

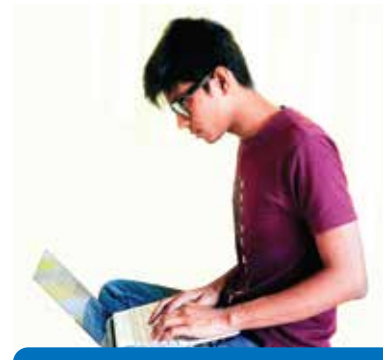
**SPECIAL
COVID
Edition**

Articles on COVID-19 inside



the
ULAB *ian*

A Student *Mouthpiece*



Communication during... ● Page 5

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Pandemics through the Ages: Reflection in Short Stories

Photo: Ashraful Islam Adib

There are pandemics every century.

Taranna Tabassum Tiasha

Short stories hold an overpowering impact on our minds. They have the force that never fail to fascinate us with their sui generis plots and short-lived characters. The following seven stories, despite being written at different times by different writers, appear to be on the same wavelength. The stories will help us divulge our minds into our respective colourful fictional worlds in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, when hope is hard to come by.



Photo: Internet

The Last Leaf by O'Henry

The tale in "The Last Leaf" is set in a period when pneumonia was prevalent. The entire world was in agony and misery. When a young artist's friend was already counting down the days before her death, he encouraged her to hope against hope. They decided to discover a modern world after the outbreak and celebrate the new beginning. The story teaches us that even if a light of hope is dimming, it can still make you powerful.



Photo: Internet

The Masque of the Red Death by Edgar Allan Poe

The plot of "The Masque of the Red Death" revolves around a pandemic in which everyone was petrified. They went to great lengths to escape death. However, we are all pawns in the hands of destiny. No matter how hard we try, we will never be able to escape our fate. Along with the concept of surrendering to chance, the author has also addressed concerns such as social inequality or class system and how the Red Death, the dangerous plague, affects everyone in this book.

The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas by Ursula K. Le Guin

The short metaphysical narrative in "The

Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas' is set in the utopian city of Omelas where everybody is happy and safe. However,



Photo: Internet

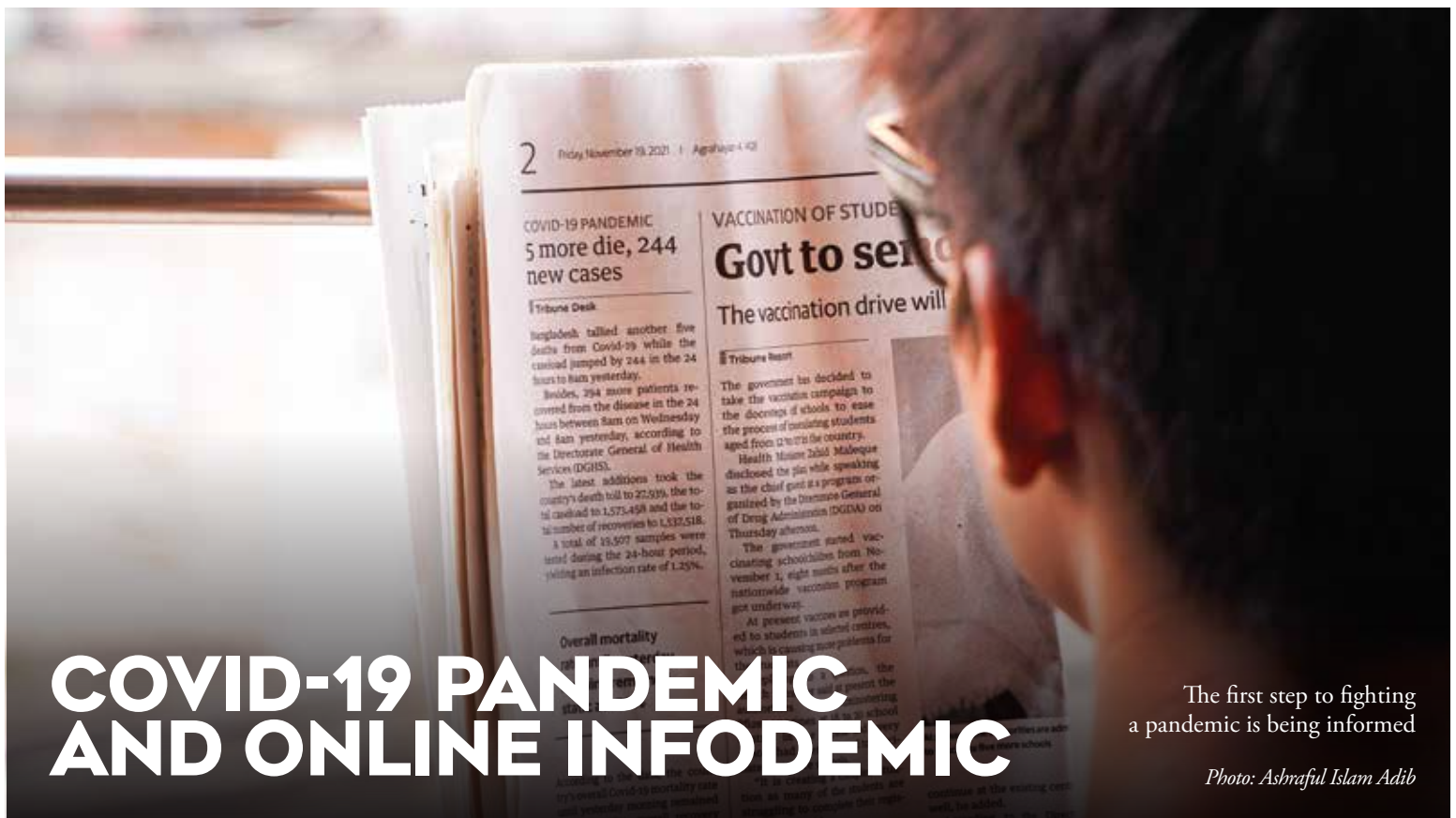
there is a hidden secret: in order to be happy, one must suffer in perpetuity. Unfortunately, we still love all the good stuff that leaves many innocent people in the dark.



Photo: Internet

To Build a Fire by Jack London

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COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ONLINE INFODEMIC

The first step to fighting a pandemic is being informed

Photo: Ashraful Islam Adib

Shanjida Akter Sweety

We all know that the world has been facing a new epidemiological problem with the emergence of the novel coronavirus for the past two years. The deadly virus broke out in China in late 2019 and in Bangladesh in early March 2020. Since it is a highly contagious virus, our government decided to shut down schools, colleges, universities, small private companies, cinema halls and all places of public gathering. Before the outbreak of the virus, we all were outbound, visiting relatives and friends, different institutions, mosques and many more places. We used to stand closely or tightly, give hugs or even shake hands with others. But in striking contrast, coronavirus has kept us housebound. For months, we were not allowed to go outside our dwelling places unless an emergency struck.

A tectonic shift we see in the way of life, living and lifestyle. Coronavirus is the game-changer. Its impact was already being felt across the world. The virus has totally changed the way we communicate. In recent times, digital platforms or social media have become our key communication tool. We have turned from physical reality to virtual reality. In the changed reality, we now communicate with each other via Facebook, Instagram, Imo, Viber, Twitter, Messenger, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom, Meet, Duo and the like. We chat and share myths and facts in cyberspace, which is collectively called a global village. And here comes an infodemic!

Coronavirus was widely discussed on social media more than anything else for the tentacles of forms and variants it spreads.

The panicked netizens delved to discuss its symptoms, precautions, cure, treatment, number of countries affected and that of casualties and caseload. They talked about self-quarantine, self-sanitising, lockdown, what to do in quarantine, how to stay safe from this deadly virus, what methods or habits we should develop to stay healthy. Many net-users also talked about government steps to stop this virus from spreading and tried to spread awareness through social media of our collective responsibility to stand by the needy and helpless others.

Coronavirus broke out at a time when community values in society are on the ebb at large. At this critical juncture of humanity, when most of the world was self-quarantined, social media was the only way to interact with people. In order to overcome this crisis situation, everyone was talking about dos and don'ts regarding this virus-induced respiratory as well as gastrointestinal disease Covid-19. They were keen on media reports on the movements of coronavirus, tallies of millions of infections and deaths, global approach to contain the spread of the virus, health safety guideline and its enforcement, social distancing, sanitisation and fumigation, precautions, quarantine, treatment and faster vaccination. Coronavirus was and is still a public health emergency. In its early days, we all know, Covid-19 raised its ugly head and affected

the entire world. This deadly virus spread across borders and territories at a faster rate beyond our imagination. So, everyone on every platform discussed the rapid march of the superbug and a way out to uproot it from the earth's surface. We also discussed ways and means to weather this pandemic situation alongside helping those desperately in need. We talked about the possibility of finding a cure for this virus and making an antibody to fight it as a good number of global drug makers made a breakthrough in vaccine development. Amid this bizarre state, we saw an endless stream of slurs, rumours, misinformation, disinformation and propaganda online. Many even used religion as a weapon against humanity. It badly affected people's mental health.

Yours truly decided to take a firm stand against slanderers and obscurantists and stand by the people who were getting distracted and derailed by logorrhoea. I made every effort to make them understand the difference between reality and rumours, and what was actually good for them. In this situation, journalists did their best to collect all the news and convey them to the masses. Since the mass media is an authentic news source, it is their big responsibility to raise public awareness. Not only is the news media doing this job, but also many citizen journalists are doing this

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The ULABian requests its readers to send views, comments and press releases via email to the following address: theulabian@ulab.edu.bd. The campus paper greets photographs, features, and stories from the university students. Your best story will be printed after selection. So you, our interested candidates may be called to unite with the ULABian. Your submissions are subjected to editing.



Conspiracy Theories about Coronavirus

Jannati Ferdowsi Meem

Improper use of face masks is a big concern today.

Photo: Ashraful Islam Adib

The coronavirus pandemic changed our lives nothing if not holistically.

A plethora of questions have been raised about coronavirus in early 2020. The first question is: From where did the novel coronavirus originate? China came up with an official explanation. The Chinese authorities said that coronavirus originated from a live animal market in Wuhan city. People were content with their fictitious explanation.

But a few days later, when people were quarantined, they started making conspiracy theories. Multiple conspiracy theories were propagated, peddling racist

undertones like white supremacist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, ultra-nationalist and anti-immigrant. American government leaders and senior officers were at play directly or indirectly, encouraging a hate campaign, racism and xenophobia by using anti-Chinese rhetoric.

At that time, many political camps, groups and parties, including the USA, Italy, Spain and Greece also latched on to the Covid-19 crisis to advance those conspiracy theories that succeeded in demonising refugees, foreigners, political leaders and statesmen.

The conspiracy theories had implications

and a target group of people. The conspirators perpetrated physical violence and made racist attacks, beatings, bullying, threats and discrimination against the people of Asian descent. In Africa, local people attacked Asian people, accusing them of carrying coronavirus. In India and Sri Lanka, many people attacked Muslims.

Ultra-nationalist leaders made the political capital out of this pandemic to justify threats and hate speeches. To my mind, none of us are born racist. The mindset of different varieties of people in our society gives rise to racism among us. We begin to discriminate between people.

In the very beginning, gullible audiences bought into those racist conspiracy theories. A case in point here. When immigrants started coming in, they were not primarily allowed to enter the country. Notices were put up in front of every shop barring the entry of the returnees.

In addition, Muslims began to believe that the virus would only kill gentiles. Therefore, I think the audience would be receptive to such racism if they have been provided with particular data from the laymen and researchers who have gained experiences studying about this fact. Furthermore, in the event that they can think of new thoughts and arrangements as opposed to ordering and mortifying individuals while relinquishing their bias.

PANDEMICS THROUGH THE...

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The storyline in ‘To Build a Fire’ depicts a tenacious man who tries to climb a rock despite warnings against travelling alone in unfavourable conditions caused by freezing temperatures. We must all be patient and brave, but not arrogant. It is thus best to leave something behind in order to start over. Caution is also needed, no matter how brave your heart is.

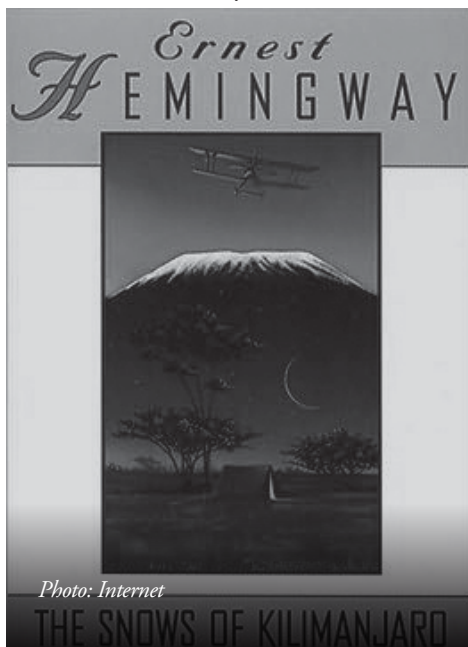


Photo: Internet

The Snows of Kilimanjaro
by Ernest Hemingway

The plot of ‘The Snows of Kilimanjaro’

revolves around a dying man ruminating on his past experiences. In this big life with a limited time, there are few things to regret. The main character is an author who fears he will never be able to write down all of the stories that run through his mind. As death is unavoidable, he needs to do better in his life. The story is a reflection of Hemingway’s thoughts on the protagonist.



Photo: Internet

Inertia by Nancy Kress

The short science fiction ‘Inertia’ is set in a world plagued by an incurable and deadly infectious disease. The affected are forced to live in quarantine camps with no or limited access to the outside world. Years later, it is discovered that the quarantined people fared better than the rest of the planet due to their isolation. This story helps us reflect on how violent the world has become and

how we all are now forced to quarantine. It is relevant to the current era.



Photo: Internet

Cannibalism in the Cars by Mark Twain

‘Cannibalism in the Cars’ humorously satirises the American political system. During inclement weather, some politicians become stranded on a snowbound train. It is now up to them to see if they can survive and how they interact with each other. This is very similar to how things are at work right now. It describes how human psychology works in order for a man to save himself first. When everyone is in danger, nobody is an ally. It only takes a situation like this to reveal people’s true colours.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC...

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job online which has authentic sources too. The pandemic is a hard time for Bangladesh and the world over, with more than 251 million cases so far and over 5.0 million deaths so far. When all is said and done, everyone is emotionally depressed and they need some mental support in cyberspace, not cyber bullying. If we all can use online platforms properly to give them a ray of hope and mental support, it will be easier to overcome this difficult situation for us for good.

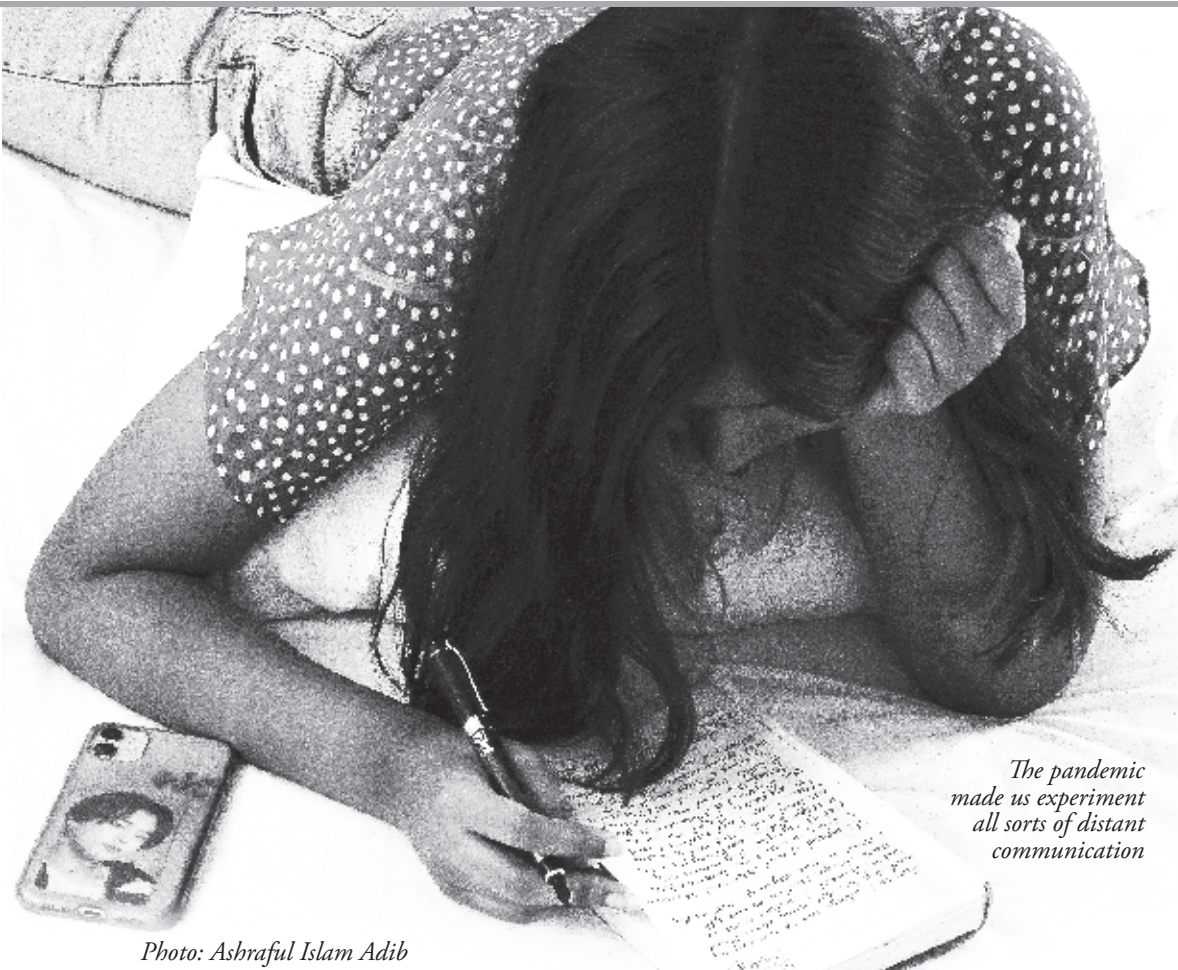


Photo: Ashraful Islam Adib

The pandemic made us experiment all sorts of distant communication

Communication is Culture-specific

Jannati Ferdowsi Meem

Communication cultures are diverse and specific. In David Berlo's model of communication, we can see that culture differences influence behaviour, lifestyle, social system, attitudes and communication skills, among others. Communication is basically based on culture.

Before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in Bangladesh, the situation was very different here. Bangladeshis were unaware of Covid-19 even when the virus was first detected in China. Before the onslaught of the deadly pathogen, people used to shake hands when they met each other. They showed their love and respect through shaking hands or hugging each other. But things unfolded differently after knowing the consequences of Covid-19! People have now stopped any form of physical contact with each other.

During the pre-pandemic period in Bangladesh, when the expatriates used to return home from abroad, there was joy and ecstasy writ large everywhere in their roots and there was curiosity among neighbours. After a long stay away from everyone back home, relatives used to come and visit a returnee. His or her house would be filled with laughter and a sense of reunification.

But what we see today is a paradigm shift from the long-held tradition, thanks to the faster spread of this superbug. The same people now come and visit their motherland, careful and cautious. The end result is the loss of costly harmony amongst each other.

The government forced restrictions on all kinds of social, political, cultural and

religious gatherings across the country. Accordingly, all the offices got closed physically, but their activities remained pretty much the same remotely.

My father did his office in the stay-at-home-remote-work mode. He made video calls by using different online social platforms, including Zoom, WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger and Google Meet, with Zoom becoming the most popular during the pandemic.

Schools, colleges and universities got closed after the virus had broken out in Bangladesh and begun to spread all over. We were asked to avoid social gatherings and maintain social distancing in order to contain the virus. Like others, I also decided to follow the health guideline and stayed back home instead of moving to my hometown.

However, our academic activities did not come to a halt. Teachers were taking classes via online platforms and also made adequate arrangements for online examinations. I did all the assignments and exams online. I felt that it was easy and comfortable for me, although it was a new platform for me. Now I am learning to adapt to the 'new normal'.

In sum, we can easily say that there is a huge change in communication culture. People are able to work at home instead of going to the office in the changed situation. In addition, students can join classes at home instead of going to the university. The mode of communication and communicators' body language vary from culture to culture. I must say communication is culture-specific.

Communication in Pandemic Times

Sadia Rahman Pitha

The way a person communicates with others depends on several individual factors like personality, culture, language, age, gender and even a crisis situation. Take Covid-19 into consideration. It has not just changed our lifestyle, but our communication style as well.

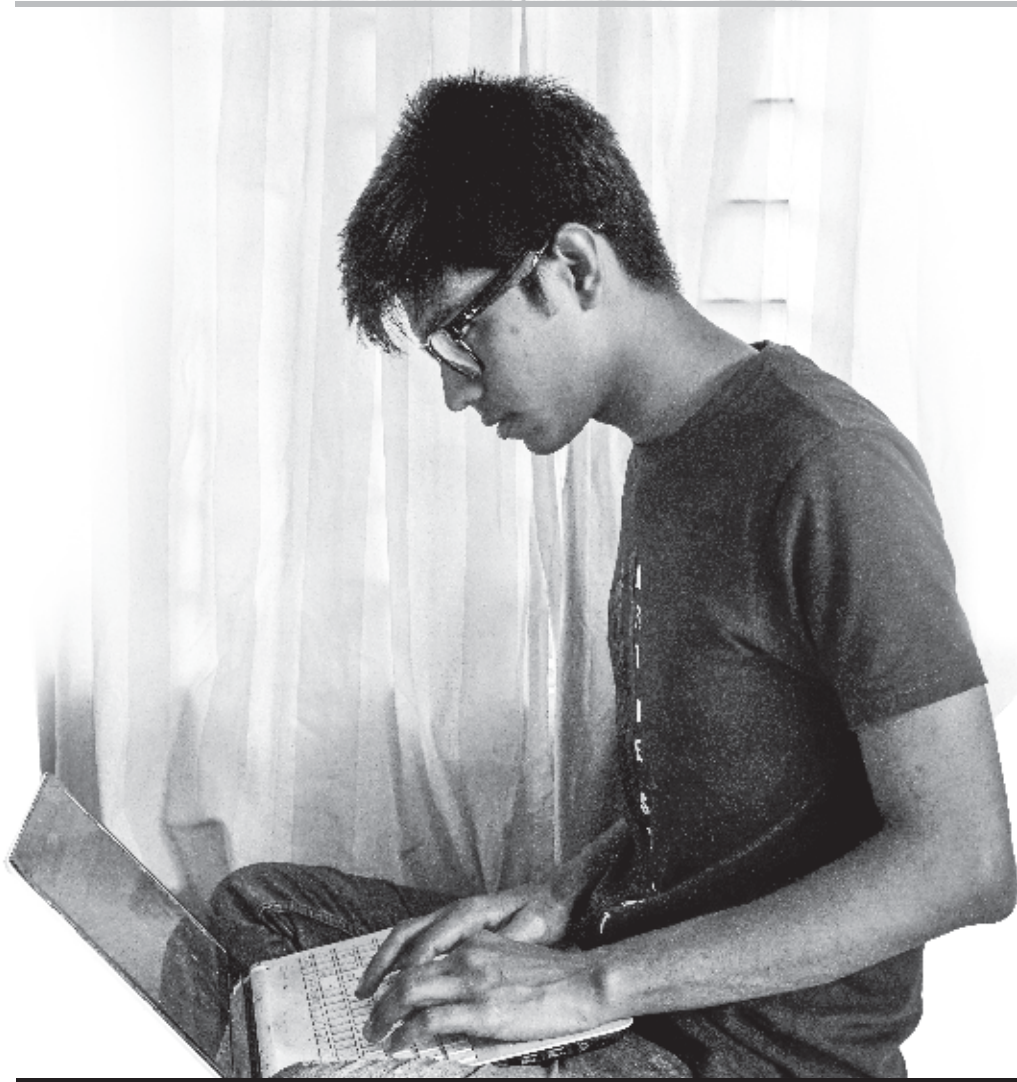
Before Covid-19's outbreak in Bangladesh was documented, we were blissfully unaware of the level of damage it could do to a country and to its people. In fact, when China alone was suffering from the deadly disease, Muslims around the world started claiming it as a form of punishment from on high, from Allah, to non-Muslims until it reached the Middle East. This phenomenon created cultural and religious chaos.

Even the whole communication system changed for this pandemic. As China was the origin of this novel virus, other countries stopped getting supplies from the populous nation. China, which is the world's top exporter, went through a lot of changes in its economy.

When my university closed, I didn't really expect to stay connected with people that much because of the strict, must-follow social-distancing norm. But surprisingly, the opposite happened and I even caught up with the people that I lost connections with over the years.

In fact, China's overall exports contracted by 17.2 per cent in dollar terms in January and February last year, which was more than what was expected by economists when polled by the Bloomberg (Wong, 2020).

The first case of coronavirus in Bangladesh was reported on 08 March 2020 and all the academic institutions were announced to shut down from March 18, the very date that also logged the country's first fatality from the superbug. After we were sent home, I did not go outside without an emergency.



In this era, we only existed through our keyboards.

Photo: Ashraful Islam Adib

Communication during Pandemic

Shanjida Akter Sweety

As people are gregarious and communal, they have been living in community in society from time immemorial. Every society is a part of a culture. A culture is created by combining many diverse things like arts, religions, economy, politics and language or the communication system. Our culture changes through the transformation of our communication system.

We know that the world has been reeling from a new humanitarian crisis caused by coronavirus since late December 2019. Since this virus is contagious and it made inroads into Bangladesh in early March 2020, our government decided to halt public gatherings and shut schools, colleges, universities, small private companies, and the cinemas. During the corona-induced overwhelmingly trying times, people in the Muslim-majority Bangladesh could not go to mosques for prayers, not even Friday's Juma prayers. The entire country was on lockdown.

In normal circumstances, we used to go to colleges, universities, mosques, cinema halls and other places with friends and family. We used to stand so close to them. We used to hug or shake hands with our friends, relatives and family members. And communication was as usual. But things were unusual. We could not go outdoors without an emergency. We had to stay housebound in reality. However, we have

been able to change our communication system.

Like my fellows and buddies, I had to stay indoors for the closure of my university because of the onslaught of the pandemic. But our midterm exam was knocking at the door. As all the institutions were closed, the authorities decided to conduct classes and exams online. Because of our being in a virtual space, there was no meeting, sitting, sharing and pairing, no group study, no library work with classmates after a lecture. I was in a quandary about what to do.

In the beginning, I attended some online classes that made me feel bored and depressed sometimes. I tried to communicate with my peers over phone and via online sites like Facebook, Messenger and WhatsApp to stay updated on classes, exams and others. Once offline, we became e-pals courtesy of social media! However, I enjoyed my stay-at-home life to a T. I spent quality time with my family. I read books and papers and mags in my free time.

In sum, we had to change our typical communication tool and it was an absolute necessity for us in this critical crisis situation. Had we not got used to this system of communication, it would have been difficult for us to communicate with each other. It is we who changed the communication system over time to fulfil our needs.

Economic Cost...

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potential threat of an eventual inflation. If the patterns are recurrent for consecutive fiscal periods, the country is predicted to go into further debt and deeper recession. Existence of such possibilities is worrisome for a country which is dependent on its labour force and debts for major industries as well as national infrastructure. Such a big deficit can be seen as a red signal for better judgment and alternative solutions. With thousands of official deaths from the Covid-19 pandemic around the country, it is no surprise that at least 40 per cent of the dependent families have lost their minimum income or subsistence wages and thus slipped into a morass of financial crisis. The daily wage-earners are unable to practise quarantine or social distancing and they even cannot afford necessary safety gears because of the opportunity costs associated with it. The working class and lower middle-class families primarily depend on a sole breadwinner for their household income, usually a male figure due to the patriarchal societal norms, followed more evidently in the lower-income groups. With that being said, there is much skepticism about their future in a normal economic condition, let alone a pandemic situation. Their families are usually larger, living in low-hygiene and highly dense colonies.

Privation, deprivation and abject poverty has recently led many families to become spongers alongside the other welfare scroungers and taken to the streets to seek food and finance, thanks to the following reasons:

- a. The lone wage-earner of the family has lost his employment or been made redundant, or
- b. The breadwinner was struck down with coronavirus or got affected and could not survive it.

Not only do these drive those families into poverty, they are likely to sell off their assets, the last straw of life, at devalued prices for a temporary source of income. Moreover, the inability to pay rents or dwelling charges has caused many to lose their homes. The privileges of a safe house do not apply to these people because they can neither shift to a new job nor start up their own business, because they lack the necessary education and equipment required to do so. So far, we have hardly seen any development schemes that address these issues. Even the government's financial bailout packages are meant for the rich, not for the needy. Thus we have been left in deep uncertainty as to where it takes us next.

Postscript: The coronavirus pandemic is almost out of the way because of the mass vaccination drive and the maintenance of the health guideline. The wheels of the economy have started to spin and students have started schooling at a pre-pandemic level. In sum, things will be rosier again.



Tickling our creative bones

Photo: Ashrafal Islam Adib

In Quarantine: Steps to Make You Feel More in Control

Sheikh Tasmima Mrenmoi

Within a few months, we were asked to change our lives in order to make room for the internet and social media. Beginning from our professional lives to our personal lives, everything changed. It almost felt like everything was out of place as if our entire routine had been turned upside down. We suddenly began taking online classes, and some of us worked from home. We had a house full of people seated in front of their computers. It could be disorienting, but it was time to reframe and refocus! These are some ways you can do that.

Make the internet your best friend

Coronavirus had to be the reason we finally got some time for ourselves. The internet and social media can be tedious, but they don't have to be.

Find ways to be more strategic, create more content and meet the needs of your networks as well as the core demographic needs of the people you want to connect with. Maintain contact with friends, family and the entire community, as the entire world is feeling the effects of this unusual situation.

Be creative

The internet provides you with new opportunities. How many jobs have you applied for so far? You must keep your eyes and ears open and seize the opportunity before your hands are full with other responsibilities. There are websites such as

Udemy, Skillshare, Coursera and Duolingo. They offer free online courses all over the world. No matter if it is related to your job or not. You can learn new things, for example, a new language, how to fix machines, the history of the world, and how to invest in stock markets to name but a few.

As depressing as the pandemic becomes, it is our duty as the responsible citizens of our country to protect and assist health workers and those in need. Due to panic buying and hoarding, there has been PPE, face mask, rubbing alcohol and hand sanitiser shortages.

Remember that learning never ends and

leadership never dies. These online certificates will not only help you get to the front of the line, but also keep you engaged in varied activities.

Create a budget plan

How many of us think about a budget on a regular basis? That's correct! We don't think so.

As the national economy continues to deteriorate because of rounds of lockdown amid the pandemic, it is imperative that we revise our budget before it is getting too late. Creating a budget plan that allows you to see exactly where your money is going can help you feel more prepared to deal with uncertainties.

Ask yourself, "How can I save more?" on a regular basis. Purchase only what is absolutely necessary. Then you can devise a recovery strategy. A possible to-do list for you is given below.

Average cash inflow for next months:

Bonus, Monthly income, Savings

Gross cash outflow for next months:

Food, Medicines, Bare necessities, Bills, Household stuff

Apply for health insurance

When a disaster like Covid-19 strikes, it is critical to review your life and health insurance policies. If you do not have any health insurance, now is the high time to get a policy. Do not be afraid to seek



When skill development is the new normal!

Photo: Ashraful Islam Adib

assistance from experts such as Metlife Insurance Bangladesh, Delta Life Insurance Company Limited and Pragati Insurance.

Exercise

Physical exercise should be done regularly during this pandemic since it is an investment in your health. Exercise keeps the body fit and improves heart and lung power. There is no point in putting today's exercise for tomorrow, thinking that you have huge free time in future. You can use apps or watch videos on YouTube. The majority of them do not require the use of any gym equipment. So, you can easily do the drills at home.

If you are having trouble motivating yourself, start by walking around your room for 40 minutes at a faster pace than usual. Make a schedule for yourself.

Household chores

Remember to do some spring cleaning! Most of our closets are so disorganised that we are often afraid to open, let alone touch them. So, start folding some of your clothes on the front row, and you will notice a difference in no time: a clean room right in front of you! Yes, indeed! There you have it! Trying out new dishes and assisting your mother in the kitchen is a definite yes. You can also divide the chores equally amongst other family members and work together. It will cheer you up!

Showcase your talent

Quarantine came as a lovely gift for the creatives. You now have complete control over your time, allowing you to get all artsy and make a parade of your skills.

Coronavirus had to be the reason we finally got some time for ourselves. The internet and social media can be tedious, but they don't have to be. Find ways to be more strategic, create more content and meet the needs of your networks as well as the core demographic needs of the people you want to connect with.

Make your quarantine as fruitful as possible. Submit your artistic works to various competitions that take place on various social media platforms. Earn yourself a certificate, even if it is one for participation. This way, you can keep

yourself occupied. Even the certificate you earned will undoubtedly come in handy in the near future. Quarantine is also an excellent time to refocus on your spirituality as it provides peace of mind and relief.

Donation/charity

As depressing as the pandemic becomes, it is our duty as the responsible citizens of our country to protect and assist health workers and those in need. Due to panic buying and hoarding, there has been PPE, face mask, rubbing alcohol and hand sanitiser shortages. Donating extra masks and gloves, helping out the needy, learning about charity organisations and providing financial aid are all good practices.

As the economic activity is at rock bottom, it is these individuals who will require the most financial and economic assistance. Let us all remain vigilant in times like this. Let us do something good for them with the "bayanihan" spirit. This is an excellent time to reflect on the simple pleasures of life and to appreciate things that we normally take for granted, such as family, friendship and the environment. After all, we are the agents of social change. And we cannot fall behind because of some minor bugs or dark thoughts and comments that bother us. While the rest of the world is progressing, each system necessitates renewal, and renewal brings smiles.

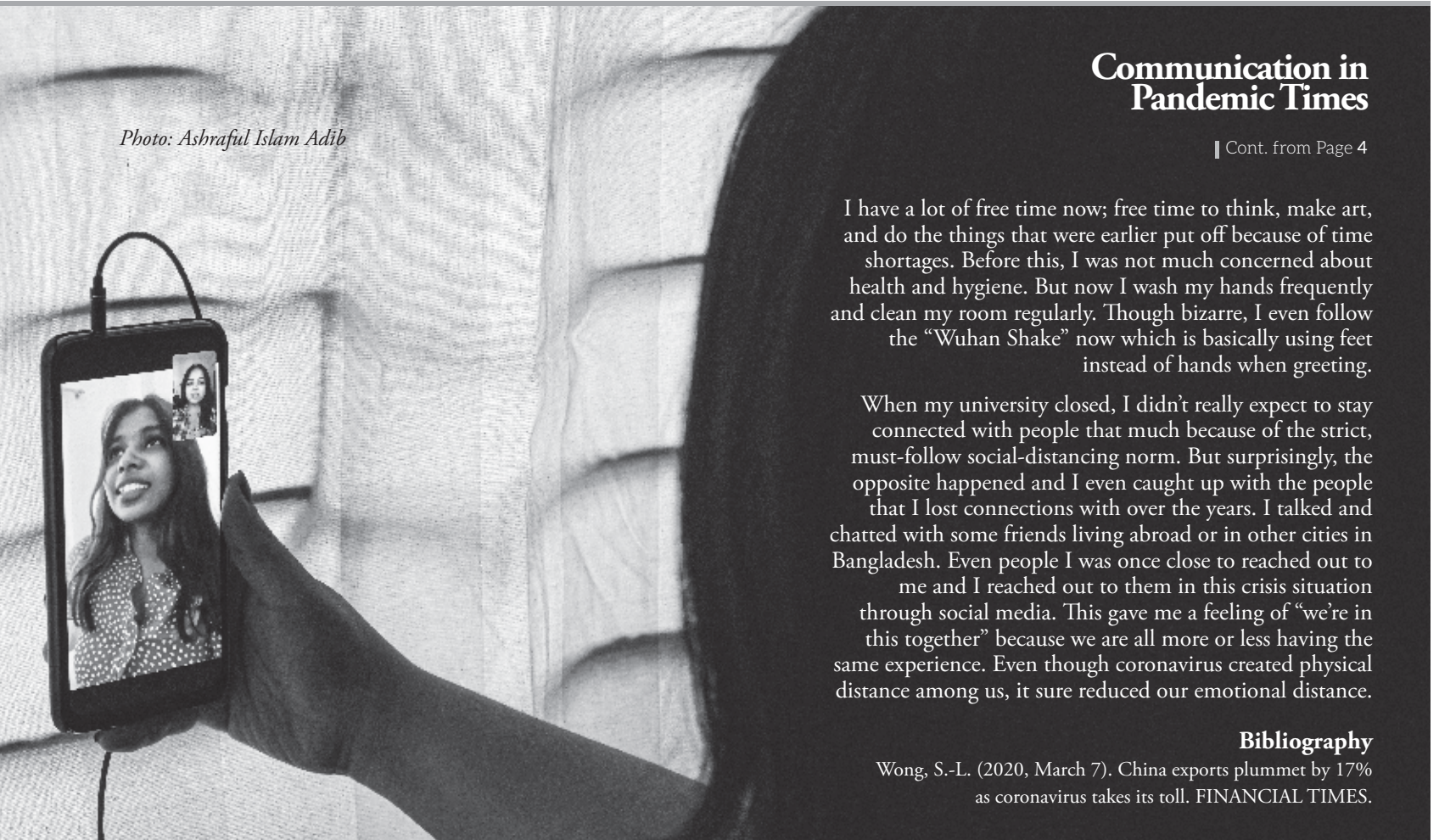


Photo: Ashraful Islam Adib

Communication in Pandemic Times

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I have a lot of free time now; free time to think, make art, and do the things that were earlier put off because of time shortages. Before this, I was not much concerned about health and hygiene. But now I wash my hands frequently and clean my room regularly. Though bizarre, I even follow the “Wuhan Shake” now which is basically using feet instead of hands when greeting.

When my university closed, I didn't really expect to stay connected with people that much because of the strict, must-follow social-distancing norm. But surprisingly, the opposite happened and I even caught up with the people that I lost connections with over the years. I talked and chatted with some friends living abroad or in other cities in Bangladesh. Even people I was once close to reached out to me and I reached out to them in this crisis situation through social media. This gave me a feeling of “we're in this together” because we are all more or less having the same experience. Even though coronavirus created physical distance among us, it sure reduced our emotional distance.

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Economic Cost of Coronavirus in Bangladesh

Nahian Jamal Joyeeta

Among the many horrors of the coronavirus pandemic on such a mass scale, the economic anxiety looms large and stands in the top tier, especially for developing countries like Bangladesh. Bangladeshi investors and job-seekers are already grappling with the pressure of keeping pace with global competition. In the light of recent events, the gross damage to the economy might be larger than it is projected to be. With exports on the rocks, the majority of the labour force is jobless and businesses are shutting down. So, it is quite clear by now that people are suffering from a low

income. As a result, they have been withdrawing a lot more than the amount invested. This puts the government in a tight spot as its main income sources are taxes and debts. If the economy is operating at a lower capacity than usual, according to economic sages, output will be lower. A recent article reveals that the deficit of the current fiscal budget for 2020-2021 amounts to 45 per cent of the projected target (9,000 crore out of 20,000 crore) which might result in an expansionary monetary policy with the

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Photo: Ashraful Islam Adib

NOW, OR WHEN?

The Dilemma of Campus Reopening

Moumita Sultana Hema

Ever since the start of the Covid-19 outbreak, all education programs have stayed closed in Bangladesh. The promise of academic programs continuing online has obviously failed, due to the extremely slow mobile internet speed in this region. The government has finally taken steps to open academic institutions after a closure of more than one and a half years. It is thought that this is a positive step forward in order to fight the outbreak and getting our life back to normal. However, not everyone agrees.

In a country where wireless internet speeds are low and connectivity is not continuous to stay connected to classes at all times, many students have suffered not only due to the low connectivity but also financially, since the cost of internet data or packages exceeds Tk 300 to Tk 500 a month. Bangladesh is one of five nations at the lowest of the worldwide ranking in terms of internet connection. The administration stated on the third of September that schools and institutions will open on September 12, starting for a single day each week. We interviewed some students from different institutions to know their thoughts on this decision amidst the ongoing pandemic.

'Opening institutions at the moment is not a good decision'

Torsa Islam, a student of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), has just finished her fifth trimester. Since the closure of the university last year, she has not only completed her entire first year of Bachelor's Degree online, but also, she is almost near the end of her second year.

Upon the question of how she has coped up to the online academic programs, "the pandemic has taken a toll on our mental health. It was not only depressing but it was also stressful." She said it was because the curriculum was different, everything was different. She continued by saying how the online ways of studying and giving exams were new and unfamiliar and people are not used to welcoming anything that is not familiar to them. She also stated that uncertainty is always scary, and the fact that she had no idea how long this will keep going on, it was stressful, and pretty frustrating for her at the beginning.

We asked her how she feels about reopening the institutions at the moment. She stated that she does not think that this is a good idea to start on-campus classes in

the middle of the pandemic where we have our family members at home, and they are not even vaccinated yet.

"I won't say online education has been successful for all institutions, as we all know that the public universities have been closed for more than a year now and students do want the classes to start, however, my university successfully pulled it off," she said. "It was hard to cope with it, but they did all the things they could as they should. All the necessities have been pulled off properly. So, we eventually got used to it, and it has been pretty impressive how the teachers have been managing as well," she answered the question of if she thinks that online education has been successful from her (or any) institution.

'I am very happy that the institutes are opening'

Jara Tithi, a student of Shanto-Marium University of Creative Technology, is in her final year of her Bachelor's degree. When asked how she has adjusted to the online academic programs, she stated, "Online education has been extremely difficult for me". She further continued that she understood how online and offline education systems are poles apart.

Jara, "Since I study fashion designing, it is a practical based subject, so online education has not been able to help me or make me learn anything". She said it is not often clear what the teachers say. The internet and electricity problems have always been there, so there's nothing new to say about that.

We asked her how she felt about reopening the institutions at this time, and she said she thinks it is a good idea to start school, and further mentioned that she does not understand why the universities haven't been opened yet. She said, "I feel the schools and colleges should have been opened way earlier because the pandemic will not be gone in a matter of few months, it will take time and despite that, we need to continue with our daily lives. Education could have continued at the same or similar pace if it were opened earlier."

She also mentioned that children have lost their flow of studying, and cannot return to that same level now that it has taken this long to open the institutions, considering the fact that universities students do not have the same flow as well.

'Teachers are taking precautions so I think it is better to open the institutions'

Nusrat Jahan Suraiya, a student of Shiddeswari Girl's College, is in the first year of her Honor's degree. In response to the topic of how she has adjusted to the online academic programs, she stated, that it was not only difficult to adjust, but it was extremely painful for her, because she completed her HSC in 2019 and has been preparing for her admission tests in Public Universities since then. But due to the pandemic, all her plans were halted, stretching the time to two years.

Upon asking if she thinks the government and institutional authorities should take necessary precautions to stop the spreading of COVID-19 if the institutes are reopened, she said, "I have already seen that each class have to go to school once a week, so that means teachers are maintaining the number of students per day in school are moderate, and do not end up resulting in a crowd. Teachers are also keeping an eye on students, i.e., if they have any fever or a cold." She added that this is not the government's duty to keep us safe and sound, it is our duty to stay healthy, sanitize ourselves at all times, people are slowly but surely getting vaccinated so she thinks that it is high time that the institutions are opened.

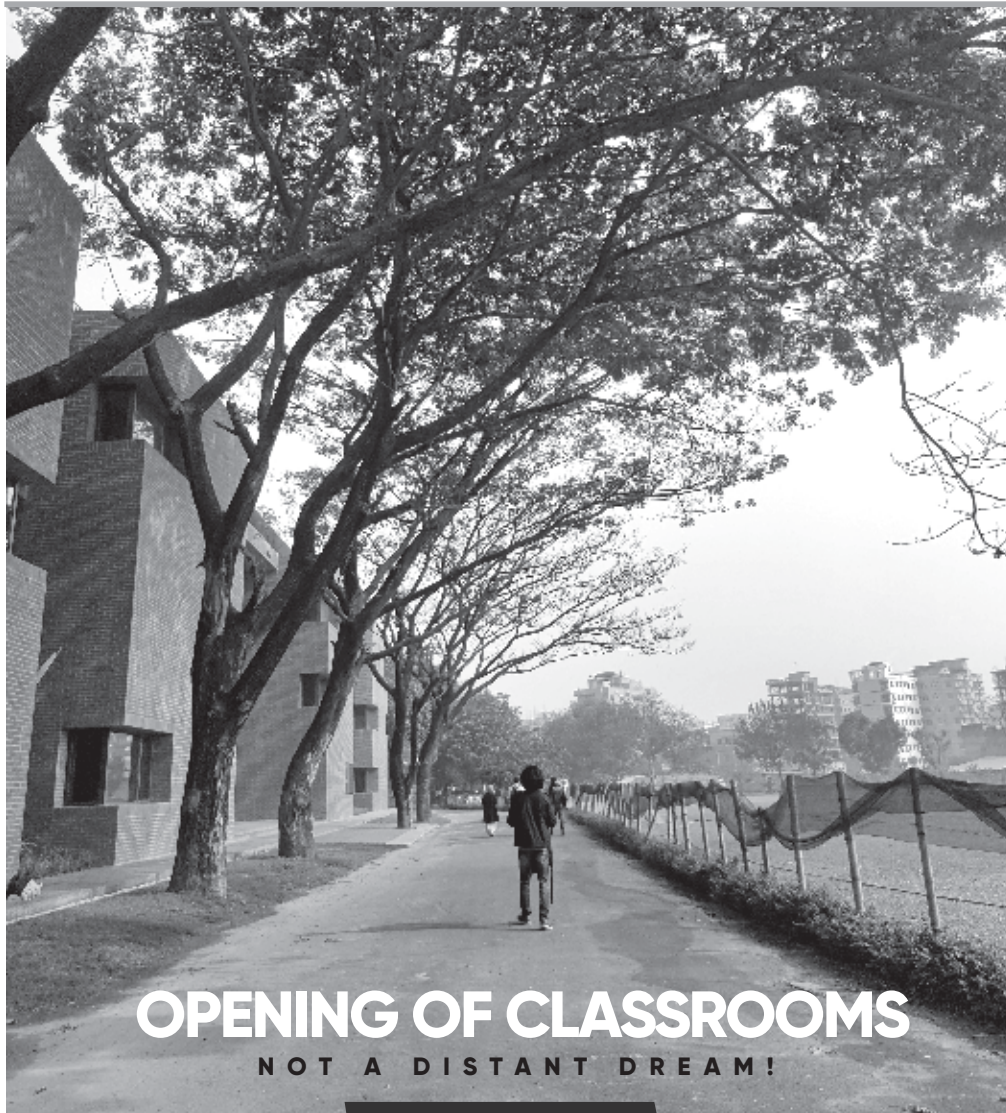
'I think schools should be opened because children are not studying at home'

We asked Monira Parvin, a mother of a university student, about how she felt about reopening the institutions at this time, and she said she feels it's a nice thing to start school now. She stated, "I think schools and universities should be opened, but taking into account the importance of early vaccinations of all the students, and maintaining necessary precautions. But despite all, it is necessary because children are not concentrating on educations and are drifting away from studies."

Students have been absent from class for more than a year and a half due to this dreadful disease that has ravaged the planet. Nothing is more damaging to culture than a long time of learning being lost or just not being there. As a result, the earlier our students return to school, colleges, and institutions, the better for all of us. But despite everything, let us all take necessary precautions in order to stop the spreading of the coronavirus further.

Photo: Internet





OPENING OF CLASSROOMS NOT A DISTANT DREAM!

Nahian Jamal Joyeeta

Photo: Anica Hossain

For the past year and a half, the heads of our beds and our always-comfortable pillows had served as a makeshift school. Getting up, joining the class, and eating breakfast with our webcams turned off and only turning on the mic to say “yes sir or yes ma’am” had been our idea of online classes. Our “new normal” was the accidental moments when our mics were turned on at the most inconvenient times: either someone was caught saying something completely obscene, or someone’s unpleasant interactions with their family members were broadcasted to the entire class! However, with the daily grind of the pandemic, the question “Is it really necessary to take classes?” appeared often; but deep down, we were all waiting for the news of campus reopening.

Now that it’s here, I’m curious to know what our first day will be like.

Maybe I’ll go through the entire cupboard the night before to pick my outfit. Obviously, I will not sleep since I will be involved in all kinds of theories and fantasies via group chat with my friends all night long in the excitement of seeing them again! I won’t have to put on headphones in the morning, but rather get up an hour earlier to catch the bus on an empty stomach, smelling only the insides of my protective mask.

I’ll strive in vain to locate my dear buddies at the front of the yellow shuttle bus queue in front of Campus “A,” and then I’ll wonder, “Why isn’t today’s class online? At least you wouldn’t have to wait in line for an hour!” Then when my best friend will greet me in the line with the tightest hug, I will perhaps realise what exactly makes the “offline” moments so precious. It’s been a while since I felt the adrenaline rush of entering our big, red brick gateway and walking past the beautiful red building facing the cricket ground; it’s been a while since I was lovingly welcomed by the puppies on campus who made sure I smiled before a stressful day of classes. It’s been a while since my friends and I sat in the back garden and sang to our heart’s content!

I know that not a lot will feel the same. Instead of seeing each other’s faces, we’ll be seeing the variety of masks being sold; instead of hugging each other or sharing food, we’ll be asked to stand three feet apart for social distancing; instead of a hearty reunion, we will be still be surrounded by the tropes of the new normal. I used to hide my face by turning off the video like online, that day I will hide behind a mask. The “No mask, no entry” sign will take the place of “Welcome back to campus!” posters, and the earthy smell of permanent campus will be replaced by the stinging rubbing alcohol and our stenchy masks. The news of who got infected in the family today, or who has passed away will be shared in person rather than our newsfeeds. The only consolation in all of this would be: we are not alone in this.

Fighting Covid-19

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about their contributions online to court corporate entities to chip in with their largesse as part of their corporate social responsibility. Akij Group, for example, began constructing dedicated hospitals for coronavirus patients. Bashundhara Group followed in Akij’s footsteps and it set up a dedicated hospital.

In times of crisis, people can be biased and unpredictable, especially in Bangladesh where the online discourse is very diverse. Instead of letting loose a stream of vitriol on social media, everyone should work with the government. This was not the time to debate political malice and point fingers at political parties. Yet, many people debated the issue, much to the annoyance of others. It should be kept in mind that a misstep in online conversations could spread misinformation. People were having panic attacks as a result of hearing a farrago of fact and myth about coronavirus. Even a fever or a cough could lead to the abandonment of a patient. Even a few people died in hospitals without being treated because others doubted they had Covid-19. People should be aware that Covid-19 is curable and avoidable if precautions are taken.

Most online discussions were fruitful because people did their best to follow the instructions for their own good. Most Bangladeshis looked concerned about public health...

The role of news media has been critical during this pandemic of epic proportions because it assists in disseminating reliable information. They are responsible for quickly informing the general public of government plans, global status of the pandemic and so on. People trust the news outlets the most and pay close attention to them because they provide accurate information. Braving the dangerous virus, all Bangladeshi news platforms are actively working to perform their responsibilities duly.

The pandemic Covid-19 has given rise to much speculation and debate, with multiple angles, actions and reactions shared and circulated on social platforms. People started raging against China as some conspiracy theories surfaced online. However, China stood by other countries, including Bangladesh, by sending test kits, PPE, ventilator, masks, gloves, sanitiser and vaccine. In sum, it is better to bury international animosity and work together.

Intimate Weddings

A TREND AMID PANDEMIC

How about a Wedding with Kacchi, but Just for the Family?

Nahian Jamal Joyeeta

When life came to a halt amid the coronavirus pandemic, it was getting difficult to imagine we could all revert back to normalcy. Some resorted to optimism and gathered with their loved ones to start the life apart together.

The couples ditched fancy halls and grand weddings amongst large crowds, opting instead, to get married among immediate family and close friends, and the end of 2020 brought many newly-weds to the list. Up until December 2020, according to national news sources, 60 couples were registered daily by the marriage registrars across the country!

What inspired you to get married amid a Global Pandemic?

“My fiancé and I had decided to get married in April, 2020 long before the existence of the virus but it got postponed due to the lockdown,” began Tabassum Islam (bride), “When we saw there was no improvement, we decided to get married on 13th August, 2020 in a very intimate ceremony, following all safety measures.” She also believes it’s easier to divulge into married life now more than ever, since the couple is spending a lot of time at home together.

On the other hand, Zareen Anika Islam, a soon-to-be bride says, “We always wanted to get married in 2021 to commemorate the new decade. Although I have always imagined a large wedding, even if it can’t be too grand now, we are sticking to the plan.” A wedding with only 20-50 guests is normal in other cultures. But in Bangladesh, they’re not only limited to being a marriage ceremony, rather, it’s a festival for families, extended families, friends, acquaintances and sometimes an entire area!

Although some people, like Tabassum, would rather prefer this low-key celebration, Zareen is not at all happy

about it because she is having to cut back on functions and invitations.

Are you okay, wedding planners?

Weddings have turned into an industry starting from food, attire, to makeup, decorations and photography; whether it’s a big event or an intimate one, a wedding planner is a must! In conversation with Sohel Ahmed, the core photographer of popular event management Reels & Stories, we discern some of these concerns. “It’s very difficult to say how many events we have planned amid the pandemic, despite many cancellations and postponements in the beginning of lockdown. With government restrictions overhead, it was not easy to go through as planned,” says Sohel. Reels & Stories started receiving more bookings near August as most people began to plan engagements and Akdth (Nuptials) at home but they are mostly choosing the smaller packages.

“At first it was quite a challenge to cover and organise weddings in a small space while maintaining distancing codes because moments need to be captured

spontaneously. Now, however, we are more used to it and people seem to be shifting towards venue events, we are getting increased bookings for winter and spring events.” Sohel added that the culture of Bangladeshi weddings will prevent the trend of intimate functions from growing further because people already seem to be loosely concerned about the pandemic. Make-up Artist Raisa Naushin also mirrored the statement of Reels & Stories, saying her bridal clients, although increasingly concerned about hygiene of make-up tools, still wanted to look their best in a budget. She believes since people are already growing less inclined towards smaller crowds (“limiting to 100-200 people is still unsafe”), this trend might expire with the pandemic when the health and financial constraints will improve. Unfortunately for wedding guests though, not many invitations have been coming along since the need for distancing is far from over, even if social media feeds show otherwise. Alas, at least we can hope for these unions to last, so that we at least get to attend the receptions after the situation normalises- whenever that may be!



Sharing a cup of coffee everyday calls for celebration.

Photo: Jawad Chowdhury



The “Qubool” moments for Zohra (left) and Tabassum (right).



We fought and survived Covid, but not without consequences.

Photo: Ashrafur Islam Adib

Fighting Covid-19 and Online Bashing

Taranna Tabassum Tiasha

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the onslaught of the 2019 coronavirus disease (Covid-19) as a pandemic. The term “pandemic” refers to the fact that Covid-19 has spread globally and that people everywhere are now suffering from it. The deadly bug is fast spreading across the world, and Bangladesh is not immune from it. Covid-19 has been a global public health emergency. Online platforms were critical in bridging the gap between the government and the people. Almost everyone was getting involved in online discussions on how to join hands and work together to combat this microbe. In Bangladesh, some Facebook groups were formed to help with the Covid-19 emergency response. New information was quickly reaching people, thanks to the promptness of these groups. The government and health workers were disseminating critical information online regularly to heighten public awareness of the dangers posing the virus. People received instructions daily from online platforms like washing hands properly, maintaining social distance and using face masks. Covid-19 has played out like a war, with participants from all walks of life. Most online discussions were fruitful because people did their best to follow the instructions for their own good. Most Bangladeshis looked concerned about public health. When they came to know

from online platforms that doctors and nurses had not received any personal protective equipment (PPE) from the government at the peak time of coronavirus, they made personal initiatives to donate PPE in hospitals in order to assist the community.

The pandemic Covid-19 has given rise to much speculation and debate, with multiple angles, actions and reactions shared and circulated on social platforms. People started raging against China as some conspiracy theories surfaced online.

To check the Covid-19 scourge, people started to wear face masks and wash their hands thoroughly. I also took part in an online discussion with friends on Covid-19. In fact, we used to discuss the day’s events.

Also, there was a new trend of donating to the poor via bKash, and friends are nominating one another for that project. This fantastic initiative was made possible by online discussion. Furthermore, the country was on lockdown for months. But its impact was immense on the poor, especially day-labourers, rickshaw-pullers and cleaners. Many people were unable to purchase bare necessities amid inflationary pressure. Some unscrupulous businessmen raised prices of essential commodities for a windfall profit during the pandemic. However, they were quickly exposed by the general public on social media, and the government acted promptly to regulate the errant profiteers. Given the plight of the poor, many non-profit organisations raised funds through online platforms with an eye to assisting those in need. They updated the situation on Facebook and other social networks on a daily basis in order to encourage more people to join them. One interesting fact is that because of the infectious nature of the disease, the super-rich were equally affected. As a result, adequate funding was being provided for anti-virus research. In addition, wealthy industries came up with munificent donations to the health sector grappling with the pandemic. People waxed lyrical

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