

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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OF EXAM PREPARATION

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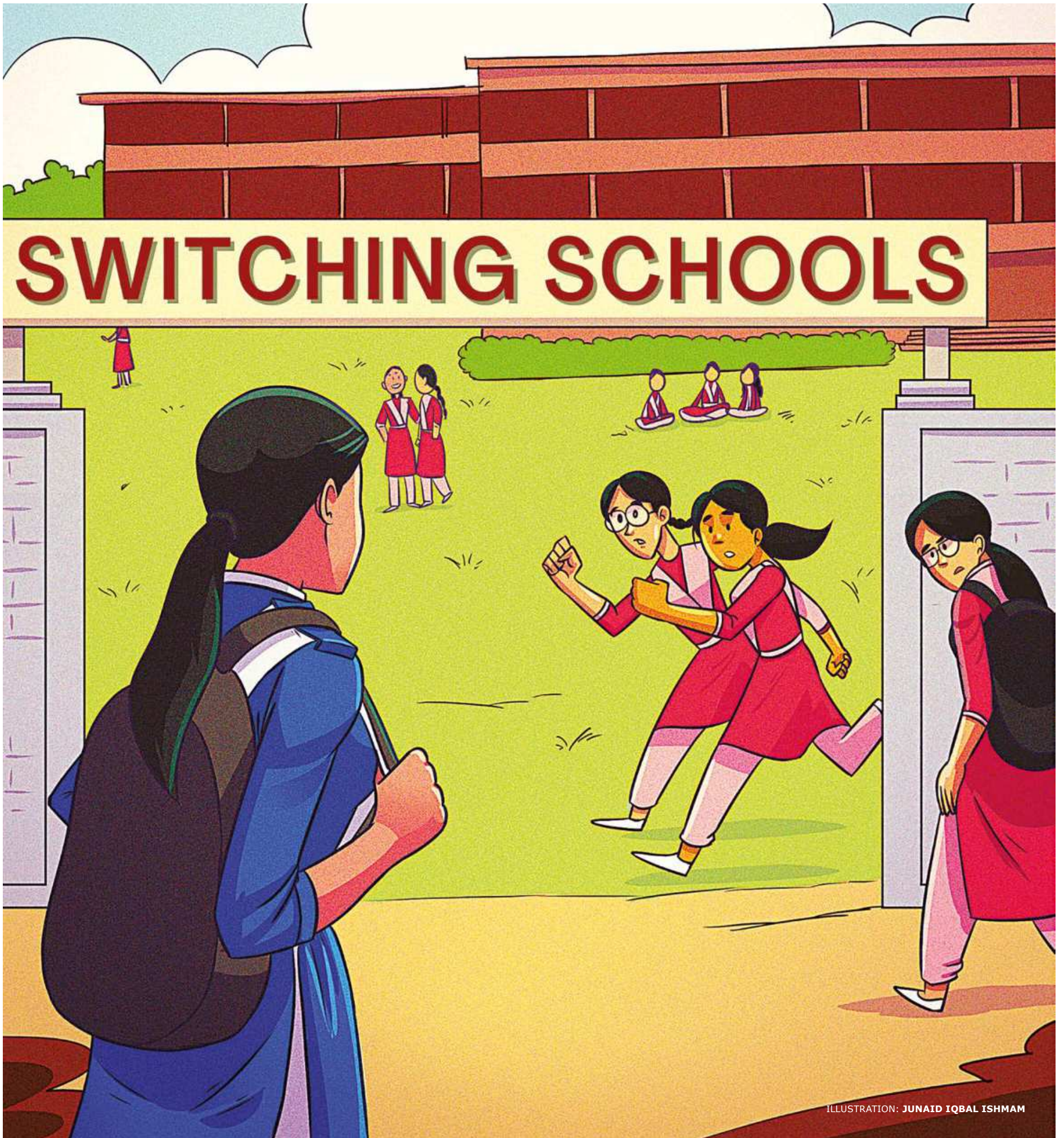


ILLUSTRATION: JUNAID IQBAL ISHMAM

EDITORIAL

No matter the curriculum or medium of education, schooling is deeply flawed in our country. It's clear every time we take a daringly honest stroll down memory lane, it's clear in every pitch meeting we have at SHOUT, where all the participants are either about to get out of school or just fresh out of it. Over the years, we've learned more and more about these systemic problems and the reasons behind it, but we've realised another important thing. It doesn't have to be this way.

When I was in school, one of the common pieces of advice teachers gave me was that as a student, I should be like a sponge, absorbing knowledge everywhere. I want to pass this advice back to schools. Schools need to start looking at themselves with increased introspection, and they need to involve fresh graduates and recent alumni in that process. People who have been in school in the last 5-10 years have a unique perspective here, one that is honest and pointed at issues that are detrimental to students. In light of the recent incidents of sexual violence, some prominent schools have taken commendable steps to involve alumni in scrutinising their sexual education curricula. It is our hope that more schools follow.

-- Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

MOVIES



Why Mulan is my favourite Disney princess

ANUSHA MOURSHED

The new live-action adaptation of the 1998 Disney animated film *Mulan* generated a great deal of controversy and criticism. Part of the film was shot in a region of China where Muslims are believed to be detained in internment camps. As a result, many demanded that the new movie be boycotted.

Respectful of the reasons and dismayed by the insensitive approach, I chose to abide by the plea. However, I did go back to the original animated film to relive a part of my childhood and fell in love with Mulan's character all over again. Here's why Mulan is my favourite Disney princess.

MULAN BREAKS GENDER ROLES

Unlike most Disney princesses, Mulan is not solely defined by romance or beauty and does not wait for a prince charming to change her life. She defies all odds, breaking gender roles as she joins the army disguised as a man and eventually proves herself to be equal to her male comrades. In quite a few instances, she even surpasses their wits with her intelligence and outsmarts the enemy in unexpected ways. In a film way ahead of its time, *Mulan* proves that strength and intelligence do not depend on gender, but who you are and on how hard you are willing to work. An eccentric character, Mulan has a lot more to offer than be a damsel whose principal purpose is to exist for the other male characters to win over.

MULAN COMBATS MISOGYNY

Instead of pretending that chauvinism does not exist or that it is trivial, the movie distinctly depicts the hapless misogyny around us. Mulan is often met with comments such as "men want girls with good taste - calm, obedient, who work

fast-paced with good breeding and a tiny waist" through numerous songs and dialogues. The extent of such bias can further be seen when Mulan's father is told to teach his daughter to hold her tongue in a man's presence.

Besides, throughout the film we also see that honour for a woman directly correlates to "striking a good match" for herself and getting married. Towards the end, Mulan finally succeeds in bringing honour to her family, however, not by finding the perfect match for herself but by being a war hero in her father's place.

MULAN COUNTERS CULTURAL STEREOTYPES AND CHAMPIONS DIVERSITY

For a franchise that has millions of children watching their content from all across the globe, Disney has strangely lacked cultural representation. It is a delight to see a non-traditional Disney princess of colour which is a general step forward.

MULAN DISPLAYS THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY BONDS

In most Disney princess movies, the protagonists either do not have living parents or are not in touch with them, hence failing to show any familial connections. Contrary to this, *Mulan* depicts the importance of family bonds and displays the extent to which people are willing to go for their families when she risks her life to save her father. In addition, we also find that love and respect are not limited to just parents but also go as far back as their ancestors who they even worship and seek blessings from.

Anusha often has a lot on her plate. Send her memes and motivation at anusha.mourshed11@gmail.com



Why Feminism Is Not the Same as Misandry

SHOUNAK REZA

"She is a feminist – a man hater," an acquaintance says while talking about a certain person. I look at him, bewildered and at a loss, but then I remember the countless times I have seen teachers in school, random people on social media, friends and even family members confuse feminism with misandry or man hating.

This confusion has become one of the many reasons the word "feminism" is feared and looked down upon across the world, sometimes even by people who have worked for women's rights all their lives.

It is painful to note that feminism, a movement that seeks to free people from the shackles of patriarchy, is misinterpreted in this way. Wondering why this keeps happening, I approach Tahmina Huq, a Bangladeshi women's rights activist. "One of the reasons people make this mistake," she tells me, "is rooted in the fact that feminism challenges gender norms. Because it aims to establish a world in which everyone will enjoy equal rights regardless of gender, people who benefit from patriarchy are reluctant to support the movement and end up confusing it with misandry. Some people even think that feminists, instead of demanding equality, want a social structure in which men will be suppressed by women."

Unlike what many people might think, feminists do not intend to establish female dominance and subjugate men. The aim of the movement is to erase patriarchy, an oppressive social system that has shackled and oppressed women, men refusing to conform to gender norms and anyone else who has dared to oppose it, for millennia.

A question may arise: if feminism is anti-patriarchy and not anti-men, why is it that feminists so often tend to criticise men and their actions?

The answer to this is simple. As patriarchy automatically places men in a position that is superior to that of women, innumerable men have oppressed women from time immemorial, knowingly or unknowingly, creating barriers and obstacles on their paths to success. Because patriarchy and the actions of so many men (towards women and men refusing to abide by toxic gender roles) are often interlinked, it is difficult to not criticise certain men while criticising the social system in question.

The fact that feminists criticise the



ILLUSTRATION: ALIZA RAHMAN

patriarchal social structure – and everything it has imposed on women – is something that does not sit well with many people. It is not uncommon to see people wondering why women need to be so "aggressive" when they raise their voices against, say, social injustice. When it comes to activism, women are expected to mince words and respect the rules that gender roles have placed on them. Rage is something that is not considered "feminine" and therefore, when women choose to indignantly talk about, among other things, the violence inflicted by numerous men on women, the accusations of misandry once again enter the picture.

Because they confuse feminism with misandry, many people who would otherwise support equality refuse to associate themselves with the movement.

"It is strange that many people, in spite of believing that all humans deserve equal rights, tend to have reservations about feminism," Tahmina Huq tells me. "We need to explain what feminism is to people from all walks of life. We need to make them aware of the fact that we still have miles to go when it comes to building an equal society. They need to understand why they have to take a stand against injustice and discrimination."

Antara Farnaz Khan, co-founder of Orodho Foundation, a non-profit organisation working on issues like gender discrimination and sexual violence, says, "While it is important that we engage in dialogue and make people understand what feminism truly means in order to dispel rumours of misandry, it is equally important to make sure we do not tailor

the movement and make compromises according to the comfort level of those it wasn't designed for."

When I ask her how young feminists should, in spite of the accusations attached to the social movement, continue with their activism, she says, "My advice for young feminists is that they should not be afraid of standing by what they believe in just because it might make them seem radical. And they should always remember that the social capital that is lost for being a feminist is not something that is worth having."

We need to remember that while talking about human rights, it is important that we address the suffering patriarchy continues to cause. It is for the eradication of this suffering that we need feminism. Misandry or man-hating has nothing to do with it.

What is NOT feminism?



misandry

/mɪˈsandrɪ/

noun

dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against men (i.e. the male sex).
 "poorly disguised misandry"

The Current Hardships of Exam Preparation

ABHOY HRIDDO

Covid-19 isn't getting any better and educational institutes are far from opening. On-line classes are a big downgrade to regular classes. Teachers cannot monitor students properly which gives students a chance to slack off and skip classes. Furthermore, bad internet connections are a big interruption. Thus, many students around the world are struggling to understand concepts and theories.

Maahi Chowdhury of Sunbeams School says, "I'm facing tremendous problems while preparing for my exams since understanding certain parts of the syllabus has been painful. I'm way behind my syllabus and still struggling and hustling to actually prepare to give the exam."

The internet connection is not the only problem that students have to face. Zubair Rahman Chowdhury, an A Level student of South Breeze School, says he had not received the proper environment to study in, "Online classes do not provide the same environment for studying as physical classes since there are lots of distractions around the house. I had to re-watch videos of online classes and it was difficult to get



the motivation to study every day."

There is still a growing uncertainty about whether exams will be held or not as the UK has cancelled all exams. This has demotivated a lot of students. According to Sadia Tasnim, student of Mastermind, "Unless you're passionate about something, you genuinely don't find motivation to do it without a sense of accomplishment. My friends and I have lost our productivity due

to the uncertainty of the exams being held and the grading system of curriculums."

Now the main question should be, how do we get out of this situation? The obvious choice would be to suck it up and make the best use of what we have. As mentioned before, Covid-19 is not getting any better. This is the only option we have and we have to do what is necessary for us to get good grades. Hopefully the

grade boundaries will be lower this year as it was for the October/November 2020 candidates.

Take the words of a Physics teacher who asked to remain anonymous. He claims, "With a few months left, the best approach now would be to solve past papers (provided the course material is finished) and referring to the book and notes when a student gets stuck. A few recent papers should be taken 'exam style', keeping track of the timing, and then later checking the answers from the mark scheme. This helps the student learn how to pace themselves during an actual exam."

We can go back and forth with the whole situation but the bottom line will be that the only way you can prepare yourself is with the motivation to practise and a stable internet connection. Exams are closer than ever so stay safe, study hard and give extra effort to catch up on what you have missed.

Abhoy Hriddo is currently in his room and very concerned about what he will do about the Physics classes he slacked off on. Help him out at abhoyhriddo@gmail.com

To All the Fashion Non-Fans

SYEDA ERUM NOOR

Yes, I said non-fans. This one is for all the people who find that they never truly know what to wear when to wear. For those of us, no matter how much we try, just can't seem to understand all the fuss about wearing the same outfit as someone else. Or the importance of an outfit as a whole.

OCCASIONS ARE STRESSFUL

I'm not referring to social anxiety being the problem. You just don't know what's appropriate to wear.

Here's the kicker. You're not even the one bothered by it. But for some reason, EVERYONE else is. The only reason you're thinking about this is to keep people from gasping, from asking you if you need to borrow something of theirs the next time you need to go out.

So you refer to good ol' Pinterest, trying to find if there's anything on there you can find that you can imitate. But let's be honest, you'll end up wearing the same thing you wore to the last important event. And the one before that. And the one before that.

Maybe that's the only outfit you have for important events. Who cares?

JEANS ARE YOUR BEST FRIEND

Your wardrobe has every shade of blue. For jeans are the easiest thing to wear. You stand by it and you will die with it.

It's convenient and you can rock it with anything. Shirt, T-shirt... And any other top that's out there. Fight me. I dare you.

INSULTS IN THE FORM OF COMPLIMENTS

"You'd look really good if you tried!" Ever heard that one before? Or maybe "You need a makeover!" or "You have so much potential. What you need is to go shopping."

Yes. Thank you. To all those reminding us of how great we'd look only if we had a fashion sense. And how awful we look now. Thanks. Really.

GRACE IS FOREIGN TO YOU (BUT YOU KINDA WISH YOU HAD IT)

It'd be a lie if we didn't admit to the fact that from time to time, we look at ourselves in the mirror, standing in the oversized sweater and sweatpants, and fantasise about what it would be like to look like the picture of grace and



elegance that all women seem to have been born with.

A gene we must be missing.

What it might be like to rock a sundress in the summer and to know how to put clothes together to make them look your best.

COMFORT TRUMPS STYLE, EVERY TIME

But it'd also be a lie to say the feeling lasted more than five minutes.

With the sudden urge to put in more of an effort, you pull on the one fancy dress you purchased centuries ago. You appreciate yourself in the mirror before you realise one

major flaw. A deal-breaker.

It's awfully uncomfortable. And it's not you.

One thing we non-fans have to remind ourselves from time to time and those around us is that we're wearing what we're wearing. That we like ourselves in it. And that people need to back off. What's in an outfit? I suppose we'll never know. But don't you ever feel bad about rocking whatever it is you're comfortable in. It's you and you own it.

Syeda Erum Noor is dangerously oblivious and has no sense of time. Send help at erum.noor1998@gmail.com

SWITCHING SCHOOLS

In a classroom, everyone has their own niche; designated seats, exclusive cliques, marked best friends, teacher's loyal army of pets and possessive class ranks. And then there's the newcomer who everyone eyes as an invasive species, a threat to the status quo. They are here to start anew. But everything meant to pull them through is labelled as taken. How would they survive, let alone thrive?

HIYA ISLAM & ADHORA AHMED

There is a frenzy of feelings that goes behind picking the next school. The vast majority of which is the parents' job to deal with. But you can only tell so much from an outsider's point of view. Moving from one school to another is comparable to uprooting one's life and sowing the remains in untrodden ground that is yet to prove its fertility.

While switching schools is necessary for many reasons, it does come with its bittersweet moments and deathless challenges. Moving schools means loss of old friendships, and strife in upkeeping the ones that survive the split followed by the cruel adaptation to a new life.

There are a myriad reasons that lead parents to change schools. Better quality of education, financial restraints, house relocation, school reputation, choice of curriculum, accommodation for special needs and so on.

For Nadim*, 12, now a fifth grader with special needs, changing schools was an experience mostly out of his control. He transferred from a top English medium school in Dhaka to a less-renowned school of the same curriculum, since academics was not his forte and the old school was being a financial burden. However, it was not until he began studying in his new school that he started to show signs of being on the spectrum.

"My parents did not look for a specialised school as we noticed his symptoms much later, when he was in second grade and had to repeat that year," Nabila*, his older sister, adds.

Sisters Azwa Al Islam, 16, and Awana Al Islam, 14, have spent most of their lives moving across different schools like ships passing through ports. Azwa has changed schools five times, while Awana has gone through the same experience thrice, each time for different reasons. "My first school had to shut down temporarily due to unavoidable circum-



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

stances. Even after it reopened, my parents deemed it was no longer safe for me to attend there. They tried to transfer my sister and I to our current schools, but at that time there were no seats available in our respective classes. So, for the time being, we had to transfer to a smaller school before finally settling into the school we are in now," explains Azwa.

The struggles essentially begin with social life. It is natural to feel like a fish out of water. It is a time in life where newcomers are especially pressurised to make new friends all the while feeling intimidated, nervous or shy. Then there is the added trouble of recalling names and matching faces to said names. And, sometimes they all just look the same. You don't want to call someone by the name of a person they hate. Or worse, ask them where they are.

Unfortunately, changing schools for Nadim has been unpleasant for the most part. According to Nabila, although his former school was unaware of his situation, the teachers were more caring unlike the ones in his current

school, where he receives no accommodation for his needs.

"They don't care that Nadim needs special care for learning, even after we showed reports supporting the fact," Nabila vents, "I think he's even bullied by both his teachers and classmates for not being a good student. But he has too much pride or is very shy to tell us about it. On top of that, he's also antisocial."

As seen in Nadim's case, as you transfer from one school to another, you witness changes in student culture and camaraderie. You receive an unjustifiable amount of attention and unnecessary judgement. Azwa recalls the time when a few students made fun of her poor Bangla at one of her schools.

Finding your way on the campus is nothing compared to dodging unsolicited advice from your new classmates. They will tell you who to be friends with and who to watch out for, with no substantial explanation. And you ask yourself how trustworthy is this kind soul who may or may not have hidden motives.

However, not everyone's experience is the same. Awana says, "Making friends in my second school was easy. It was in my third school where I realised how introverted I am. I hung out with two or three girls. And now, at present, I have friends who feel like family to me."

Oftentimes, switching schools means losing a year which adds to the growing anxiety. And if you are lucky, you skip a class. But this comes at a cost. Getting on the same page as your peers is no piece of cake, especially if you have made the bold decision of changing the curriculum.

Marshad Mostafa, 17, who has shifted from British curriculum under Cambridge to the national curriculum, found Mathematics being "very different" compared to what he had learned and Bangla being taught "at a much more advanced stage". However, according to him, acing the new curriculum comes with "a lot of practice, patience and time".

It is especially harder when you have moved to Bangladesh from a different country altogether. Marshad transferred from a school in the Middle East when he was in seventh grade. He says that he has had bouts of sickness before adjusting to the country's weather.

It is mind-boggling how differently various British curricula work. Azwa says, "Switching from Edexcel to Cambridge in Grade 8 was most likely one of the worst decisions I've made." She adds that the books and question papers were entirely different and that she struggled with Bangla owing to a completely foreign syllabus. Nevertheless, like Marshad, she persevered with copious amounts of practice. On the other hand, Awana, who also made the same switch, says, "I did not see any difference. Maybe it's because I switched earlier, when I was in Grade 5."

Changing schools is no easy feat in itself. Most students are thrown into this battle headfirst, with no prior knowledge or advice to lean back on. If you're someone who is biting your nails at the thought of changing schools, don't fret.

It's easy to disappear in a crowd by going with the flow of your new school, but it's far more important to stay true to yourself. Eventually, you'll find people with similar interests as yours, and your new school will feel less foreign. Speaking of your new school, try not to compare it to your old one, because chances are you'll pay more attention to its faults than its merits.

If you're reading this and are about to switch schools, best of luck!

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*

Hiya loves food that you hate by norm – broccoli, pineapple pizza and Bounty bars. Find her at hiyaislam.11@gmail.com

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

BREAKUP BLUES

ADHORA AHMED

It was just another day of procrastinating. I was listening to music on shuffle, when suddenly a jolt of electricity went through me with enough voltage to raise a corpse from the dead. The classic breakup song "I'm So Lonely Broken Angel" had come on. It always reminded me of my ex, so I broke down in tears. But when the song was over, I came to my senses. I've never had a boyfriend in my life, let alone exes!

Other breakup songs have elicited similar reactions from me in the past, but why? Since Valentine's Day is coming up, I put on my journalist hat to find some answers. I conducted a mass survey where people from all over the universe (alternates included) shared why they like breakup songs, if they do at all.

This investigation provided me with some interesting insights. Firstly, I noticed that a perfect 100 percent of all the participants enjoyed listening to breakup songs. Secondly, my hypothesis was that the participants would be predominantly teenagers and twenty-somethings, because these age groups tend to suffer from love's pitfalls the most.

I was surprised to find out that about 35 percent of all participants were above



the age of forty. Do old flames burn stronger as you age? "Who said the flames have to be old, or that they have to burn?" smirks Lovely Khatun, a veteran matchmaker from Narayanganj, who recently found a match for herself. "My ex-husband doesn't deserve to be called an old flame, because I doused his memories in cold water as soon as I left him. I'm now more interested in my new flame, who doesn't burn but gives me warmth. Now," she flips through the folder of bio-data

before her, "Would you like a flame in your life, sweetie?"

While 55 percent of the responses came from my expected age groups, the remaining 10 percent claimed to be below twelve. Not to sound like a boomer, but don't these elementary school kids have something better to do than cry to Lana Del Rey, like playing video games, maybe? "None of your business, zoomer," says Poltu, a third-grader from Brahmanbaria, rolling his eyes. "By the way, I noticed

your pun. 'Video Games' is Queen Lana's best song, hands down."

Lastly, my findings included the reasons why people gravitate towards breakup songs. I assumed it was in order to fuel the pain a failed relationship leaves in its wake. Astonishingly, only 25 percent of all participants cited breakups as the reason, while a whopping 60 percent claimed to have been lifelong singles. The remaining 15 percent said they were in a relationship, but I think they were secretly pining over an ex and didn't want their current significant others to know.

"Look, I have a miserable life," sighs Ananda Sarkar Pulok, a software engineer from Uttara, "I have a thankless job, a boss who gives me hell, a non-existent love life, and parents who have given up on me. My only solace in this purgatory are breakup songs. If you hear 'Bukta Faitta Jay' from my room on Fridays, just let me be." I have to say, he has an ironic name.

Well, this was quite a journey. I would've liked to say that I learned something, but I have a sudden urge to crank up "Tumi Keno Bojhona".

Adhora Ahmed listens to too much "sad white boy" songs. Recommend her better music at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

6 Ways to Celebrate Valentine's Day if You're Single

ANUSHA MOURSHED

Most single people usually don't acknowledge Valentine's Day as a celebratory occasion solely because they aren't in love. Contrary to popular belief, Valentine's Day is for everyone and not just lovers. You may take this occasion as a chance to express your love and appreciation for all those who matter, even yourself.

Here are 6 ways to celebrate Valentine's Day even if you're as single as a Pringle.

SINGLES-ONLY DINNER

Go all out with your friends and host a singles-only dinner because why should couples have all the fun? Cook or order all your favourite food, throw yourselves a feast and toast to your self-sustenance. It sure will be a lot more fun to dress up and join in on the festivities with your favourite people instead of staying home alone and complaining about having nothing to do. Put on your favourite playlist and dance away.

SET UP A DINNER FOR YOUR PARENTS OR GRANDPARENTS

If you're not too resentful about couples celebrating the day, you could put together a little dinner for your parents or grandparents. A few personalised touches such as bringing their favourite flowers or recreating the setup of their first encounter, if possible would be a delightful surprise. It is a great opportunity for you to celebrate their love as well as to show your gratitude towards them at the same time.

SECRET SANTA BUT IT'S VALENTINE'S SO, SECRET VALENTINE?



Get all your friends to jump aboard on your very own little Valentine's Day tradition and put together a Secret Valentine.

Get each other gifts anonymously and have all the fun receiving your desired items and trying to figure out who your secret

valentine is.

TREAT YOURSELF

Splurge on a nice piece of jewellery or go shopping for clothes. Give yourself a cheat day and eat all you want. If you've had a long week or even if you haven't, get a massage or go to the spa. Break all the rules and use the day as an excuse to treat yourself.

KARAOKE NIGHT

Karaoke nights are always entertaining especially if you're with the right crowd. Sing your heart out with your friends and family. Keep some accessories to get in the zone for those funky songs that you know will give you a good laugh. Include songs that have a lot of sentiment and memories attached so you can celebrate those special moments spent together through music.

SEND COOKIES AND CARDS TO ALL YOUR LOVED ONES

Sometimes there's no bigger joy than making someone else happy. If you're one of those people who like giving back to people, bake some cookies and spend some time making hand-made cards to show your love to all those who matter to you.

Just because you are single shouldn't have to mean that you must despise Valentine's Day. You shouldn't have to look at it as a festival beneath you. A culture that promotes healthy and loving relationships is a wonderful idea, celebrate it!

Anusha often has a lot on her plate. Send her memes and motivation at anusha.mourshed11@gmail.com

SCOTCH TAPE

UPOMA AZIZ

A crestfallen soldier at the end of his service, the spine of the book was not vertical. It had contorted and bent at strange angles; if this were a person everyone would look at him with rueful, pitying eyes. Pitying eyes are curious, sneering eyes, prying eyes. Pitying eyes are not kind eyes.

Books are not meant to have twisted spines; books are not the crooked man with a crooked smile. But books were not meant to be flipped through angrily, or be rolled up and used as a weapon. And yet, it had gone through these and more. Maybe purposes were as vague and mythical as fairy tales. Fairy tales are such a waste of time, so are books. I look away from the spine of the book with loose pages and at the miles between the lines.

Books are boring, I am too. Textbooks are worse than storybooks somehow, at least in storybooks they tell you that they are making it all up. Whether I am a textbook or a storybook, I do not know. Family, family, family – the book says, a family is a social unit made up of parents and their children. It does not say that the mother humming in the kitchen forgot how to sing, the father does not look his children in the eye. The children – half, two, three: in the evening they sit next to each other and flick through the pages of their books till they

land one that does not look like chaos. The faces of his children living under the same roof is a distant memory to the father. The mother does not wear her hair down anymore; the one-sided game of tug of war has left her with insufficient hair. The children whisper even outside the house, one can never be too cautious.

I know what I don't want to be when I grow up. I don't want to be an author; I don't want to write about my life, or others' lives. I was not born for it; I was not made for it. I know what I was born for. I know that, because in school essays I wrote I wanted to be Charlie in his chocolate factory, a doctor, a painter, a teacher, a dreamer. In my home, or outside, whenever I came across a relative, those were rare, the family members, not many people visited us – after a few minutes of boring small talk, their fingers, bony or sturdy, would dig into my neck. They lowered their voice, and never looked me in the eye. They glanced sideways and would whisper into my ear, they would ask if my parents fought. I'd been taught the answer to this one, so I'd shake my head no. Then they would ask me if I could fix my parents. Yes, I could, I told them. It made them happy; they'd pat my back in appreciation, or slip cash into my hands.

Yes, I could fix my parents and all their problems, I told myself. I didn't know how, but I knew that I was destined to. I tried to interfere, it didn't

help, I tried to stay out of it, and it didn't help. When our family was, once again on the brink of demolition, my sister was born. I looked at her and felt the hope that maybe she could fix all of us.

I tiptoe across the dining to reach the kitchen, where my mother with her dead fish eyes is butchering a fish. My mother stares at the fish's eyes. The fish stares back at me. I try to read beyond the dead fish membrane of my mother's eyes, I fail.

"Amma," I call out to her. She flinches, she does not look at me, but she makes it clear that she is listening.

"My book is falling apart," I hold up my defeated book from earlier. "Will you sew it up for me?"

"There should be a roll of tape in the drawer. Use that."

I take the tape. A roll of scotch tape – Scotch Tape – *kostep*, different versions of the word blurs and emulsifies into a single slab of sound. I try to straighten out the creases in the cover. It tears in my hands. I layer yet another piece of translucent tape on the book, forming a plastic shroud. The letters are no longer visible. I put the book down. The pages fall apart and shed like autumn leaves, and only a skeleton of what it used to be remains.

Upoma Aziz is now a slouching, crouching, grouchy diffused bomb that is too tired to go off. Reach her at www.facebook.com/upoma.aziz





LIFE GOES ON

It doesn't stop. One day you hear of someone's passing and you let out a sigh. This time you feel the warm air trapped in your mask. You haven't seen a smile in a long time. Embrace? A concept gone extinct. Friends and families are just pixels on screens. Mornings turn into nights and seasons come and go. And so does life.

PHOTOS: MOHAMMAD TASAWAR ISLAM
TEXT: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

