

Retaining talent depends on government action

What can the next elected government do to help retain Bangladesh's young talent?

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Brain drain is usually described as a loss. A leak. In Bangladesh, it often comes with a sigh and a statistic. The bright student you've known since school has already left the country for higher education. The story sounds finished before it even begins, but stories are rarely ever that neat. People do not leave places in straight lines, and they do not stop belonging just because they cross a border.

In this article, we try to present student perspectives from two places at once: from those studying at home and from those studying abroad. They talk about ambition, frustration, and hope. They also talk about systems that work and those that do not. Alongside their voices is a larger question: What can the next elected government do to support its youth? Because talent responds to opportunities.

Raisa*, a recent graduate from a top university in the US, laments that the lack of better pay compels her not return to Bangladesh. She states, "Bangladeshi jobs do not pay enough for me to be able to pay off my student loans."

Similar to Raisa, there are many others who opt for jobs abroad in hopes of better pay. Beyond economics, students frequently describe a broader climate of instability that influences their decision to leave. Political uncertainty, periodic social unrest, and everyday corruption create an atmosphere where long-term planning feels fragile.

Ernest Prottoy D'Rozario finished his undergrad in Japan and is currently working in the same country. He states, "Nepotism and communal tensions further erode trust in institutions that are meant to reward merit."

Merit-based recruitment across public and private sectors is seen as essential to breaking entrenched networks of nepotism and institutional bias. He also believes that without fair hiring, stable banks, and transparent governance, it becomes difficult for graduates to imagine building secure lives, starting businesses, or planning long-term futures within the country.

Raisa believes that, for women in particular, this sense of precarity is intensified. Many speak of navigating public spaces with constant vigilance, where harassment is normalised, and complaints are met with suspicion. While gendered violence exists everywhere, the difference students note abroad is institutional and social response: laws are enforced more decisively, and public sympathy tends to align with victims rather than interrogate their character. This contrast alone becomes a powerful push factor.

At the same time, students are drawn to the promise of functional systems: universities that compete globally, invest in research, and open pathways through international networks, hackathons, and collaborative projects. Better salaries make these lives sustainable, allowing the youth to save, to move, and to feel a sense of security.

Daily life also matters – reliable amenities, accessible public events, and communities built around shared interests contribute to a feeling of belonging. Interactions are often described as more respectful and predictable, reducing the emotional labour required to simply exist. Taken together, these factors frame migration not as a rejection of home, but as a rational response to environments that offer dignity, stability, and the chance to turn education into opportunity.

Students consistently emphasise that any meaningful effort to retain or bring back young talent must begin with restoring trust in the state itself. This means tackling corruption, communal violence, and insecurity,

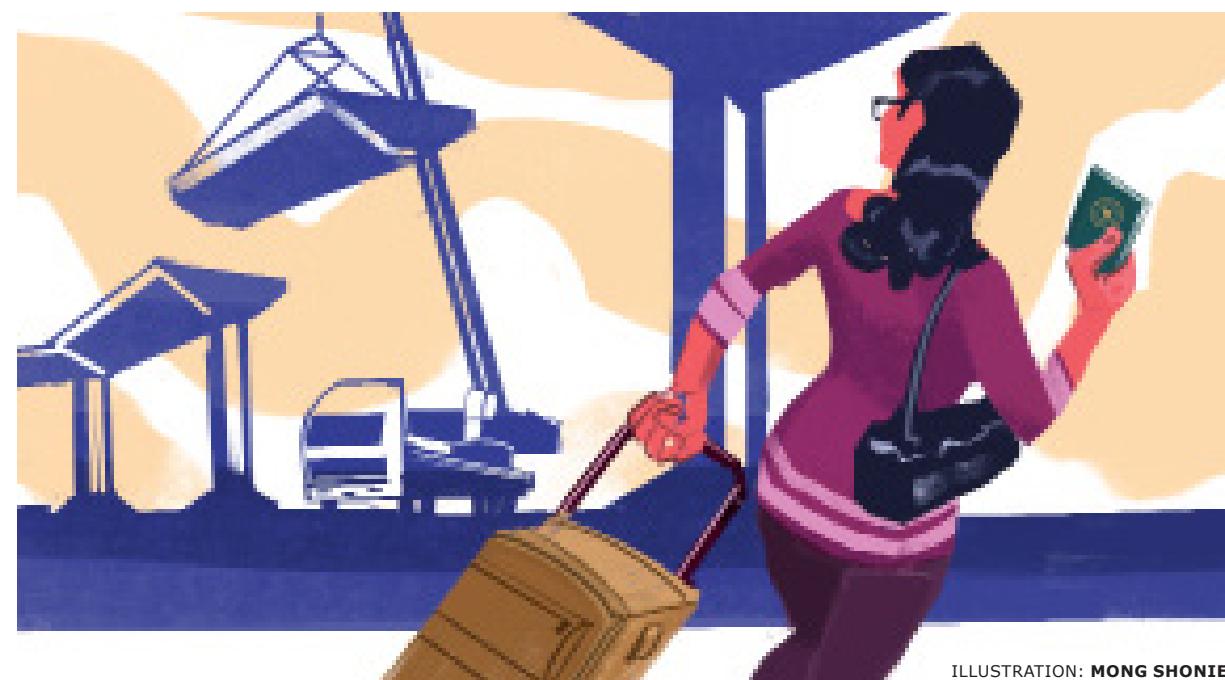


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particularly violence against women and minorities, through firm enforcement of the rule of law. Ernest says, "The government can first figure out how to solve the never-ending corruption and violence within communities and against minorities in Bangladesh. Then they need to invest more in education that is on par with the education systems of other countries."

We have reached out to students who envision spending most of their lives in Bangladesh, and most, if not all, of them echo similar sentiments. The biggest anchors for them rarely have anything to do with the quality of life, infrastructure, or state benefits, but tend to be of a more personal nature.

Faiaz Riasat Saad, a recent graduate of Electrical and Electronic Engineering from the Islamic University of Technology, shares his perspectives on why he wishes to remain in Bangladesh. "The biggest reason driving my decision is that I don't want to leave my parents alone here in their old age while I live comfortably abroad."

Faiaz shares Ernest's viewpoints, drawing from his own experiences. "One of the problems I have recently faced is the scarcity of fairly compensated jobs. There's a mindset among recruiters at top companies that caters only to graduates of renowned universities in the country. Later, those people leave the country for even better opportunities, and the vacancies are then filled by the next batch of graduates from the same universities. So, it's like a cycle where the others are not even in the loop. However, as a fresh graduate myself from a renowned university, I still had to face hurdles in the job market since the opportunities are very limited compared to the number of applicants."

Education reform emerges as the second major priority. Students want a modern, skill-based curriculum that reflects global standards in science, technology, analytics, and research, alongside fair access to scholarships and funding. Teachers are central to this vision: better training, professional recognition, and institutional support are seen as prerequisites for any improvement in learning outcomes.

Adib Sadman Al Haque, a management trainee

officer at IPDC Finance PLC, emphasises the gap between the education curriculum and the industries: "In education, outdated curricula and limited emphasis on critical thinking and practical skills have restricted meaningful learning and academic growth. I want the next government to modernise education with an updated, skill-based curriculum that ensures fair access to scholarships and research opportunities and creates strong links between universities and industry so students can better leverage opportunities."

Stronger links between universities and industry would allow students to translate academic work into employable skills, reducing the gap between graduation and meaningful work. Raisa urged that equal emphasis be placed on improving healthcare and mental health services, recognising that productivity and wellbeing are deeply interconnected.

Nafiz Islam Nadit, a servicing executive at DotBirth, expresses that while convenience and affordability drive his decision to remain in Bangladesh, there's room for improvement, especially regarding the youth who think out of the box.

"I've been personally affected by the difference between academic studies and practical industry knowledge. So, I believe that the new government should work vastly on the education sector and make it more application-based, empower sectors related to entrepreneurship and art, and create opportunities for the youth with different, new, and creative mindsets," says Nafiz.

Perhaps, brain drain is not contradictory to progress. It is seemingly a part of it. When students gain exposure, the country gains perspective. But this only matters if there is somewhere to return to. Governments largely control that reality. Through investment, trust, and long-term thinking, governments can create a sphere where young minds can thrive. The future of Bangladesh does not rely on stopping young minds from leaving, but it certainly depends on giving them a reason to believe that coming back is worth it.

*Name has been changed upon request