

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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WHY DO SOME MEN DRESS
SO TERRIBLY?

PG 3

A WALK THROUGH THE
ART OF CUSTOM-PAINTED
SNEAKERS

PG 8



STEPPING ON TO THE RAMP

*A snapshot of the
Bangladeshi modelling industry*



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

EDITORIAL

I have come to a very unsettling realisation that I am only ever unkind to myself.

My younger sister asked me which friend I identify as in my friend group. Without putting any thought into it, I answered almost nonchalantly, "the mom friend". This was strange for two reasons. One, I can almost never answer a question that quick, I must ponder, and then go over my entire thought process again to ensure I am correct. And second, I am never truly nonchalant when it comes to my friends or the roles we play in each other's lives.

I spent the next few hours thinking about why I responded the way I did and I came to the conclusion that I undermine myself and the roles I play each day. I trivialise my place in every setting and tend to make myself small, regardless of the company.

So, now that I have had this epiphany, am I supposed to do something about it? Or do I just stick it under the banner of, that's just how I am? If I am supposed to do something about it, how do I go about it?

– Syeda Afrin Tarannum, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

COMICS



Non-superhero comic books for beginners

SABIL SADAT ZAHIR

When most people think of Western comic books, the superhero genre is what comes to mind at first. While the superhero tales of Marvel and DC might be the most popular ones, there are many graphic novels of varying genres with amazing storylines and artwork that will keep readers enthralled.

While there are many lists out there with popular suggestions like *The Sandman*, *From Hell*, and *Maus*, which are all amazing recommendations, this list is curated with my personal recommendations for people looking to delve into the world of comic books outside of the superhero spectrum.

Y: The Last Man

A mysterious plague simultaneously wipes out every mammal on earth with a Y-chromosome, except a man named Yorick and his pet monkey Ampersand. They are eventually accompanied by a government agent named Agent 355 and a geneticist Dr Allison Mann, and the group embark on an adventure to figure out how Yorick survived and ensure the future of humanity.

The series has an interesting take on the post-apocalyptic genre as it is not entirely bleak with the female population still remaining to rebuild society. The story deals with serious themes of gender and the human spirit, with fascinating plot twists and character work sprinkled in between that make it a solid read from start to finish.

Do A Powerbomb

This miniseries presents a fantastical take on pro wrestling, with a woman named Lona Steelrose entering an interplanetary wrestling tournament hoping to resurrect her deceased mother.

Despite an over-the-top premise and short length, this is an exciting story with meticulously drawn action scenes and a surprising amount of character depth. The stylised and innovative

artwork elevates every panel, and by the end of each issue, you will keep wanting more. If you are looking for a short and heart-warming story, this is a great book to start with. It's extra fun if you are a fan of pro wrestling.

We3

Written by one of the all-time great comic book authors, Grant Morrison, *We3* is a three-issue-long tale of three animals – a dog, a cat, and a rabbit – who have been turned into cyborg-like killing machines by the government and escape from their captors before they were to be decommissioned. What follows is an incredible emotional roller-coaster as the animals attempt to find safety while being hunted down.

The minimal use of dialogue at times and experimental panels showcasing the animals' perception of events make the presentation of this comic truly unique. Ultimately, this book presents a bitter-sweet yet powerful story packed with emotions, besides the obvious advocacy of animal rights and compassion.

The Last God

While there are many great comics that explore the Tolkien-esque fantasy genre, *The Last God* is a more recent and stand-out title with captivatingly beautiful artwork. Two variations of the quest for saving the world from the malevolent last god are shown decades apart, and we follow both occurrences simultaneously and pick up the pieces connecting the whole thing together.

This book has some interesting twists and explores the concept of history being written by the victors and false heroes. While the story does not attempt too many innovations regarding fantasy tropes, the artwork and world-building are what make it worth the read.

Sabil spends most of his time trying to stay as hopeful as possible. You can contact him at sabilsadat616@gmail.com

TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE



A	B
Fashion Lady Gaga	24 Hours Agnes
Sweet Dreams Eurythmics	Snap Shoot SEVENTEEN
Pose Red Velvet	Snapping CHUNG HA
Look at the Sky Porter Robinson	HIP MAMAMOO

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

Why do some men dress so terribly?

ARANYO RISHI CHOWDHURY

There's no pulling the punch about this. Most guys don't have the slightest clue about how to dress themselves. Even amongst teens, there's often a startling lack of interest in fashion. At this point, we've seen it all. Outfits with horribly mismatched colours, skinny jeans that haven't seen the laundry in weeks, hoodies with sandals, and other despicable decisions made at the expense of one's appearance. One can't help but ask: are these failed attempts at fashion? Or rather reluctance towards putting in an effort into your looks?

Most attribute it towards men's plain-old indifference to their appearance. While it is quite common for girls to care about fashion, the same cannot be said for men. It's regrettable that what birthed this culture was the oppressive societal pressure on women to dress in ways appealing to the male gaze, and look "presentable".

An unfortunate by-product is that there's a great disparity between how much compliment men receive about their attires as opposed to women. After all, if you don't have an incentive to dress up, why bother? You slide into your new Converse, throw on some edgy rings, and put on your best jacket to go hang out with The Boys™, only to be greeted with a

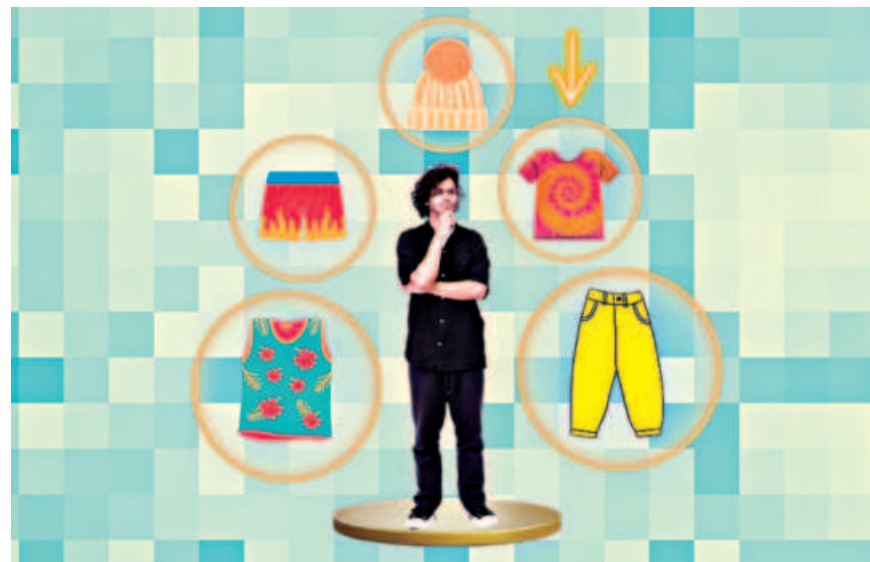


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

dry, lifeless "Nice shoes".

Since appreciating men's outfits isn't a common occurrence, we tend to be a bit clueless in terms of fashion. Not just regarding what we think other people would like, but also what we think we want to look like.

Some boys hold a strictly utilitarian view. According to them, there's absolutely no point in dressing up for a

bunch of strangers. Of course, it would be nonsensical and superficial to do so. To those with this outlook, it probably never occurred that people who put work into their outfits don't do it just for validation from people they don't know. There's the tiniest chance that maybe, it's a form of self-expression. Maybe there's a lot of satisfaction to be had in dressing up just for yourself.

Others might say that obsessing over what you wear is an inherently feminine trait.

"Why should I, a man, worry about such womanly things such as the colour of my shoes? Who has the time for that?"

Instead, men should spend all their time hitting the gym, hunting wild boars, providing for their families, and jumping away from cool explosions. If taking ten minutes to think about what to wear for the day is enough to threaten someone's masculinity, some things might be worth re-evaluating.

The moment we stop putting ourselves in boxes, the possibilities start to open up. We shouldn't need any external factors to feel good about how we look.

Wearing clothes you like seeing yourself in is a way to express yourself. It's a projection of your personality. It tells people about your sense of style, and might even leave a lasting impression. When you wear something that represents you, it can give you a newfound confidence. It can even give you the boost that makes conquering the world around you slightly easier.

Rishi's chronic procrastination is ruining his life. Send him more things to procrastinate with at: reeshe46321@gmail.com

Do you love your partner or do you love "love"?

SHAIKH SABIK KAMAL

Love is a four-letter word we have all been obsessed with at one point of our life or another. Whether it's literature, music, movie, drama or real life – love is a ruler which reigns supreme. Having consumed the deeply unrealistic portrayals of romance in pop culture, we all thrive to believe we will love someday and we'd do it "properly".

But do we ever stop to question ourselves whether we actually love our partner or, just the concept of what we think love is?

The addiction towards romance starts from adolescence. We're all longing to find our significant other to get to love them, go on dates, post pictures, and do all of the things we see couples around us do. And while we do actually find someone and do all of those things, love is much, much more than that.

Love is never not beautiful, but we fail to see the true worth of love hidden behind all the cushy cheesy narratives. Love is a box full of things we treasure. When we try picking it up, we realise that we have mistaken its weight. It's only after we've boarded the train of relationships that we realise that our journey is a far more winding road than we believed.

Young people often make the mis-

take of naming unanswered feelings "love", hurl themselves into relationships, and then fail to keep the bridge between them and their partner.

Usually, it starts out with those magical days when you can't stop thinking of going out with them. Everything seems perfect as the phrase "butterflies in your stomach" starts making more sense to you. Every moment you spend with your significant other feels like the most successful investment of time you could make.

Then life moves forward a little, and thoughts of time for our beloved get trapped in rusty crevices. You don't get to speak as much with them either, nor do you want to. And when you do, things you say

seem like just hollow words then.

Finally, the magic starts to dissipate. Soon there's fights, misunderstandings, miscommunications, broken promises, betrayals, and eventually two broken hearts. And as natural as all of it may sound, you may have never loved them. You loved love, you loved the feeling and the romance that it warranted. But you failed to love the person.

Love isn't merely a feeling, it's a commitment. The version of love portrayed through mainstream media fails to capture what it truly stands for. Loving someone is more than just any magic you share between each other. It's finding the person, embracing them and letting them embrace you.

Love can be a compromise, an understanding between two persons, a media of communication for our inner selves. To those who chase it for the highs, love is just another drug. But love is a wish granted to those who find their worth in their partner when no one else does. Even during the toughest blizzards, it exists like a veil.

So, let's not lie to ourselves and chase only the love depicted in movies without coming to terms with our feelings. For love isn't simply an experience, it's also about whom we choose to share its beauty with and who we become for it.

Shaikh Sabik Kamal loves moonlighting as a love guru, handing out romance advice to his friends for free. Remind him to stop at sabik2005kamal4787@gmail.com

ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM





THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE
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Stepping on to the ramp

A snapshot of the Bangladeshi modelling industry

FABIHA AFIFA

With the 2023 Met Gala taking place last month, I'm sure almost everyone's social media homepages were clogged with pictures and reports on who was wearing what, and other fashion content. I personally find it fun to read up on such topics, even more so as the mainstream media continues to glamorise the industry and the big names within it. It's hard to not want to catch up.

However, lately I've also realised that while the Bangladeshi youth is well-acquainted with the international fashion community, we are not as familiar with the local scene, especially when it comes to modelling. There are a few popular names on social media, and that's about it. For example, very few people

know about the casting process here, although anyone who's kept up with the Kardashians or watched the horror show of *America's Next Top Model* is likely to know how it works across North America and Europe.

For fashion model Afia Tabassum, 24, who has worked for brands like Aarong, Ecstasy, Kay Kraft, and Yellow, entry into the profession was purely accidental.

"I was originally an assistant photographer on set, but one day I had to step up as a proxy when a model didn't show up and it was our own production. The pictures came out good enough, and that made me consider a career in modelling," she said.

On the flip side, Aditi Khandaker, 26, had a more planned start at modelling.

"I knew modelling was my calling since I

was 12, so I would drop my portfolio at different fashion houses. I eventually started getting calls, so that's how I started working. Since then, I've modelled for 17 brands, including Deshal, Koinya, and Artopolis," said Aditi.

One point that most interviewees had similar experiences with, though, was the absence of enough proper agents in the industry. On an international level, even newcomers sign to modelling agencies. The process of getting signed to a reputable agent is competitive, and for good reasons. Having the right agent means access to big clients and additional favours with working schedules and pay. In most cases in Bangladesh, like Khandaker, models need to reach out to clients first.

This does influence our models' prospects to break into the international scene. As most

international brands or shows require models, having a well-connected agent brings in gigs at fashion weeks or runway shows more easily. Here, however, models usually have to rely on word of mouth or the reputation built on their previous work to get calls for fashion shows that local brands arrange, which can then open doors to opportunities in other countries. Participating in national modelling hunt TV shows is another way that models get their name around.

As for pay, there seems to be no fixed amount a model can expect to make. Many factors like the brand being modelled for, the model's popularity, the quality of product being marketed, time commitment, etc. influence their monthly average income.

Maysha Chowdhury, 25, a skincare brand

owner who also works as a fashion and commercial model, says, "Some models rack up to 5 lakh taka in one month, and then others might make less than a liveable wage. It varies from person to person."

This variance of experience does not seem to continue on to the positives and negatives of the industry. Nearly every interviewee for this article had very similar, concrete views on what they think are the highs and lows of modelling professionally.

Upoma Chakma, 27, who works as a commercial and fashion model, talks about her experience. She started her modelling career in 2013, when a few brands approached her after seeing her photos on Facebook. When asked about whether her indigenous identity affects her experience in the industry, she said, "Not everyone is likely to take an indigenous face for any brand shoot. So, the work that comes along the way is very segmented. Segmented with the need of an indigenous character only in the commercial. For photoshoots for fashion brands, the face of the model also creates a barrier in getting the job."

Chowdhury, who is a plus-size model, shared that the emphasis many brands and social media put on having a certain kind of appearance and physique push many models – men and women alike – down the rabbit hole of body dysmorphia.

Abdullah al Mahfuz, also known as Raaz Mania, talks about the struggles he faced in the early stages of his career, "When I started modelling in the early 2010s, a large majority of models working in Bangladesh were foreigners. A lot of big-name brands, as well as designers, preferred shooting for-



eign models, so the local male models did not get to work as often. The Bangladeshi audience generally favours fair skin, so the foreign models got more opportunities for work."

Quazi Sreya, a 24-year-old model, adds, "You need to be very confident in your looks and who you are as a model because you're so exposed. Your face and body are up on the internet for other people to literally judge you, and most usually do not hold back when they make comments on others' appearances, especially if it is a woman being judged. In fact, a darkly funny thing I have noticed since I started modelling is that some of the most conven-

tionally attractive people in the industry are the most insecure."

A positive aspect of the profession, meanwhile, is the camaraderie models usually share, perhaps even catalysed by their shared struggles in their line of work. "I have rarely ever met unfriendly people in my career. Especially people who want to grow into a big name in this industry are always nice to their co-workers," Sreya says. "I also don't mind the free clothes, and PR, occasionally!"

Chowdhury also appreciates the community she has built over the last five years of her modelling career. "This industry will let you meet such talented designers and

artists. You also get to inspire people yourself," she notes.

For anyone interested in modelling, being aware of these advantages and setbacks is crucial, and contrary to popular belief, it is just as important to work hard and improve one's skills to earn their spot in this competitive industry.

As Sreya shares, "Models can't afford to be shy in front of the camera. They need to remember that if someone chose them, it was for a reason. It's also important to experiment and find your angles and faces. Coming across as one-dimensional in this field can be detrimental."

Khandaker also has similar advice to offer, "You must have a strong passion for modelling and self-confidence to keep yourself motivated. Also, always keep adding to your portfolio."

In fact, social media can be a great place to start now. Because brands are constantly trying to reach as many people as possible, having a considerable social media following can boost an aspiring model's chances of getting jobs, even though many people tend to look down on influencers.

Regarding this, Chowdhury puts it aptly, "Influencers and Instagram models can be just as good as professional fashion models. Sometimes brands are even willing to invest more in influencers because of the engagement they bring to the table. What matters is the work you do."

Fabiha is now the Martell heir of Dorne, but still a secret Slytherin alum. Pledge your allegiance and soul to her at afifafabiha01@gmail.com



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

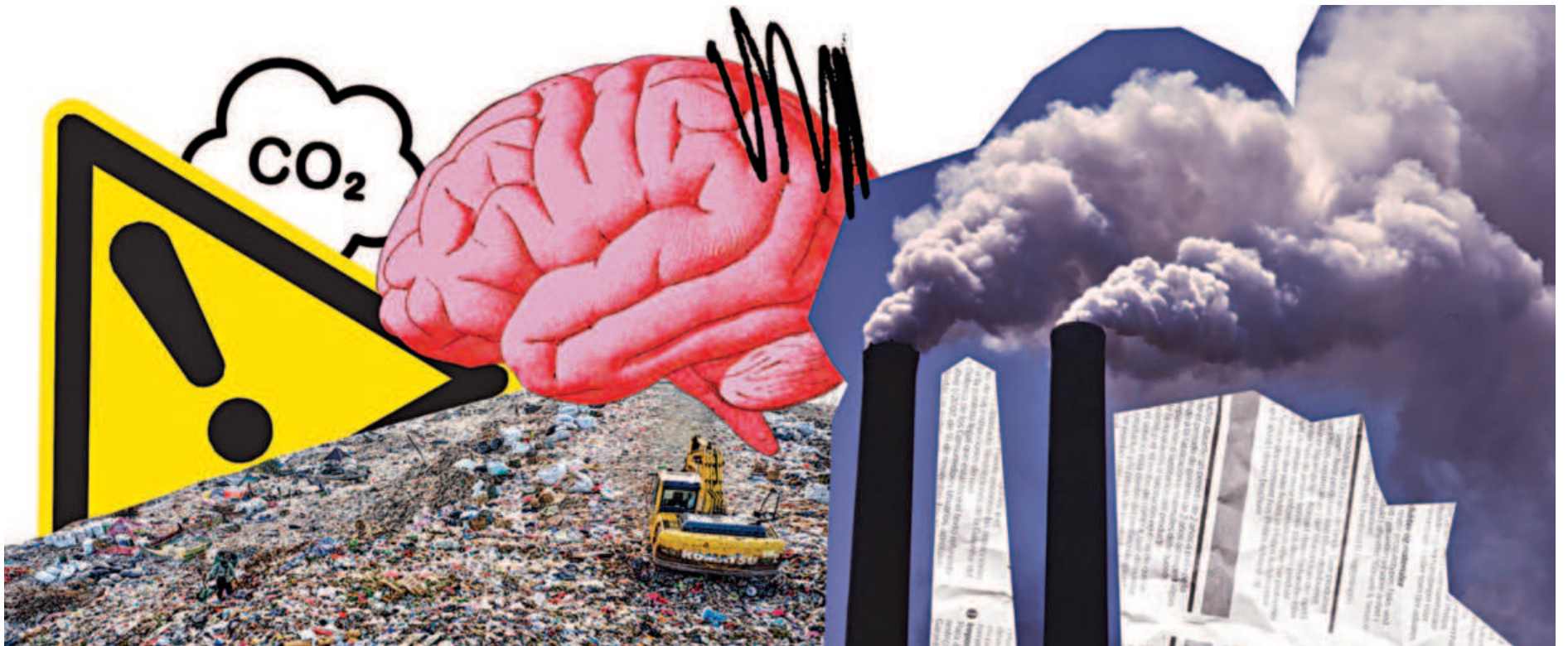


ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

Air pollution, depression, and our health

SUMAIYA RASHID

Dhaka's rapid urbanisation and industrialisation have led to a significant increase in air pollution levels. From 2018 to 2021, Dhaka has been listed as the second most polluted city in the world. However, in order to understand the ramifications of air pollution, we must first understand what the term refers to.

Air pollution encompasses a wide range of pollutants such as gases, metals and chemical compounds, and particulate matter (PM). It is the impact of PM on the body and brain that is responsible for the majority of the detrimental physical and mental health consequences of air pollution.

Both human activity and natural processes contribute to the presence of PM in the atmosphere. Windblown dust and wildfires carry PM, which is mostly created through the burning of fossil fuels (for example, from automotive exhaust), industrial activities, and large-scale agricultural operations, which explains why there is so much of it present in Dhaka's atmosphere.

PM with diameter less than 2.5 micrometres, or fine particulate matter, is easily inhaled and absorbed into the circulatory system. Fine particulate pollution is considered more hazardous than larger particles. High levels of air pollution may lead to low respiratory tract infections, depression, and other health issues. The most susceptible groups, according to a World Bank report from 2022 discussing the health impacts caused by air pollution, include young children under the age of five, the elderly, and people who have comorbid conditions like diabetes, heart disease, or respiratory issues.

"Ambient air pollution puts everyone at risk, from children to the elderly. In 2019, air pollution was the second largest cause of death and disability in Bangladesh, and costed about 3.9 to 4.4 percent of the country's GDP," said Dandan Chen, Acting World Bank Country

Director for Bangladesh and Bhutan in the 2022 World Bank report mentioned above.

While the impact of air pollution on physical health is usually emphasised, the impact on mental health is unfortunately often overlooked. Studies have shown that air pollution has a significant impact on mental health. People who breathe polluted air have changes in the parts of their brains that control emotions, which may make them more prone to mental health problems like anxiety and depression in comparison to people who breathe clean air.

Inflammation and oxidative stress in the brain have also been linked to air pollution, which can negatively impact cognitive ability and even induce neurological damage. On the other hand, air pollution has been connected to decreased attention span, memory and learning skills, and an increased risk of developmental issues in children and adolescents.

What is concerning is that the report from World Bank in 2022 makes a claim that a one percent increase in exposure to PM2.5 above the WHO AQG is linked to a 20 percent increased risk of depression.

The same World Bank Report from 2022 finds that the highest rates of depression are seen in places with heavy traffic and construction (13.7 percent). Furthermore, 13.7 percent of women and 11.8 percent of men report having depression, respectively. The tendencies of the rising depression prevalence among women and a rise in depression with age are consistent with findings in other nations.

When combined, these findings suggest a potential vulnerability of aggravated depression levels with worsening air quality. Time spent outdoors is typically associated with well-being and reduced adverse mental health outcomes. In Bangladesh, exposure to PM2.5 and the amount of time spent outdoors are both

found to contribute to depression.

Furthermore, a systematic review from 2019 analysing the association of PM2.5 with depression, anxiety and other mental health issues, discovered a substantial correlation, showing that depression rises with increased levels of PM2.5 exposure.

"With more evidence showing a pronounced impact of climate change on physical and mental health, Bangladesh needs to build on its success in adaptations to ensure a stronger health system that averts outbreaks of emerging climate-sensitive diseases," said Mercy Tembon, World Bank Country Director for Bangladesh and Bhutan in a World Bank Report from 2021 that discussed the impact of climate change on health and mental wellbeing in Bangladesh.

Research indicates that as climate change intensifies and carbon emissions remain unregulated, air pollution will worsen. Given the data and statistics available, it is clear that the youth of Dhaka are definitely susceptible to impacts of air pollution, and not just their physical health but their collective mental health is also at a huge risk.

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Sumaiya is just trying to make it through each day; give her toxic positivism at sumrashid10@gmail.com



INFOGRAPH: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

UPSIDE DOWN WORLD

A.M. FAHAD

Hurt amasses under this soil like
Water under a willow tree.
Drain it all in for the rain to continue its
Cycle of ceaseless destruction.
The sun goes down every day when it's meant to be
Your legs are already five feet under
The ground
On the pavement beside the grocery store.
You wait beside the counter –
Warmth is a longing in cold milk packets,
Plastic wrappers of junk you've stored and text
Messages in brackets that remind you of love.
You will leave as happy as the day in which you came
to be
Invisible you remain, stargazer.

Fahad is fascinated by the stargazer fish's camouflage and wishes to master the art himself. Send him texts that start with "Did you know?" at amfahad1747@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

Moony's Waffle Cart

NAHIAN JAMAL JOYEETA

Meesha walked past the neon pink sign of Moony's Waffle Cart, trying to fix her eyes on the ground despite the enticing aroma of freshly made waffles. The candy-cane-shaped shelf with jars of candy, sprinkles, Nutella, and every delectable waffle topping seemed to be clawing at her soul. Nostalgia set in, along with a hint of craving. This used to be her favourite stop on the way home from school. Moony had always been her go-to dessert place, no matter what time it was.

Her mouth watered at the prospect of biting into the sweet and crispy treat, but she quickly resisted the urge. She had been working hard to lose weight for the past two weeks, and succumbing to the temptation would mean that all her hard work would be for nothing. Her heart sank just thinking about it.

A familiar voice echoed behind her as she was about to leave.

"Hey, Meesha. What are you doing here?"

Meesha turned to face Arik, her partner, who constantly complained about her weight. She dreaded the idea of running into him at a spot where she could indulge in something he considered "unhealthy". She knew it would dampen her day.

"Uh, just taking a walk," Meesha said, her voice steady. She didn't want to give him any sign of her longing for the waffle.

"Are you sure? I mean," he said, pointing to the cart, "don't you want one?"

Meesha's stomach was in knots. She didn't want to talk to him about it, especially not in public.

"I'm just trying to stay on track with my diet," she explained, hoping he'd forget about it.

Arik laughed. "Okay, Meesha... don't say you're still on that diet. You look great just the way you are."

Meesha's heart dropped. She knew what was going to happen next. "But if you want to impress people, you should lose a few pounds," Arik continued. "You know, just for yourself."

"There it was," she thought.

Meesha felt a surge of rage in her chest. She had had enough of Arik's nagging obsession with her appearance.

"I'm not doing this for you or anyone else, Arik. I'm doing this for myself," she stated emphatically.

Arik raised his arms in defence. "All right, do whatever you want, but don't expect me to stick around if you can't take care of yourself," he said before taking

a step back and walking away.

Meesha watched him leave with a mix of sadness and resentment. She knew she needed to lose weight — not to impress him but to disprove him. She committed herself to only drinking water and eating a smoothie bowl once a day for the next 18 days. Her energy and motivation had begun to wane, and while she was visibly losing weight, she felt frail and hollow on the inside.

Meesha stopped in front of the mirror as she was getting ready for work, and she couldn't recognise herself with her sunken eyes and pale skin. She knew her relationship with Arik was unhealthy, and she needed to break free from his toxicity if she wanted to reclaim her bubbly self.

Meesha felt her spirits rebel and decided to treat herself to a waffle. She asked Moony for the largest waffle, oozing with chocolate and all her favourite toppings. All set, just as she was about to indulge, Moony pointed her to a sobbing teenage girl beside the counter. Meesha's heart swelled.

"Hey, are you okay?" she asked.

The girl looked up as if surprised to be noticed and said, "No, I'm not okay. I hate my body. I feel like I'm never good enough," she said, her voice trembling. Meesha knew this struggle all too well.

"I know how you feel," she said, sitting beside the girl and pausing to bite her waffle, before continuing, "I used to feel the same until five minutes ago."

"Really?" she asked. "What changed?"

"I realised today that others' expectations or my weight should never define who I am. I will fend for myself and listen to my heart. I am beautiful, even if no one sees it, and so are you," Meesha said. It felt liberating to acknowledge this out loud.

She stared at Meesha, her eyes wide with surprise. "Really?"

Meesha gave a nod. "Absolutely! I know it's not easy, but once you start focusing on your happiness, everything else falls into place."

The girl wiped her tears and smiled. "I appreciate it. I'm Gina, by the way, you are?"

Meesha felt ecstatic, "I'm Meesha. Want to split this waffle with me?"

Gina's face lit up. Meesha handed her a fork. A beautiful sunset was seen as they sat there munching. Relief and joy washed over Meesha. She pulled out her phone and texted Arik to meet her after work.

Spill the tea with Joyeeta at [Instagram.com/smolbabyjo](https://www.instagram.com/smolbabyjo)



PHOTOS: LABIBA IBNATH ALAM

A walk through the art of custom-painted sneakers

RAIAN ABEDIN

The most important feature of an artist is perhaps their way of viewing any surface as an empty canvas. It is in the hands of visionaries who find a canvas in everything they see to find new ways of expressing beauty. With the recent explosion in the popularity of sneakers custom-painted by local artists, I find myself drawn to this newer form of artistic expression that take the shape of fashion items.

The idea of customising fashion items has perhaps been around since the inception of fashion as a concept. Sneakers being custom-painted has also been the reason behind many brands' success over the years. Yet, in Bangladesh, the passion the artists put behind these custom-painted sneakers makes them stand out in their own way. Labiba Ibnath Alam, a 24-year-old artist better known as Labaeba on social media, shares her story with us.

"I was never sure if people would buy stuff like this, so I started this as a hobby in 2020 when the pandemic started. I posted a few pictures on my page and that attracted a lot of people and they were very interested. I've been in love with painting since I was a child. So, this has been very rewarding," she said.

Even still, for Labiba, the journey has not always been easy. As artists slowly move towards turning their hobbies into a business, pitfalls and obstacles follow one after the other.

"If you go through my page, you'll see that I posted pictures and videos of

sneakers every day. I've struggled with suppliers giving me the wrong product, and with explaining my whole process to customers. My prices can be high, but they're always a product of a lot of time and effort, and the paint I use is always a special sort that has to be imported. Many people don't realise that regular acrylic does not work on sneakers," she added.

Similar thoughts were echoed by Venessa Kaiser, a 26-year-old professional artist and one of the founders of Grey-Lo – a company focused on providing custom-painted sneakers.

"When we were just starting off about three years ago, even finding the right paint was a trial-and-error process. Nowadays, on average it takes at least five hours to finish one pair, but the time can differ if the design is much more complex," said Venessa.

According to Venessa, client feedback and communication is vital for artists to grow. As customers slowly come to terms with this new form of fashion, artists are



also trying to develop themselves, and the need for a community has become very apparent.

Both Labiba and Venessa agree on the need for more artists to pick up on this new boom and share their excitement. After all, communities allow artists to work alongside each other, contributing

to the simultaneous growth of both the artists and the world of custom-painted sneakers in Bangladesh. And yet, as the artists themselves have declared, the journey is an arduous one.

In this regard, Labiba stated, "New artists should primarily focus on delivering quality work. There are many artists who might be doing this just for the clout, but that's never going to be a good idea in the long run."

Recently, in Coke Studio's music video of the song "Deora", Pritom Hasan was spotted wearing a pair of custom-painted sneakers that was prepared by Labiba herself. The rise in popularity of these new fashion items has clearly been rapid, but it is only with the passion of these artists that such a thing exists. In the future, it will be exciting to see what new artists have to bring to the field of custom-painted sneakers.

Raian's current favourite activity is shouting at the top of his lungs.