep an eye out for what their universities are saying and in this break fill out on anything they have missed."

These are confusing times and for now nothing is certain. The best way to move forward would be to look at all the information available, and to make a decision catered to each individual's goals and practical realities.

Abhoy Hriddo is an AS student facing the same dilemma as every other student. Knock him at abhoyhriddo@gmail.com





Bangladesh University of Business and Technology

Established in 2003

BUBT

Admission Ongoing for Summer 2020

Undergraduate Programs

- BBA
- B.Sc. (Hons.) in Economics
- B.A. (Hons.) in English
- L.L.B (Hons.)

Faculty of Engineering and Applied Sciences

- B.Sc. in CSE
- B.Sc. in Textile Engineering
- B.Sc. in EEE

(Weekend and evening class & special tuition fee waiver for diploma holders)

Graduate Programs

- MBA
- M.A in ELT
- M.Sc. in Economics
- EMBA
- Masters of Arts (M.A) in English
- LL.M
- MBM

- ▶ Quality education at an affordable cost
- ▶ International collaboration/Credit transfer facility
- ▶ Career guidance and job placement
- ▶ Free medical facility
- ▶ Free internet and WiFi facility
- ▶ Large playground
- ▶ 42 Highly-equipped labs and workshops

PERMANENT CAMPUS

Plot No. 77-78, Main Road, Rupnagar, Mirpur-2, Dhaka-1216

Phone: 9020132-4, Website: www.bubt.edu.bd

10%-100% Tuition fee waiver/scholarships for poor and meritorious students

25%-100% Tuition fee waiver for the first 3 semesters based on the results of the SSC and HSC Examinations

10%-100% Tuition fee waiver based on the semester results at BUBT

Special tuition fee waiver for siblings (25% each)

Special tuition fee waiver for spouses (25% each)

WhatsApp Viber

01845734337

01680050630, 01741129235

01967169189, 01554882075

Admission Office is Open Everyday





FIGHTING THE INFODEMIC

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE
SHOUT

ALIZA RAHMAN

In recent days, I've heard of several people engaging in various odd behaviours: not bringing in the newspaper home, shaving off hair for protection, and a family of four buying over a hundred strips of vitamin C lozenges and 200 kilograms of rice.



As people reading these might have already guessed, these behaviours have been influenced by information regarding the coronavirus outbreak. However, a more accurate thing to say would be misinformation or misguided ideas about the global pandemic.

The sheer amount of information regarding Covid-19 has been, is, and might well continue to be, overwhelming. Even as I write this, I got a "breaking news" about the death toll in a country surpassing a dangerously high number, all the while knowing that the death toll in another place or the same place might be even higher in a period of time as early as next week. News outlets have created new podcasts just to spread information about Covid-19; even YouTube has a link to the WHO website and a Covid-19 section on its homepage to help out in this crisis. While we live in an age where more people than ever before publish the truth, we also live in a time where more people than ever before can publish falsehoods—intentionally

or unintentionally.

If you're not someone who believes this to be a serious issue, the severity of the problem might sink in after reading an article on United Nation's (UN) official website titled "UN tackles 'infodemic' of misinformation and cybercrime in Covid-19 crisis". According to WHO, an infodemic is "an excessive amount of information about a problem, which makes it difficult to identify a solution" and that infodemics can "hamper an effective public health response and create confusion and distrust among people."

People are worried and rightly so. Wanting to share information, especially ones that seem alarming, is understandable, especially considering the current circumstances. Unfortunately, many have been susceptible to falsehoods propagated online. In the past few weeks alone, people acting under fear or with wrong information has led to a scarcity of toilet paper, the burning of 5G towers, and xenophobic behaviour to name just

a few. Moreover, just as people have been making use of technology to enhance their storytelling, so too have propagandists been making more sophisticated videos spouting false information. These come in a variety of forms, often with eerie and odd music, individuals confidently shouting out their opinions, videos of a person's silhouette on a cliff or sunset among other irrelevant images and statements designed to cause panic. Additionally, when many of these sources of falsehoods have their content removed from sites because of their harmful nature, they weave a narrative of themselves as heroes fighting against powerful corrupt forces. These narratives are compelling, even more so when many carefully mix some factual information with the lies. Some have even taken to pretending to be trusted sources. The WHO has had to publish a guide for people ("Beware of criminals pretending to be WHO") to identify scams where their name is wrongly used by people with malicious intent to trick other people.

New terms have been coming up in relation to the coronavirus, and one of them is "covidiot". The term applies to panic-buyers, people flouting public health warnings and spouting conspiracy theories, and generally anyone behaving irresponsibly in regards to the coronavirus outbreak. Reading news about less than commendable actions on the parts of both ordinary individuals and individuals with authority can make many feel the urge to use the word covidiot and far less savoury words, but here, it might be more helpful to practice restraint.

In an article in *The Atlantic* called "How to Talk about the Coronavirus", science communicator Liz Neeley writes, "Identity threats trigger identity-protective behaviours such as motivated reasoning." More importantly, the information people have and believe also depends—as almost everything does—on the privilege that a person has or does not have. An article in *The Daily Star* on April 24 says that "Nearly half of the lower-income group living in coastal areas do not have any idea about the Covid-19 virus". In many instances, people lack information through no fault of their own. Moreover, even when people do have access to information explaining complex situations or countering false information, it may be in a language a person is not proficient in.

The situation we're in is an unprecedented one, and so



even when we've done our parts to ensure the information we're sharing is correct, we have to pay attention to how we word things. Words have connotations, and can alter how a person reacts to a piece of information. As political commentator and late night show host John Oliver rightly points out, using words with negative connotations like "swarm" can make even kittens seem scary.

Another *Vox* article explores the problems that arise when war metaphors are used when discussing Covid-19 such as shifting our attention away from the provision of care and support and putting shame on people who've gotten the disease. We've even seen public officials making statements that have misguided the public in many ways. One of the most prominent examples of one of these statements was its comparison with the flu. Fortunately, news outlets and sites such as *Vox* have content explaining the differences. Trustworthy newspapers and media outlets have been putting in effort to help people navigate the sea of information better. For those looking for a guide on how to distinguish between correct information and misinformation about the coronavirus, an article in *The Guardian* titled "Coronavirus overload: five ways to fight misinformation and fear" might be very helpful.

Another aspect we have to pay special attention to when dealing with Covid-19 is scientific knowledge. We must remember that discoveries in science come to us after a

lengthy process that requires peer reviews and several other factors taken into consideration. In *The Guardian* article previously mentioned, one of the recommendations is to "be wary of preliminary scientific findings". Additionally, even when looking at data or charts that has been created by scientists and checked by other scientists, we should be aware of the fact how an ordinary person interprets the data and how a person trained in science interprets the data can be vastly different.

To give an example, consider the video on *Vox's* channel "Coronavirus is not the flu. It's worse". It talks about the basic reproduction number or R_0 , which is a unit by scientists to describe how contagious a disease is. The video shows that in comparison to highly contagious diseases like the Zika virus and measles, the flu and Covid-19 with their comparatively lower R_0 numbers of 1.3 and 2-2.5 respectively, not only seem less dangerous but also make the two diseases seem similar to each other. In addition, some of the symptoms between both diseases are similar. However, the video quickly highlights how much more dangerous Covid-19 is than the flu with a diagram showing the number of people affected after ten rounds—the number of people getting infected with Covid-19 is significantly higher.

This and various other pieces of work by reputable sites and newspapers show us that caution and patience is key. Even scientists are learning along the way about the coronavirus, and expecting concrete information, advice and cure for a new strain in a short amount of time is unreasonable. For those of us who do not have the specialised knowledge and skills to help out, the least we can do is not partake in spreading false information that can have negative consequences in the lives of those who follow the information you've shared.

At a time when we are having to halt our daily activities to stop the spread of a disease, being extra cautious about sharing and discussing information, especially about an issue that has drastically changed all our lives, might seem frustrating. But it is our duty to do so.

In this crisis, what you *don't* do is extremely important.

Aliza is Matilda resurrected. Reach her at aliza.hridula@gmail.com



“I’m a cool girl”: An epidemic, explained

SHAROSE ISLAM

As a young woman, I am constantly exposed to tropes in television and media who model the “cool girl” behaviour. If you haven’t heard about *The Girl Next Door*, you are surely familiar with the iconic “I’m a cool girl” quote from *Gone Girl*.

The whole idea behind being the cool girl is to strip yourself down from everything that makes you a woman; whether that be your own femininity or your preference to be friends with other women. A “cool” girl is hot without trying, chill without being a pushover, and has a dark sense of humour that “other girls” just don’t understand. Because obviously, the coexistence of all these traits is unimaginable.

At a glance this may seem innocent, and even funny, until we actually dig into the root of where this phenomenon stems from. “You’re so funny for a girl” – is a phrase I am all too familiar with. And I, like you, had considered this to be a huge



compliment for the longest time without realising the backhandedness of it. The reason is that I belong to a patriarchal society where men’s preferences are preferred and women’s likes, fantasies, and interests are shunned.

Traditional gender roles suggest that women are to look good, dress well, and speak softly. However, it is ironic that the originators of these very gender roles have labelled one set to be boring and uptight

and the other to be fun and edgy. So, for many women, the only way to feel validated and empowered is through compliments which would be a result of them rejecting all of the stereotypical girly traits, better known as, practicing internalised misogyny.

As a society, we are guilty of always creating dichotomies based on extreme traits and framing them in boxes. We then go on to try and fit every person we come

across into one of those boxes without realising that most of us are, in fact, laying somewhere in between. The cognitive dissonance of wanting so badly to fit in and at the same time stand out, leads us to rebelling over things that, in an ideal world, should not matter at all. Being funny and being feminine are not mutually exclusive but the patriarchal norms imposed upon us often make us feel that they are.

The question is whether our need is to be different from other girls or be different from other people in general. We often end up identifying with traits which we believe are perceived by others as unique or quirky. Our need for social validation is so deep rooted that it ends up clouding our vision as to what really matters — that people are allowed to be themselves.

Sharose Islam is currently seeking rehabilitation in order to recover from her near lethal over dosage of milo. In order to set up an MAA meeting, reach out at facebook.com/sharose.islam

The Secret Life of Women in Ramadan

RASHA JAMEEL

Ramadan for women has never been the same as that for men. Women are constantly weighed down by oppressive patriarchy and it’s no different during Ramadan. In addition to carrying out their regular rest of the year duties, the women are also expected to shoulder chores around the house, whilst fasting. I thought things couldn’t get worse until one of my friends brought to my attention the decades-old practice of women concocting elaborate ruses to keep their periods a secret from men, during Ramadan.

What?!

Dear readers, did you know that a significant number of women in our country have to consume sehri and pretend to fast so as to keep their periods a secret during Ramadan, owing to the menstrual cycle’s taboo nature?

I didn’t. At least not until recently.

Here’s what happens – when menstrual calendars of all the ladies in a specific household strike that dreaded “Day 1”, they all immediately get to work trying to somehow cover it all up. The preparation that follows is no less than those taken by a criminal covering their tracks. Every precaution is taken so that the issue does not attract attention in any way, such is the taboo nature of periods. To ensure their covers are not blown, the women of the house create a ruse, by sitting down for sehri with the rest of the family, pretending to fast alongside them.



An elaborate ploy, no doubt. But is it a practice to be normalised? Absolutely not.

Menstruation is not something to be swept under the rug, it must be dealt with appropriately. Encouraging the practice of the aforementioned

activity will only enhance the taboo surrounding the menstrual cycle, which can result in adverse consequences for women. Due to its taboo nature, the schools in our country, co-educational or otherwise, refrain from studying the

menstrual cycle in detail. Girls end up feeling awkward in studying the topic and instead choose to rely on misinformation surrounding menstrual hygiene.

Health problems related to the menstrual cycle, namely polycystic ovarian syndrome/polycystic ovarian disease (PCOD/PCOS), premenstrual syndrome (PMS), dysmenorrhea, etc. can often go unreported or undiagnosed due to the patient’s reluctance to discuss her menstrual cycle at length. Even more so, underprivileged women in our country often resort to using crude substitutes for sanitary napkins, rather than buying the cheap, locally-produced pads. They feel too embarrassed about menstruation to treat sanitary pads like a basic sanitary necessity.

While my parents have never enforced such irrational practices within our household, I can’t say the same about that of my friend’s. She and her mother have to sneakily scarf down food in the kitchen, in between cooking iftar meals for the rest of the family. They are made to feel ashamed of their periods, like many other women oppressed by the patriarchy.

At the end of the day, menstruating is a bodily function. It’s a process that removes waste materials from the human body, or, specifically, the female body. Nothing taboo there.

Rasha Jameel is an overzealous Ravenclaw who often draws inspiration from mundane things such as memes. Send her your thoughts at rasha.jameel@outlook.com

HYMN FOR THE LOCKDOWN

SAKIB AL MAHMUD

As they were running through the debris, Maria could see the boy tripping over and getting trampled on, but there was no time to go over and save him. They all knew he couldn't be saved. He had lost the race; the race to survival. Maria remembered him from the day before. He and his younger brother had joined the group coming from the south. She couldn't remember their names. Nevertheless she didn't have time to think about his loss. She needed to find a safe place immediately. The enemy was gaining on them. She found a large boulder ahead and shouted for the group to follow her. There was a cavern behind the rock. They managed to get in before the first hound came in sight.

By the time the dust settled over, everyone had found a place to sit or lie down behind the boulder. If one tried hard enough, they could hear the loud heartbeats that were resonating inside the cavern. One could very well compare those resonating heartbeats with a hymn, Maria thought. They were safe for the moment. But for

how long? She didn't like their odds. They wouldn't be able to go out before the hounds were done scanning the field. They were stuck inside this dark cavern. She was becoming restless. She thought she was going to lose it if they had to spend another night in one of these dark caves.

Jeremy was the first to talk, "I think we should wait till the evening. Then we move west. There used to be an airfield. We will find shelter there." He was their leader. Well, sort of. He was always there to direct them to the next destination, to tell them what to do and how to do it. She found it quite extraordinary for one person to know so much about everything. But she never put her thoughts to words. One could never be too careful in situations such as this.

"We might find some food there as well," remarked Omar.

Maria was walking about. She retorted, "No, we will not find any food there."

"We need shelter for the night," said Jeremy.

"What about the morning after? What do we do then?"

"We move somewhere else, searching

for food."

She snapped, "I am tired of being on the run, looking for caves and tunnels, living like... Like a damn rodent."

"Ever since Joshua was killed we have been following Jeremy. He saved our lives so many times," Mina cautioned her. She was consoling the little boy whose brother had just died out in the field. Mina had been the motherly figure of the group for as long as anyone could remember. They say she used to be a nurse. The night Maria joined the group, it was Mina who bandaged her broken arm and sat beside her through the feverish night.

"Don't you get it?" Maria couldn't hold it any longer. She was screaming at that moment, "He has been the guide all along because he was written like this. He's purpose is to guide us, to show us the path. Not only Jeremy but each one of us... We are...", she started to say something more but then stopped herself. She realised they already had a lot on their plate to deal with, and giving in to her frustrations wasn't going to help.

"What do you suggest?"

"I say we stand our ground here. We fight those beasts, or animals, or whatever the hell they are," she didn't know what to call them.

"We won't survive against them."

"Some of us will die," Maria admitted. She walked over to Mina and took her hands, "But we have been losing a few every week. We can at least take the zone back if we fight together."

"You're saying we have a chance?" asked Omar.

"We might," Maria tried to see hope even though there wasn't much left of it. She saw the faces filled with anguish and despair. But they had to fight back. It could not go on. "I say we take the fight to them even if that means only one of us makes it through. We shall remain and survive as one."

They saw the fear in each other's eyes, but also knew they had to do what needed to be done.

The writer is a Computer Science and Engineering student at the University of Dhaka.



STAY HOME, STAY FIT

HIYA ISLAM

Six feet. Quarantine. Sanitizer. These words have been ringing in our ears for the past few weeks. With cities looking like ghost towns, the virus has finally got its way with us locked indoors, washing hands 24/7, devoid of hugs and sunlight.

Even in these trying times, there is no excuse to lose all the gains from the gym. While a home workout can never replace intense bouts of pumping iron, it is guaranteed to work up your sweat glands and break the new-found sedentary lifestyle for amateurs and bodybuilders alike.

BACK TO BASICS

Binging on television series or surfing the internet can only go so far. Thus, beginners are welcome to start with the basics.

Push-ups, sit-ups and squats are at the core of any workout. Burpees are never an easy thing to do. And none of these require any equipment. There are already established workout routines such as, the 30-day fitness challenge, 7-minute workout etc. Getting started with these is a great way to enter into a fitness regime.

However, for pro-enthusiasts, try challenging yourselves with a set number of reps in a given time frame. For example, break the 5-minute plank record, try wall-



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

sits with weights and so on. Missing the benches and dumbbells? Use the chair for a set of tricep dips. Lift some filled water cans. You have all the creative freedom to use the furniture in your house however you like.

If not, spend some time researching.

There are hundreds of blogs and channels offering online workout lessons for free, specifically designed for home, with or without equipment. Narrow down your search depending on your needs and fitness level. Find a fitness personality you like, stick to the do's and don'ts. Start out with

the stretches. Make sure to not strain yourselves too far; pain does not always equate to gain.

TRY SOMETHING NEW

It's also a good time to try new things. For example, yoga. From relaxing poses to biting stances, pick some moves to try. There is meditation, too; not to forget, aerobics. To make things interesting, try a few dance workout classes. Say, Zumba?

Endorphins and exercise go hand in hand. Endorphins are neurochemicals in the brain that make you feel good and physical exertion is one big cause of their release. But they work with serotonin and norphenylephrine, feel-good chemicals that are released at varying times during workout and the reason behind "runner's high".

WHO recommends a weekly activity of 150 or 75 minutes of moderate and vigorous intensity respectively. Studies have found that exercise reduces anxiety and stress and helps in depression. In these dire times, when we run out of things to do, breaking out some sweat is the least we could for our well-being.

Hiya loves food that you hate by norm -- broccoli, pineapple pizza and Bounty bars. Find her at hiyaislam.11@gmail.com

How predictive text is changing writing

OSAMAN BIN AHMED

Open your smartphone keyboard and type a word. Do you notice the three suggestions? This is one good example of how keyboard developers use your word usage tendencies and conversation history to determine what you might type next or the words you used before.

Let's play a game. Type one random word and choose from the others from the word suggestions to see the resultant sentence. Is it funny? It could be. It often isn't.

Dependence on predictive texting

Dependence on anything has its own pros and cons. Text prediction immensely speeds up your conversation on a messaging platform. The typing experience is more streamlined than ever before and will only get better. For example, being an anime lover, it is quite common for me to use the word "Nani" (which translates to "what"). The keyboard knows when I will use such a word and brings up as soon as I type a "n". Another example would be when we exaggerate interjections such as "lol" to "looooo", the keyboard predicts it yet again more often than not.

Just like most tech, there is an argument against this as well. Critics say that this undermines the cognitive skills of an individual that is used for writing. The argument against it is rather strong when the usage of this tech among kids



is brought into perspective. It can be said, without a doubt, that more kids are using smartphones than ever before. A child's experience of learning by writing using a pen is by no means equal to that of typing. Children who learn to write by typing do not have the same understand-

ing of character or letter forms as those who learned to write by hand.

A study done in China in 2010, estimated that almost 80 percent of people in China had problems remembering the spellings of words such as "cologne" and "enough" as dependence on auto-com-

plete got the better of them.

What lies in the future?

Predictive text algorithms are developing further, and for the first time in history, it has been quite an achievable task for a computer program to write a story. In a few more years, it is quite possible that our silicon friends, with the help of our data, will be able to write literary pieces almost indistinguishable to ours. Will they be as good? Perhaps better? Only time will tell.

As far as the usage of predictive text is concerned, it is a technology here to stay for all the reasons, good or bad. But for now, it is our imperfections that make us the best version of ourselves. As for the tech, it will never say "Time is monkey."

For us humans, unpredictability is in our nature where a computer is about all things perfect. This makes me grateful. Whatever lies in the future, none can beat the crisp and smell of paper, the loopy L's, grammatical errors, and the sudden depletion of the pen's ink.

Reference

South China Morning Post (January 5, 2017). *Is predictive text robbing us of our ability to write?*

Osaman is a curious mind always wondering about AI, simulations, theoretical physics and philosophy. To discuss nerd stuff mail him at osamanbinahmed@gmail.com