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UNPACKING THE ABUSE INFLICTED BY TEACHERS

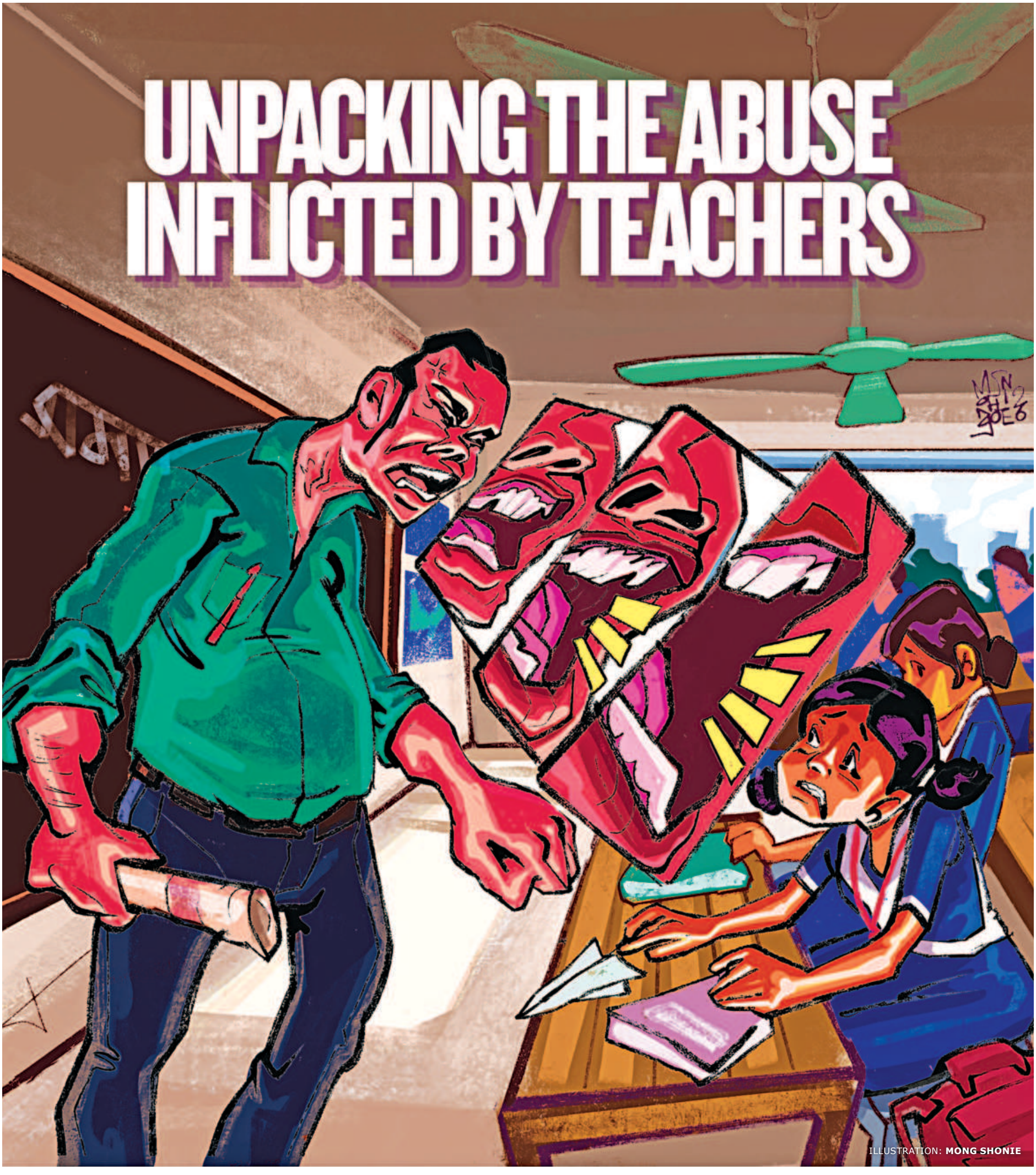


ILLUSTRATION: **MONG SHONIE**

TV SERIES

The Grand Tour enters a promising new era

MYNUL KARIM

The Grand Tour is back with a new season, but it is no longer hosted by its original legendary trio of hosts Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond, and James May.

As someone who grew up watching the trio of Clarkson, Hammond, and May for years on BBC's *Top Gear*, and later followed them to *The Grand Tour*, I was not convinced that the formula could work without them. So, when Thomas Holland, James Engelsman, and Francis Bourgeois were announced as the new hosts, my expectations were fairly modest. I expected a competent car show; I did not expect to enjoy it nearly as much as I did.

What gave me relief was that the new hosts brought their own personalities to the format without spending all their time and energy pretending to be the original trio.

Thomas and James already have a natural chemistry from their work on their YouTube channel Throttle House, which I highly recommend everyone check out, where they make some of the most entertaining car reviews on the platform. They bounce off each other comfortably, and their enthusiasm for cars feels genuine rather than manufactured.

On the other hand, Francis, who became a TikTok sensation owing to his trainspotting obsession, is the wildcard inclusion. There is a slightly awkward, almost innocent quality to his enthusiasm that makes him surprisingly funny. His excitement can be wonderfully infectious. His quirkiness, with all his train trivia sprinkled in the episodes, also reflected the authenticity of his character without taking away anything from his petrolhead side. And, most importantly, he gels with the duo of Thomas and James brilliantly.

The show also handles its transition from the old trio better than I expected. The cameos of Clarkson, Hammond, and May act as an obvious nod to the past, but it does not feel like the entire season is built around nostalgia.

The format of the show ditches the audience segments of the early seasons of *The Grand Tour* and runs continuously as a series of documentaries akin to the latter seasons and the specials. Fast cars, slow cars, cheap and expensive cars all feature in magnificent shooting locations in each episode that represent unique car cultures across the world. There are also solo car reviews, road trips, comparisons, and the kind of unnecessarily elaborate challenges that have always been part of the show's DNA.

The production still looks as polished as ever. The show's runtime is also well managed, packed full of content in only six episodes with negligible filler. But the direction feels noticeably less chaotic than the old one.

This tonal shift is probably the biggest difference between the old and the new. Clarkson, Hammond, and May had spent decades developing their particular rhythm. Their arguments, insults, and ridiculous decisions felt completely natural. Thomas, James, and Francis may still need some time to carve out their particular rhythm as a trio. Some jokes feel slightly forced, which had me searching for the punchline. Some sequences lack the wonderfully unpredictable feeling that the original trio could create without even trying. Nevertheless, the show never kept me yearning for more humour or pandemonium with its balancing act of the spectacle and the personalities.

However, those shortcomings became less of an issue when I decided to stop comparing the new hosts with the old ones and started watching them on their own terms. The new *Grand Tour* does not have the same magic as the Clarkson, Hammond, and May era with its safer setting and toned-down humour and chaos, but there are still moments when you can feel the shadow of the old *Grand Tour*. Most importantly, it introduces the new trio splendidly and establishes a great starting point for what could be a new winning formula for the years to come.

After watching the disastrous attempts to simply replace the original *Top Gear* trio, I think Amazon has taken the more sensible approach here: give the format to people who genuinely love cars, let them be themselves, and see what happens. Perhaps the new hosts were due some credence from the fans as well, since they had been handpicked by Clarkson, Hammond, and May as their successors. And it has clearly worked. They are genuinely hilarious, energetic, and essentially sincere in their act, and together, they are surprisingly entertaining.

I would be lying if I said that I did not miss Clarkson's shouting, Hammond's spectacular mishaps, and May's increasingly exasperated explanations. But after completing the new season, my mind did not jump to the thought of wanting to see the original trio make a comeback. Rather, I was watching and wondering what Thomas, James, and Francis might do next.



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ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

COVER STORY

UNPACKING THE ABUSE INFLICTED BY TEACHERS

Bullying comes in many forms. Sometimes it happens at such a young age that the victim can't even identify it for what it is; they end up blaming themselves for being berated.

SHEIKH FABIHA AMREEN

Trigger Warning: Mentions of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse

I can still feel the humidity of my sixth-grade classroom. As a natural reaction to the heat, some of us had opened one or two shirt buttons. Suddenly, the teacher, who had been conducting the lesson, called out one of our classmates. She pointed at the girl and started disparaging her because she had opened a few too many buttons for the teacher's liking. This went on for several minutes – one word after the other being thrown at her, insinuating that she did it to grab the attention of the boys in the classroom.

My classmate had started crying by the end of that interaction. The rest of us quietly began closing the buttons we had opened for momentary relief. Sadly, this wasn't that rare a situation for us. This particular teacher's "strict guidance" was known to almost every student in my school. We were simply expected to deal with it, and to pray that we didn't face the brunt of her wrath on any given day.

Schools are often the place where we spend most of our adolescence besides our home. It is the main focal point of a lot of students' socialising as well. Therefore, the fact that the authority figures in such an important environment can be bullies themselves is an extremely uncomfortable truth. A lot of people think that teachers are far more lenient towards us these days. Some are under the impression that children are becoming too sensitive and soft, simply because corporal punishment has been prohibited — that too in 2011.

A report titled "The prevalence of teachers who bully students in schools with differing levels of behavioral problems" defines a bullying teacher as a teacher "who uses his or her power to punish, manipulate, or disparage a student beyond what would be a reasonable disciplinary procedure."

Bullying comes in many forms. Sometimes it happens at such a young age that the victim can't even identify it for what it is; they end up blaming themselves for being berated. Such is what happened to Pia*. She says, "Back when I was in class one, I had just been admitted to a new school and was told to draw an octopus. As I was only six years old, I couldn't draw very well, and my science teacher took my drawing in front of the class and humiliated me. As a timid child, this really affected me. She carried on berating me for every little thing. Once she started on her tirade, it took a long time for her to calm down. I became even quieter after facing such treatment from her."



Asked to shed some light on this, Laila Akter, a psychological counsellor, says that neurodivergent students tend to be more vulnerable to teachers' rebukes. Not all neurodivergent students are bullied, of course. It depends on their communication style and sensory issues, with their behaviour often being misinterpreted by teachers.

Back when Nusrat Shabnam was in the fifth grade, her ADHD was still undiagnosed. Even though she used to complete her homework, she would sometimes forget to bring the note copy to class. This would enrage her maths teacher to the point that he would punish her on other days for no reason. It became particularly bad one day in class when, as the teacher's phone was ringing, she simply pointed it out.

She alleges that he began marching towards her and hitting her on the face with a rolled-up notebook so hard that her glasses fell off. Her friend tried to pull her away from the attack, but he didn't stop. He carried on tormenting her for the rest of the school year.

Bullying isn't limited to insults or physical retaliation. Sometimes it takes the form of active sabotage. Such is what happened in the case of Farhan*, who did not want to enrol in his class teacher's private coaching centre. Following this, the award for ranking first in his batch eluded him.

The procedure required that the class teacher submit his name to the school authorities for the prize to be authorised, which Farhan recalls the teacher forgot to do. Yet, another student, who did attend the teacher's coaching centre, received it instead.

Students may think that at least in university they won't have to put up with any sort of abuse or humiliation anymore. However, the start of their academic journey may be tainted by some faculty members' awful behaviour.

Rafi* explains a distressing encounter that he faced. On one particular day, during class, everyone had been talking amongst themselves while the attendance sheet was being passed around. Rafi merely asked a classmate whether they had signed their name, following which the professor came rushing towards him. Rafi alleges that he almost hit him as he charged to the end of the bench and also screamed at him.



He then forced Rafi to call his father and berated him, asking why he had sent his son to that particular university. He proceeded to call Rafi's mother as well. The student says that the most traumatic part was the fact that the professor decided to humiliate his parents in front of his whole class. Rafi says that he was the subject of horrible nicknames and gossip following the incident.

Through all of this, students are more often than not told to just accept it. They are also scared off from reporting a teacher's behaviour to the school authorities on the basis of a single question: who would they believe – a young student or a grown adult with a long history at the institution?

Mustering up the courage to report incidents is not easy either, as victims are often hounded simply for speaking up. Sadly, there are also extreme cases where students have lost their lives for speaking out against an authority figure, such as in the infamous case of Nusrat Jahan Rafi, a young girl who was set on fire for speaking up against her school's headmaster, who had sexually assaulted her.

It's quite daunting to be treated so harshly by the person who is supposed to be your guide, at the place that is supposed to shape you.

Asked about the effects this type of bullying has on people, Laila opines, "When exposed to prolonged bullying like this, strong psychological effects can be seen in students. They get depressed, they're anxious, and they have self-esteem issues, which can devolve into not performing well academically and developing an aversion towards going to the institution. The worst part is that they sometimes blame themselves for these situations and try to make themselves smaller in social settings."

She also offers insight into why teachers act this way: "A lot of our teachers, sadly, aren't trained properly to handle neurodivergent students. They may also not have a proper work-life balance and use the classroom as a way to let out their frustration. They're often so burnt out that their personal authoritarian teaching style overrides the training they do receive on how to handle students."

Laila believes that educational institutions shouldn't simply try to hide these cases. Rather, they should stand beside their students through difficult periods. Beyond support from the institutions themselves, some also struggle with opening up to their parents, as they may minimise the severity of the teacher's actions. As such, while institutional support remains imperative, it is just as vital that the prevailing mentality of people also change.

The inner lives of students are left in turmoil through no fault of their own. As we strive towards a better future, it is imperative that we recognise that teachers' unwanted, aggressive behaviour is not only called out but deemed unacceptable.

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**Names have been changed upon request.*

Fabiha is going to put herself in time out for trying to juggle so many things as though she were the part and parcel of a circus party. Give her juggling tips at s.fabiha.amreen@gmail.com

STUDY ABROAD

SHOULD YOU DO AN MSC IN MANAGEMENT INSTEAD OF AN MBA?

SHARAR CHOWDHURY

After finishing my electronic engineering degree in the UK, I went home to Dhaka to work out what I actually wanted. I knew engineering wasn't it, and I was drawn to something between engineering and management. I gave myself a year, took a few internships in the financial sector, and looked at courses. What I landed on was an MSc in Management (MiM) at Cranfield University, and almost every time I mention it, someone asks whether that is just an MBA. Well, it is not, and the difference is worth understanding if you have just finished your undergrad and are thinking about studying management.

An MiM covers managerial psychology and organisational behaviour, strategic management, management consulting, economics, and the basics of accounting and finance. An MBA covers similar ground, but the course expects you to arrive with several years of full-time work behind you, because the teaching runs on case discussion and on what the people in the room have already done. An MiM assumes you have not managed anyone yet. It teaches the same territory from the foundations and feeds you into associate- and analyst-level roles rather than senior ones. For a Bangladeshi student who has just graduated, an MBA abroad is not available to you yet. An MiM is the route that exists for exactly that gap.

MiMs are also concentrated in Europe. The top six schools of the QS Business Master's Rankings 2026 for Management are in Europe, with five of those in France. Kellogg School of Management – Northwestern University, the highest-placed American school, sits at the seventh position.

What made my course worth it was the parts outside the classroom. The internship was built into the programme, which meant I finished with UK work experience rather than just a transcript.

Now the money, because this is where most people stop reading brochures and start doing arithmetic. My course was around GBP 34,445 for the year, and an MBA costs considerably more. A British Council GREAT Scholarship took 10,000 off, and the paid internship covered a chunk of the rest. These scholarship schemes change their participating countries and universities every cycle, so it is worthwhile to check the listings for whichever university you are applying to.

So, how do you build a profile that gets you in? Academically, most UK universities ask for the equivalent of an upper second-class result. The exact threshold depends on which university you attended, because UK institutions maintain tiered lists of Bangladeshi universities. Some programmes accept a lower second-class result. English requirements are normally IELTS 6.5 at master's level, though some departments ask for more.

Beyond grades, the personal statement carries substantial weight. It needs to answer why this course, why this university, why the UK, and where you want to end up. Everything else is about giving that statement something to point at. Consulting challenges and case competitions help, because they show you can do the work the course asks for. Any internship during your bachelor's helps, even a small one, if you can explain what you took from it. A network that can produce a decent recommendation helps too.

It is less about technical difficulty and more about reasoning. Expect write-ups and reports, some data analysis and accounting, and a lot of analysing real companies and arguing for a strategy based on evidence. If you can show your thinking clearly, you will do well.

When it comes to career prospects, two things are worth knowing early. The first is that the job hunt starts while you are still studying, not after. I secured my role while still at university, which meant juggling applications and the careers service alongside modules and coursework, so use the careers team from the start rather than saving it for the end. You are paying for it as much as for the teaching.

The second is timing. The UK Graduate Route, which lets you stay and work after graduating, drops from two years to 18 months for applications made on or after January 1, 2027. If you start a one-year master's now, you will fall into the shorter window, so plan around 18 months rather than 24. As for what happens after your degree, I will be working as a manager in a logistics environment. Others from my cohort are in business excellence roles in aviation and tourism, in supply chain, or running their own ventures in the UK or back home.

The degree does not put you in a box, which is the main thing I wanted from it.

If you are coming out of your undergrad degree, want to study abroad, and do not have the experience an MBA demands, an MiM with an internship attached is worth looking at. It buys you work experience, a network, and a solid foundation to build from.

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Sharar Chowdhury is learning how to be a manager and believes "I'm confused" is not a complete sentence. Send him emails at: sharar672@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: **AZRA HUMAYRA**

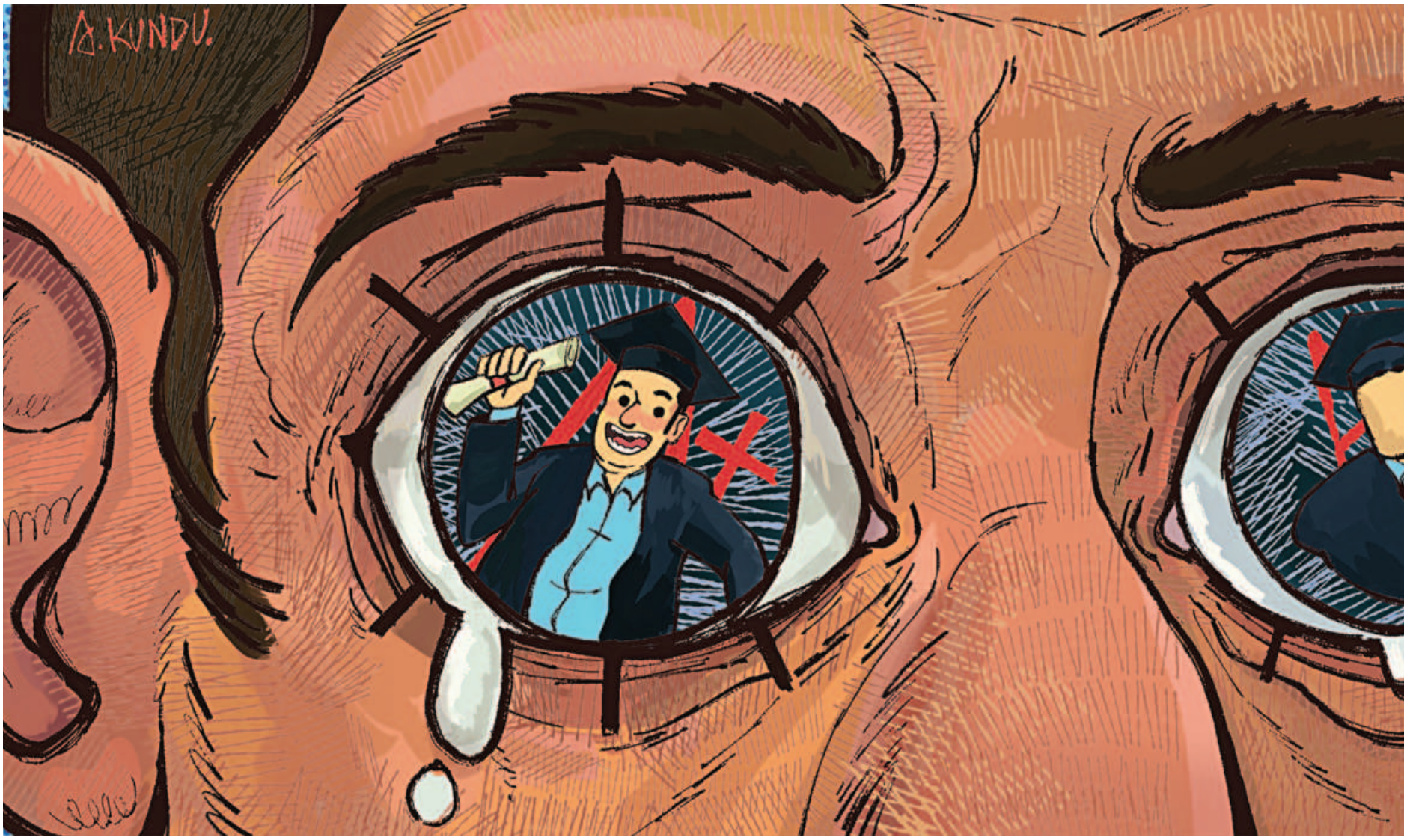


ILLUSTRATION: **ARINDOM KUNDU**

OPINION

The cost of our obsession with meritocracy

SUMAT SAQLAYEN

Ask a student what their roll number is, and you might get a very different reaction depending on the number. A low number can come with praise, whereas a higher one can invite jokes, assumptions, and, sometimes, a shift in how people treat you. We laugh about it, but the joke points towards something more serious about the way we understand academic success.

In our culture, there is a certain obsession with meritocracy. We love the student who comes first: the perfect score, the name announced at the assembly, and the photograph posted after results. We celebrate the outcome so enthusiastically that we rarely stop to ask what happens before that moment. What does it actually take to create an environment where students can succeed?

A meritocracy only works if everyone starts from the same point, with the same resources, the same support, and the same room to fail and try again. In reality, only some students are at the starting line while others are already 10 metres ahead.

What we've built, instead, is a culture that expects everyone to run the same race, while quietly ignoring the fact that some students were given a head start. We celebrate it as if grades show who worked hardest but rarely admit the unequal circumstances, expectations, and treatment that surround those grades.

In Bangladesh, academic success is often compressed into a handful of numbers: marks, grades, GPA, and class rankings. Sometimes, roll numbers become convenient shorthand for a student's ability. But a number can tell us what happened. It cannot always tell us why.

If we look at two students who scored 70 percent marks on a test, one of them could have spent months working their way up from 50, and the other may have just fallen from 90. Same score, different stories. Yet our culture is often more interested in the final destination than the journey it took to get there.

Take something as ordinary as seating arrangements. In many classrooms, students are segregated by their grades. The high scorers are seated up front, and everyone else is seated in the back rows, as if it were a gravitational pull. It may just seem like a simple seating arrangement, but it can often make students feel marginalised. Teachers call on them less, their questions start getting shorter answers, and, eventually, some students just stop asking.

This is the part of meritocracy nobody wants to talk about. It doesn't just reward the front row; it also penalises the rest. A student who is struggling isn't simply identified as needing help. Rather, they're sorted out of the spaces where help usually reaches. The system claims to measure ability, but what it's often measuring is who already had the advantage of stability at home, tutoring at home, or being able to join multiple coaching classes.

This shows up even in the simplest, mundane parts of school life in the form of how students get divided into different sections just because of contrasting grades or how friend groups drift apart after they are advised not to surround themselves with students with lower grades, as if academic performance is a personality trait.

The same fixation can extend beyond classrooms. Report card season isn't really about asking whether a child understood the material or grew as a learner. It ends up fixating on the number attached to their name and how it compares against a cousin's, a neighbour's, or a classmate's. "Did you improve?" quietly gets replaced by "Where did you rank?" And the two questions, despite sounding similar, lead students toward entirely different relationships with learning, where one builds curiosity and the other instils self-consciousness.

A student who moves from struggling with mathematics to confidently solving problems may have achieved something profound, even if their position barely changes. A student who learns to write independently, develops the courage to ask questions, or finally understands a concept they once feared may have made an achievement that cannot be captured by a rank sheet.

None of this means that grades are meaningless. They are useful indicators of hard work, and healthy competition itself is not harmful, so excellence should absolutely be encouraged. But if meritocracy is supposed to reward ability and effort, the culture surrounding it must also give students opportunities to develop both.

The real failure of our obsession with merit is not that we celebrate achievement too much, but that we, sometimes, celebrate the result while forgetting the conditions that make improvement possible.

A healthy academic culture should not only ask, "Who came first?" It should also ask, "What did we do to help them get there?" Otherwise, we are not cultivating merit. We are merely getting very good at counting it.



SKILLS

WHAT TO AVOID WHEN TEACHING YOURSELF A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

ZARA ZUBAYER

Musical instruments are perhaps one of the only inanimate objects in the world capable of speaking to us, only if we learn their language. Being able to play an instrument is a skill built on dedication and practice. Many are often hesitant and intimidated by the concept of picking up an instrument later in life, but I like to believe that "too late" doesn't exist when it comes to learning anything.

With that being said, it's essential to be practical and avoid assuming that you might be gifted by the musical gods like the child prodigies you may see on *America's Got Talent*. There's no golden buzzer to validate your musical endeavours, so it's important to have a few pointers to stay on track.

ROMANTICISING SONGS INSTEAD OF THE INSTRUMENT

For many, fixations with instruments begin with certain songs, but it's naive to assume that you'll be able to play your favourite music in the early stages of your learning. At the start, you need to learn the names of the keys or strings, understand the anatomy of the instrument, and correct your posture and hand movements before playing even nursery rhymes like *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. Brian May didn't immediately start shredding "Bohemian Rhapsody" on the electric guitar; he, too, had to learn and persevere.

If your initial excitement wears off when you realise you are not able to play what you want, you were never really in it for the long run.

SKIPPING THE BASICS

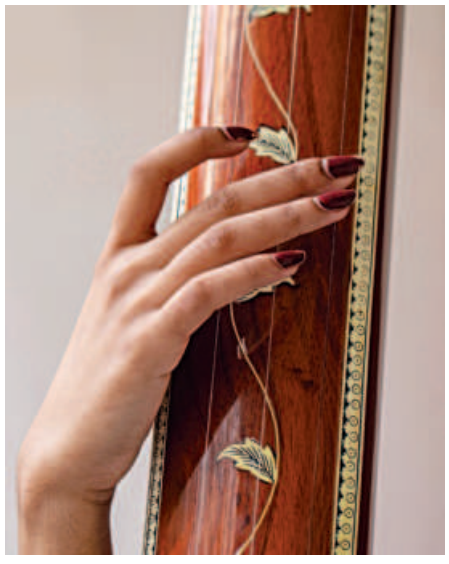
Can you imagine learning a language without knowing the alphabet first? It applies to music as well.

While the internet makes it very straightforward to learn any instrument nowadays, there are downsides to being your own teacher. I went the longest time without learning any music theory on the piano—such as chords, arpeggios, and scales—and although I was able to physically play complex songs due to muscle memory, I lacked the technical skills.

Music theory and its fundamental principles are the same for any instrument, almost like a universal language composed of scales, chords, rhythm, and harmony. Eventually, upon getting a grasp of these fundamentals, you'll be able to recognise notes and chords just by ear.

BEING SHY TO PLAY FOR AN AUDIENCE

The piano in my childhood home had a loud presence in our living room, so the arrival of any guest fond of music would prompt a request for a performance. My shyness often had to take a backseat due to my very strict musical father, whose one stern look would have my hands move on their own. The practice of playing in front of a crowd dissolved my stage fright over time, and that helped immensely during actual competitions.



Even if playing in front of people makes the blood rush to your cheeks and your heart race, it helps break performance anxiety and builds confidence. You become less conscious of making mistakes and more eager to deliver a memorable performance.

IGNORING BOOKS

I learnt more about playing a guitar from a 36-page book written by David Taub than I did from a teacher who spent two months talking to me about the guitar before letting me even touch it. Reading text takes a bit more patience than visual tutorials, but the right resources are worth looking into. For sheet music, there are many sites that provide free documents which you can print without even having to buy the books.

Limiting yourself to one way of learning can sometimes put you in a box, so it's helpful to diversify your materials.

GIVING UP BEFORE PROGRESS SHOWS

The journey to learn a musical instrument has moments where you feel like nothing is changing, as if the practice sessions are going nowhere. But then one day, your fingers move without thinking, or a song that once felt impossible suddenly becomes natural. That specific moment makes the entire process worth it, and many quit before realising that they were closer than they thought.

Hours of practice might boil down to merely two minutes of a song, but they represent every mistake, every repetition, and every moment you almost gave up.

Music has a way of connecting everyone – a living room full of guests, a crowd of strangers, or even someone who doesn't speak your language. It begins as something personal and often frustrating, but over time it becomes something shared, something understood without words. It takes time to learn an instrument, but in return, it teaches you patience, persistence, and a deep sense of reward.

Zara Zubayer is a half-pianist, occasional grandma (she knits), and a collector of instruments she never learns. Suggest a new hobby she won't commit to at @ zarazubayer1@gmail.com