

Concern as screen time soars for kids

Many children suffer from frequent headaches, eye pain or bloodshot eyes after extensive online classes



At 8.15 am every weekday, Bahrain resident Aji Thomas' nine-year-old son opens his laptop and signs in to Zoom to start the school day. For the next five hours, he is not supposed to switch off the camera and is only offered a recess time of ten minutes. Along with 45 classmates attending online classes, he is not allowed to eat or drink while on camera nor is he allowed to wear any dress other than uniform with the usual tie around the neck.

Staff Reporter
TDT | Manama

“It is really painful to watch my son struggling before the laptop,” Thomas told *The Daily Tribune*. “But there are not many options left. I want my son to attend offline classes. Since school buses are not running, there is hardly anything I can do.”

Headaches, eye pain or bloodshot eyes are no longer adult disorders after extensive online sessions. Even the children are facing similar health scenarios after being subjected to online classes for over one-and-a-half years now.

“Parents must ensure that their children are having their eyes protected amid this increas-

ingly continuing online classes,” said Dr Manoj Kurian Philip, Consultant Ophthalmologist at American Mission Hospital.

“Every child attending online classes must follow the 20-20-20 rule; every 20 minutes spent using a screen; the child should turn his eyes at something that is 20 feet away for a total of 20 seconds. And this would make their eyes relaxed. But I don't know whether any parent is making their children regularly exercise this rule.”

Dr Manoj said that children can also use blue filter glasses to protect their eyes while attending online classes for longer hours. “Increased screen time during the pandemic season is causing myopia progression among many children and the

number of cases has been increasing. Both school authorities and parents must encourage outdoor activities intermittently to secure the eye health of children.”

Recent studies have also shown an increase in the cases of squint eyes among school children after the excessive use of digital screens.

Speaking to *The Daily Tribune*, K Gopinath Menon, The New Indian School Bahrain Principal said school managements always opt for offline classes but there is no other option left in the existing scenario. “Online classes are not by choice. It is something the pandemic situa-

tion has imposed on us.”

Gopinath said the teachers are aware of the struggle students are facing after being made to sit before the screens for longer hours. “We give frequent breaks to students of lower classes. But for higher classes, we have limitations to offering frequent breaks as it would disrupt the momentum of classes.



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“There are many students who switch off the screens after breaks. So, frequent breaks don't seem like the right solution to the suffering students face now, especially when we talk from a teacher's perspective. We are offering breaks after two periods (one hour and 20 minutes) as per the generally established standards.”

The principal said he expected the number of students attending offline classes to rise. “But unfortunately the number of students attending offline classes has remained stagnant between eight and 10 per cent. And I don't think it will improve in the near time as we see pandemic numbers increasing every day.”

Book on Gandhi's engagement with Arab World launched in four languages

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“Gandhi: His Engagement with Islam and the Arab World”, a landmark Arabic-language book, authored by Abdalnabi Alshoala, focusing on the great Mahatma Gandhi and his impact on the Arab world, was launched yesterday in four translated versions – English, Hindi, Malayalam and Urdu – during a virtual event hosted via Zoom at the Isa Cultural Centre in Manama. The book, now in its third printing in Arabic, was launched in the presence of a sizeable audience, numbering several hundred people, tuned into the Zoom cast from Bahrain, India, Egypt and around the GCC Countries.

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The event, moderated by Sara

Al Buraik, a prominent Bahrain TV news anchor, was organized by the Bahrain India Society, which was founded by Alshoala. The launch of the book coin-

cides with the anniversary of India's Republic Day.

Srivastava congratulated Alshoala on a “... brilliant and well-researched work on the life, thoughts, intellectual heritage and ideals of Gandhiji.”

“It is only befitting,” Srivastava continued, “that the translated book has been launched in four languages today on the occasion of the 73rd Republic Day of India. It is also a tribute to the author, who is a distinguished intellectual, Gandhian scholar and a torch-bearer for strong bonds of friendship and partnership between India and the Kingdom of Bahrain.”

Juma, the Bahrain India Society chairman, said the society was “... honoured to be a platform for the multi-lingual launch of such a work of scholarly relevance as

Alshoala's book.”

Alshoala said the book intended to both express his gratitude to India for the hospitality he received while a student and, also, to strengthen ties between India and Middle Eastern countries. A former Minister of Labour and Cabinet Minister of State, Alshoala is currently the chairman of Dar Albilad for Journalism, Publishing and Distribution and the founding chairman, and advisor to the board, of Alfanar Investment Holding. Alshoala also served on the Board of Directors of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Coming in French soon

Alshoala announced that negotiations are underway to have the book published in the French language soon.