DHAKA THURSDAY DECEMBER 5, 2024, *AGRAHAYAN 20, 1431 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

CAMPUS

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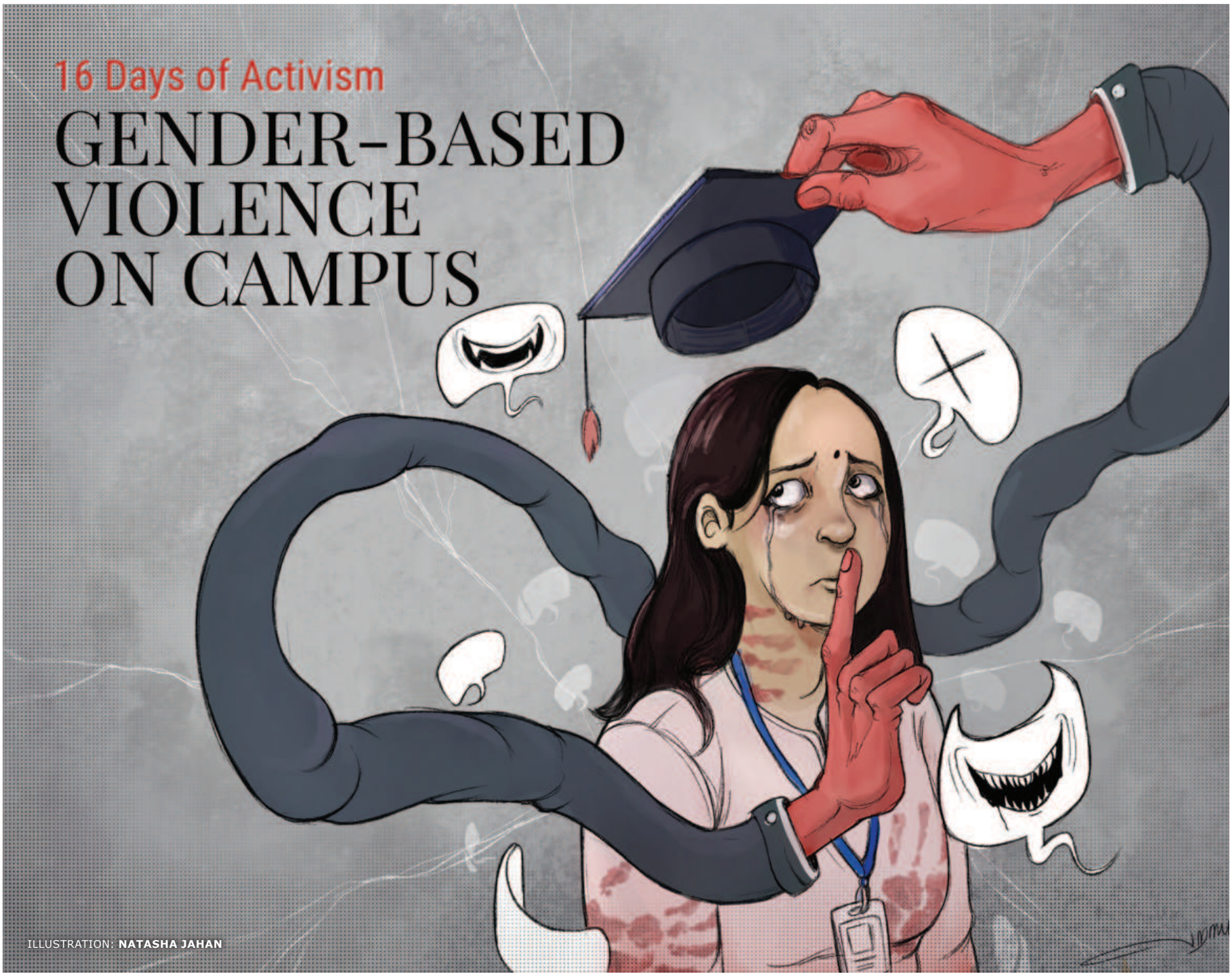

ILLUSTRATION: **NATASHA JAHAN**

MOVIES

LOOK BACK

An ode to all the reasons we create art

RAIAN ABEDIN

Adapted from Tatsuki Fujimoto's 2021 one-shot of the same name and directed by veteran animator Kyotaka Oshiyama of Studio Durian, *Look Back* is nothing if not about art and the human connections that give us all the more reason to pursue it.

It is told through the bond between Fujino and Kyoumoto, as they grow close and distant in the runtime of the film. The relationship they share is messy, much like the characters themselves. In classic Fujimoto style, the characters are off-kilter, and not altogether "likeable" in a traditional sense. They carry their flaws on their sleeves and often speak in sardonic ways, unwilling to acknowledge their feelings in dialogue. Art is how they meet each other halfway. The story, as a result, is an intertwined play of both the nature of art itself and these two characters' lives.

But what really helps the story live is the direction from Oshiyama, which feels careful and intentional. The framing is always carefully considered, the montages are well-placed, and the music, executed wonderfully by Haruka Nakamura, hits its cadence only when it needs to. Fujimoto is notorious for the rough and messy style in which his narratives play out – that energy is still contained here. But with Oshiyama's obsessive style, it is almost elevated in many ways.

Creating art is not a pleasant process, and at no point does *Look Back* even try to suggest that. Even Kyoumoto at one point asks, "Why do you draw?" The question has no definitive answer. But it would be silly to suggest that there is no answer at all. Both Fujino and Kyoumoto go through the wringer trying to make their dreams come true. The expressions on their faces make it clear that the time spent creating art is mostly spent in agony. And yet, they persevere. For Fujino and Kyoumoto, art is the language in which they communicate. For the rest of the world, it is up to us to decide what impact it can have on us. In today's wasteland filled with AI-generated slop, it is important to remind ourselves that creating art is painful, and yet tremendously beautiful, as a process.

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CAREER

FIRST FEW DAYS AT A NEW JOB
Avoid these common pitfalls

ADRIN SARWAR

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Your first few days at a new job are likely to fill you with a mixture of excitement and self-doubt. You will have a voice that keeps asking, "Am I doing this right? Do I fit in? Why did I sign up for this?" These questions are natural and they will keep cropping up from time to time. You will simply have to trust yourself and find the confidence to remind yourself that you will make it through. Avoiding these common mistakes can also help you navigate your doubts and find your footing at your new workplace, making those early days smoother.

Thinking you know it all

When starting a new job, it is easy to assume that your previous job prepared you enough to fit in anywhere and you already know everything. But remember, it is a new workplace, and every workplace has its own culture and way of doing things.

Take some time to observe and learn. In the first few days, people at your workplace will guide you on the proper and preferred way of doing things. So, grab that opportunity to learn more about the work and the work environment. You might regret not paying closer attention to these crucial moments later on.

While dedication is important, it is also essential to set healthy boundaries from the start and maintain them. Focus on completing the tasks assigned to you with reasonable dedication within your working hours and not burdening yourself with too much work.

Complaining from the get-go

As you start working on a new job, it is natural to want to start contributing ideas right away. You might have a different perspective on how things should be done, which is perfectly fine.

However, offering harsh criticism early on can backfire, making you seem hard to work with and leaving a bad impression on your colleagues. Rather than directly pointing out things you feel don't work or suggesting major changes, ask thoughtful questions like, "What is the reason behind doing this particular thing this way?" or "How has this worked in the past?"

Questions like these not only show your curiosity but also allow you to understand the process and sprinkle in some suggestions for improvements.

Asking for detailed instructions constantly without trying first

While it is natural to want to seek constant guidance when you are starting a new position, try to avoid relying on others too much. Try to find a balance between looking for advice and asking for constant help.

When assigned a task, take the basic instructions and give it your best shot first. Even if you find your task challenging, avoid submitting a half-done job and expecting someone to step in and fix it. Instead, use your problem-solving abilities to navigate the difficulties as much as you can.

Approach your supervisor for aid only when you hit major hurdles. When doing so, explain your thought process for tackling the task as you go. The more they understand your methods, the better they can help guide you.

Taking the initiative to complete your work like this shows you are dedicated and eager to learn. While your employers won't expect perfection from you immediately, they will appreciate sincerity and effort.

Overworking to prove your dedication

Some people throw themselves into creating the impression of being an ideal employee when they start working at a new place. In their rush to make a good impression, they over-commit to their tasks, take up every job that is offered to them, and stretch themselves thin with extra hours.

While dedication is important, it is also essential to set healthy boundaries from the start and maintain them. Focus on completing the tasks assigned to you with reasonable dedication within your working hours and not burdening yourself with too much work.

Thinking you have to be perfect

Starting a new job means learning and adapting; mistakes will be an inevitable part of this journey. Some days, you might feel frustrated with these obstacles and wonder if you made the right choice by starting this job. Your patience will be tested, and things might feel overwhelming. However, it is important to remember that when trying to fit into a new work environment, progress matters more than perfection.

Give yourself time to grow into the role. If things get too overwhelming, take a moment to pause and remind yourself that everyone faces challenges in a new job and you are not alone.

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

ADDRESSING THE CRISIS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

It was in the corners of a university hallway, my (Azra) books pressed tightly to my chest, that I first understood the weight of silence. A friend had confided in me about her professor – a man whose late-night phone calls felt intrusive, whose compliments edged into discomfort. She dismissed it with a trembling laugh. "It's nothing," she insisted, though the crack in her voice betrayed her. I knew it wasn't nothing. Stories like hers don't disappear on campuses like ours; they linger unspoken, ever-present in the quiet spaces, waiting for someone to finally listen.

ILLUSTRATION: NATASHA JAHAN

AZRA HUMAYRA *and* **ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA**

University campuses ought to be places where we can learn, grow, and discover new things. Yet, for many women and gender-diverse students in Bangladesh, these spaces have become arenas of fear and marginalisation due to pervasive gender-based violence (GBV). This violence manifests in forms ranging from sexual harassment to systemic exclusion, establishing an atmosphere where safety is compromised and voices are silenced.

Basma Rahim, a student at Independent University, Bangladesh, relays her personal observation about gender-based violence and the inaction by respective authorities at her institution. "After an incident of gender-based violence, the proctors who deal with these issues were unavailable for a long time, and once they could finally be contacted, they claimed they were not allowed to rusticate or suspend anyone during the absence of the Vice-Chancellor, so the perpetrator was not penalised."

The numbers paint a bleak picture. A study conducted at Rajshahi University titled "Strategies for preventing masculinity and gender-based violence in higher educational institutions of Bangladesh: A study of Rajshahi University" revealed that 90 percent of students subjected to sexual harassment choose not to report their experiences, fearing stigma and the futility of action. The perpetrators – often classmates or even teachers – wield institutional or political power, perpetuating a culture of impunity. The tragedy at Jagannath University, where a student's suicide showed us the lack of recourse against harassment, is a heartbreaking reminder of these realities.

A pattern of silence and inaction

For women, harassment on campus often goes unreported. Whether it's an inappropriate remark, coercion by a teacher, or cyber harassment, fear of retaliation or damage to one's reputation keeps survivors silent. Gender-diverse students, like those from the Hijra communities, face additional layers of marginalisation. They endure not only harassment but also institutional discrimination. This exclusion normalises bias and denies their rightful place in higher education.

Grievance redressal mechanisms on campuses are woefully inadequate. Anti-harassment cells, where they exist, often fail to function effectively. Decisions are delayed, investigations are derailed by political interference, and survivors are left without closure.

Despite a 2009 High Court directive mandating the formation of sexual harassment committees, implementation remains inconsistent. Many universities have not even established such committees, while others operate with little transparency or accessibility.

The human cost

The human cost of GBV on campuses cannot be overstated. Survivors face psychological trauma, academic setbacks, and often an erosion of trust in institutions meant to protect them. For gender-diverse students, who frequently face harassment from classmates and teachers alike, the cost includes exclusion from educational opportunities entirely. The lack of safe spaces forces many to abandon their studies, depriving them of the futures they deserve.

When the perpetrators are teachers, the dynamics become even more fraught. Earlier this year, a Dhaka University (DU) professor was relieved of academic and administrative duties after a fact-finding committee uncovered preliminary evidence of sexual harassment and mental abuse. For Sarah*, a student at DU, the experience of seeking justice revealed the chilling intricacies of the process. "The perpetrator and I had to share the same room when I was called to the sexual harassment cell," she recounted. "It was excruciating to endure the stress of proving that I was the victim of his advances."

Rupaiya Shrestha Tanchangya, a student at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, at DU, believes the solution lies in clearer institutional boundaries. "There should be explicit guidelines for both students and teachers to avoid any room for miscommunication," she said. "Like Oxford, universities here should implement policies banning romantic relationships between students and teachers. With the unequal power dynamics at play, these situations can spiral into something far more damaging for everyone involved."

When perpetrators are politically connected or hold positions of power, accountability becomes a distant dream. The absence of consequences reinforces a toxic environment where abuse thrives unchecked. This culture of impunity does not merely harm individuals; it undermines the integrity of educational institutions themselves.

Inadequacies of existing policies

Most universities in Bangladesh claim to adhere to a strict anti-discriminatory policy that includes the protection of students from gender-based violence, but in reality, only a few institutions truly enforce these regulations. More often than not, students are unaware of policies in place in their own institutions, leading to disorientation about where to seek assistance after facing harassment.

The majority of universities do not observe any seminars or awareness campaigns against sexual harassment or gender-based violence, and the few that do, have low attendance rates or substandard content. Regardless of the frequency of such campaigns, without mandatory attendance and rehashing of existing policies, such measures are rendered ineffective.

Another matter of note is the lack of alignment between the actions and formal policies, which doesn't have much room for optimism as large numbers of students tend to have no faith in their authority's discretion. A common answer among university students was that proctorial teams or student welfare committees are rarely keen on abiding by regulation, instead focusing on demotivating students from taking action by citing a lack of evidence or simply displaying negligence.

Awsaf Hossain Chowdhury, a student at BRAC University, states, "While the university policy notes stern action to be taken, it can be rarely seen that they implement these policies towards individuals found guilty."

Schools are often devoid of any awareness endeavours against sexual harassment, let alone concrete policies. Abm Farhan Tajwar Khan Bishal, a student at Mastermind English Medium School, shares his observation of gender-based violence on his own campus and his school's inaction towards them.

"Our authority is infamous for blaming the victims and even expelling them. There are no policies regarding gender-based violence or sexual harassment, other than separating the two sexes, which is absurd."

Reputed institutions are often quick to silence any issues regarding sexual harassment and discrimination as they believe such incidents besmirch their image, and further compromise the safety of their students through inaction.

Minimisation of microaggressions

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment cases are brushed under the rug more often than not, so it comes as no surprise that female students encounter such horrendous circumstances on a regular basis in the pursuit of education. Female students tend to be on the receiving end of inappropriate behaviour and comments by students and faculties alike, which are often unaddressed as they're not deemed serious enough to warrant attention. Yet, turning the other cheek to microaggression makes further room for escalation in the future.

Aurora Dewan*, a BRAC University student, shared that she had witnessed many counts of microaggressions towards female students during her university life, having been a victim of it herself as well. "A friend of mine once turned down the advances of a fellow male student, who continued to pursue her regardless of her refusal. He later took videos of her without consent and sent those to me, and when I reacted negatively, he laughed them off calling me one of those 'woke, feminist types.'"

Aurora adds that microaggressions are not always necessarily perpetrated by male students. Oftentimes, female students make negative comments about other women's attires, behaviour which is borne out of internalised misogyny or other prejudices. Sometimes, they're the perpetrators of sexual harassment as well.

"An acquaintance commented about my social media photos because of my clothes, telling me that I should start profiting off of showing my body if I was going to post photos like this. While I do not owe anyone an explanation as to what I was wearing, my clothes in those photos were by no means as provocative as she was painting them out to be. She had also physically assaulted me at a later time, pushing me up against a wall when nobody else was around, claiming it was a joke when someone walked in."

Aurora mentions that while she hadn't been vocal about these incidents for a long time, the few instances where she reached out to share the stories were not taken seriously, and the perpetrator was not held accountable. Sadly, this is far from a one-off incident. Rather, it is the most common scenario in educational institutions.

Reimagining campuses as safe spaces

Looking at 20 GBV cases on public university campuses from May 2023 to October 2024, reveals systemic issues. Incidents range from sexual harassment and assault to discriminatory policies, affecting primarily women and gender-diverse individuals. While some perpetrators faced punishment, institutional responses were inconsistent, and often influenced by power dynamics. Survivors frequently avoided reporting due to stigma and distrust in institutional mechanisms.

Progga D'Rozario, a final-year student at DU, reflected on an incident involving a fellow student and the hurdles she faced. "Learning about the hassle the victim had to endure just to file a complaint and then worrying about a potential media trial was deeply unsettling," she said. "I think many students, even when they want to come forward, are held back by the bureaucratic maze they must navigate to prove they are victims. That, I feel, is something that urgently needs to change."

That's why addressing gender-based violence effectively requires more than just streamlined reporting systems; it also requires a complete overhaul of how institutions support victims and prioritise their safety.

To address gender-based violence effectively, universities must commit to cultural and systemic change. This begins with ensuring anti-harassment committees are not only in place but actively engaged in addressing complaints. Their composition must reflect gender diversity, and their procedures should be transparent and survivor centric. Regular workshops for students and faculty can build awareness about what constitutes harassment and the rights of survivors to seek justice.

Inclusivity is another critical pillar. For gender-diverse students, policies must go beyond mere recognition to actively create safe and welcoming environments.

University administrations must also prioritise mental health resources, appointing counsellors in every faculty. These professionals can provide survivors with support while working to cultivate an environment of openness and trust. Additionally, a national framework to monitor and evaluate universities' progress in implementing anti-harassment measures could help hold institutions accountable.

A call to action

Ending gender-based violence on campus requires more than isolated acts of reform. It demands a collective commitment to creating institutions where every individual – regardless of gender – feels safe to learn and thrive. Students, faculty members, and policymakers must rally together to dismantle the structures that perpetuate abuse and rebuild campuses as havens of equality and respect.

The next time we hear of an incident, let us not wait for another protest, another tragic loss, or another report detailing the failure of our systems. Let us act. Because the cost of inaction – of lost futures, broken spirits, and shattered trust – is one our society can no longer afford to bear.

***Names have been changed upon request**

NOTICE BOARD

Sir John Wilson School hosts
"ROAD TO WELLNESS 2024"

ABIR HOSSAIN

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

"Road to Wellness 2024" organised by Sir John Wilson School (SJWS) took place on November 30, 2024, at the school's main campus in United City. The event sought to emphasise the significance of physical and mental health and raise awareness about these issues amongst its students, teachers, parents, and alumni through a holistic approach.

Sanumkia, a teacher of History and Geography in the middle section of SJWS, said, "October 10 is World Mental Health Day, and the event is an extension of that. We have had many events before this and Road to Wellness is sort of a conclusion to everything we have done before this."

The event included several activities and attractions such as food stalls, indoor games, a magic card-making station, and a photo exhibition of the students, parents, and staff amongst other things. SJWS also set up four panel discussions, each addressing a different aspect of mental and physical well-being. The panel discussions revolved around bullying at school, healthy and stress-free lifestyles, managing diverse expectations of society, digital wellness, and professional and personal life balance. Parents, students, teachers, and experts from their respective fields were in attendance as panellists.

Alongside panel discussions, the event included sessions on comedy, yoga and meditation, Zumba, dance, storytelling, and art therapy. By actively engaging with such mediums, the sessions were designed to educate its attendees on how these creative outlets can be used as tools to improve one's well-being.

Sabrina Shaheed, Principal of SJWS, said, "We wanted to make sure that both parents and children feel supported. The photography exhibition that we have put together – where students, parents, and employees submitted photos of what makes them happy – really does indicate that it's the simple things that make all of us happy. These are the things we should be focusing on rather than constantly asking kids to focus on good grades and individual achievements. While we are proud of our students who attain recognition, it isn't only about the awards. It is about how you feel in your mind and body which is what the Road to Wellness has been designed to emphasise."

NSU's Law department holds "Undergraduate Law Symposium Summer 2024"

On November 28, the Department of Law, North South University (NSU) organised the NSU "Undergraduate Law Symposium Summer 2024". The Department of Law at NSU has been hosting this symposium since 2021. It celebrates the academic contributions of young legal minds from various universities. This edition of the symposium saw the highest number of submissions. Almost 70 students from about 30 universities submitted their papers, of which, 13 were shortlisted for presentation.

Dr Liton Chandra Biswas, Assistant Professor, Department of Law, Independent University, Bangladesh, Nadia Rahaman, Senior Lecturer, Department of Law, East West University, and Md Johir Uddin Shohag, Director, Bangladesh Institute of Research and Education, attended the symposium as judges.

Mobasshira Tabassum Rahi, an NSU student, became the symposium's champion. At the same time, Durdana Chowdhury of Dhaka University and Upama Sharma of Chittagong University won the prizes for 1st runner-up and 2nd runner-up respectively.

NSU Vice Chancellor, Professor Abdul Hannan, graced the prize-giving ceremony as the Chief Guest, along with Professor Rizwanul Islam, Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, NSU, and Dr Ishtiaque Ahmed, Chair, Department of Law, NSU.

Professor Hannan noted the need for good lawyers in Bangladesh to bring about dynamic growth in the legal arena of the country. He emphasised how arranging such symposiums aids the process of creating well researched and competent future lawyers.

Southeast University hosts "3rd IEEE BECITHCON 2024"

Southeast University (SEU) successfully hosted the "3rd IEEE Conference on Biomedical Engineering, Computer and Information Technology for Health 2024 (BECITHCON 2024)" at SEU from November 28 to 29. This event was jointly organised by the IEEE Bangladesh Section (IEEE BDS) and the IEEE Engineering in Medicine and Biology Society (EMBS), Bangladesh Chapter.

The event was graced by Prof. Dr Yusuf Mahbubul Islam, Vice Chancellor of Southeast University, as the Chief Guest. Prof. Dr Celia Shahnaz (BUET) and Prof. Dr M Mofazzal Hossain, Pro Vice Chancellor of SEU, served as General Chairs. Prof. Dr Sheikh A. Fattah (BUET) led as Technical Program Chair, and Prof. Dr Mohammad Moshiul Hoque (CUET) as Organising Chair, ensuring the event's success.

The conference featured presentations of contributory research papers, engaging plenary and invited talks, and student-led competitions that showcased innovative ideas and solutions. Most plenary speakers joined virtually from the USA, Australia, Japan, and Malaysia, reflecting the global nature of the event.

BECITHCON 2024 was conducted in a hybrid format, combining both in-person and online participation to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.

HR Summit 2024 held at Uttara University

Uttara University hosted the HR Summit 2024, bringing together Chief Human Resource Officers from the top 20 companies in the country on November 30. Senior HR professionals from various industries, including banking, insurance, garments, pharmaceuticals, and corporate offices, joined the event alongside students, faculty members, and experts from the university.

The summit began with a keynote speech by Professor Dr Musharrof Hossain, Head of HRM at ICDDR'B. The central theme of this year's event was "Industry-Academia Collaboration and the Role of Universities in Creating Industry-Standard Graduates".

Following the keynote presentation, two roundtable discussions were held, where HR specialists participated in engaging dialogues and a Q&A session. The event aimed to explore how students can develop industry-relevant skills and identify the competencies necessary to excel in the job market.

The Vice-Chancellor of Uttara University, Professor Dr Eaysmin Ara Lekha, graced the occasion as a distinguished guest. She expressed her joy over Bangladesh's transition from Industry 3.0 to Industry 4.0 in both the industrial and educational sectors. She emphasised the importance of sustaining such initiatives at both individual and institutional levels and expressed hope for future collaborations. The summit was inaugurated by the university's Pro-Vice Chancellor, Professor Dr Gour Gobinda Goswami. The event was also attended by deans of various faculties, department chairs, esteemed faculty members, and students from multiple disciplines.

OFF CAMPUS

From MIST to MIT: THE JOURNEY OF AKIB ZAMAN

FATIMA ASHRAF

Akib Zaman, an alumnus of the Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST), is currently pursuing his PhD at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS).

Campus sat down with Akib as he shared more about his experiences, research, and insights.

Campus (C): *Could you tell us a bit about your current research?*
Akib (A): Initially, my research focused on the intersection of robotics and geometry processing, but now, I am specifically working on developing algorithms to optimise the design and control of shape-shifting robots.

I am also interested in extending this work using phase-changing materials, which could enable liquid shape-shifting robots. This technology has vast potential in robotics, especially for exploring unknown environments such as space, the deep ocean, and the human body.

C: *What were some of the most notable projects from your undergraduate years that align with your current research interests in robotics?*
A:During my first two years, I focused on strengthening my understanding of core Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) subjects like SPL, OOP, DSA, etc., without any involvement in robotics. My capstone project during my third year, "Intelli-Helmet", was a stress monitoring system for soldiers and it used EEG and heart rate data to identify post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This project was inspired by a scene from the TV series Band of Brothers, and it was published as my first research paper.

Later, I worked on developing "UVC-Purge", a semi-autonomous robot designed to disinfect spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic using controlled ultraviolet-C (UVC) radiation. Our team won the championship in the "Application Category" at the Medical Robotics Challenge for Contagious Disease 2020, hosted by the UK Robotics & Autonomous Systems (UK-RAS) Network. This recognition, along with a GBP 5,000 grant, inspired me to further explore the field of robotics.

C: *What relevant initiatives did you take during your time at MIST?*
A: After winning the grant in the early part of my fourth year, my group and I had a dream of participating in the University Rover Challenge (URC), one of the most prestigious rover competitions in the world, organised by NASA's Mars Society. We presented our success with UVC Purge as proof of concept to MIST's higher authorities, and we were granted funding to pursue our vision.

With an incredible team of around 50 members, we built the Mars rover from scratch, re-forming the Mongol Barota - MIST Mars Rover Society. In that year's virtual finals, we became the top-scoring team globally and produced another publication based on the novelty of our rover.

C: *Could you please tell us how you approached the MIT application process? How did you connect with professors or research groups at MIT during that time?*

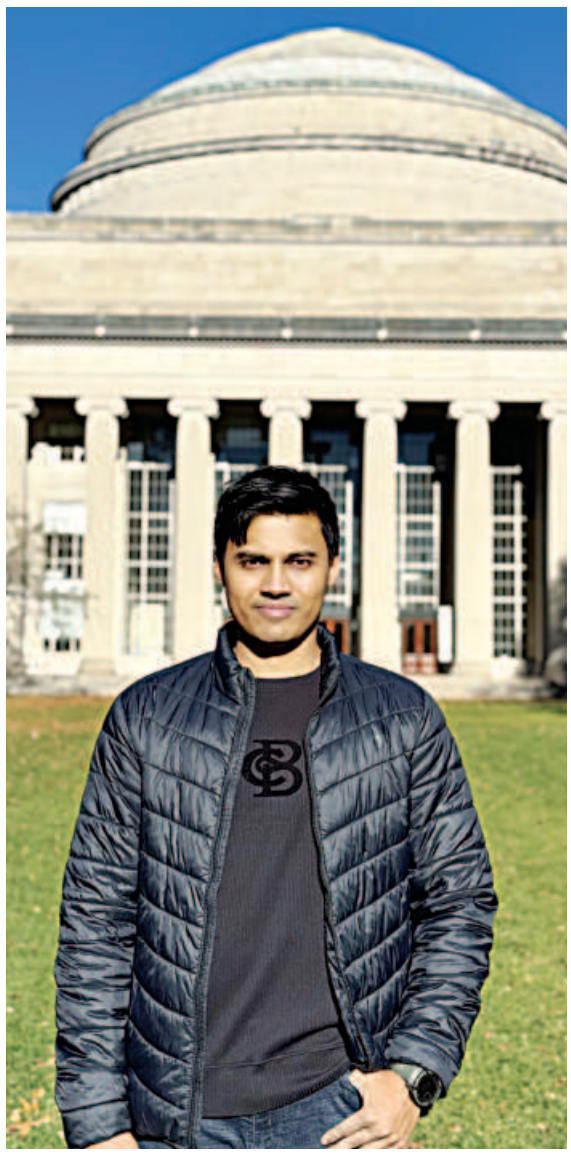

PHOTO: **COURTESY**

A: I didn't apply right after graduating in 2021 because I felt my profile wasn't strong enough to get into a top-tier university where I could pursue advanced research. So, I decided to take a year or two to strengthen my research experience. During that time, I worked with a professor at Rutgers University, USA, working on a deep learning framework for developing a sleep stage classification framework, and co-authored two research papers. I also collaborated with my thesis supervisor and colleagues as a lecturer at United International University (UIU) on several research projects, which helped solidify my research portfolio. Around September 2022, I began compiling a list of professors whose research interests aligned with mine and whose labs I felt would be a good fit. I started networking with them, finding common ground before eventually reaching out to them via email. My target universities included Imperial College London and several top and mid-tier US universities based on the QS World University Rankings. In the end, I received acceptance offers related to robotics from MIT, University of Washington, University of Virginia, and University of Minnesota Twin Cities among others.

C: *What key factors should students consider when planning their graduate applications, especially for top universities like MIT?*
A:There are several key factors, the importance of which I realised even more after becoming a student reviewer for MIT applications this fall. First and foremost are CGPA and research profile. My CGPA was 3.98 on a scale of 4, and to get into top universities, you typically need a strong CGPA to demonstrate long-term dedication.

However, you can make up for a lower CGPA with significant research experience, particularly if you've published your work in well-known conferences or journals. It's crucial to have projects and publications in the same domain as your intended programme. In my application, I was able to connect the dots clearly, showing an intermediate level of expertise through hands-on projects like those in the rover challenges, along with a few publications in conferences and journals. All of this showcased my passion for solving complex problems, particularly in robotics.

Next, comes the standardised tests.I didn't take the GRE since MIT waived it during my application year, but I did take the IELTS and scored a Band 8, with all sections higher than 7.5. For those preparing, I recommend taking mock tests to ensure readiness and aiming for balanced scores across all sections.

Moreover, start building your CV and academic profile early, keeping them concise and organised. Your statement of purpose (SOP) and letters of recommendation (LoRs) are vital for piecing together your profile. They present your unique story and align your research interests with the programme. Engaging in projects with faculty members and maintaining strong relationships with them will help you organically identify the right people to write strong LoRs, which are absolutely crucial.

Lastly, extracurricular activities (ECAs) round out your application, showing versatility. I had a moderate ECA profile, working as a lecturer and being a founder of several teams that secured over USD 200,000 in funding, which demonstrated my commitment to STEM and community service.

Reaching out to professors is also a key part of the process. I had interviews with professors from five of the nine universities I applied to before the application deadlines, thanks to targeted outreach.

C: *As an MIT PhD student and a MIST alumnus, what advice would you give to aspiring international students in Bangladesh?*
A: My favorite quote from the movie *Turbo* is, "No dream is too big, and no dreamer is too small." Keep your dream alive by working hard and nurturing your inner inquisitive spirit along the way. I believe the fear of failure is the biggest enemy when it comes to taking risks in such a competitive academic environment in Bangladesh. I would encourage people to still take risks and follow their passion wholeheartedly. Not every voyage will lead to success, but each journey will teach you valuable lessons. And one day, you might look back and smile, realising that every step was necessary for the dots to connect perfectly.

Fatima Ashraf is a Campus Ambassador for The Daily Star from MIST.

OFF CAMPUS

Reforms in the judiciary are essential to restoring PEOPLE'S TRUST

MD NAYEEM HAIDER

Having stepped into an era of hope and uncertainty, all of us now dream of a state that is just, efficient, and accountable. However, for this dream to materialise – even a fraction of it – and prevent history from repeating itself, a strong, independent, and impartial judiciary is an essential prerequisite. As individuals who aspire to practice law and ensure its proper implementation, students of law understand and feel the need for such a judiciary,

An issue that poses a fundamental roadblock to the dispensation of justice in this country is the overwhelming backlog of pending cases in courts. Having doubled in the past 15 years, the number of pending cases in our courts stood at 4.2 million in 2023, according to an article by the *Dhaka Tribune*. The lack of judges is to blame for this, with there being just one judge for every 94,444 people.

Mahfuz Ul Haque, a Master of Laws (LLM) student at the Islamic University, Kushtia, believes that steps must be taken to increase the appointments of judges at the Supreme Court and subordinate courts. He also suggests that more specialised courts and tribunals could be established to deal with this issue. "To reduce the number of cases, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) should be made more effective in civil suits. This can be done by penalising negligence in the ADR process."

While successfully meeting the people's demand for justice in an efficient and timely fashion is a necessity, the indispensable function of guarding the constitution and holding other organs of the state – the legislature and the executive – is just as important. Through writs, courts can call into question the legality and constitutionality of acts of public bodies. This ensures a system of checks and balances where the government or any of its officials can be challenged in court if they overstep legal bounds.

"I believe that during the previous regime, the lack of judicial independence was a serious problem. This compromised the fairness and impartiality of the justice system, which is a cornerstone of democracy," says Tahsin Hasan Ameer, a final semester LLB student at BRAC University. He adds, "Going forward, it is essential that the judiciary remains completely independent from political influence. Judges must be able to make decisions based solely on the law and facts to ensure the justice system remains fair and trustworthy."

Aside from making sure that our judiciary is independent of interferences, it is also crucial to ensure that corruption and political bias cannot once again take root in the justice system.

Zaid Ekram, an undergraduate Law student at Dhaka University, expresses his views on the corrupt practices that have gone on in our courts. He says, "It is common knowledge that money exchanges hands often in the courthouses of Bangladesh. Cases as simple as land registration disputes stay on the court's floors for decades, accruing thousands, if not lakhs of taka, for state prosecutors, court officials, and sometimes even judges," he says. "The tendons of corruption have reached so far into all of the state's mechanisms, and the court is no exception.

People fear being harassed and extorted by the court itself. How can there be justice when people cannot even believe in it?"

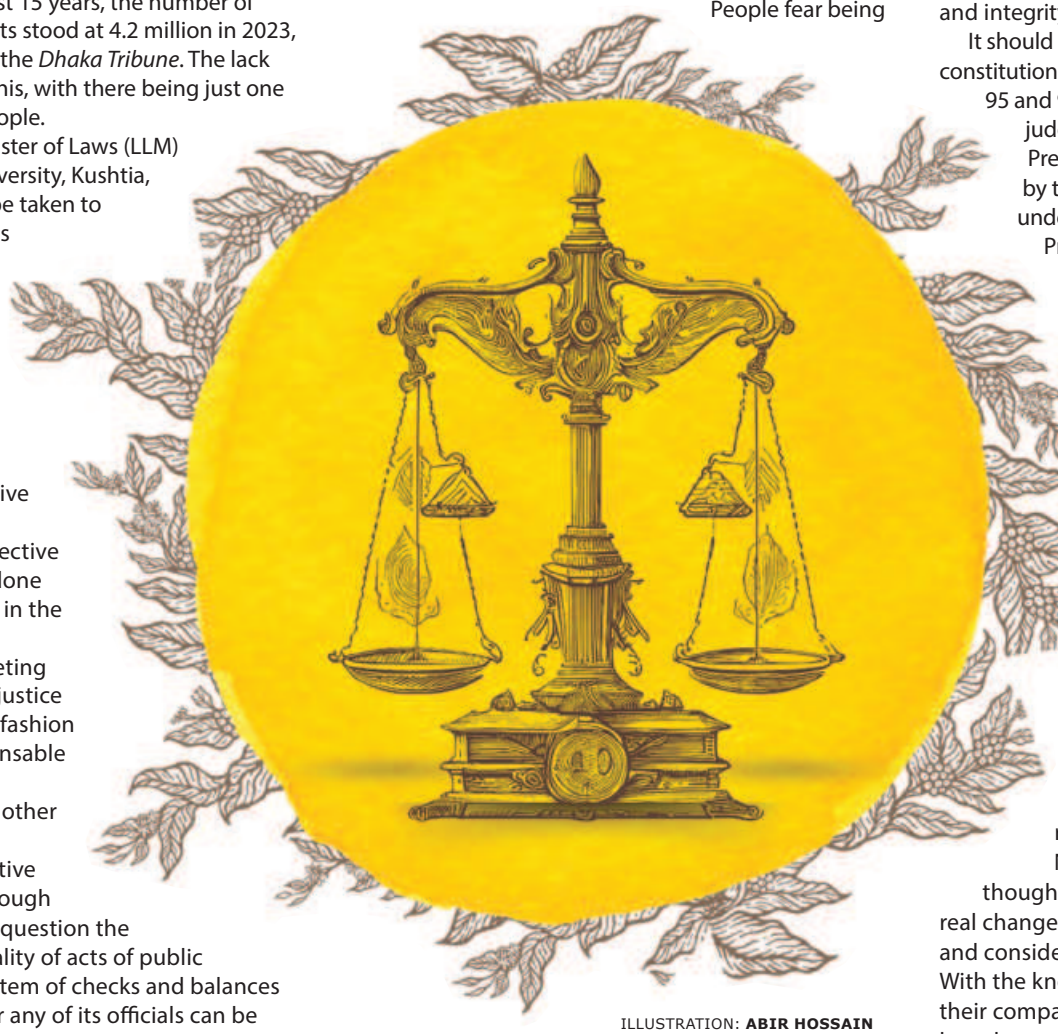

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

Political biases of judges and the perception of a politically biased judiciary have also had a similar effect on the people's faith in the law. Tahsin explains, "If judges are perceived to be aligned with specific political interests, it weakens their credibility and the public's trust in the law. For the sake of a strong and balanced democracy, it is therefore crucial that they remain neutral and confine themselves outside the fold of politics."

The fall of the previous regime can only do so much to ameliorate the weaknesses of our state. Thus, a collective effort is needed to strengthen this vital organ.

Nafisa Binte Borhan, a third-year student at London College of Legal Studies (South), discusses reform measures that could help realise a judiciary that is more in line with democratic values. She suggests, "The enactment of a Judicial Appointment Commission Act could ensure merit-based appointments devoid of political influence. This commission should be diverse, comprising members from the judiciary, civil society, and academia, ensuring that appointments are based on competence and integrity rather than political favouritism."

It should be noted that to implement this, constitutional reform would be necessary. As per Articles 95 and 98 of our Constitution, the power to appoint judges in the Supreme Court is vested with the President, a power that is ultimately exercised by the Prime Minister. The President is required under Article 48(3) to follow the advice of the Prime Minister in appointing Supreme Court judges other than the Chief Justice.

Nafisa further adds, "To reduce bias and corruption, transparency must be prioritised. The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2009, and The Whistleblower Protection Act, 2011, act as critical tools in this regard. It is essential that these laws are strengthened to encourage transparency in court proceedings and judicial conduct. Further, we must enforce anti-corruption provisions and amend them to include special provisions as well. Expedited trials for corrupt judges under specialised tribunals – as empowered by the Special Powers Act, 1974 – could help restore public confidence."

Nonetheless, ideas – no matter how well thought out – can only be conducive towards real change if they are executed with pragmatism and consideration of the nuances of the situation. With the knowledge that students have earned in their comparably insignificant years, they can only have hopes and ideals for a nation that is more just. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with those whom the students have entrusted to actualise their aspirations.

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