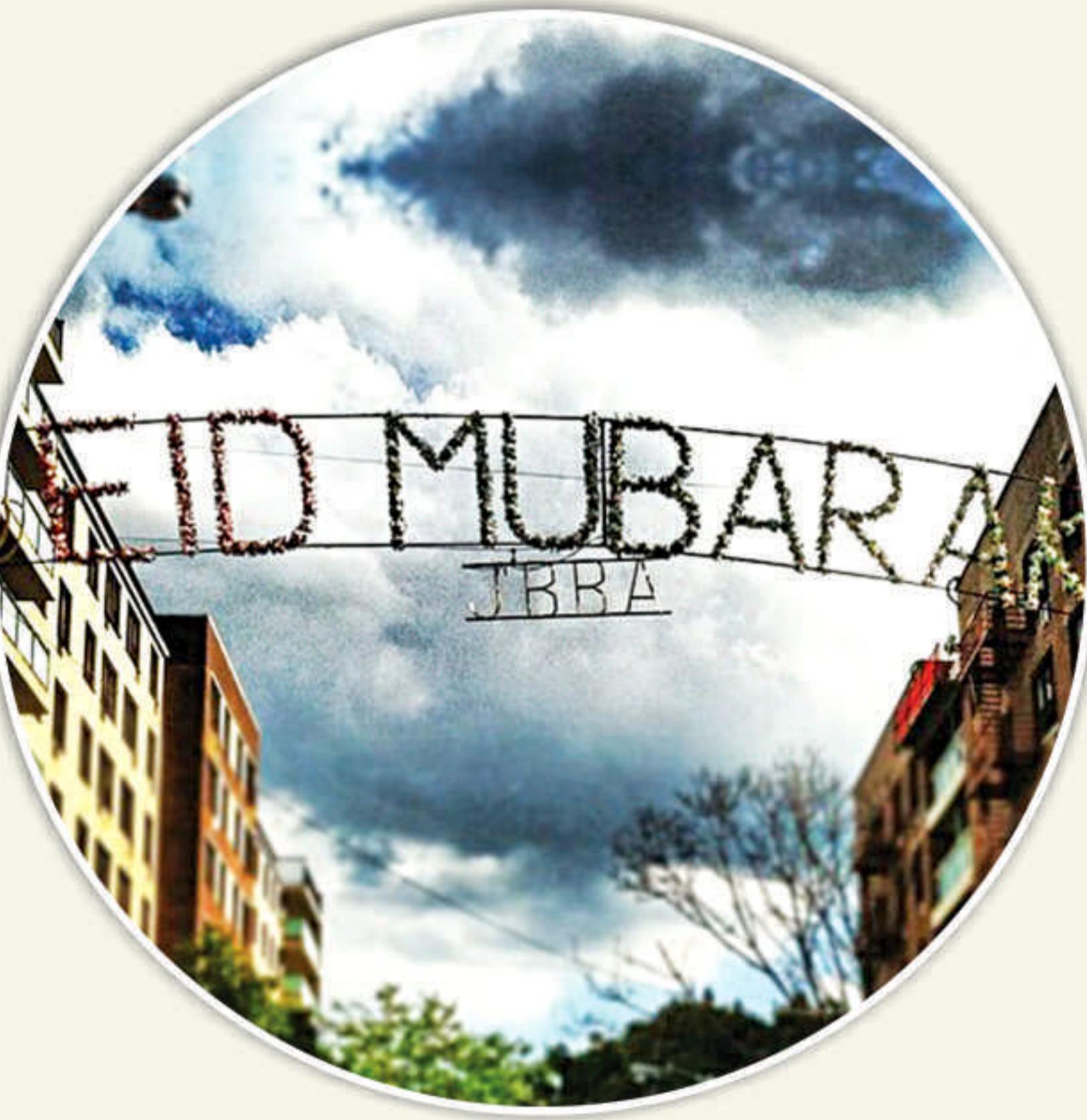


EID

AWAY FROM HOME



RAYAAN IBTESHAM CHOWDHURY

There are a number of things that come together to make Eid as special as it is. Would the end of Ramadan be this special if we spent it alone, away from friends and family? Probably not. After all, Eid has always been about bonding and catching up. But when reality strikes and some of us have to be away from home on this special day, experiences can vary greatly. This Eid, SHOUT caught up with several young Bangladeshis studying abroad about their experiences of celebrating Eid away from home. Here's what they had to say.



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AUSTRALIA

S.M. Shafqat Shafiq is pursuing a double major in Engineering and Commerce at the University of Sydney, Australia. Like in all countries where Muslims are a minority, the local mosque becomes the centre of all Eid celebrations.

"I go to the local mosque at 8 am. We have the Eid jamaat and a little feast. The celebration continues but many of us have work. So I have to rush to work at 9 am and start an 8-hour shift. Most of the other Bangladeshi students who study here work to support themselves too, so I'm pretty sure I speak for many."

Shafqat has spent multiple Eids away by now and he admits that it was really hard the first time. "Gradually, you get used to it. Back in Bangladesh, Eid is the highlight of the year; everyone's cheerful. Here, it's hardly any different from any other day so you really miss home."

Shafqat's sentiments are echoed by Sarah Zaman, who is studying Economics at Monash University in Melbourne. She remembers desperately missing her family on her first Eid away from home. "If you're lucky, you can take a day off and spend time with the local Muslim community so it feels kind of like home. But no matter what you won't have your family here and that stings. I remember breaking down on Skype when I was talking to my family and they were all together and here I was, all alone in a different part of the world."

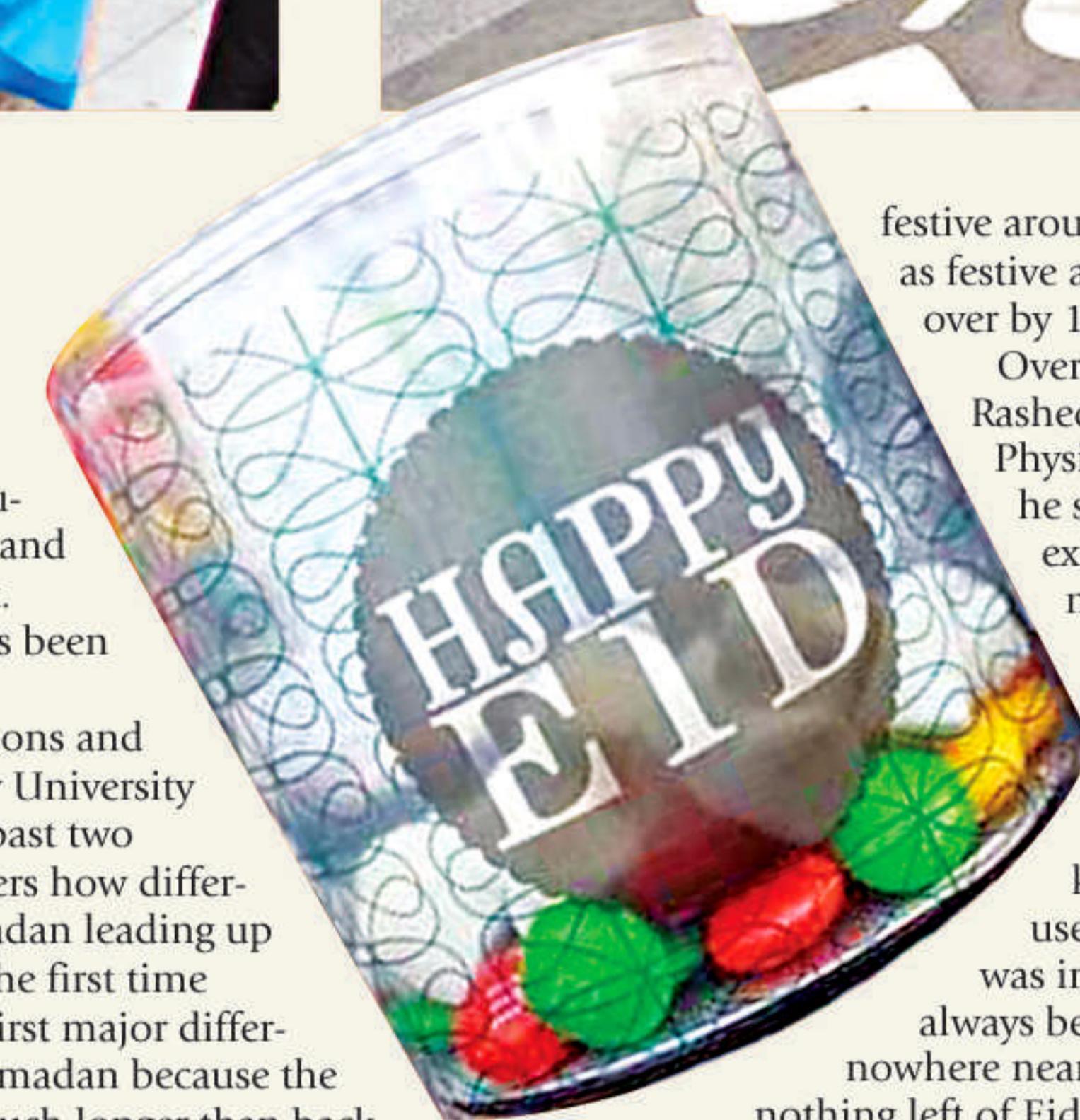
UNITED KINGDOM

The story is a bit more cheerful over in the UK, where the Muslim community is much larger and much more vibrant.

Sama E Deen has been studying Politics, International Relations and Law at Queen Mary University in London for the past two years. She remembers how different Eid – and Ramadan leading up to it – was for her the first time there. "I think the first major difference was during Ramadan because the fasting hours are much longer than back home. Here we fast for about 19 hours compared to 15 or so back home. And although the community is bigger, unless you live in the heart of a Bangladeshi community, like the one in Tower Hamlets, you won't really feel like it's Eid. At least, not like we know it."

"The food here is really different," Sama adds. "You can buy things like *shemai* and such at some stores but they are really expensive so you're left eating fish and chips on Eid, which doesn't really feel like Eid. Back home food is such a central part of Eid celebration."

Like in Australia, the mosque is a central part of Eid celebrations. Muslims of different nationalities gather here and there are feasts and recitals at the mosques along with *Nasheed* (religious songs) festivals. "It's



festive around the mosques but not everyone is as festive as Bangladeshis. Eid celebrations are over by 10 am," Sama says.

Over in Scotland, Eids are even quieter. Rashedul Alam is a doing his master's in Physics at the University of Glasgow, and he says Eid over there is almost non-existent. "The Bangladeshi community is tiny here, as is the Muslim community in general. So compared to England, the celebrations are really quiet. The celebrations are so low key that you could drive by the mosque without knowing something is happening. I used to live near Old Dhaka when I was in Bangladesh and there would always be fireworks and music. Eid here is nowhere near that and I really miss it. There's nothing left of Eid after you're done with the Eid jamaat."

USA

In the New World, experiences seem a bit better than what we've heard so far in other parts of the world.

Anika Hasan is studying Finance at the University of South Florida. She says that having really close friends made Eid much better than she had thought it would be. "I've made some really close friends here, ones I can call family. And they did their best to make sure Eid was fun for me so I wasn't ever lonely on Eid day. But I still missed my mother's cooking. You know what they say, *ammu* is always the best cook."

Ratib Ali, who is doing his master's in Economics at Boston College, echoes what Anika had to say. "Last Eid, I went to a Bangladeshi colleague's house. A few

other Bangladeshis were there too. So it was like a small impression of Dhaka. If they weren't here, Eid would have been very dull."

But our most moving story comes from Masfiq Rahman, who spent a year with his host family, the DeVores, in Lyons, Kansas under the Kennedy and Lugar Youth Exchange & Study (YES) Program. Masfiq fondly remembers how much of an effort his host family took to understand the significance of Eid and make sure that Masfiq wasn't feeling bad about being away from home.

"When I first came here I was worried about how I would be received but they were so warm and loving that my fears dissipated soon. They worked so hard to understand everything about the day and what it represented."

On Eid day, Masfiq's host family listened intently as he explained the concept of Ramadan and Eid to them and at night they went out to eat to celebrate. Their warm hospitality is something Masfiq can never forget. To Ron and Angela DeVore, and their children Sam, Emily and Margi, Masfiq says "Thank you for a new home, a new life and for never letting me feel I was away from family. I love you all."

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Tahmid Bin Zafar spent four years studying Electrical Engineering at the National University of Singapore. Both Eids are holidays there and all the Muslim Students there came together to celebrate the day. This gave the day the "family feeling" many miss when they are away from home. "You really miss your family when you're celebrating Eid here. But the community feeling we have somewhat makes up for it. There's always the

senior *bhaiya* or *apu* who is looking out for you, paying for the food. There are the juniors you look out for yourself. It may not be as festive as it is back home, but we make the most of it."

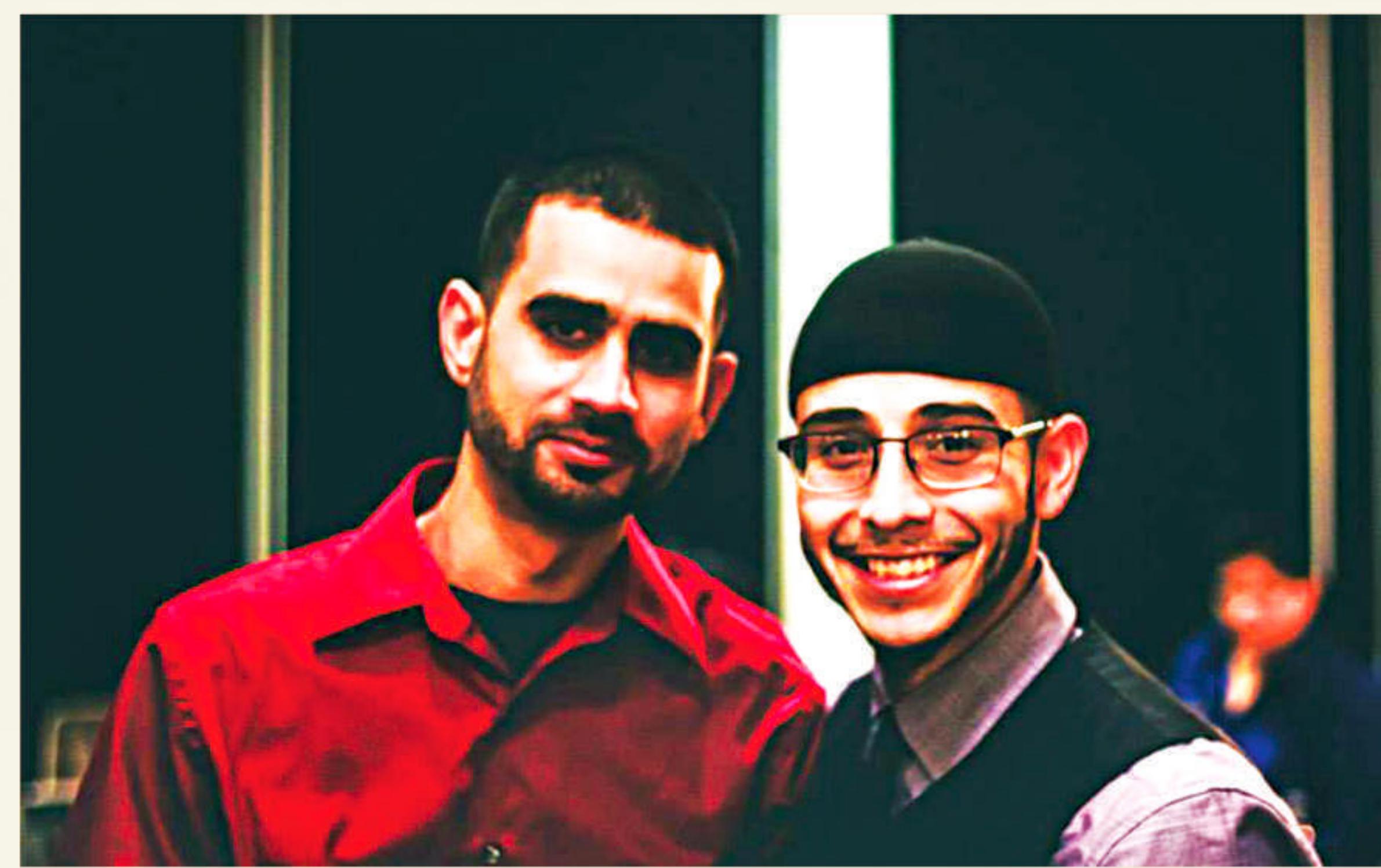
Mashiat Rabbani is studying at Hong Kong University. The Muslim Students' Association arranges several things for Eid, including a Henna Night for the girls and a Halal Food Festival. "There are many Muslim students here and we hold the celebrations at the Global Lounge so that the non-Muslim students can also take part. But we still miss home anyway. I guess you can never replicate that anywhere." This year, though, Eid will be during the summer holidays, so Mashiat fears having to be alone. "Those of us staying back for summer research programmes will be alone. But I guess we'll make do."

INDIA

Rushnaif Wadud studied at Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi, India. With a huge Muslim population, Eid in India is grand and colourful. But Rushnaif realised that didn't make up for not having your family there. "In other countries, all the Muslims are alone. But here, my Indian Muslim friends had their families. I was one of the very few who were alone. That kind of stung even more. But going over to their homes made it better."

Everyone studying away from home admits they miss home. And they all agree it gets worse on Eid. After all, this day is synonymous with friends and family. Keeping with what everyone had to say, make sure you take up the chance to spend the day with your loved ones even more this Eid. In a few years time, you will probably be studying somewhere thousands of miles away. Until then, let's make the most of Eid.

*special thanks to Rawnak Zaheen Wasi



PHOTOS: SHEIKH FARHAN MAHMOOD, IBRAHIM HASNAIN, FAHIM FERDOUS KHALIL