

Times change, so MUST WE

EDITOR'S NOTE

In the last two years, we were forced to accept a new way of living. The world as we knew it will possibly never be the same, but as "change is the only constant in life," we have learned to adapt to this new reality. Our everyday normal has changed forever, and with that change, come realisations of what is resilient and important, and what need not be preserved.

"Times change, so must we" is the 5th instalment of this year's annual Anniversary Supplement. In this segment, we focus on the changing lifestyle in the year 2022.

We start off with "Surviving a pandemic" that highlights the challenges of the times we are going through, and how we still continue with our fight against COVID-19. It zeroes in on our collective suffering, and lessons that can help us mould our future. We look back through haunting photos of the pandemic, changes in lifestyle that were adapted in the face of the pandemic, the effect of the trauma on our mental health, and how many businesses are still struggling to get back their footing, particularly the segments most affected by the

lockdown, like tourism.

"Facets of modern life" deals with the aspects of life in both its lighter and serious notes. From fashion, to our love for the aesthetics in forms of flowers, and food – our take is varied! Just as each individual's lifestyle.

Our last section, "Traveller in your land" takes us on a journey through Bangladesh and its many traditional *haats*, and into the lives of Bangladeshi diaspora, living in a land they have learned to call their own, nurturing parts of their own heritage while melding it with the host's.

Our past defines, in many ways, our present, and takes us through a journey into the future. The lessons for humanity that COVID-19 has to offer will help us reinvent a future that is in harmony with nature, people friendly, and sustainable. That is our sincere hope for the year 2022.

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COVID-19 and the misfortunes of artisans in Bangladesh

#CRAFTS

Late 2019 saw the world face one of its toughest calamities in modern history – a deadly virus that rapidly spread across continents causing a pandemic, which had huge socio-economic consequences. COVID-19 halted economic progress, regressed development and ceased tourism, arts, crafts and entertainment to almost nil. While it took a toll on the whole world, poor artisans of a developing country like Bangladesh suffered the most.

During any major health crises, including a pandemic such as COVID-19, the entire world becomes busy managing and putting greater emphasis on the health sector, and activities pertaining to arts and culture fall short. They are either shut down or put on hold until the situation improves. Till date, the pandemic still ravages on, through which, the poor artisans and their livelihoods



wheel) is also different. Our special *haris* (pots) cannot be made in their pottery-wheels. So, if this craft must go on, then this is about the right time to train the younger generation on our traditional techniques. And I cannot do this alone, or by myself; I need help from private or governmental organisations to come forward and help me in saving our craftsmanship – our *pal* legacy.”

Problem with lack of documentation

The handloom and handicrafts sector is one of the largest in the country in terms of providing employment, but the hurdle lies in the fact that the sector falls in the category of unorganised or informal sector, for which there are no significant data.

“We are unaware of the actual count of artisans all over Bangladesh,” said Sk Saifur Rahman, General Secretary, NCCB, National Crafts Council of Bangladesh. “We do not know what

have been nearly phased out of existence.

The slow death of crafts

“The pandemic has ruined everything for us. The little business that we had before the virus hit was also disrupted and today, we really don’t know how to carry forward with our trade,” said Gitesh Chandra Das, a master-craftsman from Mokambazar, Moulvibazar, Sylhet, best known for making the *sheetal pati* – a distinct floor-covering made out of green cane, the *murta gach*.

“A single piece of *sheetal pati* takes at least 15-20 days to make and I am talking about the simple designs. An exclusive piece usually takes more than two months to make. We do not even get Tk 2000 for our hard work. People nowadays seem to be disinterested in buying traditional items in general. In addition to that, the showrooms were closed and all kinds of gatherings such as the seasonal fairs (*melas*) were put on hold, so where would we get any customers?” he asked.

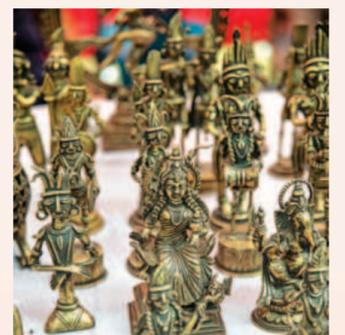
Also, part of the discussion was Shushanta Kumar Pal, a *shokher hari*

“A single piece of *sheetal pati* takes at least 15-20 days to make and I am talking about the simple designs. An exclusive piece usually takes more than two months to make.”

(decorative clay pots) artisan from Bashantapur, Bagdhani, Rajshahi.

“The pandemic made it clear that the future for traditional crafts is quite bleak. People used *shokher hari* as a daily requirement in the past; they used these on special occasions and also their everyday lives. Today, they do not even want to use it as a rare, decorative material. Our citizens are more attracted to foreign goods, plastic and machine-made items. They do not have the time to appreciate the prestige and exquisiteness of hand-crafted goods and the legacy it holds,” he says.

Pal added, “Once upon a time, in the Rajshahi division alone, there were around 4500 *shokher hari* craftsmen. Today, there is only me, and with my passing, there will be no one taking the heritage-trade forward. Things that the Arts Department students make in Dhaka are completely different from how we make it here. Their ones are more design based, ours are more nature inspired. Our *chach* (pottery



trade they are involved in, but we can assume from experience that the number is quite large. A process is underway to count all of the artisans through a census, and I hope the government initiative would start rolling soon,” he added.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4





COVID-19 and the misfortunes of artisans in Bangladesh

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

"Every single crafts council in Bangladesh dealing with artisans has their own list, but there's no one single directory to look into. And that's why during the pandemic, it became even harder for the artisans, because most of them could not be reached to provide support, neither did they know who to approach for sustenance. This situation was definitely difficult.

"However, things are not so bleak as they appear. From NCCB, we tried to fund as many artisans as we could throughout the pandemic, plus for the future, we are planning to work on big projects with the government where we hope to train artisans from four different categories, namely *Bash-o-Bet* (bamboo and cane products), *Benaroshi* (Banarasi sari), *Adibashi Shelai* (Indigenous community weaving), and *Sheetal Pati* (decorative cane floor-mats). Through this scheme, we hope to train the artisans in product development and skill development. After that, we plan to hold an exhibition for them where they will be able to sell their stock and earn for themselves. The most important part of the project is that it will be 100 percent funded, meaning the attendees would be paid for the commute, food, shelter and for any other necessities throughout the entire training process," said Rahman.

A change in our attitude
With the world more amused by and

invested towards fast fashion, plastics and everything new, the pandemic proved to us once again that sustainability should be at the core of every little production idea. It is about time we take things slow and concentrate more on possessions that were natural, and local.

Shahid Hussain Shamim,
Director, Prabartana, could not agree more.

"We have learned that sustainable living is the only way to living in the future, if we are to save our planet and live in harmony with nature. A large section of the population has already realised this fact and is looking to procure only sustainable products in a global economy. This is where we come in. And I have facts to prove it. Where many sales dipped during the pandemic, our sales in exports actually increased and we are hopeful for further increase in the future. So, the future is actually there, all we need is proper training of the artisans and products development to match the needs of the global audience."

"The Bangladesh Government has been quite progressive in the heritage crafts sector through applying for GI (Geographical Indication of Bangladeshi Product). Now, the second step that remains is to create a proper seal for GI, which can be used while exporting

materials like the *Jamdani*. The motion has been put into effect; all we need at the moment is unity and joint activities to take the process further," explained Hussain Shamim.

To conclude
Speaking to the experts and the master-craftsmen, we realised that while many things are being exercised to reach the goal, there are still gaps and loopholes which need to be addressed to make for a smooth and systematic development. And maybe digital platforms could be the solution to plug in the pitfalls.

Dismally however, the subject-matter lacked in all conversations. The artisans were not introduced or informed of any digital platform concepts, neither the dignitaries spoken to were informed of any future plans, including digital platforms.

The pandemic has made us realise that the economy requires change and huge investments in the digital economy, especially because a huge number of people logged on to various digital platforms during the crises. From shopping, to holding virtual meetings to conducting online classes — anything and everything shifted to the digital platform. With easy access to smartphones and online connectivity all over the country, maybe it's time that we concentrated on this sector and thought of innovative ways to bring in the artisans under one network: to train them, to motivate them, to fund them and to showcase their products to ourselves and the world.

By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed



The pandemic has made us realise that the crippling economy requires change and huge investments in the digital economy.



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A pandemic and how it pushed us into the digital age

#TECHNOLOGY

If you were to tell your mum or dad, even back in 2019, that they would be shopping for groceries, medicine, or be doing their office from home, they would tell you to lay off the lazy man daydreams. And yet, that is precisely the reality that they, and we, have come to accept as the new normal during the COVID-19 pandemic. Just like the rest of the world, we were also told to go home and stay home to curb the spread of the virus. And with that directive, everything we as Bangladeshis did on a face-to-face basis had to

takes a while to gain traction. Most of us, up until the pandemic, did most, if not all of our shopping physically, especially things like groceries.

Another thing to consider is that we, as a nation, adopted the computer and the Internet much later than the rest of the world. The home computer was already becoming commonplace in most developed countries since the '80s, and connected to the Internet by the very early '90s. By contrast, our story was slightly different, with computers just appearing around 1996-1997 at some work places, and home computer adoptions starting after 2000 in select homes, while the Internet reached our shores around 1996. Since then, the innovations happened online, with various innovative services popping up, and we were always late to the party.

So, how did we close this seemingly huge gap so quickly and become a nation that is more reliant on online services?

Well, in short, we had no choice; we went into this whole thing cold turkey. When the lockdowns were announced, most workplaces and all schools completely shifted to an online based work from home situation. Services like Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams became vital to functioning in this new normal.

And then there's Zoom!

Before the pandemic, only a handful of people knew what it was, but during the 2020 lockdown, this was THE medium to use for just about everything; from office meetings, to full-blown classes, to discussions and seminars held online.

Tania, a teacher at a prestigious school in Bangladesh, had to face just such a change, moving from physical class attendance to online Zoom based classes.

"It took some time for us teachers to adjust, but pretty soon, this started to feel like the norm. There are the odd annoyances such as losing a student in class due to poor Internet or a power outage, and taking exams is quite tricky, but we have managed," says Tania.

Another thing we learned was shopping online, especially our groceries. As mentioned before, for the older members of a family, shopping online for groceries is a hard concept to get round, even if the rest of the world already does it. When the lockdown hit and venturing outside was almost outlawed, we had to

accustom ourselves to online services for doing our weekly home shopping.

Thankfully, a lot of the existing super shops like Agora, Meena Bazar etc. already had online services running way before the pandemic hit, plus dedicated online platforms such as Chaldal was also active previously, albeit used in much smaller capacity by more tech-savvy people. With going to kitchen markets basically impossible, our mums and dads had to learn how to get online and get everything they needed to run a home online.

S M Nurul, a 68-year-old retiree, went through this strange learning process, saying, "Buying groceries is an involved process, your judgement of condition is key, as well as haggling skills. If you didn't choose right, you would end up with bad products. But with the lockdown in place, it wasn't easy to go the kitchen markets, and my kids were also warning me to stay away, and instead use Chaldal to order whatever was needed. While not being able to see what produce you will end up getting is a downside, in this climate, this is the best compromise."

We also started to lean more heavily on shopping online for things like clothing, trinkets, hobby items etc. because people suddenly had a lot of time and very little to do, and retail therapy is a thing. Because of this tremendous spike in demand, many Facebook businesses have cropped up to meet demand, along with ever-expanding e-commerce sites.

Along with shopping and doing groceries, we also started to lean on food delivery services harder than we ever have. The scenario is easy to understand; you aren't allowed out, so no dining out, and cooking at home constantly, even when doing it in shifts, gets frustrating and mundane. This is where services like Foodpanda and Hungry Naki really came into their own.

With restaurants taking a tougher stand on sanitisation, and contactless nature of these services, it became possible to break the monotony of eating home-cooked meals only. While these food delivery services are by no means new, and neither is their usage amongst us, their services really went on overdrive during the pandemic.

With such a massive spike in online shopping and transactions taking place, there is also cause for concern. To meet demand, loads of new pages

and services crop up every day, and along with them, increases the number of fraud pages, or fake products. The recent hubbub regarding a certain e-commerce platform should serve as a warning for everyone to never fall for deals that are too good to be true, and to always check the reputation of every outlet online via experience from past users.

As for defective products, many platforms do offer services such as replacements or refunds, but it's always wise to check these terms and conditions from them beforehand. The one area where defective products is most prevalent is doing grocery or fruit shopping online, and it's the one area where nearly every online outlet shares the blame and needs to do better.

Sabiha Khan, a 55-year-old homemaker shared similar sentiments when ordering for her weekly groceries online, saying, "When my husband shops from the kitchen market, what we end up with is absolutely fresh produce. But when ordering online, what is delivered to me looks old and damaged. I ordered three cauliflowers, and when they were delivered, they looked discoloured. When asking the delivery person, he asked to call the company and let them know. And when we called, the response was not favourable."

Thankfully, if you do end up with something that is not what you paid for and the seller refuses to take responsibility, you have the tools to fight back. Assuming you have some credentials of the seller, or their company/brand, you can lodge a complaint with Jatio Vokta Odhikar Songrokkhon Odhidoptor and rest assured that your case will be handled with the full might of the authorities.

Up until 2019, Bangladesh was still very much behind in terms of using online services compared to the rest of the world. With the pandemic, and the lockdown that followed, the status changed very quickly, and now, we are at the forefront of what the Internet has to offer. If the news of Amazon planning to enter the Bangladesh market is anything to go by, it should serve as a testament to how far we have come, and how much farther we will go post-pandemic.

By Intisab Shahriyar
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed



be done online, meaning Bangladesh would stop playing catchup with the rest of the world in terms of participation, and join in as equals.

This was a real challenge for just about anyone not born after Y2K. The younger generation basically grew up with the Internet, smartphones, and tablets and take it all for granted, whereas the '90s and '80s generation, and those earlier than that, basically read about the Internet, smartphones, and tablets in science fiction novels. Plus, we as a nation, are very tradition driven, so any change

This was a real challenge for just about anyone not born after Y2K. The younger generation basically grew up with the Internet, smartphones, and tablets and take it for granted, whereas the '90s and '80s generation, and those earlier than that, basically read about the Internet, smartphones, and tablets in science fiction novels. Plus, we as a nation, are very tradition driven, so any new change takes a while before gaining traction.

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Frugal living during the pandemic

#PERSPECTIVE

The post-2020 world we live in is very different from the one we are all used to living. For many, it meant losing their loved ones and braving an emptier existence. For others, it is living with the scars after battling for their lives. But for the rest, it is simply a world where every move needs to be a calculative one. This is the world that have been, and continues to be, ravaged by the SARS-CoV-2, more commonly known as COVID-19 or Coronavirus. Global



outbreaks of a disease like COVID-19



are not an unprecedented event. If you were to go through history, you would find other outbreaks of diseases. You could almost say this was inevitable. However, knowing the science does not really prepare you for the reality of ghost cities around the world, where everyone is instructed to stay home to keep safe. It also does not prepare you for the damage to the economy, and by extension, your household finances and spending habits.

Cracks in the plan

Pre-pandemic life hardly ever called for keeping a count on your expenses, or the

To survive, one needed to ditch what they knew to be normal pre-pandemic, and start embracing a more frugal lifestyle.

odd impulse purchases here and there for a significant section of the middle class. That all changed after the pandemic hit.

Initially, the situation was two-sided, with the upper- and middle-class remaining somewhat stable after being shifted mostly to working from home in order to curb the spread of the virus; while most of those below the poverty line, or those who live by daily wages, lost their livelihood almost overnight.

Asma, a domestic help working for a family living in Gulshan lost her job within a week of the announced

lockdown back in 2020.

"My employers are concerned that since I come and go from my own house, I might unknowingly bring the virus to them. My husband is also making less money pulling a rickshaw as there are very few people on the streets," stated a concerned Asma, adding, "If I cannot find another work, we might need to go back to our village, because our options are either to starve to death, or die catching coronavirus."

Many, like Asma, had opted to retreat to their villages and try to survive.

Things for the middle class also did not stay stable for long. Soon, a multitude of issues started rearing their ugly heads. For some, it started with pay cuts at work, in order for their respective organisations to stay afloat in a depreciating economy. Others, whose families did unfortunately end up contracting COVID-19, there was the added, and rising, cost of hospitalisation and medication. And for many others, it was a complete loss of income due to being laid off.

Survival of the frugalist

To survive, one needed to ditch what they knew to be normal pre-pandemic, and start embracing a more frugal lifestyle.

Every little thing needed re-evaluating as either necessity or luxury. For many in the middle and upper class, there were tonnes of expenses hiding under "necessity" that simply did not cut the mustard. These included subscriptions to things deemed "not necessary for survival" such as gym memberships, Netflix or OTT platform subscriptions, eating out or ordering food from outside, clothing, etc.

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A Bank of Sustainability

Mutual Trust Bank Limited (MTB) rejoices along with its customers, shareholders, stakeholders, regulators, patrons and well-wishers, on being recognized as **one of the top ten (10) Sustainable Banks of Bangladesh by Bangladesh Bank.**

The recognition is made by Bangladesh Bank's Sustainable Finance Department (SFD) based on its performance in 2020. This is the first time, Bangladesh Bank has published such kind of rating based on four indicators such as Sustainable Finance, Green Refinance, Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) and Core Banking Sustainability.



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Frugal living during the pandemic

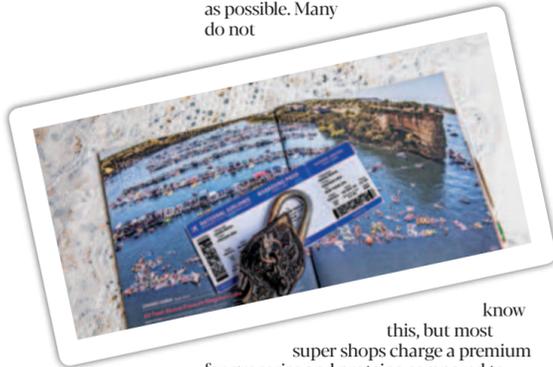
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Many do not know this, but most super shops charge a premium for groceries and proteins compared to shopping directly at kitchen markets, and in a pandemic, every little bit counts.

Saadi, a newly married 36 year old working for a private firm, went through a similar routine of cancellations and evaluations.

"This pandemic made me realise how many unnecessary expenses were eating away at my pay check. After axing those, I also discovered that on top of shopping for groceries, I had a habit of buying things that made no sense in an uncertain time like this, such as buying mountains of crisps, chocolates and so on. We also realised that by skipping takeaway meals and only consuming home-cooked meals, our monthly expenses dropped significantly. We have now opened a joint-savings account and saving our leftover earnings for emergencies," remarked Saadi.

On top of just curbing unnecessary costs and re-evaluating spending, doing groceries also became a tricky venture, because when every taka matters, you want to avoid overpaying as much as possible. Many do not



know this, but most super shops charge a premium for groceries and proteins compared to shopping directly at kitchen markets, and in a pandemic, every little bit counts. On top of this conundrum, there has been supply constraints with produce, making them scarcer, meaning more expensive.

Unfortunate realities

Pay cuts is another serious hurdle that many needed to tackle and integrate

into a frugal spending budget.

Naima, a 31-year-old working for a private television company, had to deal with just such a reality, saying, "After a month or so of lockdowns, me and some of my colleagues had our monthly salaries cut nearly in half. This put a huge strain on me, a single woman living with my parents in Dhaka. I actually had to limit my usual grocery shopping and buy enough to make one type of food for a week, before shopping again."

An ever-harsher reality was for those who were eventually laid off by their respective organisations. Shaffat faced just such a reality. A 48-year-old father of two, who worked for a newspaper for over 20 years, was let go at the height of a raging pandemic.

"No words can describe how betrayed

Pay cuts is another serious hurdle that many needed to tackle and integrate into a frugal spending budget.

and heartbroken I felt. I didn't have that long before retirement. If I didn't have a saving, I could have ended up on the street," stated Shaffat.

Safe to say many others were on the same boat as Shaffat, but minus any kind of savings.

Now and forever

Things started to stabilise slowly after mass vaccinations were enabled and lockdowns were withdrawn, allowing daily wage earners to return and start work. As for the upper- and middle-class workforce, regular work resumed, to try and steer out of this battered economy. However, it will be some time before things slowly start returning to some form of equilibrium, because the fight is still not over, especially if you consider current events.

Our country is currently being rocked by yet another variant, named Omicron, and infection rates are high again, putting many recovery plans in jeopardy. Until that day comes, and it will be a while, the frugal living practise should not be forsaken at any cost.

Once things do settle down, and we arrive at a new post-pandemic era, we can take all the lessons that we have learned during the pandemic about calculative and frugal living, and apply it there, because if there was one lesson we need to take into heart, it is that maintaining a saving is more important than it ever will be and these couple of years will serve as that reminder.

By Intisab Shahriyar
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Heartiest Felicitations
and Best wishes on the

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Doctors clad in PPEs enter the Covid-19 unit at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The photo was snapped in mid-2020. Despite fears of infection, these doctors had been treating patients for around two months by then, staying at a city hospital far from home. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



A man feeding stray dogs in front of Dhaka College. Some phases of the pandemic saw food sources for the animals become scarcer since people retreated from the streets and restaurants were shuttered; this scene was captured on 18 April, 2020. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



THAT'S NOT A MASK, SIR... A fishmonger covers his face with his hands as an executive magistrate of Barishal District Administration running a mobile court conducted drives across the city to enforce mask-wearing to curb the rising number of COVID-19 cases. This photo was taken from the city's Port Road area, on 31 March, 2021. PHOTO: TITU DAS

COVID-19 IN PHOTOS:

**The Daily Star's documentation
OF A PANDEMIC**

Shahriar, who has COVID-19 symptoms, and his wife Poppy, wait in front of Shaheed Sheikh Abu Naser Specialised Hospital in Khulna city. They were waiting there for almost six hours before they left without treatment. Poppy said her husband got tested for coronavirus, but the result was yet to be out. And the hospital would not take any patient without the result. The photo was published in early July of 2021.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN



#PERSPECTIVE

Bangladesh, along with the rest of the world, is living through the strangest of times. It feels surreal to think of the 'new normal' — seems straight out of a sci-fi apocalypse movie! Nevertheless, to make sense of it all, journalists continue to bring the latest of the ongoing pandemic and to keep the world informed and updated.

The journalists of The Daily Star have also bravely taken this call to duty to heart, providing you the myriad



▲ Wearing masks and maintaining social distancing, devotees offer Juma prayers at Jamiatul Falah Jame Masjid in Chattogram city on 8 May, 2020 — a day after the government withdrew a month-long partial restriction on offering prayers at mosques. The ban was imposed to slow the spread of coronavirus.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

dimensions of COVID-19. In this anniversary-special volume of The Daily Star, we humbly take this opportunity to look back and present to you some of our published photographs of the pandemic, from eerie scenes which would otherwise seem unreal, to heart-breaking visuals of anguish, to inspiring portrayals of COVID heroes. We hope that these photographs will shed light on the extraordinary circumstances the world is in and bring an appreciation of the things we had always taken granted in the pre-pandemic world.

Above all, we hope that these pictures will remind or reinforce the necessity of following COVID-19 health guidelines, so that we can survive through it together with grace and dignity towards a better and brighter future.

Compiled by M H Haider

Note: The captions accompanying these photographs have been slightly tweaked from the original (previously published) ones in order to fit the purpose of this photo feature.

A notice placed in front of the emergency unit of Mugda Medical College and Hospital says all beds in the hospital dedicated to COVID-19 patients, including those needing ICU care, are occupied. The photo was snapped on 29 July, 2021, during a grim phase of the pandemic, when many hospitals were dealing with a rush of coronavirus patients.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



LITTLE ONES SHOW THE WAY... A child washes her hands while another one waits for her turn inside the circle marked on the ground. This photo taken at Holy Cross Girls High School shows how children can follow the rules and health safety guidelines impeccably whereas some adults fail to do so. This scene from September of 2021 also portrays the reopening of schools after a long period of campus shutdown. Schools were however shut down again after a few months due to surging cases. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



A policeman with his face buried in his arms sits at the tennis court of Jatiya Press Club after several hours of being on duty wearing PPE on Topkhana Road. In the scorching heat, one of his teammates fainted not long before. The photo was taken on 10 May, 2020. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



A deserted part of Mayor Mohammad Hanif Flyover in the capital's Jatrabari during a strict lockdown sometime in July, 2021. COVID-19 and lockdowns gave us unfamiliar scenes of empty streets in the otherwise traffic-choked Dhaka. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

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Mental Health Post COVID-19

#HEALTH & FITNESS

Today, the world is quite aware and fluent on the physical symptoms of COVID-19, largely publicised by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and WHO (World Health Organization). From fever and chills to blue coloured lips and persistent pressures in the chest, the symptoms are varied and extensive. However, psychologists globally have one more symptom to add to the list, which we may have frisked-over in haste: mental

distress post-COVID.

Shamima Akter, Psychological Counsellor, PHWC Dhaka, (Psychological Health and Wellness Centre Dhaka), agrees.

“COVID-19 brings with it an associated list of trauma, from losing loved ones, to suffering from chronic fatigue because of the disease itself — all these conditions have a huge impact on one’s psychological health. It’s not uncommon to hear people complain that they feel lethargic after suffering from COVID-19 and somehow seem to have lost interest in doing things they once used to enjoy.”

“We have had a sizeable number of patients with triggered mental health ailments seeking help, post-COVID. In most cases, the psychological disorders were mild, borderline or dormant pre-pandemic, and got triggered later after the spread of the disease,” revealed the counsellor.

Hasnat Imam, a COVID survivor enlightens us with his experience.

“COVID has ruined our (my family’s) lives unlike anything in the world. I have lost both my parents to the pandemic, that too within a span of 6 months. I have suffered from the disease myself and somehow have never been able to get back to my pre-pandemic health condition till today.

“Before COVID, I used to love going to clubs, social gatherings, and parties. Today, I am a completely different man. Parties do not excite me anymore, in fact, the very idea scares me and I prefer staying away from meetings, crowds or any sort of get-togethers. Some say I have become a recluse, but I can’t help it. I just don’t feel hip anymore,” said Imam.



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We also spoke to Shamima Jahan, a struggling entrepreneur, who used to have a thriving Jamdani store at one of Dhaka’s most prominent shopping malls. Two years of the contagious disease, associated lockdowns and escalating costs forced her to close her shop and seek financial help elsewhere. Today, she feels depressed and hopeless about her future, especially with two young children to look after; she feels like all the weight of the world is on her shoulders.

“I don’t really know what to do anymore. I feel upset all day, angered, anxious and agitated. I do not think my children deserve such a hostile environment to grow up in,” shared Jahan.

Thankfully, Shamima Akter, psychologist at PHWC, was familiar with both the symptoms and had worthy suggestions.

“These are typical symptoms. So many people have been traumatised by the pandemic. Some have lost their loved ones, others have lost their jobs, and businesses. The first and foremost action that we suggest as counsellor is to be able to recognise the existence of an unwanted mental health condition impairing our regular lives. The rest becomes easier,” she said.

The practitioner also added, “Next, we help the victims recognise that the unfortunate circumstance was purely an act of nature, where they couldn’t have done anything to change the situation. We teach the sufferers to stop blaming themselves for the pandemic and its aftermath. We then encourage them to live in the present, rather than in the past

“I don’t really know what to do anymore. I feel upset all day, angered, anxious and agitated. I do not think my children deserve such a hostile environment to grow up in.”

“So many people have been traumatised by the pandemic. Some have lost their loved ones, others have lost their jobs, and businesses.”

or worry about the future. We provide them with tools to improve their mental clarity and find ways to improve their lives.”

Sajed Huq and Mariam Noor-Huq revealed having a complicated marital relationship during COVID times.

“The pandemic forced us to stay together 24/7, our tense and agitated personalities clashed so much that we had to seek out a marriage counsellor at PHWC,” said Noor.

Snigdha Sarwar, a dentist by profession, revealed that her 3-year-old became aggressive and hostile during the pandemic.

“I did not notice these symptoms even last year. The psychological counsellor we consult said, my son’s ADHD has been triggered because of increased screen-time during the pandemic,” said Sarwar.

These and countless other similar stories, tell us the extreme importance of psychological health, especially after a global disorder like the pandemic. We, as a nation, since time immemorial have considered psychological conditions as a subject-matter not worth discussing. We have stigmatised victims of mental health disorders and we have refrained from showing any sort of sympathy. In any normal condition, statistics show that at least 17 percent of the population of Bangladesh suffer from some kind of mental disorder, and the pandemic has perhaps escalated the problem. Given the circumstances, if we continue to undermine mental health and well-being, things will only get worse, affecting our social and economic conditions.

It’s about time we learned to give value to mental health and hold it equally valuable as physical health. It’s about time we sought professionals to discuss our problems and find solutions with them.

**By Mehri Mubdi Chowdhury
Creatives: TurnUp Pr
Special Thanks to PHWC for enlightening us on the subject matter
Names of patients have been changed to maintain privacy.**



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Cox's Bazar: ready and waiting for more tourists

#TRAVEL

Bangladesh's domestic tourism arguably was born as the beach town of Cox's Bazar started to be recognised as a holiday destination, and it has been a bustling hub for tourists for many years now. And yet, it seems that all we hear about the town in the news is negative—unfair price hikes, lack of safety for female travellers,

terrible roads, lack of overall security and all problems that could possibly plague a service industry-based town. But how much of this is true, is the question.

The tourism industry in Bangladesh, and all over the world, has been among the hardest hit by the social distancing and lockdowns that were necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The entire year of 2020, except for January and February, tourism and all sorts of other travel were largely prohibited in Bangladesh. Last year, people obviously cut down on travel for pleasure whenever COVID transmissions increased periodically, or a



According to recent government data, about 17 percent of local tourists, numbering in the millions, visit Cox's Bazar each year.

new variant of the virus emerged.

According to recent government data, about 17 percent of local tourists, numbering in the millions, visit Cox's Bazar each year. Combined with the local residents, a large number of development officials staying there, the influx of tourists, however welcome, does create management issues for the city, much of which has developed in an unplanned way. However, the tourist experience has not deteriorated as much as it could have.

Due to being a tropical beach town, it gets very hot in Cox's Bazar during

most of the year, and November to February are generally peak business times. The tourist sector lost two entire seasons of business to the pandemic, and is still struggling from the weight of the losses incurred, as the number of visitors has dwindled once more due to the spread of Omicron.

"The number of tourists I saw in Cox's Bazar this time is quite low, compared to previous years that I visited. Because of that, hotels are quite empty, and prices are more reasonable. What is absurd is that hotels here do charge more from people who book earlier, and walk-in rates are often cheaper," said Sadia Islam, former executive of research and development at Orion Pharma, who visited Cox's Bazar in Feb 2022.

"We found the hotel staff quite humble, and service was good too," she said.

Director of Primacy Opelia Beach Resort in Cox Bazar had the same thoughts.

COUNTINUED ON PAGE 15



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Cox's Bazar: ready and waiting for more tourists

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

"We have fewer regular visitors coming to Cox's Bazar, although the numbers increase a bit on the weekends. Surge in Omicron cases has reduced the number of visitors once more. We do provide guests with masks, and have hand sanitisers in place for everyone to use freely, but a lot of people are not in the habit of wearing masks," he said.

However, no guests have fallen sick at the hotel or reported falling sick after returning.

"The people working in the tourism industry in Cox's Bazar are not doing well. We were in dire straits right after the pandemic cut down our visitors in March 2020, and since then, periodically business ebbs and flows, but has yet to reach pre-pandemic levels. We had a good run in December 2021, but right after, due to the unsavoury news spreading about safety in Cox's Bazar and such, business fell from January. Even now, we are not

We had a good run in December 2021, but right after, due to the unsavoury news spreading about safety in Cox's Bazar and such, business fell from January.



can say that the bad rep Cox's Bazar gets is often unjustified. The report of a hotel charging Tk 400 for a meal of rice and lentils was blown out of proportion, as that bill was for four people as well, I myself went to that hotel that night," he added. "Although unscrupulous elements exist everywhere, but I feel Cox's Bazar is the safest city in Bangladesh, as there are police around 24/7 for tourists. The government has also amped up security measure due to the large number of foreign development workers stationed in Cox's Bazar working on issues created due to the refugee influx," he said.

"So far, the business owners are still trying to make things work, but if the season does not go as expected, business will again dwindle during Ramadan, and it is also low in summer, things might become very difficult for us here," he added.

There are often complaints by tourists of people charging unfair prices or conning shoppers and holidaymakers, and the ramshackle state of the city's infrastructure.

constructed, so it is temporarily very inconvenient.

"I do feel the unruly traffic in Cox's Bazar is enough to cause higher anxiety to even Dhaka residents," he added.

Services and activity options have also increased, with the new aquarium opening, parasailing, trekking, and even limited surfing in the region, merely hints of the scope latent in the naturally beautiful beach town. However, residents of Cox's Bazar and anyone who stays in the town for purposes other than a holiday, will easily notice huge infrastructure issues like unplanned urbanisation, lack of sanitation infrastructure and waste management, piles of plastic garbage and clogging of water bodies, and traffic congestion.

The pandemic lull was a perfect opportunity for the authorities for much-needed improvement work that is otherwise inconvenient and even difficult to execute during tourism season.

Nature did try to recover from the influx of human beings with flora and fauna thriving, returning to places once abandoned of foot traffic.

Despite the obviously plaguing issues, people in Bangladesh continue to show love for Cox's Bazar and the longest beach in the world. However, it is high time that we take a look at how to improve the existing city rather than embark on multimillion taka projects to create new ones, and implement sustainable changes. This will allow tourism, livelihoods and environment to fall into harmony, and finally begin harvesting the true potential of Cox's Bazar.

By Sania Aiman
Photo: Sikder Ahmed



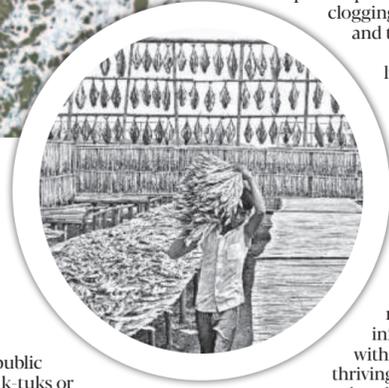
booking any large corporate events as the permissions for those are unofficially halted for the surge in Omicron strain of COVID-19," said Md Mozahidul Islam, director of operations at Hotel White Beach.

Although, as a resident of this city, I

It is high time that we take a look at how to improve the existing city rather than embark on multimillion taka projects to create new ones.

"There is a tendency of shopkeepers to charge unfair prices from unsuspecting buyers," said Sadia Islam. The same applies to public transport, like tuk-tuks or CNGs, or even the larger semis often used to visit the nearby places. These usually operate as a syndicate, and charge high fixed prices. But, on the other hand, singer Ritu Raj has a different opinion. "During my numerous visits to Cox's Bazar, I have stayed in hotels of varying prices, from Tk 1500 a night to Tk 3500 a night rooms, and I found no difference in their behaviour or desire to do their available best for me," he said.

"The footpaths along the Kolatoli Road have already been re-built or are being rebuilt. But some others, like the one from the airport and in front of the famous Poushee Restaurant, are being



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SOCIAL MEDIA TRIALS:

Conflicting to the Legal Court Trial?



#SOCIAL ISSUES

Presumed Innocent Until Proven Guilty—this is well established in criminal law. According to this, the burden of proof

This can backfire sometimes, since ‘victims-survivors’ can suffer from huge psychological impact, and a distraction is created from the real-issue at hand, turning it more into a social, cultural and even moral issue, instead of a legal one.

lies on the prosecution, which has to invalidate the assumption of innocence against the accused by proving all the elements of offences beyond reasonable doubt. In any case, if it fails to do so, ‘the accused or the victim’ is acquitted from any further legal trial.

This however, is only the case in a utopian scenario. A usual set-up may depict otherwise, whereas a number of media may be strongly involved, conducting an illegal trial of the accused in the court of public opinion, creating a widespread perception of guilt, even before a verdict has been reached by the

court. And things take a tumultuous turn when this tendency is incorporated into the digital space, especially social media, where mob societies are generated, with their own views, ideas, logic and perceptions.

But does the double-edged sword of social media have any credible effect on an ongoing legal trial.

“The swiftness with which any message or news spreads on social media is extremely alarming. Before you know it, an occurrence or the information of a special circumstance is at the fingertips of the masses. This can backfire sometimes, since ‘victims-survivors’ can suffer from huge psychological impact, and a distraction is created from the real-issue at hand, turning it more into a social, cultural and even moral issue, instead of a legal one. Furthermore, people lack inhibitions on social media, they think they can say anything and everything on the medium,” said Kajalie Shehreen Islam, Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka.

Mohammad Golam Sarwar, Assistant Professor, Department of Law, University of Dhaka and also the Editor, Law &

Social media may seem to be a boon momentarily, but it will definitely pose as a misery in the near future, if it ‘cannot be’ curtailed in due time and refrained from interfering with the legal system.

Rights Desk, The Daily Star, had been slightly apprehensive about the entire subject-matter. According to the veteran educator, media trials cannot influence any trial procedure legally. However, he also informed us that reality was slightly different and we could not ignore the impact of media trials on our justice system, in practice. The professor’s view on the ongoing social media trials were varied and informed of a completely different story, altogether.

“Journalists are accountable to a range of Codes of Conduct. They are unable to instigate the regular process of the court. Otherwise, they are regarded as being in ‘Contempt of the Court’, which is the offense of being disobedient or disrespectful towards a court of law and

its officers. There’s a multitude of legal doctrines such as the Children’s Act 2013 that prevents the identification of any child involved in a trial. There is also the Violence against Women and Children Act 1995 that prevents the publication of the identity of a victim. Instituting a false case in the latter, may cause two years of imprisonment and Tk 1 lakh in fines,” said Professor Sarwar.

However, he also agreed that there was no ‘Notable Code of Conduct’ for the digital space and that definitely prompted people to say whatever they wanted to and felt like.

“Social media is a double-edged sword if I may say, it definitely provides a platform for the voice of the masses, but on the other hand, it cannot stop the process when it goes overboard and misinformation overflows. There’s many amongst us who do not know the etiquette of speaking on the digital platform.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

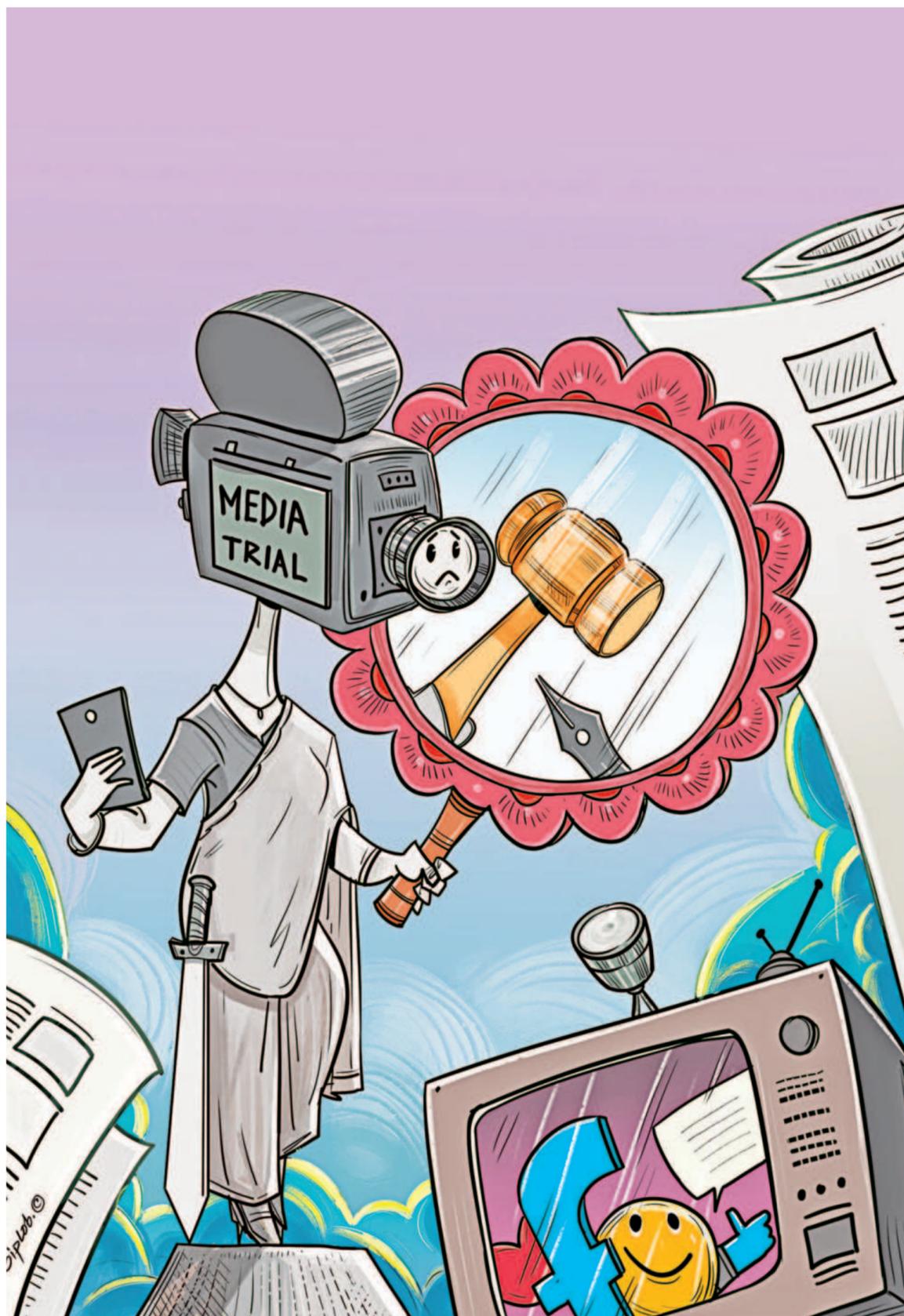
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SOCIAL MEDIA TRIALS: Conflicting to the Legal Court Trial?



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

“There are however different kinds of laws that may help prohibit unwanted speech or sharing of thoughts and these are the Digital Security Act, The ICT Act and the Pornography Control Act.

The conundrum lies elsewhere – people are frustrated to their core, most of the court cases in our country are pending, because of the lack of ‘adequate’ evidence. And every day, there are new cases being added to the list. With frustrations reaching their peak and justice being delayed over the years, sometimes people take their frustrations to the digital space, considering it safe. And naturally speaking, judges and police officers are human as well, and sometimes a special case that receives a lot of attention may get a faster verdict because of all the ‘attention’ it had received in the online space. That is possible, but definitely unfair, to the huge number of pending cases that are yet to see a fruitful ending. In this case, all I would like to say is that social media may seem to be a boon momentarily, but it will definitely pose as a misery in the near future, if it ‘cannot be’ curtailed in due time and refrained from interfering with the legal system,” the professor explained.

The absence of any strict code of conduct allows people on the social media platforms to be largely active in voicing opinions – especially ones that may have an effective role in framing the opinions of others. Ideally, in a democratic society, it is healthy to have a functioning social

Professor of Anthropology at BRAC University and also an avid social media researcher, explained the contradictions, saying, “The most interesting discussion about social media is that it ‘should not’ be reduced or simplified to the description of ‘just an online space to express views,’ it is so much more. It is a whole society out there, a hybrid-society, where everyone from a child to a senior citizen is present, connecting, socialising, learning, educating, informing,

We may as well be a little apprehensive and accept the fact that many of the news ‘in social media’ maybe be paid, fabricated and false.

expressing and so much more.”

“We have entered a polymedia environment without any preparations at all. This is very dangerous for both the end user and the state-machinery. There’s a lot of discussion on the subject-matter but a reasonable solution could be developing state-level policies to educate people early on, about the etiquettes of using social media. Disseminating information via text books and primary education could be an effective way to reach out to the masses. Then there’s the family outlook, where parents should teach their children about the decorum of the online space, since children have been learning to use the smartphone from their toddler years. And the media must also play a huge role in instigating rightful information and only then can we be considered social media savvy and safe to use the platform effectively in order to express our concerns in a positive away, which only helps the society and refrains from hurting the regular judiciary process,” Chowdhury said.

It can be said in an idealistic situation, the legal system is expected to consider the people’s rights (online and offline) to be informed and be able to cover and disseminate information amongst themselves, while playing a facilitator’s role. In a similar situation, it is also expected that the latter would pay due diligence and exert extreme caution in reporting stories, helping to ensure a fair and free trial. Until and unless these positions are reached, the scales will continue to be tilted and social media trials will continue to exist as a unique challenge to the 21st century justice system.

“We have entered a polymedia environment without any preparations at all. This is very dangerous for both the end user and the state-machinery. There’s a lot of discussion on the subject-matter but a reasonable solution could be developing state-level policies to educate people early on, about the etiquettes of using social media.

media for netizens to be able to express opinions freely under the ‘Freedom of Speech and Expression’ clause.

However, since the term double-edged sword exists to describe the platform, we may as well be a little apprehensive and accept the fact that many of the news ‘in social media’ maybe be paid, fabricated and false. Furthermore, these ‘fictitious’ evidences cause defamation to persons who have been acquitted by the courts based on a legal trial and on the grounds of lack of proof beyond reasonable doubt. Because of social media defamation, the accused-victims in these cases, face difficulty in resurrecting their reputation in society, ultimately jeopardising their rights to a dignified life, causing severe psychological and physical harm.

Mojien Zalal Chowdhury, Assistant

**By Mehryn Mubdi Chowdhury
Art: Biplab Chakraborty**

*Online Resources:
Research Paper by Ms. Somali Chowdhury, Media Trials: Contradiction to Media Ethics?
Research Paper by Barrister Ahmed Ehsanul Kabir, Media Trial: Prejudicing the Rights of the Parties in Criminal Case
Research Paper by Ayush Verma, Social Media Trials: A threat to the society and legal system*

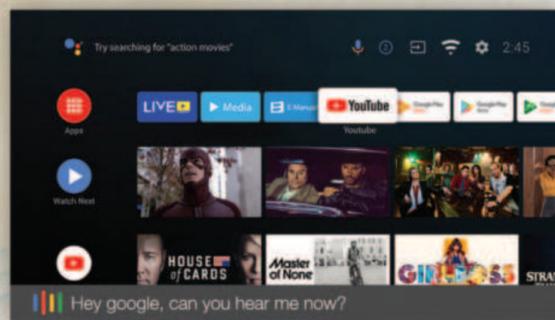
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#PERSPECTIVE

Flowers have been admired, sought after, and cherished throughout the history of humankind. There are a number of reasons for it, but the reason we usually seek flowers is the simplest of all. We seek flowers because they are beautiful. Native or exotic, we often get mesmerised by their beauty and forget that they come with a story of their own.

SHAHBAGH MARKET

If you have ever stepped out of a bus at Shahbagh or Shishupark or ever walked towards the Dhaka University Campus or Shaheed Minar; you have seen the Shahbagh flower market.

The shops are along the road and in a row. Big, small, even temporary ones. With the bright and conspicuous colours of chrysanthemum and marigold and the intricately outlined petals of roses and the bewitching fragrance of tuberose, this place is hard to miss without getting lost in the beauty of it all.

The Shahbagh market has two parts: one is a wholesale market and the other one is retail market. The wholesale market is located on the Shishupark side and the retail shops are everything that remains. The wholesale market starts rather early, at 4AM and it continues till 11AM. The rest of the market however, is open roughly 24 hours a day; so whenever you come here, you can get yourself a stick of tuberose or a bouquet according to your choice.

AGARGAON MARKET

The other wholesale market in Dhaka is at Agargaon. Originally, the market started at Khamarbari in 2009 where it had a good run for five years. Then it was moved to Agargaon and it's already been seven years since. The market is similar to the one in Shahbagh. This market also starts pretty early; in fact, earlier than the Shahbagh market. Starting to prepare at 2AM, this market kicks off by 3 in the morning and goes on till 10AM. After the wholesale business has been concluded, the retail shops will still remain open.

"There is a business of at least Tk 10 lakhs here every day, going as far as 20 lakhs," said Nur Mohammad, President of Sher E Bangla Ful Chashi O Baboshayi Somobai Samiti. It's a spectacular gathering of native and foreign flowers. Whether you are into orchids or lilies, or Chinese rose and gerbera, you will find them here. The million shades of colours and aroma will send you in frenzy if you step inside the market.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Where do all these flowers come from? Well, all sorts of places. From nearby places like Savar, Tangail and Narayanganj to far away locations like Jashore (Godkhali), Jhenaidah, Chuadanga; Even Natore, and Bogura — you will find flowers from all across

The wholesale flower market of Godkhali tends to the flower need of more than 50 districts in the country. In addition to that, flowers are also exported abroad.



the country in both of these markets. As soon as the flowers are ready to collect, they come straight to Dhaka, fresh from the fields. The native flowers are more popular than the exotic ones. One reason for this is that such flowers are costlier. Most of the exotic flowers come from India and China and even though they are low in demand amongst the mass people, they have their demand amongst a specific group of customers.

FLOWER CAPITAL

Godkhali in Jashore is called the flower capital of Bangladesh and rightfully so. While many places are known for their cultivation of different kinds of crops, flowers are cultivated in acres and

acres of fields in Godkhali. The wholesale flower market of Godkhali tends to the flower need of more than 50 districts in the country. In addition to that, flowers are also exported abroad. At least 15 different kinds of flowers are grown in the fields here, which include but are not limited to — rose, gerbera, gladiolus, tuberose, and marigold.

Md Ali Hossain, owner of 'Godkhali Krishi Nursery & Pushponir' has been in this business since 2006. "Before me, my father used to do the same business. You could say we are in this business since our birth," he said with a chuckle.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



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The business of flowers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

"The shops and fields here supply flowers all across the country. Most shops have a prevalent contract to a shop or market in Dhaka or another city and we supply according to that.

We load up the vehicles with flowers by 1 or 2 at noon.

They arrive at Dhaka by midnight and then the wholesale market over there kicks off," he said, discussing the usual timetables.

Presently, he maintains about 75 acres of flower garden and like many Godkhali farmers, growing exotic flowers in the near future is an appealing idea to Md Ali

Hossain.

"The ground here is amazing; the soil is like gold. Anything we sow, it blooms like magic," he added with pride. "This season, there has been an experimental cultivation of tulip in a field. The seeds were from Netherlands and dare I say the production was fantastic so this

looks like a promising prospect."

STORY FROM THE OTHER SIDE

In summer, the average flower will last for two days at most. It's easier in winter as flowers can survive for up to five to seven days depending on their variety "If we cannot sell all the flowers within two to three days, then we have no choice but to throw away the remaining ones as trash. There's no other way around it" said Md Dulal, owner of New Aparajita Pushpaloi, a flower shop at the Shahbagh market. Having been in this business since 1996, he's seen quite a lot but the pandemic was quite an unexpected blow. "The business was really good and blooming before the lockdown. Since the pandemic, it's been really difficult and even though everything is reopened now, the demand for flowers is not what it used to be," he added.

Md Rasel from Agargaon flower

"The emergence of artificial flowers also dealt a blow to the flower business. Even the farmers back at Godkhali had suffered a drop in business because of artificial flowers."

market, a comparatively young face in the business shared a similar story, saying, "From December to March, our business blooms since it's a seasonal business but this year, not so much. COVID has really smothered it but I think it's the panic of COVID rather than COVID itself that did the most damage."

"The emergence of artificial flowers also dealt a blow to the flower business," stated Nur Mohammad, President of Sher E Bangla Ful Chashi O Baboshayi Somobai Samiti. Even the farmers back at Godkhali had suffered a drop in business because of artificial flowers. "And the farmers barely get any assistance in their cultivation of flowers. It's a blooming business, but there just isn't enough support that we hope for," he added.

A DIFFERENT STORY

'Pushpo Nir – One Stop Floral Decor & Design' is a high-end flower shop in

Gulshan that shares the flower business but their story is a bit different. For a more upscale location, they have a higher demand in exotic flowers compared to native ones.

Flowers are imported mostly from China and Kenya.

"Roses and Lilies are in high demand but roses are the most popular," said Mehedi Hasan, IT Executive of Pushpo Nir.

"Compared to a few years back, the overall demand of flowers has vastly increased. On the special days, we observe a higher demand of flowers but yes, from December to March, the business increases by 70 to 100 percent," he added.

While the average flower business has suffered because of artificial flowers, this high-end shop didn't suffer on those grounds. "We think that natural flowers and artificial flowers have different customers so those who are interested in natural flowers will not go for artificial ones."

Shakespeare said in one of his plays – "That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet." I am no literary critic, but one thing I know for certain is that even he was captivated by the beauty of flowers. The rest of us remain enamoured just so.

By Ashif Ahmed Rudro

Photo: Adnan Rahman

Model: Niki

Flower Jewellery: Eskay By Samiul

Karim

Make-up: Sumon Rahat

Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha

Studio: Uturn Production





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SEWING FOR THE GROOM:

**Points to remember before ordering
the perfect wedding sherwani**

#Fashion & Beauty

Designers across town will vouch for the fact that although festivities calm down at the end of winter, the proverbial 'wedding season' is now a yearlong phenomenon. Sewing for the bride's groom never exactly stops at the tailoring workshops, there is no hiatus for makers of panjabis and sherwanis — quintessential attires for the wedding.

Matches are still 'made in heaven,' but what has changed for mortal Bengalis is that weddings are no longer scaled down affairs. There is now a long list of events, each calling for its own appropriate,



as current trend goes, it is perhaps only possible to match the extensive range of bridal wear with bespoke choice for the groom.

This is of course not true for those who are opting for designer wear. Yet, not everyone can afford it, and it is still popular to select the bridal ensemble first and then handpick every attire the groom is to don on those special occasions. Going bespoke will offer you some freedom; so use it wisely!

To complement such picture-perfect settings, the groom must also stretch his sartorial repertoire and amp up the glam factor. And, as far as weddings are concerned, the sherwani has now emerged as the South Asian counterpart to the Western jacket.

Instagram-able moments.

To complement such picture-perfect settings, the groom must also stretch his sartorial repertoire and amp up the glam factor. And, as far as weddings are concerned, the sherwani has now emerged as the South Asian counterpart to the Western jacket.

Sherwanis used to be a stiff affair in the distant past; a heavy outer garment that spelled discomfort every time one tried them on. The colour scheme was predominantly monochrome, that too in popular shades of black and white.

Choice of colour, availability of a wide range of fabrics, and improved sewing techniques now all contribute to making

Ideally worn as an outer garment that is neither loose nor a snug fit — there is a right cut for every physique, which can only be brought to life through careful tailoring.

them do justice to the male silhouette. The Bengali man comes in various body shapes, and each can now safely opt for a nice, tailor-cut sherwani that will complement whatever wedding ensemble the bride decides to choose.

Ideally worn as an outer garment that is neither loose nor a snug fit — there is a right cut for every physique, which can only be brought to life through careful tailoring. And this is where the specialised sherwani makers come to your rescue.

Wedding culture has changed, and so did the fashion and styling aspects attached to it. Neither the bride, nor the groom; not even their entourage now stick to age-old traditions. And as far



We have spoken to master tailors; they suggest the following mantras to shine on D-day! So, here are some sartorial tips to make you the perfect groom.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25



**SUPER GLOSSY লুকের সাথে
বহিরের দেয়ালকে রাখে
WATERPROOF**



Sewing for the groom: Points to remember before ordering the perfect wedding sherwani

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

01. Make a pick that befits the occasion

Choose what complements the bridal wear. Remember, the idea is to shine as a duo, and when it comes to choosing the colour, the cut, even the accessories for the groom, it is best if you take cue from what the bride is wearing.

02. Be occasion specific

Resist the temptation of tailoring a piece that you think you can safely wear on other occasions. When ordering your wedding sherwani, just think of the wedding day itself.

“Does Indo-Western work?” you may ask. Yes! Absolutely, if you have the physique and attitude to pull it off. Go for traditional styles if you are shaky; these ensembles are simply timeless.

03. Coordinate the colours

Good news is that the colour scheme is no longer limited. Wear a shade that reflects your personality. Remember, your complexion will matter.



sherwani, and the groom's physique.

08. Accessorise to amp up the style game

Well-coordinated outfits are a visual treat for the wedding photos. If the bride wishes to don some daring colours or add elements to her ensemble, rather than selecting an equally adventurous sherwani, wear a shawl. To satiate inner desire to keep to with your bride, perhaps a neckpiece. Perhaps!

There is no universal rule for pairing bottom wear with the sherwani. Many options are available, including slim pants, churidars, and even dhoti pants. The right selection will depend on the combination of style and cut of the sherwani, and the groom's physique.

04. The right fabric is paramount

The sherwani you wear will determine the mood for the entire day, and the memories will last a lifetime. Invest on your wedding attire and leave the budget cuts on actual wedding extravagances. You may opt for silk or even cotton, so that you can breathe.

05. Prints vis-a-vis embroidery: Take your pick

For winter weddings, embroidery is the way to go. Skip the prints for winter weddings. Don dazzling geometric/floral prints for spring and summer weddings.

06. A fit for the groom

Make sure the cut is sharp. The current trend is to go for a body-hugging sherwani suit, but make sure you will be comfortable in it. Always leave some margins to avoid that button popping feeling every time you exhale. Wedding day is going to be a long one!

For winter weddings, embroidery is the way to go. Skip the prints for winter weddings. Don dazzling geometric/floral prints for spring and summer weddings.

The length of the sherwani will depend on the size of the kurta.

07. Pay attention to the bottom wears

There is no universal rule for pairing bottom wear with the sherwani. Many options are available, including slim pants, churidars, and even dhoti pants. The right selection will depend on the combination of style and cut of the



Buttons are a safe game to play with.

09. The all-important turban

You can't complete your wedding sherwani look without a turban. It is that piece, absolutely essential to make your ensemble complete. Never forget the pocket square!

10. A friend indeed

If there was this one time your trusted tailor will come in handy, this is it. If you are going for specialised sherwani makers, which you should, have faith on their expertise. If you have a friend who has mastered the art of style and fashion a little more than you have, maybe this is the time to ask for some advice!

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Model: Rabbi
Wardrobe: Cats Eye
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha



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BEHIND THE GLITZ AND GLAM of the Bangladeshi fashion industry

#FASHION & BEAUTY

“It exists everywhere in the world and our country is no different. However, the upside is that today’s young generation are smart, connected and more informed. So the unsolicited circumstances are tactfully avoided.”

The allure of the fashion industry anywhere in the world is apparent, often giving out a fabricated feeling of certitude and hopefulness, when in reality there are thousands of obstacles living in ‘whispers.’ From ‘casting couch theories’ to favouritism and exploitation, the grievances could go on forever. Things take twice the tumble, especially in a developing country like Bangladesh where a formal home-grown fashion industry has yet to take shape.

An industry that promises high aspirations to the young and the beautiful, ultimately becomes a sour wound; disorganised and muddled behind the green screens.

The honorarium scams

Sonia Yeasmin Isha, a rising fashion director and choreographer of the country, has been associated with the local fashion industry for the last 12 years. According to Isha, she has given her complete efforts, and dedication to the industry for over a decade to become who she is today, one of the most recognised faces in the trade, someone who also chose to work behind-the-scenes and lead the industry as a choreographer.

“I was determined from the beginning, but you won’t see as many people in the field with a similar story,” reveals Isha.

According to the veteran model, the lack of proper grooming institutions, specialised modelling

Isha also points out the lack of unity in general.

“There’s no association as such, no proper agency to hire us and delegate work and because of the shortfall, we often get cheated of our honorariums. Remunerations are often delayed, and work hours become intolerable.”

“People only get to see the polished faces walking on the ramps, but they do not see the gruelling hours that we have to put behind each show. They do not notice our agonising journey, the

would mean less work and that’s hard for many of us, who actually depend on the profession to pay for our living expenses,” said Mizan.

Mizan was open about her experience in the industry.

“I began work as an assistant director in a production house and then moved forward to become a face in the industry. So, I have seen it all.”

Talking about her grievances, Mizan

Niki Mizan is a rising model of the city who has been the face of many upscale fashion brands agrees with her colleague. She points out the fact that many organisations do not provide legal papers or a form of contract before delegating work.

According to the designer, Bangladesh is a flourishing market for the home-grown fashion industry, but lack of rules and regulations pollute the environment.

“Everyone who can go to a tailor and order a dress, is able to call themselves a designer nowadays. Even importers of garments are calling themselves designers and this is overcasting the real concept. There’s nothing wrong in doing business, in fact it is very encouraging to see so many women involved with the trade. But a line must be drawn somewhere, these people need to call themselves entrepreneurs or businesswomen, not designers! The latter group are individuals who spend hours to create fresh designs, which are out-of-the-box, authentic and unique,” states Ahmed.

Speaking on the business prospects, Ahmed reveals that business is expected to flourish in the next few years because of the booming population, especially young adults and the fashion-conscious working men and women.

“Things would have been more exciting if our people were more open to experimental clothes. This would have encouraged us to truly work with our



stress and the agitations. And sometimes even after all the hard work, we are conned of our dues.”

“I am not saying that this is the norm, and there are many professional corporate brands in the market that perfectly follow the rules, but things definitely would have been better if there was a governing body looking over,” she said.

Inquired about sexual discriminations, the senior model was slightly hesitant to speak about the subject-matter.

“It exists everywhere in the world and our country is no different. However, the upside is that today’s young generation are smart, connected and more informed. So the unsolicited circumstances are tactfully avoided,” informed Isha.

Niki Mizan is a rising model of the city who has been the face of many upscale fashion brands agrees with her colleague. She points out the fact that many organisations do not provide legal papers or a form of contract before delegating work.

“Everything mostly happens over ‘verbal trust’, and that’s very ‘easy’ to deceive. And if we choose to protest, it

mentioned the absence of legal papers to certify experienced models as professionals.

“If I ever wanted to venture out in the foreign market, I wouldn’t have any legal documents to show. Besides few pictures which I could have taken anywhere, I don’t have any formal contract papers or even a professional certification as a ramp model. The grooming institutions and the model-agencies actually provide all these and it’s highly necessary for the field to develop to an international standard.

“In an age when people are going global and there are models of various capacities, from plus-size to hand, face and even models with down-syndrome taking up prestigious titles and space in world-renowned shows and magazines, why should we fall behind because of a lack in congruency,” revealed a frustrated Mizan.

Imitator designers

Tasfia Ahmed, a professional designer who graduated from the prestigious Raffles International College in Thailand with a degree in Fashion Designing, adds on to the grievances.

While designers and models are an integral part of the industry, there are so many others working hard to make the photoshoots come out alive – hair and makeup artists being one of the most vital.



creative sides and come out with ideas that could also grab the attention of the global audience,” she added.

Lack of conceptualisation

While designers and models are an integral part of the industry, there are so many others working hard to make the photoshoots come out alive – hair and makeup artists being one of the most vital.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30



agencies or even the lack of assistance from seniors in the field, leads to the frustration.

“I have been extremely lucky to have been mentored by Azra Mahmood, a renowned choreographer and senior model of our country in the early stages of my career. She helped me reach my goals, but not everyone is as lucky.”

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FOOD FUSIONS

**Yummy
or yucky?**

**It's a debate
Dhaka's foodies
can't settle!**



#FOOD & RECIPES

Would you eat shorisha pizza? How about kalabhuna dumpling? Bolognese fuchka? Yes? No? Well that's where the debate starts. First respectfully, then passionately, and then, in no time, things get out of hand! The food scene in Dhaka over the past few years has boomed. Boom away all it may want, but not all changes have been taken in good spirit by everyone. That's where the debates break into brawls, mostly verbal though. The case of food experimentation and innovation – fusion cuisine – gets fans and haters stirred up equally passionately.

This has not gone unnoticed by me, neither a fan nor a hater, but a resident foodie at my office.

Now, as someone being hailed as a serious foodie, I have certain responsibilities towards others, mostly in the form of answering all their questions:



friends who are polar opposites on this topic, and then write about it.

To keep this debate civil – worried that a clash was waiting to happen between my friends – I began with the so-called, 'Thai soup thick.' It's safe. Because theoretically 'Thai' or not, it does not matter, it falls under the broad category of Bangla Chinese, a subgenre of fusion cuisine that we have all come to accept and love. I watched my friends peacefully slurp up the spicy, tangy, pink-orange soup on a winter evening without any arguments whatsoever. That's a good start, I thought!

It got us thinking, fusion has always been around in our country and around the world, such as Tex-Mex. Fusion is inevitable. The attempt to make something suitable to the palate of a culture or community is bound to happen.

How many of us even like authentic Chinese or Thai? I secretly do, although I love deshi Chinese equally.

After starting on a positive note, I served kalabhuna potstickers from Dumplings of Fury. So, let the debate begin...

My open-minded friend chewed away with delight. "Dumplings and potstickers can have meat. That's normal. Now, who has ever made a definitive list of meats that one can and cannot use in dumplings? I have a deshi palate and I love this," he advocated. Meanwhile, my cynical friend asked me, "What do you think?"

I just shrugged, not willing to spark an argument. I love some delicacies of Dumplings of Fury, but when it came to this particular item, I felt that the kalabhuna effect overwhelmed the dumpling effect: it was as if I was taking in morsels or lokmas of kalabhuna. But that's the purist in me talking.

I moved on to shingaras from Love Triangle. Clever name, right?

When it comes to shingara, the usual aloo shingara and kolija shingara are

But what if the creators of foods such as shorisha pizza or green chilli rosogolla (yes, you read it right), are the Elon Musks of the culinary industry?

"Where do I take my wife out for our first anniversary? Is this new place any good? Is so-and-so restaurant budget-friendly? Is that real Hajir Biryani or a fake? Did Nando's really shut down?"

I answer such questions coolly and confidently. I know my stuff, but when some of my colleagues brought to me the debate of the newer fusion foods, I was in a fix.

You see, I am more of a purist. I'm all in for change and new things, but when it comes to food – and many things in life – while creativity is great, one should also know when to stop.

Unless you are Elon Musk! But what if the creators of foods such as shorisha pizza or green chilli rosogolla (yes, you read it right), are the Elon Musks of the culinary industry?

And so I entertained this debate: got myself a bunch of fusion food items to try them out with an open mind, with two

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Food fusions: Yummy or yucky? It's a debate Dhaka's foodies can't settle!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

some of the most popular deshi snacks out there. Intikhab Ahmed Nasir, the founder of Love Triangle (and one of the owners of Dumplings of Fury as well), took things further.

The results of the experimentation were The Pizza Shingara, Kalabhuna Shingara, Cheeseburger Shingara and so on, in addition to the traditional ones. "I brought many of my favourite items and foods within the shingara!" Nasir had told me the day before. The Mini Naga Shingara had the potential to heat up the debate between my friends, but peace sustained as they agreed



that this is basically delicious aloo shingara meant for those who really enjoy extra-hot food.

The Pizza Shingara is another highlight: we all were amused as to how immediately and strongly it reminded us of pizza, thanks to all the relevant ingredients and stuffing.

But the winner from Love Triangle was The Shingara Dog. A happy union between shingara and hot dog, it has the shingara wrap instead of the bun, and inside it has sausage, mayo, and other goodies. I enjoyed it more than proper hotdogs.

Next, I brought in some fuchkas — namely Peshawari and Bolognese — products of Fuchkawali. Elevating the notion of fuchka, a husband-and-wife team comprising of architects A M Shafkat Noor and Anzara Ashraf boldly concocted up these innovations.

"When we invited our friends to try it out, we got mixed reactions. Some of them really liked it, some were okay with

it, while a few weren't exactly happy," Noor informed.

Well that doesn't point in any direction, I cheekily replied in my head. But these fuchkas indeed became quite popular among my friends on the other hand.

Peshawari and Bolognese, one giving out a Pakistani street food vibe and another an Italian taste, both have beef in common. Beef in fuchka — what do you make of that?

My sceptical friend replied, "I don't mind. It's still good fuchka. But, if I go to Fuchkawali, will I be ordering these? May be not, I'll have their regular fuchka."

"That's because your life is boring," replied my other friend, who has been a fan of these fusion fuchkas for quite some time by then.

Next came pizzas: The Kala Bhuna and Spicy Shorisha from Cheez. It's the brand that made the concept of kalabhuna pizza topping popular in Dhaka, I reckon.

Labib Taraidar, one of the owners, opined, "Take the shorisha pizza for example. Wasabi is so popular all across the world. But shorisha is rather understated, despite its unique taste."

But, I was not so sure how my friend — whom I had seen angrily argue even against Hawaiian pizza (that's pizza with pineapple topping) — would react to shorisha.

Eating a slice of Spicy Shorisha (a shrimp pizza), he mocked, "So what's next? Shorshey ilish pizza? Chicken korma pizza?"

"Dude I don't know about that, but I have ordered their kalabhuna pizza

"Burgers are of course a popular food all over the world. But we wanted something in our menu to really stand out from the rest, something which will be also be very Bangali."

numerous times before," my liberal friend defended Cheez.

Madness continued, this time with Madchef, my favourite burger joint. Not just mine, but my friends' too. And so when we tried The Dhakaiyya, we were hopeful, despite that we never tried this particular burger before. Overall, our collective sentiment was that Madchef cannot go wrong.

After the first bite, I frowned and dismantled the burger to start dissecting. Dhakaiyya boasts (along with delicious patty and other goodies) deep fried paneer and a green chilli mint sauce.

None of us found the burger awful, but it was a shocker. Weird, because it's so different. So, the natural question to put forward to Taraidar, who happens to be an owner of Madchef too, has been: "Why?"

"Burgers are of course a popular food all over the world. But we wanted something in our menu to really stand out from the rest, something which will be also be very Bangali," he replied, adding that The Dhakaiyya performs well in sales.

Finally, it was time for desserts: shahi tukra from Basic Kneads. Not triangular, but rather roundish. Not made with pau ruti, but with a different kind of bread: pain au lait. Quite amazing! The makers did not get carried away with their experimentation so much that it would go on to ruin the dish.

Basic Kneads is a bakery; it has croissant and baguette and so on; and yet shahi tukra fits in nicely with the treatment given.

"We wanted a sweet dish for the celebrations in our country. And hence the experimentation began. Fusion, when done right, can be a wonderful treat!" said Shadman Shahriar, one of the owners.

All throughout this extraordinary meal we were having, my friends bickered on almost every item. I did not stop them as they were giving me good content:

"Innovation is good, given that the innovation is not mindless... but who is to decide what's mindless and what's not... it is like acquired taste, give it time... these fusions just create hype on social media... but let's not forget that some of these foods have also been ridiculed online... it is all about the gimmick factor... no it is about rethinking food to suit the tastes and preferences of the people being served...the integrity of a food must remain intact...but chocolate pizza is popular in many countries...but that's not really pizza, is it?"

Opinions among restaurateurs offering fusion food vary as well: "these are some of our better sellers...not everyone accepts, you can't make everyone happy...there is a segment of people who are open to it and are willing to embrace newer things...we still rely mostly on our traditional items in the menu."

The debate went on for some time between my friends. When done with eating, the three of us resembled chubby cats lying flat on our sofas, too lazy to move or continue on with any skirmish; feeling sleepy after a very diverse, strange, and heavy meal. My stomach was full, and so was my head — full of opinions on fusion food, enough to cover for my assignment on the topic.

And so I reached for my laptop. I had an article to write.

By M H Haider
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Food Styling: RBR

Disclaimer: The purpose of this write-up has been to report on the current trend of fusion cuisine in Dhaka and to present both sides of the story. The opinions expressed about the particular food items are solely of the author and those quoted.

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Behind the glitz and glam of the Bangladeshi fashion industry

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

“If the stage is designed based on a theme, then a photoshoot excels. This is based on research! Hence, every fashion campaign must have a set designer to be more visible to the client. Often, the brands do not realise the importance of it and end up doing below par. And this is definitely a hindrance to achieving excellence in the field of business.”

“Without hair and makeup – nothing would be complete, the models wouldn’t look as good as they do and the brand representation wouldn’t be fulfilling. We are an integral part of the process and yet very much looked down upon when considering remunerations. This is unexpected and extremely frustrating,” said Sumon Rahat, a renowned freelance makeup artist in the fashion and media scene of Bangladesh.

Samiul Karim, a prominent set-designer of the country, adds to this conversation.

“Stage-designing is often ignored during a photoshoot and many brands do not realise the importance of it amongst other variables. But anybody who has the time to research will notice that successful campaigns speak otherwise; a photoshoot only becomes complete when everything in it works in correspondence, including the set.

“If the stage is designed based on a theme, then a photoshoot excels. This is based on research! Hence, every fashion campaign must have a set designer to be more visible to the client. Often, the brands do not realise the importance of it and end up doing below par. And this is definitely a hindrance to achieving excellence in the field of business,” said Karim.

In an age and era of conscientious capitalism where corporate brands are loudly supporting social causes and screaming fair wage, it is certainly discouraging to see that they are silently exploiting the fashion industry workers who keep their dreams of business alive.

Rony Rezaul, an upcoming fashion photographer of the country, adds the final nail into the coffin, saying, “In the many years that I have been in the industry, I wouldn’t say I had anyone at all to help me. I did everything on my own and today, if I am considered to be anywhere at all, it’s all because I learned to

do everything on my own and survived.”

The self-taught photographer doesn’t expect a unified industry anytime soon. “It’s a ‘look-out-for-your-own-self world,’ and you have got to be better than the best to survive,” said Rezaul.

Imperative necessity to change

Niki Mizan was a little more hopeful than the rest; she expected someone senior from the industry to be benevolent enough to step up and lead the future of the industry, steering it in the right direction.

“Maybe someone from the industry can get affiliated with a professional and internationally recognised modelling agency and bring it to Bangladesh. Not only will they be able to structure the industry and reap benefits from it, but also get tonnes of blessings from future apprentices like us,” she said.

All in all, we found an industry that was maintaining an illusion of beauty and glamour on the outside, whereas it was built upon exploitation and undermining of the workers who were willing to slave away largely underpaid and unappreciated because there was no alternative. For this situation to change, it is imperative that someone should vocalise the problems and save the industry from submerging down the rising waters.

By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury
Photo: Adnan Rahman
Model: Isha, Niki, Rony, Samiul, Tasfia, Sumon
Make-up: Sumon Rahat
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Studio: Uturn Production
Wardrobe of Isha and Niki: Tashfia Ahmed



All in all, we found an industry that was maintaining an illusion of beauty and glamour on the outside, whereas it was built upon exploitation.

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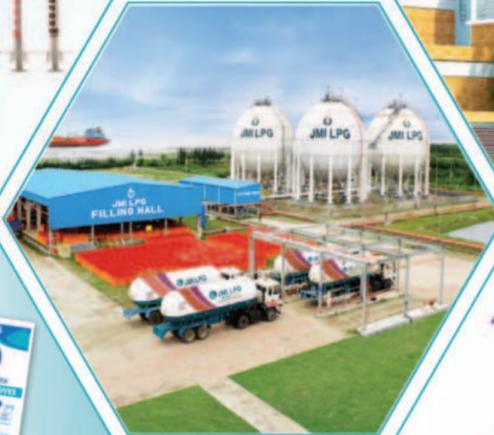
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COUNTRY ROADS TO HOME 5 most scenic roads in Bangladesh

#TRAVEL

Talking about the beauty of the country is no easy feat, still we have tried to begin somewhere and our easiest bet were the roads that evoke a sense of beauty amongst those who love to call themselves travellers. There's no end to discussing the beauty of the country and that is

probably why the quote — "it (Bengal) has a hundred gates open for entrance, but not one for departure."

Here's a list of 5 roads that are a must-visit by the explorer at heart.

Cox's Bazar to Teknaf via Inani Beach — The Marine Drive
With lush green hills (Himchari) on one

There's no end to discussing the beauty of the country and that is probably why the quote — "it (Bengal) has a hundred gates open for entrance, but not one for departure."

side and the roaring sea on the other, this is a unique 80km drive that one must not miss in their lifetime. The experience is notched-up ten folds at least, on a moonlit night with the breath-taking beauty of the sparkling sands from the world's largest unbroken sea beach.

To further level in the experience, one can stop at any point in-between and let their hair down to flutter with the wind. There are quite a few

restaurants on the Marine Drive that can be taken as a pit-stop to refuel the body with scrumptious seafood delights. The gastronomical affair is a completely different take that needs a separate page on its own. Simply said, one must try out the local food to genuinely bond with the environment.

A final point to make the conclusion could be that the roads are well taken care of and secure, so any sort of trip, solo or with the extended family, is recommended. While the experiences might be different, they will be soul-fulfilling at all times.

Bandarban Sadar to Thanchi via Nilgiri

For the young at heart and those who ardently love the mountains, this one trip (approximately 74km long) will be both engaging and refreshing at the same time. The ride is best experienced on a four-wheel drive slightly on the larger side, maybe a Jeep or a Land Cruiser. There are many local public

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



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COUNTRY ROADS TO HOME

5 most scenic roads in Bangladesh

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

The 48km long road was inaugurated amidst the pandemic in 2020. That adversity however did not stop travellers from taking the road-trip that connects three upazilas in Kishoreganj, namely Ashtagram-Mithamain-Itna on a stretch.

vehicles available aka *Chander Gari* to make the commute, but if privacy is required, then something of the former is suggested. The driver must be experienced and acclimatised to the environment.

The experience is thrilling, with roads snaking up the verdant magnificence. There's green on all sides of the mountains and the immensity of the dimension will make you respect nature once again. On the way up the mountains, there's also the additional experience of witnessing local villages completely untainted by the urban environment.

This drive up the mountains from Bandarban City can be taken to many peaks, including Sairu, Nilgiri, etc. But here, we discuss the Thanchi because it is the highest altitude in the entire country, almost 3500 feet above sea level. The Nilgiri peaks are equally enthralling, with clouds forming below like cotton candies.

Travelling by the road is usually restricted during the rainy season, but if one is lucky enough, they might witness waterfalls on their way up the

Srimangal, is called 'the land of the two leaves and a bud.' Because all over in this region are tea estates and lush greenery brimming with the captivating fragrance of the new budding tea leaves.

This is a sight worth watching and if it means you can drive around on a long stretch of road, almost 18km long, beside a heritage park (the Lawachara National Park), a five-star resort (the Grand Sultan Resort) and discover unique offerings like the 7 coloured tea by the locals, there's no stopping from taking the road-trip and marking it as one of the most appealing.

One of the few highlights of the trip would be to take candid pictures next to the locals as they work, picking the perfect leaves to be processed later in the factories.

This is one trip that must be experienced first-hand, because of the rare acquaintance it provides. The tea gardens almost look akin to a fresh green carpet thrown over the hills — perfect, manicured, and captivating.

Mithamain to Austagram Road — The magnificence of the haors

The 48km long road was inaugurated amidst the pandemic in 2020. That adversity

There are basically two ways to enjoy the captivating beauty of the Nikli Haor, one is to take a boat ride, another is to drive past it on the Mithamain-Itna road.

music, like folk-songs, kirtan, pala gaan etc.)

There are basically two ways to enjoy the captivating beauty of the Nikli Haor, one is to take a boat ride, another is to drive past it on the Mithamain-Itna road. Whichever way you decide to take, the picturesque twilight is the same. The horizons get raging red, like the grand hibiscus.

Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga Expressway — The manifestation of the future

The 55km long Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga Expressway is the only national expressway and country's first international standard expressway. Its six-lanes have two service lanes and connects to two different sides of the mighty Padma (Jatrabari intersection to Mawa -35km) and (Panchar to Bhanga -20km) after the Padma bridge is complete.

The roads are massive, clean and barely a two-hour ride from the capital.

The journey is scenic both in the scorching sun or in the immersing rain. The experience is however different in each, and travel enthusiasts are encouraged to get both the familiarities.

There are

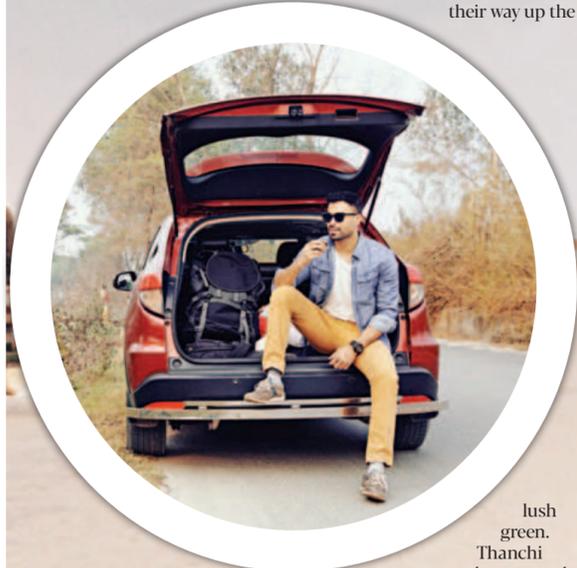
restaurants at the base of the Padma Bridge, brimming with crisp-fried and aromatic Hilsa treats. A boat ride is offered below the bridge to experience the massiveness of the build.

A day-out long drive to the location is a must for those wanting to experience the progress of the nation and also to spend some time in the ridge of the mighty Padma to appreciate its unruly waves and the bustle of the local community.

All in all, Bangladesh is one of the most scenic countries of the world, it caters to every kind of demand by travel enthusiasts; from pristine beaches to the high lush green mountains, from homely country-roads to the most-modern expressways.

And yes, the roads are the most simplistic way to get closer to our 'dreamland' — Bangladesh.

**By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Model: Abdullah Al Mahfuz
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha**



lush green. Thanchi can be accessed via the Sangu River

during the monsoon season, but that's a whole different story to decipher.

Final point to be made here would be: There's a school of thought which trails the belief that sorrow and lost thoughts can be buried deep in the ocean and there's another that makes the same assumption with the mountains. Having been a passionate traveller and an aficionado of both the marvels of nature, I have grown to believe both are true. Because once you are hidden in a corner of the magnificence that are the mountains, there's not a single troubling thought in the world that could take over you or the moment.

Srimangal to Bhanugacha — the tea capital of Bangladesh

There is a reason why Sylhet, particularly

however did not stop travellers from taking the road-trip that connects three upazilas in Kishoreganj, namely Ashtagram-Mithamain-Itna on a stretch.

The freshly built road cuts through the vibrant waters of the Nikli Haor. During the monsoon season, there are waves and boats cruising on both the sides of the road. And in more dryer seasons (October to April), lush greenery surrounds the roads as far as the eyes can stretch.

On any given day, the skies are the brightest of blue, clad with tufts of sparse white clouds. On a clear and moonlit-starry night, the shooting stars' grab attention and demand that the lonely bard's passionate tunes be heard. (Kishoreganj region is famous for heritage



The Daily Star-এর ৩১তম প্রতিষ্ঠাবার্ষিকীতে
আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা

**বিলাসবহুল ক্রুজশীপে
চট্টগ্রাম-সেন্টমার্টিন ও বঙ্গোপসাগর ভ্রমণ।**

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Bangladesh's well-known haats

It is no wonder that there are numerous fish markets in the country, all along the coastal belt such as those in Khulna as well as the larger towns near river banks of the Padma and Jamuna.

#FESTIVITIES

"Haat-baar" or the weekly/fortnightly bazaars aka market day are a concept enshrined in the fabric of traditional rural Bengal. In the olden times, artisans and traders of various wares would travel from one region to another, peddling their products for just the day or two, before moving on swiftly to the next haat. Typically, the market set up and pack up were such quick affairs, to listen to a description of their appearance and disappearance sounded astounding indeed, and is quite fascinating to witness even now.

In modern times, with brick and mortar shops everywhere, abundance of shopping malls in the cities, and of course online shopping, things are quite different for consumers. But, there remains a significance of the traditional haats still, and many of us bound within our city homes are unaware of the sheer hustle and excitement that these haats still carry. They serve as hubs of commerce and stores of tradition all at the same time. Of course, there were traditional haats in all regions of Bengal, but here are a few well-known to people even outside of the home regions.

Tangail and Pabna taant haats

Taant or the handloom and cloth woven on that was an integral part of life in rural Bengal, and there were taanti-baris and weekly haat with taantis all over the region. They would sell saris, gamchas and lungis of a cornucopia of vibrant colours. Each area had its own traditional speciality



This means lucky shoppers at this market get to choose from a vast array of fresh and salt water fish every single day, and supplies are sent off to markets all over the country as well.

Rajshahi's mango haat

Mango is a beloved fruit of most Bengalis, and grows in a lot of places. But nowhere in Bangladesh will one see such expansive swathes of land with rows upon rows of neatly planted mango trees, orchards lining the roadsides one after another for miles — as far as the eyes can see. One of the largest hubs of mango on a wholesale level is at Baneshwar, where thousands of tonnes of mangoes are bought and sold every day during the harvest season. Different kinds of mangoes are heaped onto vans and trucks, and packed into baskets as well to be sent off to fruit markets all over the country.

Munshiganj's wood houses

The idea of moving an entire house by attaching flying gas balloons to it might have been a children's fantasy in the animation movie "Up," but it is not too far from the truth for a very interesting kind of house sold in the haats of Munshiganj, like the one in Louhajang.

Houses of different sizes, fully built on wood and tin, are put on display here for customers to browse and check tangibly. Then the entire structure is taken apart panel by panel, transported to the buyer's address, and assembled on the spot.

The tradition of these movable houses emerged for the frequent river erosion by the numerous large rivers in the area, for which locals adapted by making homes which can be moved away from the danger zone fairly quickly.

The houses are often aesthetically pleasing, with intricate lattice work on the edges of the roof and carvings around the door and window panels, soothing shades of tin trimmed with naturally varnished wood.

Taant or the handloom and cloth woven on that was an integral part of life in rural Bengal, and there were taanti-baris and weekly haat with taantis all over the region.

looms, and specific patterns on the pair or edge, are two such significant haats of handloom saris. Taant saris in pure cotton and intricate designs can be found for as low as Tk 400 with finer versions being pricier. Now versions of power loomed saris in silk and half silk are also available.

Chandpur fish haat

What combination of food from the Bangladeshi cuisine is more emblematic of the culture than rice and fish? So, it is no wonder that there are numerous fish markets in the country, all along the coastal belt such as those in Khulna as well as the larger towns near river banks of the Padma and Jamuna. But most well-known amongst these is the fish market in Chandpur, and aptly so, as the town sits at the largest confluence of major rivers in the country, and has direct access to the Bay of Bengal.

in the texture and designs of the items produced by the local weavers. Many of them thrive even today, and very well-known among these are the ones in places like Korotia, which is more than 200 years old, and Baburhat in Tangail, both famous for Tangail cotton taant saris. The Korotia haat was established by the local Panni zamindars to accommodate the flourishing trade in taant saris at the time, on an area of nearly 200 bighas. The haat used to feature all sorts of rural produce at the time. It has evolved into a taant specialised hub over time, and has shrunk in size but grown in importance in the handloom trade. Tangail haat is also known for high quality Jamdanis and Benaroshis along with taant.

Ataikula and Shahzadpur haat in Sirajganj and Pabna, with their very own collection of taant items, often noted for a wider breadth compared to other areas'



CONTINUED ON PAGE 37



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Bangladesh's well-known haats

There are many areas where boats are bought and sold, but one of the most well-known and significantly large haats of dinghy boats is in Ghior of Manikganj.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

There are various sizes and types of the houses, like "dochala, chouchala," or even "shaat chala," which are versions of the design based on the number of tin layers used in the roof. These houses have been traditionally used locally for a really long time, but now can be ordered and transported to many parts of Bangladesh.

Bonorupa haat in Rangamati

Sellers of all sorts of items pile their wares on boats and head to the Shomota ghaat in Rangamati, to meet their customers at the area's famous Bonorupa haat. The entire place comes alive with activity on haat day, with lots of stalls set on the boats themselves, creating a floating section of the market, but most vendors line the roadside with their colourful and interesting wares.

The most important of the items sold here are the fresh produce, including local



Jamdani haat in Demra

Since ancient times, the Meghna delta including the Dhaka and Narayanganj regions are well known for producing Muslin, the famed premium cotton cloth of Bengal. The legacy of the Muslin lives on in the modern Jamdani, which is a product of the weavers' deftness and heritage, as well as cultural influences of the Mughals.

Today, one of the largest hubs of Jamdani trade is in Demra, near the capital. The haat takes place every Friday from 5AM to 8AM, and sadly, the duration of the haat has been reduced due to diminishing number of buyers, especially

in the post-COVID period. Yet, this remains the place for Jamdani trade, and product prices can vary from Tk 3000 to Tk 20,000 easily. Finer versions are even more expensive, and nylon and other machine-woven versions are of course available for cheaper.

It is just on the outskirts of the capital, and an obvious destination for anyone that loves or even just works with the Jamdani.

There are many other haats, essentially spaces for wholesale trade of particular or locally produce items, that have thrived in various corners of Bangladesh. Some of these have thrived and died over the years and others like Korotia, Ataikula, Sirajganj, Ghior, and Munshiganj have survived, carrying tales of local heritage with pride.

By Sania Aiman
Photo: Azim Khan Ronnie
Photo: Sikder Ahmed



"baash korol" or bamboo shoots, "chukai" or rosella, and snails collected form the hilly streams.

Noukar (boat) haat in Manikganj

Boats have been an essential part of life in the riverine delta lands of Bengal, and so it is no wonder then that artisanship has developed in various regions, and trade of boats is well established and traditional too!

There are many areas where boats are bought and sold, but one of the most well-known and significantly large haats of dinghy boats is in Ghior of Manikganj.

Narrow and flat-ish bottom boat sell for between Tk 3000-12000, depending on the boat's size and the wood used in it, like mango wood, koroi, mahogany, etc.

Manikganj has many of the large and important rivers like the Padma, Jamuna, Dhaleshwari, Ichamoti, and other small ones, passing through the district, and monsoon season often sees large low-lying areas of it submerged quickly. That is when the demand for the boats peaks, for everyday commute becomes difficult without them.

vegetables and fruits, both farmed as well as gathered, and not to mention organic too. The whole range of unexplored hill produce is on a brilliant display here, with innumerable items unknown to the plainspeople and cuisine, as a lot of these are highly local flora, and can only be found at this bazaar, or specially sourced from the same. Some prime examples are

During the harvest season, hundreds of boats of nearly the same dimensions can be seen fully laden, heaped with fresh green guavas, selling to wholesalers and dealers, and of course regular customers too.

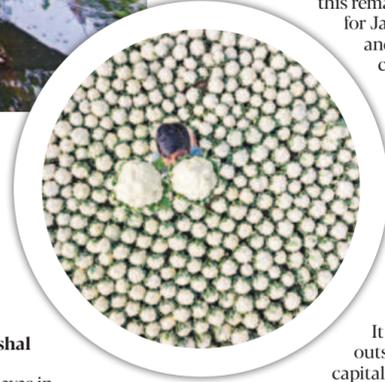
Small but locally significant haat can also be found in Raninogor of Naogaon, and Bhangura of Pabna, thanks to the proximity of the Chalan Beel system.

Peyara Bajar in Barishal

There is a fascinating floating market of guavas in Bhimruli, Barishal.

During the harvest season, hundreds of boats of nearly the same dimensions can be seen fully laden, heaped with fresh green guavas, selling to wholesalers and dealers, and of course regular customers too. The produce is actually local as well, as about 26 villages in Barishal, Pirojpur, and Jhalokathi have large orchards of guava, and have to be known for them as a tourist spot too.

The haat happens on the confluence of three canals, in a relatively wider space, and makes for a verdant spectacle for any observer. The peak season for this haat is from July through September.



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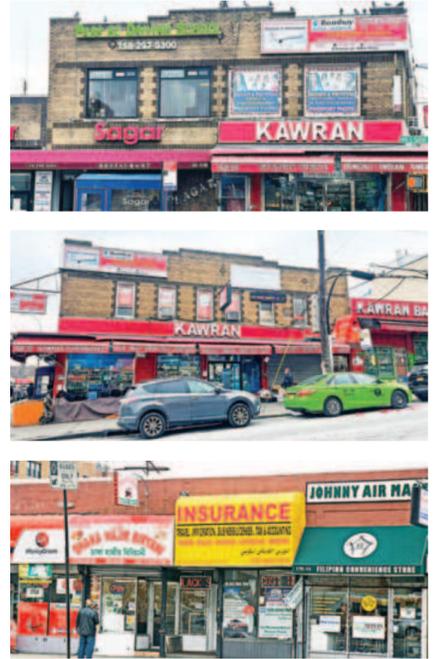


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JAMAICA, NY:

A slice of Bangladesh away from it



#PERSPECTIVE

It was the summer of 2013, I was strolling along Jamaica's Hillside Avenue and turning my neck every time I was hearing someone utter something in Bangla. It was my first time in Jamaica, a neighbourhood in New York city's borough of Queens, which boasts a large population of Bangladeshi Americans and is considered one of the most ethnically diverse places on the planet. Jamaica is a slice of Bangladesh away from it. With 'deshi' men and women speaking Bangla on the streets in traditional garbs like panjabi, pyjama

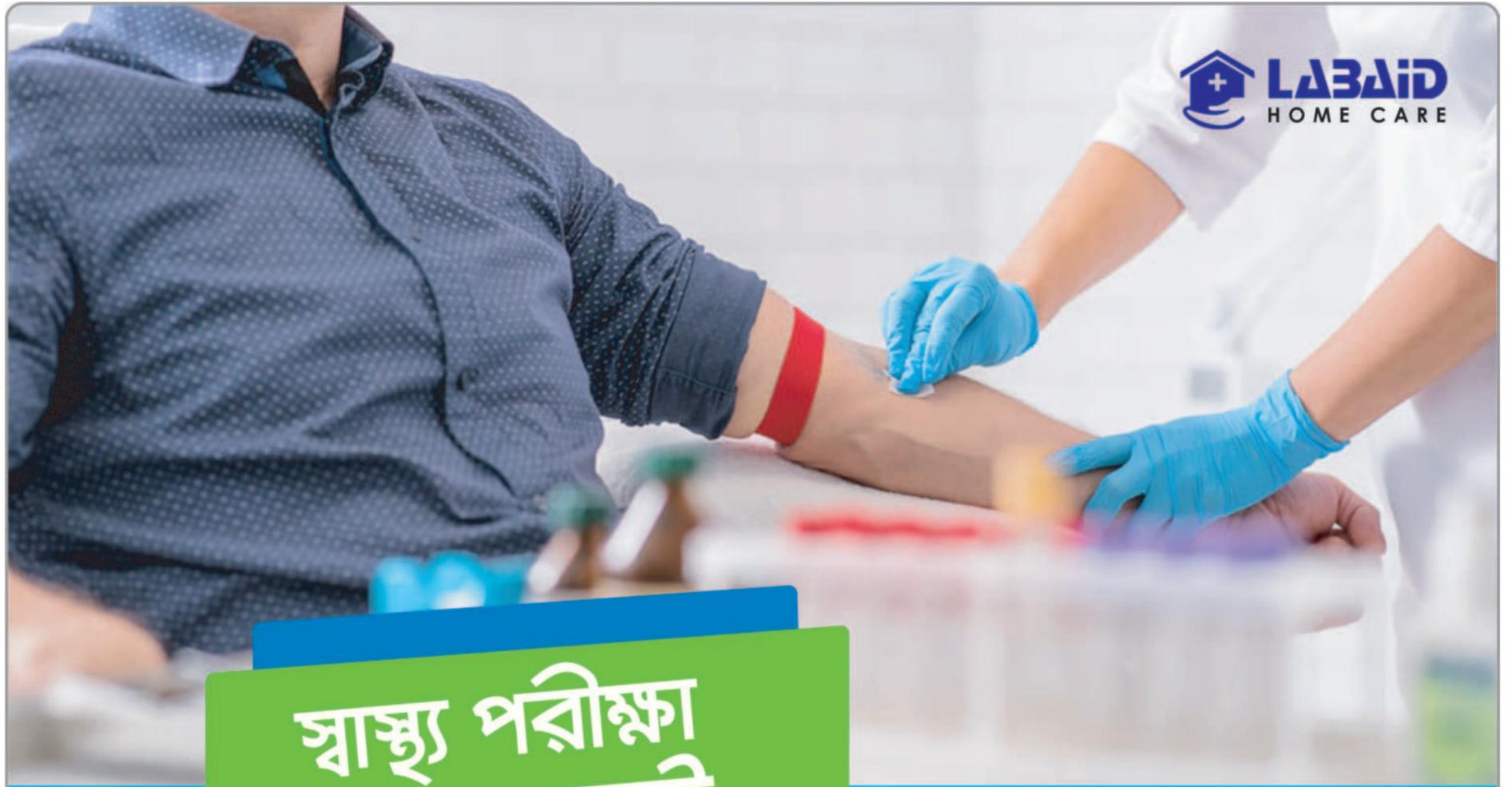
and shalwar kameez, streets lined with Bangladeshi-owned restaurants and grocery stores selling your favourite 'deshi' vegetables, halal meats, and foods ranging from shingara-samosa, chotpoti-fuchka, naan-kabab, doi-mishti, and halua-paratha to kachchi biriyani, tehari, Haji-r biriyani and bhat-mach-bhorta, Jamaica is an instant reminder of the country you have left behind. For a second, you might even forget that this place is very much a part of the continental US, and not somewhere in South Asia. Bangladeshis from all over America and even tourists visiting the US from Bangladesh, visit Jamaica for a taste of their homeland. The cleanliness and customer service at Bangladeshi-owned stores and restaurants in Jamaica may not meet your expectations, especially if you are visiting from other parts of the US, but if your heart is craving 'deshi' food and

A large number of doctors of Bangladeshi origin practice in the area, which means that even at a doctor's office, you can communicate in Bangla.

'deshi' vibes, this is the only place besides Jackson Heights that you would want to explore. Jamaica is heavily populated by Bangladeshi Americans, many of whom or their immediate or extended family members arrived in New York after winning the Diversity Visa lottery in the 1990s and 2000s. The lottery winners brought with them their spouses and children under 21 years; the winners subsequently sponsored other immediate family members under family preference immigration categories, resulting in a large population of first-generation Bangladeshi immigrants calling Jamaica their home. Although Bangladesh is no more eligible to participate in the DV program, hundreds of people immigrate to the US from Bangladesh every year under family preference immigration categories. Yasmin, 66, came to the US a decade

ago after her brother sponsored her Green Card under a family preference immigration category. She currently resides in Jamaica. Asked what she feels about living in the neighbourhood, she said, "Everything is pretty much right outside your door, including the bank, post office, halal grocery stores, subway station, and bus stop. "For someone like me who came to America in her 50s, this sort of convenience was necessary for survival," she added. For Bangladeshi immigrants who come to the US in the later years of their lives, limited English proficiency is often the biggest hurdle to overcome. In a place like Jamaica, however, you do not need to worry about your English fluency. "A large number of doctors of Bangladeshi origin practice in the area,

CONTINUE TO PAGE 39



**স্বাস্থ্য পরীক্ষা
ঘরে বসেই**

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JAMAICA, NY: A slice of Bangladesh away from it

Every day during the month of Ramadan, the Bangladeshi restaurants sell iftar fare. On Chand Raat, the Hillside Avenue buzzes with people. Bangladeshis come from other parts of New York and neighbouring states to partake in the Chand Raat merriment.

CONTINUE FROM PAGE 38

which means that even at a doctor's office, you can communicate in Bangla," she said.

There was a time when Bangladeshi Americans in New York City were known as a diaspora of taxi drivers and shopkeepers. Times have changed. Today, you will find thousands of accomplished engineers, physicians, entrepreneurs, and academics of Bangladeshi descent in the city. The children of fathers who once worked or still work as taxi drivers or shopkeepers excel in school and find a strong footing in mainstream America.

Mozammel Khan, who is an assistant manager at a 7-Eleven store in Manhattan, lived in multiple communities in and out of New York before settling in Jamaica. According to Khan, accessible public transportation, public schools and parks for children, banks, higher education institutions like

St. John's University and York College, and last but not least, 'deshi' and Halal grocery stores and restaurants make Jamaica an enticing place to live.

"I have lived in Jamaica for most part of my life in America. For Bangladeshi Americans, there are countless perks of living here, including Bangladeshi restaurants like Sagar,

Premium Sweets, Panshi, etc. Masjid Al-Mamoor, more commonly known as Jamaica Muslim Center, a mosque established by Bangladeshi Americans, is another added attraction of the place."

Khan, whose son recently entered Rochester Institute of Technology

study Computer Science, thinks that Jamaica is an affordable neighbourhood to live, much less crowded than the similar 'deshi' neighbourhood of Jackson Heights, and not a bad place to raise children.

"Jamaica is an affordable place to live for people with family. Living costs are much lower than most parts of New York City, which makes it an attractive neighbourhood for new immigrants," he said.

"I can't afford to live in Manhattan. However, the train system allows for easy transit to Manhattan as well as Long Island, making my daily commute to work hassle-free," he continued.

The residents of Jamaica complain of occasional street robbery, which is, however, not uncommon in big metropolises, and overall cleanliness of the neighbourhood being subpar. However, the joy, which comes from living around your 'own' folks, relishing 'deshi' cuisine whenever you want, and enjoying Eid, Ekushey February, Pahela Baishakh, and Bijoy Dibosh observations and celebrations, remains unmatched by typical American neighbourhoods.

Every day during the month of Ramadan, the Bangladeshi restaurants sell iftar fare. On Chand Raat, the Hillside Avenue buzzes with people. Bangladeshis come from other parts of New York and neighbouring states to partake in the Chand Raat merriment. Bangladeshis living out-of-state visit their friends and family in NYC during Eid times, because Eid genuinely feels like Eid in 'deshi' neighbourhoods like Jamaica and Jackson Heights.

On Chand Raat, Jamaica's Hillside Avenue comes alive with live music, young girls set up mehendi booths on the pavement, and men and women are spotted doing their last-minute Eid shopping.

All New York City public schools are closed on Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha. It may be noted that the New York City public school system is the largest in the United States, with over 1.1 million students taught in more than 1,800



For Bangladeshi Americans, there are countless perks of living here, including Bangladeshi restaurants like Sagar, Premium Sweets, Panshi, etc

schools. The Bangladeshi-owned shops and restaurants are also closed on Eid days.

I have celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr with my extended family in Queens on a number of occasions; with schools and shops closed, Jamaica feels like an Eid day in Dhaka. On the streets, you see men, women, and children in traditional Bangladeshi outfits, chatting and laughing. They visit their friends, family and neighbours, prepare sumptuous meals at home, and exchange gifts and clothes, just like it is done in Bangladesh.

Ever wondered where America's largest Eid jamaat is held? The Jamaica Muslim Center organises the largest Eid congregational prayer in the US. Before the pandemic, as many as 15,000 men, women, and children congregated to offer their Eid prayers in the playground of Thomas A. Edison High School in Jamaica, Queens!

Nayla Aziz, an online business owner in her 30s, lives with her husband in Minnesota. Before moving to Minnesota, she used to reside in Jamaica with her parents and brother. Nayla says that she always misses the hustle of New York City, the resilience of New Yorkers, and the Bengali vibes and vibrancy that places like

Jamaica offer.

"Because my parents still live in Jamaica, I visit them a few times a year. On my trips to Jamaica, I bring back kachchi biriyani, sweets, etc. from Bangladeshi restaurants for my family in Minnesota," she said. "We can find Indian and Pakistani-style biriyani here, but not Bangladeshi-style kachchi biriyani or beef tehari!"

"In addition to proximity to literally anything, from 'deshi' grocery stores to beauty parlours, Jamaica gives you a different kind of happiness," she continued. "The happiness comes from being around people who share your home country."

Bottom line

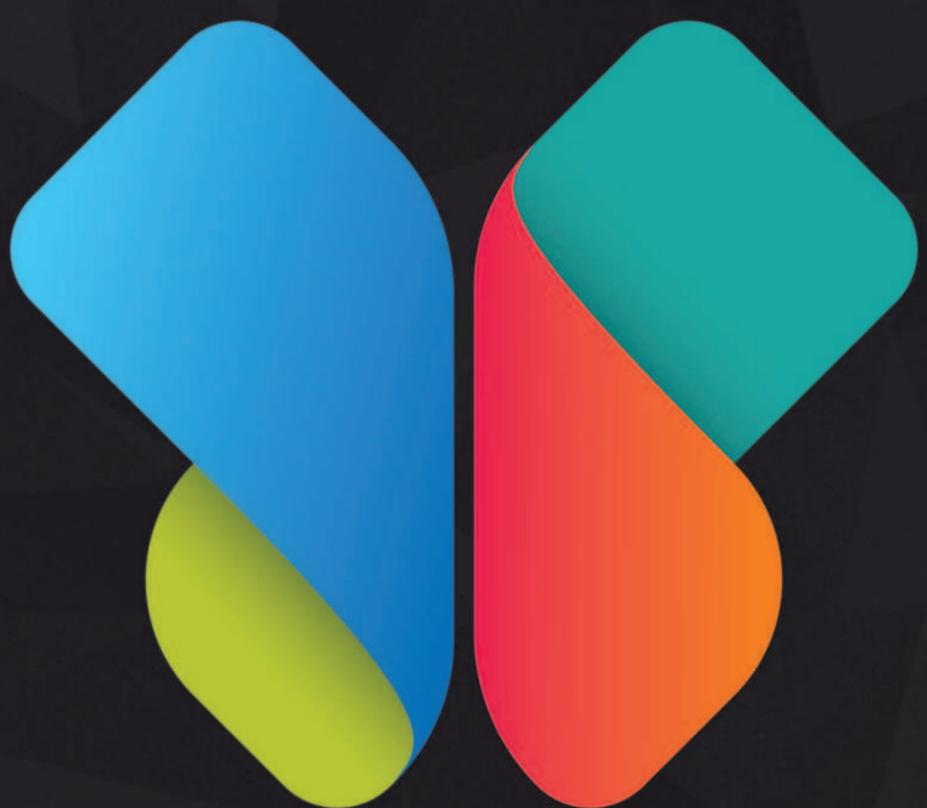
It is for places like Jamaica and Jackson Heights that the diaspora of Bangladeshi immigrants gets to immerse in the sights, sounds, and aroma of traditional cuisine of their birthplace. It is because we pride on our roots and rich cultural heritage that only a few of us, if any, would ever miss a chance to explore Jamaica and the like, when we visit the "Big Apple."

**By Wara Karim
Photo: Litu Anam**



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