DHAKA THURSDAY NOVEMBER 6, 2025, *KARTIK 21, 1432 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

# CAMPUS

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## The student-led business initiatives of Chittagong University Railway Station

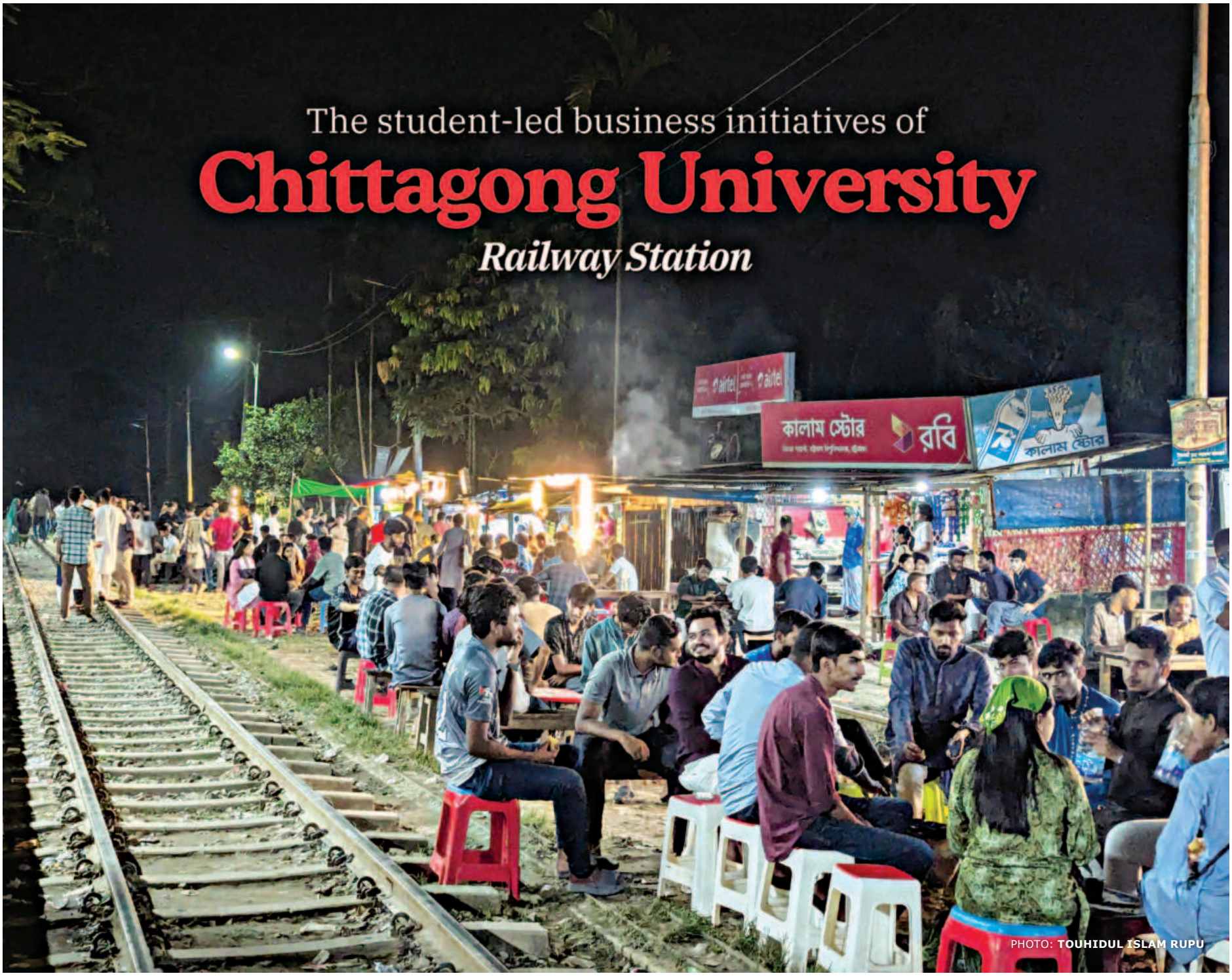


PHOTO: TOUHIDUL ISLAM RUPU

ANIME

# CHAINSAW MAN – THE MOVIE: REZE ARC

## A moony, gory, and unhinged love story for the ages

**AYAAN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE**

*Chainsaw Man – The Movie: Reze Arc* plays out more like a twisted rom-com than a straight-up action flick. The crux of the story revolves around Denji, our jagged-toothed main character, and Reze, the titular female lead who presents herself as a potential love interest to Denji.

Although Denji has hardly ever experienced basic humanity, he is no stranger to infatuation, particularly towards his boss, Makima. It is the collision between these two conflicting feelings that stirs up the teenage devil hunter's mind — does he try to stay loyal to his unrequited crush and idol, or does he reciprocate the seemingly genuine feelings from someone who is far more alike?

Studio MAPPA's visual portrayal of these internal conflicts is where the film shines brightest. Building on top of the source material's strengths – the minute details – it depicts the subtle and gradual softening of Denji's otherwise restless energy. It may be a slow burner but once it is put into the context of the series' usual chaos, the *Reze Arc* feels like a stroll in the countryside away from the city (if you know, you know).

As the final third of the movie begins and the central antagonist of the *Reze Arc,* the Bomb Devil, makes its first on-screen

appearance, the gloves come off and the chainsaws start whirring. From that point onwards, the entire film becomes a full-blownfeast for the eyes, with some of the punchiest and most striking visuals in an anime film that I've seen in recent times.

With most of the tail-end of the movie being utterly chaotic, the animation turns into a visual feast. Bombastic visuals, vivid colour splashes that mirror the manga covers, and meticulously choreographed fight scenes all combine into an incredibly stimulating theatrical experience. The production quality of the *Reze Arc* film never wanes. The early, softer scenes carry a dreamy palette and fluid animation that perfectly capture Reze's playful charm and Denji's tentative affection.

Whether or not you're a fan of the franchise, you should not deprive yourself of the absolute eye candy that is *Chainsaw Man – The Movie: Reze Arc* on the big screen.

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EDUCATION

# How universities can make group projects more collaborative

**BIPRA PRASUN DAS**

ILLUSTRATION: **AZRA HUMAYRA**

The project is due in two days. You have done your part. Another team member, bless their soul, has done theirs. But the crucial third section — the one assigned to the person who has been silent for a week — remains a blank, blinking cursor on a white screen. After you have sent them countless reminders – that were met with silence or short, half-hearted apologies – you find yourself in the dead of night, trying to write an entire section on a topic you barely understand. Your grade, and the grades of your other diligent teammates, now rest on your sleep-deprived shoulders.

If this scenario sounds familiar, it is because this is often the reality of university group projects.

Universities tell us collaboration matters, and employers want to see applicants who have experience working on a team. And yet, many classroom group projects tend to reward the loudest, overlook the organised, and hide freeloaders behind a single, shared grade. That mismatch is not a minor annoyance. It is demoralising, and it trains students to avoid teamwork rather than learn from it. There is the frustration of doing more than your share, the anxiety of carrying the risk for someone else's absence, and the awkwardness of confronting a peer who will not reply.

**A single member's poor performance should not influence the entire team's hard work. Thus, putting a cap on how much a single member's score can reduce others' grades could be a solution.**

These feelings are real. They affect learning, and they affect mental health.

So, can universities change the system to ensure that each member is held equally accountable, while fair credit still reaches the students who earned it?

**Contribution contracts**

Before a single slide is made or a draft uploaded, teams could agree on a one-page contribution contract. Not a legal document, just a list of names, roles, milestones, deliverables, and deadlines. Students then sign or confirm it in the learning management system. This contract serves two purposes. Firstly, it sets expectations, and it creates a record. And secondly, when someone fails to do their part, teammates and instructors have something concrete to refer to.

**Modular grading**

Modular grading is a grading system in which students are assessed on each module separately. It separates the group product from individual contribution. Allocate a portion of the grade to the shared work and another portion to measurable individual work. The important point is to stop conflating individual effort with the group's overall score. When the grade structure is explicit, students know their actions matter, and they learn that teamwork skills are being assessed alongside technical skills.

**Regular checkpoints**

Small, frequent milestones with short deliverables reduce the harm caused by last-minute absence. If each checkpoint requires an individual output, such as a paragraph, a data table, a code commit or a slide, then contribution becomes visible. Faculty can grade or verify these outputs quickly. Problems show up early instead of the night before the final submission, and students feel more ownership over the process.

**Making use of simple technology**

Version control systems such as Git are obvious for coding courses. For essays and presentations, tracking document history could be useful to show who contributed what and when. Learning platforms can show uploads and timestamps. Even a shared spreadsheet with time-stamped entries would be adequate. The goal is not surveillance; it is traceability. When contributions are documented, calibrating credit becomes easier and disputes become less personal.

**Keeping instructors in the loop**

Faculty are not referees for every squabble, but instructors could design projects with realistic oversight. That means building quick formative assessments, providing clear instructions that define contribution, and being available for mediation when teams are stuck.

**Limiting collateral damage**

A single member's poor performance should not influence the entire team's hard work. Thus, putting a cap on how much a single member's score can reduce others' grades could be a solution. A balanced system protects the many from the few.

Education is not only about mastering content but also about preparing for workplaces where accountability is clear and team members depend on one another. Students deserve group projects that teach collaboration and that do not punish those who try. They deserve grades that reflect their contributions, and they deserve to enter the workforce with fewer scars from university teamwork.

*Bipra Prasun Das is an undergraduate student at North South University.*

PHOTOS: **TOUHIDUL ISLAM RUPU**

OFF CAMPUS

# The student-led business initiatives of CHITTAGONG UNIVERSITY RAILWAY STATION

**Most of the students commencing their businesses here don't want their initiative to end up just as a student project. As a handicraft enthusiast and craft maker herself, Labonno aims to promote the realm of handicraft businesses as well as bring joy to people.**

**LAKUM MURSALUN**

Once only serving as a platform for trains, the Chittagong University (CU) Railway Station now blooms with different kinds of student-led initiatives, making it a multipurpose hub for showcasing creativity, campus entrepreneurship, and a safe haven for students to hang out.

Apart from regular days, the place appears most vibrant on weekends and during festivals. From late afternoon till 10 at night, the station bustles with students amidst the thriving small businesses. "It wasn't like this before. The bloom began mainly after Covid-19 in 2022," said Minhajul Islam, a master's student in International Relations at CU and the owner of Mr. Cha.

Entering the station's platform, you will come across small stalls and carts, lined up along the side of the platform. Among them sits Sabikun Nahar Labonno, a fourth-year student from the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, CU, with her carefully crafted handmade gypsum decor items in front of her. Her exquisite collection consists of a variety of items such as coasters, boxes, and mini showpieces, along with crocheted accessories like hair ties and bag charms.

"All my products are completely handmade and designed with a touch of creativity and simplicity," said Labonno. At the time of writing, she mentioned it was only her second day there, and the responses she had been getting were overwhelmingly positive.

Just a few steps ahead of Labonno's stall stands Hill Taste Canvas, a food cart featuring various dishes on display. Their usual menu includes *pahari* chicken with bamboo shoot, chicken *laksu*, *binni chaler payesh*, different types of *mungdi* items, chicken and egg items, naga pudding, pickles, and banana chips.

"Our stall offers a mix of unique flavours, and as the name suggests, our focus is on cuisine from indigenous communities," said Tahreem Bin Nasir, the co-owner of the initiative along with Priyanka Chakma, both of whom are current students of the Department of Music in CU.

You will also find Renasha Chakma and her two friends, all fourth-year students at the university, sitting with two foldable tables serving dessert items, fashion accessories, and various seafood dishes. "At first, my friend started selling accessories here, spending around Tk 6,000. Seeing her slowly make profits inspired the two of us to start something too, and we are also slowly making profits," said Renasha.

Though unlike Renasha, for Tahreem and Priyanka, it all started as a hobby. "We have always loved cooking. My friend is from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), and we used to cook and share each other's dishes. It was also my childhood dream to open my own restaurant someday. That's how we got the idea of opening a small food stall, and started this cart five months ago," Tahreem expressed.

Minhaj, on the other hand, was familiar with food carts in Mohammadpur, Dhaka, and had already sketched the plans in his mind of doing something similar after entering CU. "I maintained good relations with many food cart owners based in Dhaka, and during the Ramadan vacation of 2022, I utilised my free time and learned the necessary skills required to run my tea cafe here. Later, in July 2022, I officially opened my stall," he said.

Tutoring is one of the most common and accessible ways students can make money. When that option becomes inaccessible, students are forced to find creative ways to earn. Thus, when we asked the students about their motivation behind their initiatives, they unanimously mentioned how the 44 km journey to the city for tutoring gigs did not feel practical in terms of time constraints and finances.

This was exactly the case for Julfeqar Molla, a third-year student of Islamic History and Culture, who sits in his bookstore at the station. "Tutoring had become hectic for me as it required travelling to the city by train and making frequent trips back and forth. Being a bookworm myself, I found the bookstores here charging exorbitant amounts for books. So, I thought about selling the same books at a lower price so other students can afford them, and that's how I got started here," he said.

Despite all the independence and glitz of opening a business here, it, of course, has its own ups and downs. "Since these businesses are mainly student-led, many who start out can't keep it going beyond a month or so, espeially if they can't maintain the quality within a reasonable price range. That's not easy for students, and only those who can maintain that balance are the ones who can survive here," shares Minhaj.

Renasha shared her own experience, "You need a fridge to store pudding, but there are none in the female halls we live in, nor are we allowed to keep one in our rooms. And this, sometimes, costs me a lot," she said as she lifted the lid off a spoiled batch of pudding that cost her BDT 600 to make.

"As a newcomer here, more than anything, I feel that just surviving here can be tough," she admitted.

Tahreem reiterated similar concerns as well. For him, the hardest part is keeping customers coming back and maintaining the same food quality every day. "I am not making food, bearing in mind that my close loved ones will eat it, but rather that paying customers will. So, I always focus on serving with the best quality consistently. And since I am also investing both time and money, I obviously want it to pay off," Tahreem explained.

When asked about some major technical problems faced by the shop owners here, Minhaj, along with others, called out on the security issues of the station area, as well as the lack of adequate waste bins.

"We have had some theft cases here. In the beginning, we used to carry our stove and gas cylinder back home every day. We now chain them up here inside the cart. It would be better if there were CCTV cameras and guards around," said Tahreem.

Minhaj expressed his concerns regarding the waste issue. "If you look at the rail tracks, you will notice trash and waste materials lying all over. Even though we provide waste bins along our shops, it's not enough. The administration can take numerous steps to resolve the issue. However, we are yet to receive news of any efforts from the perspective of the administration."

Talking about the student-led businesses on campus, Prof. Md Anwar Hossain, the Director of Student Counselling and Guidance, expressed the administration's positive views towards them, but reminded them to be aware of their studies. "Lately, more students are getting interested in running small businesses, and we encourage all to do so. However, they need to make sure that their projects don't come at the cost of their studies," he said.

Raising the topic of problems faced by the students, the Director said, "Our entire university area is under CCTV coverage. If students notice any spot that needs extra surveillance, we encourage them to inform us so we can take proper action. As for cleanliness, it is also a top priority for us. We have set up dustbins at multiple points, created a central dumping station, and hired dedicated cleaners, but keeping the campus clean is everyone's responsibility, and we'll take any suggestions from the students on this matter seriously."

Most of the students commencing their businesses here don't want their initiative to end up just as a student project. As a handicraft enthusiast and craft maker herself, Labonno aims to promote the realm of handicraft businesses as well as bring joy to people.

"I always liked seeing how small handmade items can bring joy to people. I want to expand my business here and online by introducing more creative handmade products, improving my designs, and promoting local handmade art instead of factory-made products," expressed Labonno.

"Currently, I am doing it mostly out of passion, and it also helps cover some of my expenses. But yes, in the future, I do have plans to make it bigger and open up a restaurant if all goes well," said Tahreem.

Echoing Tahreem, Minhaj also mentioned his plans to grow his brand and expand through outlets if he doesn't move abroad. Even if his aspirations don't pan out, he would still be proud of his beloved initiative. "I think from the 15-16 batch to each one that came after, everyone has built some memories around Mr. Cha. They hung out here, celebrated birthdays, *addas*, and created their own memories. I hope when students look back on their memories at CU, they'll remember Mr. Cha and all the nostalgia surrounding it. Being able to foster that connection and having my stall be part of such fond memories for so many students feels like the biggest achievement," states Minhaj.

On a bright note, the student advisor Prof. Hossain tells us about future plans of constructing a multipurpose building next to the ladies' *jhupri*, where more varied products and other common goods will be made available. "This idea is still in the planning stage, and student-led initiatives may be prioritised in this project, though no formal talks have taken place yet," he stated.

In an era of job scarcity and uncertainty for youth over their futures, growing hubs like the CU Railway Station can not only give them a platform to shape their future entrepreneurial endeavours but also motivate others to diverge from the traditional job-oriented career paths and create something of their own. And for that, such spaces deserve more attention and institutional support in helping students grow into lasting examples of what youth-led initiatives can achieve.

*Lakum is currently overwhelmed doing his master's thesis at CU. Console him at mursalunlakum@gmail.com.*

# A Revolutionary Initiative by Bangladeshi Visionary Captain Golam Kibria to Solve Global Humanitarian Crises

Bangladeshi visionary Captain Golam Kibria, the Founder of the Dr. Mostafa Hazera Foundation and Chairman of MH Global Group, addressed the UK Parliament on 26th October 2025 to advocate for a free Bangladesh and condemn human rights violations.

He discussed the UN Human Rights Office's fact-finding report on the severe violations during the July–August 2024 protests, stating that Bangladesh's current democracy roadmap is inadequate without proactive steps to prevent state-sponsored violence and impunity, with the presence of UK MPs (including Dr. Rupa Huq and Apsana Begum), the FCDO lead, and UN representatives.

He urged the UK Government and the UN to implement a strategic action plan, rather than just issuing statements, to ensure that Bangladesh achieves democracy and justice. He confirmed that his work and the presence of international figures in the discussion sent a strong signal that "the world is now watching Bangladesh."

Captain Kibria has taken a groundbreaking step in addressing humanitarian crises worldwide. Through his Dr. Mostafa Hazera Foundation, the Global Five Zero Campaign is challenging centuries-old charity traditions by establishing a new model of empowerment and sustainable partnership.

**Global Advocacy and Youth Engagement**

Captain Kibria's revolutionary Five Zero model has been actively advocated to global leaders and is now set to make a significant academic debut at Oxford University in mid-December this year, where he will unveil the detailed framework of the Five Zero Campaign. The model has already created waves of revolutionary change among young people worldwide through presentations at prestigious institutions, including Queen Mary University of London's Global Youth Summit and various Canadian university programs. His message has sparked unprecedented enthusiasm and engagement among the younger generation, who see in his approach a fresh, actionable path toward meaningful global change.

**Bangladesh Model Presented at the United Nations**

In a significant global advocacy move, Captain Kibria has committed to working with the United Nations to implement the Five Zero Campaign for the Rohingya refugee community. Following extensive camp visits and submission of a comprehensive report to the UN, he presented a detailed roadmap for sustainable refugee welfare.

This initiative has received unprecedented response at the highest levels. The President of the 30th United Nations General Assembly has aligned with the same strategic approach for Rohingya welfare, marking a historic achievement for this Bangladeshi visionary on the global stage. This recognition establishes Captain Kibria as an emerging humanitarian strategist providing practical solutions to one of the world's most complex refugee crises.

**Living Testimony of Success in Africa**

The campaign's global impact was vividly demonstrated through recent spontaneous celebrations in Africa, where entire communities took to the streets expressing joy and gratitude for the Foundation's work. People gathered with radiant faces and cheerful voices, celebrating the tangible support received through the Five Zero mission. This heartfelt public endorsement serves as undeniable proof of the campaign's profound success and deep resonance within the communities it serves.

**The Five Zero Journey from Noakhali to the World**

The 'Five Zero' framework of Dr. Mostafa Hazera Foundation, which began in Deoti village, Noakhali, has the following core objectives:

1. Zero Beggars - Transforming street dependency into skilled self-reliance
2. Zero Homeless - Converting shelters into partnerships of mutual responsibility
3. Zero Illiteracy - Weaponizing education against the darkness of ignorance
4. Zero Death Without Treatment - Establishing healthcare as an inalienable human right
5. Zero Unskilled - Unleashing human potential through capacity building

This "action-based" philosophy is now transforming lives across 15 countries. The United Nations has also welcomed the application of his model to the Rohingya refugee crisis.

**Visionary Blueprint for Maritime Economy**

As an internationally recognized maritime expert, Captain Kibria has presented a bold vision for the country's economy: "Bangladesh's next economy must be maritime-based." He possesses a concrete maritime economy roadmap and has challenged that this sector can surpass the ready-made garment industry, potentially creating a $150 billion economy and 3 million jobs. As a maritime specialist, he recently invited global investors and shipowners to invest in Bangladesh at the IMO conference.

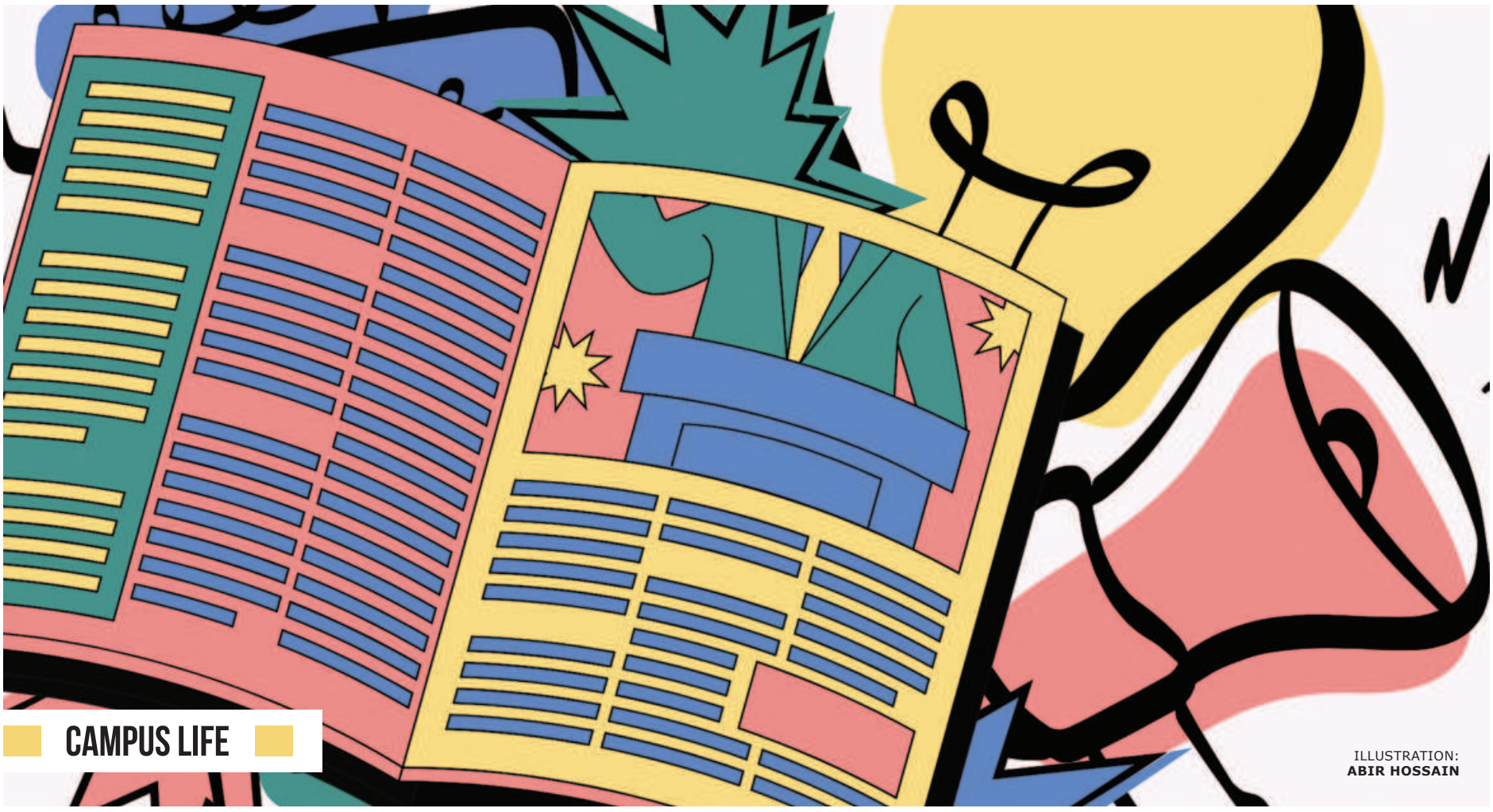
**National and International Recognition**

The Foundation's profound impact - having directly benefited over 500,000 people, provided free medical services to more than 362,000 patients, supported over 21,000 students with educational materials, and constructed 30 km of rural roads to enhance local economies - has already gained recognition from the Bangladesh government and worldwide. The Government of Bangladesh has formally recognized the Foundation's groundbreaking work through the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Additionally, Captain Kibria's invitation as a State Guest by the Singapore government during Chinese New Year celebrations acknowledges his global social contributions.

**New Horizon for Global Peace**

Captain Kibria's clear message: "We stand at a historic crossroads. We can either continue with century-old approaches that have delivered limited results, or embrace a new paradigm where compassion transforms into concrete action, pity becomes genuine solidarity, and every human being is seen not as a recipient of donations, but as a partner in development."

The Dr. Mostafa Hazera Foundation demonstrates that global peace is not built through fundraisers but through empowering individuals, strengthening communities, and restoring the fundamental dignity of every human being. His visionary thinking is unveiling a new horizon for global peace based on empowerment and collective humanitarian responsibility - through one skilled hand, one educated mind, and one dignified life at a time.



CAMPUS LIFE

ILLUSTRATION:
**ABIR HOSSAIN**

# Why universities should have STUDENT NEWSPAPERS

**FARIHA LAMISA**

Student-run newspapers have the potential to amplify student voices, highlight campus issues, and drive social change. For instance, in 2014, The *Columbia Daily Spectator*, the student-run newspaper of Columbia University in New York, ignited a national debate by covering the story of Emma Sulkowicz, a student who carried a mattress around campus to protest the university's handling of her alleged sexual assault case. The mattress symbolised the weight of trauma that survivors of sexual assault bear in their daily lives, and major media outlets soon picked up the story, sparking nationwide discussions on the handling of sexual assault cases, institutional accountability, and due process on American university campuses. This incident clearly delineates how campus newspapers can play a vital role in advocating for students' causes.

A number of student-run newspapers across campuses in Bangladesh have also demonstrated that student-run publications can have a meaningful impact, contributing to personal development and strengthening campus community engagement.

Regarding the importance of campus newspapers in a university setting, Tagabun Taharim, the former Editor-in-Chief of The *BRACU Express,* believes that such publications provide a valuable platform for students to express their voices. She explains, "Student newspapers give students a real voice. At university, we meet so many different people, and things happen every day. In our newspaper, we capture those moments, share opinions, and keep everyone informed. It connects the campus to the wider world, sparks conversations, and highlights student talent and concerns in a way nothing else does."

Besides building a community within the university, a student-run newspaper can also benefit the university and its students in terms of career growth.

Saquib Bin Raschid, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of *TheULABian,* says, "I think a student-run publication can help the university a great deal. Students with great potential in writing, editing, and literature in general end up working for top news portals from a very early stage of their studentship. This also enhances and strengthens a university's alumni hold in the journalism sphere while also offering encouragement to the upcoming ones."

Working for a student newspaper can have a profound and positive impact on students' personalities as well. Rishov Aditya, Editor-in-Chief of *BRACU Express,* says that working for the campus newspaper has taught him to be more tactful. "Sometimes, the topics we write about may not be viewed in a good light by the authority or even by some individuals," he explains. "For example, I once wrote an editorial about the reemergence of student politics, specifically within private universities. As it is a sensitive topic, I had to navigate it in a delicate manner. At the same time, I had to make sure my writing isn't too vague but does answer the important aspects of the topic."

Additionally, managing a newspaper within the campus can help students garner crucial research skills. Tabassum Haider Risha, former Head of Communication for *The ULABian,* says, "Being part of a student newspaper has helped me become a better researcher. When I used to write about specific topics, I had to conduct thorough and well-rounded research on them. This required both patience and curiosity. That's one of the lessons that I took away from my time at *The ULABian*. The more I grow, the more I appreciate its value."

Despite having the potential to make a positive contribution to both the campus community and individual students, the circulation of student-run newspapers is scarce in Bangladesh. Mrittika Anan Rahman, a lecturer at the Media, Communication, and Journalism (MCJ) programme at North South University (NSU), believes that the reasons behind a lack of student-run newspapers across campuses may range from the prevailing political culture to declining interest amongst young people towards print media.

"There could be multiple reasons why student-run newspapers are not common in our country. These include a lack of encouragement for freedom of expression in our culture and insufficient university funding," she says. "However, there may be other reasons as well, such as a decline in interest in reading print newspapers amongst young people. It may also be attributed to a reduced interest in pursuing journalism as a future career."

Student-run newspapers have significant potential in building community and nurturing the personal and professional growth of students. However, the culture of maintaining a student newspaper continues to be an anomaly due to logistical and cultural constraints. The transferable skills and community benefits generated by student publications should compel us to rethink the absence of student newspapers across most of our campuses.

*Fariha Lamisa is a professional procrastinator and a clueless human being. Please send your consolation via email flamisa2020@gmail.com*

INTERVIEWS

# MEET THE COSPLAYERS WHO REPRESENTED BANGLADESH IN JAPAN

PHOTO: **COSPLAY INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION**

**AYAAN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE**

In Bangladesh, recognition is one of the most pressing problems that cosplayers face. From newcomers to seasoned veterans, everyone has suffered from a dearth of appreciation and acknowledgement from people outside of their own community. Consequently, international exposure has been few and far between, despite many cosplayers creating outfits and choreographies worthy of global recognition.

That is why it was such a milestone when two Bangladeshi cosplayers, Arika Ahsan and Khushnud Mahzabin, who go by the aliases "Akira Cozer" and "Shionchawn Cosplays" respectively, were selected to represent our country at the Pop Culture Hiroshima festival in Japan. Held from October 17 to 19, the event gave them a chance to experience the cosplay community in Japan while showcasing their own creativity to fans from around the world.

The journey to the global stage began way back in 2018 for Akira, when she started out as a casual hobbyist who loved making her own costumes. "I was a creative kid, so it made sense to challenge myself by trying to make my own costumes," she reminisces. It wasn't long until that creative outlet took a competitive turn.

Shion, on the other hand, still describes herself as a casual cosplayer. "I didn't really intend to become a cosplayer," she says. "But the support and enthusiasm I got from my friends and even complete strangers pushed me towards it. It's still a hobby for me, but I always give my 100 percent. That's how I show respect to the *mangaka*."

Naturally, I was curious to know how a serious, competitive cosplayer and a casual one not only teamed up together, but also won a ticket to the big stage. As it turns out, the two didn't start out as close friends, but became teammates thanks to their shared love for anime and craftsmanship.

"Akira had once mentioned a duo look she wanted to try out, so I watched the anime and loved the idea," Shion recalls. "We had great chemistry because our skills complemented each other well. She's good with foam work, and I love working on gowns. It just worked out perfectly."

Their teamwork would eventually pay off at the Nihon Jai competition held in August, where they cosplayed as Tenjou Utena and Himemiya Anthy from *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, a classic 90s shoujo anime. Akira, recalling how she felt back then, shares, "Since the winners of this competition would represent Bangladesh in the Pop Culture Hiroshima event, we were intimidated at first by the sheer number of amazing cosplayers who were participating. But we decided that regardless of the outcome, we would leave our hearts on the stage and make it an experience to remember."

As fate would have it, the duo came out on top as the champions. While a large part of their victory was due to the intricate costumes they made from scratch, their on-stage performance also played a pivotal role in helping them stand out from the crowd.

PHOTO: **FASBEER ESKANDER**

Shion, who cosplayed as Anthy, said the role appealed to both her creative and technical sides. "I loved the gown and the part where Anthy pulls a sword from her chest," she says. "I made it a point to figure out how to recreate that seemingly impossible scene under the bright lights."

"The following three months leading up to the main festival were equal parts thrilling and nerve-wracking," says Shion. "We worked non-stop since this was Bangladesh's first time participating in Pop Culture Hiroshima. The pressure to make a strong first impression was a big driving force."

When they finally reached Hiroshima, the nerves seemed to melt away significantly, all thanks to the people they met during their time in Japan. As Akira puts it, "The international cosplay community, for starters, was incredibly welcoming. Many of them even gave us little gifts as memorabilia."

She continues, "The event organisers also made us feel included every step of the way. Even strangers we came across on the streets helped us with directions, translating menus, and even recommending food that didn't contain haram items like pork."

The actual event had multiple parts to it. Describing the itinerary at a glance, Shion says, "October 17 was rehearsal day. On October 18, there was a parade through the streets of Hiroshima where every cosplayer was in costume, interacting with the locals. Once that was over, seven out of the fourteen countries performed their on-stage choreography later in the day. October 19 started with a brief tour around some traditional local spots before the stage performances for the remaining countries — including us — commenced."

As for their choice of costumes, the duo chose two different sets of costumes. During the parade, Akira and Shion donned the outfits of Inuyasha and Kagome, respectively, from the anime *Inuyasha*. For the stage show, they reused their costumes from the Nihon Jai event, choosing to focus on their performance and the overall production quality. Despite the need for perfection, both cosplayers took the bold decision of making nearly everything from scratch.

"Our outfits, accessories, and stage props were all made by hand over a very busy and hectic period of time," Shion shares. "Only our swords were 3D printed and modified according to our needs."

Being the first ones from the Bangladeshi cosplaying community to carry the flag on international lands comes with its fair share of emotions. Akira, in particular, hopes that their participation will go on to inspire more opportunities for fellow cosplayers in the foreseeable future.

"We have so many talented people here who just need a fair chance, and it's about time the rest of the world recognised our skills," she says. "If given the right support, we can represent Bangladesh in an overwhelmingly positive light like never before."

*Ayaan immerses himself in dinosaur comics and poorly-written manga. Recommend your least favourite reads at ayaan.shams@gmail.com*