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The Daily Star
DHAKA, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2016
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NEXT STEP

THE CHRONICLES OF
BANGLADESHI STARTUPRENEURS

With new startups springing up almost every day, the business arena of this country has never been hotter. The passion for entrepreneurship is undying, but so are the imminent challenges facing it. We at Next Step spoke to a few such passionate entrepreneurs who know exactly how to turn any stumbling block into a stepping stone.

Taking the plunge

The startup fever is now ubiquitous, but what is it that triggers someone to get the ball rolling? Of course embarking on this journey bears different significance for different types of startups, quite understandably due to their distinct visions. Ayman Sadiq, CEO of 10 Minute School, an educational website and one of the most talked-about startups of recent times, avers, "Economic, geographic and information barriers were three of the most acute problems on the road to accessing educational facilities that I wanted to address."

But not everyone starts off with weighty approaches though; some just choose to play around with ideas. "A bunch of us were just trying things out like gaming events, and we were loving it! That's how we got the kick and decided to continue," quips Sheehan Rahman, CEO of 7TEEN, a youth organisation.

The stumbling blocks

Entrepreneurship is not a ride free of hurdles of course. Those with a shaky faith in the face of uncertainties will nix their ideas even before making an attempt to materialise them. Make sure you're not one of them.

Right from funding and legal procedures to having the right team on board, the struggle is never-ending. Once you do set things up, the pressure just gains momentum. "Serving customers with consistent quality is the biggest challenge while you're on board. Communicating your vision is not always easy," says Shayeera Tasneem of makeover platform Roopkotha.

But there's also the social/emotional hit that you have to take. Having at least your family's consent to your venture is deemed crucial. "It is important that you don't get bogged down by any social stigma, family concerns, etc. If you do it right, you'll have the greater privilege of inspiring your peers to pursue their dreams," contends Al-Amin Sarkar, founder and CEO of youth employment website Unigigg.

And it goes without saying that you can almost take for granted that there will be economic and political hurdles, particularly in the Bangladeshi context. But that is also why you have endless opportunities here. Seriously speaking—if you can make it here in Bangladesh, you can make it anywhere in the world. As
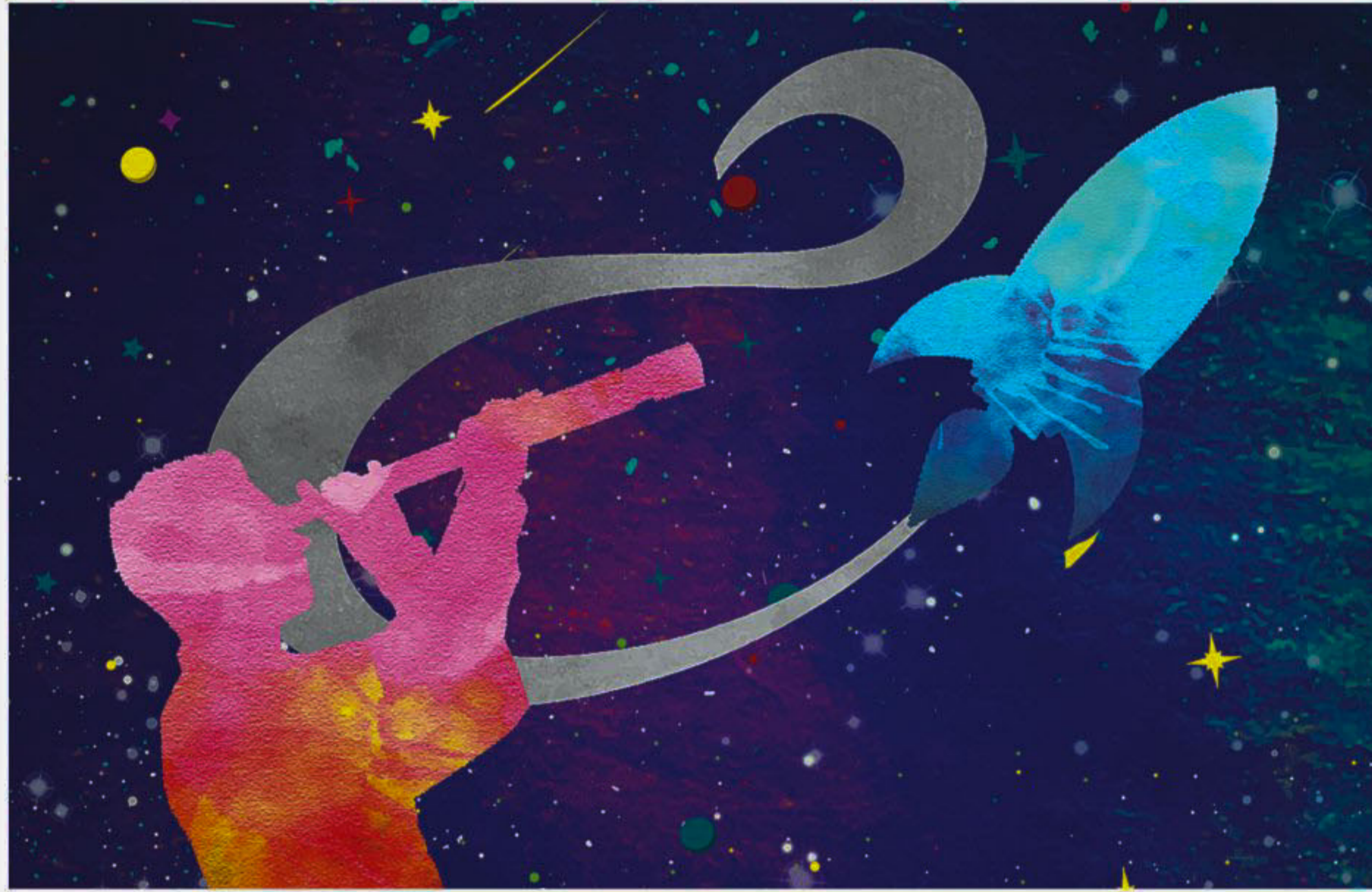
Mahmudul Kabir of Dhaka-based car rental platform Oggro says, "No external hurdles are too big for entrepreneurs if they have persistent willpower."

Daily hassles

Doing a full-time job is one thing; managing an entire startup day and night is a completely different thing. Co-founders will be there, but the workload is often most exhausting for the CEO. Mahmudul Kabir says, "I remember getting orders even at midnight initially, and I had to personally drive them through at 6 a.m. in the morning because I couldn't contact my drivers late at night. But I didn't want to say no to my clients either."

The average day bears tiresome work for almost all startupreneurs, but the extent depends on the type of business you are in. Roopkotha, for instance, is a makeover platform and hence the diurnal workload is less hectic than a full-scale service-providing business. Ayman Sadiq mentions, "My team and I have been travelling all across the country to try reach out to as many institutions as possible. It's a messy routine but it's fulfilling."

Quoting Mahmudul again, "Entrepreneurship is beyond full-time. You have to take care of all mundane details, because at the end of the day, it's your brainchild."

Myths versus reality

Startups tend to boggle most, especially because the misconceptions are many. A common bubble that most of us live in is that your idea will be discovered by someone or the other and thereby you'll make it. As the Roopkotha beauty enthusiast asserts, "You're going to have to market yourself."

Delving into the Bangladeshi culture of startups, you find most young souls imagining it in line with the utopian world of Silicon Valley—and hence the setback is massive here. A giggling Ayman admits, "Our entrepreneurial ecosystem is nothing like theirs. So forget having multi-million dollar acquisitions—get to the field yourself and get your hands dirty." Hence, no matter how passion-driven you are, make sure you consider financial requirements in the initial phase itself to not go broke midway.

Having said so, the world of startups isn't all grim either. It can be just as fun if your will is intact throughout and you don't let the frustration get to you. "Some people think that if they fail, others will question their credibility. This is not the case. Keep testing your ideas, and if one doesn't work, move on to the other," says Mahmudul.

The success recipe—is there one?

By now we know that even though the journey is bittersweet, it is definitely worth the plunge. But is there in fact a secret formula to success? Mahmudul says, "One word—perseverance. Try thinking out-of-the box. Don't quit your idea the moment you hit a brick wall. Keep evolving." Also, ask any entrepreneur and a unanimous recommendation will be to always have a committed team on board. Otherwise you're doomed.

What is more, you must have a vision for the future and be aware of the competitive front. While the Oggro team aspires to become "the market leader in the pre-booking space and a strong player in the on-demand market", the 7TEEN gang says, "We want to be the first name that comes to your mind when you think of any youth-oriented activity. And by youth, we mean its associated energy, not an age."

Hence, for you to avoid burnouts and hiccups in the process of setting up a venture, you must keep on track with the plan, be persistent and keep motivated.

WORDS: HALIMA SADIA
ILLUSTRATION: AMIYA HALDER
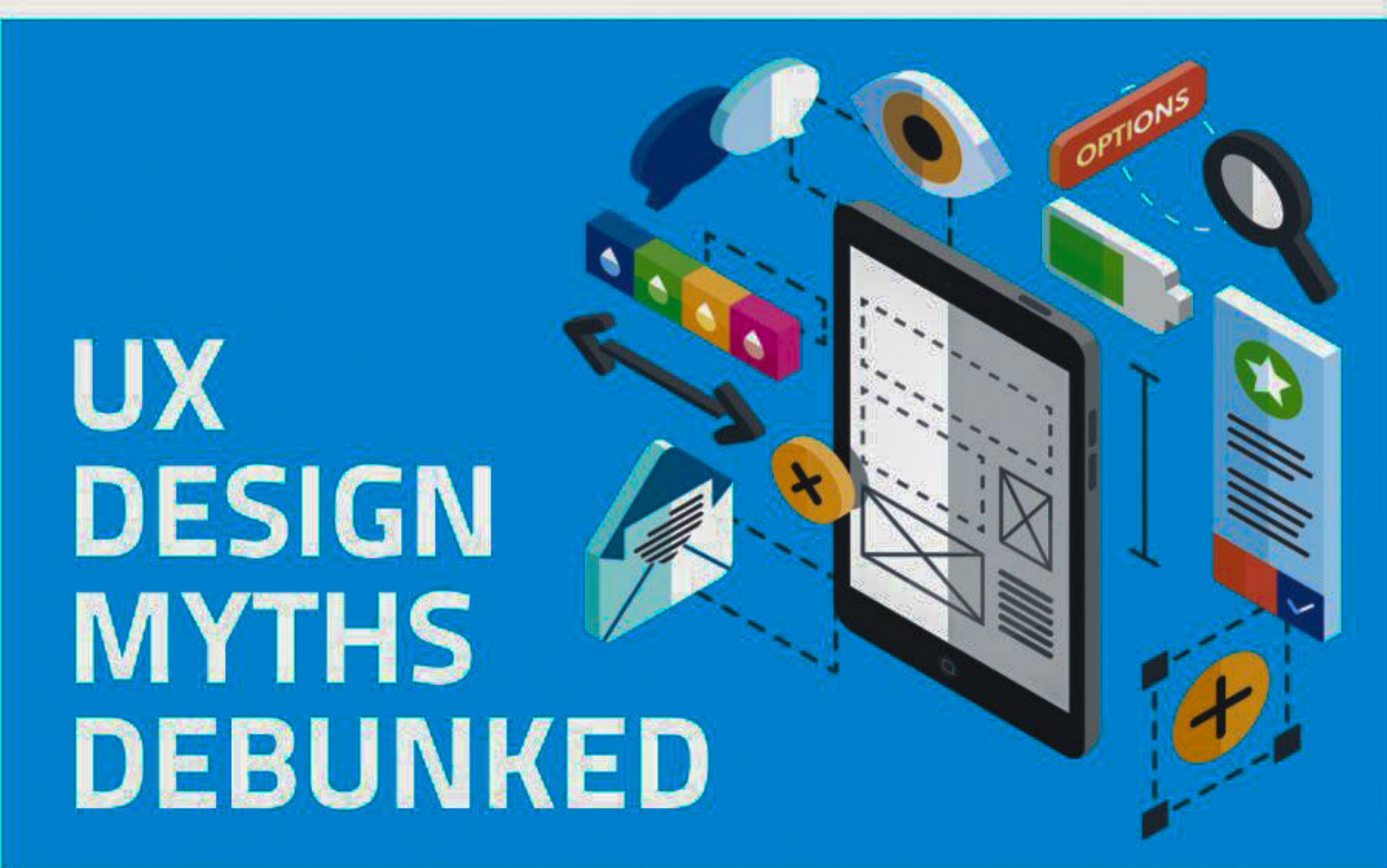
UX DESIGN MYTHS DEBUNKED

User experience or UX design is underestimated when it comes to building a digital product. People mistake it as interface design and end up ignoring the fact that just because something looks good doesn't mean it works as well. If your users are facing issues, that neat stock image and the flashy text effect isn't enough. But the industry is constantly changing and trends that might have worked a few years ago can easily become useless. Here are a few common UX design myths that we need to let go of.

Single-page accessibility

UX designers get caught up in simplifying the process by trying to cut down the number of screens you have to interact with. Thing is, by adding a few extra screens that ask for small inputs one at a time, you take away your user's frustration with having to put in a lot of information at once on a single page. The process is broken down and it feels simpler than having to fill out a form. For example, while signing in to Google services, you have to enter your username first and then your password on a second page as opposed to typing in both together. The key is to not make your users feel overwhelmed by asking a lot of things simultaneously.

Visitors HAVE to sign up

Having a lot of users register for your service when you're starting out seems rather exciting. But if your target customers aren't coming back to your site then the account they created to learn more about you is redundant. Which is why it's important to let your first-time visitors use your product or service or at least certain features of it before asking them to sign up or commit to a plan. You make sure the users who opened an account did so because they liked what you're offering and not because they were forced into it.

Functionality is everything

Yes, we've all heard things like: "Design is not just about how it looks, it's about how it works." But at the end of the day, having an amazing concept is not enough if it looks and feels like crap. You might have taken a 10-year old, cluttered site and simplified it, but there's a lot more to user experience design than just a cleaner approach. Your colour scheme, fonts, visual elements and interactions are equally important in a creating a better digital footprint.

Users don't scroll

Scrolling was less preferred when almost everyone around us didn't have a smartphone. Now that the circumstances have changed, trying to cram important information above the fold is a primitive strategy. Building sites which expect visitors to scroll down to discover specific call-to-action buttons or beautiful product descriptions give you a lot of space to strategically place your content and be generous on the visual side.

Hidden menus

If you have a menu that's hiding more than 3-5 clickables, then you're failing to understand your user's priorities. Hamburger menus are confusing because your visitors don't know what to expect. Will I get what I'm looking for if I click on those three lines? Why do I have to work harder for reaching something I want? If your users are willing to make the effort to go to a hidden menu for a feature, it should be right in front of them.

ABHIK HASNAIN

Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

How to shut down negative people

There will always be the office ranters, the permanently disgruntled employees with their endless list of grievances. You can avoid them or you can get embroiled in their drama, but neither ends well because either you've alienated an ally who's otherwise resourceful, or you've made things worse, haven't helped one bit, and wasted your entire lunch break. Here are five ways to respond to people who whine non-stop without ruining either of yours day.

1. "I'm so sorry that happened to you. Did anything good come out in the end?"

This shows empathy while gently nudging the other person towards more positive thoughts. If nothing good in fact came out of the situation, then you can express your sympathy and change the topic.

Don't directly tell them to look on the bright side because then they'll feel you're making light of their situation.

2. "That's awful, but it's amazing how you powered through the whole thing."

In the same way that complimenting a person on how diligent they are encourages them to live up to that reputation, commending someone on their impressive resilience instils a feeling of self-worth in them and motivates them to be less pessimistic.

3. "Oh. What do you usually do in these situations?"

This will help put the other person in problem-solving mode. Plus, a question like this will definitely divert the focus of the conversation to something more positive, like coping strategies.

4. "Oh well, what are you gonna do. What else is new with your work?"

What is your colleague going to do when you ask something like this? Say "No I don't want to talk about anything else?" This response will successfully force him or her to move on to a less depressing topic.

5. "Can I help in any way?"

Or some version of this. Offer to step in if you can actually follow through. While the venter probably won't ask anything of you, it will tone down the situation in general and help you transition the conversation to something else.

AMIYA HALDER