DHAKA, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2024, *ASHWIN 11, 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

ILLUSTRATION: **NATASHA JAHAN**

DID YOU KNOW?

The origins of BOBA TEA

Boba tea, or "bubble tea," is a sweet drink that contains chewy tapioca pearls (or boba) and has been around since the 1980s.

The battle for who invented it was serious enough to spark a decade-long lawsuit between two Taiwanese tea houses – Chun Shui Tang in Taichung and Hanlin Tea Room in Tainan. In the end, the court ruled in 2019 that since bubble tea isn't patented, it doesn't matter who invented it.

Boba tea made its way to the United States in the '90s, starting in California, and quickly became a hit among East Asian communities. By 2022, the global boba tea market was worth a whopping $2.29 billion. Today, you can find these drinks in boba-specific shops and even general restaurants everywhere, serving up those irresistible tapioca pearls that keep us coming back for more.

DESIGN: **FAISAL BIN IQBAL**

Editor & Publisher
Mahfuz Anam

Features Editor and Head of Content Marketing
Ehsanur Raza Ronny

Rising Stars In-Charge
Faisal Bin Iqbal

Rising Stars Team
Syeda Afrin Tarannum
Abir Hossain

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

EXO BAEKHYUN'S HELLO, WORLD IS ONE OF HIS BEST RELEASES TO DATE

SHAIKH SABIK KAMAL

Released on September 6, *Hello, World* is Baekhyun's fourth mini album that showcases his artistry with six songs. The main vocalist of EXO, renowned for his belts and runs, has made it clear yet again that he's truly an artist to be celebrated. Baekhyun's discography is deeply infused with the elements of RnB, more specifically K-RnB, soul, and pop. This mini album is no different in terms of genre exploration and vocal showcase. However, it doesn't fall short of being an interesting listening experience.

The album's title track – "Pineapple Slice" – is the perfect promotional song for *Hello, World*. The song itself is pure magic, mixing and matching the boldness of the talented vocalist. The danceability of the song is perhaps the reason why it was chosen as the title track. The song also doesn't cut corners to fit the TikTok marketability. Rather, its catchiness lies in its authenticity and uniqueness.

"Hello Morning", the opener for the album, sets the mood perfectly for the rest of the songs. A good opener can almost always be the key to a great listening experience, or so I believe wholeheartedly. EXO's RnB track influence is vivid here, but the track still manages to stand on its own without being perceived as an EXO knock-off. "Rendez-Vous", the third track is more laid back and consistent in carrying that vibe throughout the song, allowing the listener to ease into the next track: "Pineapple Slice".

My favourite b-side from the mini has to be "Cold Heart" – an angsty song with dark beats and a mysterious setting. Despite disliking short songs, this one, even with its generic structure, is an exception. The slightly heavier part of the album is further enlightened with "Woo" which is a catchy song with breathtaking vocals. Everything about this song delightfully scratches an itch in my brain, starting from the little piano bits to the beautiful outro.

Usually, I'd expect a vocal-heavy artist like Baekhyun to end the album with a gentler vibe, preferably with a ballad. But "Truth Be Told" is a track that perfects the album run with its bewitching beats and sultry vocals. Even with many familiar generic influences, every single element of the song complements each other to deliver a grand finale to the mini album.

One thing about K-pop artists and bands is that they often fail to deliver cohesiveness in their releases; be it a studio album or just an EP. But the cohesiveness that *Hello, World* brings makes it almost as fulfilling as listening to a full album. Sparing no space for filler tracks or unnecessary marketing strategies, this project consolidates Baekhyun's status as a game changer in the Korean soloist scene.

Shaikh Sabik Kamal exists at sabik2005kamal4787@gmail.com

WITH BSRM FASTBUILD
YOUR HOME WILL BE BUILT ON TIME
WITH THE BEST QUALITY RODS
BSRM
building a safer nation

Should you go down the commerce path in A levels?

ILLUSTRATION: **SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM**

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM & **ARANYO RISHI CHOWDHURY**

Making a decision as crucial as your academic track, something that will go on to define what you do professionally for the rest of your life, is a bit much to ask of a teenager with a barely developed prefrontal cortex. However, for students with an inclination towards the world of business and commerce, it is even more difficult to make this already tough choice.

Not only do parents and relatives pressure you into a more "prestigious" STEM track like engineering or medicine, but students these days tend to contribute to the problem. While the digs made at commerce students and their lighter coursework are usually not mean-spirited, it is not uncommon for people to have legitimate biases against people who go down the track.

"It's hard to take myself seriously sometimes because a lot of my STEM peers look down on my field of study." says Ahmed Junaed Karim, a 2023 A level graduate who took Accounting and Economics. "Sometimes they joke and sometimes they mean it but you hear it so much, sometimes you think: *Is it true? Am I a commerce student just because I wasn't good at anything else?*"

Irrespective of your academic interests, when your peers make you feel insecure about your intelligence for choosing certain subjects, you wouldn't want to choose them. Before jumping to conclusions about difficulty, it's better to know what the commerce subjects actually teach, and whether or not they may actually be a better fit for you.

The most common choices are Accounting, Business, Economics, and Mathematics. The Mathematics components chosen are usually Pure Mathematics 1 and 3, along with Statistics 1 and 2. Economics isn't included here due to it being more of a social science than either a STEM subject or a commerce subject, but it is usually grouped with the latter category nonetheless. Staying in the commerce track leads to careers in financial analysis, accounting, marketing, human resources, and, of course, entrepreneurship.

Starting with Accounting, it mainly teaches the interpretation and preparation of financial statements for different kinds of businesses, as well as internal decision-making. The coursework is relatively lighter than something like Physics or Economics, so it's a safe option if you want good grades. However, the course might not be an accurate representation of the profession of chartered accountancy.

"The syllabus content is too focused on manual data entry and book-keeping, something that's being automated anyway in the profession today" says Ahmed. "The course hasn't really evolved. It would be more interesting to explore how human behaviour relates to accounting, like in Economics. How, for example, as a chartered accountant you wouldn't just have to do bookkeeping, but also evaluate the data to advise business-owners for better performance at the company."

Thus, your performance in the subject may not necessarily indicate whether or not you'll like being an accountant. If this career path is something you consider just because you get an A* in Accounting, it's definitely recommended that you do personal research, listen to firsthand experiences, and then come to a conclusion about if it's really for you.

A more go-to pick for A level commerce students is Business. From learning about economic factors affecting a business, to marketing strategies integral to its survival, to every type of management required to keep it running smoothly, the course covers a lot of ground for our level.

> **"I started off with a bunch of random work, from editing and writing small social media articles to interning for bigger projects such as the Matarbari Joint Venture Project,"**

However, the course suffers from an overemphasis on rote-learning. "The commerce curriculum is heavy on memorisation and retention of information" says Fairuz Shams, an A level Business and Accounting student. "I imagine that's kind of hard on students like me, who have difficulty focusing and retaining huge chunks of information. Accounting is relatively better, since it's like Mathematics in terms of format. But Business is difficult due to this rote-learning aspect."

In spite of this, STEM and commerce students unanimously agree that the commerce path is easier to cope with. While people rag on the track for not demanding as much effort or "intelligence", at the end of the day, it's the commerce students who get to make the most of their last high school years outside of the classroom. They have a lot of time leftover for leisurely activities, as well as other skills they might want to develop outside of school, like programming, graphic design, or any other area.

Besides the better academics-leisure balance the track affords, the subject content is also more intuitive for many people. "After studying pure science for a whole year I knew I wanted to study something easier," says Audri Ali, a 2024 A level graduate.

"I did a six-month trial period and shifted to commerce while keeping science as an option in case I didn't like it. However, I ended up sticking to it because it just clicked better. I understood things in ways I could never understand science."

One significant edge that commerce holds over science is the ease of access of extracurricular activities related to the field. Research internships at laboratories are often difficult to access without certain connections or paying your way to them.

With commerce, it's easier to explore the field outside of the classroom due to the necessary skills being relatively easier to acquire. Whereas to intern at a laboratory you would need specialised skills in handling delicate equipment, there's an abundance of small businesses that need people on marketing and management fronts. Landing such positions will give you a lot of experience, which you can use later to apply for posts at bigger enterprises.

"I started off with a bunch of random work, from editing and writing small social media articles to interning for bigger projects such as the Matarbari Joint Venture Project," says Audri. "After working for free for four years, I've finally started getting paid work. I'm currently the Head of Marketing and Strategic Planning at Pizza da Wali, and an event and PR manager at Boiragee."

Since these ECAs are seemingly a big time commitment, is it really worth it for you to pursue them? "They don't really do much unless you've worked for a considerable amount of time. However, you can only understand the dynamics of a working environment if money is involved. So they do prepare you better than having zero experience," Audri added.

It's not necessarily impossible to shift to the commerce track after having completed your A levels in the sciences. However, the sooner you have yourself figured out to a decent extent, the better off you'll be. Feeling like you made the right choice can really help you live your final school years to the fullest, and the only way to do that is to explore every track available and see what truly works for you.

Zaima and Rishi are fresh highschool graduates still reeling from A level trauma.

Speaking to parents about your SEXUAL ABUSE EXPERIENCE

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

AZRA HUMAYRA

"When I told my mother about my abuse experience that took place when I was seven, she resorted to blaming me instead of confronting the abuser. She hit me more often because I had started bedwetting again and failed to realise the correlation," says Tabassum Sifat*.

In high school, I discovered the necessity of boundaries—a lesson learnt not from a textbook but from an unsettling experience. Like many teenagers, I went to coaching classes, sat at the front of the class, and was eager to absorb the wisdom imparted by my teachers. Yet, one teacher's gaze lingered too long, his hands found excuses to graze mine, and his jokes veered into uncomfortable territory. I was paralysed by guilt, convinced that I might somehow be at fault. Rather than confide in my parents, I withdrew from the coaching altogether, unnerved by his insistence that I attend extra sessions alone—a proposition that sent chills down my spine.

It took a year, perhaps two before I mustered the courage to tell my mother, thanks to the support of friends who had urged me to speak out. When I finally did, her first question was why hadn't I told her sooner. I found myself struggling to articulate the knot of guilt that had lodged itself in my chest, a burden so heavy that the fear of blame seemed easier to bear than the truth.

According to a survey done in 2022 in collaboration with INCIDIN Bangladesh and the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), about 55 percent of the total surveyed children in Bangladesh reported experiencing sexual violence at home, 52.7 percent of the respondents claimed they were unaware of being sexually harassed at the time, while 61.7 percent indicated they did not disclose it to anybody out of embarrassment and fear of their parents and guardians. The fact that these young victims, who bear no responsibility for the abuse, must carry the burden in silence is deeply troubling. It is the responsibility of the parents to give their kids an environment of safety where they can talk about anything without the fear of judgement.

When Jyoti Ahsan*, a student at Dhaka University, confided in her mother about an incident of sexual harassment, she found herself in a situation that only deepened the wound. She says, "My mother was enraged; when I told her about the complaint, she treated me terribly. She didn't even talk to me properly and said some very hurtful things. At such a bad time when I needed my mother the most, I did not get her support at all. Instead, her words and behaviour made me depressed. I felt so alone."

When children muster the courage to confront abuse, they often find that their parents fall short of providing the safety and reassurance they so desperately need. This may also create a negative precedent for other victims.

"When I told my mother about my abuse experience that took place when I was seven, she resorted to blaming me instead of confronting the abuser. She hit me more often because I had started bedwetting again and failed to realise the correlation," says Tabassum Sifat*, a former student of Dhaka University.

Not only was she being physically abused, but she was forced to attend family gatherings regardless of the abuser's presence ever since she was a child because her mother didn't want to let her father or other relatives know.

She spoke in detail about her experience and how her parents responded to her complaints. "When I finally told my father back in college, he didn't do anything and focused on blaming my mother, and physically abused my siblings and I," added Tabassum.

It is extremely important for parents to respond in a healthy manner as the effects of sexual abuse manifest through a wide range of symptoms, including fear, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and various externalising and internalising behaviour problems, such as inappropriate sexual behaviours.

Sumaiya Jahan*, 16, currently a student, candidly spoke about her experience, "I talked to my mother about it, and I remember completely breaking down into tears while telling her. If I want to describe her reaction, she was beyond shocked and could not handle her tears. She hugged me and let me finish what I had to say and kept telling me it was alright and nothing happened. I think she was unprepared for this and did not know how to respond."

Parents are rarely prepared for such sensitive situations and often respond in a way that makes processing the emotions for the victim an even more arduous task. Sumaiya further added that her mother informed her father, but he did not talk to her about it in depth.

Speaking to the respondents, a pattern was observed: parents often fail to respond in a way that could help the child. When a child discloses sexual abuse, some parents may react negatively due to shock, denial, and overwhelming guilt, which can lead to defensive or dismissive responses.

Cultural stigma and fear of social or legal consequences may also drive parents to downplay the abuse, fearing judgement or ostracism. Additionally, some lack the emotional tools to process such traumatic news, resulting in confusion or anger. If the abuser is a trusted figure, parents may struggle with disbelief, further complicating their response.

Mostak Ahamed Imran, lecturer and child play therapist at BRAC University's Institute of Educational Development, says, "Parents must first focus on their emotional intelligence because, in most cases, they are unsure of how to respond in these sensitive circumstances. To communicate effectively, they must understand the developmental stage of their children. Speaking with a child will differ from speaking with a teenager, whose maturity must be taken into account. In order to make their kids feel safe and secure, parents must tell their children that they will be supported. To help their children feel more comfortable talking about their experiences, parents could speak about their own experiences."

Mostak Ahamed discusses adopting a more proactive stance to shield kids from sexual abuse and harassment. He counsels parents to foster a trusting atmosphere in their homes. If children feel that their parents do not trust them, they might not speak about their experiences with them.

Giving children privacy and discussing sensitive situations can help them create healthy boundaries, which can prevent sexual abuse and harassment. He states, "The child is never to blame; it is not their fault, so parents have the task of not making their children feel guilty. If they fail, counselling can help. The victims can also benefit from support groups."

The emotional well-being of children who have experienced sexual abuse hinges significantly on their parents' responses. Parental reactions often exacerbate the trauma, leaving children lonely and unsupported. To prevent this, parents must make their homes a place of trust and safety. Effective communication, reassurance, and professional support are essential to helping victims process their experiences in a healthy way and move towards healing.

Six YouTube channels for learning PURE MATHEMATICS

BIPRA PRASUN DAS

Having spent most of my final high school years during the Covid-19 lockdown, I found myself needing to learn a lot on my own, especially math. Initially, this seemed like a challenge, but I soon discovered that learning math from YouTube could be both fun and fulfilling. A few YouTube channels proved to be extremely helpful.

Here are a few YouTube channels to learn Pure Mathematics from, each catering to different levels of learners.

Richard E Borcherds

Richard E Borcherds – a Fields Medal-winning mathematician – offers a treasure trove of content that dives deep into advanced topics in Pure Mathematics. The content is delivered with a clear emphasis on rigorous proofs and theoretical frameworks.

This channel is best suited for graduate students, researchers, and advanced undergraduate students who already have a solid foundation in Mathematics. Borcherds' lectures assume a high level of prior knowledge and are geared towards those looking to delve into the intricacies of Pure Math.

The channel primarily covers higher-level mathematics, with a strong focus on algebra, number theory, and complex analysis. Borcherds' expertise in these areas provides viewers with deep insights and a thorough understanding of complex mathematical theories.

3Blue1Brown

Created by Grant Sanderson, *3Blue1Brown* is renowned for its visually stunning and conceptually clear explanations of mathematical concepts. The channel uses a unique visual approach, employing animations to illustrate complex ideas in a way that is both engaging and easy to understand.

High school students, college students, and anyone with an interest in mathematics can benefit from the content of this channel. The content ranges from basic to advanced topics, making it accessible to a broad audience.

3Blue1Brown covers a wide range of mathematical subjects, including calculus, linear algebra, probability, and differential equations. The channel's emphasis on visual learning helps demystify abstract concepts, making them more approachable for learners at all levels.

Blackpenredpen

Run by Steve Chow, *blackpenredpen* focuses on problem-solving and detailed explanations of mathematical concepts. The channel initially gained fame largely due to marathon integral and derivative videos. These videos, which feature Chow solving a large number of integrals and derivatives in a single sitting, attracted a significant following. His approach to solving problems live on a whiteboard, coupled with his engaging and energetic teaching style, resonated with many students and math enthusiasts.

The channel is particularly popular for its step-by-step solutions to various math problems, which are presented in an easy-to-follow manner.

High school and university students will find this channel especially useful, as it covers topics that are commonly encountered in secondary and undergraduate education.

DESIGN: **FAISAL BIN IQBAL**

The clear and concise explanations also make it a great resource for self-learners.

The channel covers a broad spectrum of mathematics, including algebra, calculus, and geometry. It also provides helpful tips and techniques for solving standard math problems, making it a valuable resource for students preparing for exams.

Trefor Bazett

Dr Trefor Bazett's channel is dedicated to providing high-quality math tutorials that are both comprehensive and easy to understand. His content is well-structured and covers a variety of topics, with a particular emphasis on helping students grasp fundamental concepts.

Both high school and undergraduate students can benefit from Dr Bazett's tutorials. His clear explanations and methodical approach make it easy for learners to follow along, whether they are reviewing material for class or self-studying.

This channel is extremely useful if you want to learn in-depth about the various types of mathematical series, and it also covers topics such as algebra, calculus, statistics, and linear algebra. Dr Bazett's tutorials often include detailed examples and illustrations, which help you understand the content in an intuitive way.

The Organic Chemistry Tutor

While primarily known for its chemistry content, *The Organic Chemistry Tutor* also offers extensive tutorials on mathematics. The channel is well-regarded for its thorough and accessible explanations, making complex topics understandable to a wider audience.

High school and undergraduate students will find this channel to be very beneficial, especially those looking for clear and detailed explanations of math topics covered in their curricula.

The channel covers a wide range of subjects, including algebra, trigonometry, calculus, and statistics. *The Organic Chemistry Tutor's* math tutorials are designed to build a strong foundation, making them ideal for students who need to solidify their understanding of core concepts. The channel also has a large number of examples and practice problems, which are a useful supplement to self-studying.

Mathologer

Mathologer, hosted by Dr Burkard Polster, offers an entertaining and insightful look into various mathematical concepts. The channel is known for its engaging presentations that explore the beauty and intrigue of mathematics beyond standard curricula.

Math enthusiasts, who want to learn more about math than is conventionally taught will enjoy this channel. Dr Polster's engaging style makes complex ideas accessible and interesting, making it a great resource for those looking to explore mathematics in a fun and informative way.

The channel covers a diverse range of topics, including number theory, geometry, and recreational mathematics. *Mathologer's* videos often delve into the historical and philosophical aspects of mathematics, providing viewers with a broader perspective on the subject.

Bipra Prasun Das studies Computer Science and Engineering at North South University.

MY LOVE IS LOST, and I don't want it anymore

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

They cooked the fries a different way today. The angle at which they drooped between my fingers and the precise sand-like texture that usually cuts across the surface of my tongue felt different. The same golden-brown appearance, the same aroma of fat-soaked goodness – and yet, different. I don't sigh in the face of the server who asks, "Madam, the food was good, no?" despite the overwhelming urge to do so. Instead, I extend a smile that can even be perceived as warm towards him before stuffing the leftovers in my already overflowing tote and exiting the bleakness of Arabian Fast Food.

My senses are not overwhelmed in the way they usually are on a late February day in another year. There is no hint of the upcoming heat wave and no pulsating weight in the air. The atmosphere tastes stagnant and stale. It carries itself with a flavour that would have made the insides of his nose dry and itchy – making him reach for the steroid nasal spray that he uses a little too much. He would have hated this day and would have hated the fries. He would have vowed to never set foot in the place again only to come crawling back the next time he felt the need to appease me but didn't want to burn a hole through his worn-out, hand-stitched leather wallet. Perhaps it is a good thing he isn't here.

I don't want to shuffle my way across the disproportionately wide footpath towards the drab foot over-bridge. I don't want to awkwardly brush my shoulder against the *alkhella* of the *hujur* who glances at my red-stained knuckles with intrigue. I don't want to clutch my cash-filled bag tightly to my chest while walking across the floating, steel path over a disturbingly deserted road. I certainly don't want to anxiously fly towards the automated entrance of the glass edifice or tap my right foot aggressively while waiting for the elevator to arrive. But I still do it all. And I register, during each instance, the exact shade of emotions that shiver their way across my skin before falling off into the landfill where emotions rot after I fail to bury them in my body.

> **The elevator ride up is not a lonely one. There is the middle-aged couple in the corner, clasping each other's hands as tightly as they can manage.**

Every time I enter it, this building carves out a tiny piece of my heart, leaving behind the sharp tang of hospital bleach and lemon-scented air freshener in its place. The sterile smell clings to the soft cotton of my *kameez* even when I am not here. The essence of the place grabs onto me like a needy child, dragging me along on a ride through its bacteria-ridden, suffocatingly melancholic halls till I can barely remember who I was when I started. I think he likes it this way. He likes me when I forget who I used to be. I just don't know how much of my heart I still have left to give.

The elevator ride up is not a lonely one. There is the middle-aged couple in the corner, clasping each other's hands as tightly as they can manage. With her other hand, she brushes some stray strands back into his salt-and-pepper hair, neglecting to tidy up the wild black strands around her heart-shaped head. I know I will see them again in a couple of months or maybe in a few years. I know his hair will remain salt-and-pepper and hers will have decayed to a dirty, unwashed ash. I know, too, the teenage boy standing beside his mother, looking disinterestedly at his phone, won't be here for long. He will soon be gone to an unknown land, a distant city. Perhaps, he will remain in the same city but become lost with unknown people in an unknown world. As I step out onto the fifth-floor corridor, the newly formed wounds on my heart already feel distant and blunt. This floor is too vast, too all-consuming for there to be any space remaining for my hurt.

I don't have to labour too hard to pick up the gruff voice from the other side of the heavy-set, double doors. It sounds exactly as it always does: dissatisfied, impassionate, boiling with an inexplicable internal rage. I don't want to cross the threshold to the other side to see him, with the veins on his forehead popping out menacingly, shouting at the ill-fated nurse who drew the short straw today. There is an instinct of self-preservation in my head that is trying to pull every inch of my body away from those doors. But I am a mouse caught in an inescapable trap. I don't even bother bracing myself as I pull the doors open and step into the dull, fluorescent ward.

Zaima is a half-fledged person trying to be a full-fledged yapper. Send her your condolences at zaima2004adrita@gmail.com

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

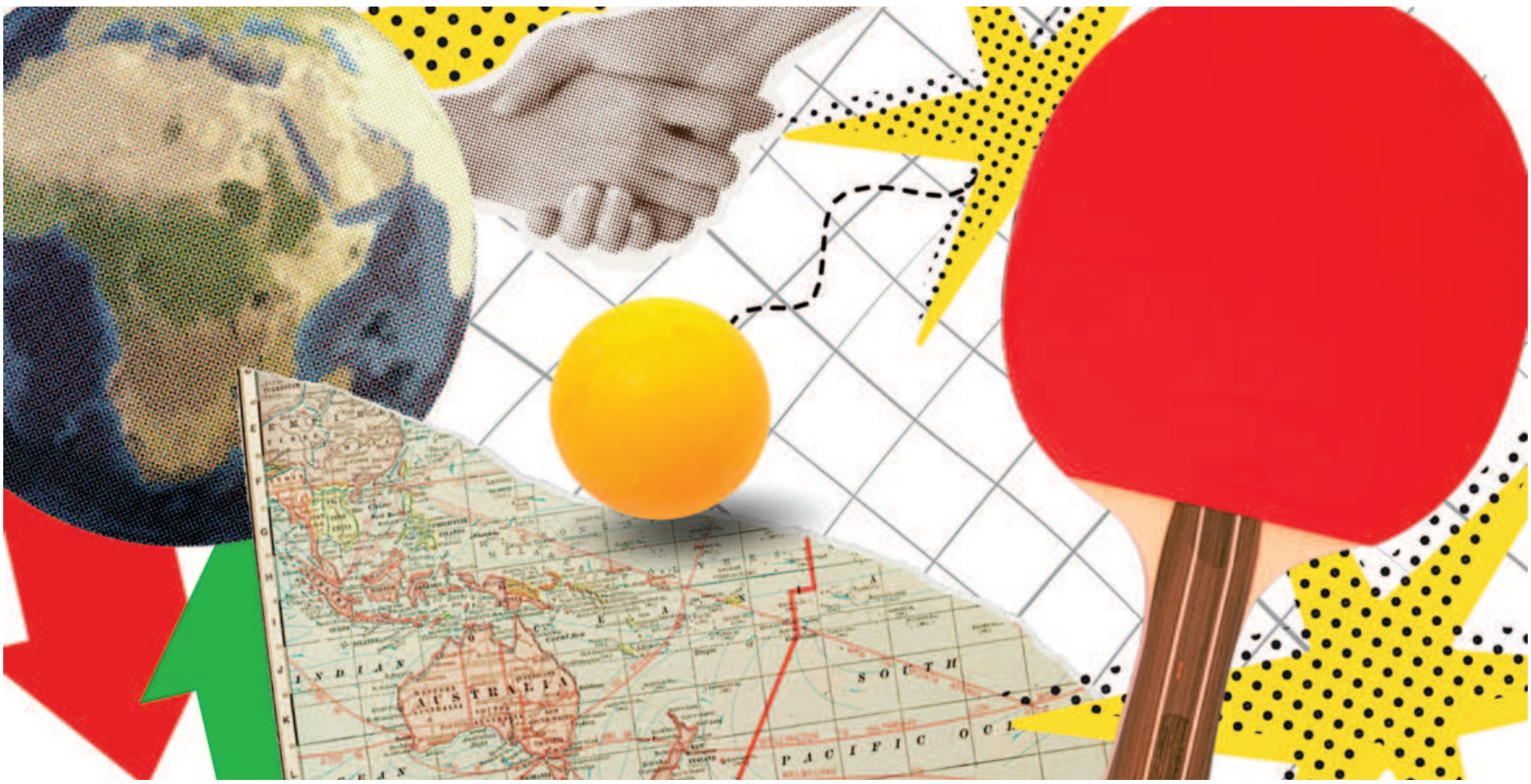

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

Ping-pong diplomacy: Explained

TAMJIDUL HOQUE

The power of sports to unite people all over the world, regardless of their differences, is well-known to most. Lesser known, however, is the fact that it was also once used to bring two bitterly opposed nations together, changing the course of world history forever.

As unbelievable as it sounds, this did happen 50 years ago and the sport that managed to do so was table tennis, also known as ping-pong, thus the name ping-pong diplomacy. Ping-pong diplomacy refers to how table tennis was used as a diplomatic tool by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to start normalising diplomatic relationships between itself and the United States.

History behind ping pong diplomacy

Since the formation of the PRC in 1949, the US had no diplomatic or economic relationship with the country, mainly due to its communist ideology back then and its entry into the Korean War in 1950. After over two decades of the US trying to isolate China, both countries felt the need for things to change.

> **Ping-pong diplomacy refers to how table tennis was used as a diplomatic tool by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to start normalising diplomatic relationships between itself and the United States.**

Yet, there was no significant development in the normalisation of the relationship between the two countries for years. That was until Glenn Cowan – a 19-year-old table tennis player of Team USA – mistakenly got on the bus carrying the Chinese national team during the 1971 World Table Tennis Championships in Nagoya, Japan.

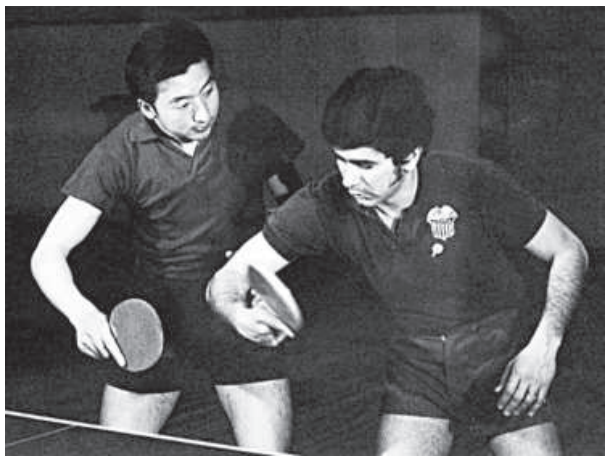

PHOTO: **AFP VIA GETTY**

Initially, Cowan was met with awkward silence on the bus, but he was later greeted by the Chinese team's best player, Zhuang Zedong. Zedong spoke with Glenn through an interpreter and even gave him a silk-screen picture of China's Huangshan mountains as a gift. Glenn repaid the gesture the following day, gifting Zedong a t-shirt with a peace symbol and lyrics of the song "Let It Be"' by The Beatles.

This simple exchange did not just catch the eye of the media but also caught the eye of the then-Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong. To the world's surprise, he used this opportunity to invite the US table tennis team to an all-expenses paid visit to China and play table tennis. Thus, the world got to see ping-pong diplomacy in action for the first time.

The invitation was accepted and a group of table tennis players unexpectedly became one of the most important diplomats in US history when they set foot in China on April 10, 1971, for the visit. The American players visited various places in China and participated in exhibition table tennis matches.

What happened after the match?

The effect of the trip was felt even before the trip was over when the then-US President Richard Nixon shared that the US was easing its travel bans and trade embargos against China while the players were still visiting the country. This was followed by an increase in communication between both countries as Nixon became the first US president to travel to China.

Finally, in January 1979, the US formally established diplomatic relations and trade with the PRC. Eventually, both countries became important trade partners, as US imports from China rose from about USD 100 billion in 2001 to more than USD 400 billion in 2023.

Is such kind of diplomacy only limited to ping-pong?

While Ping-pong diplomacy is mostly used to describe China's use of table tennis as a tool of diplomacy, in reality, any other sport can play a similar role. An example of this was seen in 2023 between Argentina and Bangladesh, and the sport that was used for diplomacy was football.

While both countries established diplomatic relations in 1972, Argentina closed its embassy in Dhaka in 1978. Bangladeshi nationals needed to travel to New Delhi if they wanted Argentine visas. The two vastly different countries on two ends of the planet probably had only one thing in common – their love for football. And that's all it took.

The overwhelming support for Argentina's national football team in Bangladesh during the 2022 FIFA World Cup caught the world's eye, especially that of the Argentine people. During the World Cup, Argentina announced they would reopen their embassy in Bangladesh, which they did in February 2023.

Reference:

History.com (October 19, 2018). *How Ping-Pong Diplomacy Thawed the Cold War*.

Tamjidul Hoque is an UK LLB graduate.