

■ OPINION ■

Your comments on **LEAVING THE COUNTRY ARE NOT WELCOME HERE**

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In 2018, as a microscopic part of the student protests for road safety, I was told over and over again by sceptics and critics that there was no point in attempting to stand against the status quo. I was chased by strangers and threatened by law enforcement personnel, all with the end result that, at the end of the day, didn't amount to much. Six years later, I am faced with the same world as I attend sites of Quota Reform Protests, the same scenes – of a country under a chokehold and of people who find ways to divert the conversation with one simple line: this is why you should leave the country.

On social media, a discussion around this arose based on a Facebook post made by an international student from Bangladesh. The post depicted a picture of a goon hitting two women with a weapon, and the caption read, "Anybody asks me why did I leave my country? Well here is a reference for you."

In the comments of their post, as many others began to point out how distasteful their comment was, the international student went on to completely ignore them and doubled down on their stance. It is also known that they provide IELTS lessons to Bangladeshi students, thus, many concluded that this was an attempt at furthering their own cause, causing many to infer that students should neglect their cause and essentially, the country, instead of asking for meaningful change.

Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. Other institutions that work with students wanting to study abroad were also seen promoting their content. The capitalist greed is blatant, sure, but what's more irksome is everything the statement stands for – the blinding privilege that permeates so many of us.

This issue is not, in any way, specific to this personality on Facebook. Conversations around remaining apolitical and leaving the country to stay away from violence are ever-present in many of our lives. The statement too, in a vacuum, probably doesn't mean much. After all, leaving the country is an outcome desired by many, and for many valid reasons.

But let's also not forget that nothing, not even a social media post, exists inside this hypothetical vacuum. The narrative of leaving the country for something better is sold only by a certain class like a dream, spun into existence the moment a crisis befalls us, but who does this apply to? Based on the economic



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

status of every single one of us, how many can actually afford this dream?

And what happens to this silent majority who are unable to leave? The whole purpose of the quota reformation is to remove the disadvantage faced by many searching for a job or attempting to enter university. Do these people simply rot away because they are unable to find help in a system that works against them?

Logically speaking, if a system causes more harm than good, is it a worthless endeavour to ask for it to be changed? Surely, running away cannot be the only answer in the face of trauma and crisis. If I were to leave today, what would become of every person I have ever loved? Do I take them with me? Can you take an entire country with you when you are leaving it?

It is the task – the responsibility, even – of anyone

with a semblance of power to uphold the rights of those without. So when crisis befalls, why do we suggest escape to those who cannot? Why do we shy away from the idea of 'politics' when so many of us have our entire livelihoods dependent on dealing with said politics? The truth is that blanket responses that solve nothing are easier to hand out than actual solutions, but we still have to try.

I am reminded of the numerous protests I have been laying witness to in the past many months. I have followed the incidents in Palestine, the protests for it across the world, and the many other protests across Africa, Asia, and so many more places. I think of how important it is to stand, to be angry, to let that anger out, and hand it to those misusing their power as you stand by everyone else, united in anger.

I think of this and I wonder, even if I did escape, where would I go?

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