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# RISING STARS

FOR YOUNG MINDS ON THE RISE

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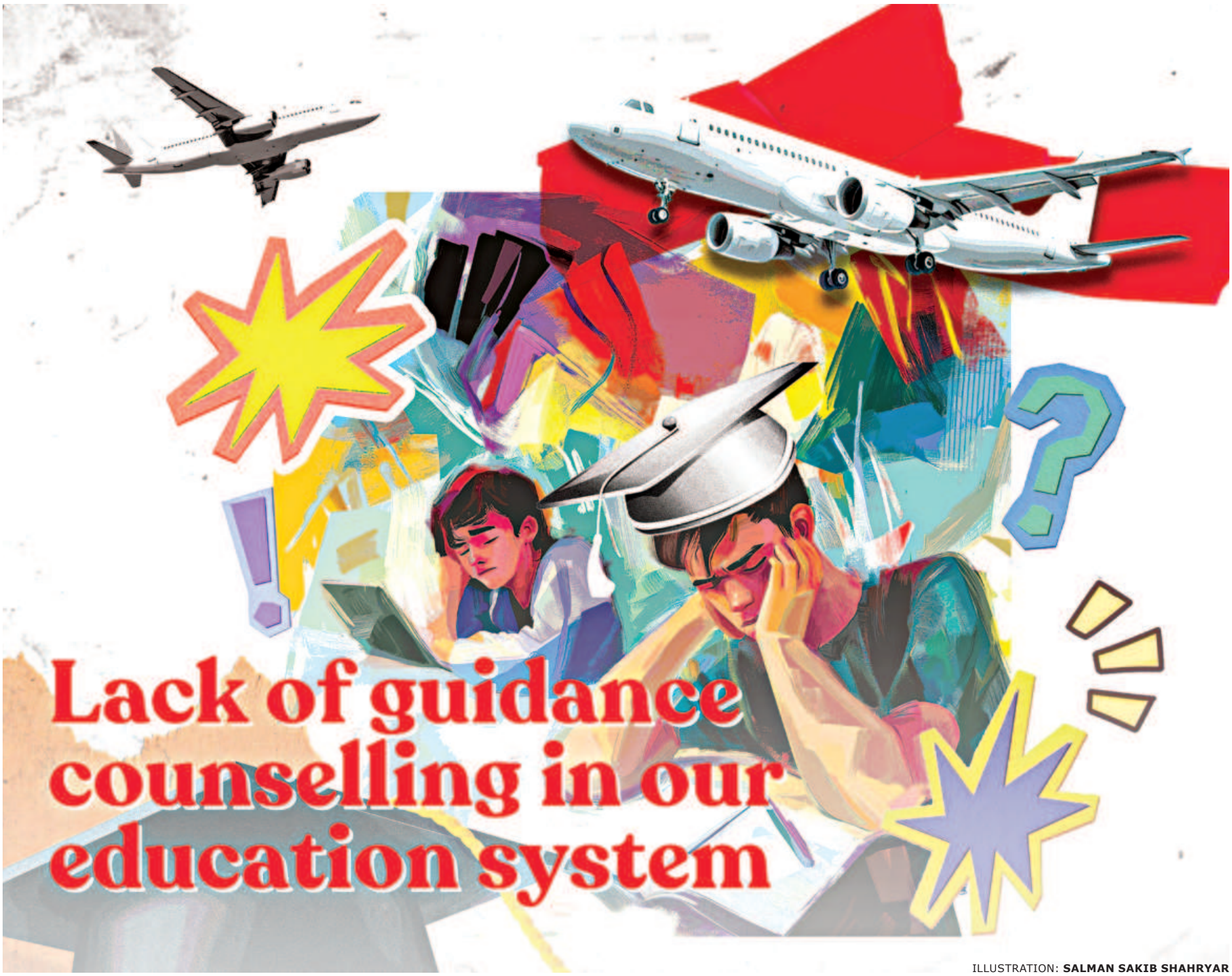


ILLUSTRATION: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

DID YOU KNOW?

# HOW THE MONTH OF JANUARY GOT ITS NAME

Many believe that January was named after the Roman god "Janus". The months of the Gregorian calendar, widely used today, derive their names from Roman mythology, emperors, and Latin. January is named after Janus – the Roman god of beginnings, endings, transitions, and doors.

Janus is often portrayed with two faces – one looking to the past and the other to the future. This idea perfectly symbolises the start of a new year. January replaced March as the first month of the Roman year by 153 BCE – Before the Common Era.

However, there's also widespread belief that the roots of the name "January" actually lie in the Latin word "ianua", meaning door. The name reflects the idea of opening a new door as the new year begins.

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# NOSTALGICHOLIDAYMOVIES to enjoy this time of the year

**ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM** *and* **RAIAN ABEDIN**

**How the Grinch Stole Christmas**
The classic tale of a grumpy creature who wants to ruin a joyous holiday because of misguided intentions but has a change of heart upon learning that the true value of the holiday lies not in materialism but in togetherness with friends and family? All wrapped up in a heartwarming, beautifully animated, twenty-six-minute package that comes with a near-perfect soundtrack? And the legendary Boris Karloff completes the deal with his thunderous, booming, spectacular voice.

**Home Alone**
There's something about the original *Home Alone* and its ability to maintain a balance between a sense of spookiness and a sense of joy that, to this day, has not quite been replicated in any of its sequels. The special effects, the creativity behind the traps set up by our eight-year-old protagonist, Kevin, and the ridiculous escalation of the action by the third act is still a joy to watch. At this point, the story of *Home Alone* may be known to everyone, but even decades later, the movie is endlessly rewatchable.

**The Nightmare Before Christmas**
When Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King of Halloween Town, gets bored with his annual Halloween fiesta and decides to instead take over Christmas one year, the adventure that ensues involves a kidnapped Santa, a mass terror, sledges pulled by skeletal reindeer, and a holiday saved from the brink of ruin. Every single song is undeniably brilliant, the stop-motion animation is without fault, and Tim Burton's signature touch wonderfully complements the film, making the grotesque seem beautiful.

**Tokyo Godfathers**
Legendary director Satoshi Kon's most unique project by a long shot, *Tokyo Godfathers* manages to be heartfelt, poignant, and extremely goofy without ever missing a beat. The story, on paper, can seem darker than what one might find on display: three homeless people (Gin, Miyuki, and Hana), on Christmas Eve, stumble upon a baby abandoned in a dumpster. This sets them off on a sprawling adventure that mixes humour with a sort of realism that is very rare in any form of media. The slapstick nature of the comedy is aided by the decision to have the narrative be led by one small miracle after another. A chance encounter, a sudden discovery, and gusts of wind that save lives. These are what make *Tokyo Godfathers* feel like magic.

# Anthropocentrism and climate change EXPLAINED

**FARIHA LAMISA**

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

Back in high school, I came across the term 'anthropocentrism'for the first time through one of the philosophy podcasts that I used to listen to at the time. I do not remember the title of the podcast anymore. What I do remember, however, is my subsequent excruciating effort to understand what it meant.

First, I had to figure out its correct pronunciation. Regardless of how difficult it may be to spell and pronounce, I found the term thoroughly astonishing. Moreover, the concept has become a heated topic of discussion in academia. Once I understood it myself, anthropocentrism ended up providing a new perspective to my understanding of human activities.

Anthropocentrism refers to the belief that human beings are the centre of the world. In this perspective, human needs are prioritised over the needs of other species which include animals, plants, and other entities. According to the anthropocentric understanding of the world, human beings are inherently superior to other species. The rest of the species on earth exist to cater to human needs. Support for this view has been traditionally popular and believers of this philosophy include prominent philosophers such as Aristotle and Immanuel Kant. Meta narratives from major religions also endorsed this perception. However, due to advocacy by environmental activists, this view is being increasingly scrutinised.

**Regardless of our understanding of anthropocentrism or human centricity, it is imperative to recognise that the climate crisis we are encountering is largely man-made.**

The reason anthropocentrism is being cross-examined is because it is assumed to enable and aggravate deforestation and, thus, climate change. In our world, deforestation has become a common practice despite it contributing significantly to rising global temperatures, disregarding the climate crisis that we are facing. Human beings' unchecked greed for economic growth continuously poses a danger to the biodiversity of our planet. This need – that only really benefits the very few – to gain wealth and development has often been used as a justification for environmental degradation.

An example that vividly illustrates the effects of this is the condition of the Amazon Rainforest – the lungs of the planet – which has declined rapidly. In a report published by InfoAmazonia in 2023, the Amazon lost over 54.2 million hectares between 2001 and 2020, or almost nine percent of its forests, an area the size of France. According to a report by BBC however, the rate of deforestation nearly halved in 2023 compared to the previous year but the deforested area is still more than six times the size of New York City. This makes our already volatile climate even more vulnerable to climate change.

Nonetheless, the negative perception of anthropocentrism is not unanimous. Not everyone likes to view anthropocentrism as a reason for inevitable catastrophe. Rather some scholars have voiced support for anthropocentrism believing that it can accommodate environmental sustainability. In the essay "Anthropocentrism and Nature: An Attempt at Reconciliation", Kyle Burchett argues that it is not anthropocentrism that is harming the environment rather it is our collective impulse of prioritising short-term consequences over long-term ones. He advocates human beings to be more conscious environmentally, considering it is their long-term well-being and the survival of their succeeding generation that is at stake. He also points out that without a sustainable approach, it is unlikely that human beings' existence will be able to continue on Earth.

Regardless of our understanding of anthropocentrism or human centricity, it is imperative to recognise that the climate crisis we are encountering is largely man-made. Since the 1800s, human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels, have been the most significant contributor to climate change.

Now, it is time that we recognise the crisis and collectively take action against it for the survival of planet Earth. To attain such a feat, large corporations and the wealthy must be held accountable. Simultaneously, changes need to be made by policymakers to curb the effects of climate change. If we claim to be superior, then the least we can do is to demonstrate it by rational decision making which sustains our long-term development. While we collectively hold a lot of power, combating climate change without support from the very top will be difficult, if not completely impossible.

*Fariha Lamisa is a struggling student who is on the verge of giving up on university. Please send your consolation at flamisa2020@gmail.com*

# What about the English medium students who decide to stay back?

## A lack of institutional support, persisting stigma against local education, and subpar coaching catered to the demographic leave students in disarray.

**ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM** *and* **TAZRIN RASHID PRITHA**

People consider it an invariable fact that students completing their secondary education from English medium schools will leave the country after their A level or International Baccalaureate examinations and pursue their higher education abroad. However, when students choose to pursue their undergraduate degree in Bangladesh, they face obstacles from an array of fronts.

There are a multitude of reasons why students might choose to stay back in Bangladesh for their higher education. For many, the cost of a foreign education plays a significant role in their decision. Sumaita Zahin is a fifth-year medical student at Ibrahim Medical College and a graduate of Manarat Dhaka International School. She attests, "If I could afford it, I would have gone abroad. I even got into a university in Canada. However, not getting a scholarship was the only reason I chose to stay back in Bangladesh."

Subhan Zawad Bihan, a final year undergraduate student at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), says, "I received scholarships from a few US colleges. However, my older sister had gotten admitted to Rangpur Medical College, and my parents didn't want me to move away too as the house would feel too desolate."

For many others, particularly female students, familial and societal barriers and expectations make pursuing an undergraduate degree abroad an unreachable dream. Rasha*, a third-year student at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) felt pressured by her family to stay back because they believed living abroad by herself would pose too many dangers.

Regardless of the reasons students choose to stay back, institutions should provide support to make the process easier. However, the overwhelming stigma students face from school officials when they choose to stay back is demoralising. Counsellors and teachers offer little to no help when it comes to preparing for public university entrance tests.

Towheed Hussain Chowdhury, currently a college counsellor at International School of Hyderabad and a former counsellor at a prominent English medium school in Dhaka, disagrees, "I have no reservations for students staying back. This is not due to prejudice but rather it reflects the concept of demand and supply. Most students currently attending prestigious schools generally prefer to study abroad, as they have the financial means to pursue a degree overseas. Hence, it is likely that they will allocate more resources to help students secure places at renowned universities worldwide."

He also says, "However, I have personally not discriminated against students who preferred to stay back."

This experience is not universal as Rasha says, "My counsellor would openly criticise the quality of education and the environment at local universities. My school subtly conveyed that students were not expected to stay in Bangladesh and that staying back should not even be considered an option. I personally believe this is a key factor that fuels the stigma against students who choose to stay back."

Turuna Ishraq, a first-year student at the Institute of Business Administration at Dhaka University (IBA, DU) and a graduate of S.F.X. Greenherald International School, says, "My school, and most likely other English medium schools, assumes that every student is going to leave the country. So, my school didn't provide any substantial resources that I could make use of for my admissions process."

ILLUSTRATION: **ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM**

From the very beginning of high school, and even long before that, teachers and school officials push the idea of leaving the country upon their students. Additionally, they constantly speak of students who have gained admission into top foreign universities but rarely highlight those who chose to stay back. This approach is inconsiderate as it does not benefit students who don't have the means to study abroad.

English medium students also find that the resources available to prepare for entrance tests are few and far between. "Proper and useful academic resources are scarce. There is only one coaching centre that caters to us, and even that coaching is unbelievably disorganised," laments Aritha Shasmeen, an alumnus of Sunnydale School and a current Biomedical Engineering student at BUET. "The question papers they gave us were simply translated into English from Bangla and riddled with grammatical errors that sometimes changed the entire meaning of the questions. The coaching centre would just dump a bunch of books and question banks on us without proper guidance as to how we should be approaching the syllabus."

Turuna echoes this sentiment. "The resources provided by the coaching I attended were subpar, to say the least. I had a lot of trouble understanding the new content. It was made worse by the fact that the text seemed to have been translated by Google Translate. I had to rely on the notes provided by the coaching centre because there were absolutely no resources online," she says.

Admissions coachings that specifically design courses for English medium students are also significantly more expensive than ones for NCTB students.

Riz Mohammad Hossain Khan, another student at IBA, DU who finished his A level from S.F.X. Greenherald International School says, "Until recently, BUET's minimum requirements for English medium applicants were higher than those of Oxford University's for comparable degrees."

Our country's educational system stacks the odds against English medium students who want to stay in Bangladesh. Universities need to take an active role in not alienating these students. While counselling for university admissions abroad exists within most English medium schools, these services should also extend their support to students who intend to stay in Bangladesh. Be it through seminars on the requirements for public university admissions, sessions on the timeline for the admission cycle, or just general guidelines on how to prepare, the provision of this support has to start from schools. That can only be achieved when educators and counsellors make a proactive effort to uproot the stigma against students choosing to pursue their undergraduate degrees in Bangladesh.

**Name has been changed upon request.*

# THE LACK OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLING in our national curriculum and education system

**AYAAN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE** *and* **MEHRAB JAMEE**

ILLUSTRATION: **ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM**

For grade 12 students who have passed the HSC exams, their biggest point of concern is admissions. Most students under the national curriculum are conditioned from childhood to get themselves into a public institution, preferably an engineering university or a medical college.

This one route to academic success is ingrained in the minds of students under the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) as well as their parents. Any deviation from this established orthodox is met with familial shaming and societal condolences. And so, most kids terrified about their future prospects don't dare to step outside these well-defined lines.

Students in our schooling system are encouraged from a young age to pursue engineering, medicine, or simply study at a public university. They are seldom given the full picture of what a career in these fields might look like and are rarely presented with options outside of these choices.

Furthermore, our colleges don't have career or guidance counsellors to educate an admission candidate on the pros and cons of career choices. As a result, there is no adult to sit down and talk to them about their academic strengths and weaknesses which would have aided them in choosing a career better suited for themselves.

Nafiz Mahamud, an admission candidate from the capital's Government Science College said, "No one ever talks about anything other than Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) or Dhaka University (DU). But the competition is so high there. All my friends signed up for engineering coaching classes, so I did too. I was scared that otherwise I would get left behind. I understand that my parents want me to pursue a career in engineering, but I am not sure what I want. If I was given the choice, I might have chosen to study History."

The obsession with technical degrees sprouts from the fact that it was historically easier to get a job after studying in these fields. The admission coaching industry is fine-tuned to capitalise on these biases. They only sell the success stories of kids getting into public universities, further reinforcing the half-truth that academic and professional achievement depends on one getting into a public institution. What they sweep under the rug are the stories of talented individuals who aren't cut out for engineering or medicine.

There is still an active stigma working against admission candidates who want to get into a private university or even a university abroad. This is despite the fact that many private universities are ranked higher than public ones.

Ahsan Mohammad Mahin, an admission candidate from St. Joseph Higher Secondary School, said, "I have been conditioned into believing that getting into a public university is the only option. No one has ever actively encouraged me to pursue private universities. Rather, it's only ever been painted as a shameful last resort when all else fails."

These kinds of biases only work to distance a student from achieving their full potential. Many are left with lifelong scars of going through an admission process which isn't suited to their abilities. This creates unnecessary feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and self-doubt which they have to then overcome.

Meanwhile, national curriculum students hoping to go abroad for their higher education are almost immediately hit with a wall of obstacles. Insufficient time to build a unique profile is one of them, as students are rarely encouraged from a young age to try their hand at foreign institutions to pursue undergraduate studies. As a result, when application season rolls around, students have virtually no time to prepare for standardised tests, language proficiency tests, interviews, etc.

Little to no support from teachers is another major problem that plagues students in the national curriculum. Since teachers themselves are also accustomed to the binary choice of engineering or medical after completing the HSC exam, they're often unable to provide any sort of guidance or assistance when students try to go abroad for studies.

Aritrya Saha Shuvo, an undergrad student at The University of Texas at Arlington, who graduated from Notre Dame College in 2022, was no stranger to these perils when he was applying abroad. He says, "As an NCTB student, I had to manage the entire college application process on my own, which was quite challenging. There was also no counsellor available to guide us. For instance, when I needed letters of recommendation, I had to approach nine or 10 teachers, explain the process to them, and persuade them to write the letters. What would have been most helpful is having access to a mentor or professional who could provide not just information but personalised guidance based on my abilities and interests."

On the flip side, students in foreign countries, like the USA, for example, are exposed to a far wider range of opportunities when it comes to their post-high school lives. Guidance and career counsellors work closely with students throughout all four years of high school to determine what trajectory someone should take. Each student's unique circumstances and capabilities are analysed, after which they are encouraged to pursue research universities, liberal arts colleges, athletic opportunities, technical degrees, community colleges, or whatever path best suits them.

Labib Al Karim, a Bangladeshi high schooler who studied in the US for a year through the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (K-L YES) Program, said that his American high school appointed individual counsellors for each year in high school, and they all helped students figure out how to navigate life beyond high school.

"If someone says they want to pursue the engineering field, counsellors put them on a path that would help them get into engineering programmes in college, like preparing for the SAT, doing personal projects, reaching out to professors to do research work in a relevant field like physics, and so on," says Labib. "I have even seen counsellors recommend certain students to not pursue college at all because they're already skilled at and passionate about a certain job, like fixing cars, for example."

Due to the non-existent counselling infrastructure in Bangladesh's national schooling system, there has been a large influx of students enrolling in third-party counselling services and higher education agencies to guide their applications for higher studies abroad in recent years. In exchange for a sum of money, these services offer guidance on various educational pathways and assist with tasks such as essay writing and preparing supplementary materials.

However, these services are quite costly, barring students from low-income households from accessing help when it comes to applying to colleges and universities abroad. Thus, it is imperative for schools to foster a culture that encourages students to pursue their dreams while also establishing the necessary support systems to help them achieve their goals.

# Myopia rates in children on THE RISE

## Is too much screen time the only reason?

**MEHRAB JAMEE**

One day, when I was in the second grade, I was struggling to see the blackboard clearly in class. I moved from the back of the classroom to the middle, and finally to the front bench; yet, I struggled to decipher the squiggly lines written on the blackboard.

I was scared to tell my parents at first, fearing that my mother would give me a stern scolding as I had disregarded her advice to eat fish and vegetables regularly. Eventually, the severity of the fuzziness in my vision surpassed the fear of my mother's scolding and so, I told her.

My parents took me to the doctor afterwards and I have had prescription glasses ever since. Most kids who need spectacles have a somewhat similar experience of getting diagnosed with refractive errors, which is an evolving health concern among children in our country.

Myopia is the leading refractive error, especially in school-age children and teens. According to a study conducted by the Ispahani Islamia Eye Institute and Hospital (IIEIH) on 32,748 students from different schools, 40 percent of Dhaka's school children have some form of visual impairment. A great deal of them have myopia.

Refractive errors are a group of eye disorders where the eye focuses images either in front of or behind the retina. So, patients either have trouble seeing distant objects or ones up close or both.

Myopia is a refractive error where the focusing power of the lens or the whole eye alters in such a way that the image is formed in front of the retina instead of on the retina. It happens because of several reasons ranging from genetic and developmental anomalies to malnutrition, exposure to too much artificial light, or even lack of exposure to enough sunlight.

A study titled "The Environmental and Social Risk Factors for Myopia in Children and Adolescents in Bangladesh" published in the journal *Scholars Journal of Applied Medical Sciences* shows significant associations between myopia and low outdoor activity. As seen in the study, older children had a greater frequency of myopia than younger ones. This trend may be attributed to a decline in older children's exposure to natural environments and a shift in how they use their free time.

The study further suggests that the frequency of exposure to sunshine is more significant than other factors in determining myopia onset. Kids who spent more time outside each week were less likely to develop myopia compared to those who spent more time indoors. Thus, children living in urban areas are highly susceptible to developing myopia. Sunlight retards the secretion of the hormone 'adenosine'. Lack of sunlight leads to unrestricted adenosine secretion which results in the eyeball increasing in length, causing myopia in children. Indoor lighting cannot substitute sunlight in this regard, as normal daylight brightness ranges around 1,00,000 lux, whereas a well-lit room will hover around 500 lux.

Healthcare providers have long warned about the detrimental effect of prolonged exposure to electronic displays. But exposure to daylight is a factor we are yet to consider from a public health awareness standpoint.

"In my practice, the number of children coming in with myopia and other refractive errors has gone up without a doubt," said Dr Md Asaduzzaman, a senior consultant on ophthalmology at the capital's Mugda Medical College Hospital. "If we look for the reasons behind this uptick, well-known causes such as deficiency of vitamin A and too much screen time for preschool-age kids come to mind. But lack of playgrounds for children living in urban areas and primary and secondary schools lacking proper infrastructure for kids to spend some time outdoors are important contributing factors."

As to how we should best prepare ourselves to tackle this emerging issue, Dr Asaduzzaman said, "We should start at the school level. Yearly eye checkups should be introduced at schools. Classrooms and study materials should be developed in such a way that they put minimum strain on the eyes. Screen time for primary school-age children should be strictly controlled to one to two hours. Many a time, kids complain at home about hazy vision or headaches. Parents shrug it off thinking the child is inventing excuses to skip lessons. These matters shouldn't be overlooked. Parents should consult an ophthalmologist if the school doesn't ensure health checkups. Often, easy to cure refractive errors develop complications because of delays in receiving healthcare."

The World Health Organization (WHO) predicts that half of the world's population will be myopic by 2050. With the rates of myopia in school children on the rise, we cannot afford to be nearsighted on this issue. This has to be treated as a public health concern and steps have to be taken to address the problem accordingly.

*Mehrab Jamee is an activist at Sandhani, a fifth-year medical student at Mugda Medical College, and writes to keep himself sane. Reach him at mehrabjamee@gmail.com*

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

# Bulb of a WontonShop

**OHONA ANJUM**

A pale bulb casts its amber glow,
Soft and mellow, over the wonton shop.
Its light falls tenderly on yellow-shadowed bowls,
Stacked in prim rows upon the counter,
Their edges gleaming faintly,
Kissed by steam that curls upwards,
Delicate as a bird's breath at dawn.

Evenings come here quietly,
Slipping into hands that move with gentle purpose
In the fragrant mist.
Fingers fold dough with the care of shaping secrets,
While others stir pots brimming
With the earthy scents of broth, ginger, scallions.

The bulb, suspended like a solitary star,
Pours its golden light into every corner,
Smiling at the way life gathers
Beneath its watchful gaze.
Dust motes, long forgotten by the hurried world,
Twirling lazily in their beam,
Stirred by shuffling feet,
By the muted hum of voices.

And oh, the laughter—soft and rich,
Mingling with clinking bowls,
With mellow-toned conversations,
As warm as tea sipped slowly
On these December evenings.

Here, under the bulb's gentle glow,
Life sings its quiet song.
The glossy floor catches its tune,
Reflecting a melody of fleeting miracles,
Of a world paused, if only for a moment,
To live.

It is enough—
Enough to be here,
Beneath the bulb of a wonton shop.

ILLUSTRATION: **ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM**

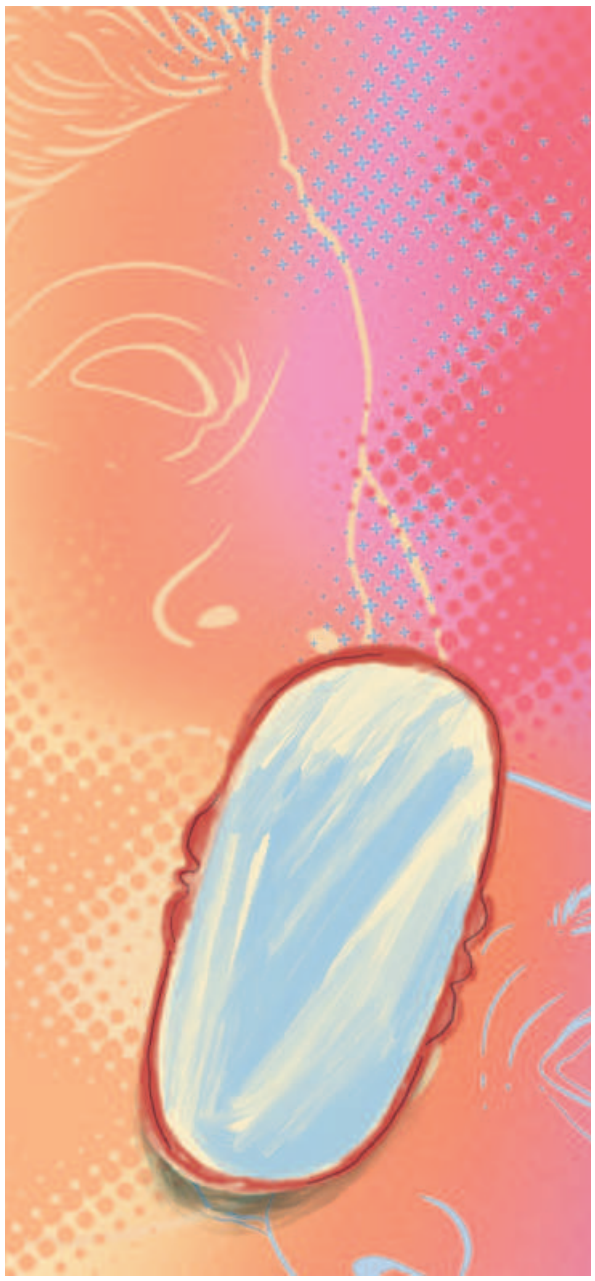

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

# OUT OF BODY

**WAZIHA AZIZ**

I know of my feeble frame
of its graying at the edges.
I know of the hollows of my eyes
and how they stare back at me.
I know of the folds of my forehead
of the cracks in my lips
of the mop of my hair that sits, sways,
I know of these things.
These things how they
dance in my mirror
these things they will
float to the surface
and catch me in my
daydream
these things they will
be placed back in
place please
I know
of them
these things.

# Migratory ANIMALS

**A.M. FAHAD**

we drift doorstep to doorstep
Are you a memory or the sweat beneath my eyebrows
or the distortion of language in these memories?
I couldn't say the words like you
a repetition in anger and not in devotion
and I couldn't find comfort in sleep
where you visit me as a ghost
migratory animal
Are you looking for a home?
is there anything salvageable from your old nests
If I had found you, I would have held your heart
on my palm
my voice would have been the breeze above your dreams
have you found your home yet
far beyond the horizon where the mountains meet the sea
These days, I am nowhere to be found
migratory animal
have you found me yet
I cannot glue myself together
much longer
come
find me

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

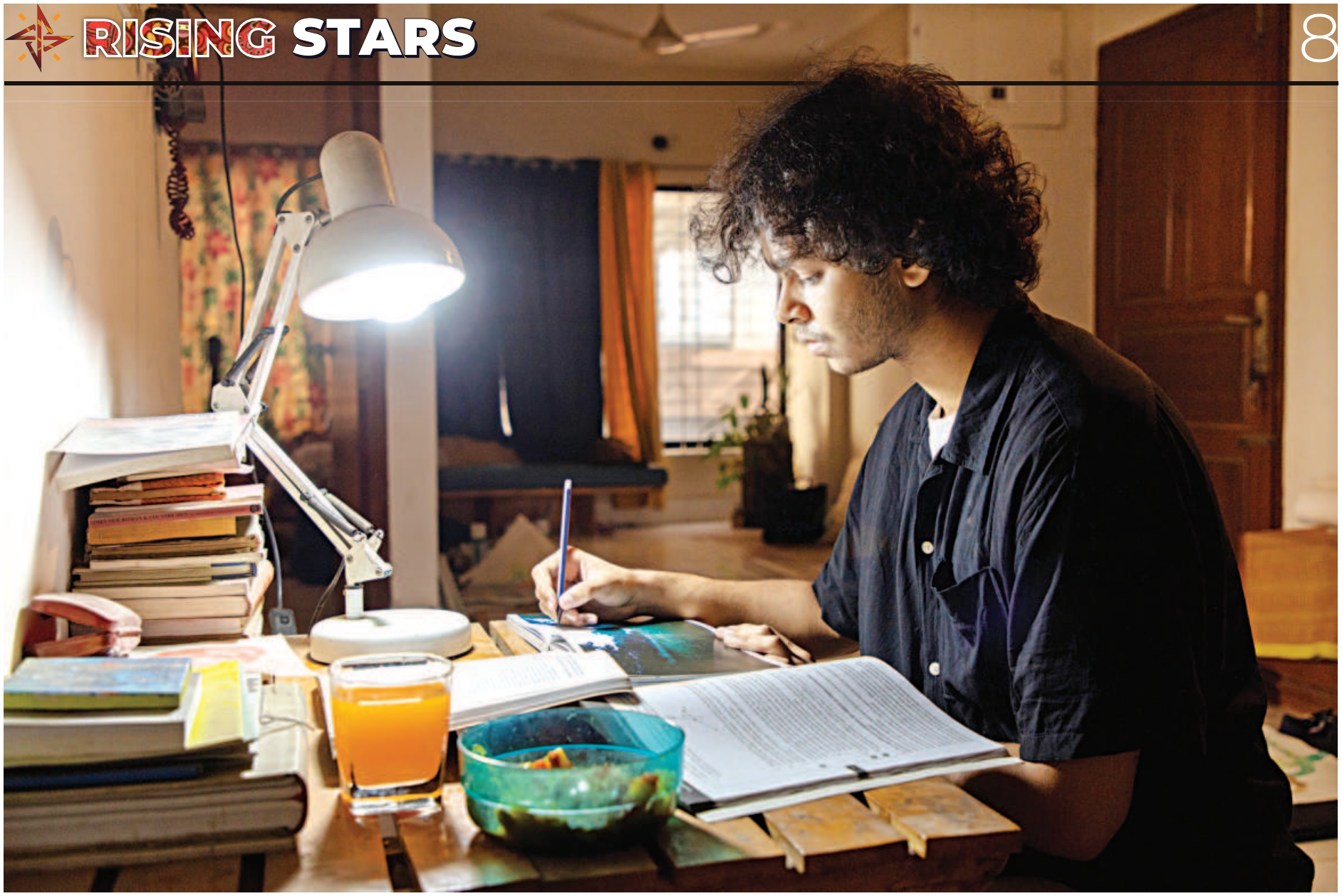

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

# Guide to self-studying for niche A LEVEL SUBJECTS

**TARANNUM KHONDKAR**

If this article has caught your eye, it likely means that you are or are thinking of being someone who breaks away from convention to pursue your passion amongst the less popular A level. If so, you have probably come to terms with the myriad issues you will face, starting with the glaring lack of resources. You may also have realised that self-studying might be the only way to cope with this problem. This article will hopefully help guide you on this journey.

The first step to self-studying a subject is to thoroughly understand its structure. Visit the official websites of your exam boards and download the specification or syllabus. This document is, in simple terms, the map of your course. It details all the information you need to know, including the weightage of marks and relevant external resources. If you are entirely self-studying the subjects, it is crucial to go through your specification or syllabus a few times to get a thorough understanding of how your exam will take place, if the procedure will be different from the standard, and which segments you need to study. Use this document to understand and study each topic well.

Many niche A level subjects, like law, psychology, and history, experience the problem of not having locally available books or qualified teachers. Now what do you do when the standard methods of learning fail you but you are determined not to quit? Well, you turn to the old friend of mankind: the internet.

One of the most helpful resources I found was notes2you on Wix, which offers comprehensive notes and past papers across a variety of niche subjects. If this website does not work out for you, YouTube is always a treasure trove for all, but other sites such as SaveMyExams or Revision World carry all the necessary resources as well. Between you and me, these sites single-handedly helped me pass after I put off studying for my exams for months.

Not just that, you may be missing the sense of camaraderie one gets from suffering together with their friends in a coaching centre for hours on end. But what if I told you that can be replicated on a virtual level as well? Lo and behold, the world of Reddit. While problematic to a certain degree, this site does have its wonders, one of them being the forum for suffering A level students. Here, you can share your woes, get insight from others who have already taken the exam, and take notes from those who can spare it.

Now, what is the use of knowing all this if you simply save these sites or forget about your syllabus until two weeks before the exam? The essence of self-study is discipline. It is easy to lose track of studying a subject that you are not getting formal lessons in. To combat this, begin by creating a study schedule that allocates time to each topic in the syllabus. Break your work into manageable sections and set realistic deadlines to complete them. Use tools like digital planners or apps to track your progress. As you are learning things alone, it may be harder for you to grasp concepts and, thus, any streak of laziness will set your progress back.

Now you have learned your course, finished all topics and ticked off all your goals from your list. What next? Time to practise past papers. Practising past papers is the only similarity that nearly all A level subjects share. From art prompts to essay questions, past papers are invaluable for understanding exam patterns and honing your skills in answering questions effectively. By solving these, you can quickly realise your inconsistencies and work on them to get better. Try your best to finish at least 6 years' worth of past papers to have a stronghold on the subject. Remember, examiners often look for specific keywords and phrasing, so reviewing official mark schemes is essential. Use the marking schemes to check your answers and understand how to improve.

Self-studying a niche A level subject can be challenging, but it's entirely achievable. Focus on understanding your syllabus, use online resources and forums for support, stick to a disciplined study plan, and practice past papers to build confidence. While the journey may feel lonely, remember there's a global community of students facing the same challenges. Stay motivated and success will be within reach!

*Tarannum Khondkar is a struggling student and a contributor at The Daily Star.*