

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY OCTOBER 8, 2020, ASHWIN 23, 1427 BS

A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*

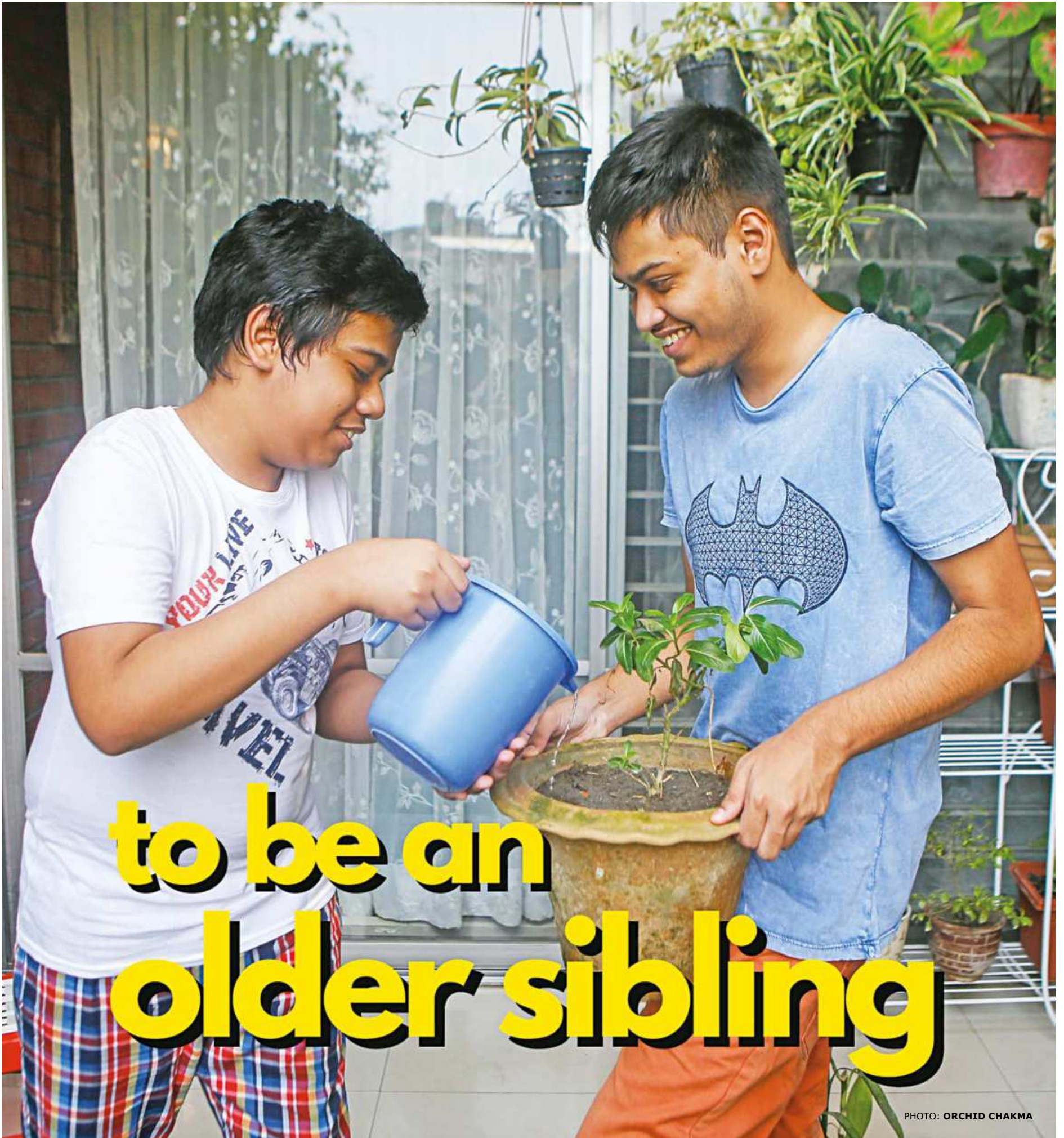


ON CIVIL LIBERTIES AND
NETIZENSHIP

PG 4

THE JOY OF
LISTENING TO RADIO

PG 6



**to be an
older sibling**

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

EDITORIAL

Cooped up in my house, away from the rest of the world, I have explored every shade of being lost, stressed and bored over the last seven months. As certainties became uncertainties and quotidian experiences became fantasies, I had to create a self-sufficient little world for myself, one that kept me busy, happy and productive.

This world would've been miserable without the company of two other people (somewhat) near my own age who were equally stressed and confused as I was. My younger siblings and I painted, did DIY, binged movies, celebrated birthdays and routinely didn't give each other as much space as we bargained for ourselves. While my brother chopping off a chunk of my hair when I wasn't looking or my sister filling her gallery with unflattering photos of me should have been enough to make me insane, somehow it did the exact opposite. Quarantine would've been a bore without my siblings.

-- Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

K-DRAMA REVIEW



ANSWER ME, THE DAYS OF MY YOUTH

RIFAH TASHFIA

This review does not contain any spoilers.

"The year was 1988, a time when it was chilly, but our hearts were fiery, a time when we didn't have much but people's hearts were warm."


After years of watching K-drama, it's hard to find a show that connects so deeply with the viewers that it stays with them forever. I found *Reply 1988* years after it had aired, and instead of thinking "I wish I'd found it sooner", I thought, "I found this at the right time."

Reply 1988 shows a heart-warming story of five friends and their families living in Seoul, which we later come to know as Ssangmun-dong in the year 1988; a special year as the Summer Olympics were held in South Korea for the first time. Instead of focusing on the lives of these five friends, we're introduced to all the members of this ragtag group living in the neighbourhood. Each character has the spotlight on them at some point during the show, balancing it out and allowing us to know these characters more intimately.

For much of the show, these young friends are in their late teens figuring out life as they spend their youthful days, which hits home for viewers their age. They are a quirky, bashful, comical but also kind and passionate set of characters. The actors here made their charac-

ters come to life and made it feel like you could personally connect with them. You could see the way these kids were maturing throughout the show while trying to solve the conflicts they faced at their age.

The parents in the show played a big role in making this drama so pure. It shows the daily lives of the housewives as they stayed home while the fathers went to work. These parents too went through different hard-hitting points in the drama financially, socially, and in other ways. As neighbours, they grew close over the years resulting in sending food to each other's place during meals to going out of one's way to help someone else out. It's the simplicity of the characters that made it seem so real. The only complaint I might have is that one storyline was hastily wrapped up in the end, but it was only a small aspect of the otherwise fulfilling plot. The final monologue of the series, narrated by the female protagonist Duk-Seon sends goosebumps erupted in its wake and brought tears to my eyes. In retrospect, the show stretched over thirty-five hours of warm and wholesome stories; it was more than a breath of fresh air for me. If you're looking for a new show to binge that will make you laugh out loud, jitter your heart but also get you bawling your eyes out at the same time, it's time to join the *Reply 1988* bandwagon. The series is currently available on Netflix.




shoutds
Bangladesh

FOLLOW



**BANGLADESH'S FIRST
ONLINE INTER-SCHOOL QUIZ COMPETITION**






POWERED BY WALTON
Smart Fridge

MONDAYS AT 9 PM, LIVE ON
The Daily Star

AN INITIATIVE BY **SHOUT**

YouTube f LIVE



shoutds Tag us or use #shoutds to get featured.

The stages of deciding to post feminist opinions

MOMOTAZ RAHMAN MEGHA

As I scrolled through my newsfeed to find a poem called "Yet Another Rape Poem" by Blythe Baird, I decided to click on it. By the end of the poem, I realised that despite what the title might say, it is not just another piece of unrecognised art that you forget, it is the kind that you share and talk about. But within a millisecond of having this thought, my little brain went through the most complex cost benefit analysis women go through every time they want to talk about their rights, their tragedies, their struggles.

To understand the depth of my insecurity, I went ahead to talk to a few women and realised that the complex decision between choosing to press the share button or not to press the share button happens in a few stages.

STAGE 1: FREQUENCY DETERMINATION

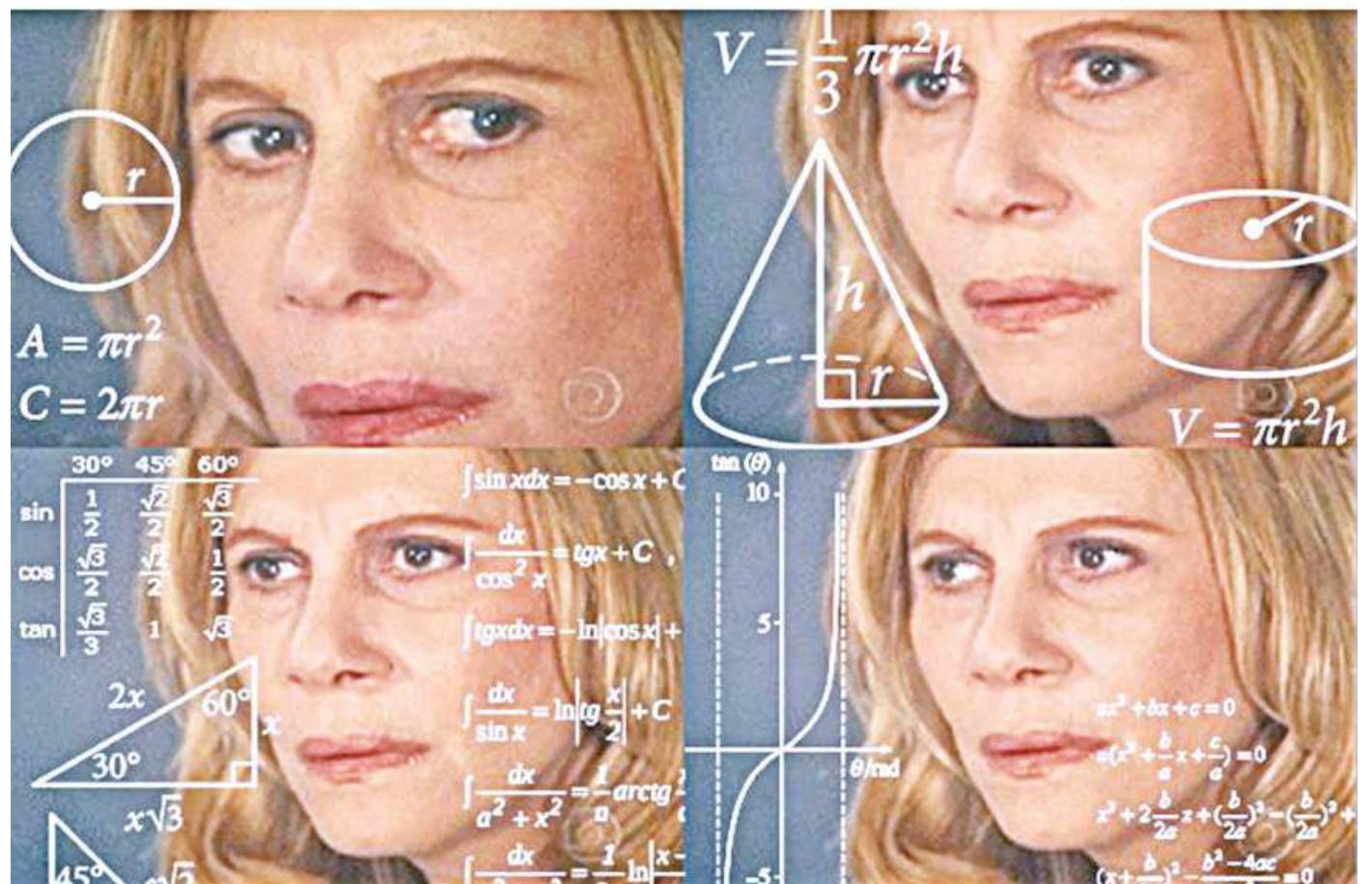
There seems to be a maximum number of posts that one can share in a month that is pro-feminist. You can't be advocating for your rights every other day or every couple of hours. That might not send the right message. People might think you're "too outspoken", or worse, "just a feminist" and nothing else. And that's obviously bad because who wants to be reduced to just someone who advocates for basic equality?

So, count how many posts you shared that day. How many did you post that month. Jumanah Ahmed, a sophomore at University of Waterloo, says, "It is an irrational fear, but a fear nonetheless, that somehow I will be taken less seriously or be considered annoying if my feminist posts are too frequent."

STAGE 2: DEPTH ANALYSIS

After assuring that the maximum frequency has not been reached for that particular day, we move on to weighing out how heavy this content is. While struggles that women face cannot be quantified to decide which trauma is more important, society has made sure we understand that certain highly sensitive topics like sexual assault is not to be discussed too openly because it brings the highest level of shame.

What it feels like when you have to decide whether you want to post something feminist



When asked about what she feels about this, Mishi Chowdhury, a junior at London College of Legal Studies, says, "Every time I want to post something related to sexual as-

sault I wonder if people will think that this happened to me and then victim blame me or worse, treat me as someone around whom one can't discuss sexual topics without them being offended."

STAGE 3: PRE-EMPTIVE HUMOUR ADDITION

This seemed like the most interesting stage. Snigdha Khan* who is a final year student in a public university in Dhaka, shares, "Sometimes when I am unsure of how my advocacy will be perceived, I willingly put something humorous or ironic in the caption just to make sure that I can later say that it was a joke. It isn't that I don't feel deeply about women and their struggles, it's just that I get scared at times that maybe I will be laughed at or labelled as feminazi."

STAGE 4: TESTING STRENGTH OF SUPPORT GROUP

Even with three levels of filtering, there needs to be a "what if" analysis. "What if I still get backlash, will I have support?"

Maliha Noshin Khan, a senior student, wonders, "I fear that instead of supporting me, society will remain silent or worse, I will be told that I should make my own practices perfect and socially acceptable before commenting about important

issues in society."

STAGE 5: DECISION TIME

When it comes to deciding if our voices have successfully passed the filter test of society or if it still needs to be hidden away in some corner of our minds, some of us end up pressing "Enter" while others opt for repeatedly hitting the "Backspace" button. Abort mission.

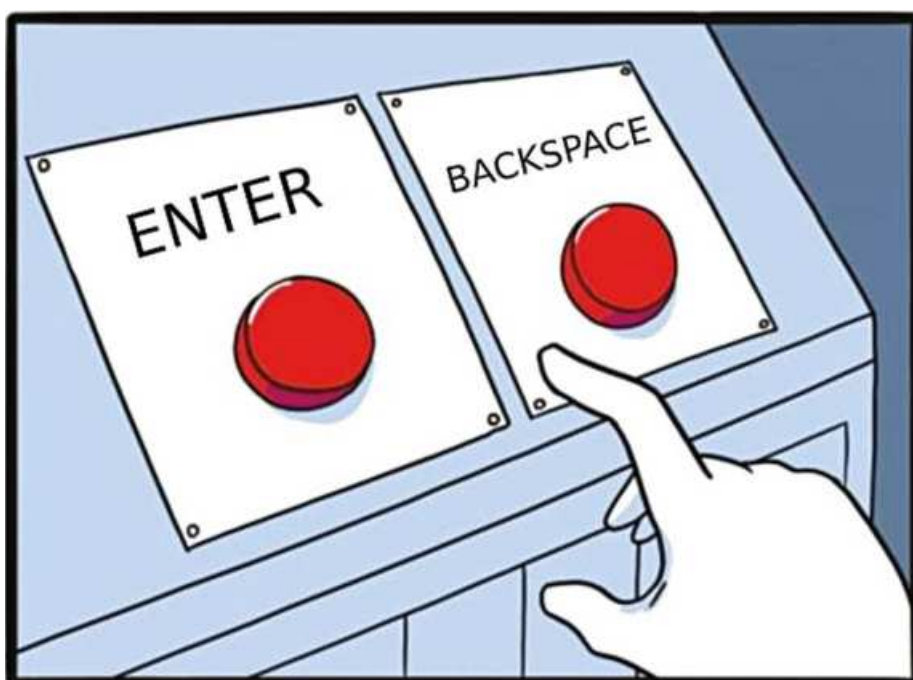
While it is perfectly possible for women to go through these stages in different orders, or not to go through them at all, the fact that women have to think more than twice while asking for what is rightfully theirs, cannot be denied. So, what must we do?

Subah Ali of University of Asia Pacific shares how she processes all of this. "I remind myself how irrelevant all of society's sexist concerns are and the fight for women's rights is a very real thing. This is exactly what the patriarchal system wants - to make us feel apprehensive. We must not let them win," she says.

Press "Enter".

*Name has been changed for privacy.

Megha often hits enter. Send her doggo memes at megharahman26@gmail.com



On Civil Liberties and Netizenship

RASHA JAMEEL

As decreed by the Guardians of Hate Speech Promotion Front, the following are the laws dictating the facilitation of relentless hatred online:

1. No difference of opinions will be tolerated
2. All errors, regardless of the degree of their severity, shall be crucified and those committing them shall be dragged through the muddy tracks leading to our House of Hate Groups
3. Criticise with utmost brutality instead of working on narrow-minded views
4. Purveyors of constructive criticism will be prosecuted
5. Always bully like there's no conscience

Our motto: We love demotivating and bringing people down because it--

Woah, am I overwhelming you? Is all the outburst of negativity and pessimism getting to you?

I apologise, for this just might be one massive bitter pill to swallow. How about we sit down with a glass half full of water and a handful of sunflowers... to ease the blow?

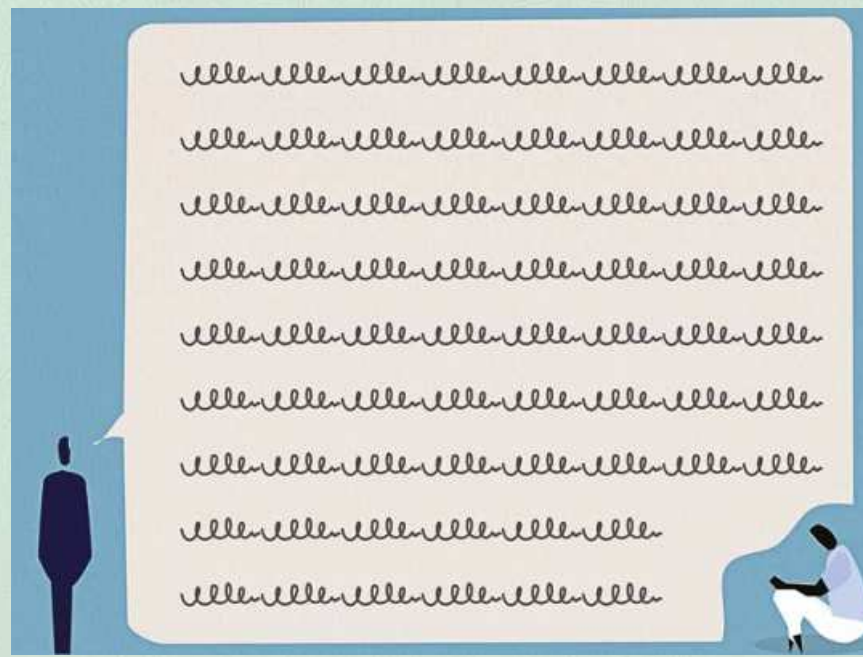
We've only touched upon the surface of the hateful reality out there that's heavily propagated on social media. Let's dig in.

It's always hateful in the comments section

I thought I'd seen the worst when this random stranger in the YouTube comments section left a reply to my comment saying, "Go

back to eating your curry ice cream Jameel. We know brown names like you are paid to do this." The comment in question consisted of about five terms: "We stan a quirky kween" followed by a harmless crying tears of joy emoji. Long story short, I was expressing my take on a video featuring wacky dancing, performed by one of my favourite comedians, Lilly Singh. The hateful response from the stranger was baffling. Of course, the mention of a non-existent food item is certainly questionable, but I truly became curious as to why a person who didn't know me would feel the urge to leave a scathing comment underneath mine because I'd written five light-hearted words for a video that was in no way problematic.

Let's consider racial prejudice as a factor here. With that in mind, we can deduce that this person consciously chose to spew racially-charged hate at me online, from behind the comfort of anonymity provided by a keyboard. That wasn't the last time I left a comment on YouTube. I simply grew used to the rude disposition so ungracefully sent in my direction with seemingly no provocation other than hate. As though right on cue, several other strangers jumped in with even more

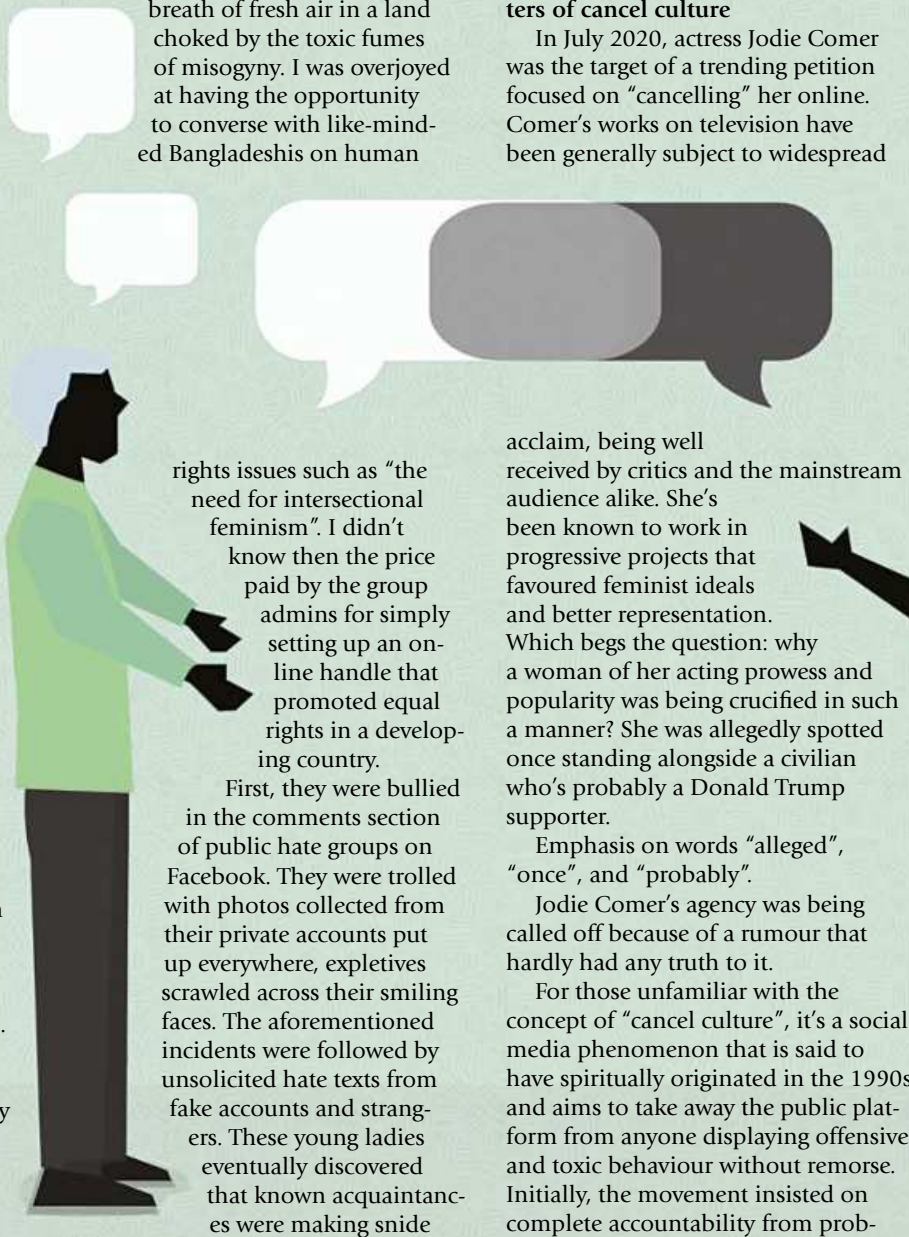


foul comments, words of which are normally bleeped out on audio.

I thought that was the worst.

Then, I befriended a group of ladies from Sylhet who'd all joined hands to form a Facebook group dedicated to challenging the patriarchal norms of our country. For a feminist like me, the group was a revelation, a

breath of fresh air in a land choked by the toxic fumes of misogyny. I was overjoyed at having the opportunity to converse with like-minded Bangladeshis on human



rights issues such as "the need for intersectional feminism". I didn't know then the price paid by the group admins for simply setting up an online handle that promoted equal rights in a developing country.

First, they were bullied in the comments section of public hate groups on Facebook. They were trolled with photos collected from their private accounts put up everywhere, expletives scrawled across their smiling faces. The aforementioned incidents were followed by unsolicited hate texts from fake accounts and strangers. These young ladies eventually discovered that known acquaintances were making snide

remarks behind their backs.

I'd written "We stan a quirky kween" on a YouTube video of an Indian-Canadian woman.

My friends had opened a Facebook group to advocate for feminism in Bangladesh.

Let that sink in.

Wading into the treacherous waters of cancel culture

In July 2020, actress Jodie Comer was the target of a trending petition focused on "cancelling" her online. Comer's works on television have been generally subject to widespread

acclaim, being well received by critics and the mainstream audience alike. She's been known to work in progressive projects that favoured feminist ideals and better representation. Which begs the question: why a woman of her acting prowess and popularity was being crucified in such a manner? She was allegedly spotted once standing alongside a civilian who's probably a Donald Trump supporter.

Emphasis on words "alleged", "once", and "probably".

Jodie Comer's agency was being called off because of a rumour that hardly had any truth to it.

For those unfamiliar with the concept of "cancel culture", it's a social media phenomenon that is said to have spiritually originated in the 1990s and aims to take away the public platform from anyone displaying offensive and toxic behaviour without remorse. Initially, the movement insisted on complete accountability from prob-

lematic figures supporting objectionable ideologies. But in recent times the movement has been exploited by hate groups looking to shut down conversations and healthy debates. People are joining in on the tirade of hate speech before sitting down to share facts first. All this has proven to be more of a distraction for netizens who then fail to take necessary action in real life.

While actual predators such as Matt Lauer and Kevin Spacey – with large numbers of credible accusations filed against them – go on with their normal lives, hardworking individuals like Jodie Comer are constantly on the receiving end of unwarranted online scrutiny.

So where should we draw the line?

Excellent question. Start with becoming more informed. Acknowledge the topics that are and aren't available for debate.

Encourage people to present their opinions about putting pineapple on pizza, reading Harry Potter as an adult, eating Madchef more than Chillox, and which direction a country's economy and politics are going.

Discourage differential opinions on issues like human rights, because those aren't debatable.

Become woke. Develop a morning diet of credible news. Put that to use. Advocate for intersectional feminism.

Call out problematic behaviour when you see it, keeping in mind that the goal is to discuss and enlighten. The Guardians of Hate Speech Promotion Front are false prophets. The remorseful should be granted a second chance, and the hateful condemned by the law. Passing judgment on each other on social media can't be considered the equivalent of a fair trial.

The author accidentally poured Savlon on her head instead of her favourite essential oil. Teach her to properly differentiate between the two at rasha.jameel@outlook.com

The author accidentally poured Savlon on her head instead of her favourite essential oil. Teach her to properly differentiate between the two at rasha.jameel@outlook.com

ILLUSTRATION: EHSAN MOSTAFA INAN

To be an older sibling



SYEDA ERUM NOOR

It started from the moment your parents sat you down and looked at you with glittering eyes, almost giddy with excitement as they delivered the news.

"You're going to have a little brother or sister!"

In that moment, a few thoughts flitted through our young brains. One of which was dread. Dread of a little ball of drool and poop coming into our lives and stealing our parents from us. While the drool and poop were real, things changed for most of us drastically as soon as they did crawl into our lives.

They grew up to become our best friends, enemies, archivals, partners in crime and a billion other things we'd never be able to summarise even if we tried. They grew up to become one of the most important parts of our lives. At times, even more than our parents.

Another way in which our lives changed is the responsibility. Our actions were now impacting the little people in our lives. Strangely enough, sometimes we were held responsible for what they did, by our parents.

This responsibility isn't exactly a bad thing. For one thing that it offers us is companionship in what otherwise could have turned out to be quite a lonely life.

"For one, we're never alone," explains Ahmed Afridee, a student of North South University and a big brother to two sisters. "The responsibility is never burdensome because it's one I gladly accept. For without my sisters, I'm not sure where exactly I'd be. They're my friends, my companions. So taking responsibility for them is no big deal."

And companionship isn't all that comes with it. Responsibility can come with its own set of pressures, but it also greatly benefits us as individuals.

"Any sort of responsibility is good," agrees Rakeen Murtaza, a student of University of Texas at Dallas, as he discusses his role in his little sister's life. "She's a little devil, but I do enjoy sharing knowledge with her, trying to help her avoid some of the pitfalls that I so carelessly fell into growing up."

This takes some of us time to adjust to. Some of us have to grow into the role that we are chosen to play. Because, if you're the oldest, there's a good chance you have at times felt more than just someone with a

few extra years on Earth. You decide how much of what they do to reveal to your parents. You're the one who stands between them and your parents backing them up while they sleep soundly in their rooms.

You have the chance to right everything that your parents might have done wrong when raising you. Because with you, they were first-time parents.

"When you're an older sibling you tend to be the guinea pig for parental experiments," says Rakeen. "The one pressure I feel is some of the earlier mistakes my parents made, the first time around. This time, I want to make sure that I can correct those mistakes by offering a different, more



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

plausible perspective."

Apart from ensuring that they don't suffer from the same mistakes that we had to, we tend to take on a different kind of role when it comes to growing up with them. When talking to a few others who have little siblings, I noticed one thing in common in all of them.

The need to step up and take on the role of the parents when it comes to growing up with a sibling comes naturally. When talking to most of them, they didn't even notice they were doing it. They downplayed the role that they played because of how instinctive it is.

"I felt the need to step up when my father got into an accident," recalls Afridee. "You just feel it. The need to take on what



they did for you. You're next in line for your siblings."

However, the role of a sibling isn't as straightforward as that of a parent. You're more of a friend than a parent. You have more of an insight into their lives than your parents do. This can make bearing the responsibility to look after them more complicated. It doesn't necessarily mean you know everything they're doing. In fact, some of the time, due to the constant buzz of the world and the mess of your own life that you're so busy trying to sort out, you have no idea what the little ones are up to. Yet, there's a part of them you know that they don't reveal to your parents.

siblings that our parents don't have the luxury of getting to know.

"It was just a conversation in the car. That may never have happened had we not been stuck in traffic," she adds. "The fact that we had it was of monumental impact because he did end up looking into the matter. And now he's studying something else. Something that I'm sure he'll excel at."

However good it feels to be able to contribute to your sibling's life. We tend to have to take many things into consideration far earlier than we normally would. We're no longer just trying to study hard and become successful for ourselves. We do it so we can ensure the well-being of our ageing parents and the future of our growing siblings. We're next in line for who they depend on and we have to make sure we can live up to that. And that pressure can sometimes be crushing.

But that's not the only thing we feel.

It's also up to us to protect them from the pressures of society. Being the younger sibling sometimes means that you're crushed under the burden of having to live up to the older sibling.

Syed Afrid Iqbal, recent graduate from York University, was fully aware of how that would affect his little sister.

"I made sure to keep reminding her," he states. "Whenever my parents set expectations in comparison to me, I told her she didn't have to be me. In this situation, I was playing the role my parents should have played. I made sure to remind her that there were things about her that made her special. And that she would excel at whatever it is that she was meant to."

Older siblings can in no way replace parents. We're nowhere close. A lot of the advice we offer, we're not fully sure of and we make a lot of mistakes that affect the younger siblings more than we ever know. We sometimes act like know-it-alls and can be a real preaching pain to be around. And we're sorry for that.

Younger siblings play into every decision we make in our lives. And no matter the pressure of sometimes having to step in and play the role of a younger, very inexperienced parent, we don't know where we'd be without them.

Syeda Erum Noor is dangerously oblivious and has no sense of time. Send help at erum.noor1998@gmail.com



ECHOES BY
 ASRAR CHOWDHURY

The Joy of Listening to Radio

I
 My listening ability developed better than my reading ability due to circumstances in life. I spent my initial childhood (1974-1979) in Aberystwyth in Wales, UK, in a beautiful sea-side university town, where my father was studying. At school, we all developed a habit of reading books. Roald Dahl was our JK Rowling. I had limited exposure to television, but BBC Radio would play in the background. My parents were fans of BBC Radio.

The first twist came when we returned to Bangladesh in 1979. I was nine. My grandpa (Dada) taught me Bangla from scratch. I entered mainstream education in 1980. It took me ages to read properly. By the time, I was prepared to read, a second twist came.

After my SSC in 1985, my parents gifted me a National Panasonic music system. The cassette player and the radio was my portal to an imaginary world. Just like social media is today's portal to a virtual world. Audio attracted me much more than the world of ink and paper. Thus began my journey with audio, through music and radio.

II
 We didn't have mobile phones or the internet. Many of us didn't even have landphones. The night meant you were on your own. After studies, reading books, listening to music or following the radio was what you could do. I was never a voracious reader. The only option left was the audible world.

If devices are the portal for the night today, for me it was my music player. I spent endless nights listening to music or the radio. FM radio wasn't available in 1985. We relied on medium wave and short wave. Our choices weren't much, but we were content with what we had.

The radio channel was Bangladesh Betar (then Radio Bangladesh) and its different stations. World Music played between 2.30 and 3 PM on weekdays. There would be a special *Yesterday Once More* on Tuesdays that featured music from the 1960s and 1970s, my signature decades when it comes to music.

At night there was then and still is now, *Nishuti*. This was an assorted mixture. There was a 30-minute drama. There was a Bangla cinema songs programme



that exposed me to our master composer Alauddin Ali Shaheb and others. *Nishuti* played till almost 3 AM.

Short wave was my passport to the outside world. BBC World Service, Voice of America, All India Radio, Radio Ceylon, Radio Luxembourg, Australian Broadcasting; the list goes on. I can't express in words how much these programmes "informed, educated and entertained" me.

III
 My love for radio resurfaced during my youth when I was studying at Cambridge. BBC Radio 2, Radio 3, Radio 4, Radio 5,

and World Service all had something for every mood and every occasion. It was in my Cambridge days I realised how beautiful BBC Radio was.

Technology was changing. Radio was ripe for a transformation. The Guardian, UK launched the world's first podcast in 2004. That changed radio forever. Soon, NPR (National Public Radio) of the USA started providing texts with their programmes. You could now download a podcast and listen later. Who could have dreamed this in 1985?

I've never been a TV person. I'm not a voracious reader. Why do I love radio so much? I can close my eyes and concentrate. I can escape into an imaginary world. I can let my thoughts travel like they never have before. Ritwik Ghatak, the filmmaker from Dhaka, once said, "Practice the art of thinking." Radio is probably the thinking person's medium.

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

Cartoon People: Inspiring a generation of artists

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

When I first came to know of Cartoon People back in 2017, I didn't think much of them. They seemed nothing more than a group of youngsters trying to make a name for themselves on social media. Back then, webcomics like *Cyanide and Happiness* and *Loading Artist* were quite popular on Facebook and Instagram, and as far as I was concerned, Cartoon People was trying to emulate a similar appeal.

As years rolled by, I realised how my initial idea regarding them couldn't have been any more wrong. Over the years, I got the opportunity to learn more about their plans and vision, and also had the chance to work alongside a few of the group's members.

And from what I can tell, they're definitely onto something big.

Cartoon People are celebrating their fourth anniversary this year, and I thought of taking this opportunity to look at how far they've come, and how some of their own artists are set to make it big on a global basis.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the group, Cartoon People is a community of Bangladeshi cartoonists and visual storytellers that was founded in 2016



by cartoonist Syed Rashad Imam Tanmoy. The group specialises in comics, caricatures, and of course, cartoons.

Since its inception, Cartoon People has wholeheartedly worked to inspire like minded enthusiasts. Apart from holding regular workshops and sketchbook sessions for its members, as well as for the general public, the group has also gone on to organise events related to their line of work. In

the process of doing so, they have worked with different local and international organisations such as a2i, United Nations, World Bank, and so on. They've gone from being a small community of cartoon and comic enthusiasts, to taking on bigger roles to develop the art form, as well as take on other social projects.

Perhaps the most inspiring part of Cartoon People's journey till now is how

it showcased talent. Many cartoonists and artists from this community are now doing quite well for themselves. Some of my personal favourites from Cartoon People include *The Bathroom Artist* by Walker Bin Zaman, *Gorib Anju* by Tamim Anju, *Tiborai er Cartoon* by Chandrika Nurani Irabotee, *Peu Draws* by Debadrita Peu, *Tube Light* by Tuba Anjum, and *Shesh Raater Shopno* by Ayman Aswaf.

The thing about these artists is the variation in their work, and their ability to say so much through their stories and characters. From entertaining us with humorous and satirical comic strips, to making us think and question global and societal issues through illustrations and political cartoons, they have left no stone unturned to establish themselves as important figures in our local art scene. There's no doubt that these youngsters are inspiring a whole generation who're currently following their every single work.

In their four-year journey, Cartoon People have indeed come a long way, and they aren't going to stop. The group is eager to publish their own line of comics, as well as create some visually stunning animation along the way. And with all the things they've done and achieved so far, who knows how far they'll go?

SNAKES AND LADDERS



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

ADHORA AHMED

"Whose face did you wake up to this morning?"

Just as she was about to gain on Ritu's token, Sarina's own landed on a snake again. She had lost the two previous rounds of Snakes and Ladders, and was about to score a hat trick on that regard. Ritu wondered what was behind her friend's bad luck.

"*Fahim er ma.*"

"You mean your next door aunty?"

Sarina rolled her eyes and sighed, "Who else?"

She had woken up a little later than usual for a Friday morning. When she got out of her bedroom, she saw Fahim's mother leaning on the doorway of the kitchen, doling out the latest gossip to her mother. Before she could even think of retracing her steps, the woman spotted her disheveled form. She wasted no time in making judgmental comments about Sarina's sleeping habits, passing them off as jokes.

"It's funny how we've lived next to her for six years, and I still don't know her real name."

"Do you refer to her as *Fahim er ma* in front of your mother, when she's not around?" Ritu asked, shaking the dice for her turn.

"I wish," Sarina scoffed. "She's my mother's idol, unfortunately."

"I bet even your mother doesn't know her real name." The dice landed on two,

much to Ritu's disappointment. Had it rolled on a three, her token would have climbed up a ladder.

"Yeah, her identity is always in relation with Fahim. Fahim *bhabi*, Fahim aunty," Sarina picked up the dice and the shaker. "God, that's kind of pathetic."

"More pathetic than you about to lose again?" Ritu quipped.

"Shut up," Sarina's token landed on a ladder for the first time this round. "Ha, joke's on you!"

"Maybe I said that because I don't like Fahim," she added.

"Why, what has he done?"

"Nothing really. He's only the first boy in his class, but the way his mother brags about him, you'll start thinking she gave birth to Einstein reincarnate. Because of this, my mother has developed some sort of inferiority complex. So, in order to gain bragging rights, she wants me to be more like him."

"Well," Ritu started shaking the dice.

"Don't we all have a *Fahim er ma* in our lives?"

The dice rolled on a five, leading Ritu's token to the mouth of a long, winding snake. It slid down to just a few boxes ahead of Sarina's token.

"I can't believe it!" Ritu gasped. "Your bad luck's rubbing off on me. It's all *Fahim er ma's* fault!"

The two friends shared a laugh.

"Wait, who's your *Fahim er ma*?" Sarina asked.

"There's this aunty at my math coaching who's always trying to dig up dirt on me."

"How come I don't know about this?"

"That's because we don't go to the same coaching, silly," Ritu said. "Plus, she hasn't succeeded yet. But she came close once."

"How?"

"I'm friends with this girl called Maliha. She's kind of weak in math, so she asks me for help with the easier stuff. We sit next to each other most of the time. One day, I saw her with her brother on my way to class, and we decided to go together. Her brother was dropping Maliha off on his way to somewhere else," Ritu paused. "It's your turn, Sarina."

"Oh, it can wait," Sarina waved her hand dismissively. "Then what happened?"

"That aunty saw the three of us together, and jumped to the conclusion that Maliha's brother was my boyfriend. The next time my mother went to the coaching, this is what she told her."

"Oh, these good-for-nothing aunties!" Sarina huffed. "That's why I go to coachings alone."

"I don't know what she had to gain from this. Not long after this, she spread false rumours about another girl's parents, saying they were getting divorced. The girl's mother later had a nasty fight with her."

"Sounds like she has no life," Sarina

commented.

"At least I had it easier than my little brother."

"Oh no, what happened to Rinku?"

"You know how he's a bit hyperactive," Ritu started. "He gets into fights sometimes at school, which has gotten him in trouble before. But this one aunty, out of nowhere, threatened my mother, claiming that Rinku stole her son's pencil box, which was apparently new and expensive. She also vowed to get him suspended."

"Then?"

"He never stole it!" Ritu's voice rose in indignation. "That boy got into a minor fight with Rinku and complained to his mother afterwards. That woman came up with a plan to get Rinku severely punished, and made her son take his old pencil box to school. During the investigation, the boy broke down and confessed that the whole thing was a lie."

Sarina was speechless.

"I was so angry that I wanted to hunt her down and –" Ritu closed her eyes and heaved a deep, shaky sigh.

"All those *Fahim er mas*," Sarina found her words. "Always bringing us down like these snakes," she gestured to the board game placed between them.

"This stuff is depressing," Ritu opened her eyes. "Roll the dice, Sarina."

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com



MODERN ANTIQUE

Kolkata has a sense of modern antiquity in its air. In the signature yellow taxis crowding the roads, the marvellous architecture inspired by Mughal and British motifs, mesmerising Howrah bridge brightened by hues of pink and blue, the cycles adding a separate tune to the streets and the Coffee House which lives in Manna Dey's song. Be it the warmth of its people or the busy atmosphere on the roads -- this is Kolkata in its truest essence.

PHOTOS BY AVIPSU ARKO
CURATED BY ORCHID CHAKMA

