

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

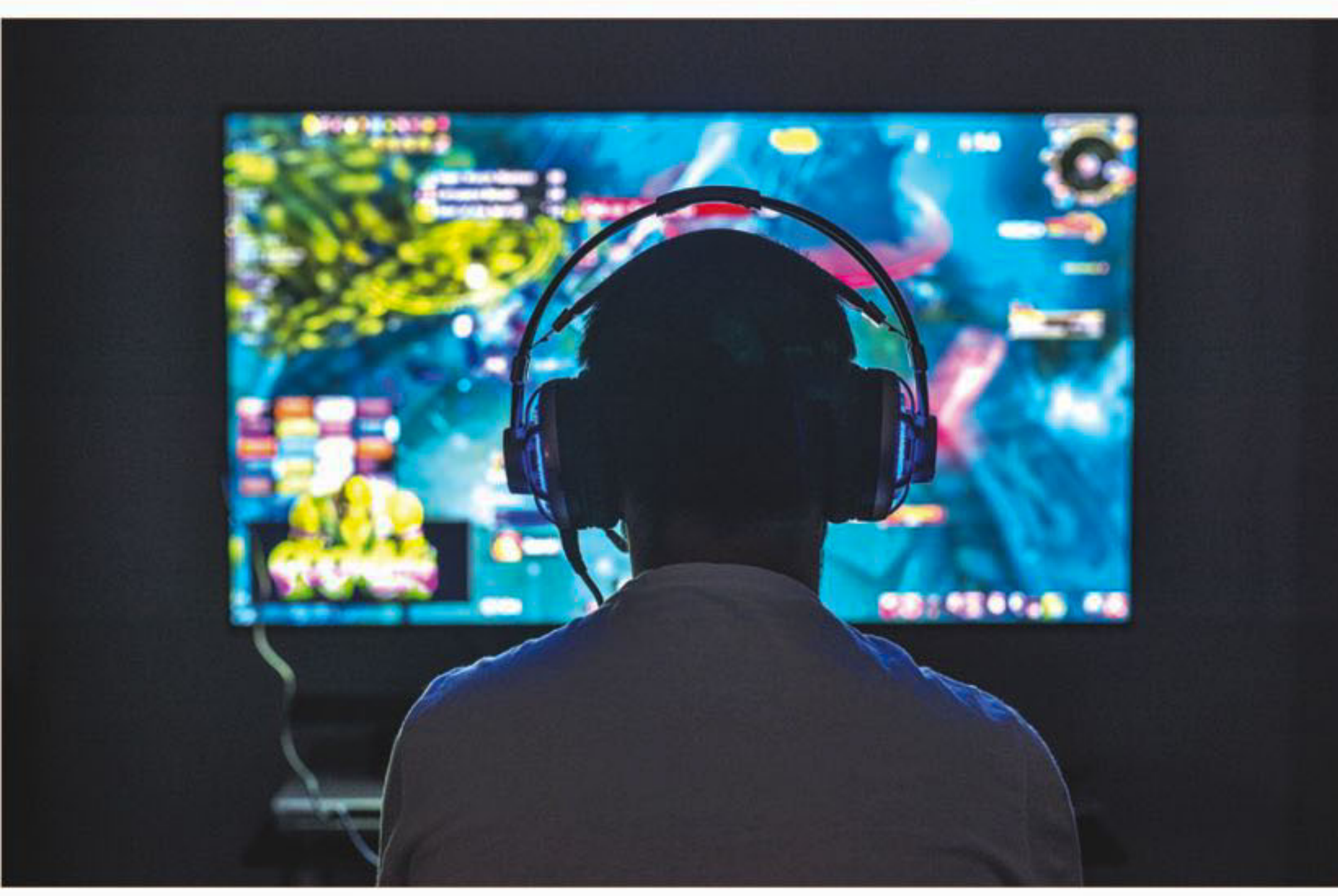
Virtual play to combat MENTAL ILLNESS



SARAH ANJUM BARI

OUT of the 161 million people of Bangladesh (as of 2015), 16.1 percent of adults and 15.2 percent of five- to 10-year-olds live with mental health issues. Only 0.44 percent of our national budget was allocated for mental health in the same year. Provided in the report "Pathways to care of patients with mental health problems in Bangladesh" published in the *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* in 2018, the statistics may be fresh, but the information is age-old. Mental health issues plague the young and the old in this country, but far too many fail to understand and acknowledge them, while physicians fail to refer patients to mental health experts, who are in turn scarce. WHO's theme for this year's World Mental Health Day is "Young people and mental health in a changing world." The post on their website addresses how "the expanding use of online technologies, while undoubtedly bringing many benefits, can also bring additional pressures [for young people], as connectivity to virtual networks at any time of the day and night grows." With my memories of high school and college still relatively fresh, I understand what such pressures entail. I remember, all too clearly, how family problems,

realise how strongly I feel against war; and that you may be able to 'respawn' in a game, but you only live once in real life," he shares. For my friend Shahrukh Ikhtear (22), a management trainee at Grameenphone, it offers a necessary respite from work stress. "The deep narratives of some single-player games help me feel empowered as I am in charge of my actions in those virtual spaces. Multiplayer games satiate my competitive nature while doing something fun," he tells me. Some studies support this testimony. Research carried out jointly by Johns Hopkins University, Queensland University of Technology, and University of the Sunshine Coast has found that moderate amounts of video gaming can "contribute to emotional stability and reduce emotional disturbances in children." Feelings of anger, guilt, or frustration seem to dissipate fast after children spend some time inside video games. Contributing to a narrative larger than oneself helps battle depression, and interaction with online communities allows kids to share sensitive emotions that they're struggling with. This doesn't just mean an absence of mental health issues, but an actual positive impact on their wellbeing. Children experience greater self-esteem in terms of their intelligence, computer skills, and mechanical ability. WHO tagged gaming addiction as a mental disorder earlier this year, but they stressed that it refers strictly to very extreme cases. The keyword is moderation.

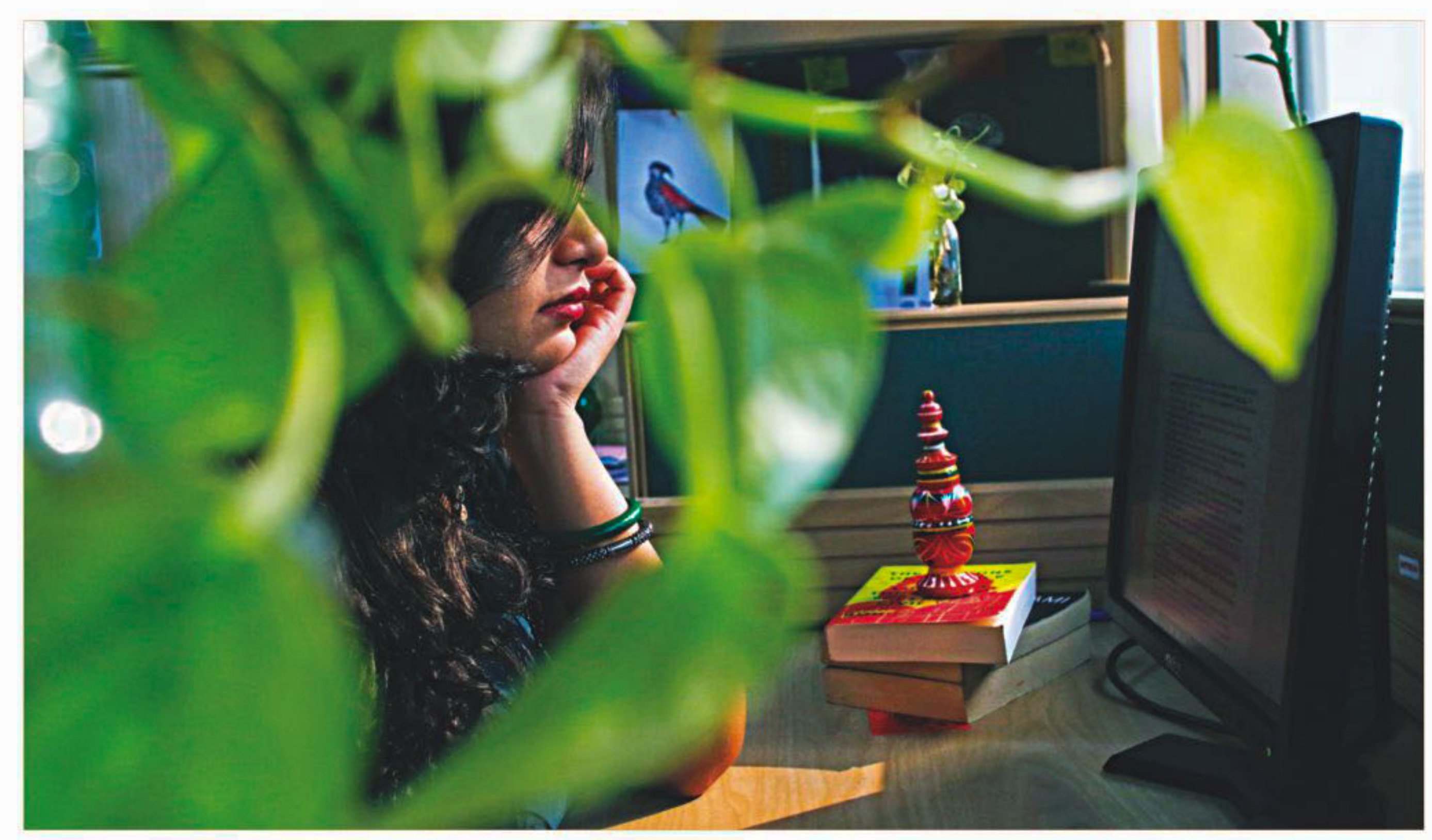


break-ups, bad grades, the fear of being bullied, and even the pressure of maintaining social cache can feel like the end of the world for youngsters. I remember the red gashes on classmates' wrists, the stories of medicine overdose, and the gradual disappearance of common faces as they descended into drug abuse. When I hear stories and confessions from younger cousins and their friends, I realise that these issues have only multiplied with the use of online platforms, manifest in cyberbullying and the threat to privacy. This is one set of realities of the youth today. The other is that video gaming is a huge part of their lives, regardless of whether they're teenagers, college students, or recent graduates trying to jumpstart a career. According to a *Daily Star* report from last year, Bangladesh makes up the third-largest video gaming market in South Asia, and video games account for 10 percent of the Tk 8,000 crore ICT market of the country. They may seem to belong to two entirely separate worlds—mental health and video gaming—but with so many young Bangladeshis taking refuge in virtual realms, it's only natural that the two should correlate. My 13-year-old cousin tells me playing video games gives him something to look forward to. Winning a game makes him feel empowered, and having gaming knowledge helps him make friends and communicate better with those around him. Wasiur Rahman (19), a family friend transitioning from high school to college, explains that violent video games help him channel his emotions on a bad day and recover from stress immediately. "FPS (First Person Shooter) games like COD or Battlefield have also showed me the brutal sides of war and how much suffering it causes. It made me

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This is good news for us in a country where playgrounds and open spaces seem like a fantasy in urban areas. The threat of abduction, harassment, and road accidents makes it too unsafe for kids even to walk around the city, let alone play outdoors. Coupled with the scarcity of mental health experts and the outright refusal of many families to address mental health issues, this leaves little to no avenues through which the youth can deal with stress, depression, and more extreme mental illnesses. Fortunately, they seem to have found channels of mental release and positivity for themselves on their own. Perhaps we can put this to some use?

Sarah Anjum Bari studied History and Literature at the Columbia University campus in France.



A workspace that invokes nature, with greenery and natural light, can have a positive effect on the mental health of employees.

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

A vibrant workplace for happier employees

RAIDA AK REZA
ILLUMINATION from the fluorescent lights fails to reach the cubicle at the end of the room as a girl leans over her laptop. She's scribbling over her notebook and she can only hear the faint sound of rain hitting the window. Suddenly, she feels her chest tighten as she looks at the clock ticking above her. She tries to distract herself by looking around, but now she feels distant from everyone around her and finds herself unable to breathe properly. The faint light turns dark and she sits in the corner, unable to move.

An anxiety attack can happen out of the blue, and to maintain our capacity to address issues related to mental health and wellbeing, we need to recognise the daily triggers that cause us harm every day. Mental health is not only related to mental illnesses but also how you feel about yourself and how you adjust to life events. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression and anxiety are the two most common causes of mental illness and the total number of people living with depression in the world is 322 million. In Bangladesh, over 7.3 million of the adult population struggle with depression every day.

The damage that is caused by mental illnesses has traditionally been hidden behind a screen of stigma. To create awareness for this cause, World Mental Health Day was observed for the first time on October 10, 1992. Each year a specific theme is assigned to this day and this year's theme is "Young people and mental health in a changing world." The youth in the modern era, in their transformative phases, have to face various kinds of mental pressures—whether it is within their home, at their workplaces or in their social circles. With mounting competition, expectations and pressures from all directions, many don't know how to overcome their anxieties and other mental setbacks, since they are seldom equipped with sufficient knowledge about these issues.

In fact, quite a lot can be done to help build mental resilience that can prevent mental distress and illness among adolescents and young adults, and help manage and recover from mental illness. Just some simple changes in one's life, such as creating a positive and relaxing atmosphere, can play an important function here. For example, an employed young adult spends a considerable time

in their workplace, and an excellent method of reducing stressors is being exposed to a healthy surrounding. In order to remain productive and not burn out under work pressures, we need to acknowledge our daily stressors and make a conscious effort to take care of our physical as well as mental wellbeing. Imagine a fall morning when you're eager to start the day and you head into your office. As you pass through a common area, you see a group of coworkers in a collaborative work session. They're seated in a conference room where natural light seeps through the huge floor-to-ceiling windows providing plenty of light and greenery. Imagine getting to your desk and sitting down, with a view of an open space where you can look around and greet your colleagues without needing to get out of your cubicle.

Imagine being surrounded by decorative elements that invoke nature and keep you connected to the natural world even while you're inside. You look

the daycare with a dedicated caregiver. You settle into your seat at the end of a full day's work, feeling the positive effects of having spent your day in an environment filled with clean indoor air, with plenty of exposure to natural light. Your mind is clear and your energy and spirits high, knowing that your productivity was high and any stress that you encountered could be fixed with a few simple activities.

This is how it feels like to work at an inclusive office space, and this is a unique example of how organisations can take concerted steps to prioritise and nurture the wellbeing of their employees. Any workspace's work culture should be one where constant attention is paid to nurturing the mental health of all employees. A great example would be SAJIDA Foundation's office, where similar elements of the workspace can be found.

Work-related pressures have been linked with the leading causes of stress, depression or anxiety. For an employee, a fundamental human need is having the basic necessities fulfilled at their workspace, and, unfortunately, very few organisations in Bangladesh and around the world recognise this. Creating an office culture that is inclusive for all and takes into account one's mental wellbeing may not be an easy process, but examples set by organisations like SAJIDA Foundation are also important to mark the way forward. Every employer has a responsibility towards the health and wellbeing of his or her employees. Organising more dialogues and addressing different mental health issues in the workplace can help build a healthy lifestyle for employees, and, at the end of the day, help us flourish and grow as not just staff, but also as individuals, allowing us to thrive. This should not just be a trend but a lifestyle change.

At the end of the day, we should not just "celebrate" a day in recognition of the importance of mental health, but actually practise positive and healthy living, figure out what really makes us the best versions of ourselves, and bring about changes needed to achieve this. And above all, may we never fear talking about mental health issues openly, and seek help when help is needed.

Here's to health, happiness and dignity for all this World Mental Health Day.

Raida AK Reza is a communications coordinator in SAJIDA Foundation.

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at the small plant that you watered the day before, and you make yourself a cup of coffee at the counter beside you, all to your liking. Imagine an educational display in the office lobby—a constant reminder for you and your company's visitors of just what it is that makes your workplace so special. The day might get stressful—there's a deadline coming by. You take some time to yourself and sit in a quiet room that's been designed to de-stress. Or you can go to the corner and engage yourself in activities like playing board games or a session of carom. You look at your colleague come out of the daycare with a smile on her face, and you can hear children laugh and play in

QUOTABLE Quote

RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861-1941)
BENGLI POET, MUSICIAN AND ARTIST

When old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart; and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Thyme or tarragon
- 5 Link up
- 10 One way to read
- 12 Love, to Luigi
- 13 Indiscreet
- 15 Make a choice
- 16 In favor of
- 17 Crone
- 18 Handles
- 20 Deck worker
- 21 Uses a towel
- 22 Seine summers
- 23 Intense fear
- 25 Extra amount
- 28 Dog show category
- 31 God of war
- 32 Maine park

DOWN

- 1 Circular glows
- 2 Ran off to wed
- 3 Fan
- 4 Tour carrier
- 5 Brush target
- 6 Little rascal
- 7 Formal headwear
- 8 Invent
- 9 Yard surrounds
- 11 More adept
- 14 It's up for grabs on a court
- 19 Flanks
- 20 Greek sorceress
- 24 Polar
- 25 "Das Lied von der Erde" composer
- 26 Baltimore player
- 27 Take out
- 29 Like some mushrooms
- 30 Stay home for supper
- 33 Peruvian peaks
- 35 Porgy's love
- 38 Comic Caesar
- 39 Ran into

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

ICED ANTES
ROLE BEEZER
AMEN SLEEVE
TACTFUL KEG
ESTUARY IRA
ARIEL VELL
GEMS TIN
ATE SEATTLE
TEA INSURER
SLINDER EPIC
STOWS SENT

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT