

# CAMPUS

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## PREDATORY PUBLICATIONS

What are they and why they pose a threat to academia

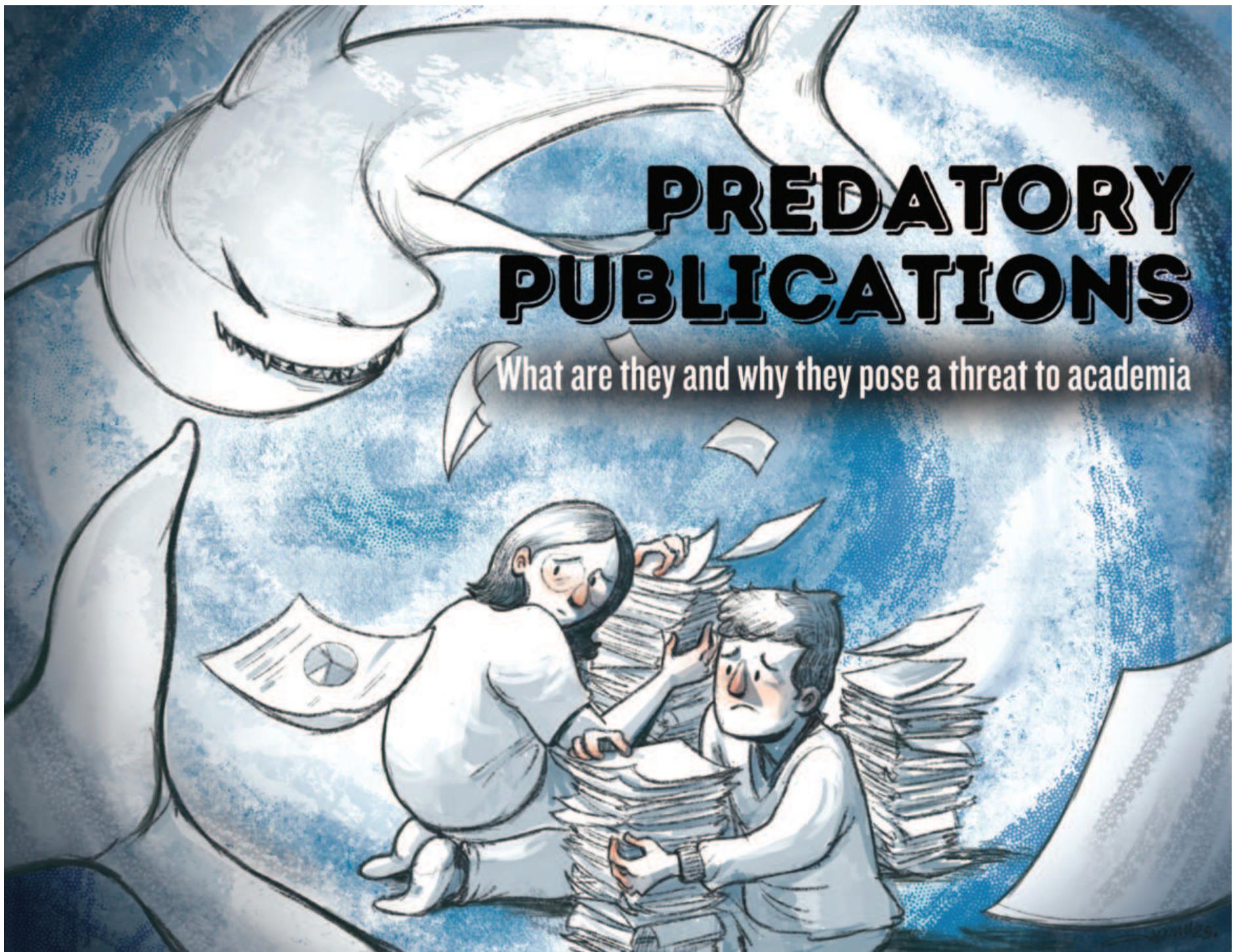


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MOVIES

# All We Imagine as Light carves out tenderness in the harshest of spaces

ABIR HOSSAIN

*All We Imagine as Light* follows the story of Prabha and Anu, roommates who also work at the same hospital. While the two quite literally share the same space, both at a personal and professional capacity, the plights plaguing each character are vastly different.

Nurse Prabha is thrown into a daze after receiving an unexpected present (a rice cooker), presumably from her husband, whom she has not spoken to in over a year. In contrast, Anu wishes nothing more than to seek a safe space, away from the prying eyes of the city, to spend some time with her partner, Shiaz.

Despite the obvious contrasts between Prabha and Anu, they are both in a state of delirium. It is through their differences, however, that Payal Kapadia, the director and writer of the film, underscores the impact of the city on its inhabitants. In dense places with compact spaces, we may be ripped apart and left all alone, or fortunate enough to find someone in the nooks and crannies that we've been pushed to. This sentiment is echoed through Parvaty, who also works at the same hospital as Anu and Prabha. She is forced out of the house she has lived in for decades as the



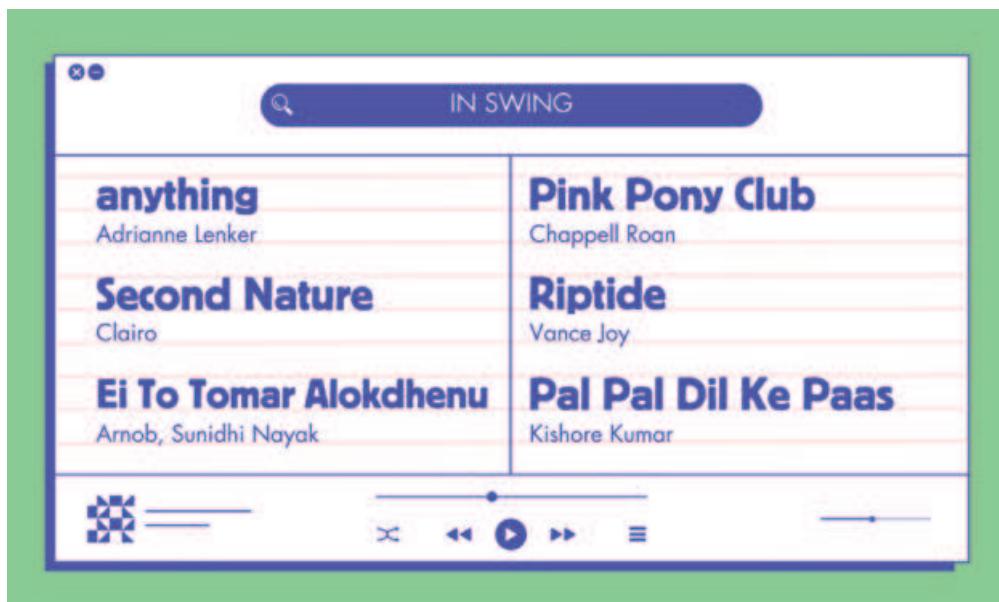
plot has been occupied by a real estate developer.

The first hour of the movie is set in Mumbai, with each character's delirious state of mind portrayed through a hazy, soft, and almost dreamlike look. Most of the movie looks luminous, giving the visuals a visceral feel. This quality also extends to the sound design and soundtrack. The two work together in harmony to capture the essence of the film's settings.

Such prowess is not only merely limited to the technicalities. In fact, I thought that

the writing was the film's strongest quality. Payal Kapadia has crafted scenes that unite the characters in small moments of respite, only to then snatch it away. At no point does she rush the pacing.

*All We Imagine As Light* is a refined film, complete with technical mastery, controlled storytelling, and a lot of heart. It perfectly encapsulates the essence of a city like Mumbai, where even amidst cramped spaces, we manage to steal glances, long for familiarity, and curse the selfish desires of its inhabitants.



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## ■ STUDY ABROAD ■

# KNB SCHOLARSHIP

## Fully funded opportunity to study in Indonesia

TAMJIDUL HOQUE

Bangladeshi students aspiring to study abroad often begin their search for scholarships in more popular study abroad destinations such as Europe and North America. However, there are also lesser known destinations which provide scholarships covering full tuition fee reduction and stipends. One of those scholarships is the Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship.

The Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship is an initiative by the Indonesian government available for students from developing countries. It offers scholarships for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs and covers much of the expenses including tuition and living costs. The scholarship is given every year and for 2025, the Indonesian government is planning for around 200 KNB Scholarship applicants in total to be accepted in 34 KNB Scholarship host universities in Indonesia, with most scholarships given to Masters applicants.

Naufel Anwar Ishaq, a Bangladeshi LLB graduate who is currently pursuing his LLM at the University of Indonesia, located in Jakarta, Indonesia, is one of the recipients of this scholarship and while describing how he found out about this opportunity, he says, "I discovered the KNB Scholarship on LinkedIn in one of the posts shared by the Indonesian embassy and I thought why not just apply and see."

For each of the bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes, there are different sets of requirements to be eligible for the scholarship such as age limits, having the required English proficiency test score etc. In terms of applying, Naufel says, "One can apply through the official KNB portal where you submit the necessary documents and then candidates may undergo additional screenings via interview by the University and one will also need embassy recommendations for the final selection process."

After the selection process, the successful applicants will be allowed to study in Indonesia and during their stay, they will have to do a mandatory Indonesian Language Training programme which can last up to 1 Year, a preparatory programme and then move on to study their academic programme.

In this regard, Naufel says, "The whole programme will basically consist of one year of Language programme and then your main course, which is 4 years for Bachelors and 2 years for a Masters and so on."

The most attractive aspect of this scholarship is the financial support it provides for the international students who want to study in Indonesia. The scholarship covers the tuition fee required for the language and the academic programme, a settlement allowance upon arrival and a living allowance every month, health

insurance and more. The KNB scholarship is calculated to cover all the required costs of the students during their stay.

On the other hand, some aspects may seem challenging according to Naufel as he says, "The only downside for this scholarship is that you have to be fluent in the Indonesian language and your course may also be conducted in the Indonesian language, although that mainly depends on which faculty you're applying for." In addition to that, after completing their programme, students will need to return back as Indonesia does not provide post study work permits, which may be seen negatively by some.

The task of learning a new language wasn't much of an obstacle for Naufel as he says, "I found it very easy to be honest and if you're very good at English, you will have an easier time learning the language."

Nevertheless, the scholarship will provide students

a unique opportunity to explore Indonesia while completing their studies with no costs. About the experience as a student, Naufel says, "Studying here has been a blast. The quality of education here is amazing. Alongside studies, we got to take part in fun activities and trips and the people are nice and supportive and you get to learn about the various tribes here and their cultures. From my own experience and what I have

heard from others, the first year when you do the language course is more fun but after that you have to really lock in when your main course starts."

For future applicants, Naufel focuses on the importance of preparing early as he says, "Prepare early by

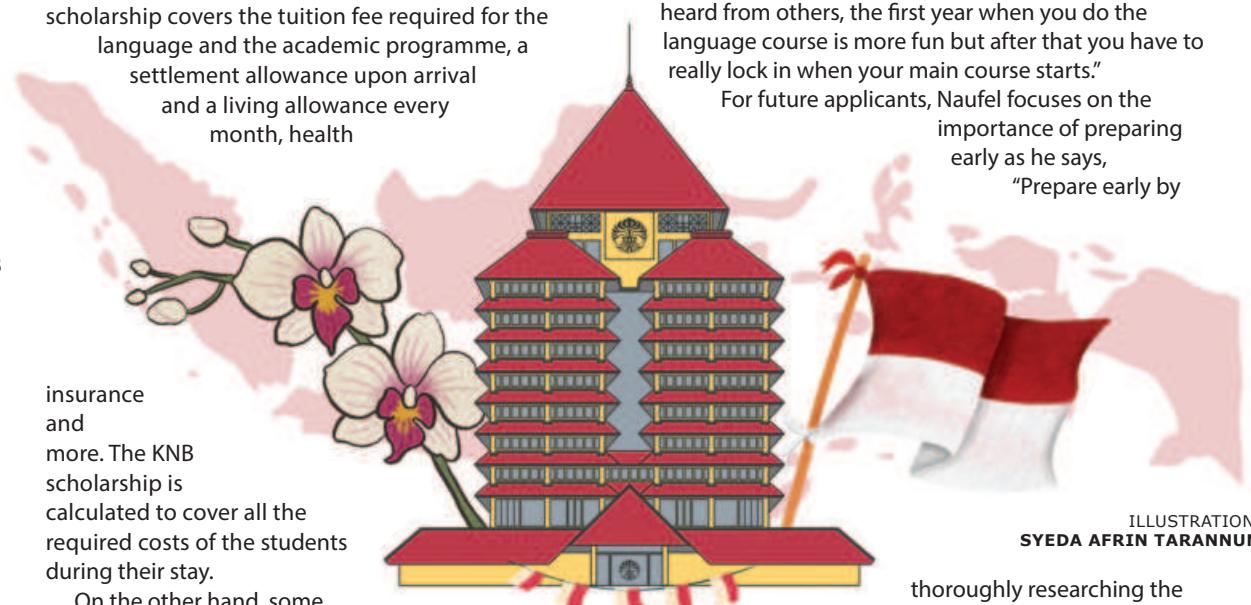


ILLUSTRATION:  
SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

thoroughly researching the scholarship requirements and ensuring you have all necessary documents, especially the embassy recommendation, in place. Developing a basic understanding of Bahasa Indonesia can also be beneficial, as language plays a vital role in the cultural immersion offered by the KNB Scholarship."

For students looking to study abroad with funding, the KNB Scholarship is an underrated option about which many may not be even aware of, especially for students who are looking to do their Masters as more seats are available for them. With proper preparation, one can avail this scholarship which can unlock further opportunities and help them realise their study abroad dream.

*Tamjidul Hoque is an UK LLB graduate.*



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# PREDATORY PUBLICATIONS

What are they and why they pose a threat to academia



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For our research work to hold any merit, it must undergo a thorough review process before it is considered for publication. Predatory journals are dangerous because they are not reputed or considered by any scientist to hold any value.

#### RAIAN ABEDIN

Imagine yourself in the position of a prospective academic, conducting research in your field of interest. The best – in fact, the only – way to grow in the world of academia is through having your work published. However, researchers often have to deal with the crushing anxiety that arises over not publishing as frequently, facing rejections, and looking out for conferences and journals to submit their work. All of this is most certainly not easy work. Moreover, it's very easy for young researchers to be completely overwhelmed by the sheer amount of patience and sustained effort it can take to have their names published even once. This is where the pitfall of predatory publishing comes in – a devastating scam that many junior researchers have fallen for.

To understand how exactly a predatory journal functions, let's try to understand how academic publishing works in the first place.

"Peer-reviewed" is a term that many may be familiar with – in academia, this serves as the bread and butter for all things that deal with research.

According to Dr Md Kabir Uddin, an assistant professor at North South University's Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology, "For our research work to hold any merit, it must undergo a thorough review process before it is considered for publication. Predatory journals are dangerous because they are not reputed or considered by any scientist to hold any value. The biggest reason behind this is that these journals will provide no peer-review on your work, and sometimes they go as far as to publish falsified or doctored data under the guise of having done some 'research' work."

Mahir Amer, a master's student in Biological Sciences at the University of Edinburgh, further elaborates, "A lot of faculties or researchers receive unsolicited emails asking them if they'd like to submit papers. These journals often

have some major red flags that are pretty easily distinguishable if you spend some time in academia. Journal that publish on topics that have nothing to do with each other, exorbitant processing charges, and misleading claims about legitimacy are all indicators."

Similar sentiments are echoed by Dr Mahbubul H Siddiqee, an associate professor of Microbiology at BRAC University, who goes on to paint an image of how predatory journals plague researchers, specifically in Bangladesh. "A big portion of mainly young researchers in our country have had some dealings with predatory journals. A whole lot of these cases do not occur by accident, as many researchers are driven by this 'publish-or-perish' culture that permeates academia today," he lamented, highlighting a core issue of how research is perceived in the country.

According to a study by Umme Habiba and SM Zabed Ahmed, over 79 percent of participants admitted that the rapid acceptance and publication time provided by predatory journals might be a motivating factor for researchers to submit their work in these spaces. But why would any researcher care for that? The answer comes from Dr Mahbubul, who says, "Young faculty members looking to make their CVs heavy will definitely make use of this – especially because many universities in Bangladesh don't have strict restrictions against hiring researchers who have published their work in these predatory journals. Many lecturers and assistant professors also use these to increase their publication rate as a means of obtaining promotions as universities in our country have particular criteria that are concerned about the number of publications one makes over the quality of their publication."

It is evident, thus, that a lack of awareness and general apathy regarding research work has led to this practice being far more commonplace than it has any right to be. It is true that no matter your field, conducting research in a resource-strained country like Bangladesh can disillusion even the brightest minds. The appeal of these predatory journals begins here. Complete with deceitful indexing information and false claims to scope, these journals are often sought out by researchers for the sake of boosting their own reputation in the eyes of others – not realising the damage it causes to their name as a researcher on an international stage. Published research, after all, is scrutinised thoroughly by academics across the world.

Dr Nneka Logan, an associate professor at the School of Communication at Virginia Tech

University, reflects on this, "The quality of the journal matters to academic institutions. The same applies to questionable conferences. It is much better for students to take the time to have their work featured in more respected and legitimate scholarly venues. This is a case where less is more. It is better to have less work published or featured in more notable outlets than it is to have a great deal of work published or featured in questionable outlets."

Undergraduate students looking to enter academia, be it in the sciences or humanities, certainly have their work cut out for them. When playing on an international stage, as researchers so often do, it is important to rigorously understand how academic publications work. And while there is a definite group of people who are apathetic towards publishing in high-impact journals, one thing that also requires discussion here is the lack of knowledge that plagues researchers in Bangladesh regarding predatory journals.

In the study by Habiba and Ahmed, it was suggested that many of the participants were simply confused by the terminology of "predatory publication". Nearly half of these participants, the majority of whom were assistant professors, did not feel confident enough to assess a journal's quality all by themselves. This poses an issue that is institutional in nature, and as such has to be dismantled from the ground up.

University students, despite not necessarily being in charge of what research is being carried out, have a massive role to play here. After all, these are the same people who will eventually take on the roles of professors and researchers. If – through cultural diffusion – their perception of research is altered to favour predatory publishing, then where does that put us? And if these students are accidental victims of having their work printed in a predatory journal, then what implications does that have for their future?

To this end, Dr Ing Ulrich Vogt, Head of the Department of Flue Gas Cleaning and Air Quality Control at the University of Stuttgart, offers a sliver of hope. "I see no issue with students getting published in such publications, at least during their undergraduate studies. In most cases, students aren't aware of or don't have much knowledge of the journal communities or industry," he claimed.

"During their postgraduate or doctoral education, this is viewed differently. During these times, the publication and reputation of the journal are reviewed better," he added.

While undergraduate students may have some leeway in this case, it is clear that beyond this boundary, publication in a predatory journal can come with serious repercussions. The lack of awareness, which seems to be a pervading issue, has to be addressed within every respective university. Additionally, there is also a subculture that thrives on 'quick and dirty' work as future repercussions aren't considered. It is imperative for university students and young academics to be keenly aware of both sides of the problem, and to establish programmes that allow these problems to come to light.

**Reference:** *Understanding and Mitigating the Menace of Predatory Journals: Perspectives of University Teachers in Bangladesh*. Habiba, U., Ahmed, S.M.Z.

Raiyan is a poet, a final-year student of Biochemistry, and a contributor to The Daily Star

## HOW TO IDENTIFY PREDATORY JOURNALS



- ⌚ The journal promises quick publication.
- ⌚ No International Standard Serial Number (ISSN).
- ⌚ Not indexed by MEDLINE, Scopus, PsycINFO, Web of Science, or other legitimate abstracting or indexing services or databases.
- ⌚ The journal lacks clear policies on retraction, corrections, or plagiarism.
- ⌚ Predatory journals lack description of the manuscript handling process.
- ⌚ Manuscripts are requested to be submitted by email instead of through an online submission system.
- ⌚ Journals claiming to be open access either retain copyright of published research or fail to mention copyright.
- ⌚ Article processing and/or publication fee is very low, for instance, less than USD 150.
- ⌚ Information on whether and how journal content will be archived and preserved is absent.
- ⌚ Scope of journal is not clear.
- ⌚ Journal's website contains spelling and grammatical errors.
- ⌚ Journal is not published by reputable or known publisher.



## INDICATORS THAT A JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER IS NOT PREDATORY

- ⌚ Scope of the journal is well-defined and clearly stated.
- ⌚ Journal's primary audience is researchers or practitioners.
- ⌚ Journal's editor and editorial board are recognised experts in the field.
- ⌚ The journal is affiliated with or sponsored by an established scholarly society or academic institution.
- ⌚ Any fees or charges for publishing in the journal are easily found on the journal web site and clearly explained.
- ⌚ Journal clearly indicates rights for use and re-use of content at article level.
- ⌚ Publisher is a member of Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association.
- ⌚ Journal is registered in UlrichsWeb Global Serials Directory.
- ⌚ Journal is listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals.
- ⌚ Journal is included in legitimate abstracting or indexing services or databases such as MEDLINE, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Web of Science.

## NOTICE BOARD



## BRAC University's School of Law wins the ninth Bangladesh round of the Jessup Moot Court Competition

The Philip C Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition is held annually in two segments – the national round and the international round. This year, BRAC University formed a team consisting of Nasreen Alam, Syed Abdullah Jabeer, and Mahia Rahman, and these three junior students of LLB from the School of Law emerged as the national champion in the ninth Bangladesh Qualifying Rounds of Jessup 2025. This marks the first time in history that BRAC University has become the champion in the Bangladesh national round of the competition. Team BRAC University was guided and coached by Md Mostafa Hosain, an assistant professor at the School of Law. The team members dedicated themselves to a yearlong intensive preparation in the area of international law and continue to do so as they will be representing Bangladesh in the global stage.

This year, the competition saw participation from 44 universities across the country. The Bangladesh national round was organised by Jessup Bangladesh in association with International Law Students Association (ILSA), Hearth Bangladesh, and American International University - Bangladesh (AIUB). It was held at the AIUB campus from February 6 to 8, 2025. Team BRAC University defeated Dhaka University in the semi-finals, and Eastern University in the final round of the competition.

After becoming the champion in the national round, team BRAC University advanced to the Jessup 2025 "White & Case International Rounds" where the team will be competing with the best law schools from all over the world. The international rounds are going to be held between March 29 and April 5, 2025 at Washington, DC. Previously, the BRAC University moot court team clinched the runner-up position three times in the national round of the Jessup competition.

## Strengthening Bangladesh's startup ecosystem: The role of university incubators

As Bangladesh's startup landscape expands, university incubators have emerged as pivotal forces in fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation. To address the challenges and opportunities in this space, NSU Startups Next (NSUSN) hosted an exclusive roundtable discussion on the topic "The Role of University Incubators in Fostering Bangladesh's Startup Ecosystem" on February 17, 2025, at North South University's (NSU's) Syndicate Hall.

Bringing together prominent academics, policymakers, investors, and industry leaders, the event served as a high-level

challenge, strengthening public-private partnerships, expanding regional incubation programmes, and developing policy frameworks.

Monjur Mohammad Shahriar said, "We celebrate outputs, but true success lies in outcomes. A startup, like a child, matures through mentorship, passing through stages of growth before becoming a thriving business."

Specifically relating to the state of students in today's ecosystem, Mohammad Shahriar added, "Many ideas seem new to students simply because they haven't



dialogue on the sustainability of university incubation programmes. With over 1,200 active startups in Bangladesh, university-driven incubation models are essential in providing entrepreneurs with access to mentorship, funding, and policy support. However, financial sustainability, limited industry collaboration, and regulatory constraints remain key barriers to their effectiveness.

The discussion featured an esteemed panel of experts, including Prof. Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, Vice-Chancellor, NSU; Prof. Abdur Rob Khan, Pro-VC In-Charge, NSU; Rahat Ahmed, Founder and Managing Partner, Anchorless Bangladesh; Waiz Rahim, Venture Partner, Sturgeon Capital; and Monjur Mohammad Shahriar, Project Director, DEIED-Project, BHTPA. In addition, successful NSU alum entrepreneurs such as Anayet Rashid, Founder and CEO of Truck Lagbe, and Fahad Ifaz, Co-founder and CEO of iFarmer, shared their experiences and insights into navigating Bangladesh's startup ecosystem.

The discussions revolved around several critical themes like fostering university-led innovation, addressing sustainability

encountered them before. The real challenge is bridging this knowledge gap."

During further conversations and deliberations, Rahat Ahmed stated, "A strong startup ecosystem requires balance – government support must be complemented by private sector investment to ensure long-term success. Ignoring global standards prevents Bangladeshi startups from scaling internationally. To compete on the world stage, we must embrace best practices."

The discussion was moderated by Samuel Mursalin, Director (IC), NSU Startups Next, who highlighted the significance of university incubators in today's entrepreneurial landscape. The event concluded with commitments to developing a strategic roadmap for university incubators, advocating for government-backed funding mechanisms, and fostering deeper industry-academia engagement. The insights gathered will contribute to shaping policy dialogues that ensure university incubators remain sustainable and impactful, supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

## Success of DIU BNCC unit in Regiment Training 2025

Daffodil International University (DIU) BNCC platoon recently distinguished itself at the Ramna Regiment Camp held from January 26 to February 4. The camp offered a rigorous programme designed to cultivate discipline, leadership, and other essential skills.

DIU BNCC cadets immersed themselves in a variety of activities. Daily drills and physical training honed precision and fitness. Weapon handling and marksmanship training provided

them with necessary practical skills in a safe environment. Tactical exercises, including simulations of raids, ambushes, and camouflage, prepared cadets for real-world scenarios. The inter-battalion competition showcased the platoon's teamwork and talent.

Beyond military exercises, the camp fostered camaraderie and cultural expression, with DIU cadets earning ten medals in "singing", "acting", and "media" categories. The camp also incorporated



sessions on time management, chain of command, sports, and co-curricular activities, promoting holistic

development.

The Ramna Regiment Camp provided invaluable lessons. Cadets learned the importance of discipline, time management, punctuality, and teamwork. They honed leadership skills, strengthened resilience, and gained practical experience in military tactics. The camp also instilled a deep sense of patriotism and responsibility, shaping cadets into responsible citizens and future leaders.

## INTERVIEWS

# Carbon emissions, climate change, and the cacao tree

## In conversation with Shams-il Arefin Islam

Shams-il Arefin Islam is based in the United States and works in the agricultural landscape, helping manage and design proposals for innovative solutions. He is a Yale Berkeley College fellow, and a former Global Scholars fellow. Shams is a classically trained tenor and has sung in concerts in Bangladesh and the United States. He is currently writing two books – one for children and another on the dangerous journeys made by Bangalis escaping the 1971 Liberation War.

Campus sat down for an interview with Shams where he talked about his work and shed light on how the cacao tree acts as an early climate alarm bell.

**Campus (C): What led you to pursue a career in environmental management and climate? What were some of the challenges that you faced along the way?**

**Shams-il Arefin Islam (S):** As a child, I was always climbing trees, and my favourite cartoon was Captain Planet on Bangladesh Television (BTV). The show, towards the end of each episode, would explain some of the immediate challenges that our planet faced – from waste to air pollution and what we can do to help reduce it. In retrospect, I believe the show had a significant impact on how I saw our planet. I strongly believe that being exposed to appropriate messaging during our youth, when we have a clean slate to work with, can have a direct

Foundation fellows on waste-to-resource conversion projects. It gave me a lot of insights not only into recycling but also into soil health which is critical for agriculture. After work, I would study under professors Mizan Khan and Nurul Amin in Dhaka, both of whom had a wealth of knowledge to share on development and economics. Eventually, I went back to the US, where I pursued a master's degree, and started working with US companies sourcing agricultural commodities from developing countries.

**C: What was your experience of working in Bangladesh? Can you provide some insights into this field for our readers?**

**S:** While not unique to Bangladesh, a critical challenge here is that policy and law lag far behind the pace at which technology moves and what our society immediately needs. By the time there is policy approval through a complex process to adopt an efficient agricultural practice or piece of technology, years may have passed. Furthermore, the lack of long-term vision and unnecessary politicisation of society's existential needs can have far-reaching consequences on the farmers to the end consumers and the national coffers.

I strongly feel that if you want an entire generation to suffer, then stall the quality of education. Finding excellent teachers and gaining professional experience is a crucial process that everyone should properly

map out.

Moreover, there is nothing better than field-level experience. That is where one learns the most. So, I strongly advocate for students and professionals – at all levels – to learn by venturing out of the confines of office spaces and into the fields.

That is where

one learns the most. So, I strongly advocate for students and professionals – at all levels – to learn by venturing out of the confines of office spaces and into the fields.

**C: Your professional experience is in agricultural commodities, including the chocolate supply chain. Can you explain how the cacao tree – from where we get cocoa for making chocolate – informs what will happen to key crops that we depend on, as our climate changes?**

**S:** While it may seem that cacao is a rich man's commodity, there are millions of farmers and their families who depend solely on this crop. Even though the prices of cacao have increased by 400 percent recently, farmers, sadly, only receive around six percent of the final sale of a chocolate bar. The price increase has little positive impact on farmers or consumers, who end up paying more for less chocolate. Many companies are responding to wrinkles in the supply chain by using less cacao solids and more artificial fillers and flavours to make up for deteriorating cocoa quality and supply.

But there is more to the chocolate problem. I take the cacao tree as a litmus test that we must not ignore. The tree acts as one of the early climate alarm bells. It informs heavily how other key agricultural commodities, like rice, wheat, and bananas, will



respond to rapid changes in our earth's climate.

The cacao ecosystem grows in the Goldilocks zone – 20 degrees above and below the equator and very sensitive to Earth's climatic changes. The cacao plant is extremely sensitive to heat, humidity, water, and soil conditions, and new trees require around three years to produce fruit. To make matters worse, there are rapidly moving diseases such as the cacao swollen shoot virus which thrives in a changing climate. Its production output and quality can foretell the sensitive parameters of our key crops that the world's population depends on.

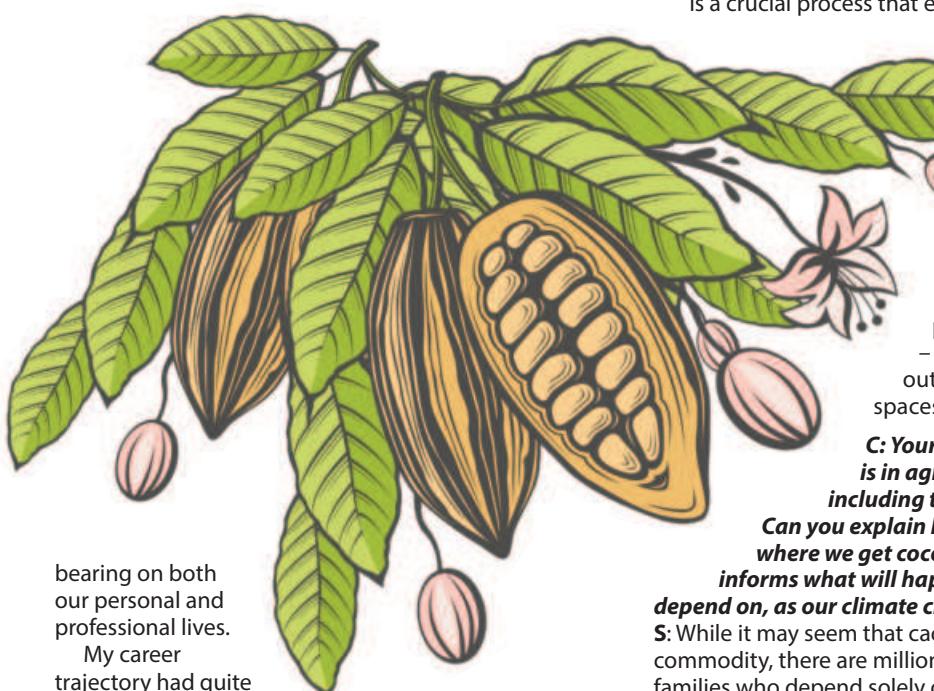
We have seen around 14 percent reduction in cocoa supply in just the past year and we can see that farmers are already increasing their use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Since we have already breached the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit, the prognosis of this new tipping point is a risk to all our food commodities replicating what we are seeing with sensitive cocoa plants.

**C: You are also focused on this relatively new term of "insetting" within the agricultural supply chain. Can you explain the difference between "insetting" and "offsetting" of carbon emissions?**

**S:** Offsetting is a common term used to balance carbon emissions after an emission has already been made. This can be done through, for example, carbon capture technology that can either be mechanical or natural such as afforestation. The key word here is "after" the emission has already been made.

Insetting, on the other hand, means stopping the carbon emissions even before they have a chance to be released into our atmosphere. This is done by focusing on mapping a commodity's supply chain and using tools such as regenerative agriculture to significantly reduce the possibility of emissions. Therefore, if companies can reduce their emissions at the source before it is released, then we benefit both from increased agricultural output due to improved farming practices and reduce the need for offsetting later.

We cannot move forward to address global emissions without offsetting and if we do not adopt rapid insetting, then we will have to offset to perpetuity. Thus, we need both mechanisms in our toolbox to address the deteriorating climate.



bearing on both our personal and professional lives.

My career trajectory had quite a few twists. After receiving my degree in Business from the US, I was not able to immediately land a job due to the on-going global financial crisis back then. As a result, I had to leave within 60 days after my visa ended, which made me feel like a failure. However, I turned my fate around by listening to my parents. I furthered my education in Bangladesh, learned a new language, and gained distinctive and strong professional experience in a developing country which would be an asset to companies and organisations.

I had a unique opportunity to work on social business initiatives, and then for two Schwab

## ■ OFF CAMPUS ■

# What it takes to run an online handmade jewellery business AS A YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR

ALLIN MOHANA BISWAS and FARIHA LAMISA

Contrary to what many may presume, running an online handmade jewellery business requires consistent effort and commitment. In Bangladesh, the online jewellery scene is thriving with the growing popularity of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, where handmade jewellery is being sold and promoted. And behind every well-crafted jewellery page is a story that incorporates courage to begin, a painstaking creative process, survival in a competitive market, and a desire to leave a footprint in the field of online business.

A natural question that propels the curious mind is how the artisans behind these wonderful creations found the inspiration to start their journey. Syeda Tithila Manjur, owner of Layes Fita, says that the initial idea behind the business stemmed from her childhood game of decorating her dolls. She states, "Back in my childhood, I used to make dolls' jewellery from beads, and that is where I got my first inspiration to make handmade jewellery. Since then, I have wanted to work in this field."

Similar to Tithila, Afrin Parvez, owner of the page Little Creations by Afrin, has harboured an interest in this work since her early days, but she could only translate her interest into reality during the COVID-19 lockdown.

It is important to emphasise that for both individuals, starting their journey was not a sudden decision.



Rather, it was the realisation of a long-nurtured dream, characterised by passion and a genuine love for the craft, that manifested into reality only when it felt right.

When asked about what made them open their business in a virtual space instead of a physical one, different entrepreneurs had different reasons. For Tithila it was pure coincidence. She shares, "Once I just uploaded some pictures of my work to share with my friends. Surprisingly, I got some orders from those works, and thus I started my journey."

In contrast to Tithila, Afrin felt it was the manageability of the online platforms that made her start her business online instead of in a physical store. She states, "An online page is easy to manage from any place." One thing to observe is that, unlike a physical business, an online business requires comparatively less investment. The flexibility, in terms of time



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

commitment, of the online medium is also note-worthy. These aspects have made the online platform an attractive opportunity for many hesitant entrepreneurs who might have a different primary commitment but want to manage a successful business.

With more and more handmade jewellery shops cropping up on our feeds every day, securing quality materials can make or break an online handmade jewellery business, especially when designs are unique and intricate. Sadia shares, "Sourcing from the right places was quite challenging. Sometimes we source raw materials from abroad through importers and some materials are sourced domestically. Mirpur 1, for example, is a good place for buying wholesale. Using my own design and aesthetic, I transform these materials into jewellery in my unique style."

Mownita Ahmed, owner of the online page Mownita's, relies on accessible resources, choosing art and craft stores for sourcing. This reflects the determination of small-scale entrepreneurs who must maximize what is available to them. Local stores are a simple solution for sourcing raw materials, especially for those who don't have access to large suppliers.

Mownita's journey also highlights the hurdles that come with starting a business with limited resources. "Having little to no money to invest in a business as a student and also having no basic knowledge of art was the real problem for me. I used my pocket money, which was only BDT 10 to 20 at that time, as an investment, bought some raw materials, and instantly started my business with only one hand-painted designer jewellery piece," she shares. For new entrepreneurs like her,

starting with minimal capital and learning on the go is often the only option. However, this entrepreneurial spirit of making do with what's available can serve as an inspiration for others who have limited capital and experience but a strong desire to create.

Marketing is an added hurdle that small online businesses face. "Facebook was actually my first platform for marketing. Now, I also work with several local initiative-based organisations for marketing," explains Sadia.

Mownita takes a different approach and relies on customer trust and loyalty. She says, "I think trust can be the biggest marketing strategy nowadays. Every one of my loyal clients market my products." This organic form of marketing shows the importance of small-scale online businesses building genuine relationships with customers, especially in an industry where word-of-mouth can influence sales.

Every creative job is draining due to the pressure of maintaining novelty. Upon being asked how she deals with this challenge, Afrin says she frequently explores different media of art, which allows her to gain new insight. She says, "Working with different media and changing media help me diversify my designs."

Speaking on how to overcome creative challenges and keep moving forward as a new business owner, Mownita shares, "Art needs persistence, not perfection. Use your imagination and authentically express yourself. The right client will love you for your work. It will be difficult in the beginning, but stay resourceful, and eventually, you will have a fulfilling and successful business."