WHERE IS MY LAST DAY OF SCHOOL?
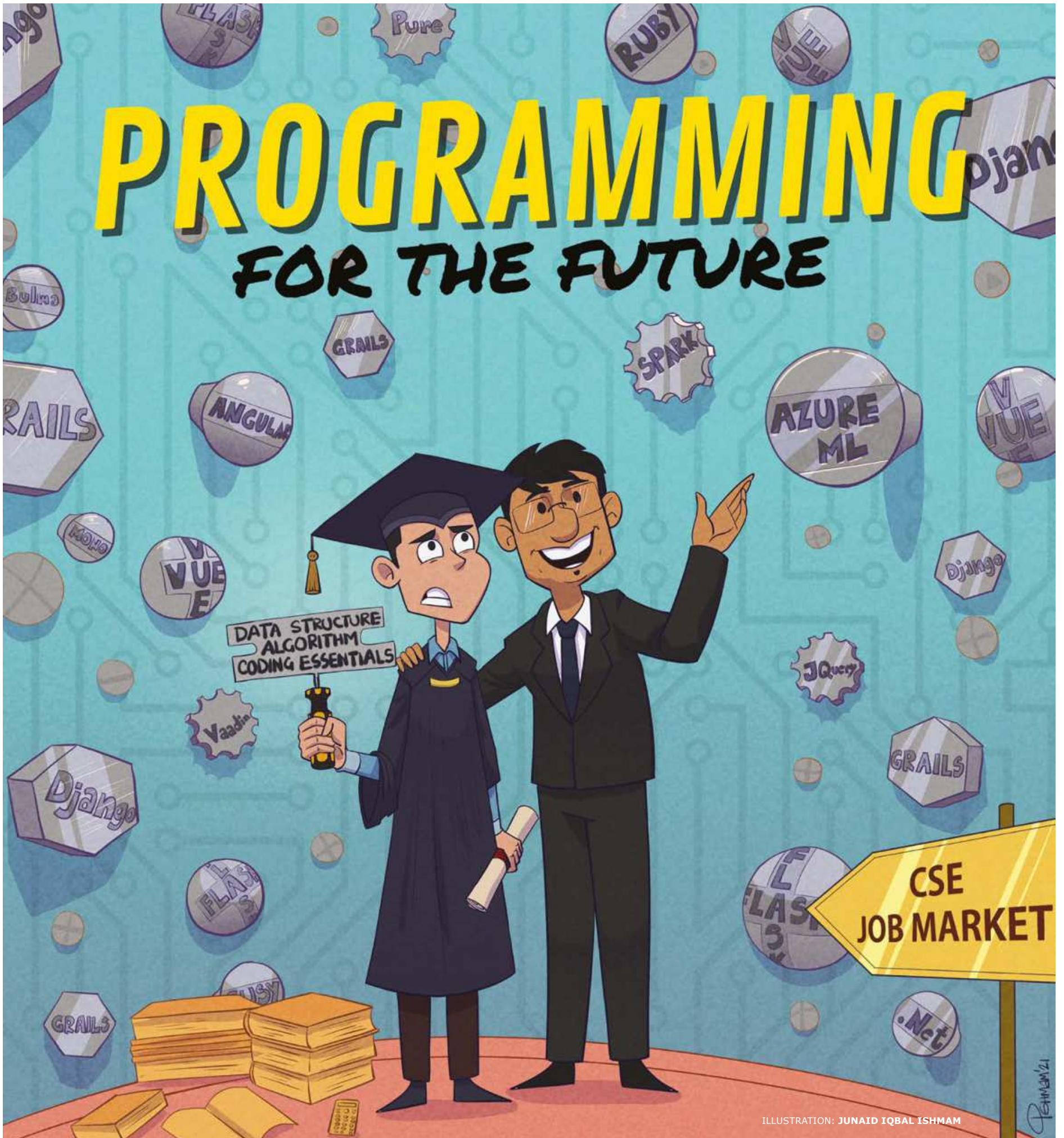**PG 3**

WHEN YOUR FOOD CRAVINGS DEPEND ON YOUR MOOD
PG 6

PROGRAMMING FOR THE FUTURE

ILLUSTRATION: **JUNAID IQBAL ISHMAM**

EDITORIAL

I never intend to pull an all-nighter. It's just that some nights, the hours fly but things don't come together.

Work. Sometimes it's just lots and lots of work. Sometimes I'm too exhausted to move, so I'll sit on the floor and think in circles about all that needs to be done.

Once you notice the room softly glowing because of the light entering from behind the curtains, you know you're done. There's no hitting your pillow tonight.

But it's not all bad. You don't have to undergo the painstaking exercise of dragging yourself out of your bed to the tune of whatever unfortunate noise you have set as your alarm.

That tune is absolutely a trigger for me now. One of you should come up with a random alarm tune generator so the rest of us aren't prepared for what noise is about to wake us up the next morning. Constant vigilance.

-- Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT

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PLAYWATCH

MUSIC

DESIGN: **KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD**

Reimagining South Asian Ghazals with *Arooj Aftab*

RAYA MEHNAZ

Pakistani musician Arooj Aftab is no stranger to the decadence of cultural heritage in musical imagination. After all, she has used Urdu ghazals and idioms frequently in her music in the past. Her newest installation, *Vulture Prince*, is no exception. The album was released on April 23, 2021, an otherwise idle Friday, unleashing endless grief, sorrow and acceptance packed within seven songs.

Aftab, while having worked with Pakistani ghazals on her first album, *Bird Under Water*, have used the ghazals in this album to channel her grief regarding the death of her younger brother—to whom the album is dedicated. Using poetry from Mirza Ghalib, Jalaluddin Rumi and ghazals from Hafeez Hoshiarpuri, Aftab tries to articulate her loss through a genre-defying experience.

Ghazals are and have been a South Asian musical delicacy that has often been inspired by, and consequently meant to, bridge the gap between the Creator and man. Considering the fact that it is perhaps the oldest form of music that speaks of otherworldly loss, it seemed fitting for Aftab to create an odd unification of centuries old words with contemporary losses.

It is especially fitting considering that ghazals were often meant to convey the worldly obstacles as well as otherworldly devotions. The poets used their ghazals to reflect social, political and religious drawbacks as a message to God. It would not be too forward to say that *Vulture Prince* inhabits all the modern sorrows of man within its century-old words.

After all, Aftab's album was being written and produced at a time when the world was in disarray because of a pandemic and Aftab's own world was destroyed by personal loss. The pain is portrayed rather spectacularly; her single "Mohabbat" went on to receive many accolades and a place in Obama's personal playlist.

"Mohabbat", originally a Hafeez Hoshiarpuri ghazal, is a 7-minute-long track that only relies on minimal guitar string to guide Aftab's grief-stricken voice. The song begins leisurely with the words, "Mohabbat karne wale kam na honge," which loosely translates to, "Those who love you won't be few in number." The lyrics of this stunning track might fool the listeners into believing it is a love song, however Aftab's voice will set them on the right path. It can be a song about love, however, it intersects love and loss. It is about healing. It is everything consuming about love and it is everything outside of love, all rolled into one song. Aftab does more than cover ghazals, she inhibits them, moulding their souls into her own imagination, her own story.

Arooj Aftab's music has long since stopped meaning anything ordinary and expected. She was always outside the mold, creating and recreating with her Pakistani-Sufi roots and her western instrumentalisation. With *Vulture Prince*, she has managed to create an experimental intimacy within something that was until a few years only a South Asian heritage.

Raya Mehnaz likes to critically analyse anything regarding pop culture, and when she's not doing that, she likes to live life dangerously — one House MD episode at a time. Send help at fb.com/raya.mehnaz

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

Where is my last day of school?

RIYANA AFROZE

Convinced I look like an owl (wise and lacking sleep) in the graduation regalia, I settled down for my virtual graduation ceremony.

I scrolled through the participants to get a glimpse of the people I shared a classroom with, before changing the layout to fit my best friends in one frame. It was a chore, but hey, I had the most beautiful faces on my screen.

The next one-and-half-hour was brimmed with nostalgia, but there was still space for motivation and zeal. In the end, through sending virtual clapping emoji, we were done with our "school life."

However, a few months after goodbyes were officially said, the reality of it suddenly hit me as I saw the juniors prepare for school. I realised there were no more uniforms, no more heavy backpacks and no more strict hair styling rules — I could finally highlight my hair and no one would be bothered.

My friends and I, unsurprisingly, failed to realise every single plan that was made for the last two years in school. On top of that, we lost the opportunity to go on any school trips as well. Be it sleepovers or a trip to Sylhet, unfortunately, none of them came to fruition.

An average human spends about 15 to 16 years in school. The transition from school to university is a big one. A very big one. It's a transformation that is meant to be celebrated and cherished. But it feels like we lacked the closure required to appreciate these new beginnings.

We never got to have that "cinematic separation." Growing up, we had been anticipating the day we would all take flight and find our places in the world. It's sad to think we may never see some familiar faces again, and we never got the grand farewell we all had planned for each other.

It doesn't matter who moved out and who stayed back. We won't be sharing the same classroom anymore. Now that schools have reopened, the classroom chairs and cafeteria benches will no longer remain empty but we won't be a part of it anymore.

The library books may be cleaned, the dust removed, but not the traces we left in them, right? We must have made an impact; we must have left a mark.

I remember walking through the corridor with my friend discussing the predicted yet spontaneous school closure, back in March 2020. Little did I know that the day I left the campus for a "two-weekclosure" would casually become the last day attending classes under that roof.

The reopening of schools may be a joyous occasion for many, but it also brings a wave of resentment for the ones who have been robbed of the experience of a distinct "last day of school."

*Riyana is an introvert self-debating on whether she is an INFJ or INFP. Send her memes on introversion and MBTI personality tests on Instagram at @_raya_riyana_*

What are we doing on our phones?

SABIBA HOSSAIN

Did your parents ever accuse you of staring at your phone all day?

I'm not saying we're not guilty of doing this. A lot of our precious time is wasted scrolling through social media, liking posts, typing comments. But is that all? Are we really accomplishing nothing by making use of our phones?

I had a chance to reflect on what it's like to live in the digital era. It has made me question whether we're actually doing something meaningful with our phones, or if it's what our parents say we are doing – wasting our lives with something intangible.

According to UNESCO, the uses of digital devices, communication applications, and the ability to access networks and manage information are defined as digital skills that are imperative to know to survive in the 21st century. Setting up a social media account or having the ability to distinguish facts from hoaxes may seem as easy as breathing air to you, but they're now legally defined skills.

Gen Z, also known as the generation most hooked to their smartphones, has access to anything and everything through their phones. They shop, watch movies, write memos, listen to audiobooks and more all through their phones.

Nashiha Ali, a student of Holy Cross College, shares her opinion, "I spent a huge chunk of my time during this pandemic doing digital drawings. As someone who is new to the whole thing, I had a lot of help watching tutorial videos and scrolling for hours on Instagram and Pinterest on my phone."

Al Zubayer Onkon, a grade 12 student, says that he's aware of wasting time on social media and understands why his parents think negatively of it. "But that's not all," he adds, "I've also increased my work productivity and enhanced certain skills, and once I showed my parents this, they became more supportive."

We've seen young people setting up their own kitchens or small businesses, posting tutorials, organising events, and taking action over important issues through their phones. Students are turning their hobbies into part-time jobs using mobile phones and earning money to cover their own expenses.

Social media is a great tool for networking and finding opportunities. However, it has acquired such an infamous reputation that it's quite difficult for our elders to think that anything good could come from it. The generation gap between the Gen Z, millennials, and the Gen X is a crucial factor.

Gen Z didn't have to adapt to smartphones; they got accustomed to it like they did their native languages. For that reason, Gen Zs are more comfortable with doing work digitally than on paper. "It's much faster, and I can store everything in one place," says Sadia Hossain Samarah, an A Level student.

Is our attachment to technology healthy or addictive?

Reference
UNESCO.org (March 16, 2018). *Digital Skills Critical for Jobs and Social Inclusion.*

Sabiba Hossain is a Hufflepuff who plans to go into hibernation every winter but never succeeds. Send her fantasy book recs at fb.com/Sabibastro

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

What if you wanted to become a football coach?

TAMJIDUL HOQUE

A career as a football coach is something of a fantasy for many football fans, often lived through *Football Manager* or career mode on EA Sports *FIFA*. In reality, due to lack of good opportunities, investment and initiatives from the relevant authority and even lack of effort on our part, this fantasy is difficult to bring to fruition.

However, if someone did try their hand at becoming a licenced football coach in Bangladesh, what would that be like?

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is under Asian Football Confederation (AFC), and to be a coach in Bangladesh, you need to be licenced by AFC. There are four types of coaching licences one can obtain: "D", "C", "B" and "A" licences; starting from a D Licence and then working their way up to A.

To get started, a CV needs to be submitted where previous experience regarding football is mentioned, with an application letter where the reason for applying is mentioned. Some sort of playing or working experience in football teams or at local academies and a recommendation letter from a coach or academy should be included as proof of your work experience. This will give a greater chance at being called for selection.

Nishitangshu Datta, a 24-year-old Criminology student, applied and went through the process and is currently a C Licence coach. Speaking of his experience on applying for the licence, he said, "It took a lot of time. I applied for the coaching certificate in June 2019 but my program started in August 2020 and ended in October 2020."

The documents need to be submitted in person at BFF House in Motijheel, Dhaka. After applying for the D Licence and the call for selection, the candidate has to go through a course which has a theoretical and practical part. After the course is finished, a licence exam takes place, and depending on the result of the exam, the licence is issued.

The D Licence makes one eligible to be a coach at local/grassroots level and as the "C","B" and "A" licences are obtained, coaching at a higher level becomes possible. An "A" licence is the requirement for being a Bangladesh first division coach. This licence also enables the individual to hold other jobs like being a trainer at institutes like local sports academies or sports trainer at schools and colleges.

After overcoming all the hurdles and managing to be a licenced trainer, what opportunities await? Not a lot, it seems. One reason people never consider doing this kind of job is lack of jobs with good pay.

It's even tougher to get jobs if you don't have any sports background, as Nishitangshu explains, "I am not involved in any football-related job now. There is a lack of football related jobs in Bangladesh. Also, if one doesn't have any professional football career, he faces more problems in finding a job as no team or academy wants to appoint him if he has no professional playing career."

In Bangladesh, the truth is there is a lack of licenced coaches available at the grassroots level. There is a clear lack of direction and planning when it comes to helping our young football players and the local young talents aren't getting proper training to polish their skills and grow as a better footballer.

In this regard, Nishitangshu said, "The development process of young players at the local level is very bad. Many of the rural coaches are not qualified for the job. Often, there is no difference in training for a player who is 7 years old and who is 17 years old, which ultimately makes the training session useless and worthless."

Ultimately, the truth about the football coaching scene in Bangladesh is that it's not an attractive professional option for many. As a football fan, it's very sad to see the current state of Bangladeshi football. We support international teams and clubs but the truth is there is nothing like supporting your own country. I still remember the World Cup qualifying away match against India where we almost won and I never felt so happy after a football game.

Even though the situation is grim, the youth of Bangladesh needs to step up and help football grow. Many fans might have gone past the age when we could have become a football player, but we can still help in other ways and by being a local trainer is the best way you can contribute.

Tamjidul Hoque likes to watch premier league and talk about football. You can talk with him at tamjidulh@gmail.com.

PROGRAMMING FOR THE FUTURE
Are CSE graduates ready for the industry?

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Most Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) students have long faced the problem of meeting industry standards and requirements after graduating from their respective curriculums. For many of them, there is a gap between academia and industry. Most CSE programs in Bangladeshi universities have a similar curriculum that's designed to prepare students adequately for the job market. Yet, different software, tech, and IT companies have to train new recruits for months to fit their standards.

Are our CSE graduates well prepared for the industry? And the gap many students and graduates talk about, does it really exist?

"My university made me career-ready by teaching me how to learn. However, I wasn't taught the tech stacks I needed to write my first piece of professional code the day I joined," says Afia Rahman, a software engineering intern at a leading software company in Dhaka. "It took me some time to learn the tech stacks I needed in my field, but thanks to what I learned at my university, all that wasn't too overwhelming."

Of course, there were interns from other universities who were taught everything they needed to know by their respective institutions. But that didn't bother Afia. "Although it was demotivating to me at first, I was lucky that I had been taught programming through flowcharts, tracing and coding," she says. "Almost every other language becomes easier to learn if you're taught this way."

Despite what she learned from her university courses, Afia still had to struggle a lot when she entered the industry. While her university equipped her with the knowledge necessary to explore software engineering, machine learning (ML), AI, and other tech industries, the courses themselves were not enough to equip her with the practical knowledge she needed in the actual work field.

"I was surprised by these small gaps in my knowledge," she says. "Those gaps need a lot of googling to figure out, and the time taken to discover them can be expensive."

In order to fill in those gaps, the industry needs to step in. The tech sector is vast. Be it software engineering, mobile or web app development, machine learning, data analytics or electronics, each company or organisation works with its own tech stack. While some of the programming language, frameworks or technology might be common or seen as standard in the respective industry, it is highly likely that there are major differences in the overall stack itself. Hence, companies have to recruit individuals who meet their standards, but then have to train them in their own way.

For these organisations, life would definitely have been a lot easier had the universities prepared their graduates for the industry directly.

However, it is difficult to put the blame on the universities as well, given that they have only four years to prepare the students for the real world.

"Each semester is very compact within which you have to complete a generalised field of CSE and hence, learning specialised topics or frameworks would become difficult and tiring for the students," says Samiha Haque, a lecturer at the Department of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), Brac University.

"Not all companies follow the same specialised tools, so which one should you focus on? I think it's more of a trade-off between learning a more generalised version of that field and focusing on a specific branch of that field which will be helpful to some but not to most, and I think universities try to pick the former."

Afia agrees with Samiha. "Students need to be taught how to learn, instead of being fed the contents directly," she says. "They need to get stuck and have that eureka moment to actually grasp why their program isn't working."

She further adds, "I had some amazing faculty members from my time who not only taught the fundamentals we needed during classes, but advised us on how the world would be out there and how comfortable we need to become with the core concepts so that any language becomes a piece of cake. In class, we were taught how to understand the syntax, and trace our code, which helped us better understand the program, discover mistakes, and so on. This helped me not only picturise how the program was swaying and flowing from one logic to another, but also helped me learn other languages faster."

So, in a way, universities focus on the basic and advanced concepts, and it's needless to say that most of them do a pretty good job at it. Then, however, it becomes difficult for them to spoon feed everything students need to perform well in their careers. And while some universities do take the initiative to incorporate a lot of the industry-standard tech stack in their curriculum, it definitely comes at the expense of leaving out a lot of necessary conceptual courses and lessons.

Almost all the CSE departments in Bangladesh maintain some similarity in their curriculums. As Samiha mentioned, universities have to cover a lot of ground in a short time. Instead of getting their students accustomed to various programming languages, frameworks, libraries, and other related technology or tech stack, universities prepare them, not for the jobs, but for the opportunities. By teaching students about algorithms, data structures, machine learning and artificial intelligence, universities allow students to choose from a wide range of opportunities that the tech or IT field has to offer.

"Teachers discuss the competitive job market," says Samiha. "But I don't think the curriculum is necessarily built to train students on how to crack a job. Universities will give them a taste of the basics, which will help them to fix their aim. Once it's locked in place, they can then evolve their skills from there."

At one end, universities are preparing their students in the limited time they get. Then you have the industry itself spending hours to train these new recruits. In between, both the academia and industry expect students and graduates to acquire knowledge on their own.

"I definitely believe CS students should learn certain technical skills on their own," says Mashrur Mahmud, an AI Engineer at Intelligent Machines Limited. "It isn't possible for universities to teach their students everything. Specifically in the context of machine learning and AI, I believe if students solely rely on university courses, that is just setting themselves up for failure later on."

"Those who are self-taught or have the habit of learning things outside of curriculum often excel here," adds Mashur. "ML/AI is a constantly evolving field, and you need to keep learning on your own in order to keep up."

The case is the same for the software engineering, app and web development sector, as explained by Afia. "Software engineering is a volatile field, forever changing," she says. "It keeps shifting from one tech stack to the other, whichever fits its then-current performance needs. Hence, to cope with such changes, CSE students need to become comfortable with the idea of self-learning certain technical skills."

"The university can help them with one stack," adds Afia. "Spoon feeding students only harms them since they lose that comfort to keep shifting from one environment of programming to another."

Having established all that, let's return to that gap between academia and industry. Does it exist? Yes, and no.

There are three key elements in this situation – academia, industry, and students. As long as universities maintain their standards, and impart their lessons properly, they'll have done their part. Tech companies need to understand the scenario, and provide training that's necessary for their employees to meet the required standards.

Finally, students have to play the intermediary role, where they take it upon themselves to gather knowledge on their own, and do a bit of self-learning. The moment one of these elements fail to play their respective role, the gap is created. But as long as they do what's expected of them from the other, that gap becomes non-existent.

When Your Food Cravings Depend on Your Mood

BUSHRA ZAMAN

I always crave chocolate ice cream when I'm upset and fried chicken when angry. I have two friends who continuously test their spice level limits by picking different spicy ramen whenever they are frustrated and need a pick-me-up. One of my siblings has noodle soup as comfort food for stressful days, and I have a brother who always celebrates a good day with *fuchka*.

As one might guess, there is a connection between one's mood and their food cravings. According to an article published on *Healthline*, dark chocolate has theobromine as a constituent, the consumption of which can help elevate your mood. Some experts have also mentioned a general psychological effect.

So if you, like myself, get yourself a treat in the form of chocolate when upset, maybe this explains the reason why chocolate helps. The same *Healthline* article also mentions how bananas are high in Vitamin B6, which aids in the synthesis of dopamine and serotonin, both of which are quoted as "feel good neurotransmitters."

There are obvious examples of food affecting a person's feelings. The biggest example of this, in my opinion, is perhaps caffeine. Coffee has helped me stay awake to study for an exam even after a hectic day. Caffeine gives you a boost of energy which can change both your mood and thereby the mood of those around you, because how you feel can no doubt reflect on others too.

However, mind you, too much of a good thing can be bad. Too much coffee is a big no-no, on account of negative physical health involving irregular heartbeats, for example.

In an article, the FDA mentioned that 400 milligrams is the limit for caffeine consumption per day, without any negative effects on one's health. This is roughly equivalent to approximately four to five cups of coffee.

Stress eating has even been verified as a phenomenon according to an article published by Harvard Health Publishing. The article also mentions that scientific research connecting particular dietary factors or food to depression was still inconclusive when the article was written. An example of food being connected to depression would be blueberries because it has often been said to help those who are feeling low, although the exact mechanism of this is still unclear.

Do you have particular cravings based on your mood?

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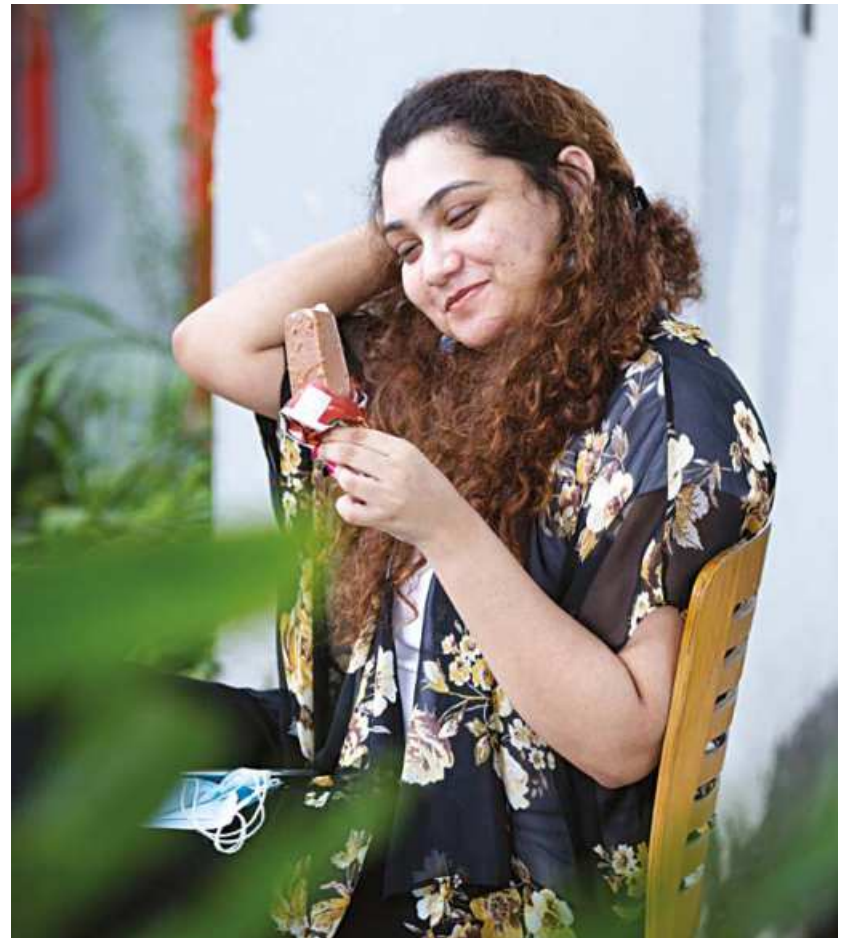*Bushra Zaman likes books, art, and only being contacted by email. Contact her at bushrazaman31@yahoo.com*

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

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satire.

Find your better half with *BrokenBiye.com*

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

Finding your better half is a tedious job. You're supposed to grow old and obnoxious with this person, share a bed when you're not fighting over the other's family and if you're blessed enough, bring a child into a dysfunctional marriage.

Like millions of other entitled bachelors, maybe you're wondering who can help your parents make this life decision for you. Well, who else but the internet?

BrokenBiye.com is a matrimonial service that truly understands our delusional people and uses that understanding to add an extra judgmental oomph to the local marriage. Starting from compiling the bride's biodata in a more "auntie-suitable approach," to adding the right amount of mutton in *kacchi* before people start grouching, we take care of everything.

A nagging old uncle will almost always judge the bride's character, personality and qualifications as a human being based on words on an A4 paper, the biodata. Petty things like her preferences, educational qualifications or ambitions are not necessary. Our services will make sure you highlight the more important aspects of a bride, namely, your hometown that you last visited in 2013 or more importantly, your skin tone.

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ILLUSTRATION: **KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD**

and invest all her time and effort to teach the kids how to multiply. Cancer can wait, your grandchild's admission in a reputed and pretentious school cannot.

After taking care of a man-child in the form of a husband, the actual children, and some passive aggressive in-laws, if she somehow still manages to find time for herself, *BrokenBiye.com* will arrange a post-marital intimidation session. The mother's newfound fear of her kids choosing Commerce over Science should take care of it.

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Suggest Ifti post-war Japanese literature at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com

FALLING IN REVERSE

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

Climbing over walls with barbed wire fences,
Steep stairs and stained elevators,
Holding on to the cold metal;
Not letting go.

Walking over thorns under satin,
Finding roads crisscrossed and broken,
Cutting with a knife through the ocean;
No drowning now.

Persist, you'll reach the highest high,
Survive, the clouds there are too cotton-white,
Don't look back, the lines have been blurred off,
Win, no dust will dare to settle onto your armour.

But the spell breaks and the magic's gone.

No more lavender skies with flamingos flying over,
Just pitch black void waiting to devour.
Only treacherous swords and arrows to choose from,
To build and break your own ice sculpture.

And you find yourself alone in a skyscraper,
Top floor, but there's no room to take cover.
Nowhere you can breathe without feeling the pressure.
No hand to hold that you haven't trampled over.
You've done everything to reach here,
And stand atop plinths made of bones and tears,
But all along you were just –
Falling in reverse.

Maisha Nazifa Kamal has lost track of time and is living in a world where she never existed. Break her reverie at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com

UNLUCKY IN LOVE

SHIMIN MUSHSHARAT

As I burn through my twenties at a nauseating speed, the thought that I will die alone creeps in softly, stretches, and curls into a tight ball like a sleepy kitten, and claims my heart as its permanent residence. Time passes. The kitten – that is in truth a thought – grows. Yesterweek, it was tiny, fluffy. Today it has doubled in size, the claws sharper, and now it invites a friend called loneliness.

I love love. Love as we see in the movies, love like they write in the books, love that our favourite musicians serenade on. But suffering through years of abuse in the name of love, I slowly learn that I do not know love out of fiction. I decide one day that I have had enough. I give up on love. The decision is sudden. I make it quietly. But my conviction is absolute. I remain blissfully alone for years. In these years, I make friends, learn new hobbies, and allow myself to grow. In these years, my heart remains sealed shut inside a steel cage.

One day that could be called fortunate or ominous depending on the rest of the story, love finds me again. This love looks like friendship. This love resembles a ship coming ashore with all its sails painted in the deepest of greens. I am the shore but it feels as though I am the one that's come home. I let myself bask in the warmth of a love that feels right, right, right. My hopes and dreams that were buried deep, deep inside raise their greedy heads. I fail to thwart them. They grow like ivy on a derelict wall. They fly like kites in the spring wind. But ships tend to sail away. So does mine. I lose faith once more. And as they say, 'fool me twice, shame on me.'

I am ashamed. I do not think. I hurt and I cry and I suffocate. Worst of all, I change. This time I don't heal. This time I decide on vengeance. Only, it's my own head under the guillotine. Now I meet new people. Now I find them interesting. Now I let them charm me. Now I let them make me laugh. But all my senses are on high alert. Listening, listening, and waiting for them to tell me they love me. As pre-rain wind smells of sharp things, so does the air around people. A whiff of love and I run. And I leave. And I keep leaving.

I wake up one Wednesday morning from a deep sleep. And I realise that my heart has turned corporate. It pumps blood. And it puts time stamps on people. This human stays for three weeks. That human leaves in a month. It is extra cautious of the undeterminable people. This new and improved heart dreams of people but buries those dreams under prescription pills. It has, at last, unlearned how to love. I marvel at my own heart as if my consciousness is a balloon floating a few inches above my body. I whisper to this heart that maybe we simply ran out of luck in this life. Let us try again in the next one, yes?

The writer is a student of computer science at North South University.
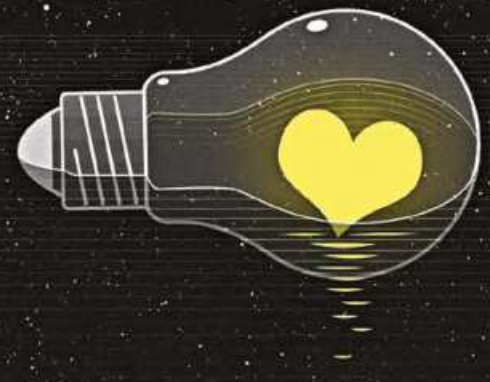
The World's Greatest Journey by Boat

**NAHALY NAFISA KHAN &
AZMIN AZRAN**

"What are you going to do on a boat for two days?"

The question was valid, and we didn't have an answer. But when schedules aligned for our group of eight friends – an unlikely occurrence for a cohort of individuals who are either university students, young professionals, or both – we took a leap of faith and jumped at the opportunity to leave Dhaka. It was a good leap.

Rangamati is a town that is very much dictated by the Kaptai lake. *Mawrum*, a 77-feet long and 19-feet wide diesel-engine boat on the Kaptai, would show us the sights and wonders of Rangamati. We got on the boat and settled ourselves down on a picturesque deck lounge, and the boat finally started to pull away from shore. The hum of the engine could hardly drown out our buzz of excitement, and when the hot and sappy weather became a cool breeze under a bright sun, we realised what we were going to do for two days on a boat – relax.

The sights were breathtaking. Cascading greenery sloping down the sides of small hills had the effect of creating winding waterways, and as we felt beholden to nature for its offerings, ever more breathtaking sights revealed themselves from behind the hills. At one point, one of the writers found themselves with a sore throat from all the gasping – their breath was truly taken.

A big part of the first day was spent in and around the Shuvolong waterfalls, where we were lucky to encounter strong currents. The water, which was the perfect temperature for dipping toes, washed away any remnant city-induced tension. Back on the boat, most of us felt truly calm and at one with the laid back attitude that life on a boat forces its inhabitants to adopt. The rest were asleep.

PHOTO: **ANUPOMA JOYEETA JOYEE**

This entire trip took place mid-week, which is an odd choice on the face of it, but we were a group well versed with the moon calendar, or at least we remembered to Google when the next full moon was before planning. Our first night on *Mawrum* was the second night of the Harvest Moon. In anticipation of a moonlit soiree, the boat was docked on what felt like the perfect spot. Against a mound of land jutting out of the lake, we had the expanse of the lake to one side and an imposing silhouette of wild overgrowth on the other.

As darkness finally broke and the moon peeked out from behind silver clouds, we celebrated. Little by little, moonlight revealed small fishing boats in the distance, dark against the sparkling golden water that reflected the moonlight back to us in a million different angles. All the songs of lunar devotion we knew escaped our throats, and for a while, we sang at the top of our lungs. Then we just murmured into the night, eventually falling silent and letting the moon do the talking. Some of us slept on the deck that night; we had to.

By the second day, lounging on the roof of the boat turned out to be a fan favourite activity, with the wind in our faces and the feeling of being on top of the world. There were extensive safety precautions to be maintained, like staying away from the railings and constant supervision by the staff. But safety wasn't an inhibitor to fun, on the contrary, it was quite the addition.

On the day, we decided to dock for a swim. Our group, comedically lacking in swimming skills, found out that mandatory life jackets meant we can float around in the water (in shallow depths of course) without being scared. After that, it was all rainbows and butterflies. It was as if we were in a Studio Ghibli film universe. Lying on the water bed, we saw the sky changing colours with the sunlight peeking through tree leaves, making patterns as if wanting to be let into our hearts as a muse while we kept chasing the clouds.

After four hours of pretending to be fishes, we recreated evolution by rediscovering the function of our feet. It was silly, it was a bit stupid, it was assisted swimming, but it was overwhelming. It made us realise the mundane insignificance of our existence in the grander scheme of things. The experience destroyed the self we carried to *Mawrum* from Dhaka in the most terrifyingly beautiful way possible. One of us grew new skin.

Another highlight of the trip was the food during our stay on *Mawrum*. It was cooked according to local tradition, and every meal was mind-blowingly delicious. Whether it was the bamboo chicken, the fish, the bamboo curry or the curry prepared from banana cones, the dishes were an absolute delight.

As we write this travelogue at our office and look back at this journey, we realise it had been nothing less than an ethereal experience. We all left parts of our souls on *Mawrum*, and in the depths of the Kaptai, in between the hills. In our hearts, we are still in the *"Lal Paharir Desh."*

To find out more, visit facebook.com/mawrumboatlife

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**