

| TRIBUTE |

It was one of those “do you remember where you were and what you were doing when it happened?” moments. I was out having dinner with family when I found out that Chester Bennington was dead. Just like that, it felt like my heart had dropped into my stomach. I excused myself, went outside, and just cried—not only was I mourning the loss of one of my favourite musicians, but also those early teenage years spent listening to his music obsessively, relating to every single lyric about loneliness and depression.

The next few hours were spent carefully navigating social media to avoid seeing comments from ignorant people, yet some still managed to filter through. From random people on Facebook to well-known musicians, insensitive opinions were rife. There was the usual drivel—along the lines of “How could he be so selfish?” and “How could he do that to his six children?” There were also predictable jokes referencing several Linkin Park lyrics: “I guess he took *one step over the edge*” (truly the pinnacle of their comedic career!). People repeatedly asked how a man who had so much to live for could choose to end it all. That’s the thing about ignorance: it just doesn’t occur to these people that if

someone who seemingly has everything in the world still commits suicide, then maybe it’s an indicator that what they simply couldn’t overcome was their mental health issues. That maybe even having the nicest house, perfect relationship, and successful career isn’t always enough to beat your demons.

My Linkin Park story is echoed by most people of my age—evident by the almost-identical statuses that went up on Facebook following the news of Chester’s death—about listening to *Hybrid Theory*. I was around 11 or 12 years old and new to heavy music and out of all the music I listened to in the 2000s, *Hybrid Theory* and *Meteora* made up a substantial part. The music itself sounded good, but for me and countless others, there was more to it than that. I happened to discover Linkin Park at a time when I struggled with severe depression, yet had no friends or resources that could help. Linkin Park’s music became my crutch. Those troubled lyrics, so easily dismissed as being too angsty, mirrored what was going on in my own head which I simply could not formulate into cohesive thoughts. It seemed as though I suffered in silence for so long and all of a sudden, here were these songs that so perfectly and concisely



Chester Bennington

PHOTO: COURTESY

illustrated how I felt about anything and everything. It gave me, and so many others, this feeling of comfort—that there were others out there who felt, but more importantly, *understood* what I was going through.

Naysayers will say anything to devalue that experience for us. They’ll

say it’s all mass-produced music and therefore not genuine, and that it’s impossible to find a connection to a band’s music when there are so many songwriters churning out generic lyrics. Maybe these people are lucky enough to have never experienced the kind of pain that causes you to find solace in music. While these songs were never light-hearted to begin with, Chester’s suicide has added a brand-new level of sorrow and morbidity. I felt the heartbreak from a decade ago all over again as I re-downloaded those same songs the other night and listened. When I listened to ‘*Somewhere I Belong*’, I was suddenly 13 again—in my room with my MP3 player, with every fibre of my being screaming along with Chester’s voice, begging to be healed too. I don’t think I’ve listened to anything since that has had such a profound impact on my life.

I recently had the chance to see Linkin Park live, and I decided against it. I took them for granted. I figured they’d be touring again in a year or two and I’d go see them then. Right now I’d give anything to reverse that decision, to go watch one of my favourite bands in the whole world performing the songs I cherish the most. Chester Bennington took his own life but the music he created saved mine and thousands of others, and for that I will always be grateful.

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Somewhere I belong

ZAHRAH HAIDER



PHOTO: COURTESY



OSAMA RAHMAN

“Now I understand
What you tried to say to me
And how you suffered for your sanity
And how you tried to set them free...”
Starry, Starry Night by Don Mclean

Today we break the mould of satire and really talk because it seems we need to.

Zeheen Ahmed, a guitarist for Mechanix, took his life a day after performing for another band, Indalo, at the Russian Culture Centre. In his last moments, he was said to be recording. Zeheen, as far as I knew him, had two constant companions: music and depression. These two would ultimately remain till his very last breath.

The factors leading to his suicide are perhaps many and too complex to summarise. When one suffers from depression though, everything that follows is either a cry for help or an attempt at momentary sanity. Imagine waking up everyday wishing you hadn’t. Imagine believing that your very presence hurts those you love and those that love you. Then imagine having no one to talk to about all these thoughts because people are so prone at conflating sadness with depression.

When Zeheen entered a turbulent period in his life, I slowly, shamefully, made my exit. I made excuses of giving him space, of me being a bad influence, but in reality, it was the discomfort that being around someone in pain causes. We became phone friends, and then soon, into friends who just liked each other’s posts on Facebook. And it was perhaps there that I made my biggest mistake because Facebook manages to mask the uncomfortable truths of our lives all too well. We are left with only the brightest spots that momentarily make the darkest corners look vibrant. Was Zeheen going through depression? I didn’t know because I never tried to. Now I understand, but this comprehension only adds to my guilt.

Lying idle in his house, hearing him play the guitar, almost every day, became a routine, but all I can remember now is the hot bowls of noodles his mother brought us. I don’t remember what we spoke about. What we discussed. I never asked where life was taking either of us. We laughed, we smoked, and we listened to his music. I never saw the darkness in his life, too entranced by the light in his soul. Here was a man who would open his doors to me at 3:00 am without a question asked. And there I was, distancing myself when I should have been there. I cannot claim to be Zeheen Ahmed’s friend. He was my friend.

A LIGHT DIMMED, A FRIEND BURIED

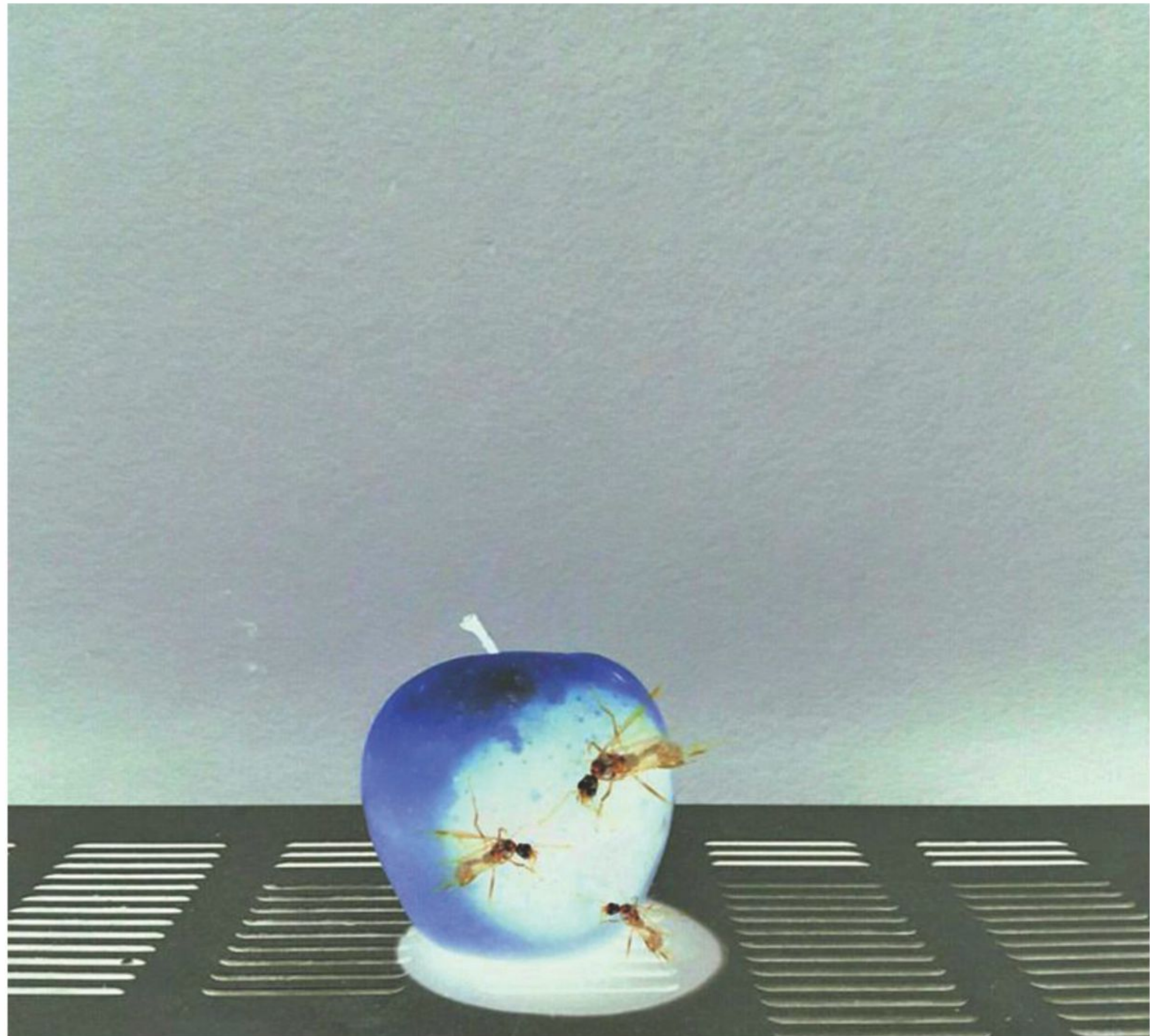


IMAGE: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

Now that everything that could happen did, social media is rife with debate. People ask why. People call it cowardice. People wonder why he did not think about the people who loved him. People look for ways to shift blame: family problems, drugs, a bad breakup, poor academic performance, dissatisfaction, etc. What all that does is undermine the issue of mental health.

Then there are others who take this opportunity to put themselves on a higher pedestal, explaining how they went through very bad times but they still fought and survived. This is when people misunderstand depression for sadness. It is clear from these ignorant and egotistic comments that mental health is something many of us refuse to understand.

According to 2012 police statistics, at least 10,000 people die of suicide in the country every year. While the reasons are many, when contacted at the time, Dr. Mohammad Jahangirul Alam, a

physician at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), pointed out that the most common underlying disorder was depression and 30-70 percent of suicide victims suffered from major depression or bipolar (manic depressive) disorder.

According to a 2017 WHO report, 64 lakh people in the country suffer from depressive disorder while 69 lakh from anxiety disorders. These disorders are not things one could just “suck-up” and get rid of. You cannot forever distract yourself. You cannot smile more. You cannot give it some time or watch a movie. All you can do is live under an ever-increasing burden.

That is what Zeheen set out to do: to free himself from his burden. To call his final act as one of cowardice is to demonstrate the lack of empathy that plagues our society. To blame society is to forget that we are in fact a part of the system that created the conditions we are now fighting against. It is time perhaps

to admit our own mistakes and do our best to ensure that we try our best to prevent such a tragedy again.

Our expressions of love and regret, after the fact, are irrelevant. They are perhaps merely our attempt at telling ourselves that we did love him, that we are good. But Zeheen is no longer reading our posts on Facebook. The dead cannot hear you. His story has ended and for those who knew him, it was an often troubled yet beautiful story nonetheless.

I wish I could rewind time and spend more hours with him. I wish I could do a hundred things differently. But I cannot. Right now, we can all mourn and set out to ensure that the next person in Zeheen’s situation does not find themselves alone.

If you or a loved one is considering suicide, please call the emotional support helpline Kaan Pete Roi at: 01779554391 or 0168870996.