

#LIFEHACKS

How to practice positive thinking

Our thoughts have a significant impact on our actions and overall life choices. The sad reality, however, is the fact that we live in a world surrounded by negativity. Although that is the case, the practice of positive thinking can help us fend away the undesirable energy that the world and our surroundings have to offer. This in turn creates for us an environment to grow and thrive.

Here are a few ways to practice positive thinking.

Be grateful and write it down

We have just as many things to be grateful for (if not more) than we have to be worried about. Try and focus on a few of them to

put your mind at ease. Write them down if you have to. In fact, write five things you are grateful for every morning after waking up. We do not practice being grateful enough hence our mind has an easier time filtering out the good than the bad.

Identify bad habits and replace them with good ones

Whether it is overthinking, procrastinating, or being hung up in the past, we have an array of bad habits that plague our lives. We must identify these habits and learn to move away from them. Obviously, this is way harder to practice than to preach but we all need a starting point and we can always delve into new habits.

Identify areas where you need work

Similar to bad habits, there are plenty of areas in life where we can improve. We are not the complete package and we will never be, but we can always get a step closer to things. Doing some self-reflection in order to improve in certain areas will take you a long way. Perhaps, you can practice being more patient or being more mindful. Maybe, you can start working out or reading to sharpen the mind. The possibilities are endless.

In conclusion

Positivity and optimism can have multiple benefits. It helps us manage stress which

makes us more adept at handling nerve-racking situations, which in return means that you are more likely to reach greater heights in life. Positive thinking can enhance both our mental and physical health. It has been proven that positivity boosts our immune system making us more resistant to certain ailments. It makes us less prone to cardiovascular diseases due to lower blood pressure. If that is not enough, it also lowers the risk of depression and other mental health issues.

By Irfan Aziz
Photo: Collected

KOHINOOR CHEMICAL

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#LET'S TALK MEN

Monsoon in style with TAAGA MAN

An atmosphere of renewal and revitalisation fills the area as monsoon clouds approach. A magical atmosphere is created by the pitter-patter of showers on rooftops and the earthy aroma of damp soil, luring us outside to enjoy the season. It's time for men to update their wardrobes and effortlessly adapt to the rhythm of the rainy season. This monsoon, embrace cotton clothing and lightweight accessories that not only keep you comfortable but also create a statement in fashion like no other. And to make our lives easier there's TAAGA MAN monsoon collection with almost everything to meet our rainy season fashion requirements.

Cotton comfort

Finding the ideal balance between style and utility is key to monsoon fashion. The best fabric for the season, thanks to its airy and moisture-absorbing qualities, is cotton. Replace bulky synthetics and denim with light cotton shirts, t-shirts, and pants. To allow for easy mobility while preserving a clean and elegant appearance, use fabrics with a somewhat looser fit.

Adopt the trend of pastel colours and soft tones that go well with the rainy season this year. The calming atmosphere of rainy days is reflected in the soft blues, mint greens, gentle yellows, and blush pinks. These shades help you stay cool in the humid weather, in addition to adding a touch of elegance.

Footwear finesse

Without the appropriate footwear, a monsoon wardrobe is incomplete. The ideal fusion of style and utility is offered by leather shoes with soft straps. Look for styles that provide adequate grip and support so you can confidently go on slick streets.

Smart Accessories and Shorts

Leather backpacks and messenger bags are your go-to buddies when it comes to monsoon accessories. Leather, which is renowned for its strength and timeless beauty, is a great material option to protect your possessions from unplanned downpours. To effortlessly coordinate your cotton outfits, choose timeless hues like tan, brown, or black. These bags not only keep your belongings dry but also give your outfit an air of refinement. Another piece of clothing that can be synchronized with the backpack are comfortable shorts, which are also provisionally available with TAAGA MAN.

Rain-ready confidence

While rain and the monsoon season go hand in hand, it's still important to be ready for unexpected downpours. A portable, lightweight travel umbrella that fits in your bag can be a good investment. Choose a convenient model with a strong frame and an automatic open/close mechanism.

Furthermore, timepieces

with leather or cloth straps that are waterproof are the ideal accent for your monsoon attire. These watches provide a practical aspect to your outfit and can endure the occasional splash.

Styling tips — Pastel Colours

Pastel colours are very much in for the season, embrace the charm of hues by teaming your cotton shirts with comfortable shorts. This will definitely add a fashion edge to the entire look.



Ankle Length Pants

Once upon a time, people used to roll their trousers up for the ultimate relaxed and casual look. Nowadays there's no need to do so since ankle length pants are already available in the market, especially at TAAGA MAN. This not only prevents your pants from getting soaked but also adds a touch of personality to your outfit.

Let your sense of style adapt to the situation as the raindrops fall. You can negotiate the rainy season with delicacy and panache if you wear the appropriate mix of cotton clothing, lightweight accessories, and a dash of confidence. Accept the beauty of the rain, and let the reviving vibe of the season inspire your attire. So, gentlemen, get ready, go out, and make a fashion statement this monsoon!



By K Tanzeel Zaman
Photo: TAAGA MAN

Top 5 gardening apps for a booming garden

Technology has made our lives a lot easier and more efficient. Whether you are a seasoned gardener or a beginner, gardening apps can be invaluable tools to enhance your horticultural experience. With a variety of features—from plant identification to tips for growing and maintaining various plant types—these apps can guide you to create and nurture a blooming garden.

Here, we have gathered a list of 5 gardening apps that can enhance your gardening experience and make it more fulfilling!

Plant Parent: Plant Care Guide

If you are unsure about the perfect spot for a new plant or wondering how much sunlight a particular plant needs, the Plant Parent app has got your back! As a newcomer to the gardening scene, I was confused about where to place my peace lily and how many times to water it. This app helped me out with the correct guidance. Moreover, the Plant Parent app has a customised plant calendar and by using it, you can efficiently manage watering and fertilising schedules throughout the year.

Seek by iNaturalist

Ever wondered about the name of a beautiful plant you came across? Or do you have a plant at home, but the name tag is missing? Many plants regularly come in front of our eyes, but seldom we are aware of their correct names and species. Seek by iNaturalist uses image recognition technology to identify plants and animals.



All you have to do is simply open the Seek Camera and point it at living things like plants, birds, fungi etc. The app will quickly analyse the image and provide you with information about the identified organism.

Planta – Care for your plants

Planta is a useful gardening app with a range of features, including smart care reminders, step-by-step guides, plant identification, and light meter assistance. This app is quite similar to the Plant Parent app. However, the feature that differentiates Planta from Plant Parent is its light meter, which helps you identify the right plants for every corner of your home and by understanding the light conditions of your rooms, you can select plants that thrive

in either shade or sunlight, ensuring they receive the optimal lighting required.

Lovely: plants care journal

Do you love jotting down little details about your beloved plants? Well, this app has it covered for you. The Lovely: plant care journal app allows you to add notes, and photos, and track the growth of your plants. The automatic journal entries for watering, fertilisation, and other care routines help you stay organised and keep a comprehensive record of your plant care activities. Moreover, this app allows you to create profiles for each of your plants, including details such as the plant's name, location in your home, care reminders and photos.

The feature I found the most interesting is its collection of beautiful pictures of houseplants, which can be an inspiration for us on how to decorate the interior with greenery.

iScape

Whether you are a landscaping professional or a homeowner looking to improve your outdoor space, iScape allows you to design stunning and functional outdoor living areas. By using this app, you can visualise your landscaping ideas and make informed decisions before embarking on any project. Although the concept of landscape designing is new to me, I found the integration of 3D and 2D designs to blend my physical garden space with digital design elements quite useful.

iScape will be the perfect choice for landscape professionals as this app has a vast design inventory, including an extensive catalogue of plant images, textures, and landscaping elements to enhance the designs.

To conclude, gardening apps can be indispensable companions for plant parents. With their user-friendly interfaces and plethora of features, these apps will elevate the gardening experience to a whole new level for you. Hence, if you have a love for plants and a desire to cultivate your green paradise, let these gardening apps help you foster a blooming garden.

By Ayman Anika

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

#ARTS

On her art reaching the moon: In conversation with Salbhi Sumaiya

Salbhi Sumaiya's tale is one of resilience, inspiration, and a profound connection to both art and the stars. At the age of seven, she found her voice through painting. It was not just a hobby; it was a way for her to speak a language that everyone could understand—the language of art. As a hard-of-hearing (HOH) individual, her artistry has transcended barriers, becoming a bridge between worlds.

Sumaiya's artistic odyssey began when her parents stumbled upon her meticulous drawing of an aero plane on a small blackboard. Recognising her innate talent, they enrolled her in a prestigious art school in Dhaka, where her creative spark ignited a lifelong passion.

"Art became my sanctuary, a realm where I could freely express myself without the confines of words," Sumaiya confides.

As her brush danced across canvases, Sumaiya's journey led her from the narrow streets of Dhaka to the broader horizons of Canada. Her hearing impairment posed challenges, yet her determination remained unshaken.

"I enrolled in the LINC programme at CCS' Birchmount location, honing my language skills and bolstering my confidence. Overcoming barriers became my second nature," she asserts.

But it was not just language that Salbhi Sumaiya mastered; she navigated the intricate world of entrepreneurship through CCS's Small Business Support Project. With unwavering support from people around her, Sumaiya ventured into



the realm of possibilities.

Then, cosmic luck beckoned: The Lunar Codex project. A fusion of art and human exploration that resonated deeply within her.

"The idea of leaving a lasting mark on the moon, a connection between humanity and the cosmos, ignited my imagination," Sumaiya muses.

Her artwork, a tribute to wildlife preservation, would transcend the confines of Earth, leaving an indelible message among the stars.

For those who have not heard about the Lunar Codex, it comprises four time-capsules filled with the works of more than 30,000 artists, writers, singers, and filmmakers from 157 different countries, which are being sent to the moon as part of the massive project. The goal of this amazing project is

to create a wide range of artistic mediums that will serve as an eternal testament to humankind's boundless ingenuity and artistic talent. The project is spearheaded by Canadian art collector and semi-retired physicist, Dr Samuel Peralta.

Learning that her art would journey to the moon was a blend of emotions—excitement, pride, and thankfulness, all at once," Sumaiya shares.

"When I got an email from Dr Samuel Peralta, the promoter of the project, explaining that my art was going to the moon, I felt both amazed and unsure if it was real. To dispel my uncertainty, I delved deeper into his background and explored his website. After doing so, I became certain that this was indeed a genuine opportunity."

She continues to share, "I'd be the first artist from Bangladesh to represent my country on the moon. That was something to be really proud of. And then, to know that not just my art but also a powerful video, a Studio Tour of mine, would be there too, it felt like I had achieved something big."

As viewers on Earth and potential lunar visitors gaze upon Sumaiya's artwork against the lunar expanse, a message of unity resonates.

"My art reminds us that we're all part of a journey to explore, discover, and protect," she asserts. "The moon's allure, its mystique, connects with my art's message about taking care of our planet and its creatures."

Sumaiya's lunar-bound masterpiece aims to inspire future generations.

"Art and exploration go hand in hand. Through my art, I hope to ignite imaginations, nurturing a connection between art and science," she expresses, her eyes glinting with hope.

As her artwork embarks on its celestial journey, Salbhi Sumaiya showcases the limitless potential of human creativity.

"This project has shown me that art has no boundary. It's like art can travel beyond borders, even beyond Earth," she states, her voice carrying a sense of wonder. With each brushstroke, she paints not just a picture but a legacy, bridging worlds and leaving an indelible mark on the cosmic tapestry.

By K Tanzeel Zaman and Abdul Warith Khan

Photo: Collected

#PERSPECTIVE

The many faces of freedom

The very day I turned 30, I went straight to the bank to relinquish the fixed deposit and buy myself a red sports car. Immediately lowered it, adding in upgraded rims, and mounting a screen so that I could listen to my 'all-time favourite' rock bands while driving through the chaotic Dhaka streets.

Most people called it **midlife crisis**, I called it the freedom to do anything I wanted to. Freedom to do anything that made sense and yet was not possible earlier, all because I could not master enough courage to pursue what my heart bled for — a little bit of insanity.

Another friend, let's call her Maliha, despite being a high-flyer in the fields of law, one fine day left everything behind to promote solely the education for the girl child in her hometown. Apart from her new line of work, today, she spends most of her time encouraging youngsters to pursue their lifelong dreams — be it chasing a certain profession or rekindling a relationship gone sour.

Why? Because to Maliha, trailing what she deeply believes in, is almost synonymous with the ultimate freedom — being happy from the inner depths of her soul.

The next story is of my neighbour, Samiha — a single parent raising her 7-year-old daughter, Iliana. Over the last few years, Samiha has become more of a friend to me and because of the nature of our relationship, she has been able to repeatedly complain about how her daughter was being deprived of 'true' freedom, by which she meant the little one was cooped up in a rather small classroom during the day and later confined to their 1000 square feet apartment with nothing much to do but play with plastic dolls and being exposed to unhealthy levels of screen time.

Her only connection with the outside world seemed to be when she looked out of the rather restricted veranda to witness all the possibilities that she was missing out on. Simply said, childhood had gone all wrong.

That is exactly when Samiha, decided to take her daughter, off school for a whole one-month period and the duo went travelling throughout the country — learning important life skills like swimming, cycling, and how to manage emotions.

In other words, they both learned to take charge of their lives. In the process, they ultimately acquired the skills to instil confidence and protect both of them from depression and anxiety.

A month later, and to much dismay of Samiha's concerned family members, she returned to town with her little one. This time Iliana was smiling more and made friends easier and did not seem upset and gloomy as before. This act of running away momentarily from chaos and concrete, translated into freedom for my beautiful neighbour and her daughter.

These and many other stories let us believe that freedom exists in many forms, all we have to do is listen closely to our hearts first.

And when we can resonate with our inner feelings, will we be able to discover freedom which can also be translated into peace.

Certain names have been changed in the article to protect their identities.

By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

In Frame: Mubashshira Kamal Era, Aerial Dancer



In a world saturated with dreams, there exists a young artist whose aspirations are as boundless as the open skies. Mubashshira Kamal Era, a name that resonates with the vibrant hues of creativity, once called Naogaon home but has now embarked on a thrilling adventure to Dhaka. As she unfurls her wings of talent, Era envisions a path that traverses continents, connecting her artistry with the global stage.

Weaving dreams *and* DEFYING BOUNDARIES



A JOURNEY BEYOND CONVENTIONS
Mubashshira's artistic journey defies the confines of convention. Beyond the fluid dance moves and gravity-defying aerial acrobatics, her essence as an artist encompasses a constellation of passions, each twinkling with its unique brilliance. What may appear as distinct stars in her artistic cosmos are, in reality, interconnected fragments of a much grander vision.

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS DANCE
Her artistic genesis took root in dance, where her tender feet first found rhythm and expression. But like a dexterous painter experimenting with different strokes, Mubashshira's artistic evolution led her to embrace a plethora of forms, from the swift courts of tennis to the disciplined corridors of martial arts. Her spirit of exploration even graced the cricket field as part of the women's national team, a testament to her unyielding courage and adaptability.

A DANCE WITH THE SKIES
Amidst the mosaic of talents, she has nurtured, Mubashshira's intimate connection with a suspended metal ring shines with a luminous intensity. Her self-taught journey into aerial acrobatics is a manifestation of her innate ability to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. The graceful twirls and daring suspensions on the ring are more than

mere physical feats; they embody her spirit of innovation and her relentless pursuit of pushing artistic boundaries.

THE CALL OF THE GLOBAL STAGE
The aspiring artist's desire to extend her horizons grew as her talent as an artist flourished. Her gaze crosses national boundaries and transcends geographical limitations in this endeavour. Mubashshira has a laser-like focus and hopes to further her education abroad to further her talents. Her ambition is stoked by the idea of immersing herself in many cultures and artistic traditions, and the prospect of unexplored possibilities makes her eyes sparkle.

A CANVAS AWAITING ITS MASTERSTROKE
She imagines herself crossing international borders and letting the colours of fresh encounters colour her artistic canvas. Mubashshira imagines perfecting her abilities through arduous training and exposure to a global network of artists. Higher education abroad is not only a means to an end; it is a transforming journey that will give her artistic expression and fresh perspectives and spark the flame of originality.

A HEARTFELT OVERTURE
The artistic journey of the Mubashshira Kamal Era is a symphony made up of ardour, bravery,

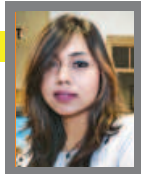
and a constant search for improvement. Her journey is a reflection of the hopes and aspirations of other young artists who dare to dream big. The hopes of her hometown, Naogaon, her mother Fahmida Akhter's unfailing support, and the voices of a world impatiently awaiting her artistic disclosures accompany Mubashshira as she embarks on this new chapter. Abdul Matlub Ahmad, whose continuous support has been a motivating force in her journey, has her most sincere gratitude. His confidence in her abilities has sparked a spark that will take her to new heights.

In an era where artistry transcends borders, Mubashshira stands as a radiant beacon of inspiration. Her story reminds us that true artwork is a tapestry fashioned from the threads of passion, exploration and an unwavering commitment to growth. Mubashshira Kamal Era invites us all to witness the maturation of an artist, the blooming of a dream, and the symphony of a spirit yearning to create enchantment across continents as she sets her eyes on the global stage.

By K Tanzeel Zaman
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
In Frame: Mubashshira Kamal Era, Aerial Dancer

LIFE AS IT IS**WARA KARIM**

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The power of a cup of tea

A steaming cup of strongly-brewed tea, boosted with milk and sugar, is sometimes all you need to unwind. For a few minutes, you do not want to think of anything else but the cup right in front of you. In the steam that rises from the cup, your stress and fatigue mix and evaporate.

Every morning, a cuppa prepared in deshi-style is what most Bengalis crave no matter what part of the world they live in. In a Bengali kitchen, the first thing that often sits on the stove in the morning is a



saucepan or a kettle to brew breakfast tea. Why? Because a Bengali tea lover's morning without tea makes them unproductive, fatigued, and irritable!

A cup of tea prepared with milk and sugar is what we love in the morning and evening, although many are now switching to plain tea for health reasons. Our undying love for tea, whether it is plain tea, lemon tea, masala tea, or milk tea, bind us together; our love for tea transcends all our differences.

To us, tea is more than just a caffeinated beverage, tea is an emotion. Tea has a sentimental value in our culture. A cup of tea when offered to someone symbolises hospitality.

Bengalis' social

gatherings are incomplete without tea. Does not our love for tea make us innately Bengali?

The clatter of teacups and saucers and the clinking of teaspoons stirring milk and sugar in teacups are music to the ears of Bengali tea enthusiasts. The aroma of tea induces in us Bengalis feelings of warmth, comfort, and belongingness.

Although coffee is rapidly gaining popularity and cafés have sprouted all over Dhaka city and beyond, our love for tea is not to be lost. A steaming cup of tea will always bring back fond memories, ease stress, erase fatigue, and give life to a social gathering. After all, tea transcends our social, cultural, political, regional, and religious differences; tea brings Bengalis closer.

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Almond tea latte

Just for tea-fanatics we have added in a recipe just in case they want to try something different and yet flavourful enough to evoke strong memories.

Ingredients

1 cup almond milk – any brand
 2 tbsp vanilla cream
 1 cup water
 ¼ cup brown sugar
 ½ tsp ground cinnamon
 ½ tsp ground ginger
 ¼ tsp cardamom
 2 black tea bags
 Ice cubes, as needed
 2 shots espresso, cooled

Method

Take a saucepan and combine water, brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and cardamom. Bring to a boil, then turn off heat and add tea bags. Allow to steep for about 5 minutes.

Strain tea mixture into 2 ice filled glasses, then add espresso shots. Pour almond milk and the creamer, into the glasses.



#FOOD & RECIPES

A GENTLE BREEZE ON THE PLATE



Nestled at the crossroads between culinary excellence and the serene embrace of nature, Zephyr is a haven that invites both connoisseurs and wanderers alike. Zephyr, meaning a gentle breeze, is a restaurant that culminates the



The moment you step out of the rooftop elevator into the lobby, you are greeted by the friendliest staff with a marvellous sight of a space that feels infinitely larger because of the floor-to-ceiling windows letting in all the natural light during the daytime.

In the evening, you can feel the ambience change drastically as the meticulously adorned lighting and decor really catches the eye. Beyond the windows, you can see the beautiful skyline of Dhaka city. The furnishings and colours mixed in with the greenery of 57 different flower plants surrounding you truly is a unique experience.

"We desired to give people, not just a restaurant to dine in, but a special experience when they come to Zephyr. We integrated nature and the big blue sky into the overall dining experience that will surely take it to the next level," expressed the owners, Muhammad Amir Abdullah and Kazi Motahazzad Billah.

Talking about the food, it's focused on European continental cuisine with delicious dishes from Spain, Greece, and Italy just to name a few. They have a wide

range of dishes from artisan pastas, spaghetti, and aglio e olio to precisely grilled steaks from a wide range of cuts to freshly imported sizzling snapper and lobsters. Their food quality is of the highest standard and combined with the style of cuisine, it's a tantalising affair!

"Zephyr is a family-oriented restaurant so we ensure that quality is always kept at a maximum for which reason almost all of our product is imported from abroad," said Amir Abdullah.

Their drinks selection is as extravagant as the food. From aromatic tea and coffee to riveting mocktails and fresh seasonal fruit juices, they possess flavours for any and all taste buds. The owners themselves are deeply health conscious so they made a decision not to have any carbonated

drinks on board. Not to worry though! One sip of their Blue Hawaii or Sunrise Mocktail will make you forget soft drinks even

existed. The presentation matches the taste extremely well and really sets them apart.

The ambience of colours and nature surrounding your visual senses as you are digging into your flavourful meal is honestly a feeling like no other. They are constantly innovating new recipes and they have plans for a live kitchen of sorts in the coming months. All their staff are highly trained professionals and they ensure that no matter what you eat, no matter how much time you spend in there, you will leave elated. The charm of Zephyr really reels you in and hits the nail on the head of a place where you truly lose your sense of time.

By Abdul Warith Khan
Photo: Zephyr

three things that Dhaka city lacks tremendously — a marvellous view of the big blue sky, rejuvenating fresh air, and lush greenery everywhere the eye can see. The food only enriches the experience with phenomenal delicacies made with care and expertise by the finest hands in the city.



Breaking taboos one at a time

"Have you done it?" "Do you have a past?" "How far have you gone with someone?" "Ms or Mrs?..."

From friends, relatives, partners, spouses or even the OB/GYN — at some point, everyone's shown some strange (read: intrusive) interest in your sexual history. Addressing these deep-seated insecurities among the youth and adults, we speak to gender rights activists and a psychiatrist to deconstruct why people still cling to the social construct of 'virginity' in this day and age.

Why do people do what they do?

From a psychological standpoint, Dr Ashique Selim, MRCPsych, MBBS, Lead Consultant Psychiatrist and Managing Director, Psychological Health and Wellness Clinic (PHWC) explains that we cannot have a conversation about sex and sexuality without addressing the patriarchy that we live in.

"Controlling or prohibiting people from engaging in sexual acts, allows for gender disparity to exist. As a result of this continuing system, female sexuality is something that's largely monitored. Placing importance on the first sexual act is closely related to the religious and cultural beliefs of a particular society which happens to be a global phenomenon. It's present in the USA, Middle East, and Eastern countries as well. Hence, it is not predominant to just our faith but rather extends across other religions as well," says Dr Selim.

Generally, in conservative cultures, the preservation of the first sexual act is reserved for after a religious or spiritual ceremony such as marriage. However, in liberal societies, there is the value placed on chastity among some people, while in others there can be undue pressure to have the first act at a certain time or age i.e., 'before the high school prom.'

Dr Ashique states that people are having sex now as they were in the past, whether it's before, after or during marriage, since the beginning of time. Hence, pre-marital sex is not entirely the media's fault because teenage pregnancy has been an issue for generations.

"Our grandparents or great-grandparents were getting married at the age of 13 and having children at 16, which at the time was the norm. Nowadays, people remain children longer since marriage has been pushed back due to societies becoming more educated. When equipped with the right information and the freedom to

exercise their choices, the youth should be able to make healthy decisions at the right time without pressures imposed by mass media or society," he informs.

Dr Selim feels that people should be given autonomy at a younger age because they have far more access to information than previous generations.

In his line of work, he has found that people tend to confuse real-life sexual acts with those in pornography, thus suffering from performance anxiety. So, it is important to understand what healthy sexual acts entail, without demonising it as 'dirty' or 'sinful.'

"People who have a low sex drive should not feel guilty about it; nor should someone with a higher libido, just as long as they are

areas such as policy and awareness while working with individuals who are experiencing difficulties with these issues. In the same vein, we must take into account the structure of our society whilst being sensitive to people's belief systems; we have to be complicit with both sides in order to live with a healthy balance.

"Sex involves a lot of different things aside from the act itself. One needs to factor in Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and unwanted pregnancies — so it's extremely important that when one is choosing to have sex, they must be aware of the risks and consequences."

The state of gender rights and bodily autonomy

Drawing from her expertise in gender

Tasaffy Hossain elaborates that the issue of virginity, and the 'need' sometimes to present oneself as a virgin or not, both are problematic, if there is social/peer pressure put on it. This creates a need for young people to fit in, to try to get to that 'status,' as opposed to considering important issues like comfort, choices, consent, and being able to understand what feels good and what does not. Instead, we see people never thinking about it or considering themselves and their bodies and minds as something to explore; or we see young people trying to fit into the larger peer 'cool' factors, still not focusing on their own selves enough.

Neither of these ways leads us to understand ourselves better, to focus on pleasure being a core right for everyone, and eventually in relationships leaves us feeling unfulfilled, and not being able to enjoy satisfactory sexual lives with partners.

"We see all forms of insecurities among both women and men; about their bodies (breast sizes and penis lengths); about what makes orgasms happen; orgasming too soon or too late; not being able to satisfy their partner's needs, not being able to communicate their own needs — the list is endless. But at the core, it really is the lack of sexual understanding of oneself," highlights Tasaffy.

But beyond all these, there are other elements that are worth considering for the youth when it comes to physical intimacy.

Someone with a disability, gender dysphoria or chronic illness might not love or feel comfortable in their body directly, but being able to explore how pleasure is in their mind, body and soul can create space for exploring different forms of joy and high.

Another important factor would be to encourage and learn how to pay attention and communicate with others, to understand what someone else is enjoying, ask and listen, explore together and hold space for growing and figuring out pleasure as partners. Nothing can beat verbal and non-verbal communication when it comes to sexual and romantic relationships.

"There's so much when we look into the diversity of human love, sexuality, and pleasure. Narrowing it down to virginity and pressure to satisfy society's needs, is really leaving one's own capacity to feel pleasure in the backseat. Safe, consensual, communicative sexual relationships need to become more of the fantasies we aim to achieve," says Tasaffy Hossain.



well informed and are being safe," Dr Selim elaborates that readiness to be sexually active is based on one's individuality — someone may be ready earlier while others may want to wait it out. "If we accelerate the process or suppress it, it can have a negative effect on our mental health either way," he says.

As a mental health professional and a father, he observed that even now, censorship of basic biology textbooks takes place even in progressive English medium schools.

"It's a common practice to remove the chapter on reproductive health to refrain children from seeing what genitalia looks like," he says.

Dr Ashique Selim emphasises that substantial work needs to be done in

sensitisation, Tasaffy Hossain, Founder and Coordinator, Bonhishikha-Unlearn Gender, explains that the concept of virginity is largely attached to girls and women as opposed to men, however, there is still some wholesome value placed on virginity in general.

"If we delve deep into understanding what role virginity plays in society, it will eventually link to the basics of 'who gets to own the womb of a woman' as it is linked with heirs and who will inherit a man's (or their male ancestors') lineage. There is no other 'real' reason to obsess over virginity," she explains. This has eventually been translated into the cultural, social and traditional measure of 'how good' women are and thus valuing them when it comes to their role, largely as a wife.



Breaking the stigma through education
Mayabee Arannya, works as the Co-Lead for Kotha, an organisation which was established in 2016 to fight the root causes of gender-based violence in Bangladesh. Kotha also uses social media as a tool to aware and educate people through resources created by the youth for the youth.

Education is an integral part of their operations and Kotha has the first youth-led Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programme which is called 'Kotha at School'.

"We go from school to school, teaching young people about their bodies, rights, gender norms and stereotypes, bullying, cyber harassment, sexual health and peer-to-peer relationships. What makes our programme stand out is that our peer educators who are teaching these middle

and high-school students are close to their age. They are usually high-school graduates or university students who are trained by us. We believe every young person has the right to knowledge and information about their bodies," shares Mayabee.

Mayabee explains that due to past experiences, judgment, and sexual stigma, people's insecurities surrounding relationships and sex increase tenfold. Having past sexual experience can make one person insensitive towards a partner's lack of it. Additionally, many people might feel insecure sleeping with their partners knowing they have had sex with someone else before and they compare themselves to them.

"I've observed when people who get into a relationship and have sex, with the expectation of getting married in the future, the person who was emotionally

more invested often regrets 'losing it' to someone before marriage when the relationship does not work out. Placing such value on virginity adversely affects all parties involved, even though virginity is a social construct and not a fact," observes Mayabee.

She opines that conversations surrounding taboo topics, like virginity, need to be mainstreamed. "They are only happening behind closed doors and safe spaces, but I think we need to have the 'audacity' to bring this up in our day-to-day conversations. Making this a dinner table discussion might cause chaos at first, but we need to have these uncomfortable dialogues with people to start shifting our perspectives."

By Rubab Nayeem Khan

Artwork: Rubab Nayeem Khan / Collected

◆ HOROSCOPE ◆



ARIES
(MAR. 21-APR. 20)

This week will be hectic. Loved ones might find you annoying. Do your own thing without drawing attention. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



TAURUS
(APR. 21-MAY 21)

Be careful when dealing with investments. Your original ideas will be appreciated by your superiors. Social activities will promote new connections. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



GEMINI
(MAY 22-JUN. 21)

Take care of issues at hand. Be prepared to overcome frustrations at work. Think twice before agreeing to take on new projects. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.



CANCER
(JUN. 22-JUL. 22)

Romantic opportunities will be plentiful. Don't stop doing what you love. Secret affairs will come back to haunt you. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.



LEO
(JUL. 23-AUG. 22)

Don't get intimately involved with a co-worker. Make plans with loved ones. Minor health problems may lower your productivity. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.



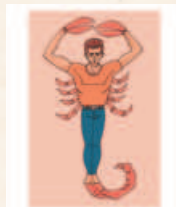
VIRGO
(AUG. 23-SEP. 23)

Relatives may be difficult to deal with. Things can escalate if you are not careful. Look out for yourself this week. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



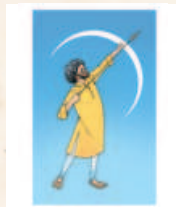
LIBRA
(SEP. 24-OCT. 23)

Sudden changes regarding friendships are likely. Lovers will be demanding. Go after your professional goals. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



SCORPIO
(OCT. 24-NOV. 21)

Avoid boredom by being productive. Set your goals and head for your target. You will want romance in your life. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.



SAGITTARIUS
(NOV. 22-DEC. 21)

Consider volunteer work. Put your efforts into creative projects. Sudden changes could result in estrangements. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



CAPRICORN
(DEC. 22-JAN. 20)

Avoid residential changes this week. Check everything before getting into anything. Put off any plans for travel for now. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



AQUARIUS
(JAN. 21-FEB. 19)

Help family members sort out difficulties. Things at home will be unpredictable this week. You can expect opposition at work. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.



PISCES
(FEB. 20-MAR. 20)

Control your spending. Look into career choices. Enjoy the company of those who enjoy the same pastimes. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

#CHECK IT OUT

How to design your kitchen?

The kitchen has become the centre of family life. As trends change over the years, custom designs, colour choices, and various décor styles will help to modify this area. When planning a kitchen renovation or remodel, homeowners are interested in learning about the latest styles in kitchen design and how they might be used in their own homes.

So, with that in mind, here are some of the major kitchen trends for the year 2023!

Smart internal storage solutions, like breakfast boxes and smart closet ideas, are big in 2023. The focus will be on storage that can be hidden when not in use. They can include everything you need for your morning, like a professional coffee maker, a toaster, a place to store your everyday dishes or a wide range of cereals for the children. The best part is that you can shut the doors when you are done and hide all of the clutter and waste until you are ready to clean up. The constant, ingenious adaptability of it is impressive!

In the past few years, taking greenery into the home has become very popular, and this trend is not likely to end in 2023. Kitchens will continue to have natural elements like natural stone floors, renewable and eco-friendly materials, wooden cabinets and storage, and metal details, to name a few. Although quartz will still be popular, more and more homeowners are opting for colourful marbles and quartz crystals for their kitchen worktops and more.

Even if white kitchens remain fashionable in 2023, you might see a shift towards more vibrant colours in the kitchen space. Homeowners are especially drawn

to warmer tones and bright pops of colour instead of Scandinavian-style simplicity or white and grey farmhouse-style kitchens. Be prepared to witness the removal of all-white cabinetry in favour of natural wood tones that range from dark to light in both light and dark shades.

If you spend a lot of time in the kitchen, it makes sense to decorate it according to your likes and fill it with mementoes. Adding pieces that are not part of the main furniture is a fun way to give a kitchen more style. Antiques, family heirlooms, and other unique old things will grow even more popular to mix with standard furniture pieces. Vintage eating tables that can be turned into a centre island, wood shelves, and found items all contribute to giving your kitchen a distinctive look.



But remodelling your kitchen to reflect current trends will need not just significant effort but also a big financial investment. A great way to ease this financial worry is to buy all the items on EMI (equal monthly payment). EMIs are monthly payments made by borrowers to lenders to repay debts on a predetermined date. The term implies that instalments are the same in size. At several furniture and home décor

shops, EMI plans may let you divide your finances into lower monthly instalments. You may update your kitchen to reflect the beautiful 2023 trends without taking on too much debt if you make use of the EMI instalments. So, by choosing EMI plans, you may enjoy your new kitchen's comfort and beauty for years to come!

By Samayla Mahjabin Koishy
Photo: Collected



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