



WHY I AM PROUD OF
THE PADMA BRIDGE

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YOU SHOULD BE WORRIED
ABOUT SURVEILLANCE
CAPITALISM

PG 4



BACK TO THE WALL

HOW I LIVE WITH BACK PAIN

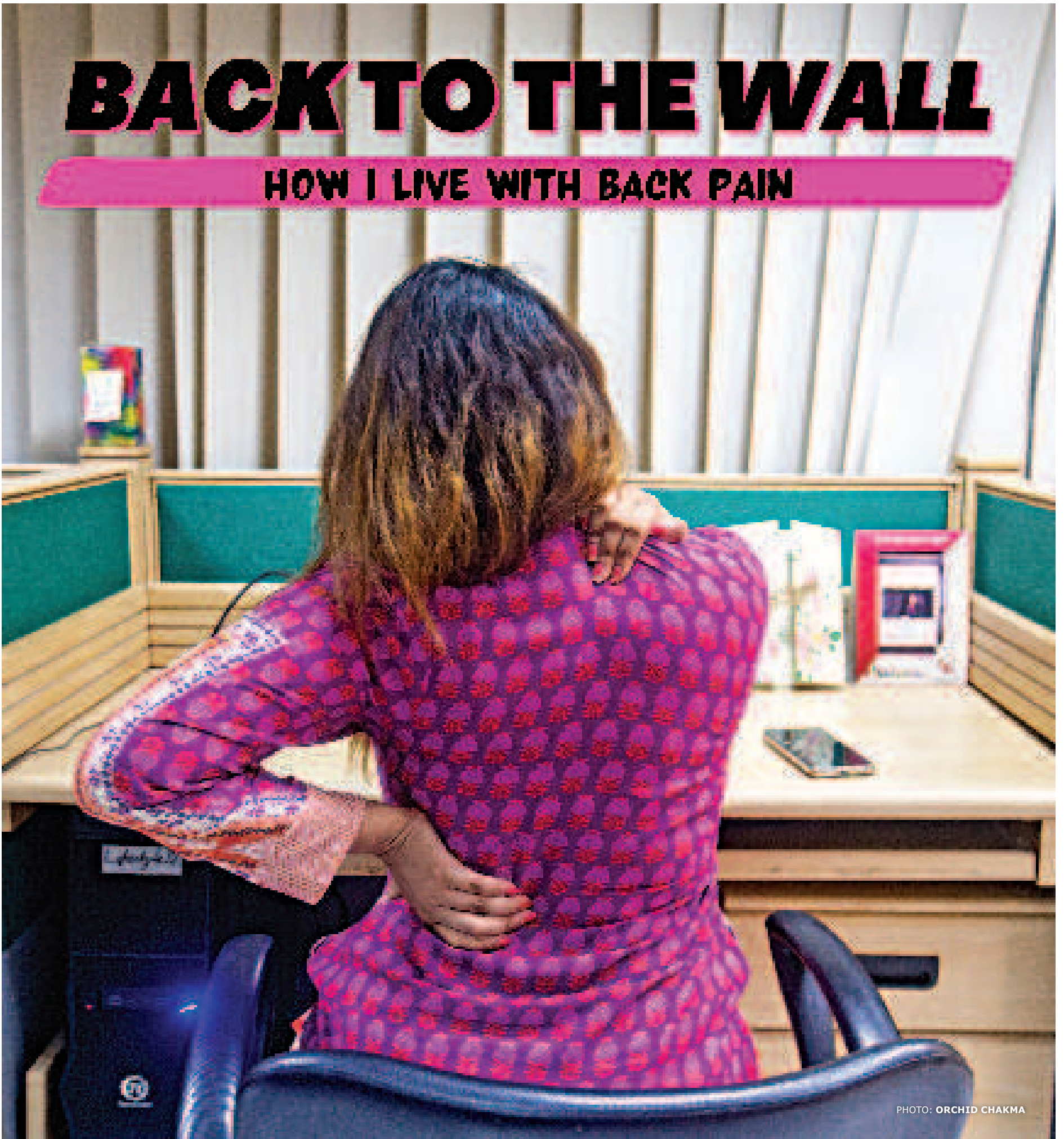


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

EDITORIAL

I've had to make countless adjustments to the way I go about my day thanks to my back pain. No high heels, no slouching, no watching TV from the living room couch, because there is no position of sitting on a sofa for more than 30 minutes that won't cost me dearly.

It's beyond sad that I'm not the only 20 something I know for whom sitting in traffic and then days at work/ class adds up to sleepless nights. This tragedy is unfortunately common.

On an entirely different note, I am perhaps singing off on a SHOUT issue for the very last time. SHOUT is a special place, and I have learnt so much and grown with week's issue over the past several years.

I grew up eagerly waiting for Thursdays and pouring over each issue trying to find the funniest article. I wish to see good things on SHOUT 10 years from now too. I'm truly fortunate to have been a part of SHOUT's journey.

-- Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

MOVIE



Spiderhead

Another mediocre attempt from Netflix

ABHOY HRIDDO

With nothing to do in my summer vacation, I started scrolling through Netflix to see if they had anything new in store. I saw the mediocre collection of shows with *Stranger Things* on their most viewed page and a new movie, starring Chris Hemsworth and Miles Teller.

I tried giving this movie, *Spiderhead*, a watch and I have concluded that Netflix is desperately trying to crawl out of the grave they created and just putting money on literally anything that may make them relevant.

Spiderhead follows a group of prisoners at a testing facility controlled by a charismatic scientist named Steve Abnesti, played by Hemsworth. We follow Jeff, a prisoner in the facility, played by Teller, who wants redemption for the crimes he committed. Jeff and the other prisoners are subjected to multiple drug tests and are tasked to "make the world a better place" via these experiments.

This movie was mediocre at best, with too many overused tropes. Midway into the story, things were getting kind of repetitive and falling flat as the subjected prisoners were just asked to test the same drugs. The drugs, although colourful, didn't really show any out of the ordinary effect. However, with the acting from Miles and Chris, the movie could progress in a steady pace. I would also like to add that this movie had great soundtrack which made every scene's atmosphere enjoyable.

Apart from the mediocrity, the film also had many unrealistic tropes. The prisoners stay in an unbelievably gor-

geous building with almost everything handed to them in a silver platter. Each of them resides in a large room, enjoys delicious cuisine, and has access to arcades and fitness centres. This really strays the fact that they are criminals and have done horrible crimes and reduces the depth this movie is trying really hard to provide.

Finally, the worst part about this movie is that it could have been something much more enriching. The ideas were, dare I say, kind of brilliant but the movie tried to stay as scripted as possible. Nothing felt real or thought-provoking.

Characters make weird decisions and some characters we do not even get to know properly become something else, via a motivational talk. It felt like the movie was setting up this messed up and twisted ending but just boils down to a badly choreographed action scene and a generic villain death.

However, I would like to mention that I do not dislike this film. But I don't like it that well either. The film was just painfully average and I wanted more from a filmmaker as talented as Joseph Kosinski, who helmed *Top Gun: Maverick* and *Tron*. Netflix can't really greenlight any good media for the past few months and instead resort to quantity over quality.

Spiderhead is just one of the few examples of this with many more to come. With this steady stream of content, Netflix may just keep on losing viewers and add that last nail to their coffin.

Abhoy Hriddo just scrolls Instagram all day waiting for the next update on The Boys. Send him your thoughts at abhoyhriddo@gmail.com

TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE



A	B
ALAG AASMAAN Anuv Jain	Movement Hozier
Welcome To My World Jim Reeves	I Appear Missing Queens of the Stone Age
Hopelessness Courtney Barnett	Freaks Surf Curse
SLOW DANCING IN THE DARK Joji	this body means nothing to me shrimp

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

Why we need menstrual leaves at work

SHIMIN MUSHSHARAT

The Spanish cabinet recently passed a bill which will give people who menstruate the option to take days off from work during their periods. Some companies abroad also allow employees the chance to work remotely during periods.

The level of distress that is felt during periods varies from person to person. Symptoms can include both physical pain and mental health issues. Some women experience intense cramps, dizziness, bloating, exhaustion and more. Mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety can spike during periods too. Other problems include, but are not limited to, having difficulty concentrating, irritability, and mood swings.

It is difficult for a lot of women to function in their day-to-day lives during periods, let alone invest their mental and physical labour into the workplace. Apart from the women who have serious medical conditions, the best way to cope with menstrual discomfort is to rest. Working through the pain affects both their health and productivity.

There is not a lot of period awareness in Bangladesh. It has been, and still is, a taboo topic here. Personally, I had no knowledge of what periods are prior to having them. Paid leaves are also quite scarce here. A lot of workplaces are stringent about offering them. Both of these together make paid menstrual leaves a difficult conversation in the context of Bangladesh.

However, the good news is that slowly some voices have started to come through. Chaalchitra, a café in Dhaka, recently posted a job opening offering menstrual leave among the job's bene-

fits, which is commendable.

In the global scenario, only a handful of countries offer menstrual leaves at present, namely Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Zambia. Spain will be the first European country to provide menstrual leave if the bill passes through their parliament.

Critics of the idea however think that it will hinder gender equality in the workplace, since people who menstruate will be treated differently than others.

The crucial point here is that the menstrual leave policy establishes "equity" among workers. The leave will be offered to those who need it. People who menstruate feel physical and emotional distress that is unique to them. Their disposition is different from those who do not get periods. So, it only makes sense that these people are accommodated.

Those who receive menstrual leaves are more likely to work better for it, according to studies. When employees get enough time to heal, it ensures that the quality of their work is not compromised.

This policy creates an environment where women feel respected and valued. It is past time workplaces started to recognise this issue.

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2. BBC (April 29, 2022). *Could 'menstrual leave' change the workplace?*
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Shimin reads everything she can find, talks to cats, and writes a lot of letters. Send her a book at shim.mush@gmail.com



PHOTO: STAR

Why I am proud of the Padma Bridge

HRISHIK ROY

Growing up as someone who had his roots on the other side of the Padma, I was often scared of going to my hometown because we had to cross the river on our way. The path across the Padma river was not only hazardous because of the swift currents, but was also lengthy and stressful as it required one to be crammed inside a tiny launch for over an hour just to cross the river.

This was the simple reason eight-year-old me hated going to my hometown: the long and arduous journey across the river. Every time I would complain about how I was scared to cross the river and how tiring the journey to our hometown was, my uncle and aunts would console me that one day there would be a bridge across the Padma river and then we could come across the river within less than 20 minutes.

Throughout the past, I have made my fair share of jokes and memes about the Padma Bridge; I have often criticised the corruption involved in the project. Now that the country has finally achieved the seemingly impossible feat of building the mighty Padma bridge, it is important that we finally acknowledge and appreciate what the bridge would mean for people in the southern and south-western parts of the country.

I have grown up hearing from my father about how my grandmother would have to wake up at five in the morning and walk about 12 miles from our village to the launch terminal when returning back to Dhaka, when she was young. In case she had missed the launch, she would have to walk back another 12 miles and return to our village because that was the only launch which was available during the entire day.

When I called my extended family living in my hometown at Shariatpur after the inauguration of the bridge, my uncle told me how he had seen two of his friends suffer because of the lack of a bridge across the river. One of them had seen their father dying inside an ambulance while waiting for a ferry, and his other friend had missed his flight abroad as there was no ferry to take him to the other side.

According to my uncle, now that the bridge has been built, no one has to face such miserable fates ever again. I was also told by one of our relatives who is suffering from skin issues about how he could easily come to Dhaka now for his doctor's appointment, and return back on the very same day.

While we all have heard about the macro level benefits of the bridge, such as how it will result in the growth of the country's economy and allow better trade and connectivity between the country's south and other regions, the bridge remains more than just an infrastructure to people like me. It is a symbol of hope and resilience for the people on the other side of the Padma river, after decades of struggles against the adversaries of not being connected with the rest of the country.

This bridge is not just a series of spans with driving lanes on the top, it represents the bundles of emotions coupled with the silent sacrifices of thousands of people!

Hrishik would like to dedicate this article to the average citizens of the country, especially those from the other side of the Padma river, as their funding and effort is what made the bridge possible. Reach out to him at hrdibbo@gmail.com

Is body neutrality our way out of unattainable beauty standards?

FABIHA AFIFA

When I had my first pimple in fourth grade, I was devastated. I would check rush to the mirror every 15 minutes, hoping the pimple would be gone and go to bed with a pea-sized dollop of toothpaste on the zit every night. (Please don't do this to your skin.) Over time, my attitude towards my skin changed. Initially for the worse, and then for the better.

At first, I was sucked into the movement of radical body positivity that told me everything about me was absolutely divine and it would be a pathetic waste of my life if I did not have a crush on me. However, I found it stressful to fall in love with myself. I would be in my head constantly, reminding myself to see some abstract beauty in all my human imperfections.

I do not recall how I grew out of it but I did. I no longer feel the need to cringe at myself, nor do I force myself to be my own muse. I only make sure I'm eating well, getting enough sleep, not stressing too much and drinking enough water. Not so that my pimples vanish, but more so I know my lifestyle is healthy.

Recently, I have learnt that my new-found acceptance of my appearance as it is, without any forced appreciation, has a name— body neutrality. The term was originally coined by body image coach Anna Poirier in 2015 to help her clients have healthier, more practical relationships with food and exercise.

Poirier's belief was that the concept of body positivity can be too big of a jump for some people. Not everyone can transform their frustration with their cellulite or rosacea into seamless confidence and self-love overnight or even over years, regardless of how natural or common they are.

Simply accepting the body for what it is and being grateful for all its functions, on the other hand, are attitudes people can adapt to more easily. They also help people become healthier more holistically— physically, mentally and emotionally. After all, one will be more mindful of their health when they work out for strength or health instead of their goal to achieve the perfect summer body.

Similarly, thanking the body for all the wonders it does for us every day will make one appreciate their bodies more and make them feel more comfortable in it.

Beauty can still be on one's list of desirable traits for themselves and in no way does body neutrality deny that. All it simply asks is to not prioritise beauty over everything and to move towards self-love at a more realistic, organic pace instead of shoving forced affirmations down one's throat day and night.

If one happens to see beauty in all their flaws, great. But if one does not, they can aim to see the beauty in the functionality of their body before moving on to its appearance. After all, like most things in life, it is what is on the inside that counts the most.



DESIGN: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

You should be worried about surveillance capitalism

AYAAN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE

Earlier this week, a friend of mine was bragging about his optimised Facebook feed. He claimed he gamed the system by watching videos of burgers and fries on YouTube, which led to him getting all sorts of promotions and discounts of fast food joints on his feed.

What my friend unsuspectingly took as personal gain, is actually hard proof that he, along with billions of active social media users, are victims of surveillance capitalism.

In essence, surveillance capitalism is a process that relies on the constant gathering of online data by tech companies. The data that is generated is the byproduct of our everyday web browsing, app usage, and digital consumption — the videos we watch, the memes we react to, and the news that we consume. This allows companies to make personalised predictions about who we are, the things we want, and the things we're likely to do.

However, this isn't all, since gathering and selling information is only the tip of the iceberg. Through subliminal cues and triggers, tech companies have learnt to "modify our behaviour in the direction of their preferred commercial outcomes". This subliminal coercion and herding is why my friend sees ads for fast food joints.

So why should this be a cause of concern when the convenience this provides for us seems to outweigh the cons at an



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

initial glance? The reasons are manifold.

Firstly, the business model of surveillance capitalism wholly undermines personal privacy. Google, Facebook, Amazon, and other tech companies claim human experience and data as raw material to feed into their systems and gain profit from.

While these companies claim to take a user's consent before collecting their data, the truth is far from it. More often than not, there isn't really much of a choice involved with giving platforms access to your personal data.

Secondly, in the process of modifying

our behaviour, our free will is impeded to a large extent. The future that we project ourselves into is no longer a meaningful result of the present, but rather a programmed outcome of hindering our critical thinking and moral judgement.

It is also important to note that even though surveillance capitalists know everything about us, we know little to nothing about their incursions. The extent of knowledge they have on our behaviour and preferences extend far beyond the scope of the information we consented to give them.

However, truth be told, there isn't a single, universally applicable solution that can ensure our privacy on the internet. So, the next time you find sneakers on your feed after a trip to the sports shop, do take it with a grain of salt.

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Remind Ayaan that he should be studying for his SSC examination at ayaan.shams@gmail.com

Back to the wall

How I live with back pain

MAISHA SYEDA

My constant state of pain comes from an injury I had some six-odd years ago when I slipped and fell – from the steps of my yoga class – and landed square on my bottom. The shock that my spine suffered at that moment resulted in two slipped discs: one cervical and one lumbar.

The consequence was a complete 180-degree turn-around of my lifestyle choices, my moods, how I interact in relationships, the way I henceforth sat, stood, slept, when or what I ate... basically my entire life.

And even though my case was somewhat unusual, young people these days, from teenagers to adolescents, all seem to be suffering from severe back issues for far less – like habits and lifestyle choices. It wasn't only because of the heavy bags we carried to school for years and years, but that seems to be one of the earliest contributing factors.

Tanvir Rahman, whose back pain isn't as recurrent, says the pain mostly appears when stuck for two hours in the backseat of a car with two other people on his way home from work.

"I've had a long day already and it's a long way back home, with very little room to move inside the car; it is cramped and uncomfortable," Tanvir says. "And then my pain hits."

Doctors suggest that age, stress, development of various degenerative diseases of the spine (like osteoporosis, fibromyalgia, and arthritis, among others) that occur over time are some of the leading medical causes of back pain. These can occur due to age, natural and/or genetic causes, among others. Lifestyle choices, like lack of exercise, gaining excess weight, and smoking can also lead to various back problems.

However, for Mir Zunayed Hossain, a customer sales representative, there is no "identifiable" reason why his pain may act up.

"It's usually when I have a particularly stressful or busy day at work," says Zunayed, adding that he usually goes on carrying on with work when it's still tolerable. "I may take a day off if the pain is too severe, but mostly I can't because it doesn't seem like that big a deal," he asserts. "Who doesn't have back problems these days?"

Practicing physiotherapist at United Hospital, Dr. Md. Tanvir Alam, notes, "I have found throughout my career that the cause of back pain among young people mostly is postural alignment."

He reasons, "These days we spend most of the time with gadgets like mobile phones, computers, laptops, gaming consoles, etc. Moreover, we do not engage in exercises or outdoor sports anymore due to the lack of time in our hands."

"It is because of physical inactivity that our musculoskeletal structure is becoming vulnerable day by day," Dr. Alam explains.

And that is the irony: our bodies – the structure of our spines – are devolving to one similar to the Hominids', or cave people, because of technological advancement. Growing up, we fell into these unhealthy habits because it was demanded of us from our tech-savvy, easy, social practices resulting in a sedentary lifestyle. We keep working at our desks, hunched over, because most of our jobs are desk jobs and there aren't too many options for physical exercise.

Lifestyle-induced backpain is now such a systemic problem that even if wanted to change it, we wouldn't know where to begin or how to keep up.

But while back pain seems merely like an occasional inconvenience to some, others suffer far more and severely. Studies have found that even sitting down for too long

or gaining a little bit of weight can cause disc herniations.

Senior analyst Fairouz Rahman, who has to sit working long hours at desk, complains of chronic pain impacting her moods and relationships. She said her back usually acts up when she's had a lot to do in the office.

"Which is almost always," she mentions. "That means I haven't had the time to take a break or even leave my desk, and the lack of movement or stretching causes a sharp, ceaseless pain that shoots up and down my spine". When asked if and how it affects them in their personal lives, she said it makes them irritable and short tempered.

"Suddenly, even the smallest thing triggers me, and I end up picking a fight with my husband and become passive-aggressive with my in-laws," Fairouz tell me.

"There's nothing I can do though. I have a desk job,

on a chair with good lower back support.

"Good posture can reduce the stress on back muscles," he added.

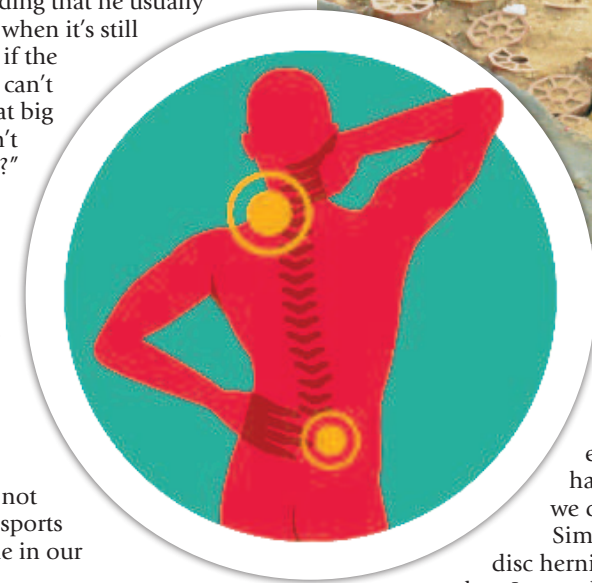
With all due respect, and at the risk of contradicting myself, is maintaining this ongoing list of challenging (read: unrealistic for us non-super humans) "tasks" always attainable?

Our "bad" posture is the consequence of our lifestyles. Such lifestyles of ours, in turn, is the consequence of the system, the social practices, the norms, and the lack of attainable options on the contrary. Because we can't make a lifestyle out of being an active Olympic runner in this country. And doctors and medical treatment are expensive – and not sustainable.

Abir Haque, 24, a private university student who also works as a copywriter, demands there be massage facilities



PHOTO: KK NAYAN



it requires me to stay seated at my desk for hours at a stretch. Most people in this country have desk jobs, so it makes sense that almost everyone in our generation will have back problems. It's not like we can just quit," she adds.

Similar to her, the pain from my disc herniation became prominent

when I started teaching at a school, at least two years after I suffered the injury, surprisingly. The doctor I went to at the time mentioned that the "minor" injury was aggravated due to sitting for long hours and constantly working with my right hand unsupported (I had to check countless copies every day).

However, he couldn't do much because I hadn't completely become bedridden from the pain yet.

But the pain, for me, was still unbearable, and I looked to go to a physiotherapist on my own.

When I first started going to a physio, my doctor mentioned a good practice was to sit on a chair with a hand-rest to support the elbows. Sitting straight in a chair with a back support is also a good idea, and even better, if we can manage to work with a standing desk.

Public health professional Dr. Tareq Salahuddin suggests maintaining a healthy weight as excess weight strains the muscles. He also advised to "avoid movements that strain [the] back" by not slouching, or sitting

ties at every workplace. It makes sense to me, what sane working individual hasn't asked for that at some point in their working life? My colleagues and I wish for one every other day. But that is wishful thinking, obviously.

Even though a number of workplaces house gyms these days, the people do not have enough time to go to that gym. I mean, no one is really stopping us from spending an hour doing stretches and light exercises, but it has somewhat become ingrained in our understanding that our times are better spent finishing the work at hand.

Besides, are there workstations that have the option of standing desks? I've never seen or heard of those here. And most of the time, we work on chairs that are poorly designed, with no ergonomic support, which are already present in the office.

It would take years to change the work culture, the system, these norms and accordingly, our lifestyles. Our backpains are not getting better – permanently, at least – any time soon.

What are we supposed to do then, stop texting, attending to our emails and quit our jobs? As one of my colleagues aptly puts it, "Our backs are suffering from the weight of our responsibilities."

Maisha Syeda is a writer, painter, and a graduate of English Literature and Writing. She is the sub editor of Daily Star Books.

UIU Mars Rover team triumphs at the University Rover Challenge 2022

United International University's Mars Rover team ranks #1 among Asian countries at URC 2022

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

UIU's Mars rover – nicknamed "MAVEN" – ranked 1st among Asian countries and 13th among 36 global finalists at the University Rover Challenge (URC) 2022. The event was organised by the Mars Society, a US-based non-profit organisation that advocates and encourages human and robotic exploration on Mars, and also seeks to establish a permanent human presence on the Red Planet. The three-day world final round of the event took place from June 2-4 at the Mars Desert Research Station (MDRS) in southern Utah.

Before the final round, the UIU Mars Rover team competed with 98 other universities from all around the world to secure a place in the finals. MAVEN achieved an outstanding score of 90.92 out of 100 to be selected as one of the 36 finalists from 10 countries including the USA, Canada, Australia, India, Poland, Columbia, Egypt, Mexico, and Turkey.

In the initial round, the team had to submit a System Acceptance Review (SAR) video to the competition. This video focused on the various capabilities of the rover, and its ability to perform a variety of missions like terrain traversal and delivery, equipment servicing, and autonomous mission. MAVEN also performed a variety of scientific tests where it analysed soil and rock samples to detect the presence of life. The video also went through MAVEN's core electronic and communication systems, as well as its testing and operation capabilities.

In the final round, participating teams had to perform four missions in front of a jury. These included a science exploration mission, autonomous navigation, extreme terrain traversal, and equipment servicing. UIU's Mars rover completed all four missions and



became the most successful team from Asia.

The UIU Mars Rover team consists of student members from the UIU Robotics Club. They come from different disciplines such as computer science, engineering, and business. UIU's CSE department lecturer Akib Zaman is the team director and mentor while Rokib Hasan, a student from UIU's CSE department is the team leader. Former CSE department head of UIU Prof. Hasan Sarwar is the team advisor. Under their supervision, the team is further divided into six sub-teams for various operations.

The journey to the top, however, did not come without hard work, dedication, and sacrifice. And no one knows it better than the team who worked around the clock to help MAVEN reach the top.

"Forming the team was the first major challenge," says team director and mentor Akib. "After that, we had to deal with the fact that the technology that goes into making a rover is not readily available in Bangladesh. We had to work out ways on how we could import it from countries like China and the US."

Building a rover using imported hardware is not an easy feat, especially when you think of it from a financial point of view. However, UIU had it covered.

"Managing the funds for our project as well as the trip was one of our biggest concerns," Akib adds. "Fortunately for us, our Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr Chowdhury Mofizur Rahman took care of it. Thanks to his administrative capabilities, and backing from the United Group, we did not have to stop working on this project, whereas many other teams fell behind and failed to meet expectations because of lack of funds."

Team advisor Prof. Hasan Sarwar adds to this. "At URC, we required a lot of money," he says. "Not just for the rover itself, but to also cover various other costs. UIU bore the entire cost

without hesitation." "UIU wants to become a centre of excellence in Asia," states Prof. Sarwar. "The university wants our students to do so not just by doing better in studies, but by also taking part in extracurricular activities

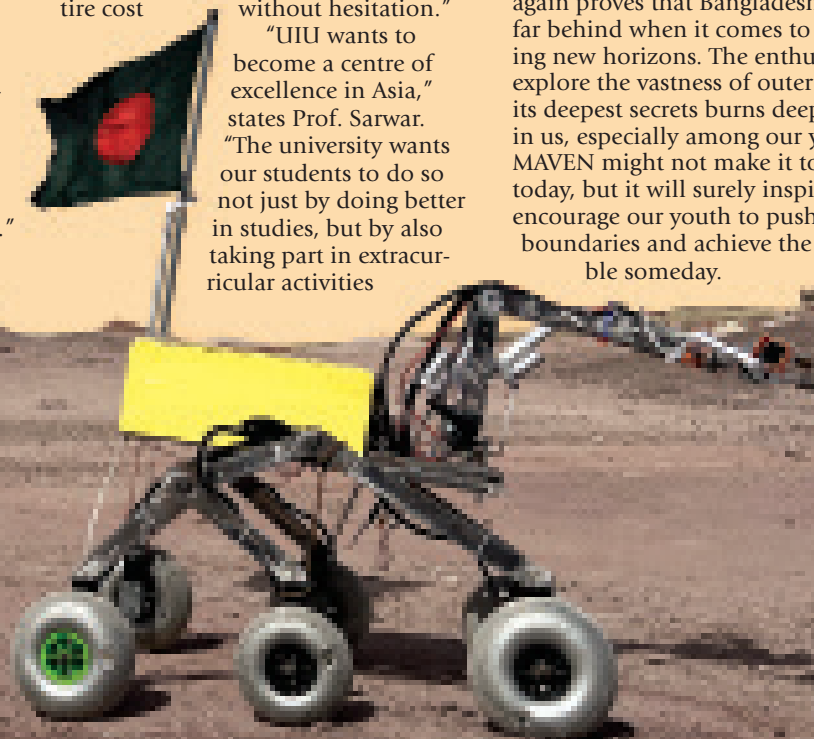
and research. Financial barriers are no problem to UIU, for the university and the United Group are more than willing to fund research and projects."

And it goes to show how dedicated the university, its students and faculty members are when it comes to pushing forward in such avenues, especially with the effort they have put behind the UIU Mars Rover, and what they have achieved with it.

"Robotics and AI are the future of technology, and the developed world is already ahead in this sphere, whereas we are lagging behind," says Prof. Sarwar. "Thus, comes the need to focus more on these areas, especially for those working or studying engineering."

"The fact that we were able to take our country to that stage [in the URC 2022] gives me immense joy and pride," he adds. "There were more experienced teams with better technology. Even then, we were able to outperform them. It goes to show that there is always an opportunity for us to exceed expectations in these competitions, and cement Bangladesh's name in the arena of space exploration."

Prof. Sarwar also believes that the government can play a vital role in presenting Bangladesh as a global leader when it comes to information technology. His belief is that the government will appreciate the efforts of UIU and other universities in this field, and assist them in the journey ahead. The UIU Mars Rover team's success at the URC 2022 once again proves that Bangladesh is not far behind when it comes to conquering new horizons. The enthusiasm to explore the vastness of outer space and its deepest secrets burns deep within us, especially among our youth. MAVEN might not make it to Mars today, but it will surely inspire and encourage our youth to push their boundaries and achieve the impossible someday.



A Room in the Corner

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

"Do you think our souls have a uterus, Nargis?" she whispered.

Why did she whisper? She isn't the whispering kind. Nargis can't remember the last time she heard Rakib Bhai's wife whisper. Sure, she always had a trembling voice, like windows quiver on a stormy night. Only her storm never really stopped. But this time, she whispered. Like she was sharing a grave secret with Nargis, someone she didn't talk to for the past 19 years.

"I don't know, Apa. I haven't really thought about it," Nargis replied hesitantly.

"I don't think they do," she sighed, "Souls are separated from our bodies, right? It doesn't have anatomy, no physical agony. No arthritis, no diabetes, no headaches. And no uterus." She laughed and started coughing, choking on her own blood.

Renu! Her name was Renu, Nargis suddenly remembered. In the five years when they were neighbours, she probably mentioned her name once. It didn't matter though. She was Rakib Bhai's wife to the entire building. Rakib Bhai's wife, who always had a smile on her face, who always helped everyone with whatever they needed. And most importantly, who couldn't give her husband a child.

Over the hundred desolate afternoons, cooped up in that small corner bedroom as Nargis's daughter would sleep, she'd tell Nargis her stories. How she was married off to this insect of a human being in exchange for a job by her father because her skin tone couldn't afford any better. How her insomnia wouldn't let her sleep at night and she'd stare at the moon in silence for hours as her husband would snore like a growling wolf. And how the moon looked the most beautiful when blurry.

She'd stare at Nargis's infant and sigh, "I had one of those, you know? I named her Jasmine. Our house's all empty now but for those seven days, it was like a Bazaar! They'd try to pick her up but she'd cry, for all she wanted was her mother's warmth. She was the only one who wanted me unconditionally. I'd wait for everyone else to leave so that I could be with my Jasmine in those quiet afternoons. Just me and my Jasmine. And then she'd grow up and I'd take her to that kindergarten at the end of the lane. I'd sit outside the entire time she'd be in class – like those mothers do! And my Jasmine and I would walk home and I'd buy her ice cream. Not every day, though. Only on special occasions. I wouldn't wanna spoil her."

Rakib Bhai's daughter was 7 days old when she died. They buried her at Rakib Bhai's village graveyard. His wife started visiting Nargis more frequently after Jasmine's death. When Nargis wasn't home, she'd sit outside the kindergarten at the end of the lane. She'd talk to the other guardians waiting outside, and hear their stories. And just before the bell rang, she'd walk right back home as fast as she could before anyone noticed.

"I shouldn't have listened to him," she blurted out one afternoon, "I was young and didn't know any better. And he kept saying how this was the right decision for our future and that we couldn't afford a child back then."

"What are you talking about, Apa?" Nargis asked in fear.

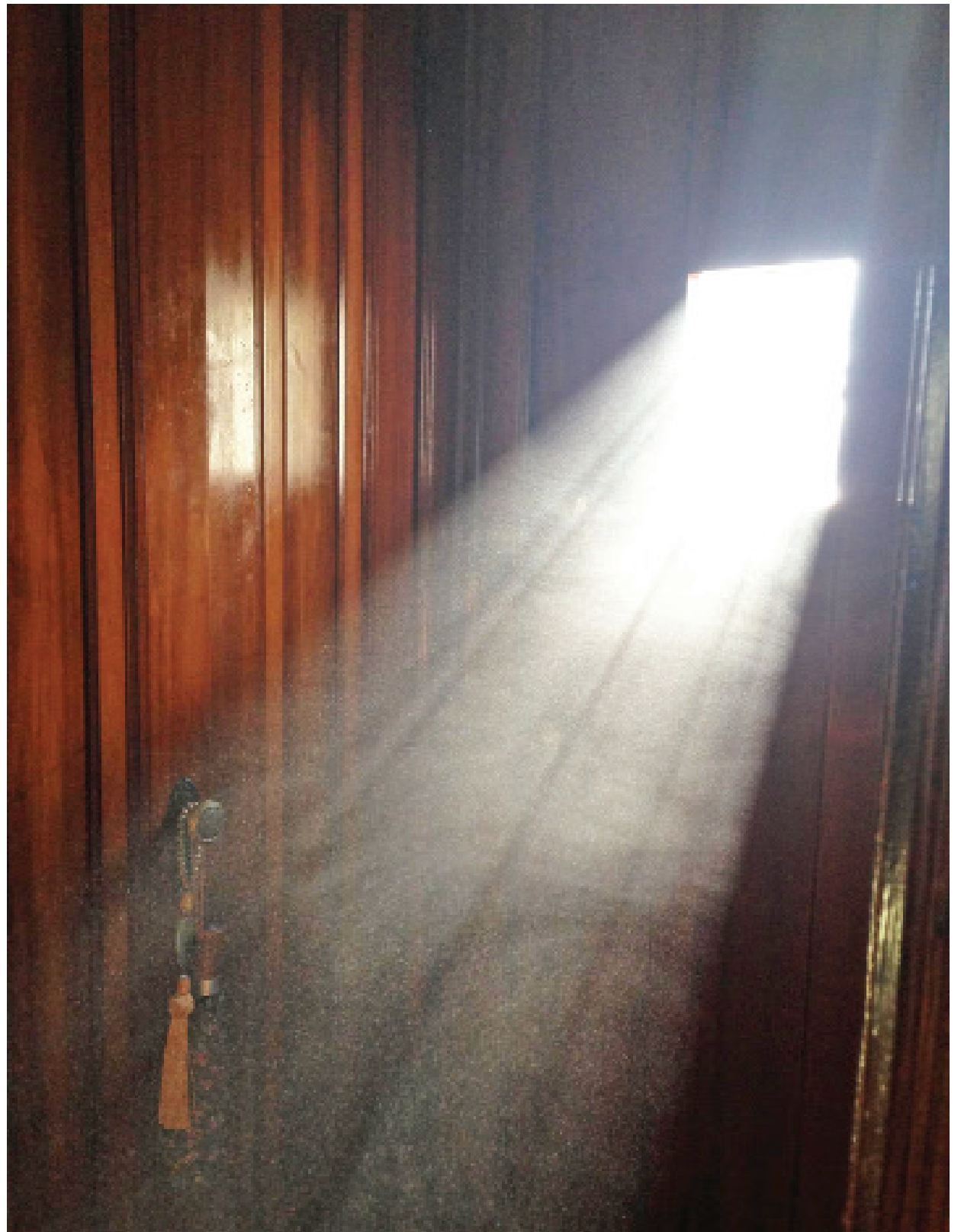
"He made me do it, Nargis!" she cried, holding Nargis's hand in fear and unrest, "he said we were too young and he didn't earn enough to support a child. There was so much... The sheets were soaked in red. I squealed and I cried but not a drop of tear or a hint of sound would come out. I have this... I'm trying so hard, but..."

"You can tell me, Apa," Nargis held her hand tight and came closer.

"I can't scream, Nargis," she said. Her voice cracked, "I have this scream stuck in my throat, trapped inside. I keep trying to scream at the top of my lungs, but it just won't come out. Your brother's a doctor, right? I know this sounds silly, but would you mind asking him?"

Nargis and her husband moved out with their child later that year. Renu didn't contact her anymore, not once in the next 19 years. The next time Nargis heard her voice was on a Thursday afternoon in June 2018.

After Jasmine died, Rakib grew distant realising another child with Renu was unlikely. He got a few rapid promotions, made some money and built a nice little house in



his village. He convinced Renu to live there because his job needed him to move around a lot.

"I was in Faridpur when I heard he'd married again, in secret. He started looking for another wife right after I left Dhaka. Apparently, he told his new wife that he'd been a widow," she laughed over the phone, "I wish I'd died with Jasmine."

Renu shifted to her brother's house later that year. Her brother was the only family she had left. She was allotted a small corner room, similar to the one at Nargis's house. Maybe that's what reminded her of Nargis after all these years – Nargis thought to herself.

Renu brought a steel-plated almirah, her only property, to her brother's house. She bought that with her own money right after she moved to Dhaka with Rakib.

"They don't talk to me, my brother's kids," she sighed, "I can't move without the nurse as well. She comes twice a day, cleans the pan and sweeps the entire room. Takes her

about 8 minutes. I ask her about her family, her children – the same questions again and again. I know she gets a bit annoyed, but I can't really afford having manners at this stage, can I?"

Nargis had guests waiting for her. "Apa, I have to go now," she said quietly.

"Yes, yes," Renu sounded embarrassed, "Listen, before you go, did you ask your brother about that problem I had in my throat? About the scream?"

"I forgot, Apa. I'll try asking him again," Nargis replied hesitantly.

"No, it's okay," she said after a pause, "Will you call me again, Nargis?"

Nargis didn't. Renu died 4 months later, in her sleep. Her brother sold her steel-plated Almirah for 6000 Taka.

Remind Ifti to be quieter at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com

How to cope with a friend's vacation as a broke person

TAASEEN MOHAMMED ISLAM

Do you ever open social media to see your friends eating tapas in Barcelona, swimming in the Maldives, or riding the tram in San Francisco while you sip instant coffee and not a 400-taka brownie mocha? You're not alone.

Travel envy is a leading cause of breaking up friendships, pent up anger, and hostility amongst young people. Here's some tips on handle your emotions the next time you see a friend on an exotic vacation.

WRITE A BACKHANDED COMPLIMENT

There's nothing more satisfying than raining on someone's parade. Unleash your toxic self on them by consistently commenting on what they post. A photo caption with only emojis? Comment on how articulate they are. Did they just post a picture of a delicious seafood feast? Please let them know children in Africa are starving.

If you are feeling bold, DM that their outfit isn't flattering enough to make a grid post on. However, the border between backhanded and malicious can be thin, and I don't take any responsibility if this destroys your friendship.

WATCH A MOVIE

Please remember that we live in the streaming era. A library of countless movies, TV shows, and media exists practically at your fingertips, allowing us to vacation vicariously through Hollywood's eyes.

While your friend sweats bullets in Greek islands, you can watch *Mamma Mia!* from the air-conditioned comfort of your home. Similarly, you can visit almost any major American and European city without suffering from awful weather and spending an arm and a leg on airfare and accommodation.

MAKE (IMAGINARY) PLANS

So what if you can't afford to jet off to Istanbul

at a moment's notice? Making plans costs nothing as long as they aren't implemented. Plan galore, book a first-class flight to Marrakesh, book the room Anna Delvey conned her way into (about BDT 760K per night, by the way), and plan an itinerary around the best Morocco has to offer, from the Atlas Mountains to the lush Majorelle Gardens. Just don't authenticate the payment at the end.

SWITCH YOUR PHONE OFF

As your mother once said, all you do is scroll that phone all day. The endless stream of Cox's Bazar content your friends are mass-manufacturing can only hurt you if you spend all day looking at it. So rather than giving Instagram power over you, switch off your phone. Go out and explore your local area, read a book, and maybe actually study for once.

PLACATE YOURSELF

Reality appears much more skewed on social media, and while the pictures look perfect, it doesn't guarantee that their trip was. After all, thousands of Europeans visit Southeast Asia for a "spiritual" experience and leave with mosquito bites and typhoid. How are you so sure your friend had such an amazing trip?

Turns out Taaseen Mohammed Islam can write semi-decently at the expense of being able to do basic math. Send him pointers at taaseen.2001@gmail.com



satire.

Man faces existential crisis as internet brawls fall to zero

ABIR HOSSAIN

The grass is green on both sides. The birds chirp in unison and there appears to be no traffic jam in Bijoy Sarani. For others, however, hell has spawned right before their eyes. They see the smear of dirt even when they touch the grass. Their cacophony only induces pain.

"And there they were, just agreeing with each other," says Toukir.

A survey conducted by the Department of Hatred over Technology (DHET) revealed a ground-breaking discovery. By surfing through the profiles of Elon Musk fanboys, holocaust deniers, and those who comment "Messi OR Ronaldo" on your posts regardless of what it's about, the researchers caught no sight of disagreement. The phenomenon was thought to be extinct.

Keyboards no longer appear to be the source of mass inconsequential consequences. Instead, they have become the tools to spark Socratic dialogue. People are more interested in others' points of view without immediately deeming them invalid.

"We thought we missed something during research. In the initial stages, the study seemed like a complete waste of time but after accumulating enough data by means that might or might not be classified as a breach of privacy, there was some hope," said the Head of Conflict Specialist at DHET.

Misinformed moral policing, petty fights about sports



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

and even personal attacks on strangers have come to a halt. While the sky appears to be blue on the World Wide Web, it isn't so bright for others.

"I have this hilarious GIF of a man feasting on popcorn, snickering at a monitor. I can't even look at the GIF anymore because everyone managed to invent the correct way to pronounce 'GIF'. Either way, they're all wrong. It's pronounced GIF," he continued.

When inquired about how else he would contribute to a conversation apart from laughing at both sides and

spamming GIFs, Toukir appeared bewildered.

"Contributing? To a conversation? By developing points of my own?" Toukir asked. He almost stumbled upon an important epiphany before losing his train of thought, quickly shaking his head to snap out of it.

Toukir now spends his days reading old comments, pondering about the misery of life and what it means, and occasionally disagreeing with people on the internet. His efforts are futile.

Toukir is not the only one who has been affected. An entire industry has started to face the effects of internet brawls ceasing to exist. With reported losses over the past two quarters, and revenue unlikely to pick up anytime soon, popcorn producers are afraid it is time to close up shop.

"I understand that a group of sadists kept me and my family afloat but people losing jobs isn't funny. Sure, those employees have moved on to better positions with more fulfilling roles but what about me?" says Bisho F Rahman, CEO of Bibad Industries.

Toukir wails. He affirms that people need to channel their true primitive selves and truly encapsulate Diogenes' spirit.

"Step into the spotlight with a plucked chicken and claim that it is a man. What's stopping you?"

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