

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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DOWN TO BUSINESS WITH
THE BEST BATHROOMS

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SPEAKING DESHI WHEN IN
BIDESH

PG 4

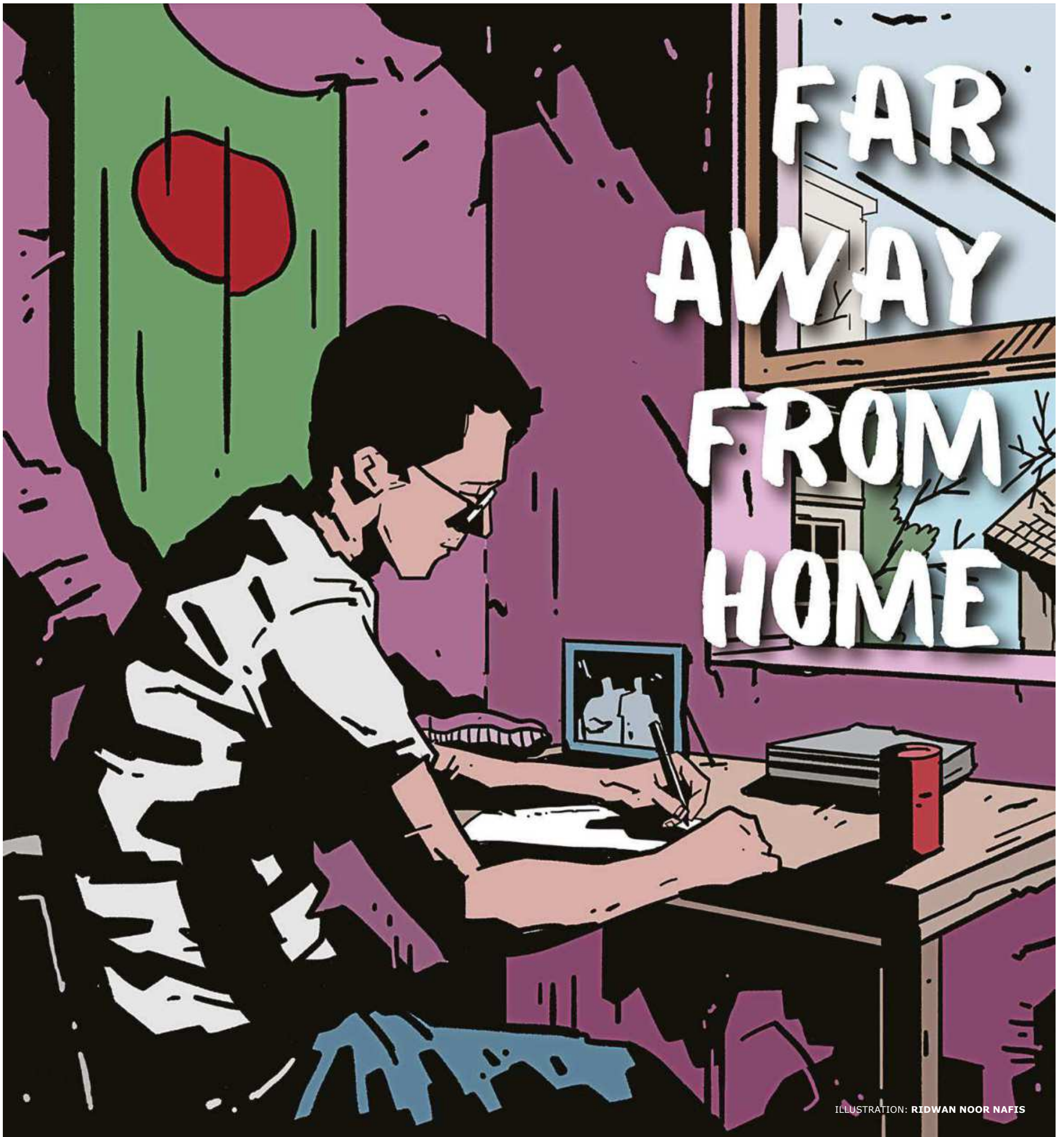


ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFFIS

EDITORIAL

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that making plans about your life only goes so far. As students, in our myopic vision about our future, we convince ourselves that a particular educational route, be it a certain major or institution or the very act of studying abroad, is our only ticket to success.

Perhaps you had your heart set on something since childhood, perhaps your family hammered a plan into your brain or perhaps your friends flying off to some faraway land one after the other made you want to follow suit.

Younger me would probably declare one setback or change of life plan as officially the end of my world but, if my time since graduating school has taught me anything, it's that life always goes on.

No matter where you end up studying, at home or abroad, it's only a minuscule part of all that you are, and all that you can do.

-- Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

MOVIES

HOLIDAY ROM-COMS, MADE BETTER WITH FOOD



SHOUT DESK

Winter rolling around makes us want to snuggle up in a blanket and binge our favourite holiday rom-coms. Because every movie marathon needs snacks to complete the experience, here are our expert pairings so you know exactly what to stack up on before you hit play.

LOVE ACTUALLY

Counting down to Christmas with the OG holiday romance special is practically a tradition at this point. Some hot chocolate bombs should serve well as company for this one.

A CHRISTMAS PRINCE

A box of decadent *shahi tukra* will keep you well-fed for the entirety of this light rom-com featuring the atypical story of royalty meets ordinary. After all, there's never enough movies to make about falling in love with a mysterious prince. And what says royalty better than *shahi tukra*?

THE HOLIDAY

What's in a name? Just two classic cases of "boy-meets-girl" taking place over the course of a Christmas vacation. Since Cameron Diaz's impulsive grocery shopping sequence is sure to make you crave some cheese and carbs, we recommend munching on cheese crackers while enjoying this film.

LAST CHRISTMAS

You'll probably want to pick up a pack of Oreos while watching this romantic comedy of opposites unfold. As you

bite into each biscuit, note how the soft vanilla complements the relatively bitter chocolate, much like the pairing of our protagonists, Kate and Tom.

LET IT SNOW

'Tis the season to discover first loves and grow through first heartbreaks. Settle in with a scoop or two of chocolate chip cookie dough ice-cream on your waffles, as a tribute to the fictional "Waffle Town" of course.

VALENTINE'S DAY

Settle in with a box of chocolates because in this movie of assorted stories, you never know what you're going to get next!

NEW YEAR'S EVE

You'll laugh, you'll cry, but you won't be disappointed with these stories of love and loss. Watch with a cold pasta salad by your side or else you'll be salivating at Chef Laura's creations throughout the film.

HOLIDATE

If you're going to experience Sloane's story of the rut she's in, you have to do it her way. So get on the couch with a big bag of potato chips and refuse to move as you watch Sloane and Luke span a calendar year trying to find love.

BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY

This one's an emotional roller-coaster ride. Nothing satiates the soul better than chewy chocolate chip cookies, and what better option than to choose cookie dough, with bits of chocolate chip surprises inside?



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DOWN TO BUSINESS WITH THE BEST BATHROOMS

WASIQUE HASAN

Let's get this out of the way first – travelling isn't fun. It's even less fun when you're doing it alone over 48 hours to a foreign country where you don't know anyone and are going to spend four years. When you're fatigued, stressed, and thousands of miles away from home, a bathroom can be all that stands between you and an honest-to-God meltdown.

I went through this life-altering moment multiple times because I knew in my heart I would one day rate them all on a numerical scale.

HOME SWEET HOME

I don't need to tell you about Bangladeshi bathrooms. You know what to expect by now. The quality of bathrooms you've come across while travelling will vary greatly. At their worst they're a biohazard. At their best, however, they are the bathrooms in the Dhaka airport. I have to give credit where it's deserved, those bathrooms are almost always clean.

In addition, recently there are people with packets of pocket tissue to make sure running out of paper is never a worry. If you average out the two ends of the spectrum, I can give the bathrooms I've come across a solid 6/10. This is the benchmark that bathrooms across the world have to meet. Let's find out how they fare.

LIVE LIKE THE SHEIKHS

There is no way to sugarcoat just how good bathrooms are in airports in the Middle East. These bathrooms have everything you could want and more. Need a comfortable place to perform *wudu*

before you pray? You got it. A place to change your baby's diaper? It's there before you can even ask. They even have the feature all Bangladeshis look for: bidets. Just having bidets would be an automatic 9/10, but they go the extra mile and have temperature-controlled bidets.

I cannot overstate how comfortable a long transit is when you have such nice bathrooms to look forward to. It might sound silly to look forward to a nice bathroom but think back to the worst public bathroom experience you've had. Let that sit in your mind for a moment. Put into that context, is it really that ridiculous to look forward to a nice bathroom?

THE AMERICAN DREAM

Before we can even talk about the bathrooms, we have to address how weird US airports are. They are almost identical. Unfortunately I'm not exaggerating, you can't tell the difference between landing at Boston and landing at NYC until you exit the airport because they are exactly the same. As such, I will have to take a point off for the confusing layout. Once we get past that, however, the bathrooms are really quite nice. They are clean, have adequate space, and look very *shiny*. I wish there was a better way to describe them, but there isn't.


Also, perhaps it's just because of my bad luck, but I always end up going to the bathroom right before the janitorial crew show up. I don't know what I'm doing wrong but having to explain to the staff that the bathroom isn't unoccupied gets quite tiring. Since that could just be an unfortunate series of coincidences,

I won't penalize them for it. What I will penalize them for is the lack of bidets. That is unforgivable, what kind of animals use toilet paper? 8/10, could be better.

I hope you enjoyed learning about bathrooms across the world as much as I enjoyed discovering them. You'll notice

that none of the bathrooms got a 10/10. That's because there is no bathroom better than your own, with your *bodna* by your side.

Wasiq is an undergraduate student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Write to him at hasan.wasiq75@gmail.com



মাইলস্টোন স্কুল অ্যান্ড কলেজ

College Code: 1056 School Code: 1098 EHN: 108572.

ভর্তি বিজ্ঞপ্তি-২০২১

প্লে/নার্সারি থেকে ৯ম শ্রেণি

বাংলা ও ইংরেজি (জাতীয় শিক্ষাক্রম) মাধ্যম

- শ্রেষ্ঠত্বের স্বীকৃতি : ২০০৮ সালে ঢাকা বোর্ড কর্তৃক শ্রেষ্ঠ শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান হিসেবে স্বীকৃতিপ্রাপ্ত।
- ফলাফল : পিইসি, জেএসসি, এসএসসি ও এইচএসসি পরীক্ষায় (মেধা তালিকা পদ্ধতি থাকাকালীন) সারাদেশে এবং ঢাকা শিক্ষা বোর্ডের প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক মেধাতালিকায় মোট ১৩ বার স্থান লাভ করে।
- ব্যবস্থাপনা ও পরিচালনা : মাইলস্টোন স্কুল অ্যান্ড কলেজের বিভিন্ন ক্যাম্পাসে ৪১৫ জন অভিজ্ঞ ও সুদক্ষ শিক্ষক-কর্মকর্তা [ক্যাডেট কলেজের প্রাক্তন ২ জন অধ্যক্ষ, ১ জন উপাধ্যক্ষ, সরকারি কলেজের প্রাক্তন ৩ জন অধ্যক্ষ, ৩ জন কর্নেল (অব.), ৩ জন লে. কর্নেল (অব.), ৫ জন মেজর (অব.), ৯ জন সহযোগি অধ্যাপক, ৮৯ জন সহকারি অধ্যাপক এবং ৩০০ জন প্রভাষক ও সিনিয়র শিক্ষক] শিক্ষা ও প্রশাসনিক কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা করছেন।
- বিশেষ সুবিধা : মফস্বল এলাকার ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের জন্য আলাদা হোস্টেল ও পরিবহনের ব্যবস্থা রয়েছে। জেলে ও মেয়েদের এবং বাংলা ও ইংরেজি মাধ্যমের ক্লাস আলাদা আলাদা ভবনে অনুষ্ঠিত হয়।
- প্রতিম, দরিদ্র কিন্তু মেধাবী ছাত্র/ছাত্রীদের আর্থিক সহায়তা ও বৃত্তি প্রদান করা হয়।
- ভর্তির ক্ষেত্রে শিক্ষা মন্ত্রণালয়ের নির্দেশিত নীতিমালা অনুসরণ করা হবে।
- কলেজটি এমএনআরএস ট্রাস্ট কর্তৃক পরিচালিত একটি অলাভজনক শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান। নিজস্ব ক্যাম্পাস দিয়াবাড়িতে (উত্তরা) ৫০০ জন ছাত্র-ছাত্রী আবাসিক সুবিধাসহ শিক্ষাক্রম ও সার্বিক প্রশিক্ষণ গ্রহণ করছে।
- ঢাকার বাইরে গাজীপুর ব্যতীত মাইলস্টোন স্কুল অ্যান্ড কলেজের কোনো শাখা বা ক্যাম্পাস নেই।

<p>কর্নেল নূরুন নবী (অব.) প্রকল্প পরিচালক ও উপদেষ্টা প্রাক্তন অধ্যক্ষ-ফৌজদারহাট ও কিনাইদহ ক্যাডেট কলেজ এবং প্রতিষ্ঠাতা অধ্যক্ষ- রাজউক উত্তরা মডেল কলেজ ও মাইলস্টোন কলেজ।</p>	<p>এম. কামালউদ্দিন ভূঁইয়া লে. কর্নেল (অব.) অধ্যক্ষ- মাইলস্টোন কলেজ।</p>	<p>মিসেস রিফাত আলম অধ্যক্ষ - মাইলস্টোন প্রিপারেটরি কে.জি স্কুল।</p>
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২২, ৩০ ও ৪৪ গরিব-ই-নেওয়াজ এভিনিউ, সেক্টর-১১, উত্তরা মডেল টাউন, ঢাকা-১২৩০।
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SPEAKING DESHI WHEN IN BIDESH

MONEESHA R KALAMDER

Language was such a core part of my being that I was barely thinking about it when I stepped foot in a cold, snowy, faraway land. I did not miss Bangla much in the beginning because I was still conversing with family and friends back home in it. However, over time, especially on days when I was experiencing something emotional, I wished to have a conversation with someone in Bangla. Not only is it easier to express yourself in your native language when you're emotionally strained, the language is associated with childhood and comfort. Terms of endearment in Bangla feel so much more loving and intimate.

Another thing that my Bengali friends overseas agree with me is we all miss the use of Bangla slang. *Hanging out* just does not have the same vibes as *adda mara*. I have started to teach my closest non-Bengali friend Bangla phrases – I'm sure he'll be fluent by 2070.

One great thing about growing up speaking Bangla is the distinction of the formal pronouns. When you can switch from *tumi* to *tui* with a person, you know you've become friends. If I'm not speaking to someone in Bangla, how am I supposed to figure out what friendship level we're on? Generally, Bangla feels a lot more personal than English. I wonder if that is why we have a culture where nosiness is acceptable. Yes, I'm talking about you, next-door-auntie.

Even in Bangladesh, we use many English words while



conversing in Bangla. For example, the word "practice". Has anyone ever used the Bangla word for it? A non-Bengali friend commented that trying to figure out what my sister and I are saying is like playing a video game on hard mode.

We speak a completely different language, yet we use the occasional English word and if they're paying enough attention, they can figure out what the conversation is about.

Partly due to this habit, and partly because my default mode has to be English anytime I'm dealing with school or work, my Bangla got rusty. The worst bit is forgetting words and phrases in both languages and having expressions that just cannot be translated. *Obhimaan*, anyone?

Sometimes when I speak, I switch languages without realising it. Once I became aware of this, I tried to be more conscious of my words. However, this attempt has given birth to some truly horrifying moments in my life.

Two summers ago, I had to share a room with my sister and she always left the room without making the bed. What I wanted to say is, "Who's supposed to make the bed every day?" Halfway through, I forgot the Bangla for making the bed, but near the end of the sentence, I realised I was beginning to use another English word, and desperately wanted to end the sentence in Bangla, so the atrocity that came out of my mouth was this: "*Bichhana ta ke make korbe, every-din?*"

I will never live this down. My family knows. My friends know. And now you know too.

Moneesha R Kalamder is a University of Waterloo graduate. Write to her at mkalamder9.75@gmail.com



Empty Room with Cardboard Boxes

How I Miss My Family



NUHAN B. ABID

One and a half years.

That's how long it's last been since I went back to Dhaka and saw my family. It's not a new thing for me, though, to have gone so long without seeing them. I left for university in the United States of America in August of 2018 and initially spent my entire year there, finally coming back in the summer of 2019 — and I've remained here since.

I knew going in that there'd be these long stretches of time where I'd be separated from

DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD



my loved ones. I just wasn't prepared for how lonely it'd feel. The beauty of technology is that you can keep in touch with them. If I see flowers I know my mom would've excitedly pointed out on a walk together, I'll send her a picture to know I'm thinking of her. I'll see a funny meme that reminds me of my sister, I'll tag her.

But then again, it's not easy. An 11-hour time difference isn't always easy to navigate. A real part of being a university student abroad is knowing you will inevitably be busy for a phone call when the other side is free. Call at Bangladesh night when it's US morning and you have classes, or call at US night when you're doing homework or with friends and your family is free? The scheduling dilemma makes it difficult if you have someone with similar

timing problems, like my sister will have school when I'm free and we end up not being able to call for an extended time unless it's a weekend.

It gets even harder when you con-

sider other people like aunts, uncles and cousins you might need to keep in touch with. But even no amount of video calls replaces actually being able to spend time with your family in person, to just be able to spend time in the same place, eat a meal together or hug each other.

In all honesty, I might've considered going back this winter holiday because it does get exhausting to be away from everything you've known for so long. And I might've too, had it not been for a pandemic. Flying is never cheap and easy, doing it while risking your health and knowing you'd be unable to see most of the people you care about even if you came back made it a tougher decision.

At the time I'm writing this, I'm alone on campus, looking out my window and watching a raging snowstorm. I'm homesick and lonely, I want a hot home cooked meal and to not be this cold. I want to be able to hear my family talking in the same room instead of unmet silence in an apartment by myself. *I just want to be home.*

Ultimately the sacrifice is worth it, because you know they're doing this for you as much as you are for them. Being apart isn't easy for them either, but they know their support and confidence in you will be repaid in the form of your success. It's what keeps me going honestly, knowing my mom and sister will be proud of me for what I accomplish here. Until then, we'll have to settle for video calls till we get to make up for it later.

Nuhan B. Abid is an undergraduate student at Dickinson College, Pennsylvania, USA. Write to him at abidn@dickinson.edu

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE SHOUT

NUREN IFTEKHAR

The first night I fell asleep in the small, empty room that would be my "home" for the foreseeable future, I woke up in a fit of panic. My brain couldn't comprehend why the room I lived in for the last 20 years looked so different.

Cardboard boxes all around, my bare essentials clumped up together in a corner, a mattress without a bed sheet – the clues were all there to help me solve the mystery, but it didn't stop me from waking up every single time feeling lost. Over the following months, I made little improvements to that tiny room some 8,000 miles away. The cardboard boxes went away, a Star Wars poster went up and a table made its way (just barely) in the other corner. And one day I wasn't waking up in utter confusion anymore. I finally saw that tiny room as home without trying to piece the clues together.

The reason why I wanted to start with that tiny room some 8,000 miles away is that I find it analogous to getting accustomed to this life abroad, whether culturally or just plain emotionally. When I thought about writing this piece I thought the focus would be on "fitting in". But it has been more than that and I think it is fair to assume that is the case for many.

The first major reality check I was presented with was that I have been taking the minor details of day-to-day life for granted for way too long. Coming from a person who has lived his life in privilege, I never really paid attention to the simple yet crucial things that kept my life in motion for so long. I found myself stranded in a sea of

minute chores and tasks that I never bothered to pay attention to before. Coming home after a tiring day of work and classes didn't initiate an uninterrupted period of relaxation and tomfoolery anymore unless I wanted to starve that day or watch the dirty laundry in my room pile up into a daunting figure. I still remember the day I nervously asked my American roommate how to use the washing machine. It might have felt embarrassing but I learned an important lesson, even if it was 15 years too late. The fantastic thing about living in a college town is perhaps that I was never the only one stumbling through life and learning from it.

Being a part of a community is probably the most efficient way of incorporating yourself into a new life. And yet getting over the inertia to make yourself a part of one can still be challenging. I have found the international and local communities in my city to be exceptionally kind and welcoming. As soon as the semester started, I was introduced to a plethora of communities focusing on things such as politics to table-top games. If I got to start this journey over, this is one thing that I would have changed. In spite of finding these enthusiast communities, I withheld myself from being a part of one because of a crippling impostor syndrome and social anxiety I didn't even know I have. But the only thing this does is make the solitude more unbearable.

Luckily I had the Bangladeshi community to turn to who made me a part of their group when I was too shy to approach them. While I didn't join the writer's club,

or the Dungeons and Dragons enthusiast club, I was lucky enough to find people in the Bangladeshi community who I could talk to about writing and who I could play Dungeons and Dragons with. I found reassurance in the fact that these people suffered through the same feeling of isolation and anxiety while habituating to this new life. Before I knew it, my weekends were not a lull anymore as I found myself sharing a laugh with other people over coffee.

The cultural difference of a new country is something that many people have trouble getting used to. This has been less of an issue over time due to globalisation and how exposed we are to the culture abroad now. This is something I have truly appreciated about my life here – the amalgamation of the Bengali culture we grew up in with the customs of America. People in my college town foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation. For example, whenever they go out to eat with a multicultural group they make sure that everyone there could have an option to choose from that doesn't go against their cultural norms and restrictions.

My American colleague in the lab drops by every now and then to let me know what new Spanish word he learned and then asks me to teach him a Bangla one. Within a month I picked up the habit of holding the door every single time I enter a building for the person a few steps back, a very small etiquette I never had before but learned from the people around me. The cultural shift is such a noticeable thing that my few examples don't come close to doing it justice. But it's in the little things that I

see in myself that the confused person in that empty room did not have, and I'm all the more glad for it.

I wanted to share a little story to finish things. Within the first few months I arrived in America, there was an Eid, a time for celebration back home but now just an occasion to reminisce about a life left behind, or so I thought.

I was invited to a *dawat* in the Bangladeshi community and I put on the only *panjabi* I had brought with me. When I arrived at the bus stop wearing my *panjabi*, I felt a crippling sense of self-doubt. "Are people staring at me?", "What will they think of this alien attire?", "Isn't this a bit too much?" I kept wondering. I didn't get on the bus that day. I went back to my home and wallowed in my bed. I was wrong to do so, I was so very wrong. It's easy for me to know that now, but not for the person in that empty room with cardboard boxes.

In spite of the many hardships, breakdowns and heartaches I have been enduring since, I have found a new home 8,000 miles away from Bangladesh, to the point that I can go to the coffee shop in a *panjabi* now and talk about culture with another person from another country. To the many people who would find themselves in another empty room with cardboard boxes in the future, the room can start feeling awfully a lot like home once you give it a chance.

Nuren Iftexhar is a PhD student at Virginia Tech. You can find him at n.iftexhar18@gmail.com

Start-ups that create employment

KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

Employment, many assume, refers to job done by a person under the supervision of another. In all honesty, employment is but a relationship. It is a contract – an agreement – for exchanges of service and rewards.

In Bangladesh, the service industry has reached new heights in recent years. This industry doesn't produce goods or tangible items, but creates and provides services for all. One start-up that works to provide such services, and more, is BD Assistant.

"I was working as a volunteer for organisations in 2016, when I realised our country is Dhaka-centric. People move to Dhaka for employment or better standards of living. As I was born in a remote village in Rangpur, I was always looking for solutions for such issues. We started BD Assistant (Bangladesh Assistant) to assist local people with living facilities that were not available before," explains Abu Sayed Al Sagor, CEO of BD Assistant.

BD Assistant looks to help families with a digitalised web platform where services such as technicians, daily grocery and medicine delivery are available at a click. "Our aim is very clear. We want to be a digital assistant for every small family in every small city, especially those facing difficulties managing their daily necessary services," states Sagor. "Our vision is to work for the decentralisation



of opportunities and facilities across the country."

Likewise in rural areas of Bangladesh, the start-up iFarmer is working to improve the lives of those who put food on our tables. Co-founded by CEO Fahad Ifaz and COO Jamil M Akbar, iFarmer started as a project in 2018 from an idea to create an Uber for urban farming.

Later, the idea evolved to enable farmers to make the most of their agricultural businesses. Who would've imagined farmers to have direct access to financing

and investment opportunities? iFarmer breaks the chain of middlemen between farmers and consumers. In addition, with the use of technology and data, it empowers farmers to gain high-quality inputs for their land.

"We ensure secure investment options for urban middle-income populations. With that, we provide access to capital, advisory support and a better market for the farmers," says Tahmid Hasan, Head of Growth and Partnership.

It was a challenge for both the start-up and the farmers; iFarmer had to pitch to a technologically disadvantaged community, and the latter had to trust themselves into introducing new products. It is a success story now, with iFarmer even launching insurance options for the initiatives.

A similar noble initiative, to foster community development and generate employment, is carried out by Avijatrik. Leveraging the potential of tourism and the lack of job opportunities in rural Bangladesh, this start-up is an online community-based travel platform that empowers underdeveloped local communities.

"Bangladesh is a potential destination for eco-tourism with its diversified culture. But our rural economy is lagging behind with very few job opportunities. So, we designed a business model to benefit local communities with tourism as well as provide unique and authentic

experiences to travel enthusiasts," shares Nazmul Islam, CEO.

Avijatrik helps the local tourism entrepreneurs with their "community-based tourism", providing travellers with meaningful experiences and contributing to the preservation of culture and conservation of nature while bringing economic opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

Nazmul adds, "A social enterprise faces many challenges in funding, marketing, and technology. Finding the perfect mentor is one of the biggest challenges. UNDP's Youth Co:Lab is the perfect platform for social enterprises, helping us with knowledge sharing within and beyond Bangladesh."

The start-ups unanimously agree on the pivotal role played by UNDP and Youth Co:Lab in their efforts. Introducing them with subject matter specialists, connecting the founders with international investor networks, and organising month-long mentorship programmes are how UNDP and Youth Co:Lab expedite the growth of the start-ups, creating sustainable impacts.

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.

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TALK TO YOUR PROFESSORS

Not all of them are scary

MASHIAT LAMISA

In an all girl's public school in Dhaka, my class always had 90+ students and it was always difficult for the teachers to retain the attention of everyone. I can perhaps count the times I have had a proper conversation with teachers about anything outside the syllabus. Now, at a university in Hong Kong, I took classes by different types of professors from around the world, and my interaction with them has completely changed from what it used to be in Bangladesh.

Before I had declared a major, I was taking general requirements like Math and Physics. These were classes held in big auditoriums with hundreds of freshmen. I was a shy foreigner and would never interact in these classes, ending up never even going down to the professor and asking them questions if I had any.

In second year, I remember meeting my department head and talking to him about my aspirations as an engineer, and him spilling out stories about his university life. I was surprised that there could be such friendly, up close and personal conversations while being respectful to the professor. With this group of engineering professors, my batchmates and I have had game nights, pizza parties, and heated arguments about studies. While we are extremely professional during class hours, we can also joke around as long as it is appropriate and I think that's something that really motivated me to study bet-



ter and pay more attention in class.

If you are a high schooler both intimidated by and excited about how to build and foster relationships with your professors in university, I have a few tips for you.

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

In both large and small classes, the best way to grab professors' attention is to ask them good questions - within and outside the curriculum. I think that really helped me stand out among a lot of students in a classroom.

BE PROFESSIONAL BUT ALSO FRIENDLY

Like any healthy relationship, boundaries are extremely

important especially in terms of approaching professors. I would recommend not asking about their personal lives if they don't bring it up themselves, but I would also recommend following up if they do mention anything about their personal lives to not seem ignorant and unempathetic.

UPDATE THEM ON YOUR WORK

This is a good way to not just improve your relationship with the professors but also to let them know you value their advice and remind them about opportunities suitable for you. I usually send them emails if I have any awards I won, or found a good research paper they might like.

I think the takeaway from this would be to remember that while there are so many variables about how your relationship with your teachers might be, it all does depend on you and them as people in general.

If you can't get through to a professor, that's okay; we are only human. Piggybacking on the same point about being human, it's also good to note that professors are super busy humans too and just asking them about their wellbeing might be a great way to start up a conversation that might lead to an amazing teacher-student relationship.

Mashiat Lamisa studies Integrative Systems and Design at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Write to her at mlamisa@connect.ust.hk

Untitled, 2018



SARAH WASIFA

To whom it may concern,
A pencil bag was found in the examination hall no. 3 on Sunday. It is the standard school-issued jute bag, with no identifiable label. It contains 3 pens, a CASIO fx991-ES, and a rather large sheet of paper folded a number of times. Upon further examination, the contents were as follows:

Even while numbed by the fringes of anaesthesia-induced sleep, he remembers being afraid. Afraid of what, he doesn't know. Just fear, stretched taut across his skin.

1.

Even while numbed by the fire that December nights bring in tow, igniting a sickly blue tinge across fingers nursing Arabica blends, even then, he remembers being afraid of opening his eyes. Unafraid of the winds, but there was this fear he had had; that this little ember he had found in a Starbucks one December night was just a flicker of his imagination; that she would've had faded out, dissolved into the sea of all that is ordinary when his eyes met light again. It had been cold, unbearably so, and with snow weighing down his lashes with dew drop kisses, he had even less incentive to do so. But it was snow, and it was wet beneath his skin, and with his mind steadily clearing of intoxicating smog, common sense had dawned.

It had been snowing, it had been three nights before the New Year's Eve, his glasses gone, and his chest burning with the effulgence of a critical overload of emotions.

Oh, and so did his stomach.

Lying there below the steadily falling card stock snippets, his senses had registered a faint splash of watermelon, a whiff

of red; decidedly feminine. She had been stirring against his chest, and all notions of how stupid his inebriated self was to follow her slurred form into the snow with an exaggerated fall sailed off on a reindeer sleigh into the bespeckled Styx.

Did you know the actual colour of the universe is actually beige? It's called the cosmic latte.

He just stared.

Her; she hadn't been here a sunset ago. And then she was there, walking in with a flurry of words, a scalded chest, and a penchant for sunflowers. And had him wishing that she would never leave.

2.

Even while dreams shone like celluloid silver screens above his eyes, mind running on the remnants of throngs of passion, he remembers a faint apprehension dotting his skin. His arm stretching out across a vast plane, sank into a void wherein her figure existed in his mind, white cotton searing his skin with unfamiliar iciness.

Weightless.

Such was the dip in the space to the left of his chest that light forced itself between his lids, pouring white hot luminescence into his consciousness.

His mind screamed; curtains pulled wide.

Ah, there she was.

It was chilly, a not-so-random autumnal Sunday, a friend's wedding, and a trip to the countryside. Her hasty decision to dye her hair brown.

Just brown?

Just brown.

But to him, it was the colour of freshly brewed tea, the soft shards of sunlight making the red shine through. It was like her sunflower heart, always drawn to light.

Like a stained glass painting, standing at the window, legs a sharp contrast to the burgundy couch. Her silhouette played out from behind his shirt, a half-moon birthmark standing out like a stain across her shoulder blades.

His heart stretched beneath his ribs, straining to accommodate this surge of euphoria coursing through every inch of his being. He was falling apart; he knew that. Infatuation leaked through the crevices axed in with every laugh, every moment they had spent together.

Did he love her?

It wasn't long ago that he associated this warmth with her. A feeling that made him laugh, because smiles were not enough to contain his joy. He had felt the flowers she planted in his heart burst into spring, and maybe, that's when he knew.

Oh no. I love her.

His soliloquy came to a halt when she turned, his mind being noisy enough to draw her eyes from the scenes behind the glass. Letting the organza in her grip follow the trail to the veined marble of the floor. Her lips parted, but it wasn't until the fourth syllable that he registered her words.

-jumped off the building opposite ours. They're taking him to the hospital.

3.

It's neither cold nor warm, but as shivers underline his skin, he's briefly aware of a metronome-like tick marking his perception of time. It slows down, like a clock running out of breath, before his senses begin to clock in for a Monday morning. Undertones of metallic scents weave in with antiseptic-

Hospital. I'm in a hospital.

Pain ringing through his synapses, he

discovers faint traces of a watermelon lingering like a homeless person in rain. He lusts after it, violently chasing with hopes that the dead weight on his chest was her, all of her. Unhurt.

He was going to propose; he wanted it to be perfect. But perfect wouldn't mean all those nights she bled through wounds he couldn't see; all the words they had shared in fits of red and scarlet; the time she had locked herself in her room for days when she got to know what he did for a living. Perfect wasn't in her burnt mushrooms and coffee rings.

No, they weren't perfect. Nor does he want them to be.

But her smile, with indents that look like apostrophes, was as close to perfection as he would ever see.

He had pirouetted into love with her, to the melody of a song he hadn't heard. He believed she was here, digits slotted between his, like they're perfect.

(We felt like we had the world)

With extreme effort, he opens his eyes. White walls, white spreads. Cold. Speeding up of the metronome attached to him. Two more ticks. He can breathe. One. He tastes blood behind his teeth.

One.

But no red.

She isn't here.

(but in the end it was a kid's craft of a blue ball.)

Please contact the exam coordinator on the third floor if this is your pencil bag, in the third or fourth break.

- School Authority

Sarah Wasifa is an undergraduate student at Singapore University of Technology and Design. Reach her at sarahuf77@gmail.com



AWAY

Away we go, in search of life
To where the sun sets, and some to where it rises
A life fulfilled by knowledge and experiences
In places full of surprises

PHOTO: FARHAN ZAHIN
TEXT: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

