

VOLUME 24, ISSUE 43, TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2025
CHAITRA 25, 1431 BS

Star **LIFE** Style

E-mail: lifestyleds@yahoo.com
64-65 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215. A publication of *The Daily Star*



WELCOME BACK!

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MEMES

PHOTO: SABBIR AHMED KHAN

PENNY WISE
NASREEN SATTAR

Former CEO, Standard Chartered Bank,
Afghanistan



How to protect your money from risky schemes

High interest return is always a temptation, but staying grounded in your investment principles will help you make more rational and less emotionally driven decisions. We have to thoroughly understand the product we are investing in and the background of the financial institution concerned.

Despite being a banker for many years and writing columns on financial advice, I became a victim of being lured to invest in a high-return product. Alas! Today, with the current situation in many of the financial institutions, I am sad to say that I lost quite a substantial amount.

The officers of the particular financial institution, who used to call me daily, now do not answer my calls, and my messages are ignored. I am sure so many of us are going through this crisis, some more than others.

Here are some tips to help you to invest with caution —

Consider your reasons for investing

Your long-term financial goals should be prioritised. If your objective is stability or steady growth (for example, retirement savings), you should not think of high-risk, high-return investments. This may help you remain focused on your goals and avoid temptations. However, if the financial institution is a sound one with a good track record you can take the risk of investing.

Though investing in a savings account is a sure bet, your gains will be minimal due to the extremely low interest rates. However, do not forgo one completely. A savings account is a reliable place for an emergency fund, whereas a market investment is not.

Do not put all your eggs in one basket

It is always a risk to put all your savings in



a single financial institution that is offering you a high return. If anything were to happen to that institution, you might end up losing all your savings. A diversified investment portfolio is a much better option; a balance of low-risk returns and a minimum amount in high-risk returns.

A background check of the financial institution you are investing in should be a top priority.

You are bound to get endless WhatsApp messages, emails, texts, etc., offering you fixed deposits with very high returns. Do a thorough background check before you decide to invest. Always be suspicious of high returns over and above what the market is offering.

Think long-term

A long-term, steady approach to investing

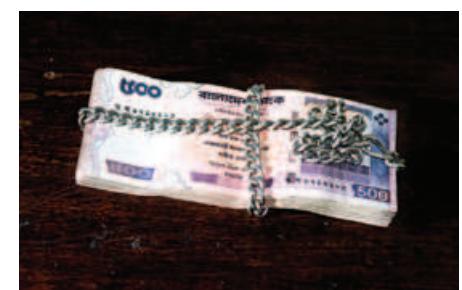
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tends to deliver more reliable outcomes. Quick returns are often fleeting. The market keeps changing, so be patient and wait for the right time. This will yield better results than chasing high returns in the short term.

Avoid 'Get-Rich-Quick' schemes

High returns often seem too good to be true — and that's because they usually are. If you are promised unrealistic returns with little to no risk, it's a major red flag.

Always be cautious and sceptical of "too good to be true" investment schemes. Just remember the case of Bernie Madoff, who deceived countless individuals and organisations, luring them into his Ponzi scheme with promises of high returns, only to eventually leave them penniless after being unable to pay back their investments.

Investing in Shanchaya Patras/ Government Bonds

This is considered one of the safest financial products available. There are three types of

Shanchaya Patras, each varying based on tenure and interest returns. However, the maximum investment an individual can make is limited to fifty lacs. Additionally, you can receive a tax rebate on investments up to Taka five lacs. For more details, please reach out to your branch manager.

Investing in the share market

Investing in the stock market carries higher risks but also the potential for higher returns compared to savings products. Over time, stocks have given the best average returns. However, there are no guarantees of making a profit, making stocks one of the riskiest investments.

Right now, the stock market is in a volatile situation, with most investments dropping in value, even though some are still doing okay. Despite hearing that the market will improve, it still seems pretty bad.

Photo: LS Archive/ Sazzad Ibne Sayed

INFERTILITY: A silent struggle

"Only my closest friends and a few family members knew about my IVF journey. I kept it private to avoid judgment, the whispers calling me 'defective' for not conceiving naturally. In India, I saw women in their 50s enduring the same gruelling treatments, all longing to hold a child. People do not understand our pain; they only expect us to have children, as if that's our sole purpose."

— Rumana, 35, while reflecting on her recent IVF success.

In Bangladesh, where motherhood is deeply woven into a woman's identity, infertility is more than just a medical condition — it is a deeply entrenched social stigma. For many women, being unable to conceive means being treated as incomplete, facing emotional abuse, and even experiencing violence.

While scientific advancements have led to Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) such as In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) and Intrauterine Insemination (IUI), these treatments remain largely inaccessible, expensive, and shrouded in misinformation.

According to a study "Infertility and Assisted Reproduction as Violent Experiences for Women in Bangladesh: Arts-based Intervention to Address GBV (Arts for I-ARTs)" by Dr Papreen Nahar and Farhana Alam, infertile women in Bangladesh often experience a form of social exile, where they are treated as incomplete, inadequate, or even cursed.

The hidden struggles of infertile women
According to Dr Nahar, an expert in global health and infection at the University of Sussex, infertility leads to serious social and emotional consequences for women in Bangladesh.

"Being childless can have severe impacts,



including family violence, social stigma, emotional abuse, and financial difficulties. Infertility is not included in public health policies, and there are few public services to support childless women. As a result, many turn to ARTs, but these procedures often expose them to further harm, including lack of informed consent, painful and intrusive treatments, and even life-threatening risks."

Research suggests that 15 per cent of Bangladeshi women struggle with infertility, the highest rate in South Asia. The emotional toll is immense, with many women experiencing depression, anxiety, and social isolation. Women who seek medical help often find themselves blamed and judged rather than supported.

At the same time, women endure constant pressure from their families and communities. Many are pushed into traditional healing practices before seeking



medical help, while others are pressured into arranged second marriages for their husbands, worsening their emotional trauma.

The cost of hope: Economic and healthcare barriers

Infertility treatments in Bangladesh remain prohibitively expensive. Dr Farhana Anam, a fertility specialist and the Medical Director of Harvest Infertility, highlights that while ARTs can solve many fertility issues, access remains limited due to financial constraints.

"IVF and IUI treatments are extremely expensive and unaffordable for most families. Many women remain unaware of their options or lack the autonomy to seek help. A major barrier is also the shortage of trained specialists and regulations to ensure quality care."

The high cost of ARTs exacerbates the inequalities faced by infertile women. Many families exhaust their life savings in pursuit of pregnancy only to be met with failed treatments, financial ruin, and social humiliation.

The role of male infertility: An untold story

Infertility is often framed as a women's issue in most cases, despite medical evidence showing that male infertility contributes to at least 50 per cent of infertility cases worldwide. However, due to deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs, male infertility is rarely acknowledged, let alone discussed openly. Women bear the brunt of the blame, while their husbands and male family members escape scrutiny.

According to the study "Infertility and Assisted Reproduction as Violent Experiences for Women in Bangladesh: Arts-based Intervention to Address GBV (Arts for I-ARTs)," infertile women in Bangladesh are often blamed for a couple's inability to conceive, regardless of medical evidence.

Even when male infertility is confirmed, women are pressured to remain silent to "protect the man's dignity" and uphold family honour.

The study highlights a critical gap in knowledge about male reproductive health in Bangladesh. Frequently, male infertility is not diagnosed early because men and their families often refuse to accept the possibility that infertility could be due to low sperm count, poor sperm motility, or other reproductive issues.

Dr Sabina Faiz Rashid, Director of the Center of Excellence for Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (CGSRHR) at BRAC University, explains, "We live in a patriarchal society where men are rarely held accountable. Even when male infertility is recognised, families – and often wives – conceal it to protect the man and the family's honour. As a result, women bear the burden alone, facing social stigma and ridicule."

This lack of accountability reinforces misconceptions about infertility and further isolates affected women. Men are rarely asked to undergo medical tests, while their wives are subjected to numerous diagnostic procedures and treatments without questioning the possibility that their husbands could be infertile.

Infertility and gender-based violence

A growing body of research, including that of Dr Papreen Nahar and Farhana Alam, argues that infertility-related discrimination should be recognised as a form of gender-based violence (GBV). The justice framework of reproductive health argues that women must have the right to access affordable fertility treatment, mental health care, and protection from stigma and violence.

One promising intervention is the use of art to address infertility-related GBV. Dr Nahar highlights that art can help women heal, advocate for their rights, and challenge societal norms.

"Art-based interventions can be especially powerful in addressing gender-based violence related to infertility. Theatre, documentaries, and storytelling can communicate women's struggles in ways that traditional advocacy cannot, breaking taboos and fostering empathy."

Participatory art programmes can provide safe spaces for women to express their pain, reclaim their voices, and inspire collective action against infertility stigma.

Future beyond motherhood

In our society, the expectation of motherhood is deeply ingrained, shaping a woman's identity from the moment she is married. Infertile women are not only seen as incomplete but also ignored in social circles and subjected to verbal abuse and emotional neglect. This dehumanisation must change.

Dr Rashid emphasises the urgency of redefining womanhood beyond childbirth, stating, "There is a deeply rooted belief that a woman's primary duty is to give birth. This thinking needs to change. Women are more than their ability to conceive. Society must recognise and celebrate their achievements, intelligence, and contributions beyond motherhood."

Therefore, it is high time for us to rewrite the narrative on infertility, moving from shame to support, from exclusion to inclusion, and from silence to empowerment.

By Ayman Anika

Photo: Collected

Special thanks to Dr Papreen Nahar (Brighton and Sussex Medical School, University of Sussex), Dr Sabina Faiz Rashid (BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University), and Dr Farhana Anam (Harvest Infertility) for their invaluable insights.



#PERSPECTIVE

THE ROLE OF VIDEO PODCASTS: Bridging global and local narratives

As the new darling of Bangladesh's digital content landscape, podcasts have quietly transformed how we consume information and engage with narratives. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst and pushed creators to experiment with new formats, and thus, video podcasts emerged as a practical and appealing medium to discuss diverse topics from lifestyle and career tips to mental health and pop culture.



2 Cents Podcast



Scane Media Podcast

No longer confined to just traditional media or YouTube's monologue-heavy vlogs, podcasts now offer an authentic, visually enriched platform that draws creators and audiences alike.

So, when did it start, what's driving this shift, and why does it resonate so deeply in our context? Let's explore through the lenses of three individuals who are shaping this space: Nafees Salim of the *2 Cents Podcast*, Neel Nafis of *The Blueprint Podcast*, and Sameer Ahmed, a pioneer of the field with *Scane Media*.

Authenticity at heart

Undoubtedly, one of their strongest appeals is their rawness. Unlike the glossy perfection of TV or radio, podcasts embrace imperfection. As Nafees Salim aptly puts it, "They are the new radio. What sets them apart is their authenticity. Unlike the polished and scripted nature of TV, video podcasts thrive on raw, unfiltered conversations."

This authenticity resonates deeply with a generation tired of overly rehearsed content. Sameer Ahmed of *SCANeDalous* — the podcast series of repute — notes that their content goes beyond superficial narratives



Neel Nafis of The Blueprint Podcast

to explore deeper reflections, tackling issues that traditional media often sidesteps.

"We offer a deeper dive into personalities and ensure the coexistence of long-form content with the bite-sized snippets that dominate our feeds," Ahmed observes.

Neel Nafis agrees, highlighting that imperfection is a feature and not a bug! "The imperfections are what make it unique. It's this rawness that attracts listeners seeking value-packed yet genuine content."

The podcasting world's charm lies in its ability to create a personal, almost intimate connection with its audience. Nafees Salim reflects, "Our listeners tell us that *2 Cents Podcast* feels like home...it's about being real, relatable, and most importantly, human."

This connection is not accidental but crafted through content that speaks directly to the listeners' lives.

Neel Nafis sees his creations as a platform for mentorship by proxy: "I bring mentor figures and let them straighten out my life; my viewers similarly put themselves in my shoes and take the advice as if it were for them."

The strategy works because it transforms the content from passive consumption to active participation.

Storytelling in a video-driven world

In a world increasingly dominated by video,



Blueprint Podcast

audio-only content was bound to evolve. Video podcasts — streamed on YouTube, Facebook, or TikTok — cater to Bangladesh's visually oriented audience.

Sameer Ahmed elaborates on the advantage: "Growing up in Australia, I saw how they dominated every social platform. When I moved to Dhaka, I realised creators here were still stuck in Facebook Lives, which they casually labelled as podcasts. At *Scane Media*, we took creators from basic setups to studios with a calculated strategy for distribution."

This shift has paid off, as some like *2 Cents* amassed millions of views.

Neel Nafis points out the scalability of videos: "You can turn a one-hour episode into multiple mini-clips and reels, ensuring

professionals.

Nafees Salim recalls the impact of an episode with Neel Nafis: "Listeners told us it inspired them to take charge of their careers. That's the power — sparking real change through conversations."

Rafayat Rakib, a content creator and entrepreneur, recently started his own show. Asking why, the driven individual shared that he believes in using his platform to inspire Bangladesh's youth to take charge of their futures.

Explaining his motivation, he shared, "Bangladesh needs direction from a top-rated professional and a certified seller! Among so many pseudo-successful freelancers, someone with a proven track record must speak to encourage the youth of the country regardless of their backgrounds or qualifications."

For Rafayat, it is a call to arms for those who feel side-lined by traditional structures. "Everyone deserves a second chance," he adds. "I want dropouts from corporate ladders, society, and universities to march forward to create job opportunities for more people like us in Bangladesh 2.0. Because if we don't do this, who will?"

Sameer Ahmed's *SCANeDalous* focuses on peeling back layers of its guests' lives, diving into failures and personal growth instead of surface-level success stories. "It's not about their latest movie or big win; it's about their heartbreaks, crises, and growth mentality," he shares.

Overcoming challenges

While the trajectory is promising, the journey is not without problems. One significant hurdle is production cost. Building a studio, ensuring quality audio-visual setups, and creating engaging content require substantial investment. Sameer Ahmed notes that despite the potential, some creators remain reluctant to invest in better production.

There's also the challenge of balancing personal passion with audience expectations. As Neel Nafis puts it, "I just create what I'm passionate about, attracting an audience that shares those interests. It's not about catering to them; it's about aligning with them."



Nafees Salim of the 2 Cents Podcast

Maintaining authenticity while navigating diverse opinions is a tightrope walk. Nafees Salim remarks, "We haven't had to host guests we disagree with yet, but if we do, the goal will be dialogue, not debate. There's always something to learn."

A cultural shift in the making

Currently, video podcasts represent a significant shift, one where authenticity, depth, and connection take precedence over traditional media's glitz. They represent shifting audience expectations and a rising need for in-depth discussions, making them more than simply a passing trend.

Video podcasts are already shaping narratives. Nafees mentions how an episode about his decision to return to Bangladesh sparked conversations on reversing the brain drain.

Ahmed adds that podcasts combat the 'brain rot' of high-retention, low-value content by offering thought-provoking discussions.

"The more we consume these conversations, the more they impact our perspectives and ideas," he says.

Neel Nafis envisions them as tools for personal growth: "Every podcast I host teaches me something valuable. It's like having a front-row seat to a masterclass with every guest."

The impact is reflected in the numbers. Platforms like *Scane Media* report producing over 200 episodes for 25+ clients, generating over a billion views. Nafees Salim's *2 Cents Podcast* alone went from 20,000 subscribers to nearly half a million in two years — a testament to the format's growing popularity.

Creators like Sameer Ahmed, Neel Nafis, and Nafees Salim are spearheading a movement as the industry matures, demonstrating that the potential is limitless when the proper balance of strategy, enthusiasm, and genuineness is put into play. In a country where every word carries weight, videos are giving voice to ideas that deserve to be heard, ensuring they resonate well beyond the screen.



Sameer Ahmed, a pioneer of the field with Scane Media.

wider reach. The visual element also makes them more engaging, giving audiences a chance to connect on a deeper level."

Bridging global trends with local narratives

The topics tackled by Bangladeshi creators are as diverse as the audience they cater to. From entrepreneurship and personal growth to culture and societal narratives, they bridge a gap. Episodes delve into everything from reversing brain drain to freelance strategies for young

By K Tanzeel Zaman

Photo: Courtesy



Dhaka has had many names over the years — City of Rickshaws, City of Mosques, City of Magic, and many more. Perhaps, calling it 'Mini-Bangladesh' is not a misnomer either. People from every nook and cranny of the country come together in this place, and each brings something that makes it what it is today.

When we talk about Bangladesh, we refer to everything that makes up this nation. The people, the language, the food, the arts and culture, the festivals and most importantly, all of this come together and form an identity that is our own. Dhaka, in that sense, reflects the whole country in this small metropolis.

A MELTING POT

Kaniz Mezbabin works at a private university. For her, living in this metropolis has been a remarkable journey.

"Coming here was scary, but later, it became fun and quite a learning experience. During my undergraduate years, I had multiple roommates, and all of them were from different districts. This gave me a unique opportunity to interact. This would not have been possible had I not come here for my studies," she said.

"Melting pot" is a sociological term that usually refers to America, highlighting how it holds diverse cultures and how they all come together in harmony. While this concept ideally requires immigrants, I feel like this is not an inappropriate term when it comes to this city.

Dhaka and its inhabitants hold a culture of their own. While that is true, it's the people from other localities that turn the wheels of the metropolis. This can be felt during the holiday seasons when the average people turn homebound and the city becomes a desolate ground.

All these people come from their own districts and they bring together their culture. Once in Dhaka, they try to blend in. Like they say — When in Rome, do as the Romans! So, when you are here, one has no choice but to do as the city wants you to do. And these days, that is to follow a routine, learn to accept traffic congestion, and go crazy during holidays.

FUSION AND INTRODUCTION

The place forces people to come together

in an almost symbiotic relationship. Thus, fusing their cultures.

Yeasin Arafat is a school teacher originating from Pabna, and lives in a mess near Kuril Bishwaroad. Like all messes in Dhaka, he has to share a room with a few others. One of them is from Narsingdi, and the other is from Chattogram.

"I had never met someone from the port city. We have so much difference in language and culture that it often makes me wonder," said Arafat recalling all the times he heard his roommate speak over the phone and speak in Chatgaiya. "It made me curious, and to be honest, I kind of want to learn Chatgaiya now," he smirked.

HOLDING ON AND LETTING GO

My favourite way to describe the capital in one word is "unforgiving"! It can transform into many forms, but one thing remains constant — it is demanding. And one realises this just as they move into this city.

Shamim Ahmed works at a private bank. The 30-year-old moved to Dhaka from his hometown of Cumilla when he was just a little boy. It has been almost two decades since he moved here, and his experience tells you a lot about the place — how difficult it is to cling to one's roots and culture!

It can be difficult to find people from your locality, and that takes a toll on people who tend to get homesick.

"It helped that when I was completing my undergraduates at Dhaka University there was an organisation for people from my upazila. I came to know a lot of individuals from my district through this network. Sometimes, when you feel homesick, you will not believe how one simple gesture can help. Being able to speak in your local dialect is a great respite," he reminisced.

Ashraful Kabir Razul is the member secretary of a similar community, "We are the people of Ruppur", and shared something similar.

"Our community is village-centric. We started back in 2020 when we realised that there were a lot of people from our locality living in Dhaka, but we lacked unity. So, an initiative was taken to establish a group," shared Razul. "For five years, we have arranged picnics and similar events, but we have bigger plans. We want to cherish our culture and we want to create a community that helps each other because in a large city like this, where nobody has time for anyone else, only your

brothers will come to help."

SEARCH FOR A FAMILIAR TASTE

One thing is clear — a man can try as hard as he wants, but escaping nostalgia is no easy task. And most people do not even want to. That being said, holding on to your culture is so much more than a longing — it's one's identity and individualism. There are the basic elements of one's personality, and society itself stands on these elements.

So, when one looks for the familiar taste of

mezbani gosht in Dhaka or chuijhal to tickle his taste buds as he can back home, it should be applauded.

Soikat Barua, an administrator who works at BUET, loves trying out new food and experiences, but being someone from Chattogram, he is not very impressed with the offerings of Chittagonian food here.

"Don't get me wrong, they are trying, and

some of these restaurants are doing great, but I have not been able to find that familiar taste that I get back home," he said, admitting that homesickness might be a factor in play.

The same goes for Tamzida Tamanna, a fresh graduate from DU who hails from Bogura.

"Most of the time, you do not find that signature dish from your hometown. So, when the mood strikes, you either have to make it yourself or soothe yourself with a Dhakaiya alternative. I can never get into the curds that you find in Dhaka. Call me selective, but that's the way it is!"

DHAKA

A city of many stories

CULTURES

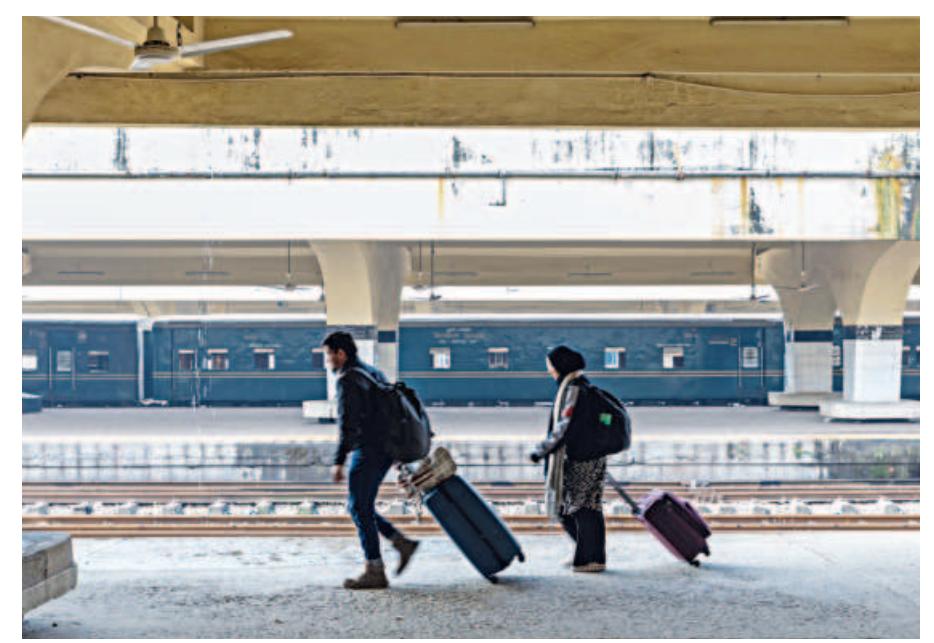


If one goes looking, there are a million stories in Dhaka, each with its unique twists. For education or livelihood, people have left their hometowns and settled in the city.

While some nurture a distaste for the city, people at large have embraced the capital as Dhaka has embraced them as its own. In all its chaos and charm, it is much more than just the capital of Bangladesh. It is a place where stories converge, cultures intertwine, and identities evolve.

Amid its unforgiving pace, Dhaka remains a place that unites, proving that even in the busiest metropolis, nostalgia and cultural pride thrive. In embracing its people, the capital city truly becomes a reflection of the nation it represents.

By Ashif Ahmed Rudro
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel
Location: Kamalapur Railway Station



PUNCHLINES AND PROGRESS

The rise of stand-up comedy

From the witty exchanges of Bengali folk songs and the satirical undertones of theatrical productions to the cheeky punchlines of television dramas, laughter has been an essential part of our culture and a popular outlet for connection and commentary. However, the concept of stand-up comedy, an individual armed with a microphone and delivering witty and observational humour to a live audience, has been a foreign notion until relatively recently.

Over the years, the scene, especially in urban areas like Dhaka, has transformed into the new go-to for entertainment from an obscure idea. So, it is natural for one to wonder how this transformation happened. What made people acknowledge stand-up comedy as a budding art form? The answers lie in the stories of its pioneers and the societal shifts that have shaped its growing popularity.

Ferdous Utsho, an employee at a digital marketing agency, regularly attends shows with his friends to unwind after a hectic workweek.

"On Thursday nights, we gather at a comedy show to catch up and laugh



Sami Doha

together. It has become our way of escaping the daily grind and starting the weekend on a positive note," he shares.

The beginnings: A slow start

You tell people you're starting a comedy club. What would be their first reaction? Perhaps laughter...but not the good kind!

That's exactly what Naveed Mahbub, one of the pioneers in Bangladesh, faced when he launched Naveed's Comedy Club



Nilima Rafi

(NCC), where he now remains as its CEO. According to Mahbub, the story began during the early 2010s — a time when the concept was barely understood.

He elaborates, "When we started the Club back in 2010, the biggest challenge was finding performers. We didn't have many comedians at the time, and to organise regular shows, we needed a consistent line-up."

In the beginning, shows were sporadic,

poorly attended, and often misunderstood by the majority. Sadly, artistes who emerged during this time leaned heavily toward slapstick or theatrical humour and borrowed inspiration from Western styles.

Remembering the initial struggles, Sami Doha, a telecom expert turned celebrated stand-up comedian, says, "You see, back then, performances were mainly Dhaka-centric, and shows were sporadic. The audience did not quite understand what stand-up comedy was, and performers were few and far between. Everyone considered it to be a hobby and not a profession."

The lack of platforms only contributed to the struggle, as early enthusiasts mostly performed in cafés or as opening acts for bigger events. Nevertheless, the hurdles were there, and so was the determination.

The turning point

According to Naveed Mahbub, the advent of social media platforms in the 2010s was a game-changer for the stand-up comedy scene, with Facebook and YouTube becoming vital tools for performers to share content, reach wider audiences, and establish a presence beyond live shows.





"Digital media, especially social media, has played a central role in spreading the word," says Mahbub. "With comedians sharing reels, shorts, and videos online, it has noticeably boosted awareness and interest in stand-up comedy."

Thanks to this digital revolution, the reach of comedy was not only amplified, but audiences started to become aware of the format.

Echoing the same sentiment, Doha shares, "Truly, social media has been a game-changer for the comedians. Regular reels and videos rack up hundreds of thousands of views, helping us build fan bases far beyond Dhaka. On top of that, stand-up specials on OTT platforms have also brought Bangladeshi comedy to new heights."

With time, open mics became more frequent, and stand-up comedians gained visibility. Now, there are organisations like Naveed's Comedy Club (NCC) and Standup Dhaka that dedicatedly nurture new talents. The popularity and support those performers have received have paved the way for a growing talent pool, making it easier to organise regular shows not only in Dhaka but also in other districts.

A flourishing phenomenon

Today, the scene in Bangladesh has come a long way from its humble beginnings. We now see cities like Dhaka and Chattogram hosting regular events, ranging from intimate open mics to large-scale performances. Moreover, shows



Naveed Mahbub

are performed weekly and in our native language, which has made stand-up comedy more relatable to wider audiences and created a thriving community of enthusiasts.

Dhaka has become the epicentre of this cultural shift, as Doha details, "The city boasts multiple shows, thanks to relentless efforts from dedicated venues and organisers."

He highlights how the frequency of these events has fostered a sense of community among comedians and allowed audiences to develop a deeper appreciation for stand-up comedy as an art form.

Comedians now focus on everyday themes that the audience can connect with, from the chaos of Dhaka's traffic to



Poushi Razzaque

quirky family dynamics and the absurdities of bureaucracy and politics. These topics are mostly delivered in the audience's native language, which has further increased its popularity.

"I would say it is both a challenge and a thrill when it comes to tailoring jokes that cater to a diverse Bangladeshi audience," says Doha. The art lies in addressing shared experiences while respecting cultural sensitivities."

While people elsewhere might delve into edgy or provocative material, Bangladeshi performers often take a more discreet and sober approach, balancing humour with respect for societal norms.

Major milestones, such as Shilpkala Academy hosting its first-ever stand-

up comedy show in 2024, have further legitimised the art form. The show featured notable performers like Mahedi Hasan Toru, Akhlaq Siddiqi, and Shawon Majumder.

Events like these demonstrate that stand-up comedy is no longer confined to niche spaces but is becoming an accepted and celebrated part of Bangladesh's cultural landscape. Moreover, events like the Roast of Salman Muqtadir, which raised funds for flood victims, have demonstrated that Bangladeshi audiences are open to edgier humour, provided it is handled with sensitivity.

Another defining feature of today's stand-up scene is how people are experimenting with different styles. You may notice some using observational humour while others rely on self-deprecating humour and light-hearted commentary on societal taboos. This growing diversity is truly commendable and the best part about this is the development of a unique sense of community among comedians and audiences.

As the scene continues to expand, its role as both an entertainment medium and a social gathering phenomenon is becoming increasingly important. This shift highlights the broader cultural impact of stand-up comedy in Bangladesh. It's not just about the jokes — it's about bringing people together and creating moments of joy in a fast-paced world.

By Ayman Anika

Photo: Courtesy, Shadab Shahrokh Hai

FROM LAUGHS TO LEGACY

The rise of meme culture in Bangladesh

What started as a niche form of entertainment, in recent years, has grown into a medium for storytelling, political satire, and everyday connection. Memes now serve as a mirror of society, and as Bangladesh continues to embrace digitalisation, they are now contributing to online conversations and sparking social change.

From their origins as simple jokes to their evolution as a medium for critique, activism, and connection, they have become an integral part of our digital culture. They entertain us, reflect our realities, and provide a platform for collective thought and action.



From jokes to cultural commentary
In the early 2010s, memes in Bangladesh first gained traction and were prominently influenced by global trends. Rubel Rony, the founder of Memelate — a template library — details how the journey began.

"Back in 2006, Facebook was a different platform — people used it mostly to communicate, share stories, and upload pictures. After 2010, images like the troll and frog faces began creating a buzz, and people started sharing these widely," says Rony.

According to the popular creator, local content was initially dominated by global templates borrowed from platforms like Reddit and 9GAG. While these made people laugh, they inherently lacked a unique identity. Recognising this gap, he founded Memelate to archive what was created by Bangladeshi 'memers' and empower local artists.

"Platforms like 'Moja Loss' and 'Keu Amare Mairala' were initially very popular among young people. I founded Memelate primarily to promote Bangla templates. It's a repository where users can download prototypes and customise them with their creativity," he adds.

That said, early works were undoubtedly funny and relatable, but what they essentially lacked was that genuine touch of Bangladeshi context and impactful stories that would have the power to promote societal change.

However, we did not have to wait very long! As time progressed, so did creativity and thus came the advent of political satires, through which online activists address more serious issues.



Laughter with a purpose
By blending wit with metaphorical storytelling to navigate societal and political constraints, activists started to tackle complex topics, particularly politics. Rony compares this creativity to Iranian filmmakers who use metaphors to work around restrictions.

"Despite laws like the Digital Security Act (DSA), our creators came up with witty and humorous content that was metaphorical in nature," he elaborates.

Still, many popular pages could not escape the restrictions imposed by the previous government, and an example



is the closing down of *Moja Loss* in 2015 on account of circulating political commentaries through memes.

Many enthusiasts were saddened by this closure — one of them being Shayak Chowdhury, who was an HSC examination candidate back then.

"*Moja Loss* dared to humour the government in a satirical manner, which I think was brilliant. Political humour is necessary because you can criticise authority through metaphors. The closure of this page came out as a huge disappointment," he remarks.

During the July Movement, the power of this form as a tool for mobilisation was particularly evident when thousands of people took to the streets, demanding systemic change. Satirical works — whether on the former prime minister or her other ministers — not only entertained people but also spread information and motivated them to defy the restrictions.

"I saw a noteworthy rise in activity,

especially after July 2024. Moreover, the number of downloads on Memelate's website (which I manage) skyrocketed. It shows how they became a tool for spreading awareness and rallying support."

Memes have continued to play a role in keeping the conversation alive even after the protests subsided. So, it would be safe to assume that they have become the unofficial pulse-check of our society that reflects not only humour but also our pent-up frustrations. Now, creators use jokes to roast authority figures, call out inefficiencies and remind people of the need for vigilance.

Connecting through shared experiences
One prominent example would be artist



Mehedi Hasan's 'Kopila-Majhi' series, which captures the duality of human thought.

"I chose these characters because they represent the questions and answers we grapple with daily. Kopila asks, and Majhi responds — it's a dialogue that encourages people to reflect on their beliefs and societal norms," Hasan explains.

Indeed, the 'Kopila-Majhi' series is like watching a philosophical debate unfold at a tea stall! As Hasan mentions, memes help to create a sense of shared understanding by capturing the idiosyncrasies of daily life — whether it's the frustration of load-shedding, the excitement of Eid shopping, or the infamous traffic of Dhaka. Ultimately, they distil these experiences into bite-sized pieces of humour that resonate with everyone.

For people like Mehedi Hasan, this relatability, with a dash of humour, is central to the effort they put into their creations. Hasan elaborates, "When people engage with my content — sharing, commenting, or adding their thoughts. It helps me understand their pulse. People's feedback inspires my work."

The challenges of creation

As fun and relatable as they are, creating meaningful and original content is not always a walk in the park. Very frequently, oversaturation in the market leads to recycled ideas and shallow humour, which greatly dilutes the quality of meme culture. Additionally, one still has to navigate a fine line when addressing sensitive topics, especially politics.

Hasan acknowledges these challenges, saying, "The hardest part is staying neutral while addressing relevant topics. My goal is to create content that makes people feel seen



and heard without pushing agendas or being divisive."

On being ethical, Rony emphasises, "Memers need to adhere to ethical boundaries. If you are not conscious and create only for the sake of trends, you can seriously harm someone's reputation. Once something is on the internet, there's no erasing it. That's why we emphasise ethics in workshops and interactions with creators."

As we all know, humour is subjective and what might make you laugh might offend another. Therefore, creators must be mindful of how their content impacts individuals and communities.



A brighter path ahead

The future looks bright despite all the challenges that persist. With platforms offering resources for meme creators and an ever-growing audience hungry for relatable content, the culture is poised for continued growth.

"They have become part of our lives. They entertain, inform, and connect us. I believe the future of memes and memers is promising. Humour is an inherited trait for us, as Bengalis, and as long as we have stories to tell, our work will thrive," reflects Rony.

For Hasan, the importance lies in their ability to inspire change. "History is often documented in traditional ways, but memes allow us to live history in real-time. They have shown us that art and humour can be powerful tools for expression."

By Ayman Anika

Meme: Mehedi Hasan, Rubel Rony

SCENT OF SPRING

Songbirds, cherry blossoms, and warmer days

LIFE AS IT IS

WARA KARIM

Writer, painter, gardener, content creator
Website: <http://www.scratchingout.com>

To me, birdsongs are the harbinger of spring. I know the season is about to arrive in Delaware because after a series of unusually frigid mornings, which lasted from December through February, cheerful chirping of red-breasted robins, blue jays, and chickadees has now filled the morning air. In contrast to spring mornings, winter mornings are so hushed and uneventful that one may even question if birds exist in this land at all.

At the first sight of a blue jay perched on the backyard fence or a cardinal dancing on a leafless cherry branch, I know that my wait for spring is almost over, for I have learned from past experiences that an increase in bird activity signifies the approach of the beautiful season.

In this part of the world, nature comes alive with an abundance of activity. Everywhere I look, I witness signs of life. I witness new life in the pair of robins that's building a nest outside our bathroom window.

In May and June, we will discover blue eggshells in the garden. In spring, I witness life in the adult Eastern gray squirrels which munch on peanuts and bask in the spring sun, the young ones playfully leap from branch to branch.

I am reminded that the time has come to clean the backyard birdbath. With the return of migratory birds and other

species that sleep through winter, we see a lot of activity around the house. Feathered friends come searching for food and water in our backyard: mourning doves, blue jays, cardinals, sparrows, and robins are the most frequent visitors, often seen dancing, drinking, and/or bathing in the birdbath.

Joy sweeps through the animal and plant kingdoms as everything in the natural world prepares for the arrival of pretty flowers, longer days, clear skies, and gentle breezes. Like everything else in nature, I also eagerly anticipate the time when the days will be warmer and the beauty of young leaves, vibrant daffodils, and delicate cherry blossoms will light up my world.

Spring, though short-lived, is an enchanting season. Every season may bring the same kind of energy and activity in nature, and yet every spring is unique. Springtime's subtleties are only perceived and cherished by those who discover new ways to love the season every year. Every spring is, therefore, the same yet different.

Photo:
Courtesy



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KOHINOOR CHEMICAL

A dining room makeover for warm post-Eid gatherings

Even after all the vibrant Eid celebrations, your dining room remains an important place to spend time with family or friends. To help you fill your days with food and fun, you might want a room where everyone can sit back, relax, and enjoy conversations. Some subtle changes in your dining room can portray an atmosphere of bliss and relaxation, making sure that the gatherings cherished together as a family become warm and comforting.

Soft and cosy lighting

Lighting plays a crucial role in creating the mood for any room. To create an aura of relaxation in your dining room, choose soft and warm lighting rather than bright overhead light fixtures.

Warm-toned pendant lighting or well-placed table lamps would add to the hominess of the room. Some fairy lights or



candles in elegant beige holders will shed soft light that enhances the splendour and makes the room feel snug and welcoming for your loved ones.

Seating for fun banters

After an appetising Eid dinner, sitting down

with comfort is a must. So, you can go for cushy seating with upholstered chairs or a long bench with soft pillows in your dining room. A throw or a table runner in soothing, neutral shades like beige, light grey, or soft pastels would also go a long way in making the room lighter.

If the dining room is an open-plan, you may think of creating a cosy corner with comfy chairs and a small sofa, letting family members sit after their meals and be close to each other to converse.

Inviting nature into the decor

Bringing a piece of nature indoors can evoke a sense of tranquillity in your dining area. In fact, a few indoor plants could easily beautify the room while purifying the air.

Plants such as peace lilies, ferns, and succulents will present no maintenance challenge to you; they will also synchronise with the dining area's theme. Besides that, a floral table centrepiece would symbolise serenity and still retain a bit of the festive feel post-Eid.

Declutter to dine

A cluttered dining space can sometimes ruin the whole mood you intend to have for the gathering with your friends or family. So, ensure that all unwanted and tangled materials are taken away from the room to give it a cleaner look.

You should maintain simple but classy table settings with minimalist cutlery. A fresh, organised space creates a wonderful environment for everyone

to relax and soak in the moment, free of distractions.

Knick-knacks and personal touch

When all the major works are done, get personal with some accents in your dining room. Consider putting up framed memories with family, handmade placemats, or heirloom objects that express your personality.

These little things will remind everyone of the close bonds and give your space an even warmer feel. With comfort, simplicity, and warmth in consideration, the dining area then becomes the true heart of your home, long after Eid festivities.

However, upgrading your dining room for a relaxing impression might not feel so relaxing for your wallet. Thankfully, the option of EMI is a blessing that you can avail. Whether it is upgrading lighting fixtures, buying a new sofa set, or purchasing decorative items, EMI allows you to buy it without burdening your finances.

Moreover, EMIs can also provide access to expensive items that you might not have ever imagined obtaining, all within your budget. In any case, with EMI, you can always create your dream space without any compromise.

So, you can now enjoy a nice meal, and this renovation will turn your dining room into a place where everyone can unwind, recharge, and, most importantly, be connected by the memory of such a wonderful gathering!

By Samayla Mahjabin Koishy

Photo: Courtesy

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