

VOLUME 21, ISSUE 36, TUESDAY  
FALGUN 16, 147

Star

Life



# Navigating through THE BIAS

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PHOTO: RONY REZAUL ♦ MODEL: PEYA JANNATUL ♦ FASHION DIRECTION AND STYLING: MAHMUDUL HASSAN MUKUL  
HAIR AND MAKEUP: JUMMAN HOSSAIN ♦ LOCATION: SHERATON, DHAKA

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# International Women's Day: Everything you need to know

Observed annually on 8 March, the International Women's Day is solely marked to celebrate the cultural, political, and socioeconomic achievements of women. The day originated in 1917, after women gained suffrage in Soviet Russia, but it garnered global attention after it was adopted as a formal occasion by the United Nations in 1977.

Every year, the International Women's Day gets tagged with a new theme or campaign and sparks dialogue about important women's issues like gender equality, reproductive rights, and abuse. The IWD 2022 sports the hashtag

**#BreakTheBias** where important issues such as gender discrimination and how women can break free from the prejudices surrounding them, will be the focal point of discussion.

The theme calls all men and

women to be part of a movement where they strike the **#BreakTheBias** pose and pledge to support the cause behind it. The pledge is to build a gender equal world which is free of bias, stereotypes and discrimination that hinder the progress of women, is inclusive, equitable and diverse, and a safe place where pluralism is celebrated and not opposed.

It pushes people to collectively break biases in personal thought and action, in communities, workplaces and educational institutions by calling out

and challenging stereotypes each time they encounter it and thereby level the playing field for both the genders to coexist and flourish.

This year, the IWD has set a number of goals in order to work towards their ideal world.

The first one is to build an inclusive work culture for women so that their contribution is

recognised and their careers can take flight.

They aim to do this by putting up a comprehensive list of women's career platforms that can help women choose the career of their dreams, by sparking open dialogue about menopause and its impact on women's careers, by putting exceptional women leaders in the spotlight, addressing concerns about fair pay and closing the global gender

gap, and a host of other agenda.

Goals also include showcasing women's art in the form of poetry, music, visual arts, artwork and quotes to the world, bringing to the spotlight women achievers in sports and forging women empowerment globally by putting women achievers in the limelight.

As the world becomes increasingly tech savvy and tech efficient, IWD will rightly turn its focus to promoting equality for women in the field of technology, starting from YouTube influencers to those working in AI. The IWD agenda also celebrates women who are working to bring about positive change in the world, by working to alleviate world hunger and other such sectors.

Finally, the IWD this year seeks to assist women to take charge of their health and their right to make decisions about it. The dialogue is extensive and ranges from issues like body positivity to women's health issues and everything in between.

Women are worth their weight in gold and over the years, they have proven to be forces to be reckoned with, in a multitude of sectors ranging from art to science to sports to politics. It is not about breaking barriers anymore, that has already been done. This year, it is all about breaking biases.

By Munira Fidai  
Photo: Collected



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#PERSPECTIVE

# Dealing with quarter-life crisis

Life is uncertain, life is unpredictable, and life has its crests and troughs. We all have aims and goals to achieve, we have plans, and yet, there comes a point in life when everything seems to fail, everything seems to slip right through our hands. One thing leads to another and worries continue to grow bigger, and sooner than we realise we start to question every decision we ever made.

While some people experience these turbulences earlier in life, many young adults find themselves trapped within these walls of uncertainty in their twenties, which is commonly termed as the quarter-life crisis. It is common, and even certain for some.

After all, prior to this, all these years we have a constant rope that we hold onto in order to reach a destination through the stages of education, from school to university. And suddenly, once we complete graduation, we are left on our own, not knowing where to go or what to do as anxiety creeps within our minds, making us worried about the future.

With the absurd amount of competition nowadays, the entire job hunt procedure can be extremely difficult. This period of transition is naturally very tough to deal with, that is overflowing with worry, stress, and crippling with anxiety.

We have a constant rope that we hold onto in order to reach a destination through the stages of education, from school to university. And suddenly, once we complete graduation, we are left on our own, not knowing where to go or what to do as anxiety creeps within our minds, making us worried about the future.

Everyone deals with this individually, but it is also a situation which you alone are not facing, there are many like you. And remember, like every other difficulty, this shall pass too. If you are lucky enough to catch a break amidst everything, try enjoying it to the fullest rather than worrying about what is next. Here are a few things that may help you redirect yourself.

**Don't fall into the trap of procrastination**  
Having access to an abundance of free time



all of a sudden can push us to procrastinate and delay tasks. While it is okay to take a break and relax sometimes, constantly delaying can be dangerous. You might as well lose the energy and drive you once had if you let procrastination feed on you.

It is easy to feel demotivated and laze around. In times like these, try to complete your tasks little by little, if not at once. Complete your work partially, take a short break, and resume. Don't let procrastination get the best of you and make it a habit!

**Do things you like**

Often, we lose touch with things we like to do most as we get busy with life. You may as well utilise this break to reconnect with lost hobbies. Pick up an old hobby, or discover new ones —whatever your heart finds peace in. It can be drawing, painting, writing, cooking or reading, maybe it is finally time to get over that reading slack!

"I was initially very upset when I saw all my friends around me getting jobs whereas I did not hear back from anywhere. But then I utilised my free time to cook and realised I have a knack and passion for cooking!" said Maheera, who just completed her internship.



**Redirect your focus on health**

As we get overburdened with work and classes, we often push down health in our priority list. In a worst-case scenario, we make it a habit to eat junk food and rarely exercise. You can utilise this break to turn around these unhealthy habits into healthier ones. Make it a routine to exercise daily and monitor your food intake.

You can also try jogging regularly and making your own healthy meals. It is

You might as well lose the energy and drive you once had if you let procrastination feed on you. It is easy to feel demotivated and laze around. In times like these, try to complete your tasks little by little, if not at once.

also important to take equal care of your mental health as you would for physical health. Yoga and meditation benefit both.

"Since I started meditating every day, I believe every aspect of my life is more aligned and I feel so much at peace," remarked Sabrina, a fresh graduate.

Learn, explore and discover  
We always have a list of new year resolutions or a never-ending to-do list that we carry forward, literally every year and think of ticking it off when we finally

have time. It can be learning an important skill such as swimming or driving, learning a new language, or maybe something you wanted to do since childhood such as riding a bicycle.

It can also be finally time to complete these chores as you can now afford the time.

"I finally managed time to learn swimming as I am no longer surrounded by books and notes with constant deadlines. I am glad I got a break and utilised this transition period well," said Rafeeq, who recently completed his BBA degree.

Revitalise bonds with near and dear ones

As we try to juggle between part-time jobs and full-time education, we often lose touch with our circle of friends and relatives we have not met in a long time. They say, when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. I say, when life gives you a lot of free time, use it to rejuvenate old bonds and make them stronger.

Meet friends, go on hangouts, make up for the occasions you missed. You may finally even go to that long-awaited trip you always planned, but which never happened. It is a sad truth but sometimes, we even distance ourselves from family members living under the same roof. Spend the excess time you have with your parents and siblings, regenerate your bonds.

This period of inactivity in our lives when we are hit with the reality check of being in a state of quarter-life crisis is tedious and onerous. Nevertheless, it is just a phase, there is definitely light at the end of the tunnel. Although everything seems to happen at a pace that is hard to grasp, your time to shine shall come.

**By Fariha Amber**  
**Photo: Collected**



# The power of female friendships

Women are powerhouses of emotions, and things can get very intense very easily. It may be for this very reason that for the past few decades or more, the media has pitted woman against woman, associating dark emotions like competitiveness and jealousy (think catty celeb gossip) with inherently uplifting female friendships. Even folklore has been known to use the myth of “woman against woman” (think Cinderella against her stepsisters or Snow White against her evil stepmother) for its own patriarchal agenda.



Truth be told, humans are social animals, and all social animals need a pack — to work with, to bond with, and to lift each other up.

Roxane Gay, author of *Bad feminist*, once said that it is time to let go of the idea that all female friendships must be toxic or competitive.

“This myth is like heels and purses — pretty but designed to slow women down,” she stated.

In stark contrast to media’s harsh portrayal of platonic female friendships, women today recognise the sheer power of togetherness and the benefits of having power packs that help them overcome obstacles together. They value their female friends, not simply to rebel against the exaggerated claims of hyper competitiveness that hinder true friendship, but also because they realise that sticking together and boosting each other up is the only way for this gender to reach the heights they desire.

While organic and innocent, there is a very definite and precise science behind powerful female friendships. A UCLA study shows that during stressful situations, where men most often feel a “fight or flight” response, women tend to release oxytocin, which is a hormonal surge to “tend and befriend” others. It is this innate difference in the wiring of the female brain that has them turning to friends of the same gender whenever they



are going through something major in their lives.

Women ‘understand.’ The term has been used specifically for female friendships because in situations of emotional turmoil where a male friend is quick to offer (good-natured) advice or support, a

female friend empathises. Women make other women feel heard, nurtured and validated just by being a non-judgemental safety net for them.

Female bonding is all the more rewarding because it allows for certain freedoms that a woman may not be able to hold outside of her close circle. As mostly all women go through the same physical and emotional changes in life, healthy female friendships make women feel safer, calmer and less restricted.

Very seldom do healthy relationships let emotional intensity get the better of their friendship. Mostly, if not always,



female friendships are the true great loves of our lives. Assuming often interchangeable mother-daughter roles, they channel the intensity of their emotions into caregiving and boosting rather than belittling and pulling down. Female friendships are crucial for our emotional wellbeing and from a young age, are known to provide a sense of emotional connection, purpose and belonging.

Gloria Steinem once so eloquently said, “Women understand. We may share experiences, make jokes, paint pictures, and describe humiliations that mean nothing to men, but women *understand*.”

**By Munira Fidai**  
**Photo: LS Achive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed**

#PERSPECTIVE

# Role of the mother in gender equality

We all love discussing gender equality, and it's very common for someone to point out during the deliberations, "What about men? Why is it that women get to enjoy the benefit of the subject-matter?" Its comical to know that even at this age, people don't realise the importance of achieving gender equality or admit the urgency behind it.

We have seen in so many places that the women are taught to accept their fate and be doormats to their surroundings, where in the same circumstances, men are forced to break-free and live their lives to the fullest. This sort of early nurturing creates a defined gender gap where the little girls of today become single ladies, mothers and wives of the future, who are meek and indecisive, whereas the boys grow up to be men who are more assertive and influential.

Sadly, much of the thinking comes from the women in our society, ladies who find it very hard to break through years of conditioning. And somehow, they put forward their bitter experiences to their progeny, repeating the unwavering attitude over and over again like a broken record.

However, the stories are not the same everywhere; amongst the shattered souls emerge a few individuals who are progressive enough to break through the glass ceiling and create a better future for their children. Today, we speak to all these women, especially mothers of sons, with their differing ideologies and expectations.

**Mother of a son**

Some of us have birthed them, raised, nurtured, loved and supported them whenever they needed us. In doing so, we may have sacrificed a significant portion of our lives and hence, achieved the outcome: trophy

children. This sort of intense dedication may have created a sense of entitlement, which forced us to believe that our children, especially our boys, need to be forever indebted to our love and affection. But is this the case really the case, or just an assumption?

**The progressive**

I have raised my son to be a kind human being, I have instilled enough confidence in him so that he is flexible and tolerant enough to tackle whatever the world hurls at him. I do not expect my son to feel responsible for my wellbeing, just because I have taken care of him when he was unable to do it on his own. Whatever I did for him was a choice, a decision that I had taken sensibly; nobody forced me into motherhood. I chose to take care of my child, because I valued motherhood over everything else.

In the future, I want him to be similarly happy. Go wherever his heart takes him and do whatever makes him feel content. Our souls will continue to connect, whichever corner of the world he is in. In the case of my daughter-in-law, I want my son to meet his soulmate, a partner who understands him, loves him and respects him and vice versa. They can choose to start a family or not, the choice lies entirely upon them.



daughter-in-law, I want her to do the same as my son, return what she has been given to her loved ones, including her brand-new extended family. This is how life progresses and I want them to follow then same rules for their children – son or daughter.

**The manipulative**

I love my sons from the bottom of my heart and I have sacrificed my life for their welfare. I have ensured good education, warmth and comfort. If they go away in my old age, then I'd consider myself nothing but a complete failure. I demand that my children take care of me when I am older, just like I have taken care of them when they were young. Even our religion states the same. I can't even imagine how children put their ageing parents into old homes, these children have no heart at all and have not been raised well. As for my daughter-in-law, of course I am going to love her and appreciate her but she must also take care of the family she has been gifted with. I have done it all through my life and she must do the same. Life for women in this world is all about family and everything else is superfluous.

**Reflections**

These stories are factual stories narrated from real women and may actually resemble the manifold of thought processes that exist in our society. Whatever the ideologies, we believe that new mothers are the administrators of the future — mother of a son or daughter, and it is on them to choose only the correct route that assures gender equality; where men and women, together raise their children equally and install enough kindness and emotional intelligence in them so that they are able to justly make decisions about their future, their forthcoming family, and also the wellbeing of their ageing parents.

Hopefully, they will be a strong support to each other throughout their lives, the good, the bad and the worse. I only want happiness for both of them and nothing more. This is what my parents wanted from me and I want nothing less for my son and his beautiful partner.

**The realist**

I hope my son grows up to be a good human being, somebody who is worthy of the world. I have made sure he gets the best of education and mixed with the right people to get the best of experiences. I want him to excel in every part of his life and if that means he has to go somewhere far away from us to get better education, then be it. But I definitely have a condition attached that he must come back for his country, for me and his father. He must reimburse some of the benefits he has been offered, because how the of life As

benefits he offered, that is circle works. for my



By **Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury**  
Photo: **LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed**

Peya Jannatul announced becoming a mother on social media with a progressive maternity photoshoot sometime in late 2020. In the picture, she was seen in a transparent, red-gown caressing her baby bump with her perfectly manicured nails. In a largely conservative country, where an open display of motherhood is still considered a taboo, Jannatul chose to break the stigma, simply with confidence. "There's nothing wrong in showing off the biggest blessing of my life," she said. When very few people in the industry were expecting Jannatul to be planning motherhood, she came out with the news with a certain pride. "My son Ares is my delight — my fulfillment."



# Breaking the stigma *with a* SUPERMODEL

After the success of being able to put an important message such as 'progressive parenthood' and 'body positivity' through to the masses, Peya Jannatul decided to carry on with the ideology. "Motherhood doesn't stop with the baby bump. There's so much more in the process. I have had a C-section and that is a whole new journey on its own, especially for someone like me who is majorly invested in the business of fashion and beauty.

"With this new photoshoot, I want to put another important message out there: motherhood doesn't cause any hindrance in the natural progression of life; in fact, it is a major part of life itself. And the stretch

marks that we get in the process should be considered as warrior inscriptions and regarded as a symbol of pride and dignity," confessed the supermodel.

As we spoke, Peya Jannatul was clad in a neon-green dress. With her hair curled in the sides, and bare faced with literally no makeup on, she mostly resembles her teenage self, quite the compliment for a mother, who juggles between two separate full-time jobs; motherhood and entrepreneurship.

"Giving birth to a baby is a natural part of life. Some women choose to be mothers, some don't. I was one of the former. It has nothing to do with my professional life. In fact, if I consider reality, I have become much stronger, more affirmative and more respectful towards time and people around me."

In a ruthless world that considers anything above size zero outdated and

unfit, how does a supermodel wade through the turbulent waters?

"I am obviously not going to be size zero forever! Plus, it is only natural that I will grow older as time progresses. I need to accept these factors. Plus, I am all about body positivity and the progress of womanhood in general. I appreciate the celebration of all ages, skin types, body compositions etc., because in a time where we have made progress in so many fields, why should we hide behind the drapes of pure anachronistic attitude?"

When asked if Jannatul planned on instilling the values of respecting women onto her son, she responded promptly, "Oh Yes, sure. But more importantly, I am going to tell him to work really hard in life if he has to compete with a woman. Because women are fearless and extremely hardworking. Years of patriarchy have made them stronger and more determined than

ever, so if he has to level up with a woman, he needs to work really hard," said the assured mother.

With a walk worth its fame and a face that appeared on countless magazines, tabloids, and dailies, Peya Jannatul is in a league of her own. But what makes her more special is her blunt support towards the issues of diversity and feminism. "I may be Peya Jannatul to you, a supermodel with a degree in law. But I am also all the women in the world, trying my best to juggle between my professional and personal life to become the best version of myself."

**By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury**  
**Photo: Rony Rezaul**  
**Model: Peya Jannatul**  
**Fashion Direction and Styling: Mahmudul Hassan Mukul**  
**Hair and Makeup: Jumman Hossain**  
**Location: Sheraton, Dhaka**



# Kavazo: Delectable desserts for celebrations and a story filled with passion and love

Zareen Tasnim Omar has always had a knack for baking ever since she was a child. It was therapeutic for her, and watching videos of the mirror glazing and batter mixing would calm her. Learning from Instagram videos and YouTube tutorials, she began experimenting as she grew older. It was in university that people around her started noticing Zareen's skill at baking. With the support of friends and an intimate close network, all brought together with a heartfelt passion, Zareen's story began as she birthed Kavazo.

The name 'Kavazo' is unique in that it combines multiple languages. In Arabic, 'kava' means beverage and in Hungarian, the word 'kávészó' means cafe or coffee shop. So, with a little

personalisation, a fitting name unique to Zareen's own baking identity was formed. Zareen's intention behind such a unique name was to create a recognisable brand specific to her, and her work.

Kavazo was conceptualised and with Zareen's determination, was launched in March, 2020. With the pandemic at its peak then, and Zareen's refusal to let her passion project die out, Kavazo which was supposed to be a coffee place, started operating as a cloud kitchen. Then, by reaching out to their close network, she and her partner Nur Elahi Razin began garnering the love and support — if not a cult following — for their desserts.

Offering assorted dessert boxes which could be customised, word about the Kavazo's scrumptious desserts spread quickly. Until today, their assorted dessert boxes have become Kavazo's identity. These boxes came in varying sizes and can be customised or bought premade. Their light, fluffy choux pastry, filled with

flavoured cream, the rich and delicate cake slices of salted caramel, mousse and many more, leaves one wanting more.

Kavazo prides itself in quality and

consistency.

"I don't like using seasonal products. What happens when the ingredient is out of season? That's not consistent," says Zareen. All the ingredients used are freshly outsourced such that it is available

of course consistency, Kavazo makes everything fresh in batches thrice a day. So, ordering a cake from them would require at least a 36-hour notice.

As of now, Kavazo's outlet is situated on the ground floor of Suvastu Jahanara Square in Banani.

They only offer pick-ups, delivery services, cater to theme parties, and make customised cakes. In the future, Zareen and Nur hope to make Kavazo a full cafe with savoury and sweet food, with coffee and traditional cafe food.

Zareen's passion for her baking is monumental. As a working mother, the support of her friends and family have played a great role in making Kavazo what it is today. She is focused on making Kavazo blossom into her dream — "This brand was made from love. Not for the money."

despite the season, and so, they can consistently keep reproducing the desserts on a regular basis. She further adds, "My main focus is consistency and quality. These two things I cannot compromise. For me, it is not about the money, it's about giving the customer something I am proud of, and something they will love."

Focusing on quality and taste, and

**By Puja Sarkar**  
**Photo:Kavazo**



**THE MILLENNIAL COOK**  
FARIHA AMBER



# Strawberries and cream: Makings of divine desserts

As we embrace the colours of spring, we not only welcome flowers and festivities, but also greet the season of strawberries. Having a hot and humid climate, the season of strawberries does not last long in our country. We wait all year round for this time of the year just to be able to taste the fruity flavour of fresh strawberries, and foodies like me can fully resonate.

While the tart and sweet strawberries of our country can be used to make a variety of recipes ranging from basic jams to classic desserts, there is something unmatched about the combination of strawberries with cream. The way the tartness of the berries meld with the luscious cream creates an irresistible sensation in the mouth.

There are recipes aplenty to make, featuring strawberries and cream, but here are a few handpicked favourites that are bursting with fruity and creamy flavours! Try them while the season lasts.

## STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE CUPCAKES

*These vanilla cupcakes are filled with a delectable strawberry filling, topped with whipped cream and fresh strawberries, which have everything about a strawberry shortcake but in cupcake form!*



### Ingredients

2 whole eggs  
2 egg whites  
¾ cup sugar  
1½ cups oil  
1 tsp vanilla essence  
1½ tsp baking powder  
2 cups flour  
¾ cup milk  
¼ cup sour cream  
1 cup whipping cream

### For the filling —

2 cups fresh strawberries  
2 tbsp strawberry jam

### Method

Beat eggs and egg whites on high speed until they are fluffy and add sugar. Continue beating until the sugar is completely combined and then incorporate oil and

vanilla extract. Sift the flour and baking powder together and lower the speed of your mixer. Gradually add in flour, alternating with milk and sour cream until you get a homogenous mixture. Pour the batter into cupcake liners and bake them in a preheated oven at 160°C for 25-30 minutes.

Meanwhile, dice one cup of strawberries into little pieces and combine with strawberry jam. Once the cupcakes are cooked and cooled, make a hollow in the centre of each cupcake and fill them with the mixture. Whip chilled cream to attain stiff peaks and pipe them over the cupcakes. Finally, top them with fresh strawberries.

## STRAWBERRY PANNA COTTA

*Panna cotta is an Italian term meaning cooked cream. And what can be better paired with cooked cream than the season's freshest strawberries?*



### Ingredients

1 cup cream  
1 cup milk  
¼ cup sugar  
½ tsp gelatine powder  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
*For the strawberry sauce —*  
2 cups fresh strawberries

2 tbsp water  
3 tbsp sugar

### Method

Soak the gelatine with 2 tablespoons of cold water and let it swell for 5-10 minutes. In a saucepan, bring the cream, milk, and sugar to a simmer, being careful not to boil it. Once the sugar has dissolved and the mixture is steaming hot, remove from heat and add in vanilla extract. Let it cool for 5 minutes before mixing the gelatine.

Pour this onto serving glasses and let it chill in the refrigerator until completely set. To make the strawberry sauce, cut them into quarters, sprinkle sugar and let them rest — this will draw out natural juices and remove the tartness of berries. Add them to a saucepan with water and cook for about 5 minutes, crushing the strawberries in the process.

Cool the strawberry mixture and once the panna cottas are set, pour over the chunky sauce and let it cool in the fridge before serving.

## STRAWBERRY CREAM CHEESE TARTS

*This tart gives delight in every bite as the various textures of the crispy biscuit crust, creamy cream cheese filling and fresh strawberries on top come together.*

### Ingredients

*For the crust —*  
200g cold butter  
1 egg  
2 cups flour  
1/3 cup caster sugar  
*For the filling —*  
250g cream cheese  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
2 tbsp strawberry jam  
½ cup cream  
¼ cup sugar

2 cups fresh strawberries

### Method

Cut the butter into little cubes and use your fingertips to combine with the flour and sugar. After that, add a beaten egg and knead until it forms a dough. Let this cool in the refrigerator before rolling it out and placing in an oiled tart pan. Scrape off the excess from the edges and poke holes with a fork. Let it bake at 180°C in a preheated oven for 15-20 minutes.

Beat the cream cheese, sugar, jam, and vanilla to make a smooth mixture and whip the cream to form stiff peaks — fold them together. Pour this mixture into the cooled and baked tart shell levelling the top. Slice fresh strawberries and decorate the top before serving.

## STRAWBERRY AND CREAM BREAKFAST CUPS

*This simple breakfast idea can be your quick fix for breakfast that requires minimal ingredients but is utterly delicious.*

### Ingredients

6 slices bread  
3 tbsp melted butter  
1/3 cup cream  
1 tsp cinnamon sugar  
1 cup fresh strawberries

### Method

Slather butter onto both sides of the bread and press them down to the dents in a muffin tray, creating a cup-like shape. Toast this in the oven at 160°C for 8-10 minutes. Meanwhile, whip the cream and cinnamon sugar. Once the bread is toasted, let it cool and add dollops of whipped cream. Finally, top with fresh strawberries before eating.

**By Fariha Amber**

**Food & Photo: Fariha Amber**



# Women behind the steering wheel in Dhaka

Dhaka, a metropolis that is always hustling and bustling with people and busy crowds. This densely populated city is constantly moving around the clock and as people move, so do vehicles. That is what defines our city as a concrete jungle with a sea of transport on the roads.

But have you ever stopped to ponder and notice something unusual in these busy roads? Well, you would not find this unusual unless you compare the streets of Dhaka with that of any other country.

I am not pointing towards the absurd amount of traffic congestion, dirty lanes, or mismanagement of traffic. Rather it is something a lot of other developing countries have achieved and yet, we lack behind — it is the number of female drivers.

How many female drivers would you notice if you stood even at the busiest junctions of Dhaka for five minutes? Maybe a couple in about hundreds of vehicles. But what is the reason behind this discrepancy? Is it due to a patriarchal society? Is it owing to driving predominantly being tagged as a task for men? There are reasons aplenty.

## Societal stigma

Despite the fact we are progressing as a society and have come a long way as women, treading our path, overcoming every obstacle thrown at us, there still exists people who see women driving as something unpleasant, like a stigma. Often times, even if females are interested to drive, backlash comes from within their own homes. This is especially the case when women tend to ride bikes, or are eager to be a part of the ride-sharing industry.

Take Sweety Akhter for example, who was previously a rider at OBo, "I had to go through a lot of hassle to convince my family in order to allow me to take up the profession of a driver. It was a tiresome process from argument to agreement, but only after a month, I had to quit as my husband was not happy about it," she said.



She also added that she did not receive support from her community when she took up this job. "Even after taking and excelling the extensive training and finally getting the offer, it seemed like I was the only

one proud about myself. I come from a small community and people here see women bikers as an outcast," she shared.

## Safety concerns

The streets of Dhaka are not the safest to drive on and this is another reason for the lack of female drivers. However, particularly for women, road safety is not the only safety concern while driving. Sadly, more often than not, women are the subject of being followed, jeered upon, or catcalled while driving alone.

Speaking from her years of driving experience, Ayesha Shams shared, "There were times when my vehicle was deliberately hit on the road when I was taking slightly longer to pass or make a turn. But I am more afraid to drive on empty highways than busy roads as several times, I was followed, being forced to speed up and get myself out of that unfavourable situation."

But women have learnt to adjust with the most unusual circumstances and find a way out, owing to their perseverance. Salma Hakim, who is a performer said, "The nature of my job compels me to drive at night, for which I have had to withstand

many harsh comments from various people. But I could not be any less bothered. I have the right to be independent and drive as long as I am not doing anything wrong."

## Familial priorities

A woman has several roles to play simultaneously, and a lot of times, she has to make the decision of prioritising her family responsibilities over others. Rowshan Ara, a mother of two, underwent similar circumstances.



"Previously, I would regularly drive to work and I really enjoy driving on my own. But since the birth of my second child, work became too hectic to manage and I had to take a break from office," she remarked.

On the other hand, some women take up driving as a job to support their families. Sharmin Parvin, who is a rider at Uber said, "Although there were many incidences when a passenger cut my call only for hearing a female voice, I drive to earn bread and butter for my family, so I find these incidents to be humorous now," she laughed.

Another service provider, Rumpa Khatun who is a delivery person, shared, "When the pandemic hit, my husband lost his job and

it was very difficult to make ends meet. That is when I took upon this job and although initially, my family showed restraint, they gave in when they saw it was generating income to run the household."

## Shift in trajectory

Albeit women drivers still have to face an unnecessary horde of comments and go through additional hassle just to drive on the streets of Dhaka, this scenario is gradually changing.

The society progresses with the thoughts of its people.

Many women such as Leuza Akhter, a rider at Uber, have attested to being encouraged to drive by her passengers. "My passengers usually get surprised to be greeted by a female driver but most of them have shown great encouragement towards my profession and hope to see more such female drivers in the future," she said.

Tithy Zaman, who has been riding a bike for over a decade, also shared the shift in trajectory she witnessed, saying, "I still get comments and jeered upon when I go out for a ride. But the number has reduced drastically and I am beginning to see more civilised behaviour from our population."

There will always be people finding negativity even in the best of situations, but it is upon our discretion on what to focus on. Dhaka is progressing in various aspects, and one day, we dream of a city where female drivers is as common as male drivers.

By Fariha Amber

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

#PRESS RELEASES

# 'Alor Noksha', a photo exhibition showcasing nature's tranquillity underway at Gallery Qrius

'Alor Noksha,' a photo exhibition by M Shahadat Hossain Kiron and presented by lifestyle brand QRIUS, has been underway at Gallery Qrius at Banani 11 since 15 February. The event is exhibiting 122 photos, showcasing an intimate proximity to nature.

When asked about the inspiration behind his photos, M Shahadat Hossain Kiron said that he is motivated to capture feelings, bring them together, and share those very feelings with the audience.

Hossain's photos have an appreciation of nature that captures its immaculate form. The 122 photos are displayed into



groups of two to three in 43 frames, with titles like 'Shristir bhumika,' 'Kothin komol,' 'Shironamhin' — headlining each frame. The wide variety of aesthetic compositions and the colourful presence of birds, flowers,

sculptures and other elements can be seen in the photos.

Keeping up with the theme of the event, Gallery Qrius has been decorated with potted plants, drawing up a parallel with

the nature themed photos of the exhibition. The gallery also had frames showcasing award winning photographs from around the world, a brief history of photography in Bangladesh, quotes of famous photographers worldwide, a display on the evolution of cameras through time and a neat collection of vintage cameras by Bashir Ahmed Sujan, a photographer himself.

The exhibition concluded on 26 February and was held at Gallery Qrius, 4th floor of the showroom of lifestyle brand QRIUS at Plot 58, Block F, Road 11, Banani.

By Feda Al Hossain

## ◆ HOROSCOPE ◆



**ARIES**  
(MAR. 21-APR. 20)

Look into family projects. Meet new lovers through work related projects. Difficulties will see you rise to the occasion. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



**TAURUS**  
(APR. 21-MAY 21)

Enjoy your time with children. Don't be dishonest about your feelings. Elders may irritate you. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



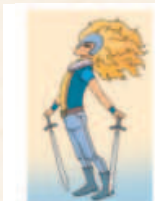
**GEMINI**  
(MAY 22-JUN. 21)

Don't let your partner coerce you into things. Don't linger for too long. Refrain from doing anything rash. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



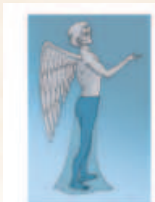
**CANCER**  
(JUN. 22-JUL. 22)

Sudden romance won't last long. Make money using your ingenuity. Put your faith in a good friend. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



**LEO**  
(JUL. 23-AUG. 22)

Don't try manipulating any situations. False information will start problems. Don't get involved in secret affairs. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



**VIRGO**  
(AUG. 23-SEP. 23)

Don't gamble unnecessarily. Hassles with family can cause heartache. Attend to things in due time. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



**LIBRA**  
(SEP. 24-OCT. 23)

Family outings will make you feel good. Do your job diligently. Take advantage of travel opportunities. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.



**SCORPIO**  
(OCT. 24-NOV. 21)

Don't take unnecessary financial risks. Get involved in organisational functions. Be friendly at work this week. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



**SAGITTARIUS**  
(NOV. 22-DEC. 21)

Your partner will appreciate your honesty. Home renovations will pay off. Your boss won't be happy with you. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



**CAPRICORN**  
(DEC. 22-JAN. 20)

Your approach to things may be unrealistic. Social get-togethers will expand your social circle. Don't lose your cool if you lose. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



**AQUARIUS**  
(JAN. 21-FEB. 19)

You need competition in your life. Do your part for your family. Secret affairs will eventually backfire. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



**PISCES**  
(FEB. 20-MAR. 20)

Don't confide with meddling family members. Avoid purchasing expensive items. Pleasure trips will promote romance. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

এখন  
**ফাস্ট ওয়াশ**  
ডিটারজেন্ট পাউডার  
১ কেজির সাথে  
১ টি  ৫৭০ লত্ৰীসোপ **ফ্রী!**



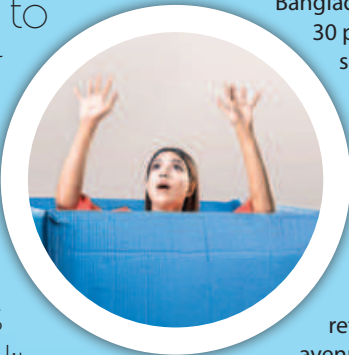




#PERSPECTIVE

# Positive discrimination to create a gender balanced society

We all want to live in a world where people, irrespective of gender, have equal opportunities to channel their talents. A place where everyone has access to privileges like quality education, freedom to utilise the gained knowledge and shine on their own rights.



Unfortunate as it may be, we still do not live in such a world. Gender equality is a far cry under most circumstances, but we are working together in our society to eradicate discrimination at all levels.

According to reports published in 2020, female participation in the Bangladesh workforce stood at 30 percent. While there are sectors where the women employees are higher in number, the RMG sector for instance, the percentage of women in mid-level and top management positions drop significantly. The same is also true for retail, hospitality, and other avenues where the proverbial 'glass ceiling' is an everyday reality for the women now taking an active role in the labour market.

Women comprise 50 percent of the population, which means that a company that does not encourage enough female participation at all levels of the hierarchy are missing out on the capabilities of a wider talent pool. Men and women experience the world differently and their perspectives differ. Having a gender balanced team can ensure that when it comes to problem solving, one can tap in on resources generated from different life experiences.

Gender inclusion at a wider level is not only a commendable social goal, but research also shows that it makes good sense too as a demographically diverse

workforce can improve the financial growth of any organisation.

The subject of 'positive discrimination' — which refers to a form of discrimination that favours someone by treating them differently in a positive way — has been much talked about recently due to various reasons. While most agree that it is a necessary tool in creating a just workforce, others disagree, and with plausible reasons, that this is often unfair to deserving candidates. One can argue that by favouring someone by treating them differently, even in a positive way, is still 'discrimination'. In a society where the struggle is to maintain fair play, a new form of prejudice is the last thing we need.

But, the fact that women are still lagging behind in society, gives us valid reasons to promote their presence in the workplace in higher numbers at all levels of the hierarchy. This does not mean that qualified male co-workers should be deprived of opportunities when it comes to matters of promotions; the administration must strike a balance where no employee is mistreated, but at the same time,

making sure that a gender equal

environment prevails in the workplace.

The first step towards achieving that goal would be to start at the recruiting process. Women should get the opportunity to show their capabilities and not be judged based on their gender. Organisations and businesses should proactively work towards closing in on the gender gap in the recruitment process, which can help build a more gender-equal workforce in the future.

The next important action would be to groom all employees so that they can reach the pinnacle of their potentials. This will create an atmosphere where multiple candidates become qualified over time for a said position. To create such an atmosphere at the workplace will not be an easy task, but for the sake of our future it must be done.

The fact that one feels compelled to exercise positive discrimination at the workplace to create a gender balance speaks volumes for the disparity that exists in society. It is well understood that this norm cannot go on forever. Steps must be taken at all levels that soon, the day comes when there will be no need for positive discrimination, and a gender balance will be a natural consequence of our day to day activities.

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif  
 Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

