

An examinee's ode to the New Year

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As 2022 firms its grip around the world, the O Levels, for so long a source of fantasy, intrigue and curiosity for my younger self, stands right in my horizon. Despite having an apparent decade to prepare for these fabled exams, the life-defining magnitude of the potential repercussions is still enough to unnerve my otherwise assured self.

As I come to terms with the complicated and unforgiving reality of the exams, and life, I realised one important thing – you truly appreciate what you have after you lose it. The warmth of my childish enthusiasm has now made way for the cold, piercing fingers of subdued fear to ping my mind.

Ever since I had first heard of the exams from seniors and teachers, I have been impatient. The countless stories served to fuel my burning desire to be done with my exams right away, which wasn't possible as I realised later. Seeing my seniors sit for the O Levels and hear their tales, the exams became the stuff of legends we only hear, but don't realise.

However, that turned out to be no more than our wishful thinking, trying to dodge the inevitable. As I stand with the imposing shadow of the "dreaded" O Levels as company, it now feels unreal. After seeing our seniors write their own chapter, it is now our turn to contribute to our school's legacy, while also getting results to improve our future prospects and make our parents proud.

The time lost due to the pandemic certainly did not make things easier. The challenge to cope with academic losses and still perform well was exceptional,



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exuberated by the less-than-perfect state of my mental health. The stakes are truly immense. It is something which can only be realized if you have been through it.

Being a meritorious student from the start, my teachers always had big expectations from me. Conversely, I set my bar too high. Even though I initially wanted to get excellent grades, subsequent realisations have led me to realise that it may not be possible. However, my obsession

with getting straight As still burns bright as the sun. Hearing the success stories of seniors from my teachers, my fire becomes even stronger, encouraging me to write my own odyssey in my school's folklore.

Appearing in our lives' first public exam is a mixture of fear and hope. The Covid-19 gap only makes things trickier. As we continue with our preparations, the hope is to perform according to the expectations to make everyone proud and make

2022 a memorable moment in our lives.

That, of course, is easier said than done. Amidst all the hectic last-minute preparation and mocks, drawbacks still remain. But mountains are there to be climbed, aren't they?

Inqiad Bin Ali has 'got a pain in his heart and a love in his soul' to put it in an artistic way. He is found deep in thoughts at inqiadali007@gmail.com

Do not worry about gift anxiety

HIYA ISLAM

If you have not bought a gift for someone, cancelled it, and then gotten a "better" gift, maybe you haven't experienced the gift-giving anxiety at its peak.

Some people don't even have to try. They magically swoon friends and family with whatever is under the wrapping; they must be God's favourite. For many of us, though, the simple act of giving is a source of stress followed by more stress.

The spiralling thoughts only make it worse. Does my gift make me look insincere? Did I spend enough? Am I showing off? Is it too small? What if they don't like it, or worse, already have it? The list goes on.

A gift in its truest sense is a gesture of appreciation, love, and altruism. Gifts are supposed to be fun, even for those with a history of bad gifts. Being good at gifting could be a skill or a blessing, but there are few ways to indulge better in the joy of giving. But many people put various meanings to it from making the right impression to gaining someone's approval.

The anxiety itself comes from the fear of disappointing a beloved one. It is important to remember that we cannot control people's reactions to our gifts. In order to experience the joy of gift giving fully, think of it as a selfless act. This removes the focus from the outcome and



brings it back to you.

While it is tough to juggle price tags, time, and apparent gift likeability, shopping for a gift does not necessarily have to turn out to be terrible. Expensive does not mean better. Always set a budget. That way you can prevent yourself from going overboard as a means to compensate for a hovering anxious thought. Instead of playing an endless guessing game with yourself, try asking the

person what they want if possible. Lastly, avoid price matching. When you try to do so, the thoughtfulness tends to leave.

Presents are often a two-way thing and receiving them can be just as nerve wracking. When on the receiving end, givers are on high alert to sense any change of emotion in recipients. For some people, this leads to worrying if they have showed a reaction big or sincere enough to reciprocate.

However, emotions are a spectrum and different people choose to express themselves in ways unlike yours. During gift-exchange occasions, one might find themselves empty-handed as they were not anticipating. In this case, it is okay to respond that you were not expecting it.

Be it ingeniously practical or warmly personal, at the heart of a gift exchange lies the intention to connect two people on a deeper level. It is why gifts are one of the love languages. A hand-made card, a bowl of baked pasta, or simply spending more time together, are all gifts that don't come wrapped.

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