

STAR PEOPLE



Ahsan Habib

Ask a writer, what's the most difficult genre to write. Ninety nine percent will state: humour, comedy or satire. It surely takes a special skill to nail a punch line in your writing along with a humorous illustration that will make others laugh until their bellies hurt, of course without being too offensive. Ahsan Habib has been playing this game for the last 40 years with Unmad, the first of its kind (in Bangladesh), satirical magazine. Habib's writing career began in his early childhood, as his father would often encourage him and his brothers to write stories, tempting them with rewards awaiting the best work. Since then, Habib has always been engaged in writing, fusing it with his passion for drawing cartoons. The brother of late Humayun Ahmed, and Muhammad Zafar Iqbal – two leading writers of the country – Habib has achieved success in his own right; he is regarded as one of the leading and best cartoonists of Bangladesh. Even though Ahsan Habib and Unmad have become inseparable, Habib was not the magazine's original founder. "Unmad

HAPPILY HUMOROUS

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA
PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

was actually launched by two of my friends, Ishtiaq Hossain and Kazi Khaled Ashraf in 1978. The cartoon magazine was able to draw attention for its intelligent satire. Later, by the mid 1980s, I left my job as a banker and took charge of the magazine," he says. Leaving a secure job for a fairly new venture - many were critical of his decision. But if Habib paid heed to them and turned into just another corporate climber, we would never have had the Unmad we have now. Relying mostly on social disparities and parodies of popular TV shows/films, Habib, along with fellow cartoonists and satire writers, soon made Unmad a household name. "Currently in Bangladesh, we have 30 professional cartoonists, and each one of them has worked for Unmad at some point of their life." As a writer, Habib made his debut with 999 Ti Jokes Ekti Fao. Through his later works, he successfully experienced with satire that spoke about social issues in a humorous manner, establishing himself as a leading writer of the genre in the country. So far, Ahsan Habib has nearly 50 book titles under his name.



He prefers to be known as a feature cartoonist, though. "Most cartoons I draw tell a story. In order to do that, I have to lay out a lot of dialogues. And this is the reason why I prefer being known as a feature cartoonist," he says. When asked about the challenges he faced in his 40 year long journey with Unmad, Habib's face brightens up, remembering the times people could not digest the mockery.

"Once we made some spoofs of a Bangla film that sparked quite an outrage within the film industry. As a result, some of us actually got beaten up by Bangla cinema villains, but luckily, I was not one of them," he laughs out loud. "Another time, someone filed a defamation lawsuit of Tk. 1 crore against Unmad, as he was offended by a cartoon that we published," he remembers. "Later, we were able to make him understand

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that our motive was never to offend any individual, or misuse our artistic freedom. As cartoonists, we attempt to point out the disparities and express them in a humorous, enlightened manner. As long as the message and the cartoon are not offensive, there is no harm in embracing the humour and joining in on the laughter," believes the maestro. Renowned artist Dave Gibson has aptly named this genius, "Dad of Cartoons in Bangladesh." A conversation with the 58-year-old legend helps you lighten up and laugh at life in general. The spontaneity in his storytelling, the witty one-liners that he delivers with a natural flair, and the hint of a smirk on his face – now you know why Unmad is the longest running magazine in Bangladesh and the longest running satirical magazine in South Asia. ■

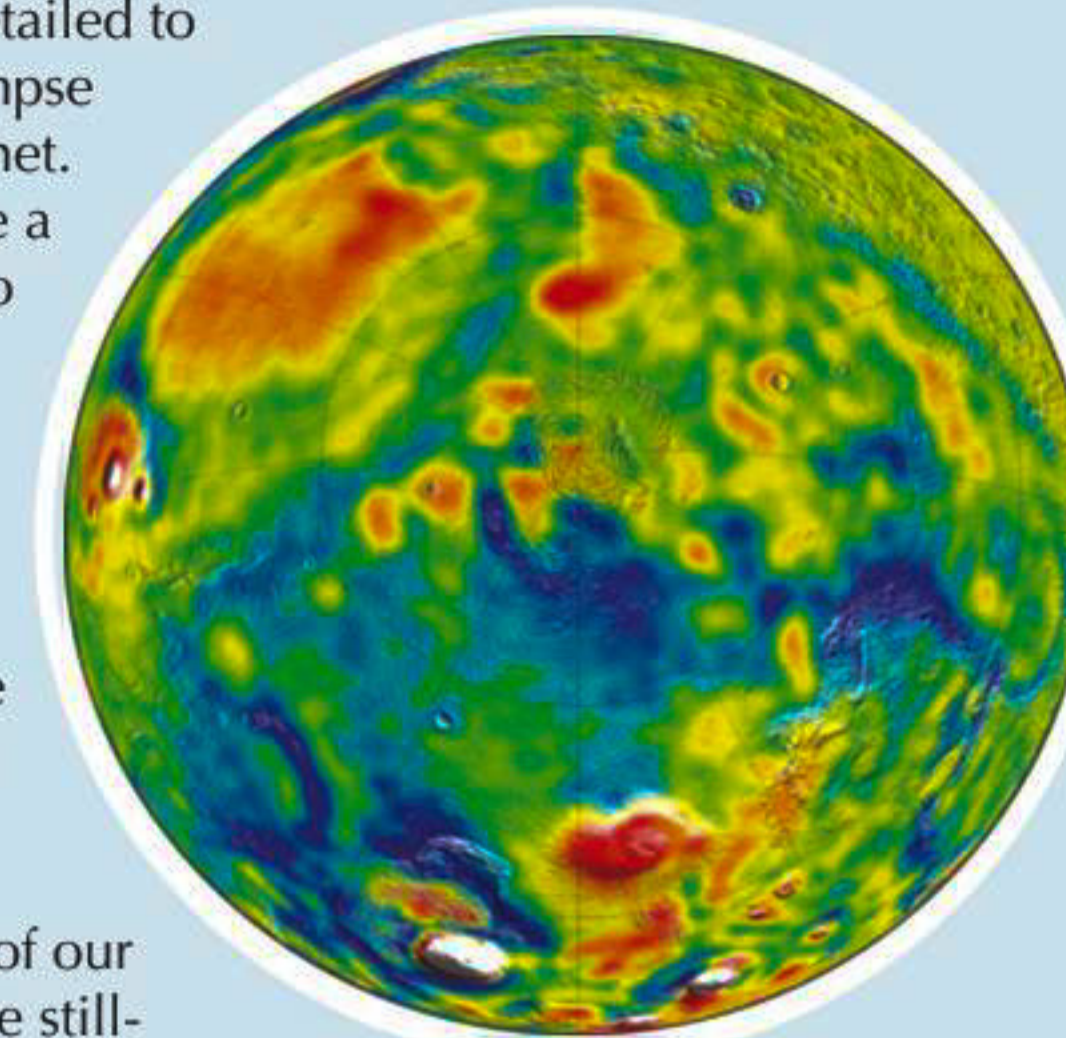
QUIRKY SCIENCE

NEW GRAVITY MAP

A new map of Mars' gravity made with three NASA spacecraft is the most detailed to date, providing a revealing glimpse into the hidden interior of the Red Planet.

"Gravity maps allow us to see inside a planet, just as a doctor uses an X-ray to see inside a patient," said Antonio Genova of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, Massachusetts. "The new gravity map will be helpful for future Mars exploration, because better knowledge of the planet's gravity anomalies helps mission controllers insert spacecraft more precisely into orbit about Mars. Furthermore, the improved resolution of our gravity map will help us understand the still-mysterious formation of specific regions of the planet." Genova, who is affiliated with MIT but is located at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, is the lead author of a paper on this research published online March 5 in the journal *Icarus*.

The improved resolution of the new gravity map suggests a new explanation for how some features formed across the boundary that divides the relatively smooth northern lowlands from heavily cratered southern highlands. Also, the team confirmed that Mars has a liquid outer core of molten rock by analyzing tides in the Martian crust and mantle caused by the gravitational pull of the sun and the two moons of Mars.



US ADULTS GET FAILING GRADE IN HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Only 2.7 percent of the U.S. adult population achieves all four of some basic behavioral characteristics that researchers say would constitute a "healthy lifestyle" and help protect against cardiovascular disease, a recent study concluded. In this study, researchers from Oregon State University and the University of Mississippi examined how many adults succeed in four general barometers that could help define healthy behavior: a good diet, moderate exercise, a recommended body fat percentage and being a non-smoker. It's the basic health advice, in other words, that doctors often give to millions of patients all over the world. Such characteristics are associated

with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease as well as many other health problems, such as cancer and type 2 diabetes. "The behavior standards we were measuring for were pretty reasonable, not super high," said Ellen Smit, senior author on the study and an associate professor in the OSU College of Public Health and Human Sciences. "We weren't looking for marathon runners." From the perspective of public health, the findings of the research were not encouraging, Smit said. "This is pretty low, to have so few people maintaining what we would consider a healthy lifestyle," she said. "This is sort of mind boggling. There's clearly a lot of room for improvement."

Source: Sciencedaily.com

FIVE THINGS

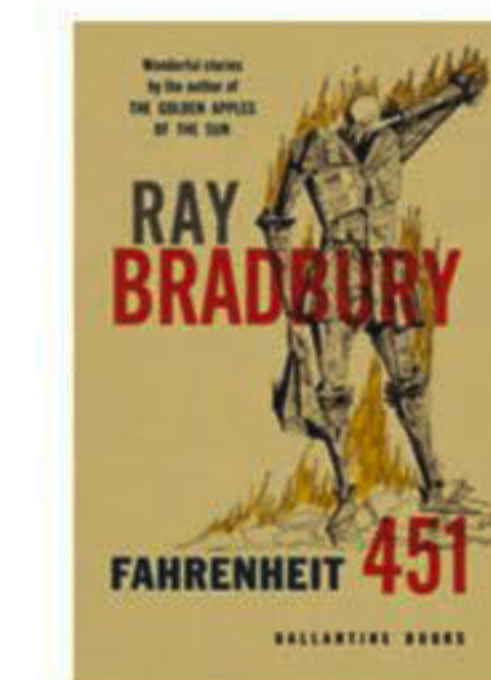
5 CLASSIC READS YOU CAN FINISH IN A DAY

M H HAIDER

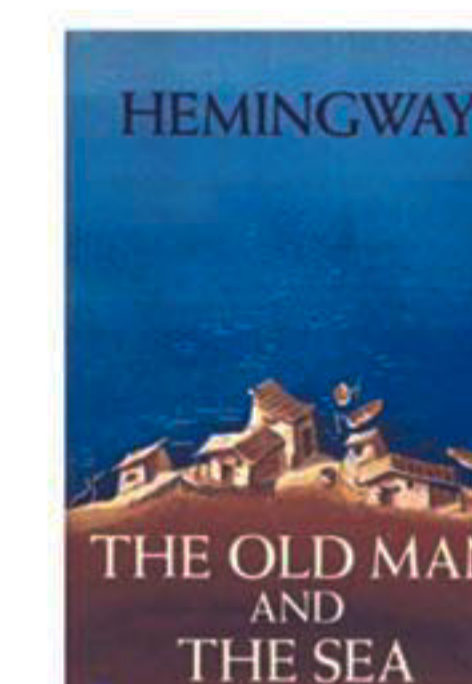
"I don't read as much as I used to," a common grumble goes. One excuse cited is lack of time, especially if you've graduated from university and have landed yourself on a hectic, demanding job. Big, fat books now look a little intimidating to you! A true bookworm never makes excuses, though. But, if your reading habit is indeed gathering rust because of lack of time and energy, here're 5 quick-reads under 200 pages that will rejuvenate the reader in you.



The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka
What would you do if you wake up one fine morning to discover that you have turned into a bug? That's exactly what happens to Gregor Samsa, a travelling salesman. Instead of giving any reason why such an odd tragedy hits him, Kafka focuses on how the burdensome Gregor and his family tries to adjust with this rather repulsive condition. It's one of the best - and the saddest - stories you'll ever read.



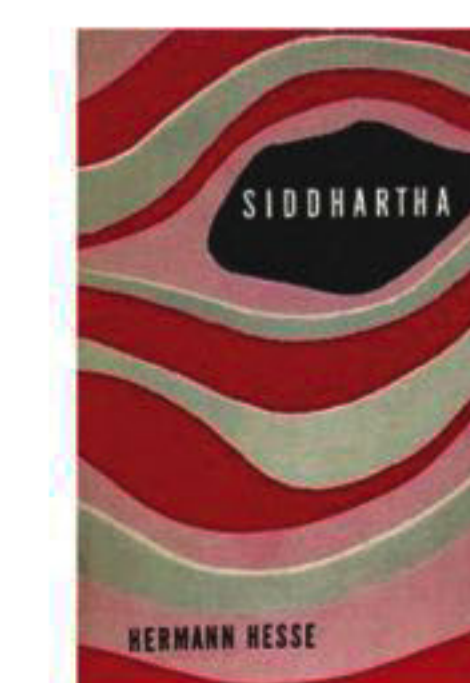
Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury
Kafka burned a lot of his writings, and instructed in his will to burn his remaining works, unread. Book burning has existed for ages, in some form or other. Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 deals with this concept. It talks of a futuristic society where books are banned and the job of firemen is to burn all and any that are found. It's a thrilling read on the topic of censorship. Needless to say, this book is extremely relevant in today's world.



The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway
"Fish," he said, "I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends." It is one of the best works by the Nobel laureate. This small book (about 100 pages) tells a story that revolves around an old fisherman, who does not have luck out on the waters for many long days. And then, one day, a huge marlin falls under his trap. The marlin fights for survival, as determined as the old man who won't let it escape. It's a gripping tale - of the hunter and the animal, of hard work versus luck, and of willpower of the mind and body.



Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck
George and Lennie are an unlikely pair, being poles apart. But yet they are family to each other. Set in the backdrop of the Great Depression in America, the story is about two ranch workers and their shared ambition: to have a piece of land one day that they can call their own. Drifters in search of work, they try to make their way to their goal in this unforgiving world.



Siddhartha by Hermann Hesse
Nope. This is not a book about the Buddha. It is, however, a work of fiction about a man (named Siddhartha) who lived during the time of Buddha. But the protagonist, too, much like Buddha, goes out on a spiritual journey of self-discovery. And it gives you a twinge of excitement when Siddhartha actually meets Buddha and has a conversation with him in person!

These five works of literature are rather 'tiny', and you can indeed finish off a book a day. Nevertheless, they are powerhouses of fiction that will not fail to move you, and perhaps, bring back the enthusiasm of reading that you once had. ■