

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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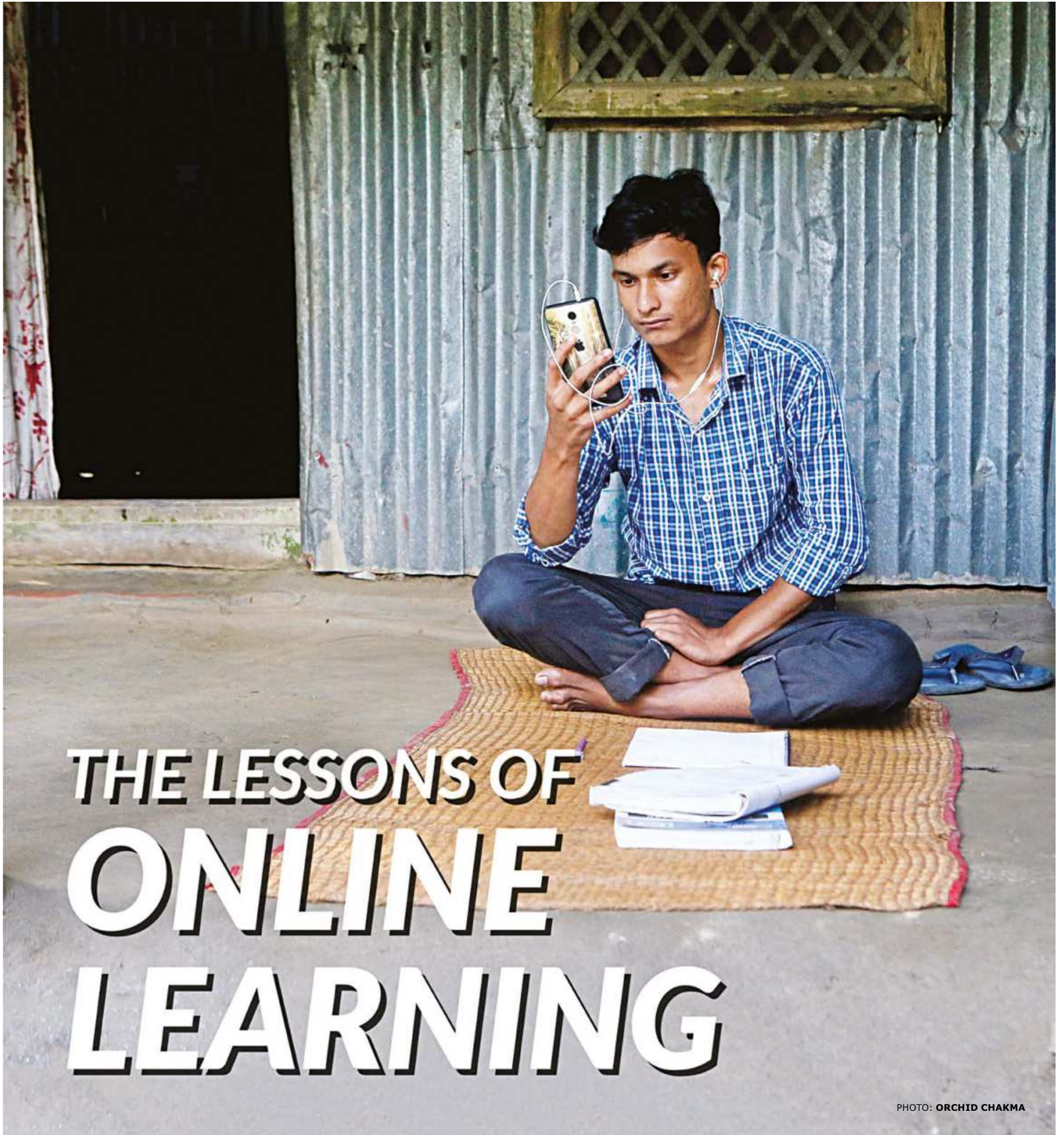


THE BEAUTY AND THE
BEAST OF OUR TIMES

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SMALL STEPS TO REDUCE
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THE LESSONS OF ONLINE LEARNING

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

EDITORIAL

This week's cover story on SHOUT is one of our many articles discussing the state of education in this country, something we deeply care about as a youth publication. For these articles, we talk to students and teachers of all backgrounds, but there's a disturbing trend that I've noticed while doing that. Everyone's scared to talk.

Students and teachers alike are scared to talk about their institution's shortcomings. Readers will notice in our cover story that many students quoted have requested their name to be hidden, for "safety and privacy". From my understanding, this request comes from the fear that authorities in most institutions do not take kindly to criticism from within. This is heartbreaking, because without criticism from within, how does any organisation even begin to improve? Especially for universities, where students are the lifeblood, is their feedback so unwelcome that they are scared to dish out honest opinions?

SHOUT goes out to many universities across the country, and we have prominent VCs and professors among our readership. Please let us know why this trend exists, or let your students know that it's okay to talk.

– Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

ANIME REVIEW



THE BIZARRE CULT FOLLOWING OF JBA

OSAMAN BIN AHMED

You know it's JoJo's Bizarre Adventure (JBA) when it starts with iconic OSTs and eye-catching animation, spoiling the entire plot through its lyrics, and giving birth to once popular memes such as "To be continued". From bloody action scenes to death of main characters and plot holes, there's something unique that JBA has to offer to its audiences. The question is, what makes JBA so unique? I'll try to be spoiler-free.

THE CHARACTERS

JBA protagonists have a unique aura of personality around them. Questionable hair styles and radical styling add to the mix of persona. The entire goal is to make these characters unpredictable in a way that viewers can only learn more about them as episodes pass by. Most characters possess a "stand". A stand is basically a manifestation of an individual's innate psyche.

JBA's pool of amazing villains consists of overpowered Aztec superhumans, mythical creatures, vampires, and so on. JBA is probably one of few anime where one might feel inclined to side with a villain. Weird posturing accompanied with katakana for "menacing" means an antagonist is serious business. These villains are not your regular ones. With quirks such as poisoning their own father to adoring the amputated hand of a female victim.

OK COOL. BUT WHY DO YOU LIKE JBA?

JBA does a perfect job in getting the viewer hooked to the screen with anticipation on what happens next. Behind it, is a

concept similar to "villain of the week" where the protagonists face sub-villains and mercenaries as they get closer to the prime antagonist.

Remember me mentioning stands? These sub-villains each have their own stands aligning with their personality, and can only be seen by others who possess such powers. The plot does a great job and doesn't make protagonists immune to death. The story often changes with a whim as protagonists face challenges, barely overcoming those with their intellect. The story is fast paced, yet doesn't feel rushed and has one of the best anime musical scores.

IS THIS A JOJO REFERENCE?

Yes, this article and many things are! JBA's creator, Hirohiko Araki makes stands and characters named after tarot cards, rock stars such as Terence Trent D'Arby and even iconic musical pieces such as Queen's "Killer Queen" and "Another One Bites the Dust".

Despite the quirks and questionable styles and personality of the anime and its characters, JoJo fans don't seem to care. The anime is different and doesn't try hard to shove a particular styling or ideology into its viewers. Suspense, plot, characters are its tour de force that make JBA one of the best anime to binge watch and has given birth to cult following in Reddit or fan groups scattered all over the interweb.

Osaman is a curious mind always wondering about AI, simulations, theoretical physics and philosophy. To discuss nerd stuff DM him on www.fb.com/osaman.binahmed



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The Beauty and The Beast of Our Times



ECHOES BY
 ASRAR CHOWDHURY

I
 I miss the kids. I miss their sight and sound.
 I miss the kids cooking up a story when they try to enter late. I can tell by looking at their faces, they're a better storyteller than I am.
 I miss the kids talking behind my back. I miss them talking among themselves even when I'm trying to talk to them.
 I miss the kids staring at their mobile phones. I even miss them fiddling with their mobile phones. They know that's "the" thing that irritates me. And yet, they can't stay away from a screen.
 I miss the kids in the corridors. I miss their chirping.
 I miss the kids in an exam hall. I miss them eyeing the room at all degrees, in three-dimensions.

II
 I miss the human contact. I miss the kids coming to me in person. I miss them sharing their dreams and telling me in excitement what they've achieved in life. I miss them asking me about career options.
 I miss the kids sharing their anxieties. I very much miss them telling me about their depression. I cherish that some of them share their intimate thoughts, which they may not share with a professional psychiatrist. This trust and faith they bestow on me is the beauty of the teaching profession, when the kids see you not only as a teacher but also as a guide and a friend.

III
 Nobody could have predicted the 2020 pandemic. Like all previous pandemics, it caught everyone by surprise. But life has to move on. Changing and adapting with times and adversities is a challenge. And it's an even bigger training in life.

I completed 25 years of teaching in July this year. I belong to a generation where teachers taught on blackboards in the style of "chalk and talk". I started teaching in the same manner. I always felt, something that has stood the test of time shouldn't be changed.
 The blackboards were replaced by whiteboards around 2000. The chalk was replaced with markers. Then came the overhead projectors. I did learn the new technologies, but I didn't change. I was trained to see teaching as an experience — a discussion or dialogue between two parties, which is probably much better expressed verbally. "Chalk and talk" did it better than anything else.

IV
 Education institutes couldn't remain closed indefinitely. Classes had to start. But this time, "chalk and talk" entered a virtual

reality. I started asking myself, "Is this the real life? [or] Is this just fantasy? Am I a bohemian singing a rhapsody?"
 There's always more than what meets the eye when changes take place. We go through an uncertainty of trial and error. I took time to adapt. I've been trained to observe first and then learn. Thus I took time to learn.
 I called one of my students who is now a university teacher. I asked him to educate me. I was amazed at how technology has progressed.
 I'm old school. I'm not comfortable watching YouTube tutorials. Monir, my student-turned-teacher, asked me to come on Zoom. He gave me tutorials on Zoom and Google Meet platforms. The only question I asked: do these platforms have a whiteboard? "Yes, they do, sir" was Monir's response. I learned the whiteboards of Zoom

and Microsoft and the jamboard of Google Meet. That was one side of the story. The next was an agony I didn't foresee.
 Yes, it's possible to save what I write on whiteboards, go back to them and then send the saved images back to the kids, but I couldn't escape from preparing Microsoft Powerpoint slides. You have to write such that the kids do read the text. Or else, the slides "become" their text. This makes learning shallow.
 Then comes recording lectures, saving written materials in PDF, and sending them to numerous platforms for future consumption. But the real challenge is when I talk in the virtual world. I know I'm connecting with everybody from my living space. But I feel like I'm talking to myself most of the time. That human touch is what I miss.
 This isn't a real life. This isn't even a fantasy.

V
 Nothing is permanent in life. Online teaching will come to an end. Things will get back to normal. However, every experience teaches a lesson. And tougher experiences teach better lessons.
 In the midst of all the beasts of online teaching, there is one beauty. The whiteboards. I can write on a touch screen, go back to previous screens, save and share. But most of all, the human contact of a time-tested "chalk and talk" will be back.
 That world, even if it's a fantasy, has always been real for me.



Asrar Chowdhury teaches Economics in classrooms. Outside, he watches Test cricket, plays the flute and listens to music and radio podcasts. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

THE LESSONS OF ONLINE LEARNING

RASHA JAMEEL & H. RAINAK KHAN REAL

The Covid-19 pandemic had forced educational institutions to close down their campuses on March 17, 2020 as per government directives, and they eventually shifted to online classes. As of late August, the government extended this closure till October 3. Online classes replaced physical ones to ensure that our students do not fall behind, but the question remains as to whether this learning approach is feasible for everyone across the country, from all walks of life.



Online learning has drawn criticism in Bangladesh primarily due to our unfamiliarity surrounding the concept, having never been attempted before in this magnitude. With that in mind, let's take a look at the problems students across the country have faced in attending online classes. **IS POOR INTERNET THE REAL CULPRIT?** As social distancing was enforced as a part of the safety measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, a majority of the students who stayed in Dhaka for the sole purpose of education had to return home. Students living in remote areas have been facing a lot of trouble joining online classes, the most common of which is poor internet access and connectivity. Many of them have gone to great lengths to ensure they don't fall behind their peers. "Due to very poor internet connection at my village, I have to cover a distance of

almost 2 kilometres to reach the bazaar in order to get the 3G signal required for sustaining the video stream," says Sharif Mahadi*, a student at the Department of Geography and Environment, University of Dhaka (DU), about the daily struggle he faces to attend online classes from Krishnapur, Brahmanbaria. Covering such a distance to attend daily online classes is a major inconvenience. In an already uncomfortable setting, undesirable noises, sudden interruptions and unwanted interventions can be really distracting and demotivating. When asked about her experience, Abinta Khanam*, a fourth-year Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) student from a reputed public university in Sylhet, now living in her hometown in Noakhali had similar things to say. "Because of the trouble of getting a stable network within

my house, every time I need to join a class, I grab a chair and head to an open field right outside my house gate where the network seems much better. But this is a hassle, especially on rainy days." Even for many students who are participating in online classes from home, the experiences have been unpleasant. "Due to an unstable network, the video lags, the audio becomes fuzzy and the streaming quality drops drastically. As a result, I miss out on the most important parts of the lecture," states Asif Hasan*, another fourth-year student at Islamic University of Technology (IUT), who attends classes from Ramkola, Nilphamari. **HAS THE QUALITY OF CLASSES DROPPED?** Students we talked to have been quite displeased about the overall quality of classes, raising questions about the academic

content being offered, the manner in which classes are being conducted, and the guidelines being conveyed from administration to students. There have been complaints about teachers progressing with online classes as though they were being conducted in-person. It doesn't sound like a bad thing until you realise that online classes have been hovering on a middle ground between a strict rote learning system and interactive critical thinking sessions. Faiza Alam*, a student at Sylhet's Metropolitan University (MU), commented, "As a Literature student, I'd prefer more interactive classes. Studying Literature and related courses get tiring with just lecture notes and study materials. The teachers should be more open about what they're teaching and discussing, prioritising the student's overall experience

and how we can learn effectively."

It's rather evident that the channels of communication between students and teachers have become severely strained, with both parties failing to fully understand each other's shortcomings.

Sohana Zaman*, pursuing an undergraduate degree in Marketing at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), spoke about her teachers, "I don't think they're always taking our disadvantages into account. I say so because my coursemates and I are tired of seeing the administration taking decisions just as suddenly as they're dropping them. It would be of great help if they thoroughly discussed a matter before finalising any decision."

Aniqa Afroz* from DU, a student of Economics, added to Zaman's statement, discussing her university's divided stance on online learning. It seems that while most universities are making the attempt to digitise their course materials, DU's administrative body is slow to handle matters, leading the students to suffer from poor handling of online classes.

Doubts have also been raised regarding teachers' capabilities with conducting online classes. Maisha Zebin*, a second-year student of Media and Communications from Independent University Bangladesh (IUB), commented on her university's administrative body failing to provide sufficient training for some of the older members of the faculty.

Abu Bakar Siddik, a BBA student from a reputed private university in Dhaka, told us, "The quality of online classes is nowhere near that of an actual university class. Most of my teachers are just busy completing the syllabus. Only a handful of students are actually getting benefitted from the lectures."

According to a lot of students, proper access to classes and course materials has been difficult to attain, with certain universities prohibiting any kind of recording of live classes. Second-year CSE student from University of Asia Pacific, Showkot Iqbal* shared his thoughts, "I think they should make a reliable platform like HarvardX or MIT OpenCourseWare where they can provide pre-recorded classes, which we'd be able to access without any time-related hassles."

Similar measures have been put in place by Brac University (BracU) with the creation of the BuX platform where students can access all their required course materials.

We reached out to Dr. Hasan Mahmud Reza, Dean of School of Health and Life Sciences at North South University (NSU) in Dhaka, for comments on dealing with the aforementioned issues. In response to students expressing dissatisfaction with the online assessments, Dr. Reza commented, "NSU is working hard towards acquiring a world-class LMS (Learning Management System) pretty soon. We'll then be able to ensure better proc-

uring and fairer examination conditions for all our students."

Whether or not other universities will follow NSU's footsteps is dependent on the LMS' success in a Bangladeshi university, which remains to be seen.

DO SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY? Many students coming from low-income families lack access to digital devices needed and are at a major disadvantage.

Nabil Mahmud*, a second-year student of science from DU shared that while residing in the university hall, he completed his work either using the computer lab of his department or managing a laptop from one of his friends. Since the halls closed due to the pandemic, he was forced to return to his village in Kushtia and had to borrow a laptop to complete his assignments.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

According to research by a2i, over 20.4 million workers are currently unemployed across eleven high-impact sectors of the economy. Maruf Imtiaz*, a BBA freshman at a public university in Savar expressed his concern about the financial instability of his family as both his father and elder brother had recently lost their jobs, stating that he is in no position to attend online classes.

Having to take part in multiple online classes per day requires a considerable amount of mobile data, affording which is tough for underprivileged students who don't have access to broadband internet. In order to ease their pursuit of online education, the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC) urged the government to introduce free internet packages for public university students and even sought financial assistance for students who need to buy smartphones to take part in

online classes. In addition, the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh demanded the introduction of affordable internet packages for private university students.

In our interviews, we've found that some private universities have waived part of their tuition fees. Public universities such as Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) in Sylhet have opted to provide 15 GB of mobile data, monthly, to 20 students per batch who cannot afford to buy data packs. **ARE MENTAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS BEING CONSIDERED?** Meanwhile, students attending online classes at home are not at all free of inconveniences. There are those who fear the adverse effects of a sedentary lifestyle on their health, and those who are concerned with grief and panic spreading like wildfire.

Liakat Sheikh*, a third-year engineering

student from BUP, shares, "In spite of facing several issues at home, missing my attendance is a price I cannot pay. So, I've got no choice but to attend my classes."

In the interviews conducted, students have talked about neuro-developmental disorders that have caused difficulties in adapting to online classes.

A third-year student in BracU's English and Humanities department, Joyeeta Das* cited learning disabilities as a factor not being taken into consideration by her university's admin, and commented on online classes, "A lot of the text material provided are either unavailable in dyslexia-friendly fonts or can't be deemed text-to-speech friendly." No known measures have been put into place for online classes in Bangladesh to accommodate students suffering from developmental disorders of any kind.

An officer from NSU's Student Counselling Center, Md Shaphawat Hossain, provided some personal insight into students' current state of distress, "After NSU began hosting their student counselling sessions online, the initial response from students was overwhelming. A large number of students expressed feeling uncomfortable with online classes as they weren't able to interact with their classmates and teachers like they used to in physical classrooms."

The pandemic has wreaked havoc on almost everything we considered normal. We spoke to several students across Bangladesh seeking to understand their perspective, lend an ear to their voices on what online classes have been like for them. While answers varied throughout, their plea remained constant, "We just want some clarity and cooperation from both our universities and our government, during these trying times."

*Names have been changed for privacy reasons.

Reference
A2i. (2020). *Post Covid-19 Jobs & Skills in Bangladesh*.

Rasha Jameel is trying to figure why she needs to write a dissertation for 2 marks in her Genetics assignment. Send her your theories at rasha.jameel@outlook.com

H. Rainak Khan Real still has trouble sleeping at night thinking about his 3rd Year Field Report. Send him tips to sleep soundly at rainakhanreal@gmail.com



TO YOU, BHATU DADU

SAMIN SABAH ISLAM

Bhatu dadu died on a Friday morning, uneventfully and unobtrusively, surprising none in the village. Little to no tears was showered at his burial for he had little to no kin to carry out the honours. A distant nephew had arrived to only nod (approvingly or disapprovingly it cannot be said) but seemed scarcely moved. As for the rest of the villagers, some generously hit pause on their everyday toil to let out an ephemeral sigh and mutter, "At least he's freed from all his sufferings now."

Amin scorned at this. Simply put, sufferings were mere house pests that Bhatu dadu had squashed out of existence years ago. That was even prior to losing sensation on his left leg and having his clay money bank stolen. He was living his best life as an 89 years old childless widower, who, in the epilogue of his colourful life had discovered his fond and long shrouded love for fishing.

Let the records show that with his elderly trembles and cracked heavy rimmed glasses, Bhatu dadu was exceptionally unskilled at the avocation. That however, was a trifling shortcoming to him and didn't discourage his many endeavours. Those were the times when he was surrounded by his small army of admirers – six of the rowdiest and equally ardent village children. Bhatu dadu entertained the lot with highly exaggerated tales of his medieval life, accounts of the notorious boyhood of the now austere village-head and what not.

So on Saturday, the assembly of six, with ages ranging from 5 to 11, dangled their bare feet from the concrete barrier on the river side, hopelessly trying to hold back their whimpers. Nine years old Rimjhim, who was currently rebelling against hair braids, was the only one who had broken the sacred vow of a dry eyed goodbye. Now she not only lamented the death of the only 'dadubhai' she had left, but also feared the wrath of his ghost.

The agenda of the meeting was clear cut – dividing the crucial duties of Bhatu dadu now that his absence plagued the village. Among the members of this meeting it was well known, understood and agreed that no matter how much the adults scorned and sneered at the 'senile old man' (as they would call him), his contributions to this village were endless.

His entire life, Bhatu dadu had been the life of the party wherever he went, that is wherever he was invited, or at least tolerated. He filled the air with humour (and bodily gas). Even when neither was appreciated, it added colour to the greyness of the village. Bhatu dadu was content at being the joke as long as the audience found reason to laugh. He also took it upon himself to customarily embarrass the school headmaster, with animated retellings of the story where the latter had once urinated in front of the school building as a defiant teen. Someone needed to keep that pompous muppet in check from time to time! Bhatu dadu would also speak to the lonely old banyan tree behind the graveyard and throw baby fishes back in the pond after they were flung out by a storm.

Now in his absence, the six sets of



paint-stained, mud-stained hands were to be the keepers of prosperity in their village – an homage from loyal disciples to their revered leader.

"How come you guys get to do all the good things and I'm stuck dealing with the pesky old man (headmaster)," whined Rimjhim.

"That's because you don't go to school yet. If the rest of us get caught pulling pranks, we'll be walking home with ripe tomatoes for bottoms", Rownak explained to his sister, cringing at the mental image of his own description.

"Also, who will keep the old banyan tree company? Though I'm the oldest, I don't know how to have a heart-to-heart with an ancient tree!" he added.

"Leave that to me," 9-year-old Amin

chimed proudly, "My father is a farmer. I know a whole lot about plants. I can teach him a thing or two about living healthily and avoiding beetles".

"Who in their right mind goes to educate a tree?" giggled Durga, the baby of the group.

"That too one ten times his age!" Montu added, equally amused.

"I think someone who didn't fail the first grade should take on the role of the educator," Jimin chimed with an impish smile.

Amin creased his eyebrows in annoyance and decided to ignore Jimin's comment.

"Well, I once heard Bhatu dadu tell the tree that he should stop crouching because it's bad for its back!" he defended.

"I once heard Bhatu dadu apologise to the tree for passing gas in front him," Rimjhim piped in.

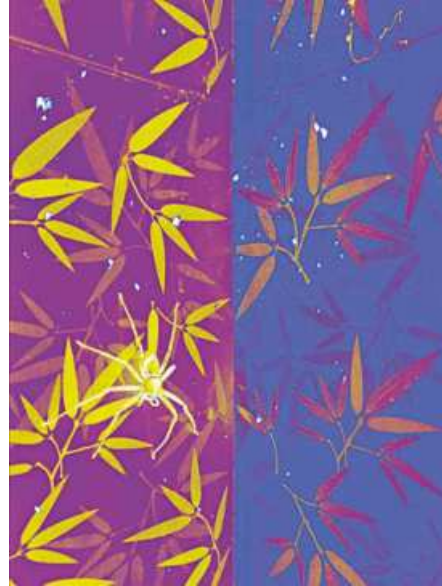
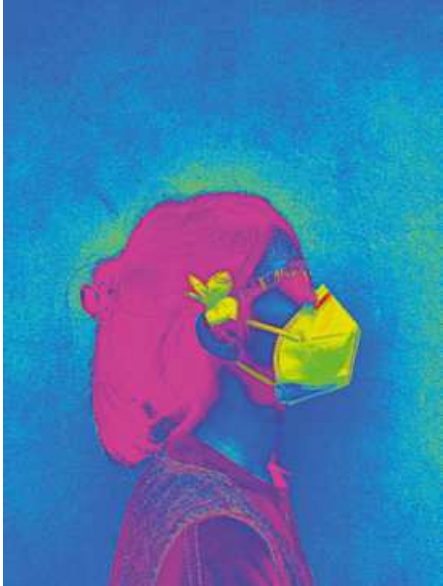
Again the group couldn't help but burst out in laughter, as if for the first time perceiving the extent of their leader's eccentricities.

As the reminiscence of Bhatu dadu's comical idiosyncrasies dragged on, not one of the six pairs of eyes were left dry. He had left them with memories of sheer joy.

"He really was a senile old man," Rownak sighed amidst the laughter, carefully wiping the tears that had amassed from all the giggles.

Amin gazed across the lake at a distant bird fleeing towards the blue abyss.

Tears of happiness don't count, right Bhatu dadu?



MIND'S EYE

In these strange countless days, I'm trying to adapt to a new normal. I look at the sky, at the ground. I look right and left. There are thousands of scattered stories floating around. I picked the floating imaginary colours from my mind and brushed the photos with them.

Isolation forces us to tap into a new part of our creativity that we wouldn't normally access. Everything is a bit confusing and up in the air, but still, everybody tries best to keep looking forward. Pandemic has changed the normalcy of life and we are all trying differently to bring back colours into our lives.



PHOTO & TEXT: **FATIMA-TUJ-JOHORA**
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