

An open letter to those who are tired of Dhaka



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Citizens of Dhaka,

I hear you. Dhaka is one chaotic inferno. Now don't come at me with your playlists on how beautiful this city is, because you're right, it is kind of alright in terms of sunsets. The rest, though – spending hours in traffic, never having a moment of complete silence, getting desensitised to tragedy, the toxic air – it's mostly an agonising experience.

Throughout the pandemic, many of us went on a deep-dive through our consciousness. Staying at home, it felt as though we were made to confront bitter truths and accept difficult realities. The Grim Reaper had visited the city, taking our near and dear ones with him. Many lost their means of income. And don't even get me started on the mental health toll.

It is at times like this, one asks themselves – *what are we even here for anyway?*

If you were looking for a constructive answer to that question, I don't have it. All I can tell you is that, as humans, we tend to conjure our own sense of things, based on our experiences and our learned values that help put those experiences in decipherable boxes. But how does it make sense if our reality is riddled with grief? The question pecks away at my brain like a woodpecker.

Not too long ago, just within the last century, before the world had witnessed world wars and borders were less stringent, it was the time of the empires and exploration. My best bet is, in those times, when individuals found themselves in this precarious position, they set off to the unknown to find those answers. Marco Polo, a simple Venetian merchant, ended up as an official of

the Privy Council appointed by Kublai Khan's reign in China. Scholars travelled far and wide, to enhance their understanding of the world and to challenge what they already knew.

Take Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan scholar who travelled more than any other explorer in pre-modern history, visiting southern Eurasia, including Central Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, China, and the Iberian Peninsula over a period of 30 years. I wonder how they felt before they set sail. Did they know they'll outlive the raging seas? Did they wonder if they'll ever be back home again? Were they afraid? Even if they were, they took a chance.

In the olden days, before mental health was recognised, doctors in Bengal would prescribe "*hawa badal*" (a change of atmosphere) when people fell sick. If you think about it, it made sense. Especially for us Dhakaites, this city resembles a pestering brown relative who has no sense of personal space and that is exactly why it necessitates us to take a break from it.

The break doesn't even have to be outside of Dhaka, you can take a stroll through the University of Dhaka, visit the zoo, take a walk through your area at dawn, and take a boat ride on the Buriganga – any place that rids you of the essence of the city.

My dear netizens, if you are feeling big emotions that's swayed by the big blue, get some wind to your sail. Grab your earphones, your masks and sanitizers and set off to the unknown. Go now! Yes, NOW! Get your butt moving.

Nazifa mostly spends her days wondering what leisure even means. Send her your commiserations at nazifa@thedailystar.net

The link between art and mathematics

AYRA AREEBA ABID

Art is more than caressing brushes on a blank canvas or sketching a black and white portrait. It is one of the few rare things to exist on Earth which truly enlightens us. Art has allowed me to view the world in many different ways.

Like any piece of art, any scenario can be projected and understood in various ways. The human mind is anything but simple. It is so complex that we ourselves, at times, fail to decipher some of our own words and actions. However, it is possible to express some things in other methods which we often fail to string into words.

Personally, I've never really seen the world in a mathematical order. However, when it comes to art, there is a great deal of mathematics involved and I think that's beautiful. Art is logical because you get the ability to decode messages or abstract paintings. There's a story and sometimes, a muse behind every successful drawing. It's the artist's way of creative expression.

When I was younger, I remember going to art exhibitions with my mother where she taught me that our perspective on art lies within us. There's no hard and fast rule, no definite formula. Though both art and maths have something in common. It was the idea that paintings and numbers both have a pattern, supported by the famous mathematician G.H. Hardy's words from his memoir, *A Mathematician's Apology*, "A mathematician, like a painter or poet, is a maker of patterns. If his patterns are more permanent than theirs, it is because they are made with ideas."

The world's multifaceted matters are suffused by mathematics and art. There are layers you'll discover, steps that are necessary to reach your final answer. It is also true that there are some questions that are not solvable. You can't simply reach a result.

Art is essentially the same. Much of Leonardo da



Vinci's paintings included mathematics. One of the iconic ones is the Vitruvian Man, which portrayed a perfectly proportioned human form. This, in particular, is the beautiful merging of art and science. The Mona Lisa was also constructed using an aesthetic ratio to bring out "the divine proportion". Art and math breathed together in da Vinci's artworks.

True mathematicians and artists are able to get lost in their world to the point where everything else is on mute. They lose track of time because of the immense passion

and thus leading to inevitable attention to quench the thirst of knowing the unknown.

We need both math and art to keep things sturdy, literally and metaphorically. Art is anything but irrational. The buildings, the trees and even the most minute things you're surrounded by are mostly an intersection of math and art.

Ayra Areeba Abid's favourite word is 'serendipity' and she's a linguistics geek. Connect with her at areeba.ayra@gmail.com