DHAKA THURSDAY JANUARY 22, 2026, *MAGH 8, 1432 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

CAMPUS

SCAN THE QR CODE TO ACCESS CAMPUS ONLINE

HOW UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE INEFFICIENCIES AFFECT STUDENTS

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

Keeron Study Abroad launches, setting a new standard for credible and trusted global education guidance

Keeron, an upskilling platform and a subsidiary of *The Daily Star*, has officially launched its newest vertical, Keeron Study Abroad, with the aim of providing transparent, ethical, and student-centric guidance for Bangladeshi students aspiring to pursue higher education abroad.

The launch comes at a time when global student mobility is undergoing significant changes. Student visa assessments — particularly for destinations such as Australia — have become increasingly rigorous, with greater emphasis on applicant credibility, documentation quality, and genuine study intent.
As a result, visa refusals have risen in recent periods, affecting not only weak applications but also other students who receive inaccurate or unrealistic guidance.

Against this evolving backdrop, Keeron Study Abroad has been established to address one of the most critical gaps in the study abroad ecosystem: trust.

A credible and responsible approach to study abroad

As a subsidiary of *The Daily Star*, Keeron Study Abroad is built on principles of transparency, responsible counselling, and long-term student success. Rather than focusing on volume-based admissions, the initiative prioritises realistic academic planning, profile suitability, and compliance with destination country regulations.

"At Keeron, we believe education is a journey, not a transaction," said Tajdin Hassan, Chief Operating Officer of Keeron, and Chief Business Officer of *The Daily Star*. "In an environment where visa scrutiny is increasing globally, students need guidance that is accurate, ethical, and aligned with policy realities. Our goal is to help students make informed decisions and apply responsibly."

End-to-end guidance for students and parents

Keeron Study Abroad offers structured support across the entire student journey — from initial counselling and academic profiling to university admissions, visa guidance, and pre-departure preparation. Each student is guided based on academic background, financial capacity, career aspirations, and long-term outcomes.

"Our objective is not simply to send students abroad, but to help them choose the right pathway," said Faiza Zahin, Head of Business Development at Keeron. "In the current global environment, credible counselling and realistic planning have become more important than ever. That is exactly where Keeron Study Abroad positions itself."

What further differentiates Keeron is its integrated education ecosystem. Alongside study abroad counselling, Keeron operates a skill development platform that prepares students with future-ready skills — strengthening employability whether students pursue education overseas or build careers locally and globally.

Key study destinations

At launch, Keeron Study Abroad is focusing on:

- **Australia**
- **The United Kingdom**

The initiative works through reputed international education partners to provide access to globally recognised universities, colleges, and pathway institutions.

Services offered

- Academic profiling and career guidance
- University and course selection
- Application and offer letter assistance
- Visa documentation guidance
- Pre-departure briefings
- Ethical counselling aligned with long-term career outcomes

As global education continues to evolve, students and parents often struggle with fragmented information, unclear processes, and one-size-fits-all counselling. Keeron Study Abroad addresses these gaps by offering tailored guidance based on each student's academic background, career goals, and financial realities. From university shortlisting and application support to visa guidance and pre-departure preparation, the platform ensures clarity at every stage

Special launch offer

To mark the launch, Keeron Study Abroad is offering a complimentary BDT 6,000 skill-based course for students who open their files during the launch phase, helping them prepare academically and professionally for their overseas journey.

Office and student access

Keeron Study Abroad is now operating from Banani 11, Dhaka, offering a student- and parent-friendly counselling environment.

About Keeron

Keeron is an upskilling platform under *The Daily Star*, focused on education, skill development, and career readiness. With the launch of Keeron Study Abroad, the organisation expands its mission to support Bangladeshi students in accessing global education (initially Australia and the UK) opportunities with integrity and excellence.

Location: Banani 11, Dhaka

Study Destinations: Australia and the UK

Target Students: Undergraduate and postgraduate aspirants

With its official launch, Keeron Study Abroad invites students and parents to reimagine the study abroad experience guided, informed, and built for the future.

Monash Admission Day set for January 24: Explore MUFY and MCD Pathways for direct progression to Monash University

Consistently ranked among the world's top 50 universities, Monash University is known for its state-of-the-art research facilities, industry-aligned curricula, and a strong alumni network achieving success across industries and continents. As a result, students from around the world aspire to study at Monash, drawn by its academic excellence and global career outcomes.

Bangladeshi students are no exception. For many, however, accessing a Monash degree traditionally meant relocating overseas from the very beginning of their academic journey, often bringing challenges related to cost, readiness, and distance. That pathway has now evolved, thanks to Universal College Bangladesh, which has brought the Monash academic experience home without compromising quality or international recognition.

As the exclusive and pioneering partner of Monash College in Bangladesh, UCBD is the only institution in the country authorised to offer official Monash University pathway programs.

UCBD currently offers two globally recognised Monash pathways: the Monash University Foundation Year (MUFY) and the Monash College Diploma (MCD). Both are designed to align fully with Monash academic standards while allowing students to begin their studies locally. The Monash University Foundation Year provides a strong academic transition directly into undergraduate studies, ensuring assured progression to Monash University campuses in Australia or Malaysia upon successful completion.

For students seeking a quicker and more cost-effective academic progression, the Monash College Diploma offers an accelerated pathway. Through this program, students complete the equivalent of Year 1 of a Monash University degree at UCBD and progress directly into Year 2 at Monash University in Australia or Malaysia.

Together, these pathways ensure students are not merely preparing for international education but actively advancing through it. Families also gain reassurance from a transparent, trusted progression structure, while students benefit from academic continuity, international recognition, and a smoother transition into Monash's global campus network.

Understanding which pathway best aligns with individual academic goals, timelines, and long-term aspirations is an important decision. To help prospective students and families understand these transformative opportunities in depth and take the right decision, UCBD is hosting Monash Admission Day on January 24 from 11 AM to 6 PM at Aerial Legend, House 1080, 7th Floor, CDA Avenue, GEC Circle, East Nasirabad, Chattogram. This exclusive event will bring Monash College and Monash University representatives from Australia and Malaysia together in one place, offering prospective students and families the opportunity to engage face-to-face with the experts who guide admissions and pathway progression.

Throughout the day, attendees will gain detailed insights into Monash pathway options, overseas transition processes, scholarships, admissions requirements, and application timelines. Interactive information sessions will be complemented by personalised one-on-one counselling, allowing students to receive tailored advice on academic planning and long-term career outcomes based on their individual goals and aspirations.

Monash Admission Day is an invaluable opportunity for aspiring Bangladeshi students to make informed, confident decisions with expert guidance. Register and attend to take the first decisive step toward your Monash University future, starting right here with UCBD.

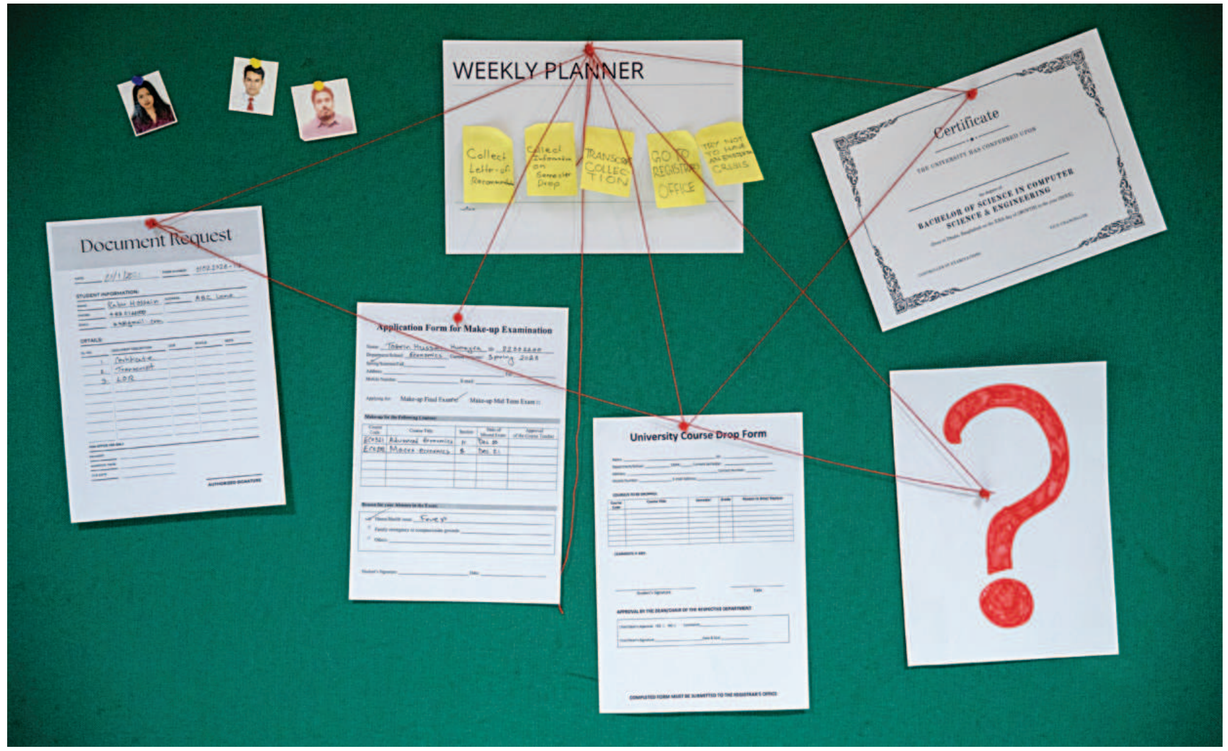


PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

How university administrative inefficiencies AFFECT STUDENTS

AZRA HUMAYRA AND AFRA ANIKA NAWAR KHAN

University administration: the phrase alone is enough to make students sigh, slump in their chairs, and wonder what they did to deserve it. I (Azra) remember being a fresher, wandering across campus with a stack of papers and stopping strangers to ask where I was supposed to go with them. Five years later, the process remains just as puzzling.

An example might help the reader understand the scenario if they are not familiar with it.

I had been awarded a scholarship for doing well in my classes, and all I had to do was collect the money. Simple enough, I thought. I showed up at my hall office – hopeful – only to be met with a shrug. The person who handled scholarship information was out that day. I came back another day. She was out then, too. By the third day, she appeared and raised an eyebrow at me. "Where's your hall card?" she asked. I didn't have one. No one had told me I needed one. Had I known, I would have made it over the course of my last two visits.

So, I set out to make the hall card, which required a payment at the bank, along with a fine for "not making it last year", even though I had never needed it before. I returned, bank slip in hand, filled out the paperwork, and then waited for the provost's signature. Only then did they agree to help me with the scholarship process. Papers in hand, I had to hunt down my course coordinator for a signature, then the chairperson for another, before finally submitting everything back at my hall office.

Then came another wait, two weeks for my name to snake its way through the registrar's building, before I could collect a voucher number, which I would need to hand to an officer, who would then hand me a cheque. All to receive the scholarship I had already earned, if only I could survive the paperwork long enough to claim it.

Speaking to students of Dhaka University (DU) and Jahangirnagar University (JU), the stress of navigating the administration is mostly due to the lack of available information. Noshin Nuha, a fourth-year Economics student at JU, says, "I wanted to sit for an improvement exam. Some said that there's a chance I can sit for one, others said that I couldn't, but I went to the exam controller's office to learn about the process. They could not tell whether I'd be able to sit for the exam. They sent me to another room to get the information. When I went there, they sent me to another one, but the doors were locked, so I could not enter. The same thing repeated after I went another day."

Noshin asked why clear information had not been available. Neither her department nor the exam controller's office could provide the information she was looking for, which should be common knowledge among all.

Afrina Sultana Ariya, a postgraduate student in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at DU, says, "The hassle I faced during the admission process at my hall was unimaginable. On the last day of my admission process, I had to wait three hours because the librarian went to school to pick up her kids, and she came after lunch."

Even after showing up on time, students are not offered the services they are entitled to. Many are advised to show up "after lunch".

Afrina continues, "Why do we have to face this kind of trouble when we are non-resident students? As my hall was far from my department, I had to spend Tk 300 extra for rickshaw fare. Not only this, but my hall admission fee was much higher than that of other halls. Still, I'll have to go to the hall to renew my hall card for two more days."

The lack of uniformity in the processes of different halls adds to the hurdles faced by students. Jyoti*, a non-resident student at Shamsunnahar Hall (DU), speaks about her admission process. "I submitted my papers correctly at my hall, but the next day they sent my papers back, telling me that I needed my photo to be attested by the department chairperson. If that was necessary, why didn't they tell me beforehand? My friends from other halls did not have to get their photos attested. One of my friends didn't even have to make a hall card to get admitted. Why is there a lack of uniformity?"

Students have noted that the lack of clear communication often leaves them wandering the campus without direction, resulting in wasted time. They advocate for the effective implementation of online systems to reduce the burden of excessive paperwork and to ensure that relevant information is readily accessible for their specific needs.

Marzia Bhuiya Tabenda, a master's student at DU, says, "Our university has a website, but it rarely offers anything useful. Whenever I try to find the information I need, I come up empty-handed. Instead, I have to go from office to office, in person, just to get basic details. We urgently need a functional website that can provide clear and accessible information, saving both time and energy."

In her role as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Administration) of DU, Professor Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha speaks candidly about the challenges the university administration faces that hinder its efficiency. She does not deny the gap in coordination among offices and opines that "There's no alternative to digitalisation."

"The biggest challenge is that we have a lot of data. A huge volume of it remains in hard copy and has to be manually processed to transform into digitised form," she says.

Dr Bidisha draws comparisons with foreign universities. She says, "In foreign universities, you only need your registration number, and the information is given to you automatically. But our problem is that we do not yet have a central/master database of students, teachers, and staff, which can be used by different university entities for administrative purposes. As a result, students and other employees do not get the information easily."

The administration is currently working to address this issue by manually updating data from the past 15 years to make it accessible in the online database. "It's complex given that clearances from halls, libraries, and departments are important," she says. "But we are trying to integrate the processes so that the students do not have to roam around haplessly on campus. Within a few months' time frame, several of the students' services will be digitalised."

Speaking to students, it is clear that the administration needs to be well-equipped with relevant information. Marzia Bhuiya says, "The administrations of public universities tend to do everything the old-fashioned way, which, frankly, only hinders progress. We cannot afford to lag behind in this digital age. Yet I still have to present pay slips and other documents in person, even though all of this information already exists in the online database."

Private universities, in contrast, are assumed to offer smoother administrative services. However, for many students and alumni, the reality seems to be different.

Students have noted that the lack of clear communication often leaves them wandering the campus without direction, resulting in wasted time. They advocate for the effective implementation of online systems to reduce the burden of excessive paperwork and to ensure that relevant information is readily accessible for their specific needs.

Jannatul Ferdous, a student at NSU, recalls an incident she faced in 2023 when she applied for financial aid. Upon receiving confirmation that her scholarship was approved, she visited the financial aid office to inquire about the percentage she had been awarded. Jannatul says, "I went to meet the then director of the financial aid office. To my surprise and exasperation, he made me wait for an entire hour just to inform me about that one thing."

She adds, "I had a presentation and a project afterwards, and due to that, my entire schedule for the day was derailed. If this small information were accessible to me through the Student Portal platform online, then at least I wouldn't have to be physically present there and wait the long hours."

The waiting queues seem to be never-ending, even for alumni, as noted by Munaem Mostofa, an NSU graduate. Munaem says, "I completed my undergrad a while back from NSU, but had to make a few runs to campus for some paperwork. Back then, I was also looking for graduate programmes, and wanted to inquire about the MBA programme, for which the Registrar's Office referred me to the MBA Office. When I went there, three representatives were not doing much."

Munaem adds, "They dismissed me by saying that everything is available online. I expected better from them as an undergraduate alumnus, and wanted to ask about the possibility of waiving the admission test or receiving credit for relevant courses. But their approach discouraged me from reapplying to NSU."

In response to these concerns, Dr Ahmed Tazmeen, Registrar at North South University, emphasises that the university has several administrative offices allocated with their individual responsibilities. Dr Ahmed says, "Students may need to visit multiple offices, but these visits are connected to provide the required services while maintaining confidentiality and transparency. There is room for improvement, and all offices are continually working to make the processes more streamlined and hassle-free."

Dr Ahmed further adds, "The university has a comprehensive system in place to provide access to critical information. Information related to the curriculum for both undergraduate and graduate programmes can be found on the respective department pages of our official website."

When asked about the administrative staff's professionalism in handling student cases, given that students have faced difficulties due to their half-hearted responses, Dr Ahmed reemphasises the idea of improvement and that NSU actively works on training its professionals.

He says, "Our staff receive ongoing training on IT, policy updates, and customer service. To provide the required training to various groups based on their needs, we have a specialised unit called the Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC). These trainings are always centred around student-friendly service. Each unit head assesses the service standards and works to improve through brief internal training and communications."

Despite the availability of online portals and systematic processes, student experience tells a different tale and confirms that there remains a gap. Both public and private universities are falling short in handling minor issues, and action must be taken to reduce the red tape involved.

During a time when Bangladeshi universities are aspiring to hold themselves up to global standards, it must be realised that it is not the availability of modern, digitised systems that determines accessibility, but how these systems are designed to be more student-centric that matters more.

Azra Humayra is majoring in Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Dhaka. Find her at: azrahumayra123@gmail.com

Afra is a student of English Literature at North South University. Write to her at afraankhan20@gmail.com

***Name has been changed upon request.**

HANDS-ON LEADERSHIP

How EWU prepares students for the real world

In today's fast-paced world, relying solely on academic knowledge gained in the classroom can be limiting and even counterproductive, as it does not foster the leadership skills that are increasingly in demand for today's competitive job market. Recognising this crucial reality, East West University (EWU) emphasises the development of dynamic leadership among its students. The university facilitates this through a range of club activities and active faculty-student collaboration. Such on-campus opportunities are essential for preparing students to become capable leaders in an era of rapid technological advancement.

One of the most accessible ways for students to develop leadership skills on campus is by joining a club. East West University currently hosts 23 clubs, including the Business Club, Debating Club, Science Club, Sports Club, Economics Club, and many others. These clubs, guided by faculty members, provide platforms for students to explore interests beyond the classroom, engage in extracurricular activities, and develop interpersonal and communication skills.

Reflecting on his transformative journey, G M Rabby, the current President of the East West University Business Club (EWUBC), shares, "I began my journey at the Business Club as a shy probationary member, eager to learn. Gradually, through small tasks and organising workshops, competitions, and seminars, I developed leadership, initiative, and confidence. Over time, I earned the trust of my seniors and accepted the responsibility to guide newcomers, oversee projects, and represent the club on larger stages. Now, as President, I apply these skills both within the club and in my career in the corporate world. I feel proud that I chose to join EWUBC – it has undeniably helped me advance faster toward my goals."

Similarly, Nabila Shahabazee, President of the East West University Debating Club, emphasises the personal development she gained through club activities. She says, "Working for the club and presiding as its President, I have attained a plethora of soft skills, from conflict negotiation to event management. I have become a better listener, and I consider others' perspectives when making decisions and act with emotional intelligence. Organising events has required me to manage logistics, resolve conflicts, and coordinate diverse teams. All these experiences have solidified my leadership qualities."

Leadership development at EWU, however, is not limited to club activities. Students can also cultivate these skills through academic pursuits. Sadia Adnin, from the Department of Pharmacy, recounts how encouragement from faculty members enabled her to undertake a cross-departmental research project. She explains, "Collaborating with faculty members from both the Department of Pharmacy and the Department of Mathematics and Physical Sciences allowed me to explore advanced nanoparticle research beyond my major. The freedom my supervisors gave me to think independently and lead each stage of the project greatly boosted my confidence. This supportive academic environment helped me grow as a young researcher, strengthened my leadership skills, and motivated me as we prepared our work for publication."

Sourav Sarker, from the Department of Civil Engineering, similarly highlights how academic collaboration shaped his leadership development. He states, "Working with my faculty mentor and EWUCRT—The Center for Research and Training, East West University—turned my interest in environmental sustainability into meaningful, hands-on research. I gained exposure to everything, from fieldwork to data analysis and manuscript preparation. Through their guidance, I developed confidence in my own academic voice, strengthened my technical and critical-thinking abilities, and learned to take ownership of complex tasks. This collaboration helped me grow into a more capable and accountable leader, enhancing my decision-making, communication, and teamwork skills."

These student experiences illustrate how an engaging campus life and active faculty member involvement foster confidence, promote critical thinking, and nurture leadership qualities. Emphasising this institutional commitment, Professor Dr Shams Rahman, Vice-Chancellor of East West University, stated, "Our goal is to provide a transformative education that balances academic excellence with real-world leadership. By empowering students to take ownership of their learning journeys, we ensure they graduate not merely as degree holders, but as visionary leaders prepared to contribute meaningfully to society."

Whether through club participation or academic collaboration, East West University remains firmly committed to the holistic development of its students.

OFF CAMPUS

How to fix your sleep schedule

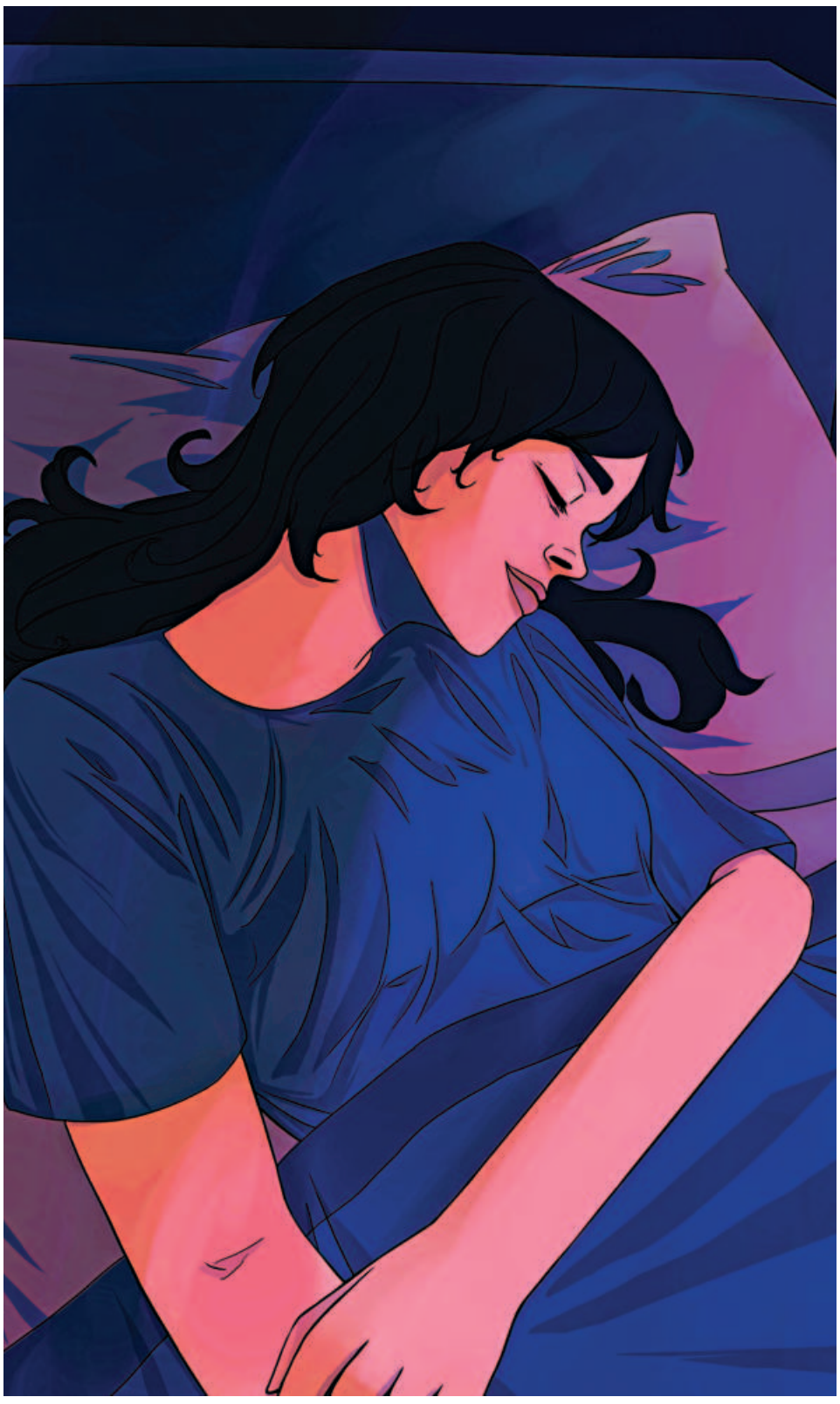


ILLUSTRATION: **SANJANA SABAH KHAN**

TINATH ZAEBA

We know sleep matters, yet when midnight hits, our minds relive every awkward moment from the past decade. Fixing a sleep cycle isn't just going to bed earlier—it's a biological process involving hormones, the brain's clock, and unconscious habits.

Inside your brain is a tiny structure called the suprachiasmatic nucleus. It's your built-in timekeeper, controlling your natural 24-hour circadian rhythm. Two hormones regulate your sleep-wake cycle: melatonin and cortisol. Melatonin is the "night mode" hormone; it helps you sleep by lowering alertness. Cortisol is the "day mode" hormone; it helps you wake up. With a steady sleep schedule, these hormones rise and fall in a smooth wave. But if you sleep at odd hours, scroll until 3 AM, or drink coffee late, your hormone timing gets confused. Cortisol surges when it should rest. Melatonin is released too late. You lie in bed, worn out.

Screens add a layer to the problem. Your phone emits blue light, which mimics daylight and signals the brain to reduce melatonin production. When you stare at your phone in bed, you're basically telling your brain that the sun is out and it's not time to sleep. But the physical light isn't the only issue. Constant scrolling forces your brain to switch emotions rapidly, even if you don't notice it.

A sad post, then a funny video, then a shocking headline – it's emotional whiplash. Throughout the day, our brains accumulate tiny emotions: a small frustration during a conversation, a bit of stress from work, and a tiny insecurity from social media. Normally, the brain processes these micro emotions during quiet moments. However, we rarely allow silence or mindfulness anymore due to constant doomscrolling, and our brains never get the chance to sort and store those emotions.

So, when we finally lie down with no distractions, all those unprocessed feelings show up at once. That's why your brain suddenly wants to analyse every decision you've ever made, right when you're trying to sleep.

Fixing your sleep cycle means treating sleep like something intentional. Start by giving yourself a cue. About an hour before bed, dim the lights and step away from screens; even better, put your phone somewhere you can't reach from bed. This signals to your brain to start producing melatonin again. If your sleep schedule is completely messed up, don't jump to a perfect routine immediately. Instead, shift your bedtime 15–20 minutes earlier each night. Your brain responds better to gradual changes than to sudden discipline.

Another key factor is cortisol. Cortisol requires daylight exposure during the morning to function properly. Going outside early, even for just five minutes, has a significant impact on your internal clock. Morning sunlight signals to your brain to anchor your wake cycle, which helps melatonin rise automatically earlier at night. If you can pair morning light with movement, like a short walk, your sleep cycle stabilises even faster.

Personally, it was easier for me to fix my sleep routine by keeping my phone in another room, using an alarm clock instead of my phone, and keeping the curtains above my bed just an inch ajar for the sun to be available as soon as my eyes opened. I eventually practised smaller, better habits, such as drinking water as soon as I was awake and ensuring my first action of the day would be to go to the balcony.

Also, it helps if you pay attention to how you use your bed. Humans are creatures of association. If you scroll, work, eat, and watch videos in bed, your brain begins linking your bed with stimulation instead of rest. The goal is for your brain to associate bed with sleep. That means when you lie down, the body automatically starts the "power down" process.

At night, if your mind races, don't fight it by scrolling. Instead, write down whatever is bothering you. Research shows that dumping thoughts onto paper reduces cognitive load, allowing your brain to let go. Your mind doesn't keep replaying tasks or worries because it knows they're stored somewhere safe.

We don't fix our sleep by forcing ourselves to just sleep more. We fix it by creating a life that naturally leads us toward rest. And sometimes, that begins by putting the phone down and giving your brain a moment of silence to catch up to your emotions, instead of letting them attack you at night. When sleep improves, everything else falls into place.

Tinath Zaeba is an optimistic daydreamer, a cat mom of 5 and a student of Economics at North South University. Get in touch via tinathzaeba25@gmail.com

How not to ruin your sleep schedule

Don't pile up work
No one's immune to procrastinating until the deadline is within panicking distance. The only course of action then is to either finish on time or minimise tardiness as much as possible.

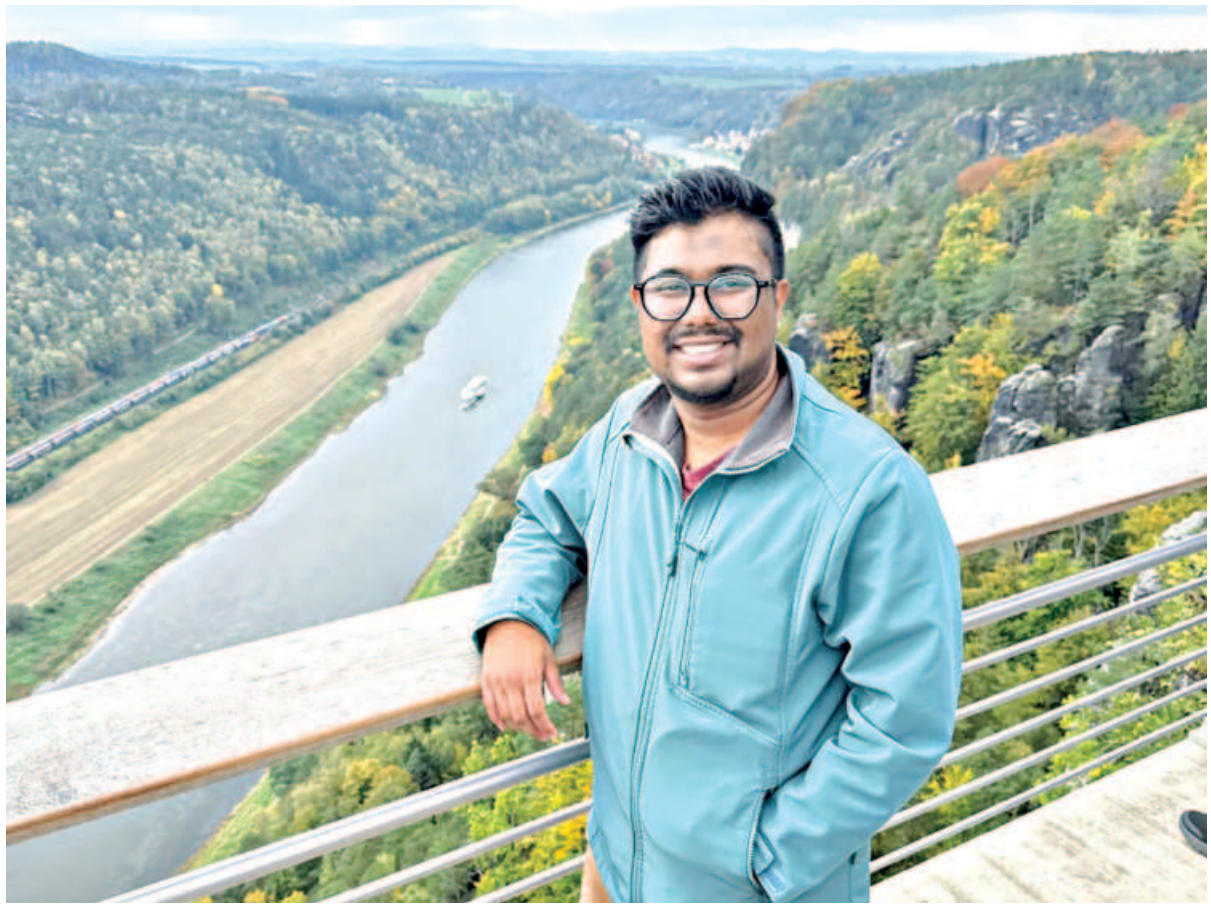
Keep your screentime in check
Staying up late to enjoy your favourite pastimes is guaranteed to be your downfall. As fun as these activities are, the terrible sleep cycle that accompanies them is not worth it. You can keep a daily alarm at a specified time to remind you to drop everything and get some sleep.

Try eating and drinking healthy
Many of us need something extra to get us through the day. But abusing it can lead to demolishing the regular sleep cycle, and causing sleeplessness until late at night.

READER SUBMISSION

How global experiences shaped my perspective as a development professional

RAISUL MILLAT SAFKAT



Last summer, when I boarded my flight from Dhaka, I didn't know how deeply the next four months would shape me. I had a rough plan, some scattered opportunities stitched loosely together, and a stubborn belief that if I stayed open to the unknown, the unknown would teach me more than any classroom ever could.

I was a master's student at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Graduate School of Economics and a development professional at Shikha Shastha Unnayan Karzakram (SHISUK), accustomed to being grounded in research, fieldwork, and youth engagement. But this time, I was stepping out with the intention of learning from the world around me, even if the route wasn't straightforward.

My first destination was Herrsching, a lakeside town outside Munich, where I was to attend the International Leadership Workshop for Rural Youth. There, I discovered a global community I hadn't realised I was missing. Participants came from Kenya, Nepal, the Philippines, Germany, Latin America, and many other regions, all united by a shared desire to grow as leaders. Our days were filled with teamwork, simulations, hands-on agricultural challenges, and problem-solving activities that tested our ability to collaborate. Evenings, by contrast, came alive with music, storytelling, cultural exchange, and laughter.

In one of the team tasks, as we tried to build a makeshift irrigation system using limited materials, I saw leadership emerge in its truest form – not by speaking the loudest, but by listening deeply, encouraging others, and connecting people despite their differences. That was the first lesson Europe gave me: development is never theoretical; it is lived through human interaction, patience, and empathy.

When the workshop ended, I wasn't ready to return home. I had a long gap before my next scheduled training, so I decided to stay in Sweden with my uncle's family.

One afternoon, I saw that the WINWIN Gothenburg Sustainability Award Week was taking place nearby and that a Climate Fresk workshop was open to participants. I joined out of curiosity, but the experience reshaped how I understand climate education. Through cards and collaborative design, the facilitators made climate science simple, emotional, and accessible. In Bangladesh, climate conversations often feel heavy and technical. In contrast, they felt like a shared story we were all responsible for telling there.

During a coffee break, someone mentioned that the Nordic Youth & Children Climate Conference would be held in Stockholm the following week, and I applied for the conference, booked a seat, packed my bag, and left for Stockholm the following week. There, I witnessed something remarkable: children and teenagers engaging with policymakers as equals, questioning decisions, proposing ideas, and advocating for their futures. Seeing nearly 40 young participants from Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland confidently shape policy discussions inspired me to imagine what youth platforms in Bangladesh could become if empowered in similar ways.

Just when I thought the unexpected opportunities were slowing down, I received a message from SHISUK asking me if I could attend APIMONDIA in Copenhagen. APIMONDIA – the world's largest beekeeping and honey congress – was directly relevant to the community honey enterprise programmes we run in Bangladesh.

I didn't hesitate. I boarded a train and soon found myself in a vast convention hall showcasing hundreds of honey varieties, hive technologies, medicinal research, and innovations from producers around the world. I tasted more honey in one day than I ever had before. What stood out to me was how small technical improvements, like better hive boxes, improved harvesting methods, and bee-friendly plants, could meaningfully increase the incomes of rural families back home. It was a powerful example of how global learning can directly support local development.

By October, it was time for the programme that had originally triggered my entire journey: the UNEP-affiliated CIPSEM Climate Training at the Technical University of Dresden. It was prestigious and intensive, filled mostly with mid-career government officials, environmental scholars, and climate professionals. I was the youngest participant there, and for a moment, that fact intimidated me. But as discussions unfolded on climate governance, adaptation strategies, environmental diplomacy, and ecological economics, I realised I had already built the confidence I needed. My experiences from Sweden, Germany, Denmark, and the workshop in Herrsching had prepared me far better than I had imagined.

Field visits made the programme even more transformative. We travelled to climate-resilient farms, forest management zones, circular economy hubs, and renewable-energy sites. For the first time, I understood how policies translate into infrastructure and behaviour, how a decision taken in a ministry can shape an entire landscape, and how governance becomes visible when you step out of the classroom and onto the field.

After Dresden, I headed to Bonn for the Young Scholars Initiative UNCCD Negotiation Simulation. Representing Bangladesh in a simulated global negotiation was intense, emotional, and eye-opening. We debated land restoration, finance mechanisms, and political compromises. I experienced the pressure countries feel in global negotiations, the need to protect national priorities while contributing to global commitments. For the first time, I could imagine myself someday sitting in a real COP negotiation room, carrying the voice of Bangladesh with confidence.

Through all these experiences, my understanding of development deepened. It is not only about economics, policies, or infrastructure; it is shaped by culture, discipline, social trust, design, and shared values. Europe taught me that progress is never accidental; it is built daily through collective responsibility.

I returned to Dhaka carrying far more than memories. I brought new technical knowledge for honey producers, fresh insights into climate governance, networks from around the world, a stronger grasp of negotiation strategies, and a renewed sense of purpose. Most importantly, I returned with the confidence that young people from Bangladesh can not only participate in global conversations, but they can also contribute meaningfully to them.

Development work is, ultimately, about understanding the world our communities live in. And sometimes, to understand that world, we must step outside it, if only for a while, to see more clearly how to serve it better.

The author is a senior research officer at Shikha Shastha Unnayan Karzakram (SHISUK).