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Movement in STYLE

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WARDROBE: TURAAG ACTIVE
MAKEUP: SUMON RAHAT
HAIRSTYLE: PROBINA
STUDIO: EVF

#EVENTS

The beauty of second chances Kuhu Plamondon's wearable art

There are exhibitions you walk into and leave, and then there are ones that stay with you, not because of scale or spectacle, but because they make you feel. Kuhu Plamondon's "Bags as Wearable Art" at Arka Collective in Banani belonged to the latter. On Saturday, 10 October 2025, the exhibition felt like more than an event — it was a unique affair where even the air seemed a bit textured, like the very fabrics that inspired her work.

At first glance, the display looked like a series of beautiful bags. They were bold, colourful, and somewhat distinct. However, when we looked closer, each one began to tell a story. Torn saris, worn-out tablecloths, old blouses, leftover leather scraps, pieces of kimono, and tribal clothes from the Hill Tracts were all stitched together, reborn as art in the form of bags.

"I've always been drawn to what's broken or half-used," said Kuhu. "I think there's an honesty in things that have lived a life before. They carry a kind of quiet beauty that new things simply don't."

Her collection is not about pristine perfection. It is about emotion, texture, and memory.

"For me, creating is like building a collage," she explained. "I don't plan it; I let the materials guide me. Sometimes, a piece of fabric tells me exactly what it wants to become. I just listen."

That instinctive approach gave birth to twenty unique bags, no two alike. One was made from a tin box painted with pop art, another from an old sweater that still seemed to hold warmth. A warrior vest–inspired piece, which she insisted on including, reflected her deep fascination with nomadic cultures. She also showed a scarf called Dhaka Traffic, printed with baby taxis where women navigate from the backseat while men drive.

"It's funny but true," she said, smiling. "Men might be driving, but it's the women who are really steering things. We're always navigating — through traffic, through life."

While many Bangladeshi artists find their muse in the rural landscape, rivers, fields, and village life, Kuhu looks to the city. Its rawness, noise, and contradictions shape her art.

"I think something of life is really meaningful to me," she said softly.

"I'm an artist from Charukala," Kuhu added. "I have a master's in painting and drawing. Fashion was always something I wanted to do. I started creating my own textiles because somehow the ones that got into the market never appealed to me. So, I began to take my art into textiles, and I called it wearable art."

Her works indeed blur the line between art and utility. "I also like anything functional," she explained. "Think about architecture, the grandest of all arts, or pottery, which we use every day. Art evolves, and so does architecture, and so do textiles. Over time, it takes new forms, new beauty. Even jewellery — it's art that you wear."

Kuhu's fascination with bags, however, feels almost psychological.

"I was always intrigued by bags," she said. "We stuff things in them. It's almost like we're stuffing emotions and our everyday needs into them. If you notice, when we walk, we all have an angle of how we carry our bag -- it denotes something; it shapes our mind and our body. This is why I find it meaningful to create something we carry so much in our lives."

Beyond the craftsmanship, her collection also spoke of memory and sustainability. In an age of fast fashion and disposable design, her bags urged a slower gaze, one that values repair, reuse, and reflection.

"A bag is never just a bag," she said. "It holds not just money or make-up, but memory, emotion, small pieces of our day. Women especially know this truth. We carry our lives inside these bags, our chaos, our care, our comfort."

Through this collection, Kuhu reminds us that sustainability can be poetic. Her art does not preach; it invites. She somehow gave chaos a second chance and beauty a second life, all through her bags.

ByJannatul Bushra
Photo: Jannatul Bushra

#PERSPECTIVE

How reels and shorts contribute to a LACK OF READING

Growing up, reading was my absolute favourite pastime. Three decades ago, my friends, cousins, and the other children I knew cherished reading as a leisurely activity. We borrowed books from each other and gave books as birthday presents. I would often see my grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles reading during their free time, too. Many homes subscribed to two daily newspapers and one or two magazines. In short, reading for enjoyment was an integral part of our daily lives.

Was it all because entertainment was not available 24/7 and thus, we had to find ways to keep ourselves entertained? Perhaps. I grew up in the '80s and '90s, and I'm grateful that I did not have to deal with the digital clutter of today while growing up. The absence of 24/7 TV programmes and the internet helped me tremendously in fostering a lifelong love for books. I must also thank my mother for not subscribing to satellite TV until I finished my O' Levels. Our home was perhaps the only one in our extended family that did not have "dish channels" until 1999. By the time we had satellite TV at home, I had already lost my interest in television. Luckily, my love for leisure reading was still going strong.

A recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Florida and University College London and published in the journal iScience showed that between 2003 and 2023, the proportion of Americans reading for pleasure daily declined by more than 40 per cent.

The study analysed data from over 236,000 Americans over a period of 20 years. This trend is not unique to the United States, though; if you look around, or ask friends, family, and co-workers, you will see that people read much less than they used to; some do not read at all.

So, why are we reading less?

24/7 access to entertainment

Round-the-clock access to entertainment is certainly part of the story. Once you start watching Reels or Shorts, you know how quickly time passes. Unlike reading, watching short videos does not demand focus or attention. Open eyes and ears are all that you need.

Short-form content is contributing to a decline in our attention spans. A friend of mine, who was an avid reader until her twenties, recently mentioned that even watching movies on Netflix has now become a tedious task for her due to her short attention span. She now struggles to watch a 90-minute film in one sitting and has stopped reading for enjoyment altogether.

This shift in my friend's ability to focus is relatively recent, and she is not the only person with a shorter attention span; more and more of us now have difficulty concentrating on one task for extended periods. Anything that is slower-paced or demands undivided attention quickly becomes boring.

We now watch less TV and more YouTube videos. Unlike TV shows, we can fast-forward YouTube videos and watch them at our convenience from anywhere in the world. Among these YouTube videos, the short-format videos are more popular, reflecting our declining attention span.

Rabeya A, a Bangladeshi expat and an HR professional based in Sydney, Australia, shared that, "I can no longer watch YouTube videos that are longer than ten minutes. If a video is longer than that, I'll just fast-forward it unless it's an intriguing podcast or something similar."

When we asked her about her television-viewing habit, she said, "At the end of the day, if I ever sit down to watch TV, I do not watch anything in particular. Watching an entire show is too much for my brain to handle these days. I keep switching channels until I am finally ready to fall asleep."

A lack of work-life balance

In today's fast-paced, digitised world, where we are running after success non-stop, we find ourselves expending all our energy to climb the 'intangible' ladder of accomplishment. We have become slaves to our workplaces, sacrificing our personal lives and well-being in the name of professional advancement. We have also become slaves to our phones. Just imagine for a second how you react when you cannot find your cell phone!

When we return home from work, we are too exhausted to leaf through the pages of a book. Our minds seek quick, momentary pleasure, and the perfect source of that sort of pleasure lies in scrolling Facebook newsfeed, Reels, and Shorts. We mindlessly scroll, swipe, and slide through our feeds, oblivious to how these actions are harming our brains.

Reading books is a complex yet rewarding task. However, once you get used to receiving momentary pleasure and, in the process, suffer from a short attention span, it becomes difficult to read books solely for pleasure because the enjoyment derived from reading follows a slow process. There is no such thing as a momentary dopamine rush when it comes to reading, because reading requires concentration and undivided attention.

Reading prevents cognitive decline

The benefits of reading for pleasure are so many! However, one particular benefit of reading that I find particularly important to focus on in today's world is that reading prevents long-term decline in cognitive functions.

People are living longer than before, thanks to medical advancements. However, I am noticing how senior members of my own family are beginning to suffer from memory loss, poor judgment, difficulty making decisions, trouble finding the right words, and losing their train of thought.

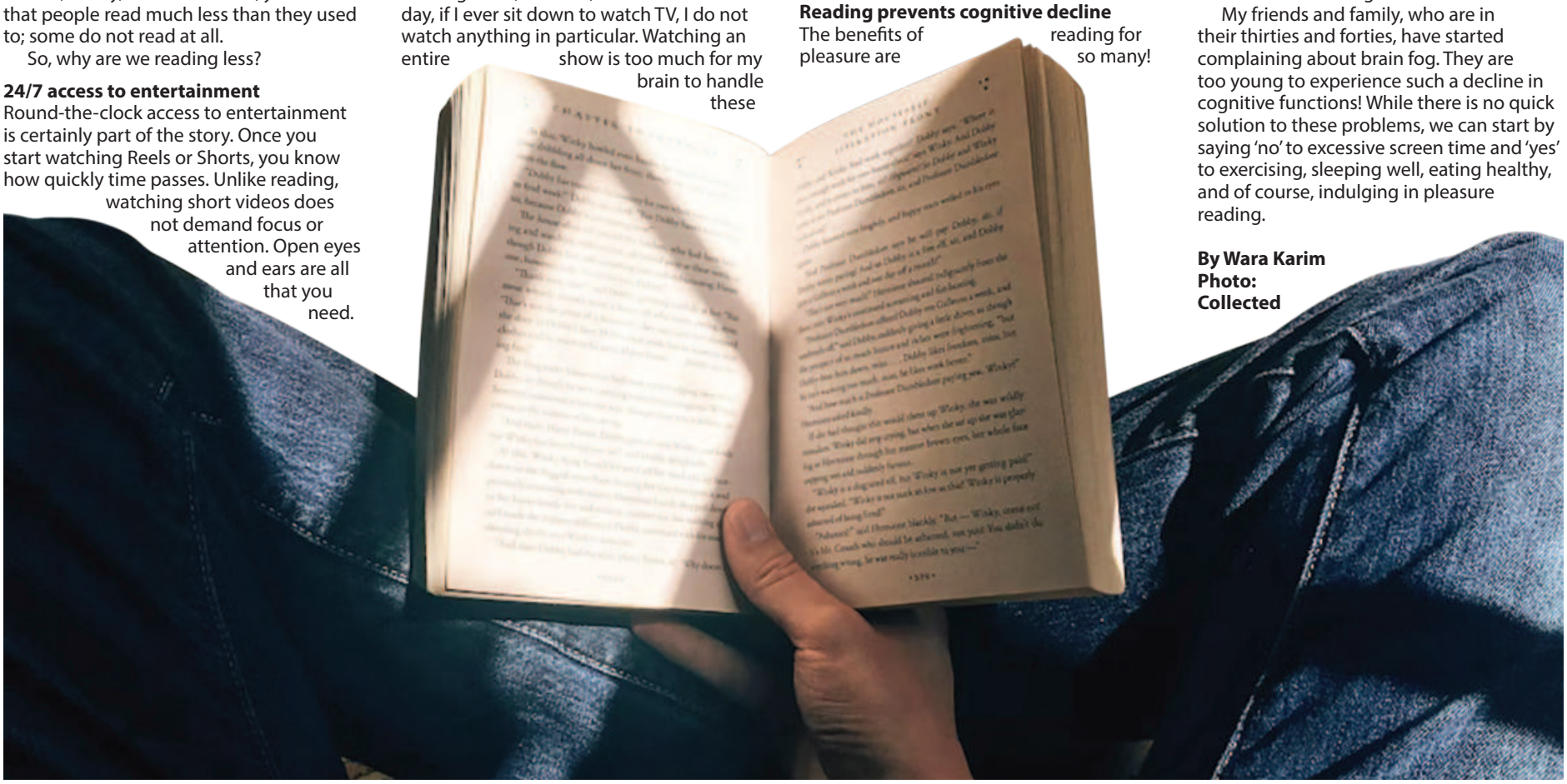
Studies have consistently linked frequent reading activities to a reduced risk of cognitive decline in older adults. Therefore, while medications can extend our physical lives, it is upon us to nurture our brains and minds to enjoy this extended life to the fullest.

My neighbours are a 74-year-old couple who have chosen travelling as their passion after retirement. On most days when Bill and Alison are in town, I catch a glimpse of them reading in their backyard, on the porch, or in their living room. Both husband and wife are avid readers and when I converse with them, I am amazed at how sharp their minds are, even at 74. They do not sound or act like typical 74-year-olds; they exercise, eat healthy, drive, remember little details, joke, volunteer, garden, rake leaves in autumn afternoons, and even babysit their grandchildren. They are an inspiration to me.

Among other things, people like Bill and Alison have slowed down their old-age cognitive decline through regular and engaged reading. Recreational reading alone will not prevent or slow down mental decline (eating healthy, sleeping well, and exercising are also important), but it will help you tremendously in preserving your brain health in old age.

My friends and family, who are in their thirties and forties, have started complaining about brain fog. They are too young to experience such a decline in cognitive functions! While there is no quick solution to these problems, we can start by saying 'no' to excessive screen time and 'yes' to exercising, sleeping well, eating healthy, and of course, indulging in pleasure reading.

By Wara Karim
Photo: Collected



#WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

From environmental science to ethical soles: SARA HOSSAIN'S LEATHER LEGACY

When Sara Hossain moved back to Bangladesh in 2021 after nearly two decades in Canada, she was not chasing reinvention. She was stepping into a responsibility: a leather footwear and accessories venture built by her father, which needed care, commitment, and direction.

A company was already standing in bricks and mortar; what it needed was someone to give it character, consistency, and a conscience.

Hossain did not come in as a figurehead. She rolled up her sleeves.

Father's blueprint, a daughter's resolve

Craftsman Footwear & Accessories Ltd. was founded by Sara Hossain's father with the idea of entering Bangladesh's robust yet invisible leather export economy. A factory was built in Gazipur. Production lines were set up.

However, the pandemic hit just as operations were about to begin. Hossain, who had just finished 18 years of life abroad, including a degree in Environmental Science and work in the health sector, returned home to help hold the fort.

"I came back when things were uncertain," she says. "The factory was there, but someone needed to be fully present. My father planted the seed; my role has been to help it grow."

Making the local matter

While 90 per cent of the brand's output goes to international clients, Hossain has been quietly working to build a parallel brand for Bangladesh's domestic market. "We're excellent at making for others," she says, "However, we don't recognise our own value."

This is not just about pride; it's about shifting perception. Hossain points out that many Bangladeshis unknowingly wear foreign brands made right here in Gazipur, Hemayetpur, or Narayanganj. "Our people buy international because they think it's better, but it's often the same leather, made by the same hands."

Her ambition is not only to make shoes but also to make consumers see differently.

Inside the factory: Not just workers, but people

Walk into the factory today, and you will find something unusual — a sense of dignity.

Hossain is adamant about running a workspace that is not just compliant but comfortable.

"We're the first industry in this village. Many of our employees have never had formal jobs before," she explains. "We didn't just create employment. We created expectations."

There's music playing. Tea breaks are real breaks. Cleanliness is incentivised with small awards. People stay. Women return after maternity leave. Craftsman also employs individuals with physical challenges across various roles; not for the sake of optics, but because Sara believes inclusivity should be a baseline, not a headline.

Not "eco-friendly" for the sake of it

With her environmental background, Hossain brings a quiet but unwavering attention to sustainability, although she refuses to greenwash. "We're working towards sustainability, but we're not perfect," she says. "I don't claim that our brand is a fully sustainable one yet.

However, we're honest about where we are."

Leftover leather is reused for sandal straps, patchwork bags, and accessories. "Even flawed factory rejects are altered or repurposed under our internal initiative," she says. "It's less waste, more value."

And unlike many businesses where packaging is an afterthought, Hossain has already transitioned to recycled plastic wraps and is planning to shift entirely to biodegradable jute or cardboard packaging in the next cycle.

Changing the conversation around leather

Part of Sara Hossain's vision also involves educating Bangladeshi buyers. "People don't always know how to care for leather," she says. "They store it wrong, fungus grows, or they discard it too early."

She wants customers to understand not just what they're buying, but how it's made, where it's from, and how long it can last. For her, consumption is part of the supply chain.

The future is not global first; it's local forward

Sara Hossain has no illusions of overnight fame. There is no celebrity brand ambassador, no TikTok strategy. Just slow, consistent growth. She hopes to open a storefront in Canada and eventually expand into e-commerce. But for now, her focus is here — on building trust with local consumers and continuing to honour the factory her father built.

"I'm not in a race," she says. "What matters to me is that the people who make our products feel valued, and the people who buy them feel informed."

Ultimately, Sara Hossain is not trying to create a movement. However, if her kind of grounded, ethical business quietly becomes a blueprint for others in Bangladesh's leather sector, that would not be a bad legacy to leave behind!

By Ayman Anika
Photo Courtesy

#FOOD & RECIPES

Why seafood deserves a place on our PLATES, HEART, BODY AND MIND

As Bangladeshis, we have always had fish from the sea in our diet. With time, once considered a coastal luxury, fish like hilsa, rupchanda, koral, and even imported varieties such as basa, are now easily available. This rise in accessibility has opened new possibilities for healthier eating — something that nutritionists have long encouraged.

One of the biggest advantages of seafood is its rich omega-3 fatty acid content, which helps increase HDL — the "good" cholesterol — while lowering triglycerides. This combination plays a vital role in keeping the heart healthy and reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

According to Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin, Chief Clinical Nutritionist at United Hospital Limited, omega-3 from saltwater fish is especially valuable for people already vulnerable to heart problems, as it helps maintain overall heart function. Hasin also highlights that the benefits of seafood go well beyond heart health. Regularly eating fish such as hilsa, koral, and rupchanda can boost memory and brain performance by supporting the structure of brain cells.

"Seafood supports cognitive capacity and even helps slow down the aging process," she says. "It nourishes the brain while protecting against age-related deterioration."

Another benefit often overlooked is its impact on vision. The same omega-3 fatty acids that benefit the heart and brain also help protect eye health, reducing the risk of dry eyes and age-related vision problems. For many people who spend long hours in front of screens, seafood offers a natural way to strengthen and maintain eye function.

"Saltwater fish is particularly good for weight management," notes Hasin. "It keeps you satisfied longer without the heaviness that comes from fried or red meat dishes." Since these fishes are high in protein but relatively low in calories and saturated fats, it makes them filling yet light — ideal for balanced diets.

However, Hasin cautions against the way seafood is often prepared. Most of the time, we tend to deep fry them, which ends up destroying much of the omega-3 content and adding unhealthy fats that cancel out its benefits. Instead, she recommends baking, grilling, or steaming to preserve the nutrients while maintaining flavour.

Seaweed and spirulina, not found in our diet commonly, are rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals — especially iodine, which supports thyroid function. Spirulina, a type of blue-green algae, is praised for its high protein content and anti-inflammatory properties. However, it should be consumed cautiously, particularly for those with kidney issues.

Incorporating seaweed in small amounts — whether as dried flakes, in soups, or as part of salads — can help diversify nutrient intake without adding excess calories. For vegetarians or those who eat less fish, seaweed can offer some of the same benefits, especially when it comes to minerals and antioxidants.

While seafood offers numerous benefits, it also comes with certain risks if not chosen or prepared carefully. One of the most discussed concerns is mercury contamination. Some large saltwater fish tend to accumulate higher levels of mercury, which can be harmful — especially for pregnant women and young children. "It's a controversial topic," Hasin admits. "Saltwater fish is nutritious, but due to the mercury content, it's not suitable for pregnant mothers or babies. Exposure at that stage may lead to hyperactivity or developmental issues."

Another major concern in Bangladesh is seafood contamination. Given the country's warm climate and often unhygienic handling practices, consuming raw or undercooked seafood can be extremely risky. Cooking fish properly eliminates harmful bacteria and parasites that may otherwise cause severe illness.

Allergies are another issue to consider. Shellfish and certain fish can trigger allergic reactions ranging from mild skin irritation to serious respiratory distress. Hasin advises, "If you're trying seafood for the first time, start with small amounts to make sure you're not allergic."

People with heart disease should also be mindful of sodium levels, especially in processed seafood like dried fish or canned options. These products tend to be high in salt, which can raise blood pressure.

Overeating seafood can also lead to digestive problems, particularly if it's fried or prepared in heavy sauces.

Moderation, as always, remains key.

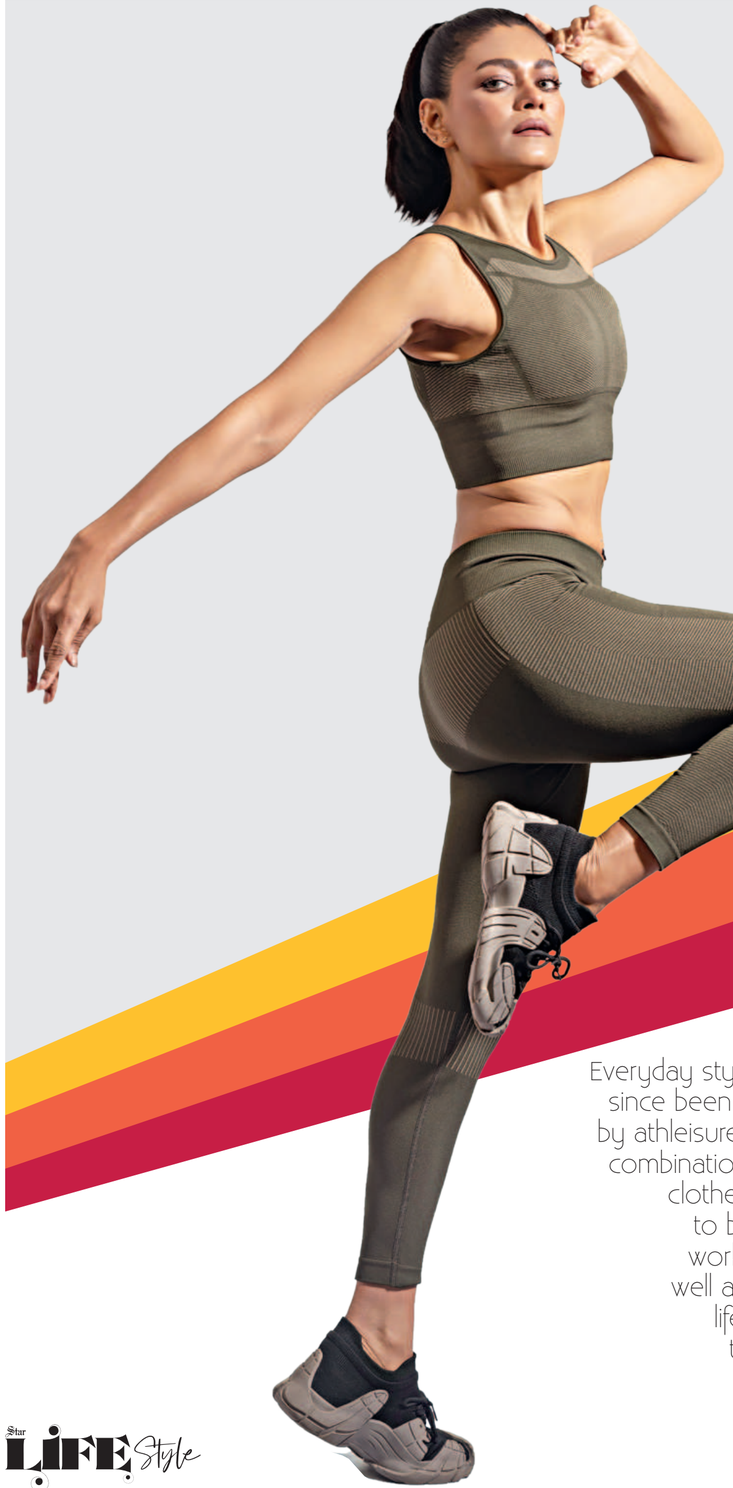
Seafood can be one of the healthiest additions to a balanced diet when eaten in right portion and prepared correctly. Opting for local options such as hilsa, rupchanda and koral ensures freshness and lower mercury level, while lighter cooking methods help preserve the nutrients that make seafood so valuable.

As Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin sums up, "Saltwater fish is more available now than before, and that's a good thing. But we need to eat it wisely — choose the right fish, cook it properly, and be mindful of how much we eat."

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: Collected

GET YOUR BODY MOVING

Athleisure at its best!



Everyday style has long since been dominated by athleisure — a great combination of casual clothes designed to be worn for working out as well as everyday life. Gone are the days of strict dress codes and rules.

In 2025, it's all about multitasking! And why not? Life has become faster-paced than ever before. Everyone has their plates full, and fitness is no longer just a pastime but an integral part of one's lifestyle.

Want to stay at the top of your game? Being active is the only way to go. In a day packed with back-to-back meetings, Zoom calls, and what have you, squeezing in a workout is a challenge but not an impossibility. And this is where athleisure comes into play. A transitional style that is perfect for work as well as working out, this is the upgrade your wardrobe has been waiting for!

Working out means burning calories and a lot of sweating! So light, sweat-wicking workout clothes are a must to stay dry while exercising, not to mention staying fresh!

Choosing the right clothes for a workout is crucial, and many homegrown brands now offer incredible active wear, both in terms of quality and performance. What's even more impressive is that they are very stylish and affordable, too! So, those of you who drop big money on imported active gear must know that Bangladeshi garments produce exercise clothes for the majority of the world's big brands, and you are just paying a premium for it.

Local brands have great quality fabrics; there is something for everyone at every price point. Basic blacks and blues are not the only options for men — T-shirts, sweatpants and other items in latest designs are readily accessible from local brands. A quick search online will reveal a wealth of styles, and one needs to find his/her favourite. And women are truly indulged in this regard! Stylish colours, bold designs, and patterns galore with fun shapes and the latest styles.

From sports bras to sweatpants to performance gear that is specifically designed for particular activities, one is truly spoilt for choice when shopping for active gear locally. A bright pink or teal set will look fabulous as you are running on the treadmill, and a latte sweatsuit with chocolate brown sweatpants will look chic when on the Peloton. Printed tanks with solid tights will look fabulous for pilates, and a sunny orange set will add extra oomph to your hot cycling session!

Following COVID, when working from home became the norm, the line between workwear and casual wear became blurry, non-existent even. Having attended Zoom meetings and calls all day in a hybrid of formal top and casual bottoms, everyone everywhere was left confused about what's next in fashion.

Athleisure stepped in to bridge this awkward gap with its style and flair. Loungewear became the new necessity; a sweatshirt with stylish sweatpants paired with chic and comfortable sneakers is a perfectly acceptable choice of outfit, and this will see you through from day to night.

In 2025, athleisure has been elevated, and how! A pair of sweatpants can be dressed up with a chic striped or solid white shirt, a smart jacket, a nice pair of heels and a purse. Alternatively, dress them down with a basic T-shirt, sneakers, ponytail, and a cap as a cherry on top! A chic sweatshirt is a great investment for all intents and purposes. It can again be dressed up or down depending on one's mood. Colours like cherry, mocha, sage and smoke are very trendy, very on point when doing athleisure; the cooler the tone, the better.

Channelling '90s minimalist vibes is the key. When comfort and cool go hand in hand, the result will always be chic and classy!

By Sabrina N Bhuiyan
Photo: Adnan Rahman
Model: Joly, Emon
Styling & Fashion Direction: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Wardrobe: Turaag Active
Makeup: Sumon Rahat
Hairstyle: Probina
Studio: EVF

#HEALTH & FITNESS

PREGNANCY CARE

Rise of traditional, home-based alternative therapies

It is a time of profound change in a woman's life — physically, mentally, and emotionally. As the body nurtures a new life, it needs extra care and calm, and since the pandemic, more mothers-to-be have turned toward traditional care and home-based alternative therapies for support. These approaches are gaining popularity because they are natural, low-risk, and promote overall well-being. From yoga and meditation to Ayurveda, herbal remedies, massage, acupressure, and aromatherapy, ancient practices are making a modern comeback. They help ease many pregnancy discomforts like back pain, insomnia, nausea, stress, and anxiety.

Yoga: Breathe, move, and connect

Imagine a serene morning where a pregnant mother rolls out her yoga mat, takes a few deep breaths, and gently stretches her body. Yoga is more than movement — it's a dialogue between the mind and body.

Gentle postures such as Baddha Konasana (Butterfly Pose) and Malasana (Squat Pose) strengthen the pelvic floor, preparing the body for smoother delivery. Poses like Ustrasana (Camel Pose) and Shashankasana (Child's Pose) relieve back pain and improve posture.

Breathing techniques like Anulom Vilom, Ujjayi, and Bhramari help calm the mind and enhance oxygen flow. Regular yoga practice builds strength, improves flexibility, and nurtures emotional balance throughout pregnancy.

Ayurveda and herbs: Healing from the kitchen

Our kitchens are full of natural remedies that have stood the test of time. Turmeric, garlic, cumin, and coriander are not just everyday spices; they're immunity boosters that support digestion and reduce inflammation.

Ayurveda also highlights herbs like Ashwagandha, Yashtimadhu, and Amalaki, known for improving strength and vitality. Herbal teas made from peppermint, fenugreek, or chamomile can ease nausea, bloating, and colds. While most herbs and spices are safe, it's always wise to consult a healthcare provider for proper dosage. With the right guidance, these time-tested remedies can make pregnancy more comfortable and wholesome.

Acupressure and reflexology: The power of touch

A gentle touch can do wonders. Acupressure involves using the fingertips to apply light pressure on specific points of the body to relieve pain and anxiety. For instance, the SP6 point near the ankle is often used to calm the mind and reduce labour-related stress.

Reflexology, which focuses on the feet and hands, can ease nausea, back pain, and fatigue. These therapies stimulate the nervous system, promote relaxation, and encourage the body's natural healing response.

Massage, music, and aromatherapy: Soothing the senses

On a quiet evening, a mother-to-be lies down as her partner gently massages her back and legs. This simple act melts away physical tension and deepens emotional connection. Prenatal massage reduces anxiety, improves circulation, and prepares the body for childbirth.

Sometimes, healing does not need medicine — just rhythm and scent. Music therapy helps lower anxiety and ease pain naturally, while gentle dance movements can make labour more manageable. Meanwhile, aromatherapy — using calming scents like lavender, chamomile, or peppermint- creates a peaceful environment. A few drops in a diffuser can lift mood, ease nausea, and encourage restful sleep.

A natural path to motherhood

These traditional and alternative therapies remind us that pregnancy care does not always come in a bottle or a pill. When practised mindfully, they offer a holistic approach to support the physical, emotional, and spiritual journey of motherhood. By embracing these gentle practices, mothers-to-be can find comfort, confidence, and calm — making pregnancy not just about growth, but about grace.

By Farhana Abir
Photo: Collected
((The writer is a PhD Scholar & Antenatal Yoga Expert, Pelvic Floor Rehab Therapist, and Runner, Bangladesh.))

#PERSPECTIVE

Why 'performative kindness' is hurting genuine human connections

The rise of pop psychology on social media has informed us about myriad mental health issues. At the same time, it has also instilled in us the knee-jerk reflex to self-diagnose ourselves.

Unfortunately, in most cases, these narratives become self-serving when people make claims of being an 'empath.' As a result, they focus on performative 'niceness' rather than genuine kindness. Today, everyone's an 'empath' diagnosed and certified by Facebook and Instagram.

Mariyam Sultana, Psychological Counsellor for Psychological Health & Wellness Care (PHWC), informs on the changing human narratives in a tech-driven Bangladesh.

The foundation of empathy

According to Mariyam, empathy is attached to genuineness and compassion. "Whether or not someone is actually empathetic is dependent on their ability to understand your perspective. In short, can they actually put themselves in your shoes? Authentic empathy can be felt when someone views your predicament through a compassionate lens, tries to gauge your feelings and reassures you with sensitivity."

Adding to this, she clarifies the common confusion between empathy and sympathy. While empathy enables people to relate to someone's hardships, sympathy only offers surface level concern while remaining detached from the sufferer's experiences.

The fractured class, culture and privilege

She explains, "The practice of appearing 'kind' manifests from our childhoods, with elders pressuring us to be nice to everyone. These teachings are present in school textbooks, imposing black and white concepts of socialisation without addressing the grey areas." By learning these in our formative years, we remain stuck in these behaviours. As adults, there's no way to navigate away from these life lessons, let alone finding different approaches to connect with people. Hence, authentic feelings remain an alien concept here.

Mariyam also addresses the cultural habit of people-pleasing and how it impacts our authenticity. "We tend to lose sight of ourselves, and in the process become detached with society and over time, with our friends." This traces back to our need to be subservient to others, with the hopes of fitting into the fabric of family and society. These insecurities not only cause us to lose ourselves along the way, but also compromise our ability to connect with others- who may align with us," she explains. Hence, women often bear the brunt of people-pleasing, as do some men in society.

Class and academic privileges also influence our ability and inability to empathise with the experiences of others. Mariyam finds that in rural areas, people are able to acknowledge their feelings, despite the barriers to verbalise. Additionally, collective living enables villagers to seek empathy from more than one source. Urban families on the other hand, are more separated from their communities. Which is why we remain oblivious to what's happening to our neighbours next door. Therefore, class and education privileges not only disconnect our ability to feel for others, but also enables misuse of knowledge.

The self-tooting horn

Mariyam observes that people today misinterpret connection. Connection is what we think of others and what they think of us. "While social media can be useful for us, it will still validate content without doing an accuracy check between facts and performance," she explains

People often want to align with a certain agenda on social media. For example, someone appearing to help a wounded animal may just be focused on the reach of their post for how it positions them in society as opposed to raising awareness for the actual cause. This enforces the idea that they fall under the spectrum of 'good' as a person. When faced with little to no engagement, it may leave this self-proclaimed empath starved for attention from specific people.

Against this performative kindness bubble, selective empathy often gets a bad rep. But Mariyam confirms that it's not realistic to expect empathy from everyone. "Socially, if we continue being agreeable with people, we prevent them from seeking other opportunities," she says.

Inner narrative check

The counsellor reflects that becoming overconfident and labelling ourselves as totally empathetic can be risky, considering how complex the human mind is. Being open to knowing ourselves allows us to hold space for our limitations, encourage us to grow personally, tackle challenges, learn about others and help them in the process.

Mariyam suggests understanding the self and surrounding events in order to differentiate between authentic empathy and projection.

"If someone is being mistreated and it affects you emotionally, you may want to ask why it resonates with you, and how are you impacted by it? Moreover, was rejection something you felt in your own life? A good way to understand this is by journaling," she recommends.

Authenticity in action

"If you genuinely want to help people who are struggling in school, university or workplace, you can create a safe space where they can share in confidence. In case they are hesitant to discuss, you can connect them to professional help," suggests Mariyam.

As for families, she suggests being open to conversations and modelling positive behaviour within the home and beyond to create a behavioural blueprint for children. "There are times even children refuse to come through for their parents. In such cases, labelling them negatively validates that they are only capable of socially unacceptable behaviours. Instead, maybe try discussing how and why you need their support. Additionally, allow them to respectfully share the reason behind their decisions," she emphasises.

Mariyam ends with the wisdom that internet trends alone should not be one's sole confirmation of goodness. "Despite presenting ourselves positively, we may be surprised to find there's also darkness within us — such as jealousy. But there may also be underlying reasons for that. We need to be open to the idea of understanding it. Then only can our authenticity shine through."

By Rubab Nayeem Khan
Photo: Courtesy/Collected

#PERSPECTIVE

How Leesa Gazi's work restores forgotten women's stories from the Liberation War

If stories are weapons, then Leesa Gazi carries hers with unwavering resolve. For over a decade, she has been weaving narratives that centre silenced voices — women bruised by war, forgotten by history, and yet brimming with defiance. Whether through theatre, documentary, or films, her work does not just bear witness — it insists on justice.

From the stage production "Birangona: Women of War," which toured both Bangladesh and the UK, to her gut-wrenching documentary "Rising Silence", Gazi has long pushed against the erasure of women's experiences.

Her latest film, "A House Named Shahana (Barir Naam Shahana)", continues that legacy—earning the honour of becoming Bangladesh's official submission to the Oscars.

With Star Lifestyle, the trailblazing storyteller shares her journey through memory, loss, resistance, and what it truly means to tell women's stories from a woman's gaze.

You've worked in theatre, literature, and now cinema. But how do you define your artistic identity?

I like to call myself a storyteller. My passion lies in telling women's stories from a woman's

perspective. It does not matter whether it's through drama, film, or literature — my path has always been about amplifying the voices of women who have been silenced or erased.

Your early work with the Komola Collective and Birangona. What first drew you to the stories of the Birangonas?

My father was a freedom fighter. When I was 17, he told me about seeing a truckload of women being brought to Dhaka after the war — rescued from rape camps. That image haunted me for years. I never saw their stories in the textbooks or on screens. It was as if history had deliberately erased them. That haunted absence became a lifelong drive to restore what had been denied.

Even your recent fiction film Barir Naam Shahana carries that same spirit — centring women, identity, and reclamation. Why do you keep returning to these themes?

Because I live with these stories. I carry them. They become part of me. Whether it's a moment, an image, or a real person, their truth stays with me until I have no choice but to tell it. We have seen too many portrayals where women are reduced to suffering, war, and melodrama. However, there are so many women I know—family, friends, strangers—who have stood tall, carved their paths, and lived unapologetically. I want to reflect those stories on screen.

How did it feel to hear that Barir Naam Shahana was selected as Bangladesh's official Oscar entry?

It was overwhelming. An incredible honour. But honestly, the greatest reward has been the response from the audience. When the ordinary woman sees herself on screen and celebrates that representation, that's the real award.

Many of your projects bring together survivors across generations and geographies. Why is that cross-border solidarity important?

Because trauma is universal. So is strength. When women who've endured violence come together — not to be pitied but to be seen, heard, and understood — they reclaim power. That exchange was not just symbolic; it was deeply healing. These are the kinds of bridges I want my work to build.

In your view, what are some quiet yet powerful acts of resistance by Bangladeshi women that deserve more attention?

A girl going out for a walk. That shouldn't be revolutionary, but it still is. A woman deciding what to wear, or when to return home without explaining herself — that's resistance. These are fundamental rights, yet they're treated as luxuries. The fight begins at the most basic level.

What advice would you give to emerging female filmmakers who face rejection or a lack of institutional support?

Don't take no for an answer. You will be told "no" a thousand times, but if the story lives inside you — tell it. Make your path. No one will make it for you. But, once you start walking it, you will find others who believe in you. I've lived that truth.

What's next for Leesa Gazi?

I will keep listening. And I will keep telling the stories that the world is too afraid to hear. Because someone has to.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Courtesy

#HEALTH & FITNESS

Why dengue is getting deadlier — even when we know the rules

Every year, as soon as the season changes towards monsoon, along with rising humidity, Bangladesh readies itself for a familiar battle. We know the drill by now — empty water containers, wear long sleeves, use mosquito nets, dab mosquito repellent, and call for fogging when needed. Yet despite all the precautions, dengue continues to rise, and more alarmingly, so does the death rate.

The question that now looms over every hospital ward and worried household is simple: why are we losing the fight even when we know what to do? According to Dr Syed Abu Sayeed, Emergency Medical Officer at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, the problem lies in the fact that both the mosquito and the virus are changing faster than we can keep up.

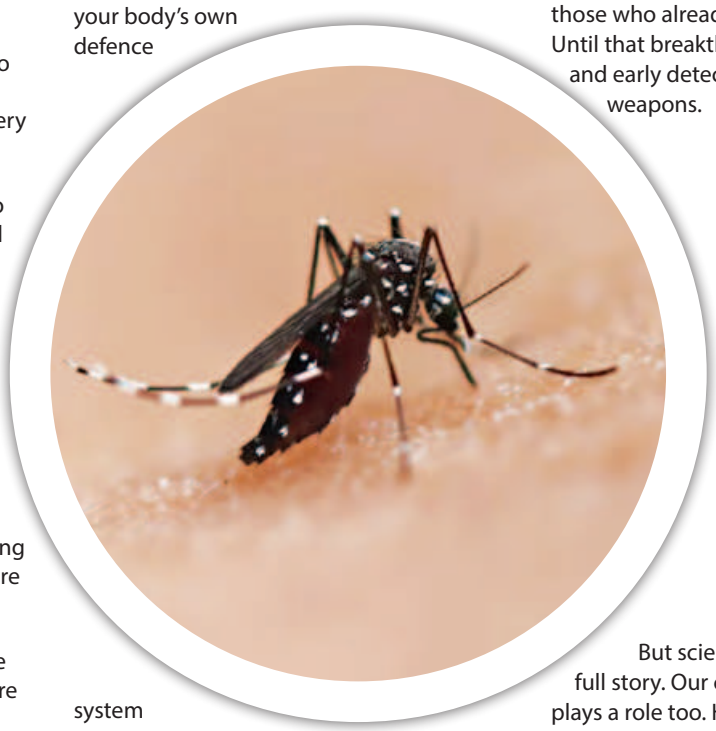
"There are many variations of the female Aedes mosquito now. Vector change is leading to a rise in the rate of infection," he explains. What this means is that the mosquitoes spreading dengue — mainly Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus — are evolving, breeding in new environments, and becoming more resistant to control measures.

At the same time, the dengue virus itself has grown more complicated. There is not just one type of dengue — there are four, known as DENV-1 through DENV-4. Bangladesh used to see one or two dominate a season, but now, all four are circulating at once.

This creates a dangerous overlap.

"When someone gets dengue twice or more, the antibody of the first type can conflict with the second, creating a deadly reaction," says Dr Sayeed.

This is the reason behind the higher fatality rate — a phenomenon known in medical terms as cross-infection or antibody conflict. In simple words, your body's own defence



system can overreact the second time, leading to severe complications such as shock, internal bleeding, or organ failure.

To make matters more complex, there is still no widely available dengue vaccine. While some candidates are in clinical trials, there is not yet one that can safely protect everyone against all four types of the virus.

Scientists face a delicate balance — they need a vaccine that works for people who have never had dengue before, as well as those who already have some immunity. Until that breakthrough comes, prevention and early detection remain our strongest weapons.

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But science alone doesn't tell the full story. Our changing environment plays a role too. Humidity, unpredictable rainfall, and warmer temperatures now give mosquitoes more time and space to breed. Rapid urbanisation, clogged drains, and uneven waste management all make controlling the spread even harder.

And then there's human behaviour — the delays in seeking treatment, overcrowded hospitals, and limited awareness of warning signs like sudden abdominal pain or persistent vomiting. Many patients arrive at hospitals only when their condition turns critical, and by then, the chances of recovery sharply drop.

So, while the preventive advice remains the same, the battlefield has changed. The mosquitoes are adapting, the virus is mutating, and the climate is helping both. What's needed now is a collective push — cleaner surroundings, faster medical response, and greater awareness that dengue isn't just a seasonal inconvenience anymore; it's a shifting, evolving threat.

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: Courtesy

Star LIFE Style

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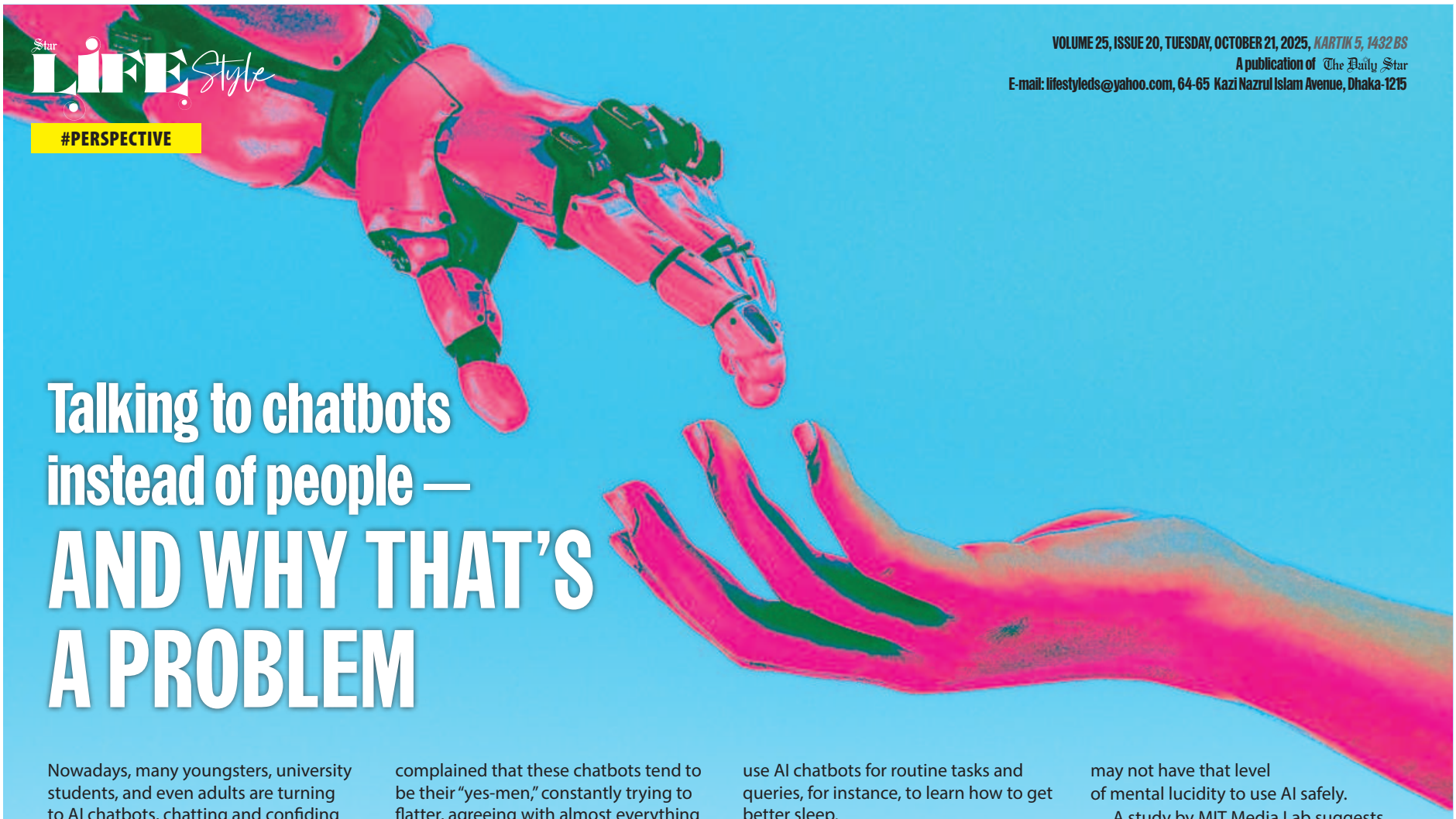


Talking to chatbots instead of people — AND WHY THAT'S A PROBLEM

Nowadays, many youngsters, university students, and even adults are turning to AI chatbots, chatting and confiding in them the same way they would with a well-wisher or even a therapist, often using models such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Character AI. Oblivious to its downsides, we pour our hearts out to them, typing into these chatbots about how we feel when things do not go our way or when we do not get the job we worked very hard for.

Many even use them for self-validation and motivation. They rant to these chatbots, hoping to feel heard and to receive the words they have longed to hear from someone: "You're working really hard," or "It sounds like you're going through a lot right now." Many others use it for making decisions, starting from what to wear and how to plan their study schedule.

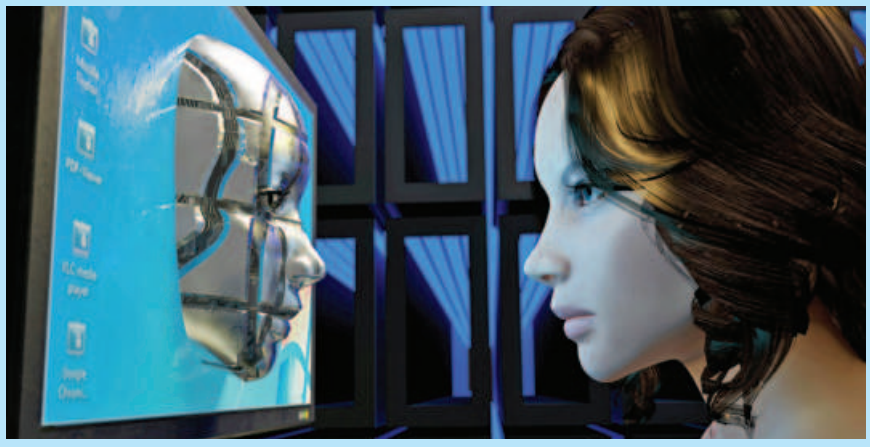
The chatbot seems like just the kind of friend we need — non-judgmental, always available at a moment's notice, and never too demanding. But this growing attachment raises a grave concern. It reflects a generation becoming so lonely and isolated that they now turn to chatbots to say the things they once shared with their friends, siblings, teachers, or parents.

In an interview with The Daily Star, Dr Ashique Selim, a consultant psychiatrist based in the UK, pointed out, "To identify the real problem, we should look at what is prompting the young adults or school children to tell their concerns to these chatbots in the first place."

Referring to a case where a school-going child asked ChatGPT if he should tell his parents that he failed a school test, Dr Selim remarked, "What we should be asking here is, does the kid have no one to share this with — not even his teacher or someone he can trust?"

He points out a worrying gap between what we need (someone we can trust) and what we get (a lifeless chatbot). Many users have also complained that these chatbots tend to be their "yes-men," constantly trying to flatter, agreeing with almost everything they say, and inadvertently validating their beliefs, a phenomenon otherwise known as the AI sycophancy.

Dr Selim highlights a critical issue, saying, "If someone with symptoms like grandiosity tells a therapist, for instance, that he believes he is a king, the therapist can use their expertise to gently guide him toward a healthier perspective. But when posed with the same statement, these chatbots are known to respond with something like, 'That's a very good question.' And that's where the real problem lies."



Instead of constructively pointing out problematic traits to the person, as an expert therapist or well-wisher would, these AI chatbots are known to over-empathise, even with unhealthy behaviour.

Experts warn that these chatbots have neither the experience nor the capability to assess a person's non-verbal cues, and their inaccurate answers pose serious risks to the mental health of vulnerable users who frequently rely on AI for making important life decisions. However, Dr Selim emphasised that the chatbots themselves aren't entirely to blame. He mentioned that one can still use AI chatbots for routine tasks and queries, for instance, to learn how to get better sleep.

He further explained, "For anyone to use AI chatbots efficiently and safely, they need three things: knowledge, awareness, and the right mental state."

More often than not, problems arise when a person lacks one of these three things. When someone has unusual or emotionally heavy conversations with an AI chatbot, they should have the awareness that it is, in reality, just a bunch of code.

They should have the knowledge of the mechanism of the AI chatbots; that it is a Large Language Model (LLM) that uses previously input historical data to generate predictive responses, basically a lot of probability maths taking place behind the scenes.

In essence, it's not human, and what it says is not a human opinion but a statistical prediction of the most probable next set of words that fit the context and the prompt you have just entered. In a way, it is designed to give you a palatable answer.

That being said, users also need to be in the right mental state — lucid enough to make judgment calls, not taking the AI at its word. For instance, a school-going child or someone clinically depressed may not have that level of mental lucidity to use AI safely.

A study by MIT Media Lab suggests that users who view ChatGPT as a friend are more likely to experience negative emotional effects such as loneliness and emotional dependence.

Dr Selim also shared in this regard, "The important thing is to have a balance. After spending a certain amount of time chatting with an AI, there must be a point where one realises they should now spend some time with real people."

Beyond confiding in chatbots, youngsters and children today use AI frequently for homework or assignments. Instead of asking for a ready-made answer to a difficult math problem or theoretical topic, consider asking the AI to explain the underlying concepts and guide you through the methods so you can solve it on your own.

Sal Khan, an American educator, visionary and the founder of the educational platform Khan Academy, contends that AI will not replace human tutors, but it has the potential to complement them by acting as a powerful tool. However, AI will only serve as a powerful tool if we actually use it as one and not become overly dependent on it. Dependency on any tool, including AI, will ultimately prove counterproductive.

Lastly, while AI chatbots can mimic human judgment, they will never be an alternative to a talk with a friend, family member, teacher, or simply someone you can trust. When using AI chatbots as a tool for small queries alongside your conventional tutor or therapist, it is essential to keep in mind that it is merely just that — a tool!

By Minhazur Rahman Alvee
Photo: Collected