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# RISING STARS

FOR YOUNG MINDS ON THE RISE

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# Managing traffic through student involvement

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

DID YOU KNOW?

# WHYWINTERSINBANGLADESH ARE GETTING COLDER

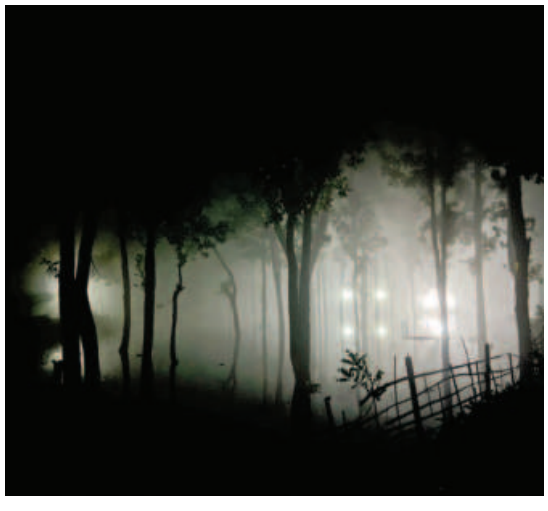

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

This winter, Bangladesh is expected to experience a severe cold wave with the likelihood of temperatures dropping as low as four degrees Celsius. The country's cold winter can be attributed to global warming's impact on the polar vortex.

Arctic temperatures have increased in recent decades at about twice the global average. Due to warming, more ice of the Arctic Ocean is melting during the summer months which causes the ice sheets to reflect less sunlight. As a result, the Arctic Ocean absorbs more heat and releases it to the atmosphere. The melting of ice sheets weakens the polar vortex, allowing frigid Arctic air to move southward. Not even Bangladesh is spared from this phenomenon.

While global temperatures are expected to rise by two degrees Celsius by the end of the century, occasional cold waves will persist, though they may become less frequent but more prolonged. The extreme weather underscores the urgency of addressing climate change and reducing dependency on fossil fuels to mitigate future disruptions.

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# THE WILD ROBOT

## ACINEMATICMASTERPIECEOFSURVIVALANDSELF-DISCOVERY

**TINATH ZAEBA**

*"Sometimes, to survive, you must become more than you were programmed to be."*

*The Wild Robot* is a surprising portrayal of nature versus nurture – a film that, despite its simple plot, goes deeper than you'd expect. At first, the premise seems predictable: a dystopian robot, Roz, is stranded on an island after a typhoon and forced to adapt to the wild. Yet, the filmmaker transforms this simplicity into something profound, a message of what it truly means to survive and grow.

From the beginning, the visuals are impressive. Colours shift with Roz's journey, moving from steely greys and blues as she awakens to lush greens, warm oranges, and earthy browns as she settles into island life. It's like seeing the world come alive through her mechanical eyes. The animated expressions of the animals and Roz are so well done that some scenes need no dialogue at all.

Though Roz is "just a robot," she's surprisingly relatable. As she journeys through survival, her programming develops a sense of connection and growth. The film introduces a lively cast of foxes, beavers, squirrels, and raccoons, each with guarded feelings towards Roz – because, in a way, they are programmed to distrust her too. It's an ironic take when you realise they have a lot of things in common with a robot because we all have our instincts.

Roz's character arc is brilliantly crafted. Despite being designed for perfection, she makes mistakes and takes responsibility, subtly reflecting a very human quality. The film cleverly twists typical ideas, showing an unfeeling robot experiencing the highs and lows of motherhood, friendship, and the weight of responsibility.

What's most striking and unique is the film's portrayal of the wilderness in all its raw, untamed beauty. Scenes that might typically seem brutal – migration, hibernation, even the wild animal food chain – are presented with such charm that they're even funny. The film highlights the quirks and rhythms of the wilderness in a balanced way that feels genuine and engaging, transforming what might be harsh realities into moments of connection and warmth.

At its heart, *The Wild Robot* is about more than survival – it's about defying instinct and learning to care. Roz could have simply followed her programming, but instead, she chooses to adapt, protect, and connect with her new family. In turn, the animals grow too, stepping beyond their natural instincts to support Roz. The story reminds us that real growth begins when we move beyond our comfort zones to care for others, even if it is not instinctive at first.

In the final showdown, accompanied by incredible cinematography, the story comes full circle unpredictably and satisfyingly. Without giving anything away, the ending feels like the perfect resolution even if it was not the expected one, showing a bittersweet evolution of Roz's journey. *The Wild Robot* is a cinematic experience that stays with you, reminding the audience of the connections that make us human, even in the unlikeliest of places.

*Tinath Zaeba is an optimistic daydreamer, a cat mom of five, and a student of economics at North South University.*

# Md Moynul Islam's story calls for a profound shift toward inclusion

**MEHNAZ IRTIKA**

For those who are visually impaired in Bangladesh, the educational path is strewn with obstacles. Yet, Md Moynul Islam, a student at Iqra Commerce and BM Institute, Narayanganj, defied these odds, achieving GPA-5 in the 2024 HSC exams.

Moynul's vision began to fade as an infant, and by fifth grade, he was entirely blind due to retinal damage. According to diagnostic reports from Islamia Eye Institute and Sankara Nethralaya, his left eye was severely damaged and required removal, followed by the placement of a prosthetic eye. His right eye, while initially functional, underwent progressive retinal deterioration, ultimately resulting in complete vision loss.

The medical evaluations detailed extensive retinal scarring and detachment, confirming that surgical intervention was not a viable option. These reports emphasised the need for accessibility-focused education and adaptive measures for his vision impairment.

"I realised then that my education would be different, but I refused to give up," he shared. Moynul's journey is fueled by his family's steadfast support, especially his mother's dedication to his education after his father's passing in his early years.

For Moynul, technology was both a lifeline and a challenge. With braille textbooks being unavailable beyond primary school, he relied on screen readers like NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access) and JAWS (Job Access with Speech), which convert on-screen text to speech. These tools enabled him to navigate and type but mastering them took a lot of work.

"It was overwhelming at first," he said. "I had to memorise countless shortcuts and adapt to interfaces without guidance."

Determined to keep pace, Moynul taught himself to use Microsoft Word, Excel, and Python, customising software like Visual Studio Code to meet his needs. He also spent hours converting textbooks into audio formats – a costly and exhausting process often done with help from teachers or local computer shops.

Learning was harder without proper guidance, but Moynul learnt to thrive in a system designed without students like him in mind. "There were moments when it felt overwhelming," he admitted. "But every time I overcame a hurdle, it reminded me that I had to keep pushing forward, not just for myself, but for others like me."

Visually challenged students in Bangladesh depend on scribes – people who transcribe exam answers as directed by the students to complete their examinations. Usually, the scribes help during tests either as junior students or volunteers.

Finding scribes was another challenge for Moynul. He often relied on untrained juniors or friends through personal networks, which turned exams into a test of patience and adaptability. According to Moynul, this unofficial approach stresses the systematic obstacles students who are visually impaired in Bangladesh must overcome, which brings into question the need to ensure equitable educational opportunities.

Moynul's achievements have earned him accolades, including an honour from the National Disabled Development Foundation in 2023, and an Imdad-Sitara Khan Family Foundation one-time scholarship of BDT 10,000 in 2024 based on merit. Aspiring to study Computer Science, he dreams of advocating for accessible resources for the visually impaired.

Currently, Moynul is preparing for university entrance examinations and searching for institutions that address his accessibility needs.

"I want to make a difference so others like myself can access the skills they need to succeed," he said, envisioning a Bangladesh where the disabled are seen as assets.

Moynul's story highlights the urgent need for accessible technology in Bangladesh, especially AI-powered smart glasses that could transform daily life with features like text-to-speech, object recognition, and navigation assistance. Yet, most life-changing tools remain beyond reach due to high costs and limited government support. "These tools could change lives," shared Moynul, "But without backing, they're a distant dream."

Bangladesh's limited investment in assistive tech, braille resources, and institutional support is more than a social oversight. It's a missed chance to empower resilient, talented individuals. "I may not see," Moynul reflected, "However, I dream of a world that values our intellect."

His journey highlights that what we perceive as accessible often remains out of reach for many. It underscores the transformative potential of accessible technology – a prospect that must be unlocked to empower everyone, not just a privileged few. For Bangladesh, this is not merely an act of charity but a necessary investment in its future, ensuring that the visually impaired can realise their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

# Managing traffic through STUDENTINVOLVEMENT

**"The response from the public was very positive; people showed respect toward us and willingly cooperated. When we pointed out certain issues in people's documents or helmets, they quickly apologised, promising to follow the laws thereafter."**

**AYAAN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE** *and*
**TAZRIN RASHID PRITHA**

If you've been out and about near high-congestion areas around the capital recently, you may have come across young people in reflective vests aiding traffic control alongside the police. Since the early days of November, approximately 300 students have been working in morning and evening shifts to help alleviate the city's growing traffic jam issues.

This initiative began following an announcement on October 30 by Labour, Employment, and Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Mahmud Sajib Bhuiyan, who stated that 700 students would be recruited as support staff for the traffic police and would receive a designated honorarium for their efforts.

Ebrahim Khalil, student of Vashantek Govt. College, went to the Rajarbag Police Station to apply for the position. Regarding the selection process, he said, "Participants got their height and weight measured and were also asked to run a marathon. SSC results also played a role as they preferred candidates with good academic records. Around 180-190 students were selected alongside me after approximately 300-400 showed up for the selection."

On the other hand, Shafi Bin Sultan, an eleventh grader from St Joseph Higher Secondary School, said, "11 students were chosen from our school's scout group. The candidates were nominated by our school authority based on their leadership abilities, effective communication skills, and capacity to handle situations in stressful environments."

The selected students have been working in one of two daily shifts: morning shifts from 8 AM to 12 PM, or evening shifts from 4 PM to 8 PM. These four-hour shifts were designed to ensure sufficient staff presence on the roads during peak traffic hours. Students' placement for specific shifts and locations was generally determined by the traffic police, with flexibility allowed for shift adjustments as needed.

Ebrahim shared, "We were added to a group chat where we could introduce ourselves by our provided 'tag number' if we wanted to swap our shifts."

As for responsibilities, the students were primarily tasked with checking ongoing vehicles' papers, stopping incoming traffic to let other lanes through, ensuring bikers were wearing helmets and weren't overloading bikes, and so on. All the students we spoke to shared positive experiences, especially highlighting the supportive attitudes they received from both pedestrians and drivers.

Saniya Akter Pinky, a student of Dhaka State College, shared how surprisingly uplifting the entire experience has been for her. "Our country's streets are known to be quite unsafe for women," she said. "However, my experience at work has been far from what anyone might have anticipated. As of now, I have not heard a single demeaning comment or been catcalled by bystanders."

She continued, "I am overwhelmed by the support and care that I am showered by the locals during my duty. Moreover, trying to find a clean washroom as a woman has always been a struggle. But, thankfully, every single traffic police box in my area is equipped with usable washrooms which makes my entire work experience even smoother. We are also encouraged to take regular breaks and are supplied with drinking water by the police department."

Her sentiments were reiterated by Shafi, who found the experience to be mostly smooth. "Being engaged in such impactful community work has truly been a rewarding experience," he claims. "The response from the public was very positive; people showed respect toward us and willingly cooperated. When we pointed out certain issues in people's documents or helmets, they quickly apologised, promising to follow the laws thereafter."

For Ebrahim, this experience held additional weight, as his future goals align with the work he has been doing over the past few weeks. He states, "I plan to join the police force when I grow up, so this opportunity to work closely with law enforcement officers has given me an insight into what I want to do for my future career."

PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

PHOTO: **COURTESY**

In recognition of their valuable contributions, students are set to receive BDT 500 for every shift. Talking about the honorarium structure and mode of payment, Pinky said, "Students were given the option to either get paid for each shift as they ended or receive the entire month's payment at the end of the month. Most of us preferred to receive our payment at the end of the month."

She then explained that this preference stemmed from the desire to receive a lump sum at the month's end, which many planned to use for more beneficial purposes. "Getting paid after each shift could have led to impulsive spending," she added. "After all, the amount isn't insignificant. A student working for 30 consecutive days can earn as much as 15,000 Taka."

Community policing involves engaging ordinary citizens in the law enforcement process, a model already well-established in developed countries like Japan.

Muhammed Ayub, Project Management Professional (PMP), Superintendent of Police for Bangladesh Police, described the initiative as "a win-win for everyone involved." He explained, "Engaging students in community service like this encourages them to become proactive, law-abiding citizens while giving them a unique perspective on the importance of following traffic rules."

Ayub added that by taking on the responsibilities of maintaining order firsthand, students gain a deeper understanding of the need for safety and the role they can play in reducing traffic congestion. He further noted, "Pedestrians and drivers often respond more positively to students, viewing them as peers or younger family members, compared to uniformed traffic police."

Expressing confidence in the programme's potential, he stated, "I am sure that the involvement of students in the roads will significantly improve Dhaka's traffic situation."

Another benefit of this initiative lies in the promise that students who participate in this will have the option to transition into permanent positions upon completing their studies, if they express interest.

Involving youngsters in such initiatives also helps them build a sense of responsibility and develop essential leadership skills. Additionally, it bridges the gap between the public and authorities, fostering trust among all stakeholders.

However, in order to maximise the effectiveness of this effort, it is crucial for the authorities to gradually expand the range of internship opportunities available. While such physically intensive jobs are obviously important, internships in fields such as municipal planning, public policy research, community health programmes, and environmental conservation projects, among others, can provide valuable hands-on experiences. These opportunities will not only prepare young individuals to address real-world challenges but also equip them to lead with confidence and competence.

**Reference:**

Dhaka Tribune (October 30, 2024). *700 students to join Dhaka's traffic management, to get honorarium*

*Ayaan immerses himself in dinosaur comics and poorly-written manga. Recommend your least favourite reads at ayaan.shams@gmail.com*

*Tazrin is a finance and banking student at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). Send her well wishes at rashidtazrin1@gmail.com*

# ISD celebrates 25 years of success with a new strategy in place

**ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM**

International School Dhaka (ISD), one of the pioneering International Baccalaureate (IB) schools in Bangladesh, is celebrating its 25th anniversary. On this occasion, *Rising Stars* sat down with Steve Calland-Scoble – the Director of ISD and an accomplished educator – to talk about the school and its plans going forward.

***Rising Stars (RS): Could you please share some of the most significant achievements of ISD over the past 25 years?***
**Steve Calland-Scoble (S)**: ISD has had many accomplishments. It was the first IB continuum school in Bangladesh and has a long tradition of offering unique programmes that were groundbreaking for their time. Moreover, our diploma programme results are very strong, and almost a hundred percent of our students go on to pursue higher education in different countries. We have a track record of academic success and of placing students in great universities. Our alumni group is also very strong. Over the last 25 years, we have built up amazing programmes, facilities, resources, and, most importantly, a reputation that goes beyond Dhaka. ISD is known on an international stage.

***RS: ISD has a rich heritage of offering the IB curriculum in Bangladesh for over two decades. Could you elaborate on the advantages of the IB curriculum for students at ISD and how it prepares them to become global citizens?***
**S**: I think the IB curriculum allows students to have some agency over how they develop. From an early age, they learn from a very broad range of subjects to see what they are strong at, where their interests lie, and what they are passionate about. As they go through the programme, they can begin specialising in areas that interest them. In doing so, they find relevance. The students can also relate learning to real-life experiences. We try to bring real life into the classroom and go outside the classroom to learn about real life as well. Our students learn how to analyse and organise data and develop skills that help them when they pursue higher education. Successful students in the diploma programme do better in their degree programmes, get into better universities, and go into better and more high-paying professions.

We use multiple methods of learning. Research and inquiry are central to our curriculum, as is finding a balance between academic and personal development. For example, we teach our students to contribute as world citizens through various community service activities and also have a wonderful array of after-school activities that include sporting, cultural activities, and so on. We cater to a wide range of student interests, both inside and outside the classroom. The IB curriculum adopts a holistic approach to education to foster well-roundedness in our students.

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

***RS: There is a large number of international faculty members and students at ISD. How does the diverse international community at the school contribute to the learning experience of students from various backgrounds?***
**S**: With teachers coming from about 20 countries and students coming from 33 different countries, we are truly an international school. The cultural exchange that results from this mix encourages not just tolerance but appreciation of different cultures amongst our students. They become more aware of global issues. Staying connected to the world is a quality we try to cultivate in our students. When you have friends and teachers from different countries, you have a greater capacity to adapt, a skill that is vital when you go on to attend higher education in multicultural societies like the US or Australia. Our international faculty comprises educators who not only come from different locations but have also taught in many different countries. They bring in diverse experiences and perspectives as a result.

***RS: How does ISD stay aligned with trends in global education? And what role does international collaboration play in enhancing educational outcomes for your students?***
**S**: We are connected to many global activities. Our students, for example, participated in a Model United Nations conference last year in Singapore and went overseas on a "Week Without Walls" programme to engage in practical learning. ISD is connected with many other international schools, so our students can interact with their students and engage in conversations about global affairs. Our students learn about global issues through the curriculum itself as well as in the form of various programmes. Our teachers are trained by instructors from different parts of the world.

We also run some programmes, like the Barca Academy and Carnegie Mellon Robotics Academy, with international collaborators. These and other overseas learning opportunities allow our students to learn about their unique place in the world.

***RS: In what ways does ISD engage with the local community alongside international partners to enrich the educational experience for its students?***
**S**: ISD is serving Bangladesh and its educational needs. Bangladeshis are the largest nationality group in our student body, and we celebrate all of the national events. At ISD, we show respect to and embrace Bangalee culture. We bring in the best resources from the country and do service programmes for the local community. For example, during the recent flooding, we did a large donation drive, and our students hand-delivered the relief items to victims in Cumilla. We also do some corporate collaborations with local businesses to help our students learn in a hands-on environment and have local authors visit us every year to talk to the students. Bangla is offered throughout the school as both a first and second language because we want to make our students proficiently bilingual. Bilingualism, as research shows, helps students think critically, giving them an advantage when they go out into the wider world. ISD also does not put a cap on the number of host-nation families at the school. One of the highlights of being a foreigner in Bangladesh is experiencing the Bangalee culture, and we want to incorporate that culture into the school.

***RS: ISD is adopting a new strategy. With the new strategy in place, what initiatives or changes can we expect from the school in the coming years to enhance student learning and engagement?***
**S**: We have some long-term, strategic goals. We want ISD to mirror all the qualities we think are important in an international school. A new rebranded website is being developed, and we are trying to build a larger social media presence so that we can show some of the great things we are doing. Improvements are also being made to some of our programmes. The introduction of new school subjects, particularly mother tongue languages, to fulfil the language needs of our international students is also being looked into. We are also expanding our after-school activities and opening up more opportunities as well.

> **We also run some programmes, like the Barca Academy and Carnegie Mellon Robotics Academy, with international collaborators. These and other overseas learning opportunities allow our students to learn about their unique place in the world.**

We want to make ISD one of the best schools in South Asia, so we have to do a lot of work to build on the successes of the past 25 years.

# Love poem for the reflection in the mirror

**A.M. FAHAD**

The earth splits itself open in cold streams of water
And the trees sway to the wind and bend with all their glory
Leaves fall and leaves grow
Colours fade and colours change, for you, they do
With the rustling of the leaves and the shades of the skies
With a dog standing on its hind legs with its arms
Clasped to your waist, singing you lullabies
The bed turns warm when your back needs something soft
When the wind passes through the lonely corners of this city
With your back against the world
You look for some quiet
And the birds give it to you with their songs
Soft sunlight on your cheek
A flower on your ear, and a gentle autumn breeze
I will not even begin with the skies
To begin, you need a starting point
There is no start, and there is no end
Tell me you don't think
It's not all for you
Look at me
Tell me
You're not full of love

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

# STATES

**NOWREEN SARWAR**

"You cannot take that past this point, ma'am."

"Why?"

"It's a fluid. You cannot take fluids beyond this point."

"It's frozen. It's not a liquid."

"I cannot let you take fluids on the plane, ma'am."

"This is ice."

"Step aside, ma'am."

"Why?"

"We need to check the rest of your belongings."

"Why did I pass through those machines then? Are you letting people pass without those radioactive things working?"

"Step aside, ma'am. Now."

The issue, of course, was the gallon of water labelled "09.12.2019-Dhaka-Ecstasy".

The Transportation Security Administration agent appeared to be unaware of the three states that water took on with temperature fluctuations. It was ice then. It *was,* however, water yesterday when she decided to freeze it overnight. This was the only jar which she couldn't fit inside the two pieces of luggage she had checked in. Plastic, bubble, and paper-wrapped jars of water occupied one. The other had her winter clothes and some postcards.

Her son needed them, you see. God was in the rain.

"You don't understand. It's *ice.*"

"What's your final destination, ma'am?"

"Chicago."

"And what's your purpose of this visit?"

"I'm going to see my son."

"May I see your ID and passport?"

She handed her Bangladeshi passport, the ticket tucked inside, and the luggage tags. She handed him her driver's license. He examined the passport with great concentration and looked over the stamps from previous years: Colombia, Panama, Samoa, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Solomon Islands, India, and Papua New Guinea.

The driver's license was from the UK. He glanced at her curiously in between flipping through the pages. Her eyes were on the mason jar. It sweated under her frozen white fingertips which grazed its narrow neck.

"He lives in Chicago?"

"No, he lives in Zimbabwe. If I'm going to see him in Chicago, then of course, he lives there!"

"Don't use that tone with me, ma'am. I'm trying to help you."

"I'm sorry. You're making me very tense. I *need* to take this to him."

"What's in the jar?"

"Rainwater. From God."

At this point, the agent's body became rigid, far tauter, and more elongated than before. He seemed alarmed. His face, however, remained unfazed.

"Is anyone travelling with you?"

"No."

"Ma'am, are you on any drugs?"

"I'm fifty-six years old; of course, I'm on a lot of medication."

"Do you have a prescription for the drugs?"

"Do I look like a drug peddler? Yes, I do have prescriptions."

"Show me."

"Why on earth would I *carry* my prescriptions?"

"Are you *carrying* the drugs?"

"Of course, I am *carrying* the drugs. I need them to stay alive!"

"Then why are you not *carrying* the prescriptions?"

"Are you serious? Who carries prescriptions? Are you carrying *your* prescriptions now?"

At this point, the officer frowned and grabbed his transceiver. He requested another officer's assistance in the lowest voice coherent to the receiver. She felt confused, but the situation humoured her. It was *just* ice.

"What's the matter, Johnny?"

"This passenger here with Alaskan Airlines is trying to go through security with a jar of rainwater. The final destination is O'Hare."

"Well, that's simply not possible, ma'am," said the woman with shiny, long braids which went down to her waist.

"It's *ice.*"

"Ice is still considered a fluid, ma'am.'"

"And the Earth is flat? It's solid."

"You're more than welcome to put it inside your check-in luggage."

"I can't! I collected the rain from all over the world for him. This one's from Dhaka. My luggage has more of these and forcing another in could break them all."

The agents exchanged glances of mockery mixed with sorrow. This was a lady in her fifties, in an ochre salwar-kameez, hair oiled and braided, wrinkled skin, soiled Keds and fingernails, putting up a fight against immigration officers to take a gallon of rainwater inside a plane.

Marvellous Tuesday afternoon.

"Well, if you got so many other jars, why can't you discard just this one?"

"*God,* God is in them."

There were a pair of raised eyebrows, Johnny did not react this time either.

"What do you mean God is in this water? Is it blessed?"

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

"Well, whenever I felt something, anything when it rained, I'd store the rain and write my emotions on the jars. I want to share my emotions with my son. That's why I have jars of jealousy, anger, sadness, monotony, but this – it's important. This is ecstasy. I was so happy when I stored this rainwater at home. My grandson had just been born. From my daughter. In Australia."

"Ecstasy, the drug?"

"Ecstasy, the feeling. Why on earth would I carry ecstasy, the drug in a jar, Johnny?"

"Ma'am, this is your final warning about the tone. I can and will cancel your flight."

"You can't do that! He needs to bathe in these. It'll cure him."

"He's sick?" asked the lady with braids.

"He's had cancer of the brain for years; he's been in a coma for about a month now. His wife said the doctors have given their answer. Now I'm going to heal him. I'll sponge his body. I brought these from Dhaka. The rain is marvellous there, you should visit. I also collected some in Seattle, but this rain has less oomph…You must visit."

"Ma'am, we're sorry for your son, but we must comply with the rules we have. We *cannot* let you pass with this. It's mostly liquid now anyway. I'm sorry. Truly."

Her small, mousy pupils gleamed. She popped open the jar without delay and drank its contents. The two watched in absolute amazement as she drank a gallon of rainwater, including the sedimented grime and dirt. She didn't wait for their permission. She swung her luggage in one hand and her jar in the other from the counter and sprinted towards her gate – relieved, knowing she would refill the rainwater when the seat belt sign turned off. God was in the rain.

*The writer is pursuing a master's at University of Washington, Seattle and is a storyteller at heart.*

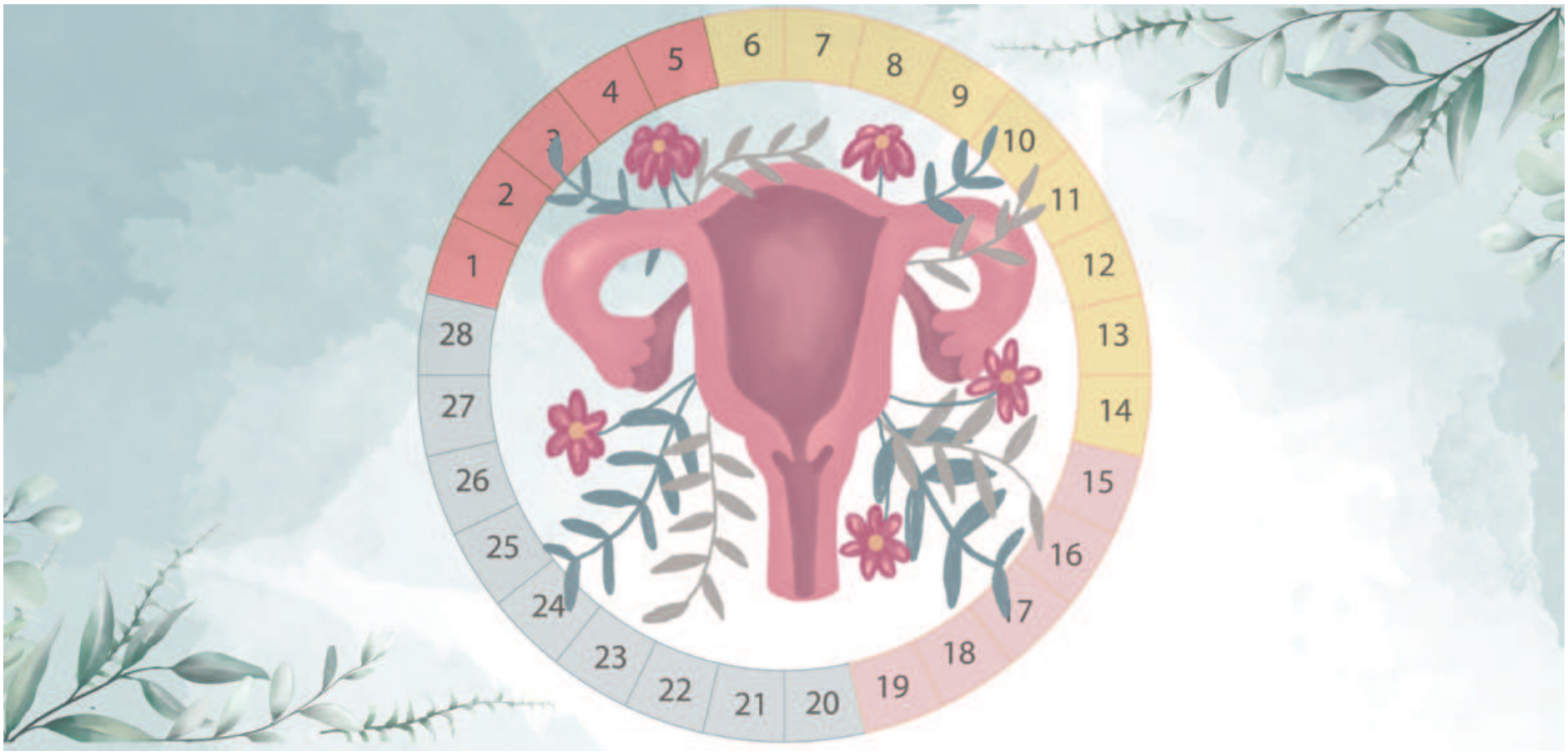


ILLUSTRATION: **ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM**

# The menstrual cycle EXPLAINED

**ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA**

I was always confused about the numerous ways in which one referred to the phenomenon of menstruation as a child. Between discrete terms like *"shorir kharap"* and *"pet betha"*, and technical terms like menstrual phase and cycles, I was always left in the dark regarding what we actually meant by periods and what are the systems that cause it. I found most of my peers to be equally confused throughout their childhoods as well.

It took a great deal of time, hushed conversations and hidden searches to find out that a period is a monthly occurrence when the lining of the uterus (an essential part of the reproductive system where a foetus develops) sheds, resulting in bleeding over a period of about four to seven days. It took even longer to learn that it is part of the menstrual cycle, which is a hormonal cycle that prepares the body for pregnancy.

**So, how does the menstrual cycle work?**

The menstrual cycle is usually divided into four phases: **follicular, ovulation, luteal, and menstrual phase**. These phases are controlled by a variety of hormones. Eggs or ova are the female sex cells that, when they become fertilised by the male sex cells or sperm, allow a pregnancy to take place. Biological females are born with one to two million eggs and, until they hit menopause (when periods permanently stop), their ovaries release one egg per month. Ovaries are an essential organ of the female reproductive system.

During the **follicular phase**, a hormone named Follicular Stimulating Hormone (FSH) stimulates the production of follicles, which are fluid-filled sacs that contain an immature egg, in the ovary. As the egg matures, this phase also sees an increase in the production of oestrogen hormone in the body which causes the lining of the uterus to start becoming thicker in anticipation that the egg will be fertilised and become implanted on it so that a pregnancy can occur.

The increase in oestrogen triggers the release of another hormone, the Luteinizing Hormone, during the **ovulation phase**. This causes the mature egg to be released from the ovary into the uterus. This is the time when a person is most fertile and a pregnancy is most likely to occur should sexual intercourse take place.

Following this, in the **luteal phase**, the body starts producing a hormone called progesterone which makes the uterine lining even thicker in preparation for implantation. If an implantation doesn't occur, the levels of progesterone and oestrogen fall and cause the uterine lining to be shed as there is no need for it anymore as a pregnancy isn't viable.

This lining comes out as blood, mucus, and tissue through the vaginal canal during a menstrual period over three to seven days at a time known as the **menstrual phase**. Once menstruation ends, the cycle begins from the follicular phase all over again.

**Does the menstrual cycle impact how you feel?**

Yes! The follicular phase after the end of menstruation is when most menstruators feel energetic and positive. Studies have found menstruators feel happier, more confident, and more clear-minded during this time. During the ovulation phase of the cycle, you might experience your body temperature getting higher, a shift in your mood or appetite, and thicker vaginal discharge. Your senses might also heighten, almost like Spiderman!

If an egg implantation doesn't occur, during the luteal phase, you may experience fatigue, mood swings, bloating, acne, tender or swollen breasts, muscle pain, trouble sleeping, etc. This is known as Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS).

The menstrual phase and periods come with their own set of symptoms, many of which vary widely between different people. Most people are likely to experience abdominal cramps, tender breasts, bloating, mood swings, headaches, nausea, fatigue, body aches, etc. during this time.

**Does everyone have the same experience of menstruation?**

No. While the above mentioned symptoms are some of the most common ways different symptoms manifest during the menstrual cycle, not everyone experiences the same set of symptoms.

A typical menstrual cycle is 28 days long. However, everyone's body is different, and it may vary from person to person. Many women experience cycles between 21-35 days long, and that's completely normal. You can keep track of yours using a calendar or a period tracker app, but if you experience severely irregular periods, it's best to visit a doctor.

Moreover, if you or anyone you know experience severe pain during periods, it's best to consult a doctor as it may be an indicator of endometriosis, a condition around 10 percent of women suffer from. Even if you experience pain during periods and it's not endometriosis, seeking out proper pain management medication is crucial as this pain can significantly affect your quality of life.

Everyone experiences different blood flow, duration, and symptoms during periods. To ensure your menstrual health, you must pick a product that you're comfortable with. It's best to avoid scented sanitary napkins or tissue papers and use unscented cotton pads or menstrual cups instead. Cleanliness is a huge factor in preventing infections or other complications. It's also important to get proper nutrition and rest, and try to reduce stress during your period if you're feeling down and unproductive.