



There isn't much to do in Dhaka apart from eating garbage

FATIMA JAHAN ENA

My friends and I have an ongoing joke about our food preferences. Whenever we try a plate of *fuchka* that doesn't immediately induce a digestive issue with its copious amounts of spices and other questionable ingredients, we say, "*bhejal na thakle moja nai*" ("There's no flavour without the impurities").

The simplest solution is that we could just choose not to eat out or order in. Knowing how to cook is a necessary skill and refraining from eating fast food will be kinder to both our wallets and our stomach linings. We could host house parties, visit exhibitions, go on walks, and whatnot.

We may not realise it but it's probably an exercise in denial. The joke loses its comedic value when we stop to actually think about the quality of the food that we consume every day. The quality of food in the city has deteriorated to the point that even the people selling it actively avoid it. One of many examples would be the video that

went viral on Facebook last week. In the video, the managers of a popular *kacchi* chain refused to drink the juice that's offered at their own restaurants. Even though they were under the harsh scrutiny of the health inspector, their interaction was forever immortalised on the internet. Naturally, one may think about what stopped them from taking one for the team. They could've easily downed the glass of juice, which apparently is contaminated with dye before being served to customers, and then moved on with just another fine. After all, it's nothing new that a restaurant in Dhaka has been penalised for questionable hygiene practices or their problematic stance on expiry dates and dead poultry. Their refusal to drink it begs an even more worrisome question – what exactly did they put in the drink that they couldn't muster up the courage for a forced sip? Furthermore, why are incidents like this so rampant? Regardless of what the answers may be, it cannot be denied that a large portion of our social lives revolve around the food culture in the city. But what other platforms do we have left for socialising if we

cut out going out to restaurants? The simplest solution is that we could just choose not to eat out or order in. Knowing how to cook is a necessary skill and refraining from eating fast food will be kinder to both our wallets and our stomach linings. We could host house parties, visit exhibitions, go on walks, and whatnot. However, the aforementioned alternatives may be just wishful thinking as cutting out restaurants from the equation of our social lives doesn't really make sense in a country where there's not much else to do. There is a lack of options that does not involve outside food unless you're willing to stay home or spend a lot of money just to hang out with your friends. Additionally, the severe traffic congestion that we have to face just to get from one point to another further inhibits our desires to deviate from frequent visits to restaurants in favour of a new experience. On top of that, there are safety concerns that hinder activities like going on a trip or even simply going on a walk to the park in the evening. So, having no other option, we crawl back to restaurants where

the food is cooked with no regard for hygiene and quality. Before we know it, the ritual of eating garbage becomes an unavoidable aspect of our social lives. Clearly, a drastic change is needed in the restaurant industry in the city. Restaurants disregarding any and all sense of ethics when it comes to cutting costs while actively harming the populace has become too integrated in our lives. Several buildings in a single main road hold at least seven fast-food joints. Apart from that, availing food delivery services have become commonplace. The trouble with the restaurant industry opens up discourse about how we desperately need more accessible means of socialising. Being unable to pay the hefty amounts of money required to do literally anything else but eat leaves a huge chunk of the population with no avenues to meet friends or family outside of their homes. Needless to say, the possibility of change is slim. But one can always make a wish on a wishbone covered with weeks-old grease. *Fatima Jahan Ena is a sub-editor at SHOUT.*

Why our parents rarely show outward affection

AHMED NUZHA OISHEE

A friend once told me that when she became a teenager, her mother refused to hold her hand unless it was absolutely necessary during times like crossing the street. While my friend acknowledges that her parent's intention was to help her grow into the shoes of an independent adult, she felt like she was missing out on parental affection. Bangladeshi parents are very inexpressive about their own feelings and in turn, they rarely show outward affection to their children. My mother's big on physical gestures like embraces or head pats. I have never felt like an unloved child but none of my parents has ever professed their parental love or pride out loud. Our parents' affection simmers within the surface but never finds direct effusion. Instead, their love language is passive gestures or acts of care. You may smell the wafting fragrance of your favourite dish or receive a gift from your parents before you hear them utter words like "I love you" or "I'm proud of you." They will suffer an anxiety attack when you don't pick up the phone but they never initiate a hug. Affection runs deep within everything they do for us except in the simple act of using words. Our parents were raised during a time when filial piety and hierarchy in the family were unfailing norms. Endearments never fit in with the respectful tone they had to strictly maintain with their elders. They did not always get to be frank about their emotions with their parents. So, they show affection in their own strange ways.



Some parents are wired by their stoic upbringing to equate etiquette with affection. They believe that the best way you can love your child is by educating them to overcome the adversities of life, even if it means putting on a stern demeanour. Some psychologists refer to this as "tiger parenting". But affection is the strongest catalyst during a child's formative years. Younger kids or teenagers don't have the cognitive ability to understand shrouded forms of affection. They perceive the world in a literal sense. If a parent never utters affectionate words, young children may get discouraged from sharing their distress to their parents because they may misunderstand their parents' behaviour to be dismissive of their emotions. In a gender-biased household, young boys are misled to believe that it's "unmanly" to show their affectionate side while girls are deprived of equal affection due to gender stereotypes. Physical affection slowly wanes as religious and cultural norms begin dictating our lives once we come of age. Moreover, most parents approach parenthood using negative assertions because it has a stronger impact on children. As a result, children might feel unheard and unloved. Some parents expect their children to naturally feel loved because they try their utmost to provide and care for them. Some of us have gone so long without hearing utterings of dotting words that we are on our way to embody our parents. We squirm at the thought of uttering sentences like "I love you" to our parents because it seems completely unnatural. It's a cycle that's begging to be broken. *Nuzha forgives people for pronouncing her name wrong and wallows in books and anxiety. Suggest her fiction at nuzhaoisheel256504@gmail.com*

The unhealthy relationship between children and screens

MAHEEM N AHMED

Excess screen time among children has become a common occurrence in today's world where our lives have become enslaved by technology. The gleeful interaction that used to take place when children used to see their parents at the end of the day no longer takes place. Both parties now have their noses two inches from a screen and some children even refuse to eat without their iPads in front of them. To the parents whose households regularly see this phenomenon, are you sure you are building up your child's future in a healthy manner? Several doctors and concerned experts have spoken out against this habit of modern-day parents, and a lot of research has been conducted to find out how prolonged exposure to screens affects children. According to Dr Nusrat Farooq, a paediatrician at Evercare Hospital, Dhaka, the overuse of screens can result in speech development disorder or developmental language disorder (DLD). It is a communication disorder where a child's ability to speak, listen, read, and



write is severely hampered. As the child grows, the brain's ability to perceive sounds and convert them into words is damaged. Thus, the child suffers from what is known

as "speech delay". A study at the University of Toronto showed that DLD was most commonly seen in children under four years of age. Similar

research at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto showed that every 30 minutes of screen time among toddlers resulted in an additional 49 percent risk of them suffering from this speech disorder. Human beings love to socialise. Kids love it when someone spends time with them by making wacky faces or playing with them. This is also an integral part of a child's growth. It helps them socialise, communicate, and be less afraid of unknown people. When they are simply handed a phone to keep themselves distracted, the various sounds and colours prevent them from noticing their surroundings. As a result, their interest in socialising gets lost. DLD is not a short-term disorder that affects children's learning ability in their early years. It persists into adulthood. According to the National Institute of Health in the USA, children diagnosed with DLD may struggle with reading and writing even when they are adults. Their vocabulary will be weakened, they may make grammatical errors while speaking, and they may face obstacles in maths and even in forming complete sentences. Overall, their ability to communicate in general will be impaired. Such are the

disastrous effects of casually handing over devices to children, which is something that many parents overlook quite often. Some may argue that parents nowadays are very busy, so they always keep their children preoccupied by handing over their phones. Many parents also defend themselves by saying that the videos their children watch on YouTube are educational, as they teach important things such as sharing, practising the 3Rs, colours, etc. However, I highly doubt how much of that information the brain of a one-year-old can absorb. Moreover, these lessons would be much more effective if they directly came from the parents or through other forms of social interactions. Screen time is not all bad. It can be educational and provide entertainment when no one can spend time with a child. But it is imperative to limit the exposure of a child to screens. Today's children are the leaders of tomorrow. They will lead us into the future where technology will rule all. To safeguard their tomorrow, we must protect them from the dangers of digital screens. *The author is a student of class ten at Sunbeams School.*