

THE DEFINITIVE  
**YOUTH**  
MAGAZINE

# SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY OCTOBER 29, 2020, KARTIK 13, 1427 BS

A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*



DISABLED  
IN DHAKA  
**PG 4**

YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL,  
DHAKA  
**PG 7**



# ART IN THE CITY

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

# How not to act when you are being held accountable

**AONKITA DEY**

Maybe you weren't a schoolyard bully with brass knuckles, but your more self-presumed innocuous actions like being mean and vicious under the veil of banter did leave scars. So if you're being confronted by your victim, here's a list of things you shouldn't resort to saying.

**"I didn't do it."**

Life isn't an episode of *Gossip Girl* or *Dynasty*. So, more often than you think, when someone says they are a victim of your bullying or "slut-shaming" (a very common form of bullying amongst teenagers), chances are it's not a big, fat conspiracy against you. Respect the victim's feelings by thinking of it as valid and consider the possibility that while your memory holds no recollection of it, it still happened. The only acceptable response should be for you to apologise.

Additionally, denying your wrongdoing by questioning the victim's memory

is futile because science has proven that not only do people vividly remember being bullied, it also gives rise to serious problems like self-esteem issues, anxiety, and even depression. Unless your victim went through memory loss, your actions have been etched onto your victim's memory as well as who they are today.

**"Why after so many years?"**

The mere passage of time does nothing to undo your actions or the resulting inflicted damage. Your victim is in a more vulnerable position since it was on them to process all the negative experiences and emotions you caused. Thus, that person gets to decide when, where, or how to talk about the occurrence and not you.

Whether your victim hasn't processed it yet or they just want a final thrust of closure after coming to terms with it, you are required to answer for your wrongs even if a decade has slipped by.

**"You are causing me mental stress."**

The reason you feel mentally stressed is due

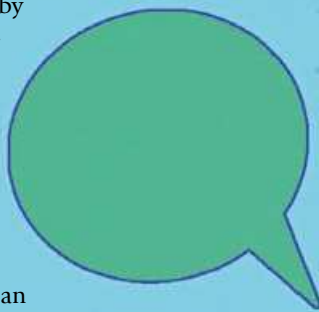
to your victim reminding you of your misdeeds, which you are responsible for in the first place. What you feel is a result of your own actions and not someone else's. If you feel guilty and shameful, that's because you should. Moreover, what you feel does not take away the right of your victim to seek closure or confrontation. Besides, your victim has definitely felt worse emotions and probably will continue to feel the same in the future, so sit back and enjoy having a taste of your own medicine for a while.

**"But I have changed!"**

And that's great! However, the absence of your bullying today does not undo any of your past actions. You were still a bully, regardless of whether you are one now, and you need to feel the guilt and shame of your previous actions. Hence, never ask your victim to exempt you from your past wrongs just because you think you have mended your ways now.

On a side note, if your initial response to being confronted is to deny, provide justifications, and gaslight your victim then you might want to revisit your glorious plans of having turned over to a new leaf.

*The writer is a graduate of SFX Greenherald International School.*



# Fishing for Real News Amidst Fake News

**RASHA JAMEEL**

You've probably heard about wanton debates before, gone through guides to all the "fake news versus real news" dos and don'ts. Yet your hands itch to press SHARE every time you come across an explosive "news" statement that promises some grand reveal in the life of a public figure.

Maybe it's time to go beyond the list of dos and don'ts, and explore the whys.

**Blind faith can be cancerous**

Newspaper and magazine subscriptions are largely products of their consumers' faith in the publication house, attained through years of regular news consumption. However, faith shouldn't be blind. When your curiosity dies, so does the stream of real news, as media publications begin to prioritise what their consumers want rather than what they need. The wheels of "fake news" will then churn out one clickbait after the other, keeping the audiences preoccupied with increasingly shortened news cycles, while the real world passes by, unnoticed.

There's also the perpetuation of fear-mongering, which has now become easier than ever due to the internet, where news, both fake and real, can travel at lightning speed. To avoid suffering from paranoid episodes fuelled by repeated exposure to fake news, keep calm and

question everything.

**The new "221B Baker Street" can, and should, be your IP address**

Nothing beats doing your own research. You owe it to yourself to investigate the facts and figures you've consumed all day long. You can always break it down to two major processes:

Fact checking, where you verify the authentication of the information provided, by cross-referencing with multiple similar reports and the backstory involved. Source verification, where you track the point of origin for a piece of reported news, verifying whether or not the source is reliable when it comes to offering real news.

In recent times, discussion threads on social media are known to easily garner traction through screenshots of text messages, chat windows, and emails. Unfortunately, this also results in online movements being easily exploited through doctored images and plenty of clickbait. Once



never really learn much from hearing yourself speak."

The significance of Clooney's quote is timeless. Personal growth is directly proportional to the amount of attention paid to everyone else. An excellent way of understanding the world is to view it from others' perspectives. That being said, while it is healthy to keep an open mind while taking in everyone else's opinions, some wariness doesn't hurt. Remember that opinions can either be shared by a large group of people, or just one individual. One must know to keep their radar tuned to acknowledging the source's ulterior motives, to help discern propaganda from reality.

Once upon a time, people had no choice but to rely on a game of Chinese whispers to convey news of an incident from one end of the world to another. Times have changed, and people have more options and less excuses. 'Tis the time to be a Good Samaritan, and make an effort to be well-informed of the real world and its affairs.

*The author runs on 'RST: Rasha Standard Time' where minutes can extend weeks and months. Drop a note at rasha.jameel@outlook.com for inquiries on how RST can affect your daily life.*

such a movement goes public, it attracts an uncontrollable amount of eyeballs, giving rise to social media phenomena such as cancel culture and trolling. Consumers of mass media often end up jumping to far-fetched conclusions before looking to verify the issues raised.

**Solving the equation of personal growth for a more informed individual**

I wouldn't call George Clooney the most progressive person alive, but I do live by one of his famous quotes, "You

# DISABLED IN DHAKA

## Living in a city inaccessible

FARIHA S. KHAN

Anyone, at any time in their life, can become disabled. Only a fraction of the disabled people were born with disabilities. Despite this fact, disabled people are among one of the most marginalised communities to exist. Popular discourse in Bangladesh (and other parts of the world) dictates that disability is a curse, often believed to be contagious. Other times, people believe it occurs because of misdeeds in past lives.

None of that is true.

A disability is any continuing condition that puts restrictions on an individual's day to day activities. This can include learning, intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illnesses, sensory impairments, and temporal disabilities. However, disabilities are more than what someone is mentally, physically, or emotionally. It's a significant aspect of people's identities and it often determines not only how they are treated by the world, but also how they interact with them.

According to a 2016 report by the World Bank, 16 million people in Bangladesh are disabled, which is roughly 10 percent of the country's then population. Despite this number, they are not represented in most workplaces or educational institutes across the country. Speaking to a representative from a reputed private university in Dhaka, statistics revealed that only 0.5 percent of their 3,000 strong workforce and 0.15 percent of their 22,000 students consists of disabled people.

When asked if they have programs that specifically aim to recruit disabled people, either as students or employees, they respond, "No. We don't discriminate based on disabilities, there aren't any pay discrepancies, so if we get their application, we will consider them just as we would any other applicant. We don't see why we should go out of our way to recruit them when they can just as easily come to us."

When asked if the institution makes any special adjustments to accommodate disabled people within their community, they said, "No. They don't take up a lot of space, so I don't see why we should. If they made up more of our community in terms of numbers, we would, of course, consider investing in special facilities for them."

But this is precisely where the problem lies, isn't it? When there's no investment in special facilities for disabled people, it deters them from wanting to participate, or in some cases, makes it impossible, which in turn reduces the number of disabled people seen in public, prompting people to think they're an outlier and deem that there isn't much of a need to consider them or make special considerations, bringing us back to square one. *This is the cycle of inaccessibility.* With the social stigma that already exists surrounding people with disabilities, organisations should make it clear that they are disabled-friendly by investing in accessible facilities.

This problem isn't just prevalent in workplaces, though. It's embedded in every aspect of our society. Public transportation in Dhaka rarely has accessible facilities. Our washrooms aren't big enough for wheelchairs to comfortably roll around in. Even something as low-effort as a wheelchair ramp is unavailable in most buildings, and nor are there elevators big enough for wheelchairs to fit in.

There needs to be a collective effort from more people if we want to normalise disability and make Dhaka more accessible. Disability rights foundations have been at the forefront of this movement but it seldom garners support from people who have the power to make a change. Perhaps the biggest responsibilities fall on parents, educational institutes, and the media. Representation matters and these are the places where children learn from most. While progress has been painstakingly slow, Bangladeshi media is finding

new ways to represent disabled people. However, that doesn't mean that we should overlook the fact that prejudice against disabled people rooted in our society has largely been because of a lack of representation in the media over the past few decades. Even today, agencies and institutions should be doing more than just the bare minimum.

Most often, students with disabilities note how difficult it is for them to go to school without being discriminated against by teachers and bullied by their peers. Sabahun Salam, a high-school senior who has significant experience working with children with disabilities notes how important it is for students with disabilities to be able to go to everyday schools. "They shouldn't go to special schools because that effectively disintegrates them from society. This is what normalises the use of words like 'autistic,' and 'pongu' as an insult. It makes people think that disability is something *abnormal* just because they aren't used to seeing disabled people every day, and in the end, what this does is make it impossible for both communities to know how to communicate with each other."

Despite being an aspiring basketball player who has often been the victim of temporal disabilities, Sabahun argues that she barely knows what it's like to be disabled. She's not wrong. She says that when children don't make friends at school, this isolation is carried out onto adult life, "You know, it's not that difficult. Schools need merely one small special education department that can effectively help disabled students get integrated into society, but a majority of schools aren't ready to do that. All these kids need is a community."

Speaking to a representative from International Hope School, Bangladesh, I learned that the school has made some improvements over the past couple of years to be more accessible for disabled students, installing ramps and elevators on all its campuses. However, the fact

remains that the school does not cater to the visually and hearing impaired.

"Teachers need very high levels of training to cater to the needs of these children. I think that it's better for them to go to special needs schools where the teachers were trained to attend to their needs, like providing books in Braille. However, we have trained our teachers in the differentiation curriculum so that they can support visually impaired students. In the future, we hope to do more meaningful work like this," comments a school representative.

Even though the school makes special efforts to incorporate students that have physical and learning disabilities, not a lot of strides have been taken to effectively integrate students with other kinds of disabilities. "We do intend to make more improvements over the next few years so that we can accommodate as many students as we can. Education should be accessible for all," the school adds.

It's very hard to set out all the needs of disabled people because of what a wide definition that is. Each type of disability requires a different kind of accommodation. However, in order for us to cater to the needs of all disabled people, we have to first *normalise* disability, and the responsibility of that falls largely upon the media and educational institutes.

Moving forward, let's remember to be less ableist. Disintegrate words from our vocabulary that villainise disability. Value unlearning just as much as we do learning. Let's talk about disabilities. Make space for accessible parking. Ask if our spaces are accessible for people with disabilities; are our graphics readable? Do we make efforts to incorporate Braille into everyday life?

Let's stop looking at disability organisations as a way to boost resumes. We can only move forward as a society when we accept that disabled people are people, just like us.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

## ART IN THE CITY

MOHUA MOULI

Home is where the heart is, they say. And my heart is always looking for art.

Dhaka, despite its aplomb supply of exquisite dust clouds, is home to various historically significant mementos of art. But it's also full of stories, new and old, told through the landscapes, the architecture and simply the environment of different parts of the city. It only takes a little bit of curiosity and intention, to unravel the clutter to find all the art that hides within the city folds.

My journey of discovering the beauty of Dhaka however, didn't start in Dhaka. **UNCONSCIOUS**

Growing up in a small town, I was blessed with a childhood cocooned inside nature's womb. My mother was a creative, while my father was a romantic. Walking by the river, chasing fireflies on a moonlit night, birdwatching from the balcony was in perfect correlation to the education I was receiving at home in art, poetry, and dance during this time.

So, it was no surprise that the culture, the people, and the concrete jungle of Dhaka overwhelmed me at the tender age of nine. It took some time for me to find my identity amidst a city that was so full of character. **SUBCONSCIOUS**

My explorations of Dhaka began in my early teens when I first started tutoring. On my way to my students' houses, I would walk by the beautiful bends of Dhanmondi Lake. En route, I would do some sightseeing of the old buildings that survived the poaching by real estate developers. Most of these houses were also home to various kinds of flowering trees. These flowers would ornate the streets in beautiful hues of reds, pinks, and whites. And as an avid flora enthusiast like my mother, I would pick up as many flowers as I could from under the trees and take them home.

As my walks by the lake became more frequent, I began to notice several young men and women, equipped with paintbrushes and a canvas, settling into the lakeside habitat for a daily ritual of practicing art among the birds and the trees. It was fascinating to see others manifesting their own versions of natural romanticism into their art.



Inspired by the artists of Dhanmondi, I began taking regular trips to well-known art galleries in the area. Many of the places I began to frequent included Drik Gallery, Bengal Gallery, Gallery Chittrak and Gallery Twenty One, to name a few. All these featured artworks, photographs by artists from across the country, and sometimes beyond borders. Even one of south Asia's most celebrated photography institutions, Pathshala, was located within the vicinity of Dhanmondi. **CONSCIOUS**

It wasn't until I had become a student at the University of Dhaka, did I finally begin sharing these experiences with my peers who carry a similar appreciation for art. Every morning I would wake up an hour early, just to go to Charukala and sit under the famous *bokultola* by myself to read a book or write poetry while enjoying the fresh morning air. Soon, some of my friends began to frequent the premises with me.

With these friends I walked around the entire university campus, which is glittered with various forms of art and is also home to several historical landmarks. Art exhibitions, theatre, musical and dance performances are all part of the culture at this age-old institution, with places like Shilpakala Academy, Bangla Academy and Charukala hosting events almost every other day of the week.

The new paintings on the walls of Charukala every *Pahela Baishakh*, the graffiti and murals on the walls of DUCSU, the regal beauty of Curzon Hall and its ethereal gardens only scratch the surface of the more public display of the art in DU.

A frequent place to visit for my friends and I were the lovely roadside shops that trail the sidewalks of Doyel Chattar, from where we bought and window-shopped for all kinds of ethnic ornaments, trinkets, wooden lampshades and jute bags, all of which were produced by local artisans.

After the first year of university, my first job and new friendships took me to the northern parts of Dhaka. It was a

challenge in those early days, figuring out the bus routes, while navigating through the maze-like streets of Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara.

I began engaging myself in musical activities at the time, and would attend youth cultural hotspots of this area, the most significant of which is probably Jatra Biroti on Kemal Ataturk Avenue. The premise, the walls of which are hand painted in beautiful local art styles, consists of a lifestyle shop, a vegan restaurant on the rooftop and a space for independent artists to come and showcase their talents. From here, I was suddenly exposed to an entire community of young artists, musicians, filmmakers, and photographers who all had incredible talent and even more impressive levels of dedication to their craft.

I had also started working as a reporter for SHOUT, *The Daily Star* during that time, which gave me the opportunity to interview and talk to several of these artists. It was nothing short of inspiring to find out how much raw artistic potential is going unnoticed by the world at large. There are filmmakers in their late teens and early twenties making films about mental health issues and topics such as feminism, artists depicting social issues and using their art to start conversations on social media, and musicians writing songs about love, friendship and pain. This "art scene" continues to evolve as more and more young creative individuals showcase their work throughout the city.

As the culture changes with every passing generation, there are more stories to tell through art. Dhaka is truly alive and breathing, and just like a human being, it has its own personality, its own sets of good and bad traits, making it a dynamic and ever-changing city holding a unique duality of magic and realism.

I, a mere observer, will continue to explore and feed my own mind and soul as my bond with the city grows deeper through our shared love for life and beauty.

*Mohua Mouli likes cats and taking naps while listening to podcasts about aliens. Don't mail her at mohua210@gmail.com*



ILLUSTRATION: EHSAN MOSTAFA INAN

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE **SHOUT**

# Start-ups to take care of our mind and body

**KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD**

*SHOUT, The Daily Star and UNDP Bangladesh have partnered up to bring you stories of impactful start-ups. These enterprises—all aligned with a singular or multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals—are part of Youth Co:Lab, the largest youth social entrepreneurship movement in Asia and the Pacific, co-created by UNDP and Citi Foundation.*

Healthcare. While this word carries an inevitable significance in our day-to-day lives, this year it has taken on a whole new meaning. The global pandemic has restricted our movements within the walls of our houses. Months of staying indoors, as a result, takes a toll on our mental health. Start-ups Mindo and Moner Bondhu provide all-accessible mental health services.

"I was affected when a senior at my university took his own life, and so I opened a forum for people who were going through difficult times. Over the years, this evolved from a personal, free charity programme to a mental health service platform," shares Imrul Kayes, co-founder and CMO of Mindo.

On the other hand, Moner Bondhu was inspired by personal events. Founder and CEO Tawhida Shiropa explains, "During my time as a journalist, I received many letters where people wrote about their struggles. I saw my mother, too, go into depression as her children grew older and got busier with life. These experiences made me determined to start Moner Bondhu."

Both Imrul and Shiropa agree that



the biggest challenge in working in this undermined sector is the lack of awareness. Mental health is still stigmatised in the society, for which those who suffer cannot always reach out to seek help. These two enterprises aim to tackle this challenge by providing affordable and accessible counselling services.

The mind and the body of a human being are intertwined. It is important that we take care of both. Wahiduz-zaman Sadi tells an interesting story about how the idea to establish RiBANA, the organic skincare brand, came to be.

"I learned about organic soaps from a friend. The product piqued my curiosity, and in the process I discovered the horrors of harsh chemicals used in everyday cosmetics. And so, after a year of research, trials and errors, we started making hand-made organic soaps."

It was not only important to produce vegan, halal and naturally-sourced beauty solutions for this brand, Sadi wanted to be socially responsible as well. The brand collects raw materials from rural families around the country, thereby financially supporting them. Over the years, the team spent days and nights working on issues, feedback and criticism to earn the trust of its consumers. RiBANA aims to put Bangladesh on the map by gaining worldwide recognition in the future.

On the other hand, Safewheel had already gained a wider audience in its formative days. What started as an entry for the globally-renowned Hult Prize competition, is now an internationally recognised social enterprise providing emergency medical transport services to rural Bangladesh.

"There are very few ambulance services in rural areas. Villagers rely on traditional three-wheelers which can be life-threatening for patient transportation. Even if they get an ambulance, it is expensive. We wanted to bring an innovative and affordable solution for the villagers," says Rafiq Islam, CEO of Safewheel.

The team mentions that it has been a tough but rewarding journey so far. Like any other start-up that wants to create positive impacts on people's lives while being financially sustainable, the Covid-19 pandemic has been a learning experience.

Co-founder and COO Anas Hossain Makki mentions Safewheel spent a majority of time communicating with villagers and health professionals, to understand the customer's reaction, demand and preferences. The team wants to launch inter-district regular ambulances as the demand has increased during this pandemic.

These start-ups working to boost the country's healthcare sector by providing accessible services and are aligned with "Goal 3: Good health and well-being" and "Goal 12: Responsible production and consumption" of the UN SDGs.

*An extended version of this article is available online. Read it on The Daily Star website, or on SHOUT on Facebook and @shoutds on Instagram.*

*Kazi Akib Bin Asad is the editor in-charge of SHOUT. Write to him at akib.asad@thedailystar.net*

# TO EXIST

**A. M. FAHAD**

For a person who doesn't support any particular philosophy, I do love learning about them and exploring them. One ideology I have recently found interesting is "existentialism". Existentialism is the idealisation that we do not live by a purpose or standard set by someone else, instead we live our life and give it meaning ourselves, finding our own purpose in this journey.

## ESSENCE

Philosophers in the early days were deeply into essentialism. Essence is a core set of properties that are necessary, or essential, for a thing to be what it is. They believed everyone was born with their own essence and a specific purpose in this vast universe.

## ESSENTIALISM IN OUR CULTURE

Even though the thought of essentialism isn't widely explored in our culture, its basic idea is within every brown parent. Most of them make decisions for their children—if they would be raised to become a doctor or engineer—thus fulfilling their purpose in the family or basically realising their own dreams.

Families that have been following a path



for generations usually teach their children to do the same. The children embrace their culture and the past choices their ancestors had made for their future. Most of our parents are convinced that when we have a clarity of purpose, it would lead to success. And it is true.

A strong sense of purpose is definitely essential to succeed in life. If we do not have an inherent sense of what we want, we would not be able to achieve any goal. No one wants to be lazy or broke. These things happen when we don't have a plan, right?

However, we ask, "What is my purpose?"

This is where most brown parents and existentialists collide. Essentialists believe

you were born with a purpose. Existentialists believe you were born without a purpose; you will find your purpose as you make yourself along the journey of life. And most of our parents do not agree with the latter.

## EMBRACING EXISTENTIALISM IN OUR CULTURE

Theistic existentialists refute the notion that God created the universe, our world, or even us, with any particular purpose in mind. French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre believed one has to recognise that they give meaning to their own life. If you decide to follow a path that someone else has set for you, then—according to Sartre—you live

by bad faith. Basically, it'd be like living in a hole and pretending that something out there has meaning. Meaning that wasn't given by you.

Existentialism isn't a widely explored thought in our culture. However, many are harbouring ideologies of purpose that support the idea of existentialism. Most of us are starting to see that there aren't only one or two destined paths for everyone to follow. There can be other paths too, even for things we're passionate about. These paths are harder to pursue because there isn't a map for success.

People take these leaps of faith because they believe in themselves. If they're passionate about what they do, there's no stopping them. There's no stopping you.

As Sartre put it, there is no traced-out path to lead man to his salvation, he must constantly invent his own path. To invent it, he is free, responsible, without excuse, and every hope lies within him. It is terrifying, but exhilarating.

*The writer is a class 10 student at St. Joseph Higher Secondary School.*

# You are beautiful, Dhaka

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

Some days, I wake up feeling wrapped in plastic. This feeling grows over the day, I continuously feel like I am reaching out from underneath a plastic foil as it stretches infinitesimally through my every motion but never tears apart.

On those days, I go out to get stuck in a traffic jam in Dhaka.

"You're not taking the car?" is my Mom's way of affirming whether I am having one of those episodes.

"No. Rickshaw."

She sighs, rolls her eyes and mutters something under her breath and then gives me a warm hug. This is our ritual, this is how we cope with my sudden transitory escapes in the middle of the day, with warnings of returning before the evening.

But today she smiles, "You look beautiful."

Today, as I hail a rickshaw and as it slowly paddles across an alley and then flits out onto a busy road, my mother's word echoes along with my little silver *jhumkas* in the air. And thus starts my game.

You can never steer me into a conversation when I am on a rickshaw. Because my mind travels to wherever my eyes land on. I see a toddler on the sidewalk, holding a bright red pinwheel. The man who walks an inch behind that little girl must be her father. And I imagine that the girl must have cried a great deal when she wanted to buy that little pinwheel but her father refused because they were running late for her school. I imagine how puppy-eyed the girl must have been, when her father finally succumbed to go back and buy it, like all fathers do.

My rickshaw slowly halts beside a silver car as a long, familiar traffic jam forms.

Unlike others, I love to wait in a traffic hold up. It gives me more time to watch everything, gives my imagination more time to escalate up and down in its roller-coaster. Inside that car, with the windows rolled up is a girl who's also wearing a *saree* like me. She carefully tries to align her "tip" right above the bridge of her nose, looking into a small, ornate hand mirror. Who uses mirrors these days? But maybe, it's from a special person. Maybe that's the person she's going to meet. I imagine her with a guy in a green panjabi, walking and talking about books they've read. They might never be together, but she will always look back to this day.

To the left of that car though, parallel to me, a guy sits in a rickshaw arguing loudly in his phone. "Why don't you ever just solve your own problems?" He almost hisses. "I know I am your friend but that doesn't mean—" he is cut short. I phrase his friend's argument in my head "I don't always ask you for your help." Or "This is the last time." Who knows how it would work out?

Ahead of us, in a corner is a small grocery shop where a woman wearing a black *burqa* is nervously looking right and left as a gang of guys leer at her. I don't need



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

to imagine what she's thinking really. *I know it.* She's scared and must be having a conversation with herself about why she didn't just listen to her family and not go outside alone like that. I want to jump from the rickshaw and scream at those filthy guys. That's how immersed I get when I try to picture someone else's life to drown out my own. It's like plunging into an ocean from your own glass tank.

I don't get to do that though, the rickshaw pulls ahead when the traffic police signals to. I imagine the traffic policeman waiting for his shift to end, so that he can go to a nearby restaurant and eat his lunch where he'll miss his wife's cooking.

I catch a glimpse of a mango tree, bending humbly and shading a boulevard. A smile sneaks onto my lips, when I think how its leaves rustle and dance in the breeze, just like my open hair does too. Those leaves must watch all those who pass below them, and maybe shy away to let a beam of sunlight shine over only those they find deserving.

Our rickshaw takes a little detour, and again slows down into a small congestion. This one won't take time, I know. I see an almost empty tea stall, where a guy sits staring at an empty cup of tea. Wisps of invisible smoke carrying the weight of sorrow and regrets glide into the sky. He puts it down finally, and buys

a small packet of biscuits. Breaking them into tiny pieces, he feeds them to a stray dog which was sleeping under a bench. The dog will always recognise those pair of mud caked shoes, whenever it will see them from inside its safe haven under that rickety old bench.

A woman from a second floor balcony, dries colourful clothes. Her eyes wander to a piece of cloth wedged in between a branch and a window sill. Over it, crows, glistening under the sun, perch over telephone wires. I have a theory that crows listen to all the conversations that pass through those wires.

All the vehicles dissolve and we speed away. An old woman selling boxes of vibrant bangles sits on the road, a man prepares a plate of *fuchka* for his first customer, a girl sniffs a white rose, and a boy walks with art papers tucked to his chest like they carry his soul. A small skip of puddle on my left, a crowd of people cursing the workers who were digging the road, the stench of drainage and the smell of freshly baked *naan* and sizzling beef, coexisting.

"Mama, we're here," I am broken from my reverie and see the old rickshaw puller who's wiping away his sweat. Getting down, I hand him a lot of extra notes other than the fare, and his eyes glisten with gratitude. I imagine him returning home, and

talking about the extra money he made today because of a young passenger.

Standing on the sidewalk, I finally look at the sky as a way of ending my escape.

Today, the sun overhead looks like a blooming drop of orange colour an artist mistakenly dropped on his otherwise blue canvas. The crows I saw a while ago caw "You're beautiful" together and fly off into the cotton clouds. I believe clouds can hold anything. They hold the souls of animals when they are slaughtered brutally. They have secret gardens for hungry children who were killed for stealing fruits.

A purple kite falters and fitters slowly up the sky. Its string is cut and detached from its owner. It flies on its own, nimbly up, till it disappears into the white clouds. And as I look down, I see another girl, standing in focus amidst a colourful blur of motion, looking at the kite too. This city is a place for bleeding and healing at the same time. Everyone is alone but together here.

Sometimes, I wake up and feel like I am wrapped up in plastic.

But today, ever so slowly and just by a fraction, I break out of it.

The author can be reached at [01shreshtha7@gmail.com](mailto:01shreshtha7@gmail.com)

# THERE IS A WORLD OUTSIDE DHAKA

## H. RAINAK KHAN REAL

Growing up in Pabna Sadar, I was accustomed to being called an urbanite by my cousins and relatives who lived in the slightly rural areas of Pabna upazilas. I also noticed how eager the people from the surrounding upazilas were to migrate to the city in search of livelihood and hoping to settle permanently, as the Sadar has always been the financial and educational hub of our district.

However, I was baffled when I first moved to Dhaka for college. Instead of being treated like an urbanite, in Dhaka, I found myself being treated quite the opposite. Also, I was frequently asked about where my "graamer bari", or village home, was. It took me a while to realise that by village home, they actually meant my hometown.

But, as I started to fit in, I noticed yet another use of this term, and it was not a positive one. Apparently, a handful of Dhakaites use it to underrate other cities of Bangladesh as they consider (and treat) the rest of Bangladesh outside of Dhaka as underdeveloped and lacking modern amenities.

Since Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh and this megacity is the industrial, financial and entertainment centre of our country, therefore, it may seem natural that they would view the inhabitants of other districts as rustic. While that may be true to some extent, the reason



Cities and towns outside Dhaka have a life of their own.

PHOTO: STAR

behind such misconception is nothing other than ignorance. Speaking from my experience, the Pabna Sadar possesses every criterion required to be called a full-fledged city.

The agricultural economy of Pabna has long since been transformed to an industrial one, with rice, jute, cotton, sugar and pharmaceutical industries making Pabna an economically important district of Bangladesh. The country's first nuclear power plant is being constructed in Roop-

pur of Pabna. Apart from being an industrial centre, it has a pretty good healthcare system, along with the only public mental hospital in Bangladesh being located here. As an educational hub, Pabna Sadar houses numerous government and private colleges and ranked universities like Pabna Medical College and Pabna University of Science and Technology. The administrative capital harbours vibrant arts and cultural scenes, such as public libraries, cinema halls, restaurants serving local and

exotic delicacies and dazzling celebrations of both indigenous and international festivals. Overall, a good transportation network and developed infrastructures have greatly contributed in shaping the Sadar into a developed city.

My point here is that some people in Dhaka are just parochial to notice that like Pabna, there are lots of full-fledged cities all over Bangladesh which provide its inhabitants with modern facilities, celebrate different cultural events within the communities and are playing an active role in the country's economy. So, the tendency to depreciate other cities based on preconceived notions is downright wrong.

While it's true that other cities will never get as much attention as that of Dhaka city, these cities are nonetheless significant for Bangladesh. Besides contributing to the country's economy, these cities often end up contributing a significant part of the talent in Dhaka based industries as well. Such ignorant mischaracterisation of places outside Dhaka is a problem, as it further perpetuates the social and economic centralisation around Dhaka that our country suffers from. Maybe we'd all be better off if people from Dhaka got off their high horse for once.

*The author has given up on alchemy and has decided to buy a dinghy just to set it on fire. Send him tips to keep his cool at rainakkhanreal@gmail.com*

## The wonderful world of *Cities: Skylines*

### AZMIN AZRAN

I used to despise myself for my choices in gaming – always going after single player games that have no specific end goals but could easily take hundreds of hours out of my life. A couple of years ago, however, I found out about *Cities: Skylines* from my YouTube recommendations. It fit the bill perfectly, it was a single player game that could only end if you got bored or your PC died.

I gave the game a go, and well, I'm glad I did because life has never been the same for me since.

*Cities: Skylines* is the best, most popular city-building game ever made. My discovery on that fateful day two years ago was nothing special, but I have since found out that like most Paradox games, people found *Skylines* really difficult to get into. It's understandable too – it's a complicated game with a lot of different functionalities that takes time getting used to. Add more than a dozen DLCs on top of that with a modding community that churns out thousands of new mods and assets every day, then the name of the game's maker, Colossal Order, really starts to make sense. It's daunting from the outside but if you are a person who loves building things and is interested in channelling their creativity through the games they play, *Cities: Skylines* is the best



A quiet neighbourhood in Otro Elaka.

thing you could ever ask for.

I needed help getting started with *Cities: Skylines*. My first points of reference were the YouTubers "Biffa Plays Indie Games" and "Seniac". After spending hours watching them build colossal cities that start off as humble villages, fixing traffic backlogs by replacing intersections with roundabouts, and filling entire lakes with fresh, hot sewage, I decided it was time to build my own. My first city was a boring old town with grids for roads and traffic jams

that went on for miles, but little by little, I saw myself improving. I had started using mods once I had half a dozen cities under my belt, and by the time I got to my 50th city, I was hitting 100k population with ease. My best city thus far – *Otro Elaka* – has around 150,000 people, two major ports, two passenger airports, two cargo airports, and an extensive public transport network made up of buses, metro rail, trains, and ferry lines. The city has two universities educating its citizens, citizens

who go on to work in its booming forestry, fisheries, oil and ore industries, or the high-tech manufacturing businesses that make up its economy. There's even a tourism sector, with sandy beaches and tall hotels, and a very interesting nightlife scene. And the best thing about all of this is that I built these amazing features in my own city little by little, and watched it grow into the megalopolis of my dreams.

For me, *Cities: Skylines* is more than a game. I always knew I liked cities and liked finding out how they functioned, but the intricacies involved with simply simulating a good liveable city really puts into perspective how difficult it is to actually run a good liveable city. I believe cities are the vessels of civilisation, cities are where human innovations happen and mankind finds the future, which makes me think it's a good thing to be fascinated by cities. More people caring about cities will lead to better cities, and that's what I think is truly wonderful about the world of *Cities: Skylines*.

*I'm a city-planning enthusiast and also sub-editor at SHOUT. To look at some beautiful cities built using Cities: Skylines, try the YouTube channels "ARTEX Gaming" and "Citywokcitywall". You can reach me at azminazran@gmail.com*