

QUESTION LEAKS

A ROT IN THE CORE

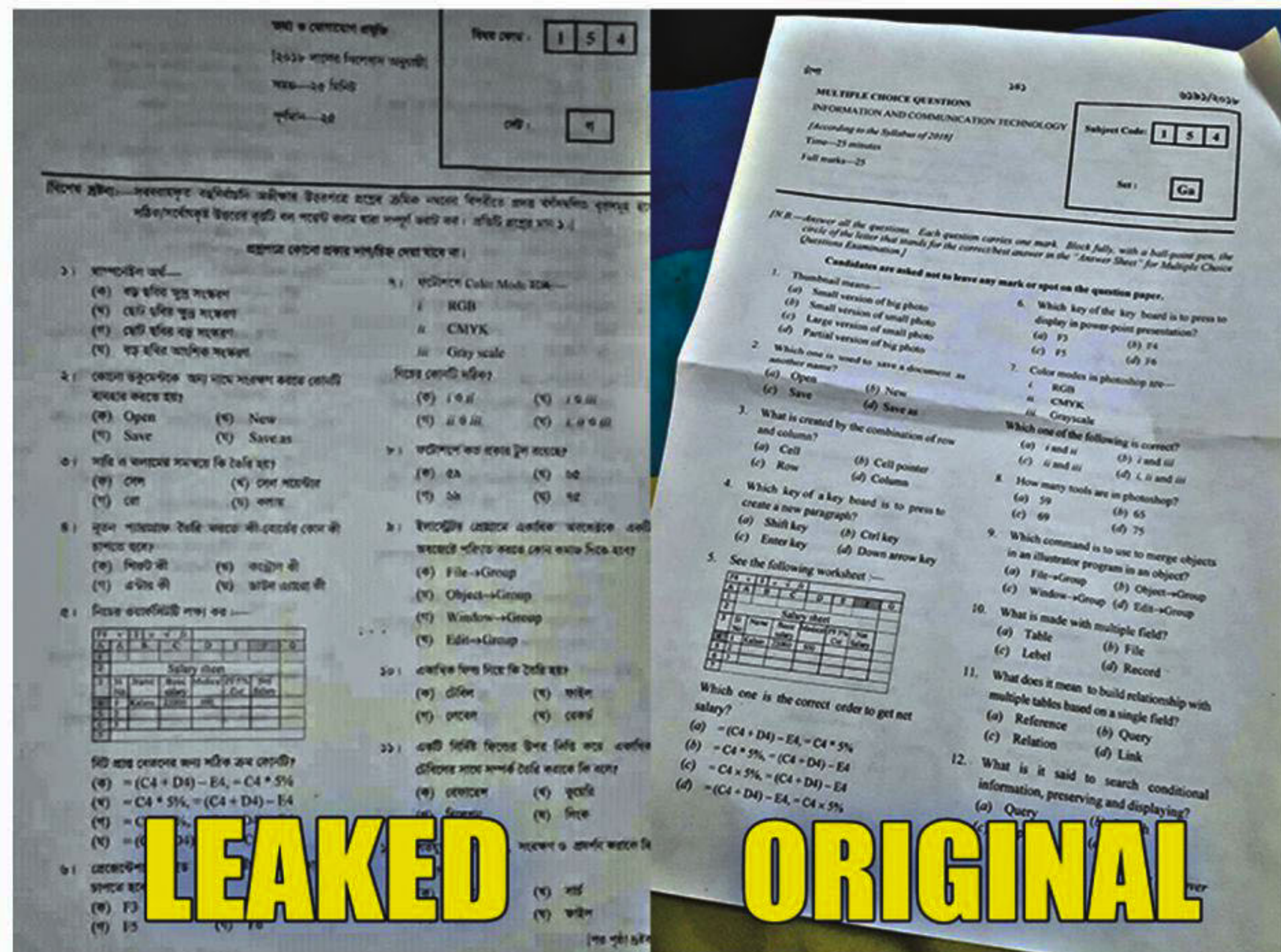
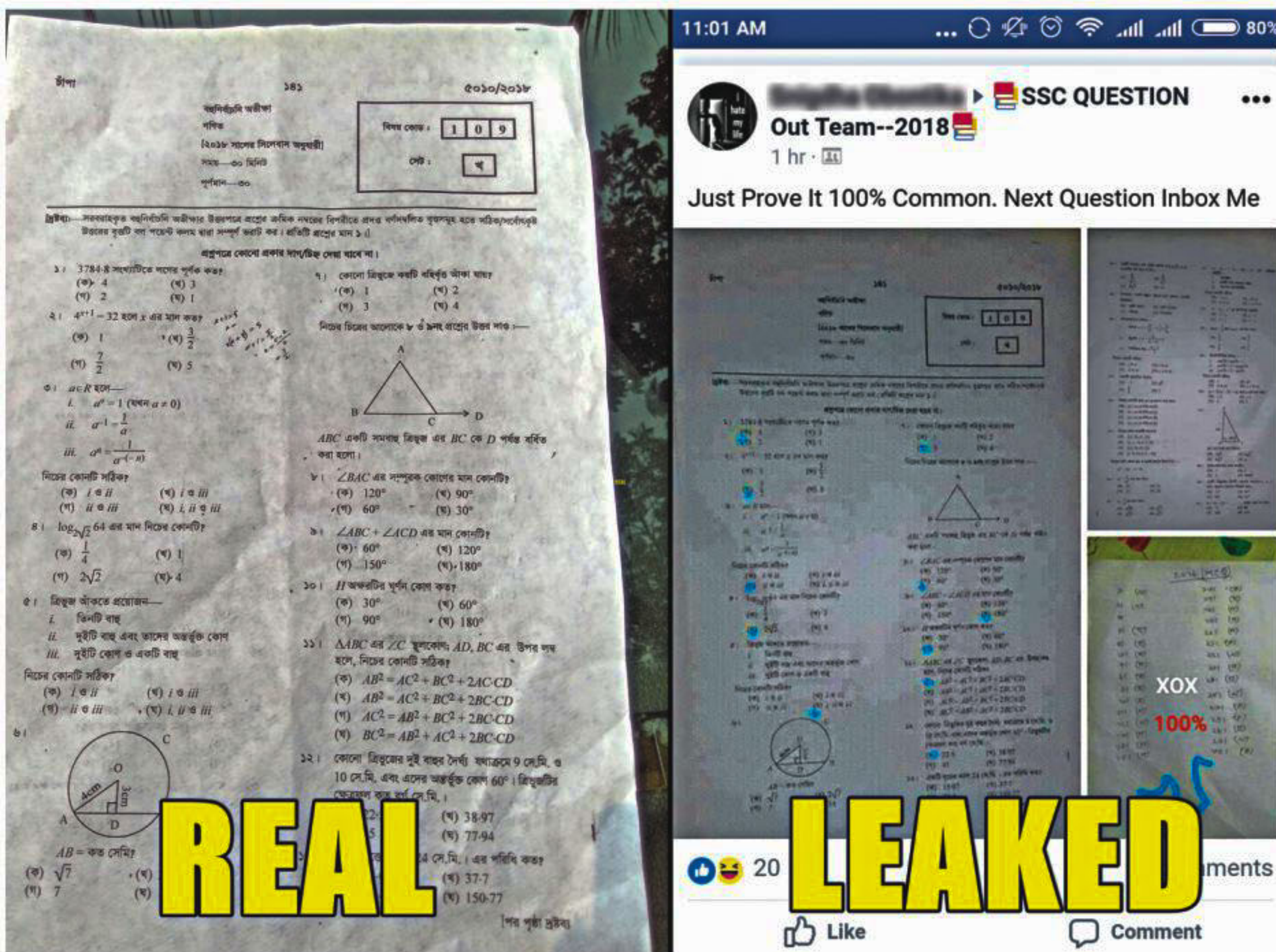


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'Leaked questions' is a phrase that has been in the mind and on the lips of the public almost as much as they've been seen in the hands of students for the last month. It is a national issue that has been overblown, underplayed and even denied from various quarters. One part of the populace whose opinion has been sought less, in my opinion, are the ones directly benefiting or suffering from this ordeal – students. This is an attempt to do just that.

I write from my experience of being part of the most recent batch of HSC graduates, and being familiar with people a couple of years either side of my own age, question leaks isn't a new phenomena. It has been there as a thorn at the side of students for at least 5 years (in its current form of online leakage), but has taken an abnormally long time to find the public spotlight it merits. Whether this delay itself is a failure of deplorable magnitude on the part of the concerned authorities is a question that needs to be pondered, but what is more relevant and even sadder is the response the authorities have come up with when this concern finally did find a spotlight. Initially, an attempt was made to ban the use of mobile devices within 200 metres of exam centres, a futile attempt as almost every school in urban areas around the country are at most a dozen metres away from residential or commercial buildings. A plan to restrict internet usage before and during exams was proposed, but was shot down by public opinion.

During the course of ongoing SSC exams, scores of students have been apprehended all over the country because of possession of question papers before exams. Highly publicised arrests of so called question leak syndicates have been made but that has done little to stop it, and law enforcement has admitted that

the real source remains untraceable. The Education Minister has asked for assistance from teachers and parents, the same teachers and parents of whom many have been arrested for being involved in leaking questions.

Leaking questions require the undertaking of substantial risk on the part of corrupt government employees, and it's clear that they only do it because there is a market for it. Getting your hands on question papers on the morning of an exam can often cost a lot of money, and it's apparent that this money comes from overeager parents who want their kids to bag a GPA 5 more than they want them to not grow up as thieves. On one hand, most parents pressurise students for good results, and on the other hand, some parents splash the cash that creates a market for leakers. Teachers often give a helping hand in this scenario, providing connections and early solutions to the questions that are then fed to the students on the mornings of exams. This is a supply chain that needs breaking, and breaking it will require striking it where it begins, not where it ends.

For every student, any public exam or an admission exam is usually the most nerve-racking ordeal they have ever faced. Most of them would rather prepare to the best of their ability instead of having to deal with a hassle. Raiyan Ibne Hossain, an SSC candidate from

the Dhaka Board, explains, "Having accepted the harsh reality, I'd decided to keep it aside and focus on my own preparation. Since question leak has been common for the past 4-5 years, we weren't surprised that they were leaked this year too. Although it did hurt somewhere in our hearts that someone out there might have seen the questions and successfully answered them, we had to accept it, put it aside, and prepare for next exams on our own."

For some students, this harsh reality has a harsher effect. "I believe my performance in the exams could have been better as I was disheartened the day before with the knowledge that someone is taking advantage of something unethical and illegal whereas most others have worked hard for two years," says a female student from Dhaka, whose name is not revealed on request.

An exam, by definition, is a way to evaluate how far a student has developed his/her academic aptitude. If the system is so broken that it not only does the evaluation inadequately, but also gives young ones an early introduction to corruption, then it is time for all concerned parties to take a long and hard look at, trust themselves, and then the system.

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