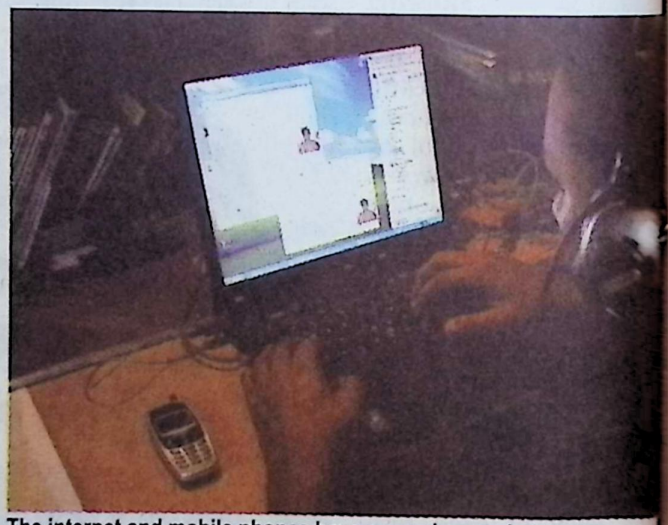
Love @First Byte

SYED ZAIN AL-MAHMOOD

By all appearances Nusrat Azim was a particularly happy and well-adjusted young woman. She had always wanted to be a doctor, and was well on the way to fulfilling her dream. A fourth year student of Dhaka Medical College, she was popular among her classmates who knew her as a kind, decent if slightly reserved human being. Nusrat was an active member of Shandhani, a volunteer organisation, and loved to sandwich a bit of social work in between studying and devouring movies on HBO. A safe secure and well-balanced existence. But all that changed in a flash one evening when her mobile phone rang. The male voice at the other end introduced himself as Palash, a final year student of civil engineering at BUET. He had got her number from a friend, he said, and wanted to get to know her. *Ami ki apnar shathe kotha bolte pari*? She brushed him off. But he called again the next day, and then the next. Grudgingly, she began to talk. Palash turned out to be extremely glib and persuasive. The conversation soon turned romantic, and within six weeks they had exchanged vows of love.

Palash proposed over fried chicken at a fast food joint, and they become "engaged". Nusrat's friends, although initially skeptical, were won over and soon she prepared to break it to her parents. Then came the phone call that was to shatter her peace of mind. A man called her and said Palash was not a student of engineering. He was in fact doing a BA at Titumir College. The anonymous caller even gave her his class roll number.



The internet and mobile phones have opened up a whole new social frontier
Photo: Zain Al Mahmood

Throughout the tears and recriminations that followed, Palash kept insisting he had lied because he loved her. Nusrat was in the depths of despair. But in spite of everything, she could not bring herself to make a clean break. "I'm too deeply involved," she kept telling her friends. Torn between loyalty to Palash and anguish at his deception, she became clinically depressed. Her grades went down, and she failed her professional MBBS examination in January 2008.