



AN ALARMING BRAIN DRAIN CRISIS

Why are Bangladesh's brightest
engineering minds leaving?



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ANIME

Legend of the Galactic Heroes: DIE NEUE THESE

A political and philosophical epic set amidst the stars

MD NAYEEM HAIDER

The legend begins in the distant future. Civilisation, spread across the galaxy, gravitates around two poles: the autocratic Galactic Empire and the democratic Free Planets Alliance. Both of these gargantuan states have been embroiled in a debilitating war spanning over a century. A third, albeit much smaller, power, Phezzan, exists to profit off the forever war between the two behemoths.

From the beginning of the series till the end, *Legend of the Galactic Heroes* offers its viewers a look into ingenious military tactics and complex political strategies. The series is at its richest when it strives to explore and comprehend the interactions of the state, society, and individual.

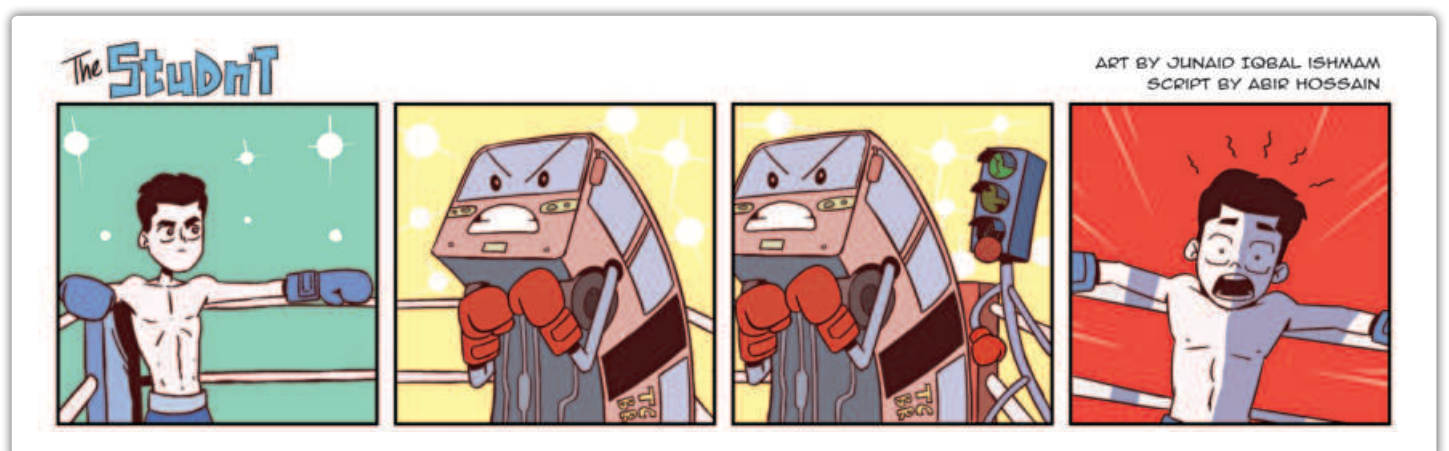
Through the Empire and the Alliance, the series sheds light on autocratic tyranny and corruption in democracy. Yet through Reinhard and Yang, the ideals behind both systems of government are poignantly fleshed out for the viewer. The series, however, does not attempt to sift right from wrong for us though. Rather, it invites us to



join the debate and think for ourselves. To us, the audience, and to all of society, it only offers a crucial piece of warning: Politics always takes vengeance on those who belittle it.

Legend of the Galactic Heroes is also a tale that is rich with emotions, touching upon every facet of human nature. It is a story about things such as love, responsibility, and

conviction. It speaks of the human ambition to grasp within one's own hand, the stars that dot the serene night sky – the unquenchable desire to attain what is unattainable. And for that audacious crime, punishment and redemption shine upon the heroes, imparting a bittersweetness that is laced with poetic justice and divine irony indistinguishably intertwined.



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OFF CAMPUS

From Bangladesh to SILICON VALLEY

Tech startup InveStar founder Farihan F. Rahman recently became the first founder from Bangladesh to graduate from the Draper University Entrepreneurship Program – an immersive entrepreneurship programme in Silicon Valley – with a scholarship. He talks about his experience at the programme.

Farihan and his team at InveStar are on a mission to revolutionise financial literacy and democratise micro-investing in Bangladesh by harnessing the power of artificial intelligence (AI). The tech startup wants to empower young people to build long-term wealth and financial security by making investing knowledge accessible to everyone.

"With InveStar, we're not just building an AI-driven investing platform; we're creating a movement to democratise wealth-building and promote financial literacy," Farihan shares. "We want every young person to have the tools and knowledge to take control of their financial future."

This vision took Farihan to Draper University, a unique hub of innovation in the heart of Silicon Valley. Over five weeks, Farihan and more than a hundred founders from 37 countries underwent an immersive entrepreneurship programme led by some of the world's most successful entrepreneurs, teachers, and investors. The experience included lectures from representatives of Stanford University, Tesla, and NASA, and masterclasses with Tim Draper, the billionaire venture capitalist behind companies like Tesla, SpaceX, and Robinhood.

The experience also featured an exhilarating "Demo Day" where Farihan presented InveStar to a distinguished audience from Silicon Valley, including Tim Draper himself.

"Presenting InveStar to such a high-profile audience was both nerve-wracking and incredibly rewarding," Farihan says. "It validated our mission to make investing more inclusive and accessible with the power of AI."

Farihan's team, "Lanterns" shone brightly throughout the programme, earning them the title of the "Best Team."

The participants were also taught essential survival and leadership skills, including first aid care, cooking, boat building, hiking, axe throwing, knife fighting,



PHOTOS: COURTESY



archery, and firearm handling.

One of the most unforgettable moments of the programme was a 3.5 km hike led by Tim Draper. Draper guided the group across Silicon Valley, ending the journey with a symbolic jump into the Draper University pool, doing so fully suited.

"Tim Draper taught us that sometimes you just have to take the leap," Farihan says. "His energy and passion were infectious, and it was a powerful lesson in boldness and resilience."

For Farihan, the time he spent at Draper University is not about personal achievements but about paving the way for the next generation of Bangladeshi

entrepreneurs.

"I'm deeply grateful for this opportunity," Farihan says. "But more than that, I hope my journey inspires other young people in Bangladesh to dream big and pursue their passions. There is so much potential in our country, especially among our next generation, and I am excited to see what we can achieve together."

As InveStar continues its mission to promote financial literacy and make investing accessible to all, Farihan's experience in Silicon Valley will serve as a powerful foundation.

"We are just getting started," he says. "The future is bright for young innovators in Bangladesh, and I am looking forward to seeing more of us step onto the global stage and make a real difference."



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OFF CAMPUS

Can we break free from THE BRAIN DRAIN CYCLE?

ALLIN MOHANA BISWAS

Fahim Tahsan, a student at Oklahoma State University, has always dreamed of contributing to his homeland, imagining a future where his skills could help build a better Bangladesh. However, the reality he encountered was far from his expectations.

"Despite having a degree with good results and relevant experiences, I was unable to get a well-paid job. Entry-level positions were only paying an average of Tk 25,000," Fahim recalls. "If Bangladesh had offered sufficient opportunities and a better work-life balance, I might have considered staying back," Fahim reflects.

Similarly, Jasper Shaon, Assistant Manager at China Northeast Electric Power Engineering & Services Co. Ltd. (NEPCS), decided to move abroad with his family in search of a better life. "In Bangladesh, engineers have to work long hours with little work-life balance. It would have taken several years of experience to earn a stable salary. Having only one income source wasn't enough, and it would have been difficult to support our family, so we made the decision to shift."

Thousands of students and skilled professionals across Bangladesh face similar dilemmas, forced to choose between staying in their homeland with little prospect for advancement or seeking alternatives abroad. The systemic challenges they encounter are indicative of deeper issues within Bangladesh's socio-economic condition.

According to the latest UNESCO figures, 52,799 Bangladeshi students pursued higher education overseas in 2023. The departure of skilled professionals in fields like business, engineering, and information technology has created a void in the domestic labour market, leading to decreased productivity, reduced innovation, and slower economic growth. The loss of these individuals not only hampers the immediate economic prospects of the country but also stifles its long-term potential for development.

The reasons for this ever-growing set of challenges are complex.

On one hand, there are the push factors – limited job opportunities, low salaries, poor infrastructure, political instability, and a lack of educational and research facilities. These factors make it difficult for even the most talented individuals to actualise their potential

in Bangladesh. The frustration of hitting these barriers repeatedly can lead to a sense of disillusionment, prompting many to seek opportunities elsewhere.

On the other hand, the pull factors abroad, such as higher salaries, better education, advanced career prospects, and a higher standard of living present are all great incentives. Society often views moving abroad as a mark of success, further influencing young people to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Tousif Rahman, a specialist at the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO), emphasises the systemic issues that contribute to brain drain, "The government should hire a specialised team of experts to improve the system's efficiency. Fair compensation is essential to attract top talent. The engineering and transport sectors require a comprehensive overhaul. From tendering to project management, we need to implement a functional system. A team of skilled engineers and technologists is essential to achieve this, which would also help attract top talent."

Tousif's analysis points to the need for structural changes in how Bangladesh manages its key industries. Without sufficient changes, retaining or attracting skilled professionals will remain a distant goal.

The impact of brain drain on Bangladesh's development is profound. A 2020 study by Transparency International Bangladesh revealed that at least 250,000 foreign workers are employed in Bangladesh to address the shortage of skilled professionals. This reliance on foreign labour not only drains resources but also holds back the growth of home-grown talent. The country's economic development is thus stunted, as it continues to lose its brightest minds to more developed nations while depending on external expertise to fill the gaps.

However, remittances sent home by Bangladeshis working abroad have contributed to economic stability and poverty reduction. According to the Bangladesh Bank, remittance inflow stood at USD 23.91 billion in FY24, rising by 10.66 percent compared to the year prior.

This uprising in remittance highlights the substantial economic impact of the diaspora, but it also shows the fact that Bangladesh's economic success is, in part, built on the shoulders of those who have left.

Is it possible to turn brain drain into brain gain?

The recent rise in support from Bangladeshis studying and working abroad suggests it might be. Many are now considering returning home to contribute to the country's development.

Taosif Ahsan, a PhD student of Physics at MIT, shares his aspirations: "I want to return to Bangladesh and start the first-ever nuclear start-up in Bangladesh."

Similarly, Israt Jahan, currently pursuing a PhD in Infectious Disease Research at Mahidol University, Thailand, states, "I believe that if there is any opportunity where my academic and professional experience can be of use to the country, I will seize it. I just need a situation where I can live healthily with my family."

These sentiments reflect a growing desire among the diaspora to return and contribute, provided the right conditions are in place. Moving forward, to attract talent back to Bangladesh, the government and private sector must work together to create a conducive environment.

Maliha Yasmin*, a Data Analyst at a US-based financial institution, suggests creating platforms for Bangladeshi experts to contribute to policy-making. She says, "There should be an opportunity for Bangladeshi experts to propose opinions or suggestions to government policies. For example, a platform to submit suggestions, or a poll where experts can agree or disagree on a policy, or suggest changes."

The government can also implement policies that incentivise skilled professionals to return. Offering tax breaks for investors, providing funding for research and development for academics, and establishing partnerships with foreign universities for knowledge exchange, are just a few strategies that could make a difference. By encouraging innovation and creating ways for career growth within the country, Bangladesh can offer its citizens compelling reasons to stay and build their futures at home.

Bangladesh's journey towards reversing brain drain will require patience, persistence, and commitment from all stakeholders. Only then can we hope to break free from this vicious cycle.

**Name has been changed upon request for privacy*

Allin Mohana Biswas is student of Global Studies & Governance at Independent University, Bangladesh

■ OFF CAMPUS ■

AN ALARMING BRAIN DRAIN CRISIS

Why are Bangladesh's brightest engineering minds leaving?

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

Every once in a while, the term "brain drain" pops up in discussions to dissect the migration of too many Bangladeshi students to foreign countries. Although the migration takes place in pursuit of higher studies, most of these students have no intention to return to the country. The percentage is even higher for engineering students.

The primary motive for engineering students to move abroad is the lack of opportunities and the poor salary structure in engineering jobs in the country, according to Iftekhar Amin Ifty, an M.Sc. (Engineering) student at Minnesota State University, "I graduated in Materials Science and Engineering from Rajshahi University of Engineering & Technology (RUET). Since there aren't too many job options for a Materials Science graduate in the country, my father advised me to move abroad. I wanted to stay in Bangladesh and also started working in a government institute as well. However, a closer look into the Bangladeshi engineering job sector made me change my mind."

"Starting from the highly competitive admission procedure for the public engineering universities to four years of inhumane pressure, graduating with a good CGPA takes an insane amount of hard work," explained Ifty. "After graduation, you get offered a mere salary of Tk 26,000 to Tk 30,000 while your business graduate friends, who usually experience a somewhat easier undergraduate life compared to engineering students, might be earning a higher entry salary. Discrepancies like these make all your hard work feel worthless."

For some, it is the pursuit of better learning resources and research facilities that influences their decision to leave the country.

"I have always felt that the education system in this country is broken," said Anindya Alam, a fourth-year undergraduate student at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). "The classes are boring and the teachers are mostly insincere and uninterested in teaching. I have always liked learning new things and have grown up hearing praises about

the teaching process in American universities from my relatives and friends who were in the United States. Now that I am about to graduate and pursue a PhD degree, colleges in North America and Europe can provide me with the opportunities, facilities, and resources that Bangladeshi universities simply cannot."

Another massive factor for moving abroad is merely shifting to a better life in a country with more developed working and living conditions.

"After the first three months of studying Architecture at the Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST), I wanted to move abroad. It wasn't driven by academic reasons at that point, but rather by watching the lives of some of my friends who had left the country for their undergraduate studies. After talking to them, the difference in the living conditions and facilities between Bangladesh and countries abroad hit me in the face," said Shartaz Ahmedur Rahman, an M.Sc. (Engineering) student at Auckland University of Technology.

As I spoke to several other engineering students, it all circled back to the pitiful working conditions and salary structure for engineers in Bangladesh.

"Anyone who worked in the technical fields in Bangladesh can vouch that it is a massively competitive and stressful field. Either you break yourself mentally and physically to reach the top in the private sector, or you grind yourself to land a government job," said Shartaz.

"Even big private companies are not offering their engineers salaries more than Tk 40,000," said Ifty. "Running a family with such a salary in this economy isn't practical. Right now, I am working as a graduate teaching assistant while pursuing my master's, and my monthly allowance here is a little over Tk 120,000 in Bangladeshi currency. In Bangladesh, it would have taken me more than ten years of constant grinding day and night to reach this

pay scale in the private sector."

"We need to expand access to the latest technology and ensure adequate funding for research laboratories that inspire engineering students to innovate and pursue research within the country," said Anindya. "Better pay for teachers and training programmes should also be ensured so that they are more sincere."

Shartaz believes that employers use the excuse of heavy reliance of engineering graduates on theoretical knowledge to lower the starting salary, "Bangladeshi or Asian engineering curricula are heavily influenced by theoretical knowledge. Eventually, employers use this as an excuse to lower the entry salary and demoralise people to pursue technical fields. There is no work-life balance in the private sector. Despite having a huge ethical guideline from the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) and the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), no one is following it, which is leading to a very stressful environment in the private job sectors."

The talks of reforming the country have been crowding up the internet since the students' movement. One of the key prerequisites for effective reform of Bangladesh is putting a halt to the brain drain and initiating what has been termed as "reverse brain drain". The Indian government, for example, has taken up several schemes to repatriate the scholars who went abroad and they have seen some success through the Ramalingaswami Re-entry Fellowship, which led to more than 550 biotechnologists returning to India from abroad.

To ensure that the best of minds in Bangladesh get to work for the development of their country, it is crucial that our engineers and researchers are provided with enough facilities and options which are lucrative enough for them to consider staying in the country, and maybe even come back to their homeland after they are done pursuing higher studies abroad.

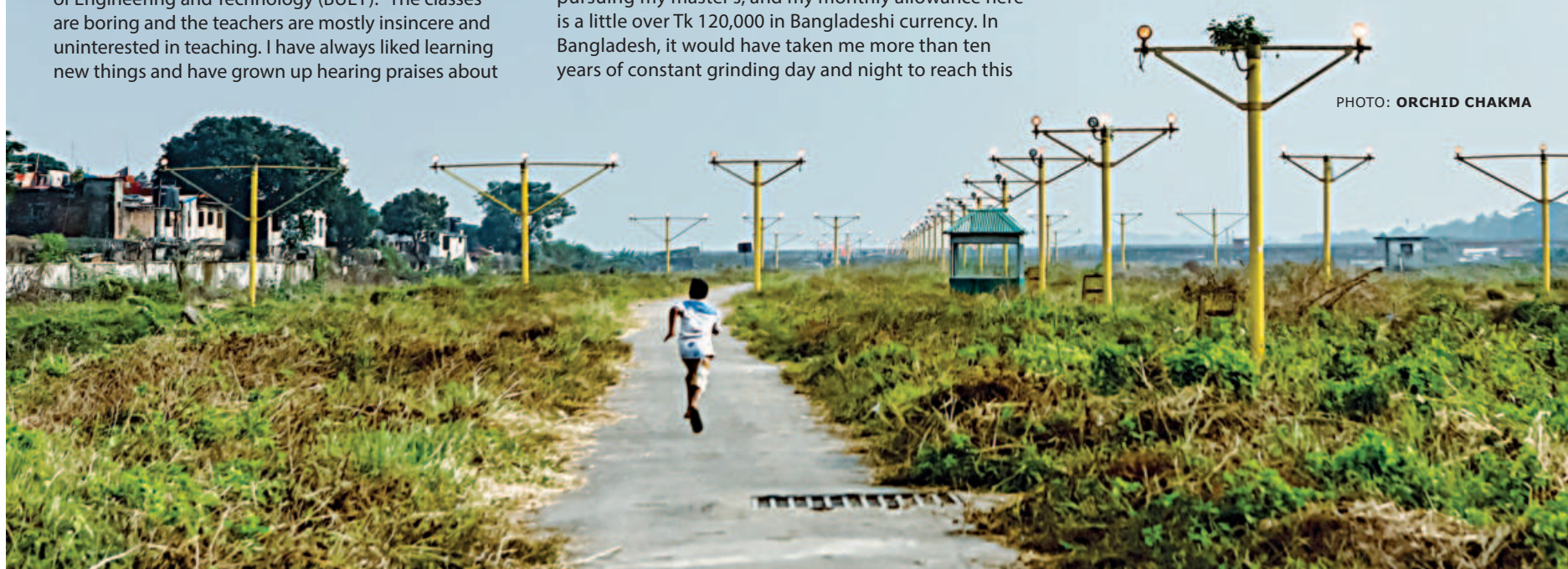


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ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION AND BEYOND

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Mahjabin Muneer

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equipping me to confidently tackle the academic challenges of university."

"The IB Diploma Programme significantly enhanced my time management and organizational skills. As a result, I feel much more confident in tackling the challenges of university life."



Auritro Shayel

One of the top
grade point holders from
IB DP (Got 39 out of 45)

I am truly grateful for the experiences I had during my time at AUSIS, and I am excited to see what the future holds."

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ENHANCING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

The role of career training and enrichment workshops in tertiary education



David Kolb's idea of "experiential learning" further underpins the effectiveness of career training activities in creating work-ready graduates. Kolb maintains that learning works best when it includes real experiences and experimentation. At ZNRF University of Management Sciences (ZUMS), career preparation and enrichment workshops are inherently integrated into the curriculum to provide students with essential skills for their future careers.

SHAHADAT HOSSAIN

In today's transmogrifying job market, the significance of career training and skill-building workshops in tertiary education for creating job-ready graduates cannot be overemphasised. The liberal arts education, as compared to the traditional education curriculums, that usually lean toward offering degrees, transforms the lives of the students by developing graduate employability skills and capabilities.

Stakeholders such as guardians, alumni, and employers also find it beneficial to fund the higher education curriculum that creates career-relevant learning. As this form of learning is unlikely to be automated, even in this age of machine learning and artificial intelligence, organisations value it the most. Consequently, career preparation and training workshops are a key factor in equipping students with the knowledge and capabilities necessary to navigate workplace dynamics and complexities.

Creating pathways for career-building opportunities is as important as making a long-term commitment to advancing higher education outcomes for graduates. It is necessary to maintain a purposeful dedication to the continuous advancement of both educational attainment and creating paths for career development.

However, studies unveil a mismatch between the skills recent graduates come up with and the abilities required by employers. In a recent virtual forum titled "The Soft Skills Gap", organised by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, experts investigated a gap between the knowledge imparted by higher education institutions and the skills demanded by employers. The forum highlighted the growing importance of soft skills development in an era characterised by hybrid work and digital innovation.

Another study by Deloitte, the largest professional services network, reveals that approximately 74 million youths worldwide are seeking employment. Nevertheless, there needs to be more between the skills they possess and those required by companies, particularly in already-developed and emerging markets.

In his *Harvard Business Review* article "The Biggest Hurdles Recent Graduates Face Entering the Workforce", Professor Andy Molinsky of Brandeis University calls this gap a "cultural" void, that is "very significant, but typically underemphasised." He advocates that intelligent individuals should be ready to spend the time and learn the skills necessary to improve their careers.

It is crucial to ensure that education and skill development are equally accessible to all students in tertiary education institutions to ease the transition from academia to industry. So, incorporating career preparation and enrichment workshops into our tertiary education curriculum addresses these skill gaps many employers cite as barriers to new hires.

The article "The Employability Mismatch" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, suggests that graduates crumble due to a lack of necessary skills in oral and written communication, decision-making, logical reasoning, and research ability. To this end, we prioritise workplace skills enhancement training to bridge this

gap and ensure that students are academically prepared and well-equipped with the interpersonal and practical skills needed to succeed in the 21st-century modern workforce.

While some argue that higher education should educate individuals widely and not as narrowly as to teach the workplace skills required to be trained on the job, others claim that workforce capabilities should be taught as part of the curriculum to help graduates adapt to real-world experience as sustained by Mantz Yorke, "It is inappropriate to assume that students are highly employable on the basis of curricular provision alone."

Yorke continues that while an academic degree is a good indicator for seeking entry to employment, there is always a strong reason for co-curricular learning activities to boost students' employability after graduation. Career preparation training is meticulously focused on developing abilities essential to employment but is usually overlooked in traditional academic programmes.

Students develop communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, and resilience skills through simulations and other practice-oriented activities. These skills transform them into market-ready seasoned individuals.

David Kolb's idea of "experiential learning" further underpins the effectiveness of career training activities in creating work-ready graduates. Kolb maintains that learning works best when it includes real experiences and experimentation. At ZNRF University of Management Sciences (ZUMS), career preparation and enrichment workshops are inherently integrated into the curriculum to provide students with essential skills for their future careers.

Through personalised lessons and interactive activities covering the areas of soft skills employers look for the most, students gain the confidence to showcase their abilities and communicate effectively with potential employers. This hands-on approach equips students to articulate their strengths and experiences and makes them more competitive in the job market.

Integrating a skills enhancement and career development component into our tertiary education curriculum plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainability through education. Victoria Jackson et al. note in their *Routledge* article that "skills developed in a more situated context yield better outcomes." Moreover, these career enhancement lessons go beyond classroom teaching to networking opportunities with industry professionals and alumni. These opportunities allow students to build connections that can be influential in their job search and provide practical skills to meet specific needs and expectations and face the challenges within their chosen industries.

Career-enhancing training and workshops are essential components of a well-rounded tertiary education curriculum to bridge the skills gap in graduate employability. By investing in these programmes, we support our student's career aspirations and contribute to a more skilled and adaptable workforce.

The author is an Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English, ZNRF University of Management Sciences.

CAMPUS LIFE

The dark underbelly of student politics in MEDICAL COLLEGES

AHNAF TAHMEED PURNA

Student politics, once a substratum in shaping the national political landscape, has become a source of distress for the current generation. The real issue lies elsewhere as student politics has become tainted over the past few decades, losing the integrity it once held.

The brutal torture by Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) cadres at Chattogram Medical College (CMC) in 2011 which led to the death of fourth-year student of Dental Surgery Abidur Rahman, the murder of Biswajit Das in 2012, and the killing of Abrar Fahad, a second-year Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) student in 2019 are some of the most extreme outcomes of violence perpetuated by student political factions across institutions.

On February 8, a group of BCL activists tortured four students at Chattogram Medical College (CMC) hostel, with two requiring ICU treatment. The CMC academic council later suspended seven BCL activists.

"The apparent cause was to label the tortured students as Chhatrashibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, to exert dominance over the other lobby," said Shabab*, a student at CMC. He added, "After Aqib bhai (Mahadi J Aqib) was fatally injured during a BCL factional clash in 2021, campus politics was officially suspended, but activists continued their practices through two separate lobbies." Describing the February 8 incident, he added, "The hostel's room 17/A had earned itself a reputation as the torture cell of the CMC hostel."

A similar factional clash occurred on May 1 at Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College, Bogura

(SZMC). "The central BCL committee announced the members of the newly formed SZMC unit, favouring the President's lobby. The General Secretary's lobby chose to remain apolitical, yet members of the other lobby attacked and vandalised general students due to clashes in the past. This led to a casualty where a second-year student named Afrazem was stabbed. He was gravely injured, and we rushed him to the emergency room before he was later taken to the operation theatre for surgery," recounted Ayaz Wasif*, a student at SZMC.

This influence isn't just limited to direct harm to students, however.

Sadman Sakib*, a former BCL activist and a student at Dhaka Medical College (DMC), shares his experience, "I had no interest in politics, yet I was forced to join one of the lobbies as soon as I was admitted to the medical college. We were compelled to participate in political processions and post about them on social media. Owing to my association with the political faction, I secured a room for myself along with two of my batchmates, even though such rooms typically house four to five students."

He then detailed the day he decided to leave BCL, "On July 16, students were peacefully protesting at TSC against the quota system. Our seniors planned to forcibly take us there, chanting BCL slogans. I was deeply uncomfortable, but they wouldn't let me leave. I managed to slip away, and fled home, leaving my belongings behind. That day, I vowed never to be part of such rogue acts again. After leaving the party and

showing solidarity with the movement, I received death threats from local BCL activists and those at my college."

The pressure to join a lobby is just as strong for female students. "We got hostel allotments through political connections. After I protested ragging, I was verbally abused by seniors, which took a toll on my mental health," says Tasnia Haque Achal*, a student at DMC.

"The rampant misuse of power has long been ingrained in the actions of politically active students, resulting in unnerving incidents across various institutions, including medical colleges. While some cases surface, many remain hidden. For an institution to function effectively and safeguard the rights of its general students, I believe it requires a completely apolitical student body. It's time to ban all forms of student politics in medical colleges that are tied to national political parties," quotes Naveed Shehriar, a student at Ibrahim Medical College.

The countless experiences that have gone unnoticed are just a glimpse of the dark reality. Most medical colleges have recently banned politics on campus, while others are in the process of doing so. However, the pressing question remains: can we truly safeguard the student community from such continued brutality?

**Names have been changed upon request*



PHOTO: AHMED DEEPTO