

Bridging the Digital Gender Divide

As improving women's digital literacy is closely related to their level of education, the government must continue investing in women's education, and also raise awareness among rural citizens about the significance of digital literacy for both men and women.

NILIMA JAHAN RAHMAN

Despite the government's ambitious Digital Bangladesh agenda, a significant digital gender divide persists in the country, leaving women at a disadvantage in accessing and using ICT tools compared to men. This not only limits their participation in the digital economy but also hinders their overall socio-economic progress. Age, region, and income disparities exacerbate this divide, making it crucial to implement targeted interventions to bridge the gap and ensure equitable access to digital opportunities for all citizens.

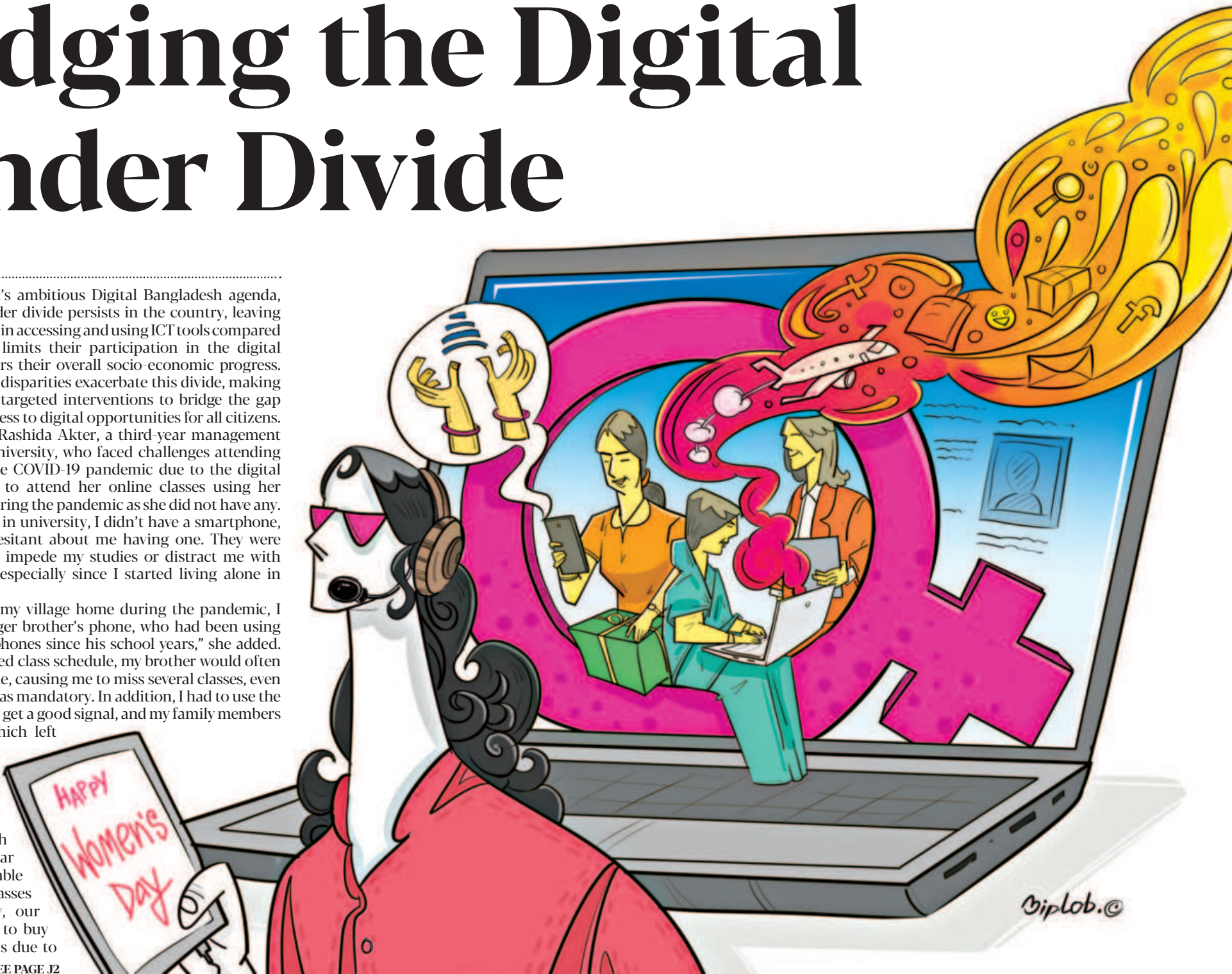
Take the example of Rashida Akter, a third-year management student at Jagannath University, who faced challenges attending online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the digital gender divide. She had to attend her online classes using her brother's smartphone during the pandemic as she did not have any.

"When I first enrolled in university, I didn't have a smartphone, and my parents were hesitant about me having one. They were concerned that it could impede my studies or distract me with romantic relationships, especially since I started living alone in Dhaka," Rashida said.

"When I returned to my village home during the pandemic, I had to rely on my younger brother's phone, who had been using my parents' only smartphones since his school years," she added. "However, as I had no fixed class schedule, my brother would often be outside with the phone, causing me to miss several classes, even though my attendance was mandatory. In addition, I had to use the phone in a nearby field to get a good signal, and my family members were not supportive, which left me feeling discouraged. As a result, my grades suffered during that semester."

"My younger sister, Juli, who was in fifth grade, had a similar experience as she was unable to attend her Zoom classes regularly. Unfortunately, our family could not afford to buy a new smartphone for us due to

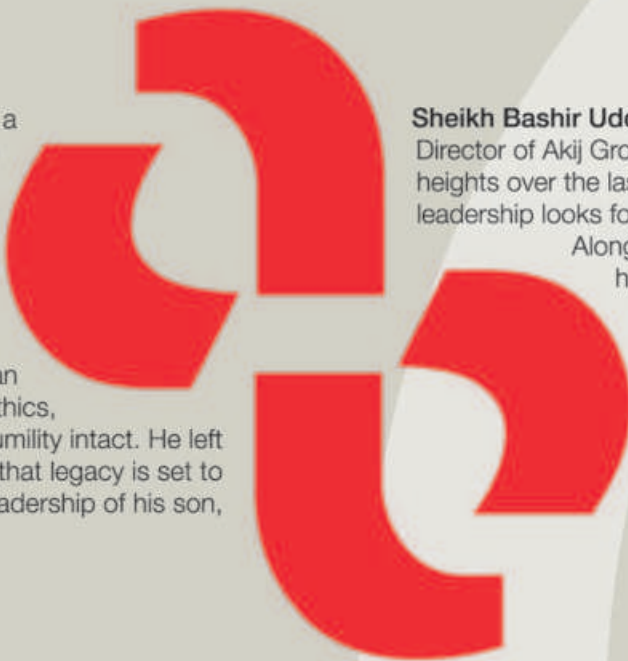
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Unfolding
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