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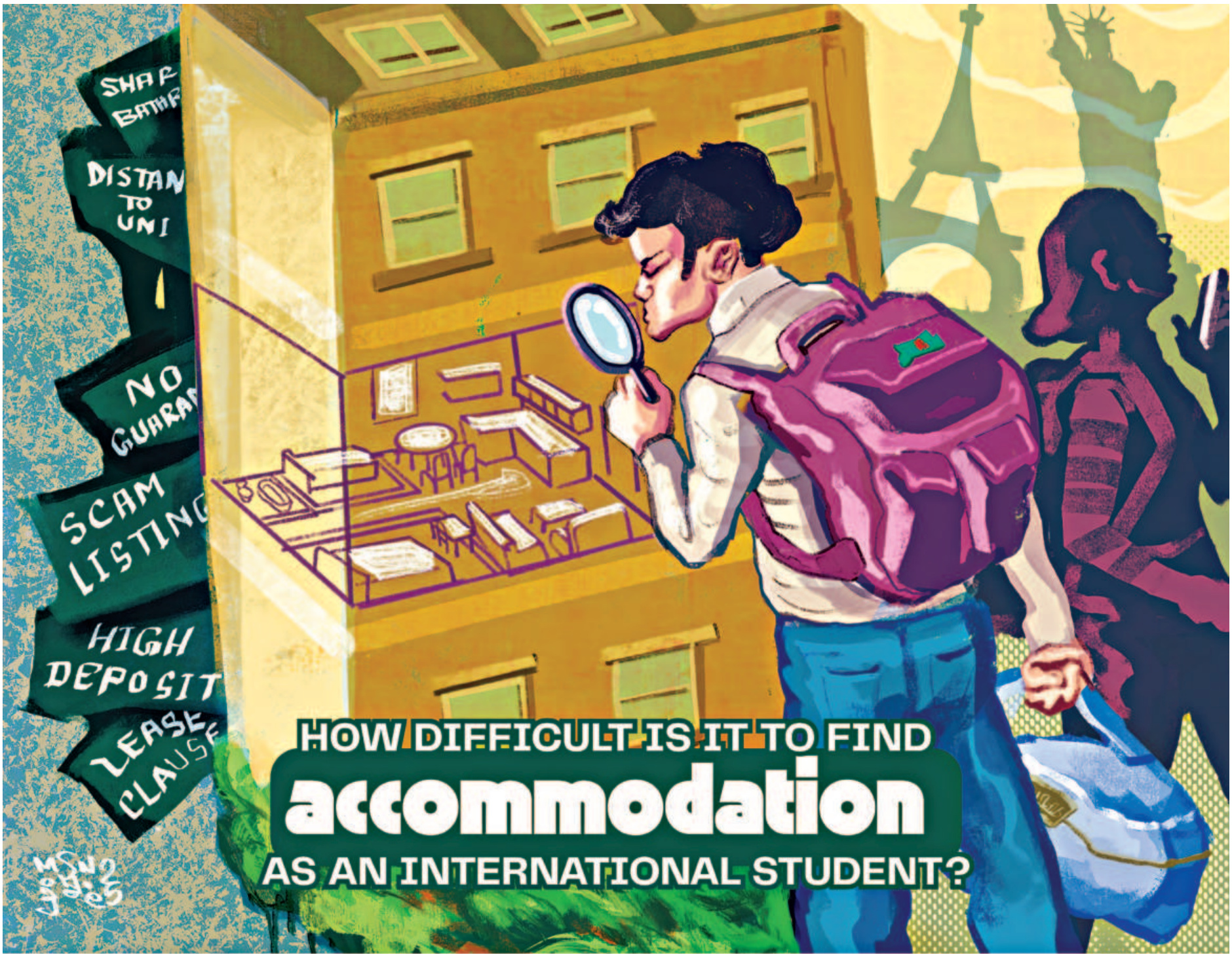

ILLUSTRATION: **MONG SHONIE**

WRESTLING

THE (LAST) TIME IS NOW

Bidding farewell to John Cena

AAQIB HASIB

On July 7, 2024, during WWE's Money in the Bank premium live event (PLE), John Cena, actor and one of the most popular professional wrestlers, made a surprise appearance to an incredible reception. And then, the wrestling world stood still in silence as Cena announced his retirement.

Cena would later explain during the press conference that he was not retiring immediately. Rather, 2025 would be his last year as an in-ring talent. Come December 2025, his time as a wrestler would end.

Retirement in the wrestling industry is usually not where things end. Wrestlers go away, and eventually come back for a match here and there. Cena, however, clarified that his retirement is absolute. Come 2026, WWE fans will no longer see him in the ring.

Even though a lot of us did not like Cena, there were many who absolutely loved him. In particular, his "Doctor of Thuganomics" character has inspired a whole generation of kids to fall in love with wrestling and with his core values of "Hustle, Loyalty, and Respect". And whenever he faced adversity, whether it was an injury or a creative setback, he always barrelled through such obstacles with his "Never Give Up" attitude.

Often, when you are the top guy for as long as Cena was, people can end up hating you. In most cases, those wrestlers are loved during their initial run, but people eventually get fed up with seeing them come back over and over, while also holding down new talent. Cena has been an exception to that rule.

When he ventured into Hollywood and became a part-timer in the ring, he made sure to push the new generation of wrestlers, taking loss after loss to the likes of other pro wrestlers. Even in his final year, Cena has taken multiple losses and showcased upcoming talent like Dominic Mysterio. And the fans have cheered him throughout, even when he turned heel – a wrestler who portrays a villain.

When you watch Cena explain his retirement and his deep admiration for the fans and the wrestling business, it is clear to see why Cena is finally getting his flowers. The man could easily have secured himself a big WWE paycheck, mostly with his success in Hollywood, for at least ten more years. Yet, Cena willingly chose to end it at the age of just 48, because he does not want the fans to see him as a shadow of his former self in the ring.

The "end of an era" is often an overused phrase, particularly by wrestling fans. However, when Cena retires on December 13, it truly will be the end of an era. And it will be on Cena's terms.

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CAMPUS LIFE

KHORSHED MAMA'S ICED TEA

A staple among BRAC University students

RITTIQUE BASAK

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

What comes to your mind whenever someone mentions iced tea? For the students of BRAC University (BRACU), this beverage has a deeper meaning, and the one person who comes to mind is none other than Khorshed Alam, better known to the students as *Khorshed mama*, who has been serving his famous iced tea to students for years.

Khorshed found the transition from academia to entrepreneurship to be extraordinarily fulfilling and rewarding. He opened his shop during his student life, and continued with it even after completing his bachelor's and master's degrees.

Motivated by a strong desire to serve the community and business, Khorshed decided to establish his tea shop — "Ek Cup Cha"— near the BRACU campus. At the time, Khorshed had no idea that his choice would lead to the beginning of a tradition that thousands of BRACU students would appreciate.

Khorshed's start was not very easy. The usual nine-to-five jobs did not satisfy him, as the salaries he was getting were negligible compared to his hard work. So, he decided to continue with the tea shop. Even then, there were many other hurdles he had to deal with.

"My father ignored me for a week when I first started the shop," said Khorshed. He also said that there were times when the shop was ordered to be shut down, but this didn't stop him. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, Khorshed carried on with the shop.

Iced tea was first introduced at Khorshed's shop during a time when load shedding was common in Bangladesh. Lemonade had always been the shop's most popular drink, but on an extremely hot day, continuous power cuts left the blender unusable, making it impossible to prepare any lemonade.

That same day, a very thirsty customer arrived and asked Khorshed for something refreshing. Since lemonade wasn't an option, the customer suggested simply adding ice to some fresh tea. Khorshed served the drink, tried it himself, and was pleasantly surprised. The customer loved it as well.

Soon after, five more customers ordered the iced tea and were just as impressed. What began as a lucky accident soon became Khorshed's now-famous iced tea.

What makes Khorshed's shop truly unique is the bond of trust shared between him and his customers. Some of the customers — mostly BRACU students — even help out at the cash register or behind the counter from time to time, a gesture that reflects how close they are with their Khorsed *mama*.

To Khorshed, customers are far more than people who buy his iced tea. He trusts them just as much as they trust him. They are his friends and supporters. Because of this mutual connection, his shop has become a gathering place where people come to talk, share stories, and feel a sense of belonging. Over the years, these relationships have supported him through both good and difficult times, with customers lending money or offering help whenever he needed it most.

"I don't see them merely as customers," said Khorshed. "To me, they are more than family. Even when I don't get full support from relatives, my customers are always there for me."

For students, Khorshed's shop has become a safe space where they are always met with a warm smile, a listening ear, and, of course, a good cup of iced tea. For Khorshed, nothing is more fulfilling than feeling a sense of unity with the BRAC University community.

"I love spending quality time with the students and chatting with them," he said. "I try to offer hospitality that makes them feel at home."

Khorshed *mama* has been serving BRACU students for around 20 years. When the university moved from Mohakhali to Badda, he was the only shop owner from Mohakhali lucky enough to get a shop near the new campus location before the university had officially opened.

"My previous tea shop branch (the one in Mohakhali) is still running well, but I prefer to stay around the students, so here I am at the campus in Badda," said Khorshed. "During the first two to three days of opening the Badda shop, I used to wait outside so that I could grab students' attention. After that, students started to visit my shop as usual."

"I have been serving BRACU students for almost two decades," said Khorshed. "Many students have graduated and are doing great in their careers, but the connection is still strong."

Rittique Basak is a contributor for The Daily Star.

STUDY ABROAD

How difficult is it to find accommodation as an international student?

ABIR HOSSAIN

ILLUSTRATION:
ABIR HOSSAIN

The prospect of leaving the comfort of one's home and venturing out into the world — one that is unlikely to offer any of the privileges that a lot of us have grown accustomed to — is understandably daunting. Inevitably, it comes with its fair share of challenges. From managing finances to taking up part-time work and learning how to balance household chores with academics, the adaptation period is steep to say the least. The list of things one has to get used to appears to be never-ending.

The life-altering changes can feel seismic. Through it all, however, there is one integral aspect that students can hope to offer some semblance of stability and refuge from the relentlessness: the space one lives in. This is especially true in a foreign land where the risks of alienation are more pronounced. To be able to return to a space of one's own is certainly a gift. Yet, for a lot of international students, the very experience of looking for accommodation poses a number of issues.

Maleeha Muniyat, a third-year student at the University of Portsmouth in the United Kingdom (UK), lived in the university's dormitory for the first two years of her degree, after which she moved to an off-campus accommodation.

She explains how she began looking for a place, "There are popular websites like Rightmove and OnTheMarket that I used to look around for houses. The websites have a filter system that allows you to look for accommodation based on what you want. This can include criteria such as the number of rooms and the kind of area you want to live in. After you make your choice, you call the agent or the landlord and wait for them to respond. From there, you visit for a viewing, based on which you make a decision."

When asked what hurdles she faced during the search process, Maleeha spoke about the house viewing experience, saying that the houses looked different from the pictures on the website.

"When you visit for a viewing, naturally, there are tenants living there. But some of the houses that we went to were in horrifying condition. Neither the kitchen nor the toilet was clean, and the bills weren't paid either. A couple of the houses we viewed were dark and smelled really bad," recalls Maleeha.

"How can you imagine living in a house that is in such poor condition? Although the agent reassured us that the place would be cleaned if we decided to move in, we were deterred by the conditions. This forced us to reject a lot of the options that we went to look at," added Maleeha.

Leaving the country to study abroad is expensive as it is. Finances are arguably the most pivotal factor in determining which country and institution a student chooses to attend. If we were to break down the cost into smaller fractions, then perhaps the single biggest recurring expenditure for any student is the rent they have to pay.

Affordability, thus, becomes a driving factor. After all, a hefty amount is likely to exert greater financial strain. However, with affordability being at the forefront of students' concerns, does that entail that they have to compromise on other areas of their living conditions?

Sadman Kamal, a third-year student at the University of Manitoba in Canada, discusses the factors he considered when looking for accommodation: "I was obviously looking for a place that was within my budget and close to my university. At the time, however, I did not realise that I should move somewhere that was also accessible by public transport."

"The other concern was the number of people I would have to share the house with. It seemed like the situation would become more complex with more people involved. I also considered whether or not I would get along with my flatmates and if they were students or graduates who are already working," he adds.

Nahaly Nafisa Khan, an alumna of Virginia Tech, discusses the hurdles she faced: "Initially, it was just the rent-to-amenities ratio. A lot of the apartments I looked into did not have the amenities I was looking for – in-house washer dryer in particular – but came at a higher rent. I kept looking and eventually found one I could afford by sharing with two other roommates."

Although Nahaly admitted that she had to compromise on other aspects of her accommodation to save money on rent, she did mention that it wasn't all bad. "I had a lot of space to myself and could make things work once I sorted out my priorities when it came to housing," she explains.

"The rent I pay is definitely worth the space, but I wish the facilities were better. When we initially moved in, it wasn't clean at all. During my first week in this house, I didn't take a shower because the bathroom that came with it was dirty. After work, I would go to my previous dorm, use my flatmate's key, and use the shower there," Maleeha expands.

Though there are many factors that the house possesses which align with her preferences, there remain a few drawbacks, such as the heating and wifi, which she said don't work very well.

"I might have been able to find a better place to live in, paying the same rent that I do now. People live in houses where they have to pay 110 pounds a week, including utilities. I pay more, excluding utilities," she laments.

In a survey conducted by Academica Forum, where 265 international students in Canada participated, it was found that international students mostly sought accommodation off-campus. But finding a space proved to be difficult for many of them. In the same report, the authors mentioned that some of the participants alleged that "landlords did not like renting to international students—who may not have a credit score or history in Canada—or that they had to opt for crowded living spaces to get by." A lot of them also felt that their housing accommodations had been far too expensive.

Sadman emphasised that most of the problems he faced when looking for accommodation had a solution, except one. He recalled that transferring the flat deposit to Canada proved to be challenging. "Although it was a relatively small amount, I didn't really know how to transfer it from Bangladesh. There weren't any reliable channels, apart from hundi," he said.

Though he did vouch for Bangladeshi student communities (which most universities have) as a bridge to address possible concerns that incoming students might have regarding housing, Sadman's encounter proved to be less than ideal.

"I knew of an acquaintance who was looking for tenants to move in with him. I was very close to confirming my place in the house, but, for some reason, he would not tell me the rent for the entire house. Despite asking several times, he would not disclose it. Instead, he asked what I would do with that information. So, there is always the possibility that even people you are familiar with could try to deceive you," he explains.

Despite the emergence of online house renting platforms all across the globe, the risk of falling prey to scammers — especially as an international student — remains. Most students who are moving to their respective countries do not have a trusted individual who can go look at the place or verify the details on their behalf. Additionally, multiple online groups and forums on Facebook and Reddit, which are meant to help incoming pupils with securing housing, consist of posts by students outlining their frustrating experiences and warning others about the perils of being deceived.

> **If we were to break down the cost into smaller fractions, then perhaps the single biggest recurring expenditure for any student is the rent they have to pay. Affordability, thus, becomes a driving factor. After all, a hefty amount is likely to exert greater financial strain.**

There are other issues that students have to put up with as well. This can include sporadic text exchanges between tenants and landlords, which can primarily be attributed to the difference in time zones. Additionally, gauging the exact size of the room you may be considering can be a bit difficult. It is also worth accounting for the fact that popular destinations such as the United States (US), the UK, Canada, and Australia have a credit score system, which Bangladesh does not. Thus, translating such gaps to landlords and agents abroad could also be a hurdle.

Nonetheless, what students must remember is that many thousands of Bangladeshi students leave the country each year in pursuit of a degree abroad. The number has continued to increase exponentially, with pupils going almost everywhere and at all levels of higher education. Given current developments in popular destinations, however, the number is likely to decrease. What cannot be denied, though, is that a precedent has been set.

"Talk to your potential roommates before signing the lease, discuss food habits and your lifestyle to check if you're compatible enough to live in the same house," Nahaly advises. "Read all the documents before signing and paying the security deposit, and double-check with the property manager if you have any confusion. Ask for a house tour on video call if possible, don't just settle for pictures."

Elsewhere, Maleeha recommends incoming students to start looking for a place as early as possible. Sadman urges them to be aware of the existing tenancy laws and remain up-to-date with any changes.

The students who have gone before their younger counterparts have paved the way for their predecessors. Although the world order appears to be shifting, it would not be entirely wishful thinking to speculate that it is going to take a while before these paths are entirely closed off.

Reference:

Academica Forum (September 19, 2023). *The Housing Crisis and International Students.*

Abir Hossain is a sub-editor at Campus, Rising Stars, and Star Youth.

OFF CAMPUS

Alternative dispute resolution is crucial for its lawyers

MD. NAYEEM HAIDER

DESIGN: **AZRA HUMAYRA**

According to a Supreme Court report published this year, as of December 2024, a staggering 45,16,603 cases were pending with the Appellate Division, High Court, and lower courts across the country. It further shows that each lower court judge handles 1,977 cases, while each judge in the Appellate Division and the High Court handles 4,446 and 6,552 cases, respectively. The status quo is a matter of dismay, not just for lawyers' clients, but for many lawyers themselves.

In the context of our overburdened courts and strained legal system, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) offers a more efficient solution and is seen by many as an essential avenue for addressing these issues. It has seen great expansion in the past few decades, globally.

Rahim Shamji, the Founder and CEO of ADR ODR International, who is an international mediator and digital dispute resolution specialist (DDRS), informs that ADR processes are well-established in the UK, with competency in them no longer a luxury but an absolute necessity for lawyers in many practice areas. "The scene in the US is significantly more mature than in the UK," he adds. "95 to 98 percent of cases filed in the US don't go to trial, they are resolved in ADR."

The core idea behind it is not new in Bangladesh, with village elders, religious leaders, and prominent members of communities informally arbitrating (*Salish*) or mediating (*Madhyasthata*) disputes between parties in conflict. What is new to us, however, is the incorporation of these processes into our legal system.

Arbitration in the domestic context can be understood as the court-regulated, state-sanctioned privatisation of legal proceedings that allows greater flexibility and efficiency. But the ambit of arbitration is not just limited to domestic cases. The New York Convention, to which Bangladesh is a signatory, requires courts of one state to uphold arbitral awards given in another.

Dr Khaled Hamid Chowdhury, Senior Advocate at the Appellate Division, a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (FCIArb), and the Head of Laws at London College of Legal Studies (South), believes that the current professional landscape makes it indispensable for law students and young lawyers to know and learn ADR procedures. He states, "Corporate clients are well aware of the drawbacks of litigation, and they naturally gravitate towards alternate means to resolve their disputes. So, they look for professionals who are competent in alternative dispute resolution procedures."

The most prominent among ADR procedures are arbitration and mediation.

Arbitration in Bangladesh is regulated by the Arbitration Act of 2001. It involves parties entering into an agreement to let their dispute be decided by an Arbitral Tribunal that they themselves have the freedom to appoint and then appointing lawyers who present their cases before the tribunal. Upon hearing the arguments made on behalf of both parties, the tribunal can make an arbitral award that is enforced "in the same manner as if it were a decree of the Court" (Section 44). This means that a decision reached through arbitration proceedings can be considered equivalent to a court judgement, unless it is set aside by the court (Section 42).

"Arbitration is generally much more expeditious," says Margub Kabir, Barrister-at-Law and Head of Chamber of Margub Kabir & Associates, on the differences between litigation and arbitration. He elucidates, "In court, when you go before a judge, there are many cases in the court's docket, and yours is one of them. Procedurally, you file the case, come on the list, get the judge to hear your case, pass an initial order, and then there will be a final hearing and then a final judgement. But for the entirety of the process, you will have to wait with all the other cases in the docket of the particular court. But in the case of arbitration, the tribunal exists just for the case that is in front of it."

Essentially, arbitration in the domestic context can be understood as the court-regulated, state-sanctioned privatisation of legal proceedings that allows greater flexibility and efficiency. But the ambit of arbitration is not just limited to domestic cases. The New York Convention, to which Bangladesh is a signatory, requires courts of one state to uphold arbitral awards given in another. Thus, in this era of complex international contracts, arbitration is predominantly the preferred means of settling disputes, providing an immense scope for growth and diversification for individual lawyers and the legal profession in Bangladesh at large.

"Graduates who have acquired the skills and are pursuing this field can have brilliant careers – almost automatically they are regarded as more employable by commercial law chambers," says Dr Khaled Hamid Chowdhury. "But as a method of dispute resolution, I think mediation is an even more powerful tool."

Mediation involves a neutral, impartial mediator facilitating conflict resolution. The mediator does this by asking the right questions and having the parties explore the alternatives to settlement, as well as proposals and the likelihood of their acceptance. In a successful mediation, all of this leads to the parties thinking beyond their respective positions and towards a solution that is great for them but also good for the other side.

Speaking from his experience both as a lawyer and a mediator, Shahariar Sadat, an Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and the Deputy Executive Director of the Centre for Peace and Justice, BRAC University, describes how mediation is a more empathetic method of dispute resolution, "As lawyers, our eyes are always on the evidence, on the technicalities, and we avoid the human aspect, giving the law all the prominence. But as mediators, the biggest emphasis is on the human element." Both Dr Khaled Hamid Chowdhury and Advocate Shahariar Sadat believe that in the legal profession, mediation training reminds them to focus on their client's humanity and, by extension, their own.

As of now, there is no overarching "Mediation Act" in Bangladesh. Nonetheless, section 89A of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908, facilitates court-directed mediation in civil cases. Notably, the *Artha Rin Adalat Ain*, 2003, under section 22, mandates pre-trial mediation between the financial institution and borrower in money loan cases. Moreover, recent developments have only added to the prominence of mediation in the Bangladeshi context. Through the Legal Aid (Amendment) Ordinance 2025, the government introduced mandatory pre-case mediation in matters of maintenance, dowry, house rent, and family disputes. However, mediation, like arbitration, is not limited to the domestic scene alone.

With the Singapore Convention making mediated settlements in one signatory nation binding in the courts of another, mediation is also set to enjoy increased relevance in the field of international commercial disputes. But despite the personal, societal, and national necessity that goes even beyond the obvious economic opportunity, the ADR scene in Bangladesh still lags behind by magnitudes in comparison to the global standard.

"Arbitration is definitely faster, but after it's done, you still have to litigate in court for enforcement. It basically frustrates the purpose," says Barrister Margub Kabir.

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NOTICE BOARD

National law conference held at Bangladesh University

A national law conference, titled "Law, Justice, and Human Rights in the Global South: Challenges and Prospects", was held at Bangladesh University (BU).

Prof. Dr Md Jahangir Alam, Vice-Chancellor of BU, attended the opening ceremony as the Chief Guest. Prof. Dr Abdullah Al Faruq, former Dean of the Faculty of Law at Chittagong University, was present as the Special Guest. The keynote paper was presented by Prof. Dr Farhana Helal Mehtab, Dean of the Faculty of Law at Southeast University. The session was presided over by Md Mostafa, Acting Head of the Department of Law at BU.

During her keynote presentation, Prof. Dr Farhana stated that a significant portion of the population in the country shows reluctance in complying with the law, and raising public awareness is essential to change this mindset. Prof. Dr Md Jahangir said that establishing the rule of law is crucial for the nation's progress.

The closing session of the conference was attended by Justice Md Akram Hossain Chowdhury of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh as the Chief Guest. Dr Khaled Hossain Chowdhury, Founder and Head of the Law Department of the London College of Legal Studies (South) and Senior Advocate of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, was present as the Special Guest.

Justice Md Akram said that with the advancement of civilisation, the necessity of law in every sphere of human life has become increasingly evident. He stated that the protection of human rights and all other civil rights is possible only through the establishment of the rule of law.

The day-long conference featured two technical sessions covering 11 topics, with participation from renowned lawyers, researchers, and academics. Deans from various faculties, department heads, senior officials, and students of the Department of Law of BU were present throughout the programme.

NSU hosts seminar on contemporary compensation strategies in the Bangladeshi banking sector

North South University's (NSU) Department of Management organised a seminar titled "Contemporary Compensation Strategies in the Banking Sector of Bangladesh: An HR Perspective" on December 4. The session was graced by the presence of Dr AKM Waresul Karim, Professor and Dean of the School of Business & Economics (SBE), as the Special Guest, and featured Md Sahidul Islam, Senior Executive Vice President and Head of Business at Shimanto Bank PLC, as the Guest Speaker.

In his remarks, Dr Karim emphasised the importance of understanding evolving compensation frameworks in the country's banking sector and highlighted the need for students to stay abreast of industry trends. Md Sahidul delivered an insightful presentation on contemporary compensation practices, the impact of digitalisation, and HR strategies shaping

talent management in the banking industry.

The programme was organised under the guidance of Dr Ziaul Haq Adnan, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Management. The event was coordinated by Hamida Mosharraf Moniea, Senior Lecturer, Department of Management.

IUBAT Hosts "Dhaka Bank Presents IUBAT Career Festival 2025"

International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT) organised one of the country's largest employment-focused events, "Dhaka Bank Presents IUBAT Career Festival 2025". The day-long festival saw participation of more than 130 renowned local and foreign organisations.

Thousands of students, graduates, and job seekers visited the booths of participating organisations throughout the day. This year, employers offered over 1,200 job vacancies, conducting on-the-spot CV collection, preliminary screening, written assessments, group discussions, and interviews to shortlist eligible candidates.

During the festival, a series of 10 career sessions was conducted by distinguished HR experts from various industries. A special panel discussion featured top corporate leaders, successful entrepreneurs, and prominent HR professionals.

Alternative dispute resolution is crucial for its lawyers

FROM PAGE 6

"Enforcement can be tricky at times," says M M Asif Yousuf, a final-year LLB student, legal intern, and ADR ODR Associate Arbitrator. "The courts' willingness to enforce awards links to how much foreign investment it receives, so we should definitely make it easier here."

Barrister Margub Kabir elaborates on the need for change, "Our Arbitration Act is pretty good, but it needs reforms. If there were a special court for the enforcement of arbitral awards, or if it could go to the High Court, it would certainly be faster and save a lot of time."

Regarding mediation, Advocate Shahariar Sadat offers gloom, but with the prospect of sunlight, "Despite the existence of legal provisions promoting it, there is a lack of institutions active in this field. And until there is a proper institutional framework, and until the overall litigation culture changes, it will be difficult to build a career purely as a mediator in Bangladesh. But if the state does not create opportunities, society will create opportunities for itself."

Dr Khaled Hamid Chowdhury, an ardent proponent for the inclusion of the study of ADR at the undergraduate level, expresses his profound belief that expanding it from the grassroots level will instil its virtues both among advocates and in the judiciary.

Thus, with ADR processes rooted deeply in our culture, and with their potential for being bridges connecting us to our aspirations and ambitions as a nation, it is certain that their expansion through reformation and education would, in time, change society and the legal profession for the better.

Reference:
The Daily Star (Dhaka, 6 July 2025). *Over 45 lakh cases pending in courts.*

Nayeem is a final year law student and an accredited Civil-Commercial Mediator. He can be reached at nayeemhaider90@gmail.com

ILLUSTRATION: **AZRA HUMAYRA**

EDUCATION

How you can prepare to get a perfect score on your IELTS

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

Despite vowing to take an entire month to indulge myself in my hobbies after my graduation, I began feeling restless, having nothing to do, and decided to sit for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Preparing for the test indeed delayed the inevitable existential dread of figuring out what to do with my life. I took the test after a week of preparation and scored an overall band 9.0, with a 9.0 in reading, listening, and speaking, and an 8.0 in writing, which happened to be an unexpected but pleasant surprise.

Since then, I've had more requests to help people out with their IELTS preparations than I have made acquaintances, which is the reason behind writing this. So, without further ado, let me take you through the motion of how my IELTS preparation went.

Do your research

By research, I really mean that you should annoy every single one of your friends who recently sat for the test about how they registered, when, where, and why. Get a feel for what to expect, whether you want to sign up online or in person, and most importantly, the facilities of the venue you're going to be attending. I decided to go to the venue in person to check it out, but for the sake of convenience, you may complete the process online.

Consider whether you'd be more comfortable taking the computer-based test or the paper-based one. I personally took the computer-based test because I thought it would be closer to my test preparation at home, and also more convenient for the writing segment. Not to mention, my handwriting is awful. If you're more comfortable attending tests in a conventional manner, paper-based tests might be better for you.

Assess where you're at

Before registering, take a moment to set a target and evaluate how long you might need to prepare. It's not necessary to score super high if you're attending IELTS for higher studies, universities generally accept a score of 7.0 on all bands. My personal target was somewhere around 8.0, and I took free mock tests online to gauge my capabilities. I personally found that mock tests tend to be more restrictive, so don't get too anxious over receiving a lower score.

Keep in mind that there's no way to evaluate how well you're doing in writing or speaking unless you sign up for a paid online mock test or an in-person one offered by IELTS coachings. I specifically recommend this for those from a Bangla medium background like me, as I was absolutely not confident in my speaking on the day of the test.

Gather your resources

It's important you don't listen to people who hand you a list of books to practice. If you try to practice using too many resources at the same time, it's likely you'll end up spending money unnecessarily (and IELTS is expensive enough on its own) and not have a solid preparation. I used a website called IELTS Online Tests, where there are free mock tests and simulated test environments. As for speaking and writing, I found YouTube videos of IELTS instructors and practiced along.

Utilise doomscrolling

I have an obscene screentime, so I was inevitably getting sidetracked by Instagram reels while studying. So, instead of taking measures to be a better person, I decided to work smarter, not harder. I searched IELTS and related keywords a few times, and let the algorithm do its thing. Soon, my feed was filled with IELTS content. From informative videos to borderline brain-rotting humourous skits, I was able to enhance my IELTS preparation while procrastinating.

Strategise

Approach the test with a strategy. Practice a few times to find your groove, because evenly distributing time for every section in reading or writing may not be effective. The second writing task holds more weight, and one of the reading passages will be more difficult than others, where you should ideally spend more time. Reading every sentence word for word is time-consuming, and often counterproductive. I suggest reading the questions before you read the passage during reading, and in the breaks during listening. Try not to panic while listening, because you can make up to two mistakes before your band score decreases. I zoned out and missed a question, and had to remind myself to simply tune back in.

As for speaking, keep a general structure in your head, as it's subject to change depending on your interviewer. The most important part is to keep talking. It's not an interview where you have to answer with accuracy or boast your vocabulary, you simply have to build a rapport with your examiner and have a natural conversation. This is where I got lucky, as I had a super friendly examiner who patiently let me launch into tangents and followed up with questions.

The best game plan is one that works for you, and there's really no other way to find it than practice. Keep it simple and hold onto your focus, and hopefully you'll reach your goal.

Zabin is an engineering undergraduate and a chronic oversharer. Find her at: zabintn@gmail.com