

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY MAY 14, 2020, BAISHAKH 31, 1427 BS

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OH MANGO,
MY LOVE...

PG 3

FALLING IN YOUR
DREAMS

PG 6



BANGLADESH ONLINE UNIVERSITY

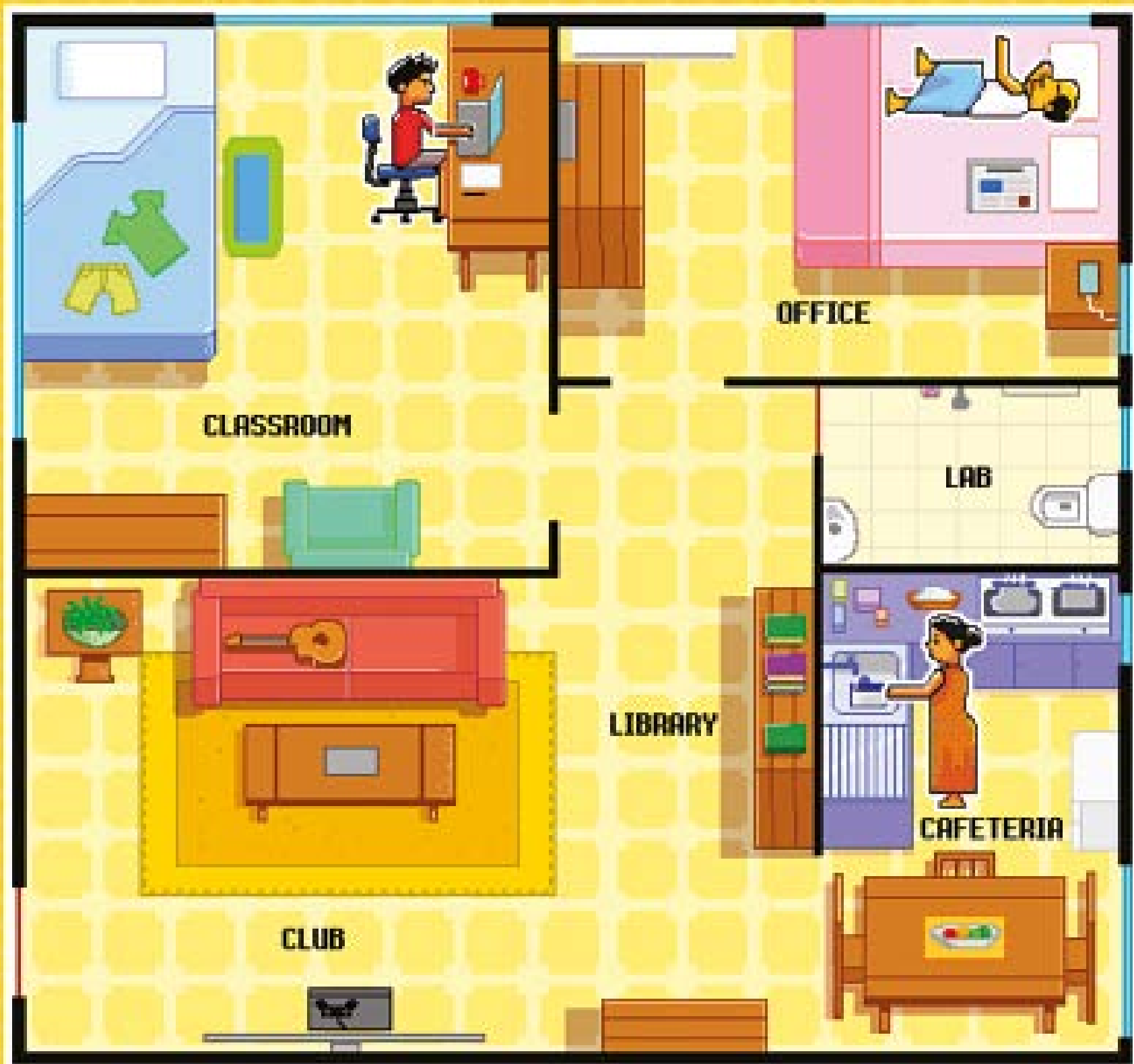


ILLUSTRATION: JUNAID IQBAL ISHMAM

EDITORIAL

This past month, I think I spent the most time with my parents since I was a toddler. And that brought me to a realisation. Millennials and zoomers are very conscious about their mental health problems, and we are aware of the fact that many of these problems are caused by our parents. What goes unsaid and undiscussed is the fact that our parents, boomers, suffer from many of the same ailments as us. Remember, they had parents too, many of them so old that we don't even have a generational moniker for them.

Talking to your parents about their mental health issues may be one of the toughest conversations you ever have, but it's also one of the most important ones. Talk to them. Are they lonely? Are they sad? Do they want to work on that? We spend a lot of time practicing pseudo-psychology on friends who already have one foot in the therapist's chamber, giving some of that time to our parents might just make for a healthier household.

– Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH
YOUTUBE CHANNEL REVIEW



History of the world with **INDY NEIDELL**

TAQDIRUL ISLAM

I came across the YouTube channel *The Great War* some time in 2017, and I was blown away instantly. Week by week story-telling of one of the most important events in world history, a mind boggling amount of detail that's not really common on other breadtube or infotainment channels, and just the sheer scope of the project intrigued me. But I was busy in 2017, catching up to 4 years worth of YouTube videos was not going to be practical, so I gave up.

Fast forward to now, and I'm not busy at all. I was actually trying my hand out at *Hearts of Iron IV*, and that got me thinking whether the makers of *The Great War* had something similar for World War II. Turns out, they did. The channel, unsurprisingly, is called *World War Two*. *The Great War* and *World War Two* are actually produced by different entities but the format, style and the host, American historian Indiana "Indy" Neidell, is the same across both. There were only about 100 videos I needed to watch to catch up to where they currently were, and I can say without exaggeration that these were the best three days of my life. I'm lying, of course, but the videos were excellent.

If you want to learn about the first or second world war, YouTube has a LOT of options. Almost too many. But these two channels stand out for some pretty obvious reasons. The learning is gradual so there's a better chance that some-

one could actually absorb some of this knowledge, the history lessons take place at the same speed that they happened many years ago, and that gives the viewer an element of living through the wars in real time. Because they don't have to rush, there's a wealth of information in these videos that are hard to find on YouTube. The lessons are based on well-regarded literature on the two wars, and they're referenced heavily in almost every video. The scripts contain discussions on the grand strategy that came to define these two wars, as well as the more personal stories of soldiers and civilians, who suffered greatly and fought bravely for their respective causes.

Indy Neidell's sufficiently dramatic delivery is my favourite thing about these channels. He's funny when he wants to be, sombre when he needs to be, and ends every video with a soul searching question that keeps you wondering about life and reality on Earth in the early to mid twentieth century. Both these channels have extra content delving into the lives of people who played important roles in these wars, there are videos shot on location of some of the important battles during these wars. There's a series that talks about the time between the two wars called *Between Two Wars* as well. But a personal recommendation is the *War Against Humanity* series that dives into the human cost of the Second World War, which makes me sad every time I think about it.



Riding the wave of uncertainty

OH MANGO, MY LOVE...



HIYA ISLAM

Let's face it, a virus with the same name as an alcoholic drink has got us all indoors. We have got lost internships, deferred graduation and zero paychecks. And we accede to Your Highness. It is after all, a killer microbe with spikes making it look like a crown. That being said, are mangoes really cancelled this summer?

An average Bangladeshi is said to be made of 90 percent mangoes in summer time. Mangoes are an emotion or, as millennials like to call it, a "mood". You can never go wrong with mangoes. Slice it into the salad, plop it in milk or blend into a smoothie. Might as well dunk it in chocolate; if strawberries taste sublime, so will the 'goes. Step up the game. Sticky rice with mangoes, anyone?

However, this summer, it is more than likely that we cannot feast on pounds of mangoes in ways we had dreamt all along the year. Much worse, there'd be little to no stack of pickle jars in the pantry. A few months ruined has come to a high price that is to be paid until the next season. Imagine the joys of picking slices of fresh mangoes in the kitchen, the aroma teasing the buds until hunger caves in. Yeah, none of that is happening. It'd be just *khichuri* with passable, store-bought *achar* for the rest of the year.

The possibilities do not end here. You can literally write a book on "1001 Ways to Eat a Mango". There's *aam bhorta*, there's *mango lacchi*. *Aamshotto* and chutney. While we are still at the subject of unripe mangoes, the recipes for *kacha aam er shorbot* would top the list of "Useless Recipes of 2020". And of course, *aam-doodh-bhaat* would be a major missing at *sehri* hours.

Here's to hoping our summer gets drenched with *himsagars* and *lengras*. May our fruit baskets never pass a day (or a little longer is acceptable, given the times) without an *amrapali* or a *fazli*. *Gopalbhog*, *rajbhog*, *mohombhog* and the rest of cultivars, do you have a type? Do we even need to have a type? They are all beautiful. There are 152 varieties of mango in Bangladesh; only 31 are mostly grown and it is still a lot to digest.

When the going gets tough, the tough get going; it'd be a hard catch but we sincerely hope to bag a few kilos of this wonder fruit during "mandatory" grocery runs. It would last a little while in the face of fierce appetite (quarantine side-effects). And, it is in our everyday prayers that the mangoes reach Dhaka on time, unhurt. That is, to elaborate, minimal damage to the glorious harvests due to transportation hokum plus a decent profit for the angelic growers. Is that too much to ask for?

Hiya thinks if you're not a fan of mangoes, you're not human. Send her your favorite mango recipes at hiyaislam.11@gmail.com

FAIZA ADIL

With the grappling fear and uncertainty of what the future holds for us looming over our heads, it can become increasingly difficult to look forward to the future we once had all thought out. Before the uncertainty of now, our lives were packed with classes, goals, exams and plans on plans - once stressful things. With most board exams being cancelled and confusing alternative grading measures not seeming to be in most of our favours, there's not much to look forward to each morning.

Who would've thought the cancellations of the exams we dreaded most would bring about such unease?

Having short-term goals, be it an exam session or even an event, academic or otherwise to work towards adds a great deal of focus and drive to our lives besides just the stress. Now stuck in this monotonous daily routine of almost nothing, no school, exams or social gatherings - the sudden change can take a toll on our motivations and aspirations. Well, yes, some of us are making great use of all this free time, but productivity isn't coming to everyone which in itself is a challenge and that's okay.

Barely grasping what's going on with the state of our education is likely taking a huge toll on most of our mental health. A lot of us around the country were due to give our first board exams and with them being cancelled we have almost no control on the final outcomes. All of our university prospects and plans feel murky amidst all of this doubt and uncertainty about what the future holds. The future we once looked forward to and worked towards could not seem more out of reach.

And even if you've gotten into your universities, the pandemic means actual classes aren't starting anytime soon, but tuitions are. With most businesses taking a huge hit in these uncertain times, paying the hefty sums for universities is a burden for both the student and their guardians. Lockdowns mean that applying for student visas and permits are even more complicated and worrisome, with our final grade not being in our hands anymore, conditional offers from universities seem far

more out of our reach.

For the average student in final years, our higher education prospects seem to not be in our favours. If you're pessimistic about your future too, it can be hard to feel hopeful and motivated stuck at home with nothing to do to help ourselves. While the future feels grim, learning to cope with this plaguing feeling is increasingly important.

I can't tell you that it will all work out, our futures haven't ever felt this bleak and out of control. But we must all learn to cope, the absence of short-term goals is far more demotivating than one might think. Start with setting your own goals, anything at all, focus on an art, a hobby, even something academic - focus on what you can still control. Stuck at home in this monotony, at times we don't even know what day or time it is, we've all faced it but adding structure and a working timetable to your daily life at home will help with the sometimes overwhelming feeling of uselessness.

While it's easier said than done, don't dwell on what isn't in your hands. Know that while it is uncertain - the future is coming, and whatever it brings your way - you aren't alone in this.

Faiza enjoys the lazy company of her overweight cat and the crippling fear of tomorrow, reach her at faiza2421@gmail.com





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EXCELLENCE OUT OF NECESSITY

Bangladesh Online University (BOU) begins its journey

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE
SHOUT

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA
DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

BOU promises to deliver world-class quality education to its students while making sure that they do not have to step outside the safety of their own humble abodes. It is the first-ever hybrid and online university of Bangladesh, and perhaps the entire world, meaning that it has successfully managed to merge the culture and ideologies of both public and private universities, that too without a physical campus.

About BOU
BOU was founded just last week by a group of overly enthusiastic students and elite academicians, who cannot be bothered enough to wake up for 8 AM classes. Thanks to their insightful thinking and foresight, and the cancellation of all on-campus academic activities due to the shutdown, BOU was brought into the academic scene of the country and has managed to quickly become an integral part of the country's education system.

BOU is accredited by the renowned association Universal World Universities (UWU), and approved by the Ministry of Online and Social Media Based Education. BOU, in this short time, has managed to affiliate with various local and international educational institutes like Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, The Academy of Abstract Arts, Starfleet Academy, South Hatirjheel Institute of Technology, Bidirectional University, and many more.

Vision
"To become the best university in Bangladesh—online and offline—and to mould its students into ideal netizens who will become leaders of the new normal."

Although the university administration conceded that they cannot see beyond the current state of affairs, they are going with the aforementioned words as their vision.

Mission
"BOU promises to deliver quality education right to your room. Our motto is 'Excellence out of Necessity', which refers to the timely establishment of this esteemed institution, and how it was a necessary step that had to be taken for the sake of our nation's education. Our mission is simple, but difficult as it will thoroughly push our individual patience as well as our internet bandwidths to the maximum. However, we will leave no stone

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Established very, very recently amidst the global Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, Bangladesh Online University (abbreviated affectionately as BOU) is a latest state-of-the-art international education institution based in—you guessed it—your home!



turned in our quest for excellency. We will produce the best skilled personnel the world has ever seen. Our keyboard warrior graduates will lay waste to all the threads and comment sections on the internet. BOU shall dominate online education for months to come."

A Message from the Chairman, Board of Trustees
I remember reading online that Newton said "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid", which is why, instead of judging our student's ability to climb a tree, we are about to judge them by their broadband speed. BOU has been established to impart quality education amongst its pupils. We are fully capable of catering to

the needs of our students through Zoom, and are more than ready to provide filters to help them face the challenges posed by the new normal.

~ Amar Bari, Chairman, Board of Trustees, BOU
A Message from the Vice Chancellor
I am extremely delighted to have been invited to be a part of this wonderful university. BOU will surely be making some amazing strides in the field of global online education. We have some of the most excellent teaching facilities in the world. Unlike any other basic university, our academic curriculum consists of courses which will help the students in the "real" world. The degree programs we offer are unique, and cannot be found anywhere else.

You cannot even MOOC this. No adversity can prevent us from continuing our academic activities. We are ready to take the responsibility of your education, and to turn you into WFH industry leaders and entrepreneurs.

So come, learn with us, as we take you on the journey of your lifetime. I welcome all to BOU.

~ Prof. Dr. Engr. John Cook, MBA, FCA, Vice Chancellor, BOU

The following are the programs offered by BOU under its various departments, along with their respective graduation requirements.

Undergraduate Programs
Bachelor of Arts in Cooking: Cook sehri and prepare iftaar for a whole week without burning your house down.



Bachelor of Arts in Home Cleaning (Majors offered: Dishwashing, Bathroom Cleaning, etc): Do the dishes for an entire month without breaking more than five items. Clean the bathroom tiles in such a manner that you can see your face and future in them.

Bachelor of Arts in Video Call Management: Complete 10 consecutive video calls without forgetting that you are not wearing a shirt, or that your hair is home to a lovely pigeon family.

Bachelor of Science in Netflix: Pick a series, and finish it on the same day. Note: Whatever you pick cannot be shorter than three seasons, and each episode must be at least 40 minutes long.

Bachelor of Science in Sleep Studies: Forget what the sun looks like.

Bachelor of Business Administration (Majors offered: Online Shopping): Purchase a legitimate product online and maintain proper precautions while receiving it. Exams held in quality of written review.

Bachelor of Engineering in WiFi Router Maintenance: Troubleshoot your WiFi router without physically abusing it.

Graduate Programs
Master of Arts in Cooking: Cook sehri and prepare iftaar for a whole month, including hosting an online iftaar party. For your final thesis, compose a report as to why chikon jilapi is better than the mota jilapi.

Master of Arts in Home Cleaning (Majors offered: Floor Sweeping and Mopping, Detergent Science, etc): Keep your house as clean as you can. Mothers will act as special guest proctor during final examination.

Master of Engineering in WiFi Router Maintenance: Change the router's access credentials every time the speed goes down, such that the only one who can access it then is you. Feel free to change the credentials once you are done with your work.

Master in Movies, TV Series, and Anime: Watch any movie except Extraction and an entire season of any TV series except Friends, every day. For your final thesis, binge watch One Piece and finish it within three days.

Research Opportunities
BOU is currently conducting research in a wide range of areas. Some of our most interesting ongoing research projects include the study of the sleeping millennial, why rumours on the internet get parents more excited than the sight of their own children, the psychology behind families on WhatsApp groups, how long a distance can long distance relationships go during a

global pandemic, and so on. Our research on creative Zoom backgrounds has been selected for an international award.

Faculty Members
BOU hires only the best personnel for its teaching staff, which is why most of our faculty members are Facebook group admins, Instagram influencers and BOU graduates. Our faculty members are very smart and cooperative, but most importantly, they are the personification of the term "tech-savvy". They will in no way burden you with quizzes and assignments. Feel free to join the live classes whenever you wish, because we do not care about your attendance.

Admissions related FAQs - Local and International Applicants
What are the admission requirements? Willingness to study, and a stable internet connection.

How do I take part in the admission test? No admission test. Just create an account, pay the fees, and you are good to go.

Do you offer waivers and scholarships? No, but we do offer discounts to early applicants.

What are the tuition fees? Reasonable and non-negotiable.

Campus Life
BOU is the creator of the patented Infinite Campus™ that exists in the infinite cyberspace, but also manifests in your home. Our campus is housed in servers spread across the whole of Bangladesh, as well as many other countries. We at BOU believe that by eliminating the need for a physical campus, and conducting all sorts of academic activities online will allow our students to focus more on their studies and less on the unnecessary joys of studying at a university. Besides, this will also save them time and money otherwise wasted on daily commute to and from the campus. Please refer to the cover illustration for a clear picture.

Club Activities
BOU encourages its students to engage themselves in different activities offered by its various clubs and online forums. Some of our most prestigious clubs include the BOU Memers Association (BOUMA), the Quarantine Forum, BOU Ludo Society (BOULS), World TikTok Forum of BOU (WTFBOU), and so on. Each club is a family in itself;

there is no politics. Members are brothers and sisters. Our flagship event is a 72-hour long diplomacy conference over Zoom, the BOU Model United Nations (BOUMUN). We believe that by maintaining regular interaction with the club members, and participating in the club's General Body Meetings, students can foster all the skills necessary to stop themselves from losing their sanity during this period of lockdown.

Why study at BOU?
BOU is committed to deliver proper and timely education to its students. We will not only prepare you for the career options available in the new normal, but will also help you excel in those fields. So join us to experience a new form of education from the comforts of your home, something you have always wanted to do.

Enroll at BOU. Admissions going on until further notice.

Faisal wants to be the very best, like no one ever was. To stay home is his real test, to survive the pandemic is the cause. Write to him at abir.afc@gmail.com



The young and the bold

Youth-led start-ups supported by UNDP join the fight against Covid-19

A CORRESPONDENT

Covid-19 has brought the world to a screeching halt in roughly four months. Its crippling effect has touched on every aspect of people's lives. Bangladesh and UNDP have been actively working with the government on mitigating the impacts of Covid-19.

Sustainable youth-led startups and social enterprises developed through Youth Co:Lab, a common platform for young entrepreneurs co-founded by UNDP and Citi Foundation have been working in Bangladesh since 2018. They have repurposed their operations to help Bangladesh fight the crisis.

We take a look at some of these Youth Co:Lab supported initiatives.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Moner Bondhu

The social enterprise propped up by the Youth Co:Lab platform, Moner Bondhu is a platform to provide care for mental health and well-being service with a dynamic and skilled team of counsellors and experts from Bangladesh.

Moner Bondhu is currently providing free 24/7 tele-counselling and video-counselling to help people handle the mental stress caused by Covid-19. Anyone can seek free counselling by calling the hotline number +8801776632344 or by contacting their Facebook page.

BD Assistant

BD Assistant is active in Rangpur district (North

Bengal) as a Peer to Peer (P2P) service marketplace for daily maintenance services such as appliance repair, renovations, handyman services etc. for households and offices. But when they saw that in Covid-19 crisis people need more support such as delivery of daily groceries and medicine, the enterprise started assisting people quarantined at home with a new service line delivering farm fresh groceries collected from farmers, as well as medicine right to their doorsteps.

PeaceMaker Studio

PeaceMaker Studio has been working to create awareness and spread information before the Covid-19 crisis. During the crisis it has now repurposed its mission to also battling misinformation, which according to the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres is "infodemic." They have produced and published visual content on preventing fake news and awareness building, safety measure from Covid-19 promoted through individual interviews and proper hand washing techniques. To date, their content has reached more than 60,000 people.

iFarmer

iFarmer is an impact tech start-up that has developed an innovative online platform for any Bangladeshi to easily invest in farming and livestock.

The initiative has also started a Business to Business (B2B) vegetable supply to the e-commerce platforms based in Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital, so that the farmer families can sell their produce at a fair price.

"It took iFarmer.asia five days to design a supply chain mechanism to procure vegetables from the farmers," said Fahad Ifaz, CEO of iFarmer.

"We worked for only a couple of days for PriyoShop.com to adopt fresh veggies and groceries into their platform for customers and a LinkedIn message and couple of calls for Truck Lagbe to get on board, who gave amazingly quick and cost-efficient support to bring farm produce from the north of the country to Dhaka," he added.

Shuttle

Shuttle, another start-up supported by UNDP Youth Co:Lab, provides safe, comfortable and affordable transportation for women in Dhaka.

Following the crisis, they have expanded their operations to provide safe and secure transport support to people who provide essential services and need to attend office during the lockdown situation in Dhaka and Chattogram. All the vehicles are especially sanitized for the passengers, carry sanitization kits and first aid as necessary.

These are just the tip of the iceberg of innovative ways to fight Covid-19. UNDP Bangladesh hopes that this inspired a wave of fresh ideas which will set the trend for the rest of the region.



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

Falling in your dreams

OSAMAN BIN AHMED

It is midnight. The silence settles in, its presence periodically interrupted as the clock ticks by. You try to sleep and switch sides. Thoughts, as uninvited as some relatives, come to seek your attention. Finally, after minutes or even hours of battle, your sleep triumphs over your subconscious thoughts. You dive deep into your sleep only to wake up again, startled, perhaps even breaking a sweat.

This feeling of falling in a dream is quite familiar to most of us. Chances are, more of your dreams have been broken this way than due to nightmares.

So, what is it?

Such a dream brings forth an involuntary twitch in your arm and leg muscles, and sometimes in the entire body causing you to wake up. This is called a "hypnic jerk". If you have watched the movie Inception, the "kick" they refer to as the key from exiting their dream state is none other than a hypnic or hypnagogic jerk.

What do the scientists say?

Researchers have found that approximately 70 percent of people have experienced hypnic jerks at least once in their lives. As a person drifts asleep, certain parts of the brain reduce its activities as they hand over to others. During this handover, the previous part detects a decrease in brain activity. It then carries out a last-ditch effort to regain control and rarely becomes successful in doing so. This surge in brain activity due to a rough or failed transition during sleep causes the twitching of muscles causing a person to wake up.

Another such hypothesis explains itself using the theory of evolution. Brains of earlier primate-like human forms had this reflex mechanism to protect them against falls as they often rested on trees. Additionally, hypnic jerks may also have been useful in making them more alert against potential predators.

I experience these jerks. Should I be worried?

According to most experts, these sudden movements are nothing to worry about. Factors such as stress, lack of sleep, increased caffeine consumption usually contributes to these jerks. Don't restrain yourself from having your daily cup of cappuccino if these hypnic jerks are not as bad for you.

References

1. MedicalNewsToday. *What is a hypnic jerk?*
2. Wikipedia. *Hypnic jerk.*

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

WANDERERS

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

It'd been so long since I last walked in this city.

Dhaka has been to me a blur of colours and faces as I used to drive my rickshaw from one end to another. At night it was a passing tunnel of yellow street lights and lamp posts. Wheeling through the mass of vehicles and people here, it was so easy to not think of anything. It was a routine of picking up passengers, speeding away and sweating. It was a routine of earning and living.

But today Dhaka was just a dead city, softly lit by the sun melting behind the clouds. After days of being locked down at home, eating scraps of food and wishing there was more money in the tin box where my wife, Rabeya saved our money, we were allowed to go outside for food. One of those organisations which once in a while knocked on our doors and gave us food were distributing food in a nearby schoolyard.

When I got there, there was already a huge queue of people, all ragged looking and thin, snaking its way ahead, though keeping a safe distance from each other, to the distributors. Scrunching my nose, I edged my mask up to it. Rabeya washed it

tenderly three times a day because it's the only mask we have. Everyone has masks on, clean or not, except one little girl.

She stood before three or four persons before me, her small palms pressed determinedly on her mouth. The way she squirmed and tried not to touch anyone, looking down as the great snake of people inches forward proved she's here all alone. A sense of helplessness overwhelmed me as I realised she must be younger than my own daughter. Maybe she had an ailing parent back at home and so she was here to collect the staples.

"Hey, let that little girl go up front," my voice quivered a bit but I managed to say it anyway.

"Everyone's going to get food, so stop hustling around," the man who stood before the little girl said in a booming voice.

"But she has no mask on!" I tried to reason.

"Mind your own business, mister," a thin, bent-over woman screeched.

The girl tentatively looked back at me and pressed her palms firmly to her mouth. She kept on doing that every now and then as we all slowly moved ahead.

The school field looked like a haunted house for some reason without its children running around, the field barren without

them playing. Jhorna, my daughter loved playing here too.

Time crawled and slowly the queue got smaller. But as we moved forward, we could see the distributors and they seemed kind of frenzied. They talked among themselves and motioned repeatedly to the pile of food that didn't seem enough for the remaining crowd.

Panic seized me. I was still behind some people and so was the small girl. I hoped that both she and I would get our food. The distributors were now decreasing the amount of rice grains and lentil seeds in the plastic bags in order to accommodate the remaining people there.

But the ration stopped just when the little girl walked to the front. There was no more food left.

The remaining people turn into an angry mob, raising fists and shouting for food. Only then the girl finally took her hands off her mouth and went to sit by a corner.

I thought of Rabeya, how she woke up early today and was smiling even because we were going to get food today, how Jhorna asked her mother to cook *khichuri* today. Today it proved again, without my rickshaw I cannot return with food.

For some reason my feet dragged me to the sobbing girl. Her hands were by

her sides, they were no longer a makeshift mask for her.

"Come on Ma, I will buy you a mask," I said to the girl. I barely had money in my pocket, maybe a twenty taka note and a five taka note. The girl's big eyes stared at me with shock, her lips puckered up more and she renewed her sobbing. But she stood up and made an attempt to stand beside me. And we started to walk.

All around were people who walked back too, but all so different, some clasping the plastic bag of food because their lives depended on it. In front of us was a frail, old man returning empty handed. The distributors were returning too, hands shoved deep into the pockets of their aprons, the patrolling police officers urging us to go back home quickly.

Maybe I never noticed these people or this girl in my life, or maybe I did while paddling my rickshaw, while I breathed in Dhaka without ever seeing the clouds, while I earned my money without ever stopping for anything else, while we all lived here, never knowing why.

Maybe we were all just wanderers here, no one a wonderer.

You can reach out to Maisha Nazifa Kamal at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com



WHERE IS HOME?

RASHA JAMEEL

For as long as I can remember, my grandfather would tell me about the events surrounding his migration from Sahasram, a city in Bihar, India. He'd tell me about the struggles he faced with his rights as a migrant all on his own, about the difficulties that his children, my father and his siblings, had to go through, trying to identify as one with the rest of the Bangladeshi citizens.

Growing up, I almost always reacted to my grandfather's stories with insensitivity and dismissed them as ancient history. I didn't think it would ever have an effect on my life in any way. "Why should I bother with ancestors I've never met or with the ancestral lands I've never set foot on?", I'd think to myself. After all, I was a Bangladeshi citizen, born and raised in this country.

Oh, how wrong I was.

I remained oblivious throughout pre-school and primary school. It wasn't until middle school that reality dealt its first blow.

A classmate walked up to me on the first day of fifth grade and promptly remarked that I looked different than the rest of them. That I looked "Bihari-type". It turned out that a lot of my other classmates felt the same way. As did some of my teachers. Thus began my slow and steady alienation from the rest of the class. I still had some difficulty understanding the situation even when I was made fun of for trying to express my interest in Bengali festivities, when I wasn't taken seriously whilst carrying out class projects on the Liberation War. The situation worsened, I was occasionally addressed with derogatory terms such as "ghoti", had my patriotism doubted, had my citizenship questioned. I simply didn't understand the discrimination and hate – I was a Bangladeshi citizen who spoke Bangla as her first language. I wasn't the same as my ancestors.

Turns out, I wasn't the only one on the receiving end of ethnic and racial discrimination.

There were a handful of other kids who were also deemed as "different". Their facial features and accent were a little too unique, names a little too outside the norm. They were all denied acceptance because they all stood out due to the diverse nature of their ethnicity.

A friend tells me about the experience of being asked as a kid if frogs and snakes were part of his daily diet, because of how he looked. "Incidents such as these made me feel very different from others, and that I didn't fit in," he says.

Unfortunately, such discrimination wasn't limited to school.

I personally witnessed the sentiment



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

being sustained by bigots for over a decade.

Things at university were far worse than what I'd faced at school. All those who had small eyes were collectively referred to with derogatory terms. Everyone who had a slight ethnic accent in their Bangla like I once did got the same derogatory treatment. Everyone deemed even the slightest bit "different" on grounds of ethnic diversity, was eligible for discrimination, for being made to question their idea of home.

"You're not from here."

"Where are you from, really?"

The hateful comments, the incessant questioning - it's everywhere. For those of us who identify as ethnically diverse, it's practically impossible to attend a social gathering and not get stared at or extensively questioned about where we're "really from". Our responses of "we're Bangladeshi" are only regarded with further scrutiny, since it turns out that how we describe ourselves doesn't

really matter. Us young adults, we will always be defined by our ancestors.

A lot of the kids like me have somewhat accepted that there's an uncertain future in store for them, one that comes without job security. All because of their backgrounds, which gives rise to the social stigma surrounding their very existence. They all know how difficult it'll be to attain a well-paying job in a place where they were born with a social status deemed disrespectful by the wide majority.

Another person I had a conversation with describes an unsavoury experience they recently had, "My family recently moved to a different part of the city, and when the furniture was being moved in, my parents were conversing between themselves in Urdu. The neighbours may have heard them because according to my parents, when they eventually met the neighbours, they just stared at my parents instead of greeting them. One day, I even heard the neighbour telling

other people in the building that my family would 'pollute' the building. This incident made me feel really angry."

Stereotyping and bigotry continues to run rampant in my university campus, the same as the rest of my country, the same as the rest of the world.

In the 50s, my grandfather had to adapt to changes in a foreign land so his children could then call it home. In the early 2000s, the idea of home is something that I, his granddaughter, was struggling to comprehend. This cycle of identity crises keeps finding new frontiers as borders become rigid, only to be endured by generations to come.

Reference

DW.com (October 10, 2019). *The neglected 'Bihari' community in Bangladesh.*

The writer is using a pseudonym because she still feels insecure when talking about her Bihari ancestry. Tell her it's okay at rasha.jameel@outlook.com