

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE
SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 30, 2023, CHAITRA 16, 1429 BS

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HOW TUITIONS EXHAUST
US PSYCHOLOGICALLY

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IS ENOUGH BEING DONE TO
CURB SMOKING?

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RAMADAN AND THE HECTIC LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

EDITORIAL

Some people are good at time management, some people are bad at it, some people would be late to their own funerals. For something so important to leading a functional life, a disproportionate amount of people struggle at it. It makes me wonder.

If you went on the internet and looked for ways to make you better at managing your time, a tornado of self-help content would come flying at you. The prevailing idea is that time management is a matter of discipline, something anyone can achieve if only they try. If you are unable to manage your deadlines, maybe you're just lazy.

I think there is a lot to be said about a person's ability to work under pressure, and how not everyone can do it. The amount of mental exertion humans need to put themselves through to reach a rudimentary definition of success has changed rapidly in the last century or so, and I don't think it's natural for our minds to be pulled in so many directions. My evolutionary ancestors spent their time hunting, eating, and sleeping. Excuse me if I can't be on time for my 19th meeting this week.

– Azmin Azran, Editor, SHOUT



TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE



A	B
The Hand That Feeds Nine Inch Nails	Losing My Religion R.E.M
Nobody Cares LÉON	Ego Death Polyphia ft. Steve Vai
XS Rina Sawayama	Bite Me Avril Lavigne
Lost Frank Ocean	will he joji

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PLAYWATCH

TV SERIES



ROCKET BOYS: A dramatic retelling of India's scientific triumphs

NAHIAN JAMAL JOYEETA

Writer-director Abhay Pannu's *Rocket Boys* premiered on the Indian OTT platform SonyLIV in February 2022. Several social media posts featuring two of my favourite actors, Jim Sarbh and Saba Azad, immediately caught my eye and led me to the series. I watched the entire first season at a go and eagerly awaited the second until last weekend. Both times, the acting, storyline, and cinematography had me spellbound.

Rocket Boys delves into the conquests of famous Indian scientists Dr Homi J Bhabha (played by Jim Sarbh) and Dr Vikram Sarabhai (played by Ishwak Singh) as India fights for and obtains independence from colonial rule. The series recounts every scientific and political victory of India from the 1940s to the late '70s. Overall, it has its bearing on Indian nationalism, but anyone interested in the colonial and post-colonial history of the Indian subcontinent would mirror the sentiment.

The vintage, dark academia aesthetic and music of its title score led me to believe it would be a sombre show when I started watching. However, as the series progressed, I was treated to some of the best comic elements, which were created subtly through witty dialogues and situational humour.

Due to the impeccable background music and lighting, whenever a serious scene appeared, I felt as though I was physically present there. Instead of using artificial lighting, the series makes good use of natural and low lighting.

The plot follows the characters as they struggle with failure, love, grief, and personal growth. Homi and Vikram, the two scientists, have a charming on-screen chemistry; they continue to support and collaborate despite their differences in a

highly competitive profession.

The way the role of the female protagonists in the show was highlighted in the plot given that the series is set in the 1940s-70s was remarkable. Padmabhusan Mrinalini Sarabhai (Regina Cassandra), Vikram's wife, uses Bharatnatyam as a language for social justice and makes political statements about women's rights, vehemently opposing her husband's illicit affair. The carefree, independent Parwana Irani (Saba Azad), often known as Pipsy, is a lawyer whose judgments widely impact Homi and Vikram's decisions.

I particularly enjoyed watching the ascent of young APJ Abdul Kalam, who began as Vikram Sarabhai's apprentice and went on to play a significant part in the founding of India's first space program and nuclear tests before becoming the country's eleventh president in 2002.

Rocket Boys contains overtly anti-American undertones, including allusions to the United States' alliance with Pakistan in Bangladesh's liberation war, Britain's defeat in World War II, and the potential for a Cold War. The prominent fictional characters Mathur, Raza Mehdi, and the CIA agents who wreak havoc in the series represent the theme.

The series can at the same time be considered a simulated political documentary as it continues to tug at nationalist sentiments exploring Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's power in an independent, post-colonial India, establishing a republic under Congress, until the ascension of his daughter Indira Gandhi, Lalbahadur Shastri led the country. Pandit and Dr Homi's friendship seemingly mechanised India's quick rise to industrial and technological dominance.

Rant with Joyeeta on her Instagram at [@smolbabyjo](https://www.instagram.com/smolbabyjo).

How tuitions exhaust us mentally

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

The key source of financial independence for most undergraduate students in our country is tutoring other students. With the pandemic last year, undergraduate students' access to tuition increased as the culture of online tuition grew. But down the lane, tutoring others becomes a burden for most of us.

The exhaustion of tuition has its very own timeline.

At the beginning of semesters, it's easy to afford those extra hours and put it into making a few extra bucks. The academic pressure is a bit less and putting in the extra few hours after classes is worth it. But you have to synchronise your schedule with the tuition, and gradually, in doing so, you lose your freedom. You start compromising on other plans and commitments to fit the tuition into your schedule, and they, in turn, start carving out the plans for your daily life.

However, things get worse as the semester progresses.

As lab projects, presentations, class tests, and quizzes start, the compromise just doesn't involve hangouts or creative outlets but rather your academic progressions. Things start getting less flexible as you can barely find time for the tuition amidst the hectic academic schedule. And when your

students' exams get closer amid your chaotic schedule, you don't have any other way but to compromise on your own studies and cater to your student's needs.

To balance both worlds, you must compromise on leisure, entertainment, or your creative commitments. Consequently, you're constantly stressed out and exhausted both mentally and physically. The bare minimum takes a lot of effort. Just to survive the semester, you have to compromise on your sleep cycle and it takes a huge toll

on your physical well-being.

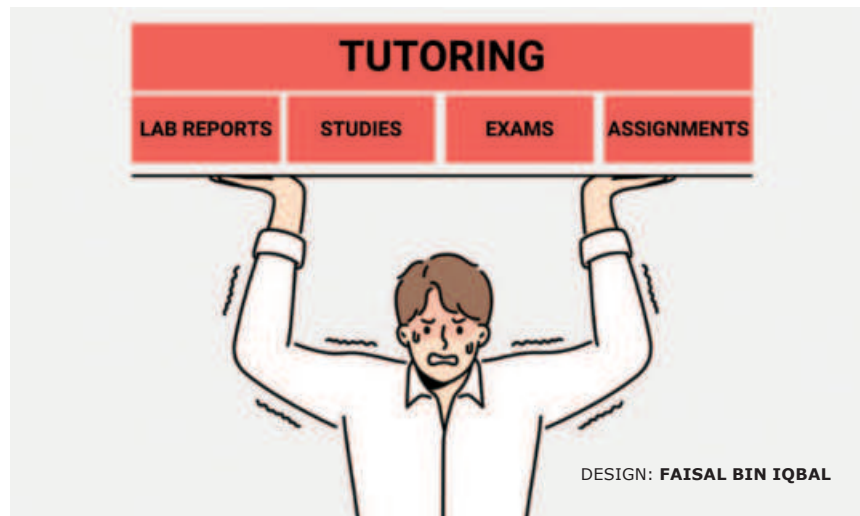
Logically, one or two tuitions shouldn't really hurt. You should be able to afford six to eight hours per week for them. However, things really aren't that simple when you take the Dhaka traffic into consideration. If someone's taking a local bus or a rickshaw to their tuition on a working day, it's at least an hour wasted on the road in the round trip. With twice the time taken, the eight hours per week end up being 16 hours or more.

Moreover, it's not just the hours spent on the job but also the mental exhaustion that comes with it that can affect you. Since you're continuously exercising your brain and your job involves giving lectures and solving problems, it can't get the rest it needs to concentrate on a new topic. This leads to poor efficiency and a lack of attention span. It starts affecting your social life as well since you can't accommodate time for yourself or others.

For most students, tuitions are their only way of survival. Many of them even have their families financially dependent on their tuition, so leaving them isn't really an option, even when it costs them their mental health. For others, it's a matter of financial independence. Once you start earning, you grow out of the habit of depending on your parents for your own expenses. Dropping the tuition would mean having to answer to others for your expenses and losing that independence.

Before committing to tuition, maybe we should try to be a bit more far-sighted and prioritise our work-life balance rather than making heavy compromises that'll impact our physical and mental well-being in the long run.

*Remind Ifti to be quieter at
hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com*



The love-hate relation we have with our cities

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

A mug of steaming tea and sunlight illuminating the balcony of your apartment. You have a lovely view of the cars, the people, and the roads – mellowed out with sparse flecks of green from plants. Vehicle horns mix discordantly with the calling of birds, yet, to the accustomed ear, it's practically a symphony.

The imagery above is a rather romanticised outlook on urban life. Living in an apartment blessed with abundant natural light will soon become a rare privilege. High rises have started to surround our abodes, looming over us with their mountainous forms, obstructing the path sunlight would have taken to reach our windows. Other than the carefully tended bougainvillea bushes here and there, it's difficult to locate any foliage.

In a way, there's a twisted form of

solace to be found in our bleak habitats. With the arrival of morning begins the day's obligations, not to let our minds or bodies disengage from our tasks till evening. Had nature still been so beautiful, our hearts might have been full of lamentations at not being able to stop and admire her allure.

The night lights are pleasant enough to the eyes. A few hours to ourselves before we must sleep, for tomorrow will likely be an iteration of the same day we've lived today.

We stay awake a bit past what's advisable, sacrificing our sleep for a little chunk of time where we're free to do what we want, breaking away from the predetermined routine. The irony stares us in the face when this short time of lawlessness soon becomes another entry in our daily itineraries.

The weekends may bring relaxation, but not much comfort. The presence of

the upcoming weekday hangs in the air, asphyxiating and scorning our lassitude.

There's nothing like a few days' trip to the countryside to lift our spirits.

We hear from the locals there that the majesty of nature pales in comparison to what it once was. But to those of us accustomed to metal and concrete or some unholy combination of both, a few trees side by side can parade as an orchard of Eden.

But as the days roll by, we start missing the comforts of home, the people, and the mundaneness of everyday tasks. Perhaps it's the people with their wildly different perspectives, or perhaps there's not much to do once the initial novelty of picturesque sceneries wears off. Either way, we realise that the urbanisation we loathe has glued our limbs to the threads of its intricate web.

We come back to where we feel most at home. Although debatable, it's where

our hearts reside. The cycle resumes once again, perhaps with a little more fondness than before, a little more tolerance towards the traffic, the pollution and the dullness that grated on our nerves before.

In our attempt at making life more bearable, we find things to admire – a family happily chatting away, a pair of lovers walking down the street with their fingers intertwined, or even the commonplace decorative marigold bushes adorned with yellow and reds.

Sometimes, in these unremarkable days when the sunlight is gentle on our skins or the night breeze soothes, we can almost fool ourselves into thinking the city doesn't consume a piece of our souls with each passing day. We can eke out a smile and say, "I love my city," albeit not by choice.

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Ramadan and exam season

KOUSHIN UNBER

This year, a large number of students have had to face the unfortunate moment when they received their exam routine and saw that Ramadan, a month that is supposed to be filled with festivities and devotion, has been imbricated by exams. Although the spirit of this holy month can never truly be suppressed, the extra pressure of having to rigorously study while you fast has its own set of complications.

It is very much true that the more active our brain is as we go on to solve question papers and memorise formulae, the more it becomes hungry for nutrition.

Studies have shown that when individuals fast, their cognitive performance can be impaired, especially for tasks that require sustained attention and working memory. However, the effects of fasting, at its core, depends on the individual. A lot of participants in a study done on university students of the Muslim faith report that they are better able to focus when they fast. It has also been said to improve long term memory and prevent cognitive disorders.

Eahsan Abedin, a recent graduate from St. Joseph Higher Secondary School says, “Fasting helped me focus in some respects as you had more time to concentrate on studies rather than making or helping to make a meal. However, the main problem for me was never food, it was feeling dehydrated during exams, as I was obviously nervous.”

The problem does not just stem from

the rigid timings for fasting and meals, but also from the content of said meals, especially the iftar since most students opt to study at a long stretch in the time between iftar and sehri. Food offered in traditional iftars are usually filled with saturated oils, refined sugars, and processed items, all of which are known to make people feel more fatigued.

Samin Ibteda Chowdhury, an A level student, claims “Ofentimes I think I’ll have a lot of energy after I break my fast so I will sit down to study then. But the contrary happens. I end up losing out on more energy after meals and feel too bloated, which hinders my focus on books.”

Growing up, my mother would always stock the pantry and fridge with various snacks and fruits when our exams were near. Before my O level exams we had also gone on a grocery store spree.

Thousands of students choose to fast around this time of the year, and there are many ways in which they can adapt their routine to suit the needs of their academics while managing the traditions of the month.

Firstly, you can tweak your diet to your advantage while fasting. Cut down on the traditional fried food during iftar and opt for more nutritionally rich meals by including simple carbohydrates and a variety of fruits and vegetables to your diet. Drink lots of fluids to stay hydrated. Introduce nuts into your diet, as they are rich in fats and allow you to store energy. Walnuts, almonds, and pistachios are also known to increase brain function and

memory power.

Furthermore, it is crucial to manage your time wisely. You can plan your study breaks around prayer times and during iftar to reduce the need for breaks through the rest of the day and allocate more hours to studying. Switch the topic you are studying every hour or so, since fasting can impair your ability to fixate on one subject for long periods of time.

Showering more often is a lesser known hack to keep ourselves cool on the heated summer days while also maintaining productivity, especially when feeling tired and low on energy from hunger. If needed, create a nap schedule and stick to it. Let your family members know about it in case the sound you set for your alarm somehow incorporates itself into your dreams and you oversleep.

In terms of environment, there are a couple of changes you can bring about to make your surroundings more equitable. Avoid studying in your bed, and see if you can set up a study space away from your bed. You feel tired more easily when your sleep schedule is shifted, and the temptation to sleep will be greater than ever. Don’t let the comfort of an empty bed get to you. Try to study at dining tables, which should be unused throughout the day before iftar, or at a station that is not in a bedroom.

Clean up your space before Ramadan begins as you will be less motivated to tidy things up once you start fasting, a cleaner workspace makes for increased productivity by decluttering your space and reducing distractions.

It is also wise to join an online study group at this time so you can hold yourself accountable, along with the others in the study group for your study schedule. However, be wary not to let the endless sessions on Discord turn into a hub for spilling more gossip than getting work done.

The communal side of Ramadan in our culture is one that is unlike any other. It brings a heightened sense of community and togetherness amongst students as well, which leads to greater number of social activities.

Fasting every day for 30 days, or at all, can become tiring and extremely difficult for students who also have to sit for exams during this season. Coupled with having to wake up early in the morning, the lack of replenishment depletes a lot of people’s energy and compromises their health, for which, they might opt out from fasting during Ramadan. They might also be concerned about their performance in the exams as board exams, especially international ones, often tend to take place around Eid. Therefore, we must remember not to make anyone feel pressurised or get coerced into fasting.

Reference:

Department of Internal Medicine, NBU (December 2022), *Effects of Fasting on Student Performance in Exams*

Koushin currently keeps 3 screens turned on in front of her to prevent the chance of a thought occurring. Replenish her fugitive attention span at koushinunber27@gmail.com

Ramadan and young professionals

SHOUT DESK

The perception of regular events taking place around you changes as you grow up. It’s a well-known reality that is nonetheless jarring, and for a young person shifting gears from a life of classes and exams to one of meetings and appointments, these changes can be a challenging thing to come to terms with.

In the life of a young Muslim Bangladeshi, Ramadan is more often than not a highlight of the year. As a child, you grow up dreaming of the time when you will be able to fast every day. The teenage years are spent learning the spiritual significance of the act, and also obsessing over one’s favourite items on the iftar menu. As a young person in high school or university, juggling classes and exams with the Ramadan schedule can be difficult, especially when a spanner is thrown into the works of a carefully balanced (or rather, imbalanced) sleep schedule with the addition of an extra post-midnight meal. Yet, it’s all part of the fun because all of this is done surrounded by family, where the burden of responsibility to keep things running doesn’t often fall on the youngest person in the household. A young person’s Ramadan can be a vibrant social affair too, as the opportunity exists to attend gatherings with friends and family, with schools extending long holidays for Ramadan and Eid.

But as the exuberance of youthfulness makes way for the dreary realities of

early adulthood, Ramadan changes in more ways than one. The festivities that took priority once upon a time have to be pushed back to the status of meagre entries on a routine. And the routine itself becomes a difficult game of whack-a-mole, where having to wake up for sehri might mean an incomplete night of sleep because getting to work early in the morning is necessary if one intends to get home on time for iftar.

“My sleep schedule has changed because I have to wake up early for sehri. I found it somewhat difficult because previously, as a student, I often had enough time to sleep after sehri but now I do not have that luxury as I need to go to the office,” said Faiaz Amin Khan, a recent graduate who is now a Junior Software Engineer at Samsung Research and Development Institute, Bangladesh.

Wasima Tanzim, 24, is a Management Trainee Officer, Content Development at Forethought PR, and she echoes this sentiment.

“Waking up early hasn’t really been the easiest. It is always a struggle, especially as work starts even earlier now. Although my workplace is a bit lenient in terms of timing, most workplaces aren’t. For them, it’s even harder,” she said.

“My sleep cycle was somewhat normal before Ramadan. I used to sleep around 12 and wake up at seven. But now, since I still need to wake up at seven and have sehri before that, I am trying to shift my sleep cycle from nine to three but till now

I have failed miserably. I went to sleep at 12 still, woke up for sehri and then at seven again and had to get 2 hours of sleep at work (luckily my office has a relaxation room for sleeping),” said Farhan Fuad, 24, a software engineer at a local tech firm.

Moving further along the day, the next struggle is the fight against Dhaka traffic to get to work on time, and then to make it back for iftar. Dhaka’s notorious traffic tends to get worse around Ramadan, especially for younger professionals on a budget who don’t have access to private transportation.

“Fighting for a place to keep my foot on public buses at the rush hour, especially after fasting for the whole day is not easy. Sometimes, I don’t make it in time for iftar and my parents are rightfully upset on those days,” added Farhan.

All of this leads to a level of physical exertion during Ramadan that young people would have been protected from during their student lives.

“I think it has gotten more difficult for me now because I have to work for 7 hours straight without any breaks. As a student, there would be breaks between classes and the overall hours I spent at school or university were lower,” said Faiaz.

Farhan agrees that Ramadan felt easier as a student, “In university, I wouldn’t have to be present strictly from 10 to 6. It was on average 5 hours per day and my university provided its own transportation, which made things much easier.”

This tiring reality leads to the situation where young people finally have to grow up when Ramadan is no longer about frequent iftar parties with family and friends or long shopping sessions on weekdays. The choice has to be made to keep up with the grind of work, and at the end of the day, the social and community aspect of Ramadan is what takes a hit.

“I definitely can’t meet friends and family during Ramadan as I used to in the past. Post-iftar hours are already tiring and an eight-hour office shift on top of it means I have hardly got any motivation and energy left to go out and socialise with others. I prefer staying home and trying to go to sleep early the next day,” said Farhan.

Shoaib Ahmed Sayam, 25, works as a journalist at The Daily Star. His work hours mean he can only have iftar with his family at home once in a while. “When I was younger, Ramadan was all about family. When I became a teenager, I had a lot of iftar and post-Taraweeh hang-outs with my friends. But growing up, getting a job, and the added responsibility has meant all I do during Ramadan now is wake up, get to work, have iftar there, and by the time I get home, most people’s days are over. It makes me a bit sad but I have also made peace with it as not much can be done.”

Perhaps, Wasima sums it up the best, “Ramadan or not, socialising has become significantly difficult anyway. It seems as though we have grown up.”



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Is enough being done to curb smoking?

SHAIKH SABIK KAMAL

The act of smoking is one that is far too often misinterpreted as a soother of sadness, when it really is a deadly companion. From every possible perspective, it is the arch-enemy of the human body. Nonetheless, there are people who are aware of this and still smoke frequently, even from an alarmingly young age.

Personally, from an early age, I had faith that everyone in my class would internalise the lessons taught about smoking and never engage in it. Starting from textbooks listing the harms of smoking to raising general awareness, I assumed Bangladesh had already done enough to stop smoking for the new generation.

But now I think to myself: what went wrong? The faith I possessed was naively built on fragile foundations, and encountering more and more students who indulged in smoking only solidified that misconception. Some of my friends, who swore to stay clean, would soon become additions to this club of regular smokers.

All of this begs the question, is enough really being done against smoking in our country?

In search of an answer, it became clear that some issues and stigmas around smoking aren't discussed often. It's widely accepted that many smokers in Bangladesh are victims of so-called "bad company". But people usually forget to consider that many people start smoking to escape from pain, depression, and trauma. They were rendered helpless, and in their vulnerability, cigarettes and tobacco products were readily accessible.

Imagine if your own schooling institution has tobacco sellers disguised as tea stalls in close proximity. Imagine being persuaded to smoke by your peers and seniors who did so as a coping strategy during difficult times. Institutions even show poor records of dealing with student smokers, failing to give them

proper counselling and rehabilitation.

Culturally, smoking is oftentimes associated with manliness, being a femme fatale, or rebellion. There are fictional smokers who may be romanticised or portrayed in a favourable light in the pop culture landscape. Additionally, despite not being chain-smokers, many influencers advocate for a hazard that traps others into developing a nicotine addiction.

But saying all of this as if Bangladesh authorities haven't made any attempts to combat smoking would be disrespectful to the hard workers who truly want to combat the issue.

With acts like "The Smoking and Using of Tobacco Products (Control) Act, 2005" and "The Juvenile Smoking Act, 1919", Bangladesh has successfully reduced smoking from a reported 34 percent to 20 percent within the span of 13 years (2000-2013). Nevertheless, how strictly these laws are being implemented is still questionable, as statistics show roughly 4 in 10 of student smokers starting before the age of 10.

There aren't any concrete parameters for what can be considered "enough" against smoking in our country. However, we can do better against it. Whether it's through ensuring the strictness of authorities on the matter or simply providing a close friend with proper guidance and support, there are things we can do against smoking that can help to make a difference.

References:

1. Tobacconomics.org (2022). *Bangladesh: Raising Tobacco Taxes in FY 2022-2023*
2. National Library of Medicine (2006). *Prevalence of tobacco use and its contributing factors among adolescents in Bangladesh: Results from a population-based study*

Shaikh Sabik Kamal is (metaphorically) lost. See if you can direct him home through sabik2005kamal4787@gmail.com

You can be the cycle-breaker of trauma in your family

SUMAIYA RASHID

Tales, heirlooms, and genetic traits are just a few of the things that are passed down through the generations, but many of us are unaware of the fact that trauma may also be one of those things.

The passing of physical, emotional, and psychological damage from one generation to the next is referred to as intergenerational trauma. Many factors, including historical trauma, familial relationships, war, abuse, etc. that occur throughout our lives can lead to generational trauma.

It is important to remember that our parents' hurtful behaviour may be a result of their traumas, not because there is something wrong with us. For instance, parents who experience oppression may come up with "survival messages" (such as "don't cry or ask for help, it's a sign of weakness") and hand them down from one generation to the next. While these messages may have worked to protect previous generations, they can cause subsequent generations to have a fearful outlook on life, which prevents children from seeking assistance that is required to overcome the trauma.

All of this occurs in response to a traumatic event because our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents all needed to find a means to survive with no room for processing their situation. A parent who retains emotional wounds from childhood trauma will unintentionally pass on dysfunctional coping mechanisms to their children by how they treat them, what they teach them, and what they model to them.

According to research, if parents do not pause and reflect on the memories, traits, or even survival tactics they retained from their childhood, their children might inherit the negatives of those aspects as trauma. Researchers also state that if the negatives do get passed on, the children can learn to develop themselves in a healthier way if they can understand the impact of such trauma.

Now that we have the awareness to be able to notice these patterns, we also possess the potential to change. But where do we start?

Learning to recognise generational trauma is the first step towards changing it. We cannot change what is happening unless we acknowledge or identify it. The second step is to locate the origins of the trauma, even if it began generations ago. This will allow room to understand how the trauma branched through the generations, which will help us in the third step, and that is to challenge these ideas. We may then learn to detach from the ideals perpetuated by the trauma and disassociate from it.

In order to learn how to self-regulate and prevent ourselves from being overcome by negative emotions and harmful behaviours, it is important that we establish coping mechanisms and seek professional help throughout the process.

Lastly, it is important to remember that we in turn can pass on the trauma or negatively affect those around us. While we have no control over what triggers us, we can learn to have control over how we deal with our triggers, even if it is extremely tough. Learning about the complex layers of intergenerational trauma, as well as being self-aware, is key in breaking the cycle.

Reference:

DeAngelis, Tori. (February, 2019). *The Legacy of Trauma*; APA.org

Sumaiya is in the midst of her researching untold topics era; send her leads here, sumrashid10@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

Explorations on Time

WAZIHA AZIZ

I've found that time is a magic trick
we're taught at birth.
One where Houdini wraps himself
in a locked mesh of rusted chains,
plunges into deep water
And loses the key.
I long to search for it but my numb-
ness exhausts me.
I'm sorry
that all I can do with time, is lose it.

I'm tired of turning the days over and
over in my head only to find there
was always just one.
Just one that kept knocking on my
door and
Just one I'd refuse to answer.

I used to wear my minutes as acces-
sories and now the minutes wear me.
And I'm wary, that this exhausting
play on words that I so eagerly label
as poetry
could be nothing but a waste of my
precious time.

*Waziha Aziz is a really loud person with
an inflated sense of self. Remind her
that she's not all that via Instagram
@useless_depressing_poetry.*



ILLUSTRATION: FAISAL BIN IQBAL



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

EPHEMERAL

MORIUM KULSUM

We can run away from this sad city,
And roam around as if we were to just merely
exist.

No need to be anything more or anything less,
No need to make believe all of it makes sense.
My soul desires to be free,
Like a bird in flight.
Making the most of these momentary moments,
Without the fear of the future or the past.

I'd rather chase the last rays of the dying sun,
And explore the stories of those twenty-one pilots
with you by my side.
So that I can eventually tell you everything I
couldn't say to you before,
Tell you that I never imagined I'd meet you where
I met you.
But I won't take for granted that November
afternoon,
When you first said your hello.
My six-yard drape, your smile
And the crowded hallway,
I still remember how you'd break all the social
conventions
Just to make me stay.

I knew we'd make it work,
Anywhere away from here.
But in this lifetime, we'll never know what we
could've become,
If we only had the courage to ask for this love.
But I'm convinced it doesn't have to be forever
To leave an everlasting mark on our souls
Or make us come back for more
Even when we've drawn the line between us two.
Cause some things can be remarkable,
Even when they're ephemeral.
Just like the last rays of the dying sun.
Just like our few moments,
Between the sweet hello and the forlorn goodbye.
Just like the little infinity that we call life.
So remarkable, yet so ephemeral.

Dreams I Dare Not Dream

SHAHBAZ MAHMUD

You wish me to speak of my despair
Then I shall tell you of the dreams I dare not dream.
To live simply under an old banyan tree by the stream –
Clean, pristine, free of sin.
You by my side, what could've been.

You ask me to speak of my sorrows
Then I shall show you the tears of my mother as she prays for
me.
They fall with the heft of a lifetime of worries
Splashing into a pool of silken misery,
Breaking my heart as I hear her plea.
For me, to be holy, wholly.

You ask me of my rage.
I take you to the window and show you the city –
I rage not at the city, but for it.
I rage for it not being allowed to love me,
I rage for not allowing myself to love it,
I rage, I rage, I rage, knowing it rages with me.

And then I rage at you, gently,
With these questions, you kill me softly.
You never ask of my joy, my love, my hope,
You don't ask of my victories or even laugh at my jokes.

Nevertheless, I will tell you of my joy –
It is belly laughing with my friends after a day of endless
woes,
It is the smell of *gorom khichuri* during a downpour,
It is the juicy kick of an orange on a cold winter night
And the silent comfort of sharing them with you by my side.

And about my love?
Boundless, insatiable, untapped.
It seeps out of me every chance it gets
It flies, it runs, it even crawls, for what?
For a pair of open arms,
For the warmth of a forehead kiss,
For a home.

For hope,
For hope is when I
dream those dreams I
dared not dream.
It is fantasy and
delusion and reality
and everything in
between,
Hope is when I look
out at the world and see a place for you and me
Dancing in childlike glee, carefree, under that old banyan
tree.



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

The history of Shadhin Bangla Football Team

In conversation with Pratap Shankar Hazra

INQIAD BIN ALI

As I waited to interview Pratap Shankar Hazra, vice-captain of Shadhin Bangla Football Team, I was nervous. The memorabilia and photos on display told the story of a man who had been through everything.

Pratap sir emerged into the room soon. Dressed in a chequered, collared T-shirt and trousers, he oozed wisdom and intellect.

"You are younger than my grandchild!" he was taken aback. "If I knew, I would have given you more time," he said, apologetically.

Assuring him that it was absolutely fine, we proceeded into our conversation.

After the Pakistan Army burned down his Armanitola home, he took a long, winding road to Kolkata. There, he planned to enlist with the group of fighters under Hafizuddin Ahmed, but fate had other ideas.

"Hafiz's senior Towfiq Elahi *saheb* (current energy advisor to PM Sheikh Hasina), told me I wasn't eligible for service," he said.

"Next evening, Shamsul Haque MP approached me with a proposal of creating a football team of refugee players."

For Pratap sir, making a competitive team wasn't an issue, but he asked, "Why?"

"I will tell you everything. But this team is as important for the Mujibnagar Government as the frontliners," Shamsul Haque had replied.

Pratap sir later found out how D.P Dhar, then-Indian PM Indira Gandhi's political advisor, and the Mujibnagar Government planned to utilise the team.

"Indian Muslims believed Hindu infiltrators instigated the trouble in Bangladesh. Our job was to debunk Pakistan's propaganda and garner their support," he said. "We selected football specifically because it can attract thousands with the help of these boys, while in concerts, success is only limited to the few who attended."

The following day, a meeting in Theatre Road resulted in the formation of the Bangladesh Krira Somity, and, over the course of the Shadhin Bangla Football Team's existence, they took care of logistics, accommodations, food, hospitality and gear supply for the players.

"Shamsul Haque was the president, so I went as his special guest," Pratap sir said. "As an introvert, I was shaken in the presence of so many politicians. I was asked to draw up an acceptable budget in three days. Keeping everything in mind, I made it similar to Mohammedan's, which got accepted swiftly," he added.

After this, he devoted himself to assembling the team. Thankfully, most players were based in Agartala. Pratap sir added the talented Zakaria Pintoo and referee Nani Boshak to the committee to represent footballers' interests.

Although the Agartala players enthusiastically signed up, their clubs declined to release the players, even after seeing Mr. Dhar's decree. The clubs only agreed on condition they played an exhibition



PHOTO: **SHOHIDUL ISLAM PIAL**

against Tripura XI. This proved to be Bangladeshi football's first ever game, unofficially. After that, they used Shadhin Bangla Betar to summon Pintoo from Balurghat and announce trials for team selection.

"The response was overwhelming. We selected 27 of the 70 players," he said, before adding, "Kazi Salahuddin and Shahjahan, two brilliant young footballers, turned up later, as they had to flee enemies. Knowing their abilities, we skipped their tests. Coached by Nani Boshak, the team increased to 30 footballers."

Training in their Park Circus base, belief grew among the players. Their moment came on July 26, 1971, when Shadhin Bangla Football Team took on Nodia XI. The game was almost called off though.

"Nodia declined to hoist the Bangladesh flag and sing our national anthem, as we weren't a FIFA-authorized team," he said.

"D.K. Ghosh, D.C. of Krishnanagar, ultimately saved the day. He realised how cramped the small stadium was, and any untoward incident would result in a deadly stampede. As a sign of approval, he himself hoisted and allowed us to run a lap around the stadium flying our flag," Pratap sir added.

"The game was end-to-end. Nodia boasted some top West Bengali players. We took the lead twice through Salahuddin and Shahjahan, but they pegged us back to draw 2-2."

It was the perfect result – an amicable beginning for everyone involved. To cap it off, the local papers covered the game well, just like the Bangladeshi officials desired.

The second game was far more challenging. Up against Mohun Bagan's Gostha Pal XI, it was a baptism of fire for the brave men, losing 4-1 in soddy,

slippery conditions.

"We were happy because Gostha Pal is from Faridpur, so the Bangladeshi link was intact. Indian icon Chuni Goswami played the second half, so this game received even bigger coverage. By then, everyone knew of us."

Things happened fast after that. Our footballers followed this up with 3-0 and 3-1 wins against Vivekananda XI (Narendrapur) and South Calcutta XI (Robindro Sarobar lake). The game at Durgapur Industrial Belt was a high scoring draw, but it was crucial as it had a big Muslim community.

"The support from the Muslim community was incredible. All teams boasted players from Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, but Durgapur goalkeeper Arun Banerjee is the toughest opponent we came up against. A model professional."

At this point, we took a small break in our conversation. I found out that he was a student of History in Dhaka University, he was a distinguished hockey player and cricketer too, winning four first-class championships with Mohammedan in 1978.

Back to proceedings with football, and he fondly remembers the game in Chapra Zilla. The game against Chapra Zilla XI ended in a feisty 2-1 win, but that's not what this game is famous for.

When checking into the hotel, they found a group of men interrogating players. They were verifying if the players were Muslim or not. They even asked Pratap sir to recite verses of Quran, only to apologise later as they found out he is Hindu.

"Zakaria Pintoo and I just stood-by, watching the comedy unfold," Pratap sir laughed. "Then, their leader came and said the group thought this team was a Hindu team. They soon realised how the

Pakistani propaganda fooled them."

In total, the Shadhin Bangla Football Team played 16-recognised matches, winning 12, drawing three and losing one, all against technically superior opponents. They were passionately cheered on by Indians. The newspaper and radio coverage further gave them exposure in the world media.

The last match was in Mumbai, against the mighty Maharashtra XI, boasting top Indian players, Bangladeshi officials implored the players to keep the scorelines respectable. Even the captain of India's cricket team made a cameo.

"We won 3-1, although we couldn't play well in the second half," he said, smiling beamingly.

It was November by then, and the players could sense victory coming soon.

Pratap sir remembers December 3, 1971 very fondly.

"Indira Gandhi gave a speech. At one point, a person informed her that Pakistan attacked India. She assured us that India was ready to fight back. We didn't feel any fear. Instead, we finally realised liberation is near."

And that's exactly what happened. After victory in December 16, 1971, our government recognised the Shadhin Bangla Football Team as freedom fighters.

"The spirit within our team was one of unity and passion. We went out and enjoyed ourselves, and even donated money generated to the war effort."

"We prioritised Bangladesh and never doubted the war's outcome," Pratap Shankar Hazra continued, "Never forget about the sacrifices which got your Motherland's freedom. We laid the foundations. Now, the onus is on you, the young ones, to build our nation."