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RISING STARS

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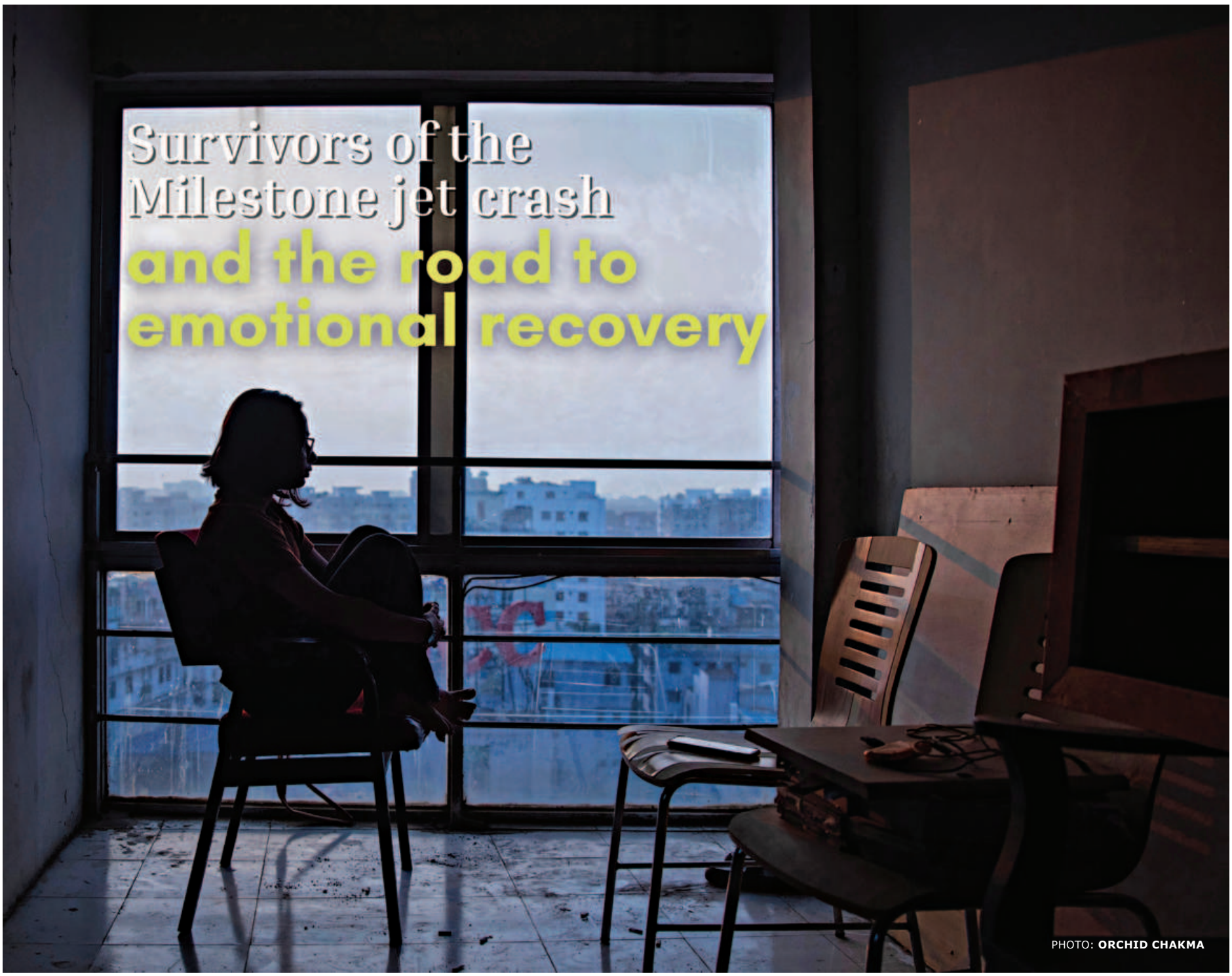


Survivors of the Milestone jet crash and the road to emotional recovery

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

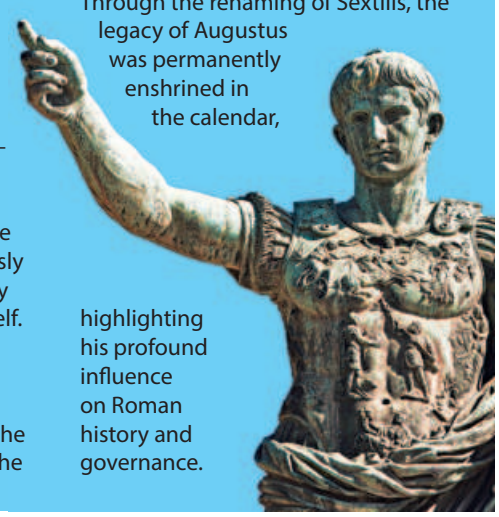
DID YOU KNOW?

How the month of August got its name

The month of August was named after Augustus Caesar, the first Emperor of Rome. In 27 BC, Augustus rose to absolute power, establishing the Roman Empire following years of civil unrest. About two decades later, in 8 BC, the Roman Senate officially renamed the month of "Sextilis"—which means "sixth" in Latin—to "August" in his honor.

Augustus followed the example of Julius Caesar, who had previously renamed the fifth month, formerly called Quintilis, to July after himself.

Augustus was celebrated for strengthening imperial authority, launching extensive building projects across Rome, reforming the taxation system, and expanding the empire's frontiers. His rule ushered in the Pax Romana, a long period of relative peace and prosperity. Through the renaming of Sextilis, the legacy of Augustus was permanently enshrined in the calendar, highlighting his profound influence on Roman history and governance.



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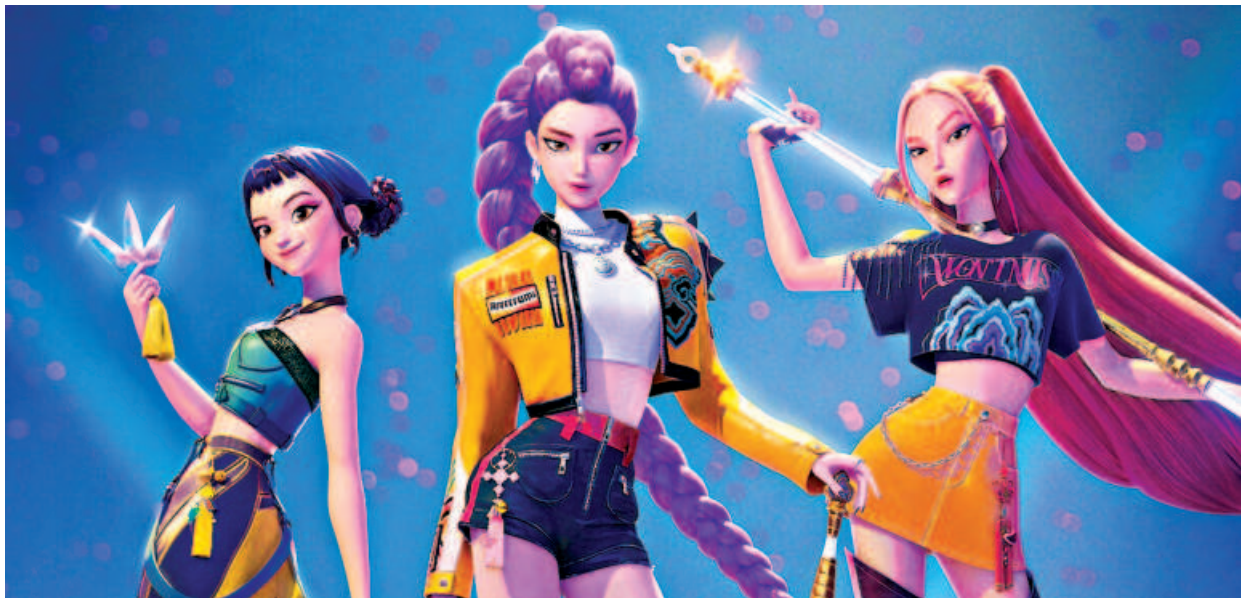
KPOP DEMON HUNTERS

A synesthetic guide to slaying monsters, being an idol, and girlhood

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA



Whether or not you're a K-pop fan, it's hard to escape this genre's clutches due to its sky-high popularity. Odds are, you've bopped along to a K-pop song in passing or been disgruntled by how much you've had to hear "APT". last year (not me though; I still love that song). Given how it's all the rage nowadays, has there been a better time than now to release a movie about K-pop? And what if demons who thrive on human souls were thrown into the mix as well?

KPop Demon Hunters does exactly that while exploring themes of self-acceptance, sacrifice, and friendships – all wrapped up in a colourful package with hilarious gags.

The story follows Huntrix, a girl group comprising Rumi, Mira, and Zoey. Not only is the trio smashing the charts as a day job but they're also powerful hunters who use their musical and combat abilities to slay demons to restore the powerful barrier called "Honmoon"that will keep Gwi-Ma, the main antagonist, sealed forever and banish all demons along with him.

The three hunters have a seemingly easy ride winning hearts and strengthening the barrier by connecting people through their music until the Saja Boys show up to stake their claims on Huntrix's fans. The protagonists, however, can't let that happen, as the fate of the world hinges on the honmoon turning golden.

The movie is engaging enough to watch even if you've never explored any facet of K-pop with its gorgeous neon-bright visuals, fast-paced action sequences, and realistic interpersonal relationships. The plot might feel somewhat predictable at times, but that does little to take away from the movie's premise which is refreshing enough on its own. Besides, I am a big champion of simplistic yet enthralling plots.

The film also boasts an incredible soundtrack from beloved K-pop artists like TWICE. Tracks like "Takedown", "Soda Pop", and "Golden" will have you jamming along throughout the ride (I maintain that "Your Idol" is the best song on the tracklist).

Despite the wholesomeness that engulfs the storyline, if you're expecting to giggle away the entire duration of its 155-minute runtime, you'd be wrong. Without giving away any major spoilers, the movie plays with your emotions in all the right ways. If you feel a strong compulsion to tell your friends how much you love them after watching the movie, you wouldn't be the only one.

Of course, this review wouldn't be complete without paying homage to Jinu, the leader of the Saja Boys, whose character depth makes him much more than a token love interest.

Being a former K-pop fan, it's also quite interesting to notice the critiques of the industry incorporated without being too on the nose. The obsession with social media points and numbers on the chart, artists being overworked without adequate time to rest, and the perfectpublic persona idols need to keep up at all times are all points of discussion within K-pop fandoms. In contrast, it also manages to portray the fun quirks of K-pop through the fans quite realistically, all without trivialising the way music impacts its audience.

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From Chattogram to the world

UCBD'S ROLE IN SHAPING GLOBAL FUTURES

Sometimes, all it takes to achieve real success in life is the courage to step out of your comfort zone. For many students, that step begins with a decision that challenges the traditional route and opens new possibilities. For Mashrur and Bareerah, who are both from Chattogram, that decision took them to Universal College Bangladesh (UCBD), which has become a trusted education partner for Bangladeshi students to launch their global academic journeys.

Instead of the traditional A Level or SAT route, both students chose UCBD, where internationally recognised foundation and diploma programmes are offered in partnership with Monash University. Today, Mashrur and Bareerah's stories are powerful examples of how ambition, guidance, and the right educational choice can change your future.

Bareerah Al Manha Begh

Mashrur Mahmud Khan

Finding UCBD

Mashrur, a former student of CIDER International School, first heard about UCBD from a senior. "I was surprised when I learned that an institution in Dhaka was offering Monash University Foundation Year (MUFY). I always thought these were only available overseas," said Mashrur. He added, "At first, I was a little sceptical. But after doing some research and learning that many of my peers had actually gone abroad from UCBD, I realised that it's a genuine, government-authorised higher education institution."

Mashrur joined UCBD right after his O Levels. The prospect of completing his foundation locally while still opening up pathways to international universities sealed the deal for him. Mashrur successfully completed his foundation, and when he considered the convenience and low cost of completing an international degree in Dhaka, he opted to do a three-year University of Lancashire Business and Marketing degree at UCBD.

For Bareerah Al Manha Begh, who is from Chittagong Grammar School (CGS), UCBD offered a perfect pathway to an international education. She initially joined UCBD because her family wanted to keep her close while she prepared to study overseas. She said, "I had always wanted to study in Australia. But I was young, and it made my parents comfortable and happy to keep me close for a bit longer. UCBD gave me the option to complete my foundation and then the first year of my Monash University degree in Bangladesh. It was amazing to get the same high-quality Monash education while still being at home, and it made the transition to university cheaper and easier for me."

A Monash student from day one

When Mashrur and Bareerah enrolled in the Monash University foundation and continuing degree programmes, they were Monash students from day one. Bareerah shared, "At UCBD, we use exactly the same online learning resources and materials as Monash students in Australia. The curriculum is also the same, and the teaching style is the same because all the lecturers are Monash-approved and use the Monash method. Studying at UCBD is like being in Australia!"

UCBD students have a head start because they are already familiar with international standards and methods of teaching and learning. This makes their academic transition to an overseas university much smoother and gives them the confidence they need to plan their next steps.

Academic and emotional support

Bareerah and Mashrur believe that what sets UCBD apart is not only the academic rigour, but also the strong support system it offers to students. "The lecturers are always available, even outside formal lecture times, and they are always ready to help and advise. When I had a family emergency, the Student Support team helped me take some time off, and my lecturers worked out a new study plan so I could complete my courses and exams on time," said Mashrur.

Bareerah pointed out that UCBD was really helpful when she decided to switch from science to business studies. She said, "When I decided to make the change, all my lecturers helped me, and sometimes, I relied on them emotionally rather than my peers."

Beyond the classroom

UCBD also helped the students to grow outside the classroom. Bareerah talked about how she used to be quite shy but became more outgoing and confident through getting involved in student activities and organising events. "I met people from all over the country, and made some great friends. UCBD helped me develop my leadership and communication skills, and all my contributions were recognised with certificates presented to me by Professor Hew Gill, President of UCBD," she said.

Mashrur too found his stride in Dhaka. He shared, "Before UCBD, I had been part of small events in Chattogram. But after coming to UCBD, I got to work with big names like Let's Viber and Tyger Media. I even helped with the Arka Fashion Week and an Atif Aslam concert. The network and visibility I gained at UCBD changed everything.".

Looking ahead

Mashrur is now completing his UK degree at UCBD, while Bareerah is preparing to move to Monash University in Australia. As they prepare for the next chapters of their lives, they credit UCBD for helping them find purpose, for building their confidence, and for showing them how to study local and think global.

Stories like those of Mashrur and Bareerah send a powerful message: Global success doesn't always begin with a plane ticket; it can start right here at home, with the right guidance, grit, and a place like UCBD.

Survivors of the Milestone jet crash and the road to emotional recovery

SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM *and* **FAISAL BIN IQBAL**

On July 21, shortly after a Bangladesh Air Force fighter jet crashed within the premises of Milestone College in the Diabari area of Uttara, a deeply distressing video began circulating on social media. Filmed from inside the campus moments after the crash, the footage captured scenes of chaos—students, parents, staff, and passers-by running in fear and confusion.

Among the heart-wrenching visuals was a Milestone student desperately trying to help another injured student lying on the ground. At the time of writing, this publication has not been able to independently confirm the condition of the injured student. Yet, the image of a young child, forced to confront such horror and tend to a friend or peer in such a tragic moment, is extremely saddening.

That same day, in an interview with BBC Bangla, Farhan Hasan, a student of class ten of Milestone College, recounted his harrowing experience. Farhan had just stepped out of his classroom, chatting with friends after finishing an exam, when the jet crashed into the school grounds.

"The burning plane was hitting the building right in front of my eyes," Farhan told BBC Bangla. "My best friend, the one I was in the exam hall with, died right in front of my eyes."

For young people like Farhan, and many others far younger than him, witnessing such an unimaginable tragedy leaves scars that, although not visible to the naked eye, run deep. The shock of seeing friends injured or lose their lives in a place they once considered safe can shatter their sense of security, creating emotional wounds that may take years to heal.

"After any traumatic event, especially one as monumental as this one, it is expected that a person will experience stress. And if the survivor is a child, the impacts may be more severe. Primarily, we observe the child experiencing acute stress, anxiety and feelings of insecurity. They often relive the events through flashbacks. After about 1.5 months to 6 months, it may even develop into PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), personality disorders, or even long-term depression," says Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed, Professor of Child, Adolescent and Family Psychiatry at Faridpur Medical College.

As per research published in the European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, children who experience severe trauma often struggle with low self-esteem, persistent anxiety, and depression. While some try to suppress or deny the memory of their trauma, others build a false sense of self to mask the pain, sometimes turning to unhealthy means of coping.

"If a child develops any of the long-term impacts, such as PTSD, personality disorders, or long-term depression, the child will experience functional impairment. Meaning that their educational prospects, career prospects and even interpersonal relationships may be hampered in the long run. Some people may even develop self-harming tendencies. This is not to say that all survivors would exhibit the same symptoms or experience the same mental health issues. However, those who do develop long-term issues may develop tendencies to keep to themselves, isolate themselves socially, and be hyper aware of themselves in the long run," added Prof. Helal.

In the wake of the Milestone tragedy, survivor's guilt is another matter that needs our attention. Survivor's guilt is a painful feeling of questioning why they survived when their friends, classmates, acquaintances, or anyone else they knew did not. Survivor's guilt can weigh heavily on children, often leaving them withdrawn or struggling to find meaning in everyday life.

Analysis from a research paper published in the Journal of Traumatic Stress Disorders & Treatment identifies three key themes among those experiencing survivor's guilt: persistent guilt and disentitlement to life, trying to make sense, and a need to repair.

The findings revealed that many survivors remain trapped in a painful cycle of trying to understand why they lived while others did not. At the heart of this struggle lies a persistent sense of guilt—an overwhelming feeling of being undeserving of life. This guilt fuels both the internal battle of making sense of their survival and the external efforts to find ways to "make amends" or seek repair, often leaving them emotionally burdened and unable to move forward.

Following a life-altering event such as this, it is crucial that parents, teachers and loved ones look out for certain signs and symptoms in the survivors. While many could reach out to those around them for support, many children may find themselves at a loss for words when trying to convey their feelings of grief and anxiety.

When speaking of what kind of behaviour one should look out for around the survivors, Prof. Helal mentioned, "The most common sign would be sleep disturbances. That could be trouble falling asleep, or trouble remaining asleep. The second most common symptom would be a deficit of attention in these children. They may be distracted from their studies or remain absent-minded for prolonged periods. One may also observe a general behaviour pattern exhibiting signs of agitation or anxiety. In some cases, they may also stop taking care of themselves, or lose interest in their hobbies."

He further mentioned the possibility of some physical symptoms, such as a tendency for bedwetting even after they had already grown out of it, or intense nausea and vomiting. It is also possible for those affected to exhibit signs of dissociation, where they struggle to recognise close ones or even themselves in certain cases.

The weight of the loss that the survivors have collectively endured cannot be erased from their minds, nor can we take away the grief they are yet to learn to live with. However, what we can offer those affected by the event is utmost consideration and support.

When we asked Prof. Helal how we, the loved ones, the teachers, the institutions, and the communities around them, can support those that have been afflicted, he said, "As crucial as it is to ensure good healthcare and safe and supportive households to the survivors, it is equally crucial that they also receive the luxury of quality time with their parents, families and loved ones. This may be through increased playtime or better avenues of accessible communication, which would ultimately lead to them having a safe space to express their grief. It is also extremely important that parents do not pressurise their children to resume their studies and other regular activities just because they may not have necessarily been physically harmed."

He also added, "Disturbing photos of the events must be kept away from the victims (those directly or indirectly affected) as well. Allowing them space to express their feelings of grief is of utmost importance. They must also be steered towards looking forward to positive events in the near future. Immediately, there is a need for basic sensitivity training for those in direct contact with victims and survivors. But overall, we as a people must develop a culture of sensitivity."

As a society, we have developed a tendency to pour out all our thoughts, emotions, theories, and perceptions into online spaces. To some, it may be a way to cope with trauma, and to many, it is part of a regular, memorised routine. For the sake of those still with us, we must create a clean, safe online space. It is crucial that we, as a community, move away from damaging practices of making content out of whatever happens around us. Those afflicted deserve our respect and empathy, and the best way we can offer these to them is through respectful space and mindful use of our shared online spaces.

PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

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1. BBC (July 21, 2025). *'My friend died right in front of me': Student describes moment air force jet crashed into school.*
2. European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation (February 2022). *The impact of childhood trauma on children's wellbeing and adult behavior.*
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Acute stress disorder (ASD)

What is acute stress disorder?

Acute stress disorder is a mental health condition that happens when a child has a very strong emotional reaction to an upsetting event. The event could be a serious accident or injury, or any other intensely stressful experience.

In acute stress disorder, the child's reaction is more extreme than normal. It can cause problems at home, at school and with friends. Acute stress disorder is similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but it doesn't last as long.

Symptoms of ASD

Signs of acute stress disorder show up between three days and one month after the upsetting or traumatic event. The child might experience:

- Nightmares or memories of the event that don't go away
- Feeling like the event is happening all over again
- Anxiety when things remind them of the event
- Going out of their way to avoid people or places that remind them of the event
- Getting angry more than usual
- Problems with sleep
- Trouble concentrating
- Frequent sadness or bad mood
- Seeming dazed

The curious case of the vanishing bees EXPLAINED

TINATH ZAEBA

As the temperature warms and summer arrives, we expect to see the bees. For many of us, the familiar buzz by the ear is enough for a flinch or half-hearted swat, since nobody wants to pet a bee. However, what should truly unsettle us is not their presence, but their absence. Even in a place as urbanised and polluted as Dhaka, you could once spot bees in rooftop gardens or high-rise balconies. Over the years, that has become rare, and one might argue it's now not a sight at all. Strangely, we don't miss what we no longer see—but perhaps we should. While we may have grown used to their absence, that's not normal, and it is not supposed to be.

Contrary to popular belief and the *Bee Movie*, not all bees wear a fuzzy black-and-yellow uniform. Most people don't know this but our country holds immense potential for honey production and thriving bee environments, because we grow crops like mustard, litchi, and sesame. That's why there are so many bee species here. Species such as *Apis cerana* (Asian honey bee) and *Apis dorsata* (giant honey bee) are native pollinators in Bangladesh and are vital to our ecosystem. Most live in complex hives and work together to make honey in areas like the Sundarbans and Sylhet, an important region for natural honey production. Each bee has evolved to interact with flowers, ensuring efficient pollen spread and plant survival.

This diversity matters, because bees are more than just honey-makers. They are essential contributors to our ecosystem. According to the United Nations, nearly 75 percent of the world's food crops depend, at least in part, on pollinators like bees. From mangoes, mustard, tomatoes, tea, much of what we consume has been touched—directly or indirectly—by a bee. Beyond food, bees sustain healthy ecosystems by enabling trees, flowers, and shrubs to reproduce. These plants provide shelter, food, and stability for countless species. In essence, bees don't just help life, they also multiply it.

And they're essential to our livelihood, too. While there are other pollinators, bees are closely tied to our survival, with 20,000 species globally pollinating crops that we, humans, and other animals rely on. It's often said that if bees go extinct, so do we, because of their ecological importance.

So, if bees are this important, why are they vanishing? The reasons are different and connected. In Bangladesh, concrete has overtaken what should be green. Fields and meadows are now rare, let alone open gardens. Pesticide use in agriculture—particularly neonicotinoids and other insecticides—has proven deadly to bees, but is still widely used because it's effective. Another harmful practice in our country is monoculture farming, which focuses on one crop and limits the flower variety bees need throughout the year. All of this leads to the same result: fewer chances for bees to pollinate and survive.

But the issue extends beyond local problems. Globally, a 2025 report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) estimates nearly 40 percent of invertebrate pollinators, especially bees and butterflies, face extinction. Habitat loss, pollution, and parasites like the Varroa mite continue to reduce the bees that should be present.

And of course, climate change is a big contributor. As global temperatures rise, seasonal patterns behave unpredictably. Flowers bloom earlier or later than they should, creating a dangerous mismatch between pollinators and the plants they depend on. In Bangladesh, rainfall and heatwaves are disrupting floral cycles and bee habitats. Many species, cannot adapt to these unpredictable changes. And if they can't survive, how long until we find ourselves equally unadaptable?

Still, there are things we can do. On balconies or rooftops, we can plant bee-friendly flowers like mustard, basil, or fruit trees such as mango and guava. These steps benefit us too because we enjoy the fruit while promoting pollination. Avoiding chemical pesticides in home gardens is a simple yet powerful step. In Dhaka, green rooftops and vertical gardens are slowly becoming part of sustainable design, showing increased awareness of these crucial movements.

Yet, it's vital we consider the bigger picture: individual effort cannot bear the weight of an ecological crisis. The decline of bees, like climate change, is a systemic issue. We need policies that ban harmful pesticides, protect habitats, and support sustainable farming. We need community-driven urban planning that makes sense for both people and nature. Most of all, we need governments, industries, and citizens working together. Because no matter how many flowers we plant on our windowsills, they won't bloom if there's no bee to find them.

The vanishing of bees isn't a distant environmental tale, it's a local, urgent reality. And if we have what we need to change it for them, and help their reality be better, it's our responsibility to do so.

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1. United Nations. (n.d.). *World Bee Day: 20 May*
2. World Economic Forum. (2016, March). *40% of pollinator species face extinction, report finds.*

Tinath Zaeba is an optimistic daydreamer, a cat mom of 5 and a student of Economics at North South University. Get in touch via tinathzaeba25@gmail.com.

PHOTO: **PIXABAY**

READER SUBMISSION

It's all in my head

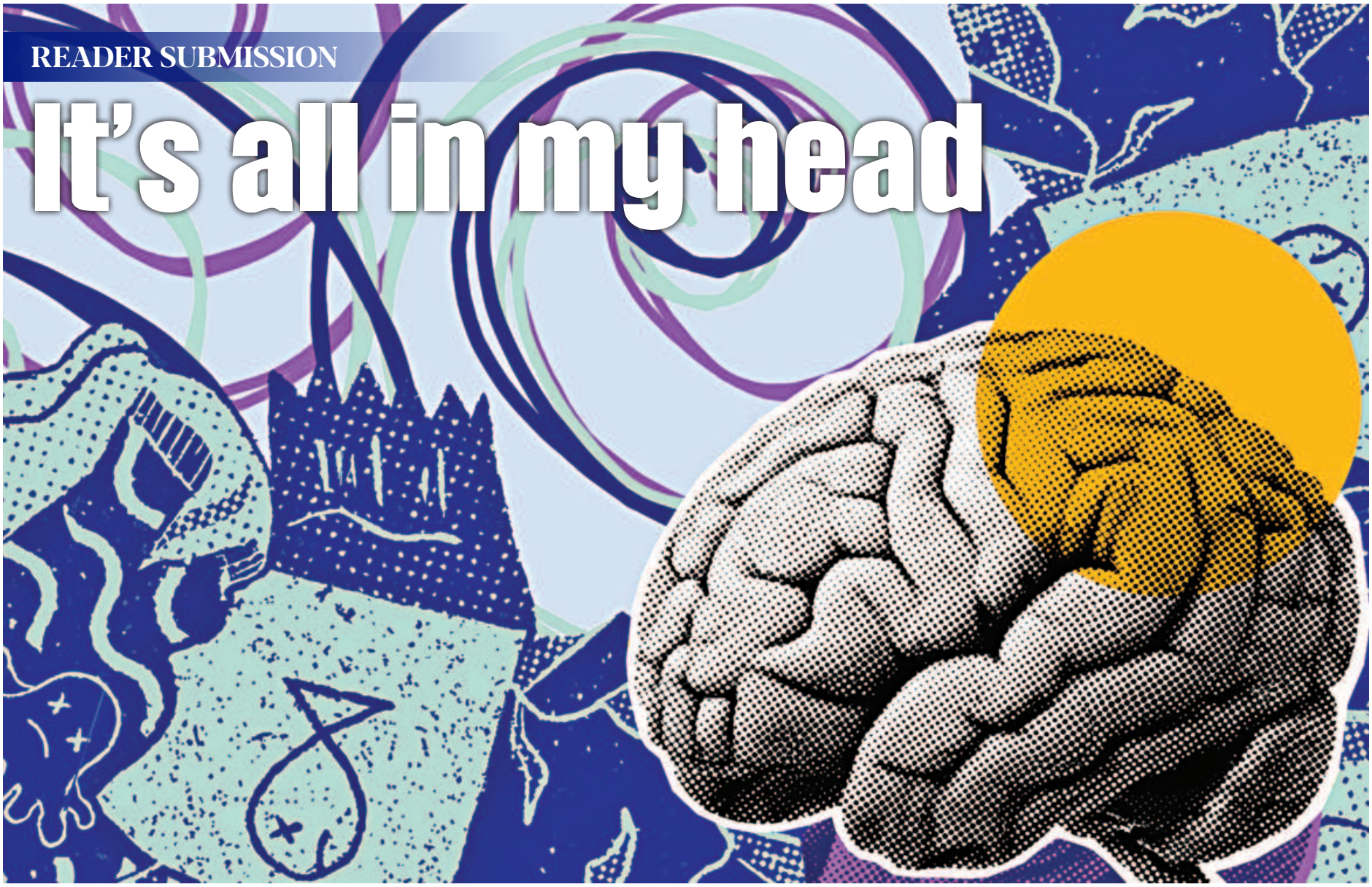

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

ARUNDHUTI BHATTACHARJEE

Nila's chest tightened. She could not sleep.

"What if I am never enough? Am I doing it right? Why could I not solve the math problem? Why did it take so long?" she wondered. "Why am I not enough?"

Her ceiling fan kept creaking with a cadence. She could not see the light and got no comfort despite curling into her blanket, squeezing her eyes shut. Nila felt burdened. Although there was nothing in particular that validated this feeling, she was compelled to carry it along with her. It caused her mind to spiral into relentless loops of thoughts, each one becoming tighter than before.

The air was too stale and heavy to breathe – she could not take it. Nila felt as though she would collapse before everything else did. She wanted to cry, but she didn't.

"What would people think of me? They'd say that I am weak or too sensitive."

She never wanted to hear those words, not again. When it was quiet, these thoughts were amplified. These thoughts repeated in loops; they were too convoluted, like a noose around her sanity. And then, suddenly, the noose was undone. It occurred to her, seemingly out of the blue, that the reason for her unhappiness was herself.

Nila pressed her palms together to whisper her prayer, but her fingers quivered. To calm herself, she took a deep breath, and then did it again, and stared at the ceiling fan.

Having turned her gaze to her hands, she saw burns and scars that had been inflicted upon her. She could not wash them off because it was her fervent imagination. She did not ask for silence, but God gave it to her.

In the silence, her mind ruminated on every little detail. She hated the way she behaved in class and thought about the things she did.

"Was I showing off? Why did my teacher not reply to me when I asked if my answer was okay? Was it because he already said so?"

Her heart beat louder than ever.

"Was I acting strange? No, I wasn't. But why does this happen?"

It gnawed at her. Unbeknownst to her, tears rolled down her cheeks. She could not refute it, not anymore. So she let them fall freely. There was no harsh judgment. The tears grazed against her cheeks, but she didn't wipe them. Again, she gazed at the ceiling fan. She stopped talking to people her own age a long time ago.

The ceiling fan continued to spin as Nila stared at the empty wall behind it. Her vivid imagination ran rampant, but she thought it also forced her to waste time seeking validation. It was, after all, incredibly addictive. Even more so because she could not provide it for herself; rather, she wanted it from her mentors and her parents.

"Why am I always the odd one out? Why could I never fit in the puzzle?"

She failed to understand what her peers were talking about. In fact, most things felt foreign to her. She was scared to pronounce a word. Even to breathe would probably be impertinent. Nila loathed how much she did not understand her own peers, to the point where she could not have conversations with them. It seemed a rather dire task. Making conversation with her sixty-year-old aunt seemed like a piece of cake, though.

The clock struck three.

The ceiling fan continued to spin as Nila stared at the empty wall behind it. Her vivid imagination ran rampant, but she thought it also forced her to waste time seeking validation. It was, after all, incredibly addictive. Even more so because she could not provide it for herself; rather, she wanted it from her mentors and her parents.

"I'm a good kid, right, Ma?"

Nila constantly asked.

"I want to laugh heartily, but I can't because someone has placed a stone where my heart is supposed to be, and I cannot lift it up."

Despite the heavy stone, she pulled herself up from the bed and put on her sandals. Even such a seemingly mundane task felt like a burden, but she did it anyway and went to start her day. For a long time, Nila stared at herself. As she attempted to change from her nightdress, she saw the stretch marks and felt ashamed. Hastily, she put the dress back on, brushed her teeth, and prayed to God again.

This time, she just talked to God, not in verses nor any particular structure, but she shared everything. She opted for her pen and suddenly felt her cheeks wet once again. Nila felt that she couldn't let her parents see how vulnerable she was and pulled the paper towards herself. Although she had been fidgeting, she still managed to scribble out: "Nila, you are doing great."

Arundhuti Bhattacharjee is a fifteen-year-old student of grade nine. Besides writing, she also loves painting and is an avid reader who wishes to write for The Daily Star.

A STORY OF CARDS, CONSOLES, AND ANIME

My life growing up with Pokémon

PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

A.M. FAHAD

Throughout my school years, I would save up most of the money my mother gave me for tiffin breaks to quench my thirst for an insatiable hobby of mine. After I had saved up enough, I would go to the nearest stationery store after school and spend hours looking at their Pokémon card collections, trying to decide whether I should make a purchase.

Years later, when one day our house help accidentally threw away the crusty old box containing the Pokémon cards I had spent so much of my lunch money on, I was devastated. The only cards remaining with me are the ones I glued inside my desk drawer after that life-altering incident.

Pokémon trading cards have their complicated battle system, but little did we, as kids, know or care about it. So, whenever my friends and I battled, we held our decks firmly and went against one another by stacking cards on top of each other at every turn, one by one; whoever had the highest base health points won.

Growing up, the fondest memory I have of video games is of booting up *Pokémon Emerald* and listening to the splashing noises in the rain as I walked across water puddles. Before that, my happiest discovery in a video game must have been in *Pokémon Fire Red*, where you could get an Eevee of your own in Celadon City by climbing to the top of the Celadon Mansion.

Over the years, Pokémon games have changed dramatically, from both stylistic and story perspectives. 3D models and landscapes have replaced the nostalgic 2D sprites and pixels that enamoured our hearts. The first time a Pokémon story caught my attention was when I played *Pokémon Black* from the 5th generation of Pokémon games. With concepts of truth and ideals stacked against each other, the narratives of *Pokémon Black/White* and its direct sequel series, *Black 2/White 2*, graze over many controversial topics of discussion among fans.

The games deal with the morality of Pokémon battling, a phenomenon in the Pokémon world that N, the secondary antagonist and my favourite character from the Pokémon franchise, actively protests against. Compared to these titles, the recent new generation additions in the Pokémon video game franchise have felt like immeasurable letdowns.

The Pokémon anime needs no new introduction. Like many other Gen-Z kids, I also hogged the TV with my siblings when it was *Maghrib*. The episode would air on Cartoon Network, and my siblings and I would follow Ash's journey of becoming a Pokémon Master with wishful anticipation. Making new friends, overcoming hardships, and embarking on fresh adventures were perhaps things I needed to watch during my formative years. It took 25 years for Ash to reach the end of his journey; I had outgrown him long ago. At the end of the road, I found myself bidding adieu to a fond part of my childhood, almost as if I was bidding goodbye to a friend of mine.

When I felt myself seeking closure surrounding the unanswered parts of Ash's journey, namely the story of Ash's Pidgeot, who was still waiting for him on some hill in Kanto, the *Pokémon Ultimate Journeys: The Series* showed up with all the older fan-favourite characters from the previous regions and extended on the story of our protagonist beyond his journey's end, drawing the curtains once and for all.

As a young adult, I find solace in crunching numbers in a damage calculator to ensure one-hit knockouts before selecting moves on *Pokémon Showdown*, an online competitive Pokémon platform. The blessing of online platforms is that sometimes you get to bond with communities, and finding the "Bangladeshi Pokémon Battlers" community on Facebook was one such blessing. Though I am older and have more important things to spend my time with, when the announcement of a Pokémon tour arrives, I still feel a rush of excitement comparable to that of a child taking up a new challenge.

Over the years, I have amassed a vast amount of indispensable Pokémon knowledge. But as I look back, I realise that these adorable and sometimes vicious creatures were not just characters on a screen; they were companions that guided me through the trials of childhood.

Capitalism has made Fahad give up on his ambitions of becoming a Pokémon Master. Find him at amfahad1747@gmail.com.