

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY DECEMBER 30, 2021, POUISH 15, 1428 BS | A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*



FIRST TIME AT A
CONCERT

PG 3

ARE PEOPLE READING
LESS?

PG 4



MOVING OUT FOR THE FIRST TIME

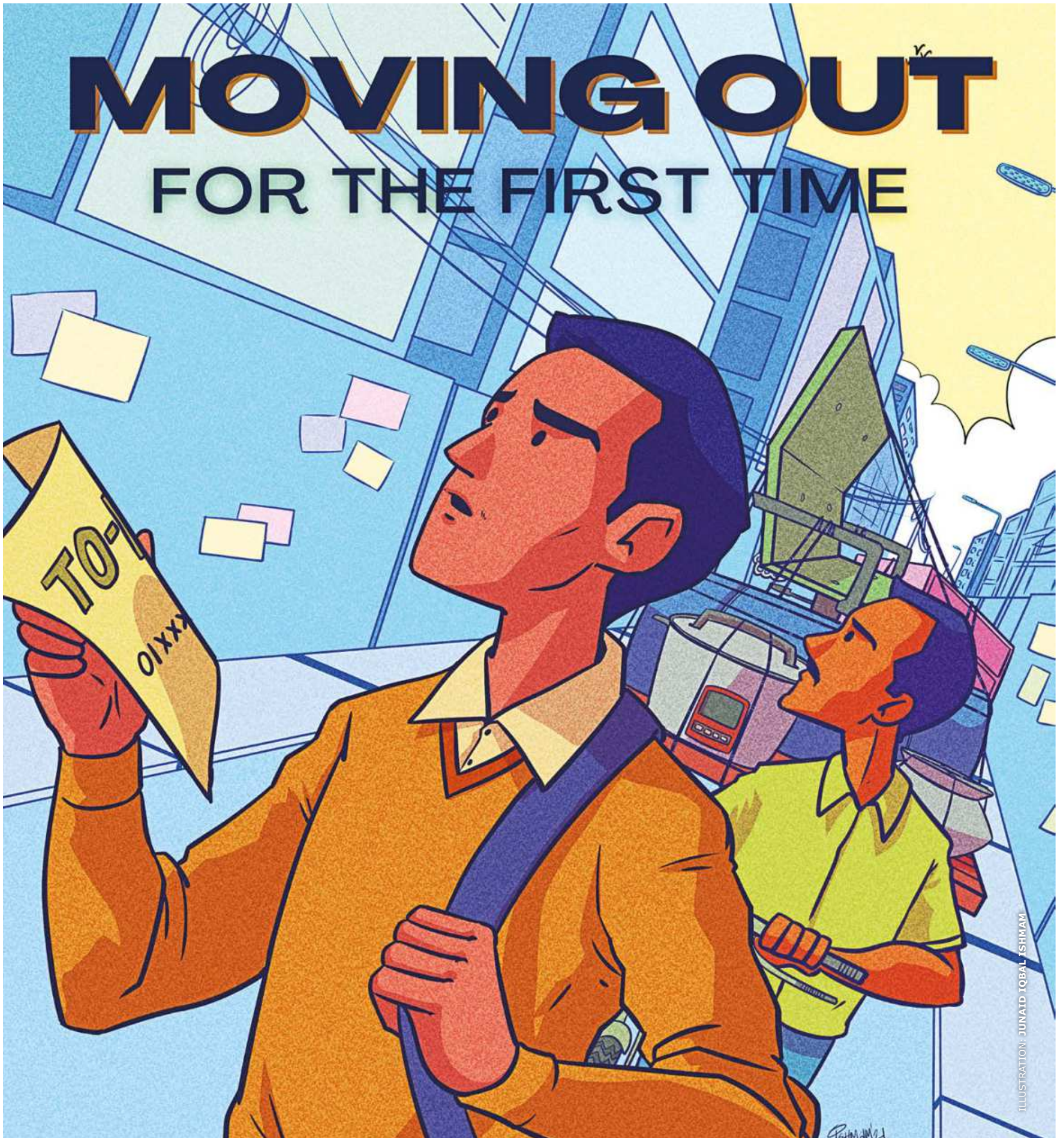


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EDITORIAL

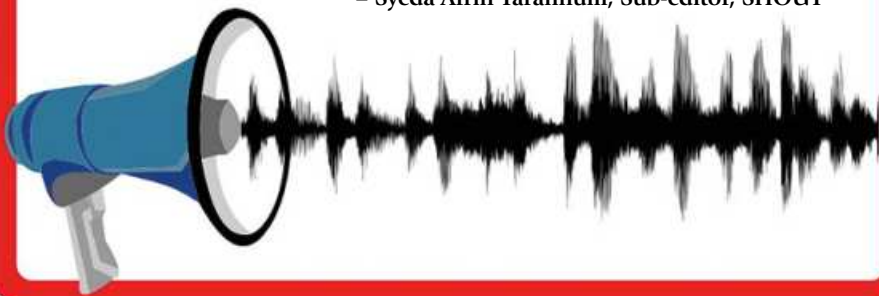
As I grow older, the idea of a new year somehow becomes more and more daunting to me. Maybe it's because the year has come to an end before I am done with all the things I promised myself I'd do.

The unfinished checklists and stacks of books (that I have spent a good part of my paycheck on) left unread sneer at me as I contemplated new plans and reading lists. I should know better than this, but somehow, I eventually stand at this point every year, in utter dismay of how fast it all went by.

This year, I've decided to give myself more credit. For pulling off some things I never knew I could, for accepting wounds I knew were coming my way and for losses I never wished I would have to experience. I believe I deserve credit for just making it this year. And so do you. A year where normalcy was constantly changing shape, we managed to make it through.

That is reason enough to celebrate. So take some time, and appreciate yourself and all that you do this New Year's Eve. Have a safe and happy new year!

– Syeda Afrin Tarannum, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

TV SERIES



SHOUT SELECTS TV shows that made an impact

RAYA MEHNAZ

As 2021 comes to an end, it is finally time for the year-end recommendation list for TV shows that had an impact on us at SHOUT. We asked our writers about the shows that made them laugh, cry or stare at the ceiling for some time, and they happily obliged.

So, here are our top picks, curated with love for our readers.

ALRAWABI SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

"A Jordanian masterpiece that is more than any regular teen drama, especially considering its top-notch cinematography, bleak storyline that is so heavy that it left me in awe. The way it showed how horrific bullying is and why revenge leads to terrible consequences is frighteningly accurate."

ARCANE

"*Arcane* redefined what a video game to TV show adaptation can look like with its utmost attention to detail, stellar animation and an iconic score from Riot Games. With relatable character intros and their bone-chilling yet awe-inspiring journeys, *Arcane* should now be a staple for what animation and storytelling can do."

MIDNIGHT MASS

"Mike Flanagan's latest Netflix original successfully combines elements of religion and mythology in such a poetic manner in a contemporary setting. The miniseries will leave you reflecting on your sense of faith and your ties to your own community and make you invested in this miniseries both emotionally and spiritually."

TED LASSO

"*Ted Lasso* delves into how a football team is managed behind the scenes, and

how crucial the role of a coach is in the team. It also illustrates how personal relationships, like the mentor-student relationship, are so crucial to their eventual success. Absolutely light-hearted, and recommended for anyone willing to learn a thing or two about man management."

QUEEN'S GAMBIT

"A greatly constructed mini-series regarding chess that got me hooked into the finer details of chess. Recommended for anyone looking for some ready-made entertainment, especially to chess lovers who want a bit of dramatic twist."

ONLY MURDERS IN THE BUILDING

"This show is an absolute treat for murder-mystery fanatics like myself, especially with its storybook style narrative elements, exploration of loneliness and unique sense of humour. The awkward and amusing trio of Martin Short, Steve Martin and Selena Gomez will awaken the amateur sleuth in every viewer as they start a podcast documenting the mystery they are trying to solve."

VINCENZO

"*Vincenzo* strays from a typical anti-hero concept. He did not rely on his traumas, but admitted his wrongs and stayed like that. The show opened up paths for his character to evolve in other ways, which I loved. Overall, a good show."

MIDNIGHT DINER

"*Midnight Diner* tells the story of a diner that is only open from midnight to dawn. It is a Japanese show that is, frankly, a healing balm to the soul. Whenever I needed solace from life, I watched this show and imagined a place like the diner, where I would find a warm bowl of butter rice and kindred spirits waiting for me."



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What if we had a four-day school week?

ZIBA MAHDI

The pandemic has made us re-evaluate traditional methods. With everything being moved online, many have found that their flexible schedules allowed them a healthier work-life balance.

This has brought renewed interest in the four-day workweek. The impetus for this schedule is that it would boost productivity and prevent burnout. Countries such as Scotland and Japan are also proposing giving it a trial run.

Students are at as high a risk of being fatigued as adults. School hours vary across the world, but it's not unusual to find students spending about 8 to 10 hours on schools and tuition, excluding commute time. A four-day school week would take some of the pressure off, let students re-energise over a long weekend, and boost productivity. It would also provide them time to pursue extracurriculars, which are at times discouraged by teachers and parents, especially when exams are around the corner.

The extra day can be used to participate in athletics, another activity commonly ignored in our educational institutes. Sports and extracurriculars aside, students would also get to spend quality time with their families. Both student and teacher



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

attendance have seen increases in four-day schools according to several studies. The flexible schedule would allow teachers more time to come up with lesson plans or invest in professional training.

Not to mention, a shorter workweek would make teaching an attractive job to many. Less school days would mean fewer vehicles on the roads, which would un-

doubtedly be a boon for the environment.

On the other side, there's a chance that students who were disinterested in school to begin with will disregard their studies even more. Academic momentum may be disrupted over the course of a lengthy weekend and extended leisure time always has the potentiality to be abused.

Additionally, to compensate for the lost

day, all four days could need longer classes which could prove to be hectic for young learners.

Even after compensating for lost time, many may perceive this system to be a lax educational policy. Schools who have implemented this system have received mixed results so far.

A study of schools in Colorado, USA revealed increased juvenile crime after implementing a four-day schedule. Whereas, another study from MIT's *Education Finance and Policy* found improved academic performance in maths and reading.

Then, there are the biggest stakeholders to consider – the students and the parents. Students might welcome the extra day, but parents are likely to be divided on this issue. For single or working parents, arranging care for their younger children on a working day might prove to be a hassle.

The long-term effects of the shorter school week also need to be mulled over. If universities and workplaces continue the five-day workweek, it would be a tough transition for students to handle. Nevertheless, with more emphasis being put on mental health around the world, it's definitely an approach worth considering.

Ziba Mahdi is your resident pessimist. Cheer her up at www.facebook.com/ziba.mahdi.735

First Time at a Concert

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

It doesn't start easy. You don't start headbanging to the first song, the second one or even the third. Initially, you simply tap your legs. You notice some people jumping up and down like there's no tomorrow and conclude that your social anxiety will never let you be one of them.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

And then it happens. You can't pinpoint when or why you started banging your head, but before you know it, you're grabbing onto your friend's shoulder, shouting your lungs out to a song you barely know and jumping up and down.

The impossible happened. You're one of them now.

My idea of a concert was that you're supposed to know the lyrics to all the songs being performed. The haunting vision of me standing awkwardly in the middle of a crowd, not knowing the lyrics to a popular song as my friends bang their heads made me cringe.

So I did my homework and spent an entire evening rediscovering Bay of Bengal, Conclusion, Warfaze and Meghdol. At 3.30 AM, with my neck aching after headbanging to "Je Shohore Ami Nei" by Bay of Bengal, I heard someone in the back shout to her friend, "I have four reports to complete this mid-break and I have no idea how I'm going to do it!"

I looked back and there she was, jumping to a song she didn't even know. Concerts, ironically enough, aren't all about the music. It isn't really about knowing the lyrics or loving the bands, not as much as we think it is. It's about being a part of the crowd and forgetting your stress, your grief, your anxiety.

It's an escape from reality, even if

for those 40 seconds you're capering until your knees hurt and you run out of breath.

Friends crying to "Purono Shei Diner Kotha" or Warfaze singing "Boshe Achi" at six in the morning in front of a crowd that's been waiting 13 hours for this moment – it all sounds overwhelming once reminisced. I saw the soft glimmering ray of the sun shine above a roaring campus, saw someone cover his loved one with a shawl in that piercing winter morning and sing "Purnota" together.

Yet, something else stood out.

Around 2.30 AM, as Meghdol sang "Maya Cycle", I looked up at the foggy night sky. The moon was just shy of a full one. In a crowd of hundreds, the chaos didn't reach my ears anymore. Maybe it was 18 hours of sleeplessness paying off or maybe it was the solace in Shibu Kumer Shill's voice. I closed my eyes. "Ei Nai Hoye Jawa Shunnota" sang the last lines of the song which roughly translates to "this vanishing desolation."

After one and a half years of the pandemic, after fear engulfed our minds and anxiety agonised our souls, even if for those six seconds on a shivering December night, the desolation left in our hearts did vanish.

Remind Ifti to be quieter at hasibur-rashidifti@gmail.com

Finding a place to move in

TAZREEN JAHAN BARI

Growing up, few of us have an idea about how to find your place in the wild when you move out of the bubble that is your home. So, here's a practical guide to finding a place to move in.

The first task is to choose an area. If you are moving because of work or study, then it's a no-brainer that you should try to find places near your respective office or university. In case you end up living somewhere that demands a regular commute to your workplace, it's going to make your life easier if you figure out your routes and budget of commuting before moving in.

Depending on your budget, you might be looking for a hostel, a room, or an entire apartment. Whatever the case, keep in mind that some landlords will only rent their apartments to families.

Safety also plays a big role in area selection. More so for girls. An area that has proper streetlights, and a building with some form of security will serve you well.

Living at home, we do not always realise how much work goes into running a household. From laundry to groceries, everything is distributed among the members of a family, so the burden does



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

not fall on one person.

However, when you are living on your own, you will have to be responsible for all of it. This is why a building with grocery stores, a laundry, and pharmacies in walking distance will be a lifesaver.

Speaking of lifesavers, if you find peo-

ple you know who live in the area before moving, it will save you many hurdles. If you have a friend who can show you around and give you some insight into the area, it will make your move much smoother and the initial bout of homesickness bearable.

Better yet, see if you can share an apartment or room with a friend. Aside from cutting living costs significantly, it will make managing household chores easier.

Many of the things you took for granted at home will not be around anymore. In Bangladesh, apartments and student housing facilities rarely come furnished, so be prepared to bring your own necessities. Unlike a trip where bringing clothes and toiletries is enough, this time you need to be fully prepared with everything from curtains to *bichhana er jharoo* so you should start making extensive lists.

Aside from the material things, some skills too are mandatory for living on your own. Learning to compromise, knowing how to mix with people, having some basic cooking and budgeting skills will make sure you survive with a little less hassle.

Finally, no amount of research and reading up will fully prepare you for the move. So get out and learn as you go.

When Tazreen is not pretending to be a high-brow literary critic, she quite likes Rupri Kaur's poetry collections. Send verbal eye-rolls at tazreenzahan@gmail.com

Moving out for the first time

NISHAT TASNEEM SHAHARA & AAQIB HASIB

Leaving behind your childhood home or the place where you spent most of your life is a common reality for many. This is especially true for those living in small towns, as often the only option for pursuing your higher education or a lucrative career is to move to a bigger district with more educational institutes and job opportunities.



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

Dhaka is usually the common denominator when talking about places where such students and wage earners come to find said opportunities — and with more and more institutions and offices reopening, a significant number of young people will be returning to Dhaka, or whichever district their institution or office is located.

Many of us romanticise this notion of moving out and living by ourselves. Western ideologies and popular media parades the narrative that moving out is one of the many character-building arcs in our lives. For many, it feels like a natural step into independence and freedom they have never had before, almost like a coming-of-age sequence in a movie.

However, this reality in the context of Bangladesh can be quite different.

TALKING WITH YOUR FAMILY

Possibly the greatest roadblock to moving it out is convincing one's parents. Irrespective of whether you're doing it for education or because you were offered your dream job in another district, getting your parents on board can be quite an ordeal.

The level of difficulty varies depending on factors such as your age, gender, perceived level of maturity, etc. A good way to get your parents on board is to show that you're a responsible adult who can be accountable for themselves on a day-to-day basis.

One of the writers has first-hand experience of this. They made a list of pros and cons for their parents, with detailed research about the private university they wished to join. This gave the impression that they were serious enough about the move, which ultimately played a big role in convincing their parents.

Another fail-safe way to help convince your family is to either move in with or in close vicinity to a relative or a family friend who can be there for you in case of emergencies. Having a guardian figure can help convince your parents that letting you move out isn't the worst idea under the sun.

FEELINGS ON MOVING OUT

Once you have your family on board, the worst seems to be over with. At this stage, the struggles are going to be internal, at least for now. While things differ from person to person, it is very natural to feel emotions ranging from fear to confusion to excitement all at once.

Iftekhhar Hasan Rahat, who moved from Chattogram to Dhaka for a job at a marketing agency, shared his personal experience.

"The hardest part of moving out was definitely the mental thought that you're on your own now. I learned to cook, do dishes, and wash clothes. But the continuous nagging thought at the back of my head that I am on my own from now on is what bothered me the most, and still does at times," he shared.

The homesickness and the feeling that you are completely alone is unavoidable. It lingers with you, and it's

alright if you can't quite move past it. From our personal experiences, a version of this remains with you wherever you go. You eventually learn to process it by surrounding yourself with friends and acquaintances who care about you, and people you can trust.

The whole process of living by yourself, without your family, is definitely a new phase in your life which demands more effort and responsibility on your part. You are removed from your comfort zone, and the safety net of having your parents in the next room is no longer there.

Samiha Hussain Wadood, a student at North South University spoke about how she adapted to living alone.

She said, "While living alone is hard, and you have to do way more chores throughout the day, but nothing beats the feeling of independence you get. The fact that I can shop for groceries by myself, without anyone telling

housing — almost always have a curfew. Sometimes, excessive regulations are imposed, making it impossible to have a life beyond working hours. You will either have to settle with a girls' hostel and the ludicrous regulations that come with it, or move in with a relative and live according to their own set of rules and regulations.

For women, renting a place with other women you are comfortable with is possibly the best option, if that is an option.

Finally, it's important to ensure that the locality you have chosen for yourself has all the necessary facilities such as grocery shops, laundries, affordable restaurants, ATMs, etc. so that you do not have to frequently travel out of the neighbourhood.

TRACKING YOUR FINANCES

Once you've made it past the hurdles of convincing your family, selecting your neighbourhood and having set your mind on the process of moving out and into your own place, it's time to look at one final checklist.

This should ideally be composed of elements that you must keep track of, as many people get to this stage and believe a lot of the hard work is done. Make sure to plan out your finances meticulously for the month; from how much money you will receive from your parents, if at all, or your monthly salary, and how much you will be spending every month.

Ideally, you should separate your budget into four major sections which are listed in order of priority: rent and bills, groceries and essentials, travelling expenses, and recreational expenses.

If you've made it this far, jumping through the proverbial hoops in the process, then congratulations.

The last piece of advice we have left to give is that with classes, work, housekeeping, and daily chores, it is okay if things get difficult and overwhelm you from time to time. That is one of the many parts of being an adult, but it becomes a little easier over time (at least that's what they keep telling us). But if there's one thing that proved true for us, it's that the experience of living alone, on our own terms, has helped us grow even more as individuals.

Take the account of Shaila Alam Urmi, a student of Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology, who moved out of Dhaka to pursue her dream of becoming an engineer.

"It's always difficult to move out of your comfort zone and it will always be a challenge. To be honest, I always wanted to live alone. Having the freedom to paint anything on the walls, roaming alone or with friends, becoming independent, making my own decisions are all things that give me a thrill. The challenges exist as well, but things get easier with time, and what seemed like a challenge at the beginning, are now excellent life lessons for me," said Urmi.

me what to get and that I can come home whenever I please, is a freedom that outweighs all the struggles. Everyone should experience living on their own terms and not having to explain themselves to anyone."

CHOOSING WHERE TO LIVE

An important thing to consider when choosing accommodations in a new city is to make sure one chooses the right area to live in. It can be hard for bachelors and bachelorettes to find accommodations easily, whether in university or working full time.

Rifat Rahman*, who moved to Dhaka from Dinajpur, emphasised, "Finding a house is always difficult for an unmarried person. Then there is the issue with finding a good community and neighbourhood to settle in. You cannot just adjust to a new place right away."

This particular issue can be much more sensitive for unmarried women. The worries regarding personal safety is heightened, and most of the time this is exactly what deters women from trying to live independently.

Women's accommodations — hostels, halls, apartment

*Name has been changed for privacy

Are people reading less?

AYSHA ZAHEEN

In what has been described as the golden age of content, variety exists in abundance. Making and enjoying content is easier than ever before with sites like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. The internet has created a pool of content that is being constantly stirred with new additions every second.

Due to said prevalence, readership is said to be in a noticeable decline. According to almost every statistical report, the number of readers is continually declining and less time is allotted to reading, each year. However, there are variables to be taken into account, like the non-traditional media of reading and the Covid-19 pandemic itself.

In contrast, there are many more reading options available. Reading is no longer limited to literary works — self-help books, comics, and online content have generated significant readership. Whilst the idea of books may intimidate readers, the idea of reading in association with artwork, exercises, quizzes, etc. seems to be less daunting.

Ever since *Barefoot Gen*, a manga, was translated fully into English in 1979, the global readership of manga has significantly increased. The widespread popularity of anime has also drawn viewers to the original sources, which happen to be manga more often than not. For those who find reading traditional novels disconcerting for the barrage of words, manga and light novels tend to be more welcoming due to the device not only being both words and

illustrations.

The internet has made pop culture globally accessible which, when merged with content creation, gave rise to a significant portion of social reading — a phenomenon created by sites like Wattpad, Tumblr, Asianfanfics, Archive of Our Own, and more. Consumers of pop culture write fictions of their favourite celebrities and other popular stories, and get feedback from other fans, which often get published. Literature, this way, has now become more interactive than ever.

While there is always talk of decline in readership, most of it is based on the US statistics. Before Covid, in 2018, Europeans were spending more on books and magazines than package holidays. African readers used their phones to read, spending four million hours and showing a significant increase of 32 percent from the year before.

The Covid-19 pandemic has generated more reading in the past two years. This year, Americans read nearly 25 percent more than the previous year. China, at 36 percent, has the highest percentage of everyday book readers. Europeans have reportedly spent over an hour reading every day. E-book sales were always outsold by print books; its sales have further plummeted this year.

All of this goes on to show that readership has simply changed in nature and has not become obsolete.

Aysha's blocks exist longer than summers in Bangladesh. Give her solutions at zaheenaysha10@gmail.com

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA





ECHOES BY
 ASRAR CHOWDHURY

HOW I KEPT MY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

I
 It is easy to make a New Year's resolution, but almost impossible to stick to it. Unforeseen events emerge to distract you. However, if you target something close to your heart, then maybe, you can stick to a resolution for 365 days.

In December 2020, it had been one year since my heart attack. My music centre was lying idle. I looked at my turntable and decided to rebuild my music library with mainly vinyls. It was a challenging task, but one that I can now comfortably say, in December 2021, was an enjoyable experience.

II
 After my SSC in 1985, my parents gifted me a National Panasonic cassette and radio player. The price, Tk 5,500, was a hefty amount in those days. Soon, this two-in-one became my portal with the outside world.

The radio opened the world of BBC, VOA, Australian Broadcasting, All India Radio, and Radio Ceylon. The cassette player made me fall in love with music. Whatever pocket money I could muster, I would spend on recording cassettes from Rainbow, Rhythm, Soor Bichitra, Geetali and Soor Kallal in New Elephant Road.

The recording stores would tape from 12 inch LPs or 7 inch EPs to an audio cassette. I loved going through the LPs. There would be information about the album, sometimes little posters in the inner sleeves, too. This romanticism of LPs made me dream that one day I would have a collection of LPs in a grand music library.

By 1995, I had a decent collection of cassettes and CDs in my music library,

but few LPs. I made an effort then to collect LPs, but failed. Then came December 2020. Could I stick to a target for 365 days? I was adamant this time, but had to be organised.

III
 In an Excel file, each sheet was the source of where I collected the LPs. Dates of purchase and price details were noted. I would follow-up on the sources in a separate sheet at the end of the month. I was aware of a few things.

First: LPs in Bangladesh are available, but sources and supply are erratic.

Second: Prices vary. I had to be prepared to pay a higher price.

Third: There could be unforeseen events and expenses.

Fourth: Look away from the money spent. The objective is to rebuild.

Fifth: Try attaining the target a few months earlier. So I could collect in a relaxed mood.

I followed all the above religiously. I passed my target by June or July. The last golden rule I followed was not to make the resolution public. Only and only after the task has been achieved, would I come out of my shell.

IV
 I am happy having achieved a dream I had from childhood to listen to albums on LPs. I am happier to share the New Year's resolution this year. Now, to listen to my music library in 2022 and beyond.

Asrar Chowdhury is a professor of economics. He follows Test cricket, listens to music, and spins Vinyls when he has free time. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

satire.

Local borhani connoisseur looks to set new standards

ABIR HOSSAIN

A string of flavours, a scrumptious kick, a warm embrace – these are the makings of the finest *borhani* one might have the privilege of tasting. This excellent drink is a testament to the staples of Bangladeshi cuisine and celebrates our refined palate. *Borhani* is made up of a bunch of ingredients that may sound like a juxtaposition but possesses the perfect “marriage” of flavours.

However, apart from the seasonal appearance at weddings and a rare glass here and there, *borhani* appears to fly under the radar but a collective has sought to change that. The Fine Borhani Club is a group that bleeds *borhani* and strives to share their passion with the world.

“The beverage completes the gap between a regular meal and the perfect wedding feast. It might also be interpreted as the remedy that prevents middle-aged wedding attendees from being blown into oblivion,” said Mrs Shantana, founder of The Fine Borhani Club.

The group had humble beginnings. From crashing one wedding to another, being confronted and eventually kicked out, the members had to fight for their place, just not literally.

“We were providing wonderful insight into the mediocre abomination they were serving. I mean, who even needs an invitation to express their opinions?” exclaimed a bewildered Mrs Shantana.

According to her, the average Dhaka resident is invited to four weddings each year; seven if they're lucky. But that implies no one takes notice of their presence. Such meagre numbers are not enough.

Nonetheless, having attended enough receptions, she has developed a sophisticated process of tasting *borhani*. It may be judged based on texture, the kick, and the experience, or “drink, delegate, and derive,” as Mrs. Shantana has phrased it.

“The drink may exude grit or serenade coolness, it may be thick and buttery or acidic and tangy,” continues the connoisseur. “There is a rare threshold where everything just clicks.”

The Fine Borhani Club deviates from numbers and instead prefers using alternatives such as “Divorce on the fourth week” or “A happily ever after.” Anything in between is left to the reviewer's creativity.

Mrs. Shantana says she started this out of love. *Borhani*, for her, is the ultimate form of tying a stronger knot.

“Each member we have here is like family. We recruited some because they threatened to expose our identities at uninvited weddings but you learn to love them.”

After decades of sipping secretly and critiquing quietly, it is finally time for the Club to emerge. The Fine Borhani Club is ready to become a household name and a permanent presence in weddings across the country. Invite them and witness the mastery unravel before your eyes. They promise to be honest, although, for the right price, that too might change.

In due time, The Fine Borhani Club will be everywhere.

Abir Hossain is a failed SoundCloud Rapper. Tell him you too can't find anything to rhyme oranges with at: fb/abir.hossain.19



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

A Butterfly Flapping Its Wings

SABRINA SAZZAD

Circumstances started to change
When a butterfly leapt out of its cage.
Bound, not by the shackles of the stage.
Free to fly, soar high.
However innate the rage,
The desire flowing with this ground shattering
Turning of the page,
With realization of the truth against the greatest lie
As consciousness made its way for freedom,
Deciphering, in its image.
A minuscule movement could commence a storm.

A butterfly flapping its wings,
Broke out of their manipulated strings.
And then it rose, up to the heavens,
Invisible to the naked eyes.

Sabrina likes to procrastinate. Tell her to get it together and not panic at sazzadsabrina101@gmail.com



Madame Wonderland

RIFAH TASHFIA

When Rue first saw the houses that grazed the city, she thought about the tiny people living in big houses; what kind of lives they had; what was their idea of fun?

Now as Rue skipped over the steps of Manor, she realised that the big houses filled the space of emotion from the owner's lives. Every house she followed her mother to for her day-jobs seemed to tell the same stories: elegant parents with no time for their stranded children, grey hues, a myriad of maids with endless things to clean and endless foods to make.

But this particular house was different. Her mother started frequenting this place for long hours and so did Rue. That's when she met the kids who were currently looming over a spot in the garden. Parting with her mother, Rue walked to the group.

"Is that... blood?" She tip-toed to get a better look.

The group jerked and scattered.

"God. You move as quietly as a mouse," Nonna muttered, blue painted nails pressed over her heart.

"Madame Wonderland is up to something again," Jaiser noted, dusting grass off his pants.

"Let's go and check it out," Derin stepped towards the house without another word and the trio followed.

Madame Wonderland was Jaiser's nickname for Wonder. Just like her name, everything she did was a wonder. When Wonder's parents moved here, there was a big two storied room inside the house they couldn't find any use of. So they handed the keys over to Wonder. She had the creative freedom to do whatever she wanted with the room.

The first thing Wonder did was cover the door (which was on the second floor) with the same golden wallpaper

as the walls surrounding it. Then she attached a big mirror on the hook and a side-piece as if it were a part of the wall, a little table with trinkets for décor. The globe on the "table" worked as a knob for the room, and only Wonder, her parents and the kids knew of it.

space to hangout in the room between all the chaos.

Today as they turned the globe and entered Wonderland, they found Wonder on the pale couch. Her hands were bathed in red, dripping onto a dark container.

"Yeah, not creepy at

asked, wide-eyed.

"Should I bring the mop?" Rue added.

"Mmmhmm? Oh no, that's Tahira. Hey, get up," Wonder said. "And this heart is fake, of course."

Just then, the figure drenched in red but unharmed sat up. "I'm alive, but your reaction to whether she killed someone was a bit terrifying."

"Was that supposed to be a prank?" Rue asked, stifling a bit of annoyance.

"Huh? No. I was staring at that." She points to the paint beneath. "I was carrying the paint buckets for Wonder when I stumbled and dropped one."

The paint bucket fell just by the stairs, and volumes of red spilled onto the colored steps.

"Oh no... Wonder," Nonna cried. "The work on the stairs is ruined!"

"Leave it, it just gave me more ideas to work on." Wonder mumbled from her place.

"What's the heart for?"

"Decorative for the knob on this side."

"You're making a real life heart shaped knob?"

"Yes."

"Girl..."

Then, quietly, Wonder added, "Would you have really helped me with murder?"

The group looked at her, jaw slacked.

The oddities of Wonder kept them together. The group was so fiercely protective of their friend. Who would Wonder want to kill anyway?

Turns out, Wonder had a list of people she wanted to eliminate from the face of the earth. Even if they were evil, it unnerved Rue; this was a side of Wonder she had not seen before. Wonder was a puzzle they were half-way through solving; but within minutes, Wonder stepped over the puzzle and scattered all the pieces away.

Every single thing inside the Wonderland had intricate details etched to them: the light-bulbs with specks of glitter on them, the chandelier with jewels embedded on it, each of the steps of the spiral staircase that led downstairs to her lair had been painted by Wonder herself. You could come here and spend hours gazing at everything. It was Wonder's workshop and her museum. The kids found themselves a

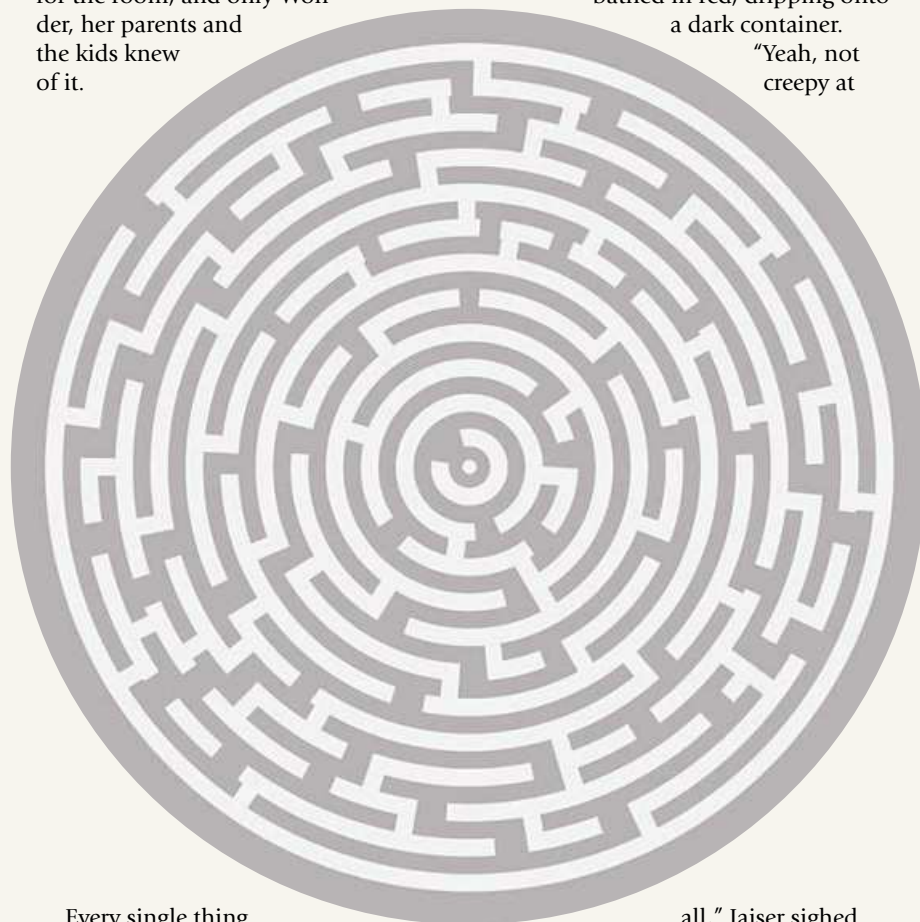
all," Jaiser sighed.

"And what might you be upto today?" Nonna drawled and peeked into the container. She gasped. "Is that a heart?"

"Is that a human?" Rue looked at the figure lying beside the stairs. Rolled on its side, red liquid was seeping out under it.

"Wonder, did you do this?" Derin whispered.

"Do you need our help?" Nonna





Teaching parents how to use a computer

SUBAH NUZHAT HUSSAIN

Our parents have mastered using cell phones – it's time to familiarise them with the final boss: the computer. For parents who are new to technology, the learning curve is steep. Progress is slow, and you'll need to take this one step at a time

LEVEL ONE - THE POWER BUTTON

The hunt for the power button is the first hurdle. Bear in mind that things that come to us easily might not be half as easy for people who are two and a half decades older than us. "How does it turn on?" is a question I've heard too often to keep count on.

The solution was simple. Tape a piece of paper with "Power" written on it followed by an arrow directed at the power button. They won't need to look for the button anymore.

LEVEL TWO - CRACK THE KEYBOARD

The concept of a keyboard is simple. You press the buttons and the computer responds.

There's a catch, however. The buttons are all over the place. Parents will need to scan through all the jumbled-up letters to find the one that they are looking for. This step plays like a broken record until the sentence is complete.

This can be really frustrating. Cheer them on, don't let them give up. Encourage them to type with more than one finger at a time. Dictate sentences so they can practice typing.

Special buttons need labels. The texts on the keys are small. Help your parents out by writing the names of the keys in block letters and sticking them on the keyboard. They will never forget which one is the spacebar. I assure you.

LEVEL THREE - DETOUR

The "Start" menu is a rabbit-hole that's best avoided. Chances are your parent's activities on the computer will be limited to a few applications at most, so this is unnecessary.

Pin shortcuts to the taskbar. Pin shortcuts to the desktops. Ensure the icons are large enough to be spotted from the other side of the living room.

Need Zoom? Taskbar. Can't find Chrome? Taskbar. Looking for important documents? It's right there on the desktop space.

Follow these pointers and you'll be able to avoid the "Where is it?" route.

LEVEL FOUR - ELIXIR OF RECOLLECTION

The human brain has a nasty habit of forgetting things. There were times where my mother would forget the things I showed her the very next day.

Write an instruction manual using diagrams. For example, I drew diagrams of the minimise, maximise, and close icons on a window and wrote down what they do.

Ditch jargon, and explain things as simple as possible, so they won't need to ask twice. Quiz them. Ask, "What do you think you should do next?" This will help them recall information better.

LEVEL FIVE - THE FINAL BOSS

For our parents, learning how to use the computer isn't as easy as riding a bike. It's a process that's going to take weeks or even months. Be patient. Be there for them. Tweak their curriculum to fit their needs.

In relationships, chemistry isn't always compatibility

ROSHNI SHAMIM

For today's generation, finding people to date has never been easier. After all, with so many apps where you can decide instantly from a photo or bio if a candidate has any potential or not, your dating pool shouldn't have a lack of options.

However, the reality is far from being this idealistic.

Perhaps the trouble begins from the confusion where people tend to put "chemistry" and "compatibility" in the same spectrum. Does this mean chemistry is *not* the equivalent of what we believe compatibility to be?

Well, most people will be surprised to know the wide differences between the terms. The simple route is to acknowledge that chemistry may feel great and giddy – but is usually short lived – while compatibility between two people can persevere the relationship for a lifetime.

Let's say you decide to go to a party at the insistence of your extroverted friend. There, you bump into a stranger reaching for the same bowl of chips, which of course leads to friendly banter or subtle sparks. After you come home, your mind willingly chooses to trail back to that interaction, leaving you with a conflicted urge to have another conversation with the stranger, convincing you this is the connection you didn't know you were missing. Without you even knowing it fully, your interest in this individual has already started peaking.

For young adults, this is such a great feeling, especially in the early days of the relationship, given the interactions

give way to one. Yet, of course, life gets real at some point and these relationships decide to start losing the spark, as well as its longevity. So, what exactly causes things to go wrong?

What makes these relationships often fail is people's denial in accepting that what they feel for their "person" actually lacks emotional depth and the understanding one needs to make a relationship last.

In short, if your surface-level preferences match yet your fundamental perspectives stand at opposite poles, it becomes next to impossible to row the boat in a mutual direction.

This is why the growth of online dating has, in many ways, hindered the process further of finding a significant other; one that actually connects on a deep level. What we are left with instead are judgement calls on how great their photos are, if they like *Friends*, and how popular they seem on their socials.

Is it any surprise that many of us are seen treading through relationships feeling lost and dejected? Breakups leave a long trail of doubt and insecurities on yourself, leaving you failing to understand what you are really looking for is mutual thought, common philosophy of life, and the urge to talk through issues where both partners actually solve problems.

All of this requires time and effort and, in fact, stems nowhere close from the naive world of only having "chemistry". Growth in general is great, but maybe some definitions should be cherished on a deeper level in its old-school box, to be felt and understood in its core essence.

