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PHOTO: KAMOL DAS

"And I realised when you look at your mother; you are looking at the purest love you will ever know."
— Mitch Albom, *For One More Day*

SNAPSHOT

HUMAN RIGHTS

As a result of the global debate on equality and social acceptance of transgenders, the Bangladeshi government now recognises 'Hijras' as a part of the third gender. This is definitely good news, but we have failed to give a clear definition of what constitutes as the third gender proving that they have not really been included in the policies and academia concerning them. This situation leads to obstacles in getting proper health services in both private and public health centres.

Shale Ahmed, Executive Director of Bondhu Social Welfare Society Bangladesh, an organisation working in the country to develop the conditions of transgender people said that a common misconception prevailing in our society is that a transgender person is born with specific genitalia, while in reality; in most cases they identify themselves with the opposite gender. Transgenders born with male genitals but who identify as female usually emasculate themselves through a transitioning ceremony.

As they grow old, transgender people take various hormone therapy regimens and surgeries to align their physical appearance with their identity. In

Bangladesh, there is very poor access to transition-related medical care. Because of the existing stigma persisting in healthcare services, transgender people don't prefer going to experts and in most cases, they seek hormonal treatment without any medical supervision which increases the risks of diseases such as cancer.

Shale Ahmed said, "In our country medical officers and doctors have no specific professional training to support and help transgender people. And that's why when a transgender person visit a hospital, they do not get proper medical

services. For that reason, many transgender people avoid going to hospitals even when they feel seriously unwell."

Even though the lifestyle of Hijras in South Asia follows the centuries-old mythological tradition, their survival is shaped by social taboos and prejudice. The individual lifestyles of transgender people living in our country face discrimination, marginalisation and hostility on a daily basis. This very real fear of dealing with the stigma and judgmental attitude of healthcare

providers keeps this community away from seeking proper healthcare.

Even though laws and public knowledge of transgender issues have evolved over time, limited or zero medical training is offered in medical schools. Our medical curricula is mostly based on the traditional woman to man spectrum, ignoring the unique set of medical needs of people whose gender identity does not match the biological sex they were assigned at birth. As a result, the country seems to be lacking in physicians with requisite knowledge and comfort level for treating transgender individuals.

In addition to gender discrimination, lack of proper knowledge is another barrier to access to healthcare that transgender people experience. The attitude of people towards those who don't fit the traditional binary identities has definitely changed in the last few years all over the world. In order to treat transgender people as human beings and nothing less than that, and to increase their access to safe healthcare, comprehensive transgender medicine training curricula for medical students, physicians and other healthcare professionals is a must need.

LIVING IN A LIMBO

ANANTA YUSUF

PHOTO: STAR FILE

MAILBOX

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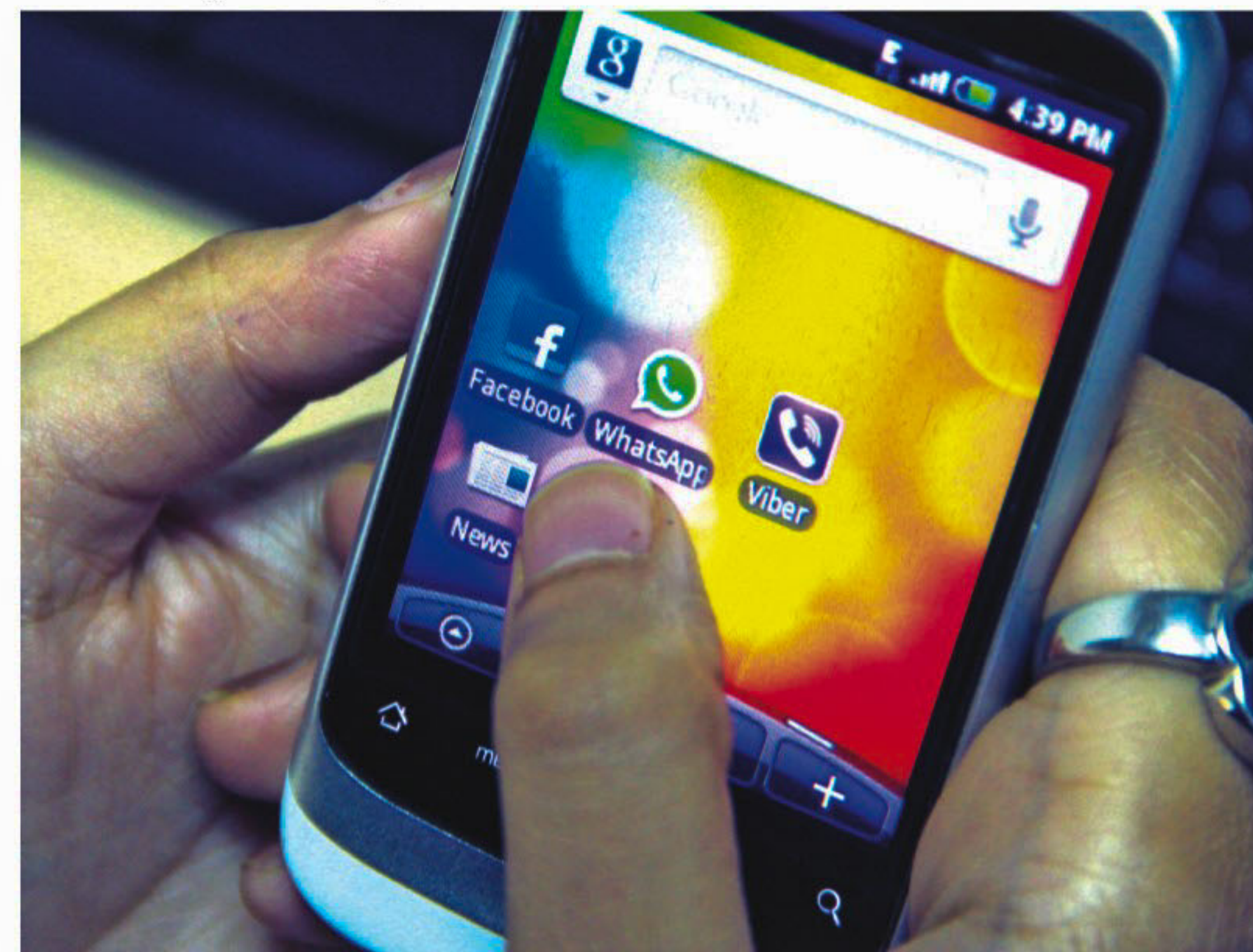


PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

The Power of Social Media

It has been weeks since Facebook and several other social media websites have been blocked in Bangladesh. Besides hundreds and thousands of its users, many entrepreneurs and small businesspersons who used to rely on these platforms to run their ventures have faced severe economic loss. Many popular campaigns which used to raise community awareness on different issues have been foiled by this ban. This ban has created a suffocating situation for millions of Bangladeshis. The government should realise that social media, nowadays, has become an indispensable part of our lives. I would like to thank the *Star Weekend* for publishing a spotlight on this significant issue (published on December 4, 2015).

Ishmam Kadir
Shankar, Dhaka

The Woe of Homelessness

This is a very unfortunate fact that transgender people are considered 'undesired elements' of our society. Most people in our country see them as thugs and miscreants even after social recognition given by the state. They cannot get enough space to live, and they are refused rented flat purchasing. I would like to thank the *Star Weekend* for publishing an article about homelessness of these people (published on November 27, 2015) and I hope it will raise enough awareness to accept them as a part of our society.

Moniruzzaman
Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur

Save the Heritages of Bangladesh

This is regarding an article published in the *Star Weekend* titled "Save the Heritages of Bangladesh" published on November 27, 2015. It is true that not everyone feels a connection with their cultural heritage, but many people do. Some may think that traditions are archaic and no longer relevant, and that they are unnecessary during these modern times. However, it is for sure that exploring cultural heritages offers a robust variety of benefits. Culture can give people a connection to certain social values, beliefs, religion and customs. Visiting cultural heritage sites automatically creates a sense of unity and belonging to our nation and its history. It also allows us to better understand previous generations and the history of where we belong. I would like to thank the group 'Save the heritages Of Bangladesh' for coming up with an excellent initiative to discover and preserve our heritage sites.

Bappi Sadhu
Islamic University, Kushtia



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The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the *Star Weekend*.



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