

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY 2026
Bridging the gap in Autism care

RABEYA FERDOUS

Observed globally on 2 April, World Autism Awareness Day highlights the urgent need to improve the lives of people living with autism. First declared by the United Nations in 2008, this year's theme, "Autism and Humanity - Every Life Has Value," calls for dignity, inclusion and equal opportunity across societies.

In Bangladesh, the day is marked by rallies, seminars and media campaigns, yet awareness alone is not enough. Experts stress the importance of multidisciplinary care, where occupational therapists play a pivotal role. They help children develop essential skills, including sensory regulation, fine and gross motor coordination, and the ability to perform daily activities such as eating, dressing and grooming independently.

Therapists also nurture social interaction, play and communication skills, while addressing behavioural challenges through structured interventions. Guidance for parents and adjustments to home environments further support children's development and reduce anxiety.

However, access to such services remains limited and largely Dhaka-centric. Expanding occupational therapy nationwide is crucial to ensure individuals with autism gain the skills needed for independence and meaningful inclusion in society.



WORLD HEALTH DAY 2026
Together for health. Stand with science.



STAR HEALTH DESK

On World Health Day 2026, the World Health Organisation is calling for a renewed global commitment to science under the theme "Together for health. Stand with science." The campaign highlights how scientific collaboration remains central to safeguarding not only human health, but also the wellbeing of animals, plants and the planet.

At a time marked by misinformation, climate threats and evolving health challenges, the message is clear: evidence must lead the way. WHO emphasises that scientific knowledge, when combined with strong partnerships and political will, can transform health outcomes and build resilient systems. The year-long initiative celebrates breakthroughs in science while urging governments and institutions to translate research into action.

Central to this vision is the "One Health" approach, recognising

that human health is deeply interconnected with environmental and animal health. From emerging diseases to food security and climate change, science offers the tools to understand risks and develop effective solutions. However, experts warn that without sustained investment and trust in science, these solutions may fall short.

The campaign calls on governments to prioritise science-based policies, strengthen support for research and reinforce WHO's role in guiding global health decisions. Embedding evidence into health, environmental and food systems is seen as essential for long-term sustainability.

Health professionals and scientists are also urged to step forward as trusted voices. By explaining complex evidence in accessible ways, they can help bridge the gap between science and the public, fostering trust and encouraging informed decision-

making. Communication, WHO notes, is as crucial as discovery itself.

Communities, too, play a vital role. The campaign encourages individuals to ask questions, seek reliable information and actively engage in conversations about health. Through social media movements such as #StandWithScience, people are invited to share how science impacts their lives and contributes to healthier communities.

Ultimately, World Health Day 2026 is more than a symbolic observance; it is a call to action. It reminds the world that trust in science is not just an academic concern but a public necessity. By choosing evidence over misinformation and collaboration over division, societies can better prepare for future health challenges.

As global health threats continue to evolve, standing with science may be the most powerful step towards a safer, healthier and more sustainable future for all.

Beyond the classroom door
Ensuring inclusion for Autistic students

TANIA ZARIN KHUSBU

Inclusive education for children with autism in Bangladesh requires more than enrolment in mainstream schools. Experts stress that meaningful inclusion depends on awareness, trained teachers, appropriate resources and a broader cultural shift towards acceptance.

Misconceptions about autism remain widespread, often leading to stigma and exclusion. Schools can play a critical role by promoting awareness and fostering understanding among teachers, students and communities. When neurodiversity is understood, classrooms become safer and more welcoming spaces.

Adapting teaching methods is equally important. Structured routines, clear instructions and visual supports help autistic students navigate daily activities with confidence. Integrating their interests into lessons can enhance engagement and emotional development.

However, teacher training remains limited, with little practical exposure to inclusive education. Continuous professional development, along with access to assistive technologies and individualised education plans, is essential for effective learning.

Improved infrastructure, collaboration with families and community awareness are also vital. Building inclusive classrooms is not a one-time effort but a sustained commitment to ensuring every child can learn, participate and thrive.

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Power without conscience

In observance of the International Day of Conscience on April 5

DR RUBAIUL MURSHED

A beginning for our time: On a small planet suspended in a vast, silent universe, a rare light flickers—the light of human consciousness. As reflected in a conversation in Davos, this consciousness may be rare, placing on humanity a profound responsibility to preserve it. Yet a deeper question emerges: what is the value of preserving consciousness if conscience itself begins to fade?

The forgotten compass: Conscience is humanity's inner compass; the force that distinguishes right from wrong and guides action. Today, however, we face a troubling paradox. While human capability has expanded beyond imagination, the moral restraint that gives it meaning is weakening.

A warning from the present: Missiles now cross skies faster than diplomacy can respond. Conflicts, technological risks, and global interdependence mean that decisions made in one region affect millions elsewhere. Beneath these developments lies a quieter danger: the erosion of moral restraint.

Today, power is abundant. But conscience is increasingly scarce. **Lessons history still whispers:** Leaders such as Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela showed that lasting leadership is grounded not in force, but in moral clarity.

Yet today, polarisation, speed, and short-term thinking challenge this principle.

New century, deeper risks: Cyber threats, artificial intelligence, and global interdependence amplify both opportunity and risk.

Technology extends human capability, but cannot replace conscience.

Why conscience must lead: Conscience is not abstract; it is practical. It encourages restraint, strengthens trust, and enables cooperation.

We must invest in:
• Ethical education
• Accountability
• Leadership grounded in responsibility

A message to the young: To the youth: your generation will shape the future.

In a world of noise and speed, conscience must not be outsourced. It must be cultivated within.

In a noisy world, your conscience is your quiet power.

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FLOW FEST REDEFINES

WORKPLACE connection beyond the office bridging wellbeing

SAZED IQBAL

In today's fast-paced corporate world, a quieter crisis is unfolding behind glass offices and crowded meeting rooms, workplace loneliness. It is not the absence of people, but the absence of meaningful connection. Professionals often know colleagues by their roles, routines and responses, yet remain strangers to their inner lives. This silent disconnect is increasingly recognised as a barrier to wellbeing and productivity.

Research from Gallup's State of the Global Workplace report highlights the impact. Employees who have a close friend at work are significantly more engaged, productive and likely to remain in their



roles. The difference between superficial interaction and genuine connection is not subtle, it is transformative.

Yet modern workplaces often mistake activity for connection. Team lunches and structured events rarely create the depth required for trust to grow. Real connection develops in unstructured moments, in shared experiences, open conversations and the simple act of being seen beyond a job title.

This is where retreats are gaining attention. By taking employees out of familiar environments and away from daily pressures, they create space for authentic interaction. In natural settings, individuals begin to shed professional barriers, allowing more honest and human connections to emerge.

Initiatives such as "Flow Fest" are tapping into this need. Their retreats in Bangladesh are designed to bring teams together through shared activities, mindful rest and collective experiences. Over several days, participants move, eat and unwind together, often rediscovering both personal balance and team cohesion.

Experts suggest that such investments are not merely about employee satisfaction but long-term organisational strength. Teams built on trust communicate more effectively, adapt better under pressure and demonstrate stronger retention. In this sense, connection is not a soft benefit, but a strategic asset.

As workplaces continue to evolve, addressing loneliness may become as important as improving performance metrics. Creating environments where people feel understood, not just employed, could be the key to healthier organisations and more sustainable success.

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Why doctors no longer want their children to follow them

PROF DR SYED MD AKRAM HUSSAIN

A growing number of doctors are discouraging their children from entering the medical profession, raising concerns about the future of healthcare in South Asia. A recent survey in India found that 91 percent of physicians would not want their children to pursue medicine, a trend experts warn may also be emerging in Bangladesh.

At the core of this shift lies an overstretched healthcare system. In public hospitals, doctors routinely face overwhelming patient loads with limited resources and support. The result is not just long working hours but chronic exhaustion, leading to burnout, reduced motivation and compromised quality of care. The pressure begins early in medical training and persists throughout a doctor's career.

Equally concerning is the growing threat to workplace safety. Reports of verbal abuse, intimidation and even physical assault have become increasingly common. Such conditions foster fear and defensive medical practices, where decisions may be influenced by legal concerns rather than clinical judgement.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed a silent mental health crisis among healthcare workers. High



levels of anxiety, depression and burnout remain largely unaddressed, with limited institutional support available.

At the same time, trust between doctors and patients is eroding. The rise of misinformation and social media scrutiny has intensified pressure on physicians, often without adequate backing from institutions.

Experts emphasise that these challenges are systemic rather than individual. Addressing them will require comprehensive reforms,

including improved workplace safety, fair legal frameworks, reduced workloads and better mental health support.

As Bangladesh considers health sector reforms, the warning signs are clear. Without urgent action, the profession risks losing future talent, threatening the stability of the healthcare system for years to come.

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BEACON
Light for life

মুখ ও গলার ক্যান্সার

সচেতনতা মাস এপ্রিল, ২০২৬

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