

The Forbidden Fruit?

Let the mangoes be



Artificially ripened mangoes are being destroyed in the capital's Kawran Bazar on May 15 after a Rab mobile court seized around 600 maunds of such mangoes during a drive.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BESIDES sending a strong message to shady traders, the picture of RAB destroying 40 tonnes of chemically ripened mangoes felt as if the fruit

was on the verge of taking the baton of the "forbidden fruit" from the "infamous" apple. Mango lovers fervently hope that this batch would be a drop in the ocean and that the overwhelming proportion of the harvest would instead bring back the smile on our faces. For mangoes not only symbolise our summer but are so important to our lives that references to it are woven into our national anthem.

The sticky deliciousness of mangoes heralds a season of lazy summer afternoons. From many years back I remember my delight at the sight of the mango tree laden with the luscious Fazli *aam* in our backyard. My mother would be quick to rustle up *paanchphoron*, mustard oil and *guur* to make the sweet and sour variety and the crystal clear Kashmiri *anchar*. I knew jam and *moroba* from raw mangoes would follow as would *amchhur*, *aamshatto* and more.

In the summer vacation, children usually have a time of their life at their grandparents' home on the suburban areas, exploring the trees laden with seasonal fruits. While the young boys have a time of their lives targeting the juicy fruits with slingshot or pieces of brick chips, the girls gather around them and collect and have them to their heart's content.

Mango is the leading seasonal cash

crop of the northwestern region of Bangladesh and dominates the economy in Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj districts. Farmers are employed for different tasks on mango orchards such as nursing, harvesting and packing mangoes for transportation during the season every year. According to reports there are over 270 varieties of sweet mangoes in the Rajshahi region alone.

With the onset of the Bangla month of Jaishttha, commonly known as "Modhumash", juicy and delectable fruits like litchi, *jam*, *kanthal* (jackfruit), and mangoes have

hit local markets. It is an age-old tradition that during the month of Baishakh-Jaishttha, different regions celebrate nature's succulent gift in many ways.

Mango production has also been on the rise. According to a report in *The Daily Star*, Bangladesh produced nearly 12 lakh tonnes of mangoes in 2016, an annual growth of about 15 percent. On basis of acreage allowed to its production, the rise is more dramatic—over a 50 percent growth to 94,000 acres since 2008. Whereas there were only 12 mango-producing districts in 2005, there

are now 23. Md Sorof Uddin, senior scientific officer (horticulture) at horticulture research station of BARI in Chapainawabganj, estimates the market for mangoes to be worth over Tk 5,000 crore annually.

On the back of this growth, mangoes have become a part of the country's export basket. The mangoes grown in Sathkira such as the Himsagar, Lengra and Amrapali sit at Asda stores across the UK, a subsidiary of the American retail company Walmart. Cultivation techniques have also changed to cater to the export market. The bagging system for

varieties such as Gopalbhog, Khirsapat, Lengra, Lakhna, Fazli, Ashina and Amrapali has become very popular. The fruits are covered with bags when a green mango is 35-40 days old to protect mangoes from pests and hail. It reduces the use of harmful chemical insecticides and pesticides, thus helping to retain the quality and colour of the mango. Entrepreneurs of Rajshahi are optimistic about the prospect of mango exports to England, Italy, France, Germany and other European countries after the introduction of the bagging technique.

With such popularity at home and abroad, it's only natural that we take pride in our mangoes. No wonder the premium varieties are Fazli, Lengra, Gopalbhog, Himsagar, Khirsapat, Ashhwina, Khisrapat, Ranipachhand, Haribhangha, Laksmanbhog, Mohanbhog, Misribhog, etc. Fazli, Lengra, Gopalbhog and Khirsapat have exotic names to go with their mouthwatering taste.

But as the recent RAB drive shows, chemically treating the mangoes is spoiling its taste as well as its appeal.

A disturbing discovery in the recent RAB raid is the detection of a new chemical called ethephon hormone that may be even more damaging to our health than formalin—the chemical that was used previously.

As part of a move against food poisoning, mobile courts destroy several maunds of mangoes that are sprayed with toxic chemicals every year to avoid public health crises. But a disturbing discovery in the recent RAB raid is the detection of a new chemical called ethephon hormone that may be even more damaging to our health than formalin—the chemical that was used previously. Many experts feel that while strict fines and punishments may be a deterrent, there could be a wider effort to enforce these all along the entire supply chain and not just at the point of sale.

Not content to leave it to law enforcement, consumers have undertaken some initiatives which have begun to gain traction. One such initiative that caught my attention was the development of privately owned tracts of mango orchards. In a recent TV interview, movie star Ferdous mentions the Green Dhaka project under which he was offered two *five-katha* plots in Thakurgaon—one for mango and one for litchis. The project is staffed by a private company responsible for the development and upkeep of the orchards, while its owners have been offered smaller plots to enjoy the fruits of labour—quite literally. Chemical-free fruits to enjoy with family and friends, it's an option that would appeal to many.

For the rest who remember days of old times when in-laws and relations alike enjoyed the magical fruit as intoxicating desserts, we ardently hope the strong long-term economics of trading in healthy produce prevails and that we continue to enjoy a fruit so intertwined in our lives.

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means, children and young adults have no real sense of what sex, consent, and rape might be unless their parents are talking to them about it, and from what I gather, they are not (for the most part).

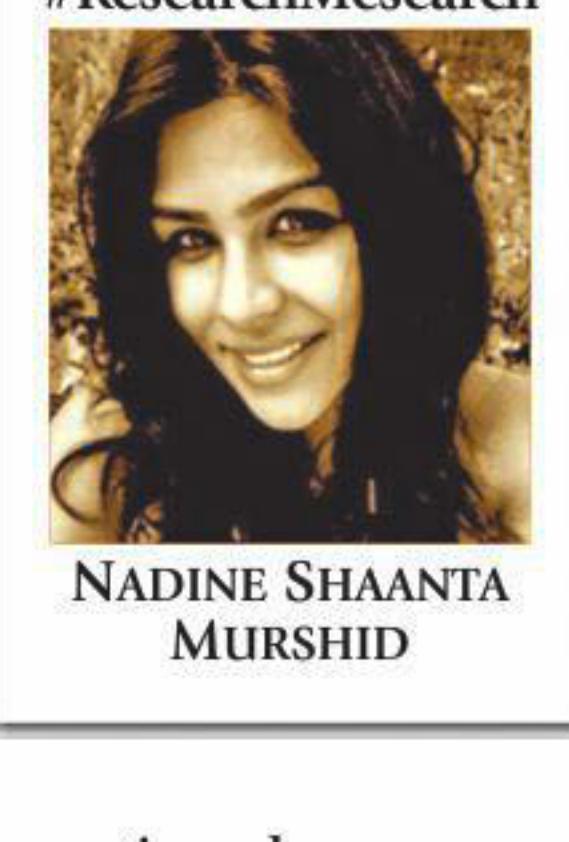
So, the flattening of "violence against women" doesn't help the innocent or the guilty, and I say this, knowing that this dichotomy of victim/perpetrator (and sinner/saint) is problematic, as indicated above, and especially so in a world where certain groups are more likely to be criminalised than others for the same actions. For example, we have recently seen how a low-income man was sentenced to death for raping a woman, while the group of high-income men who raped a woman at a local hotel were not. Similarly, those who experience violence may not be able to get the help they need because of the kind of work they do (e.g. if they are sex workers), their socio-economic status, immigration status, national origin, religion, or ethnicity. Indeed, intersections of social identity, we already know, compound experiences of oppression and associated trauma, which, arguably, is harmful for everyone.

So, when we think about the violent men around us we must recognise that they are not all the same. But, at the same time, we need to understand that they all need help. Importantly, they need to hold themselves accountable, understand the harm they caused, repeat and show contrition, and ask for forgiveness.

And that is what we must demand of the violent men around us.

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The violent men around us



#ResearchMresearch
NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

OVER the last six months I've had conversations with various people about what to do with all the violent men around us. This is perhaps my current burning

question, because we are having to contend with the fact that more than just a handful of men around us have committed acts of violence—if not against us, then against people we know, or people we know of. We no longer have to read the news to gauge how pervasive violence is. It is out there for all to see. Unless your eyes are closed.

And when I say that, I am certain that some people think I am a rabid man-hating feminist. Others think I'm being hyperbolic. While others think I am personally motivated to shame men who abuse women. Still others wonder what I mean when I say violence.

And that last bit is what requires a response.

Let's start with the statistics. Recent reports from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics suggest that 80 percent of all women experience some form of violence. This means almost every other woman we come across on a daily basis has been exposed to some form of violence in their lifetimes. But when I say "violence" people may not recognise all the forms of violence that exist. And there's a reason why. And the reason is this: the hegemonic view of violence, particularly violence experienced by women, is framed as "violence against women." But,

violence does not occur passively; there are actors involved in the perpetration of this violence, as Jackson Katz says.

The hegemonic construction of "violence against women" flattens the content of violence as a construct. This kind of flattening makes all kinds of infractions from forcible kiss to verbal abuse to sexual harassment to coercive rape and violent rape seem the same. And that is a problem. Why? Because they're not the same, and making them seem the same creates confusion and harm. Because when they seem the same, we are unable to understand the depth and the breadth of violence that permeates across our society, unless we talk in specifics—specifics that make violence seem like an individual level problem, masking the pervasiveness of it.

The construction of "violence against women" makes it difficult to examine how different types of violence are differently produced. For example, the reasons for which rape is a weapon of war are very different from how a forcible kiss can take place—both important, but we need to have separate conversations about them. Scholars and practitioners alike conceptualise different types of violence—physical, emotional, verbal, financial, symbolic among others—because it is now widely understood that the effects of each type of violence are different as well. For example, emotional or psychological violence is strongly associated with developing mental health disorders, which, some scholars have shown, does not hold true when individuals experience physical violence.

So why does mainstream media view violence as an all-inclusive construct?

Because, language, as a culturally

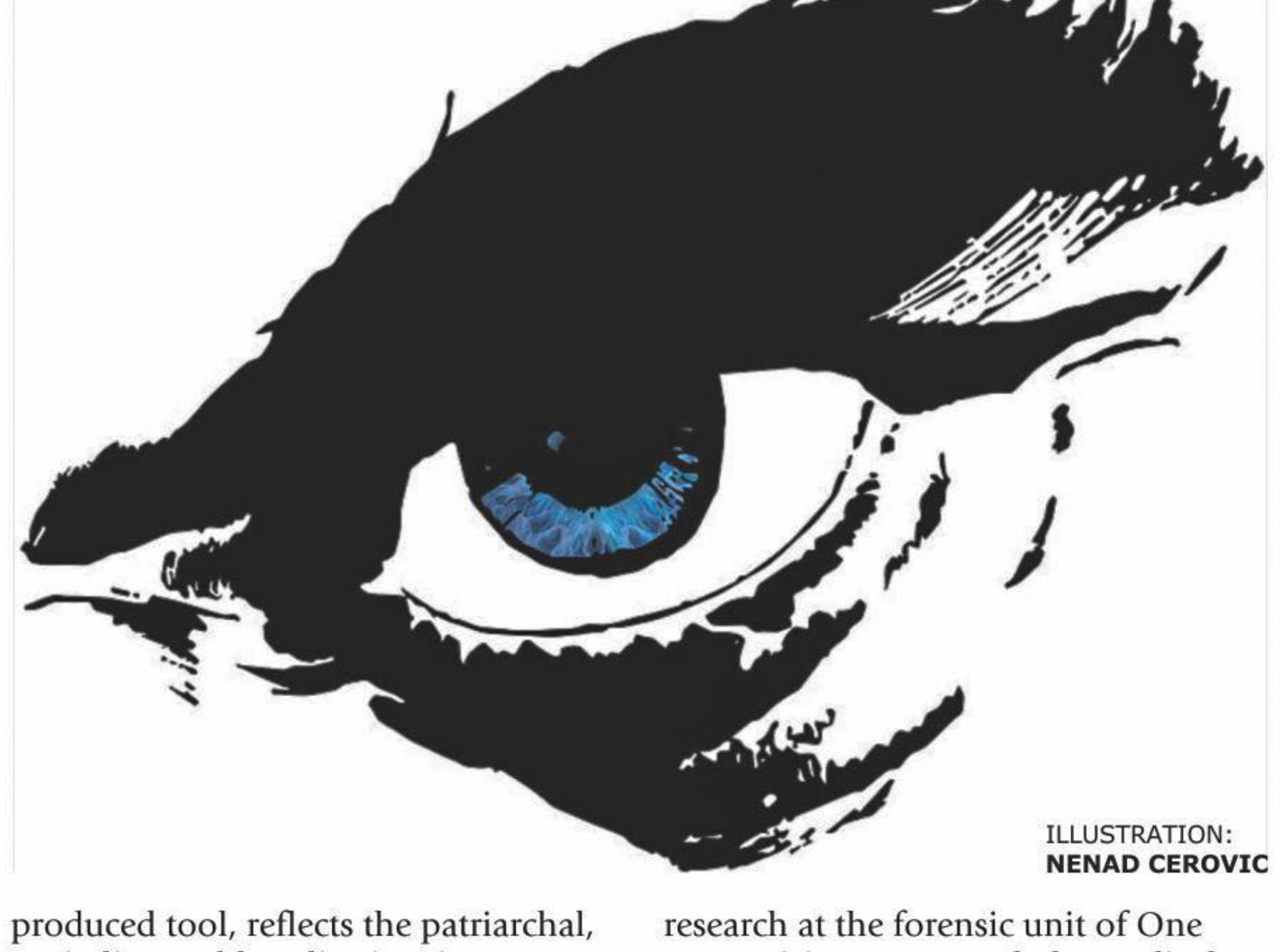


ILLUSTRATION: NENAD CEROVIC

produced tool, reflects the patriarchal, capitalist world we live in—it serves patriarchy when violence is obscured and when we are confused about what constitutes violence and what doesn't. As Price (2012) says, the narrative of violence focuses on domestic violence, or as Zizek says, focuses on wars. So when we hear the word "violence" we don't think of sexual misconduct by a professor, we don't think of sexual harassment on the streets, we don't think of coercive rape. And in doing so, we pretend that these types of violence don't exist; in other words, we obscure them. This protects abusive men. And maintains patriarchy. Violence remains a tool of power and control.

On the flipside, however, such obfuscation of violence may make it difficult to understand consent. Let me share an example that Shahana Siddiqui, a PhD student conducting

research at the forensic unit of One Stop Crisis Centre at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital, shared with me. She found that a fraction of the women who sought help from the crisis centre were women who were in relationships with men who had sex with them and left them. To them, this abandonment was a violation—a violation of trust and their bodies—but they framed this violation as rape. So, the question arises: what is rape? If it wasn't rape when they had sex, can it be rape because promises were broken? I would say, no, because there is a difference between regret and rape, even exploitation and rape, and these distinctions are important to understand. So why the misconception? I would argue, the confusion about what rape is, is structurally produced, given the lack of sex education in Bangladesh, which

A WORD A DAY



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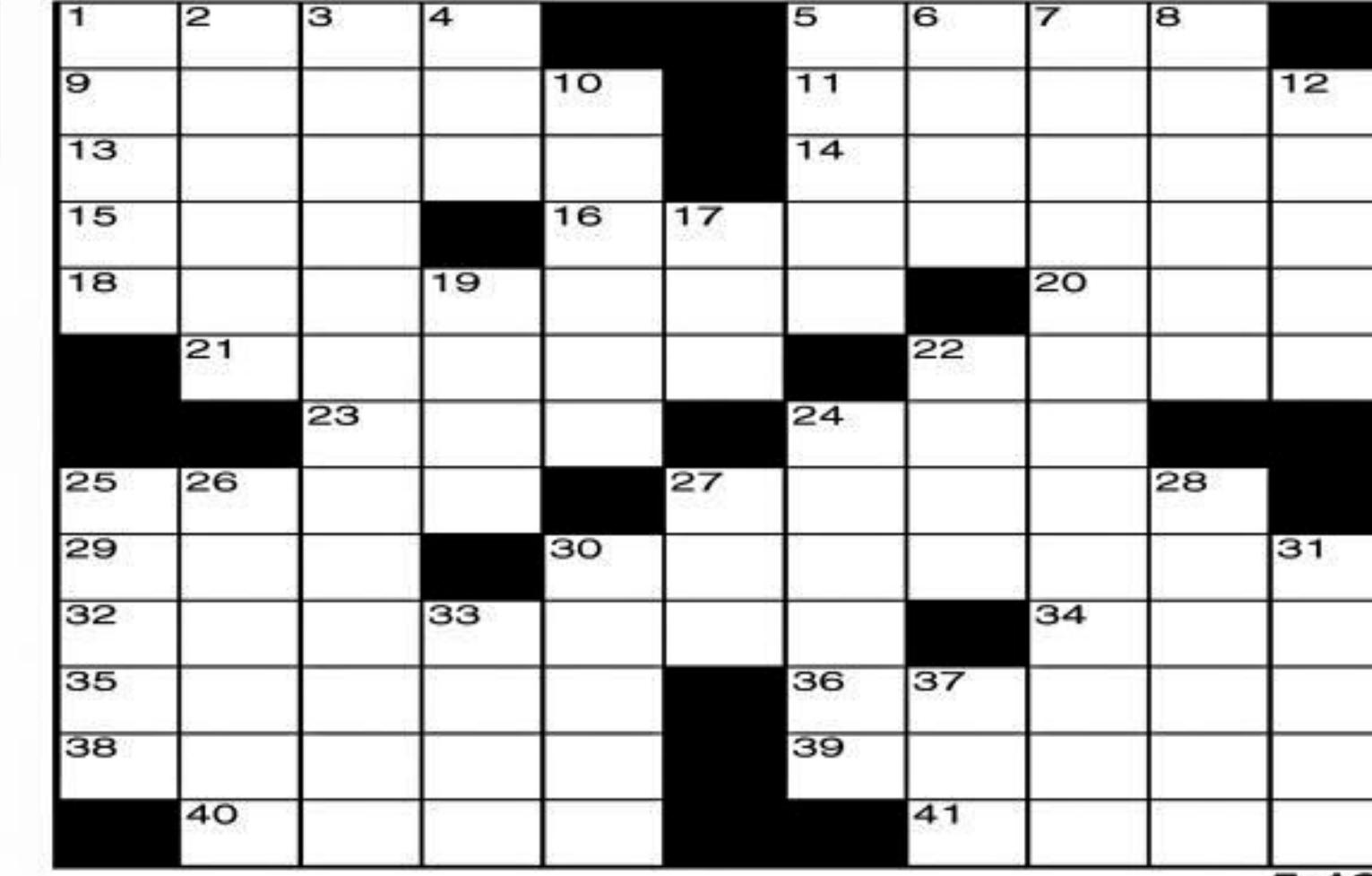
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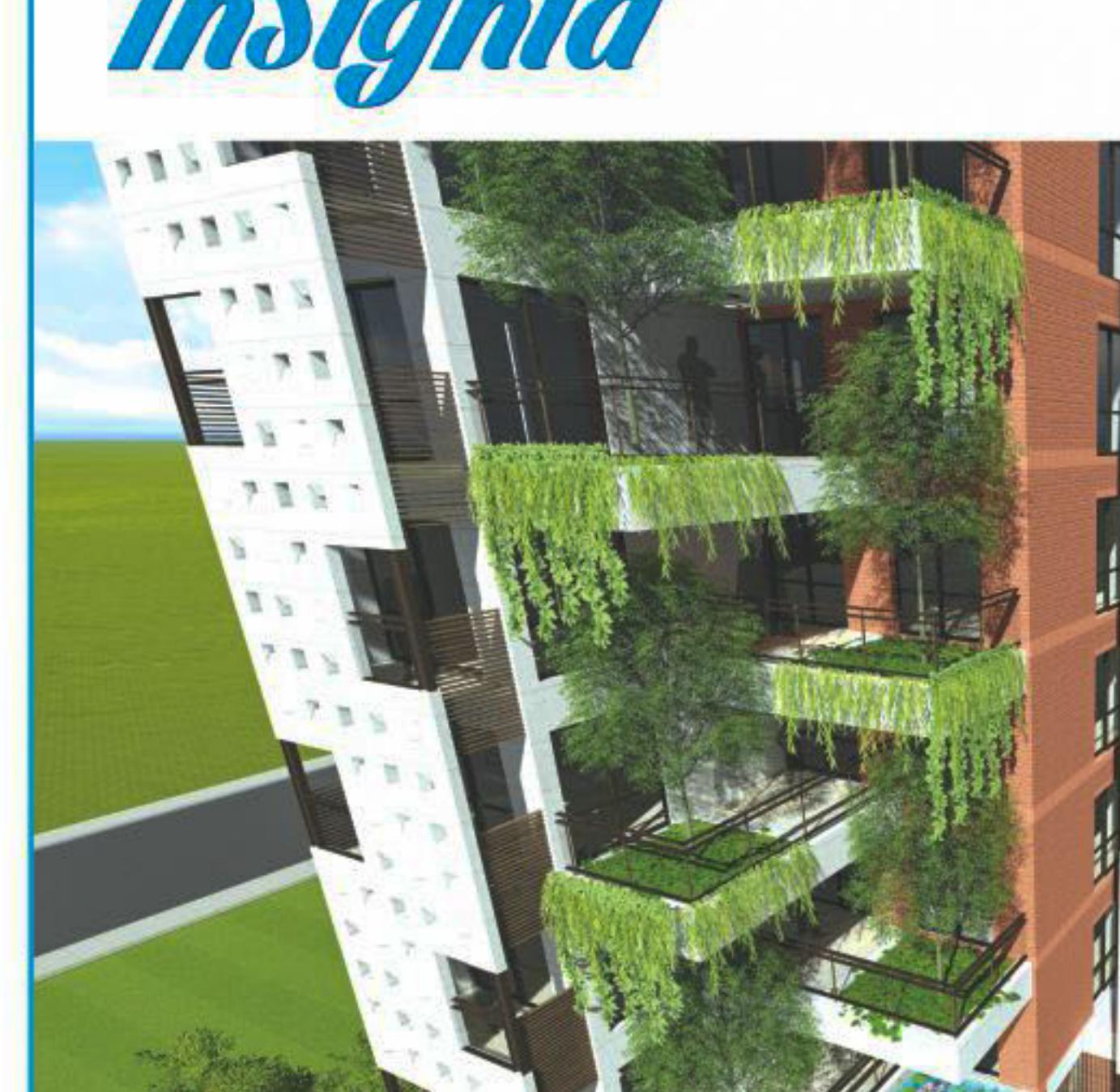
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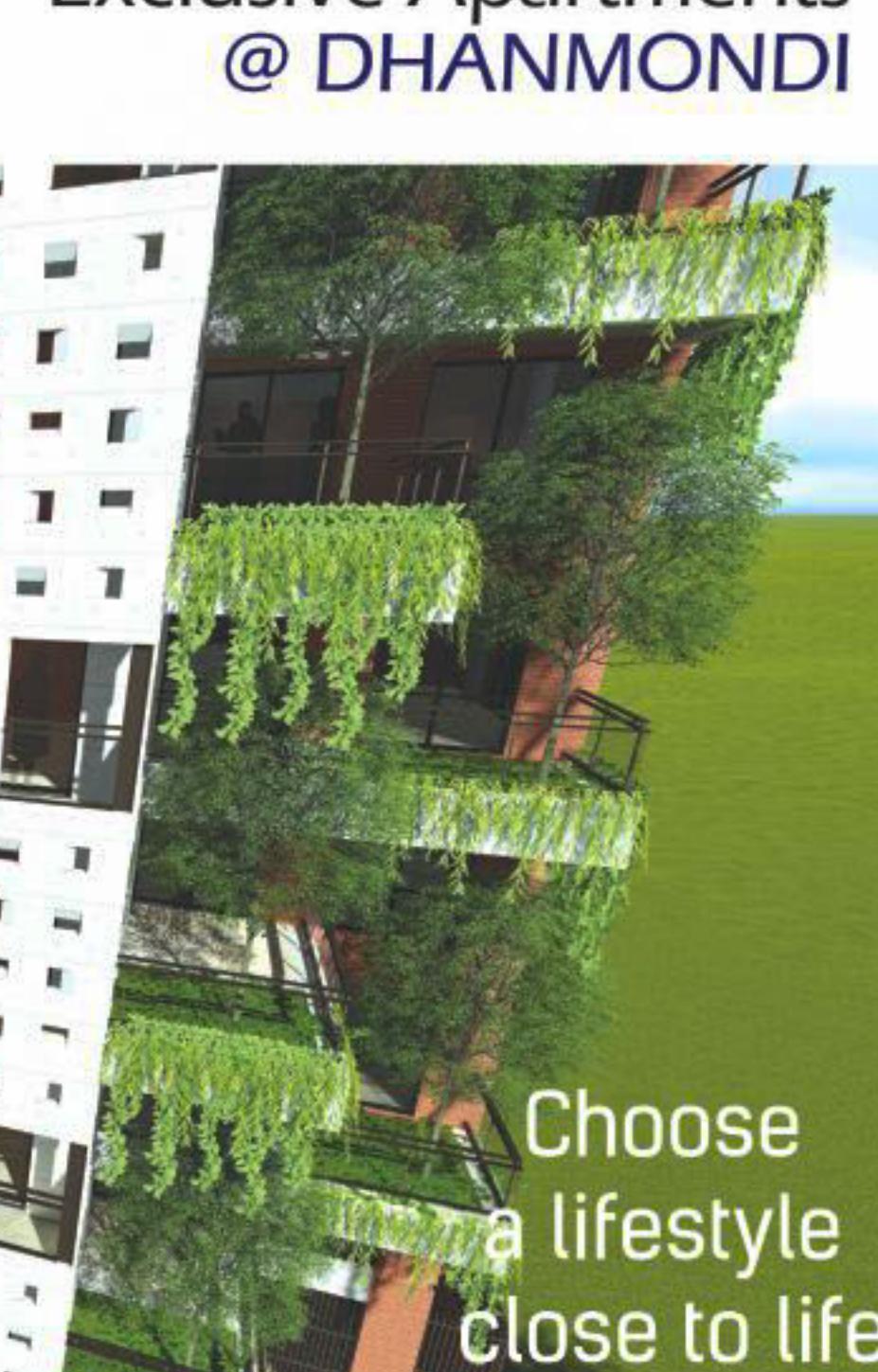
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