



DHAKA, THURSDAY, JUNE 27, 2024, ASHAR 13, 1431 BS | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

RISING STARS

FOR YOUNG MINDS ON THE RISE

SCAN THE QR CODE TO ACCESS RISING STARS ONLINE



Tapping into the harrowing realities of CYBERBULLYING



ILLUSTRATION: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

WALTON
Smart Fridge

Walton Single Door Refrigerator
Spacious Inside, Compact Outside
A Perfect Balance for Your Daily Needs

Available Size: 93L, 193L & 225L

- FASTER COOLING SPEED
- VEGETABLE CRISPER BOX
- HIDE VOLTAGE RANGE
- SUPER CHILLED ZONE

08000018267 (Toll Free) waltonbd.com

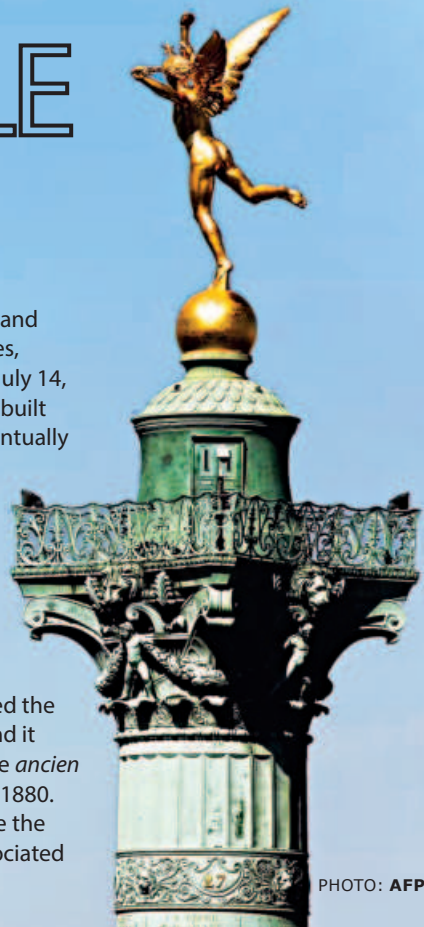


DID YOU KNOW?

BASTILLE DAY

Bastille Day, national holiday in France and its overseas *départements* and territories, marking the anniversary of the fall on July 14, 1789, of the Bastille, in Paris. Originally built as a mediaeval fortress, the Bastille eventually came to be used as a state prison. Political prisoners and detained citizens were held there. Bastille had come to symbolise the harsh rule of the Bourbon monarchy.

During the unrest of 1789, on July 14 a mob stormed the prison and released the seven prisoners held there. The taking of the Bastille signalled the beginning of the French Revolution, and it thus became a symbol of the end of the *ancien régime*. It became an official holiday in 1880. The slogan "Vive le 14 Juillet!" ("Long live the 14th of July!") has continued to be associated with the day.



Editor & Publisher
Mahfuz Anam

Features Editor and Head of Content Marketing
Ehsanur Raza Ronny

Rising Stars Team
Faisal Bin Iqbal
Syeda Afrin Tarannum
Fatima Jahan Ena
Abir Hossain
Amrin Tasnim Rafa

Photographer
Orchid Chakma

Graphics & Layout
TDS Creative Graphics

Production
Shamim Chowdhury

Send your articles, feedback, and opinion to rs@thedailystar.net
Find our content online at thedailystar.net/rising-stars

KAIJU NO. 8:

THE BREATH OF FRESH AIR SHOUNEN ANIME NEEDED

AYAAN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE

When you think about classic *shounen* anime premieres, Luffy's mammoth punch, Itadori smashing through windows, and Denji's epic battles are some of the examples that might come to mind. Overpowered protagonists establishing themselves as a force to be reckoned with is conventionally one of the most effective ways of catching the audience's attention and hooking them in for the rest of the season.

Kaiju No. 8, however, is anything but conventional, as it subverts any and all expectations right from the get-go.

Animated by Production I.G and adapted from Naoya Matsumoto's manga of the same name, *Kaiju No. 8* is set in a world where gigantic "kaijus" mysteriously appear across the country and lay waste throughout the dense cities of Japan.

The central character, Kafka Hibino, is starkly different from the flashy, young main characters across the *shounen* trope. He isn't a high school student, a



member of the ultra-futuristic Japanese Defense Force that is in charge of decimating these monsters, or part of the frontline armed forces. Instead, Kafka is a member of the cleanup crew, the team of people entrusted with cleaning up monsters' remains after they have been put to sleep.

The inclusion of a cleanup crew in itself is shocking, because shows rarely ever

focus on the aftermath of monsters running rampage. But making the protagonist an average cleaner and not a hotshot Defense Force officer is definitely a bold approach that deserves appreciation.

Kafka, of course, never wanted to be a cleaner in the first place. He dreamed of joining the Defense Force, but eventually buried that dream after multiple failed attempts. However, after a few chance encounters, his dreams were re-lit for one final time at age 32. The story thus follows Kafka's pursuits at joining the coveted Defense Force and fulfilling promises he made to his best friend and to himself.

One of *Kaiju No. 8*'s strongest points lies in the main character's progression. He is consistently portrayed as the weakest link in any form of combat scenarios and never gets his moment in the limelight. While his significantly-younger peers and fellow candidates are able to bring out their full potential, Kafka lags behind and keeps making a fool out of himself. Despite all this, he keeps pushing himself to be better, lending his intellect and knowledge when his fighting abilities aren't up to par, leading to numerous uplifting and awe-inspiring scenes.

The show has brilliant production quality as well. The animation is dynamic, fluid, and the fight scenes are as seamless as one could hope for. The artwork takes on a modern approach, styling the *kaijus* in a manner that is equally grotesque and also a delight to look at. Energetic and high-spirited tracks complement the action scenes well and provide an even more riveting experience.

In the arguably oversaturated *shounen* market, *Kaiju No. 8* is undoubtedly a breath of fresh air. It is packed to the brim with comedy, action, high-stakes, and a truckload of emotions. Twists and turns exist at every step of the way, making it a series that should definitely be on everyone's radars, and a worthy contender for the best anime this spring season.

Horoscopes: Explained

AMRIN TASNIM RAFA

You may not believe in horoscopes and think that they do not exist and do not affect you. But they do. Being very popular on social media and pop culture, chances are some of your friends believe them, and how they treat and perceive you is just a tad bit affected by when your birthday is.

And they aren't just a contemporary pop-culture craze. The study of astronomy and astrology is historically rich and has played a significant role in developing civilisations and cultural practices around the globe.

But what exactly are they? Let's dive deeper into the origins of astrology and what determines our horoscopes to gain a more concrete understanding of how the sun and the stars determine our collective fate.

History

Since the earliest times, people looked for indications in the natural world for what may happen in their lives. Some examples of this practice, which came to be known as divination, are tea-leaf reading and looking at spots in the liver and entrails of animals.

It is believed that ancient Babylonians began stargazing in the second millennium BC. They realised that by tracking the movement of celestial bodies, they could predict changes in seasons and eclipses. The earliest piece of evidence of the practice of astrology can be traced back to Babylon in the first millennium BC in The Venus tablet of Ammisaduqa, which traces the motion of the planet Venus. To this, the ancient Egyptians contributed the idea that patterns of stars made up constellations and that the sun appears to "move" at specific times of the year.

It is believed that all these ideas came together when Alexander the Great, the king of the Ancient Greek Kingdom of Macedon, conquered Egypt around 330 BC.

The Greeks were very interested in maths and logic, and thus they came up with the complicated mechanism which determines how your birthday determines your zodiac sign.

How is your Zodiac sign determined?

The most popular and culturally relevant zodiac signs are of the tropical zodiac which is based on the seasons. It is calculated by the path of the Sun against the sky, called the ecliptic, as it travels through an imaginary 360-degree circle known as the zodiac.

The logic that led to the creation of the familiar zodiac signs known today is best described by NASA:

"Imagine a straight line drawn from Earth through the Sun and out into space way beyond our solar system where the stars are. Then, picture Earth following its orbit around the Sun. This imaginary line would rotate, pointing to different stars throughout one complete trip around the Sun — or, one year. All the stars that lie close to the imaginary flat disk swept out by

this imaginary line are said to be in the zodiac. The constellations in the zodiac are simply the constellations that this imaginary straight line points to in its year-long journey."

Each zodiac sign is named after the shape of the constellation that the straight line points to. This idea that there are 12 signs along the zodiac that are 30° wide and that the sun moves through these signs regularly during the year was codified by the astronomer Ptolemy, author of the *Tetrabiblos*, which became a core book in the history of Western astrology.

Is the sun sign all we need to know?

The prevalent sun signs are far from the only sign in your astrological profile or "birth chart". The position of the moon at the time of your birth determines your moon sign, and your rising sign is the zodiac sign that was rising on the eastern horizon at the exact moment of your birth. It is believed that the sun sign determines your personality and character, making it the most defining zodiac sign in your chart. Each of these zodiac signs is thought to fall under each of the ruling elements of Earth, Air, Water, and Fire. The ruling element is one of the many things that affect the personality traits of each zodiac sign.

Is there any truth to horoscopes?

Most likely not. From a scientific standpoint, no evidence supports the validity of astrology or horoscopes. Studies and experiments have generally failed to prove any correlation between astrological predictions and actual events or personality traits. However, astrological

ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

practices remain extremely popular and many continually swear on their accuracy both in terms of predictions of the future and individual personality traits. Psychologists propose the theories of the "Barnum Effect" and "Confirmation Bias" to explain this phenomenon.

The former explains that general statements that could apply to many people are perceived as highly accurate for individuals. Horoscopes are often written in a way that they can be broadly applicable, leading individuals to see them as personally relevant. The latter explains that people tend to remember the predictions that come true and forget the ones that don't. This selective memory reinforces the belief in horoscopes.

A long history and cultural heritage also give astrology a sense of legitimacy and tradition that can make it seem real to many people.

Despite the scientific illegitimacy of astrology being widely known, the continual relevance of horoscopes is understandable. In today's volatile and alienating world, horoscopes are a powerful tool that dually promotes a sense of community and individual identity. Both real and unreal, they are a forgivable indulgence.

Amrin Tasnim Rafa is a sub-editor at Campus, Rising Stars, and Star Youth



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

THE SUN SIGNS

The Fire signs

Associated traits: energetic, enthusiastic, and passionate

Aries (March 21 - April 19)
Leo (July 23 - August 22)
Sagittarius (November 22 - December 21)

The Earth signs

Associated traits: grounded, methodical, practical

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)
Virgo (August 23 - September 22):
Capricorn (December 22 - January 19):

The Air signs

Associated traits: rational, curious, and adaptable

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)
Libra (September 23 - October 22)
Aquarius (January 20 - February 18)

The Water signs

Associated traits: empathetic, nurturing, and imaginative

Cancer (June 21 - July 22):
Scorpio (October 23 - November 21)
Pisces (February 19 - March 20)

BSRM FAST BUILD

To know more scan the QR code

**WITH BSRM FASTBUILD
YOUR HOME WILL BE BUILT ON TIME
WITH THE BEST QUALITY RODS**

BSRM
building a safer nation



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Why do you keep buying books you don't read?

PUNOMI RAHMAN TITIR

While running through my monthly room cleanout programme, I discovered a pile of books abandoned at the back of my shelf. Unsurprisingly, many of them were yet to be read. As I began to leaf through the pages and getting lost in the aroma of freshly bound timber, the ringing sound of a notification broke the spell and marked the end of what could have been a reunion with long-forgotten books.

Despite another usual failed attempt of trying to choose reading over scrolling, an interesting question came up. To observe the continuous acquisition of books that occupy space without fulfilling their intended purpose is undeniably perplexing. However, what drives an individual to purchase a book without much dedication to the reading process itself?

There is a Japanese term, "Tsunodoku", that refers to the practice of buying books but keeping them piled up in a place instead of reading them. Often, the mere idea of a shelf filled with books brings pleasure. It is essential to understand that buying a book means not only owning a piece of content, but also the hardcover illustrations, the aesthetic and the blissful feeling that tags along with it. Therefore, what may seem unrelated to the reading experience can influence in driving a book's sales.

To better address the question, figuring out where young readers look for book recommendations in the 21st century can be helpful. Social media is an obvious answer. A recent global survey conducted by the Publishers Association suggests that digital platforms are influencing Generation Z kids to grab a book. But let's be honest, book reviews have always existed online. So, what leads youngsters to find interest in an idea previously dubbed as "old-fashioned" by many? BookTok might know to answer.

In 2022, a phenomenon on TikTok featuring short videos, where influencers turn the pages to a pile of hardcover books with an aesthetic backdrop, gained popularity under the name "BookTok." What sets BookTok apart from traditional book reviews is its ability to make reading feel trendy and exciting. The platform has a unique way of turning books into must-have items, driven by the enthusiastic endorsements of passionate readers. Popular titles

often go viral, leading to skyrocketing sales and renewed interest in literature among young people. However, there is a problem.

BookTok recommendations are comically vague and inclusive to only a few popular genres of reading such as young adult fiction, rom-com, and fantasy. Due to a lack of details, it becomes difficult to identify whether or not a book can actually offer a story that caters to the reader's preference. BookTok reels are about a few seconds long and rely on viral audio to keep the audience engaged. As for visuals, the focus is generally on creating a pleasing atmosphere. Clearly, the goal is to focus on how a book

To better address the question, figuring out where young readers look for book recommendations in the 21st century can be helpful. Social media is an obvious answer.

makes you feel instead of the content inside.

The platform, while vibrant and influential, can sometimes feel like an overwhelming cacophony of trends and hype. While the benefits of reading remain settled, the issue with buying books just to inhabit shelf space promotes consumerism because they do not serve their intended purpose. Although it may be arguable whether reading and buying books are separate pleasures, the true value of a book lies within the story it uncovers. Perhaps, amid digital trends and social media influences, taking a step back and rediscovering the joy of reading for reading's sake could lead to a more fulfilling relationship with our collections.

Reference: The Guardian (August 6, 2023). 'I can't stress how much BookTok sells': teen literary influencers swaying publishers

Punomi Rahman Titir is a student at Academia School Dhaka.



How to build a reading habit

Set a reading goal

Define a specific target, such as reading a certain number of pages or books per month, to give yourself a clear objective and track your progress.

Create a reading schedule

Allocate a specific time each day for reading, whether it's in the morning, during lunch, or before bed, to make it a consistent part of your routine.

Mix up genres

Explore different genres and authors to keep your reading experience fresh and exciting, preventing boredom.

Track your progress

Use a journal or an app to log the books you've read and your thoughts on them, helping you stay committed and see your achievements.

Always carry a book

If possible, keep a book with you at all times, whether in physical form or on a digital device, so you can read whenever you have a few spare minutes.



Tapping into the harrowing realities of CYBER-BULLYING


USRAAT FAHMIDAH

"I don't want to do anything, and make it worse. I'm scared they are going to troll me using my photos online," says Shadman Fahim*, a middle school student at a private school in Dhaka while sharing the ordeals of navigating the online space as a child. Classmates repeatedly target him by adding him to group chats where he faces relentless name-calling. However, he doesn't think to share it with a trusted adult, and believes it's only going to make it worse.

Cyberbullying is defined by the UNICEF as the use of digital technologies, like social media and messaging platforms, to repeatedly scare, anger, or shame targets. This includes spreading lies or posting sensitive or private photos online, sending hurtful messages or threats via messaging apps, and impersonating others to send malicious messages.

According to research by Kids Helpline Australia, cyberbullying most frequently occurs during the transition from primary to high school, although it continues throughout the teenage years. This particular group of young people is the most vulnerable to cyberbullying due to their internet exposure at an early age, and lack of digital literacy.

Labiba Raida, a 22-year-old student studying at North South University recounts that the first time she experienced cyberbullying was during her high school years. She describes how her bullying ordeal initially started at school, involving isolation, name-calling, body-shaming, and rumours, which then extended online.

"Honestly, I was so naive that I didn't even comprehend it as bullying," Labiba reflects.

Most young people may not recognise cyberbullying right away because it often becomes normalised in their peer groups, leading them to downplay or dismiss harmful actions and making them more vulnerable to its negative effects on their emotional well-being.

Nushrat Jahan*, a second-year student at BRAC University, shares the multiple accounts of cyber-bullying she faced during her high-school years. "There was a girl who used to stalk me on social media using fake accounts. She would send me hateful and triggering messages."

This was just one of the varying levels of cyber-bullying she faced. She further shares how a person she had met online targeted her by creating defamatory posts online.

"He reached out to my therapist and harassed them to share sensitive details about me. This happened during my last year of high-school."

Both Nushrat and Labiba are now adults, but their teenage experiences have left lasting marks on them. Even

though they can now better articulate their situation, they are still recovering from their past experiences. At the time, they felt like they could never cope with the situation.

"Back then, it felt like it was the end of everything. Looking back, it wasn't the end of the world. But that doesn't change the fact that it was the worst time of my life," shares Nushrat.

One of the most common challenges young people face with cyberbullying is that they often don't recognise it immediately. Navigating the online space at such a young age is tricky, especially since schools don't typically teach online safety or digital literacy. As a result, they are not equipped to handle these situations, putting their well-being at risk.

They often recognise the situation and the threats once they become adults, as they are better equipped to identify such issues and seek help or report them.

"The most common emotional and mental effects on teenagers include issues with self-confidence, self-esteem, depression, social anxiety, self-harming behaviour, suicidal ideation, and feelings of hopelessness. These conditions often lead to a drastic decrease in self-worth, increasing the risk of social isolation and loneliness. Cyberbullying also significantly impacts academic performance," explains Mehrin Mostafa, a Psychological Counselor at the International University of Business Agriculture and Technology.

Mehrin Mostafa further shares, "Victims often engage in self-criticism, which perpetuates a cycle of shame, further eroding their self-worth and confidence."

Labiba shares how the bullying affected her mentally, and her performance at school. "I mostly stopped going to school, and my grades suffered a lot. I started dissociating during exams, and I would unknowingly leave a lot of answers blank. I completely isolated myself at school, and even on social media."

"I didn't pick up a book for two months after this incident. I isolated myself from everyone in my social circle. I deactivated all my social media accounts for two years, and got rid of all my devices except for my laptop, which I used for online classes," shares Nushrat.

"I am currently in therapy and I have been diagnosed with generalised anxiety disorder. That's how I finally recognised [the experience of] bullying," explains Labiba.

Nushrat further shares how having a supportive network of parents and teachers helped, elaborating, "I failed a lot of my mocks. At the end of the day, I am very grateful to have had teachers who helped me bounce back."

However, Labiba experienced a different situation where

she felt her teachers had singled her out. "Even my teachers had cornered me because they thought I was a troubled child," she explains.

In this regard, Mehrin Mostafa emphasises the importance of communication in such situations, be it between parents, educators, or others.

In cases of cyberbullying, victims often struggle to report incidents to their schools due to the absence of effective support frameworks for cyberbullying victims. They fear their experiences will not be validated. Young people may also hesitate to confide in their parents, fearing potential negative repercussions that could exacerbate their situation.

"Every school or educational institute should establish an anti-bullying committee comprising administrators, teachers, educators, parents, and a mental health professional to ensure a significant and consistent impact. Additionally, it may be more beneficial if both perpetrators and victims avoid group treatments or interventions, as these could potentially exacerbate the damaging effects," advises Mehrin Mostafa on institutional support.

She adds, "By informing them about what cyberbullying is, how to recognise it, and where to seek help, we can make a significant impact. It's essential to emphasise that seeking help is not shameful."

Reporting incidents of cyberbullying is crucial in addressing the issue. However, many cases go overlooked since social media platforms fall outside a school's jurisdiction, and parents often miss the issue due to their own lack of digital literacy. This places the responsibility on social media companies to ensure a safe environment. Unfortunately, current regulations may prove to be insufficient, as cyberbullying continues to occur.

We now live in a digital world where an increasing number of young people are growing up deeply immersed in online environments. However, most lack the knowledge to navigate the internet safely and possess limited digital literacy skills at an early age, putting them at risk as they socialise more online.

While cyberbullying does not cause physical harm like traditional bullying, it has a profound mental impact on its victims, with some effects lasting into adulthood. Despite its virtual nature, cyberbullying has tangible real-world consequences, making it crucial to implement effective measures to protect these young individuals.

**Names have been changed due to privacy*

STUDYING IN PUBLIC SPACES: SHOULD YOU GIVE IT A GO?

BIPRA PRASUN DAS

Before I started university a few months ago, I had almost always studied in my room, in noiseless seclusion. However, that changed when I had to catch up on studies between university classes, and I had to sit down in my university's bustling study hall to study. I was unsure whether I could focus and be productive in a place with so many people. To my pleasant surprise, not only could I focus, but I also found myself to be even more productive than I usually was in my room.

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg introduced the concept of "third places" in his book *The Great Good Place*. According to Oldenburg, third places are the informal public spaces that are neither home (first place) nor work (second place). These places, which include cafes, parks, and libraries, provide a neutral ground for people to gather, socialise, and engage in community life.

For students, these third places can become crucial study environments that break the monotony of studying at home or in a dorm room. If you find it difficult to focus in a quiet environment, wish to experiment with your study methods, or are curious about whether you could focus better in a different setting, you might consider studying in a public place.

The primary reason studying in public spaces can be a good idea is the boost in concentration and productivity these environments can offer. This boost is mainly due to moderate levels of ambient noise, subtle social pressure, and reduced feelings of isolation.

A study published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* found that moderate levels of ambient noise can enhance creative thinking and problem-solving skills. The ambient buzz of a cafe, for instance, provides a level of stimulation that is just right to keep the brain engaged without becoming overwhelmed, helping to maintain focus on the task at hand.

Studying in public spaces can alleviate the feelings of isolation that often accompany solitary study sessions. The presence of others, even strangers, can provide a sense of community and belonging.

The variety of environments in public spaces can stimulate the brain in different ways. Changing study locations within a public space, such as moving from a quiet corner to a more bustling area, can refresh the mind and prevent study fatigue. This variation can keep the brain engaged and make long study sessions more manageable.

Interestingly, the presence of other people who are also working or studying can have a motivational effect. This phenomenon, often referred to as the "co-action effect", suggests that being around others who are engaged in similar tasks can enhance one's own performance. Seeing others focused and working hard can create a subtle form of social pressure and inspiration, encouraging students to stay focused and productive. Robiah Arefin, a recent A



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

level graduate, talks about his experience. "I feel productive when I am in a place where others are also working. Having other people around me doing their own things also gets me in the mindset to work, and keeps me subconsciously accountable."

Similarly, studying in public spaces can alleviate the feelings of isolation that often accompany solitary study sessions. The presence of others, even strangers, can provide a sense of community and belonging. This phenomenon is supported by the "social facilitation" theory, which posits that the mere presence of others can enhance an individual's productivity. For students who feel lonely or disconnected, studying in a lively, populated space can offer a reassuring sense of human connection. Farhan Khan*, a student of North South University, tells us how he often gets through his study sessions more easily when there are other people around him. "I live alone, and it gets pretty lonely when I study by myself at home, however, when I study at university or a nearby cafe, I feel more at ease, and less lonely, and I find that I can study much better that way."

However, it is important to note that studying in a public place may not work for everyone. Aricia Chakma, who studies Environmental Science at North South University, tells us how studying in a public place doesn't work for her. "I find it very hard to focus in an environment where there is a lot of noise or activity. As someone diagnosed with ADHD, the constant distractions make it nearly impossible for me to concentrate on my studies. My mind is always a chaos itself, so the outside noise only adds to the difficulty. I need a quiet and controlled environment to be productive. However, the presence of one or two close friends while I

study helps me stay on track, and keeps me accountable."

For people who can study better in a public place, choosing the right space is crucial. Not all public spaces are created equal, and finding the right environment for studying is important. Factors to consider include noise levels, availability of seating, access to power outlets, and Wi-Fi connectivity.

Libraries offer a quieter atmosphere conducive to deep focus, while coffee shops provide a more dynamic and stimulating environment. Parks and outdoor spaces can be ideal for reading and brainstorming sessions, especially during pleasant weather. In addition, studying in public spaces can potentially lead one to be distracted. However, this can be managed with a few strategies. Using noise-cancelling headphones or listening to instrumental music can help filter out unwanted noise. Setting clear goals and time limits for study sessions can also improve focus and productivity.

In an increasingly digital and remote world, reclaiming public spaces for study can provide a refreshing and productive change of pace. Whether it's the quiet hum of a library, the vibrant atmosphere of a coffee shop, or the serene beauty of a park, public spaces offer diverse and enriching environments that can support academic success and personal growth. So, the next time you find yourself struggling to focus at home, you may consider packing your books and heading to a public space.

Bipra Prasun Das is an undergraduate student at North South University



AFLOAT, UNTETHERED

WAZIHA AZIZ

Stranded on an estuary in a vessel that carries me
The wind whispers ballads of shores I am to reach
Some further up ahead, some past which I've
already been.
Some west, some east, and to each hymn I pay
heed.
No sail nor oar to accompany me
afloat listlessly, you best believe I'm free.
From every direction strong torrents meet
Collide, counter, and begrudgingly recede.
Upstream, downstream, what stream? Come see
me stand still and unravel in a stagnant sea
of my own making.

ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

THE ORACLE

“Look! It’s raining sunlight!” Ruha pointed excitedly at the rays of sunshine penetrating through the foliage. His friends couldn’t help but burst into laughter at his naivety. He was, like most children, easily amused. Unlike most other children however, he never hesitated to express it. He was full of life and energy.

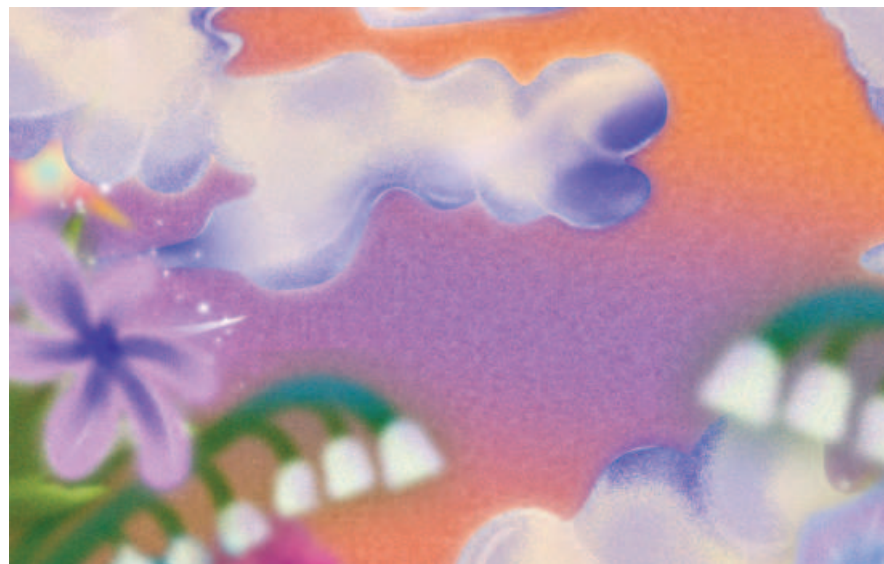


ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

MAHPARA FAATIN

And occasionally, the village just so happened to embody that spirit. Men and women scuttled all over, ensuring all the decorations looked perfect. A continuous stream of smoke escaped the chimneys of the Big Kitchen where the cooks were busy making delectable dishes for the foreign envoys. To the people of the Momoku Tribe, hospitality was the one thing which they never cut corners with.

Ten-year-old Ruha took his place beside his grandfather – the village elder – to greet the oncoming envoys. His brown eyes, betraying curiosity, darted from one stall to the next. Ruha was sure that he was going to play there all night long with his friends after the banquet had ended.

The Arushan envoys exited the Big

Kitchen. The cooks followed suite holding big dishes and even bigger smiles.

“Nana, look! A bear!” Ruha exclaimed when pointing to the stout, bulky man among the envoys heading to the main table, where they were to dine with Ruha and his family. The adults around him swiftly silenced him for being disrespectful. The envoys soon took their seats, and had the dishes placed in front of them.

One of the men, taller than the rest, raised his glass to ask the elder for a toast, a mysterious grin spanning across his face. The elder hesitated.

He recalled his aide’s words from earlier in the morning who urged Ruha’s Nana to be wary of the Arushan’s king’s crafty nature. It was rumoured that the sly king deployed a spy called “The Bear” to infest the delectables that were served to them by other tribes. All this deception for a

swift victory over a battle that only one side knew about.

The elder spared a moment to think about what he’d have to do next. Despite their devotion to hospitality, he knew that this was no time for practising caution.

“Have them hand over everything in their possession,” the elder said as he pointed at the Arushan king and the stout, bulky man. In an instant, both were pushed to the floor – exposing the bear tattoos hidden on their forearms.

Ruha had saved them.

All the villagers could only think of one thing: the ancient prophecy.

“A person bearing the blood of the elder will appear, he who sees what our ordinary eyes cannot, shall be the oracle that guides our village to prosperity.”

The crowd erupted into a cheer.

Fifteen years had passed since then.

The tribe prospered under his leadership.

Dr Blake, however, was here for an entirely different reason. He entered the main hall to be greeted by the heavy smell of incense and the sight of a young man adorned in expensive jewels.

“I wish to offer a deal with your tribe to use a native plant from here to cure ailments of the eye,” the optician said. He was a man of few words who cut straight to the chase. Ruha, admired how direct he was and thus, agreed.

“Please, place your fingerprint in the small box below,” the doctor urged. Ruha missed the box but tried again only to fail once more.

A thought struck the doctor. He brought out a lens and held it to Ruha’s eyes. The doctor’s suspicions proved true. It wasn’t that Ruha saw what others couldn’t, it’s just that he couldn’t see what most people could.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The dos and don'ts of asking for a letter of recommendation

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

Applying for higher studies abroad is a thorn-filled road on which you are bound to be greeted by wearisome tasks at every turn. Concocting a moving personal statement, curating a dynamic activities list and researching your institutions of choice will take up a large chunk of your time. However, amidst all this, it is crucial that you don't forget about another very important aspect of your application — the letter of recommendation.

Many universities abroad ask for one or two letters of recommendation from your teachers and/or academic counsellors. Some might ask for a peer recommendation or a mentor/employer recommendation, but these are usually optional. Collecting recommendation letters can seem daunting but it is not something to fear if you keep these pointers in mind.

Think about the teachers you would like a recommendation from

It is important that you choose a teacher with whom you have cultivated a decent relationship, who you can depend on to vouch for you, and has shown at least some modicum of interest in your future prospects.

Try to secure at least one recommendation from an educator teaching a subject related to your intended major. A good word from them about your aptitude for or curiosity about the field will highlight your interest in it. If you are focusing on liberal arts colleges, you can showcase the diversity of your academic prowess by asking for a recommendation from an educator specialising in a different field. This can allow you to show how well-rounded of a student you are. It is important, too, that the letters don't speak exclusively of your merits as a student but also as a person who exists outside of the realm of academia.

Don't go in with your guns blazing

As tempting as it might be to leave the recommendation letters for the last, it won't do you any good to arrive at your teacher's desk a week before your application deadline and ask them to fulfil your request immediately. Give them at least a month or two to ensure they have enough time to create a thoughtful, meaningful letter.

Also ensure to not make demands regarding the contents of the letter itself. Teachers are unlikely to remember every detail about the students they've taught. So, you could just provide them a résumé or, at least, remind them of the achievements you would like them to speak of. However, putting emphasis on these things in a polite manner is very different from making demands.

Remind, don't pester

As your deadline draws near, your hands might start itching to email your teacher — asking them to send in your letter of recommendation. It makes sense to be anxious, but you must remember that your teachers are likely drowning in work. A reminder or two via email, or a short visit to them in person should be enough.

Recommendation letters speaking about your personal character and academic capability can go a long way in securing a place at your university of choice. They not only highlight your past successes but also helps assess your ability to succeed in the future. Thus, be sure to put as much effort into them as you would into any other component of your application!

Zaima has recently escaped the clutches of A Levels.

On surviving the transition from school to university

ARSHAD SALEH

The first major transition most students face is the one from high school to university. While this is an important and exciting time in their lives, it leaves many struggling to cope with the sudden changes and decisions one must now make.

Throughout the years our routines become centred around our school schedules. When to wake up, when to go home, even the faces you see on a regular basis and the annual exam stress cycles are all dictated by your school. To some, school becomes a home away from home, while to others it is merely a place that they must endure for a good few hours a day. Regardless, it becomes the backbone of your day-to-day life and once that is gone, it can feel as though life has lost its structure and regularity.

During the transition period, structure can be found in building new habits and devoting time toward your hobbies. The routine that you are confined to in your school years often leaves little room to focus on yourself. This is the perfect opportunity to build habits that will be beneficial in university, such as regularly planning out your tasks. This is also a great time to work on a healthier lifestyle by starting to exercise regularly or by doing something as simple as working on an improved sleep schedule, as the last couple years of school are commonly driven by long, sleepless nights.

Prioritising your mental health during this period is particularly important for a multitude of reasons. Throughout your school life, you are accustomed to working towards the same goals as your peers. This, however, is not the case once school is over. Students are now faced with the mammoth task of deciding

what they want to do with their lives as they begin the first chapter in their own unique journey. Students applying to undergraduate programs abroad may have already committed to a university, some may be preparing for admission tests for institutions at home, while others may opt toward taking a gap year, looking to improve their resume or just find their footing. Having broken off from the pack, you will begin moving at your own unique pace.

Many tend to feel overwhelmed and stuck in limbo during this time as they compare themselves to their peers and consequently feel like they are falling behind. Therefore, it is crucial to self-reflect frequently and remember that you are working towards your own goals, which are unaffected by what others may be achieving. Finding your own pace is instrumental to building your career going forward.

Although the transition phase from school to university is bittersweet, filled with changes and farewells, there is much to look forward to in a new chapter. Each

transition brings you closer to the goals you have strived for and the person you aspire to be.

Arshad Saleh is a cat dad and a student at Mastermind



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA