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TV SERIES

BAIT REDEFINES WHAT REPRESENTATION OUGHT TO LOOK LIKE

SABIL SADAT ZAHIR

Riz Ahmed's latest passion project, *Bait*, is an aptly titled six-episode comedy-drama miniseries that begins as a satire of cultural representation or "diversity casting" in Western cinema, but paradoxically evolves into one of the most authentic and profound portrayals of cultural representation.

The show is about Shah Latif, a Pakistani-British actor who auditions for the role of James Bond. We follow his journey as he deals with the subsequent fallout of this audition. This includes the immense pressure to secure the life-altering role and dealing with the racist backlash surrounding his potential casting. A major part of the story is how these two factors further exacerbate his already complicated relationship with his family, consisting of his parents and two cousins.

While Shah and his family are Pakistani Muslim immigrants, it is safe to say that anyone with South Asian heritage, Muslim or not, will deeply resonate with the characters. In one of the show's best episodes, the

family celebrates Eid with their relatives and other members of their community. The entire episode features the most accurate and relatable representation of South Asian culture that I have personally seen – from the lively yet hectic festivities to the awkward encounters with relatives. Besides the perfect representation, this episode also brings out the complexities of not just Shah but each of his family members, as we see their own individual struggles unravel.

Shah is a multilayered character, each layer well fleshed out. He starts off as an abrasive and selfish individual, but as the plot progresses and the layers start peeling off, we learn to understand him and cheer for his growth. His cousin Zulfi (played by Guz Khan) serves as a secondary lead and has an amazing character arc that runs parallel to and complements Shah's story.

Besides the aforementioned relatability and character dynamics, the show has an impeccable balance of humour and drama, which makes the characters and story even more compelling. The comedy consistently ranges from decent laughs to outright

hilarity. The transition from these light-hearted moments to the sadder, emotional scenes feels properly paced rather than a complete tonal shift. As a result, the dramatic scenes manage to evoke an equal sense of pity and empathy for the characters.

It's worth mentioning the few shortcomings of the show, however. Because it's a six-episode miniseries, with each episode having an average runtime of 25 minutes, the story in certain episodes might feel a bit too fast-paced. While the comedy-drama balance might not cause a tonal shift, the plot does take some rather jarring detours. However, by the final episode, the narrative manages to fall back into place.

Overall, *Bait* is a brilliantly written, poignant, and relatable story that manages to interweave the narrative and characters in a web of ironic brilliance. It delivers on every front, from its representation of South-Asian and Muslim culture, the multi-dimensional characters, the gripping plot, and unexpected twists, to its overall presentation. It scratches a very particular itch that makes it a must-watch.

OPPORTUNITIES



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REFLECTIONS

The day I understood what teaching kindergarten students truly means



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

NABIHA BINT HAROON

I remember my first day as a kindergarten teacher very vividly. I recall myself standing at the front of a classroom of 20 students, aged five to six, holding onto my lesson plan as my hands and my inner voice were shaking. Before I could even begin introducing myself, a child started crying while another refused to sit. A few others were distracted, while a handful of them were looking towards me, probably thinking, "Who is she? Why is she here?" In that moment, everything I had practised, prepared, and studied suddenly felt out of reach and sight, and all I could feel was my own nervousness slowly taking over.

This was not at all how I imagined my first day as a teacher would be. It was unpredictable, loud, and quite different from the classroom I had imagined. At first, every small interruption felt like a failure. When a child cried, I felt helpless because I've never been any good at consoling others. When they lost focus within minutes, I questioned my ability to hold onto their attention and even asked myself, "Are my classes really that boring?" I was no longer worried about forgetting my lesson or even making a mistake. I was worried about whether I was capable of teaching them at all. The thought that they might not accept me weighed heavily on me.

But slowly, something began to shift.

One day, instead of trying to continue the lesson while a child was bawling his eyes out, I paused. All I did was I knelt down, held him close, and spoke softly. And somehow, the child softened. Slowly, I started figuring out what worked for me when a child had a tantrum. The classroom, which once felt overwhelming to me, slowly started to feel a little homely.

I started to realise that teaching kindergarten students is totally the opposite of delivering perfect lessons. It's actually about responding to moments, and living and handling those little chaotic experiences. So, I decided to adapt myself

to the situation. I turned lessons into visual explanations and used fun activities instead of strict instructions. I even allowed the children to move, laugh, jump, and have their own little fun time.

But there were also difficult days when I felt completely unprepared for how unpredictable things could be on that day. Days when nothing seemed to go as planned. But there were also moments of connection that made my efforts worthwhile, be it a child answering a question with excitement, simply giving me a big smile, or even running to me and hugging me every time they saw me. And those little moments stayed with me long after the classes ended.

With time, the classroom stopped feeling like a place of tests and exams and began to feel like a place of growth and comfort. The children slowly began to respond to my presence and even started to look for me on days I was absent. While my nervousness did not entirely disappear, it did begin to quiet down. It became more workable, a little calmer, almost like a reminder to stay attentive and present rather than to live in constant fear of messing up. I learned that it was okay not to have full control over the kids I was teaching, and that unpredictability was just a part of the job.

Looking back, I realise that those early moments of fear were not signs of failure, but the beginning of understanding what teaching kindergartners truly means and is about. In a room full of tiny voices and endless energy, I did not just learn how to teach; I learned how to grow, which helped me with my patience.

Teaching is a journey, and confidence is something that develops along the way. What once felt intimidating has now become something I genuinely enjoy and look forward to every morning with a lot of love, hope, and happiness.

Nabiha Bint Haroon is an English Literature graduate from North South University with a passion for writing and storytelling. Reach out to her at nabihabharoon@gmail.com.





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OFF CAMPUS

Social media ban for young users: WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE IN THE CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH?

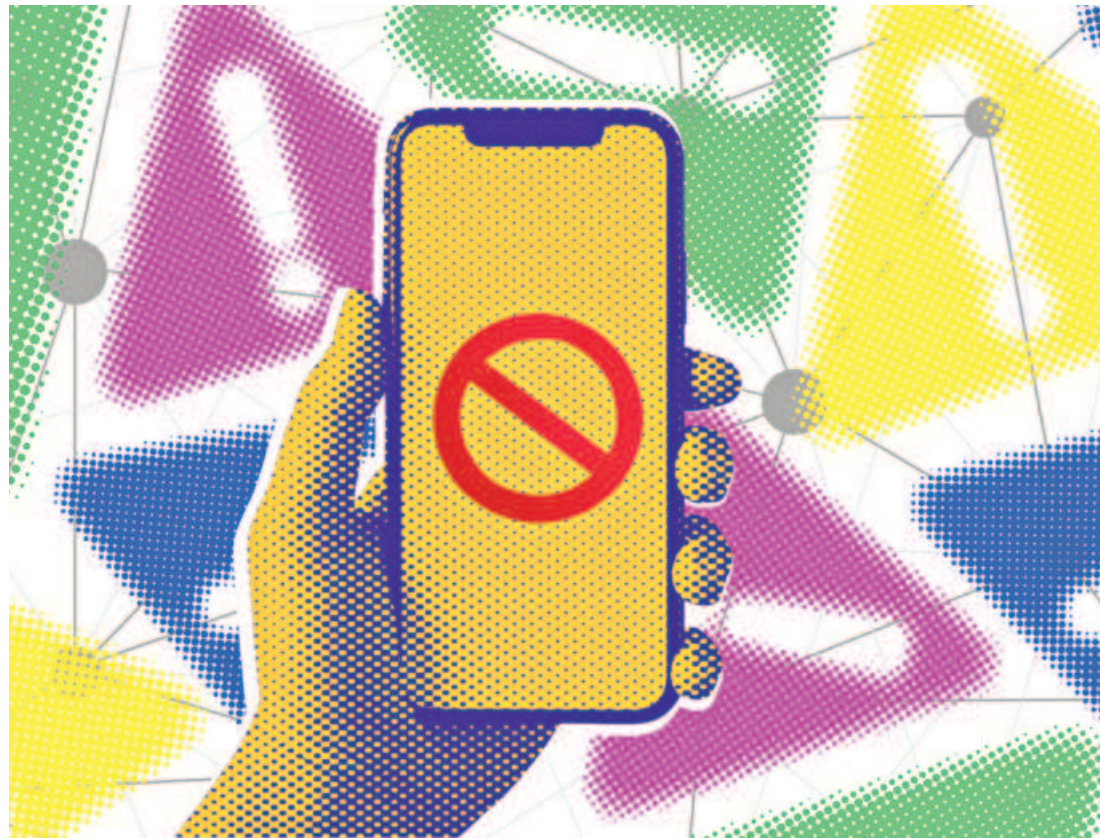


ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

Australia became the world's first country to ban social media for children. Several other nations are considering similar restrictions. As the prospect continues to gain significant momentum around the world, it begs the question: what would a similar ban for young users in Bangladesh entail?

AYAZ KADER AND FARHEEN RAHMAN

In an unprecedented move, the Australian government passed a new law. It was an outright ban on social media for minors under the age of 16. It all started back in 2024 from a call to action by the wife of South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas, who, after reading the book *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt, urged her husband to take action. The book itself argues that smartphones have directly led to the deterioration of teenage mental health due to the various harms associated with them.

In response, social media platforms are offering a number of options to verify users' ages. These include estimating age based on a photo or video. Additionally, users are also given the choice to use an ID.

The catch for tech companies is that if they allow under-16s to remain on their platforms, they will be penalised, not the violators themselves. According to CNBC Australia, many children in the country are now seeking alternative avenues to spend their free time after the ban, while others are using alternative apps not covered by the ban or are attempting to bypass the restriction using tools such as VPNs.

This Australian episode has sparked a global debate on the detriments of social media use by children and teens. Many other countries have followed suit, including France and Indonesia. Elsewhere, the prospect has gained significant momentum with a social media ban for under-16s being backed by the House of Lords in the UK. Similarly, the Indian state of Karnataka has

also passed legislation banning social media for users under the age of 16, though the date of enforcement remains unknown.

Thus, we may ask: What would a similar ban look like in the context of Bangladesh?

After being passed into law, such a ban will need strong enforcement and compliance from technological companies. One possible scenario of how the regulation can be rolled out will involve the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), which will need to request companies to enforce this ban themselves. Similar to the Australian ban, the ban may be executed using images and videos, national IDs such as a birth certificate, or a method known as "age inferencing", which analyses online interactions to figure out a person's age.

Meem Arafat Manab, a researcher on tech policy, argues that enforcement may be a can of worms. He says enforcing a ban will require monitoring, which could result in excessive monitoring of online activity and raise concerns about data privacy that may prove to be unpopular with the public. He remarks that "monitoring chats has opposition from a wide range of groups and is also very complex; thus, it is not practical in a country like Bangladesh".

Manab also contends that using IDs may be ineffective because "the government does not have the necessary leverage over social media apps to force them to use IDs to verify age, as the social media companies aren't local".

THE CASE FOR A BAN

A ban's main purpose would be to counter the detrimental effects of smartphone use, such as

excessive screen time, safety, and mental health concerns for children.

Alfred D'Silva, a high school teacher at South Breeze School, says that social media platforms have grown into open and unrestricted avenues for all sorts of behaviour and activities that are detrimental to the safety and well-being of our children.

Aklima Akter Sumi, a teacher at Milestone School and College and a mother of two, states, "If a ban can be implemented in Bangladesh, then it will be a huge step in the right direction, as children are leaning more on the negative side of social media than the positive side."

Besides being vulnerable to scammers and predators, children are also prone to being bullied online. Sanjana Afrin, a student at Viqarunnisa Noon School and College,

points out, "It is a very common incident in our country that many predators coax children through social media." She states that young kids then find themselves in troubling situations where they are taken advantage of. "I think enforcing this law (ban) could help solve such incidents and protect children."

Another concern of unfettered social media access is excessive screen time. What is particularly concerning is that applications are designed with personalised algorithms to capture attention as much as possible. As such, users – regardless of their age – are vulnerable to spending long stretches of time on their devices. For young people, this can compound to poor academic performance, lack of sleep, and reduced social interaction.

According to a 2025 study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, addictive usage of social media is linked to poor mental health and even suicidal ideation.

Besides helping schoolchildren, a main target of the ban may also include young children like toddlers and kindergartners. It is not uncommon for young children to be handed devices at a very early age by their parents in an attempt to keep them occupied. Though this practice has become quite normalised, it can have a negative effect on their speech development and even lead to problems of dependency in the future. Given just how many issues are associated with the use of social media, the case for a ban is by no means unfounded.

A ban could potentially diminish the likelihood of cyberbullying, online exploitation, and exposure to harmful content. Several interviewees emphasised the real risks faced by young children, including blackmail, grooming, and harassment. Teachers also noted signs of dependency and shortened attention spans due to constant digital engagement.

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From this perspective, restricting access



PHOTO: COLLECTED

may help protect mental health and reduce early exposure to harmful content.

Mahira *, a university student, shares an anecdote about a relative, "Children are being highly affected due to these platforms. The closest example I know is of my relative, who is four years old. We are aware that YouTube Kids exists, which is great, but kids know where the general YouTube is. She always accesses it and watches videos that I don't quite understand, as well as listens to songs that are not appropriate for her age."

THE CONCERNS

However, respondents also emphasise the educational dimension of social media. Many students rely on tutorials, lectures, and discussion spaces for academic support. A blanket ban could therefore disadvantage motivated learners who use digital platforms responsibly.

Jannatul Ferdous, who tutors students from class six to college, further highlights that there are children who, out of curiosity, may venture into territory on the internet that is less supervised and thus poses more risks. Owing to their familiarity with technology, she alleges that they may be inclined to bypass restrictions through the use of VPNs, which is why Jannat believes that a ban will bring good results.

This raises yet another point of contention: an outright ban may not fully take children off smartphones due to alternatives and VPNs. Manab argues that to effectively mitigate smartphone addiction, children need to be offered alternative hobbies. He says, "There is a lack of playgrounds and parks in Dhaka. Many children don't have the habit of reading or watching movies. Children need something to do, and so, they turn to social media. We need to give them more options."

He adds that due to the competitive nature of the education system in Bangladesh, many teenagers may seek social media as a distraction and a form of entertainment to cope with onerous academic pressure.

OTHER POLICIES OR ALTERATIONS

Alfred believes that apart from a ban, schools should provide "mandatory social media literacy programmes in educational institutions in the form of specialised workshops that would train youngsters on the responsible use of social media platforms". Additionally, they should

also be educated on diverse topics like cybercrime, cyberbullying, digital privacy, source verification for information and misinformation, and AI literacy. This is an imperative that could mitigate many of the concerns that are associated with the use of social media.

A direct transplantation of a foreign social media restriction model into Bangladesh would likely face structural and social barriers. Policy emphasis should shift from prohibition alone to strengthening digital literacy. Integrating proper and supervised education into school curricula could help children understand online risks, privacy concerns, cyberbullying, and responsible engagement.

Manab also believes that to protect children from the perils of social media usage, we need a strong social support system to support minors. He contends that a ban itself will not solve the problem wholly. Instead, he recommends that we have a strong social support system that can help teenagers tackle mental health issues.

He states, "In Bangladesh, we don't have many social workers and social work is trivialised. Mental health problems are seen

as weaknesses, and people are expected not to express them openly."

A social media restriction policy for minors in Bangladesh could reduce certain risks, but its success would depend on how it is designed and implemented. The perspectives taken suggest that while protection is necessary, long-term effectiveness will rely less on bans and more on education, cooperation, and safe digital alternatives. In this sense, the challenge is not simply limiting children's access to technology but ensuring that they learn to navigate around it safely and responsibly.

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*Name has been changed upon request

COUNTRIES MOVING TO BAN SOCIAL MEDIA FOR CHILDREN

Australia

Australia became the first country in the world to ban social media for children under 16 in December 2025. The Australian government asked social media companies to take steps to keep children off their services.

France

In January, French lawmakers passed a bill that would ban social media for kids under 15.

TheUnited Kingdom

The UK is weighing a ban on social media for children under 16. The government says it will consult parents, young people, and civil society for their views to determine whether such a ban would be effective.

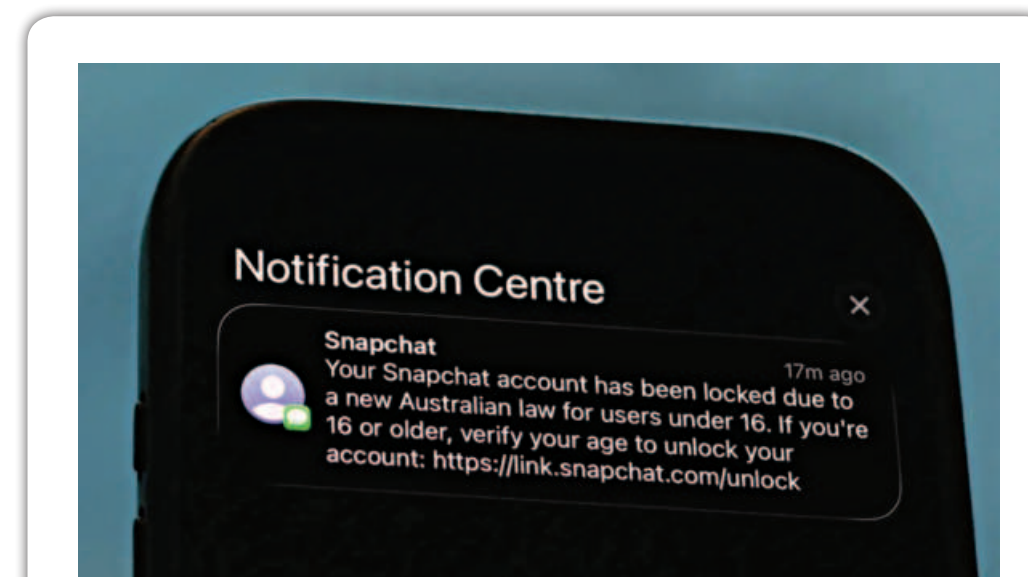
Denmark

Denmark is looking to ban social media platforms for children under the age of 15. The government's plans could become law around mid-2026, as reported by the Associated Press.

Spain

Spain's prime minister announced in February that the country is looking to ban social media for children under 16. The ban still needs parliamentary approval.

Countries like Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Slovenia are also planning to implement similar bans.



A notification from Snapchat requesting age verification is displayed on a mobile phone in this picture illustration taken on December 9, 2025.

PHOTO: REUTERS

A ban could potentially diminish the likelihood of cyberbullying, online exploitation, and exposure to harmful content. Several interviewees emphasised the real risks faced by young children, including blackmail, grooming, and harassment. Teachers also noted signs of dependency and shortened attention spans due to constant digital engagement.

Eastern University VC addresses graduation ceremony in South Africa

Prof. Dr Farid A Sobhani, the Vice-Chancellor of Eastern University, delivered a keynote speech as an invited guest speaker at the graduation ceremony of the public institution, Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in South Africa. The ceremony was held on April 17 at the university's auditorium in Kimberley in a grand and festive atmosphere.

The event was attended by the Chancellor Dr Thebe Ikalafeng, Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr Debra Meyer, distinguished national and international guests, and members of the university's academic community. Approximately 1,500 graduates from various faculties were awarded their degrees at this year's ceremony.

In his speech, Prof. Sobhani expressed his sincere gratitude to the university authorities for this honour and invitation. Addressing the graduates, he urged them to fulfill their responsibilities toward their families, university, and society, and to establish their competence on the global stage.

He encouraged the graduates to be inspired by the words of Nobel Laureate and Former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, and recalled Mandela's historic visit to Bangladesh in 1997. He

further called upon the graduates to pursue truth, take a firm stand against injustice, and remain committed to establishing justice in society.



DIU professor receives Independence Award 2026

Prof. Dr M A Rahim of Daffodil International University (DIU) has been awarded the prestigious Independence Award 2026, the highest civilian honour of Bangladesh, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to research and training.

Dr Rahim currently serves as the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Head of the Department of Agricultural Science at the university. He has been recognised for his significant role in advancing agricultural research and education, contributing meaningfully to national development. The award was announced by the Government of Bangladesh, acknowledging his long-standing contributions to research and training.

During his tenure at DIU, Dr Rahim made notable contributions to agricultural research. Under his leadership, four high-yielding and improved jackfruit varieties – DIU Jackfruit-1, DIU Jackfruit-2, DIU Jackfruit-3, and DIU Jackfruit-4 – have recently been approved and registered by the National Seed Board and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Over the years, Dr Rahim has received numerous prestigious awards, including the Prime Minister's Gold Medal in 2004, 2012, and 2013, the Bangabandhu Agricultural Award in 2014, the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences Gold Medal in 2012, and the Bangladesh Academy of Agriculture Gold Medal in 2016.

UAP and AVIANOMICS jointly host seminar on aviation profession in Bangladesh



The University of Asia Pacific (UAP), in collaboration with AVIANOMICS, organised a seminar titled "Aviation Profession in Bangladesh – Opportunities, Emerging Trends and Career Pathways" at the UAP Auditorium.

The event was graced by K M Mozibul Hoque, Chairman of the board of trustees, UAP, as the chief guest. Md Saiyed Bin Abdullah, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh on Youth Employment, was present as the special guest. Prof. Dr Mohiuddin Ahmed Bhuiyan, Acting Vice-Chancellor of UAP, chaired the event. The keynote was delivered by Prasanta Kumar Chakraborty, an aviation expert, ICAO-certified instructor, Founder of AVIANOMICS, and Director of the Civil Aviation Academy, as the lead speaker.

The seminar emphasised industry-academia collaboration. UAP and AVIANOMICS announced a strategic partnership to offer specialised training, guest lectures, and internships in aviation management, aeronautical engineering, and aviation safety.



ULAB organises festival celebrating South Asian culture

The University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) organised a day-long cultural festival and discussion titled "Cosmologies of Confluence" on April 18 at its campus, celebrating South Asian culture.

The State Minister of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Bobby Hajjaj, MP, attended the event as the chief guest. In his remarks, he emphasised that such initiatives play a significant role in strengthening mutual understanding and harmony by honouring cultural diversity. The Vice-Chancellor of ULAB, Prof.

Shamsad Mortuza, PhD, delivered the welcome address, stating that integrating education and culture through such initiatives helps nurture a global outlook and human values in the new generation. The conceptual background and objectives of the event were presented by Prof. Kaiser Haq, PhD. At the end of the inaugural session, the Pro Vice-Chancellor of ULAB, Prof. Jude William R Genilo, PhD, extended a vote of thanks to all attendees.

During the main discussion session, Ghanshyam Bhandari,

Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, along with diplomats from various countries, shared their reflections on the significance of the event. Renowned singer-songwriter and writer Moushumi Bhowmik was also present at the session.

Special guests at the event included UNESCO Bangladesh Representative Dr Susan Vize; Chief of Chakma Circle Raja Devasish Roy; Country Director of The Hunger Project Prashanta Tripura; and researcher and writer Pavel Partha.

OFF CAMPUS

THE THINGS WE LOSE BUT CAN'T COME BACK TO

As students return home following the completion of their degrees abroad, they are confronted with difficult questions of belonging, employment, and home.

FAIZA ADIL

Many people have distinct experiences to share after moving abroad for a degree. We bid them farewell and ask them often what life is like alone in a foreign nation away from home. They only ever get to visit when a break is long enough. Most don't move back in the near future. For those who do – a few years down the line with a degree – life tends to be quite different. It's not all bad, of course. I did, however, encounter a reverse culture shock. Though I returned to the same place, it wasn't necessarily the one I had left behind.

The paradox of moving away is that you belong somewhere in the middle of two homes, each with its own version of you, neither of which knows the other well enough. A lot prepares you for the grief of leaving everyone behind, but not much prepares you for the grief of coming back and finding that you miss the very place that kept you far from home. So much pulls your soul to the home you've created away from home, the life you've made as you transitioned into adulthood – new relationships, comforts, experiences, and a semblance of belonging.

As an international student, each time you visit from wherever you've gone for higher education, home seems different. People move on, and their lives continue to change without you. It's a bittersweet experience; everyone you love is just a little bit older, while you are just a little different from the version they left at the airport seasons ago. Having moved away to America, Arpita says, "It's like you're connected to everything, but not truly attached to anything or anyone."

No matter where you go, culture shock is expected – even when you come back to a place you knew years before. The friends you've left have built their own bubbles, ones that can be entirely foreign to you. The little hangout spots have been replaced, the girl at the cart has moved away herself, and the local restaurant you frequent has no familiar waiter. Suddenly, all the birthdays, holidays, weddings, and ceremonies you've missed out on catch up to you. Where have you been all this time? Surely it can't have been such a long time; has everybody else changed, or have you?

The answer is that both are true. Everyone else seems to have a better sense of belonging, a support system they've nurtured with their shared struggles and experiences. Amongst it all, you might sometimes feel like a bystander. You shouldn't dwell on this feeling,



ILLUSTRATION: ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

though. After all, chances are you have accomplishments and experiences of your own. In any case, what you have gained at the expense of your disconnection will only ever be as worthy as you make it.

What nobody prepares you for is the restlessness. Not having to actively look after yourself in your childhood home, no groceries for one, no pile of dirty dishes and no overflowing laundry or comforting solitude. Material comforts at the expense of an odd sense of loss. In conversation with Anika, who moved back some three years ago from Japan, she feels most affected by the lack of control over her day-to-day. With most tasks at home being done for us, there lies a certain suffocation in the normalised lethargy of our routines here, where responsibility is removed through house help.

From living alone and being forced to adopt a more present role in taking care of yourself, sometimes the removal of these critical chores is replaced by an unease. But you must know what a privilege it is to miss the mundane and to cherish memories of living alone – an experience we don't get to replicate here.

All the while, you sit here with the degree that begs to be proved worthwhile, a hint of grief and a mountain of job applications. No matter how many times you visit or how connected you are to

home, the irrefutable truth is that you were not here. This is something that becomes increasingly obvious the more you settle into your first weeks. If you're lucky, you might get a job pretty quickly with your "international degree". If not, it's even more humbling to have the degree that's supposed to make you a better candidate and yet have no job to show for it. Consolations are monotonous; it's not you – it's the job market. But somewhere along the way, you find yourself questioning if all the money that's been spent and time away were worth it.

In conversations with friends who have moved back, sentiments are mutual. There is a complexity in feeling both content to have achieved what you set out to do and being back home where you belong, while also feeling an inexplicable loss. Sometimes this takes form in the loss of your independence and freedom; sometimes it's the room you spent all that time in or the neighbourhood you can't just take a cab to revisit. Humaira, who just came back from Malaysia, says that it's difficult to explain these feelings to her friends and unfair to expect them to relate. It seems especially cruel to speak of these feelings to the same people who finally have their friend home after all these long years apart. It leaves you conflicted and guilty to harbour such emotions instead of gratitude.

And there exists a myriad of experiences here with the privilege of being home again, the taste of your mother's cooking, sharing a roof with your annoying siblings who tugged at your heart with every birthday you missed, and your grandparents, for whom the passage of time is most cruel. A few more years, and you would have lost the chance to hold your family close. There will, inexplicably, come a day when you have outgrown the walls of your childhood home. All the things that you would have never known, and the memories you now have the chance to make.

Perhaps there is something you could have done differently: stayed more connected, come back more often or done something to juggle your two lives. Regardless, a choice would have been made. You can't have been at two places at once, and you gain nothing from doubting and resenting yourself. Everyone is a mosaic of all their experiences. However humbling it might feel now, yours are the colours of a life lived here and there. You've survived leaving everyone you know behind; surely you must survive this unknown.

Faiza is overcompensating for her approaching quarterlife crisis - reach her at: faiza.atcorp@gmail.com

■ CAREER ■

How to transition from university to your professional life

MASHIYAT NAYEEM

Many university students complete their degrees the same way they finished school: by showing up, studying, sitting for exams, and repeating. The wake-up call often hits in the final semester, or worse, after graduation. By then, the job market feels overwhelming, the comparison spiral kicks in, and mental health takes a hit.

While sheer luck and privilege are significant factors in post-graduation outcomes, a huge role is played by strategic execution. Proper planning doesn't mean having a five-year roadmap fresh out of high school. It means knowing yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, and your circumstances, and building yourself up to be adaptable to different careers.

THE TRADITIONAL ROUTE DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK ANYMORE

Much of this can be attributed to the cultural and societal expectations of growing up in South Asia. Parents and students alike feed into the idea that completing university and holding a degree certificate alone ensures a job is handed to you. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 28 percent of the demographic was the youth in the year 2023. The oversupply of graduates relative to job creation translates to a level of competition that is easy to underestimate. Chances are, many candidates share your exact educational profile.

A degree from a brand-name university no longer offers the golden ticket in the ruthless job market of 2026. A candidate from a lesser-known institution in a small town with the right skillset and experience is just as likely to secure interviews as someone from a popular institution. That said, the playing field is not entirely even. Established pipelines from prestigious universities to local and multinational companies (MNCs) do exist, driven by alumni network biases and perceived reputation. But even those candidates have likely groomed themselves accordingly, knowing that their background has a compounding effect.

MAKING STRATEGIC CHOICES FOR YOURSELF

Some paths are specialised and pretty straightforward, such as medicine. For general streams,

while settling on a choice of major, most students think about either what subject they have an affinity towards or which subject has the most social value. Instead, I suggest finding out your goals and what is important to you in a career and working backwards to find the best-fit degree. Do you find purpose in solving societal and economic problems? Are you curious enough about something to dig deeper into a field than anyone ever has? Is a certain financial bracket and lifestyle important to you? Do you require clear, structured rungs that you can climb to progress your career?

It is also important to assess the market demand alignment of your chosen profession. Is this profession going to thrive or become obsolete in the near future? What are the long-term prospects? How competitive will it become by the time you graduate?

Choose your degree wisely, but remember that your choice doesn't limit your future. Career paths don't have to be linear. You are allowed to change your major if you see a better opportunity. You are allowed to use only the foundational skills your degree provides to work in a completely different industry. You are allowed to scale your hobbyist side hustles into something full-time.

BUILDING YOUR PROFILE ONE BRICK AT A TIME

The earlier you start, the better. The ideal time to start is the second year, once you have

found your footing and have enough time ahead to make things count. But regardless of where you are, the question is the same: are you spending your time on things that actually move the needle?

The temptation to fill free time with at-home tutoring gigs is understandable—they pay a pretty penny. But the harsh reality is that they add practically no value to your resume. Whether you want to go into academia, the corporate world or elsewhere, you have to communicate that accordingly. Just wanting something or being interested in it is not enough; your profile should be actively conveying your aspirations.

If teaching is your forte, take up teaching assistant positions at your university. If you're interested in working for MNCs, participate in business case competitions. There are many small businesses and established firms that offer part-time or voluntary positions to students, especially in customer service and digital marketing, which can offer valuable learning experiences and serve as proof of skills that employers value.

If you are unsure about your career path, explore as much as you can. Do a lot of side projects. Seek out mentorship and talk to people who do the things you want to be doing. Read, watch, and research. Become familiar with the tools, terminology, and key figures of your chosen

field. Learn the basics of resume writing, job applications, and AI for productivity, among other skills.

STORYTELLING AS A PERSONAL BRANDING TOOL

Another important variable enters here: personal branding. Having the relevant education, experiences, and credentials is not enough. You also need to be able to communicate and convince people why you are the right fit. In 2026, being able to market yourself is a skill not only for getting your foot in the door of a company, but also for increasing the surface area of opportunities that will find you. Learn to present, articulate clearly, make a portfolio, and use LinkedIn. From seminars, talks and online courses, there are tonnes of resources to learn from.

KNOWING WHEN TO PIVOT

It's important to ground yourself in reality and remember that you can get everything right and still not land your desired outcome. In that case, rethink and redirect. Your experiences don't become useless; you can always frame them in a way that suits what you are aspiring for. Bringing in different backgrounds and perspectives is actually a plus in many fields.

The aspiration to study abroad for higher education is common among incoming university students. But the reality is that it is no longer as easy as it once was. Caps on the number of international students, lack of funding, visa rejections, and geopolitical complications are increasingly frequent blockers to that dream. If it doesn't work out despite all your best efforts, you must have a backup plan to do something in Bangladesh. This is where being adaptable and pivoting come in.

Lastly, remember to explore and feed your curiosity. It's great to be strategic, but not everything you learn has to be professionally impressive. Some things are meant to simply enhance your perspective and give your personality an extra boost. At the end of the day, exposure to a multitude of activities, experiences, and transferable skills never hurt anyone. It not only helps in charting alternate pathways when your preferred goal doesn't work out but can also lead to happy accidents and careers that may not even exist yet.

Reference:

The Daily Star (April 9, 2023). *Youths account for 28pc of population.*

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

