DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 13, 2025, *FALGUN 28, 1431 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

CAMPUS

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Ramadan away from home

Spending the month at university dorms

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

MOVIES

FLOW

A refreshing ode to life's naturality

SHAIKH SABIK KAMAL

In an industry dominated by established studios like DreamWorks and Pixar, *Flow*, a Latvian indie animation film rendered fully on Blender, took the world by storm with its wins for Best Animated Feature Film at the Golden Globe Awards and the Oscars. Running for 85 minutes, the movie conveys its soul message without a single dialogue.

Flow follows the tacit story of a stranded feline in a post-apocalyptic world with no humans inhabiting it. In fact, there is another apocalypse taking effect in the film as it ventures into the nameless black cat's efforts at survival and taking things as they come with its other animal companions.

Flow adopts an unconventional approach to storytelling, allowing viewers to make an effort to connect the dots and find their own interpretations while leaving the main message clear as day. To some viewers, this freedom of interpretation might come off as a hassle. For most, however, it is what allows the film and its characters to feel personal and integral.

The representation of cruelty and the importance of kindness are subtle yet lingering throughout the film. The turns and twists feel natural, and even without the presence of any human characters , *Flow* manages to draw stark parallels to our world.

The film plays around with the largeness of its characters, in both physicality and personality. It draws comparisons through each interaction and ultimately presents a sense of meaning to the smallness of life in the face of a large world. The first and last scenes of the movie seamlessly tie together every analogy, leaving viewers with a profound sense of completion.

The animation industry, currently striving towards photorealism, may not appreciate the simplicity that the animation of *Flow* provides. Nonetheless, the film triumphs over such criticisms with its imaginative artistic expression full of rich colours and breathtaking scenery. The natural continuity of life is at the core of its premise. The characters' absence of lust for control and power, as opposed to human behaviour, is what makes the message even more consequential.

Flow has established itself as more than just a movie. It is a thought-provoking experience which is sure to leave your vulnerable sentiments in a chokehold.

Shaikh Sabik Kamal loves black cats. Mail him a black cat at wolvesandwaffles77@gmail.com

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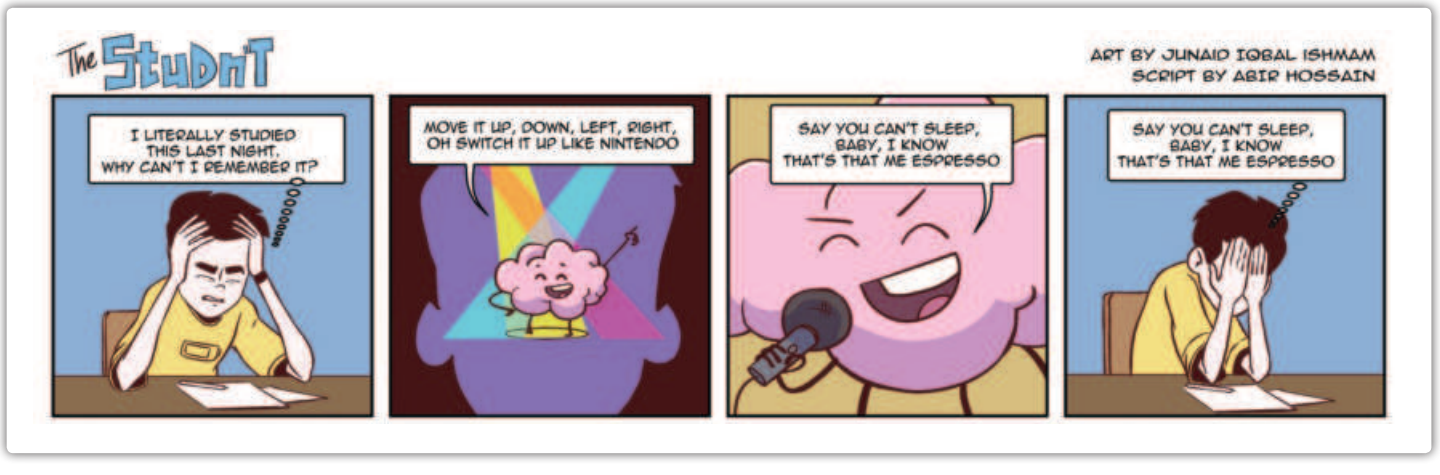


OPPORTUNITIES

Ollyo – Artist/ Designer

ELIGIBILITY

Strong portfolio showcasing your design or artistic skills.

Proficiency in design tools and software. Excellent communication and teamwork skills.

Enthusiasm and proven skills in design and artistry matter more than formal educational background.

Preferably, pursuing a degree in Marketing, Business, Operations, Economics, Data Analytics,Communications, or a related field.

Visit jobs.ollyo.com/opening/17/artist-designer to learn more

DEADLINE: NOT MENTIONED

ADA – Operations Intern

ELIGIBILITY

Strong communication skills (both written and verbal). Proficient in Microsoft Office (Excel, PowerPoint, Word).

Master's degree or equivalent in Social Sciences or any other relevant discipline.

Visit adaglobal.darwinbox.com/ms/candidate/careers to learn more

DEADLINE: NOT MENTIONED

UNDP – Project Analyst

ELIGIBILITY

Demonstrated ability to prepare concept note, training module, guideline, policy paper, etc. both in English and Bangla.

Visit estm.fa.em2.oraclecloud.com/hcmUI/CandidateExperience to learn more

DEADLINE: MARCH 19, 2025

DESIGN: **SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM**

SATIRE

Increased age limit allows candidates to complete PhD before sitting for BCS exams

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

"The moment I heard the news of the age limit extension for the BCS exam, I called my father from the US to let him know that I could still fulfil his dream," said Shadman Sakib, an engineering student currently pursuing his PhD at MIT, "That was the first time my father spoke to me in four years! I'd like to thank the Ministry for giving letdowns like us another opportunity to make our parents proud."

The Ministry of Public Administration recently increased the age limit for BCS exams to 32 years, thus encouraging an even older group of people to use their brain cells for memorising irrelevant information.

"As a PhD student here at MIT, I'm the biggest failure of my family," explained Shadman, "All of my siblings have either cracked the BCS exam or spent their 20s trying to crack it. But when I told my father about my dreams of pursuing a PhD rather than preparing for BCS, the first thing he asked was, '*Will you be able to come back and sit for the BCS preliminary in time?*'"

"My family members and relatives from all around the country came to counsel me and talk some sense into me," continued Shadman, "My father disowned me because he was too ashamed to tell people that his son wasn't preparing for BCS. Even when I was packing for my flight, my mother tried to sneak in a few guidebooks for BCS, hoping that I'd prepare for BCS while working on my research—potentially solving global warming."

Shadman's father was willing to accept his son back after he completed his PhD and enrolled in a BCS coaching centre. "During his university entrance exams, I pushed him to get into the best engineering university in the country," said Shadman's father, "But never in my wildest nightmares had I imagined that my own son would want to do something as shameless as pursuing a career in his university major! My family has had graduates from medical colleges and engineering universities. Even the unambitious and clueless ones made it to BBA. But no one dared pursue further studies in their majors. In our family, BCS is like the gutter where dreams from all branches of education come to suffocate and die."

Mr Baharul Pasha, the branch manager of the Roshunbhora Branch of BCS Purists, explained how increasing the age limit for BCS is an effective way of implementing reverse brain drain. "Postgraduate students from MIT, Harvard, and Ivy League universities are already coming back to the country as life has given them a second chance to apply for the BCS exams. This has brought thousands of underpaid researchers back to the path they were born to pursue—BCS."

Reach Ifti's spam mails at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com

NOT SATIRE

REQUIREMENTS TO SIT FOR THE BCS

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION

To be eligible to apply for the BCS exam, a candidate must have at least a bachelor's degree. After completing higher secondary school, a candidate can apply for the BCS exam even if they have completed a 4-year honours course.

If a candidate receives second class or equivalent in any two of the exams from SSC to bachelor's level, and a third class or equivalent in one exam, that candidate will not be eligible to sit for the BCS exam.

AGE

If a candidate's age is less than 21 years or more than 32 years on the first of the month in which the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC) publishes the BCS advertisement, the candidate will not be eligible to participate in the BCS exam.

HEALTH

Candidates who pass the written and oral exams are required to undergo a medical test. During the medical test, the candidate's height, weight, and chest measurement are taken, vision is tested, and a urine test is conducted.

HEIGHT, WEIGHT, AND CHEST MEASUREMENT

Male applicants must be at least 5 feet tall, weigh a minimum of 49.99 kilograms. However, police and ansar cadres must be at least 5 feet 4 inches tall and weigh a minimum of 54.54 kilograms. Female applicants must be at least 4 feet 10 inches tall and weigh a minimum of 43.54 kilograms. Police and ansar cadres must be at least 5 feet tall and weigh a minimum of 45.45 kilograms.

PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

CAMPUS LIFE

RAMADAN AWAY FROM HOME

Adjusting to rigid schedules, poor quality of food, and a plethora of other issues can be difficult, but the experience can be enchanting in other ways.

"I've generally had a good experience spending Ramadan in dorms. However, there were some challenges, such as having sehri very early due to fixed schedules. It felt as though I couldn't fully absorb the spiritual aspects due to the dorm environment."

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

As a freshman, the realisation that I was going to have to spend the very first day of Ramadan at my university dormitory was nothing short of crushing. Between phone calls from home telling me that my absence was deeply felt and not having the chance to busy myself with iftar preparations – the entire ordeal weighed heavy. In retrospect, the iftar items that my hostel provided were quite delicious, but my homesickness hindered my ability to enjoy them. Despite an apprehensive beginning, I'd spent another two Ramadans at my university. I am currently spending another.

Homesickness has always been associated with Ramadans spent at dorms. Even though I am able to return home on the weekends, this is a privilege many students, including my peers who aren't residents of Dhaka, cannot afford until classes have wrapped up. The difficulties of spending Ramadan aren't simply limited to homesickness. There are a bunch of challenges students must navigate as they balance their studies with worship and fasting. Rigid schedules for classes and exams don't exactly help the situation. In the month of abstinence and devotion, it's quite important for dormitories to ensure an environment conducive to religious practices. According to Rabiul Hasan, a student at Dhaka University (DU) and a resident of Sir AF Rahman Hall, the hostel environment falls short in this regard.

He shares, "I've generally had a good experience spending Ramadan in dorms. However, there were some challenges, such as having sehri very early due to fixed schedules. It felt as though I couldn't fully absorb the spiritual aspects due to the dorm environment."

"The communal atmosphere and shared experience can be motivating, but rigid schedules and limited facilities can often be disruptive. At home, I have more flexibility, which can help in terms of both studying and worship. It's also difficult to find quiet spaces for prayer and reflection. I feel that my experience can be improved if the dorm residents were more mindful about the noise level and considerate regarding schedules," he adds.

While the menu varies from household to household, some items such as dates, *jilapi*, *beguni*,*piyaju*, etc., are commonplace. Moreover, dorms around the country generally serve these items. While the health repercussions of having fried items during iftar can be debated, the main concern for students is the quality of the food itself. Not to mention, not all dorms are able to serve all their residents, which forces some students to resort to local hotels and restaurants. There's also the matter of other meals like sehri, as well as breakfast and lunch – for those who don't or are unable to fast – that often goes unaddressed.

Humayra Adiba, a student at Chittagong Medical College, shares that her dormitory has been able to facilitate quality food for students. "My experience spending Ramadan at the dorms was far better than I expected, although it was a little sad without my family. All my roommates and I had iftar together, and good food was available close to our dorms. My dorm provides regular iftar items like *beguni, piyaju, chola,* and *alur chop*, which are quite good. We are served rice and curries for sehri, but the quality is not satisfactory. The dormitory doesn't generally make enough for everyone, as some students buy food from outside or cook in their own dorm rooms. The dorm canteen doesn't provide breakfast and lunch for those not fasting either," she remarks.

She adds that despite having access to tools, it's not always feasible for students to cook for themselves. "We have classes and a lot of academic pressure to deal with so we're always rushing to have sehri and iftar. We also don't have enough time to cook proper food. I believe the dormitory should seek to ensure the quality of food is high as well as make sure there's enough for all its residents," she explains.

Not all dormitories are able to live up to this standard, however. Ahnaf Tahmid, a student of Rajshahi Medical College, shares that he's had some concerns about the food quality, "The quality of food in my dorm drops from time to time and we can't ever be too sure about the hygiene standards of restaurants and hostels either. We also don't always have the appetite to eat dorm food. On the flip side, we're often too tired to cook for ourselves. While we can't expect dorm food to go toe-to-toe with homemade meals, healthy food is the primary concern. I wouldn't want to fall sick during such a crucial time because of stale or old food. As long as that is ensured, most of us would be quite happy."

Overwhelming academic stress is another common issue that students must account for. Even though classes are marginally shortened during this month, regular academic activities cannot be condensed for multiple reasons.

Ahnaf Tahmid talks about the stress he's had to withstand as a fifth-year medical student: "Spending the majority of Ramadan in dorms is a norm as the classes keep going for at least 25 days. The healthcare field is demanding, especially in a divisional, state-owned hospital. We have classes from morning till noon and have to attend wards and clinical classes. Even though it's quite tough and borderline uncomfortable at times, I'd advocate for staying at the dorms for productivity."

Most dorms don't enforce a schedule, but academic course load basically forces students to adhere to a routine.

Safwan Sami, a student at the Islamic University of Technology (IUT), shares the various reasons why he's gotten accustomed to following a certain schedule during Ramadan. "In IUT, our schedules are mostly packed with exams as well as classes. Not to mention, if you don't show up on time, you might not get food during sehri. Cooking facilities are also very limited, and cannot accommodate all the residential students. But dorm life in IUT is comfortable, and spending time with friends is fun. I've found that following a strict schedule due to classes helps me be more productive. The surroundings also help me feel closer to my faith."

Ramadan is a religious and spiritual experience. Spending it together can bring people closer. The common consensus among residential students is that once they get over homesickness, the experience is usually quite pleasant. In fact, the difficulties only make their resolutions stronger. Most importantly, even if a student is struggling, the light at the end of the tunnel –an Eid with loved ones – awaits.

Zabin Tazrin Nashita is an engineering student at the Islamic University of Technology, a chronically online night owl, and a sufferer of many migraines. Find her at: zabintn@gmail.com

NOTICE BOARD

Consultation meeting held on Rx-RET project explores decarbonisation in Bangladesh's pharmaceutical industry

The School of Pharmacy, BRAC University, in collaboration with BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH), the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development (CED), and the BSRM School of Engineering, recently hosted a consultation meeting titled "Exploring Bangladesh's Green Transition: Decarbonization in the Pharmaceutical Industry" at BRAC University. The event brought together industry experts, policymakers, and researchers for an engaging discussion on the future of decarbonisation and renewable energy in Bangladesh's pharmaceutical sector.

Dr Raeed Jamiruddin, Principal Investigator and Associate Professor, opened the session with an overview of the project's objectives. Professor Atonu Rabbani shared findings on a previous energy transition project, while Dr Raeed and Amal Chowdhury presented the Rx-RET project, which explores carbon emission mitigation and the feasibility of renewable energy in pharmaceutical manufacturing.

A panel discussion, moderated by Professor Arshad Mahmud Chowdhury, Dean of the BSRM School of Engineering, brought together key industry stakeholders for an insightful exchange of ideas. The panel featured Professor Syed Ferhat Anwar, Vice

Chancellor, BRAC University; Shafiqul Alam, Energy Lead at IEEFA Bangladesh; Dr Md Akter Hossain, Director at the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA); Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed, Director of Innovation and Engineering at ME SOLshare Ltd.; Raden Siddique, Founder and Director of Future Carbon Ltd.; Engr Sharafat Ali, Executive Director at Incepta; and Faruq Ahmed Jewel, Component Lead for Smart Bangladesh under the EDGE Project at the ICT Division.

Dr Md Akter Hossain emphasised, "Decarbonisation efforts must align with regulatory changes and industrial growth to ensure a sustainable pharmaceutical sector in Bangladesh."

Professor Syed Ferhat Anwar highlighted, "A sustainable transition in pharmaceuticals must integrate energy-efficient production methods and renewable energy solutions to remain competitive globally."

The event highlighted Bangladesh's pharmaceutical sector's commitment to decarbonisation, aligning with global sustainability goals. Participants acknowledged the significance of clean energy adoption and emphasised collaborative action for a greener future.

SUB celebrates International Women's Day 2025 with an inspiring discussion on "Breaking Barriers: Women in Academia and Beyond"

The State University of Bangladesh (SUB) proudly observed International Women's Day 2025 on March 8, 2025, with an insightful discussion on "Breaking Barriers: Women in Academia and Beyond" at its permanent campus. The event served as a platform to recognise and celebrate the achievements of women while addressing the challenges they face in professional and academic spaces.

The programme was inaugurated with a welcome speech by Professor Dr Nawzia Yasmin, Pro-Vice Chancellor of SUB, who emphasised the importance of gender equality and women's leadership in higher education. The keynote speech was delivered by Dr Sharmin Parveen, Professor of Computer Science & Engineering, SUB, who shared valuable insights on overcoming obstacles in academia and beyond.

The event saw the participation of all female faculty members and officers, along with Senior Deputy Registrar Farhana Sharmin. It provided a meaningful opportunity for women at SUB to engage in discussions, share experiences, and exchange ideas on fostering an inclusive and empowering environment for future generations.

During the discussion, speakers highlighted the need for increased support for women in academic leadership, the importance of mentorship, and the role of institutions in ensuring

equal opportunities for women. The event also reinforced SUB's commitment to creating a culture of empowerment and inclusivity within the university. International Women's Day serves as a reminder of the progress made and the work that still needs to be done to achieve gender equality. SUB remains dedicated to supporting and uplifting women in academia, ensuring a more equitable future for all.

Notre Dame College hosts 8th National Earth and Space Summit

The 8th National Earth and Space Summit (NESS), hosted by the Notre Dame Eco and Space Club, concluded successfully on February 22, 2025, after three days of events and enthusiastic participation from students across the nation. The event started on February 20 at Notre Dame College and drew approximately 2,000 participants and visitors from over 60 institutions, fostering a vibrant atmosphere of scientific exploration.

The summit, with Western Engineering as the title sponsor and Bata as the gold sponsor, provided a platform for students from primary to higher secondary levels to engage in a variety of competitions and activities. Events ranged from quizzes and debates to olympiads, covering diverse aspects of ecology, earth science, and astronomy.

One of the most anticipated sessions was the astrophotography talk by Zubuyer Kaolin, which attracted nearly 1,000 attendees. His insightful presentation and the accompanying photosphere exhibition offered a captivating glimpse into the cosmos.

Adding to the excitement, students from the Islamic University of Technology (IUT) unveiled their "Formula IUT" project – their formula student car – on campus. The MICB Scientific Society, the telescope partner, provided a unique opportunity for attendees to observe the sun through a solar telescope.

"The enthusiasm and participation we witnessed were truly remarkable," said Md Nazmul Hassan, moderator of the Notre Dame Eco and Space Club. "This summit stands as a testament to our mission of inspiring curiosity and scientific exploration among students."

Notre Dame College Principal Dr Fr Hemanto Pius Rozario emphasised the importance of nurturing young minds in STEM fields, stating, "Hosting this event has been a privilege. It is essential to nurture young minds in astronomy and ecology, as their passion and discoveries will shape the future of scientific progress."

The summit's success highlights its role as a catalyst for innovation, inspiring the next generation of scientists and engineers. With the support of sponsors like Savoy Ice Cream and Dot Internet, which provided complimentary refreshments and internet access, the event created a memorable and enriching experience for all participants. The 8th NESS has left a lasting impact, igniting a passion for science and exploration that will undoubtedly drive future endeavours.

OPINION

It is time to reevaluate the importance of recommendation letters in the admissions process

OHONA ANJUM

Universities abroad typically evaluate five main components of an undergraduate application: transcripts, test scores, personal essays, extracurricular activities, and letters of recommendation. Each of these elements is designed to provide admissions committees with a holistic view of the applicant's abilities, achievements, and potential. However, while transcripts and test scores primarily reflect academic capability, and essays or extracurriculars highlight personal qualities and interests, recommendation letters often serve a unique purpose.

Recommendation letters are not merely about the applicant's abilities or accomplishments, they shed light on the context in which these achievements were earned and the impressions they leave on mentors or educators. This raises an important question: should a university application, regardless of a stellar GPA or an impressive resume, depend significantly on the strength of one's recommendation letters, especially when these letters may be influenced by factors outside the applicant's control?

Interestingly, this is the one component of the application process that has less to do with how capable the student is directly and more to do with the recommender's perspective, network, and reputation. This nuance adds complexity to the weight assigned to recommendation letters in admissions decisions.

Jon Boeckenstedt, DePaul University's associate vice president for enrollment management and marketing, authored an essay published in The Washington Post in which he says, "[…] the letter has virtually nothing to do with the student's performance, and a lot to do with the teacher's ability to turn a phrase, note interesting character traits, structure a cogent series of paragraphs … In short, it's as much about the teacher as the student … It can also be about how much time a teacher has to complete the task, and the extent to which they see it as a function of their duties."

The ability to craft compelling letters of recommendation (LORs) often depends on the training and resources accessible to a teacher which are shaped by their institution's standing in terms of academics, reputation, and funding and the frequency with which such letters are requested.

As Boeckenstedt puts it, "Who is, on average, going to write the better, more complete, and more nuanced letter? A teacher from a small college prep school where it's widely understood that giving students every advantage in the college admissions process is a part of the job? Or someone in a large, public, under-resourced school where the range of abilities in each class is wider, and the number of students to get to know greater, and the teaching load is probably higher?"

Teachers at prestigious institutions or those with well-developed support systems are likely better equipped to write detailed and effective recommendations. On the other hand, some students, particularly those from underfunded schools or less privileged backgrounds, face challenges in this regard. In many cases, applicants are left to navigate the complexities of securing strong LORs on their own. Some teachers may lack the expertise and familiarity with the admissions process to craft a persuasive letter, resulting in a situation where the student has to write the letter themselves, with the teacher simply signing it.

While letters of recommendation are generally considered less significant than top factors such as grades in preparatory courses, overall grades, curriculum strength, and standardised test scores, they are still ranked higher in importance than factors like class rank, extracurricular activities, and work experience by many universities. This paradox underscores the critical but often unequal role LORs play in shaping admissions outcomes. Students with access to experienced recommenders who can articulate their strengths clearly and convincingly are at a significant advantage, further highlighting the disparities tied to demographic and institutional factors.

The university application processes promise a meritocratic procedure which ostensibly aims to replace hereditary privilege with a system where wealth and status are earned solely through talent and ambition. This ideal envisions a society united by the principles of hard work, skill, and deserved reward, where equal opportunities are accessible to all.

However, the reality of admissions processes reveals the cracks in this promise. Factors like the quality of recommendation letters, heavily influenced by a recommender's network, institutional reputation, and access to resources, disproportionately favour those already advantaged by their socioeconomic or geographic circumstances.

As universities aim to promote fairness in admissions, it is imperative to reevaluate how recommendation letters are used and interpreted. Without addressing the systemic biases tied to these letters, the ideal of meritocracy remains unfulfilled, reinforcing inequality under the guise of opportunity. By acknowledging and mitigating these biases, institutions can take meaningful steps toward creating a truly equitable admissions process that values potential and perseverance as much as it does prestige and privilege.

Reference:

The Washington Post (March 3, 2016). *Letters of recommendation: An unfair part of college admissions*

Ohona Anjum writes, rhymes, and studies English literature.

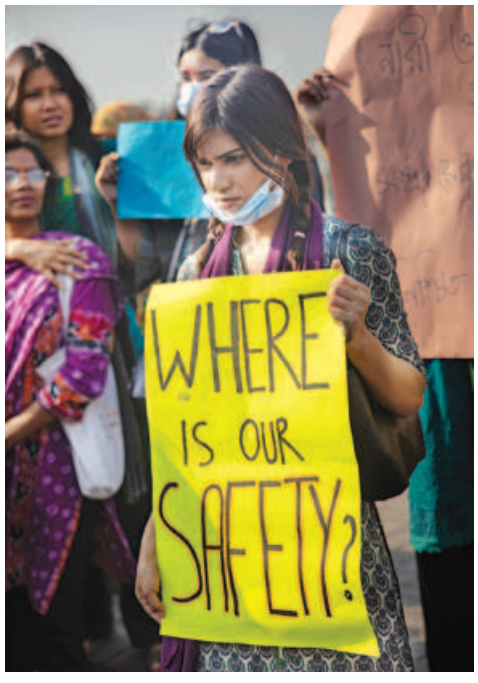
ILLUSTRATION: **ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM**

IN FRAME

WE'VE HAD ENOUGH

The youth erupts in protest over rape, gender-based violence

PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**



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