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CORPORATE PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR EATING HABITS

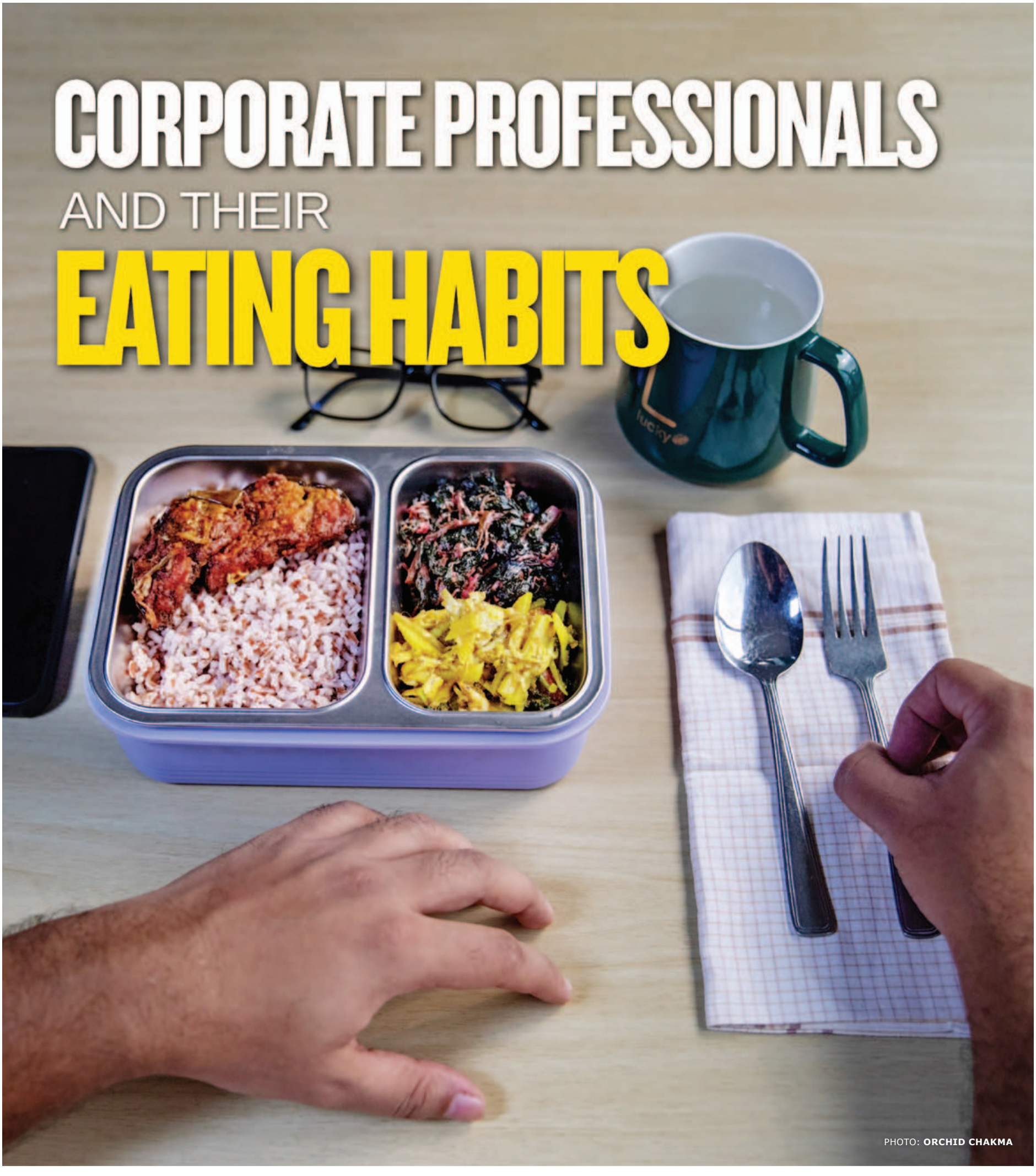


PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

TV SERIES

LANTERNS

A story of becoming more than what we are conditioned to be

SABIL SADAT ZAHIR

**This review contains spoilers.*

Lanterns is an intriguing mystery drama series wearing the suit of a superhero show, providing a divergent approach to the genre. An adaptation of the Green Lantern character, the show contains solid and thought-provoking depictions. It explores themes of fear and what it means to be steered towards a path influenced by generational expectations, childhood conditioning, and the weight of prioritising others' needs over your own. However, the show also stumbles, preventing it from reaching its full potential.

Set in the DC Universe (DCU), the plot of *Lanterns* spans multiple decades. It is centred around Hal Jordan, Earth's first public superhero and a member of the Green Lantern Corps, the intergalactic peacekeepers, and John Stewart, his trainee who has been raised from childhood to take up the mantle. While the core plot revolves around mysterious events in the small town of Rushville and a potential invasion by alien entities known as Manhunters, the story also marks the conclusion of Hal's journey and the beginning of John's.

Arguably, the best adaptations are those that respect the core elements of the source material and add new, original elements that elevate the foundation previously built. *Lanterns* achieves this in terms of its story and portrayal of the two leads.

Through flashbacks, we learn that John's father lost his opportunity to become the Green Lantern, and Hal was chosen in his stead. This results in both of John's parents conditioning him from a young age to become fearless so that he could make up for his father's missed opportunity and eventually replace Hal. Not only is this a highly original and refreshing take on a superhero origin, but it also brilliantly frames the relatable struggle of parents forcing their children onto a fixed path instead of letting them pursue their own dreams and passions.

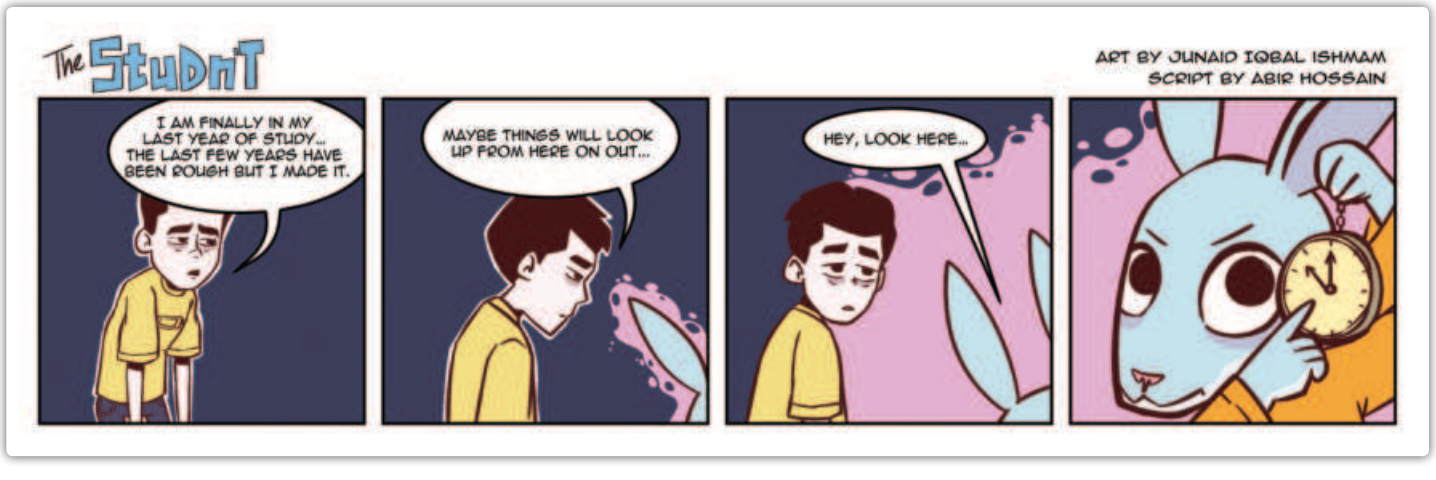
Mirroring his comic book origin, Hal's father was an Air Force test pilot who died in a crash. However, this is recontextualised by the revelation that the crash may not have been an accident, but rather self-inflicted. He struggled with depression and suicidal ideation, which he feared he might have passed down to Hal. Thus, his fear comes from a different kind of conditioning: the idea that he may be just as mentally broken as his father. The way both John and Hal navigate and overcome this conditioning is the crux of *Lanterns* and why this show is so good.



Despite the strong character portrayals, *Lanterns* also makes some jarring deviations from the source material and polarising plot decisions that hold it back immensely. While the core Rushville/Manhunter mystery keeps you tuned in, the show tries to weave in a theme of empathy towards the antagonists that completely falls flat, especially considering the nature of their actions, which ultimately culminates in a somewhat controversial ending.

Outside of a few scenes, the show almost entirely avoids the cosmic, space-opera nature of the *Green Lantern* comics – from the aliens all being depicted with human disguises to the story being set primarily in a small town on Earth. The writers deviate from the "show, don't tell" narrative technique, with characters making many references to the more interesting and grand elements of the Green Lantern lore without actually showing them on screen. Besides the climactic midpoint of the fifth episode, the show also severely lacks any action or heroics that one would expect from the genre.

Overall, *Lanterns* reaches great heights with its deep personal journey for both its main leads and core themes, but the grounded approach to the storytelling and presentation prevents it from truly soaring. Despite its shortcomings, *Lanterns* serves as a worthy entry into the DCU, paving the way for larger stories in the shared cinematic universe and successfully revitalising the *Green Lantern* franchise after the failure of the 2011 film.



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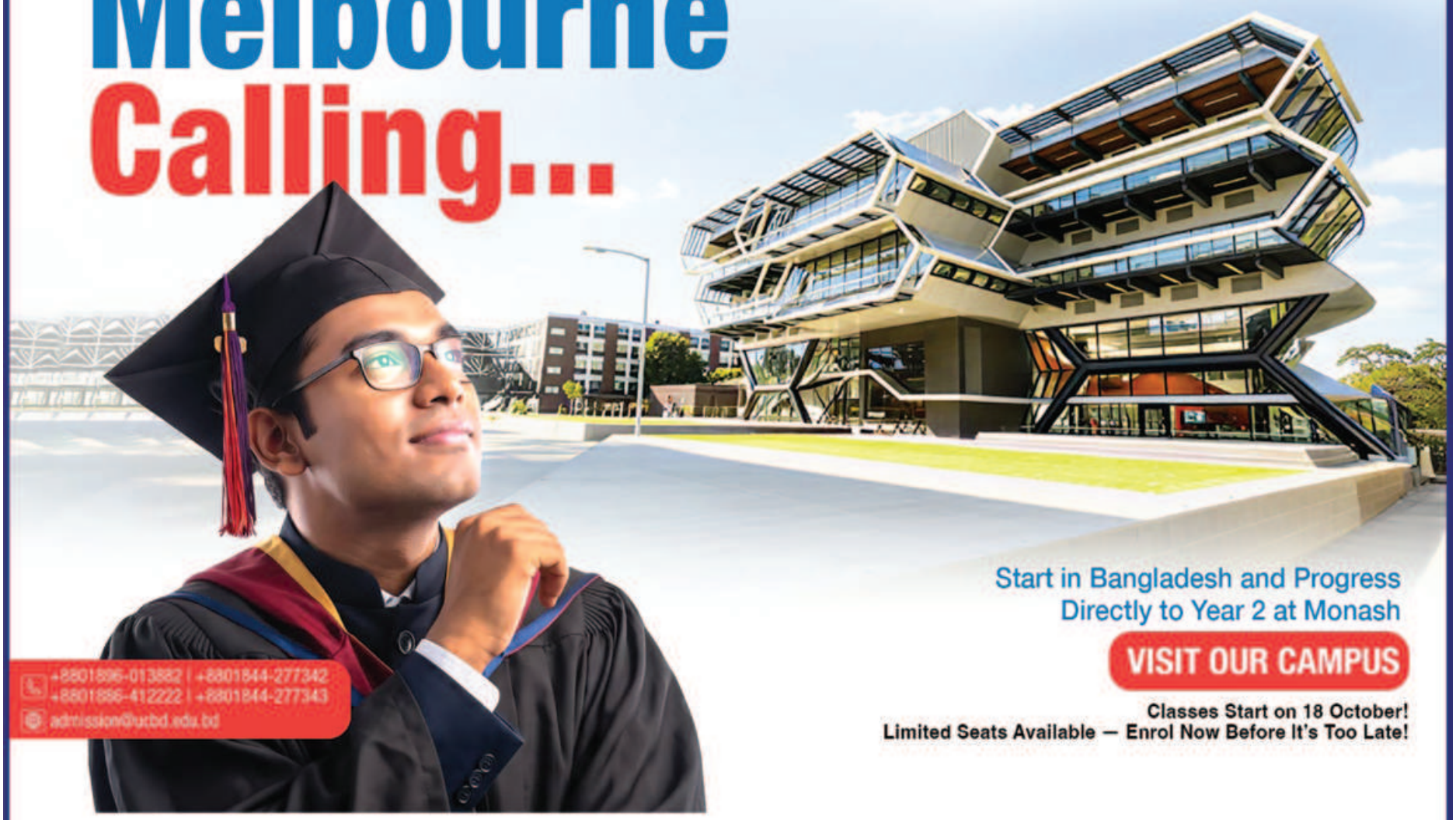
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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

COVER STORY

Inside the eating habits of CORPORATE PROFESSIONALS

"Dining at nice restaurants or ordering food delivery every day gets too expensive, so roadside Bangla hotels become our fallback. My main worry is hygiene. Every so often, government inspectors raid these places and uncover unsanitary kitchens or harmful ingredients. I don't fully trust the food, but when options are limited, I have no choice."

TAZRIN RASHID PRITHA

Across Dhaka's corporate hubs, 7 AM is considered an exceptionally early start to the day. After all, most offices do not start their operations for another two hours. Yet, these areas have their own unique rhythm of busyness in these early hours. Shopkeepers chitchat with one another as they prepare breakfast items that will soon fill the offices around them. The most common breakfast served in these eateries is *shingara* and a cup of tea – a combination considered a snack at best across the country.

Most employees rely on these makeshift eateries to start their day. Md Mahidul Islam, an assistant manager at a leading conglomerate, shared that he has observed a tendency among people around him to skip breakfast in order to reach the office on time. He says, "Most people do not live close to the corporate hubs, especially those situated in Gulshan and Banani. These areas currently do not fall within the metro-rail network, which leaves many employees with the public bus as the other affordable transportation option."

"Unfortunately, public buses not only have a negative reputation for their unpredictable schedules but also often take the longest to reach the destination compared to other available transportation alternatives. Thus, corporate employees like me usually leave home by 7 in the morning to reach the office by 9 in order to cross a distance of maybe just 10 kilometres," he adds.

But long commutes are not the only reason employees may sacrifice breakfast. For some, the morning begins after a night of caregiving and interrupted sleep.

"Being the mother of a one-and-a-half-year-old, I rarely get the privilege of eight hours of uninterrupted sleep," says Maisha Tabassum, a graphic designer by profession. "I have to wake up several times every night to feed my baby and soothe her. This is why I subconsciously trade having a balanced, nutritious breakfast for 30 minutes of extra sleep before my office commute."

Maisha's experience points to another pressure on working professionals: the struggle to fit personal needs around work and caregiving responsibilities. For postpartum mothers, this can be particularly challenging, as childcare responsibilities often disproportionately fall on mothers. In such circumstances, breakfast can become one of the first things to be sacrificed, potentially compromising nutrition during a period when adequate nourishment is important for recovery and long-term health.

Yet, skipping breakfast or relying on unhealthy alternatives does not come without consequences, particularly for professionals whose work demands sustained concentration and decision-making.

"I have noticed a significant difference in my energy levels on the days I have skipped breakfast," says Kowshik Acharjee, an accounts payable lead at a multinational corporation (MNC).

"My work entails leading my team, dealing with different stakeholders, and communicating my perspective – tasks that require considerable mental effort. Thus, I usually avoid running on low fuel, as I find it difficult to focus on an empty stomach," Kowshik elaborates.

From 10:30 AM to 11:00 AM is the unofficial snack break in the corporate world. Colleagues put a short pause on their hustle for a quick cup of tea, usually from the stalls nearby. Tea, with milk and sugar, is the common beverage of choice here.

Kowshik says, "Since I work at an international organisation, I have had the opportunity to work closely with colleagues from India and China, two major tea-producing countries. It surprised me that they are usually more conscious about their caffeine intake compared to us, limiting themselves to just two cups of tea per day, and that too without any milk or sugar."

A cup of milk tea can contain roughly 35–60 calories, depending on how much milk and sugar is added. "For someone like me, who drinks around three cups a day, that could amount to roughly 105–180 calories, before considering the biscuits or snacks commonly eaten alongside tea. I have seen my colleagues consume even five to six cups of tea per day," he sighed.

This is an alarming statistic because the survival of South Asian populations during famines has led to a genetic adaptation that results in increased fat storage, leading to a greater risk of metabolic diseases such as type-2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

An eight-hour workday, five to six days a week, leaves little room for recreation for corporate professionals. In this environment, food has become a significant part of socialising. Nusrat Sultana, a communication professional, says colleagues often meet over lunch as a common team-bonding activity.

"Training sessions, birthday parties, and farewells are all very common corporate events which are incomplete without a feast. As someone transitioning from university to the workplace, I struggled to maintain my existing healthy eating habits while trying to navigate through this transition. The excess calorie intake, accompanied by a sedentary lifestyle, caused a 10-kilogram weight gain within my first year of joining the workforce."

Beyond being an integral part of workplace socialising, food has also become a coping mechanism for workplace loneliness.

Gallup's 2024 global report found that one in five employees feel lonely at work. Despite spending hours communicating with colleagues, some employees still miss having a "real" connection – moments of shared laughter, heartfelt conversations, and emotional support from their peers.

Nusrat mentioned that as careers progress, work responsibilities tend to increase significantly by the late 20s. As a result, it can become increasingly difficult to find a common time when all her friends are available.

She says, "I have noticed that cafes have come as a rescue to these individuals. Having a quiet cup of coffee there allows them a break from the monotony of life, without the subconscious need to justify their solitude to anyone."

In addition to workplace loneliness, a toxic work environment can also influence employees' eating habits. In the APA's 2024 Work in America survey, 15 percent of respondents described their workplace as somewhat or very toxic. The situation may be no different in Bangladesh, where workplace stress can take a toll on both employee well-being and productivity.

For some, food becomes an easy way to seek temporary relief from a stressful work environment. Kowshik recalls, "At one point in my life, I used to go out for lunch every other day. My office at that time was surrounded by restaurants offering a wide array of cuisines. Trying a new restaurant every other day not only gave me breathing space from my workspace but also acted as a quick dopamine hit. This is not a sustainable way of living, as I gained a substantial amount of weight within a short span of time – not only because of the higher calorie intake, but also, I believe, because of the higher cortisol levels."

On days when employees choose not to eat out, they often have access to subsidised meals at their workplace. These usually consist of rice, a source of protein such as fish or poultry, lentils, vegetable curry, and, sometimes, a fruit. The subsidy not only allows employees to have a relatively healthy and hygienic meal within their budget but also saves them the time and hassle of preparing and bringing lunch to work.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

However, with food prices continuing to rise, Mahidul fears that corporations may eventually pass these additional costs on to employees. He adds, "Businesses usually have a greater ability to absorb these expenses than we do as individuals. Thus, they should consider not putting tangible cost benefits over employee welfare, which I see as the key to an organisation's success in the long run."

For many office goers, subsidised workplace lunches aren't always a viable option, either because their employer doesn't offer the perk or because the food lacks appeal. On the other hand, bringing a homemade lunch presents its own challenge, which is a lack of preparation time.

Faced with these constraints, professionals like Didar Hossain, an HR manager at a garments company, frequently turn to local Bangla hotels near their offices.

"I prefer home-cooked food because the subsidised meals at work don't always taste good, even if they are affordably priced," Didar explains. "However, bringing lunch from home is only feasible occasionally. We rarely have time to cook in the morning or pack leftovers from the night before."



PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

He adds, "Dining at nice restaurants or ordering food delivery every day gets too expensive, so roadside Bangla hotels become our fallback. My main worry is hygiene. Every so often, government inspectors raid these places and uncover unsanitary kitchens or harmful ingredients. I don't fully trust the food, but when options are limited, I have no choice."

Water consumption is another often-overlooked aspect of their workday habits.

Nusrat said, "It is often difficult to keep track of how much water one consumes during a busy workday. I experience this even more so on days I must go for field visits. Although this may go unnoticed for a big chunk of the workday, I experience severe headaches caused by dehydration."

These pressures can make it difficult for corporate professionals to maintain healthy eating habits. Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin, Chief Clinical Dietician & HOD, Dietetics & Nutrition Department, at Continental Hospital PLC, says that, given these circumstances, corporate professionals can adopt a few personal initiatives to better navigate the structural limitations they face.

"Many corporate professionals say that they tend to miss breakfast because they are juggling responsibilities such as getting their children ready and dropping them off at school. As a result, they may subconsciously put their own needs at the end of the priority list. Many may notice the impact soon enough, such as poor focus and irritability throughout the day. For some, it may also contribute to weight gain in the long run if it leads to overeating during the next eating window," says Hasin.

"Where possible, making small adjustments to the routine may help. For instance, going to bed earlier could allow those who cite lack of sleep as a reason for skipping breakfast to make more time for it," she adds.

On the topic of caffeine consumption, Hasin advises against villainising tea and coffee, while also encouraging people to be mindful of their consumption. She says, "Tea and coffee are popular pick-me-up beverages that may stimulate one and invigorate them for the next work session. However, it is advised to limit ourselves to two-three cups of tea or coffee and make it a priority to drink two-three litres of water a day at the same time. Many aren't aware, but excessive caffeine intake can cause dehydration in some individuals. In a busy working environment, particularly in an air-conditioned room, it can be easy to lose track of how much water we are consuming, as one may not face the physical symptoms of dehydration as much."

Additionally, Hasin acknowledges that communal meals and corporate events are an integral part of workplace culture. However, she believes that maintaining a balance is key to a healthy lifestyle. Thus, she suggests that organising committees of these events can place healthier and nutrient-rich options alongside the usual fare.

"These changes do not necessarily require drastic adjustments. Rather, small, sustainable changes to daily routines can help professionals make healthier choices while managing the demands of their workday," she says.

The corporate diet, thus, is shaped by more than appetite. It is a product of the commute, the clock, the office culture, and the demands that fill the working day. For many professionals, eating better may therefore require not just better choices but also a workplace in which those choices are easier to make.

Tazrin is a contributing writer at The Daily Star. You may contact her at tazrinrashidpritha@gmail.com.

Advertisement

AN INSIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE AT THE UNITED NATIONS
14 YEARS OF HUMANITY, A HISTORIC MOMENT ON THE GLOBAL STAGE



NEW YORK, September 25, 2026: A humanitarian initiative that began in a village in Bangladesh 14 years ago has reached the international stage, with the Dr Mostafa Hazera Foundation participating in a series of engagements during the 81st United Nations General Assembly High-Level Week in New York.

The foundation's founder Captain A. K. M. Golam Kibria (CIP) participated in several UN and UNGA-related programmes between September 21 and 25, during which issues including poverty, inequality, human rights, climate change, sustainable development, global peace and the implications of artificial intelligence were discussed.

The foundation currently promotes its Five Zero Global Campaign across 15 countries, focusing on five stated goals: zero beggary, zero illiteracy, zero homelessness, zero deaths without treatment and zero unskilled people. The Rohingya crisis was among the major humanitarian issues addressed during the week.



Captain Kibria with Juan Manuel Santos, former president of Colombia and the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize laureate (left), and with other global leaders at the conference (right).

On September 23, Bangladesh and The Gambia co-hosted a high-level side event at UN Headquarters titled "The Rohingya Crisis: A Renewed Call for a Durable Solution from Protracted Displacement, with Justice and Accountability." The event brought renewed international attention to the prolonged displacement of Rohingya refugees and the need for humanitarian assistance, accountability and a durable solution.

The United Nations has repeatedly called for sustained international support for Rohingya refugees and for conditions that would allow a safe, voluntary and dignified return to Myanmar. Nearly 1.2 million Rohingya refugees are currently hosted in Bangladesh, according to UN agencies.

The Dr Mostafa Hazera Foundation said it has previously undertaken humanitarian and medical initiatives for Rohingya communities in Bangladesh and intends to expand its activities in areas including healthcare, education, skills development and empowerment.

Captain Kibria's vision of Human Equity Civilization calls for a world where every person has equal dignity, opportunity and access to education, resources and progress. He believes humanity must move beyond economic growth and technological advancement towards a more inclusive civilisation built on equity, peace, cooperation and shared human prosperity.



Captain A. K. M. Golam Kibria with the UN Secretary- General Candidate H.E. María Fernanda Espinosa & Ambassador D H H Sanon, special envoy to United Nations for cojep.

A notable moment for the organisation came during the September 23 Rohingya-focused event, when the Dr Mostafa Hazera Foundation logo was displayed on the screen at the UN venue. For the organisation, the moment marked a symbolic milestone in its 14-year journey from grassroots humanitarian work in Bangladesh to participation in international discussions.

Speaking about the broader purpose of the initiative, Captain Kibria said, "The world does not need technology alone. It needs wisdom, cooperation and humanity to guide it."

The foundation says its work is intended to move beyond conventional charity by placing greater emphasis on dignity, access to opportunity, healthcare, education and skills development. The UNGA engagements have given the organisation an opportunity to present its humanitarian priorities in an international setting, while its stated Five Zero campaign seeks to connect grassroots development with wider global challenges.

Captain Kibria thanked Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman for attending the special event as chief guest.



PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

STUDENT LIFE

Life of a student with bad handwriting

IRFAN HOSSAIN

I still remember my eighth-grade test. I scored perfectly in almost every subject, except for two: Bangla and English, where I somehow managed to come away with a B and an A. I had seen my scripts. I knew I had written fairly well. Yet the marks made me wonder whether they had really read my answers line by line or whether my handwriting had already decided for me. The neater the script, the better the score seemed to be.

"Writing in a readable style increases the chances of scoring better in board exams," my teachers said. And that is what scared me most, even more than any science subject could.

The worst part of having bad handwriting is that you begin to feel as though you cannot write anywhere in public. Not on the classroom board, not on gift wrappers, and certainly not on your own application to school. With handwriting like mine, you know your application is going to get rejected. I used to get mine written by my friends. The problem is not that my handwriting is unreadable. It is good enough, just not neat. The real problem is the assumptions people make once they see it. They look at the script and instantly consider me a bad student, which I can live with. But that is not the end. They start to see me as a doomed student.

I still remember handing my exam scripts to my mother with a beaming smile because I had gotten full marks. The first thing that would come out of her mouth was, "Why did your teacher even give you marks for this ghastly writing?" And if that ghastly handwriting came with poor marks, all hell would break loose.

The attempts to improve my handwriting were not few. My mother used to take my notebook and make invisible lines by pressing a finished ink pen onto the page to keep my lines straight. She also had peculiar names for some of my exclusive fonts. She would refer to my ÒRÓ as ÒKv‡KiV¨vsÓ and my "r" as a "malnourished child".

The campaign to fix my handwriting eventually reached a new level. I was enrolled in a handwriting school in class eight. I entered and realised I was not the only one. Even college students were there. They were like giants in a sea of children. My instructor started from the very basics: drawing straight lines, one page at a time, then curved lines, then circles with a pencil. How to hold my pencil and when to sharpen it—all things I had supposedly learned when I was five. We started with those margin-lined copies children use to write English and Bangla. I didn't see them since class two. For a while, it actually worked. My handwriting improved.

Unfortunately, the improvement did not last very long. As I continued writing, I slowly plunged back into my old handwriting style: hurried lines, crooked lines and strikethrough sentences that looked as though the words themselves were trying to escape.

I know what the people with good handwriting are thinking right now. Do not mock us. The handwriting we have is not something we are particularly proud of either. You cannot change your writing overnight, just as you cannot grow one inch taller overnight. I have made peace with all of this. So far, I am okay with it. What I am not absolutely okay with, however, is the bias in script checking, as I said at the start.

The only explanation left for my poor marks in English and Bangla was "bad handwriting". While the toppers wrote with three different coloured pens and words that looked as though they had been typed directly onto the page, mine was completely different: hurried, disorganised and apparently a crime against the examiner's eyes. I understand that handwriting needs to be readable. But there is a difference between unreadable handwriting and handwriting that is simply untidy.

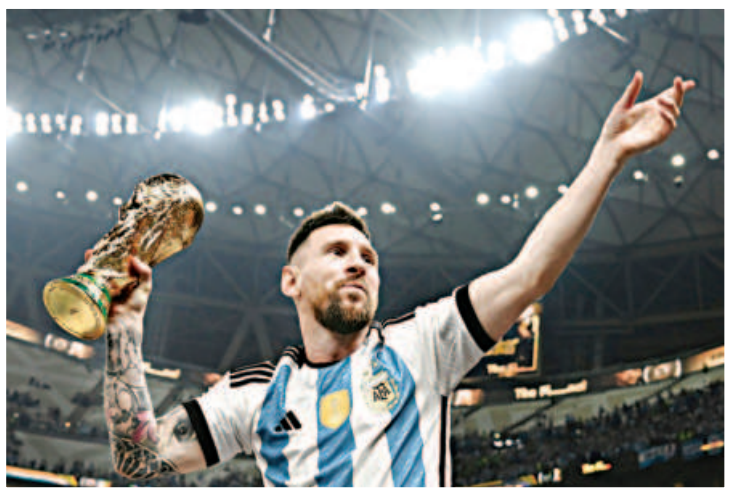
Over the years, I have tried everything: special notebooks, invisible lines, handwriting schools, different pens, different grips, and whatever else people recommend when they discover you write like you are escaping from a fire.

So yes, I have bad handwriting. I have accepted it. My teachers have accepted it. My mother has accepted it, mostly. And now that I am in university, handwriting does not matter quite as much as it did during my school years. Here, what you know and what you write matters more than how neatly you write it. For most of my school life, though, I was made to feel that my handwriting was something I had to fix before I could be taken seriously as a student. Maybe that is the strangest part of it all. We are taught to believe that neat handwriting means discipline, intelligence and effort. My handwriting is still bad, probably still capable of confusing an examiner or two. But somewhere along the way, I stopped being embarrassed by it. After all, it may not be neat, but it is readable. And it is mine.

Irfan spends his time writing, travelling, doomscrolling — and occasionally attending class for a degree he believes will be useful someday. Send him cat reels at: irfan.ink63@gmail.com



REFLECTIONS



PHOTOS: AFP

TO MESSI, FROM BANGLADESH

TAMJIDUL HOQUE

As the video footages from Buenos Aires emerged on social media, showing Messi arriving at the stadium in tears and waving to his fans, it did not feel like just a farewell match. Instead, it felt like the end of a chapter. Not just a chapter of Lionel Andrés "Leo" Messi's decorated footballing career, but more like a chapter for every football fan who loved Messi and has been part of his journey. It's a bittersweet feeling. It was an absolute privilege to experience this journey, but also a heartache knowing that, like all beautiful things, it has come to an end.

As fan of Argentina from Bangladesh, one question I always faced from people abroad and from people in Argentina is why does a country, thousands of miles away in another continent, revere Messi and Argentina so much? It won't be wrong to say that a large part of Bangladesh celebrates Argentina's success as its own. This is something many people in Argentina and outside Bangladesh couldn't get their heads around. However, for me, the answer was simple and obvious.

It starts with watching a guy kicking a ball around in ways you didn't know was possible. Whether it's dribbling past an entire team while the commentator shouts "Encara Messi!" or placing a free kick with so much precision that it's almost impossible for the goalkeeper to reach the ball. Messi has not only done things that left every football fan speechless. He has done it week in and week out, year after year. What he did on the pitch was entertaining and also awe-inspiring.

Bangladeshis found joy in every dribble, every body feint, and every time Messi charged at the defenders with sheer skill and confidence. Messi's feat with the ball was an escape for every Bangladeshi spectator. It brought joy as well as people together. It was a reason to have a good time. Nowhere was this devotion more electric than when Messi came to play a friendly in Dhaka, uniting an entire nation in a feverish, collective rush to watch greatness unfold.

The Messi story, of course, wasn't always sunshine and rainbows. It had its downs as well. As a fan, I saw how a man of Messi's talent also had to face failure regardless of how hard he tried. While his time with FC Barcelona was almost entirely spectacular, his time with the Argentine national team remained in limbo for a while. He came back empty handed from multiple tournaments, was one step away from winning the World Cup, and even lost multiple Copa America titles.

Messi was made fun of and criticised, regardless of how well he played, because he couldn't win anything for Argentina. Every Messi fan is familiar with this journey, and how it almost reached an abrupt end. We could have been left asking "what could have been" instead of actually experiencing what happened when Messi announced his retirement from the national team in 2016.

However, we all know what happened later.

The footballing gods knew better than to leave Messi without national team glory. The pieces started to fall in place eventually and luck seemed to start falling in Messi's favour after all this time. An example of this can be found when Bernd Leno got injured during a Premier League game which led to the breakout of Emiliano Martínez who played an influential role as Messi finally went on to win the Copa America and the FIFA World Cup. After witnessing all the failures, those who stuck by Messi also got to experience the success.

Messi's victory felt like our own. When he lifted the trophy, the pure, unbridled joy became ours, uniting us in a moment of sheer ecstasy. That shared passion was captured perfectly in the viral video of Daffodil International University students erupting in celebration after Messi's iconic goal against Mexico in the 2022 World Cup – a testament to how deeply his journey touched our hearts.

Every fan has a different view of Messi. For me, my view on him changed over the years.

From getting to know him when I was at the age of six to now, I realised that Messi, for me, is more than what he did on the pitch. He was not just an icon, an entertainer, or an inspiration. To me, Messi is a profound life lesson. He is living proof that talent and capability don't make the road any easier. You will still face many hurdles, ones that feel crushing. But more importantly, he showed the world that no matter how many times you fall, your ultimate goal is waiting for you at the end, as long as you refuse to stop trying.

It was surreal watching Messi give his farewell speech, while thinking about all that led to this moment. The world will move on, like it always does. However, Messi is one name the history books will always remember, and a name that will have a special place in the heart of every Messi (and perhaps every football) fan in Bangladesh.

From Bangladesh, I would like to say to Messi: thank you, for everything.

Tamjidul Hoque is an LLM student currently studying at Cardiff University. You can contact him at tamjidulh@gmail.com.