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PHOTO: LS ARCHIVE/ SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

#PERSPECTIVE

Humayun Ahmed: Still captivating Bangladesh, one book at a time

Every year, Amar Ekushey Boimela brings a wave of nostalgia, reminding us of the literary legends we have lost. Among them, Humayun Ahmed remains one of the most beloved. Yet, more than a decade since his death, Humayun Ahmed's popularity has not faded! His words continue to resonate through unforgettable characters like Misir Ali, Himu, and Shuvra. Whether at the heart of Boi Mela or in the narrow, book-laden alleys of Nilkhet, his novels are still flying off the shelves.

What is it about his storytelling that keeps generations of readers hooked? What makes his legacy so timeless?

Let's hear from the fans who continue to love his work.

Tahsin Tahira Biva, a long-time reader of Humayun Ahmed's novels, says, "Humayun Ahmed wrote what we lived — he understood the ordinary, from the struggles of daily survival to the subtleties of family dynamics. His stories were grounded in realism that almost felt like magic!"

She continues, "While many writers tend to romanticise the past, Humayun had an exceptional ability to capture the pulse of the present. Few have done that as he did. The only name that comes to mind before him is Satyajit Ray, who, like a magician, reflected the heartbeat of the then-contemporary society."

Jemim Jafar, an avid reader, shares, "If I were to answer as his fan, it would be like Dumbledore's question to Snape in Harry Potter, 'After all this time?' and my answer would be, 'Always,' just as Snape replied."

Jemim continues, "As a bookworm, I was initially sceptical about reading Humayun Ahmed. I had been engrossed in Murakami and other celebrated international authors. Yet, the first time I read Humayun Ahmed's Shonkhonil Karagar, I was caught off guard."

She also adds, "The struggle for suitable suitors for daughters, the search for jobs, the daily taunts from society, and the countless taboos that defined life — it's remarkable how, Humayun Ahmed, as a young man, could understand and depict such sensitive matters back in his university days."

"His words literally transported me to the familiar stories of the intimate corners of my own home. They felt magically real. I felt seen and heard. The themes he explored in the '80s and '90s still resonate today. His writing transcends time," she elaborates.

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#RELATIONSHIPS & FAMILY

RAISING EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT CHILDREN

Because feelings matter more than grades

Emotional intelligence, also known as EQ, is the ability to understand and recognise one's own emotions as well as those of others around you. It is important because EQ enables an entire generation to manage themselves and others, paving the way for an empathetic culture. Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist who popularised the term, argued that emotional intelligence matters more than IQ, the conventional idea of intelligence.

Yet, parents have been known to overlook its importance, mainly because the previous generation was unable to pass this torch of parenting to the next. However, it takes only one conscious generation to break the vicious cycle.

By following these tips, as parents of this generation, you can instil EQ into your children's behaviour.

Encourage them to express their emotions

Teach your children that it is okay to feel angry or sad because things did not go their way. They may not have developed the vocabulary to express what they are feeling.

As an adult, it is your job to listen to their complaints and label their emotions. This way, they will know that all human beings feel such emotions and that there is nothing wrong with them. Using phrases like "I can see that you're really upset about this…" will help them validate their emotions.

This will help them not only be better at handling their own emotions as they grow up but also be able to comfort their younger siblings and even others when they feel indignant.

As Abraham Lincoln famously wrote in a letter to his son's teacher: "Teach him (his son) how to laugh when he is sad if you can. Teach him there is no shame in tears."

Give them small responsibilities

Try to give your children small responsibilities so they understand from an early age how it feels to be held accountable for something.

Assign small tasks to them, such as making their bed, setting the table, or watering the plants. This will help your children develop a sense of responsibility.

First, it makes them aware of the effort that goes into everyday tasks. This will help them empathise with the less fortunate in society. Second, when children take responsibility, they begin to appreciate the value of hard work and the importance of contributing to their surroundings.

Celebrate their small wins

Try to encourage your child to participate in everything. Praise them for their efforts rather than for winning. This way, your child will understand, from an early age, the importance of incremental growth. This will result in a "growth mindset" that will prepare them for future success.

Your child will thank you for this in the future. Do not compare them with other children because every child is unique in their own way. Comparing them with others and not valuing them for their uniqueness would be like killing a mockingbird.

More importantly, create an environment where they feel comfortable to make mistakes. But make it a priority for them to remember the lesson from each of their mistakes.

Be an example for them

Children learn what they see. So, try to be an embodiment of the adult you would want your children to be when they grow up.

Research shows that till the age of seven, children heavily rely on learning through imitation. That's why children love games involving make-believe and pretend-play so much. It is a natural response to their cognitive development.

If you want your children to read more, pick a book yourself and start reading. They will see it and imitate you. Likewise, if you want them to be kind to other people, treat your neighbours and house-help with respect yourself.

Children learn by observing. If you show and tell the acts and habits of kindness, patience, and emotional control, they will learn it better than they would have just by getting instructions.

Developing emotional intelligence will help your child build better relationships later in their life. This ability will matter in the long run, teaching them perseverance and empathy. As parents, if you do your job right, your children will not only be able to regulate their own emotions but will also influence others with this skill which will pay off forever. As Frederick Douglass, American abolitionist and orator, said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults."

By Minhazur Rahman Alvee
Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

#FYI

The inspiration behind Bangladesh's first pet ambulance

In a pioneering move to enhance animal welfare in Bangladesh, Susthotaa has introduced the nation's first-ever pet ambulance service. This initiative aims to provide timely medical assistance to pets in need, ensuring that no animal suffers due to a lack of transportation during emergencies.

Star Lifestyle spoke with Mezbaul Amin, the co-founder and CEO of Susthotaa, to delve deeper into the motivations and aspirations behind this groundbreaking service.

What was the primary inspiration behind launching a pet ambulance service?
If I take you back to the beginning, last year, around May, we started working on ambulance services across Bangladesh. Over time, we noticed a major issue — many animals, especially stray dogs and cats, were dying simply because of a lack of proper transportation during emergencies.

The biggest inspiration for us was our chairman, Angelo Afnan Hamid, whose pet dog died due to lack of transportation. We wanted to change that. Every life is valuable, and we believed that if we could contribute in any way, we should. Our goal has been to ensure that no pet suffers — or worse, loses its life — just because help could not reach them in time.

However, one of the biggest logistical challenges we faced was that traditional ambulance providers were not willing to take on this kind of service. So, we had to find those who were willing and start working with them. While there are a significant number of ambulances available nationwide through various platforms, the number of pet ambulances is still extremely low.

Many hesitate to take bold steps due to logistical challenges. What gave you the confidence to make this idea a reality?
The confidence came from our mission, ensuring that no pet is left untreated simply due to lack of transport. We realised that pet owners needed a service they could rely on at any hour, especially during critical emergencies.

Additionally, the response from the community has been overwhelming. The growing concern for pet healthcare and welfare in Bangladesh encouraged us to move forward with this initiative. We saw a gap, and we wanted to bridge it. Overall, it was a team effort that made it a reality.

If someone's pet falls sick in the middle of the night, how quickly can your ambulance respond? What's the booking process like?
Now, imagine this scenario – it's 2 or 3 AM, and suddenly your pet falls critically ill. That's where we come in. Our goal is to provide an immediate response, 24/7.

The booking process is simple and efficient. Pet owners can request an ambulance through our hotline, ensuring that help is dispatched as quickly as possible. Time is crucial in emergencies, and we are committed to minimising delays.

Do you plan to extend your service to street animals in the future?
Our ambulance service is not just limited to pets; we actually provide emergency medical transportation for stray animals as well. We are absolutely committed to supporting animals in every way possible.

Long-term, our vision is to build a comprehensive healthcare solution for all animals in need. We want to ensure they receive the proper medical attention they deserve. Every life matters and we are determined to create a system where no animal suffers due to a lack of emergency care.

Right now, the service is groundbreaking – but what's next? Are there any expansion plans?
Absolutely. This is just the beginning. While our pet ambulance service is currently operational, we are exploring expansion plans to cover more cities across Bangladesh.

Our ultimate goal is to create a nationwide network of animal healthcare solutions, ensuring that emergency and routine medical care is accessible to all.

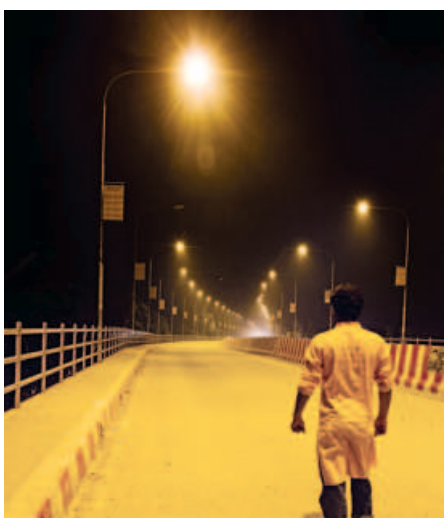
Pet owners can access this vital service by calling the hotline at 09601 222 777 or by visiting Susthotaa's official website at www.susthotaa.com.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Courtesy

Humayun Ahmed: Still captivating Bangladesh, one book at a time

"I finished Nondito Noroke in one sitting while sobbing a bucket of tears. Reading his books never felt like work. He depicts the reality in motion of words. Even now, whenever I find myself struggling with a heavier read, I open one of his books. His words save me from reader's block," Jemim concludes.

While his admirers are countless, some critics argue that his work leaned too heavily on "entertainment" rather than literary depth. Yet, perhaps that was precisely his strength. He brought literature out of the hands of intellectual elites and placed it in every household, making us all feel seen! His writing was deeply personal yet universal. He portrayed family dynamics, love, and tragedy in ways that made readers laugh, cry, and reflect — all in a single sitting.



"His stories may not have been about grand revolutions, but they made us feel something real," says Raihana, an aspiring writer. "And isn't that what great literature is supposed to do?"

Muhammad Rafiul Islam, another devoted reader, beautifully captures the essence of his impact on readers, especially at the Boimela.

He says, "If you just observe the Boimela, you will realise what Humayun Ahmed was and what we have lost. A big bunch of young people still come just to buy his books. He may not have written deep philosophical novels, but he touched the hearts of millions with his simplicity. Even someone who does not read often could easily finish 20-30 pages of his books in a single sitting, that too without getting bored. That's how captivating he was."

Humayun Ahmed, indeed, has undoubtedly shaped the cultural consciousness of an entire generation. From his humble beginnings as a writer to becoming a literary icon, his legacy is felt in every corner of Bangladesh, and it shows no sign of fading. Just like now, may every February continue to remind us of his legacy!

By Jannatul Bushra
Photo: LS Archive / Sazzad Ibne Sayed
In frame: Impersonification of Humayun Ahmed's famous fictitional character Himu.

#FASHION & BEAUTY

Tresses of Bangaliana — From Playful Braids to Regal Buns

For every Bengali woman, her hair is the crowning glory. She loves to adorn it with fresh blooms and precious jewels, wear it in many different styles, and flaunt it for the world to admire. And why shouldn't she? Her thick, black tresses, long and luscious, reminiscent of the sky at midnight inspire poetry. Oceans of ink have been spilt attempting to capture its beauty through words.

And when she wears it up in a khopa, her graceful neck and poised turn of the head show off her beauty spectacularly. The khopa is as versatile as the many hats she wears. When she's busy and rushing from one thing to another her hair is hastily put up in a messy bun, keeping her cool and free from managing her long hair. And then when she has a party to attend, she chooses a beautiful saree and matching glass bangles to go with it, her hairdo is different.

With great care she brushes off tangles, parts her hair from the side, and coils her hair into a lovely khopa that she will lovingly adorn with a flower or two, maybe with a string of beli even, spreading its fragrance. With a simple hairdo, she will embody the very essence of a Bengali woman, her grace and beauty known all around.

Braids or beni is one of our best friends. Our love affair with it began as little girls when our mothers neatly plaited our long hair in two lovely braids for school, complete with bows so our hair would stay nicely in place. And oh what fun we had, running around playing tag, throwing caution in the wind as our lovely long braids swayed away in childish mischief!

With the passage of time, when we left days of our girlhood behind, this humble beni stayed with us through thick and thin. In our downtime, after a good hot oil massage, the good old beni keeps our hair in place as we run errands. When on a beachy vacation a braid keeps the fly-away at bay while channelling island girl swank!

These age-old hairstyles are here to stay and they have been reimagined and reinvented time and again. Wearing a traditional Katan to your friend's wedding? A lovely khopa is the way to go, with a side-swept parting. Wear your favourite Kundan neckpiece on the bun and add some flowers by the side to elevate your hair game.

A chic structural gown will look fantastic with a sleek bun, kept simple but stunning. If you are wearing a fusion-style drape skirt with a sheer jacket that is all the rage right now, go for high khopa and deck it up with streaks of glitter that have been artfully painted around the bun to take things up a notch!

Braids are as versatile as they come. Fishtail braids are lovely, feminine and very flattering. From ethnic outfits to Western dresses, it complements them all. For a holud or mehendi, go for a long plait, wrap a zari ribbon on it and finish off with some lovely parandi at the end to add a fun, traditional twist to your look.

Fresh flower strings are always stunning so coil it around your braid. Baby's breath and daisies look lovely when worn on braids and are perfect for those countless pre-wedding events you will attend this year!

By Sabrina N Bhuiyan
Photo: LS Archive/ Sazzad Ibne Sayed

White panjabi — A fashion statement that stands the test of time

They have an air of timeless elegance and versatile sophistication that Bengali men love. From an understated air of a clean style to a culturally relevant look, panjabis/ kurtas can make you have it all. With the arrival of spring and anticipation of the holy month of Ramadan and Eid, there is nothing better than embracing the pristine beauty of a beautiful white panjabi!

The combination of the pure white fabric and the charm of exquisite craftsmanship makes them the ideal choice for spring. You could find hand-embroidered designs or fine thread work that are usually available in many styles. They are worth choosing because they represent cultural symbols, making the clothing more special.

Bengali men can don a white kurta for every occasion, from casual outdoor strolls to formal social events. If you want to look relaxed, wear the white panjabi with khaki pants. If you want to look more traditional, wear it with white or crème pyjamas.

Moreover, as the month of Ramadan approaches, iftar gatherings are a must.

When celebrated with loved ones, iftar takes on a beautiful note. Needless to say, your white panjabi would be a nod at simplicity when friends or family arrive to break their fasts. You could choose a white kurta with pastel accents and pair it with a soft white scarf. It will undoubtedly be in line with the evening's aura.

It is also a beloved practice for Bengali men to celebrate Eid with a befitting panjabi, as it seems to embody the spirit of that joyous celebration. With its intricate stitching and delicate embroidery at the collar and cuffs, a well-tailored kurta for Eid can add to the festivities. To make your outfit regal, you can choose a kurta or jacket with shiny work done on it and some high-quality shoes or sandals.

However, you should not keep your options limited to just these events. In fact, when paired with denim or chinos, the panjabi can create a contemporary aesthetic that is perfect for informal events. You could also wear it with a churidar or a dhoti at weddings.

You and your friends could coordinate with white panjabis in these festivities. Maybe you choose gold on shades of off-white accents with differing patterns on each kurta or blue embroidery on the collars. These slight alterations can make sure everybody shines in the elegance of the clothing and yet stands out.

Proper accessories are essential for elevating your attire to a higher level. Regardless of a metal or leather strap, a stunning watch will be the perfect addition to complement the understated white ensemble. You could also choose to finish it off with a pair of stylish sunglasses that can add a fashionable touch while preserving the stylishness of the panjabi.

It is a cultural and fashion icon of Bengali men that does not change with the times or trends. So, keep in mind that the key to showcasing the pristine beauty of the white panjabi is to keep things simple yet outstanding!

By Samayla Mahjabin Koishy
Photo Courtesy: House of Ahmed

Star LIFE Style

FROM BREEZY WHITES TO DEEP REDS

A Summer Style Eid

The year has gone around faster than we could blink, and just like every other time, we find ourselves almost ready to welcome Ramadan, and of course, Eid ul Fitr. This year's trends embrace a dynamic blend of contrasts — subtle yet striking, traditional yet modern. It's about embracing both soft pastels and bold, rich and subtle hues, blending craftsmanship with summer aesthetics. Sarees, flowing anarkalis, structured kaftans, and elegant kameez sets take centre stage, each offering a unique way to embrace the festivities.

The pastel palette, featuring hues of powder blue, blush pink, lilac, and mint green, is perfect for those who wish to embody the lightness of summer. These soothing shades reflect the warmth of the season while maintaining an effortlessly graceful look.

Anarkalis in pastel tones, adorned with delicate lace accents or subtle thread work, create a dreamy aesthetic ideal for daytime celebrations. A blush pink anarkali, for instance, with tonal embroidery, paired with an ethereal organza dupatta, exudes a quiet sophistication, while a mint green kameez set with pearl detailing captures the beauty of understated elegance.

The comeback of sarees in 2024 has been rather grand and the streak is still on the rise. Hand-painted saris are stealing the spotlight, their artistic motifs and delicate brush strokes adding to the grace of every girl. From floral-inspired designs to abstract strokes in pastel hues, these saris exude a unique charm that feels both fresh and timeless.

For those looking to make a striking impression in the evening, embroidered and embellished sarees bring an air of luxury and grandeur. Rich silks and chiffons adorned with intricate zardozi, sequin, or mirror work create a mesmerising play of texture and shimmer, making them the perfect choice for festive gatherings.

Whites continue to hold their place as a timeless classic, offering a pristine and effortlessly elegant option for Eid mornings. A flowing kaftan edged with embroidered detailing is a look that never goes out of style. For those seeking out that 'extra' in their look, soft metallic accents in the form of silver accessories provide the perfect finishing touch. Paired with a dewy makeup look featuring soft pink lips and lightly kohled eyes, the pastel and white trend embodies a breezy charm that is both effortless and striking.

While pastels and whites set the tone for the season's softer side, bold colours are making a commanding statement. Deep greens, rich magentas, and striking reds are at the forefront, adding a regal touch and grandeur to the festive wardrobe. These colours, often associated with tradition and celebration, bring a striking contrast to the more subdued tones of the season.

Think about it: a deep magenta kameez with detailed zardozi work hits the nail on the perfect balance between heritage and modernity. Whether in the form of a kaftan with intricate embroidery or a classic kameez set off by a shimmering gold-threaded dupatta, red embodies confidence. Paired with antique gold jewellery and a bold makeup look featuring berry-toned lips, these outfits exude a powerful presence while maintaining an air of tradition.

Silhouettes have played a defining role in Eid trends for the past couple of years. This season, designers are experimenting with longer hemlines, heavier flares, and intricate embellishments, giving the classic silhouette a renewed sense of grandeur.

Handwork remains a defining feature of Eid ensembles. Whether it is the delicate kaftan on breezy pastels or the intricate resham and aari work on bold tones, hand-embroidered detailing takes your outfit to new heights. The beauty of these handcrafted details lies in their ability to transform even the simplest silhouettes into statement pieces.

Accessories and styling complete the look, playing a crucial role in tying together the overall ensemble. Soft pastel outfits pair beautifully with silver-toned jewellery, delicate pearl earrings, and nude-toned footwear, enhancing their ethereal appeal.

In contrast, bold-coloured ensembles demand statement pieces — chunky gold jewellery, embroidered potli bags, and embellished juttis that add an extra layer of festivity. Footwear choices range from traditional khussas with intricate embroidery to sleek heels that add a touch of modern sophistication.

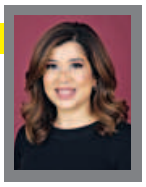
As trends evolve, this Eid is all about embracing contrasts. Whether one gravitates toward the delicate charm of a white kaftan set or the bold statement of a deep green Anarkali, the essence of Eid fashion lies in its ability to celebrate both individuality and tradition.

In the end, the most beautiful outfit is the one that resonates with personal style, allowing each person to shine in their own unique way.

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: Abdul Alif
Cinematographer: Sultan Farooqui
Wardrobe Courtesy: House of Ahmed
Facebook & Instagram: House of Ahmed

#HUMOUR

MIND THE GAP



NOSHIN NAWAL
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The Hobbyist Hustlers: A Woman's Guide to Not-So-Serious Success

Picture this: Sara, a 29-year-old chartered accountant in Dhaka, walking into her office on a Monday morning. She's carrying a laptop bag, a cup of overpriced coffee, and the crushing weight of societal expectations. But don't worry — it's all just a *hobby.* At least, that's what everyone around her believes.

From the moment Sara got her first job, the narrative was set: her work was not *real work*. It was a side gig, an accessory to her main roles as a future wife, mother, and unpaid family therapist.

"What's the big deal?" her aunt had said during her graduation party. "You'll leave this job after marriage anyway. But good practice for managing your husband's business accounts!"

Fast forward to today, Sara is battling workplace sexism with the finesse of a seasoned gladiator.

Take her boss, Amin, a man who believes his "progressive" attitude deserves a standing ovation. Just last week, during a team meeting, he told her, "Sara, you're very talented for someone who doesn't *have* to work."

When she asked what he meant, he smiled patronisingly and said, "You know, since your father is well-off. You don't really need this job, right? It's nice to see you here as a passion project."

Ah, the "financial affluence" card — a staple in every Bangladeshi woman's corporate experience! If you are well-off, you are accused of treating your career like a hobby. If you are not, your financial need is turned into an insult.

"*Taka banatei hobe? Ken shaami kaaj kore na?*" one particularly nosy co-worker once asked Sara, as if the only valid reason for her presence at work was a non-existent husband's unemployment.

But the real fun begins when office dress codes come into play. Sara's workplace is not exactly strict but it's full of unsolicited fashion critics.

And let's not forget the workplace *well-wishers* who specialise in character assassination. If Sara spends too much on a new bag, she's "showing off." If she does not, she's "stingy."

If she stays late to finish a project, she's "too ambitious" — a code word for "probably not getting married anytime soon." And if she goes home early, it's, "*Dekhecho? Ar nijeke career woman bole!*"

Then there's the pièce de résistance: workplace harassment, always served with a side of denial. Sara has mastered the art of dodging overly familiar "*bhaiya-type*" colleagues who somehow think leaning too close at the printer is normal behaviour.

When she once complained about a male co-worker's inappropriate jokes, the HR manager — a man with the moral compass of a broken GPS — asked, "Are you sure you're not overreacting? Boys are just doing *ektu dushtami*."

However, perhaps the best part of Sara's career is the unshakable belief that her job is not serious. Once, during a heated family discussion about her cousin's wedding, Sara reminded everyone she could not take the day off. Her mother waved it off with, "*shomossha ki! Tor job-e chhuti nibi, bas!*" Sara wanted to respond, "Yes, Ma, because clients love it when you cancel to attend your cousin's *gaye holud*."

For Sara, every day is a balancing act between proving her worth and laughing at the absurdity of it all. She dreams of a world where her career is taken as seriously as her male counterparts, where she is not asked to "tone it down," "cover up," or "let it go." Until then, she will keep working, not as a hobby, but as an act of quiet rebellion.

As for the *"work isn't that serious"* crowd? Sara has a suggestion: try juggling deadlines, sexism, and unsolicited advice while pretending to enjoy your coffee. If that's a hobby, sign her up for the Olympics.

Illustration: Star Lifestyle

ELEGANTLY INTELLIGENT

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Dating in Dhaka — Dreadful or delightful?

Recently, I had a bit of an epiphany. As a thirty-something woman who likes to think she has seen a fair bit of the world, I hopelessly lacked any knowledge about the way dating works in modern times.

"Knowledge is power" is a motto I have ardently believed in for the longest time, and that dating rituals in our gloriously chaotic city have taken on a whole other dimension, left me reeling. And I put it mildly.

Growing up in '90s Dhaka, where a family shared a single land phone and our exposure to the world was via television and books, we did things slowly with grace and poise. In my day, love was expressed with heartfelt prose in letters and poetry. Our days were spent in leisurely reading sonnets. Iambic pentameter was not just a literary tool but words strung together in such a way that Shakespeare's ardent love for his beloved shaped our vision.

And here we are — in the era of dating apps where one swipes left, right, up or down. Is it any wonder I feel like a fish out of water? But change is the only constant so one must keep up with changing times, no? Hence, in pursuit of gaining much-needed knowledge about this decidedly urban phenomenon I asked around, read tonnes of articles online and observed modern dating rituals with the keen interest of a sociologist! My discoveries turned out to be fascinating, if I may add.

To begin with, dating in today's world is fast, fluid, and fun. In ancient times like the '90s people connected organically through common friends, family and forums such as schools, universities or such. But in 2025 when everyone's smartwatches are pinging away relentlessly who has the time?

Dhaka society by all means is still fairly conservative and yet these apps are surprisingly popular. Here one can 'choose' the 'type' of people they desire as potential mates. Sounds like a dystopian idea? It is as real as it gets.

The way it works is — one downloads an app of choice (these apps have their individual specialities for your information, to cater to a diverse range of interests), and pay a subscription fee. Having created an account s/he curates a personalised profile that via algorithm matches them with other individuals with similar interests and characteristics.

And this is where the plot thickens. Swipe right and you might just meet the one, or swipe left if you don't like what you see. Sounds so innocuous and fun right? Apparently, it's not as simple as it seems.

Meraz, a regular Tinder user laments that rarely ever are people honest about themselves. "It's one thing to gloss over a few things but when you expect to see a person and she turns out to be an entirely different being, it's crushing' he says.

Tina has a horror story to share. "This one guy described himself to be adventurous and an adrenaline junkie who later turned out to be a car thief! I was impressed by his devil-may-care attitude and suave looks. After two dates he started acting strange and would not return my calls or texts. Imagine my surprise when I saw on an online news portal that he ran a car theft ring out of Uttara and it got busted by the police on the very day we were supposed to meet!"

Tinder Swindler, that very popular show from Netflix, taught us all that in the murky world of online dating nothing is what it seems. Proceeding with caution is essential; when it comes to matters of heart we rarely think with our heads. What's more, financial damages are often accompanied by heartbreak.

Junaid met a wonderful girl on one such dating site and fell in love with her. He proposed to her with a 1.0-carat diamond ring, alongside his mother's heirloom jewels. Shortly after his fiancé vanished into thin air, taking all of the gifts with her. He later learned that she's a professional con artist after going to the police thinking she was in grave danger.

While these may be extreme circumstances other users are mostly disgruntled with these apps. Some complain that the people they meet are only looking for casual relationships and not intending to go for long-term commitments. Some people get taken for a ride and so on.

It's not like dating apps are all abysmal. There are success stories where people ended up getting married after meeting on apps. A rare occurrence it may be but not entirely impossible. Stakes are quite high in this medium, but here comes the million-dollar question: How far will you go for love?

Illustration: Star Lifestyle

#CONTEST

THE BEST OF LOVE

Our Valentine's Day contest's top 4 winning stories

As Valentine's Day unfolded with heartfelt stories and expressions of love, our Facebook contest brought together voices that captured the essence of romance, connection, creativity, and love for life.

After much deliberation, we are thrilled to unveil the top 4 participants whose entries stood out for their originality, emotion, and storytelling. Each of them has left an imprint with their unique take on love, making this celebration all the more special.

Stay tuned as we showcase their work and honour their contributions to this heartfelt event!

Keep an eye on the Facebook group, "Lifestyle Pulse" for more exciting competitions.

Love you so much, Bably

More or less everyone has some dreams and wishes about their loved ones, sometimes they want to disappear somewhere far away, across the horizon, beyond the borders of distant countries.

I am no exception. I also want to get lost somewhere far away with my loved one.

I have a dream in my mind, I will listen to the silent roar of the sea with my beloved person and listen carefully to the thousands of unspoken words of both of them. There will be a mischievous-sweet relationship between the two.

I will walk the endless path holding hands.

Sitting by the sea, I and that beloved person will see the full moon rising in the night sky!

Keeping that full moon as a witness, I want to tell my beloved, my unspoken words, the movement of thoughts in the depths of my mind, breaking the hesitation!

Love doesn't change. Not just young love. Love does not end with age. Love grows with age. Like you're growing all over me, growing.

What a different feeling, a different moment!

The memory of you will remain in my mind for ages.

— Arsane Adib

A love that waits, a heart that heals

There's still a part of me that waits, a part that hopes. I once read about a girl, who waited just like I did — heart full of longing, mind full of unanswered questions. Each letter I sent, each word I wrote, was an attempt to bridge the distance between us. But I received nothing in return.

I told myself I would stop, that I'd erase 'waiting' from my heart. But my heart didn't listen—it kept sending out love, full of unspoken words. No matter how many times others told me you wouldn't come back, I couldn't stop hoping.

But today, something feels different. Waiting doesn't mean standing still. It doesn't mean being stuck. It teaches strength, patience, and self-worth. It's about learning to live without the thing you once thought you couldn't live without.

Do you remember the river by Shiulitala? The one where we made promises? I named it Roopkotha because it felt like our story — beautiful, fleeting, and full of dreams. But now, the river that once carried our promises flows with nothing but silent echoes of what could have been.

The garland of flowers I once imagined on my forehead now lies wilted in the pages of memory. And yet, that's okay. In all this waiting, I've learned something: love isn't about holding on forever. It's about finding the courage to let go. Even when your heart feels like it will never heal, it can—and it will.

So, I let go. I let go of the idea of us, of the future we imagined. I no longer wait for you. Now, I choose to wait for myself.

And to you, who once taught me so much: I wish you a love that's real—a love that doesn't ask too much, and a heart that understands the value of letting go.

If you're reading this, know that you are not alone. In the quiet moments of waiting, you'll find your peace, too. And love—true love—will come when you least expect it.

Waiting taught me that love isn't just about holding on—it's about knowing when to let go and finding the strength to love yourself first.

— Israt Zahan Oishy

A letter to my guardian angel

Dear Nana Bhai,

I can still hear the hum of your motorcycle early in the morning; its sound cutting through the quiet streets of Dhaka as you patiently waited for me while I took my sweet time getting ready for school, as if the world could wait for me. You never made me feel the weight of my parents' absence when they were busy with work. Those simple moments, Nana Bhai, were enough to fill my heart with love and happiness.

You were never the loud type-your love wasn't about grand gestures or expensive gifts. Instead, it was in the quiet moments of care, when no one was looking, in the steady rhythm of your presence.

You were a doctor by profession and a magician by choice, and you truly left behind a legacy of love, compassion, and sacrifice. Yesterday morning, I woke up with a sharp, crushing pain in my chest, and I tried to call you, because I always ran to you-even for the smallest inconveniences. But the phone rang and rang, and it was then, in the unbearable silence, that the cruel truth hit me-you're gone. Gone forever.

Thank you for being a healer in more ways than one. You held our family together after losing your own, silently carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders, never once complaining, never seeking rest. Were you ever able to breathe, Nana Bhai? Or were you always too busy tending to the needs of us and everyone around you? Even though you aren't here with me today, I know in my bones that I will make you proud, and your generosity and kindness will live on through me. I feel your love every single day- in the way I try to help others, in the way I can go above and beyond for my family and in the way I carry myself with integrity.

You have indeed taught me that love is not necessarily about grand gestures. It lies in the ability to show up every single day, without fail. You always showed up, Nana Bhai.

I will always be your little girl. And you will always be my first love, my guiding star.

Forever yours, Prottasha.

— **Kazi Farbeen**

Love for Life

It is so peaceful to lie down on this mild winter morning, with a blanket over my head, as if all the sleep has just been absorbed by my eyes. What a smile the sun reflects on the clear glass of the window! He seems to be grinning a little too much today. What a sweet smell! Has someone entered the room wearing perfume? What a beautiful fragrance! I can't remember the last time I smelled a marigold — my favourite flower.

I really want to have tea. I haven't had tea in a long time! Well, wasn't there also a cricket match between Bangladesh and West Indies women's today? I didn't watch the game.

The doctor said I would recover soon. But it has been two months, and I am still lying there. Yesterday, I saw the people of the house wiping their eyes in the background. Why do they do this? Don't you know how much I love them? It hurts me to see tears in the corners of their eyes!

Well, won't anyone come to see me in the morning? I know, the doctor is lying to me. I won't be good again. I don't let them recognise that I understand everything. The little one is no more.

Lately, I often dream of walking towards the light. I have even secretly written a letter to my family. I have never told you how much I love you all! What! Am I dreaming again? A light is coming towards me. My eyes are getting dazzled, and the sweet smell is getting stronger.

— **Mahabuba Sarmin Kolee**
(Translated from Bengali)

#TRAVEL

TOP 5 CHERRY BLOSSOM HOTSPOTS
for an unforgettable spring

From lush rainforests to majestic mountains, Asia seems to be full of wonders. If you are an avid traveller, you may have come across scenic hills and oceans that have captured your mind. Now is the perfect time to add cherry blossoms to your list!

Cherry blossoms symbolise beauty, the fleeting nature of life, and new beginnings in most cultures, and also bring to us the start of Spring. Drown yourself in the soothing pink and white hues in these 5 must-visit places spanning the largest continent in the world!

Yoshino, Nara prefecture, Japan
A renowned spring destination for enthusiastic travellers, Yoshino is home to more than 30,000 cherry blossom trees. The picturesque views and soothing ambience will leave you enchanted.

From late March to early April, Mt. Yoshino is dressed in shades of pale pink and white with cherry blossoms surrounding the area. The best place to get a glimpse of these is from the Hanayagura Observatory, allowing you to get a panoramic view of cherry blossoms.

You will also find a lot of souvenir shops, food stalls, and restaurants in the mountainside town, giving you the best of both worlds.

Yeouido Park, Seoul, South Korea
Just like Yoshino, you can expect to see the pink and white blossoms from late March to early April. You will come across equally stunning sights along Seokchon Lake.

Here, you will find pedestrians walking amongst the soothing cherry blossoms, and food stalls lined up for you to try.

This stunning place also hosts the Yeouido Spring Flower Festival, where Koreans celebrate the blossoms of spring. You can take a walk across nearly 1600 trees with your loved ones and capture sweet memories. The best part? Admission is absolutely free!

Gucun Forest Park, Shanghai
With over 12,000 cherry blossom trees, Gucun Forest Park is a major tourist attraction perfect for family and friends alike! There are loads of activities to engage in and flowers of all kinds to see, so you are sure to get lost in the beauty of this magnificent park.

The Cherry Blossom Festival is also held here annually, with local people and tourists from all over the world gathering to spend some quality time and welcome in the season of spring.

If you have children, there is also a 'Dinosaur World' within this park filled with large dinosaur statues, so they are sure to have loads of fun among the blooming beauty!

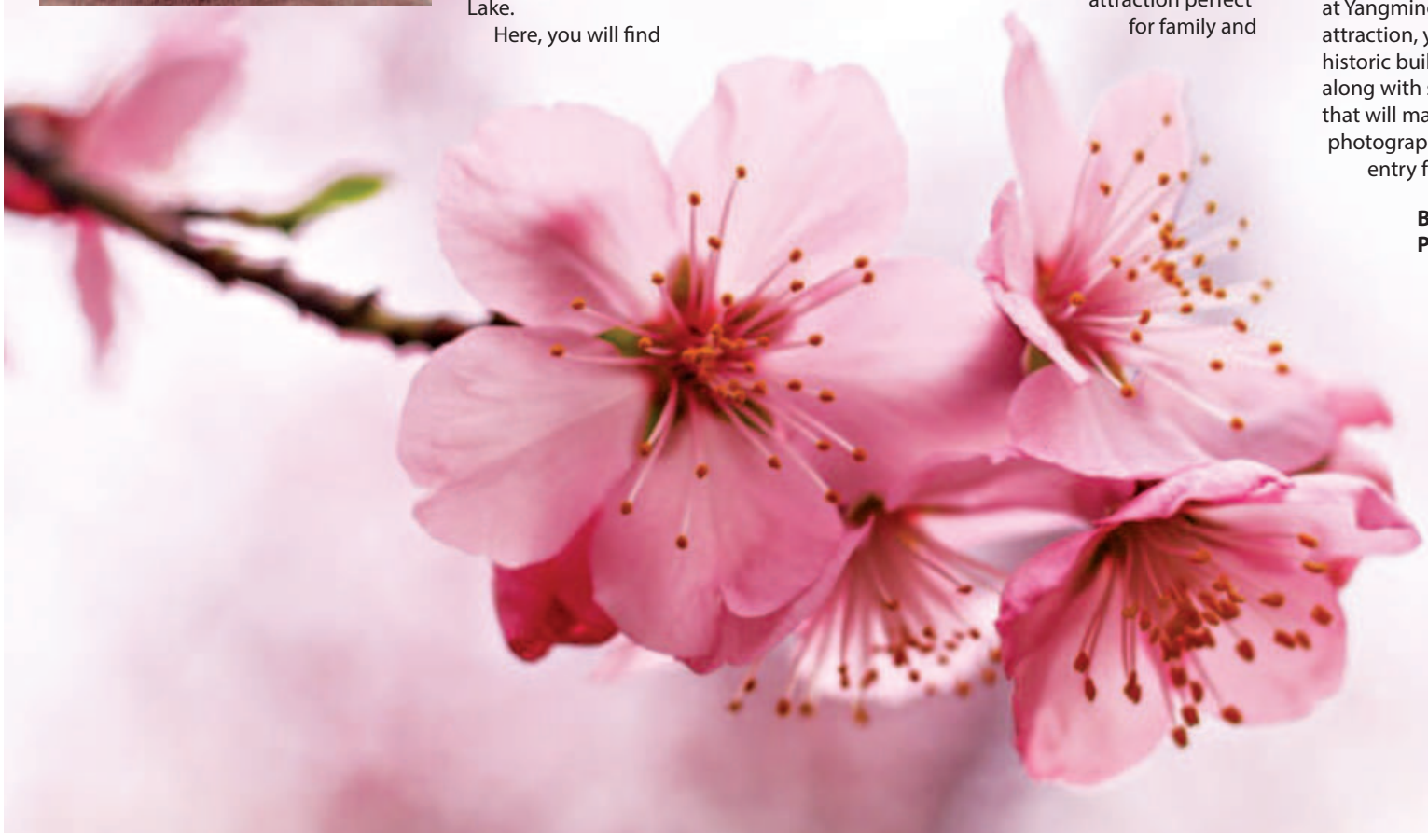
Pa Khoang Lake, Dien Bien, Vietnam
Immerse yourself in the dark red and pink shades of Vietnam's most beautiful cherry blossoms. During spring, thousands of cherry blossom trees can be found in a place known as the 'Island of Flowers'.

Pa Khoang Lake is a natural attraction known for its picturesque lakes, greenery and of course, cherry blossoms. Tourists flock to this area each year to catch a glimpse of these mesmerising trees, boasting deep pink-coloured petals.

Yangmingshan National Park, Taiwan
Cherry blossom season here lasts from around mid-January to early April but the perfect time to catch a view of these beauties is from February to March. And what other place to get lost in the cherry blossom craze than in Yangmingshan National Park!

The best collection of cherry blossoms is found at the Flower Clock at Yangmingshan. In this famous tourist attraction, you will also encounter historic buildings, ponds, and waterfalls, along with spectacular mountain views that will make for the perfect trip and photography experience. There is also no entry fee!

By Adiba Islam
Photo: Collected



#TRENDING

Get the 'just washed' look with 2025's soap nails trend

In the ever-evolving world of beauty and fashion, nail trends continually emerge, capturing the attention of enthusiasts and professionals alike. One such trend making waves in 2025 is "soap nails," a minimalist manicure style that exudes understated elegance and cleanliness.

What are soap nails?

Soap nails are characterised by their soft, sheer appearance, reminiscent of freshly washed hands. This manicure style focuses on simplicity, utilising neutral tones such as milky whites, delicate beiges, or pale pinks.

The nails are meticulously manicured and buffed to achieve a high-gloss finish that mimics the subtle shine of a bar of soap. The result is a clean, polished look that enhances the natural beauty of nails without overwhelming embellishments.

The appeal of soap nails

The allure of soap nails lies in their versatility and low-maintenance nature. This trend aligns with the "clean girl" aesthetic, emphasising natural beauty and effortless style. Soap nails are suitable for various occasions, from professional settings to casual outings, and complement a wide range of outfits. Their neutral palette makes them an excellent choice for those seeking a chic yet subtle manicure.

How to achieve the soap nails look

To achieve the perfect soap nails, start by trimming and shaping your nails to a short or medium length with rounded or soft square edges, which suit this minimalist style best. Next, gently push back your cuticles and remove any excess skin for a clean, well-groomed look.

Buffing the nail surface is essential to create a smooth base, ensuring the polish adheres evenly and enhances the glossy finish. Apply a thin layer of high-quality base coat to protect your natural nails and extend the longevity of your manicure.

Choose a sheer polish in a neutral shade that complements your skin tone, such as milky white, soft beige, or pale pink, and apply two thin coats, letting each layer dry completely before proceeding. Finally, seal the look with a high-gloss top coat to achieve the signature wet, translucent appearance that makes soap nails so chic and sophisticated.

Soap nails are proof that sometimes, less really is more. Whether you are typing away at work, sipping a latte at brunch, or casually flexing your fingers in a "just because" Instagram story, this sheer, glossy trend keeps you looking fresh and fabulous without trying too hard.

So, if you haven't already, it's time to lather up your nails in this clean, chic aesthetic — because nothing says put-together like a manicure that's as soft and sophisticated as a luxury hand wash.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Collected

HOROSCOPE

ARIES
(MAR. 21-APR. 20)

Refrain from being the generous one in the group. Be on your best behaviour. Avoid scandals of any sort. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.

TAURUS
(APR. 21-MAY 21)

Things will be emotional with your partner. Cover all necessary groundwork before signing contracts. Avoid overloading your plate. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

GEMINI
(MAY 22-JUN. 21)

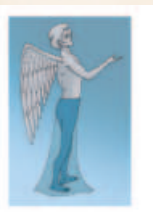
Speak out at an organisational function. Family talks may get combative. Research thoroughly to the bottom of things. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

CANCER
(JUN. 22-JUL. 22)

Focus on self-improvement. Direct your energy into physical entertainment. Avoid dealing with someone else's dirty laundry. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

LEO
(JUL. 23-AUG. 22)

Evaluate your direction in life. Arguments with employers will be detrimental. Your partner may not tolerate your behaviour. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



VIRGO
(AUG. 23-SEP. 23)

Gain cultural knowledge through foreign interactions. Take care of your health. Your stubbornness may cost you dearly. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

LIBRA
(SEP. 24-OCT. 23)

Share innovative knowledge. Losses are evident. Make changes to your living quarters for more space. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

SCORPIO
(OCT. 24-NOV. 21)

Ensure all legal documents are in order. Don't expect complete honesty from new acquaintances. Visit an unwell friend or relative. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

SAGITTARIUS
(NOV. 22-DEC. 21)

Use your energy wisely. Win points with friends using your wit. Rid yourself of what is no longer useful. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

CAPRICORN
(DEC. 22-JAN. 20)

Showcase your talents. Be mindful of the youngsters in your family. Don't expect help from housemates. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

AQUARIUS
(JAN. 21-FEB. 19)

Show interest in children's achievements. Short trips may be tiring but rewarding. Consider volunteer work. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.

PISCES
(FEB. 20-MAR. 20)

Social outings may bring attention. Reconnect with old acquaintances. Talk to close friends about personal problems. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

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#DECOR

How to gift the perfect bedroom furniture to newlyweds

You want to give a newlywed couple your blessings for starting a new life. As a pre-wedding gift, most people choose something that will make their lives easier. And what would a newlywed couple appreciate more than a well-furnished bedroom? Giving them the necessary furniture to set up their bedroom will relieve them from at least one chore to worry about.

It is understandable that you may wish to keep it a surprise. However, for something this big that comes with a truckload, you may need to solicit the opinions of those who will actually be using them. Try to get a sense of their likes and dislikes. Share with them or implicitly hint that you want to make this gesture — maybe as a parent, in-law, or a well-wisher.

First, you need to assess their needs. In furniture, do they like light colours that feel soft and peaceful, or vibrant hues that add energy and vigour to the space? Moreover, try to find out beforehand what colour their walls are painted.

Armed with insights into their preference, try to set a theme for their furniture. It is important to choose a wooden colour palette before setting your sights on any particular furniture.

Try to do a small survey of the room before making your purchase to better understand the size and layout. You do not want to get an oversized bed that blocks the window or leaves no room to walk. Opt for a regular queen-sized bed if the room is small. If they prefer darker themes, try to get them a mahogany wooden wardrobe that goes well with both light and vibrant-coloured walls.

For a bigger room, opt for a large wardrobe, spacious enough for both to have their compartments for clothes, jewellery, and other accessories.

For a room with light-coloured walls, opt for a walnut-coloured wardrobe. Also, you should keep the furniture and wall colours in harmony so that they reflect light, requiring less artificial lighting, helping the couple save on electricity bills.

Besides, a dressing table should belong to every self-respecting newlywed bride as she will be attending many invitations and family programmes following their wedding, and she will want to look her best when appearing in front of her in-laws and new relatives.

A bedside table goes a long way for a couple to keep their personal belongings such as medicines, books, or a phone charger. If the room is big enough, opt for two bedside tables, one on each side. A lamp over the bedside table can give a final touch to the room, allowing the spouses to romanticise a little light reading.

Finally, getting the couple all this furniture does not necessarily have to empty your bank account. Look for a furniture brand that offers Equated Monthly Instalments (EMI), allowing you to pay for your purchases in equal monthly payments. This option can help you pay off the furniture bills in manageable portions.

By Minhazur Rahman Alvee
Photo: Hatil