

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 24, 2022, CHAITRA 10, 1428 BS

A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*

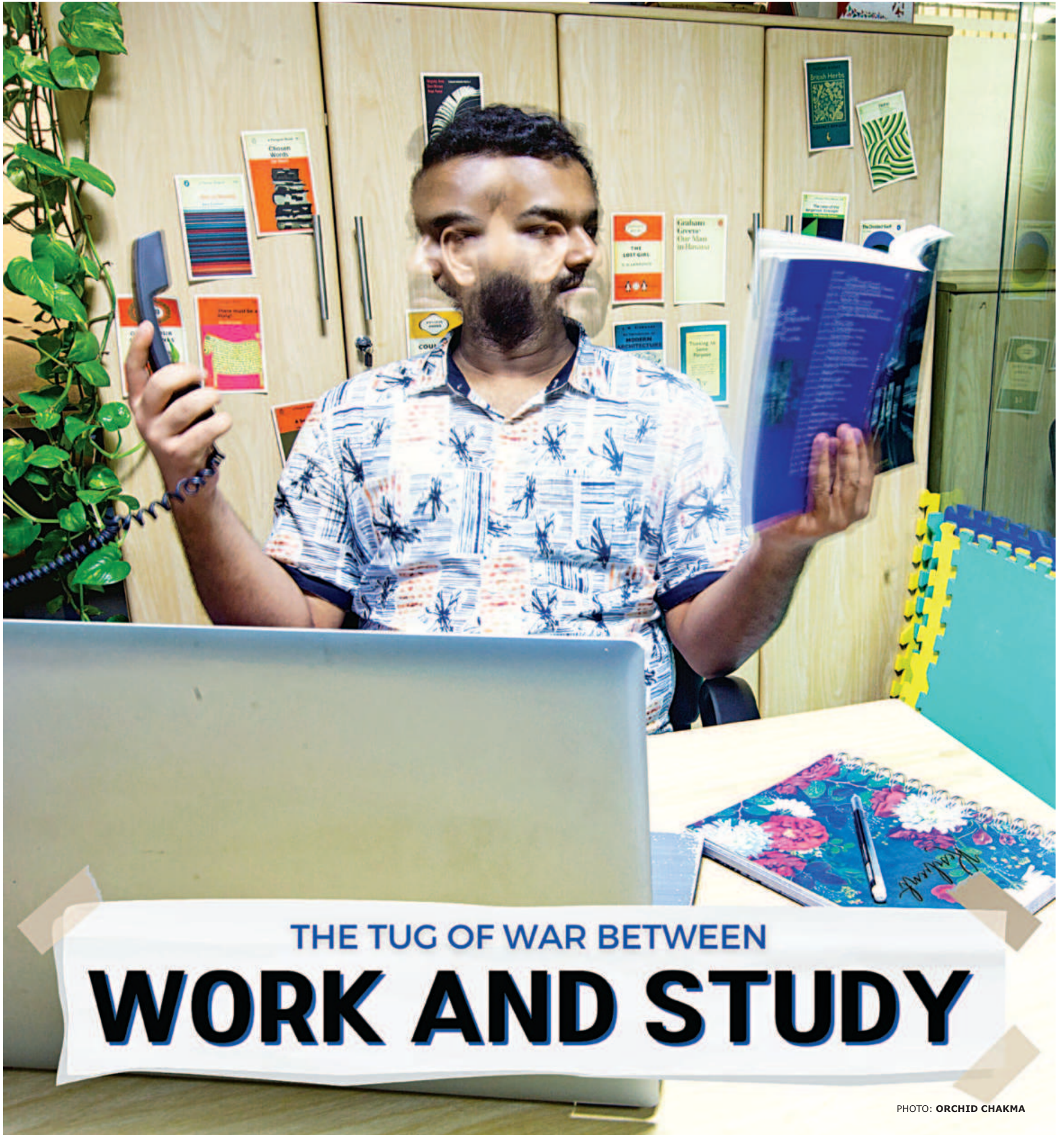


ON-CAMPUS JOB OPPORTUNITIES (OR LACK THEREOF)

PG 3

OUR INSECURITIES, WHEN HANDED DOWN TO OTHERS

PG 4



THE TUG OF WAR BETWEEN

WORK AND STUDY

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

EDITORIAL

As someone who spent a major chunk of the last decade juggling his undergraduate engineering classes and a full-time job, you might think I'd have a lot to say about this week's cover story. To be honest, I don't.

The equation is quite simple. The world isn't what it was a generation ago. We can credit it to the appeal and need for out-of-the-classroom skills, or the simple fact that students need money to purchase what they want and support their families. They want a head start in their careers, and because the primary source of income doesn't pay well or enough, side hustles become a tool to both earn and stick to a passion.

However, like a Venn diagram, the early part of the professional career overlaps on the latter parts of one's academic career. The result? A tug of war. Double the dream but half the focus, all to be taken care of on a daily basis.

If you are lucky enough to come out of this war unscathed, know that you are blessed. If you feel like it's too much, fret not. Take a step at a time.

— Kazi Akib Bin Asad, Editor In-charge, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

GAMING



Anime games for the fans to look forward to

TAMJIDUL HOQUE

With the anime fanbase now bigger than ever, franchises are taking this opportunity to venture into the world of games to give the fans a new, more interactive experience based on their anime.

Games have been made before but they never really fulfilled its true potential. Many games were made with little effort and lacklustre visuals in an attempt to get maximum profit out of minimum investments.

With game developers releasing new plans for game releases in the near future, it seems like they are finally taking this genre of game seriously. Here are some of the games anime fans can look forward to being released.

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS: ORIGINS
 Based on the popular manga *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Netmarble has released a trailer of an open world RPG similar to *Genshin Impact*. It is planned to be released in mobile, PC and console. It will be the successor of *The Seven Deadly Sins: Grand Cross*, a turn-based RPG which is very popular among the Gacha gaming community.

The new game seems more interactive and visually appealing than its predecessor, and the producer describes the game as "MMOCCG" (Massively Multiplayer Online Character Collecting Game). It remains to be seen, however, when the game will actually be released.

FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST MOBILE
 In celebration of its 20th anniversary, the *Fullmetal Alchemist* franchise is releasing its own mobile game being developed by Square Enix. They have released a teaser that shows a gameplay where the Elric brothers are seen fight-

ing a goon on top of a moving train.

The teaser indicates that it will be a fighting game with a gameplay similar to that of *Dragon Ball FighterZ* and may have a story mode. It is expected to be released in this summer.

MY HERO ACADEMIA: ULTRA RUMBLE

With multiple games already released around this popular anime, Bandai Namco has taken an unexpected route and will be releasing a battle royale game based on *My Hero Academia*. The beta was released in Japan where players were already able to get a taste of what the game will be like.

Just like any other battle royale game, the target is to survive until the end. But the game seems to have additional side missions and each character has unique skillset and moves. It's expected to be released on consoles and Steam this year.

BLACK CLOVER MOBILE

This will be a RPG game developed by Pearl Abyss and Vic Game Studios, expected to be released by 2022. Even though the producer refused to say what type of gameplay there will be, the teaser shows it might potentially be an open world game. The visuals already has *Black Clover* fans hyped up and waiting for its release.

With the developers not wanting to release much information on their games, it's hard to conclude how the final products will look like. Even then, the signs are good and it looks like anime fans are in for a treat.

Tamjidul Hoque loves talking about football and watching anime. You can find him on twitter.com/TamjidulH24

TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE



A	B
YOUTH Troye Sivan	Sugar for the Pill Slowdive
23 Jimmy Eat World	Swing Lynn Harmless
Rastay Arnob	I Want The World To Stop Belle and Sebastian
Line of Fire José González	HUMBLE. Kendrick Lamar

Email us at shoutds@gmail.com with feedback, comments, and reader submissions within 500 words.

On-campus job opportunities (or lack thereof)

TAZREEN JAHAN BARI

Being a university student usually entails some degree of financial freedom, be it out of need or want. While most students resort to tutoring, some (read: very few) get lucky enough to land a job on campus.

Hold on a second. On-campus job opportunity? Is that even a thing? Clearly not in Bangladesh?

Most universities abroad play by a system that allows students to get many on-campus job opportunities, in exchange for which they are paid an hourly wage, given stipends, or enjoy a tuition waiver. Universities being a society of its own has many such sectors for students to work in.

Rafia Bushra, currently a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma, USA speaks about her experience as an undergraduate at the University of Arizona, saying, "Anyplace I think of, student employees are everywhere. From working admin or reception jobs at different offices to university libraries and dining halls, there are numerous positions that specifically hire students of that university. Other than cleaning jobs, almost all opportunities are given to undergraduate students. While it's not much, they do get paid an hourly wage."

For postgraduate students, on-campus job opportunities serve more like real jobs as they come with health insurance, stipends, and so on. Rafia explains, "While masters students can choose to get these research assistantship jobs, it is somewhat of a requirement for PhD students. It is generally expected that postgrads will work under the supervision of a professor. While these jobs do have better facilities that come as compensation, they are also more time consuming."

As private universities like BRAC University, North South University, East West University and so on follow a similar structure of student employment; they offer on-campus job opportunities for students.

Although not as extensive as universities abroad, there is variety in these opportunities as well. Rubaba Iffat Archi, civil and environmental engineering student at NSU says, "NSU offers a few positions for students other than the conventional TA/RA positions. The posts are labelled as



PHOTO: STAR

'student workers'. We have multiple sectors under this position, like the IT office, library, and PR office. Mostly undergraduate students work in these offices."

While students doing these jobs do not get tuition waivers, they do have an hourly wage system. As Rubaba explains, "The more you get the chance to work as a student worker the more you get paid. The TAs and RAs receive a fixed salary. Coming from a student worker position in my university, I wouldn't say that the amount is inadequate as it comes on to myself how much can I work. However, I think the hourly rate could be increased, so a lot of students won't have to look for tuitions or other jobs."

Unlike private universities in Bangladesh, most public universities do not have the culture of hiring students for on-campus work. Some faculty members from renowned universities like University of Dhaka will hire selected students to work as RAs, but this practice being unofficial, the work hours and monetary compensation completely depends on projects and/or faculty members.

BUET too followed the same pattern. However, recently it has been announced that on-campus jobs will soon be available to its students. They will be given a

varying degree of opportunities such as data analysis, internship opportunities, assisting in existing projects, working at the university library and more, depending on their skills.

Although it varies from one department to another, some universities like KUET and BUP do have research assistantship positions open.

Khadija Akter Onee, Lecturer from the Department of English, BUP, says, "Back when I was a student here, I worked as a TA and also informally as a proofreader. I was paid for the proofreading job, but it was not official. We also have the opportunity of working as student tutors under the STS program which is run solely by the English department. Although student tutors do not get monetary compensation, they receive coupons for buying books. So, in some way or the other, it is rewarding. TAs, in contrast, earn a handsome salary, in terms of it being a student job. We do not have RAs yet, but it would be better if such opportunities open up in the future."

The Bangladeshi education system, being conservative, often do not see students working part-time as a positive thing as it can hamper their main job of being a student. However, students who

have benefitted from the on-campus job opportunities tell a different tale.

Khadija continues, "These jobs were always accommodating as the department prioritises academia overall. Furthermore, it helped me learn a lot in terms of taking responsibility and becoming more organised. It also helps you develop as a professional."

Regardless of the exceptions, lack of structure, a limited number of openings and an overall aversion to the culture of having student worker does little to facilitate the large student bodies of these universities. Naturally, the question that comes to mind is, why not?

Associate Professor Dr Md. Mohoshin Reza, Head of the English Department at BUP identifies two main reasons, "The problem is mostly structural and cultural, not a financial one. Universities get adequate funding for research, but this does rarely prove to be fruitful as the culture of investing in research is almost non-existent. The more research-intensive the university, the more opportunities it can give to its students. So, the problem remains in the structure and culture of university as we fail to systematically utilise the funds we do get."

The same notion is seconded by Professor Dr Omar Faruk from the Department of Criminology and Police Science, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University. He asserts, "Not only is it disadvantageous to the students, but it is also a waste of government funds. Hiring students for different sectors in the university will save funds, be a great opportunity for students and help specialised skills development on a broader scale."

Universities being the liminal space where students evolve from learner to professional, it can serve its purpose better if it provides them job opportunities on campus. Considering the myriad of benefits that can come with this shift both for universities and the students, it is imperative that we make structural changes to turn on-campus job opportunities into a reality.

Tazreen considers reading "The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath" to be a calming activity. Question her sanity at tazreenzahan@gmail.com



BUBT

Playground of BUBT at Beribadh

Bangladesh University of Business and Technology

Committed to Academic Excellence

ADMISSION GOING ON

SPRING SEMESTER 2022

Trimester | Bi-Semester
(for Engg. Programs)

**Trimester = 4 months, Semester = 6 months*

Apply online
bubt.edu.bd/admission

Key Features

- International collaboration/Credit transfer facilities
- Joint MBA Program with Central Queensland University, Australia
- Career guidance and job placement facilities
- State of the art labs, enriched library, medical centre
- Research centre
- Online payment facilities
- Adjacent to Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, National Zoo and Botanical Garden.
- One Stop Service Centre
- Large Playground

Programs

- BBA
- MBA
- B.A. (Hons.) in English
- M.A in English
- B.Sc. (Hons.) in Economics
- M.Sc. in Economics
- LL.B (Hons.)
- B.Sc. in CSE
- B.Sc. in Textile Engineering
- B.Sc. in Civil Engineering
- EMBA
- M.A in ELT
- M.Sc. in Economics
- LL.M
- B.Sc. in EEE

Special Engineering Programs for Diploma Holders

PERMANENT CAMPUS

Plot No. 77-78, Main Road, Rupnagar, Mirpur-2, Dhaka-1216.
Phone: 48036351-3, Fax: 88-02-48036355, E-mail: info@bubt.edu.bd, Website: www.bubt.edu.bd

Exclusive Waivers

25% on Admission Fee

10% on Tuition Fee

10% -100% Tuition fee waiver for poor and meritorious students, siblings and diploma holders

Hostel facility for female students

Hotline: 01810-033733, 01810033701-6

Why it is okay to want a spam account

MALIK ARAF

My recent rampant addiction to social media made me realise a couple of things.

First of all, I finally agree with my mother. Sorry mother, I should have listened to you when you said my phone was the root of all my problems. Secondly, I realised that not everyone on my friend list should see what I post and share. Yes, I am no longer in high school, and the number of followers I have on social media doesn't seem intriguing anymore. So, it is time I keep some of my connections the way they are.

To explain further, I feel like my family or my colleagues don't need to see the things I share all the time. Since they don't know my intentions, or the context, there's a high chance they might misinterpret it.

This means working on my follower list. And I thought about it. Filtering through the list and deciding upon who to keep and who to drop feels like an ordeal. Eventually, I decided to make a spam account. And I think all of you should have one too. Hear me out.

Spam accounts are great filters to social media. You see less content since you



DESIGN: MRITTIKA ANAN RAHMAN

follow less and let a small number of people follow you. You can post anything, share silly selfies, and remember the good old times without worrying about who might judge you. You can rant, post your frustrations, and seek help, too. You also don't need to worry about what your family might think since they won't see

what you share.

You can open a spam account for other reasons too. For example, you can use your spam account as a portfolio for what you do besides your academics. You can use it to keep a tab on the world since good news articles can be easily clustered among a sea of content.

However, there are some downsides to opening a spam account. To start with, you should know where opening one is safer. Many social media platforms have restrictions that don't allow users to create accounts that match with existing accounts. As in, you can't open one because an account by that same name or photo exists.

Furthermore, people who know you but don't know you have multiple accounts may report you, which is an issue in itself. Finally, when your friends or close ones see you unleash every bit of sanity you have in your spam, there's a chance they may think you lose it.

Spam accounts are honestly fun. Even if you don't find any necessary advantage for opening one, you could do it for the experience. Handling social media, and being constantly aware of other people's perception of you can be a real hassle. Opening a spam account might actually help you handle these, just like it helped me.

Malik Araf is seriously confused right now. To make him more confused, send him a text at arafmalik04@gmail.com



SHIMIN MUSHSHARAT

People who are overly critical of others are usually ruthless to themselves. This practice is quite common in our house. We stand in front of the mirror to tear ourselves apart verbally. When we accomplish something, instead of appreciating it, we try to find out how much better we could have done.

I have heard my family members pointing to their flaws often in the past. It never struck me as anything out of the

OUR INSECURITIES, WHEN HANDED DOWN TO OTHERS

ordinary until I heard my little sister speaking unkindly about herself. I kept recalling that; I, too, speak a lot about that particular imperfection. I had never realised that I was unintentionally teaching her to see herself through my self-conscious lens.

It is normal, and truthfully, unavoidable, to sometimes feel insecure.

However, when you are verbal about your insecurities in front of children, they tend to pick it up as well. We all know that they learn by example. Imagine pointing out particular features you are unhappy

about, such as your height or thinning hair, in front of a child. Even though it is about your own body, it might make them aware that these things can be the subject of insecurities. So, they start to notice if the same things apply to them.

Pulling a stop to talking about your insecurities is hard, especially if it is an old habit. Not speaking about them does not essentially make them disappear. The best solution would be to learn to think about these insecurities healthily.

As a curvy person, I grew up being told

that I should lose weight to wear certain clothes. My friend grew up hearing that she should put on some weight so that she can find clothes more easily. This concept in itself is wrong because none of us had much control over the shape of our bodies. Instead of thinking that we need to change ourselves to fit into a dress, we should have been taught that dresses should be made to fit us.

The uniqueness of our beings is one of the most beautiful things about us. So, as hard as it is to believe it sometimes, we should gradually try to accept the things that we have been hard-wired into believing are flaws. Self-affirmation meditation can be a helpful tool in this case.

The same idea applies to your accomplishments. When you catch yourself trivialising your achievements, think about how you would feel if your friends or siblings achieved the same thing. You would probably be happy for them. Learning to give yourself credit teaches you to be less critical of others, and this inspires children to be more empathetic.

We should be softer to ourselves and others for the ones you're an example to, but most importantly, for ourselves. We deserve kindness, today and every day.

Shimin reads everything she can find, talks to cats, and writes a lot of letters. Send her a book at shim.mush@gmail.com

The tug of war between academics and work

TAHMIM HASSAN

Is a student's only responsibility towards their academics? In a perfect world, it probably is. In reality, students are also required to work jobs to secure their financial independence, contribute to their family, and sustain their education.

However, balancing work and academics is not easy. With the constant stress of academics coupled with regular deadlines at work, it becomes quite difficult for a student to find the right balance. With each end demanding full dedication and effort, a tug of war emerges for them between academics and work.

Rashidul Hassan, an engineering student at North South University (NSU), works as a remote content writer in a reputed software company. For him, managing both work and academics has not come easy.

"My work hours are from 1 PM to 8 PM. I have to attend classes while working. When classes were online, I was able to manage working simultaneously, but I actually do not know how I will manage now that classes are offline. Transport will take a lot of time and I'll have to go to work with a tired body and mind. Amidst this, I have to hold on to my academics as it matters a lot to me and my future goals," he says.

While it may not be part of the dream we are sold as children, it's quite common to come across students who have to pay their own cost of education. "I have to pay a sizable portion of my tuition fees, and so working is imminent to me," adds Rashidul.

Many jobs require flexible timings from students, often calling them to attend office at odd times. These really hamper the other activities a student might be involved in, personal or familial concerns, and especially their academics.

For Faiyaz Hossain, a computer engineering student at NSU and a home tutor, it's a similar story. "Even on days when I had an important exam the next day, I was called suddenly by my students to go and teach them or take extra classes. I could not refuse because it is my responsibility to teach them. Also, I did not want to give the wrong impression, which could later result in losing the job," Faiyaz shares.

Stories like Faiyaz's are not a one-off, as often the rigours of a job get in the smooth maintenance of studies. It takes a lot of

support from faculty members to walk this tightrope, but the stances of faculty members vary on this.

Tanvir Rahman, former lecturer of BRAC University, believes that even while working, the first priority for a student must be their academics.

"In any situation, work-life balance is very important for a student, as students become industry-ready by the time they graduate. Industry-ready graduates get a head start which cannot be said for those who do not work on the side while studying," he says.

"The first priority should be studying," Tanvir asserts.

"Being industry-ready and gaining knowledge about real world tasks will only come to use if someone has decent results to be called up for interviews. Decent results also show whether a student was sincere or not, a quality recruiters often look for when they seek potential employees."

Mehetaz Chowdhury, a lecturer at BRAC University says, "Students should not put pressure on themselves by working if they have the choice of not doing so. Working definitely teaches you a lot of skills, and gives you a sense of responsibility, but many students fall prey to the allure of earning money."

Echoing Tanvir's statement, Mehetaz says, "If someone is working for financial independence, it is important that they keep a hold on their academics, too. Academics is important, and it opens a lot of dimensions for a student. They get to learn about which subjects their interest lies in, and work on that."

Speaking about what faculty members can do to accommodate students who work, Mehetaz adds, "A faculty member will always understand if you can absolutely demonstrate that you are passionate about your work. We have the best interests for students."

However, this hasn't been the experience for all students. Shimin Mushsharat, a former CSE student from NSU, shares,

"Many teachers assume their courses aren't being prioritised if they find out students are working. Teachers often don't consider pushing dates for tests even if they clash with other courses."

Reaching out to faculty members for help often feels difficult for students. Shehrin Kazi, a student at the Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka, made the mistake of not communicating her work pressure. "I never let any of my teachers know the problems I

told me about his issues on the last day. I did all I could to help him, but by then it was too late."

She does have some advice working students, "Start balancing work and study from the beginning of the semester rather than cramming at the very last moment. Students should communicate with their respective faculties and department beforehand rather than at the last minute. Finally, take less credits which will ensure reduced stress."

Employers too can play a crucial role in making sure working students get to strike a healthy balance between these two facets of their life. Providing flexible work hours, and discussing the scope of responsibilities beforehand to make sure the pressure doesn't break the student are among some of the most basic things in this regard.

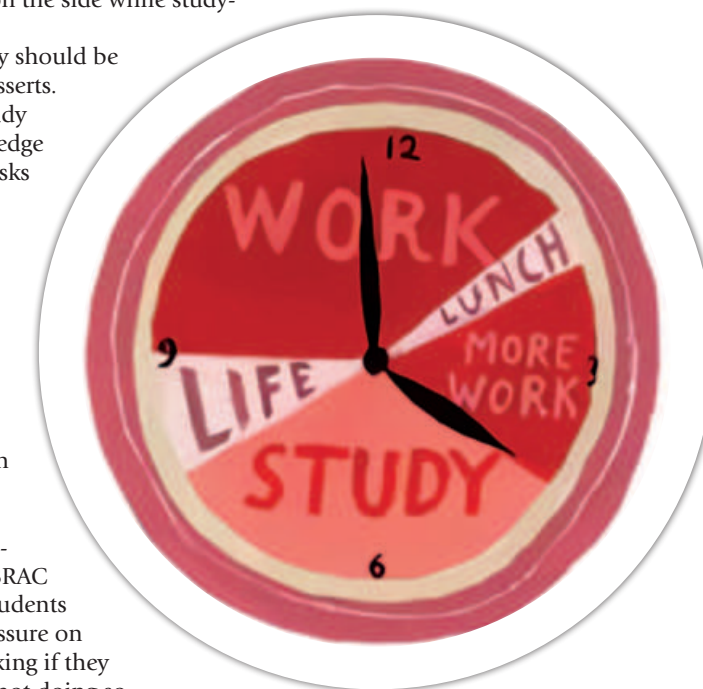
Samaha Tahsin, CEO and co-founder of Bonton Connect has experience being on both ends of this situation, having launched her start-up during her undergraduate years and now having students working for her company. Talking about hiring students, Samaha says, "Even though academics is very important, a lot of the time it is up to how skilful the student is at their job."

"The biggest challenge of dealing with part-timers who are key factors in full-scale operations is that the span of control they have on their own routine is very little," explains Ashraful Haque Emu, Deputy Manager at 10 Minute School.

"These are highly ambitious and passionate students who already want a part of the big changes. We have to be very considerate towards their academics while keeping the operations intact. As most of our operations can be run online, we have a lenient schedule to figure out the free time and work accordingly. As long as the deliverables are arriving on time, we don't need any hard and fast office hours to maintain integrity," Emu says.

It takes as much understanding on the part of employers and faculty members to accommodate working students, as it takes excellent planning and work ethic by the students to make this situation work.

Regardless, when societal expectations and personal needs give no option but to take on the challenge of juggling both roles, communicating actively with everyone around seems like the best route to take on this journey.



From lofty aspirations to bored indifference

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

Some of us were assigned the “doctors” or “engineers” labels at birth, while others had some freedom in picking their own poisons. Nevertheless, it is understood that most of us had high ambitions when we were kids.

I dreamed of becoming a chemist at some point. There was something fascinating about the cartoonish image of a messy-haired, lab coat-wearing scientist who made colourful chemicals explode comically. Unfortunately, it turns out that chemistry is not for me.

The fact of the matter is, as children we know next to nothing about how the world works. Yes, some people pick a goal at age 10 and somehow stick with it, but let’s be real, many of us have never envisioned that we’d be where we are now.

Growing older, our vision of what we’re going to be can change, multiple times at that.

Maybe you were told you could be anything you wanted to be when you were a child, but now all of a sudden “Fine Arts” won’t pay well, and you’re not allowed to study that. So, you think whether Maths or Biology is more abhorrent to you and find yourself in an oversaturated field that has a high chance of leaving you unemployed after graduation. Either way, you probably hate your field and, by extension, yourself.

At some point, you find your dream university changing until it just becomes one you can realistically get into. Perhaps at one point the concept of a “dream university” has faded away until it’s nothing but a fever dream.

You watch your grades decline until you’re toeing on dangerous territory. Your exam preparation has gone from revising twice to “God, please help me pass and I’ll straighten up next semester.”

Somehow, you make it through. Next semester around though, your exam strategy is, once again, praying or crying.

You tell yourself that you’re not the most ambitious person around, knowing that it’s only a feeble attempt at trying to console yourself.

The grand ambitions that once made you feel like you could conquer the world are nowhere to be found. That’s fine though because you only care about it once every couple of years.

At the end of the day, however, we’re not just defined by our achievements. We’re humans, and we have much to offer the world than tired minds and broken dreams. But we’ll get to that after the exam season ends.

Zabin Tazrin Nashita is trying her best to gain the affection of the cats on her campus. Help her win them over at fb.com/zabintazrin.nashita



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

In defence of, uhmm, filler words



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

RAYA MEHNAZ

“So, like, I asked him, you know, to pass me the water bottle,” you overhear a voice say.

“But Sarah, he was just, like, so rude to me,” the person’s friend jumps in.

Subconsciously or not, you feel yourself judging the speakers. You can’t help but consider them, who were so easy with the “likes” or “you knows” in a conversation, just a tad bit undignified.

Growing up, between scribbling essays about the “importance of learning English” and learning concepts from English for Today, we somehow internalised the belief that fluency in English equates to actual proficiency in the language. In that internal dialogue, there was rarely any excuse for the use of filler words.

In English, filler words are the sounds we use in between words such as “uhmm”, “like”, “you know,” which individually might not be meaningless, but in the sentence’s context usually is. Ultimately, filler words, alternatively known as crutch words, are words we use in conversations in place of a pause. The likes of these words are also used to stress or de-stress the meaning of the sentence.

Despite its harmless use in our everyday vernacular, people have an unnatural hatred for these words. After all, there is no chapter on filler words in Chowdhury & Hossain’s Advanced Learner’s Communicative English, is there?

As we are venturing out into the world, we are experiencing English in new avenues. The medium of our social interactions often largely happens in

English. From apps we use to job interviews to public speaking, there has been a greater emphasis in our society on proficiency in English.

In this greater push for linguistic efficiency, filler words are deemed almost unseemly in what we perceive to be a professional language. In that perception, using filler words could essentially ruin our legitimacy as a proper English speaker.

However, this is where our tendency to revert to Western rhetoric about English proficiency comes to play. Not to discredit English and its many varying applications in our lives, but the fact remains – the outcry that we face when we cannot use English in its proper fluency is something that needs to be looked into thoroughly.

It needs to be understood if this disdain is coming from a genuine desire to excel at a language or is it coming from some sort of cultural guilt that has been conditioned into us every time we fumble over English?

Euphonious they may not be, but filler words are not incomprehensible. Adding a few “likes” here and a few “uhmms” there should not discredit a speaker entirely. Nor should it be undignified to use it in academic settings or presentations, despite many warnings in the contrary.

In a way, aren’t we all trying to unlearn years of conditioning that “English makes us sound smart,”? So why not start believing in the idea that filler words are not our enemy?

Find Raya at fb.com/raya.mehnaz

FABLE FACTORY

Will You Be?

ZAHEEN TASFIA ZUHAIR

My town is in ruins,
 Can't believe I was born here.
 The neighbouring city in shreds,
 Can't believe I once wanted to go there

On the dirt lay the corpses,
 Forever frozen in fear.
 No one can think straight,
 A river of blood and tears.

The grown-ups have gathered,
 "We must fight or it's too late."
 It tore me to see you go once,
 Don't think I can do it again.

Will you be okay? I don't know.
 But I can't bear to watch you go.

What's in the other end? Only god knows,
 But I can't bear to watch you go.

Can't sleep, the howls at night,
 Howls of mothers with nothing to lose
 "The fear haunts me all the time..."
 When will they begin to shoot?

"I'd rather die than live this way!"
 "I'd do anything to keep you safe."
 You're a soldier in every way,
 I wish I was more like you.

Will you be ok? Give me false hope.
 No, I can't bear to watch you go.
 I'm on my knees, please don't leave.
 You turn away. Ignore my pleas.
 Will we meet again? I don't know. It tears
 me to see you go.



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

SYMBIOSIS

UPOMA AZIZ

"Are you still there?" I ask.
 "I'm here," I hear a voice that's my
 own.

I mean, it does sound like my own
 voice but, after what would be called aeons
 in units of time in the ancient worlds –
 aeons, of hearing nothing but my voice
 and the other, the two seem to converge
 and diverge at the same time.

I know them. I think I do, as well as
 one entity could know itself, or the other,
 when they have been together for millen-
 nia. I'm not as old as time, but I remem-
 ber the parts of it I've been around for. I
 remember seeing them and so I reckoned
 they came before me. But they said they
 saw me when they came into existence,
 so it must have been like looking into a
 mirror, in a sense. Maybe it was a mirror,
 after all. We just possessed the ability to
 skip through at will.

It's been another few millennia – an
 obsolete term in a place where time does
 not exist, but I say it ironically, that I
 have gazed at something. The senses I
 was used to using are disabled now, my
 emotions and thoughts are much height-
 ened, and there are things I can feel and
 do but I can't really explain. I can't see,
 touch, taste, or smell anymore. I suspect
 I have been stripped of the rights to do
 so because I am now deemed to be above
 such mundane needs.

I do miss being human.

I miss posing as a human.

Human lives are short, to say the least.
 Eventful, but short, like a fever dream,
 that starts and ends with a jolt – you'd
 be feeling that you're falling through
 nothingness and wake up to find yourself
 completely fine. And a lifetime happens



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

to have passed within.

Many fever dreams ago, I saw them,
 and they never left my side. They were
 there for me, they were there with me,
 and at some point, they were me.

I charged into battle with them, side
 by side, spears in our hands and our
 horses in our reins, our blood ebbing in

our veins and calling for bloodshed for
 each drop of blood shed from our kin.

I walked the grounds with them, as
 brothers do, with weights on our shoul-
 ders, the plough swimming through
 the lumps of dark flesh of mother Gaia,
 preparing the grounds for the soft green
 shoots that would yield bountiful crops

in months' time.

I stood the ground with them, like a
 sister would, hand in hand and our chil-
 dren strapped to our backs, long sharp
 weapons dangling by our hips and the
 nails of our bare feet bleeding into the
 grounds that could only be as stony as
 our faces – we would not give our lands
 up without a war.

I cried into their chest as they held me
 close, and kept me warm, clean and well-
 fed, being nestled away against them was
 the safest feeling in the world.

I clutched them as firmly as one could
 hold a blossomed magnolia and cow-
 ered under rubbles, the ominous sound
 of monotonous buzz of bomber planes
 approaching sounded overhead.

I felt their gaze on me as I held their
 hand and vowed to be next to each other,
 in life, and beyond, as lovers.

I lived a million different lives with
 them, as different people with different
 names, and in these fragments of the
 mirror we came from, we were the only
 constants in the facets of reality reflected
 in the shards.

And in the never ending pit of watery
 nothingness, I had them with me. If
 they were but a variation of me, or a
 creation of my imagination, or if I was
 born of their thoughts, it didn't matter
 to me. They are here and so am I, and
 this is my reality.

"Are you there?" a faint voice calls out
 from somewhere to my left.

"I'm here." I assure them.

*Upoma Aziz is a slouching, crouching,
 grouchy Goblin with a hoarding problem.
 Tell her to declutter her desk and her mind
 at upoma.aziz@gmail.com*

What is freedom to you?

AYRA AREEBA ABID

The fight for emancipation of Bangladesh commenced on the 26th of March, 1971, which has shaped the future generations of our country.

As human beings, we seek freedom and refuse to be shackled by any barriers. However, its definition differs from one person to another. After talking to people from different ages, genders and backgrounds, I was able to get insight into the perspectives people around me have towards freedom, and life.

"The human mind is very diverse. One wants to be independent as well as submissive. We want to be subject to the Creator, subject to loved ones, or subject to the laws of the land. Whatever I do, I want to make sure I love doing that. But it is up to me to decide who and what I will love. This is freedom for me," says Shadma Akter, 53.

To Afra Anika Nawar Khan, 21, a student of English Literature, "Freedom is synonymous to breathing. Every time I feel caged in, I find solace through reading, and that ability alone makes me believe that perhaps freedom is being allowed to do what you love!"

Tamjidul Hoque, 22, a second-year LLB student, says, "It's basically whatever you do, you do on your own authority. There's always ups and downs in life but for a true free person, those ups and downs are a result of their actions or decisions. I also want to add that this is not similar to doing 'whatever' you want all the time."

Anika Bushra, 28, who currently works

at a bank, expresses, "Freedom for me is the liberty to choose, but with a rational viewpoint. It should be rational but never to cross unnecessary boundaries just to prove any point."

On the other hand, Syeda Erum Noor, 23, a final-year BBA student, sees the world in a more liberal manner, in a different light. "A sense of control over your own life. Being untethered and having the right to make decisions without worrying about who it will influence or affect. Being able to make one's own decisions about only one person's opinion and feelings – one's own. Choosing things based on what makes one happy and shaping one's life with only that regard. Being able to set your own standards, your own values, and your own metric system for life and all things in it," she shares.

When we are born, we are essentially only human beings. But as we grow up, we are chained by the common law and social construction. Many people do not get the authority to choose and speak for themselves.

Hameem Zaman, 19, an A Level student, expresses the need for being true to oneself and finding one's own "style" rather than following "trends". "Being myself without others judging me is 'freedom'. It is gaining others' trust of who I am rather than gaining their trust by fitting into a mould," she says.

Sharing similar views, Raya Mehnaz, 21, a third-year international relations student, says, "It's when you can self-express in a

completely uninhibited way. I have always felt a sense of constraint following my every move, whether it is how I dress or what I write. Some of them are shaped by societal norms and some are personal. Freedom for me would be to know that I can actively rebel against these shackles around my wrist and come out the other side without any personal ramifications."

Tanzim Noor Tanmoy, 21, a student at Islamic University of Technology, defines financial freedom. He explains, "As a person coming from a background where money was sometimes very tight, my viewpoint has been shaped by the idea that money can solve a lot, if not all of my problems that restrict my freedom to have options and make choices in life. Whether or not this will bring me true contentment or will only leave me with artificial or materialistic happiness is something I'm holding off on considering, until after I am that financially independent."

"Freedom is love. The right to love, the right to live as you like without harming anyone. It's a beautiful thing we are deprived of. The right to express ourselves is freedom," says Shammon Nahar Parapar, 27, an architect.

However, freedom is a luxury which many people cannot afford. When asked about freedom to the helping hands at our home, their response was not instantaneous. At first, they seemed baffled as they expressed that they had never thought about it. It took them a while to think, unlike others I had interviewed.

This really helped me to be a better listener and empath and understand everyone's outlook on life.

Asiya, who is 15, did not really know what to say about individual freedom. Suraiya apu, 30, works at our home; she got married as a teenager. She says, "I didn't get to experience any freedom when I was forced to marry underage. I used to cry a lot initially. We had to move a lot because I couldn't adjust anywhere. I found freedom in Dhaka when we moved here, when my youngest son was around 18 months old. This job enables me to forget the tension I have at home, but only momentarily. Now that I am financially independent, although I don't earn much, I'm glad that I can support my three kids."

She adds in a plaintive tone, "I feel bad when my eldest son, who's now 16, is reluctant to study after the pandemic happened and everything went astray."

What do you mean by freedom? What is freedom to you? Is it an illusion or a reality? It really depends on our outlook on life and how life moulds us into individual human beings.

In the beautiful words of Maya Angelou, "The caged bird sings with a fearful trill, of things unknown, but longed for still, and his tune is heard on the distant hill, for the caged bird sings of freedom."

Ayra Areeba Abid's favourite word is 'serendipity' and she likes to speak against any form of discrimination. Connect with her at areeba.ayra@gmail.com



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA