

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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THERE IS MORE TO SCHOOL
THAN JUST GRADES

PG 4

AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR
TEACHERS

PG 4



It is my parents' duty to educate you.

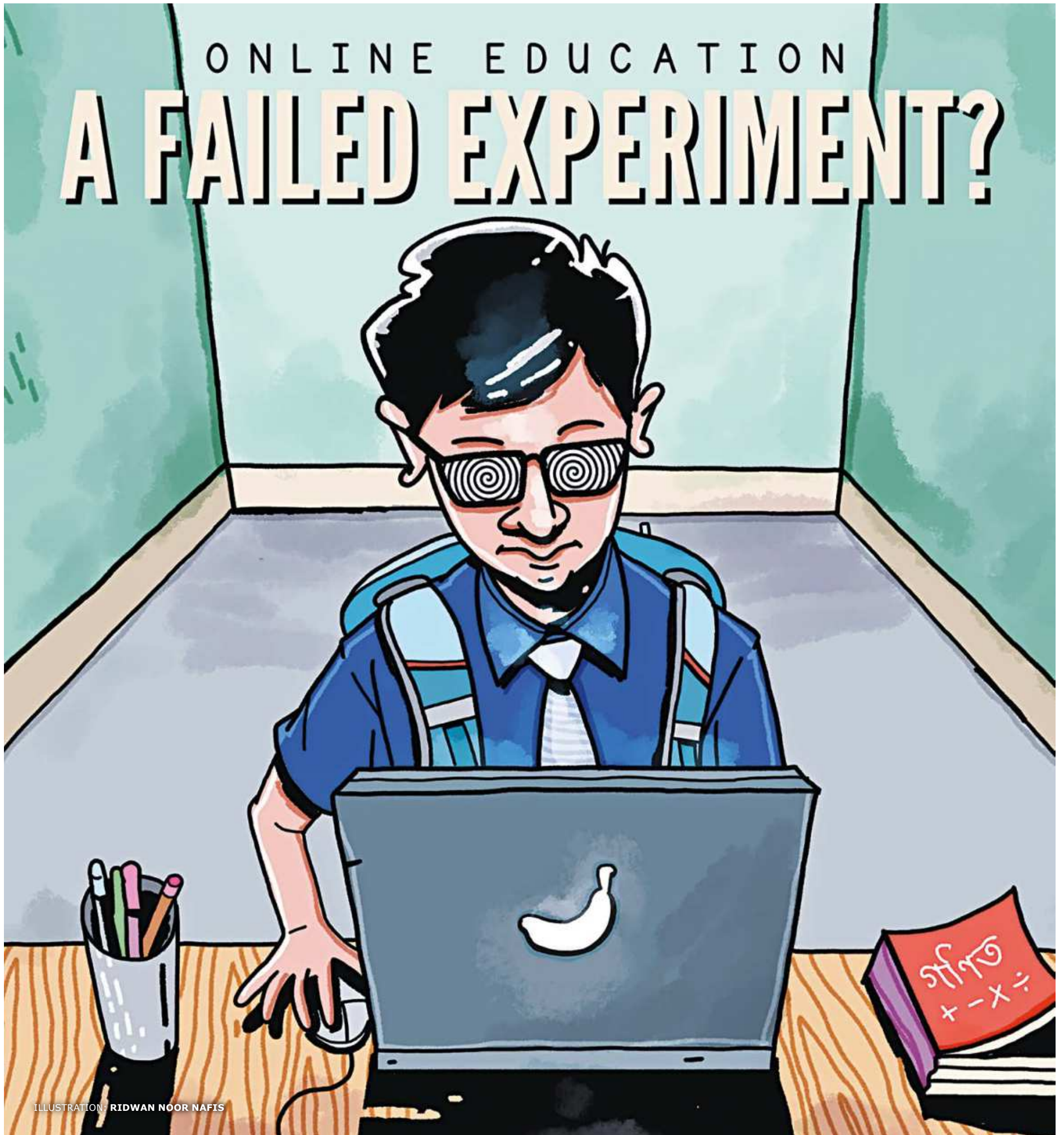


ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

EDITORIAL

It's the penultimate issue of the year.

2021 has mostly been an intense time. We experimented, worked in ways we haven't before and made space for new conversations. It only makes sense for our cover story on this issue to reflect on the status quo of the education model we have embraced throughout this year.

Personally I am not one to keep New Year's resolutions. I think nothing really changes in a year. What do I really want to change about myself or achieve in the next year that I couldn't in this one?

I like to work on my goals more short term. Hopping from one project to another, you realise just how much you can get done as you readjust your goals and learn as you go. Perhaps it's just a little scary not knowing what life will throw at you next but if you made it through this year, chances are you'll handle the next one just fine.

But for now, we still have one more SHOUT issue to look forward to for 2021.

– Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT



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PLAYWATCH

FOOD



PHOTO: HIYA ISLAM

Hanging out at Diggger

HIYA ISLAM

Diggger, a sub-brand of Chillox, entered the city's pizza scene earlier this year, on the bustling Dhanmondi Road 11/A. The menu hosts a number of pizzas categorised under classic, special, and signature labels and in four sizes (single 7", couple 9", hangout 12", and party 16"). We tried a bunch of flavours coming in single sizes coupled with soft drinks and sides.

Signature pizzas come with a stuffed crust sprinkled with sesame. The filling varies with each flavour which is a sweet surprise on its own.

The Prawn & Chicken Alfredo pizza lives up to its expectations – satisfyingly cheesy prawn scattered on top. Perhaps they could try adding more of the prawn given it is one of the focus ingredients. I would love to have it again, though. On the other hand, the Bolognese Alfredo is less cheesy which is fair considering it only has mozzarella. The crust contains minced beef; it will give you the best of both worlds: Alfredo sauce with a smack of beef Bolognese.

The special Steak on Dough is a mix of mozzarella and beef steak that has a spicy curry punch to it. From the classic section, Meaty Mushroom Ham is a stark opposite with bright colours and would appeal to non-spicy lovers. It is topped with chicken ham, corn, mushroom, and oregano. Another special, Chicken Alfredo, is a great choice for chicken fans and comes with capsicum of all colours. It is said to have "three types of cheese" like the Prawn & Chick-

en Alfredo. It is safe to say when a pizza has a mix of three kinds of cheese, you will not be disappointed.

As the majority of options seem to have only mozzarella, cheese lovers might be disappointed. I would definitely go for the ones having a mix of cheese next time. Lastly, Prawn Master is a special pizza with a rather rare ingredient – seaweed – combined with prawn and mozzarella.

Each pizza is served with two kinds of sauce. One is the absolutely necessary garlic sauce. The spicy garlic is comparatively less tangy and pairs excellently with leftover crusts.

The menu also includes a number of sides: French fries, potato wedges, onion rings, pizza pockets, and hash browns. With the pizza frenzy going we decided to try something non-pizza and hence, hash brown which is *aloo er chop* in a way but American style. These hash browns fared well in terms of taste; crunchy on the outside and mushy soft on the inside. With the spicy garlic dip that comes along, these can get addictive. For a price of BDT 150, two large chunks are served.

The large cup of drinks seems to fall short. Perhaps, the smaller size would be even inadequate for a complete meal. The prices are VAT and other taxes inclusive and are structured in an affordable range.

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



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Why women need to stop being told to learn self-defence

BUSHRA ZAMAN

As a child, I believed karate or self-defence of some sort would help make me invincible.

Watching videos promoting self-defence techniques and attending seminars or classes on self-defence are all sound activities to invest our time in, especially if you take into account how they can help us be better equipped at protecting ourselves in certain situations. Something I asked myself at a much later age, however, was how reasonable the idea of relying on self-defence, to prevent any kind of harassment from occurring, was.

Telling girls to start learning self-defence as the one solution to end all forms of harassment essentially feeds into the culture of victim-blaming, as it may contribute to the idea that if you were ever harassed or attacked, it was because you were not equipped to fight back, instead of how the harassment should never have occurred to begin with.

A potential issue lies in how self-defence could be negatively perceived. In movies, if a girl starts fighting off bad guys and defeats them, the sole reason for her win is usually her extensive training received in fighting. Sometimes the character receives help.

However, in real life, if you were a girl who got into an argument with a man somewhere for some reason, most people would likely just stand and watch the scene, often there only to ridicule the situation. The ways in which any such

situation can go wrong are innumerable. If the man was rude and attempted to raise his hand against you, would you be completely confident about saving your life alone if it came down to it? Should the situation turn worse and you were outnumbered, what would happen then?

The problems do not stop there. Women could be physically unfit to receive self-defence training, may have reached an age where they can no longer vigorously train to protect themselves, or maybe they are too young to understand how to do so. They could have financial difficulties which render it impossible for them to attend classes or seminars on how to defend themselves. Just because these women have these barriers in learning self-defence, does by no means, indicate they have no desire to protect themselves.

Knowing that you have the ability to at least to some extent, whatever the extent may be, protect yourself from bodily harm in the state of a crisis, no doubt is better than not having any clue as to how to defend yourself. It gives you confidence and increases your chances of survival in a fight. However, it is more important to promote better education and teach people how to respect people of all gender identities. It is not a woman's responsibility to protect herself, it is the responsibility of the society to avoid any such occurrences.

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

Why guilt-tripping stories on Instagram need to go

FATIMA JAHAN ENA

During my recent doom-scrolling session on Instagram, I came across something puzzling. Someone posted a story which said "Repost if you're against sexual violence. I can see who skipped."

Thinking this was a bizarre, isolated incident, I continued scrolling. About five minutes had passed when I stumbled upon another variant of the same story. This one said something along the lines of "Share this on your story if you're against xenophobia."

Over the next week, I saw multiple variations of these stories. They all addressed different atrocities or issues, but one common feature among them all was milking people's guilt.

This new trend seemed very reminiscent of old school chain mails. Here's a quick run-down if you missed out on that era: the subject of the email would say something like "FORWARD THIS TO 7 PEOPLE OR ELSE YOU WILL DIE IN A WEEK."

Not very subtle, but sufficiently effective. The actual contents of the email would talk about a tragic incident, usually with supernatural or horror underpinnings. At the end of the email, you would be instructed to forward the email to a certain number of people, or some omnipresent, all-seeing entity would "get you."

Now, I will admit. I did fall prey to those messages and bombard my friends with them. The guilt tripping really did get to me. But that was a long, long time ago. So, imagine my surprise when I saw the same guilt-inducing tactics on Instagram years later.

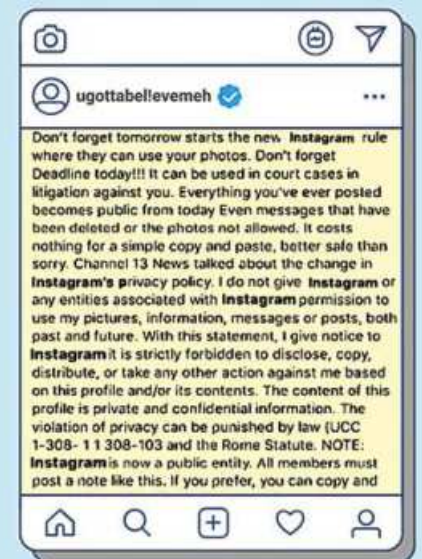
These stories use public perception as a guilt tactic. By stating "I can see who skipped," the person viewing them instantly feels like they're under pressure to repost or risk being seen in a negative light. Some may think not reposting would mean they're not standing in solidarity with the social issue.

Even though the origins of this trend might be rooted in good intentions, it's still a trend at the end of the day. This means its lifespan will be short lived until it's replaced by something else. The short-lived nature of trends makes this specific type of guilt-tripping stories seem like performative activism. Reposting a story that lasts only 24 hours is generally a one-off incident which rarely displays true solidarity.

Furthermore, the guilt is quite misdirected in this trend. The text shines the antagonising spotlight on the people who choose to skip resharing. This redirects attention from the important issue in question. Instead of focusing the guilt on the perpetrators or sharing important information about the problem, the non-sharers are made to stand under public trial.

So, what can be done in the face of these stories? It's always good practice to take a step back and think about what these posts or stories signify. Having said that, these trends aren't always performative. Displaying solidarity in any way is important but obtaining it through guilt is not the right way to go about it.

Fatima Jahan Ena likes complaining about capitalism and her forehead. Find her at mail2ena@gmail.com



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

There is more to school than just grades

SUBAH NUZHAT HUSSAIN

What's more stressful than exams? Waiting for the day results come out.

Parents wear their children's academic success like a badge of honour. The higher the score, the better. It has gotten to a point where academics trumps everything, especially the things we care about most.

Even the most cynical non-believer becomes a devout believer before results come out. Considering how much of our freedom rides on a single number, it's not surprising how academics can be a source of stress and anxiety.

You could excel at other activities. You could be an ace at sports. You could rival the best dancers on screen. Your painting could put renaissance artists to shame. All of that would mean nothing in the eyes of society if your grades suffered in the process.

Academics first, passion second. Academics always takes precedence and it can grate on a child's self-esteem and stress them out. When grades are high, you have the freedom to pursue your passion, but when they sink...

No football. No cricket. No dance. No art. No music. No extracurriculars. Not until the grades go back up.

After-school activities get replaced by



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

extra coaching classes or sessions with a tutor. Study time takes over playtime. Textbooks replace novels. Anything to pull those grades back up.

Hard work isn't good enough if your grades do not reflect that. Extracurriculars get cancelled as punishment. Whatever motivation that some had towards school dwindles fast. Cancelling the one thing that keeps them going will not

help some raise their grades.

Even teachers will tell remarkably talented athletes or artists to give up on their passions in order to focus on their grades. Schools evaluate students based on their grades. No other metrics exist to evaluate their growth.

When you aren't given the recognition you deserve and when your talents aren't being nurtured, it is easy to feel like you

are at the bottom of a chasm with no way out. It slowly chips away from your self-confidence. It feels like you're wading through quicksand. The harder you struggle, the faster you sink.

Not everyone is destined to be a doctor or an engineer like our parents envisioned. Numbers don't make sense to everyone. Memorisation is a chore. There are other ways to make a living that don't require stellar grades.

Some people are gifted with academic prowess, some are quick on their feet, others are gifted with dexterity. Our brains aren't wired the exact same way. No two people are alike. Even identical twins have different personalities. You cannot expect everyone to be good at the exact same thing.

To ask someone to give up everything that sparks joy in order to prioritise schoolwork prevents them from becoming skilled at something they are passionate about. It reinforces the notion that grades are everything and you are a failure when they fall.

Grades are important but so is everything else.

Subah contemplates the meaning of life and existence until the sunrises. Contact her on Twitter @hussain_subah

An open letter to our teachers

SABIBA HOSSAIN

Dear teachers,

First, accept my appreciation for your position. What you do isn't easy. I felt it the time I went to tutor my sister and ended up tearing my hair out. I felt your dedication when you introduced us to some new math, a structure, or a formula and I thought you were telling the story for the first time – but you weren't. You told the same story repeatedly, batch after batch, and you never showed any sign of annoyance.

Perhaps we failed to exceed your expectations when we didn't do well on that particular exam. Perhaps we tried and failed, or perhaps our negligence put us up to our demise.

But, should you have yelled at us that way? Not everyone functions the same way. Some of us could tolerate humiliation and move on; some of us would carry it our whole life, like a deep scar.

I know it was never your intention to hurt us. But human minds are emotional, sensitive, and vulnerable. I know you wanted to motivate us by scolding that one student for their imperfect grades, but what about their mental state afterwards? Did their grades drop? Were they able to obtain better grades at the price of their mental health? Did anyone check up on them?

I am not blaming you or trying to spread hatred. I am aware of the world we are living in. Where straight A's and GPA 5's seem to determine your eligibility and your status. Everyone posts updates, takes pictures, and congratulates each other on result day. The ones who don't do as well



feel left out, isolated. And I know how you, teachers, think of us as families and don't want us to face disappointment.

But does one exam determine our skills and abilities? Should you use this approach for your students? How about comforting them, telling them it's going to be okay? You are already under immense pressure throughout the year teaching and creating exam materials, and you want to say you are exhausted at our inabilities.

Look at us. We too are learning this

for the first time. And not all of us have the same potential. Some of us already feel insecure and inadequate because our peers are winning medals, going into competitions, and achieving great results in exams – while we couldn't do one job of studying properly. Some of us are scared because we put effort into something we liked besides education, and now our grades are falling. But we are trying, like you want us to, to reach a better destination and succeed in life.

We respect and admire you for your

courage to choose this profession. But in times like this, when you strike a student with word after word, we lose hope. Please, my respected teachers, give us time and space to grow. We are young and it is our nature to make errors. If you forgive us for our falling grades and treat us with care, trust us, nothing will go wrong.

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

Online Education: A failed experiment?

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Back in September 2020, a *Harvard Business Review* article suggested that a shift to a digital learning environment was long overdue, and the pandemic had made it possible for US schools to take that leap. The following year, *The Guardian* talked about online learning and how it was ready to make education more accessible to younger people.

What I can tell from all these optimistic headlines is that most of the developed world was rather excited to see how an online-based education system would pan out. To them, this revolution was a step in the right direction.

Many North American and European institutes made the most out of this system, while many others failed. In Bangladesh, it was rather one-sided. Needless to say, our students did not welcome this new system with open arms, especially since they had no idea what to expect, lacked resources, and were often met with incompetence from the academia.

After almost one and a half years of online learning, as we gradually return to classrooms, we ask again. Do we have what it takes to adapt to a completely online-based education system? If not, what are we doing wrong?

"Most students are finding the online semesters to be quite stressful," says Samiha Haque, lecturer at the Department of Computer Science & Engineering (CSE), Brac University (BracU). "While viva voce and regular assignments test students' progress, and help them cover the syllabus, it is also making them face back-to-back deadlines with barely any spare time."

Students here lack the resources to participate in online classes without a hitch. One of the major issues in this regard is the lack of high-speed internet, especially in the rural areas, which is why BracU built an e-learning platform of its own. However, was this enough?

"Pre-recorded lectures take time to watch, but they are helpful for the students since not everyone is blessed with good internet connectivity for attending the live sessions," says Samiha. "They can also skip live sessions and prioritise their personal emergencies without worrying about losing points for attendance or not understanding a topic because of it."

"However, many students watch the recorded lectures just days before their deadlines or exams," she adds. "Hence, they don't have time to clear out their confusions or fully grasp the topic. Also, sometimes making and recording some new content in between semesters is difficult due to time constraints."

BracU did not, however, completely abandon live classes. They were still being conducted, but most students did not show up as attendance was not mandatory (at least not during the early days of the pandemic). This is another reason why Samiha and other BracU faculty members feel that their students could not make the most out of this system.

Most university students have complaints against virtual live sessions. They say most instructors do not know how to make use of the technology to conduct these classes. However, these students often forget that many of these teachers did not grow up surrounded by such technology.

Samiha is new to the teaching profes-



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

that involve use of equipment, chemicals for example, could not be conducted online, it was still possible to do so for some engineering students.

"It is hard to replicate a practical class online," says final-year BracU student Abdullah. "However, given the circumstances, I will not claim I was disappointed by the way my university conducted those classes."

What was important in these online classes was that faculty members and university staff maintain proper communication with their students. To some extent, many colleges and universities (or at least specific departments) were able to achieve that.

"We not only received adequate technical support from the department, but enough emotional support as well, which was important given that we were living in the midst of a raging pandemic," states Abdul Mohaimen Al Radi, an engineering student from the University of Dhaka. "Overall, I think it was a pretty fair effort from their end."

Abdullah shares the same sentiment, as does Joyita Faruk, a sophomore from the CSE department at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

"Most faculty members were responsive," recalls Joyita. "They also provided us with their personal contact numbers and tutorial hours on Google Meet. Some of them even had us open social media groups which they kept in contact with through class representatives."

Despite all the efforts from the universities' end, students were still unsatisfied. The main reason behind this was how universities, at times, failed to stay true to their words.

"Although they tried to keep their promises, the authorities were caught up between maintaining a good standard of education and making things easier for its students," says Abdullah. "More often than not, students had to keep up with multiple, unrealistic deadlines in order to survive, which was never the initial plan."

Joyita's experience hints towards the same reality. "I personally think teachers

and the authority were more understanding initially, but later, they simply increased the workload to exorbitant amounts that it felt like they started seeing our time at home as free time for more coursework," she says. "For some reason, IUB gave us a shorter semester break than usual. Hence, a lot of students were burned out and had little time to recover."

Therefore, we can reach a conclusion where most students prefer in-person classes to online learning.

As Mohaimen explains it, "Online classes feel like a badly orchestrated MOOC with real grade consequences. I do not have any issues with online education. However, I do not prefer it. If given the choice, I would definitely choose to be in the classroom."

In contrast, the few students who would pick online learning, like Abdullah, would only do so for personal circumstances. Abdullah is dependent on online learning at the moment because of certain situations in his personal life. Had things been any different, he too would have opted for in-person classes.

At this stage, one might feel that everyone is pointing fingers at one another. It is anything but true. Every stakeholder in this online learning situation seems to have their own reasons why things are not working out. The reasons explained and situations discussed so far are very real, and everyone who has been a part of this learning system has faced one of those situations at least.

Hence, we end up circling back to the question – where did we go wrong with online education? Was online education just a failed experiment, something we just dived into because the time called for it? It probably was, because we are yet to be convinced by its benefits.

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1. Harvard Business Review. *The Pandemic Pushed Universities Online. The Change Was Long Overdue.*
2. The Guardian. *'Covid has been a big catalyst': universities plan for post-pandemic life.*

satire.

The race for Marvel movie tickets

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

"I saw the ticket. Hallelujah! 'Twas shining. Glowing, it was!" screamed the mad old man.

We stared as the guards pulled him away. "Don't believe a word he said. I've been standing here for six days, nobody saw a ticket," whimpered a man at the front. "But they say when the old man first came, he was only 21. He's been here since the very beginning," said one from the back. We all fell quiet. Was it possible? Had the old man really seen a ticket for *Spiderman: Homeless*?

I've been standing in front of Cine-Flex for four days now. I probably won't get a ticket coming in this late but they cuffed our hands and legs the moment we stepped foot, so the only way out is through. The last time a Marvel movie sailed across the Atlantic, Bangladesh became a meme template on Reddit. But with Marvel running out of ideas to extort the masses and Kevin Feige pulling out the nostalgia card on millennials each year, the stakes are the highest now.

Gone are the days of Bitcoin. My mother's words still hurt, "Your cousin's a millionaire now after mining Marvel movie tickets online! And here you are, writing your worthless PhD thesis paper!"



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Even outside the theatre, smugglers were selling tickets 50 times the price. Making money off basic rights like education and healthcare – I comply! But Marvel movie tickets? Capitalising on the most animalistic impulses of people, how low can humanity stoop to?

It was the human Bijoy Sarani traffic

jam. After three more days, the gates of Heaven opened and we went inside. Someone lost his family in the crowd, others their friends. But there was no looking back, not even for your loved ones. Someone held their dying friend in his arms, "Have y'all no heart left in you? Can't you spare one single ticket for this

dying soul? Even 2D would do!"

The dying man blurted out with all his strength, "I mean, 3D would be more preferable, though. The colours are more vibrant and with Dolby Atmos..." With one last outcry, his friend shut his mouth forcefully and choked him to death.

"I can't believe we are dumb enough to fall for these money-making baits. Standing in line for weeks for green screen theme park movies as real cinema dies? Pathetic," said a guy while folding up his tent.

Just then, the counter opened. The salesmen stood on the counter and threw tickets into the howling crowd at random. If someone was lucky enough to catch hold of one, others around him would jump at him, scratching, biting and eating his flesh off. As I stood in one corner, I saw a gladiator rise from the pile of bodies with a blood ticket in his hands. Crying in disbelief, his people hugged him tightly.

Suddenly, a ticket came flying in my direction. With it, some bloodthirsty eyes. A scream in the distance, my entire life flashing before my eyes.

Ah Capitalism, thou sadistic witch!

Remind Ifti to be quieter at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com

Get creative with pithas this winter

AYRA AREEBA ABID

Pithas have always been a Bengali household favourite. This winter, I tried to make creative versions of traditional pithas. The results came out, well, in varying degrees of success.



PHOTO: LS ARCHIVE

CREAM CHEESE PATISHAPTA

Kheersha patishapta has always been a personal favourite. When I switched its filling to cream cheese, it made the pitha less sweet but tasted perfect. I made crêpe and homemade cream cheese which I made a little thinner with a hand mixer.

I think this would pair well with blueberry or strawberry puree as well. This version would definitely be a better alternative for those with diabetes or for those who simply aren't fans of flavours too sweet. I recommend this ten on ten.

CHEESY CHITOI PIZZA

First, the sauce I made was the same I make for homemade pizzas. I mixed chili sauce and chili garlic sauce to a one-on-one ratio and added a bit of sriracha with a pinch of black pepper. The *chittoi* took the most time to make. I spread the sauce on top of one and added mozzarella on top.

To melt the cheese, I heated it for just about 30 seconds. I was honestly a bit sceptical after they came out of the oven. I carefully took a bite and strangely the taste drew me in. But it of course did not top the classic flavour. I would say this rather failed. However, if you have an adventurous palate, I would say try it just for fun.

SAVOURY PATISHAPTA

Giving a twist to the conventional sweet pitha, I excluded the *kheer* and instead added shredded smoked chicken with

julienned veggies. I mixed it with a bit of oyster sauce and soya sauce. If you want a spicy kick, you can add hot sauce.

Till this point, it was just a normal filing. I then rolled up the crêpes with the filling to make a savoury roll. I'll say this is a fail proof recipe given that making this is pretty easy.

CHITOI PITHA WITH DALGONA

Ditching the thick jaggery syrup, *gur*, I went for dalgona. No, not dalgona coffee. I followed the original dalgona recipe except I didn't harden it into the typical circular shape. Melting down sugar to a caramel consistency, I quickly added a bit of baking soda.

The catch here is to not burn the sugar and maintain constant low heat so this turned out harder than I thought it would be as I was a beginner. After letting the dalgona cool down in a bowl, I dipped the *chittoi pitha* into it. The taste was impeccable as it had a slight smoky aftertaste and the consistency was just right.

While making these innovative pithas for a week, I learnt a lot. One, there are no limits when it comes to experimenting with food. Two, there are some things which should maintain the beauty of tradition.

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

Move Out Day

ADHORA AHMED

Audity is moving today. From my balcony, I watch the van load up with all their belongings. The old stereo must be in one of those cardboard boxes, the one Aurko would blast thrash metal from, much to my annoyance. Once, when he was away on a trip with friends, Audity and I spent rainy afternoons sifting through their CD and cassette collection, and relaxed in his bed talking about everything and nothing.

There goes Aurko's guitar case with his second-hand Signature in it. Quite a few winters ago, Aurko threw a barbecue party on the rooftop and invited all his friends, including me. He had no ability to carry a tune, neither did his friends, yet he strummed away while we butchered Artcell and Arnob songs. I wanted to learn the guitar too, so he'd give me lessons on weekends. In exchange, I helped him with English. I only learned a few chords before giving up with bruised fingers, but at least he got an A+. As the years went by and we inched along to the busy realm of adulthood, other hobbies visited us, but nothing of shared interest. One day, I noticed the guitar was caked in dust and had two broken strings.

"I don't really play anymore," he supplied, following my gaze at the forgotten instrument. "Just grew out of it, I guess. I'm thinking of buying a DSLR, though.

You know, to impress girls. Do you have any idea which brand is good for starters?"

I can hear Rumki auntie's voice from the floor above us, telling the porters to be careful with the wardrobe. I saw her for the first time when she appeared at our doorstep with Audity and a box of *roshogollas* in tow, the picture of a proud mother. Audity had secured a scholarship under the talent pool. We sat in my bedroom with tiny bowls of two *roshogollas* each, struggling to break the ice, whereas our mothers were chattering away in the living room like two old friends. Both of us were shy back then, although Audity came out of her cocoon to become a beautiful butterfly in the years to come. Before leaving, the girl I'd just met invited me to her flat.

There goes the TV. The image of Ripon uncle watching cricket matches flashes through my mind. I can't help but remember him today. He was an ordinary man with a nine-to-five desk job. Yet, there was something endearing about him. Maybe it was the way he talked to his wife and children, with a warmth in his voice I wish my father had. Maybe it was him calling Rumki auntie on his way home from work to ask if I was over at their flat, so that he could bring extra snacks for me, like he did every day for

Audity and Aurko until they protested that they were too old to be pampered. I didn't know he used to go out of his way to make me feel included until he passed away, not until Rumki auntie said so.

Aurko was sleeping in his dorm room, surrounded by green hills and the chirping of crickets, when he received the news. The sun was beginning to turn golden when he arrived, with his hair disheveled and eyes red-rimmed. Later, when the funeral rites were done, the three of us sat in my bedroom in silence. They wanted to be away from their relatives crowded at their flat, suffocating the place with pity. After a while, Aurko started crying. Words would have been meaningless, so I scooted closer and took his hand in mine. Audity followed suit, taking shelter under my other arm.

Audity calls my name. I turn around.

"We've almost packed," she tries to smile, but it doesn't reach her eyes.

"I wish Aurko were here."

"Me too," Audity sighs. "We talked last night. He misses you, too."

"Does he know...?"

"Yes, I told him. He sends congratulations."

"I hope he's not mad at me. I wanted to tell him myself, I swear, but you know how I've been so stressed about all this and I didn't even know whether I'd get the

letter and –"

"Hey," she holds me at arm's length.

"He understands. Just call him when you're ready, okay?"

"We should meet again before I leave," I say after a brief pause.

"You think I'd let you get your master's degree without saying goodbye?"

I give in to the tears I fought to keep at bay all this time. Audity pulls me into her arms.

"I'm hoping against hope, but for the love of God, don't lose our new address."

I giggle at the expense of my forgetful nature. I have a bad habit of forgetting small details, but Audity and her brother's impact on my short life is too big to slip from memory. They are etched into my subconscious, which explains why their childhood and teenage selves show up so often in my dreams. They've shaped me into who I am today, and their imprint will linger on the person I am tomorrow and the years to come, even if I never see either of them again. I want to tell Audity all this, but I'll keep this too, for another day when my emotional baggage is lighter.

"No, I won't forget the address," I settle for this for now.

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



How to successfully bring a pet home

BUSHRA ZAMAN

You're scrolling through countless pictures of adorable pets on the internet and find yourself suddenly deciding to adopt a pet. You just need to convince your family/ those you live with, and here's how.

TEMPT THEM

If pictures were enough to convince you to adopt a pet, they must be enough to convince others of the need for a pet too. Technology and targeted advertisements on social media make the convincing easier; just discreetly enable notifications for pet-adoption pages from your family members' or housemates' social media accounts, and technology will do its thing and suggest adopting a pet for them.

You may also try to foster a friends' pets that you have carefully selected based on how good-natured they are, and casually show the wholesome animals to the people you live with. You could also mention how winter is a great time for pet adoption. There are countless animals deserving of love who shiver in the cold because they have no home to return to.

SHOWCASE YOUR SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

If your sense of responsibility is brought into question, you could start off by taking up other smaller responsibilities



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

around the household, which will gradually add up to your rapport.

For example, you may buy a sapling from a local nursery, show off your green thumb, and brag about how you never forget to water your plant despite any and all other work you may have. However, plants do take time to grow; if you want

more immediate proof of how responsible you are, you could try to successfully babysit a baby cousin. How hard can it be? Just use candy as a reward for getting homework done and going to sleep on time. Maybe even factor in the meals and hydration levels and you're now a professional level babysitter.

Does this coincidentally sound similar to how to treat a pet? Absolutely not. No, you'd be much nicer to your pet.

DEMONSTRATE THEIR ROLE IN THE HOUSEHOLD

The key to being a good pet parent is to have the ability to teach your pet to be a good boy/girl. You could casually bring up how your pet could be the best companion for both you and your housemates or family members.

You could also explain how, with the right amount of care and love, pets can understand humans better than other humans can. Who would not want a best friend who instantly understands if you're having a bad day, without you even having to say anything, and actively tries to cheer you up?

These should be enough to convince anyone to get a pet. However, it is important to note that pets are not commodities, and should only be adopted once everyone is onboard. Make sure you've properly convinced everyone involved so that you do not have to give back the pet, maybe just after they've gotten used to you.

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

Paracetamol isn't your panacea

SUBAH NUZHAT HUSSAIN

It's winter morning, your toes are freezing. You've stayed up late to finish an assignment. There's an entire construction site inside your skull. Tiny construction workers are drilling, banging, hammering away like their paycheck depends on it. What do you do?

Most people would reach out for a paracetamol tablet, maybe two, and wash it down with water. Sometimes the pain goes away for a while, sometimes it doesn't.

Like salt on our tables, paracetamol is a staple in everyone's medicine stash. It's affordable, does the job and it's always stocked up in your local pharmacy. From sinus infections to migraines, from fevers to back pain, paracetamols are the ultimate salvation. The panacea of the 21st century.

This is why it's not surprising that people often swallow paracetamols like candy. Even though paracetamol is considered harmless enough to be used as an over-the-counter painkiller, it was not invented to be used every day, especially at dosages we often consume.

As a child, I'd get sick at the turn of every season. My fevers would often soar as high as 103°C. Yet, I was only allowed one tablet in 24 hours and only if I truly needed it. Back then, I'd wonder why I needed to suffer through so much when most of my other friends would take two

or even three pills to ward away minor headaches.

Consuming large amounts of paracetamol chips away at your tolerance to pain. For someone who experiences chronic pain, it can be a very slippery slope. Once you are down there it's hard to find your way back up.

Why should you tolerate the pain, especially when you have an important meeting or exams right around the corner? Why should you give up on relief when it's one pill away?

I am not saying that you should give

up on paracetamol entirely. Even though it was not as revolutionary as antibiotics, paracetamols have made trips to the doctor's office less frequent. Sometimes paracetamol is all you need to weather through a really bad migraine or a seasonal cold.

However, all drugs need to be used in moderation. Paracetamol is harmless if it is used occasionally. Taking more than two tablets daily for an extended period puts excess pressure on other organs.

Taking paracetamol as a reflex and not out of necessity reinforces a habit. This

habit renders the drug less effective over time. Which leads to the consumption of higher dosages. It is an endless loop that is difficult to get out of.

Paracetamol can temporarily provide pain relief, but it is just a Band-Aid over a deep cut. In order to deal with chronic pains you need to get to the bottom of it. Consult your doctor. Keep yourself warm if your sinuses get inflamed often. Know what triggers your migraine. Get to the heart of your problems.

Paracetamol is not a cure. Don't treat it like one.

Subah contemplates the meaning of life and existence until the sunrises. Contact her on Twitter @hussain_subah

