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WHY STUDYING ABROAD IS BECOMING HARDER FOR BANGLADESHI STUDENTS

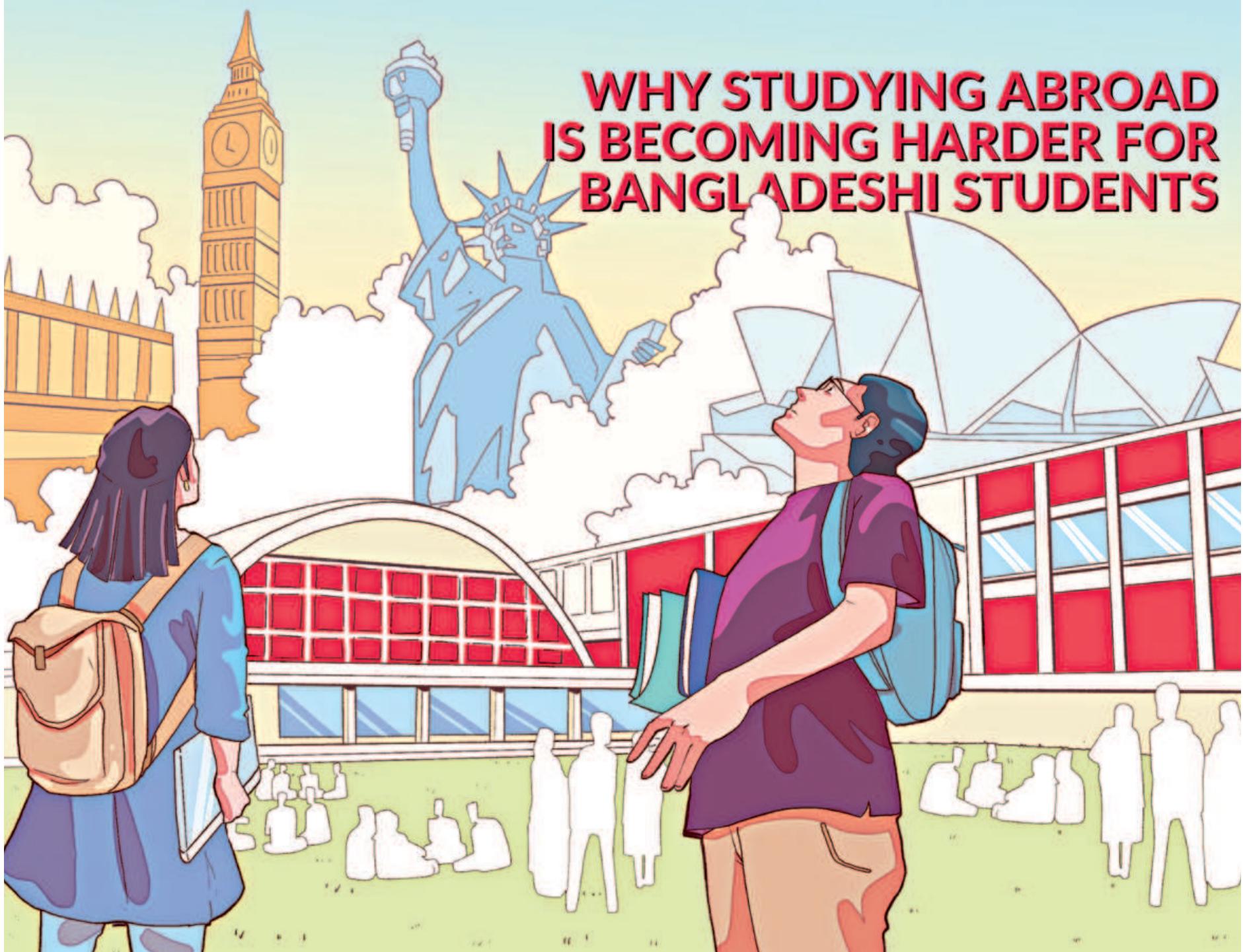


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DID YOU KNOW? THEEVOLUTIONAND ORIGINOFHALEEM

Kitab al Tabikh (Books of Dishes) by Ibn Sayyara Al Warraq, widely recognised as one of the earliest cookbooks to be discovered, documented a porridge-like dish called "harees" or "hareesa". And it is precisely this delicacy that is believed to be the predecessor or ancestor to the haleem that we enjoy today.

The Arabic word 'Harasa' and an older word 'Harasu' formed the word 'Hareesa' which refers to the pounding of meat with barley or shelled whole grains of wheat. As for the word "haleem", it means 'patient' in Arabic, advising one to stay home and to remain patient through the long, slow cooking process.

During months of fasting or during long journeys in-between battles, it was a one-dish sailor and soldier food. Some historians believe hareesa came to the sub-continental coast of Malabar with the arrival of Arab traders.



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The enduring presence of cats in JAPANESE LITERATURE

ADRIEN SARWAR

What's with all the cats in Japanese literature?

In the few books I have read, one thing has grabbed my attention again and again—the presence of feline characters, especially cats, on the covers. Most people will be amazed to find that Japanese literature has a whole history and cultural rundown behind this significant presence of cats in their literature.

From the world's first novel, *The Tale of Genji*, from the eleventh century to the contemporary famous novel *Days at Morisaki Bookshop*, cats have always been a significant element of Japanese literature. Japanese writers use the motif of cats for different rhetoric purposes, often putting them at the centre of the story. Sometimes the stories are told from a cat's perspective. In *I am a Cat*, for example, Natsume Soseki sheds light upon life in the Meiji period through social commentary by a cat.

In many Japanese stories, cats are presented as guides or companions to human characters. In these stories, the cats often help the human characters with loneliness or emotional fulfilment. *The Travelling Cat Chronicles* by Hiro Arikawa tells the story of Nana, a young and spirited cat, and his gentle human companion,



ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

Satoru, as they journey together on a mysterious road trip across Japan and discover the true meaning of love, courage, and everything in between.

The cats help the human characters confront difficult truths about life, death, and human nature. Although these lessons may be delivered in a comical manner, they are poignant. In *The Cat Who Saved Books* by Sosuke Natsukawa, readers are introduced to Rintaro Natsuki, a young man struggling with loneliness and grief. After his grandfather passes away and the family's beloved second-hand bookshop

is set to close, Rintaro's world is turned upside down by the arrival of a talking tabby cat named Tiger. With a sharp tongue and plenty of attitude, Tiger gives Rintaro an unusual mission: to save books from being lost forever. As they set off on a series of magical and heartwarming adventures, Tiger acts as both a guide and a mentor, helping Rintaro find his way out of grief and loneliness.

In the works of Haruki Murakami, one of Japan's most celebrated authors, cats take on a different kind of role. Rather than being just moral guides, these mysterious

felines appear as recurring characters in novels like *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, *Kafka on the Shore*, and *A Wild Sheep Chase*. In Murakami's world, cats aren't simply companions to humans; they serve as catalysts that launch his characters into strange and often surreal adventures. These enigmatic cats add to the magical and mysterious atmosphere that is a hallmark of Murakami's storytelling.

The symbolism of cats in Japanese literature is deeply rooted in their culture. In Japan, cats are considered to be a symbol of good luck and fortune. Most of these portrayals of cats are drawn from the familiar, comforting presence of house cats. Japanese legends also show the impact of cats on human life.

From the very beginning, cats, with their quirky and mysterious nature, have been enduring characters in Japanese literature. Combine that with the deep affection the Japanese have for these animals, and it's easy to see why cats are such compelling figures. They make fascinating characters and serve as excellent companions and wise guides in the stories that explore life's many adventures.

Adrin Sarwar is a writer, a student of Printing and Publications and an illustrator. You can reach her at adrinsarwar@gmail.com

The relationship between consumerism and the climate crisis: Explained

PUNOMI RAHMAN TITIR

Growing up, I was often reminded not to waste food or discard things that could still be of use. At the time, these lessons seemed simple acts of gratitude passed down through generations. I never questioned them further. Little did I know, the world around me was moving in the opposite direction, encouraging the endless pursuit of more: more food, more clothes, more gadgets — most of which we do not *need*.

Over the past few decades, the world has undergone an upsurge in production and consumption rates. Consumer-driven systems have staggered unprecedented growth and transformed global economies, driven by industrial development and an insatiable appetite for goods and services. However, our desire for convenience and abundance remains in direct conflict with the planet's call for stability.

Modern consumerism thrives on an endless cycle of production, consumption, and disposal. The average person now encounters between 6,000 to 10,000 advertisements every single day, constantly nudging them towards the next purchase. With more than 1.7 billion people of the global population set to join the 'consumer class', the drive to acquire goods beyond basic necessities continues to grow.

To compete against relentless consumer demands, industries exploit natural resources at unsustainable rates, depleting forests, water reserves, and fossil fuels. The cycle exacerbates the waste crisis with non-biodegradable materials filling up landfills and polluting natural habitats. This, in turn, not only affects the environment but also disrupts the Earth's functional integrity.

Human activities are pushing the planet's natural systems beyond safe and sustainable limits. These limits, known as Earth-system boundaries (ESBs), are at critical thresholds that ensure the stability of the planet's life-support systems. In other words, they define a safe operating space for humanity that cannot be exceeded if rapid and catastrophic environmental change is to be avoided.

Alarmingly, seven of these eight planetary boundaries, including those related to climate, biodiversity, and freshwater use, have already been



ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

breached. According to statistics, the top 10 percent of global consumers are responsible for 31–67 percent of planetary boundary transgressions, with the top 20 percent accounting between 51–91 percent, spanning both developed and developing countries.

Recognising the outsized role of the world's wealthiest consumers in exceeding these limits, researchers have proposed six scenarios aimed at reducing environmental impact. One approach suggests that top percentage of global consumers align their consumption levels with those of the same percentile of the total global population. Another strategy emphasises improving efficiency by adopting the most environmentally friendly consumption practices already observed within their

group. A more comprehensive approach combines both strategies, urging affluent consumers to reduce overall consumption and promote sustainable consumption patterns.

These findings support the idea of a 'safe and just corridor' — a balance between environmental sustainability and social fairness. A safe system ensures the Earth remains stable, while a just system ensures resources are shared equitably, meeting essential needs like food, water, and energy. The corridor's upper limit is defined by the need to prevent ecological collapse, while its foundation ensures that no one is deprived of basic necessities.

However, simply staying within these boundaries is not enough, resources must also be fairly distributed to prevent

inequality and environmental harm. Achieving this requires procedural and substantive justice, ensuring fair decision-making and equitable access to sustainable opportunities.

A recent study by the Earth Commission estimates the resource access needs for the global population to thrive, along with their potential impacts on Earth's systems. Unfortunately, the results suggest that even if everyone in the world lives with only the bare minimum of resources required, the safe and just climate boundaries are likely to be overshot by 2050 without radical changes in energy and food systems.

This, in turn, heightens the likelihood of disease outbreaks, natural disasters, and even conflicts over scarce resources. Vulnerable populations in low-income regions bear the brunt of climate injustice, despite contributing the least to the climate crisis. Therefore, due to a profound imbalance in responsibility and exposure, the actions of leading nations and individuals disproportionately drive the degradation of shared natural systems.

To achieve a fair and sustainable future, transformative changes will be required in how societies function. Industries must shift towards renewable production methods, prioritising efficiency and reducing waste. Governments need to implement taxation on excessive consumption, regulate harmful practices, and ensure fair distribution of resources. Cities and businesses, as significant contributors to environmental impacts, can adopt science-based targets to reduce emissions and foster innovations that minimise their ecological footprints.

The path forward requires global cooperation and a shared commitment to protecting both the planet and its people. The evidence is clear: unless we address the unsustainable patterns of consumerism and resource exploitation, the planet's ability to support life will continue to decline. By redefining progress to prioritise sustainability and equity, we can build a future where humanity and the Earth's systems thrive together.

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Why studying abroad is becoming harder for Bangladeshi students

"I believe the Canadian government will become stricter on the GPA requirements or the type of major you have before granting a PGWP in the future. This will negatively impact the chances of getting permanent residence (PR) in Canada for international students like me who want to settle here after graduation."

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

Over the past decade or so, there has been a rather noticeable rise in the number of Bangladeshi students pursuing their undergraduate degrees abroad. Destinations like the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and Germany, have been particular favourites amongst those wanting to begin their higher education journey in a foreign country. In recent times, however, these countries have been adopting policies and undergoing changes that are making it harder for Bangladeshi students to go abroad.

CANADA

Canada has been attempting to reduce international student intake for the past two years. In response to the housing and healthcare crises in Canada, where many residents are unable to find affordable housing and health services, Canada mapped out the 2025 to 2027 Immigration Levels Plan to bring down the number of international students making their way into Canada, based upon the belief that the pressure of accommodating international students has resulted in the country's current infrastructural issues.

At the beginning of 2024, the Canadian administration implemented changes that sought to reduce the number of international study permits by 35 percent. A few months ago, the administration announced it would introduce a further 10 percent reduction in the study permits issued in 2025 and 2026. Needless to say, the ramifications of these decisions have been widely felt.

Orchid Benedict Gomes, a first-year undergraduate student pursuing a Bachelor's in Mechanical Engineering at Toronto Metropolitan University, is one of the countless students affected.

"I had to apply multiple times before I got the acceptance for the study permit, and once I received it, it wasn't offered for the full length – four years – of the course. The permit was offered to me for two years, after which I must apply for an extension. This is a problem because many students fail to receive this extension and are sent back to their countries," Orchid explains.

Anindya Chowdhury, managing partner and CEO of Mentors'

Study Abroad, points out, "2024 was a bad year for Bangladeshi students looking to pursue higher studies abroad. Even for students who had the necessary financial documents and who received scholarships, there were study permit rejections. I think we saw a 40 percent decrease in the number of permits granted."

Besides, Canada also raised the average living costs that international students have to show on their study permit papers from CAD 10,000 to CAD 20,635, a step that has made Canada a significantly more unreachable destination for many study abroad aspirants.

However, students say that the current living costs are usually less than the number they are asked to show, as most international students don't opt for student residences. Instead, they rent apartments with other students or reside with their extended families living there. This is a substantial financial burden and it becomes difficult for many to show the required funds along with the tuitions for the first semester.

International students have always been a strong source of income for Canadian universities, with most international students paying tuition fees six times the value of the tuition fees paid by Canadian citizens. There is speculation that higher education institutions in Canada will be raising their international tuition fees to counteract their losses from the reduced international student intakes, making it harder for many Bangladeshi students to be able to pay for a Canadian degree. Moreover, Canadian universities are notorious for their near-abysmal scholarship opportunities at the undergraduate level, so students can receive no reprise from that end either.

Moreover, in the past two years, restrictions have been placed on work permits for spouses of international students.

However, now there is also talk of post-graduation work permits (PGWPs) becoming more difficult for students themselves. Orchid expresses his concern in this regard, "I believe the Canadian government will become stricter on the GPA requirements or the type of major you have before granting a PGWP in the future. This will negatively impact the chances of getting permanent residence (PR) in Canada for international students like me who want to settle here after graduation."

On the future of Bangladeshi students in Canada, Anindya says, "Since the beginning of 2025, we have seen a rise in the proportion of study permit acceptances to Canada. However, that could be because fewer students have been applying to Canada to begin with, put off by the fear of harsh permit policies."

AUSTRALIA

Australia has been attempting to follow in the same vein. While there was some talk about the Australian government introducing a cap on the number of incoming international students from 2025, the bill was ultimately not passed but the authorities came back with a new visa processing structure in place of the cap. The new structure might, in turn, result in visa processing delays, with many students having to defer their enrolment.

What Australia may not have been able to do in the form of caps, it has done through a range of other measures already. Aranya Rishi Chowdhury, a high school graduate who had been hoping to apply to Australian universities this year, explains the reasons behind his determent, "Even though Australia was one of my top choices for pursuing my undergraduate degree, I was put off by the lacklustre scholarship opportunities available. With most meritorious students receiving a maximum of 40 percent scholarship, I simply couldn't afford Australia. I would have to work part-time jobs just to be able to pay off tuition and miss out on all other aspects of my university life."

Not only has the Australian government raised the minimum IELTS score requirement for a student visa from 5.5 to 6, they doubled the student visa application fee from AUD 710 to AUD 1,600 and increased the proof of savings from AUD 24,505 to



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

AUD 29,710 in 2024. This, coupled with the post-pandemic reductions in scholarship opportunities, is certainly discouraging for Bangladeshi students, many of whom can't afford the nearly ostentatious costs of attendance at Australian universities without multiple part-time jobs.

Australia's relatively new Genuine Student Test, as part of their visa interview process, has also been a step the country has taken to curb the number of fraudulent students entering the country just to work low-wage jobs. Quazi Fuad, an incoming freshman at the University of New South Wales, highlights the hurdles he faced with this addition, "I had to write my answers for the Genuine Student Test twice, because my answers weren't good enough, and my agent ultimately ended up having to help me with it."

Additionally, the increasing emphasis on practical, professional degrees and a move away from the humanities and social sciences in countries like Australia and the United Kingdom has meant that universities are subtly discouraging students from studying these subjects which can be a strong negative for students interested in the humanities.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

On the UK scene, Anindya comments, "The UK, as a study abroad destination, has become drastically less popular over the past two years because of the restrictions on spouse visas. For those hoping to take their close ones on a dependent visa, recent restrictions have certainly been a massive blow."

International student tuition fees in the UK start from around GBP 13,000 and the average cost would be around GBP 20,000, and students have to carry their living costs on top of that. Scholarship opportunities in the UK at an undergraduate level are almost non-existent, with most universities offering around GBP 3,000 to 7,000 at best, and full tuition or full-ride scholarships being limited to a handful of slots at top colleges with hyper-competitive ratios of acceptance. The rising costs of tuition at many of these universities are not going to be conducive to attracting more international students either.

Rahmin*, a 12th-grade student hoping to go abroad for her studies this fall, says, "I wanted to go to the UK because their focus on a purely academic education really appeals to me. However, even with very good grades, I don't believe I would have been able to secure the few scholarships that are available in the UK. They are simply too competitive and,

unlike the US, there are no need-based scholarships available

for international students. My parents would have had to sell off whatever meagre lands they own in their village to be able to even put me through just one year of studies in the UK, particularly with the rising cost of attendance for degrees in the biomedical fields."

THE UNITED STATES

Despite its seemingly attractive need-based scholarships, the US has not been particularly kind to Bangladeshi students either.

"While the number of student visa acceptances has increased, the ratio has decreased. I believe more than 70,000 Bangladeshi students applied last year but only around 14,000 visas were granted. Students are not being able to get visa appointment slots, with many getting dates in 2026," remarks Anindya.

Quazi Fuad, who was initially supposed to attend Arizona State University, says, "I tried to get a visa interview several times but failed. I finally gave up and chose to come to Australia."

It is no surprise that admissions to top American colleges are becoming exponentially more difficult by the day. Tauhid Islam Jami, an incoming freshman at Lafayette College, speaks at length about this, "The number of US applicants has increased drastically in the last few years, making it all the more competitive. Not just that, while the expected family contribution for an average aid-seeking applicant in the past might have been around USD 15,000, it has now risen to USD 25,000. Institutions are not just looking for students who have better, more holistic, and more unique profiles; they are also looking for applicants who have more money."

Soumya Suwra Das, a 20-year-old applicant, brings up a different point. "President Trump's policies have been nothing short of lunacy so far and the US seems to be headed towards becoming a conservative and capitalistic swamp. This is making me uncertain about a future there and sceptical of my decision to apply."

GERMANY

Germany, once a rather popular study abroad option for students looking to get affordable, high-class education, is losing its appeal too. For Sajid Al Irfan Riaz, a first-year undergraduate student at the Islamic University of Technology, studying Mechanical Engineering in Germany was a childhood

dream. However, once he was nearing the end of his high school years and started looking into Germany, he was hit by a terribly harsh reality check.

"The official waiting period for German student visas is officially 25 months, give or take three or four months. This has been rising over the past few years. I could not afford to sit around for that long to start my bachelor's. Albeit, for scholarship receivers, there is no waiting period," says Sajid.

Md Emon Shaikh is a student pursuing a Combined Bachelor's in Engineering and Management at Hochschule Merseburg and Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. He says, "As a bachelor's applicant, I had to apply for an appointment at the German embassy after completing my first year of undergraduate studies. This is because Germany requires Bangladeshi students to have 13 years of education. However, I had to wait for a long time and only received my appointment in my fourth year of university. Due to this delay, I had to arrange various documents proving my student status, including my second- and third-year results."

Moreover, the blocked account requirement – the amount that German authorities require international students to deposit in a special bank account for expenses in Germany per academic year – was also changed recently. In 2020, the blocked account amount needed to be EUR 10,236. This rose to EUR 11,904 in 2024 – a nearly 17 percent increase. Emon says, "As a student from a middle-class family, arranging the required funds was quite challenging for me. The amount – almost BDT 16 lakh – was a significant sum of money for us. However, I managed to arrange it by selling land and taking loans from the bank and relatives."

There is no denying that studying abroad is becoming difficult for Bangladeshi students and their fates rest almost ubiquitously out of their hands. Students have to consider a variety of factors – escalating costs, increasing competition, limitations on student visas – before making a decision on where to apply. Looking into alternative options such as making the most of the educational opportunities within the country or finding affordable degrees in countries without these issues might be a good idea, particularly given the rising uncertainties surrounding the opportunities in countries that were once most favoured by Bangladeshi students.

*Names have been changed upon request.



Frieren: Beyond Journey's End is a timeless masterpiece about the passage of time

Here's a question for you: what happens after a journey is over? What does the world look like after the dreaded Demon King is defeated by the group of heroes? The story, supposedly, ends here. But the world keeps moving on and time, in all its wonderful beauty and cruelty, moves ever forward. This is where the story of *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* picks up. After a 10-year-long adventure resulting in the defeat of the Demon King, the group of heroes – consisting of two humans, one dwarf, and Frieren, our titular elf – return to the capital city. Celebrations ensue, and they bear witness to a meteor shower that appears once every 50 years. Here, Frieren – who does not age – tells the crew she will take them to a special spot the next time the meteor showers happen.

RAIAN ABEDIN

What she fails to realise, and really what the underlying message of the show, is that the passage of time can so often be very cruel. In 50 years, her companions will no longer have the life they currently do. But for Frieren, 50 years pass by simply as she meanders around. She remains unchanged because time means nothing to her. But her companions, now, are old and on their final breaths. This is neither the end nor the middle point of the story; it is a prologue. The rest of the story plays out in a manner filled with whimsy yet profound beauty, all the while never letting go of its most crucial element: the passage of time.

The world of *Frieren* is one of the most lush and detailed fantasy worlds I have seen in recent memory. Fantasy as a genre,

especially in anime, has seen a nosedive in quality with the rise of the isekai subgenre. Some have even taken this to mean that fantasy as a genre no longer has any appeal. This is categorically false as *Frieren* proves that a world built with care and attention and characters written to be imperfect yet beautifully humane will always see positive reception. The story of *Frieren* is as much a tale of the world itself as it is of our titular elf. And, in both regards, what they have been able to accomplish is nothing short of outstanding. The mythology and the history, along with the systems that either used to exist or have recently been put in place are all crafted with much care and attention, leading to the world of *Frieren* having a warm sensation to it, almost as if it really was lived in.

Of course, a solid narrative and

beautifully written characters aren't the only things that make this show work. From the music to the animation to the voice acting, everything in *Frieren* is crafted extremely carefully to communicate a feeling of adventure. Yet, not one of those adventures really has any urgency to it. The characters meander from one town to another, helping where they can, and occasionally running into trouble whenever they can't help it. And, through it all, we see them as people, and we see them live their lives. Life and the act of living are not things that have a great sense of urgency. The passage of time can be cruel, but there is so much beauty in the little moments shared with each other as you live. *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* encapsulates and explores this very idea – and it does so masterfully.

If you like Frieren, you should also check out

Delicious in Dungeon

Instead of a sprawling adventure filled with heartfelt emotions, *Delicious in Dungeon* has cooking. The entirety of the show revolves around our quirky crew meandering through a terrifying dungeon, felling monsters and finding new ways to make delicious meals out of their meat. The results are, to say the least, scrumptious.

To Your Eternity

Both *Frieren* and *To Your Eternity* follow characters who are mostly unmindful of the world around them. *To Your Eternity*, however, takes it a step further. Our protagonist starts off as an egg that takes the shape of whatever dying creature it encounters. The journey is, at times, confusing – but what it offers is a deep look into the nature of life and death and the things that give us identity in the time we spend alive.

Kino's Journey

There are a lot of similarities to be found between Kino and *Frieren*. It can be a very strange watch – but the subtlety present in the character writing throughout the series makes for a wonderful time with plenty of depth and adventure to be found.

Let me cut out your mother's tongue

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

Let me cut out your mother's **tongue**
and lay it down beside you
like my mother did with mine,
putting me in an English school, as is the custom of those who
spent their youths running after trains and *kulfi-walas* in the
scorching sun and their nows chasing the sweat that never
seems to bid goodbye.
Maybe you will know then what it feels like
to stand in the kitchen that smells of fenugreek and cumin but
not being able to point that out to your father
who wants little more than to just hear a kind word from the
daughter who he thought would make him proud;
But you blame him too
for not giving you the words to tell him you are not his
daughter, you can never be his daughter
and you left kindness behind somewhere in the yellowed
pages and **smudged** ink of the book you call your own.
I have wanted to be let out into the afternoon traffic
but everyone wants to communicate with their god in a
language they neither speak nor understand and I am not able
to **trespass** those boundaries
to read *Agnibina* without cutting my jaw open on the pebbles
on the road.
I have to wait patiently, my feet tapping against the raw
cement on my grandfather's roof, to be
let in through words that neither the poet
nor my grandfather
would ever have approved of,
Because the feelings baked between those *benjonbornos* are
not mine yet,
and I am afraid they will cease to exist before they ever let me
call them mine.
You might have noticed that I write my mother's tongue in
italics
and my coloniser's in
bold

because my brain is made of hardened clay, the soft plasticine
long kneaded into something more brittle
than I would like to admit and I can't hold onto the harsh edges
of *nishthur* or the rounded simplicity of *omanobik*.
But please believe me when I say that I really wish I could and
not just so I can stop formulating my name in **foreign** syllables
but so I can put out the fire that has been burning between
myself and I for so long that all that remains of the char is a soft
roughness and the
sickeningly sweet aftertaste of my
Mother's tongue.

Zaima is barely a student these days. Send them your condolences
at zaima2004adrita@gmail.com

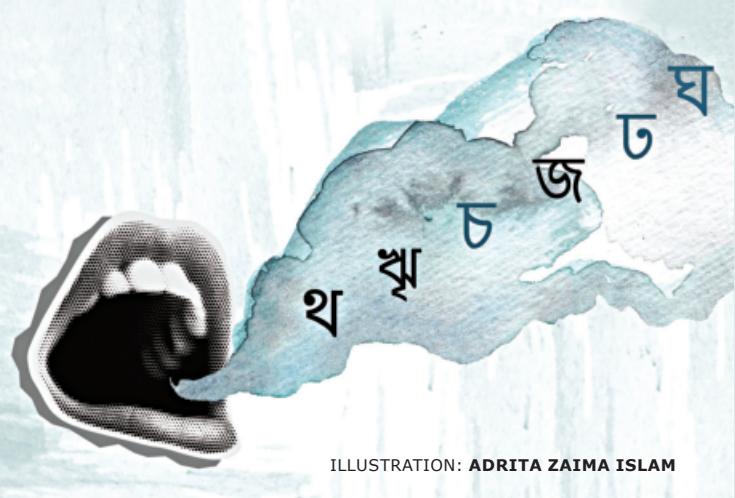


ILLUSTRATION: ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

TANGERINES and MARMALADES

SILWAT QUADER

I remember the sweet smell of tangerines that concentrated the already damp summer air of your dining room, dawdling in my memory – a not-so-distant memory but a memory still. I see the laced tablecloth decorated with embroidered patterns of little yellow flowers. Did you stitch it yourself? I can't remember. And the jars of marmalades kept sunbathing on the windowsill. I despised its smell. The little space that used to be mostly occupied with bright orange jars on the windowsill was my favourite spot in the whole house. From there I could see my beloved swing set under the Bougainvillea tree – always in full bloom – littered with a furious magenta.

I stared at the row of pre-peeled and packaged tangerines sealed tightly under plastic wrap. The soft buzz of the fluorescent light suddenly felt unbearable; too bright and too loud. I felt my stomach turn with a tragic mix of nostalgia and disgust. How do they always manage to take away the good things? Trapped in a mild fury I made my way towards the metro station with an empty grocery bag, unable to recall my grocery list.

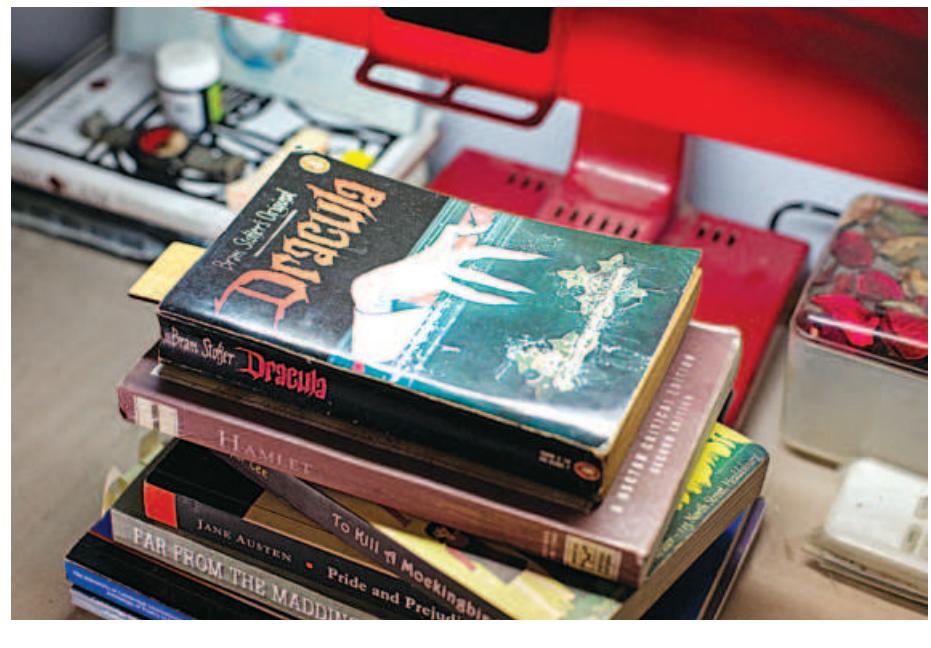
It was a warm sunny day, the sort that fills one with hope. The soft sunshine lit the canopied walkway with specks of golden rays peeking through the leaves. I waited for my cherished walks to the grocery store particularly because of this arched canopy that shaded almost five hundred metres from the station to the store, where fallen flowers and twigs welcomed the pedestrians. Five hundred metres of tranquil. It reminded me of wanting to live a slow, quiet life when I was younger. Somewhere I could hear the quiet afternoon rustle of leaves and the waking song of the birds. All these are better off as theories, and foregone longing that sprouts in silent instances

and moments.

By the time I reached the station, it was well absorbed into the rush hour. Faces reflected rectangular white lights and weary lines from the day's fatigue and a yearning to go home. I stood with my empty grocery bag carefully clutching it over my shoulder with the grocery list safely tucked inside, feeling a little embarrassed of my untamed emotions. Even after all these years, I am still unable to contain them, like the little girl who would spend the day lying on the white-varnished swing provoked by the smell of freshly made marmalade. The little sky above the swing that peered through the magenta was always a shade of cyan. But I will forgive myself for my tardiness this time, I have been unkind to myself for too long.

I do not recall the last time I was home. Or maybe I do not want to remember. It was not an experience to be treasured but rather to be buried deep. It was the kind that needed time to erase the remains. Although I remember the fleeting moments of laughter and tangerines – of course, the sweet tangerines – I lie to myself whenever I say it is not a distant memory. In reality, it has been years, much longer than I can count. The doors of the train slid open, and I stepped inside. The cold air conditioning and the smell of sweat concentrated the air. Someone offered me their seat out of courtesy, not so much out of willingness. I gladly accepted and then watched the city blur in a palette of used colours – shades of grey, blue and pink and green. I closed my eyes. Ease of habit teleported me back in time to the warm scent of fruit and sun-dried pickles, where my little sky is always blue and the good things remain.

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Is A level Literature RIGHT FOR YOU?

TARANNUM KHONDKAR

Widely regarded as one of the more demanding humanities subjects, A level Literature in English carries a reputation for being time-consuming and intellectually challenging. Yet, it's a brilliant subject for those passionate about language and storytelling. However, integrating Literature into your overall A level experience without accounting for the other subjects that you've chosen to study and future career can lead to less than ideal situations.

One of the major reasons students shy away from the humanities subjects, particularly Literature, is the stigma attached to these subjects. There's a common misconception that Literature lacks relevance to many career paths, especially compared to the 'practical' subjects like Chemistry, Mathematics, or Accounting. But contrary to this belief, Literature can be an excellent choice for those hoping to enter a variety of professional fields, particularly those who aspire to have careers in Journalism, Law, or the Social Sciences. By challenging your critical thinking, honing creative problem-solving skills, and having you manage heavy workload, Literature strengthens core skills you'll undoubtedly need in your professional life. Additionally, as the subject demands extensive external reading, it enhances your ability to grasp abstract concepts and broadens your knowledge base.

One of the most appealing aspects of A level Literature is the unique freedom it offers — the freedom to choose what you want to study. Both the AS and A2 syllabi offer a diverse range of novels, plays, and poems from various time periods, genres, and cultures. This flexibility allows you to tailor your experience to your interests; whether you're drawn to the timeless plays of Shakespeare, the complexities of modern societies portrayed in *The Handmaid's Tale*, or the abstract notions of metaphysical poetry, you can shape your papers to meet your needs.

That said, the challenges of A level Literature should not be undermined. The difficulty of an already challenging subject like Literature is heightened by the lack of support available in Bangladesh. Coaching centres rarely offer classes for Literature, and even when they do, the tuition fees are often so high that you might reconsider studying the subject altogether. This stems from the



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

fact that Literature is notoriously difficult to self-study, as it requires you to broaden your way of thinking — something that I believe is best developed through external guidance. Coaching centres capitalise on this fact by raising their tuitions, knowing that students have limited options. However, even then, the support they provide is substandard.

But don't lose hope because the internet is filled to the brim with materials to help you grasp the content better. From in-depth analyses of books and poems to recommended readings that can enhance the quality of your answers, there are plenty of resources available online. But try not to depend wholly on the internet, because while it may seem like the perfect resource mine, it still doesn't replace a skilled teacher.

Be warned, however, A level Literature is difficult to pass, let alone excel in. It is heavily content-driven, requiring consistent effort and practice on a daily basis. So, unless you're ready and determined to put in an immense amount of hard work, Literature may not be the best subject choice for you.

That said, if you have a genuine passion for the subject and are willing to put in the necessary effort, Literature can be an incredibly enriching experience. It not only deepens your understanding of the world as a whole but also equips you with valuable skills that will serve you well in any career path you choose.

Tarannum Khondkar is a struggling student and a contributor at the Daily Star.