

Once upon a time - when Facebook was not yet born, when people would actually depend on handwriting more than keyboards, when finding a new friend was not just a click away - there used to be a way through which people would make friends: pen pals.

Ever since the dawn of the digital era, multiple ways of making friends all over the world have emerged, but only the greatest ones have stood the test of time, and writing to your penpal is timeless.

Why? I can't think of replacing the personal touch that comes with a handwritten letter with anything else, it's real world interaction. A tangible letter from your penfriend comes with a bag full of suspense, a twiddling of thumbs as one waits impatiently for the letter to arrive.

And I believe so, because my uncle says so.

My uncle, who is now in his 60s, had a pen friend living in India. Apart from sports, the other thing he loved was making friends from all over the world by writing to them. One particular woman left an indelible mark on him, he says. Once he began to interact with her, little did he know the extent to which that correspondence would change his outlook towards books, music, and life. Being a sportsman, he would pass his days playing for clubs and participating in different

competitions and contests. When he was not practising, he would be found coaching the neighbourhood kids. But a ligament injury shattered his dream, and his life as an active sportsman came to an end.

When he almost gave up on life, his penpal, sitting thousands of miles away from him, made him love his life once again. For him, writing letters became another creative adventure - going to the GPO, collecting the packets, hunting down the latest books by Bangladeshi writers for her, sending them to her and waiting with bated breath for a response. The discs and books that she

used to send him, on the other hand, enriched his collection and he himself would discover, in amusement, how his taste in music and books stacked up against everyone else's. For him, this simple act of friendship was like therapy.

Interestingly, they used to address each other as *Mita* in all their letters.

Coming back to the modern days, the daily newspapers and magazines have gotten rid of their penpal sections. But if you Google "penfriends" it will bring you a handful of trustworthy sites that promise to seek out penfriends on your behalf for little or no fee. I know parents who are considering having penfriends

for their 5-year-old as an artistic outlet to keep her away from gadgets. They have made their own rules, though, for the safer and more convenient correspondence; instead of snail mails, they are opting for emails and are planning to carry out this little adventure with an old friend living in Canada who has kids of the same age.

One of my colleagues is also considering having a penfriend through email with someone she met through another friend on Facebook and never met in person.

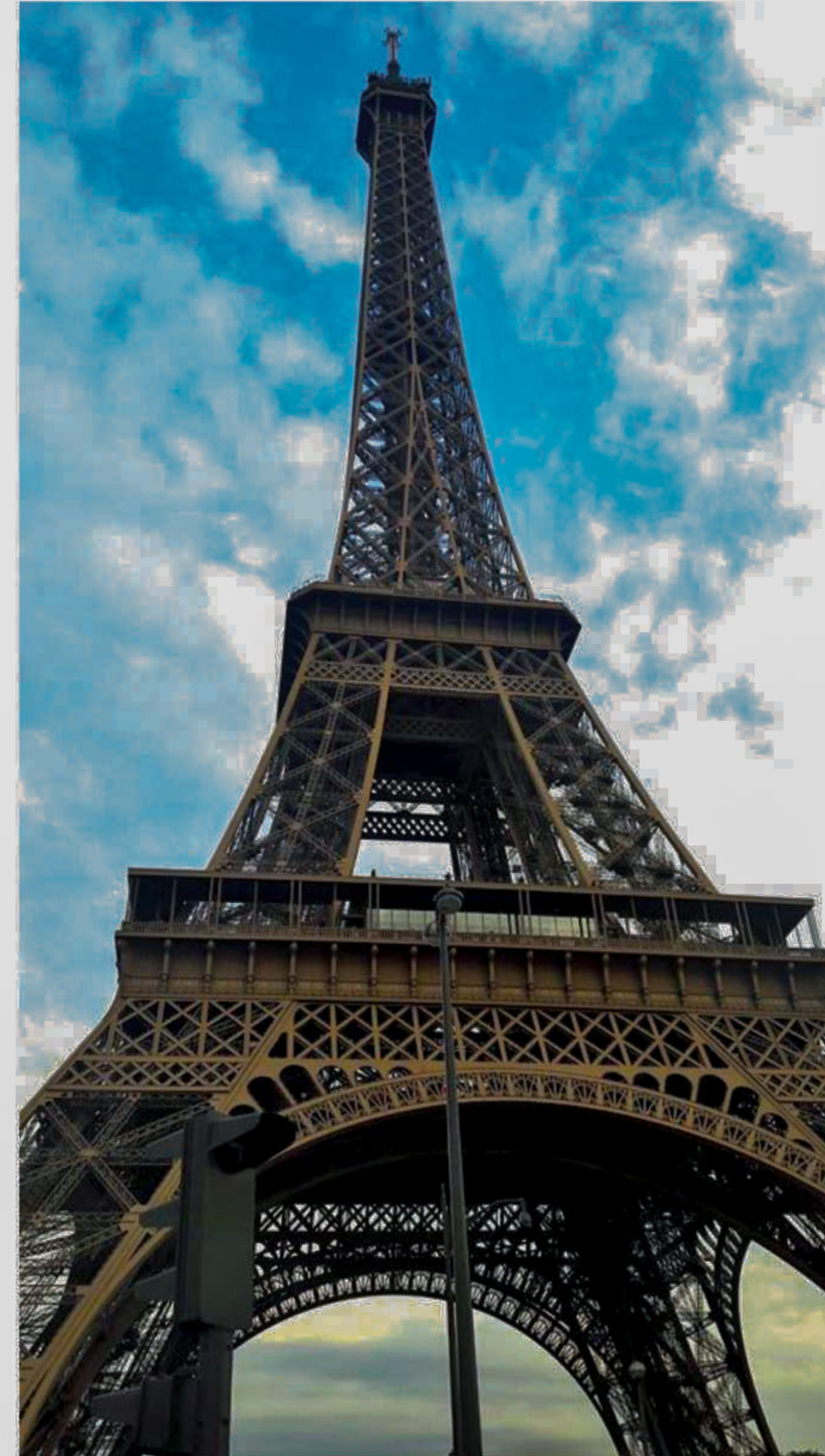
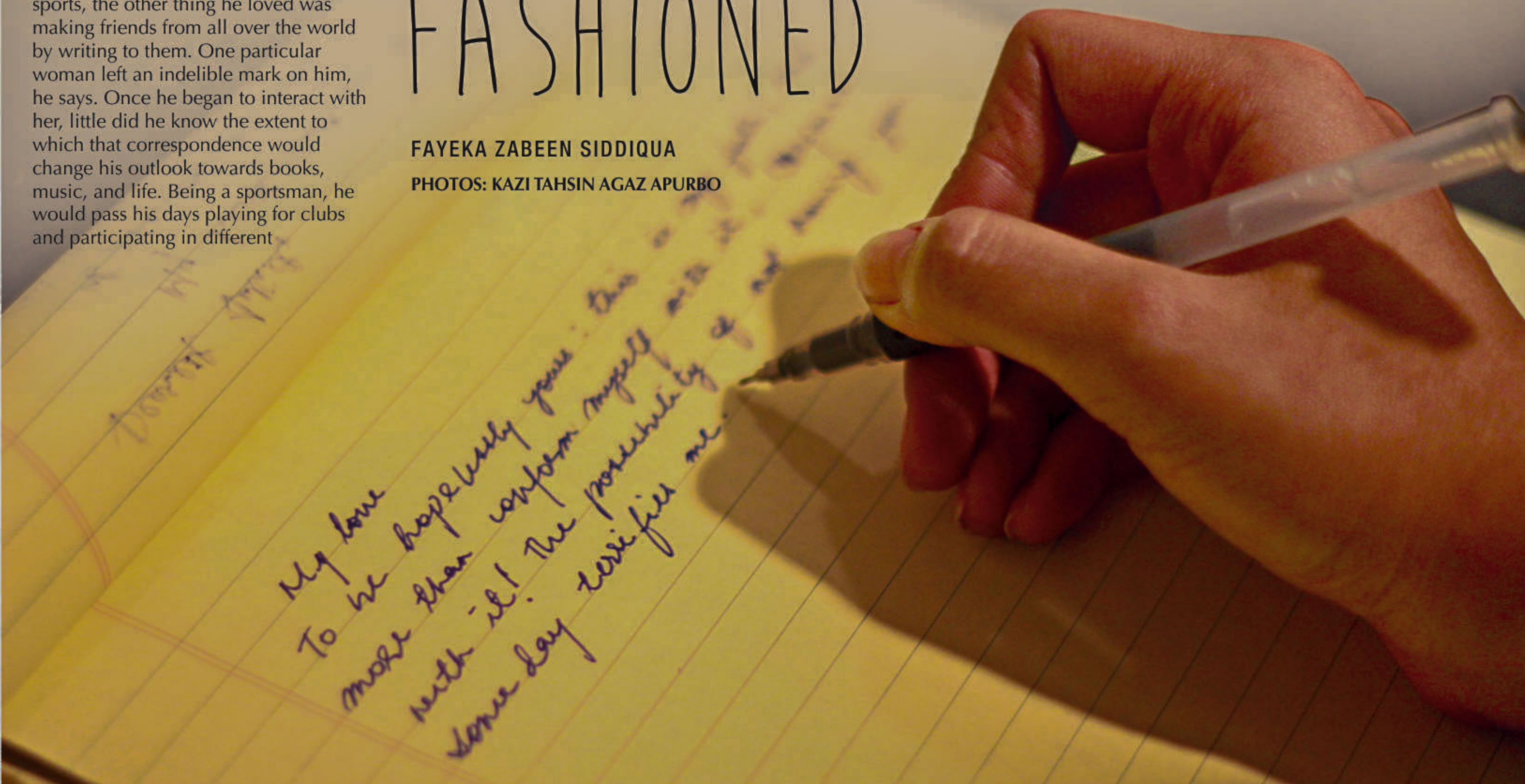
Or you could just do it the old fashioned way, like my uncle did in his days, or like the French Queen Marie Antoinette and British Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, or like Alfred and Klara from the classic *The Shop around the Corner*.

Because nothing beats a freshly delivered, stamped and sealed handwritten letter, written just for you.

CALL ME OLD FASHIONED

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

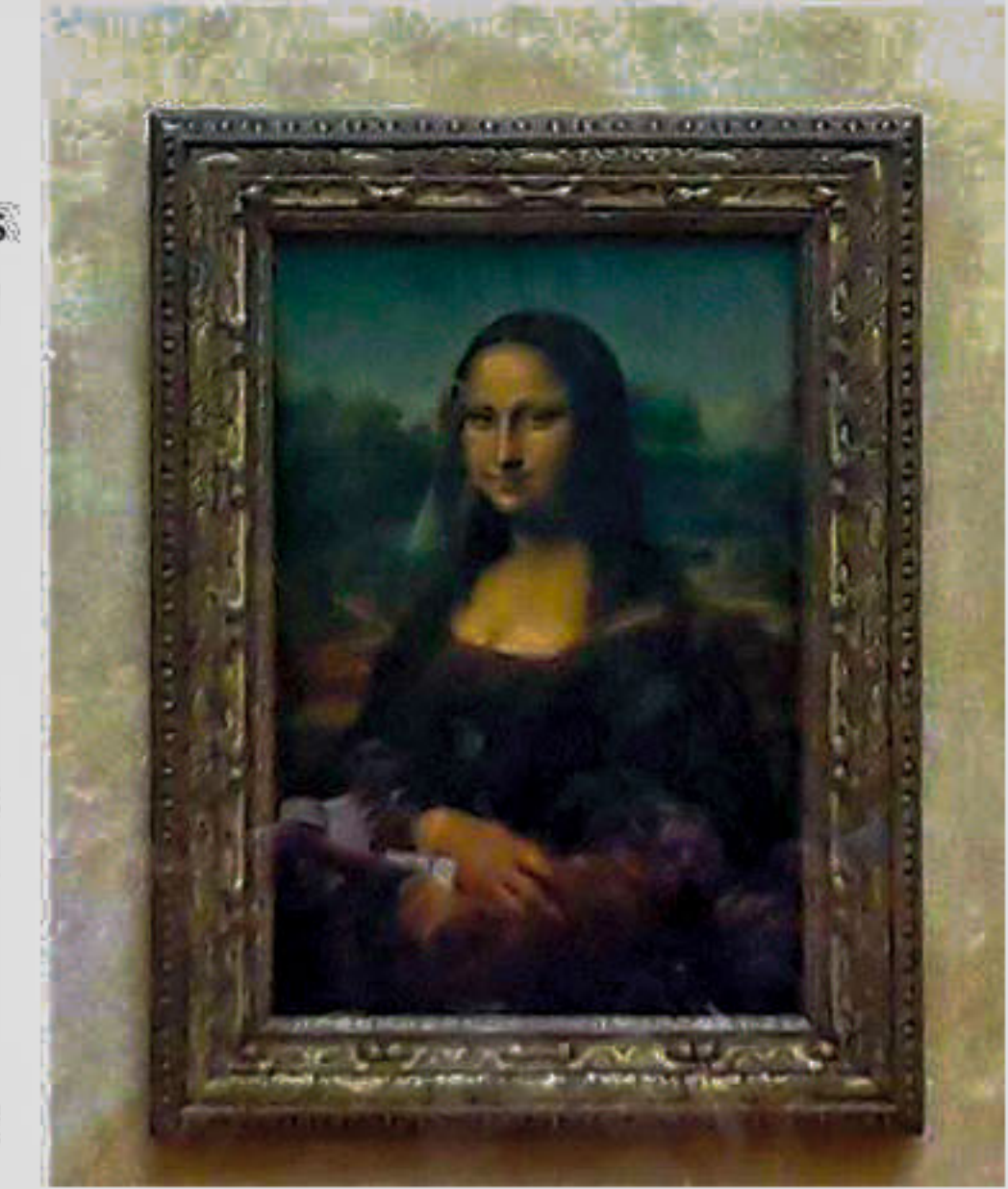


PARIS IN PIXELS

ELITA KARIM

A train ride from Barcelona to the Paris Gare de Lyon, is a long one. Even though we Bangladeshis are used to spending hours on the streets of Dhaka to get to Motijheel from Gulshan, the 6 hour train ride from Spain to France is quite a long one for Europeans. Inside the compartments, while families get ready with tabs, snacks and diaper bags occupying a little more than the single seat designated to each traveller, students and travellers bring out books, note pads, coffee mugs or travel pillows to weather the challenges ahead.

Paris reminds one of the way Woody Allen depicted an age old human flaw (or not) in his 'Midnight in Paris' which is our love for the past. We live in the past, day dream about an era with literature and revolution, of ladies and gentlemen dressed in their bests, frolicking away in bars, coffee shops and grand ball rooms.



One glance and you will find backpackers, sprawled on vibrant sleeping bags on pavements near where the Eiffel Tower is located. As midnight strikes and the lights of the tower are switched on, giving way to squeals of laughter and cheers, the streets come to life, with fire spinners, dancers, mime artists and amateur sitar players.

An eight hour walk inside the Louvre and you find yourself staring at the famous Mona Lisa, created by Da Vinci. "That's no bigger than the poster of Mona Lisa stuck on my bedroom wall," you hear someone quip beside you.

But it is all worth it, you tell yourself. Witnessing such grand heritages, sculptures and paintings which have been around for hundreds of years - when will WE begin to restore, preserve, protect and archive our own artworks and creations, you hear yourself think.

The photographs have been clicked with a Samsung Galaxy J7.

