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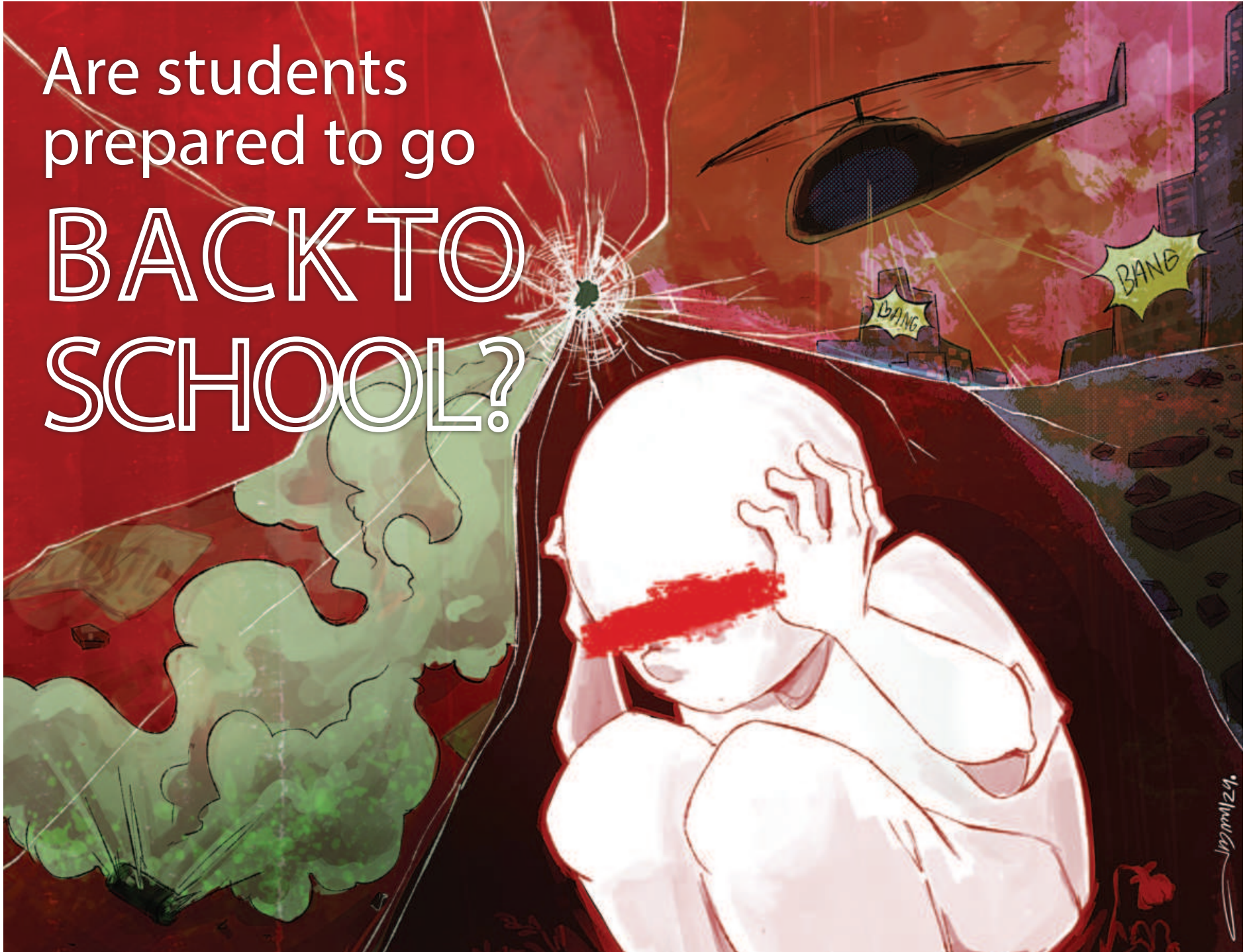


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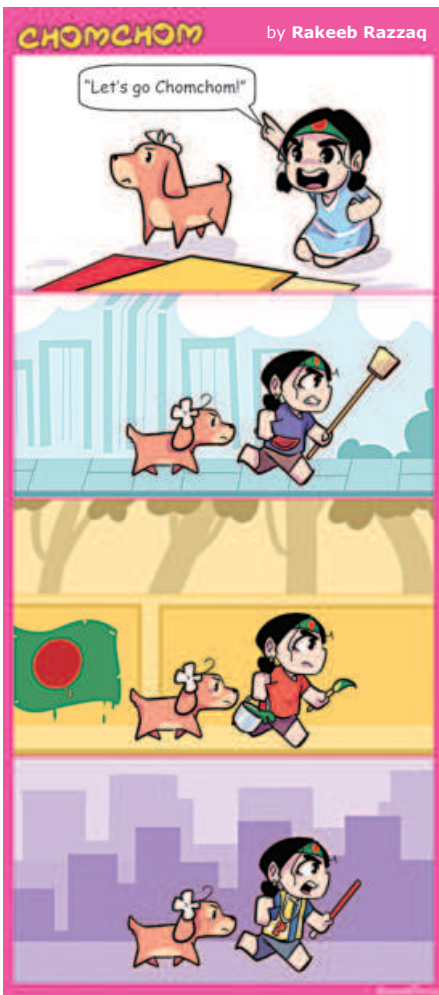
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DID YOU KNOW?

WHAT IS AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT?

An interim government, also called a provisional or caretaker government, is a temporary government, as the name suggests. Such a government is often seen as either a transitional government, an emergency government, or a combination of both to certain extents, depending on the situation.

If such a government is placed after the end of term of one government or political party's rule to oversee elections and transition to the upcoming, elected party or government, the interim government acts as the transitional government.

In Bangladesh's case, after the former Prime Minister resigned, the interim government assumed the role of a somewhat emergency government, given that most of the top-level ministers, parliament members, and government officials had absconded from their respective posts. At the same time, since the interim government is expecting to hold fair elections after restoring democratic order across the country, it is also playing the role of a transitional government.



PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

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WHAT MADE CARTOON NETWORK SHOWS SO GOOD

SAMIN SHAHAN RAHMAN

If you're like me, occasionally on a lazy weekend afternoon, you might find yourself bingeing Cartoon Network shows. Yet, is it only the nostalgia of childhood that make the shows so reminiscent, or something unique that make Cartoon Network shows so appealing even as a grown-up? The answer is a little bit of both.

The enduring appeal of Cartoon Network lies in its timeless ability to create content that resonates with a broad audience – it was a mix of everything, and so, it had something for everyone. Unlike many of its competitors, Cartoon Network didn't target just one demographic. Instead, it offered shows that appeal to both children and adults, often combining whimsical adventures with deeper, philosophical themes.

When comparing Cartoon Network to other contemporary networks like Nickelodeon and Disney Channel, several unique qualities stand out. While Nickelodeon and Disney have produced iconic shows and left legacies of their own behind, they were more adhering to conventional storytelling and animation styles. Cartoon Network, on the other hand, embraced a more experimental approach, resulting in a diverse record of shows that push creative boundaries.

Nickelodeon's lineup, with hits like *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Rugrats*, leaned heavily on humour and slapstick comedy. Disney Channel, with series like *Kim Possible* and *Phineas and Ferb*, often focused on adventures and moral lessons. Cartoon Network, however, combined these elements with a willingness to sometimes tackle



darker, more mature themes, presenting cartoons that often portrayed the complexities of adulthood in a more youth-like manner. Clearly, they weren't afraid of taking risks as seen in their choices of stories and animation styles.

Arguably, it was storytelling where Cartoon Network excelled with the themes. Proof found in the episodic story-driven narratives, where each episode would pack a new adventure consistent with the character traits, yet still portray character development. Everyday shows like *Ed, Edd n Eddy* explored the complexities of friendship and growing up, while shows like *Adventure Time* and *Regular Show* mastered the art of blending fantastical elements with relatable, everyday issues.

Characters from the Cartoon Network shows also complemented the themes. Some of them were shiny, some glimmering, and some of them weren't perfect. They had flaws, anxieties, and insecurities, mirroring the experiences of real kids. Take for instance both shows

titled after its characters – *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, the show where a loyal yet timid dog faced his worst fears in a way that resonated with viewers, or *Johnny Bravo*, with its self-absorbed yet oddly endearing protagonist. Largely, it was the characters that kept everyone so hooked to the storylines.

All that serious stuff didn't keep any eight-year-old from feeling the surge of action though. The complexities of each character were equally matched by action-driven stories presented with visually striking animation. Classics like *Samurai Jack* and *Ben 10* whisked viewers away on fantastical journeys, as if they were just with them in every adventure.

And the best part? Cartoon Network's shows almost always featured innovative animation styles that distinguished them visually. Whether it's *Dexter's Laboratory*, with clean lines and bold colours or *The Amazing World of Gumball*, with its eclectic mix of 2D, 3D, and live-action elements, every show offered a fresh and visually stimulating experience. This immediately put them in contrast with the more uniform animation styles typically seen on other networks.

Cartoon Network dared to be different, which is what its success and enduring popularity can be directly attributed to. Because of its "rather different" way of approaching cartoons, millions like me, left longing for a great lost childhood, take pride in being full-time cartoon fans since childhood.

Samin Shahan Rahman is adamant he's Ice Bear. Dare saying otherwise at samin.shahan@gmail.com

Gen-Z lingo

EXPLAINED

Here's a guide from a zoomer on how to actually use the Gen-Z vernacular, so you can stop taking an L every time you try to fit in

ARANYO RISHI CHOWDHURY

Every so often, on a leisurely stroll through social media, you'll see a string of words that ages you by thirty years. As you struggle to comprehend the sentence, you realise how far behind you've been left by your peers and your generation. It can be tempting to dive into the deep waters, unprepared and ill-informed. However, the only way to bring yourself back from the Paleolithic era is to choose your words carefully. Here are a few mistakes to avoid while navigating the beautiful language of brainrot.

Mistake 1: Getting your terms mixed up

Using terms in the wrong contexts is the easiest way to out yourself and risk a lifetime of social exclusion. Knowing the subtle difference between *mewing* and *looksmaxxing* might one day save you from getting ratioed in the comments section by some ten-year-old. It's also worth noting how the different dialects of brainrot branch out. Context is key, as *cooked* and *ate* somehow mean the same thing, but using the wrong one in a circle that uses the other is a shortcut to earning *negative aura*.

Mistake 2: Trying too hard

Random equals funny is a formula that stopped working in the 2010's. The worst thing you could do is recklessly splice words together hoping something will be funny. Throwing in twenty-five random words like *skibidi* and *sigma* in every sentence won't help with the boomer allegations. Neither will dropping 'fr' at the end of every sentence. Desperation is something to be preyed upon and mercilessly ridiculed for the collective enjoyment of the masses.

Mistake 3: Getting left behind

The tongue of the youth evolves rapidly and chaotically. No phrase retains its relevance after a week of use, and it's important to keep up. Staying connected perpetually by doomscrolling for at least six hours a day is imperative, be it through TikTok or Instagram Reels (which is just TikTok but one month behind). After all, who needs time for lame things like hobbies and productivity when there's a world of endless short-form-content consumption just waiting for you?

Mistake 4: Confusing Gen-Z with Gen-Alpha

Identifying the differences in vernacular between Gen-Z and

their younger counterpart Gen-Alpha is vital. Although there is a lot of overlap, these days, Gen-Zs tend to consider Gen-Alpha terms *cringe*, so it can be hard to traverse the various lexical pitfalls. You might even feel compelled to choose a side, as factions of the youth seem to be at odds with each other. In times like this, context-clues are your best friend. As all these different factors overwhelm you, you might even begin to question how young you even are anymore, and if learning all these do's and don'ts is just a Sisyphian task, doomed to fail again and again as you hopelessly cling on to some semblance of youth.

Mistake 5: Not mourning the loss of your youth

As you begin to lose yourself in the stream of internet lobotomisation, you will realise that you can't send a single text anymore without at least three accompanying emojis that make no sense contextually, and you'll wonder what you've become. Looking in the mirror and beholding your thinning hair and the wrinkles on your face, you'll wonder what made you *delulu* enough to embark on this pursuit of relatability. You'll realise that you wince everytime you type *rizz* or *goated*, because you're ashamed of your unworthy attempts at fitting in online with people half your age. As random back pain constantly reminds you of your mortality, you'll realise that attempting to be relatable inherently makes you more unrelatable. Maybe it's time to stop being *freaky* and start being the adult you were terrified of becoming.

Here are some terms you should know

IT'S GIVING

A versatile expression used to convey that something meets or exceeds expectations, or delivers a certain vibe or essence.

MOTHER

A woman who's iconic (does not always refer to a person's actual parent).

SENDING ME

Used to express extreme excitement, joy, or amusement.

ATE AND LEFT NO CRUMBS

To execute a task with complete precision and finesse.

COOKED

Often used to describe a job well done, but can also be used to refer to a struggling or exhausted person.

ERA

Used to label a person's current interests, aesthetic or dominant personality trait. Could also be used to describe a certain lifestyle choice.

POOKIE

A common euphemism to describe something or someone cute. Sometimes used to express approval of someone or their character.



ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANUM

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The desperate need for a nuanced narrative of history in

NCTB TEXTBOOKS

FARIHA LAMISA

Milan Kundra, in his novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* states, "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting". By this assertion Kundra articulates how humans end up forgetting their past of trauma and torture, eventually creating a path repeating the tragedy of ancient instead of preventing it. Needless to say, remembering one's past is an active form of resistance against oppression. For this reason, governments across the globe end up spending an astronomical amount of wealth to paint a picture of the past that is favourable to them and their idea of nation-building. Bangladeshi state-sponsored National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), is a perfect example of this practice.

In our country, students have been drawing their history lessons from the NCTB book for Bangladesh and Global Studies, which has been notoriously altered in terms of its history lesson to appease whichever government is in power. To do so it would select specific stories to tell and which to erase. For example, during the Awami League (AL) era, contribution of Sheikh Mujib, (founding father of the country and father of the current chief of the AL, Sheikh Hasina) would be highlighted, whereas in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) era, the contribution of Ziaur Rahman (founder of BNP and husband of current chief of the party, Khaleda Zia) would be given spotlight and an hagiography would be narrated instead of an objective history.

To empower the dominant political narrative, the main technique that the NCTB has been employing for decades is to cherry-pick specific parts of history that suits the prevailing regime. For example, although the current

version of the NCTB Bangladesh and Global Studies book mentions the incredible leadership of Sheikh Mujib during the bloody liberation war in 1971, it fails to even mention his failure to govern post-independence. His administration was filled with cronyism, important government jobs were offered to people who were close to the founding fathers by family ties.

Furthermore, Mujib had been accused of decorating Kamal as his heir apparent, essentially propelling the culture of dynastic politics in the newly independent country. However, it is not just his nepotism that has been removed from our collective memory, but also his formation of a one-party state, banning all other political parties except his own *Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League* (BAKSAL), and empowering *Jatiya Rakhi Bahini*, a para-military force that has been accused of executing extrajudicial killing, has all been erased, creating a sense of impunity for politically powerful people. It can never be denied that the way Mujib had been assassinated along with his entire family including his minor son and pregnant daughter-in-law is tragic and it was heinous in every aspect. However, he was with limitations, as are most people.

Another important aspect of history that our national book is declining to face is the history of partition. The state-sponsored textbook hardly spares a single paragraph on the history of the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent, which along with drawing two new countries on the world map has also witnessed the largest human migration in history, packed with communal riots between Muslims and Hindus.

Those communal conflicts have unfortunately left their mark even today. Many Hindus, during the Pakistan era, lost their properties under the "Enemy Property Act", which

led to the confiscation of lands that belonged to Hindu communities who migrated to India to save themselves against violence, only for them to come back and see that their properties had been taken by the Pakistani state. The Hindu community complains that the law has been used against them even after 1971.

The distrust between Muslim and Hindu communities in our country has been shaped by the violence and trauma of partition. Documenting these aspects, Anam Zakaria in her book *1971: A People's History from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India*, commented, "[P]artition remains an ongoing process in Bangladesh with communal tensions, crystallisation of religious identities, and an 'otherisation' of Hindus increasingly prevalent." It is not difficult to dissect that our past is connected with our present.

Through discourse and perception, these unknown tales of history continue to haunt us even today. This collective amnesia alarmingly has an immense impact in our lives. With the arrival of the new interim government, we must demand a nuanced narrative in the national textbook.

Bangladeshi people, from their childhoods, must be given access to their past which is not confounded within black and white but rather grey. A person would no longer be a deity or be condemned for their selective work. Historical figures must be presented as human beings with human flaws and they would be appreciated for what they truly were. Bangladeshi youth, filled with hope for a new dawn of democracy, must be given access to their past so that they can build a better future.

Fariha Lamisa is a struggling student who is majoring in English at East West University. Send her your well-meaning suggestions and consolation at flamisa2020@gmail.com.



Going back to school after exposure to violence

ARE THE STUDENTS PREPARED?

ADRIN SARWAR

The current times are neither simple nor easily escapable. During the day, you strive to maintain your routines. Yet, there is always that lingering question: What is happening around us? It's a question that gnaws at you, one that cannot be completely chased away. And at night, those questions grow louder, invading our thoughts, and keeping us awake.

Children, too, are not immune. They hear the news, sense the tension, and see the fear in the eyes of adults. The violence and unrest around have even snatched some of their peers. Though these children will try to continue with their lives, the shadow of what they've seen and heard will loom over them. There are, undoubtedly, certain responsibilities that parents and authorities must uphold to protect children's mental health.

Nayeema Islam Antora, Psychologist and Project Coordinator at the Disabled Child Foundation (DCF), provides her perspective on the issue.

"Violence can really take a toll on a child's mental development. When kids are exposed to violence, it can cause emotional and psychological trauma that affects their ability to learn and do well in school," she says.

Articles from World Health Organization (WHO) and U.S. National Library of Medicine report that children exposed to violence frequently face increased stress, anxiety, and depression. This heightened emotional strain can make it difficult for them to focus, process information, and build healthy relationships. Additionally, such experiences can interrupt the development of crucial brain areas involved in regulating emotions and managing executive functions.

According to American Academy of Pediatrics, children who are regularly exposed to violence often experience severe and lasting effects, such as developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They may endure emotional and physical "aftershocks" for months or even years. Increased aggression, violence, or self-destructive behaviour can also emerge.

The reason these symptoms are so severe is due to how children experience trauma. While adults might try to use logic to understand chaotic situations, children, with their limited experience, struggle to grasp and deal with such harsh realities. The difficulty in processing their experiences makes the effects of violence on their emotional health and development even more intense.

According to Nayeema Islam, parents are key in helping children deal with the fear of violence. It's important to create a safe and supportive space where children feel okay expressing their emotions. Parents should listen to their concerns, acknowledge how they feel, and reassure them about their safety. Having open and honest talks, tailored to their age and understanding, can also help them process what's happening. They need to know that they are not alone in this and that no matter what happens, they will be protected.

On July 15, student protests demanding quota reforms in government jobs turned violent, prompting the previous government to close all educational institutions. Schools in eight major cities were closed on July 17, followed by a nationwide closure of primary schools due to worsening conditions.

Recent decisions about reopening schools have been troubling. The previous government planned to reopen schools on August 4, excluding certain areas, but this was postponed due to ongoing unrest. After



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

a change in government on August 5, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) announced schools would reopen on August 7, but many remained closed until the Ministry of Education issued a formal directive.

Finally, on August 15, Chief Adviser Dr Mohammad Yunus directed all schools and colleges to reopen nationwide on August 18, though many parents are still hesitant to send their children back.

About reopening schools amid the ongoing unrest Nayeema Islam says, "Going back to school amid violence or after experiencing it can impact children's mental health and social growth. Schools, which should be a safe place for learning and making friends can turn into a source of stress and anxiety if they don't feel secure."

Fahima Bhuiya Sarna, an eleventh-grade student at Tongi Government College, added, "At first, we were unsure whether our classes would start on August 6 as we didn't receive any notice from the college. It's only been a week since I started attending. Now that classes have resumed, it feels good to be back to studying."

Tasnim Sumon, a sixth-grade student at National Ideal School, says, "At the time of the movement, I was disturbed. I was not allowed to go outside, not even to my balcony. My parents strictly forbade me from going to the terrace as well."

"Every night, I could hear helicopters roaming around and gunshots as well. I could not sleep at night. In the daytime, I was anxious about all the news headlines. Now that classes have finally resumed, I fear going outside, and don't feel good about returning to school. Also, there are very few students attending," he added.

Similarly, Ashraf Islam Jarif, a first-grade student at Ideal School and College, Mugda, shares, "I usually go to school by van, but none of the other students who ride with me are attending school right now which is why my parents don't want to send me to school either."

Jannatul Tasnim, a ninth-grade student at Vigarunnisa Noon School, shares, "I haven't attended school since it resumed earlier this month. Many of my classmates haven't attended either. Given the low turnout and the dangerous conditions on the roads, my parents decided not to send me to school."

As prompted by many of the testimonies, despite schools reopening, many parents remain unsure about sending their children back.

Labani Akhter, a parent, expresses her worries, "Although schools have reopened, I'm hesitant to send my child due to the lack of safety in the city. Clashes can break out on the streets in an instant. Even if I send my child to school, I worry anxiously until they return home safely."

"With all the recent changes in government and politics, I am not quite sure about sending my child back to school. I'm not confident that the situation in the classroom will return to normal anytime soon," Nasrin Nahar, another parent shares.

The authorities need to carefully consider their decisions before reopening schools. Ensuring that schools are truly safe is crucial to avoid adding more stress to children during these challenging times.

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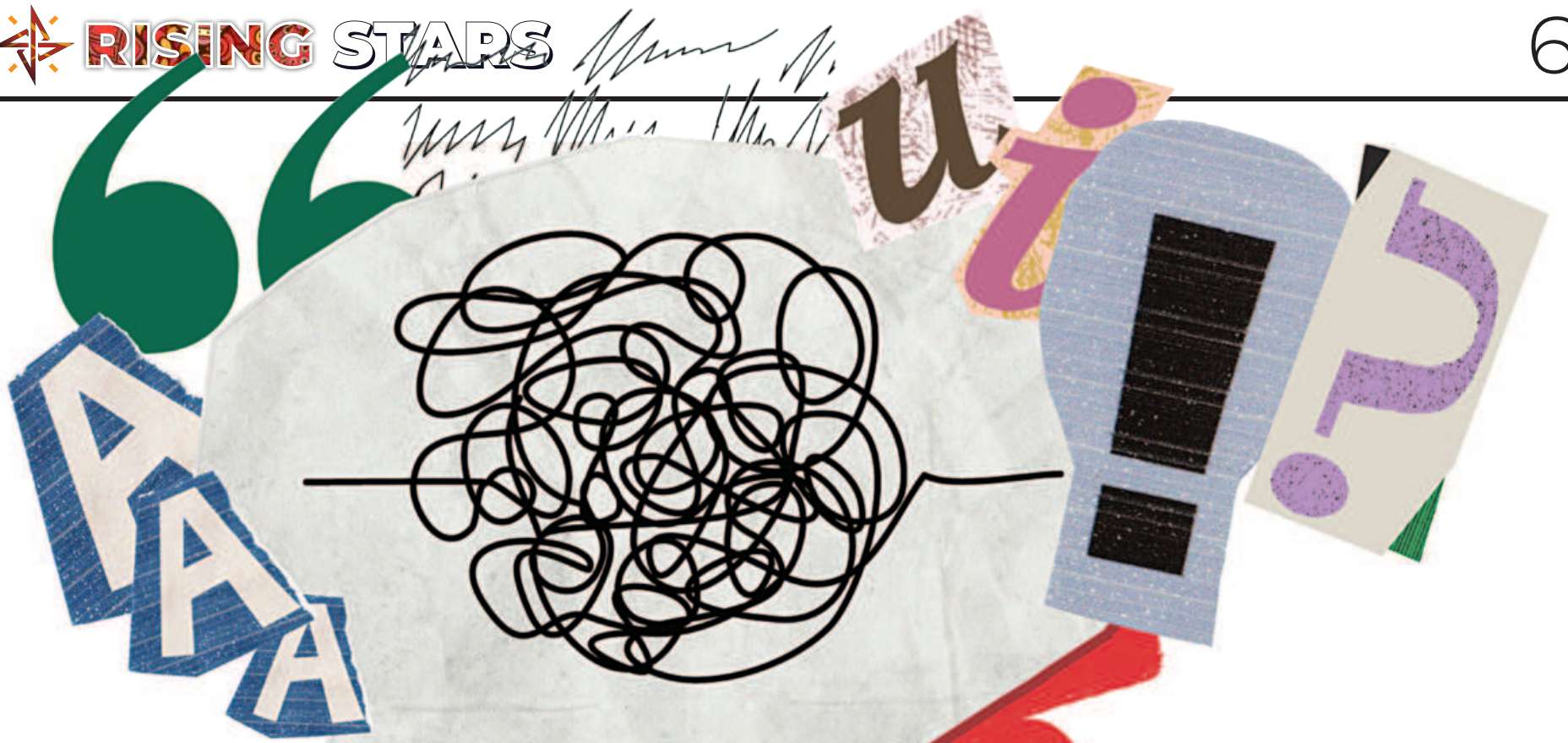


ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

Growing up and navigating life with speech disorders

ARSHAD SALEH

The ability to speak is often taken for granted given that communication is an essential part of human existence. Thus, the impact and prevalence of speech disorders often lack visibility in the public eye. According to the Department of Communication Disorders at Dhaka University, Bangladesh doesn't have the exact statistics on people with speech and language impairments, but it is assumed that the number of people with such disorders is increasing every year.

"Early childhood development is the biggest contributor to speech issues. Much of the time, speech disorders are caused by autism or sensory matters. Speech disorders, such as stutters are picked up after a child learns to speak. This is different from speech disorders caused by autism and speech delays caused by sensory problems. Stutters, however are unlike other speech disorders which can be observed from the school going age, whereas other speech disorders and speech delays can only be observed much earlier," says Mohdud Sumon, a senior speech therapist at Therapy Station.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh lacks sufficient facilities that caters to the early development of children with speech disorders caused by autism and sensory issues. Early onset symptoms of such speech disorders must not be overlooked by parents as these children should receive the care they need as early as possible. It is not only the duty of the parents but also the institutions these children attend, to make sure they get the appropriate care they require to have the best possible quality of life.

Speech disorders, such as stutters are seen from a young age. Young people with this kind of unique challenges face difficulties to express themselves clearly. Conditions such as stuttering, articulation disorders, and voice disorders can significantly impact a child's social interactions, academic performance, and self-esteem.

"When I struggle to speak, I feel a sense of shame and helplessness. If I need to mention my destination when getting on a rickshaw or the amount I need to transfer through mobile banking, I might get stuck, and this makes people stare at me. It feels embarrassing," says Nahiyam Siyam, a 26-year-old programme director at LEAD360.

Despite the physiological reasons behind a speech disorder, the way people are perceived by those around them, such as peers and teachers, plays a major role in impacting the severity of the disorder.

"A primary reason behind a person's struggles to overcome a stutter is the pressure they endure. For example, someone with a stutter may fear messing up a presentation or not being able to answer the teacher's question. Children fear being bullied constantly and picked

"A couple of techniques that work for my stutter is controlling the rate of speech. I had to bring this rate down because otherwise, I would lock up. Another technique that works for me is speaking in rhythm. If you speak in rhythm, you're linking one word with the other, making stuttering virtually impossible," said Sameer.

on at school. The problem on the surface appears to be the stutter itself, but the constant state of fear that the child lives under makes the stutter significantly worse," adds Sumon.

When asked if he faced bullying in school, Siyam says, "Yes, I did face bullying back in school. There were such instances when the teacher would ask me a question and if I got stuck, they would put me down by saying they had not understood anything I said. There were also those who tried to mock me, but I would say most people were just unaware of how it was a sensitive issue to me even though it might not have been for them."

Content creator Sameer Ahmed, popularly known as SameerScane, has made a name for himself as a public speaker across the country. Sameer has had a speech disorder throughout his life and he shares his experience growing up with a stutter, "When I was younger, people in my family were concerned I couldn't talk. It was never a problem for my family, but as a child going to school, it was a big deal for me. I used to be terrified of giving presentations. I have a vivid memory of one of my first presentations. It was a two to three-minute-long presentation that took about seven or eight minutes, and my teacher made fun of me for taking so long."

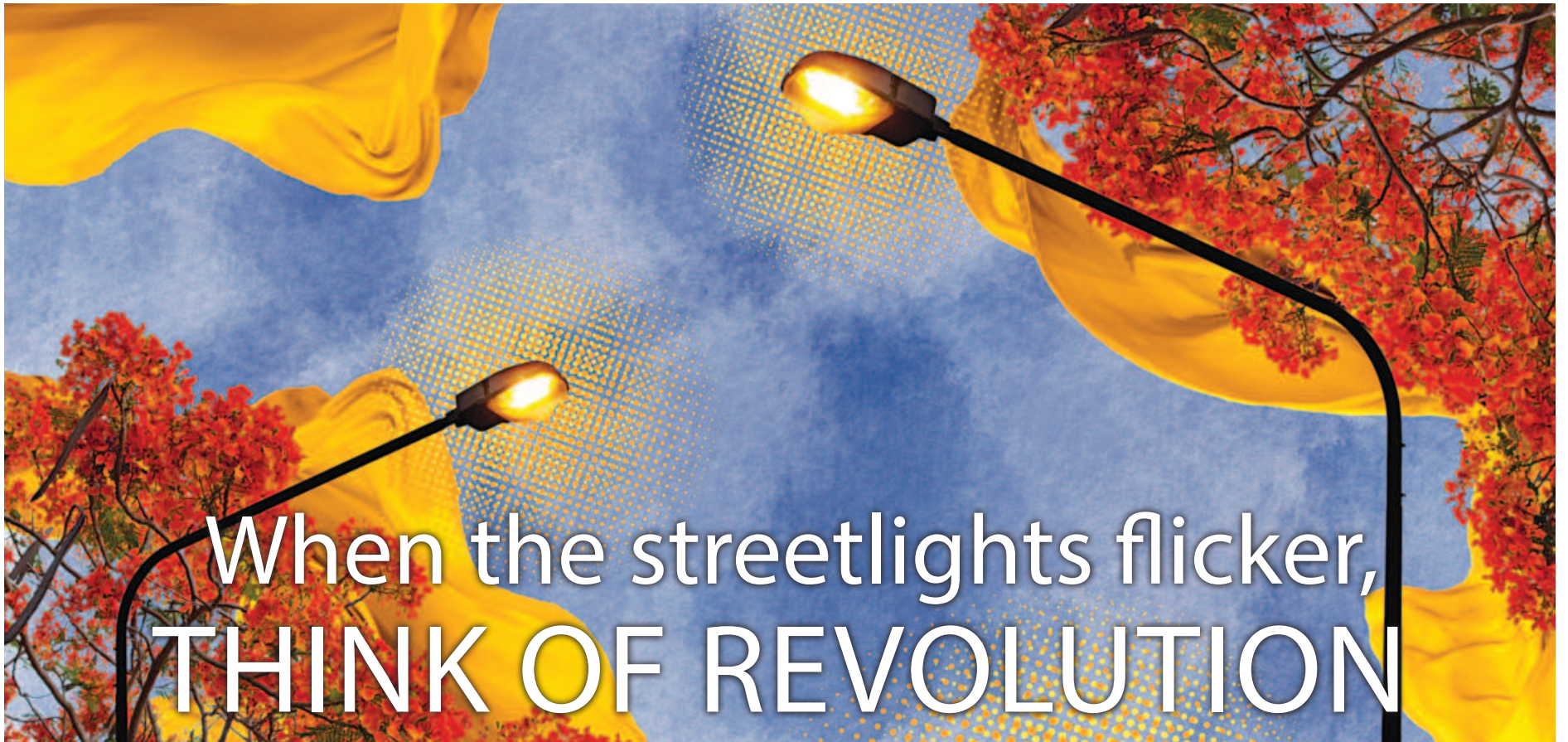
Attending speech therapy has helped many around the world. Though therapy is not as widely accessible in our country, the techniques and approaches of speech therapy stand as a solid route of action for those struggling with a speech disorder. When asked about his experience with speech therapy Siyam says, "I attended the National Center for Hearing and Speech for Children (SAHIC) back in 2014 for speech therapy. Speech therapy taught me techniques like finding the right pace to speak with. I learned to pause when speaking and take deep breaths to control my breathing."

"A couple of techniques that work for my stutter is controlling the rate of speech. I had to bring this rate down because otherwise, I would lock up. Another technique that works for me is speaking in rhythm. If you speak in rhythm, you're linking one word with the other, making stuttering virtually impossible," said Sameer.

Bangladesh still has a long way to go when it comes to providing adequate facilities for those struggling with speech disorders. However, there are a few centres available, such as Therapy Station in Shanti Nagar and SAHIC in Mohakhali. Although professional help is advised, there are many techniques and methods available on the internet for those who may be unable to access a therapy.

Spreading awareness and giving visibility to speech disorders is necessary for building a more inclusive society. Every child has their own ideas and experiences to share and they must feel included regardless of any struggles they may face with their speech.

Arshad is a cat dad and a student at Mastermind.



When the streetlights flicker, THINK OF REVOLUTION

ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

A. M. FAHAD, ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

When the streetlights flicker, think of every doe-eyed child that the city swallows in its gluttony, the dread and disease that permeates through and seeps into the hearts of men, and the hopes and ambitions used as bridges for pellets to pass through the sockets that reek of an incurable void or a never-ending death.

When you spot a new leaf poking its head out of a naked tree branch, think of relief, the sound of a little girl's giggle as she throws her arms around her father's shoulders after a long day of separation, the absence of microphones and camera flashes illuminating her naive lamentations.

When the streetlights flicker, think of the empty arms of a mother, cut onto the boundary line that marks the expression of

despair, a line stretched onto infinity, where the screams are met with echoes and the tears turn into stone before they hit the crimson-soaked ground.

When the sidewalks under your feet are carpeted with red, I hope you think of nothing but *krishnochura* petals, not of bygone days when red on the streets etched a name onto a paper with fabricated excuses, *achals* blockading the routes of teardrops trying to reach the earth.

When the streetlights flicker, think of grief, for it is not absolute, but in all its absoluteness, it is the absence (or the lack thereof) of love—absence, not of abandonment, but absence that is etched in yearning, a longing to see the sun shine gently across the horizon—with the tyrants tumbling in on themselves, and the fascists

slowly slipping away with the tightening of the noose.

When you hear a cuckoo calling, think of the air, the ease of breathing when the words on the tip of your tongue are not held down by heavy gases, hands enveloping the faces you love, the open letters to nowhere buried six feet under in every cemetery in your neighbourhood.

When the streetlights flicker, think of the hope that lingered in the aftermath of the dust, the chants and the roars, the colours and the lovers, when the city's breath was one with yours.

When you see the reptiles waking up from their slumbers, remember fondly how you did the same, the face of tyranny no longer a sleep paralysis demon, limbs no longer immovable, glaring into the furnace

of absolutism not another pipe dream.

When the streetlights flicker, think of it all, all that was lost, and all that could be

When the streetlights flicker, think of beginning, again and again and again and again

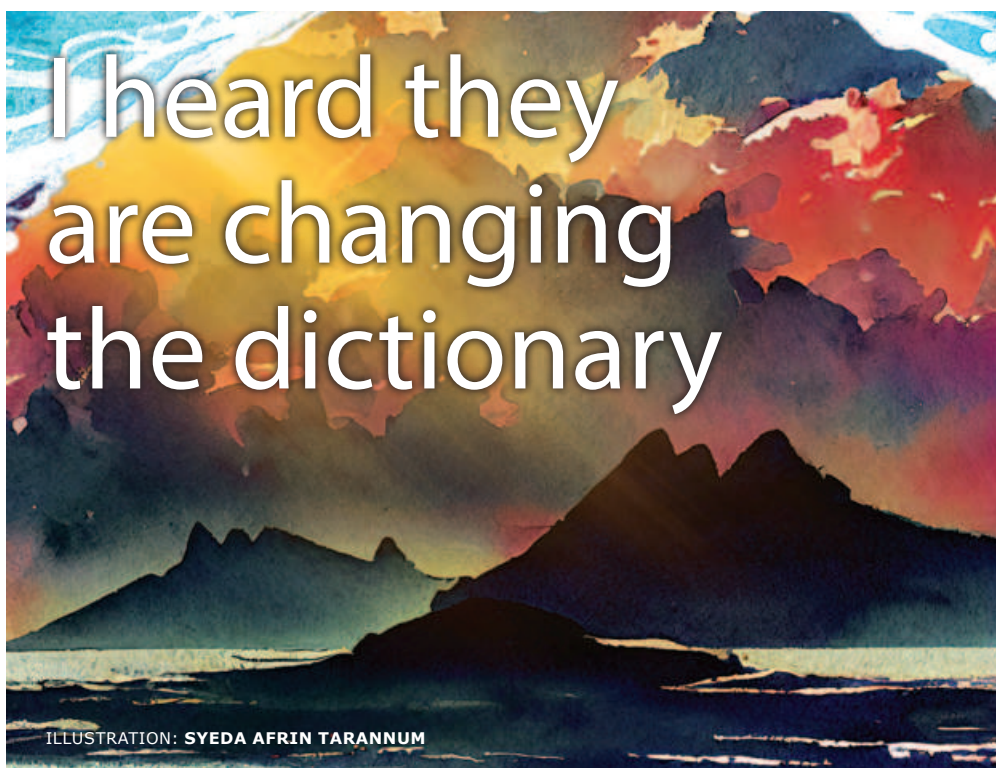
When the streetlights flicker, think of revolution

And when spring finally comes, breathe, sing, scream without abandon

When spring finally comes, mourn, grieve, and recall the names they swore you'll forget

When spring finally comes, double, nay, triple in numbers, and hit the streets.

This poem was written on the night of August 5th, before the new dawn. Zabin and Fahad like frog hats and revolution



I heard they are changing the dictionary

OHONA ANJUM

I heard they are changing the dictionary.
What will become of the ones I won as prizes?
First, second, third place—my collection grew,
With the Oxford's red, yellow and blue.
Spines lined up.
All the words once meant the same,
But now, they're changing meanings of.
The window, once a portal to the world
Becomes a barricade against the night of fury.
Bullets, once a distant threat in a far-off land
Now whistles and dances while piecing through fragile bodies,

Shattering everything in sight with a brutal ease.
Home, a refuge—
Overlooks a rallying ground where voices rise like flames.
Freedom, once a whispered hope,
Now shouts in the streets with banners unfurled.
Standing tall and fearless against turquoise-skinned puppets.
They once spoke of justice—hollow, blind, and cold.
Which was never a pillar to lean on
But a fleeting thing to chase.
I hope they're changing the dictionary—
Letting new meaning emerge from the ashes of the old.
Each page will be the canvas of a new history
As revolution rewrites the language of our lives.

ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANUM

History of student protests IN BANGLADESH

ASHZAEEN FATMI KHAN

Why do students rise with fearless fury, their impassioned yells echoing through the streets? What drives the youth to fight an entrenched status quo with such unyielding determination? The recent eruption of student protests is not an isolated episode; it is a fiery addition to a storied legacy of defiance and courage. As we delve into the history of student activism, we witness a proud past that has relentlessly defined Bangladesh's path to progress.

1952 Language Movement

"Urdu and only Urdu," said Jinnah, on a visit to East Pakistan. With this decree, an attempt was made to silence 64 percent of the population. This action, in the words of writer Abul Mansur Ahmed, would've left East Bengal's educated society "ineligible" for government jobs and chained progress.

At the dawn of this injustice, the students of Dhaka University (DU) became the dawn breakers. On February 21, defying Section 144, they brought out rallies and demonstrations. The government's bullets, intended to silence, instead turned Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Shafiur and Jabbar into martyrs. 29 students fell that day. The news spread like wildfire, leading to a complete halt of shops, offices, and public transport as the nation united in grief. The students' blood wrote a tale of sacrifice, inspiring generations and securing Bangla's rightful place as a state language.

1962 Education Movement

Fresh from their Language Movement victory, students faced a new foe in Ayub Khan's Education Commission and its regressive policies.

Labelling education a "product," the Commission pushed privatisation, mandated Urdu and discarded free primary education. Against these recommendations, Dhaka College became the focal point of dissent.

On February 1, students called for a strike. Even a field cannon placed to intimidate them couldn't silence their spirits. Scattered protests, class boycotts, and hunger strikes followed. After a historic meeting at the DU Cafeteria with representatives from all colleges, students declared a nationwide strike for September 17. The procession at Dhaka saw students, workers, rickshaw pullers, and boatmen marching together in unison. As police opened fire, bullets claimed Babul, Golam Mustafa and Waziullah, etching their sacrifice into history. Ultimately, the Pakistani government yielded to the students' demands.

1966 Six Point Movement

In 1966, amid growing disparities between East and West Pakistan, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman introduced the Six Point Movement, a plea for East Pakistan's autonomy.

Rising again, students championed the Six Points with rallies, strikes, and pamphlets. They played a crucial role in educating the masses on the significance of these points.

Braving police brutality and arrests, their cries echoed throughout the nation, compelling authorities to heed their demands. Though rejected, the seeds of defiance eventually sprouted into roots of independence, ingraining self-governance into the national psyche.

1969 Mass Uprising

As Ayub Khan's military rule tightened, economic wounds deepened and frustrations peaked. Arrests of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other Bengali leaders relit the protest's vigour. With tensions simmering, the students, supported by the political might of the Awami League and the National Awami Party, once more became the vanguards of change.

The tragic martyrdom of Amanullah Asaduzzaman in January solidified their commitment. Mass demonstrations, strikes, and brutal confrontations led to further casualties, claiming 61 lives. Among the martyrs was Matiur Rahman

respected intellectual – was murdered by Ershad's cadres. Dhaka skipped a heartbeat on December 6 as hundreds of thousands of people poured through the streets. Autocracy crumbled and parliamentary democracy was restored, with one more win for the students.

2018 Road Safety Movement

4,200 deaths, 16,100 injuries, 2,400,000 unlicensed drivers.

When a reckless bus ploughed into the sidewalk, Rajib and Dia, two school students, were killed.

The hashtag "#WeWantJustice" trended on social media as agitated students, mostly aged 15 to 19, orchestrated a powerful yet peaceful protest. They smoothly managed traffic, checked documents, and symbolically enforced rules, even on officials who had been "above the law." Students' efficiency even embarrassed the authorities, highlighting their chronic failures. Declaring a nine-point demand, students called for capital punishment in cases of reckless driving.

What began with restraint soon escalated as goons clashed with students, injuring over a hundred. Enduring smokes of tear gas, rubber bullets, and restricted mobile network, the youth outcry led to legislative victory. Most of the changes that were promised, however, were not delivered

2013 & 2018 Quota Reform Movement

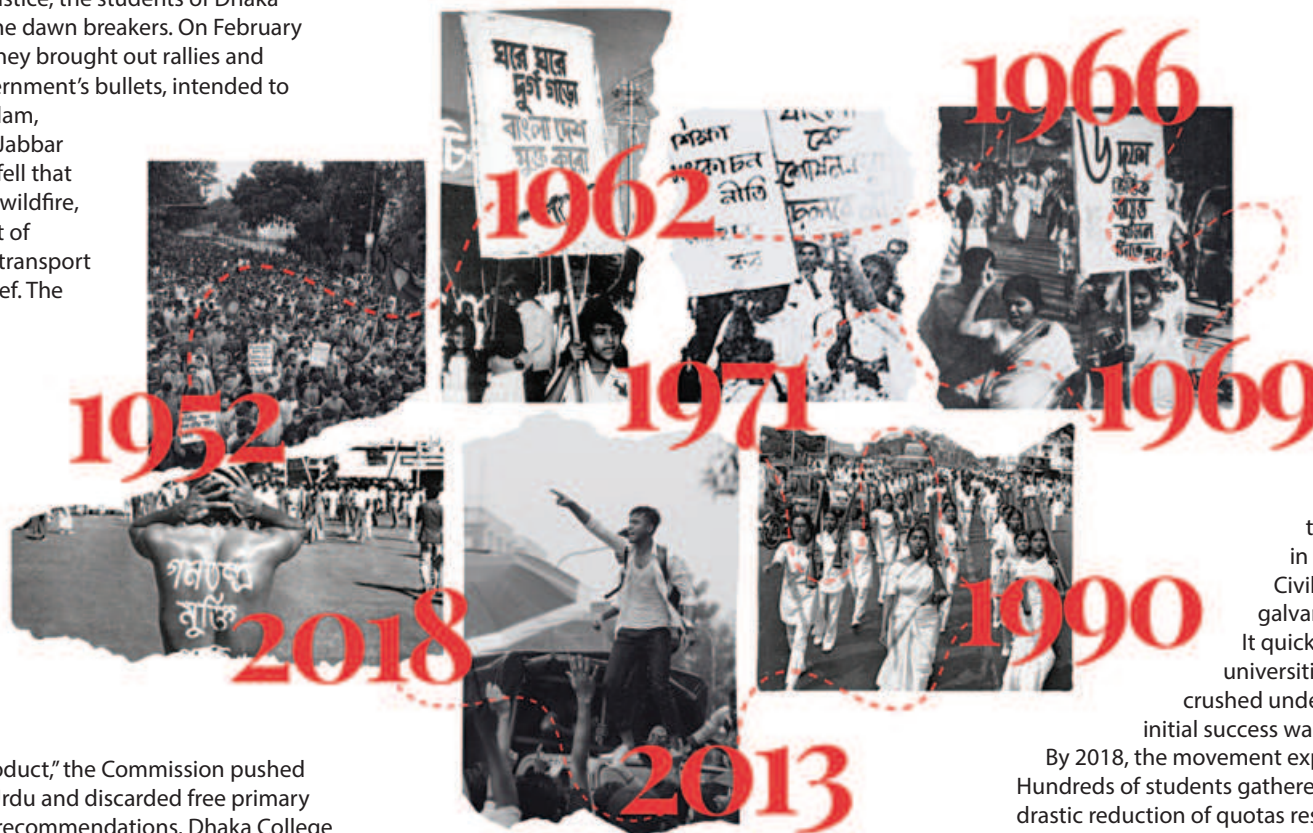
Shahbagh was the stage for the Quota Reform Movement in 2013, where Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) aspirants were galvanised to demand change. It quickly garnered support from universities across the country but was crushed under police crackdown. Their initial success was short-lived.

By 2018, the movement experienced a resurgence. Hundreds of students gathered at Shahbagh, calling for a drastic reduction of quotas reserved for the descendants of freedom fighters. To quell the movement, police deployed tear gas, water cannons, and batons against the demonstrators. Goons were also seen attacking the protestors, wounding over 160 students from Dhaka University.

In a display of widespread solidarity, students nationwide boycotted academic activities and took out processions. Private universities also joined. They blocked crucial highways and thoroughfares, disrupting daily life and compelling governmental attention. Their efforts bore fruit when former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, despite criticising their tactics, acknowledged their grievances in Parliament, leading to a cancellation of all quotas.

Very rarely, if ever, have students stood on the wrong side of history. Never have they faltered in the face of tyranny, nor have they failed in place of victory.

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Mallik, a student of class nine. In February when Sergeant Zahurul Haq – a Bengali nationalist – was murdered in captivity, an unprecedented uproar engulfed the nation. Government buildings were torched and students escalated their fight, forming the February 15 Bahini – the first armed opposition in the struggle for autonomy. The uprising triumphantly ended with Sheikh Mujib's release and Ayub Khan's resignation.

The students' involvement thus continued through the liberation war, and were at the heart of the fight for freedom.

1990 Anti-Authoritarian Movement

When General Ershad's authoritarian regime caused pervasive corruption and repression, students again led the charge. Cries from campus rallies and sit-ins pierced the air, drawing cross-party support from BNP, Awami League, and leftists.

Protests intensified when Dr Shamsul Milon – a well-