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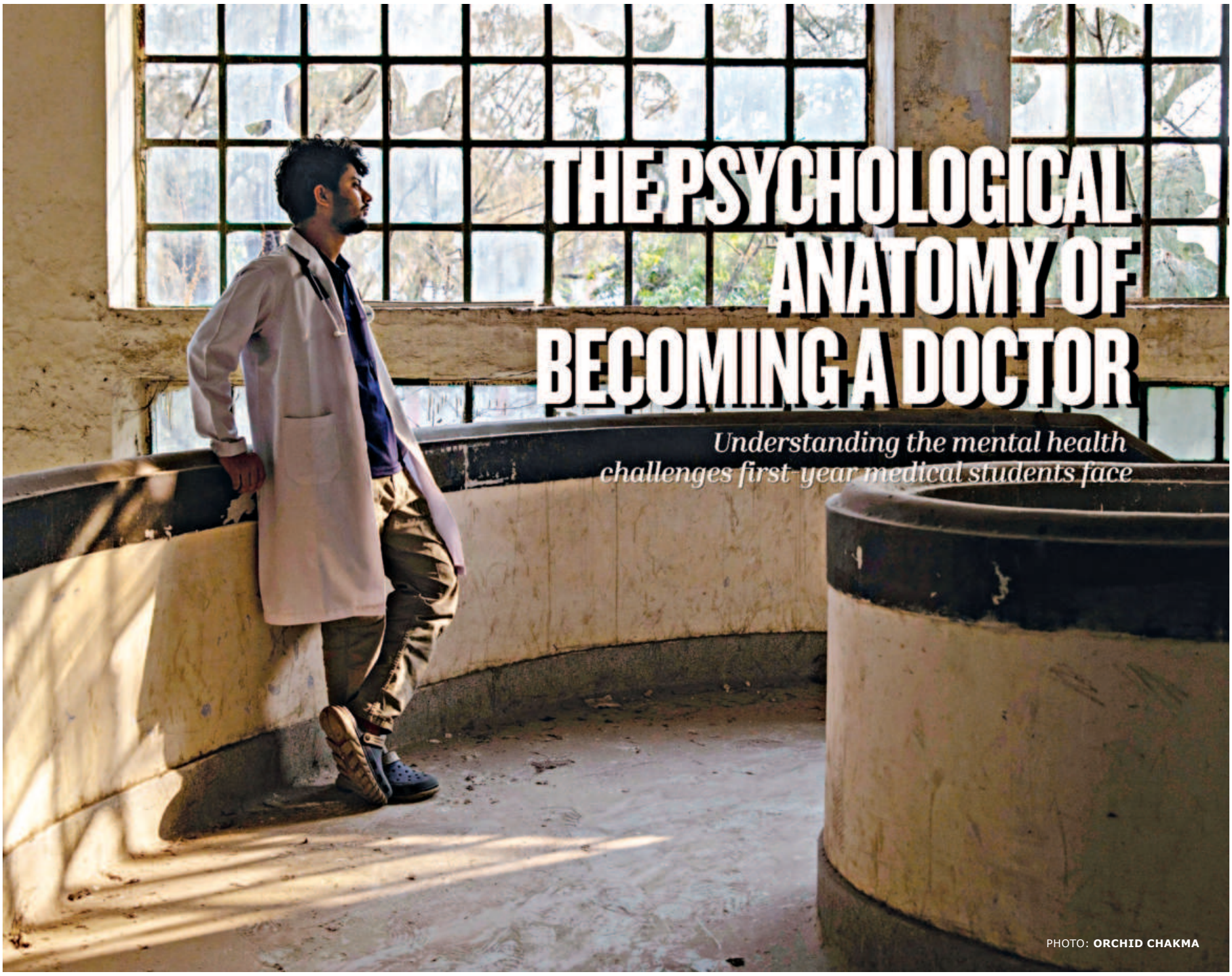

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ANATOMY OF BECOMING A DOCTOR

Understanding the mental health challenges first-year medical students face

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

TV SERIES

A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms presents a subversive adventure in Westeros

SABIL SADAT ZAHIR

The latest prequel series to *Game of Thrones*, *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms*, is an amazingly fresh entry that boldly challenges what audiences usually expect from the franchise, fleshing out the story of a hero who does whatever it takes to be honourable and kind in the grimdark world of Westeros; a world that seemingly always punishes kindness.

The show is an adaptation of the *Tales of Dunk and Egg* novella series (particularly the first book, *The Hedge Knight*), and chronologically takes place between the events of *House of The Dragon* and *Game of Thrones*. However, unlike earlier instalments in the franchise, *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms* is a more focused and grounded character-driven story as opposed to an expansive, high-fantasy political thriller told through numerous interwoven viewpoints. This approach makes it a rather self-contained addition that allows viewers to jump in without having seen the other entries.

The series follows Ser Duncan, a kind-hearted hedge knight, as he enters a tournament to make a name for himself and honour his mentor. In this quest, he reluctantly takes in a young squire, a boy calling himself Egg. True to George R R Martin's storytelling, the seemingly uncomplicated initial premise leads to surprising and captivating twists and turns.

Set in the more-often-than-not bleak universe of *Game of Thrones*, the show is made outstanding by its characters and presentation. This deviance in presentation is most conspicuously observed in the protagonist himself: Ser Duncan, whose righteous characterisation is akin to traditional heroic figures such as Aragorn or Superman.

Such apparently "heroic" characters in this franchise usually tend to face a gruesome and cynical end. But without delving too much into spoilers, Ser Duncan avoids falling into that trope. What makes this story so refreshing is that it still cleverly weaves in suspenseful subversions while maintaining a straightforward hero's journey. Besides Duncan, characters like Egg, Baelor Targaryen, Raymun Fossoway, and Duncan's deceased mentor Ser Arlan are all written as authentic characters who play compelling roles in the narrative. The show also features a good balance of humour and light-hearted moments, further distancing it from its companion instalments.

The show isn't action-heavy, paced in a manner where the action is reserved for the climax. This intricate buildup is exemplified in the penultimate episode of the season, which features a visceral and immersive battle scene that not only delivers on the promised action but also weaves in with the narrative threads. This episode alone might contain the most brilliant writing and creative cinematography in the entire *Game of Thrones* franchise.

A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms is a tale of a man who has hope in a hopeless world. It breathes new life into the lore of Westeros, crafting a simple yet subversive story that checks all the right boxes. It is a faithful adaptation of the novella that expands on the source material, a great interlude between the prequel *House of the Dragon* and the main storyline of *Game of Thrones*, and most importantly, a genuinely exciting and feel-good story that works as an accessible starting point to one of the most iconic fantasy universes ever made.

OPPORTUNITIES

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SATIRE

Students establish a club for those who are against clubs

TASFIAH LIAKAT

Founded by a group of students who refuse to share any more event countdowns on Facebook, the Anti-Club Club aims to rid the campus of what they termed as "an epidemic of student organisations".

"You can't even walk five feet without being asked to scan a QR code," whines new member Bulu Hassan. "I once said that I liked breathing fresh air and almost ended up recruited into the Oxygen Enthusiasts' Society."

"The idea was born during this semester's Club Fair," informs Founding Member and Temporary President Girin Ali. "While passing through, noticing the stalls for the 'Debate Club', the 'Debate Club for Introverts', the 'Debate Club for People Who Hate Debate', and a 'Debate Club for People Who Didn't Make the Other Debate Clubs', I realised something must be done."

"Clubs used to stand for something," adds another member, gesturing vaguely. "Now, it has become a member meeting once a semester to post pictures. That's not a club; that's a Facebook album with a logo."

These concerns were discussed during a meeting, which the members confirmed was "a lucky coincidence where everyone was in the same room at the same time". The club had issued a zero-tolerance, anti-merch policy, which lasted approximately 12 hours before someone suggested hoodies for awareness-raising purposes. The current merch line-up includes tote bags, wristbands, and a limited-edition jacket that reads "I Joined a Club to End Clubs" on the back.

Critics have been quick to point out the hypocrisy. "This is literally just another club," accuses Law Club President Belak Bhuiyan. The Anti-Club Club has addressed this issue in their newly released frequently asked questions document, Section 3.2, labelled "Ironic Necessity".

Adjusting the "clubs stink" badge pinned to his collar, Girin clarifies, "Those clubs exist to supposedly do things. We exist to stop things from existing."

Meanwhile, some faculty members are ecstatic at this turn of events. "I am hoping this club will manage to reduce the number of emails I receive asking me to be a moderator for something I neither understand nor care about, and I support it wholeheartedly," admits one lecturer, requesting anonymity to avoid backlash.

Vice-President of External Affairs (a role the club insists is purely symbolic), Marun Islam says, "Most clubs are formed because someone wants to add 'Founder' to their LinkedIn profile. So, we're basically protecting future employers from being scammed."

According to the organisers, the club plans to host workshops to teach students how not to start clubs and conduct weekly Google Meet sessions titled "You can just have friends" and "Hobbies don't need a constitution".

They are demanding that the university authority temporarily hold off on approving new clubs until they can give satisfactory answers to these questions: Will this club survive past midterms? Could the job be done with a group chat? Do you really need this, or are you just lonely right now?

When asked how long the Anti-Club Club intends to exist, members exchange looks, and Girin opines, "Ideally, not long. Our end goal is to render ourselves obsolete."

Currently, the Anti-Club Club is considering forming a subcommittee to address the interests of students who are hoping to start an Anti-Anti-Club Club.

An allergic-to-small-talk engineering student. Contact her at: tasfiahliakat007@gmail.com.

EDUCATION

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ANATOMY OF BECOMING A DOCTOR

Understanding the mental health challenges first-year medical students face

AHNAF TAHMEED PURNA

Trigger warning: The following article contains mentions of self-harm and suicide

On the first day of medical college, the white apron feels almost ceremonial. It is worn with quiet pride, reverence, and the awareness that it symbolises years of sacrifice. It represents discipline, prestige, and the fulfilment of a long-held dream.

Yet, beneath that white apron, many first-year medical students carry something less visible – uncertainty, emotional strain, and the heavy burden of a psychological reality they were never fully prepared for. For some, this burden is silent, experienced in moments alone in a dormitory or library, away from anyone who might notice.

The transition from high school to medical college is not merely about academics but also about existence. Students must renegotiate their identity, recalibrate daily routines, and sustain their emotional equilibrium in an environment defined by relentless evaluation and comparison. For many, this occurs while living away from home, often for the first time in their lives, disconnected from familiar emotional anchors. The volume of information, combined with new social hierarchies and expectations, can make the first year feel destabilising, even for those who once excelled effortlessly. The emotional weight of this transition often coincides with a sudden realisation that personal coping mechanisms may no longer suffice.

A study conducted among medical students in Bangladesh found that over half of the participating students experienced moderate to severe depression. Academic stress, maladaptive coping strategies, and various sociodemographic and behavioural factors were key predictors of depression. For psychiatrists working closely with this population, these findings confirm a pattern that is often preventable yet rarely addressed.

Dr Md Waliul Hasnat Sajib, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Psychiatry at Tangail Medical College, explains that the first year represents a period of acute psychological vulnerability.

"The first year is marked by profound psychosocial adjustment," he says. "Students are often living independently for the first time, adapting to hostel life, and navigating a far more demanding academic structure. Many struggle with time management, attentional control, and emotional regulation. When these adjustment demands accumulate without adequate coping strategies, they significantly increase psychological distress. Sadly, this distress sometimes escalates to self-harm or suicidal ideation. Suicide rates among medical students are notably higher than in the general population, underscoring the urgency of early intervention."

> **"Some medical colleges have well-established student support centres where counselling and mental health services are accessible. In those institutions, students have a structured avenue for early intervention, which can prevent psychological problems from escalating. Unfortunately, in other colleges, such facilities are absent, and students must navigate these challenges alone."**

Dr Sajib adds that this is compounded by the cumulative nature of stress, where even small setbacks can trigger disproportionate emotional reactions. He emphasises that institutional support can make a crucial difference: "Some medical colleges have well-established student support centres where counselling and mental health services are accessible. In those institutions, students have a structured avenue for early intervention, which can prevent psychological problems from escalating. Unfortunately, in other colleges, such facilities are absent, and students must navigate these challenges alone."

According to Dr Sajib, awareness campaigns and peer-support networks within colleges can also play a critical role in reducing stigma and encouraging early help-seeking.

For students whose identities were anchored in prior academic success, medical college introduces a destabilising reality: excellence is no longer guaranteed. Before entering Dhaka Medical College, Nafisa Wadud Nuha believed that her passion would sustain her. She had anticipated pressure but had not foreseen its emotional intensity.

"I had always dreamed of studying medicine, and I believed that would give me the strength to endure the pressure," says Nuha. "But within the first two weeks, I realised how different the reality was from what I had imagined."

Nuha says that this initial confrontation with reality forced her to reconsider her strategies for study, rest, and emotional regulation. The turning point arrived as her first term approached: "When I attempted to organise my studies, the sheer volume of material overwhelmed me. I became so anxious that I cried, and I struggled to concentrate effectively for days afterwards."

This cognitive and emotional overload is common among high-achieving students who suddenly find themselves in a competitive environment. Their identities, once reinforced by unbroken success, face an unfamiliar challenge. Many describe this period as a trial by fire, where resilience is tested more than intellect.

Dr Sajib notes the systemic pressure embedded in medical education. "Medical colleges are inherently competitive ecosystems. Students are constantly exposed to social comparison, which can trigger imposter syndrome, performance anxiety, and diminished self-efficacy. Exposure to hostile peer dynamics, including bullying, can further exacerbate emotional strain."

For Susmita Toppo of Shaheed M. Monsur Ali Medical College, Sirajganj, the shift was deeply personal and culturally layered.

"When I received my early academic results, they were lower than I expected, and I felt my confidence diminish," she says. "My family had placed high expectations on me, and I often felt I was not living up to them. Adjusting to the campus environment, where traditions and routines differ from what I was used to, added another layer of challenge. Opportunities to engage in familiar cultural or social practices were limited, which sometimes left me feeling isolated."

Yet interpersonal support provided a lifeline.

"My friends and seniors were incredibly supportive," Toppo adds. "They reassured me that setbacks were part of the process. Without their encouragement, I would have struggled to navigate that period."

The presence of empathetic peers offered Toppo not just guidance but validation, reminding her that emotional struggle is a shared experience rather than personal failure.

Relocation compounds these challenges. Shahrin Anziz, a student at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College, moved from Chattogram to Barishal. "The transition was not only academic but psychological," she says. "Being away from my family and familiar surroundings made stressful moments feel more isolating. I worried about safety, felt disconnected from peers initially, and had to adjust entirely to a new lifestyle. Over time, I adapted, but the first months were marked by significant emotional strain."

Even when support exists, stigma often prevents students from seeking professional help.

"There remains pervasive stigma surrounding mental health care," Dr Sajib explains. "Students often internalise the misconception that seeking psychological support signifies weakness or pathology. This leads to delayed help-seeking, allowing distress to escalate unnecessarily. Untreated psychological stress can manifest as depression, anxiety, substance dependence, and burnout. Early recognition and intervention are essential."

Physiological consequences of sustained stress are equally concerning.

"Chronic stress leads to activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and elevated cortisol levels," Dr Sajib continues. "This neuroendocrine dysregulation impairs emotional regulation, cognitive function, and overall well-being. First-year students are particularly vulnerable because they often do not seek help when it is needed most."

Long-term, this stress can leave lasting imprints on cognitive processing and emotional resilience if unaddressed.

Anatomy represents one of the first tangible confrontations with the human body and mortality. For many students, the dissection hall is a crucible of emotional as well as intellectual challenge.

Mahdia Binte Nasar, a student at Shaheed M. Monsur Ali Medical College, Sirajganj, entered medical college with aspirations of balance and personal growth. She imagined maintaining her energy and pursuing personal interests, but the reality proved far more consuming. "The academic demands drained my energy and motivation. One week during my anatomy term felt overwhelming; I thought I could not finish the syllabus. The pressure weighed on my body, mind, and heart. Yet completing the exam, even without excelling, felt like a meaningful achievement," she says.

Her experience in the dissection hall was emotionally complex: "I did not feel fear, but I felt gratitude. The cadaver was not just an educational tool; it was a human life that had contributed to my learning. That awareness instilled a deep sense of responsibility and respect for the profession I had chosen."

Such experiences often catalyse the first nuanced understanding of the ethical and human dimensions of medicine.

Students in private medical colleges encounter similar academic pressures, often accompanied by societal misconceptions. Khandakar Sidratul Muntaha Shaily of Uttara Adhunik Medical College emphasises the parity of academic rigour.

"The pressure from extensive syllabi, frequent assessments, and evaluations is identical across institutions. Misconceptions that private medical students are less capable can discourage students and affect confidence, even though the standards remain high," she says. Shaily adds that resilience is cultivated through navigating these misconceptions in formal learning.

Support from peers and family emerges as one of the strongest protective factors. For Nuha, friendships formed during medical college were critical. Shared experiences fostered solidarity that mitigated isolation. Toppo credits her roommates and seniors for helping her reinterpret setbacks as part of the learning journey rather than personal failure. Shaily recalls the emotional reassurance from her parents and close friends, even as academic challenges persisted. These networks often become a psychological safety net, buffering the impact of stressors that might otherwise feel insurmountable.

For others, coping strategies are highly personal. Nasar relied on discipline and incremental progress when motivation faltered. Prayer provided additional emotional grounding, creating stability amidst uncertainty. Even simple routines, such as short daily reflections or scheduled breaks, can significantly reduce stress and improve focus.

Yet individual strategies cannot replace systemic intervention. Dr Sajib emphasises the need for a structured mental health infrastructure within medical colleges: "Institutions with counselling services, student support centres, and proactive mental health programmes see markedly better student outcomes. Early intervention is critical for preventing long-term psychological morbidity."

Dr Sajib underscores that student support centres are not just therapeutic spaces. They are crucial for teaching stress management, resilience, and adaptive coping strategies that sustain students throughout their careers.

The first year of medical college does not merely teach anatomy, physiology, or biochemistry. It teaches emotional endurance. It teaches students to exist within discomfort, to renegotiate their identity, and to persist within systems that demand more than intellectual effort alone. Over time, the white apron loses its ceremonial weight and becomes something heavier.

It becomes a symbol not only of knowledge, but of survival. It represents a journey through vulnerability, the cultivation of resilience, and the first steps toward becoming not just a doctor, but a self-aware, empathetic professional capable of enduring both the rigour and the moral complexity of medicine.

Reference:
International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health Volume 38 Issue 1 (December 16, 2025). *Depression among medical students and the role of academic stress and coping strategies: A cross-sectional study in Bangladesh.*

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PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

OFF CAMPUS

Financial constraints of a student during Ramadan

ILLUSTRATION: **MONG SHONIE**

TINATH ZAEBA

There are too many words to describe the feeling of Ramadan and yet not enough. The shared sense of community, the closeness to something deeply personal, and the warmth of spending evenings with loved ones – these are the things that come to mind first. Nights feel fuller, streets are busier, kitchens are louder, and conversations stretch further. The month carries an energy of its own, wholesome in a way that allows days to pass in patience and nights to arrive with food, laughter, and company. And yet there is one pill that can be difficult to swallow: the growing list of things to spend on and not always enough to spend with.

For many students, Ramadan comes with a series of small but constant expenses. Iftar is rarely just a simple meal anymore, and it has gradually become something social and planned. Friends organise outings, group chats fill with restaurant suggestions, and suddenly a casual evening meal turns into a reservation and another expense added to the month. There is an expectation of going out, trying somewhere new, or gathering at a place that can accommodate large groups of people after sunset.

A single outing might not seem like much, but Ramadan is a month full of invitations. One iftar with classmates, another with close friends, and another organised by a club, department, or student group. Now, with Dhaka's increasingly busy calendar of events, not attending the many festivals and Eid shopping events can make one feel left out. Pop-up Ramadan festivals, late-night markets, and special shopping events appear throughout the city. These gatherings add to the excitement of the month, but they also come with their own costs: food stalls, small purchases, transport, and the occasional impulse purchase that seems harmless in the moment.

Saying yes feels natural because Ramadan is meant to be shared, but those evenings grow quickly in ways that are difficult to ignore when living on a student budget. One dinner becomes several, one outing turns into a weekly plan, and before long, the month carries a financial drag of its own.

Alongside this are the expectations that appear throughout the month. Bringing desserts to someone's house for iftar, buying sweets to share during visits with family or neighbours, and contributing something small when attending a gathering – while none of these gestures is extravagant, they are common parts of the social culture of Ramadan. Things like giving *salami*, buying Eid gifts for parents, and buying snacks for iftar feel like simple acts of courtesy. Over time, however, the small purchases that accompany them begin to add up.

The rising price of food only adds to this reality, especially this year, as market prices have risen to an extraordinary extent. Lime, fruits, cooking oil, and other everyday items suddenly cost more than they did the previous month. Even preparing iftar at home can become more expensive when basic ingredients increase in cost.

For students who rely on allowances, part-time work or careful budgeting, these costs can make Ramadan feel financially demanding. Participating in social gatherings, buying food for iftar and keeping up with traditions all require spending that many students have to calculate carefully. Attending these events adds to the wholeness of the month, to the feeling of being part of the shared experience that Ramadan brings. At the same time, it also adds to the awareness of a quiet mental calculator where one is constantly weighing how much something costs, how many invitations can realistically be accepted, and how far the month's budget can stretch.

Choosing not to attend can create its own feeling of absence. Friends share photos of group iftars, late-night outings and bustling Ramadan events, and conversations revolve around where everyone met and what everyone tried. Missing those gatherings sometimes leaves behind that familiar feeling of being slightly outside the moment, the small but noticeable FOMO— fear of missing out.

Ramadan remains a month filled with community, tradition and shared experiences, but it also highlights how seasonal customs can carry financial pressure. For students in particular, the balance between participating in the social life of Ramadan and managing a limited budget becomes a practical challenge that accompanies the month each year.

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.

Advertorial

A $150 Billion Maritime Blueprint:

The Policy Imperative for Bangladesh's Economic Sovereignty

Captain A K M Golam Kibria
Chairman, MH Global Group
Director, Ocean Shiptrade Pte Ltd – Singapore
Maritime Strategist

For decades, Bangladesh has treated its maritime territory merely as a geographical boundary—not as a strategic engine of economic power. Yet beneath the seabed and across the vast maritime zones of the Bay of Bengal lies an estimated $150 billion blue economy potential, capable of generating more than 3 million jobs.

The fundamental question is clear: Will Bangladesh remain confined to a coastal mindset, or will it rise as a true maritime power?

Transitioning from a passive coastal state to an effective maritime power is not simply a matter of building infrastructure. It requires a coordinated national strategy encompassing policy alignment, human capital development, institutional reform, and global connectivity.

Capital Outflow: A Silent Economic Drain

Bangladesh is producing skilled seafarers and maritime officers who have secured respectable positions across the global shipping industry. Yet the high-value segments of maritime commerce—logistics management, ship management, marine insurance, financial services, and maritime legal sectors—remain largely under foreign control.

Every year, a significant portion of freight earnings flows out of the country. Bangladesh dismantles ships but does not lead in ship operations. It produces officers but has yet to build world-class maritime service institutions.

This is not merely a policy gap—it represents a major leakage of national economic capacity.

A Three-Pronged Maritime Strategy: A Practical National Roadmap

1. Establishing Dominance in Ship Chartering

If Bangladesh establishes 1,000 domestic ship chartering companies by 2040, its participation in global freight markets could expand dramatically.

Ship chartering is relatively low-capital yet highly knowledge-intensive, generating high-value employment in brokerage, freight analytics, and logistics management. Developing this sector would position Bangladesh within the decision-making core of global shipping commerce.

2. Expanding a Bangladesh-Flagged Fleet

A target of 1,000 Bangladesh-flagged vessels is ambitious but achievable through strategic investment, policy incentives, and international partnerships.

Ship ownership is fundamental to maritime sovereignty. Retaining freight earnings within the national economy strengthens financial stability, deepens maritime expertise, and enhances Bangladesh's strategic presence in global trade routes.

3. Shipbuilding: Transforming Bangladesh's Coastline into a Maritime Industrial Hub

Bangladesh's coastline can become a golden maritime industrial corridor.

With a focused national strategy, the country could capture $6 billion in shipbuilding exports by 2040, particularly in the global market for small and medium-sized vessels.

The engine of this transformation is synergy—developing riverine shipyards, integrating shipbuilding with the existing ship-recycling sector to create a true circular maritime economy, and establishing joint ventures for technological transfer.

Equally crucial is human capital. Training 50,000 maritime specialists will be essential to drive this transformation.

By uniting shipbuilding and ship recycling within a closed industrial loop, Bangladesh can transform its coastline into a globally competitive center of maritime manufacturing.

Additional Strategic Pillars

A comprehensive maritime strategy must also include several complementary pillars:

Blue Economy Expansion – Unlocking offshore energy resources, fisheries, seabed minerals, and marine tourism.

Maritime Education and Skills Development – Training thousands of young professionals in shipping, logistics, maritime law, and marine engineering.

Port and Logistics Modernization – Transforming national ports into regional transshipment and logistics hubs.

Global Trade Connectivity – Strategic partnerships with international shipping lines and commodity trading companies.

Coastal Industrial Growth – Establishing shipbuilding clusters, repair yards, and maritime economic zones.

Maritime Finance and Insurance Hub – Developing domestic capabilities in maritime finance, insurance, and legal arbitration.

Policy and Governance Reform – Implementing a long-term national maritime strategy inspired by successful global models.

Employment and Export Growth – Creating millions of jobs while strengthening export competitiveness.

Sustainable Ocean Governance – Protecting marine ecosystems while ensuring long-term economic prosperity.

Policy Coordination: The Need for Central Maritime Leadership

Such a transformation cannot be achieved through fragmented institutional efforts. It requires the establishment of a "powerful independent National Maritime Council "to coordinate strategy across government, industry, and academia.

This body would oversee the development of integrated maritime economic zones in Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, and Payra, elevate maritime education and research to international standards, and establish a comprehensive maritime finance, insurance, and legal services ecosystem.

Across the world, several successful maritime development models are widely studied—the Korean model, the Greek model, the Japanese model, the United Kingdom model, the broader European model, and most notably the Singapore model.

Through deep analysis of these international successes, Captain A. K. M. Golam Kibria has proposed a distinctive "Bangladesh Model."

Singapore's rise as a global shipping hub was built upon integrated maritime policy, institutional efficiency, and strategic foresight. Bangladesh—leveraging its strategic geographic location, vast workforce, expanding domestic market, and abundant marine resources—possesses similar potential.

The proposed Bangladesh Model integrates maritime policy, modern port infrastructure, skilled human capital, transparent trade systems, and a sustainable blue economy—positioning the country as a major global hub for shipping and maritime trade.

Integrating Economic Power with Human Responsibility

Maritime strategy is not solely an economic agenda—it is also a platform for humanitarian leadership.

The "Global Five-Zero" initiative, founded by Captain Kibria, represents a moral commitment to a world free from poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, corruption, and homelessness.

This initiative was presented at the University of Oxford and received international recognition through the work of the Dr. Mostafa Hazera Foundation.

The foundation also participated in the 80th anniversary event of the United Nations, attended by Secretary-General António Guterres.

Economic strength and social responsibility are not opposing forces—they are mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable national development.

The Call of the Time

The sea is not a luxury for Bangladesh—it is its strategic future.

The $150 billion maritime opportunity is not merely a statistic; it is a test of national vision, policy courage, and leadership.

Captain A. K. M. Golam Kibria has outlined a roadmap to achieve a $150 billion maritime economy and create 3 million jobs by 2040, aiming to transform Bangladesh's struggling economy into one defined by strength, dignity, and global relevance.

Now there is only one question—Is Bangladesh ready to embrace its blue horizon?

CAREER

What needs to change to accommodate environmental science graduates?

ILLUSTRATION: **ANWAR SOHEL**

SHOUMIK ZUBYER

My time as an environmental science undergrad was defined by hurdles that have become run of the mill for any pursuant of this field. It is an ailment that is national in scale: the scantness of scope for graduates of this essential discipline. Despite how lucrative the applications in the field are, graduates often opt to pursue jobs that offer more security, such as finance, NGOs, and public service. Seeing the brightest-eyed lose their impassioned drive to fix the troubles that ail the climate, crops, the rivers and soil, all for the lack of a formal scope, is nothing short of tragic.

But should reality really be this bleak?

Environmental sciences is far from a niche field. Mobility frameworks have an inclination towards pure and industrial research, consultancy, policy work and even corporate agility. These are the norms for nations that are committed to their COP30 goals.

To that end, students of Human Development Index (HDI) Tier 1 countries – such as Norway and Switzerland – who pursue environmental studies don't have to put up with as many hurdles in employment. While Bangladesh obviously lags behind in many criteria compared to these nations, the fact remains that students must be extended an olive branch. Without it, all we may be left to do is lend our talents to countries that are miles up ahead in the sustainability ladder.

So, what are some of the contrived issues that plague graduates here?

Lack of support outside of academics, which values rote learning above practical implementation, is often the root of this conundrum. No formal support for research outside of limited seats involving recycled thesis ideas is yet another issue that prevails. Offering zero referrals for higher studies amid starved research funding exacerbates frustrations.

Another facet includes technical certifications. The International Organisation of Standardisation (ISO) certifications – simple paperwork that fuels the environmental monitoring and auditing industry – are behind paywalls. They remain accessible mainly via elite firms, side-lining graduates who are less fortunate financially.

Moreover, the explosive development of AI in recent times has grossly outpaced the skills most faculty members have. And as a result, students play catch-up with required skillsets and fall behind in this account.

"Unlike our engineering or medicine peers, environmental science graduates get neglected in job markets, as employers favour arbitrary soft skills over the theory mastery we slaved for," says Fazla Zawadul Arabi, associate project officer at WaterAid Bangladesh and Dhaka University (DU) alumnus from the Department of Soil, Water and Environment.

"As the curriculum is divorced from field sites, it breeds cynicism in students, leading to short-term retention—an effect worsened by zero interdisciplinary ties between academic, industrial, corporate, and humanitarian activities, and frustrated ambitions. Internships pay pennies with no training in marketable skills, pile on work, and worst of all, operate via opaque hiring processes. So, what exactly does tertiary education in this discipline yield in the grand scheme?" he asks.

Elsewhere, government environmental roles use outdated, trivia testing methods to recruit cadres. The recent BCS exams have tried to incorporate more analytical aspects into their preliminary assessments, though they were met with haste. Even so, the discipline prepares an individual in very few details.

"While salinity ravages southern deltas, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute shuns most graduates, offering internships only to the top 0.05 percent, while the nation's very own soils demand more," explains Prof. Dr Md Harunor Rashid from the Department of Soil, Water and Environment, DU.

He further explained that despite the wealth of resources that the Bay of Bengal is brimming with – including fisheries, tourism, and the potential for renewables like offshore wind and tidal power – it is not being properly utilised. He added that experts at the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of Bangladesh peg its potential at billions in value-added output, yet environmental science graduates continue to struggle for a piece of the pie.

Startups also starve without funding. For instance, Startup Bangladesh's BDT 500 crore pot snubs early career climate tech initiatives, accelerating brain drain. Initiatives from Europe, like Orange Corners in Bangladesh, provide more catalytic funds and venture support for green businesses than national establishments.

All dilemmas in sum divert the talent away from the field, giving us a glimpse at only the tip of a seemingly insurmountable iceberg.

In contrast to the issues prevalent in Bangladesh, the European framework offers insight into what a thriving system could look like.

The European Green Deal (EGD) fuses rigorous academics with a massive industrial scale that is virtually absent in this country. The EGD mandates stewardship as a business prerequisite, not just a corporate social responsibility add-on.

"In my experience, Europe contrasts with a thriving ecosystem where the discipline unlocks policy, industry, and innovation while allowing vocal input from its youth. Bangladesh would stand to gain immensely by initiating projects tackling floods and air pollution crises," Fazla Zawadul adds.

For academia, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) uses the Bologna Process to standardise degrees across 49 countries. This facilitates a fluid labour market where a flood specialist trained in the Netherlands can easily work in Italy. Bangladesh, in comparison, fails to emulate this by failing to harmonise its environmental curricula with regional partners. The issue is present even at a smaller scale, as public university students cannot transfer credits to private institutions, let alone foreign programmes.

As for programmes themselves, MESPOM—Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters in Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management—targets extensive training on environmental hazards management with policy advancement. IMBRSea – an International Master of Science in Marine Biological Resources – advances marine resources opportunities and blue economy entrepreneurs. By implementing such a robust curriculum that lays the groundwork for industry-required proficiencies, it abates the need for young graduates to move elsewhere for better opportunities.

"Between 2000 and 2020, employment in the environmental economy grew faster than in the overall EU economy. These statistics seem impossible for Bangladesh without major governmental oversight and reform. A booming job market means a more collected, socially stable youth that refrain from looking elsewhere for the welfare of their ambitions, as I have done," says Sithi Shayonti Dutta, a DU alumna currently in an Erasmus Mundus programme residing in Prague.

The EU also pumps millions into research and ventures to find solutions for high-priority climate issues. Using hyper-accumulator plants (such as Indian Mustard - widely available in Bangladesh) and engineered bacteria, they are enriching their food resources and livelihoods. Startups like Endolith and Genomines use tiny plants for mining nickel from shallow fields, which are economically unfeasible for traditional mining. Such ideas are only able to come to fruition because young minds are given the resources to flourish.

Environmental science graduates of the country are most notably battling an industry-curricula mismatch, leaving them unprepared for real-world challenges. Ensuring seamless entry into policy and tech roles and addressing the lack of a fundamental framework for the cohort, policymakers must build academia-to-industry pipelines. Additionally, training in AI-driven air quality forecasting or bioremediation approaches may also be implemented.

Furthermore, National Science and Technology (NST) Fellowships and Green Climate Fund-backed upskilling at universities, the removal of certification paywalls, and government subsidies could unlock these doors for Bangladesh. To curb promising start-ups from leaving the country, dedicated climate venture grants for waste management or mangrove conservation efforts must also be ensured.

The European framework demonstrates the significance of equipping graduates not just through certification but also with the right skills. In that regard, the need to internationalise curricula via mobility must also be a priority. Implementing any semblance of the framework may mean employing opportunity-starved youth, and finally fanning the flame of stewardship as an industry.

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