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The warmth and wonder
that street food offers

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

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ANIME

Upcoming anime to look forward to in 2026

AYAAN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE

2025 was a blockbuster year for anime, to say the least. With the likes of *Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle* and *Chainsaw Man – The Movie: Reze Arc* smashing commercial records, and dark horses like *To Be Hero X* and *Takopi's Original Sin* topping popularity charts, the lineup for this year raised the bar for 2026. That said, here are a few anime that I'll be looking forward to next year.

Witch Hat Atelier

In the magical world of *Witch Hat Atelier*, witches who wield the ability to use spells and potions are born, not taught. Coco, an ordinary girl who dreams of becoming a witch, can only stare in admiration as she sees self-cleaning hot springs, flying carriages, and paths with lit-up cobblestones all around her. Everything takes a turn, though, when she accidentally discovers a forbidden magic book and is taken under the guidance of an enigmatic witch master. With its intricate world-building and immersive adventures, *Witch Hat Atelier* is one of the most unique shows that will come out in 2026, courtesy of Studio BUG FILMS.

Jojo's Bizarre Adventure: Steel Ball Run

Any longstanding fan of the *Jojo* universe knows how eagerly everyone has been awaiting the anime adaptation of *Steel Ball Run*, the seventh part of the *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* franchise. Set in the American Old West, the show will revolve around

the annual "Steel Ball Run," a six-thousand-kilometre-long horse race with a fifty-million-dollar prize. Johnny Joestar, Gyro Zeppeli, and Diego Brando, carrying three familiar family names, are some of the many participants in the race, and at the centre of the mayhem that unfolds across the series' runtime. With one of the most captivating storylines in the franchise, *Steel Ball Run* should definitely be on your radar in 2026.

Akane-banashi

Adapted from the manga of the same name, *Akane-banashi* follows Akane Ousaki, a girl who grows up spellbound by her father's skill in *rakugo* — a form of solo Japanese verbal comedy. When her father is expelled after a brutal promotion exam and abandons the craft, Akane is fuelled by anger, love, and pride to master *rakugo* herself and confront the system that rejected her idol. Given the source material's high ratings already, it might be safe to say that Akane's character-driven journey in the world of art and performance will deliver.

Jujutsu Kaisen Season 3

When the *Shibuya Arc* of *Jujutsu Kaisen* was airing in 2023, I remember seeing anime-only watchers in absolute horror week in and week out. Unfortunately for them, the immensely popular series is set to return in 2026 with the *Culling Game Arc*, a battle royale-themed iteration that will likely break all expectations anyone had for the series thus far. Orchestrated by Kenjaku, *The Culling*

Game will see players like Itadori, Fushiguro, and allies jump into a lethal game where they must kill others using jujutsu. There are a lot of heavy exposition dumps throughout the arc, but the action more than makes up for the wait.

Frieren: Beyond Journey's End Season 2

There weren't many awards that *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* didn't snag last year, and rightfully so. Studio Madhouse's adventure fantasy following the titular immortal elf, Frieren, and the aftermath of her losing most of her companions to the tides of time, struck a chord with watchers everywhere. And even though the second season has been reported to be only ten episodes long in comparison to the first season's twenty-eight episodes, the source material's strength and Madhouse's production quality make me very hopeful for the show's return.

As things stand, the roster of new, non-sequel anime for 2026 seems a bit lacklustre. However, with all the sequels that are set to come out apart from the ones mentioned above, such as *Black Clover Season 2*, *Oshi no Ko Season 3*, *Jigokuraku Season 2*, etc., it would not be completely amiss to say that we might be in for another good anime season.

Ayaan immerses himself in dinosaur comics and poorly-written manga. Recommend your least favourite reads at ayaan.shams@gmail.com

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OFF CAMPUS

Appreciating the things parents do during exam season

ELMA TABASSUM

As admission exams are underway, previous survivors can be found reminiscing on social media. Some mentioned how their fathers took time off work to accompany them to their out-of-district exam centres, and some thanked their mothers for calling from home every day while they prepared rigorously in the city. These posts pointed out the importance of the immense support we require from our parents during all examinations, not just admissions, as they are arguably the most overwhelming and difficult parts of our student lives.

Here are some things we really appreciate our parents doing for us while we are put through the usual academic wringer.

Keeping us fed and hydrated

It painted a funny picture when I heard my college classmates tell me that their mothers had spent the morning of the exam coaxing them to eat, hand-feeding them when their kids were practically shackled to their desks.

In an attempt to take advantage of every last second, likely, we'll either forget to keep ourselves fed or simply just not prioritise it when trying to compress three months of work into three days—and so, not having to worry about food and hydration can be a literal lifesaver. Our parents have been preventing hunger-and-stress-induced fainting spells one plate of cut-up fruit at a time.

In addition to making sure we are well-fed, many parents go the extra mile during exam season by providing small comforts that make a big difference. From surprise snacks to favourite treats, these gestures help lift our mood and ease some of the stress that comes with revision.

A room of one's own

While having younger, feral cousins ransack our rooms during visits is manageable on regular days, it has the potential to be practically catastrophic for our study plans during exams. It's an underrated gift that our parents are mindful of our exam days before planning to have guests over. Nothing can compare to the sorrow of having to sit with trigonometry worksheets while everyone is having a blast in the next room over. A quiet space can work wonders for our concentration.

Similarly, travelling to go somewhere can derail our progress so much that it's impossible to get on track. Having access to our dedicated study spaces can be crucial during our exams; being able to see the familiar coffee stains on our desks, remnants of late-night study sessions over the year, and being in a familiar space can motivate us to stick it out until the end. We appreciate our



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

parents for keeping these considerations in mind.

Relaxed rules

Staying up late every night definitely isn't good for us; exam season is likely not the time that we will be able to fix that. While watching out to make sure we don't pull too many all-nighters, honestly, it's the best feeling to know that we don't have to worry about our parents being mad at us for staying up late while we frantically read through chapter summaries at 2 AM.

There's also a matter of chores – when exam season means no more dishes to do, at least for a week, it makes one contemplate if exams are the evil we make them out to be. Having our usual daily responsibilities taken off our shoulders during tests lightens both our workloads and our guilt at not being able to contribute to the home as much, and helps us focus more on studying.

Being there for us during mental breakdowns

In times of distress, our parents are the ones we call out to, while, as babies, we learn how to react to different situations by looking to see how our parents react. We never quite grow out of needing that support (my mother could attest to that).

Exam stress can drag some people to the lowest of lows, blurring our visions of a successful future and blotting out any hope we have along with it. We may look calm outside, but likely, we are just desperately trying to keep our anxiety at bay, to avoid worrying our parents too much.

In these times, we rely on our parents. Having their support and their words of reassurance, comfort and motivation during possibly the most harrowing experience in our academic lives can be crucial in keeping us sane. When our parents believe in us, even the darkest of days can seem not so dark.



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SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Integrating Islamic values into the British Curriculum

In conversation with Abdullah Jaman, Founder and Principal of Wheaton International School (WIS) and Guidance International School (GIS)

Abdullah Jaman is an author, a seasoned educator with over 20 years of experience, and a respected leader in education. He is the Founder and Principal of Wheaton International School (WIS) and Guidance International School (GIS) in Dhaka. Known for academic excellence and holistic development, his student-centred leadership emphasises innovation, technology integration, ethical values, and global practices, making a lasting impact on education in Bangladesh.

Campus sat down with Jaman to talk about his early influences, lifelong commitment to learning, and his vision for value-driven international education.

Childhood and early influences

"Growing up in a modest and disciplined household, my earliest

lessons came not from textbooks, but from the character and values embodied by my parents," says Jaman. "My father was a firm believer in responsibility and integrity. He taught us that honesty is not merely a virtue; it is a lifelong commitment. My mother, on the other hand, nurtured compassion, spirituality, and emotional strength. Together, they created a home where faith and discipline shaped everyday life."

"Despite limited resources, education was always treated as the most powerful tool we possessed," Jaman continues. "My parents believed that knowledge shapes destiny, and that conviction guided every decision in our home."

These formative experiences shaped Jaman's discipline, his deep respect for learning, and ultimately, his lifelong passion for

transforming education in Bangladesh.

Formative years and education

Jaman's early schooling was typical of the Bangladeshi system. It was structured, disciplined, and exam-driven. While it taught him resilience, he often felt restricted by the lack of creativity and critical exploration in the curriculum. This changed when Jaman entered Dhaka University.

"At Dhaka University, my intellectual world expanded," says Jaman. "I learned to question, think critically, and appreciate academic rigour. University life introduced me to vibrant discussions, diverse perspectives, and the powerful role of education in shaping societies. At the same time, my connection to Islamic knowledge grew deeper. I realised that modern education alone cannot nurture a complete human being unless paired with moral and spiritual grounding."

This realisation formed the foundation of Jaman's belief that today's learners need a global and modern curriculum, as well as a strong Islamic worldview rooted in ethics, values, and identity.

A vision for integrated education

For Jaman, the idea of combining Islamic education with the Cambridge curriculum was not a sudden revelation. It began forming quietly during his early university years, driven by countless conversations with parents who felt torn between two options: choosing world-class academics or a strong Islamic identity for their children.

"I believed that this should never be a choice as both are essential," says Jaman. "This conviction led to the first integrated-school model I designed, a system where children could experience academic excellence while developing a strong moral and spiritual foundation."

"Over the years, this model expanded through different institutions, and now, that model is being implemented at Wheaton International School (WIS) and Guidance International School (GIS)," Jaman continues. "Today, the model is widely acknowledged across Bangladesh as a pioneering framework, one that has inspired many institutions to adopt similar approaches. It humbles me to know that what started as a personal conviction has become a movement shaping thousands of young minds."

Founding WIS and GIS

According to Jaman, establishing multiple schools has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding journeys of his life. His earliest initiatives served as testing grounds where he applied his ideas with courage, purpose, and strong conviction. These formative efforts enabled him to continuously refine and strengthen the integrated curriculum model. The establishment of WIS marked a significant turning point, as it delivered an international standard of education while remaining firmly anchored in core values. GIS, by contrast, stands as the culmination of Jaman's two decades of learning, experimentation, thoughtful refinement, and sustained educational leadership.

"The greatest challenges were ensuring teacher quality, building a relevant curriculum, and maintaining strong Islamic values without compromising academic excellence," says Jaman, reflecting on his experience of establishing multiple schools. "Yet, the milestones that sustained me were far greater — watching our students grow in confidence, character, and leadership, and seeing parents trust our mission wholeheartedly. These experiences reaffirmed that meaningful change in education requires vision, persistence, and unwavering belief in the potential of young people."

Academic pursuit and lifelong learning

Jaman firmly believes that an educator must be a lifelong learner, and his academic journey clearly reflects that philosophy. His studies at Dhaka University provided a solid intellectual foundation. His postgraduate degree in Aqidah

from Al Madinah International University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, further deepened his understanding of the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Returning to Dhaka University for his M Ed strengthened his expertise in curriculum assessment and school leadership. And now, Jaman's ongoing postgraduate studies at Cambridge University in the UK have completely transformed his understanding of educational measurement, assessment validity, and global educational standards.

Cambridge exposed Jaman to advanced frameworks, contemporary research, and world-leading experts, knowledge that he is already applying across his institutions. Jaman notes that continuous learning keeps him grounded and ensures that his leadership remains dynamic, informed, and globally aligned.

Reflecting on his experience as an author and thinker

"My journey as an author began when I identified significant gaps in the materials used globally in Islamic Studies for English-medium students," says Jaman. "Many textbooks were overly simplified, lacked authenticity, and, most importantly, were not developed following international curriculum standards or established curriculum-development models."

Noticing all this, Jaman wanted to develop study materials that were academically rigorous, theologically authentic, visually engaging, and

integrate Quranic verses, authentic *Hadiths*, *Seerah*, Islamic manners, and historical lessons in a way that resonates with modern learners while maintaining complete theological integrity."

Alongside this, Jaman also developed the *Arabic Language Learning Series*, a structured programme that introduces Arabic not just as a language, but as a gateway to understanding the *Quran*. While most Arabic textbooks available for English-medium learners rely on rote memorisation, Jaman's series adopts a communicative approach, focusing on vocabulary development, sentence formation, comprehension skills, and functional usage.

The *Aqidah Series* is another effort Jaman is deeply proud of. Recognising the complexity of Islamic belief systems, he designed this series to present Aqidah concepts with clarity, authenticity, and intellectual depth. According to Jaman, this series will help students build a strong foundation in Islamic creed while nurturing critical thinking and moral consciousness.

"Together, these series form a complete ecosystem of Islamic learning materials, something I had always wished to see in the English-medium sector. Today, many schools across Bangladesh and abroad are using these books as standard references," says Jaman. "Their growing acceptance is an indication that parents and educators around the world are seeking content that is academically robust, spiritually grounded, and aligned with international curriculum standards."

Jaman's vision for transforming education in Bangladesh

Jaman's long-term vision is to help Bangladesh emerge as a global model of balanced, value-driven, and high-quality education. He wants to see a system where every child –



pedagogically structured for modern learners.

"One of the most impactful dimensions of my work has been the development of comprehensive, research-based Islamic learning materials for students from playgroup to higher secondary levels," adds Jaman. "Over the years, I have authored and supervised multiple book series that address long-standing gaps in the global English-medium Islamic education landscape."

"The *Islamic Studies Book Series* was my first major project," Jaman continues. "It was born from the need for textbooks that are not only authentic but also age-appropriate, academically structured, and visually engaging. Each level of the series is designed following internationally recognised curriculum-development models, ensuring clear learning outcomes, vertical progression, and pedagogical coherence. These books

regardless of socioeconomic background – receives education that builds intellect, identity, character, technological competence, and spiritual grounding.

"I want our children to grow up confident in their identity, competent in their skills, compassionate in their actions, and guided by a spirit of inclusivity that embraces diversity," Jaman says. "For Bangladesh to move forward, we need stronger teacher-training institutes, improved assessment systems, modernised curriculum frameworks, and a unified national vision for education. Through the schools I lead, the training programmes I develop, and the advisory work I do at home and abroad, I am committed to contributing to this transformation. Bangladesh has immense potential. All we need is strategic direction, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to educational excellence."



■ OFF CAMPUS ■

Rethinking New Year's resolutions: a case for short-term goals

FARIHA LAMISA

As we enter 2026, many of us feel a strong urge to start fresh—a familiar feeling that returns at the beginning of every new year. We often reflect on the mistakes that have limited our growth and think about how we can overcome them in the year ahead.

Personally, over the past few years, I have found myself making promises to be more disciplined in life, finish my studies on time, not overspend, and so on. However, rarely do I translate my New Year's resolutions into reality, and I mostly find myself crumbling.

My experience says I am not the only one; rather, it is quite a common conundrum. Research from the University of Scranton suggests that only eight percent of people realise their New Year's goals. Hence, isn't it time we rethink our approach to New Year's resolutions? And, instead of trying to reinvent our lives entirely whenever we enter a new year, can we not try to set short-term goals as our New Year's resolutions—goals that are achievable in a limited time?

One important, and perhaps the most vital, reason behind taking our New Year resolution based on short-term-achievements is that our brain is more receptive toward short-term goals. Psychological studies show that our brain is wired to prioritise short-term tasks over long-term ones due to the release of dopamine, a crucial neurotransmitter that controls motivation for immediate wins.

This phenomenon has evolved through the early human experience of immediate survival. In the case of our ancestors who lived in unpredictable environments, this short-term achievement came in the form of dealing with natural calamity. For them, focusing on a quick gain, such as securing food or ensuring their safety for the present, was a more reliable option than long-term future planning.

Humans tend to favour immediate rewards. So, when you're asked to choose between the healthy dinner you promised yourself and your favourite junk food—loaded with oil, sugar, and salt for instant pleasure—you are far

more likely to choose the latter and give in to short-term gratification.

Therefore, it is often more effective to set goals that allow you to see results immediately, giving you a clear sense of achievement. Instead of promising yourself that you will eat healthy for the entire year, you could set a smaller, more manageable goal, such as eating healthy two days a week with a gap between those days. This approach creates a feeling of success twice a week without requiring a drastic lifestyle change.

In addition, failing to keep a promise you made to yourself rarely produces positive emotions. More often, it leads to feelings of self-defeat and creates a lingering sense of guilt. Rather than motivating you to improve, this emotional response can quietly undermine your confidence and willingness to try again.

We feel disappointed because we could not honour a commitment we knowingly made for our own benefit. During this process, we begin to question our self-discipline and our ability to improve or make better choices in the future. Over time, this self-doubt can become a larger obstacle than the habit we were trying to change in the first place.

Over time, this self-doubt can become deeply ingrained, with guilt resurfacing each time we give in to the pleasure we once promised to avoid. It is important to recognise that our habits have been formulated over months, if not years, of practice. One decision and one promise will not undo that magically. Thus, it is important to work on new habit formation rather than altering an existing habit. That new habit might look as trivial as eating healthy once a week or reducing one hour of daily screen time. But remember: each step matters.

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Admission Fair Spring 2026 underway at Stamford University Bangladesh

Stamford University Bangladesh has launched its Admission Fair Spring 2026 on January 3, offering prospective students admission to 29 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes across 14 departments under five faculties.

The fair was inaugurated by the Acting Vice-Chancellor of Stamford University Bangladesh, Prof. Dr Md Younus Mia. Among others present at the inauguration were Academic Advisor Prof. Dr Aka Firoz Ahmed; Treasurer Prof. Dr Mohammad Jeaul Hasan; Dean of the Faculty of Science Prof. Dr Ahmad Kamruzzaman Majumder; Proctor and Associate Prof. Dr Mrityunjoy Acharjee; Registrar Muhammad Abdul Matin; Convener of the Admission Fair and Chairman of the Department of Economics Prof. Dr Abdus Sattar; Head of the Public Relations Division Prodeepo Mobarok; and Acting Head of the Admission Department Md Ashik Mahmud. Deans of various faculties, chairmen of departments, university officials, and staff members were also in attendance.

At the fair, prospective students are being offered a 50 percent discount on admission fees along with a 10 percent tuition fee waiver for the first semester.

Students interested in admission may visit the admission office at Stamford University Bangladesh's 51 Siddeshwari Road, Ramna, Dhaka campus. Admission details and online application facilities are available on the university's official website. Further information can be obtained by calling the university's helpline.

With a strong emphasis on research-oriented and career-focused education, Stamford University Bangladesh continues to attract both local and international students. The institution features modern and digitised classrooms, free internet access, advanced laboratories, student zones, playgrounds, and a well-equipped library. A permanent campus is currently under construction, with academic activities already underway on a limited scale.



OFF CAMPUS

The warmth and wonder that street food offers



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The fact that this love is shared so universally across the country — though it holds different sentiments for each of us — creates a deep sense of connection as everybody infuses these treats with stories from their youth.

ALEENA YUSRA

Sometimes, my optimistic afternoons from the second grade return to me without warning. The memories arrive as the sting of spice, the warmth of a kind sun, and a light paper plate in hand. On those days, I would always linger outside my house, trying to catch my breath after sneaking away with my aunt to enjoy a notoriously spicy plate of *fuchka*. We would slip into the bustling street to the stall in front of my school, where the kind *mama* concentrated all the magic from Andromeda into every shell he cracked.

We asked for extra spice every time, fully aware that our runny noses would betray us once we returned home. Each bite carried the childish joy of keeping a tamarind-drenched secret. We laughed as we plotted ways to hide it from my mother, sharing smiles with strangers who, like us, had dared to ask for too much heat.

Among the throngs of people, each of us was united over the universal longing for a delicious pause from the monotony of a normal day. I didn't realise then that this taste would one day become a place I could no longer return to. When my aunt moved away, *fuchka* was a snack I could remember intimately.

As I grew older, I slowly felt camaraderie with every passerby when I realised that this sentiment was far from unusual. Everyone spoke of street food in their own careful, affectionate way, as if the word itself brought back cherished times. The fact that this love is shared so universally across the country — though it holds different sentiments for each of us — creates a deep sense of connection as everybody infuses these treats with stories from their youth.

For Sahrish Nazmul, an O level student, culture felt distant while growing up in an isolated area. However, she built a sacred bridge through the delicacy of street foods.

"I didn't get the chance of exploring my own culture in obvious ways," she says. "Yet one of the strongest connections I formed came through warm, syrupy *jilapis*. As a child, this was the best part of my day. When I used to get into silly arguments with my father, he would make it up to me with *jilapis*."

Sahrish further explained how life moved forward. She had to change schools and houses, which caused the *jilapis* to slowly disappear. But something else filled the gap in this new chapter of her life.

"One evening after class, my mother and I found smaller *fuchkas* being sold right in front of my new school," says Sahrish. "It was

perfect and became a new tradition. Soon, my friends joined in too, and after every exam we would visit the same vendor for a quiet celebration."

Looking back, Sahrish reminisced about how these snacks were more than a simple bite: "These simple street foods: sweet *jilapis* and tangy *fuchkas* were my culinary map of Dhaka, marking my father's love, the resilience of my family during a move, and the forging of new friendships in every chapter of my life. They taught me culture isn't abstract. It's immediate and very appetising, waiting to be savoured on the very streets everyone walks."

This sense of immediacy repeats itself across experiences, with a hue of belonging and community. Street food often suspends hierarchy and flattens differences. It only asks that you stand close enough to wait your turn.

After sitting for the Dhaka University entrance exam last year, Akil Rafid remembers leaving with his nerves still buzzing. Not knowing many people or the place, he ordered a plate of *naga fuchka* from a nearby stall.

"Honestly, somehow the panic and awkwardness disappeared quickly enough," he says. "Everyone was united under the very simple love for a food that knows no divide."

For Nareena Sameh, a high school student who regularly participates in fundraising runs, street food holds a similar communal value.

"What makes street food so sacred to me is how easily it removes the barrier of being strangers," she reflects.

Sameh recalls a warm moment from a winter run in Old Dhaka: "After the run, my mother and I, as well as some of the people we ran with, had tea and butter buns from a small vendor. We sat together, still catching our breath, laughing and sharing something warm under the cold morning. It was a mellow moment of bonding as the city woke up."

For many, the power of street food is felt through nostalgia. Warisha Nawer, an O level student, claims that we tend to value entities that have the capability of holding memories. She recalls visiting food stalls with her parents and the enthusiasm that accompanied those visits. Although the visits are a little different, they remain just as wonderful.

Even in life's demanding seasons, street food offers something steady. As Adia Ahmed prepares to apply to universities, she remembers how she found comfort in routine during her HSC days.

"After Biology coaching, it was almost ritualistic to eat a small treat. I'd tell myself it was good motivation," she shares. "I used to have *jhalmuri* from this Sector-7 *mama* that made a special sour sauce. Looking back, during the relentless days of endless studying and coaching classes, those brief stops might've been the highlight of my day."

And sometimes, these memories endure for decades. Romana Afroz, now an academy teacher, traces her recollections from school to university and into adulthood.

"*Fuchka* captured the essence of my school life," she says.

Later, during her university days, the ritual continued.

"My friend and I would rush through the halls after class for these mini *shingaras* we could find in front of our university," she says. "It was a place called *Mamur Dokan*. I recall some of our best times in there, sharing a *jhalmuri* or tea after class."

"Life happened for both of us, and a lot has changed. We're both 40 with our own families, but now and then we come together to take a break from our lives and enjoy *jhalmuri* together as if we are in *Mamur Dokan* once again," she adds.

In Bangladesh, street food often works in magical ways. It feeds us but it also remembers us. It holds our arguments and reconciliations, our exam anxieties, and our friendships in formation. Street foods meet us wherever we are in life: stressed, joyful, young, older, and offer warmth in disposable cups, spice on shared plates, and sweetness wrapped in paper.

For me, it still tastes like *fuchka* eaten in secret, beside an aunt who now lives far away.

Aleena is a struggling 9th grader who loves robots and revolutions. Send her your esoteric online archives at aleenayusra33@gmail.com.



ILLUSTRATION: AZRA HUMAYRA

■ HUMOUR ■

My GPA and I are in an on-again, off-again relationship

TASFIAH LIAKAT

Most of us have at least had one relationship in our lives where dealing with the other party feels like facing off with a dementor. They wipe away every trace of happiness from your mind, or simply make you question your sanity. But the worst of the bunch for many is the no-amount-of-therapy-can-fix-this relationship we have with our GPA.

We were just kids when we fell in love

We met for the first time back in fifth grade. I liked GPA, but I didn't see her for who she truly was, and I had no idea what love or relationships actually entailed. I only had to show up to classes, do my daily homework, remember to bring pens, and she was happy with me. I would listen to older students' warnings and promise to myself that I won't ever let my relationship with her become like that.

As time went on, she started complaining that she was being taken for granted, demanded more, and expected better from me. By the time we got to high school, things were quite rocky. I started avoiding her for fear of being rejected. I put in more time and effort, skipped family functions, cancelled plans with friends, and uninstalled my social media accounts. All of my attempts kept failing to sway her to my side. Still, I did not stop trying.

By the time graduation rolled around, I had to talk myself out of giving up every day. I had finally had enough of her passive-aggressiveness and impossible ultimatums. I thought I would start over in university, and I would get a fresh start.

You set fires to my forest, and you let it burn

It's common knowledge that high school sweethearts rarely make it, if ever. But I overestimated us, turned up the volume to drown out the noise, and listened to "They Don't Know About Us" on repeat. I did everything I was supposed to do. I sat in the front row with laser-sharp focus, showed unnecessary enthusiasm, and obnoxiously nodded along

with every word. I took notes aggressively, with a wide range of coloured pens, sign pens, and highlighters.

I even dared to occasionally give some advice to younger students: "Just manage your time wisely" and "Discipline is the key". Who did I think I was, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar?

I promised myself every night, "I'll wake up early to study," but I didn't wake up early (shocking, I know). I promised myself, "I'll just watch the recording later (no one watches the recording later)."

Midterms arrived, and reality smacked me hard in the face. I downloaded the PDF that was shared in the department messenger group, stared at my phone screen, and my brain went, "Have I *always* been *this* dumb?" University doesn't test what you know; it tests how well you can pretend to understand slides that were never explained.

Meanwhile, my friends were all out there thriving and pretending that they were motivational speakers: "Don't let numbers define you." Except those numbers decide my scholarships, my internships, and whether my parents will still pretend to love me.

For you, I would cross the line, I would waste my time, I would lose my mind

After completing the first semester, I had tricked myself into thinking, GPA isn't the villain, I am. I was out blaming professors, classmates, when it was me procrastinating like there was no tomorrow. So, I started going to consultation hours, watched Law School fan-made videos, made a foolproof schedule with every minute accounted for. It slowly started working. We sometimes flirted when I scored well in a quiz, but then we fought again, when too many lab reports were due at the same time. My progress was being noticed by professors and classmates, and I was like, "Yes, validation, inject it directly into my veins."

Except that old adage proved true, "The path to hell is paved with good intentions" during finals week. I was juggling too many half-done assignments, missed quizzes,

and group projects at the same time. I found myself in a strange new love triangle: me, GPA, and groupmates who thought contributing meant reacting to texts with a thumbs-up emoji. I started to spiral. My sleep schedule was gone; I'd open Google Drive and realise it hadn't been updated in two weeks.

That's when I was forced to acknowledge, GPA and I had different love languages. Mine was "words of affirmation", even if they are untrue, and GPA's was "acts of service", like submitting assignments on time, which was something beyond my capabilities. I was just done with it all. Why can't she just appreciate the effort? Why does it always have to be about the results?

Cause loving is hard, it don't always work, you just try your best not to get hurt

When my GPA went from three-point-something to let's-never-talk-about-it, I finally decided to put my foot down and try the healthy way, aka going to therapy. There I came face-to-face with a whole other issue; wasting three hours sitting in sweltering heat, stuck in traffic.

So, I had to make an effort to reconnect with my friends instead, and that's when I figured out, every one of us is miserable in some way, shape, or form. One friend is pretending to love the major his parents chose for him; after all, who are you to contradict the one paying your tuition and sponsoring the life you are accustomed to living? One is living on instant noodles, regrets, and self-hate. Lastly, there's always that one friend who somehow has the perfect GPA and swears they barely studied.

While my GPA graph still might look like Bangladesh's economy, unpredictable and tragic, I came to realise, our GPA doesn't display the level of our intelligence or its lack thereof, rather it demonstrates how well we adapt to a broken system. We aren't constantly at each other's throats anymore. Instead, we are civil like divorced parents with joint custody; she gets my sanity on weekdays, I get the weekends.