CAMPUS

The state of on-campus
JOURNALISM

ILLUSTRATION:
SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

■ **MUSIC** ■

UNHEARD

Hozier's new EP is a musical manifestation of spring

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

Early last March, Irish Musician Andrew Hozier-Byrne teased his fifth EP, Unheard, with a very catchy excerpt. Unheard was finally released on March 22, featuring four songs spanning 14 minutes total. The tracks were originally intended for his album Unreal Unearth, inspired by the nine circles of hell in Dante Alighieri's Inferno.

"Too Sweet", the first track – a groovy and sweet song true to its title – depicts the tale of two individuals and their contrasting lives. The chorus of this song was used in the teaser, which, in Hozier's own words, represents the third circle of hell, Gluttony. Immediately following unveiling of the teaser, the chorus became an instant favourite and appeared on the soundtrack of reels and TikToks all over social media.

The second track, "Wildflower and Barley", features Allison Russel and is probably my favourite song on the EP. Representing Limbo, the first circle of hell, where the unbaptised and the virtuous pagans reside, the track portrays a morose springtime. Underneath the sombreness, the lyrics express a desire for renewal.

"Empire Now", the third track, represents the Circle of Violence. The song creates a post-apocalyptic ambience for the listener, mostly through its lyrics.

"Fare Well", the final track of the EP, represents the outward ascent. A relatively calm song that seeks to find joy and solace amidst the ominous shadow of calamity looming.

The themes of hope, renewal, and comfort persists throughout the four tracks, each a distinct flavour of delight for the senses, embodying the essence of spring.

FEVER

On Melancholy Hill
Gorillaz

Sunny Side Up!
Red Velvet

Cigarette Daydreams
Cage The Elephant

Heart Burn
SUNMI

End of Beginning
Djo

Yes I'm Changing
Tame Impala

■ **CAREER** ■

REMOTE WORK

Is it better than on-site jobs?

NUZHAT HASSAN CHOWDHURY

The remote vs on-site debate started some time during 2020 and is still ongoing. Since then, some very interesting statements have been made by the top dogs in business, including Elon Musk, Chairman of X (formerly known as Twitter), stating "They should pretend to work somewhere else," when asked to comment on the belief that on-site work is an antiquated concept.

On the other hand, Jack Dorsey, founder and former CEO of X, stated that his company can get talent anywhere. Echoing his sentiments, a spokesperson for Dorsey's other founding company, Square, stated that they want employees to be able to work where they feel most creative and productive.

Remote work has its pros, including being less time consuming and more comfortable as well as flexible, thus offering a superior work-life balance compared to offline jobs. This balance is arguably much needed at a time when 9-hour workdays have become the norm in Bangladesh.

However, there are very few remote jobs available in the country, possibly due to a lack of infrastructure and the general dismissive attitude of employers towards the concept. What does this mean for the employees?

In the epicentre of commercial activities in the country, time is money but nobody seems to have enough of it because they are always stuck in a gridlock. According to the US National Bureau of Economic Research, Dhaka is the slowest city in the world in terms of traffic.

This indicates that people spend hours on the road commuting, wasting away time and energy that they otherwise could have used to be more productive, or even to recharge for the next day. Remote work can save workers hours every week, allowing them to enjoy a better standard of living while contributing to decreased traffic congestion in an overpopulated city.

Moreover, companies will have access to a larger talent pool if they offer remote opportunities. The arrangement could also impact employee retention rate by lowering turnover as people most likely will not want to give up the flexibility it offers.

Offline work does have some merits including the chance to bond with co-workers, networking opportunities and the ease of dialogue at any given moment. However, it is difficult to ignore the toll it takes on workers in the form of unpaid commuting hours, cost of transportation and poor work-life balance.

The most constructive solution would be to meet in the middle. A hybrid work arrangement can relieve office workers from the draining nature of a full-time offline job, while allowing them to reap its benefits.

As technology advances, it only makes sense to use these advancements to our benefit in pursuit of efficiency and a better quality of life. With an open mind towards changing norms and a commitment to solving issues rather than accepting undesirable situations, we can finally start practicing a healthier and more modern approach to work.

Nuzhat Hassan Chowdhury is an English instructor and a writer.

■ OFF CAMPUS ■

Massive strides in the world of small things

How CHRF is redefining single cell-genomics in Bangladesh

SHANUM SARKAR

For the first time in Bangladesh, Child Health Research Foundation (CHRF) has successfully generated single-cell genomic (SCG) data for the Human Cell Atlas (HCA). This feat was realised through the support of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, which funded the "Global Pediatric Cell Atlas of Nasal and Oral Mucosa" project. CHRF, as a key contributor, has been collecting and analysing nasopharyngeal swab samples from both healthy children and those with infections in rural Bangladesh. The goal of this project is to enrich and diversify the HCA with a paediatric atlas of the nasal and oral mucosa.

The Daily Star took a guided tour through the labs to hear from the scientists themselves to understand the significance of this achievement. Dr Senjuti Saha, the project's principal investigator, highlighted single-cell genomics as a groundbreaking technology enabling scientists to individually isolate, sequence, and analyse human cells. Unlike bulk genomics, which offers a generalised overview, SCG provides a deeper understanding by discerning the specific types and quantities of cells present in a sample.

Dr Saha then transitioned to a broader issue affecting scientific research globally: the persistent colonial disparity in resource allocation and representation. She explained, "Traditionally, technology and resources have been concentrated in the global North, leaving the most affected populations in the global South underserved. Researchers from the global South have often been relegated to the role of sample collectors, with data analysis and decision-making outsourced elsewhere." This disparity extends to human genomics, where a predominant focus on samples from North European

descendants hampers our understanding of diversity and ancestry, hindering equitable healthcare solutions.

Despite efforts to address this criticism by shipping samples from the global South, Dr Saha emphasised, "As long as samples are being shipped out, the colonial divide persists. Therefore, this project marks a significant milestone in the history of the Human Cell Atlas, being one of the first designed and executed in the global South. This breakthrough is not only about doing science but also about *where* the science is done."

The SCG core team then discussed the implications of their work on both the local community and a global scale. Apurba Malaker, senior research officer at CHRF, highlighted how diseases manifest differently in individuals, stressing the importance of understanding cellular specifics for therapeutics and personalised medicine. Deb Purna, a research officer at CHRF, expressed her excitement about contributing to the HCA and ensuring representation of data from Bangladesh. Dr Yogesh Hooda, a scientist at CHRF, expressed optimism about building research infrastructure to facilitate wider adoption of this technology.

Transitioning to the challenges faced during the project, Shakiul Kabir, a research manager at CHRF, discussed the initial hurdles in sample collection and the logistical challenges of transporting samples back to the labs. Dr Saha then elaborated on the difficulties

in acquiring reagents locally, citing exorbitant prices and ethical concerns regarding profit margins. She emphasised that these challenges often take away the headspace that is required for science.

Deb further highlighted equipment issues, noting frequent faults and the lack of repair solutions. Preonath Shuvo, a research officer at CHRF, discussed data generation challenges, including initial sequencing failures and subsequent improvements.

Dr Saha stressed the importance of collaboration in overcoming these obstacles, noting a shift from historical patterns of one-way knowledge transfer. She described their collaboration with Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Boston Children's Hospital as truly equitable, with knowledge exchange and capacity building at its core.

When questioned about their motivation to persevere despite numerous challenges, Dr Saha emphasised the cultural resilience of Bangladeshis and the real-life impact of their work at CHRF. As the conversation came to a close, the SCG team said, "In addition to our core team, we extend our appreciation to those working in the field at Mirzapur, including nurses, porters, and dedicated community health workers, as well as the supportive mothers of our study participants and all partners who help make global health research truly global."

PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

CAMPUS LIFE

The state of on-campus
JOURNALISM

USRAAT FAHMIDAH

In 2022, Theo Baker, a freshman at Stanford University, decided to write an investigative story about the University President, Marc Tessier-Levigne's research misconduct for the campus paper. His story caused a massive frenzy, even leading to legal threats to stop the publication of the articles.

But things changed after more reports delved into the details, and the university decided to launch an independent investigation. This investigation found the President guilty of some of the accusations, and it eventually led to his resignation.

Theo Baker's story highlights the pivotal role that campus newspapers and student journalists play in educational institutions and beyond. Student run newspapers are not just outlets for campus news; they serve as watchdogs, ensuring transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct within the university community.

In Bangladesh's higher education space, student-run campus newspapers are hardly active. In schools and colleges, they are almost non-existent. The space for students to acquire those journalistic skills is absent.

Regarding the importance of campus newspapers, Saquib Bin Raschid, a student at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), says, "I think promoting student newspapers is necessary for every university, not just in universities that offer journalism as a major."

Saquib, who is a sub-editor for ULAB's student-run newspaper, The ULABian, thinks that student newspapers should be supported more, even if they're not seen as a typical extracurricular activity.

Talking about how working for The ULABian helped him, Saquib shares, "In my experience, my passion for writing led me to join the campus newspaper. When my piece was published last semester, the thrill of knowing faculty members would read it was amazing. I have also seen students enjoy a sense of confidence who have their work published."

Participating in a student publication equips individuals with a versatile skill set that goes beyond academics, preparing them for success in their future careers by enhancing their communication, editorial, critical thinking, leadership, and time management skills. Muskan Mortuza Mustarin, a student at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) and the director of content at IUB Journalism Club, shares, "Student newspapers are especially a great opportunity for aspiring journalists, offering practical experience and contributing to the overall educational environment of the university."

With lack of funding for print publication, student newspapers are evolving and adapting to the digital era by prioritising online content distribution over traditional print editions.

Rakin Ahmed*, a student at ULAB who previously served as the campus newspaper's editor, says, "At ULAB, the university allocates a budget for the paper each semester, printing typically fifty copies. Students handle the design and content. Due to limited copies and a larger student population, obtaining a physical copy can be challenging. Some copies go to the

administration's office for distribution to high-profile individuals, meant to showcase ULAB's vibrant life. However, this limits access for the average ULAB student. To address this, we have been discussing a shift to digital distribution."

When asked what we can learn from the editorial practices of publications like The Stanford Daily and Harvard Crimson, Professor Sudeep Chakravarti, a South Asian writer of both narrative nonfiction and fiction, a media specialist, and Director of the Center for South Asian Studies (C-SAS) at ULAB, shares, "Universities need to learn to distinguish between a university brochure and a campus newspaper. Universities need to learn to be less insecure and trust the judgement of the student editorial team – after all, this is also a learning process that shapes future journalists and media leaders."

"Faculty teams need to be mentors instead of gatekeepers. And such student-led publications need to be inclusive, to include in recruiting, participation, and representation folks from across departments, and move beyond silos. Only then can you have a truly exemplary student-led publication from the POV of students, not the POV of a university's
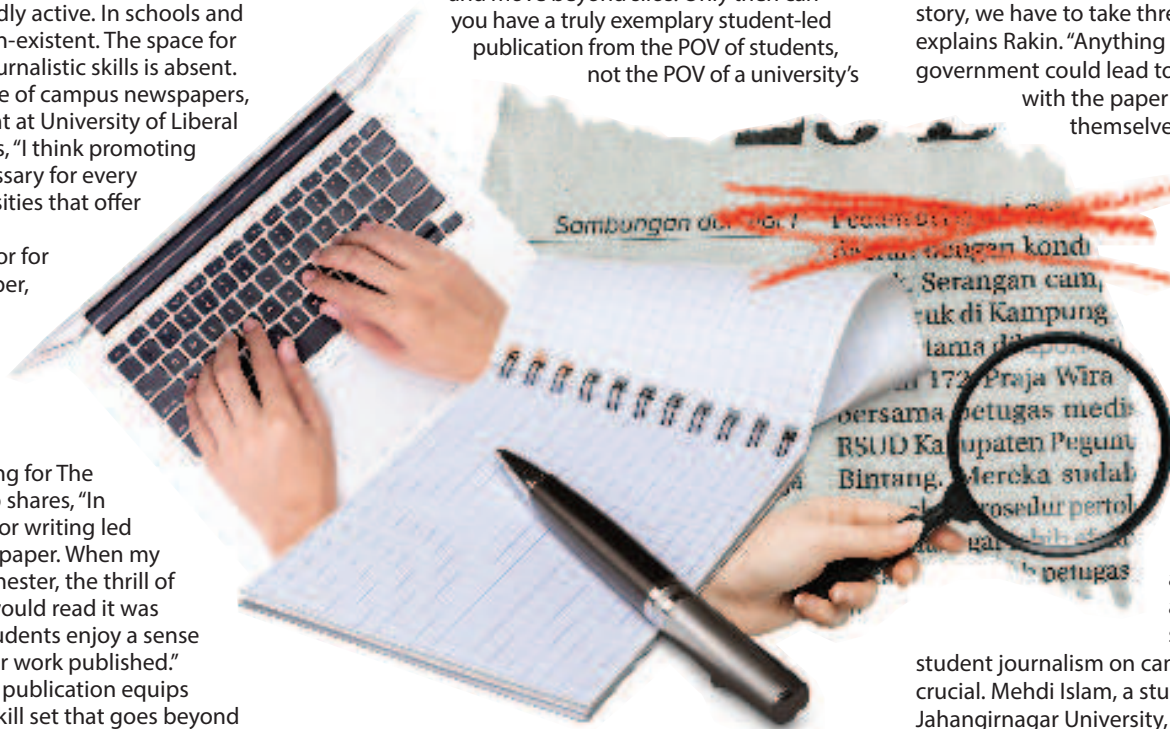
ILLUSTRATION: **FATIMA JAHAN ENA**

media department or the administration," adds Professor Chakravarti.

Limited editorial freedom also hinders students involved in the campus newspaper from participating in critical investigative reporting. While discussing the Stanford case, Rakin shares, "There's a lot of intervention by admin or faculty in Bangladesh. So, universities won't allow students to reveal such corruption because they want to save face and protect their own interests, as many appointments are political."

Rakin also highlights the trend of campus paper coverage that needs to change. "Often, many stories about students remain untold. For instance, if there's a brilliant entrepreneur on campus, student newspapers tend to prioritise faculty, administration, and event stories rather than showcasing that student's achievements. This trend needs to change. I believe it's crucial for someone to pick up a student newspaper, see

themselves in it, and feel proud and connected to the university."

On the other hand, Kohinoor Sultana Elora, a journalist at BRAC University's student paper, BRACU Express, feels the newspaper could improve with increased funding. According to her, additional funding would facilitate more events and promotions, ultimately boosting interest in BRACU Express.

In response to the question of what challenges campus newspapers in Bangladesh face in maintaining high editorial standards, Professor Chakravarti shares, "I believe several campus newspapers are discouraged from holding high editorial standards, simply because so many are treated as brochures or are controlled by over-reaching faculty or a nervous administration. Universities might also be reluctant to fund such publications."

Many student journalists in Bangladesh are haunted by the spectre of censorship, and they have to walk a tightrope when it comes to critical reporting. "Whenever we are considering crafting or covering a story, we have to take three aspects into consideration," explains Rakin. "Anything deemed anti-state or anti-government could lead to immediate termination, with the paper and university distancing themselves from the writer. As part of the editorial team, we are familiar with the Digital Security Act (DSA), and monitor stories from student journalists to prevent violations, which could jeopardise the team, students, and the university's reputation."

In light of recent events at various public universities like the situation with student politics at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and Jagannath University's sexual harassment case, student journalism on campus has become even more crucial. Mehdi Islam, a student correspondent from Jahangirnagar University, shares, "Student journalism pressured the administration to back down from their proposal to cut down trees, and construct a building in an area of our campus known as the Sundarbans. As a result of their reporting, the administration reversed its stance on the tree-cutting policy."

Mehdi also shares how incidents of student harassment in university halls at his university were brought to attention beyond campus by student journalists.

Thus, although there are significant challenges for student journalism to flourish, it also presents an opportunity for campus newspapers to be more than just news platforms. Having functional and active student journalism platforms would not only contribute positively within the immediate higher educational space but it would also have an impact on the broader societal and media landscape in upholding press freedom and democracy.

*Names have been changed upon request for privacy

BRAC University stands in solidarity with Palestine

Donates BDT 37 lakhs in financial aid to Gaza from staff Eid bonus

On April 3, in an expression of solidarity with the people of Gaza, BRAC University handed over around BDT 37 lakhs in financial aid, provided by faculty members and staff from their Eid bonuses, to Yousef S. Y. Ramadan, Palestinian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Bangladesh.

Prof. Syed Mahfuzul Aziz, Acting Vice-Chancellor of BRAC University, handed over the aid to the ambassador at BRAC University's Merul Badda campus.

On the day before, Dr David Dowland, Registrar of BRAC University, read out a note of solidarity for the people of Palestine prior to an annual iftar on the university premises.

M Sanjeeb Hossain, Director, Research, at the Center for Peace and Justice at BRAC University, also read out a keynote speech highlighting the history of the conflict.

Special prayers were held also fervently seeking an end to the indiscriminate violence being inflicted upon Palestinians.

"As an institution dedicated to social justice, compassion, and human rights, BRAC University stands by the people of Palestine," said Prof. Aziz during the handover ceremony.

"For the sake of freedom, dignity and a peaceful life, we express our support for the struggle of Palestinians. We strongly condemn all forms of oppression and crimes committed against them and demand an end to it," he said.

Prof. Aziz appealed to the conscientious citizens of Bangladesh and the global community, as well as peaceful nations and institutions, to stand in solidarity with Palestine and vocally oppose the injustice.

He also advocated for building up public opinion

> **"For the sake of freedom, dignity and a peaceful life, we express our support for the struggle of Palestinians. We strongly condemn all forms of oppression and crimes committed against them and demand an end to it,"**

and concrete actions towards fostering peace in Palestine.

"In these difficult times, let us stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Palestine to uphold their rights," he said.

He further added, "Through dialogue, discussion, and gatherings, let us bring Palestine's history and accurate information to various platforms including the international community."

"Overall, we have great respect for what you have done for Palestine…you have gone beyond our expectations and we thank you for that," said Yousef S. Y. Ramadan.

"It does not matter how much money you donate to the people and Palestine, the moment you thought about us that was good enough. People in Palestine will understand that they are not alone. They have brothers and sisters backing them up all over the world," he added.

Heads of different departments of the university, including deans, chairpersons, directors, alongside faculty members and staff attended the event.

NSU ranked in QS Subject 2024 for three subject categories

World University Rankings by Subject 2024 by the prestigious ranking platform QS has been published recently, where North South University (NSU) has been ranked for three Subject categories.

NSU and Dhaka University are jointly listed in the 351-400 band for the "Business & Management Studies" category. Only two Bangladeshi universities are listed for this category. NSU's Business and Management is a ranked programme by QS for a good number of years. For the "Computer Science and Information Systems" category, NSU stands within the 651-700 band and is preceded by Dhaka University and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). Also, NSU has been ranked for its Economics & Econometrics programme for the first time this 2024, within the 451-500 band. The only other university qualified for this Subject category is Dhaka University. For all the above three subject rankings, NSU is the only private university ranked from Bangladesh.

This year's QS Rankings by Subject features 55 individual subjects across five broad subject areas. 1,559 institutions have been ranked worldwide across these subjects. NSU has been consistently ranked in Subject categories.

Professor Atiqul Islam, the Vice-Chancellor of NSU, expressed his contentment for the results, thanking the support of the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission, while adding that "NSU will continue in its path of achieving even more glory in coming years." Qualifying for the Economics & Econometrics programme for the first time shows NSU's commitment towards comprehensive excellence.

STUDY ABROAD

What students should know before moving to
THE UNITED KINGDOM

TAMJIDUL HOQUE

The United Kingdom (UK) has always been a popular study-abroad destination for students. That being said, moving away from the comfort of home to the UK will certainly feel daunting, at least initially. However, the move can also end up being a once in a lifetime experience. Thus, while dealing with the application process, it's also important that you prepare for the challenges that await in the UK once you move.

As mentioned earlier, the initial experience of moving to the UK can be both exciting and stressful. Sarkar Md Tanzim, a Data Science student at the University of Sussex, shares his own experience regarding this.

"I was concerned about not fitting in but thankfully, the people here in the UK are friendly, so I didn't have to struggle with that," says Tanzim. "However, I did struggle with the food here which is very bland."

Another common matter of concern for students is the weather. While everyone is aware of how cold it can get in this part of the world, some may not factor in how much it rains over there.

"I was not ready for the rain there," Tanzim adds. "Although I had an umbrella, it was of no use as it's very windy. I needed to buy a raincoat to get me through this weather."

Another concern amongst students is finding accommodation. Such was the case for Irtika Uddin, who is doing the Bar Training Course at the University of West England.

"I looked for accommodation options online for quite some time but to no avail. I then got in touch with some Bangladeshi alumni from the university and they came through with a room to rent. For the price of £600 including bills, I managed to get a decent room," Irtika says.

Another option is signing up for university accommodation, which is usually more expensive but can also be much more convenient and less stressful according to Tanzim. It can also help you save costs on transportation.

"Since I'm living on campus, I hardly have to spend money on transportation. In general, the buses here cost £2 at most for each ride. One can get a one-day bus pass for just £4 as well," says Tanzim.

If you live outside campus, you will have to resort to buses and tubes. Kazi Sirajus Salakin, who lives in London and is doing an MSc in Management with Professional Development and Planning at BPP University, shares his firsthand account regarding this.

"The most reliable transport here is the London Tube service even though it is more expensive than buses," he says. "I usually alternate between the tube and buses for my commute. I use a travelcard which costs £157 per month and allows me to travel between London's Zone 1 to Zone 4 on tubes and anywhere in London on buses for a month."

Irtika also uses the buses for his travels. He says, "I bought a bus pass for £450 which allows me to use the buses for around nine months. This is the discounted offer for students and you have to open an account with a university email to get it."
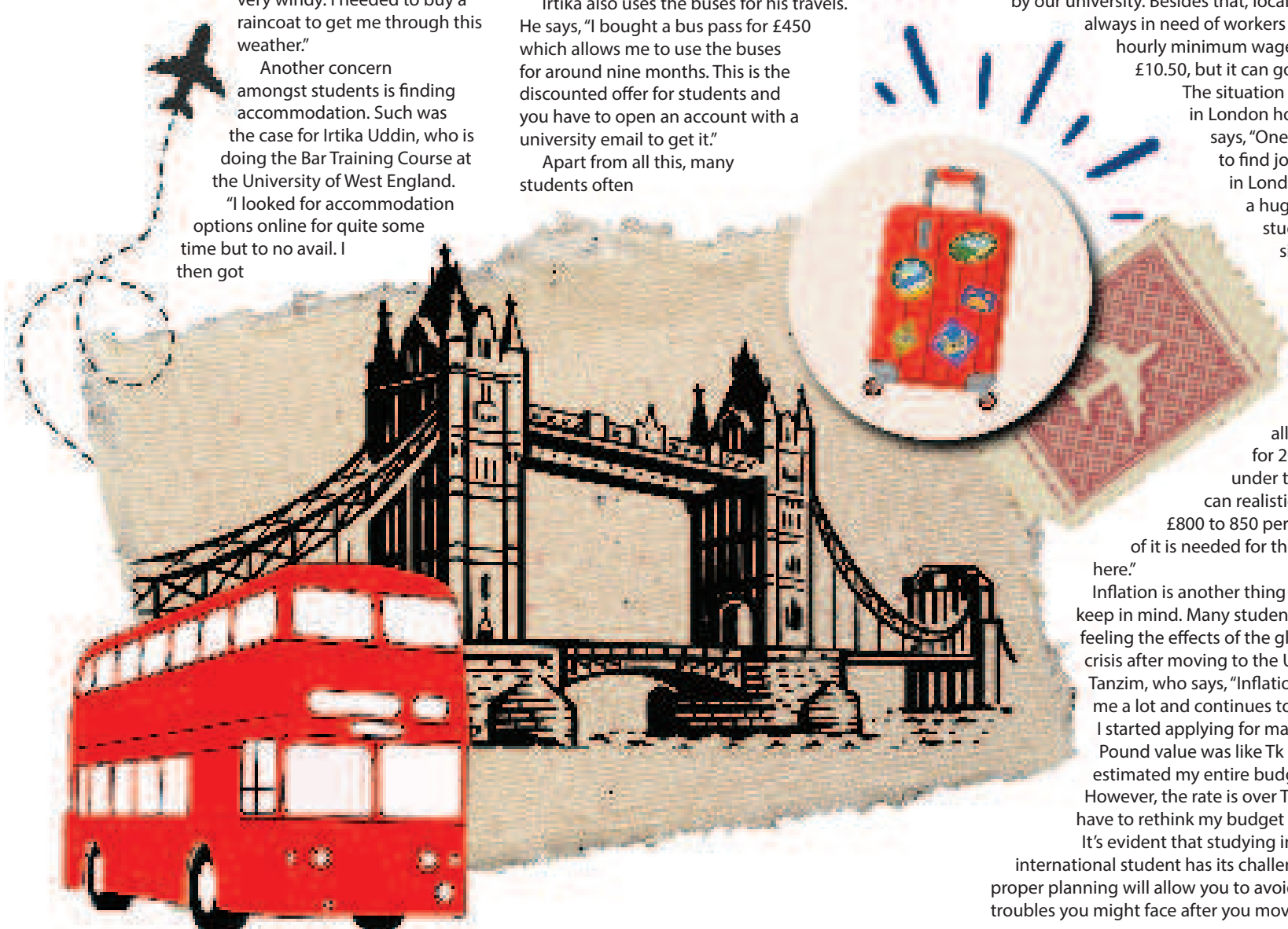
Apart from all this, many students often

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have questions about the availability of odd jobs and the pay in the UK for students. In this regard, Tanzim says, "We mostly look for jobs using a website provided by our university. Besides that, local businesses are always in need of workers as well. The hourly minimum wage here is around £10.50, but it can go up to £14."

The situation isn't that great in London however, as Kazi says, "One may struggle to find job opportunities in London as there is a huge number of students looking for similar working opportunities. However, the number of job openings is less. International students are allowed to work for 20 hours per week under the UK law. One can realistically earn around £800 to 850 per month, and most of it is needed for the living expenses here."

Inflation is another thing students should keep in mind. Many students have been feeling the effects of the global economic crisis after moving to the UK, including Tanzim, who says, "Inflation has impacted me a lot and continues to do so. When I started applying for master's, the Pound value was like Tk 120 to Tk 130. I estimated my entire budget based on that. However, the rate is over Tk 150 now and I have to rethink my budget again."

It's evident that studying in the UK as an international student has its challenges. However, proper planning will allow you to avoid most of the troubles you might face after you move there.

ILLUSTRATION: **SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM**

Tamjidul Hoque is a UK LLB graduate.

■ URC 2024 ■

MONGOL BAROTA

Meet MIST's Mars rover team participating in the University Rover Challenge finals

FATIMA ASHRAF

Mongol Barota – the Mars rover team from Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST) – is set to participate in the University Rover Challenge (URC) 2024 finals with their PHOENIX 4.0 rover. They are one of three teams from Bangladesh who will be representing the country at one of the world's most popular robotics competitions tailored for university students across the world.

Led by Md Jawadur Rahman, with Al-Amin Rashid Tarek as the co-leader, the Mongol Barota team comprises key members across various departments, each playing a crucial role in the rover's development and success. Ahmed Ahnaf Saqafi leads the mechanical sub-team, while Istiaque Ahmed Arik oversees the software and communication sub-team. Then there is Mansib Hasan Rohan, who directs the electrical sub-team, followed by Raisul Islam Rahad and Anika Tahsin Raisa leading the rover's autonomy, navigation, and science team.

As for guidance, the team turned to their supervisors, including MIST's Commandant Maj Gen Mohammed Saidul Islam, rcds, ndc, psc, Head of the Department of Computer Science & Engineering (CSE) Brig Gen Mohammad Sajjad Hossain, and Head of the Department of Mechanical Engineering (ME) Brig Gen Md Awal Khan.

Mongol Barota's journey started back in 2014 when the team made its debut at the URC, securing the 12th position globally. In 2015, the team returned to the URC arena, this time earning the 9th position worldwide and securing the title of "Best Team from Asia". Fast forward to 2021, Mongol Barota reached the virtual final of the URC and ranked first globally. Besides the URC, the team also boasts notable achievements from competitions such as the European Rover Challenge (ERC) and Anatolian Rover Challenge (ARC).

Working with the rover gave the team hands-on experience of using various advanced equipment, taught them how to think critically, sharpened their problem-solving skills, and helped build team work and patience. It also allowed team members to form life-long friendships.

Mongol Barota's faculty advisor, Shah Md Ahasan Siddique, Lecturer, Dept. of ME, and one of the former team co-leads and mechanical team leads reflects on this from his own experience. He says, "The rover team creates a path for students to venture into multidisciplinary work at the early years of their university lives. This helps them a lot when they opt for higher studies abroad or step into the workplace."

The construction of the rover involved collaboration among various teams. The mechanical team meticulously crafted the rover's structure while circuitry and power systems were adeptly managed by the electrical team. At the same time, the software team designed control mechanisms and a comprehensive feedback dashboard. Moreover, the synergy between the science and mechanical teams led to the development of a sophisticated life-detection system, proficient in discerning extinct, extant, and absent bio signatures with high precision.

Mongol Barota's initial submission at the URC's System Acceptance Review (SAR) garnered the highest score among Bangladeshi contestants, with an impressive 90.15 percent. Moreover, the team's science category performance earned them a perfect score of 16 out of 16 in the science category.

Of course, the path to success was not devoid of challenges for MIST's Mongol Barota. Importing essential components, such as carbon fiber and communication system parts, posed significant hurdles. Nevertheless, through perseverance and the support of the institution's resources, the team managed to overcome these obstacles, emerging stronger and more resilient. In the words of Jawadur Rahman, "The team members of Mongol Barota pushed their limits and showed remarkable dedication and hard work to make this achievement possible."

Besides Mongol Barota's PHOENIX 4.0, BRAC University's Mongol Tori and United International University's Yggdrasil have also qualified for the University Rover Challenge (URC) 2024 finals. Between May 29 and June 1, these teams will compete against 35 others from nine different countries at the Mars Desert Research Station (MDRS) in Utah at the final round of the competition.

Fatima Ashraf is a Campus Ambassador for The Daily Star from Military Institute of Science & Technology (MIST).

MIST
MONGOL BAROTA

PHOTOS: **COURTESY**