DHAKA THURSDAY DECEMBER 18, 2025, *POUSH 3, 1432 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

CAMPUS

SCAN THE QR CODE TO ACCESS CAMPUS ONLINE

The weight and wonder of BEING A FINAL-YEAR STUDENT

ILLUSTRATION:
SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

VIDEO GAMES

DISPATCH

A superhero story that's more about office drama than caped crusaders

NUZHAT TAHIYA

When was the last time a superhero video game made you care as much about coworkers as the crimes on its streets? *Dispatch*, the episodic superhero narrative from American indie game developer AdHoc Studio, does exactly that, and does so with surprising wit, warmth, and occasional frustration.

Released on PlayStation 5 and Windows across eight episodes throughout October and November this year, *Dispatch* has quickly become one of 2025's most talked-about video games, selling over a million copies in its first ten days alone and garnering strong critical praise.

Dispatch isn't your usual beat 'em up superhero romp. Instead of swinging through skyscrapers or trading blows with mega villains, you play as Robert Robertson III, once known as the powered hero "Mecha Man". A brutal early encounter shatters his mechanised suit and, with it, his career. Left with outdated gear and a bruised reputation, Robert takes a job as a dispatcher at the Superhero Dispatch Network (SDN), a citywide crisis hotline for every occasion, from cat-stuck-in-a-tree emergencies to armed robberies. Robert is both humorous and deeply human – a flawed protagonist whose uneasy transition from the front lines to a desk job becomes the beating heart of the story.

Think of *Dispatch* as a hybrid of narrative TV and management sim. As Robert, you orchestrate responses from a ragtag crew of reformed villains-turned-heroes dubbed the Z-Team, choosing who to send where based on personality, power sets, and the simmering interpersonal drama between them. Much of the gameplay unfolds on the SDN map, where each decision carries both narrative and tactical weight. In between missions, rich dialogue trees and episodic storytelling fill out character arcs, office politics, and the emotional aftermath of past failures.

This focus on character is *Dispatch's* greatest strength. The writing – sharp, humorous, and often unexpectedly moving – elevates even the most banal moments into something compelling. A standout cast of misfits, each with distinct voices and motivations, quickly goes from gag fodder to genuinely memorable personalities. From Blonde Blazer's warmth and Invisigal's acerbic intensity to Beef the dog's irrepressible charm, there are moments that feel lifted straight out of the best superhero ensemble television.

The voice acting, featuring names such as Aaron Paul, Laura Bailey, and Jeffrey Wright, as well as beloved streamers like Jacksepticeye and MoistCr1TiKaL, brings nuance and enthusiasm to the characters, making scenes feel vibrant and lived-in rather than scripted. There's a playful energy throughout, one that feels aware of superhero cliches without descending into parody.

Graphically, *Dispatch* leans into a graphic-novel aesthetic that suits its comic book tone and episodic structure well. Faces are expressive, environments are rich in detail, and the game often looks like a high-budget animated show. The game could comfortably pass for serialised television – a testament to AdHoc Studio's art direction and production values.

This tension between being an interactive game and a fantastically produced narrative is where *Dispatch* is at its most fascinating yet, depending on the player, detrimental. Is it a game? An animated miniseries? An experiment in genre blending? The answer is all of the above. For some players, the lighter mechanical heft may be disappointing, as those seeking deep systems-driven gameplay might find themselves craving more. But for fans of story-first experiences, where characters and writing take centre stage, *Dispatch* stands tall.

Another highlight of *Dispatch* is how it handles replayability. With multiple endings, branching relationships, and subtle variations in outcomes based on dispatch decisions and dialogue choices, the game encourages multiple playthroughs. Discovering how different choices affect character arcs and plot threads adds significant longevity to its total runtime.

Perhaps most importantly, *Dispatch* feels like a statement of intent from AdHoc Studio. From a team composed largely of veterans from Telltale Games – who are masters of episodic narrative themselves – this is a confident debut that clearly understands and utilises why players fall in love with story-driven games in the first place. The balance between comedy and drama, the thoughtful exploration of flawed heroes, and the willingness to let players shape their own experiences all speak to a fresh, promising voice in the genre.

Nuzhat is a compulsive doodler and connoisseur of bad early aughts television. Send her recommendations at nuzhat.tahiya@gmail.com.

OPPORTUNITIES

WellDev

WellDev -UI & UX Designer

ELIGIBILITY

More than 3 years of professional experience in UI/UX or product design.

Excellent professional communication skills in English.

A strong portfolio and expertise in Figma.

A solid grasp of layout, typography, color theory, and interaction design principles.

Experience in building products and applications that adhere to web accessibility standards.

A keen eye for visual aesthetics.

Visit welldev.io/careers to learn more

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 31, 2025

Editor & Publisher
Mahfuz Anam

Campus In-Charge
Faisal Bin Iqbal

Campus Team
Syeda Afrin Tarannum
Abir Hossain
Azra Humayra
Zabin Tazrin Nashita

Photographer
Orchid Chakma

Graphics & Layout
TDS Creative Graphics

Production
Shamim Chowdhury

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

OPINION

The problem with EMPLOYER BRANDING

TAASEEN MOHAMMED ISLAM

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

In business, a company's reputation is the most valuable and volatile commodity that can exist. Employer branding, a function at the intersection of HR and Branding, ensures that the employee experience is marketed in a bid to stay competitive in an increasingly tense job market. While candidates have had to step up and differentiate themselves from the sea of job seekers, companies have also started to up their game to remain lucrative. Gen Z graduates no longer subscribe to the philosophy of remaining loyal to an employer, and are often looking to change careers for better opportunities.

Unfortunately, a fat paycheck no longer cuts it, and employers are now offering transportation facilities, catered lunches, swanky offices, and insurance to compensation packages. In tandem, workplaces have also transformed drastically from dreary beige and plaster cubicles to places resembling airport lounges with game rooms and decked-out pantries, as well as frequent engagement activities to distract us from the gruelling reality of capitalism. Companies will do all this with the good intention of boosting morale and well-being, but also curate a very specific and fun image online, which may be quite misrepresentative of the reality of working there.

What may start as harmless LinkedIn posts welcoming new joiners into the company can very quickly evolve into a dedicated "Life at X" company. This has interns, marketing, and HR scrambling to make content on potlucks, volunteer activities, and special occasions and churn them out like clockwork. This is a very effective strategy that gains both traction and goodwill at minimal marketing costs. Many times, employees go the extra mile and become AI-powered, em dash- and emoji-laden pseudo-thought leaders on empathy at the workplace and are all about that "#empowerment" lifestyle – annoying but tolerable.

The other problem arises from mismatches in employee expectations. Even though employer branding mostly acts as a highlight reel on Instagram, it does normalise the special moments. Outsiders see employees being rewarded appliances as performance recognition, organising table tennis tournaments and even the annual company retreat, forming skewed expectations about the work culture.

But the problem starts when the frequency of employer branding starts to gaslight upper management into thinking people are not working. When managers see people having a bit of fun at the office, a whole lot of cognitive dissonance and mental gymnastics start to happen, and suddenly, your performance is questioned because other people around you are having fun. Even though deliverables are handed over on time and expectations are met, there is somehow an air of distrust, and passive aggressive hinting that mission-critical low-hanging fruit are being left on the table because someone is playing foosball.

The other problem arises from mismatches in employee expectations. Even though employer branding mostly acts as a highlight reel on Instagram, it does normalise the special moments. Outsiders see employees being rewarded appliances as performance recognition, organising table tennis tournaments and even the annual company retreat, forming skewed expectations about the work culture. This can attract both top talent and the wrong crowd that's not serious about their career goals, leading to a cycle of unmet expectations across the board and eventually an increase in turnover rates. More importantly, employer branding efforts are often disconnected from the business and its main mission and drivers.

Does this mean that employer branding should not exist? Of course not, but an aggressive employer branding strategy shouldn't be an alternative to employee advocacy and development. Talent pipelines are important, but employee retention is even more so, and it can often be dismaying when corporations invest so heavily in magnifying the work experience rather than addressing core issues tied to the business.

Taaseen Islam has fallen prey to shady employer branding practices before, learn more at taaseen.2001@gmail.com

OFF CAMPUS

The anxiety of facing the job market as final-year university students

ILLUSTRATION: **ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA**

Rushing from one class to another, scrolling on LinkedIn for job openings, constantly editing and sending out your CV to employers, and wondering whether your skills and connections are cut out for today's competitive job market — this is what an average day in a final-year university student's life looks like. You see your friends and classmates landing their dream jobs, and while you are genuinely happy for them, a voice deep within your mind often whispers, "When will it be my turn? Am I ready to enter the real life?"

SHAILEE NAHREEN KHAN

The last dance of your university life feels like a war between excitement and panic. The uncertainty of what comes next can leave you feeling overwhelmed. Most of our university life is spent in a routine — attending classes, meeting deadlines, and worrying about our grades. But now, our anxieties extend beyond worrying about CGPA. This feeling, while excruciating, is an inevitable part of life. These feelings of nervousness and stress are not reserved for those belonging to any particular department or university; it is universal for final-year students. Some of us manage to deal with the transitional phase relatively well, while others may cave under the stress.

We asked a few final-year university students about their feelings on being in the last year of undergraduate studies and their imminent entry into the workforce. Most of them shared similar experiences — a mix of excitement, nervousness, and anxiety regarding whether they had enough skills, experience, and connections for their desired jobs.

Anika Toushin Sinthia, a final-year student from BRAC University, who is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science with a minor in Economics, states, "The final-year of my university life has felt much more overwhelming and stressful than the past three."

Anika mentions that the reason she decided to add Economics as a minor to her profile is due to the highly competitive nature of the job market ahead. She adds, "As a final-year student, I'm seeing many of my seniors struggling to land a job in their field of study. This makes me extremely anxious about what will happen when it's my turn. Thus, as a way to diversify my profile, I decided to add Economics as a minor during the final stage of my university life."

Other than her worries about the competitive job market, she has also shared her personal struggles as a final-year student. She often ends up comparing herself to those who have already landed their dream internships or jobs, and this comparison makes her question the credibility of her skills and abilities.

Md Yasin Alam, a fourth-year student of Dhaka University (DU), studying in the Department of Communication Disorders, shares mixed feelings regarding his impending graduation. He begins, "It feels like a mix of excitement and nervousness. Entering the job market and competing with others comes with responsibilities that I have never had to take before. The fear and anticipation make the transition a bittersweet one."

His journey has made him aware of his possible shortcomings, causing him to feel somewhat unprepared for the job market. He adds, "Although we are given enough theoretical and practical exposure in the Department of Communication Disorders, I still lack a few skill sets required for my field of work. I feel that gaining more practical skills and experience, especially, would have been better for me."

Opsora Zaman Esha, a student from the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Jahangirnagar University (JU), shares the same sentiment. She states, "Our curriculum has focused more on textbook knowledge than practical aspects such as the workings of media houses, radio stations, or newsrooms. This heavy reliance on theory has impacted my confidence in navigating the job market as I'll be required to deal with the practical side of things."

Journalism has limited opportunities in the workforce and is highly competitive, which adds to Esha's anxieties. She mentions, "As a fourth-year student, I have begun to realise that my area of study is very niche and the job market is very tight, which makes me even more worried. As such, I am considering applying for alternative career options."

According to Esha, the final-year of university has given her a reality check. This is generally the time when we reflect on our entire undergraduate journey and address the regrets of missed opportunities. Abdullah Ajmain Abir, a final-year finance major from North South University (NSU), shares his story about regrets. He says, "One of my biggest regrets is not networking enough during my university years. The university that I go to, NSU, offers a lot of networking opportunities as we have strong alumni connections and clubs. Unfortunately, I could not grasp onto said opportunities properly."

Abir believes his introverted nature held him back from seizing his chances. As a result, he doesn't feel confident about entering the workforce without a strong network.

These stories highlight the common scenarios that students go through in their final-years. The common denominator tends to be a sense of nervousness, and having to constantly polish and brush up your skills to have a shot at landing a suitable job.

It starts to feel as though the weight of the entire world is on your shoulders, yet you're expected to hold onto your sanity. Which brings forth the question, how can you stay composed during this critical stage of life? Abir shares how he deals with the unavoidable stress.

"The best way to deal with the pressure is to trust the process. I have talked to a few of my seniors and faculty members who have successfully manoeuvred this stage of life, and all of them said that it does indeed get better. It may feel very hectic and overwhelming at the moment, but having faith in the process helps."

The truth is that this universal struggle is inevitable, but very necessary for individual growth. It goes without saying that almost no one can graduate feeling fully prepared and ready. The uncertainty is what makes the transitional phase a great lesson for everyone. It's best to cope with the stress by seeking help from friends, family, seniors, or even faculty members. Support from them can make this transitional phase smoother. Every challenge that you face during this period of life helps you build confidence, courage, and adaptability, which you will carry throughout your entire career.

Shailee is a highly anxious overthinker, losing sleep over worries. Reach her at shaileenahreenkhan@gmail.com

OFF CAMPUS

The weight and wonder of being a final-year student

ILLUSTRATION: **AZRA HUMAYRA**

ANICA BUSHRA RAHMAAN

I once asked my friends what one piece of advice they would have given their first-year selves. Unsurprisingly, most of them had one common answer, and that was to enjoy it all while it lasts because your time in university dashes by faster than you think. Now, in my final year, the statement rings truer than ever.

Each time you refresh your Facebook feed, someone you know is graduating, starting an internship, landing a wonderful job, getting married or having kids. LinkedIn is a whole other sphere that demands a supplementary article. A two-minute scroll there leads you to a micro-dosage of existential horror every single time, without fail.

Sure, you're happy for them, but you keep thinking about when things will work out for you.

In the meantime, you are also bidding farewell to the last remnants of your student life. The hallways on campus, which once felt so familiar, seem out of reach, even when they are right in front of your eyes. The library, which bore witness to all your internal meltdowns before a quiz, feels like a safe haven. Your favourite *tong er mama*, the one who'd always greet you with the warmest smile, becomes yet another face that you won't see on a daily basis.

Your favourite classroom where the sunrays split right at the brink of 3 PM, shy yet radiant, feels elusive. That one favourite faculty whose classes you never missed becomes a fond memory. That 11 AM break when all your friends would be free feels more distant than ever before. That one corner right by the staircase, the designated hub for your friends, which now witnesses fewer and fewer people, rests empty.

Not many people grasp how exhausting and complex this window of time really is, especially mentally. You are juggling your academics — quizzes, assignments, and projects. Despite all the pitfalls and uncertainties of life, it was one of the few things that was always constant.

Your sense of control shifts. Before, there was a roadmap – a structured curriculum consisting of routine classes, organised tasks, and specific deadlines. Now you navigate it all on your own. For many, including myself, no one has really taught us how to do that. There's nothing routine about learning to navigate adulthood. The concept of being an actual adult is no longer something you can carelessly brush off to contemplate later.

How do we accept so many changes all around us so easily?

But there are moments of growth, too. You realise how responsible you are now compared to your first-year self. You have learnt to manage time, even if only a little. You realise that it no longer makes sense to pull three all-nighters in a week, that it is physically impossible, and that sleep is now a priority, not merely optional.

You start being consistent. You are now more confident with public speaking. You are more careful about the type of people you mingle with and who you choose to hold close. You are grateful for all the friends you have made, the ones who never allow you to doubt yourself, who taught you to be a better friend, a better version of yourself, where you can go days without seeing them, and nothing can seem to mar the bond you have made.

Final year, in a nutshell, is being at odds with yourself. It's going to pass like any other phase in your life. And that is, perhaps, the harshest comfort in itself.

Anica Bushra Rahmaan is pretending that this article wasn't an autobiography. Reach her at anicarahmaan@gmail.com

WHEN UNIVERSITY LIFE REACHES ITS END

Final-year students reflect on change, fear, and hope

What are some of the major changes happening around you right now?

Some of my friends are going abroad to pursue their master's, and that's making me overthink about life and what I should do next. But I believe I need to finish this last step (my finals) properly first, and then everything will fall into place. I am not super optimistic, but I am hopeful.

- A student from Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP)

A part of my childhood is going away. Many familiar faces are moving away from the circle. The topic of discussion has suddenly changed from the fun things to real-life stuff.

- Sk. Sinan Sayefee, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET)

What makes you think that you might be falling behind your peers?

I have often felt like I am lagging behind my peers, largely because I lacked guidance and clarity about what I needed to do. I didn't know that joining clubs or participating in business competitions was important for building a strong profile in the job market. Since none of my friends or family had studied Business, I had no one to point me in the right direction. Being an introvert made things even harder as I found it difficult to connect with peers who were confident, well-networked, and seemed to always be in the know.

- Rumaisha Nowshin Fatema, North South University (NSU)

For me, the academic success of my close friends is the most triggering factor which makes me feel that way. I am studying the same as them, at times, more than them. Yet, the outcome mostly disappoints.

- Abrar Jahin Alvee, BRAC University (BRACU)

In what ways have you grown or changed since entering your final year?

Something many people don't realise about being in your final year of university is how emotionally and mentally complex it can be. It's not just about finishing assignments or passing exams; it's a transition phase packed with pressure, uncertainty, and personal growth.

- Shahazad Ruhul Rafid, BRACU

I have become more mature and aware of the friends I make, as well as more prepared for the world.

- Nur Jahan, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB)

What part of finishing university feels the heaviest for you?

The heaviest part of finishing university is the uncertainty about what comes next. After years of structured lectures, exams, and goals with clear deadlines, you are suddenly stepping into a world where the path isn't as defined. That uncertainty can feel overwhelming.

- Shahazad Ruhul Rafid, BRACU

Leaving friends and the good memories.

- Trina Saha, BUET

NOTICE BOARD

Civil Engineering students from Stamford University complete industrial attachment programme

Students of the 76th Batch of the Department of Civil Engineering at Stamford University Bangladesh completed an industrial attachment programme in collaboration with Onushandhani Creeds Limited (OCL). The five-day programme was designed to bridge academic learning with practical experience through a blend of interactive lectures and hands-on field activities. Key sessions focused on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Solid Waste and Faecal Sludge Management (SWM and FSM), and the use of drone technology in modern civil engineering practices.

As part of the attachment, students undertook several field visits, including observations at a water treatment plant, survey demonstrations, visits to deep tube well (DTW) construction sites, and household surveys on FSM and SWM in the Tangail region.

BUFT hosts two-day National Entrepreneurship Expo 2025

The two-day National Entrepreneurship Expo 2025 (2.0) was inaugurated on December 14 at BGMEA University of Fashion and Technology (BUFT). It was organised by the BUFT Business Club under the theme "Leadership and How to Create Success".

The event featured a variety of activities, including a business case competition, panel discussions, seminars, cultural shows, and training sessions. More than 50 stalls showcasing handmade crafts, food, and other items from different parts of the country participated in the fair.

The fair was attended by many distinguished guests, including Faruque Hassan, Chairman of the BUFT Board of Trustees; Acting Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr Engr Ayub Nabi Khan; actor Ananta Jalil; actress Afia Nusrat Barsha; Imtiaz Ahmed Imon, CEO of Taza Hair Oil; Shaila Abedin, Senior Executive Vice-President of Prime Bank; M M Mahbub Hasan, Senior Vice-President of Prime Bank; Aminul Islam Shamim, CEO of Step Footwear; and Sheikh Mohammad Imran, Advisor of the BUFT Business Club.

Eastern University Social Welfare Club distributes blankets among cold-affected people

Under the initiative of the Eastern University Social Welfare Club, winter blankets were distributed among nearly 400 underprivileged and cold-stricken people at Bahadurpur Bazar in the Padmapar area of Harirampur Upazila, Manikganj. Through this humanitarian initiative, Eastern University once again demonstrated its strong commitment to standing beside marginalised communities and upholding social responsibility.

The blanket distribution programme was supervised by Prof. Dr Sharmin Islam, Coordinator of the Eastern University Social Welfare Club. Financial support for the initiative was provided by the members of the Eastern University Foundation Board.

Overall cooperation for the event was extended by K M Monirul Islam, Deputy Director, Office of Student Affairs and Placement, Eastern University. Members of the Social Welfare Club,

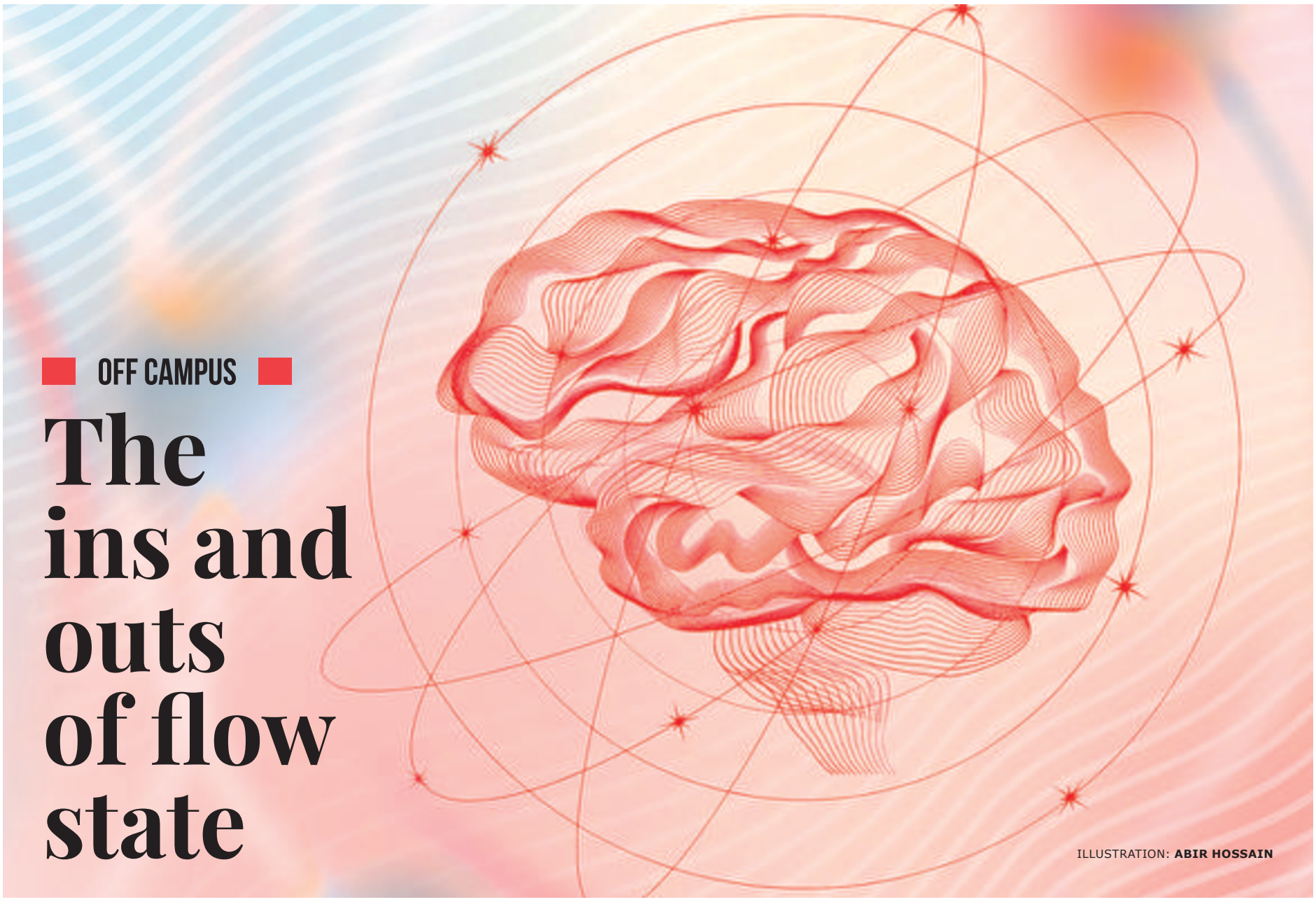
comprising students from various departments of the university, participated in the programme and personally distributed blankets among the cold-affected people.

British Council launches policy review on Bangladesh's film industry

The British Council unveiled a comprehensive policy review publication aimed at strengthening Bangladesh's film ecosystem through evidence-based research and inclusive stakeholder engagement.

The policy review is a key part of the landmark research study titled "Cinema as a Creative Industry: Mapping Bangladesh's Film Ecosystem and Inclusive Growth Potential". Led by Dr Imran Firdaus, PhD, as Lead researcher, the study is commissioned by the British Council and implemented by Dhaka DocLab.

The comprehensive research aims to provide a holistic understanding of Bangladesh's film industry by mapping its current landscape, reviewing existing policies, and developing actionable recommendations to support sustainable and equitable growth. The British Council announced the upcoming launch of a mapping report from this study, scheduled for release in January 2026.



OFF CAMPUS

The ins and outs of flow state

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

ELMA TABASSUM

It's 2 AM, and your room is cleaner than it's ever been. Heaving slightly from the exertion of rearranging all your furniture, and aching all over, you stand at the entrance feeling both incredibly smug and a little hazy — it has just dawned on you that hours have passed by.

Flow state is the intense mental state experienced by a person completely engrossed in their work, such that it feels effortless, inevitable, and immensely enjoyable. Occurring regardless of whether a person is doing routine work — like cleaning or organising — or tackling challenging creative pursuits like writing, cooking, or dancing, flow state is a feeling akin to ecstasy that is accessible to everyone, and therefore, can be considered one of the true joys of living.

One cannot possibly comprehend the many different activities during which people can genuinely reach flow state unless they are on the "#flowstate" side of TikTok. Some people have apparently reached flow state while matching pairs of socks together, or when walking through crowded hallways with friends.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, commonly recognised as "The Father of Flow", coined the term in the 1970s and popularised it through several of his publications, wherein he distinguished certain conditions often present during flow state. These include, but are not limited to, an all-encompassing concentration on the task, clarity regarding goals, a balance between challenge and ability, and the perception that time has become elastic, with hours stretching and flying by all at once.

Most prominent, however, is the overwhelming giddiness that comes with working with rapt competence, at your prime, without any doubt or fear. It's the assurance that you're in your element and that the pending assignments haunting your nights with seemingly murderous intent no longer stand a chance.

Though most first encounters with flow are likely both enamouring and unintentional, it quickly becomes apparent that flow state is frustratingly elusive. Unfortunately, no number of insults-disguised-as-motivation reels can force us to lock in. It simply cannot be switched on or off; rather, flow state is considered only a stage in "The Flow Cycle".

Described extensively by Steven Kotler, an American author and entrepreneur, it divides the process of flow into four stages: Struggle, Release, Flow, and Recovery.

Given that the cycle begins with Struggle, we can comfortably deduce that flow state isn't easy to achieve. Most of us can remember the hours we've spent toiling away trying to understand complex topics in our curricula, only to either give up or to have things suddenly, miraculously *click*.

During flow, work can become hypnotic, rendering us spellbound and completely unfazed by external factors. Miracles such as ignoring the irresistible social media notification and exercising our attention spans beyond their current goldfish capacities become far more common during flow. All of this has meant that corporations and self-help influencers alike have latched onto the phenomenon and given it a spotlight bigger than ever before.

Despite its growing pervasiveness, it is still going to take a miracle of divine proportions to help the person whose algorithm is not aware of the fact they have exams coming up. Once it does become aware, only then will they be recommended hours upon hours of content exclusively about productivity.

This was the situation I found myself in. Though it was occasionally upsetting to watch such content, especially when I was desperately trying to avoid mock preparation, those reels introduced me to the concept of flow, one of life's most rewarding experiences.

While doing so, they also highlighted the best ways to achieve flow, including removing distractions and choosing work that is both within the realm of our capabilities while simultaneously challenging enough not to bore us. Moreover, flow is encouraged in work or activities that provide immediate feedback. This can include cases where every washed dish feels like an achievement, every good serve is rewarded by points on a scoreboard, and every sentence is one step closer to a word limit being met. Also, like many things in life, flow state is best experienced alongside friends, on group projects or joint study sessions.

Flow state can be exhilarating. It is the extraordinary state of consciousness we exist in when we live and work beyond the horizon of our potentials, and so much fulfilment can be derived when working in flow. Knowing about flow state may allow us to spend more of our lives in the bliss of creation and accomplishment.

References:

1. Big Think (2015). *Hack Your Flow: Understanding Flow Cycles, with Steven Kotler*.
2. The Guardian (2025). *'An optimal state of consciousness': is flow the secret to happiness?*
3. TED-Ed (2023). *How to enter flow state*

Elma Tabassum spends too much time watching pencil case reviews and so cannot remember what sleep is like. Send her white noise recommendations at elmatassum2020@gmail.com

OFF CAMPUS

Is your hobby A PERFORMANCE?

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

ZARA ZUBAYER

The guitar collecting dust in your room, the hardened acrylic paint on your abandoned colour palette, and your expensive unused camera all represent one thing: the skeletal remains of your forgotten hobbies. With social media as our stage and our followers as the audience, there's often pressure to turn our interests into impressive content. While doing so, there's a series of unfortunate events that occur before you hit the red record button.

The first phase is when you discover the hobby. For me, it was during my usual late-night spiral — the time when most reckless decisions come to life.

I was watching "Best Guitar player Amin Toofani at Harvard University" on YouTube, where he shreds the strings in a way that would even impress the great American guitarist Jimi Hendrix. At that moment, with the conviction that only sleep-deprived teenagers possess, I decided that I would become a guitar prodigy. Reality, however, was less romantic. I sacrificed my long nails and suffered a week of blisters from playing chords, only to reach the conclusion that my music prodigy era had come to a sad and abrupt end.

Unlike me, some people can power through the first phase and reach a novice level of skill. This is the stage where most of us pull out our phones, ready to capture our newfound passion and stun our invisible audience. But once the stage curtains fall and you're left alone with yourself, a question lingers: Is your hobby really for you, or is it a performance? It's an uncomfortable thought. One might feel defensive when asked, as most of us deny that we actually thrive on praise and validation.

Humour aside, science also backs this up. A study shows that receiving social approval activates the brain's reward circuits, which are the same areas that respond to food, money, or other tangible rewards. There's a reason why praise feels biologically satisfying. The brain releases dopamine when we receive compliments. So, it's not a surprise that some of us tend to turn our hobbies into performances. Our minds, after all, crave the feel-good hit of approval. It's not just about our pursuits, but also the applause we hope will follow.

The answer to the question arrives quite naturally, though. After a few song intros or still-life paintings from Pinterest-inspired fever dreams, it starts to feel exhausting. Instead of enjoying a hobby, we feel the pressure of mastering it immediately, which is often followed by a sudden burnout. Forgotten lie the dried paintbrushes that begin to resemble fossils, and gone are the artistic ambitions.

The pressing fear of being bad at something feels like embarrassing information that might go public. Not to mention the dread of being put on the spot if someone suddenly remembers your so-called hobby. This chase for perfectionism can also be the reason why we abandon our hobbies so quickly.

Oftentimes, we like the idea of a hobby more than actually doing it. We love the thought of being a painter, but not the work it takes to actually be called one. Instruments require hours of devoted practice and music theory knowledge, while sports demand consistent training and discipline. We picture the goal before the journey, and neglect the art behind actually learning a skill. The reality is that passion and effort rarely arrive on the same train.

There's also a certain magic in uncovering an interest that excites you. The first time I felt that thrill was watching a pianist play the theme song of *Game of Thrones.* As mystified as I was by the performance, I was just as mesmerised by the way their fingers glided smoothly on the piano, with a grace that comes with years of practice.

I longed for the look of elegance that a pianist has, and on the way, I discovered the tranquillity it brings me. After years of playing the piano, having an audience actually feels like an interruption to the intimacy I share with the instrument. Although having an actual skill is often accompanied by the universal experience of your parents forcing you to perform at family functions.

The bottom line is to ask yourself if your hobbies truly bring you joy, and move forward without the burden of expectations. Some find gardening spiritually connecting, others discover cooking is both therapeutic and a love language. There's also no shame in your hobbies being performative, and if you happen to pick up a skill or two along the way, all the better. What matters is exploring your potential and embracing the simple pleasure of doing something you love.

Reference:

PMC (PubMed Central). (2023). *Reward, motivation and brain imaging in human healthy participants.*

Zara Zubayer is a half-pianist, occasional grandma (she knits), and collector of instruments she never learns. Suggest a new hobby she won't commit to at zarazubayer1@gmail.com.