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■ TV SERIES ■

Severance is immensely ambitious to a fault

RAIAN ABEDIN

Imagine a complete removal of your work self from the version of you that exists off-the-clock. While a blessing to some, the concept itself presents many questions delving into the societal, ethical, and individualistic effects this surgical alienation from labour can have on people. These conundrums are the fertile grounds in which *Severance* plants its seed, and the results make for one of the most ambitious shows yet to be finished.

The show follows Mark, after spending a good few minutes crying in his car, entering his unnaturally bright workspace. Descending the elevator, his eyes reel back, as if he's undergoing a seizure, and he returns, not as himself, but as his 'innie' — the work version of Mark. Upon entering, he is informed of the abrupt dismissal of his best friend. No whys or hows are entertained from Mark, and he is promptly made to return to work.

The story that unfolds from here works on multiple levels. The show offers a unique perspective on corporations' involvement in alienating people from their work, masterfully delving into these 'innies' who are confined to exist only as workers and exploring their individual identities even within the walls of

their workplace. The end product is complex and interesting. The finale for season one, in particular, was one of the most riveting hours of television I have seen in recent memory. Season two of *Severance* opens with Mark hitting the ground running, reeling from the events of season one. To what end is Mark running, and what does he end up finding? *Severance* builds itself around questions like these. Answers are doled out in small, but adequate portions, keeping the audience



asking for more. This is also perhaps one big spot where *Severance* falters. From a technical perspective, the direction ranges from great to near perfection. The acting does not falter for a second. The storytelling, too, is ambitious, almost too ambitious at times, as it is clear in parts of season two that the show certainly has an endgame, but it struggles to fill the gaps on how to get there.

Severance feels like an inspired piece of work that dives into corporate culture and the many ways people try to continue living in the decaying dystopia that corporations tend to create.


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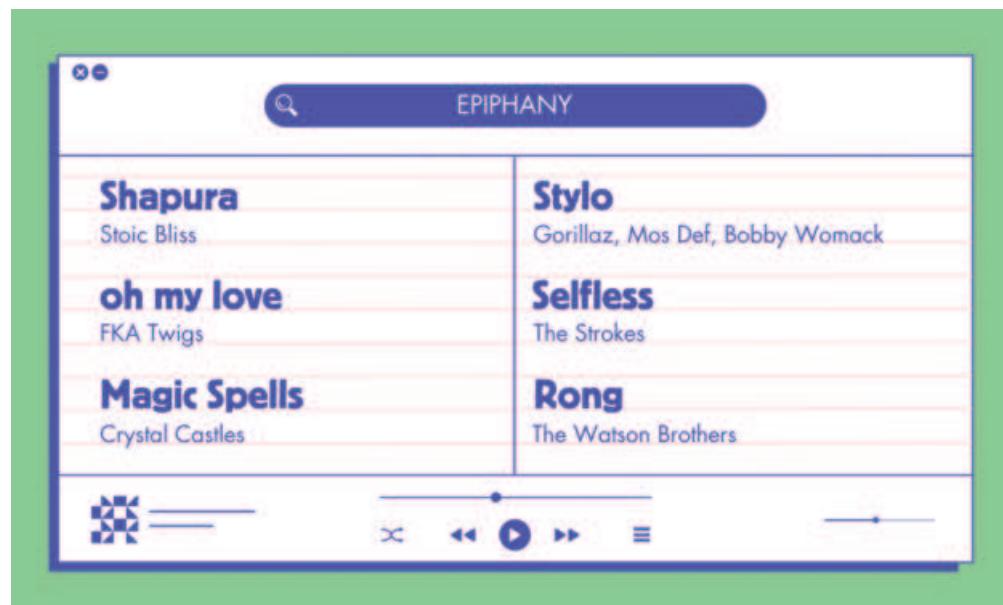
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ART BY JUNAID IQBAL ISHMAI
SCRIPT BY ABIR HOSSAIN

CAREER

Are you being exploited in your internship? HERE'S HOW YOU CAN TELL

ADRIN SARWAR

Internships are short-term work opportunities where students or young professionals – mostly recent graduates – can gain hands-on experience in a particular field. Be it paid or unpaid, on-site or remote, the primary objectives of internships remain the same – to develop skills, gain industry exposure, and open doors to future opportunities.

Interns expect to have access to opportunities, skill development, mentorship, networking, and even chances to explore different career paths. At the same time, employers seek fresh ideas, task support, and a chance to train potential hires when hiring interns. Basically, an internship serves as a valuable opportunity for both interns and employers.

However, while internships may appear mutually beneficial, they can often be exploitative where interns are overworked, underpaid, or deprived of meaningful learning experiences. Thus, for interns or those seeking internship opportunities, being aware of whether or not they are being exploited has become vital in this day and age. The signs of such

form of exploitation at the workplace are always

there; you just have to look out for them.

You are doing a full-time job on an intern's salary or, worse, for free

Even though your job description clearly mentioned the working hours and the number of days you'd get off, now that you have finally signed up for the job, the reality can be far different from what was mentioned earlier.

You often find yourself working overtime. You might be in a situation where nobody tells you when to stop. Even if the task can be done the next day, you are told that the task must be done immediately.

If this is a daily scene at your internship, chances are you are being taken advantage of.

No one is teaching you anything

Internships are meant to be learning experiences. There should be arrangements for you to learn new things, and they should be provided to you by your employer in the form of mentorship, training sessions, or at least meaningful guidance.

However, if you are constantly told to just get things done and have to figure most work or on-job related things out on your own, this is sort of exploitative. Even if they say that you have to learn while doing your daily tasks or you have to learn everything on your own, it comes off as exploitative.

Self-learning is important but it should be structured with guidance, not substituted entirely with work.

Your pay keeps getting delayed

If your internship is paid, timely compensation should be non-negotiable. You might see that full-time employees are

getting paid on time
but your pay
keeps getting
delayed for

one reason or another with varying excuses. If this keeps repeating, it's a strong indication that your employer does not respect your time or contribution.

Paid working opportunities – be it full-time or an internship – means getting paid on time, and repeated failure in this regard is not a good sign.

You are given responsibilities beyond your expertise with no support

Challenging tasks are great for growth. But if challenges mean you are given responsibilities beyond your expertise without any support, things can actually turn out bitter.

You might do your best to meet expectations, but without guidance, you're likely to struggle. And when the work doesn't turn out as expected, the blame falls on you rather than the lack of direction.

Your employer makes you feel replaceable

You are giving your best shot while overcoming all the odds, yet your employer can still make you feel replaceable. Instead of appreciating your work, they keep complaining about it, give vague or demotivating feedback, and make you feel like you're always on thin ice.

This isn't constructive criticism; it's a tactic to keep you insecure and compliant. And don't fall for the idea that this so-called 'criticism' is to get the best out of you. It's not. This is just your employer or supervisor making you feel bad about yourself so that they can take the opportunity to exploit you even more.

If one or more of these signs are visible right now or in the future, it might be time to rethink your internship. While internships can be valuable, they can also become exploitative if boundaries are not set. If you feel undervalued, overworked, or ignored, it's important to stand up for yourself.



ILLUSTRATION: JUNAID IQBAL ISHMAM

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CAMPUS LIFE

Shrouded by shame and eventually forgotten

Sexual harassment policies across universities in Bangladesh

AZRA HUMAYRA and ABIR HOSSAIN

Last year, Campus published a few articles on campus safety, gender-based violence, and sexual harassment on campus. This prompted us to study 20 cases of gender-based violence (GBV) on public university campuses between May 2023 and October 2024, uncovering deep-rooted systemic issues. The incidents, which included sexual harassment, assault, and discriminatory policies, predominantly impacted women and gender-diverse individuals.

While some perpetrators were held accountable,

institutional responses remained inconsistent and were often shaped by power dynamics. Many survivors chose not to report their experiences, deterred by stigma and a lack of trust in the system. The scenario is not all that different in private universities.

We spoke to a victim in the middle of last year, back when hope still poured out of her voice. She believed in the system then – felt that enough people cared, that the university's administration would do right by her. There was conviction in her words, a confidence that justice was within reach.

But she isn't convinced. To her, the delays are not about policy changes or bureaucratic red tape. They are about

something more familiar: a sheer lack of importance and neglect. A way of waiting just long enough for the issue to fade, for the voices to quiet, and for justice to be forgotten.

Another student from a renowned private university in Bangladesh echoed the sentiments of her fellow student from Dhaka University. In her case, it was a faculty member who conducted themselves inappropriately. "He had been my advisor back in the first semester. When I went to the campus for the first time to get my advising done, he put me in his class. Later on, during the semester, I had missed a class. When I went back to the next class, he asked me whether or not I wanted to visit his office during consultation hours so that he could help cover whatever I had missed. When I got there, however, he spent very little time teaching me anything and eventually began asking

Dr Ahmed pointed out flaws in the process of appointing faculty members. He says, "Strong academic results alone should not determine a candidate's suitability for a teaching position. Instead, it is equally important to assess whether the individual demonstrates integrity and ethical conduct."

me personal questions and making inappropriate remarks," she recalls.

Although she wanted to report what had happened to her, she did not do so because she felt like nothing would be done even if she took measures. "This isn't the first time something like this has happened. He has also made someone else I know very uncomfortable by saying crude things," she says. "I am certain he has done similar things to multiple students. Even if at least one of them reported their experience in the past, it's clear that adequate measures were not taken. So, it occurred to me that it wouldn't make a difference even if I reported my experience."

Speaking to Dr Saifuddin Ahmed, Proctor of Dhaka University, revealed several administrative shortcomings in ensuring campus safety. He says, "While policies addressing sexual harassment do exist, there are no regular training sessions to raise awareness among students or staff. Although there are broad guidelines, the university lacks a clear and enforceable service rule for its employees."

Dr Ahmed stressed the importance of making students aware of these policies and reporting systems if they are subjected to sexual harassment. He noted that efforts are underway to improve this.

He also highlighted various legal and procedural challenges. These include difficulties in collecting practical evidence, procedural delays, fear of social stigma, and concerns about academic harassment. Dr Ahmed underscored the importance of establishing a system that ensures the confidentiality of victims throughout the entire reporting and investigation process. He also mentioned plans to work with legal experts to develop checklists that would not derail the progress of cases, even if there is a

change in university administration.

Dr Ahmed further pointed out flaws in the process of appointing faculty members. He says, "Strong academic results alone should not determine a candidate's suitability for a teaching position. Instead, it is equally important to assess whether the individual demonstrates integrity and ethical conduct."

Following the interview with the proctor, one could not help but sense a troubling absence of urgency – or perhaps will – in addressing sexual harassment on campus. Policies, it appears, do exist in theory, and if earnestly applied, they might as well serve as deterrents. Yet it is precisely the "if" that lingers: the mechanisms of implementation remain elusive.

Musharrat Sharmee Hossain, a senior lecturer at the Department of English and Modern Languages in North South University (NSU) and a former assistant proctor who was also involved in formulating NSU's code of conduct explains, "There are multiple ways for students to reach out and report their experiences. Even then, incidents of sexual violence are not reported, which one could claim is a national problem. Victims tend to be reluctant to disclose their experiences, in which case a teacher (with whom they feel comfortable) might encourage or help them to do so."

"As there is an inclination to attach shame to the victims' experiences, people still harbour the belief that talking about whatever happened to them will pose issues in the future or even invite trouble from their parents," she adds.

While Musharrat Sharmee reinforced NSU's commitment to ensuring the safety of its students, she did mention that the code of conduct needs to be updated or revised, especially in terms of clauses pertaining to students' online safety. She also mentioned that she did not receive any mandatory training on preventing harassment.

In an interview with

Ekhon Television, Dr Upama Kabir, head of Dhaka University's Anti-Sexual Harassment Cell, says, "As the previous committee neither resolved past cases nor provided any conclusions or decisions, these cases remain pending. Once they are reassigned to us, we will conduct a re-verification and proceed with the necessary next steps."

It was a High Court directive issued 16 years ago that instructed universities to set up sexual harassment prevention committees. While it was an initiative worthy of praise, time has revealed that the order fell short in really tackling the issue. And that is because policymakers have failed to properly perceive and diagnose the roots of the problem: a culture that not only breeds dominance but relies on it to control and thwart the autonomy of women and gender-diverse individuals. As a result, it views incidents of harassment as isolated occurrences and not a result of the culture of dominance. Nonetheless, if individuals from these very demographics are not involved in formulating policies and their concerns are continued to be shunned out, then this vicious cycle will continue.

That is not to say that institutional policies are not needed. They are required to tackle the pressing issue that has been borne out of the gross negligence displayed towards the safety of women and gender-diverse individuals. Moreover, the most fundamental function of these institutions is to educate and enlighten young minds. They wield significant influence not only on the discourse surrounding issues of sexual violence but also in terms of informing people, raising awareness, and to various extents breaking the stigma that prevails. The culture of domination is pervasive. And as institutions that continue to function with it in the backdrop, they bear some responsibility in dismantling it.



NOTICE BOARD

BRAC University recognises 57 faculty members with 'Quality Journal Publication Award 2025'

BRAC University has continued to recognise researchers for a second year in a row, this time presenting 'Quality Journal Publication Award 2025' to 57 faculty members through a ceremony at its Merul Badda campus in Dhaka on April 24, for their high-impact research.

The faculty members published 145 research papers. Of them, 74 were published in journals ranked within the top 10 percent of Q1 journals in Scopus, while 71 in the top 15 percent. The Q1 journals are widely recognised for their significant impact on research.

The research of the awardees encompassed a myriad of contemporary issues, such as ease of doing business, mental health and emerging diseases, agriculture, food security, energy, climate, evolution of languages, and AI and blockchain in the ICT sector.

Research works initiated at BRAC University in recent years have garnered accolades and continue to be relevant to this day, be it in Bangladesh or beyond.

Studies on garment factories are shaping global trade, vaccine cold chains are being reimagined for food security, research on the Rohingya population has led to youth collaborations, and solutions to utilising elevated road infrastructures are proving invaluable to megacities.



"BRAC University stands apart in a unique way – our core foundation in education and research is centered on human development," Professor Syed Ferhat Anwar, Vice-Chancellor of BRAC University, said at the ceremony.

The Bangladesh government recognises the value of institutions like BRAC University, which tirelessly pursue research-driven innovation and the building of a

knowledge-based society, added Professor Dr Md Saidur Rahman, member of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, as chief guest.

Dr Firdausi Qadri, a senior scientist of the icddr,b, and Professor Mustafizur Rahman, a Distinguished Fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, also spoke on the occasion.

NSU CONTINUES TO BE RANKED AMONG THE LEADING UNIVERSITIES IN TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION ASIA RANKINGS 2025

In the latest edition of the Times Higher Education (THE) Asia University Rankings 2025, North South University (NSU) remains listed among the top universities. NSU has maintained its position among universities in the 351-400 ranking band.

The 2025 ranking includes 853 institutions from 35 different regions across Asia. This year marks the 13th edition of the Asia University Rankings and the third consecutive year NSU has been cited on this prestigious list.

Commenting on the achievement, Dr Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, Vice-Chancellor of NSU, expressed his appreciation for the continued support from the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission. He says, "This is another step forward for NSU as we maintain our momentum in the global academic landscape. Despite the changes that occurred both nationally and internationally since last year, we are dedicated to improving the calibre of research and education at NSU, and we are focused on building on our strengths while discovering new opportunities for growth and development."

NSU remains dedicated to offering world-class education, assiduously encouraging creativity, innovation, leadership, and teamwork.



Celebrating Sir Fazle Hasan Abed's life, legacy, and values on his 89th birthday

BRAC University celebrated the 89th birthday of its founder, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, at its Merul Badda campus in Dhaka on April 27 through a number of events reflecting on his life, legacy, and values.

The day's celebrations started off with female football players of BRAC University playing a special memorial match. Titled "Shombhabona", this football match was a tribute to Sir Fazle's lifelong commitment to women's empowerment and to his belief that every woman deserves the opportunity to grow, thrive, and succeed.

Afterwards, a photo exhibition titled "Shopnojatra - A Life of Impact" was opened for visitors. The exhibition featured photos highlighting significant moments of Sir Abed's lifetime, starting from his return to a newly independent Bangladesh after the Liberation War to come to the aid of the refugees through the establishment of BRAC.

The photos also depicted moments of his engagements with people to develop their own capacity to better manage their lives and beat poverty. The exhibition also showcased times he had been honoured with numerous national and international awards for his outstanding contributions towards the development of Bangladesh.

The exhibition also featured the Independence Award, the highest civilian honour in the country, which the Bangladesh government posthumously awarded to Sir Abed on March 25, 2025, in recognition of his lifelong commitment to social development and nation-building.

In the afternoon, some of Sir Fazle's closest friends and colleagues, who also shared his dreams and passion for music, came together in a heartfelt session titled reminiscing the times they spent with him.

"Sir Fazle was very much interested in architecture and music and always supported anything that brought good," said Abul Khair Litu, Chairman of Bengal Group and an avid promoter of the arts of Bangladesh.

Umme Sharmin Kabir, Founder of the social



organisation Wreetu, informed how BRAC initiatives and scholarships enabled her to complete her schooling alongside higher education at BRAC University.

Litu; Kabir; Tamara Hasan Abed, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of BRAC University; Professor Syed Ferhat Anwar, Vice-Chancellor, BRAC University; Lady Syeda Sarwat Abed, Founder and Adviser of the BRAC Institute of Languages; and BRAC University Registrar Dave Dowland presented the champions with the trophy of the morning's football match.

Luva Nahid Choudhury, singer and Director General of Bengal Foundation, sang some songs of Atul Prasad Sen, Rajanikanta Sen and Dwijendralal Ray. Six students of Bengal Parampara Sangeetalay also kept the audience enthralled for an hour or so playing classical musical instruments.

The event was moderated by Khairul Basher, Director of Communications at BRAC University.

■ SKILLS ■

Navigating business case competitions as a non-business student

BIPRA PRASUN DAS

When we think of business case competitions, it probably sounds like something that our marketing-major friends are meant to participate in. But what if you too could solve real-world business problems despite never having attended a finance or marketing class? That's exactly what business case competitions offer – an opportunity to step into the shoes of a strategist, marketer, or consultant, regardless of your academic background. Although it may sound counterintuitive, students from non-business backgrounds can also do well in business case competitions because they bring a unique perspective to the problems that are being solved.

What exactly is a business case competition though? Let's say a company presents a real-world challenge: maybe it's figuring out how to expand into a new market, reduce adverse environmental impact, or improve customer engagement. Your team's task is to analyse the problem, brainstorm solutions, and present a strategy within a given deadline. While business knowledge is helpful, it's not a requirement. The best teams combine different skill sets – data analysis, storytelling, critical thinking, and creativity – to come up with effective solutions.

Case competitions come in many formats, including sustainability challenges, tech-focused cases, and social impact initiatives, meaning there's something for everyone.

"Business cases are just about finding smart solutions with limited resources, and the best teams aren't made up of just business students. They need people to break down problems, designers to make things visually appealing, and all kinds of perspectives to think outside the box. Business isn't just about theories – it's about practical problem-solving, and that's a skill anyone can develop," said Mohammad Shadman Islam, a Computer Science and Engineering student at North South University (NSU) who has been a part of teams that have won and been the finalists

competitions all over Bangladesh, including HULT Prize at North South University 2023 and 2024, Brand Master 3.0, MindSparks 23, BrandEdge 2025, and many more.

However, navigating business case competitions as a non-business student is not without hardships. The first obstacle is the lack of technical knowledge which can make business jargon and industry-specific metrics sound like gibberish. Thus, it is important to learn the basics quickly. Watching YouTube breakdowns of business case competitions, taking free online courses on Coursera or Khan Academy to understand financial statements and strategy frameworks, and reading articles from publications like the Harvard Business Review to familiarise yourself with business language are all effective methods.

Adib Muttaki, a Mechanical Engineering student at Khulna University of Engineering & Technology (KUET), and the team leader of project PENTABLE, which secured a top-eight finish at the regional finals of the HULT Prize 2024, provided some insight on how to overcome this barrier. "It is a trial-and-error experience, and persistence is the key. Since we were learning all these concepts as a team, it felt less like a burden and more like a fun challenge. I collected slides from previous competitions, attended workshops, and studied materials covering the basics of business. We learnt from wherever we could. Over time, these concepts started to make sense."

Shadman echoed, "At first, jumping into a business case competition felt like diving into the deep end of a pool without knowing how to swim. The only strategy I had was 'don't sink.' I wasn't fluent in business lingo, and terms like EBITDA and synergy sounded more like names of alien planets than something I needed to understand. But instead of overthinking it, I approached it like any science student would – identify what I don't know, break it down, and help my learning."

In addition, limited exposure to business frameworks, like SWOT analysis, Porter's Five Forces, and market

segmentation, and competing against business students who have studied these concepts for years can be intimidating. While these may feel like significant drawbacks, there are strategies one could implement to excel at business case competitions. Firstly, it is important to leverage your unique strengths. A psychology student might be able to analyse consumer behaviour more deeply than a business student can. A computer science major might automate a process that others wouldn't even consider. Liberal arts students may be skilled at crafting impactful narratives. The best teams harness these diverse perspectives.

"While I didn't have the business expertise that some of my teammates at Team Roshmalai had, I approached problems in a way that felt natural to me, similar to how I would tackle an engineering problem. My engineering brain naturally broke the problem down like a flowchart: What's the issue? What are the constraints? What's the most efficient solution?" Shadman added.

"I found that I felt at ease when participating in sustainability-themed competitions because of my background in development economics. Despite being different domains, I participated in these competitions because the idea of sustainability is almost universal across all fields," said Ayon Ghosh, a recent Economics graduate of East West University, who has participated in various case competitions as an undergraduate student.

"As engineering students, when we come up with an idea, our first instinct is to test its feasibility in real life, rather than just theorising. For the competition, we didn't just propose a solution – we built a working prototype on campus. With access to resources and guidance from our professors, we could test our ideas and back them up with real-world data. This practical, hands-on approach gave us an edge and helped us stand out in the competition," said Adib, when asked if their STEM background had given his team an edge in the competition.

Additionally, communication plays a huge role too – stick to simple, clear language when sharing ideas, and steer clear of jargon that might throw people off, which is why working on your presentation skills is essential.

This includes making slides, giving an elevator pitch, and speaking about your ideas in a way that conveys the idea clearly and engages the audience.

Shadman encourages students who are hesitant to participate in case competitions because of their major to go for it. "It's actually fun once you stop stressing over fancy business terms and focus on the challenge itself. It's only a matter of time before you realise that case competitions are basically real-life strategy games."

At the end of the day, case competitions aren't just for business majors – they're for anyone willing to tackle challenges, think critically, and work collaboratively. So, if you've ever hesitated to join one because of your major but still feel like business competitions could be your thing, take the leap.

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ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN



SALUTING THE NATION BUILDERS OF TOMORROW

RECOGNISING HIGH ACHIEVERS

at the 24th O & A Level Awards



CAMPUS DESK

On April 26, 2025, The Daily Star hosted the 24th edition of its prestigious O & A Level Awards at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Center in Dhaka Bypass Expressway, Sector 4, Purbachal. For English medium students of Bangladesh, this award is the most prestigious recognition for their outstanding achievements in O and A level examinations. The 24th O & A Level Awards had HSBC Bank Bangladesh as the title sponsor. Pearson Edexcel and IDP were the academic and education partners of the event respectively.

Dr Asif Nazrul, Adviser, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, and Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Adviser, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Ministry of Water Resources, were present at the event as the Chief Guests.

The award ceremony also featured inspirational talks by Shahir Chowdhury, Founder and CEO of Shikho; Rahat Ahmed, Founding Partner and CEO of Anchorless Bangladesh; and Ayman Sadiq, Founder and CEO of 10 Minute School. Speeches were also given by Tanmi Haque, Head of International Wealth and Premier Banking of HSBC Bangladesh; Razib Mahbubul, Country Director, IDP Education Bangladesh Ltd.; and Abdullah Al Mamun Liton, Regional Development Manager for Pearson Edexcel, Bangladesh & Nepal.

The event started at 9:50 AM with a one-minute silence remembering the victims of the 2024 July Uprising, followed by the national anthem.

In his speech, Mahfuz Anam, Editor and Publisher of The

Daily Star, said, "If you are going to be the nation-builders of tomorrow, you must first love your nation. You have to love your country, your people, your culture, your religion, and all of what you stand for. If you don't, you cannot be the nation-builders of tomorrow."

"There is no substitute for hard work," Anam added. "Many of you will go to the best universities in the world. But throughout your global experience, increase your commitment to come back and serve this country so that we may all feel proud of your achievement. Your achievement must be translated to the nation's achievement."

The Editor also praised the parents of the awardees and expressed his gratitude for the role they played in bringing their children so far.

Later, in a conversation with Campus, Mini Musharrat Sayeed, the Principal of Juvenile English Medium School, said, "Our students can achieve a lot of things in life but first, they have to be what they want to be."

"You should take your education very seriously. Then, you can achieve whatever it is you want to achieve, and this will motivate you to do better things in the future," she explained.

For students attending the programme, it was a joyous occasion. Rayna Sadat, an awardee and O level graduate from Bangladesh International School and College, expressed her jubilation saying, "It felt really great to be at the programme and receive the award. In the past, I have seen my school seniors and family members getting the award. It is now finally my turn to receive the same award."



PHOTOS: STAR

The Daily Star has been holding the O & A Level Awards every year since 1999. It has been a very prestigious programme that all English Medium students look forward to. This year, the programme recognised the extraordinary achievements of 2,375 students from 112 schools around the country. Among them, there were 1,824 O level awardees – including 67 World Highest achievers and 62 Country Highest achievers – and 551 A level awardees – including 15 World Highest achievers and 32 Country Highest achievers.