

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY JUNE 15, 2023, ASHAR 1, 1430 BS | A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*

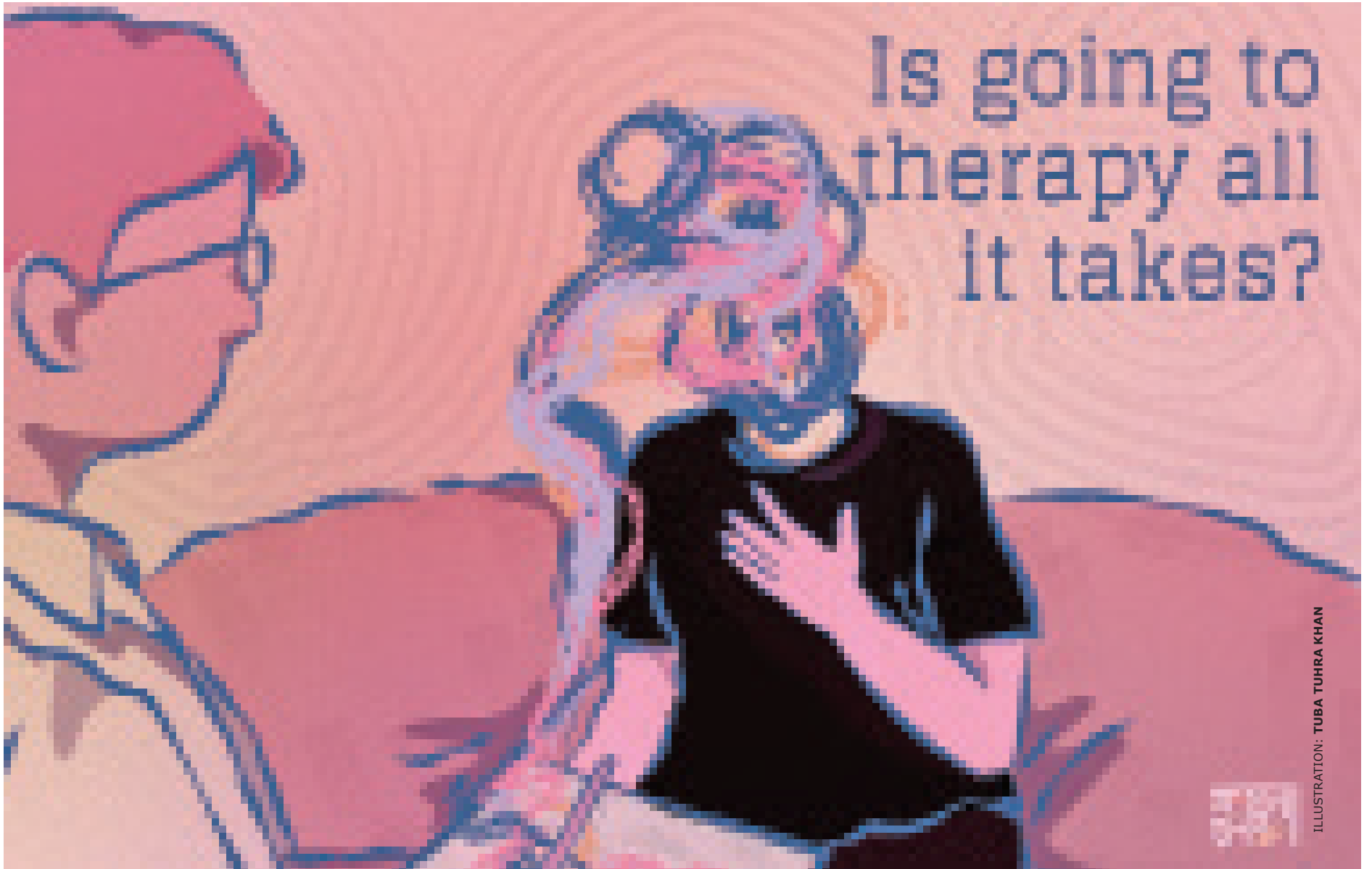


SOFT DRINKS SHOULDN'T
BE YOUR GO-TO THIRST
QUENCHER

PG 3

THINGS TO CONSIDER
WHEN CHOOSING A MINOR
SPECIALISATION

PG 6



Is going to
therapy all
it takes?

ILLUSTRATION: TUBA TUHRA KHAN



TAAGA MAN

EID UL ADHA/23

Shop online
taagaman.com

Find us inside Aarong

EDITORIAL

The heat this summer is the worst weather I have ever experienced. It reminded me of the hellish descriptions of desert weather in fantasy novels, until I remembered that this is real life. Man-made climate change is impacting our daily lives, and many of us have been too distracted to notice it.

I had a conversation with a friend during the Covid-19 pandemic where we complained about how the world was ending and instead of flying mountains and rivers of lava, we just had the boredom of sitting at home to deal with. While the conversation may have been ironic in nature, the way we were looking at things is how many people view climate change, and that is a problem. The fear attached to destructive floods and devastating cyclones is real, but the reality of climate change will look more like unusually hot summers and unusually cold winters than anything else.

While we buy ACs and clamour for more electricity produced using fossil fuel because the heat (truly) is unbearable, I fear that the climate crisis is not something at the forefront of the collective human consciousness right now. And how is that okay?

– Azmin Azran, Editor, SHOUT & Star Youth



TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE



A	B
It's Not Just Me, It's Everybody Weyes Blood	Heat Waves Glass Animals
Too Much Carly Rae Jepsen	I Wanna Help Your Mind Goth Babe
Look at the Sky Porter Robinson	I Can Change LCD Soundsystem
Freedom Beyoncé ft. Kendrick Lamar	Nancy From Now On Father John Misty

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

PLAYWATCH

MUSIC



ENHYPEN's princely return with *Dark Blood* falls short of anticipation

SHAIKH SABIK KAMAL

ENHYPEN became the talk of the town late last month with the release of *Dark Blood*, their first mini-album in over ten months. This marked the group's fourth EP release containing six tracks and featuring the seven-member group donned in a princely vampire fashion.

While their concept has finally relished what listeners have yearned for the longest, ENHYPEN's new album doesn't quite match up to the untold promises it made before its release.

The album's introductory track "Fate" is the result of their previous album's outro "Foreshadow". Produced by Wonderkid, the song beautifully introduces the album's narrative to the listeners, with hauntingly powerful siren-like vibes raising their expectations to the maximum. However, after listening, I realised "Fate" would have served much better as a full track as it stands out the most musically and fails to be trumped by its succeeding tracks.

"Bite Me", the long-awaited title song that has been teased multiple times before its release, is perhaps the most frustrating song from the record. The track showcases the members being bound by destiny to their significant partners which is portrayed through dance routines with female dancers.

This is quite a statement in an industry where you get into scandals for merely looking at someone. The minimally crafted pop song with a redundant pre-chorus runs two-and-a-half minutes before sinking into an underwhelming outro with no bridges in sight. The fact that the chorus, refrain, and verses, which have been spectacularly presented, just fuels my frustration. That is because it symbolises just how much they underdelivered. The album's next two songs, however,

could be crowned as the album's heroes. "Sacrifice (Eat Me Up)" is a song reminiscent of the group's first promotional B-side "Let Me In" as it introduces catchy reggae-inspired beats. The song whirs a distinct sound with Sunoo's mesmerising vocals, proceeding with a flavour that is truly befitting of ENHYPEN. The track "Chaconne" doesn't fall short of praise either. The trap-grunge song brings out a moody and charming colour. The song succeeds in drawing the most out of Sunghoon's husky vocals mixed with sulky guitar riffs. These two songs really set an amicable example of how bridges can accentuate a song.

The final two tracks, on the other hand, are mediocre songs that I wouldn't replay. "Bills" is a mellow song with run on trap-inspired repercussions not serving any bridges. The song exudes an underwhelmingly comfortable warmth, failing to leave a memorable impact.

The final track "Karma" is a generic spin on the punk rock style ENHYPEN has previously showcased. The song starts off a bit too hyper, collapsing any mood the album set up with its other songs. The upbeat track feels a bit too loud and largely unwelcoming as the final song on the album.

While *Dark Blood* undoubtedly could've boasted a much richer listening experience, I must say it is a huge step up from their previous mini-album. The improvements are definitely there, but ENHYPEN has the potential to do so much better. Though my main concern as of now is HYBE's imminent "bridge-phobia" with the title tracks of their groups.

Shaikh Sabik Kamal is close to writing a rant essay on why bridges are so important. Remind him that engineers exist at sabik-2005kamal4787@gmail.com

Growing up surrounded by music

SAIF SAMMI RAHAT

Growing up, while filling out school forms, I'd fill in mother's occupation with "singer". Until pretty late into my school life, I hadn't realised that this wasn't that common.

My family's musical background dates back to my grandfather – Sohrab Hossain. Born on April 9, 1923 in present-day Nadia district, India, where he was raised in a conservative Muslim family. His only exposure to music being the gramophone. He grew up being infatuated by music and, with aid from his brother, would strip down at the banks of the Churni river in the middle of the night to swim across and back to get singing lessons from his *ustad*. The community had strictly disapproved of his attitude towards music but he did not budge.

While performing at a concert in Ranaghat, his voice was discovered by Abbasuddin Ahmed, who took him to Kolkata to meet with then-prime minister, Husseyn Shahid Suhrawardy, to get him a job as a singer. *Nana* would go on to sing till his last breath on December 27, 2012.

In my childhood, I got used to seeing my mother and aunt on TV. Often, when getting ready to go to school, I'd turn on the TV and watch, half-asleep, my mother singing on screen. Classmates would come up to me to inform me that my mother had been on TV that morning.

Once a year or so, she'd leave for India to perform on Nazrul Jayanti for a week. Those weeks would be anything but fun for me, but at least I got to eat amshotto when she came back.

An interesting story about my parents – they had gotten married in 1993 but my father had first seen my mother about seven years prior. My grandfather and mother were performing in BUET where my father was a student. Unfortunately, those two events are totally unrelated.

When COVID hit, my mom and aunt started getting calls from different people to perform in live programmes, which means sitting in front of a laptop, and singing two or three songs. My mother wanted someone to remain standby in case anything went wrong. That meant me and my sister were on duty. Some days, my mother and aunt would have an event together, meaning I sometimes had to run between two flats in case something goes wrong on one side and my sister can't figure it out. But I'd get a huge dinner at my aunt's afterwards so I didn't complain.

All that said, one would assume that I'd be good at singing. But, no. My mother tried to teach me to sing. Every Saturday morning, she'd make me sit with the kids from upstairs in front of the harmonium. Eventually, I stopped showing up and I never ended up learning to sing. Do I regret it? Absolutely.

All in all, music is pretty significant in my life nonetheless. From watching my father learn to sing and play the harmonium to recently celebrating my grandfather's 100th birth anniversary, music has been a recurring theme throughout my life, which really just makes me question why I have such bad taste in music. Maybe, my sister is right and I really am adopted.

Saif Sammi Rahat claims to have bad taste in music but also listens to Lana Del Rey. Reassure him at [facebook.com/saif.s.rahaf](https://www.facebook.com/saif.s.rahaf)



ILLUSTRATION: FAISAL BIN IQBAL



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

Soft drinks shouldn't be your go-to thirst quencher

In the sweltering heat of 43 degrees Celsius, a bottle of cold drink is hard to avoid. For someone like me, who could chug on a 1.25-litre bottle of cola by myself, it took me very little to stop myself from taking a single sip this entire heat wave. I just had to find out what was inside the drinks I was putting in my body.

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

Let's look at a typical bottle of cola. It contains 44 kilocalories (kcal) per 100 ml, which is around 264 kcal for a 600 ml bottle. Although it is equivalent to a meal itself, it is adding no nutritional value at all. A cold drink followed by a meal ends up being two meals at once.

However, if you think a bottle of soft drink in the middle of the day to get rid of dehydration might be harmless, a recent study shows that hydration with soft drinks might exacerbate dehydration by discharging extra water from the body. So, rather than helping you with dehydration, soft drinks end up making you feel more dehydrated, along with renal injury and hypertension in the long term.

A typical bottle of cola also contains around 10.6 grams of sugar per 100 ml, which converts to 63.6 grams for a 600 ml bottle. If we consider the orange flavoured drinks, the sugar content is even more. According to American Heart Association (AHA), our body needs zero extra sugar daily. The sugar we consume from fruits or vegetables is enough to meet our daily requirements. However, the AHA suggests a stricter added-sugar limit of no more than 100 calories per day (about 24 grams) for adult women and no more than 150 calories per day (about 36 grams of sugar) for men. The added sugar can result in diseases ranging from hypertension to type-2 diabetes.

If you think diet drinks might be a better option, you should know that artificial sweeteners such as Aspartame, Saccharine, and Sucralose are used in diet cokes. Although Aspartame's direct link to cancer has

been debated for over the years, artificial sweeteners have been linked to diabetes, weight gain, IBS, and Crohn's disease.

In orange flavoured drinks, food colours such as E110 are often used which includes side effects such as allergic reactions, nausea, nasal congestion, kidney swelling, and even chromosomal damage. In children's diets, E110 is heavily discouraged since it agitates hyperactive behaviour and loss of concentration in children. Although E110 is banned in multiple countries across the world, Bangladesh allows it to be used under caution.

Sodium Benzoate is also used in most common cold drinks which, when in contact with light and heat, can convert to Benzene, a commonly known carcinogen.

Unfortunately, beverage companies keep trying to legalise these additives by political lobbying and continue to use these additives in countries where the restrictions are more lenient. Since consumer health is the least of their concern and heat waves aren't going anywhere, it's up to us to truly understand the effects of what we consume.

References:

1. American Journal of Physiology (July 1, 2016). *Rehydration with soft drink-like beverages exacerbates dehydration and worsens dehydration-associated renal injury.*
2. Dhruv Rathee. YouTube (August 17, 2022). *Dark Reality of Cold Drinks.*
3. American Heart Association. *How Too Much Added Sugar Affects Your Health Infographic.*

Remind Ifti to be quieter at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com

IS GOING TO THERAPY ALL IT TAKES?

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE
SHOUT

AMRIN TASNIM RAFA AND SHANUM SARKAR

Acceptance and openness to the idea of attending therapy sessions to seek help for personal psychological struggles or symptoms of mental illness has exponentially increased amongst the youth in a very short period of time. However, as expected for such a rapid change, many misconceptions have risen regarding the topic.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Most people have a vague idea of what therapy is and when to go, but foster a lot of misconceptions. While progress should always be celebrated, many come with expectations based on either lack of information or misinformation, which becomes counterproductive to your treatment.

A common misconception is that much like a doctor's visit for a physical ailment, one appointment, or at worst a couple, is enough to provide you with effective solutions to what you're struggling with.

Given the complexities of human lives, an opinion reverberates across all professionals we spoke to – one visit is truly not enough to even begin making an attempt to emotionally reach a person.

At best, one session can accomplish a brief, surface-level understanding of symptoms. In the first visit, a therapist just begins to get acquainted with the person and the situation at hand, leaving little time for feedback.

Ferdous Ara Reshmin, psychologist at Lifespring, shared with us a brief overview of the technique she uses for approaching her patients.

"Psychiatric patients, i.e. those suffering from illnesses such as OCD, anxiety and/or depression, need proper therapeutic sessions. The crucial aim of the first few sessions is to build rapport with the patients. The patient's understanding of mental illness, and willingness to accept it as an illness and openness to accepting treatment is a major factor playing into how long this takes. Absence of such openness and understanding, as is often the case in Bangladesh, takes away some time spent

in getting the patient on board. Alongside, we need to collect the patient's history, study them and their behaviour, and build a specific treatment plan for each individual. At a very rough estimate, all of this takes about three sessions, though this largely varies from person to person," she says.

After this preliminary stage, the professional applies their plan into the sessions, and since behavioural patterns are extremely complex and deep rooted, they can be time consuming to modify. The number of sessions depends on the severity of the patient's situation.

Patients then become aware of their problems, receive some guidance, direction and understanding, and explore the possibility of solutions to personal issues. This sense of continuity lets them practise what they've learned, and then receive feedback.

Devi Ayu Das*, an 18-year-old A level student reflects on her therapy sessions, which went on and off for over several months for anxiety disorder.

"I truly believed in the power of therapy, went in with high hopes and gave my best to ensure my therapist knew everything I wanted to improve within myself. It took me a few sessions to be completely comfortable with my therapist as being in a vulnerable state is difficult. Building an emotional relationship

took time and effort but was worth it. Anxiety disorder doesn't just go away suddenly, it needs patience to work towards whenever it surfaces again. The consistency of my therapy sessions gradually made my symptoms more manageable," she says.

Iman Ahmed*, a 17-years-old, says "During the first few sessions, I didn't really expect much. Building trust with a complete stranger who was much older than me and then being able to share such personal details was difficult at first. But I believed it would take time and patience. I knew things would be emotionally distressing. There was a lot of shame within me for what had happened, and having a good relationship with my therapist was important. It took me 5-6 sessions to even mention things that were not just surface level."

What was once a completely stigmatised, shameful last resort is now seen by some as the Holy Grail, all-in-one solution

weakness. This, the patient needs to apply the coping techniques they learned in therapy and apply them in their daily life," adds Ferdous Ara Reshmin.

As children and young adults live at home with their parents in Bangladesh, sometimes therapists require collaboration with parents. This need mostly arises due to the stigma and lack of information surrounding mental illness and treatment. Thus, the therapist might do the work of a social worker akin to that of more developed countries to give parents guidelines on how to approach their struggling child. If the child needs medication, parents also need to be briefed on it.

If parents do see the need to take their children to therapy, they usually do so out of extreme worry, but aren't always aware of the responsibility that they themselves hold. When the sessions do not result in immediate progress, it is common to be dissatisfied with the professional, or reach the conclusion that therapy is an ineffective practice, leading to the struggling child not being taken back and denied help.

We spoke to Dr Tumpa Indrani Ghosh, Assistant Professor of Child, Adolescent, and Family Psychiatry at Mymensingh Medical College, who also works as a consultant at Lifespring. According to her, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at Lifespring, a lot of factors need to be accounted for to attain maximum effectiveness of therapy sessions especially for a child or a preteen.

"Young children do not develop enough to take full responsibility for their wellbeing and create boundaries between themselves and their surroundings. Effectiveness of therapy depends on their home and school environment," she says.

For example, young children with ADHD usually struggle academically, and without the help of a therapist, it is common for parents to think this is deliberate, and can be fixed by humiliating and/or strictly disciplining the child. This always makes matters worse.

While more young people are open to going, most of them are not aware that therapy is a continuous process, and requires work outside of therapy.

Sabil Sadat Zahir, a third year student at BRAC University who consistently sees his university counsellor, attested to this in an account of his experience.

"When I've been in therapy long enough to see major positive changes to my life, I realised that my counsellor never handed me any solutions, rather they guided me towards the solutions that were within myself. The therapy itself didn't fix my problems, but it helped me manage them much better. It's about understanding your own emotions, weaknesses and strengths and finding more effective ways to deal with your problems. Therapy helped me deal with some of my lifelong issues like anxiety and self-hatred. Not that they've gone away, but I manage them so much better that these issues don't cripple me as they once did," he says.

Niloy Abrar*, 19, says, "Going to therapy was never an awakening or magical experience for me, my brain did not restructure to think of my situation any differently, it just made my symptoms manageable. It didn't magically fix me, it made me more functional."

Finances are a major roadblock in the consistency of one's therapy sessions. Devi and Abrar had to financially support themselves all throughout therapy, while some of the other people we spoke to had to hide that they were in therapy from their parents.

"My mom encouraged me and found a few therapists to see which one I would like. I was able to comfortably go and not feel guilty while I was in therapy," says Iman, amplifying the importance of a good support system outside therapy.

Psychotherapy is an essential element of treating mental illness. When sessions are conducted responsibly by the professional, and cooperatively by the patient, its benefits are tried and tested. The experience of therapy, and how long it takes for you to see results varies from person to person. Each person's disposition and circumstances are very different, but therapy rarely delivers instantaneous results to any. Our young people have a right to accessible quality healthcare for both mental and physical ailment, especially when we have failed them in so many ways as a society.

**Names have been changed upon request*

Shanum closely resembles a raccoon, send her reasons to cut down on caffeine at shanumsarkar18@gmail.com

Everything confuses Amrin. Send help at amrinrafa@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: YEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

to all of life's problems. However, a range of factors disturb our psyche, and thus mental illness can be treated with maximum effectiveness with a three-dimensional approach. Such treatment includes a bio-psycho-social approach. Mental illness is categorised to two types, neurosis and psychosis. Neurosis is a mild mental disorder not arising from organic diseases – instead, it can occur from stress, depression, or anxiety. Psychosis is a major personality disorder characterised by mental and emotional disruptions. Psychosis requires medication prescribed by a psychiatrist, alongside sessions with a psychologist, for effective, long term treatment. As for social factors, there exists many that are outside of the patient's, and the therapist's, control. Therapists are not advisors, nor can they provide immediate solutions or shelter you from any disruptive social factors.

"We teach patients to adapt, not escape or change their circumstances. The patient may have a behavioural weakness in dealing with a certain circumstance, through constructive discussion and positive reinforcement, we try to modify the behavioural weakness and to divert it to a strength. If we try to remove the problem, or ourselves from it, we are encouraging behavioural

Things to consider when choosing a minor specialisation

NAHIAN JAMAL JOYEETA

One of the important decisions you'll be making during your undergraduate studies is choosing a minor specialisation. This is one of the less talked-about aspects of university, although it plays a significant role in your academic journey. You may find it difficult to select a minor specialisation due to uncertainty, a lack of information, and a lack of exposure, time, and resources. Since I have struggled with this overbearing dilemma myself, I am here to assist you in sifting through the myriad of options and reaching a decision.

To start, it's necessary to consider your passions and interests. Your minor specialisation should be aligned with your professional and personal goals. Spend some time thinking about the topics that truly interest you. What are your strongest suits and favourite hobbies? Think about how a specific minor specialisation can advance your expertise in the area you've chosen. Remember, your minor should complement your major for a well-rounded education.

Another important consideration is the relevance and advantage of the minor specialisation. You can boost your employ-



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

ability by selecting an in-demand subject. Examine the market for experts in your desired fields to see how it can help your career. Many vocational fields are better suited to emerging industries or sectors with high growth potential.

I learned the hard way that pursuing a minor in subjects that genuinely interest you is equally important. I had initially chosen Sustainable Development as my minor because all of my peers did the same. With barely a few semesters left until graduation, I switched my minor to En-

glish Literature. Despite being concerned about developmental policies and the environment, I discovered that I enjoyed creative writing and literary analysis a lot more than field research, policy debates, and surveys. Some universities offer the same courses as open electives, so you can try out a few different courses from various specialisations to make a more informed decision.

Remember that your minor courses will require a significant amount of your time and effort, which is especial-

ly true for students whose universities don't follow the open-credit system. To prevent having a negative impact on your overall academic performance, balance the workload with your major courses in some areas that may require extra effort. Discuss your interests and ambitions with academic advisors, seniors, and faculty members, and ask for recommendations based on your strengths. They may inform you about the curriculum, potential career paths, and possible research opportunities in your chosen field and provide you with their insightful opinions.

Choosing a minor concentration for an undergraduate degree is an important decision that should be approached with caution. Your minor opens doors to additional knowledge and abilities, increasing your versatility and adaptability to the job market. This means that your major does not always limit you to a specific career route or determine the course of your profession. If you choose wisely enough, you may as well discover a career that wasn't in your original plan, so don't be afraid to explore your options, and seek advice when necessary.

Spill the tea with Joyeeta on [instagram.com/nahianjamaljoyeeta](https://www.instagram.com/nahianjamaljoyeeta)

History, fascism, and the hijacking of children's fairy tales

MD. NAYEEM HAIDER

Long before the television was created or books were made widely accessible, stories, like fairytales, were one of the prominent forms of entertainment available to the vast majority of people. Reality was harsh, and these stories allowed them to escape it and venture forth into distant worlds of romance and adventure.

Many children grew up without receiving any form of formal education, and to them, fairytales were not just a vehicle for the imagination but also an introduction to the dangers of the world and the accepted moral standards of the time. With the evolution of society from the feather quill to the laser printer, fairy tales too have changed to suit the times.

It was the 1930s, a time when xenophobia and nationalism ruled Germany. To fit the vision the Nazi party had for Germany and its youth, Joseph Goebbels, the Reichminister of Propaganda, had many such tales remodeled to fit the Nazi narrative. In these fairytales, the Little Red Riding Hood wears a coat adorned with swastikas, and Snow White's father is one of the German commanders leading the invasion of Poland. Snow White herself and Cinderella would be made to represent the ideals of Aryan beauty and racial purity, while the evil witch and cruel



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

stepsisters would embody the anti-Semitic stereotypes associated with the Jewish race.

In the east, the military elite of Imperial Japan would incorporate local legends and folktales into propaganda to convince the citizenry of the "righteousness" of their expansionist endeavours. In, *The Tale of Momotaro*, the demons of Onagashima were used to portray the British, Americans, Chinese, or Russians, while the heroic Momotaro represented the Japanese government. Momotaro's animal companions were meant to showcase the ideals of steadfast loyalty that future Japa-

nese citizens were expected to live by.

In the Cold War era, the Soviet Union was also known for using modified versions of Russian folktales. These were not just for domestic consumption, as the Soviets translated and exported these all over the world. Such fairytales were markedly different from western ones. The focus was on the common peasant, the impoverished Ivan as he always triumphed over the evil, greedy Czar. While the stories themselves weren't overly political, the real objective was always to bring up a generation of global youth sympathetic to the Soviet cause.

Fairytales, no matter how innocuous, serve as an effective method of delivering ideology. There is no accident in this. Children and youth are highly impressionable, and the biases formed in those formative years can dictate the sort of life a person may lead in the future.

Such tactics may seem like relics of the 20th century, but one can never really know for sure. To differentiate between what is innocent and what is not often proves to be a tricky business indeed. Awareness, therefore, is of the utmost importance.

References:

1. Verve Magazine (July 2, 2014). *THE FÜHRER'S FAIRYTALES*
2. History Channel (September 17, 2013). *The Dark Side of the Grimm Fairy Tales*
3. Los Angeles Times (June 7, 2017). *'Momotaro,' a Japanese World War II-era propaganda animation film, finally gets a DVD release*
4. Scroll.in (August 25, 2019). *Those beautiful Soviet fairy-tale books many of us were enchanted by? They were meant for propaganda*

Nayeem is an avid history nerd. Quiz him on medieval siege tactics at nayeemhaider90@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

DEATH OF A NOVELIST

MD. NAYEEM HAIDER

I stand there, staring down keenly at Dhanmondi Lake, mesmerised by the reflection of the blackness of my soul. I rip my gaze away from it and fix it on the starless night as I liberate my fingers from the oppressive touch of paper. A small splash, and nothing else. Many eternities have to pass before I can look again, and by then, not a trace of my life's work will remain. Neither stored digitally nor on paper. Nowhere in this world, and nowhere within myself.

Gently, the breeze caresses my face, as if in consolation. But I cannot muster a shred of sadness. No tears well up. Neither is there any anger nor the smallest atom of frustration. I am a bland soup of emptiness seasoned with exhaustion.

The infallible whiteness of the walls, the omnipresent smell of disinfectants, and the fields of artificial grass come back to me. Swimming before me are visions of smiling children and the legions of overworked childcare professionals constantly at their service. Every blink threatens to permanently relocate me to their world of ceaseless laughter.

The time spent in that Youth Complex in Baridhara feels peculiarly like an afterlife to me. A heaven for the youth with neither stress nor stimulation – that's what it was. At the age of thirteen, in that world of boredom and ghosts masquerading as kids, I wrote a story that encapsulated the ennui that abandoned me. I

handed it to my teacher and never got it back.

I chose literature as my undergraduate major and was utterly disgusted.

For four years, we studied the bestselling novels of the twenty-third century, only to discover that each of them had been exactly the same. Just packaged a little differently, that's all. Stories that had nothing to say yet never failed to make money. Identical characters everyone had read of a million times yet none grew bored of. Themes and messages reused and recycled to the point where even the word "generic" felt too original a description. And yet – miraculously – they always resulted in money going to someone's bank. In class, we learned the statistics of what worked and what didn't. In exams, we would stack various tropes upon each other and let artificial intelligence predict sales and profits.

"Novels do not exist for stories to be told. They exist for books to be sold," these were the exact words our professor said on the first day of class.

The world started to crumble around that time. And as the living descended further into the pits of Tartarus, the dead sprang back to life. I began to live voraciously through the works of ancient writers from long before their craft was rendered obsolete by technology. Dickens, Orwell, Tolstoy, Tagore, Nazrul, and many others shone the light of solace into the pitch-blackness of my misery. Even the darkness of Dostoyevsky felt like a hot,

humid twilight compared to the ceaseless winter that had set over my life.

Until this evening, I had worked as a Prompter at a reputable publishing company. All I had to do was construct a prompt based on an idea from the higher-ups and feed that to the office AI. Multiple fully formed novels would be ready within seconds. Afterwards, I'd just send in the one that seemed the least terrible.

"You're a genius!" exclaimed my colleagues, every other day. Unbeknownst to myself, I had become an example for others. All because my junk sold more than theirs. I made money, and I helped the corporation make money. I wore a smile at all times, spreading it around as if it were a contagion. The emptiness only expanded when I should've been perfectly happy.

I am like Kazuko from Osamu Dazai's *The Setting Sun*. Just as she existed to bring a child into this world, I too exist to show the world a portrait of myself and this dead utopia that I have endured for so long.

A picture painted by human emotions, not the algorithms of artificial intelligence. I want to stimulate the individual, not the economy. But even when I was emulating their novels with pinpoint accuracy, the publishers muttered the same words of rejection. In our world, storytellers are just as unnecessary as content creators are essential. My *raison d'être* was stripped of its worth centuries before I was born.

With uncaring leisure, the water of the lake swerves this way and that, as per the instructions of the rising wind. It goes where it is easier to go and has no thoughts of its own. Just like a certain species. I stare at the black abyss, but nothing stares back. I almost wish something did. It would take away some of the loneliness that has been hollowing me out from within.

I didn't have parents. No one does these days. The family is deemed primitive and counterproductive to building the next generation of humans. An army of degree-holding experts is far more efficient.

I had many friends, but I can't remember in the slightest what we talked about. Were we, in the end, little more than strangers selfishly humouring ourselves as we travelled along the same path? I try to remember the women I have been with over the years, but no luck again. I have muddled up their names, faces – everything.

Love is free for all. It's just that it has evaporated from the face of the earth. All diseases can be cured except sudden natural death, but neither surgery nor medicine can fill the chasm that has opened up in my chest.

Nayeem often drowns in dreams and delusions. Wake him up at nayeemhaider90@gmail.com

Send your short stories, poetry and illustrations to shoutfablefactory@gmail.com



PHOTOS: ARSHADUL HOQUE ROCKY

An afternoon spent with art

The National Fine Arts Exhibition 2023 is a must-see event this summer

A.M. FAHAD

The National Fine Arts Exhibition 2023 at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy was an experience I enjoyed more than I thought I would. With the sun hiding behind the clouds and the soft sound of rain, it was a perfect day to visit an art exhibition.

The artwork and installations revolve around diverse topics ranging from climate issues, contemporary media, and mental health to the portrayal of menstrual health and motherhood. Produced by artists of various ages, starting from experienced virtuosos in the field to young artists born in the late 90s and early 2000s, the exhibition gives a good look into what Bangladeshi artists are doing these days.

I found "Tales of Inanimate River", a popular attraction of the exhibition, which is a Kinetic Sculpture by Promotesh Das, to be extremely unique. As the artist shares his concept of the project, he talks about growing up on the banks of the Surma river, and how he witnessed the death of a river for the first time after moving to Dhaka. The way rivers lose their ability to reflect light based on the amount of pollution they suffer from is a key highlight of the project, as the project revolves around a kinetic sculpture resembling the waves of a fresh river with small traces of light reflecting off of it.

I also found "Floating Island", an installation by artist Soma Surovi Jannat, incredibly captivating. The installation explores the idea of blending in with nature and experiencing life from the eyes of the mundane. The project is a drawing installation where the artist sees themselves as a floating island, repositioning themselves in different perspectives, sometimes a flying bee, sometimes a tree, sometimes like a bird, and sometimes like a mother, while unfolding their relationship with nature.

One of the installations that caught my eye was "Story of a Mason Jar", an installation by artist Fareha Zeba. The



exhibition is a giant broken mason jar that compares the similarities between a mason jar and a womb. The artist attempts to portray the dominant aspects of womanhood in an oversized mason jar that speaks of women's struggles, contributions, and more. The exhibition was crafted with diverse forms of media such as paper, jute threads, wires, etc., and is full of layers of imagery for the viewers to claw out.

The snake ludo board by Bangladesh Performance Art Group is a unique piece of performance art where the visitors are allowed to place themselves as players of the traditional snake ludo game while taking turns rolling the dice, which is a giant cushion cube the player kicks, to move to their next position. The exhibition is a floor painted with tiles from a traditional ludo board covered with snakes and ladders to recreate the original experience of

a traditional snake ludo game in real life.

Another project that drew my attention was the "Living in Water" sculpture by sculptor Bilas Mandal. The installation resembles pieces of land made of wood scattered across a room, hung by wires as if floating on a flooded water body, with people living on it. The installation speaks volumes about the ongoing climate crisis and the risks of the ocean levels rising while also expressing our desperation for clinging on to life, even in adversity.

A highlight of the event is an exhibition consisting of artist SM Sultan's revolutionary works. On the occasion of SM Sultan's 100th birth anniversary, the walls of the second floor are adorned by SM Sultan's paintings, while his personal belongings are placed gently under display cases made of glass. Sultan's work primarily revolved around life on Bangladeshi soil. His art showcases the mundan-

ity of village life with farmers working in the fields, women bathing their children, and much more.

Among his personal belongings, his used paintbrushes and palette were memories I enjoyed witnessing as Sultan exists luminously through his paintings. The influence he has left behind on the subcontinent and its contemporary artists, with his unique art style of exaggerated depictions of people engaged in the activities of their everyday lives, continues to grow.

The National Fine Arts Exhibition is set to end on July 15. The exhibition is open to visitors of all ages, which is a perfect place for people to go out, enjoy the rainy weather, and spend a pleasant afternoon.

Fahad likes frogs. Find him at amfahad1747@gmail.com