DHAKA, THURSDAY, AUGUST 28, 2025, *BHADRA 13, 1432 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

RISING STARS

FOR YOUNG MINDS ON THE RISE

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The O/A level conundrum

ILLUSTRATION: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

DID YOU KNOW?

The difference between BARCODES AND QR CODES

Today, both barcodes and quick-response (QR) codes act as tools for storing and sharing digital information. However, they differ in structure and capacity.

A barcode is a one-dimensional (1D) representation made of parallel lines of varying widths. It is most commonly seen on product packaging in retail stores, where it encodes basic information like price and inventory numbers. Because it is linear, a barcode can hold only a limited amount of data.

On the other hand, a QR code is a two-dimensional (2D) matrix made up of black and white squares arranged in a grid. In fact, QR codes are often referred to as a type of 2D barcode. The 2D design allows QR codes to store significantly more data compared to a barcode, including text, URLs, and even multimedia links. QR codes are often scanned using smartphones, making them versatile for marketing, payments, and digital interactions.

Barcodes are typically read using laser scanners, while QR codes can be scanned quickly with phone cameras. As a result, QR codes are more accessible and adaptable in today's digital age.

Editor & Publisher
Mahfuz Anam

Features Editor and Head of Content Marketing
Ehsanur Raza Ronny

Rising Stars In-Charge
Faisal Bin Iqbal

Rising Stars Team
Syeda Afrin Tarannum
Abir Hossain
Azra Humayra

Photographer
Orchid Chakma

Graphics & Layout
TDS Creative Graphics

Production
Shamim Chowdhury

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THE RISE OF AI-GENERATED CONTENT

What does it mean for kids' entertainment?

ADRIN SARWAR

Like most others, after a long day, I try to slip into the comfort of watching an episode of a show while having my dinner. Lately, I have been watching shows from my childhood. After quite a few attempts at binge-watching all the favourites, I have been able to find episodes of *Ben 10, Ed, Edd and Eddy, Pokémon* and *Courage the Cowardly Dog* so far. These shows were from the time when I had some sense of understanding of a foreign language.

After a while, I decided to go even further back and watch shows from when I only understood Bangla. I can remember two gems, *Meena and Sisimpur*. Thanks to YouTube, I was able to find most of the episodes online. I took my sweet time reminiscing about the good old days through the shows. While watching an episode, however, I felt compelled to compare these shows to the kinds of videos I see online. In many ways, it feels as though the quality of the shows that were produced in the early 2000s can surpass today's viral "children's" content.

What I am referring to when I say viral content catered to kids are the AI-generated animations floating around the internet. What is particularly frustrating about them is that they can be characterised by a lack of narrative cohesion, sometimes featuring cats attempting to escape dogs, only to be rescued by another Hercules-like cat. There is no lesson at all. Just a string of strange scenes.

Even if it seems funny at the beginning, the frequency at which you see these kinds of content on your feed and different versions of it will surely make you think:Is anyone making sure kids aren't just watching nonsense? Are we being mindful enough of what children are watching and the type of content being produced for children?

According to Vladimir Propp, a Russian folklorist, a fairy tale has essential character roles: the hero, the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess (or person sought who is sought after), the dispatcher, and the false hero. In good storytelling, these roles create conflict, transformation, and meaning. Most of the existing children's literature, movies, and animations are based on this theory. One concern about this theory, however, is that it proposes specific roles for the characters, often leading to gender bias and strict gender representation. This impacts a child's perception of society and gender roles.

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

However, we are at a time when we are trying to remove gender bias from children's literature to present a more neutral approach towards gender. AI-generated content, though, is often a string of disconnected events, gender stereotypes, and absurd plotlines. In the age of social media and, more recently, AI, unregulated content comes algorithmically and in an endless loop. They are devoid of any logic, emotions, or values.

Shows like *Meena* and *Sisimpur* were different. Not only did they provide entertainment and amusement, but they also mirrored society. *Meena* taught us about child rights, girls' education, and health. *Sisimpur* modelled empathy, friendship, and curiosity. These shows addressed real problems with real solutions. Most importantly, they were aligned with real world context, even if they were often set in fictional and magical worlds.

The AI-generated videos do not offer the lessons these shows once taught. Moreover, there is a clear shortage of locally produced content for children in Bangladesh. Even though Duronto TV has steadily produced several shows for children in the past few years, we continue to mostly rely on producers and studios that are based outside of the country for children's entertainment. This can lead to kids feeling disconnected from their own culture and language.

Without proper supervision, lots of pointless or even harmful videos slip through. We do not need more weird animations with Elsa battling Shrek in the setting of *Subway Surfers*. We need more shows and stories that reflect our culture, teach real values, and help kids grow into thoughtful, kind people. They may be eclipsed by the barrage of AI-generated content online, but they do exist.

Green colonialism: Explained

PUNOMI RAHMAN TITIR

When you think of the word 'green', what comes to mind? Thriving ecosystems, renewable energy, or perhaps a planet that breathes a little easier. Now consider the word 'colonialism'. The image quickly reverses to a shade of control and conquest; land stripped away from its people. Two words that seem to portray utterly contrasting ideas, an ideal world versus the one we live in. But what happens when you place them side by side? Green colonialism — a term that sounds like it shouldn't exist. And yet, it quietly shapes the way the world claims to fight the climate crisis today.

In today's world, 'going green' is a phrase that catches everyone's attention. From billion-dollar climate conferences to large-scale afforestation projects, environmentalism has become a global buzzword. However, what is framed as ecological progress, in practice, often intends to conceal acts of mass dispossession and social exclusion.

Green colonialism refers to the implementation of environmental policies and projects structured around ways that justify the appropriation of land and resources belonging to local populations and communities. In a broader context, it involves how the Global North sustains its high living standards by drawing on the labour, natural resources, and environmental health of the Global South.

Developed countries often self-proclaim themselves as champions in offsetting carbon footprints, yet, in reality, much of their progress relies on outsourcing emissions-intensive activities to the Global South. That is, industries producing minerals, metals, and raw materials for 'green' technologies are concentrated in developing countries, where environmental regulations are weaker and therefore, easier to bypass.

For instance, cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) supplies the lithium-ion batteries and wind turbines powering Europe and North America. Congo, which holds approximately 70 percent of the world's cobalt reserves, bears the exploitation of tens of thousands of child labourers working under hazardous conditions to support their families. These operations allow wealthy nations to reduce their domestic carbon footprints, however, global emissions remain largely unchanged.

This is because the carbon-intensive processes are simply shifted elsewhere rather than eliminated — a phenomenon known as carbon leakage. Industries involved in the extraction, processing, and manufacturing of materials for renewable technologies continue operating unabated in the Global South. This means that the environmental burden is exported: forests are cleared, soils degraded, and local air and water pollution increase, while consuming countries benefit from green energy. Essentially, the world's total carbon output doesn't decrease, rather it is redistributed.

A slightly different example of such colonial exploitation becomes evident in Israel's ongoing campaign of mass destruction against Palestinian olive groves. Olive trees have long remained symbolic of the land of Palestine, besides significantly contributing to around 14 percent of the country's entire economy. To date, over 800,000 olive trees have been illegally uprooted across the West Bank and occupied Palestine since the year of 1967.

In place of indigenous cultivation, Israeli authorities and affiliated bodies have implemented expansive afforestation campaigns, primarily using non-native pine trees and eucalyptus. These campaigns are framed as ecological restoration, yet in practice, they function to mask the destruction of Palestinian villages, fortify territorial claims, and prevent refugee return.

Pine forests, ecologically disruptive and highly flammable, are planted atop ruins of depopulated villages to conceal former Palestinian communities. The majority of these trees are not native to the region and have degraded the local environment, acidified the soil, and even led to massive wildfires.

Similar infrastructures involving green initiatives to disguise colonial practices also evolve within individual countries. For instance, the pursuit of renewable energy and conservation efforts, at times, places an immense burden on marginalised populations, particularly indigenous communities.

In Bangladesh, forest conservation policies have long mirrored the benchmark of green colonialism. Indigenous and forest-dependent communities are systematically excluded from decision-making, evicted without consent, and criminalised through false cases. Social forestry schemes benefit elites and forest officials, sidelining actual community members. Declarations of safari parks, sanctuaries, and reserved forests routinely occur without community consultation, stripping locals of traditional land rights.

While indigenous communities are displaced in the name of protecting biodiversity, these forests are simultaneously opened up to exploitative commercial interests and environmentally devastating mega-projects. The Forest Department's failure to oppose projects like the Rampal coal power plant near the Sundarbans, despite strong environmental objections from international bodies such as UNESCO and the Ramsar Convention, clearly exemplifies its complicity.

This pattern extends across much of Asia, where large-scale renewable energy projects marketed as clean solutions often conceal patterns of exploitation. Built without proper consultation or fair compensation, they displace rural and indigenous livelihoods, erode land rights, and bring pollution, water scarcity and health risks, ultimately benefiting corporate and state interests while burdening the communities that bear its environmental cost.

In advancing climate action, the common ground is, therefore, not environmental ambition, but the centralisation of power and the erasure of local voices. Our current approach to environmentalism is one where the rights of indigenous people are treated as expendable. Green colonialism, in this sense, is not a contradiction; rather, it is the repackaging of dispossession in the language of climate action.

Despite being the most vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis, indigenous communities are consistently excluded from the very policies meant to address it. Yet without protecting those on the frontlines, climate action itself becomes hollow. If environmental policies continue to prioritise control over justice, profit over people, and exclusion over participation, they ultimately fail everyone. A climate strategy that does not centre the rights, knowledge, and resilience of indigenous people is not a solution — it is a continuation of the crisis under a different name.

Punomi Rahman Titir is a contributor at The Daily Star. Find her at punomirahman@gmail.com

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The O/A level conundrum

STAY IN SCHOOL OR OPT FOR PRIVATE REGISTRATION?

AFRA ANIKA NAWAR KHAN

Every single student is familiar with the ordeal of having to sit for board examinations. However, a question that gets thrown around often in the minds of English medium students is whether they should sit for their board examinations as a student of the school they have been a part of or as a private candidate.

To work out the right answer to this concern, we must first ask: why is it that students feel compelled to opt out of school and take either one or both of their exams as a private candidate? For some students, staying in schools seems like a safer route as it offers structure, a sense of community, access to extracurriculars, and even familiarity. On the other hand, there are others who leave school due to personal, financial, or academic circumstances. Regardless of which route a student chooses, the next step for students is to pursue higher education.

Farzin Rahman Esha, who sat for her A levels privately, left school in the eighth grade and later studied at the Institute of Business Administration, Dhaka University (IBA). She noted that her parents had her leave school because they assumed extra coaching classes were a necessity, even though she was already enrolled at school.

"We weren't financially solvent enough then to afford both school and coaching classes, so we decided that it would be best for me to sit for my O and A level exams as a private candidate," she recounted.

Despite facing some hurdles when registering for her exams, she noted that leaving school granted her benefits later down the line when she had been preparing for the IBA entrance test. She said, "When it came to university admissions in Bangladesh, I feel like there wasn't much of a difference between a student who graduated from a school and me. At the end of the day, we had essentially studied under similar syllabi, whether it was from school or not."

"Once I had settled on the idea of staying in Bangladesh, I began preparing for my IBA admissions. I feel like my time as a private candidate played a huge role in making me more disciplined when it came to studies. It helped a lot, particularly in university, since I had the habit of pushing myself to study (even when I didn't want to) and working independently," she added.

Rifah Tashfia Islam, a former private candidate and currently a student of North South University (NSU), recalled how it was the distance from her home to school that compelled her to leave. However, it was only after she graduated that she began to encounter difficulties.

"Collecting and receiving my certificates proved to be a harrowing experience for me. I was informed that the server was down, which is why I didn't receive my final grades on time. Since I was a private candidate, I had to run back and forth to British Council Bangladesh, which took a toll on me, as the officials there didn't treat me well," she explained.

Fatima Rahman, who sat for her A levels privately and completed her undergrad at the University of South Wales in the United Kingdom, explained how the process was both difficult and rewarding for her, "Being a private A level candidate did come with some extra hurdles, but they were manageable with some planning. Since I wasn't enrolled in a school, I couldn't rely on an institution to source my recommendation letters. Instead, I reached out to the tutors who had taught me through private tuition. Since they were schoolteachers themselves and familiar with my academic abilities and work ethic, they were able to provide strong and personalised recommendation letters to support my applications."

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

"When it came to the application process, universities did ask for clarification about my status as a private candidate, which meant providing additional explanation and documents. As I could clearly show my results and demonstrate my preparation, it did not hold me back. In some ways, the experience made me more independent and organised," Fatima added.

In contrast, students who sat for their O and A level examinations from a school argue that it provided structure, but that didn't spare them from having to attend coaching classes.

Tarannum Afza, a former student of Bangladesh International Tutorial (BITL), who completed her undergrad studies from The University of Melbourne, Australia, elaborated, "Back in school, since teachers just stuck to the syllabus, there was really no room for applying creativity. Although we had access to adequate resources such as labs, we ended up neglecting our classes in school, as we were getting most of our work done in coaching classes."

"Sitting for A levels from school involved spending a hefty amount of money on tuition, which was a privilege I experienced. As I stayed in school, it allowed me to stay connected with my friends and participate in a bunch of extracurricular activities. However, when it came to applying to universities in Bangladesh, I think private candidates had the same advantage as I did," she added.

Nonetheless, Tarannum did mention that it was her alma mater that helped her gather recommendation letters and transcripts, which are a requirement when applying to schools abroad.

Robin Biswas, the Head of the Physics Department at Chittagong Grammar School, alleged that there is a misconception amongst both students and parents that the school is not doing enough to aid in the educational progress of its pupils.

"Financial constraints may serve as a hurdle for parents, but I would definitely recommend staying in school because not only will it help students remain connected to the school culture, but applying to a good school later for higher education will also require them to receive recommendation letters and transcripts, which the school they have been a part of can only provide," he asserted.

Biswas also added that when students apply to schools abroad, they need to showcase involvement in extracurricular activities, which demonstrate other skills and traits that they might have. To conclude, he emphasised that the manner in which schools tend to mould students involves structure, building them up for a better future.

How a student chooses to sit for their board examinations largely boils down to what route they prefer. Regardless of what a student opts for, they will need to account for their aspirations and how well they align with their current circumstances.

Afra is a finicky student of English Literature, who is always overworking to stop overthinking.

THE A LEVEL DILEMMA

Recheck, retake or rethink?

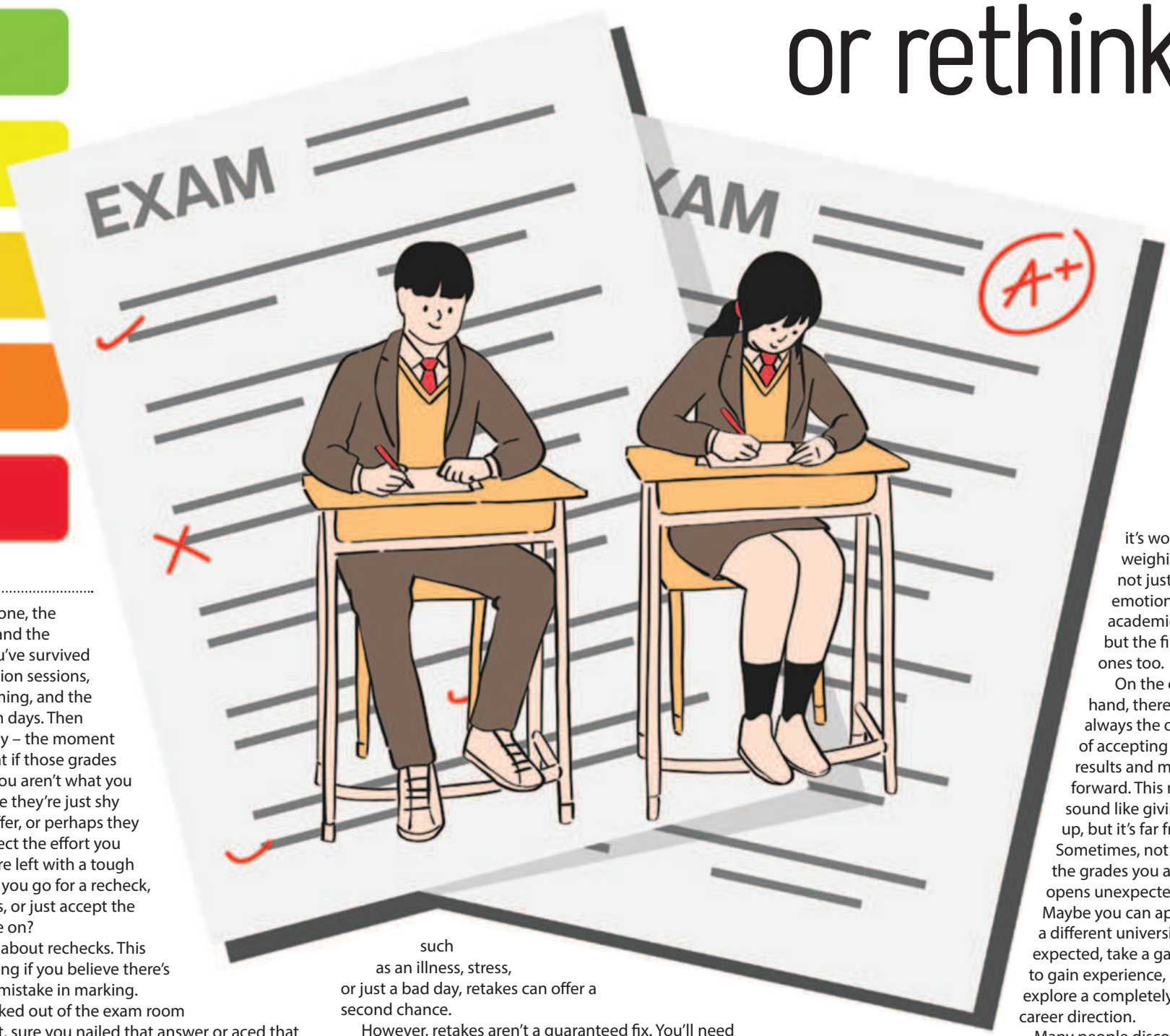

ILLUSTRATION: **SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM**

TINATH ZAEBA

The exams are done, the pens are down, and the results are in. You've survived the endless revision sessions, late-night cramming, and the exhausting exam days. Then comes results day – the moment of truth. But what if those grades staring back at you aren't what you expected? Maybe they're just shy of a university offer, or perhaps they simply don't reflect the effort you put in. Now you're left with a tough decision: should you go for a recheck, retake the exams, or just accept the results and move on?

First, let's talk about rechecks. This option is appealing if you believe there's been a genuine mistake in marking. Perhaps you walked out of the exam room feeling confident, sure you nailed that answer or aced that calculation, but your grade doesn't reflect that. In cases like this, requesting a recheck (or 'remark') can be a wise move.

However, it's important to remember that this process isn't just a free shot at getting a better grade. Your paper will be re-evaluated by a different examiner, but there's a chance your grade could stay the same, or even drop. So, unless you're confident that something was overlooked or misjudged, a recheck can be a gamble. It's worth discussing with your teachers first; they often have a good sense of whether a recheck is likely to help.

If your grades are significantly lower than you had hoped, and a recheck seems unlikely to make a difference, retakes might cross your mind. Retaking exams is no small decision. It means investing more time, effort, and money to go through the process again. But if you're determined to get into a specific university or course, or if you know you were capable of doing better but something threw you off, such as an illness, stress, or just a bad day, retakes can offer a second chance.

However, retakes aren't a guaranteed fix. You'll need to approach them with a solid plan: identify where things went wrong, adjust your revision strategy, and stay disciplined. It's also worth considering whether you're prepared to face the same pressure again, as retakes can be just as stressful, if not more so, the second time around.

It's also important to consider the costs involved in both rechecks and retakes. Surprisingly, rechecks can cost just as much as retaking the entire exam, depending on whether you're sitting for Cambridge or Pearson (Edexcel) exams. While retakes require more time and could delay your academic journey, rechecks are quicker but still come with a financial hit.

If you simply want your papers back to see how they were marked, Cambridge charges a hefty fee for this (to the point where it's the same costs of doing a retake), whereas Edexcel provides the checked papers free of charge, though without any detailed feedback. So, before deciding, it's worth weighing not just the emotional and academic costs but the financial ones too.

On the other hand, there's always the option of accepting your results and moving forward. This might sound like giving up, but it's far from it. Sometimes, not getting the grades you aimed for opens unexpected paths. Maybe you can apply for a different university than expected, take a gap year to gain experience, or even explore a completely new career direction.

Many people discover that their original plan wasn't the only route to success. So, if you feel that the stress of retakes isn't worth it, or if you're excited about other opportunities, there's no shame in taking a different path.

Ultimately, the right choice depends on your circumstances, goals, and mindset. If you believe there's a genuine marking error, a recheck could be the quick fix you need. If you're determined to improve and ready to commit, retakes offer a fresh start. But if you're open to unexpected opportunities, moving forward with your current results might lead to a future you never even considered. Whatever you choose, remember that A Levels are just one chapter in your story, not the whole book.

Tinath Zaeba is an optimistic daydreamer, a cat mom of 5 and a student of Economics at North South University. You can contact her at tinathzaeba25@gmail.com.

Should part-time work opportunities be open to high school students?

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

PUNOMI RAHMAN TITIR

After completing their O levels, I have seen some of my classmates work as teachers' assistants in coaching centres where they previously attended classes in. Many of my seniors, who were then A level students, were offered to grade test papers of junior classes and received payment based on the number of copies they checked. I, too, have considered looking for tuition gigs in order to gain some work experience as well as earn some money.

Although it is not common for school students in Bangladesh to engage in formal work alongside pursuing their education, many of us still seek out opportunities that would allow us to earn a certain sum of money in exchange for work, without interfering with our academic schedules. For some students, this could be a lookout for a side hustle, while others may need to support their families financially.

In many countries, part-time job opportunities, such as working at food service and retail stores, are usually open to high school students. It is common for students to work summer jobs during school vacations or take up weekend shifts where they are required to work a set number of hours. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, a total of 53.1 percent of young people in the US are employed, including 16 to 24-year-olds, as of July 2025.

Early exposure to the workplace environment can actually return several benefits and open doors to a myriad of opportunities. For instance, working part-time is a great way for students to gain hands-on experience and real-life skills that may prove to be useful afterwards in life. It helps to instil essential soft skills, including communication, teamwork, time management, and conflict resolution, among teenagers, as well as grow a distinct social network outside their ordinary circle.

Moreover, learning to navigate workplace expectations, meeting deadlines, and interacting with co-workers or customers are key attributes necessary to survive the workplace dynamic. Fostering a sense of professionalism from an early age not only builds confidence but also makes it easier for adolescents to transition into the labour force as young adults. Besides, for students who aim to develop a strong resume, these experiences equip them with practical examples to showcase their skills and work ethic, which can set them apart from other applicants when applying for future jobs or higher education opportunities.

Engaging in paid work at some point during your high-school years allows you to take on multiple responsibilities at once and learn to work out a balance between them. It can also teach important lessons about managing money, encouraging financial independence, and helping students develop responsible spending and saving habits.

That being said, in a country like ours, where child labour is already a pressing concern existing in various forms, the idea of expanding employment opportunities for minors could potentially open up the risk of exploitation. In the absence of proper safeguards, young workers could be subjected to working under low wages, with excessive work hours or unsafe conditions. Many may lack the confidence or awareness to recognise when they are being handled unfairly, making them more vulnerable to mistreatment.

Besides, such circumstances can likely take a toll on a student's academic performance, as long or irregular work hours often leave little time or energy for studying. For those already struggling to keep up, balancing work and school can become overwhelming, and the immediate need to earn money may start to outweigh the long-term benefits of completing their education. In certain cases, students who choose to work out of financial necessity may even consider dropping out of school entirely if completing their education no longer remains a priority or viable option.

Therefore, it is very important to keep these challenges in mind as cautionary steps if we want to present teenage employment in a positive light. For instance, the type of work being offered to school-going kids should be age-appropriate and not too physically demanding. This could include various jobs such as working in telesales, serving food at restaurants, or moderating social media business platforms.

At the same time, it is crucial to recognise that not all students will benefit equally from employment. Factors such as social background, prior academic involvement, and mental health influence whether working is actually perceived as an enjoyable experience or an additional source of strain and burnout. For example, students who come with certain existing privileges may find it easier to balance work and school, and as a result, their experiences will turn out to be completely different from those of others who may be carrying a financial burden.

In fact, in Bangladesh, the idea of having part-time jobs itself is not a widely accepted concept even among university students. The job market remains highly saturated, with a limited number of openings that often prioritise hiring full-time employees or those with prior experience. The question of whether or not high school students should be integrated into the labour force, therefore, contradicts the present scenario of the employment landscape in several ways.

Still, part-time work opportunities can surely serve as a great way for school students to gain real-world experience and practical skills, given that they are presented under the right circumstances. As evident from the post-July uprising of last year, when students took control over traffic management in the absence of authority figures, many of whom were schoolgoers, they have proven their ability to take on responsibility and perform effectively even under challenging situations. Ultimately, by prioritising safe and well-structured work environments and ensuring that teenagers are not placed in situations that could harm their well-being or future prospects, it is possible to create opportunities that benefit young people as well as the state at large.

Reference:

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ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

CHILDREN OF RAIN

OHONA ANJUM

Shirin could barely walk after the accident; her lungs gave in anytime she took more than twenty steps. In between, bed rest and medications exhausted her body but never her spirit. She was someone who could be described as being made of liquid sun – warm, radiant, bright – anything and everything people thought a differently-abled person couldn't be.

As if their entire human existence could be boiled down to what they cannot do, that they have lost the normal ability to live life. Shirin tried her best to overcome her inability to define herself. She crocheted her days away when she came home from the three-month-long stay at the hospital.

Her family gathered in the front yard as her father, with a tenderness that was reserved for handling blown glass, transferred her from the car to the wheelchair. They did not know how to approach this new Shirin. Were her hands still theirs to kiss? Would their touch be a caress or a cause of pain?

They had all been waiting for her. They looked at her face, and there was no clear sign of sadness or excitement. Rather, it was a puzzle. There were lines of melancholy etched on her face but so was hope.

There was relief in coming back home, but she was also burdened by the grief of memories, of days she could run to the kitchen to her mother, of days when her family never had to formally greet her at the front yard.

Months had gone by, and the window chair remained under the warm blanket. Shirin didn't feel the season change. Time sat beside her for bedtime stories as she looked far away in search of the future, which became a funny word to her.

In many African cultures, the concept of past, present, and future is different. Some of them proposed that the future does not exist, but the past and present do. They think the past is ahead of them; that is why they can see it clearly.

She saw the days leading up to the accident. Fire, muffled voices, reporter vans, and ambulances – everything blurred to one single scene of transition. She could feel the motion, the vehicles wheeling past her skinny body, as well as the fact that she cleared the way on the street for ambulances to reach hospitals as soon as they could.

Hours before, when the crowd had still been processing the fire and burns, she heard and responded to the call to be in the front lines. There had been so many lives in that moment in time, which were carefully balanced on tiptoes, on the verge of entering the other side.

It was a fire so close that the heat began distorting everything around it.

A strange, suffocating silence emanated from the heart of the inferno. No cries – only the roar of the flame and the groan of surrendering reality. It was this void of sound that was more terrifying than any scream. And then she ran, not as a choice, but as an instinct, toward the unfolding horror.

All she saw was the same uniforms she herself had worn, which had also been donned by children younger than her – the same ones who were terrified to be in the place where they were supposed to feel safe.

Memories of the playground and laughter, that coloured everyone's blue skies, were now melting.

Her mind refused to grapple with the scale. In fact, it could only fixate on a single, devastating detail. She remembered the wall in the primary wing, the one that had been vibrantly defaced with cartoon shapes and the earnest, misspelt names of the artists. She pictured it not as a memory, but as a premonition of loss: the bright suns and wobbly flowers had begun to blister, the proud, crayon-written names melted into unrecognisable streaks of wax, a universe of innocent creation dissolved before it could even be comprehended.

They were not just children; they were the authors of that bright, naive art, and they were vanishing inside its frame.

Soon enough, though, water was thrown as a silent apology to the massacre of a thousand unfinished dreams. The parents cried and looked for their child in panic, and so did Shirin, who refused to be frozen by the sound of the ambulance and fire trucks. Gates were flung open before the *chhutir ghonta*.

People started to crowd the scene fast enough. Reporters had started counting the lives that had already departed. Shirin, however, knew that the tragedy was about to be made worse for those who were yet to be taken by death. She ran towards the streets, with many others, and she cleared the path for ambulances to enter. For a hasty moment, she forgot about her own safety.

The same sun she was made of now warmed her cheeks – a bold and fierce light that held no room for regret inside her. On the other side, distant kites dipped and swayed, their colours blazed like the drawings that once filled the schoolyard wall. The very wind that had once carried the smoke began to lift the kites, making them dance high against the wide, forgiving sky.

Ohona Anjum writes, rhymes, and studies English literature.

From my grandmother's hands to mine: The timeless appeal of crochet

TINATH ZAEBA

My grandmother's hands are very soft and etched with lines, each telling a story. Growing up, I watched these same hands make so many things for me, whether it was something as simple as knitted clothes or doll houses from scratch.

But my favourite was when she made me small plushies out of soft yarn—her own creations, the result of hours of crocheting.

"Crocheting was known as *kushi kata* in our area. It takes up a lot of time because you have to individually loop each stitch with care," she said, her fingers already moving in rhythm as if muscle memory had never left. "The tension between the loops has to be consistent. Otherwise, some might be too loose or too tight."

She went on to explain how, back in the 80s and 70s, crocheting was more than a hobby for women; it was almost a rite of passage. In rural homes and neighbourhoods alike, blankets, table runners, lacy caps, and, sometimes, even curtains came to life under their hands. Back then, it was common for all houses to have a front lawn, and for children and teenagers to play in it during the evening after studies. Neighbours would often sit down together on the lawn, share cups of tea, and chat while crocheting together.

Yarn wasn't always available. My grandmother and her sisters would unravel old sweaters or use thick cotton threads dyed with tea or turmeric to get the right shade. They relied on observation and memory. "At one point, you just know how to get it right, and it was very common to have crocheted table runners or coasters in a house. It was also more of a common summer activity, as it gave us time to crochet things for winter," she said.

As she taught me how to hold the hook and loop, I noticed how crocheting with her made me feel connected to a part of my heritage I didn't know I had been missing. With each row, I imagined not just stitches, but of neighbours who crocheted pillowcases for their daughters' weddings or of winters when everyone in the family wore something they had made with their own hands.

What amazes me is that crocheting never disappeared with the old traditions; it simply evolved. Today, it has made a full comeback. A quick scroll through social media shows countless people selling handmade crochet bags, tiny dolls, keychains, and trendy crop tops. Online shops are filled with crochet accessories, while YouTube tutorials and Pinterest boards offer endless ideas to learn from and recreate.

As much as crochet has found its place in the e-commerce world, it isn't always financially sustainable for the makers. A single piece, whether a plushie or a crop top, can take hours to complete and require several balls of yarn. Pricing it to reflect the time and materials often pushes it beyond what the average buyer is willing to pay. This leaves makers in a difficult position: either undervalue their work or set a price so high that it likely won't sell.

Yet, for many, crochet remains more a labour of love than a profitable venture.

Modern crochet is stylish, global, and proudly handmade. No longer tied to living rooms or grandmotherly stereotypes, it has found new life among young people who crochet on campuses, in cafés, and even during commutes. The internet has transformed crochet into both an aesthetic and a coping mechanism. Perhaps that's part of why it has made such a strong comeback.

In a world dominated by mass production, crocheted pieces carry a distinctly human touch. People are drawn not only to their beauty but also to their imperfect, textured, handmade quality, something that stands apart from the uniformity of fast fashion.

And speaking of coping, crocheting is incredibly therapeutic, something I realised as my grandmother taught me how to get into a rhythm. There's something about the repetition of stitching, the feel of yarn between your fingers, and the gentle focus it demands that calms a restless mind. Psychologists even recommend it for anxiety and stress relief. In a way, crocheting invites slowness. It teaches patience, just like my grandmother always said it would.

So here I am, decades apart from my grandmother's youth and miles away from the village homes she once described, yet I understand crocheting more deeply than I ever did before. What began as a simple pastime has become my connection to her stories, and it makes me glad to see how crocheting has grown ever more popular with our generation.

Even if it may not always pay the bills, crocheting pays in presence and in the joy of creating something with our own hands, just like our grandmothers did, and now, so do we.

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.

ILLUSTRATION: **SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM**