DHAKA THURSDAY JUNE 5, 2025, *JAISHTHA 22, 1432 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

# CAMPUS

SCAN THE QR CODE TO ACCESS CAMPUS ONLINE

## YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

### AND THE MANY CHALLENGES THEY FACE

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

MOVIES

# Snow White and the many missed opportunities

TINATH ZAEBA

Disney's live-action *Snow White* (2025) arrived carrying more baggage than the average fairytale princess. Unfortunately, the film buckles under its weight. Between the early controversy and the overwhelming pressure to modernise a nearly 90-year-old fairytale, it feels like this remake never quite figured out what it wants to be.

To start with the good: the lead actress, Rachel Zegler, has a beautiful voice. Her musical numbers are the highlight of the film – warm, heartfelt, and one of the few times the story feels like it has a soul. Whether she's singing about longing, wonder, or courage, her voice carries genuine emotion and it's clear she was giving it her all in these moments.

However, outside of the musical numbers, the performances fall flat with a thud. Many of the characters feel one-dimensional which is only reinforced through stiff and emotionless dialogue. The pacing doesn't help either. Scenes that should be exciting or touching just sort of come and go with very little impact. The casting of the Prince and Snow White is not as compatible either as it seems, since their on-screen scenes are all awkward with a sudden love story thrown at the end.

The casting of the Prince and Snow White is not as compatible either as it seems, since their on-screen scenes are all awkward with a sudden love story thrown at the end. Even Gal Gadot's portrayal of the stepmother is not as frightening or intimidating as it's supposed to be.

Visually though, the movie is well-crafted. The forest is lush and the castle is grand. But Disney's high production value is no longer enough on its own. The writing also falls short with the tone shifting awkwardly between dramatic and silly. Even the humour misses the mark.

If you're a big Disney fan or simply curious, you might still want to give it a watch. It is, however, advisable to go in with low expectations. Otherwise, you're probably better off rewatching the animated classic. It may be old, but at least it remembers how to tell a good story – with charm, heart, and a bit of actual magic.

Editor & Publisher
**Mahfuz Anam**

Features Editor and Head of Content Marketing
**Ehsanur Raza Ronny**

Campus In-Charge
**Faisal Bin Iqbal**

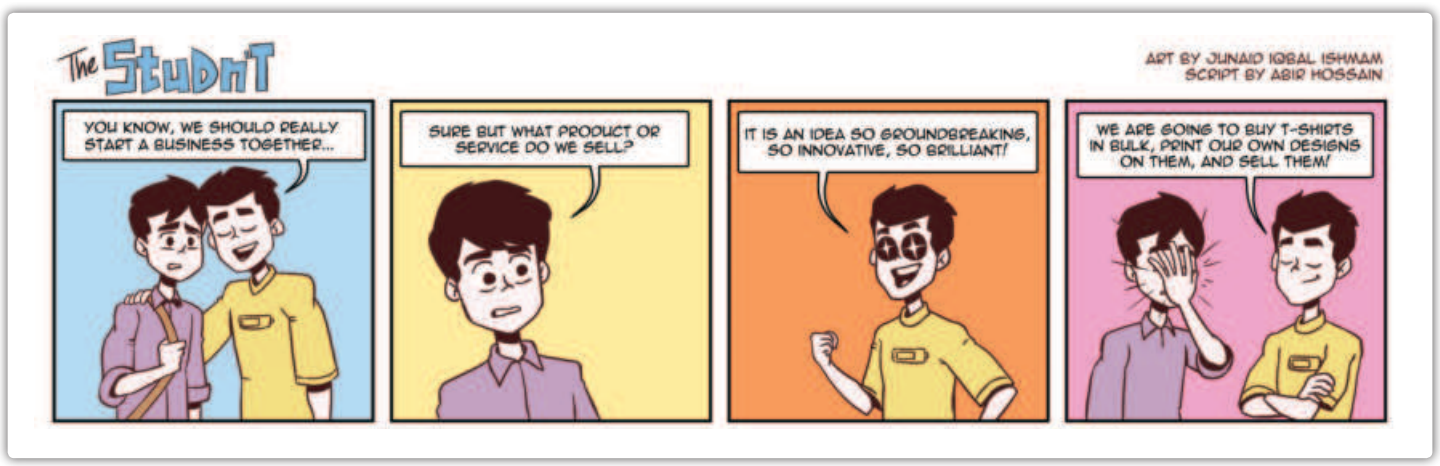
Campus Team
**Syeda Afrin Tarannum**
**Abir Hossain**

Photographer
**Orchid Chakma**

Graphics & Layout
**TDS Creative Graphics**

Production
**Shamim Chowdhury**

Send your articles, feedback, and opinion to campus@thedailystar.net
Find our content online at thedailystar.net/campus




OPPORTUNITIES

WellDev

WellDev – Content Marketing Specialist

ELIGIBILITY

Minimum 3 years of professional experience in content writing in English, preferably in the technology or software industry.

Excellent written and verbal communication skills in English.

A strong portfolio demonstrating a variety of published content pieces.

Visit welldev.io/careers to learn more

DEADLINE: JUNE 30, 2025

Optimizely

Optimizely – Associate System Administrator II

ELIGIBILITY

Certification in a technology preferred.

3 to 5 years of experience as a systems administrator.

An understanding of TCP/IP networking and technologies; LANs, VLAN's, VPNs, Wi-Fi.

Visit optimizely.com/company/career to learn more

DEADLINE: NOT MENTIONED

foodpanda – Strategic Account Manager

ELIGIBILITY

4 to 5 years of work experience within a client management role preferably including e-commerce experience.

Bachelor's degree in Business Management, Marketing, Information Technology, or other relevant fields of study.

Visit careers.foodpanda.com to learn more

DEADLINE: NOT MENTIONED

EDUCATION

# RETHINKING how we teach and study History

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

**History isn't only about what happened; it is also about why it happened, who is able to tell the story, and how those narratives shape the world we live in today.**

**BIPRA PRASUN DAS**

When many of us studied History in school or maybe in one of those GED electives at university, it probably felt more like a memory test than a subject that involves real people and their stories. History, as a subject in school and university, faces a perception problem among students who tend to view the subject as disconnected from their lives and interests.

History curricula in our country consist of assessment models that prioritise fact retention over analytical skills. Consequently, when history becomes reduced to a series of events to be memorised for exams, students naturally question its relevance and value. However, beyond the shortcomings of our curricula, why is it important that we adopt a more critical approach to how we study history?

History isn't only about what happened; it is also about why it happened, who is able to tell the story, and how those narratives shape the world we live in today. Rather than merely absorbing narratives, when we start thinking through the lens of history, we develop the capacity to question sources, contextualise events, and understand the interplay of factors that shape historical developments.

A study published in the *History Education Research Journal* shows that when students are taught explicit historical thinking skills, they show significant improvements in both analytical abilities and content knowledge. Beyond the classroom, these skills – which are transferable – are extremely important for proper civic engagement and democratic participation. Essentially, these skills are the key to better navigating contemporary social and political discourse.

Diverse perspectives, especially those that challenge the prevailing narrative, give history relevance and depth. This, in turn, helps us better contextualise the challenges our society currently faces. For instance, a study published by The University of Waikato reveals that traditional curricula have often marginalised the contributions of non-Western societies and figures, contributing to a skewed understanding of historical development. The study also found that the thinking of research participants as beginning history teachers included "questioning of a strong masculine focus in historical contexts and a recurrent theme of history as violent". This not only implies that traditional historical narratives often overemphasise certain types of historical experiences, but they do so at the expense of other narratives.

All that being said, without meaningful change in how history is taught, changing how we study history may not yield the best results. Bobby Hajjaj, a senior lecturer at the Department of History and Philosophy at North South University, believes that history teaching shouldn't be made dull. "When we teach history in schools, colleges, or universities, we often leave out the most interesting parts. But think about how many successful TV series are inspired by history. It proves that history is inherently interesting. The problem lies in how we present it. History helps us understand human nature, group dynamics, and our own origins. But if students are taught only dry facts without the full context or narrative, they won't develop a real interest, and more importantly, they'll miss the core reason for studying history in the first place. We need to represent history accurately and meaningfully," he said.

The consequences of neglecting historical thinking go far beyond exams and academia. It contributes to shallow public discourse, historical denialism, and an erosion of democratic values. In an age of misinformation and rising authoritarian tendencies, the ability to critically interpret the past is not a luxury. It's a necessity.

**References**:

1. History Education Research Journal. (2023). *A systematic review of pedagogical interventions on the learning of historical literacy in schools.*
2. The University of Waikato. (2013). *Problematised History Pedagogy as Narrative Research: Self-Fashioning, Dismantled Voices and Reimaginings in History Education.*

*Bipra Prasun Das is a student at North South University.*

OFF CAMPUS

# YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS and the many challenges they face

Zubaer's Krishi Shwapno's three wheeler smart veggie cart is named "Digital Feriwala". It serves fresh and safe agri-produce to many urban lower income-based households regularly.

PHOTO: COURTESY

**"It is a very laborious job. As an entrepreneur, you are left to oversee operations, manage finances, deal with customers, and promote your products single-handedly. It can be hard to maintain a decent work-life balance, particularly when you are a full-time student."**

**TAZRIN RASHID PRITHA**

Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia. With a large and youthful population, the country has seen a surge in young entrepreneurs over the last decade. Each of these business owners has their own reasons that propelled them to start their ventures.

For Anjuman Ara Islam, her online-based bakery shop – *Little Miss Baker* – began as a way to engage herself in a productive activity. "Back in 2019, I had failed to crack the admission tests of my target universities," she says. "Although it obviously wasn't the end of the world, it did feel like it at the time. With encouragement from my family and friends, I managed to pull myself out of that slump and open an Instagram page featuring all the cakes I had baked for them that year. I started receiving orders soon after. As a result, what started as a hobby at first transformed into a full-fledged business over the past six years."

Then there are others, like Tasneem Zaheen Samiha – a student at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) – whose desire to achieve financial independence pushed them to start their own businesses.

Samiha explains, "Although my university offers buses, it can get hectic if I must catch the bus at 7 AM when my classes don't start till 12 PM. My other options are to commute via the local bus, which can get quite unsafe for women, or by rickshaw or CNG. I prioritise travelling comfortably; hence my transportation costs can go up to Tk 300 per day, amounting to Tk 6000 per month. As a grown-up, it felt embarrassing to ask for money from my parents. Hence, I started my business within a night's decision."

Some young entrepreneurs also begin their entrepreneurial journey to make a difference in their surroundings. Sayed Zubaer Hasan, a social entrepreneur and climate refugee, asserts, "I grew up in a farmer family myself, so I know the pain that farmers in Bangladesh continue to go through."

Zubaer elaborates, "Farmers struggle to break-even even when the prices of vegetables in kitchen markets are skyrocketing, as middlemen take most of the profit."

To address this issue, Zubaer purchases vegetables at fair prices from around 17,000 registered farmers across the country and sells them directly in kitchen markets across Dhaka.

Now, the initial days of starting a business are rarely smooth. Praptee Rani Sarkar, co-founder of Shesher Shuru, a handicraft business, says, "My business uses scrap fabrics collected from factories and tailor shops to make jewellery, dresses, etc. In the early days, our family members weren't happy with the fact that we were hoarding 'waste' inside our houses. Sadly, we don't have the facilities to store our raw materials elsewhere."

Moreover, young entrepreneurs often juggle the dual roles of being a student and a business owner, facing several additional challenges along the way.

"Most young business owners often end up quitting," laments Samiha. "It is a very laborious job. As an entrepreneur, you are left to oversee operations, manage finances, deal with customers, and promote your products single-handedly. It can be hard to maintain a decent work-life balance, particularly when you are a full-time student."

For full-time students who are also pursuing their entrepreneurial dreams, sticking to a fixed routine or work timeline becomes difficult. Such has been the case with Anjuman, who usually takes a smaller number of orders or stops taking orders entirely during her exams. Unfortunately for student entrepreneurs like her, classes and exams can get cancelled without any prior notice. That, in turn, impacts their preset work routine.

Apart from work-life balance, entrepreneurs also face struggles in various other forms.

"There is a common misconception that business owners earn a lot of money," says Praptee. "My friends sometimes ask for freebies, and as much as I would love to gift it to them, my business is currently self-funded. If I start handing out free stuff to everyone, I will struggle to pay my employees a fair wage."

Young entrepreneurs also experience hurdles associated with business-specific operations. Samiha, for instance, owns a clothing business that takes pre-orders. She takes orders from her customers and then places an order on their behalf to her suppliers.

"Garment owners receive orders for the same article of clothing from different businesses and proceed only when they achieve their Minimum Order Quantity (MOQ)," Samiha explains. "This means that they may decline to proceed with our order at the very last minute if the MOQ quota is not met."

Samiha adds, "Sometimes, the customers themselves can make running a business difficult. As mentioned earlier, I take orders and then place them with my supplier. But if customers refuse to accept their parcels when they arrive, I am left scrambling to find someone with a similar body type willing to buy those dresses. It's incredibly inconvenient."

Then comes problems associated with the exchange rate, which specifically concern those who have to import raw materials or goods from abroad.

"Since I usually use imported raw materials for my baked products, my cost heavily depends on the value of our currency compared to the dollar," says Anjuman. "Even if the value of the taka appreciates, the prices of imported goods rarely adjust accordingly. Hence, I had to slightly raise my prices to reflect the increased cost of raw materials."

Jahir *, a young importer based in Dhaka, adds to this, "As someone who imports goods regularly, I can tell you that it's not just the exchange rate, it's the entire system. You would think a stronger value of taka would mean lower prices, but that rarely happens. Most of us must rely on informal shipping channels that don't respond to currency changes the way legal trade channels do."

Jahir* further explains, "Most of these shipping companies use *hundi* – an unofficial money transfer method. There's no traceable rate, no receipt, and no real accountability. Even if the official exchange rate improves, the *hundi* rates might not reflect that. Plus, these companies charge absurd handling and 'service' fees that remain high regardless."

According to Jahir, while there are legal channels for transferring money, they're mostly accessible only to big businesses. Besides, Jahir also claims that the customs process itself can be a nightmare. "A product that should clear customs in a week can take months unless you have 'connections' inside. That's why many of us are forced to use these informal routes, despite knowing the risks," he bemoans.

Further discussions with these young entrepreneurs revealed that the problems they face tend to be multifaceted, with each of them facing unique challenges.

For Praptee, her handmade baked goods are priced higher because they aren't factory-made, and she values the human touch that makes them unique. Meanwhile, Zubaer's lack of industry connections and mentorship forced him to navigate business challenges through trial and error, as most available advice is theoretical and impractical.

On the other hand, Samiha encountered new competitors undercharging to attract customers. This disrupts the market and makes it hard for others to break-even. According to her, these businesses struggle to sustain themselves in the long run. Moreover, because there are competitors selling their products at a lower price, customers often doubt established sellers, assuming they're the ones being unfair.

However, one common struggle that all business owners face is access to finances.

"My business partners and I had invested all our savings to start our business," says Praptee. "We cannot apply for external funding as they expect to see a diverse array of products that we are unable to present because of a lack of funding in the first place."

Adding to this, Anjuman adds, "Online business owners do not have enough documents to open a business account and are not recognised as small business owners. Hence, we can't usually access mainstream loan options designed for women entrepreneurs. Those are reserved for women who start businesses like boutique shops and parlours."

Apart from loans, finding investors is also a huge challenge for such young business owners, as Zubaer explains, "Startups need huge capital to scale up. However, we don't have the capacity to show collateral to secure traditional loans. The local investors aren't really interested in investing in startups. Hence, I had to focus on securing international grants to make my business a viable enterprise."

Zubaer also explains, "I had to teach myself how to apply for and secure non-refundable grants, equity funding, safe notes and convertible loans. It took me around one to two years just to access the proper amount of funds. This halted my business operations and impacted its health and profitability."

This issue is an even more complex challenge for those who are unable to access banks. Faruk, a 20-year-old street food vendor based in Mirpur, says, "Selling street foods, like *fuchka,* is a very unpredictable business. During the rainy season, my sales drop significantly. I also have to switch to other ventures sometimes, like I sold strawberries during the month of Ramadan."

Faruk continues, "I have a family of seven. To meet their necessities, I have to send home around Tk 20,000 per month. Moreover, I pay around Tk 10,000 every month in instalments. I would love to open a corner shop one day, which is a more stable business, but I don't think I can afford to bear any more debt right now."

For business owners like Faruk, securing loans from traditional banking channels can be challenging, as they often lack both the knowledge to navigate the application process and the documents required by banks. As a result, they are vulnerable to falling into the traps of informal money lenders, who are widely regarded as oppressive due to their exploitative practices such as charging exorbitant interest rates.

All this goes to show that the life of a young entrepreneur is rarely glamorous and almost always filled with struggles and new challenges. The challenges in question often vary from industry to industry, yet, these young minds try their best to persevere.

**Name has been changed upon request*

NOTICE BOARD

# BRAC University workshop explores AI in foreign language education

BRAC University recently hosted a workshop titled "Artificial Intelligence and Digital Tools in the Teaching of Foreign Languages: Turning a Perceived Threat into a Powerful Ally" at its campus in Merul Badda.

The workshop was conducted by Dr Noura El Sayed Rodríguez, an education and language specialist with over 15 years of experience in academic leadership, multilingual education, and digital innovation.

Holding a PhD in multilingualism, multiculturalism, and equity studies in education from Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth, Dr Rodríguez shared insights from her work across the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

"AI, far from being a threat, holds the potential to be a valuable educational ally when used with integrity, particularly in foreign language teaching," said Dr Rodríguez at the workshop organised by the BRAC Institute of Languages.

AI tools were explored during the session, highlighting features such as real-time feedback, grammar and vocabulary support, writing assistance, and pronunciation practice.

The session also addressed the importance of normalising the ethical use of AI in classrooms, particularly by engaging students in open discussions.

Personalised learning pathways, accessible practice outside class hours, gamification, and intercultural exposure were highlighted as major benefits of AI in language education.

Participants, including language teachers from across the country, programme coordinators, and digital learning enthusiasts, discussed the challenges of students using AI tools, particularly the difficulty in identifying when and how AI is being used inside and outside the classroom. This raised concerns about academic integrity and the need for clearer guidelines.

They participated in interactive exercises, which involved linking specific educational obstacles, such as difficulty with motivation, pronunciation, or grammar, to relevant AI tools that could aid learners.

They also reflected on widespread myths and realities of AI, helping to dispel fears and build a more realistic understanding of its capabilities and limitations.

This encouraged educators to think critically about how to responsibly and effectively integrate AI into their teaching.

In her closing remarks, Dr Rodríguez recommends that educators take an interest in the AI tools their students prefer to gain deeper insight into their learning processes.

This helps teachers integrate relevant tools into their teaching, making lessons more effective and aligned with students' digital experiences. Encouraging this dialogue also promotes responsible, ethical use of AI in the classroom, she said.

# North South University inaugurates NSU Writing Center

North South University (NSU) marked a significant milestone with the inauguration of the NSU Writing Center on May 27 at the Central Library. The Writing Center aims to support undergraduate and graduate students in improving their writing skills.

The inauguration ceremony was graced by the presence of the Chief Guest Azim Uddin Ahmed, Chairman of the Board of Trustees (BoT), Vice-Chancellor Prof. Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, and Treasurer and Pro-Vice Chancellor (IC), Prof. Abdur Rob Khan. The Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences Prof. Md Rizawanul Islam, Chair of the Department of English and Modern Languages Dr Nazia Manzoor, Coordinator of NSU Writing Center Dr Sukanto Roy, and several esteemed faculty members and the students of the university were present.

The event began with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, followed by warm addresses by key university figures. The coordinator of the Writing Center, Dr Roy, warmly welcomed all attendees. In his opening remarks, he emphasised the importance of the Writing Center.

Dr Manzoor highlighted the importance of strong writing skills in academic and professional contexts in her speech. She remarked, "The Writing Center is for our students, for aspiring writers, and for the potential they all have in terms of the kind of writer they can become."

Prof. Chowdhury shared his thoughts on the importance of forming a proper writing centre in NSU for the sake of the students in creative writing and improving writing skills. He added, "If you do not read, you will not be able to write creatively."

Prof. Chowdhury also thanked the faculty members of the Department of English for taking this great initiative.

The NSU Writing Center is envisioned as a collaborative space where students can receive personalised assistance with the writing process, including essays, research, papers, resumes, cover letters, and so on. Through one-on-one consultations with trained peer tutors, the centre aims to cultivate strong writing habits, critical thinking, clarity, and coherence in writing.

# DIU professor appointed to Oxford University journal's editorial board

Dr Kudrat-E-Khuda Babu, Associate Dean and a professor at the Department of Law, Daffodil International University, has recently been appointed as a member of the editorial board of the journal *Yearbook of International Environmental Law* published by the University of Oxford.

Among the faculty members of Bangladesh's private universities, Dr Kudrat-E-Khuda is the first and only to be selected as an editorial board member of an Oxford University journal.

Dr Babu's primary research areas involve environmental issues and cybersecurity. He has also conducted significant research on human rights topics such as the Rohingya crisis and human rights during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Demonstrators hold a banner during a "Stand Up for Internationals" rally on the campus of Berkeley University in Berkeley, California, April 17, 2025.** PHOTO: **REUTERS**

EDUCATION

# THE NEW REALITY

## International students face rising uncertainty in the US

In the era of Trump 2.0, news has continually emerged providing backing to the claim that the US is "no longer a safe destination for international students". Indeed, too much has changed in the past few months, from random threats of deportation for actions labelled as 'un-American' to checking phones and personnel for any signs of 'un-American' ways of thinking. The lives of international students living in the US are in a precarious position.

In addition, there is also the looming fear of many students losing access to their funding or scholarships. New sorts of threats constantly pop up with new administrative decisions being taken by the government. Students, amidst all of this, manage to live life with growing panic and uncertainty.

Kibria*, an undergraduate student studying in the state of Alabama, shares her anxiety. "I haven't particularly had to go through anything severe, nor have I had to face any major cut in my scholarship. Yet, I have developed terrible anxiety by simply watching the news and trying to follow what's happening. I keep thinking that they will, someday, come for me. It has gotten to the point where the anxiety harms me on a daily basis."

There is, of course, a very legitimate reason for paranoia of this nature. It was March 8, 2025, when Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist who graduated from Columbia University and holds an American green card, was taken into custody by the Department of Homeland Security without any warrants. As of writing this article, he remains imprisoned and is waiting for a hearing from the US Department of Justice that threatens to deport him on claims which, according to a video reported by CNN, have no merit or backing.

He is not the only victim either, as several other college students have reportedly been taken into custody in the weeks that followed. Their fault? Participating or helping in organising protests at their respective campuses for Palestine. Many of these students have thus far been let go of, but Mahmoud Khalil still remains confined and awaiting a hearing.

This wave of events has had a major impact on international students currently in the US. As Anusha*, a graduate student in the state of Georgia, puts it, "I have almost completely stopped talking about Palestine online in fear of deportation. Even when I am outside, I have to be extra careful and often delete all my social media apps if I think they will go through my phone. Travelling is completely out of the question at this point. I feel guilty because I often ask myself what I am even doing here if I can't exercise my right to free speech, let alone attend a protest. But then, I am terrified of what might happen if I do."

Tanvir*, an undergraduate student currently in Texas, shares a similar sort of panic. "From what I can tell, those of us who already have a scholarship or receive an aid of some kind are not all that likely to lose it due to any funding cuts. That may sound like a relief, but the rate at which new things are happening, I can't help but feel like that will change soon."

Tanvir bemoans, "I am also, basically, stranded here. I cannot go back to my country anytime soon because there's a huge chance I will just be denied re-entry to the US."

Afia*, a recent graduate living in New York, has also stated that there has been a notable lack of conversation around Palestine altogether. "Not just on social media, no matter where you go, college students have been silenced by the recent incidents."

She adds, "Very few large-scale protests have taken place in the last few months. College administrations have tightened their rules against these demonstrations, so it has become scarier to actually participate in any of them."

Since early May, reports of newly emerging pro-Palestine protests have emerged, particularly from Columbia University, Yale University, and the University of Washington. However, most of these protests were quickly met with mass arrests, suspensions, and, in other contexts, withholding of degrees. While *Campus* was unable to identify any international students amongst the numbers, it is entirely possible that internationals who may be present will end up facing repercussions if not worse.

Amongst the onslaught of administrative processes becoming a reality, the most pressing one is the latest development with the US Government and Harvard. On May 23, the US Government announced that it would be halting Harvard's ability to enrol international students. Amidst the chaos this has created, many have wondered if a government is even allowed to do such a thing.

*Campus* reached out to Bangladeshi students currently at Harvard, and while they are currently too distressed and in the dark to make any comments to shed light on the situation, they have notified us that Harvard is working tirelessly to inform all their international students of any further developments. Most recently, Harvard made a public post announcing their decision to protect their international students. While that can seem hopeful, the future still looks grim as the onslaught of draconian laws persecuting international students for their stance against genocide seems to have no end in sight.

In this complete lack of a silver lining, students from Bangladesh and worldwide continue under enforced silence, with their futures largely uncertain.

**References**:

1. CNN (May 23, 2025). *Judge denies request to terminate Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil's deportation proceedings.*
2. Axios (May 8, 2025). *Where Pro-Palestinian campus protests are emerging again.*

**Names have been changed upon request.*

CAREER

# Navigating the job market without connections

**ANICA BUSHRA RAHMAAN**

Ever since I learned about the inner mechanisms of the job market, the term "networking" found itself in my dictionary. It meant that I had to form the right connections to make my career trajectory easier, unearth hidden opportunities, and get myself a head start.

However, not everyone has an uncle who can easily get them a corporate job at a reputable firm, nor is everyone born into generational wealth. Most importantly, not everyone is able to develop people skills to the extent that they can form proper connections. What about them? Will they always fall behind or be deprived of opportunities?

Sharika Shirin Huq, a senior system engineer, shares, "I always wanted a position where I could learn as a fresher and have enough space to grow. With that in mind, as soon as I was done with my undergraduate degree in Electrical Engineering from the Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST), I applied to Next Business Leader Technology in Grameenphone, an opportunity I stumbled across on LinkedIn."

"Not only was the position incredibly competitive with nearly 3000 applicants, but the assessment process was incredibly rigorous as well. It consisted of five rounds: a CV screening, an online aptitude test, an initial interview, a group discussion, and the final interview. Fortunately, I was hired as a management trainee officer in one of the leading telecoms of the country," she adds.

For Meshkat E Rabbani Shrestho, a former intern at bKash and currently a trainee assistant at an international law firm, balancing academic and extracurricular pursuits paid off. "I have always been a career-oriented person. Since my aim was always to pursue the corporate line instead of having my own individual practice or being an entrepreneur, I was consistently dedicated to making myself as qualified as possible, to ensure I stood out from other candidates," he says.

"As a result, during my undergrad years as a law student at East West University, I was heavily involved in extracurricular activities such as debating and public speaking. Additionally, I was a teaching assistant for a brief period of time. I was able to get my thesis published too. During my final year, I applied to BNext, the internship programme of Bkash, where I was eventually selected in the legal department. I remember my manager telling me later on that I met their criteria of an active candidate who was not just solely focused on academia."

Despite their successes, there were hurdles in the path. Alvi Rahmaan, a prompt engineer who majored in Marketing from BRAC University, for instance, recalls his interview experience, "I found myself in a state of panic when I realised that the other candidates already knew the interviewee and had already established a good impression. At that time, I believed I couldn't do anything to stand out."

Although Alvi got the job, there were moments when he felt that he was being overlooked in favour of other team members. "Whenever there were any team meetings for pitching ideas, the others were given more favour. Their ideas were granted after mere minutes of them talking whereas, I had to go the extra mile and always elaborate my ideas," he remarks.

When navigating the job market without connections, it is not surprising that there are lessons to be learnt. Shrestho says that looking back, he wishes he had spent more time doing research work. "If I had focused more on research, on publications, and gone to more conventions, that would have helped. I wouldn't say I regret it, but it would surely have been a bonus," he claims. On the other hand, Alvi says that a lack of wisdom during the initial period of his professional journey got him caught in the trap of unpaid work. "I regret devaluing my skills and experience by not charging money for it. In fact, I had to spend my own money on commuting and other expenses," he says.

In spite of dejection and the feeling of isolation, there can be positive takeaways as well. Sharika claims, "The job market's increasingly competitive nature can actually be motivating in a way. Different job interviews have different modalities and evaluation processes. The more interviews you attend, the more you discover your weak points, how to answer interview questions better, and how to better present yourself."

Contrary to popular belief, acquiring the right skills to stand out in a job setting doesn't always have to be an extraordinary feat. Sometimes, expertise in just the basics will do. While the notion might seem daunting, there is no specific formula or strategy for effective job searching. It is something you get the hang of as you go. A good place to start may be a professionally written resume with the right formatting that is tailored to different job requirements.

Shrestho says, "In the case of assessment processes that are employed at Bkash, NGOs or anywhere else, you have to be very good in English, Mathematics, analytical problems and general knowledge. Surprisingly what helped me during my assessment were the tuitions I had been doing which allowed me to keep in touch with Mathematics and other disciplines."

Though there are some qualifications, skills and traits that can dispel the myth surrounding the job market, the significance of networking still cannot be understated. Sharika shares, "A potential connection is not just about an offer letter. It can help one access opportunities, increase knowledge, and sometimes receive career guidance as well. Although I got my first job without any connection, now I am focused on developing this skill every day."

Similarly, Alvi states, "When freshers confess to having no networking connections, that might be brushed off. But when someone with professional experience says the same thing, it will be looked down upon. When you're in the job market for a couple of years, it is expected for you to have a certain networking base. Moreover, through networking, you may not have to scour endlessly for a job. Knowing the right people helps because you can simply reach out to them for jobs. If you end up making a good impression, there are instances where they'll reach out to you as well."

Shrestho also mentioned that there are many job opportunities that he may not even know of and can't access as they aren't listed on mainstream platforms such as LinkedIn or bdjob. And that may simply be attributed to the fact these jobs are accessible to only those with the right connections.

Ultimately, like many other aspects of life, it boils down to resilience.

Alvi concludes, "Be selfishly and ruthlessly focused on your goals. A lot of the time, you will not be considered. That is a part of life. So, it is very crucial to not be disheartened."

*Anica Bushra Rahmaan, a student of Economics, is not prepared for the corporate life, except for the money aspect. Reach her at anicarahmaan@gmail.com*

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**