



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

An uncertain future for students amidst Covid-19 outbreak

TASNIM ODRIKA

"I find it unfortunate that the University decided to take such a decision without even considering the opinions of the students who are paying hefty fees for the whole semester. We only finished our midterms, which meant we had a few quizzes and a final left. This means that many students who had the chance to recover their grades won't get to anymore," opines Nazifa Raidah, student of Independent University, Bangladesh, in response to the cancellation of all final examinations by the university.

The global outbreak of Covid-19 has not left a single sector unharmed and the educational sector has faced a significant chunk of its effect. In accordance with the government, all educational institutes closed down from March 17, 2020 -- the students all over the country left in a cloud of uncertainty and a lot of unanswered questions.

Universities that were more than half way through the semester decided that the best course of action was to end the term and give out grades based on prior assessments.

"This decision was taken by Brac University because a lot of the students could not cope with the pressures of attending online classes, giving presentations online, and meeting deadlines for the assignments. Some of the faculties were being inconsiderate of the situation and the students claimed that they were not in the right state of mind since we can't really ignore what is happening to the world. Hence, the students complained to the Vice Chancellor," claimed Leena Kabir*, a current student of the university.

For other universities which still had a major portion of their academic term left, moving classes online remained the only option. Now, with online classes, the common problems remain. The teaching cannot be as hands-on and for lab courses, online classes really cannot do much, leaving a gap in knowledge for a lot of students. Moreover, in context to Bangladesh, other problems also arise.

According to Nazmus Sakib Nafiz of the University of Dhaka, attending online classes might not be possible for everyone since a lot of students have returned to their hometowns after the closure of the institutes. In public universities, a lot of students come from rural areas where proper infrastructure and internet access might not be

present. These students might also have financial constraints holding them back from attending the classes, adds Maisha Tasnim Sneha, another student of the same university.

For Bangladeshi students abroad, there are other issues to take into consideration.

"I work part-time at a supermarket and since supermarkets are essential, they haven't closed down yet. However, it drains you physically and emotionally when you have to undertake extra precautions for yourself as well as for the customers and you are constantly reminded of the virus and its impact by the local news. It demotivates you to study when you come home after work. International students who don't work in essential services have lost their jobs and might have a hard time paying rent and daily costs," says Zarin Rayhana, currently studying in Griffith University, Australia. She adds, "A lot of the international students at universities here are

to do so.

"I was supposed to leave Malaysia right after my convocation. Around March 14, the situation became grave as the cases of Covid-19 kept on increasing. Our convocation was postponed indefinitely and from March 18, Malaysia went into a national lockdown which was later extended to April 14," says Shehrin Tabassum Odri, finishing her graduation in Segi University and Colleges, Malaysia. Being unable to catch an early flight out of the country before the lockdown, all she can do now is wait.

Apart from the educational aspect, it has also been a difficult situation for students who had graduations/convocations, summer internships, or booked and paid-for flights back home. "I felt very disheartened because we worked for three whole years for this one day. Since it has been postponed indefinitely, there is no guarantee now that our convocation will take place," further

done in a University environment. Here, online classes or 'work from home' is not an option. My graduation will most likely be delayed, which will ruin my chances of catching the September sessions in the UK which I wanted to apply for," laments Farhan Rahman, a North South University student. Public universities in the country may also face the added issue of session jams.

Moving down to schools, students are facing a lot of similar concerns. For English medium students, cancellation of the O and A Level examinations poses a lot of unease among the students especially in regards to grading since it will now be provided based on prior mock tests taken by the school and performances of the students throughout the year.

"You might argue that mocks are a good representation but there are students who do not take mocks that seriously and end up performing better on the main exam. Dissatisfactory grades can make university applications look bad where you might need to retake the units, causing an unwanted gap year," says Osama Bin Ahmed, a May 2020 A Level candidate.

HSC candidates on the other hand are left with a lot of uncertainty as no concrete announcements have been made yet (at the time of writing this) in regards to the dates of their examinations.

According to HSC candidate Iflaj Nashita Taslim, "The whole situation has left the HSC examinees in a dilemma. Right now, all we can do is wait and keep preparing ourselves for the exam and hope that the government takes the right decision based on the situation."

"If the exams are cancelled and the students are judged based on their test results, many potential students might not even be able to sit for the admission tests of their dream universities. On the other hand, if the exams are held after the situation returns to normal, we might not get enough time to prepare for the admission tests. If the admissions are also delayed to give us more preparation time, it will result in the delay of all the later activities as well," she adds.

During these unpredictable times, it's important to try and look at the bigger picture. "It's a setback for all of us but I'm certain we will, collectively, bounce back from this," says Farhan, adding his two cents on the situation.

*Name has been changed for privacy
Send your queries to Tasnim Odrika at odrika_02@yahoo.com



going back home for a semester because of a lack of help by the government but not everyone can afford to go back and return again."

Some universities have been considerate enough in terms of housing for the international students but not everyone has been fortunate. Prachy Mahbub, who graduated in the middle of this pandemic from Mount Holyoke College, USA, shares, "It has been a rough couple of months. Our entire lives pretty much got upturned, especially for students whose homes are thousands of miles away. It has been especially difficult because we had to appeal to stay on-campus so we're not homeless."

For others, the plan might have been to return to Bangladesh but due to cancellation of flights or lockdown in their respective countries, they have been unable

to do so.

"I was supposed to go for my internship abroad this summer and I started applying from February but the pandemic had already started impacting the countries I was aiming for. It is concerning because the situation will remain like this for at least a month or two. Sitting back and doing nothing is building up a lot of anxiety in me. If this continues, we might have to graduate in spring whereas I was supposed to be done by fall," adds Leena.

This late graduation is a concern of many final-year students.

"A big concern for many final-year students is finishing their thesis or project. Right when I was starting to get a hold of the rigours of thesis work, the recent outbreak ran its course and stopped it dead on its tracks. Many of these complex, computational problems and laboratory analysis can only be

done in a University environment. Here, online classes or 'work from home' is not an option. My graduation will most likely be delayed, which will ruin my chances of catching the September sessions in the UK which I wanted to apply for," laments Farhan Rahman, a North South University student. Public universities in the country may also face the added issue of session jams.

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FABLE FACTORY

SCAR



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

KAZI SABITA EHSAN

Sometimes we lose ourselves in the music of the outside world to escape dealing with the lack of it within us.

Waking up from the light slumber I had fallen into, I put my headphones down and got out of bed. The coffee mug sat by my bed, half empty. I walked up to the window almost at a snail's pace and parted the drapes. The sky was lit up with a soft glow; soon the sun would hide behind a twilight horizon and then darkness would take over. There were birds to be seen.

So, what happens when the music stops?

No chirping of birds, no rustling of leaves. My gaze fell onto the streets. They seemed to be as devoid of life as the skies above; not a single soul was in sight. In just two week's time the city that I called home, the busiest city I had ever known, had been turned into a ghost town. A lonely rickshaw turned the corner and as I observed the old man on wheels my eyes began to sting. The man looked starved. How long has it been since he had a passenger? My gaze followed the rickshaw until it vanished out of

sight. It was as though the gloom that had taken the city by storm had also somehow seeped into the hearts of all its inhabitants and it was in no mood for mercy. "How much longer can I take this?" I wondered.

"HOW MUCH LONGER MAA?" my daughter's scream broke through my thoughts. "What?" I asked. "How much longer do I boil this egg before it's done?" I shook my head and ran to the kitchen to see what trouble she was cooking up now. To my horror, my nine-year-

old had the stove on and was trying to boil an egg.

"MOVE!" I shrieked. As I began to clean up around the kitchen she walked over to the counter and stood still, clearly waiting to ask something. "Maa?" she asked, "when can we leave the house again?" "When this virus goes away sweetheart," I said. "We're not the only ones, everyone's staying indoors you see?" She stared at me with a blank expression. I pointed at the single scar on her knees. "Remember when you fell off your bike and got that? How you had to stay in your room, be very patient and give it time to heal?" She nodded. "Well, the earth is sick sweetheart. It has seen enough. It needs to rest now, it needs time."

Running her fingers across her scar, she went silent. As I went back to cleaning the kitchen she looked up, "Maa, what happens when the earth gets a scar?" I smiled at her. "The music stops." I thought to myself.

Kazi Sabita Ehsan, a bibliophile with a penchant for overthinking about life. Find her at sabitaehsan@gmail.com

Of Cancelled Matches and Empty Arenas

AAQIB HASIB

We are living in a strange time. I think for the first time in a while, people are promoting staying at home over going out and "carpe diem", or whatever is the general jazz most motivational speakers like to throw your way.

Now, staying at home isn't the worst thing in the world. You get to binge your favourite shows, catch up on some reading, play all those games you have been storing up in your Steam library and so much more.

This particular pandemic has been a hard time for us sports fans, who like to spend our Sunday nights watching the English Premier League (EPL) and have been anticipating the upcoming UEFA Euro 2020, which has now been postponed to 2021.

We did, however, get a short period of time when football matches were played in empty arenas because while mass gatherings had been essentially banned, the associations governing individual football leagues still decided to carry on with matches behind closed doors, as rescheduling the games would have been quite difficult to accommodate.

The sight of the empty arenas was haunting, and it was the first time I got to think about just how much of an impact crowds have on these games. It isn't just the empty seats either, but the reactions, chants, cheers and jeers that fans also bring into the stadiums.

Another sport -- or "sports entertainment" being a more accurate word -- that is still continuing in the empty-arena-style is professional wrestling. Both the WWE and AEW are carrying on their shows, with zero attendees and a minimum number of staff members.

But if anything, their shows are a confirmation of just how essential a crowd really is. With no fans present to chant the regular "this is awesome", "what?", "boom", etc. it no longer feels like a wrestling show.

So while we continue to remain indoors, I wanted to throw some suggestions out there which helped, if not quench, at least somewhat satisfy my need for some of my

favourite sports.

Football fans can seek comfort in playing FIFA with your friends -- online, of course -- or even in manager mode. Football Manager is another great alternative that is guaranteed to give you hours of entertainment.

Wrestling fans can resort to "watch parties" via Discord or Kast with their friends. Both the WWE and AEW YouTube channels have plenty of wrestling content to keep you occupied for weeks. If not, the WWE has promised to give fans access to a big chunk of their network to compensate for the lack of live wrestling content. Maybe



start career mode in one of the games 2K makes for WWE (would not recommend 2K20 though).

You may assume that cricket and Liverpool fans are doomed to an endless barrage of sadness. However, fans of cricket can try out the new Cricket 19. Liverpool fans can possibly take to photoshopping Klopp lifting the trophy along with his team? I don't know, whatever works.

If you're someone slightly more creative than me and have already come up with a more interesting way to satisfy your appetite for some of the above, hit me up. Help a brother out.

Aaqib is stuck in an existential crisis loop. Send help at aaqibhasib94@gmail.com

The Dos and Don'ts of a Video Call

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

It's another week of social distancing and almost all of us are having to work or study from our homes. That being said, it's important to know what you should and shouldn't do when you find yourself in a video call. Here are some tips to help you out.

IS THE VIDEO CALL EVEN NEEDED?

If the purpose of the call can be fulfilled via text, email or a simple audio call, it's recommended that you don't opt for the video conference in the first place. That way, you'll be saving the other person a whole lot of time.

LET YOUR FAMILY KNOW

Take the call in a separate room. You wouldn't want people to barge in while you're pitching an idea. Inform your family or roommate/s that you'll be taking such a call and ask them to not bother you for the next couple of hours or so.

KNOWING WHAT TO WEAR

If you're in a video call for academic or professional purposes, you'd be better off wearing a slightly formal attire. Run a comb through your hair while you're at it. Just because you're home doesn't mean you get to do classes in your dirty pyjamas and bed hair.

MAKE SURE THE CALL WORKS

A few seconds into the call, do a quick check with everyone and ensure that all of them are able to both see and hear you. If the other participants are unable to do so, check your app or device settings. See if

your device has the permission to share live feed or not. If the settings look okay, maybe you could try fiddling with your webcam or mic. If all fails, and if others can confirm that everything is working fine from their end, you could leave the call and join again. And if this fails, you should politely message them explaining the situation and leave the call; at this stage, you're probably wasting everyone's time.

MUTE YOUR MIC WHEN NOT SPEAKING

Microphones can pick up minor background noises, like noise generated by the ceiling fan, or someone snoring in the next room. Turning off the mic when you're not speaking will prevent this additional noise from being added into the mix of the conversation.

HEADPHONES OVER SPEAKERS

Use of loudspeakers during the call can lead to unwanted noise and feedback for other participants. Use headphones, or earphones. Avoid playing music or watching videos with the sound on during the call.

CLEAR YOUR BACKGROUND

You don't need to clean the entire room, just the background which will be in direct view of the others. If you're not feeling up to it, just take whatever mess lies in front of your camera, and place it somewhere out of view.

JUST BECAUSE YOU CAN, DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULD

You're at home, meaning you have access to all the comforts you can ask for. But just because you can distract yourself, doesn't mean you should. Don't get up and leave during the call without asking for permission first. Avoid eating or using your phone during the conference, as well as scrolling your newsfeed or any other irrelevant website or page. At the end of the day, your virtual presence is still a resemblance of who you are in real life, so act the part.

