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# DEMON SLAYER: INFINITY CASTLE

Immersive, emotional, and exhilarating

## TARANNUM KHONDKAR

Amassing over USD 555 million worldwide, *Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle* has broken multiple box office records, becoming the highest-grossing anime film of all time. The film is arguably one of Ufotable's grandest productions, but does the success come from the craft itself or the two years of anticipation that fans have been led towards?

The Infinity Castle arc picks up right after the fourth season of the anime, thrusting both the audience and the demon slayers into Muzan's labyrinth fortress. The movie itself has three main fights. In addition, noteworthy appearances by other characters and smaller clashes build up the movie's momentum, depicting an all-out war rather



than a series of isolated battles.

The visuals of the movie are nothing short of stunning. Intricate background details, fluid choreography, and smooth transitions enrich the dynamic fights without making any of it look janky. Similarly, the auditory aspect is not one to overlook. The stirring scores paired with intense sound effects transport the viewers into a world that almost feels tangible.

There are, nonetheless, aspects of the movie that just don't deliver. The pacing that the wonderful animation had built towards was at threat by the misuse of flashbacks. A lot of emphasis was put on the fights, yet they were crudely disrupted with the characters diving into the past, throwing the viewers around mental walls. Though

the flashbacks are required, they proved to be more disruptive in the narrative rhythm, producing clashes that felt unsettled.

Despite this, the second half regains momentum, drawing the fans to the edge of their seats with tear-stained faces. The movie does not shy away from depicting the brutality of war or how it affects every character, no matter how seemingly insignificant their role may be.

While the movie does suffer from uneven pacing, it delivers breathtaking visuals, immersive soundscapes, and an emotional narrative that makes the film feel more like an intimate experience. The movie certainly deserves its success, for it has set quite the stage and standards for the upcoming films in the series.

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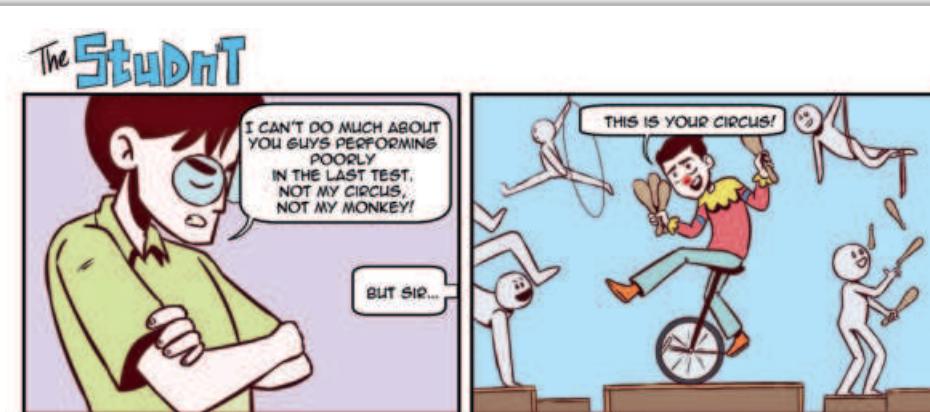
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ART BY JUNAID IQBAL ISHMAEL  
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# UCBD turns global dreams into confident journeys

Every year, thousands of Bangladeshi students enrol in foreign universities, their eyes filled with dreams of earning a global degree and a secure career path. Among them, many struggle to cope with a new learning method or cultural environment. They often lack confidence as well. These challenges significantly affect their academic journeys, which eventually leaves a lasting impact on their professional lives.

However, for many Bangladeshi students, the experiences are different. Instead of being thrown straight into an unfamiliar atmosphere, they begin their journey at Universal College Bangladesh (UCBD), the country's exclusive partner of Monash College.

Through offering the Monash University Foundation Year (MUFY) and Monash College Diploma programmes right here in Dhaka, UCBD prepares students within a global academic curriculum and context, while securing their pathway into the world-renowned Monash University.

UCBD equips its learners with a global outlook, confidence, and makes them adept at different extracurricular activities, making it easier for the students to adapt and excel in their higher education journey at Monash campuses worldwide.

Take the story of Intisar Mahmud, now in his third year at Monash University, Australia. His academic journey began at UCBD, where he enrolled in the Monash University Foundation (MUFY) programme.

While his peers struggled to adjust to Monash's online academic system upon arrival, Intisar was already well-versed in Moodle, the digital platform used by the university



Intisar Mahmud

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for courses, assignments, and learning resources. "It felt seamless. At UCBD, we were already Monash students. It felt just like that; I resumed my academic journey in Australia exactly from where I had paused in Bangladesh. The foundation year programme made the transition much easier for me," said Intisar.

This early exposure was not just about the convenience it offers—it was a head start. By completing 48 of his required 144 credits from the comfort of his home, Intisar was well ahead of others in facing academic hurdles without crumbling under the workload.

The UCBD graduate now successfully juggles his academic tasks, co-curricular activities, and internship while maintaining excellence in all these fields. Intisar is now pursuing his Bachelor's in Business Analytics, a field he deliberately chose

for its growing global demand, and is interning with the Food Microbiology Academy, an opportunity he secured thanks to his previous similar experience at Monash's Industry Expo.

Beyond academics, the UCBD degree also helps Intisar grow his leadership capabilities. His experience at UCBD in different leadership positions helped him become the Vice President of the Islamic Society Club at Monash University.

Leveraging his leadership experiences at UCBD, Intisar successfully spearheaded a collaboration with the global charity MATW Project, raising an unprecedented USD 24,000 for Palestinian relief.

"That leadership journey began with the confidence I built during my UCBD years," he reflects.

If Intisar's story speaks of confidence and preparation, another UCBD graduate named X highlights resilience and

growth. A former student of the Monash College Diploma at UCBD, now pursuing studies at Monash University Malaysia, describes her journey as 'transformational'.

Her journey began with the Monash College diploma at UCBD, which laid the foundation for her current success at Monash University Malaysia.

"When I began my academic journey at Monash University, adapting to its demanding academic style, managing the workload felt overwhelming. That was when the education and preparation I had received at UCBD truly proved their worth. That experience at UCBD was not only about academic credit; it prepared me with the mindset, study habits, and technical foundation I needed for university. Now, as I continue my studies at Monash University Malaysia, I am doing well because of the preparation and growth I gained through my diploma," said X.

The success of UCBD graduates such as Intisar and countless others at Monash University over the years shows that the difference between studying abroad and truly excelling lies in preparation. Its students arrive at Monash not as nervous beginners but as confident learners who are familiar with the system and ready to tackle challenges. This advantage goes beyond the classroom; it shapes careers and builds resilience that others often struggle to develop. By giving Bangladeshi students this head start, UCBD has changed what it means to be ready for global education.



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# What fresh Law graduates can expect when entering the legal profession

ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

Working as a lawyer in Bangladesh, being an advocate advancing arguments in hallowed courtrooms – the inception of these aspirations emerges from a sense of intrigue. There are those of us who crave the thrill of the legal battle, the inspired aesthetic portrayed in television. There are those of us who are blessed and burdened with ideals, a desire to sculpt statues of justice in an unjust world. There are also those of us who dream of material comfort. However, between such lofty dreams and the reality of being a fresh Law graduate, there exists a stark, sobering contrast.

#### MD. NAYEEM HAIDER

"In the past, some used to say that the path to becoming an advocate after graduation was easy, but this no longer holds true. As of now, that path is most certainly an arduous one," says Md Asaduzzaman, the Attorney General of Bangladesh.

The Attorney General explained further by laying out the landscape of the Bar Council exam, which all graduates must face if they wish to practice in court: "Over 41,000 people appeared for the MCQ portion of this year's examinations; only about 13,000 passed. About half of these candidates are likely to be successful in the written portion. The viva after that will whittle their numbers down even further. Thus, from the original 41,000, only about three to four thousand are expected to become advocates. The remaining will inevitably have to try again the following year."

The struggle, however, only begins with enrolment, according to Md Asaduzzaman. He says, "Even after enrolment, there is no guarantee that they will find a senior to work under as law firms are few in number by

comparison. And even if they do find a senior, there is no guarantee that they are going to be paid. As a result, for about five years following graduation, they will have to carry on with a survival mindset."

This seemingly boundless chasm that separates graduates from their advocacy aspirations is something they have to confront daily. But the post-graduation period also provides an unparalleled opportunity to learn.

"I was lucky to be under the direct supervision of very supportive seniors," says Zaiad Al Sabah, who is currently pursuing the LLM/PGDip (Bar Training Course) at the University of the West of England, Bristol, following a year of full-time employment as a Junior Associate at Lincoln's Chambers.

He continues, "In particular, I'm grateful to the head of the chamber, Barrister Md Riaz Uddin, who personally instructed me in crucial legal matters, and accompanying him to court gave me valuable exposure to the world of legal practice."

Regarding the skills he had to develop, Zaiad goes on to say, "First, I worked on improving my communication skills, both in interacting with clients and in coordinating with

seniors. I focused on enhancing my drafting abilities, given that preparing legal documents is an important part of the profession. I learned to analyse and understand complex legal issues more effectively, which has strengthened my overall legal reasoning and practical knowledge."

But Sanaul Islam Tipu, an Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, though immensely grateful to his own seniors for their support and guidance, admits that seniors who play an active role in helping their juniors make up only a fringe minority.

Thus, in the vast majority of situations, young graduates must be their own teachers. He reflects, "In this profession, you must have the drive to know more. Cases are like cinema. From start to finish, you must immerse yourself in every detail. A lawyer needs to learn everything, small or big, and those who are negligent in that learning do not have it in them to be lawyers."

But the price of learning is always a tireless and grueling process.

Barrister Nafia Haque, who is currently a lecturer at London College of Legal Studies (LCLS) (South), and an adjunct lecturer at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

(ULAB), shares her personal experience from the time she worked as an apprentice lawyer, "I had to be at court by 9 - 10 AM, which meant that I had to set out much earlier from my home. And after finishing there, I had to go directly to the chamber I worked at in Gulshan. The work felt overwhelming at first, and there was a lot to take in, especially since none of this was ever taught to us in LLB. On a good day, I could finish work and reach home by 9 - 9:30 PM. But on bad days, I'd have to stay back till much later, 12 AM even."

On the matter of remuneration, Nafia somberly cautions, "Compared to how much you will have to work, be it as someone new, or even as an experienced associate, you will never be paid enough."

Advocate Sanaul shares his personal experience on the matter, "When I started as an apprentice lawyer in 2012, my senior used to pay me 50, 100, or maybe 200 taka per day. But some days, it was just the bus fare – 30 taka. But beginnings have always been like that. My senior used to tell me that his senior paid him with meals of bananas and bread at the very start."

While things have improved since then, the financial struggle remains. Apprentice lawyers who come from less privileged backgrounds inevitably find themselves walking on a dire social tightrope.

Advocate Sanaul continues, "Those of us who were from middle-class families, having completed our bachelor's and master's degrees, were naturally expected to find stable employment and earn a good living. So, our families, relatives, and neighbours must have wondered why we, despite being educated, were unable to earn much money. This is a feature of our profession: income always starts late."

On making ends meet, Fahim Al Mustafiz, Barrister-at-Law of Lincoln's Inn and Advocate, District and Sessions Judge Court, Dhaka, offers his advice, "It is wise for young lawyers to take up part-time work to generate some income. The most viable part-time work, in my opinion, is teaching law, or any other subject. However, one must not be vested in that part-time work so much that it significantly affects their engagement at the chambers."

However, Natasha\*, a lawyer who has become disillusioned with legal practice, feels that the chamber culture is inherently exploitative and that many law chambers are actively hindering the growth of aspiring lawyers. She shares her insight, saying, "They will try to exploit you when you are a new graduate. They know that they won't need to pay you much, that you are hungry and will be happy with whatever you get. Small chambers will try to influence you to stay, curbing your career progress."

Natasha\* continues, "The work environment in law chambers is a bit toxic by default. You get commissions based on your work, and there will always be people getting paid more than you and those getting less. There is always a lot of competition."

Md Asaduzzaman believes that senior lawyers have a role to play in making the profession more bearable for its newest entrants and that they should adopt a more positive attitude towards their juniors.

But the struggles of a young lawyer don't limit themselves to merely the realms of work and pay.

On the personal struggles that lawyers may have to face because of their profession, the Attorney General elaborates, "Society, and even your own clients, will tend to view you in a negative light. Landlords will hesitate to have you as tenants. And fathers will think ten times before considering you for marriage with their

To fresh graduates, he suggests the mindset they should adopt at the onset of their careers, "You need to work with honesty and have an abundance of both passion and patience as you build your foundation. Law is a practical discipline that takes time and hard work to master, but those who are dedicated can do so relatively quickly."

Associate at Zakaria and Associates, despite the hardships of a legal career, also expresses his cautious optimism, "I know the road is tough, but every little progress – contributing to the chamber, helping a client, learning something new – reminds me why I chose this path."

And there is light at the end of the tunnel. Advocate Sanaul makes this abundantly clear with his words, "This is a difficult profession, but it is also fun. And those who own it shine brightly."

He continues, describing the stairway to success in this strife-filled world of legal practice, "When you work in a chamber for some years, you get to build a network. There are people who know that you know the work. Seniors approach you to come work for them, and they give you room to negotiate. And you get clients from friends, family, and acquaintances."

"Eventually, you can start an independent practice of your own. The ability to build and sustain relationships is crucial in all of this. And a lawyer who has learned well does not need to worry about money," he adds.

"If you get frustrated at the very beginning, you will not be able to go very far," says Advocate Md Zakaria Haider of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, the Head of Chamber at Zakaria and Associates, and the President of the Court Reporters' Association, Dhaka.

To fresh graduates, he suggests the mindset they should adopt at the onset of their careers, "You need to work with honesty and have an abundance of both passion and patience as you build your foundation. Law is a practical discipline that takes time and hard work to master, but those who are dedicated can do so relatively quickly."

Dr Khaled Hamid Chowdhury, a Fellow of Ciarb (FCIArb), Advocate at the Appellate Division, and Head of Laws, LCLS (South), drawing from his vast experience as an educator and employer, shares his insight, "Success does not come from shortcuts; it comes from showing up every day, preparing thoroughly, and being dependable to both clients and seniors. Many talented graduates falter because they expect instant results. But in our environment, the line between success and failure is often drawn by character and consistency, rather than brilliance alone."

Finally, Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman, as the highest law officer of the country, offers his advice to those at the cusp of starting their journeys. He says, "If you want to be a lawyer, don't think about earning money. Go by the book, pay attention, and channel your full concentration on the profession with the highest level of dedication. That is the only way to be a good lawyer, and there does not exist any other."

In the current landscape, legal practice poses a harsh reality that is only slightly tinged with hope. But the dream may begin to converge with the hope when we take our first step into the courtroom.

\*Name has been changed upon request  
Nayeem is a final year law student at London College of Legal Studies (South). Reach him at nayeemhaider90@gmail.com



## NOTICE BOARD



## AIUB hosts International Symposium on Responsive and Responsible Universities in collaboration with Magna Charta Observatory

The American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB), through its Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), in collaboration with the Magna Charta Observatory (MCO), successfully hosted the International Symposium on Responsive and Responsible Universities: Global Perspectives from the Magna Charta Observatory Research Initiative from September 25 to 26 at its Dhaka campus.

The symposium brought together over 150 participants, including dignitaries from the University Grants Commission (UGC), Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC), and the British Council Bangladesh, alongside Vice-Chancellors, Pro Vice-Chancellors, and IQAC Directors from universities across the country.

Distinguished international guests included David J Lock, Secretary General of MCO, Dr Mary Deasy from Technological University Dublin, Ireland, and Dr Agata Strzadala from Wroclaw Medical University, Poland, who joined in person. Participants from Lithuania and the United Kingdom joined online, ensuring strong global

engagement.

A major highlight of the event was a panel discussion on "Shaping Responsible Futures: Higher Education and Community Engagement", with contributions from the UGC, BAC, private university Vice-Chancellors, advisors, and David J Lock, reflecting on how universities can address societal challenges. On the second day, the programme was honoured by the presence of Prof. Dr Gulshan Ara Begum and Prof. SM Kabir of the BAC.

The event concluded with closing remarks from Prof. Dr Saiful Islam, Vice-Chancellor of AIUB, and a vote of thanks by Prof. Dr Md Abdur Rahman, Pro Vice-Chancellor of AIUB, followed by a vibrant cultural performance by the AIUB Performing Arts Club (APAC).

The symposium reaffirmed AIUB's commitment to responsible higher education, community engagement, and sustainability, while strengthening global partnerships under the Magna Charta Observatory initiative.

## PROF. DR QUAZI DEEN MOHD KHOSRU JOINS AS THE NEW VICE-CHANCELLOR OF PRIME UNIVERSITY

The President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Chancellor of Prime University has appointed Dr Quazi Deen Mohd Khosru, Professor, Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (EEE), Bangladesh



University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), as the Vice-Chancellor of Prime University. He officially joined on September 3.

Prof. Dr Khosru is a renowned scholar with an international reputation in the field of Electrical and Electronic Engineering. He completed his BSc from Aligarh Muslim University, India; MSc from BUET; and PhD from Osaka University, Japan. He has also held various important positions throughout his distinguished career.

Prof. Dr Khosru has carried out significant research in multiple areas of Electrical and Electronic Engineering.

## Zeenat Zoarder Ripa receives international recognition at LEAP 2025



Zeenat Zoarder Ripa, Deputy Director of Public Relations at Bangladesh University of Business and Technology (BUBT), has achieved a historic milestone by winning her first international honour at the prestigious LEAP 2025 International Educational Awards.

She has been awarded as the Winner in the category "Women Leadership in Education", representing Bangladesh on the global stage among 70 countries, 760 nominees, and 400 leading institutions and universities worldwide.

## Dark energy isn't constant: CASSA scientist authors groundbreaking paper on the fate of the universe

A new research paper authored by Anowar Jaman Shahib, an Associate Member of the Center for Astronomy, Space Science and Astrophysics (CASSA) at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), challenges a long-standing assumption about the nature of dark energy. It presents evidence suggesting that dark energy may not be a constant after all, opening up new possibilities for understanding the fate of the universe.

The paper, titled "Scalar-field dark energy models: Current and forecast constraints", was published in the Physical Review D journal on September 8. It is authored by Anowar Shahib, who is also an Einstein Fellow at the University of Chicago, and Prof. Joshua A Frieman, an Emeritus Professor at the University of Chicago.



The dominant theory for more than two decades has been that dark energy is constant – the so-called cosmological constant first proposed by Einstein and others. But recent astronomical surveys are now indicating that this energy might actually evolve over time.

This has profound implications. If dark energy weakens over time, it could affect the future trajectory of the universe. Instead of ending in a catastrophic "Big Rip" or collapsing in a "Big Crunch", the universe may cool and fade slowly into a "Big Freeze".

If dark energy continues to grow stronger over time, then in the distant future, everything from galaxies to atoms and particles – even the fabric of space and time – will be torn apart and scattered. This catastrophic scenario is known as the "Big Rip".

On the other hand, if dark energy weakens and the expansion of the universe comes to a halt, then gravity will pull galaxies and matter back toward each other. Eventually, the entire universe will collapse into a single, dense point – essentially the reverse of the Big Bang. This is called the "Big Crunch".

But as suggested in the research by Shahib and Frieman, if dark energy evolves very slowly, the universe will continue to expand indefinitely. Galaxies will drift farther apart, new stars will stop forming, old stars will burn out, and the universe will grow cold, dark, and inactive. Over time, all heat and light will fade away, leading to a final, motionless state known as the Big Freeze, or heat death.

## ■ INTERVIEWS ■

# A BUET graduate's contributions to AI in healthcare at Saudi Arabia's defence ministry



PHOTO: COURTESY

FATIMA ASHRAF

Asif Azad, a recent Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) graduate from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), is currently working remotely as an artificial intelligence (AI) engineer (health services) for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's (KSA) Ministry of Defence (MoD). He contributes to AI-driven healthcare solutions in areas of autism and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), working closely with medical professionals and centres to enhance patient care through modern AI technologies.

Campus sat down with Asif to learn more about his work, research, and his thoughts on AI and its future.

**Campus (C): Could you tell us how you found yourself working with AI at an international level, and that too for the MoD of another country?**

**Asif (A):** I had been fascinated by AI and machine learning (ML) since my third year, and by the fourth, I was lucky to have an incredible mentor, Dr Mohammad Saifur Rahman, a former Microsoft software engineer, as my thesis advisor. Most students had little hands-on experience with ML, but my practical skills stood out, and he also noticed my technical ability when I helped fix an issue on one of his machines.

About three months before graduation, Dr Saifur showed me an internal job-opening document from his friend, Dr Ehsan Hoque, a Bangladeshi-origin professor of Computer Science at the University of Rochester and a leading researcher in health AI. He was building an AI innovation team for health services under the MoD in Saudi Arabia, and Dr Saifur referred me to him. I had a 30-minute interview, thought it went terribly, and didn't follow up, assuming I wouldn't get the role. Dr Hoque mentioned I still had a few months before graduation, but they needed someone immediately, so hiring locals seemed more practical for them. For the first time in my university life, I felt a little regretful, wishing I could have graduated sooner.

Back on campus, I had started applying to other relevant job openings at local tech companies and university CSE departments, receiving multiple offers. Just as I was preparing to join one of them, I received an email from Dr Hoque confirming my selection for his AI innovation team at KSA's MoD.

**C: Why would the KSA recruit AI health engineers for the MoD instead of its Ministry of Health?**

**A:** Saudi Arabia has a large population and vast resources, and the Kingdom wants to push AI across sectors, not just limit it to healthcare. Think of it as using defence infrastructure to scale healthcare AI faster. With their focus on becoming a tech-driven country, this approach allows

them to generalise AI solutions and impact a broader population efficiently.

**C: Can you walk us through your current role and its impact on healthcare?**

**A:** I work on the application side of AI to improve healthcare services, particularly for autism and PTSD. We constantly try to make life easier for those who are living with these conditions.

Take autism as an example. Many children struggle with speech and acute communication problems. They attend therapy sessions at medical centres, but there aren't enough therapists there, leaving children underserved and families exhausted.

Our work develops AI tools to support therapists, bridge communication gaps, and provide remote patient assistance so that care can reach people rather than the other way around.

**C: What are some of the challenges and advantages of working remotely with an international defence ministry?**

**A:** The toughest part is definitely the lack of face-to-face interaction. I am naturally an outdoor person, so sometimes I miss the energy of in-person brainstorming sessions where ideas bounce around more spontaneously. On the flip side, remote work also comes with big advantages. It gives us flexibility and the ability to manage our time well while still keeping projects moving forward.

Our team is quite close-knit. We meet two to three times a week online, which feels a bit like being part of a fast-paced startup while still doing research at the frontier of AI. Our professor leads the discussions, and I regularly connect with therapists, medical centre directors, and researchers to understand real-world needs. That feedback loop makes our work feel meaningful because we are designing AI tools that can actually be used in clinics.

Besides, on the infrastructure side, training and running AI models need powerful graphics processing unit (GPUs), which we access through cloud platforms like Alibaba and Azure that have dedicated data centres in Saudi Arabia. This ensures each team member has secure, high-performance resources. At the same time, we follow strict privacy rules and ethical protocols – like clinical trial approvals and consent requirements – so that the technology remains trustworthy and safe to deploy.

**C: What skills, extracurricular activities, research, or competitions can help Bangladeshi students stand out for a global AI career?**

**A:** From my own experience exploring AI engineer roles, I found that most positions in big tech companies require advanced degrees, such as a master's or PhD in fields like AI, ML, computer vision, or large language models (LLMs). For

undergrads, this means two things: first, maintain a strong CGPA, which is essential for getting into top research labs, and second, get involved in research and aim to contribute to publications in top-tier AI conferences. Focusing on these will increase your chances of landing in a top-tier, renowned AI research lab, which will eventually help you secure an AI engineer role in leading tech companies.

Beyond maintaining strong academics and engaging in research, there are many other ways to stay actively involved and deepen your expertise in AI during your undergrad.

First, develop a clear understanding of AI fundamentals. Next, gain practical experience by participating in competitions like datathons.

Moreover, stay adaptable as tools and technologies evolve rapidly. Remember that tools change very fast. If you try to master every single library or framework at once, you will get overwhelmed. Instead, learn to understand each tool's purpose, its advantages, and when to use it so you can revisit it efficiently when needed.

Finally, building a personal brand is very valuable for undergrads. Share your projects, datathon wins, or other relevant achievements on platforms like LinkedIn or other professional channels where AI experts are active.

**C: How do you address ethical considerations in healthcare and defence AI?**

**A:** Ethics are non-negotiable. Before any tool is deployed or tested, we follow strict approval processes. Each country has an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or equivalent authority to review human experimental studies and clinical trials, and no project moves forward without clearance. For projects involving patients or children, we obtain informed consent from parents or guardians. Thus, these steps are essential to ensure safety, privacy, and trust.

**C: Any advice for aspiring AI engineers?**

**A:** Coming from a developing country, I understand the pressure of high expectations from family, friends, and society, often with limited resources. It can be hard to feel exceptional, but the key is to invest in yourself and consistently work on improving. Focus on reaching a level where you can make meaningful contributions to your community and country, and when you get there, give back.

Life will always have problems, but if you approach them with a smile and a positive mindset, you will realise life is not that bad. Life is beautiful.

A longer version of this interview is available online at [thedailystar.net/campus](http://thedailystar.net/campus).

Fatima Ashraf is a contributor for Campus, The Daily Star.



OFF CAMPUS

# A VISITOR'S GUIDE TO DURGA PUJA MANDAPS

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

BIPRA PRASUN DAS

During Durga Puja, Bangladesh lights up. In cities, streets glow with decorations and buzzing crowds, while in towns and villages, *mandaps* carry their own charm – sometimes simpler, sometimes deeply traditional – but always full of warmth. The *mandaps* themselves, decorated with vibrant colours and artistry, draw in not just devotees but people from all walks of life.

Over the years, these spaces have grown beyond their religious roots, and are now cultural gatherings where food, art, and community meet. It is a space where anyone, regardless of faith, can experience the joy. But with so many people coming together, a little awareness goes a long way. Knowing what to expect, how to move through the crowds, and the small gestures of respect that matter can make your visit smoother and more enjoyable, while keeping the celebration welcoming for all.

One of the first things you will notice at puja *mandaps* is the sheer energy. Expect a huge crowd, especially in the evenings of *Ashtami* and *Navami*, which, this year, fall on September 30 and October 1, respectively. The atmosphere can feel overwhelming. There will be a constant hum of conversations, the sound of dhaks, and music being played pretty loudly.

The *mandaps* themselves are a treat for the eyes. Though temporary, they are built with astonishing creativity, some drawing from mythology, others inspired by modern themes. It isn't just the aesthetics, though. Many *mandaps* host cultural programmes, which include music, dance, plays, or recitations. In some *mandaps*, there are concerts of popular artists too.

Timing plays a difference when it comes to enjoying Puja *mandaps*. If you are not a fan of navigating huge crowds, it's a good idea to visit later at night, after 11 PM. By then,

the rush has thinned, so you can take your time and admire the decorations and the festivities. Puja *mandaps* stay illuminated all night, and the festive mood doesn't change. For a different kind of experience, mornings are a great option. The atmosphere is quieter, the streets are easier to navigate, and you can take in the spiritual side of the festival before the day gets busy.

*Dashami*, the day of immersion, is a different story. It's emotional and chaotic at the same time. But it's also worth witnessing if you want to see the festival's closing chapter. This year, however, the government has set restrictions to ensure immersion proceedings finish before nightfall. That means rituals will end much earlier in the day, and idols will begin being loaded by noon. If you're planning to see *Dashami* rituals, it's best to go out early in the morning so you don't miss them.

While enjoying these festivities, being a bit mindful can make the celebration comfortable for everyone.

## Photography

The *mandaps* and idols are stunning, and it's natural to want to take photos. Feel free, but try not to use flash during rituals, and never block someone else's view for the perfect shot. Remember, for many, this is a moment of prayer, not just a photo-opportunity.

## Queue and patience

Crowds are part of the experience. Instead of pushing or cutting through, follow the natural flow. It might take longer, but it keeps the atmosphere calm and enjoyable for everyone.

## Inside the *mandap*

When you step inside a *mandap*, you're entering not just a decorated space, but a temporary temple. Out of respect, some *mandaps* may ask visitors to remove their shoes before entering the vicinity. Even if there isn't a sign, it's

always a good idea to notice what others are doing and follow their lead.

Once inside, keep in mind that the idol, the altar, and the ritual items (like lamps, conch shells, and offerings) are sacred. Avoid reaching out to touch them or leaning too close, even if you're curious. If you want to observe closely, it's fine to maintain some distance and observe. This gives space to those who are there to pray and ensures the rituals aren't disrupted. It's also polite to keep your voice low and avoid crowding right in front of the idol for too long, especially if many others are waiting their turn.

A little planning can make your Puja visits far more enjoyable. Around bigger *mandaps*, especially in Dhaka and other cities, expect road closures and traffic diversions. Parking is often a nightmare, so the easiest way to get around is by rickshaw, or simply on foot. Not only does this save time, but it also lets you soak in the festive atmosphere along the way.

If you plan to do pandal-hopping—going from one *mandap* to another—Old Dhaka is a good place to start. In that case, you'll likely be walking a lot, often in dense crowds, so carry a bottle of water and maybe a light snack. Comfortable shoes are a must. Plan your routes in a way so that you can visit *mandaps* that are close to one another at one go. For example, if you are visiting Dhakeshwari National Temple, Ramna Kali Temple, Shib Bari Temple, and Jagannath Hall *mandaps* in the Dhaka University area are nearby.

Durga Puja *mandaps* are more than just beautiful decorations or religious rituals; they are spaces where a community comes together to celebrate, share, and create lasting memories. By visiting with respect, patience, and a little planning, you can fully enjoy the colours, music, food, and spirit of the festival.

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