

SPOTLIGHT

Sadaf (not his real name), a 20-year-old university student was trembling with excitement when he first participated at the secret get together of a faith based youth organisation – the Hizb ut-Tahrir. Little did he know – the group was banned in Bangladesh for committing anti-state activities.

"I always had questions in my mind regarding my faith and where my responsibilities lie," says Sadaf. "What is so enticing in it that enables hundreds and thousands of people to sacrifice their lives for it?" says the first year undergraduate student, studying at a private university in Banani.

When Sadaf shared these questions and his thoughts with a close friend, he introduced Sadaf to senior members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir. "I did not know that my friend was also a part of this organisation. It was through him and his senior friends that I joined."

Finding a potential member in Sadaf, the 'big brothers' of the organisation, who were also students of the same university in Banani, started long, exhaustive discussions on a daily basis about various religion-political facts. As he got answers to many of his questions, Sadaf gradually got inclined to the ideology of the organisation.

One day, Sadaf's mother caught him red handed with some booklets and papers of the organisation. His widowed mother who is also a school teacher was stunned! "I was horrified when I realised that Bangladeshi law enforcing agencies could arrest my son anytime as he was carrying books of a banned organisation," she says. "The next day, I took my son away from home to a café where I could sit with him for a long time and explain. We discussed all the issues thoroughly."

"Finally, thanks to Allah, I made my son realise that without him I could not survive and it is also his religious duty to take care of his parent!" says a relieved mother.

After the long discussion with his mother, Sadaf decided to know more about his religion by reading the Holy Scriptures on his own. He read books, learnt about the religion through scholarly write ups online and finally realised his mistake. "Listening to my mother's request, I broke all my links with the organisation. Eventually, they stopped approaching me with their books and thoughts as well," says Sadaf.

Thanks to this intelligent, caring and friendly mother, Sadaf, a bright young man, was saved from an uncertain and dangerous future.

However, many young people in Bangladesh are not used to a friendly and responsive environment in his or her family. In the wake of the Gulshan attack, this reality became more evident, when news of hundreds of missing Bangladeshi youths were reported in the media and their families assert that they know nothing about the whereabouts of their missing children. However, four of these



YOUNG MINDS, UNHEARD

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN
PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

corruption. In this type of society socialisation of adolescent people always face a lot of obstacles – very little space to express their thoughts within their families. On the other hand, these adolescents enjoy a lot of freedom of having fun and entertainment without thinking of any responsibility.

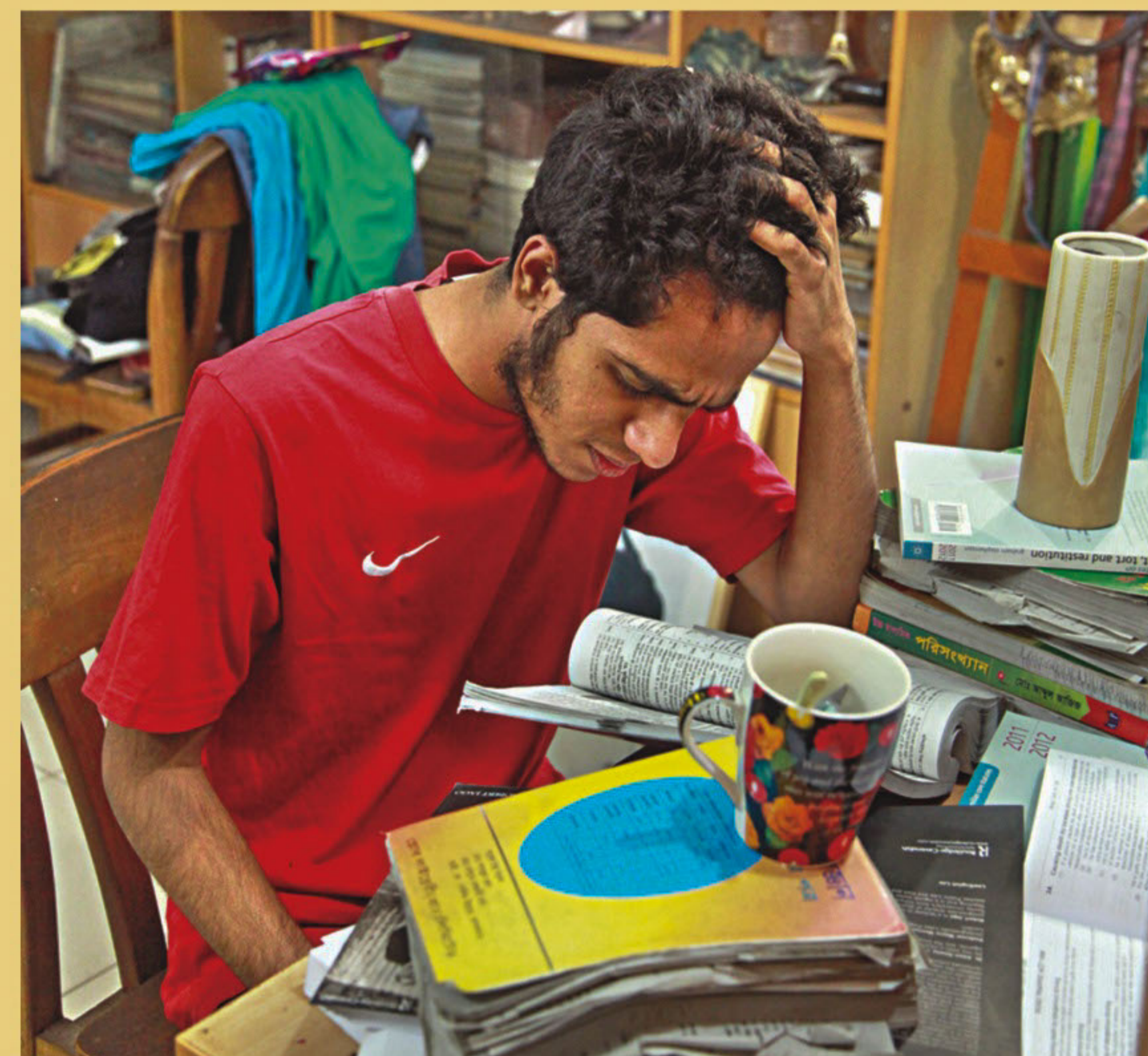
"These realities make adolescents vulnerable of getting inclined to the extreme ideological organisations that welcome and prioritise their presence and give them opportunities to prove their capabilities – something that they do not get in the over protected environment at home. They show the young minds the dream that they can change the world if they dedicate their lives to establish the ideology."

According to experts, the significance of education and institutional environment is indisputable in shaping these young minds, where they spend most of their time. However, the situation in the educational institutions is also not

that promising. Jafar Imam, a mathematics teacher of a renowned English medium school at Dhaka says, "When I see my students I feel sad for them. Most of them know nothing about their country and culture," says Imam. "The pressure of exams, day-long classes and coaching centres make the teachers and students so busy that they get hardly any time to interact with each other except regarding academic affairs."

"I think due to the immense pressure at such a tender age, at one point of their lives, they will feel isolated and suffer from depression. My suggestion to deal with such reality is – the government should make standardised ethics and religious education compulsory for all the educational institutions so that these young minds cannot be deviated by any radical and dangerous ideas," adds Jafar.

Mrinal Kaanti Biswas, a teacher of a renowned Bengali medium school of Dhaka thinks that lack of a standard institutional environment in Bangladeshi



schools contribute to emotional deviation of many students. "In Bangladesh, there are no standard and planned codes of conduct for teachers and students," he says. "Even though, the government has recently banned corporal punishment in all the educational institutions, the problems faced by a student did not disappear. Now in most of the schools, teachers emotionally abuse their students for not listening to their instructions which is even more detrimental for their

into another human-weapon of mass destruction like the Gulshan attackers. Young people like Sadaf need to be heard and their potentials should be recognised by the families, schools and the society.

According to a UNDP study in 2016, people between the ages of 18 to 25 constitute 19 percent of Bangladesh's total population of 18 crores. To utilise this large human resource, it is imperative to develop a coherent, harmonious society where families,



psychological health," says Mrinal. Experts suggest that emotional bullying and punishments can lead a youngster to social isolation which may later contribute to his/her inclination to illegal activities and illegal outfits as well.

Youngsters, irrespective of their race, country and religion, need company of their loved ones, they need space to express their thoughts which will be heard and they need answers to their questions to grow and develop properly in the community. If Sadaf, could not be rescued by his friendly mother who answered all his queries in such a responsive way, he would have turned

educational institutions and communities will work together to bring about a generation of healthy young people.

It is our duty to ensure a culture for our youth so that they can own the society where they live in; they can take pride of their family and the nation which have invested so much in them. This process needs to start within the family where they will find their parents as friends and heroes, from the schools where they will learn the knowledge of harmony and co-existence and from the community where they will find the opportunity to work for people and their contribution will be recognised properly. ■