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THE MAKING OF A DOCTOR

Medical interns open up about their experiences

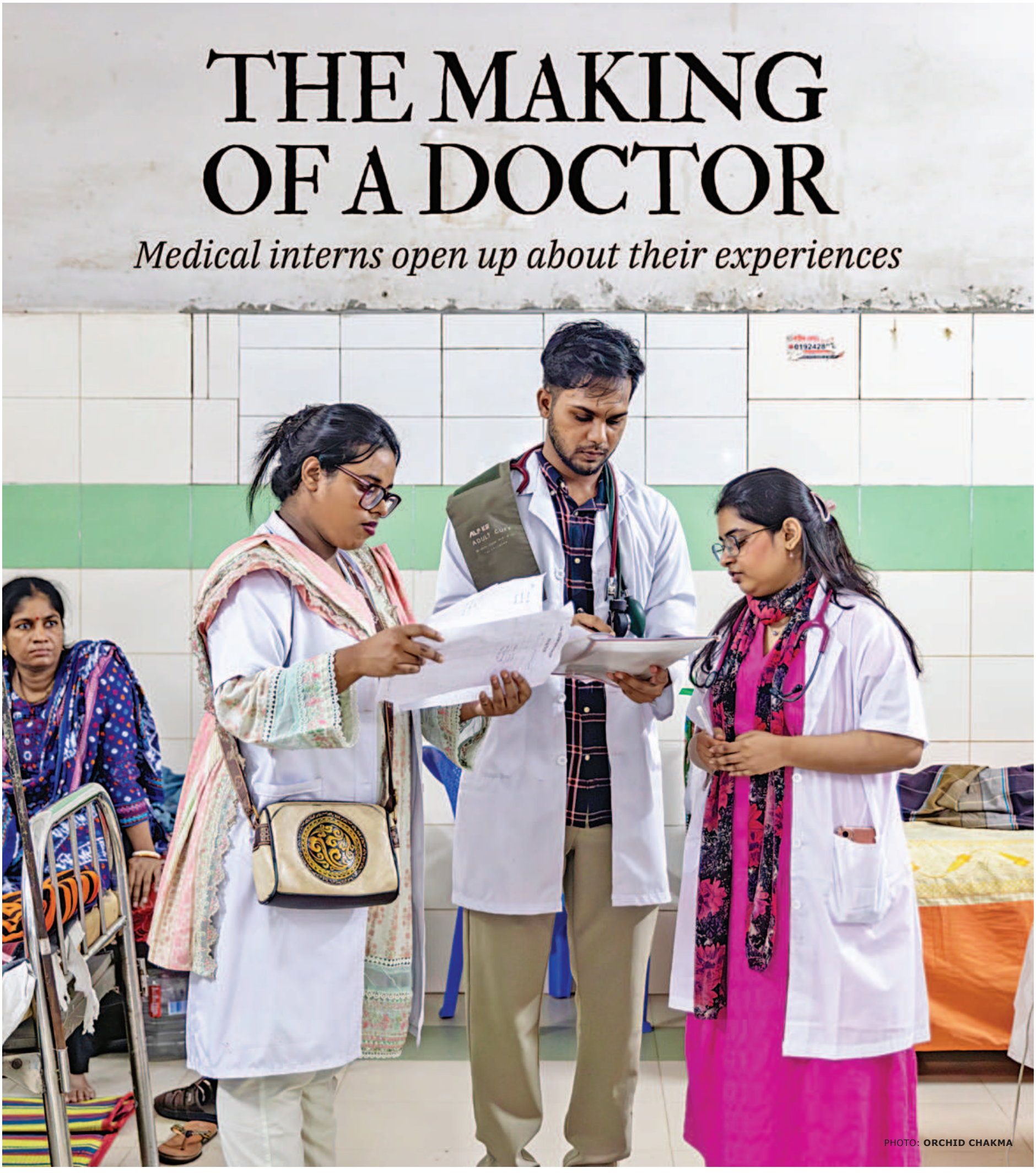


PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**



MUSIC

Reality Awaits

The Strokes return, vocoder first

SHARAR CHOWDHURY

Six years after *The New Abnormal*, The Strokes are back, and *Reality Awaits* has very high highs and very low lows. People are calling it an evil version of the last album, which is about right. It sounds like The Strokes and, at the same time, not like them at all. *The New Abnormal* had no skips for me. This one has a few.

The elephant in the room is the autotune, smeared across one of the most recognisable voices in music. Some people have joked that Julian Casablancas took the Daft Punk break-up too hard, and honestly, I would not count that out to be true. It worked on "Instant Crush" and "Infinity Repeating" because those songs were meant to sound like transmissions from a haunted future.

Here it feels more like a statement that Julian Casablancas is trying to make: Artificiality doing to a human voice what it is currently doing to everything else. That is the generous reading. The less generous one is that the two singles – "Going Shopping" and "Falling out of Love" – are the weakest tracks. They are over-processed and under-produced, and gave everyone the wrong first impression.

The rest of the songs are good, and it grows on you. I first heard it on Friday when it came out. It is now Sunday, and I have caught myself humming it in the shower. "Dine N'Dash" is the standout: clean guitar tone, minimal effects, and Julian actually singing. "Lonely in the Future" is the catchiest track here and the most argumentative, with Julian taking aim at artists who copy and steal, reminding everyone he was doing the same as a kid.

"Going to Babble On" carries the summer, with a pre-chorus that will have you reaching for "You Only Live Once". Underneath the funk, Julian sounds tired of shouting about politics while everybody scrolls past. One line, about how one side in a fight is simply stronger and some things never shift, hits quite hard. Lyrically, it is Julian doing his thing: politics, yearning, nostalgia, swipes at corporate power, none of it spelled out, which can either be read as profound or convenient depending on your mood.

The middle stretch is patchier. "Liar's Remorse" is all keys and voice, no drums, circling love, sacrifice, AI and lonesome old memories, and reads better than it listens. "The Fruits of Conquest" leans on percussion, takes its time, and creeps up on you. Then "Tyrants of the Mellow Moon" concludes properly, with a riff worth the wait and one of the few moments where the autotune does not feel like a misfit.

Overall, this album gets a three out of five. Not bad, not remarkable, lifted by four or five properly good songs.



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Promotional Content

First-Time in Bangladesh: Fashion Promotion & Marketing Programme Empowers Future Fashion Leaders Through 'Vision & Vogue'



Fashion today extends far beyond clothing. It is about branding, storytelling, sustainability and consumer engagement. Bringing this global perspective to aspiring students, Universal College Bangladesh (UCBD), in collaboration with the University of Lancashire, UK, is introducing Bangladesh's first undergraduate programme in Fashion Promotion & Marketing. Reflecting this vision, UCBD recently organised Vision & Vogue, a competition celebrating creativity, innovation and sustainable fashion.

The competition invited young participants to transform recyclable materials into Bangladesh-inspired outfits, encouraging them to blend cultural heritage with contemporary design. Fifteen shortlisted entries were showcased before a panel of academic and industry experts, with participants presenting not only their creations but also the brand concepts and stories behind them.

The initiative challenged participants to think beyond aesthetics by exploring how fashion can communicate identity, promote sustainability and create meaningful consumer experiences. The top three winners received prizes worth a combined Tk 60,000, while all 15 finalists were awarded scholarships in recognition of their creativity and potential.

"Vision & Vogue demonstrates how creativity can intersect with sustainability, cultural storytelling and brand thinking," said Professor Muhammad Ismail Hossain, Provost of UCBD. "We want young creators to see fashion not only as a form of expression but also as a platform for innovation and positive change."

Paresh Parmar, Associate Dean, School of Arts and Media, University of Lancashire, said, "It was encouraging to see participants use sustainable materials to explore ideas around design, identity, and storytelling. Initiatives like this can help young people build the confidence and creative thinking needed for the evolving fashion industry."

The first-prize winner, Maliha Nawer, said, "Vision & Vogue gave us an opportunity to look at fashion differently. Turning everyday recyclable materials into something meaningful and wearable was both challenging and rewarding."

The competition reflects the philosophy behind UCBD's Fashion Promotion & Marketing programme, which prepares students for careers in fashion branding, marketing, retail, digital communication, consumer engagement and creative strategy. By combining industry-focused learning with practical experiences like Vision & Vogue, the programme aims to equip future professionals with the skills needed to thrive in the evolving global fashion industry.





PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

COVER STORY

THE MAKING OF A DOCTOR

Medical interns open up about the experiences that shape them

"Despite the missed meals, sleepless nights, exhaustion, and the lives we sometimes lose, there is something extraordinary about seeing a patient smile again, heal again, and have hope again."

TASFIAH LIAKAT

To obtain full registration from the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) graduates in Bangladesh must complete a mandatory one-year rotatory internship. The 52-week-long internship programme consists of 19 weeks each in medicine and surgery, 12 weeks in obstetrics-gynaecology, and a mandatory two-week community placement at a thana or upazila health complex.

In practice, it is a year filled with long shifts, sleepless nights, steep learning curves, emotional highs and lows, and difficult conversations.

Dr Myesha Ahmed, an intern doctor at Sirajganj Medical College Hospital, describes the usual work schedule: "We have morning duty six days a week, typically from 8 AM to 2 PM. Some days we also have evening duty, which is six hours—from 2 PM to 8 PM—or night duty, which is 12 hours—from 8 PM to 8 AM the next day. The frequency varies depending on how busy a department is and how many interns are placed there. On some weeks we have Friday shifts, and on some we don't."

The very first thing Dr Ahmed has to do is take handover from the doctor of the previous shift.

"If there are critical patients, handover can take as long as half an hour. After that, I go and check on the critical patients again, observing their vitals and treatment. At the same time, if new patients arrive, we have to receive them as well," Dr Ahmed shares. "Alongside all this, if there are any procedures left to do, such as inserting a nasogastric tube or a catheter, performing a pleural or ascitic fluid tap, or assisting with short surgical cases, those fall on me."

Dr Md Aminul Islam, an intern doctor at Monno Medical College Hospital, breaks down how the whole day unfolds: "After the ward rounds, I monitor the condition of admitted patients, take histories of new arrivals, perform physical exams, write daily progress notes, and present patient conditions to senior doctors. I am also responsible for executing treatment plans, preparing patients for various tests, helping collect and analyse reports, and properly documenting all medical records."

During their shifts, interns have little time to eat, sit, or even pray due to the heavy workload.

"If it's a busy shift, I don't get to sit at all. I barely manage to pray. As for eating, that's not even an option. We're constantly running around. Patients just keep coming, one after another," Dr Ahmed says.

The daily responsibilities that keep these interns busy vary from department to department. Dr Islam elaborates on the different day-to-day tasks he performed during his rotations: "In the emergency department, I had to rapidly assess patients' conditions and begin initial treatment. I participated in managing trauma cases, severe respiratory distress, heart attacks, strokes, seizures, hypoglycaemic emergencies, and other critical conditions. Often, we had to make crucial decisions within minutes to save a patient's life while working under the guidance of senior physicians."

"In the surgery department, I had to prepare patients for the operating theatre, assist during operations, monitor patients after surgery, and dress wounds," Dr Islam adds. "In medicine, I participated in the management of patients with chronic illnesses, infections, diabetes, hypertension, and kidney and liver diseases. During my gynaecology and obstetrics rotation, I helped with normal deliveries, caesarean sections, and pregnancy complications. In paediatrics, I helped care for newborns and took part in vaccination programmes."

For Dr Ahmed, the tiny, precious patients of the paediatrics department are the bright spots amidst the heavy workload. "There was a neonate (newborn baby who is four weeks old or younger) whom I had to suction quite a few times and observe throughout the night. That little baby boy recovered, and I still remember his tiny fingers gripping my hand. There was another child named Taha in the paediatrics department. She was so fussy at the beginning, but later on, she used to smile whenever she saw me."

While every departmental rotation comes with its own challenges, interns find some more demanding than others.

Dr Md Hasibuzzaman Hasib, another intern doctor from Monno Medical College Hospital, notes, "Although the workload was lighter in surgery, I found it more difficult because of the constant mental pressure. Gynaecology night shifts, however, are by far the toughest. It's not unusual to have two or three emergency operations throughout the night while simultaneously admitting new patients. Then, instead of going home to rest, we continue working until 2 PM the next day. By the end of it, you're completely drained both physically and mentally, but you still have to keep going."

This is well reflected in the experience of Dr Fariba Binte Masud, an intern doctor at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital. Night shifts in the gynae ward, especially admission duty, are the most stressful for her.

"Patients who come in for admission late at night are almost always in serious condition," says Dr Masud. "Someone may need emergency surgery, immediate blood transfusion, or urgent tests to assess their internal condition. Managing all of this is extremely difficult. Because at that time of night, a lot of things aren't open anymore. Even the hospital does not have everything readily available. Many times, even after giving our absolute best, we still cannot save the patient."





To cope with the sheer exhaustion and emotional toll, Dr Masud firmly keeps her eyes on the finish line: "I remind myself that I don't intend on building a career in this department anyway. It is just a temporary phase, and it will be over before I know it. That thought alone keeps me going."

On the other hand, Dr Ahmed found the medicine rotation to be the most physically demanding of all.

"I became ill after my medicine placement. The workload was so intense that my body simply couldn't take it. I was working continuously without eating or sleeping properly. The 24-hour shifts became a regular part of my routine. This may sound crazy, but at one point, I was on duty for almost 36 hours and once even for 50 hours. The 50-hour stretch happened because we were doing consecutive double shifts," Dr Ahmed remarks.

Dr Masud feels that the biggest part of the internship is spent dealing with patient-related hassles.

"It's not just deciding on a treatment plan and carrying it out. You also have to explain everything to the patient's family and make sure they understand what's happening. Even after explaining things thoroughly, they may still fail to understand and end up doing something wrong," Dr Masud explains. "In most cases, the patient's attendants are uncooperative. They assume that once they bring someone to the hospital, everything becomes the doctor's responsibility."

Due to the shortage of resources, Dr Masud often takes on responsibilities beyond her role. When the hospital's supplies aren't enough, she counsels patients' families to buy what they need, shows them to the hospital's poor fund when they cannot afford it, and even helps them financially herself.

"If a required procedure isn't available here, we refer them to specialised institutions in Dhaka. But those hospitals are far away, and I often wonder whether our sickest patients are actually able to make it there," Dr Masud states.

Dr Ahmed points out another challenge that interns face: inadequate workplace safety.

"Even though there are guards in the hospital, it doesn't always make us feel safe," says Dr Ahmed. "If our safety could be properly ensured, we'd be able to work with greater peace of mind. Some of my colleagues have been physically assaulted and harassed by patients' attendants."

Faced with circumstances outside their control, interns sometimes feel an acute sense of helplessness.

"One night, a patient cried out, 'Save me, save me'. She had severe valvular heart disease but couldn't afford the surgery she desperately needed. After giving her the available treatment, I went back to my room and cried on my prayer mat, asking Allah to help her. I will never forget her face or her cries," Dr Ahmed recalls. "Another time, I felt like quitting when I had to tell a patient with urosepsis that we didn't have an intensive care unit (ICU) facility."

Repeated encounters with such situations have made Dr Masud question whether she belongs in the profession at all: "There are times when I feel this profession simply isn't for me. To survive as a doctor in this country, you need immense mental resilience."

Dr Masud still vividly remembers the first death she had to declare: "At the start of the internship, I had to declare the death of a young woman with dengue. She had two small children. My heart broke for her family."

There is often no time to pause or mourn before moving on to the next patient, which leaves interns like Dr Ahmed feeling numb.

"Some moments were truly surreal," Dr Ahmed recalls. "My first patient death was a child in the paediatric ward. After declaring the child dead, I went back to my room, cried, wiped away my tears, and then walked straight back out to receive another patient. One moment I was declaring a death and the next, I was calmly asking someone else, 'What seems to be the problem?' and checking their vitals."

"I remember thinking, 'What is happening?' People say doctors are heartless or emotionless, but the reality is that we witness many patient deaths and face several traumatic experiences. We spend a lot of time explaining diseases and treatment plans and even dealing with misunderstandings and misbehaviour. After a point, we stop processing our emotions. We're like, 'It happened. Fine. Move on.' There were days when I wondered why I had chosen this profession," Dr Ahmed shares.

The demands of the internship also leave little room for life outside the hospital, often straining relationships with family and friends.

"Internship kept me so busy and exhausted that I became the busy daughter, the distant sister, and the absent friend," Dr Ahmed admits.

"It has affected my personal life a lot, to be honest. I only go home once every few months. In fact, there are many days when I can't even find the energy to talk to my family over the phone," adds Dr Masud.

The long hours and sacrifices are not well reflected in the monthly stipend. "We receive a monthly stipend of BDT 20,000, which isn't enough," Dr Hasib comments.

Dr Ahmed tries to find joy in simple moments to keep herself sane: "Whenever we get a day off, we try to go outside or rest in our rooms. I love cooking with my roommates. Fridays are my favourite; we either follow our self-care routines or go out to refresh our minds. We don't exactly study during the little free time we get; we use it to reboot ourselves."

All four interns we talked to agree that those outside the medical field can never fully comprehend what they're going through. When asked whether they would choose medicine again, knowing what they know now, their answers differed.

Dr Hasib responds with a firm "No, never", while Dr Masud is more reflective: "Why would I? It's so hard and painful, and there are many other options."

Dr Ahmed, however, had a completely different answer to this question: "Despite the missed meals, sleepless nights, exhaustion, and the lives we sometimes lose, there is something extraordinary about seeing a patient smile again, heal again, and have hope again. In those moments, every hardship feels worthwhile. To be entrusted with the opportunity to ease someone's pain and serve them in their time of need is, I believe, one of the greatest ways a person can serve humanity. So, I would choose this profession again and again, despite every hardship and sacrifice, because there is no greater privilege than helping another human being heal."

CWU organises Faculty Development Training Programme in collaboration with GIZ

Central Women's University (CWU), in collaboration with GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, or the German Agency for International Cooperation), organised a two-day Faculty Development Training Programme under the Digital Skills to Succeed in Asia (DS2S) project from July 24 to 25. Since joining the initiative in 2023, CWU has been an active partner in this regional programme, implemented



across Bangladesh, India, and Vietnam to strengthen digital competencies, enhance academic capacity, and foster innovation in higher education.

The training, titled "AI in Teaching and Research", was designed to equip CWU faculty members with the knowledge, practical skills, and pedagogical strategies needed to integrate AI into teaching and research. The programme provided participants with insights into the responsible and effective use of AI-powered tools for curriculum development, classroom engagement, assessment, research design, data analysis, and scholarly writing.

At the end of the first day's session, the Vice-Chancellor of CWU, Dr Perween Hasan, expressed her appreciation to the trainers and participants, highlighting the importance of faculty development training on AI and reaffirming her hope for continued collaboration with GIZ.

The two-day training programme concluded with participants preparing personal action plans to incorporate the knowledge and skills they had gained into their teaching in the upcoming semester.

CWU's continued collaboration with GIZ under the DS2S project reflects its dedication to empowering educators, embracing digital transformation, and cultivating an academic environment that prepares graduates with the knowledge, skills, and adaptability essential to thrive in the 21st-century workforce.



NSU launches specialised training to strengthen cybersecurity for the MSME sector

North South University (NSU) Cybersecurity Center successfully commenced a rigorous six-day professional training programme titled "Integrated Cybersecurity Framework for MSMEs: Risk Assessment, Incident Response & IT Audit" on July 30, 2026. Designed specifically for NSU students, this cohort builds advanced practical skills that will enable participants to support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) through the centre's Cybersecurity Clinic initiative.

The programme combines solid theoretical foundations with extensive hands-on practice. Over six days, students will progress from understanding how cyberattacks unfold to conducting full risk assessments, performing technical gap analyses, responding to simulated incidents, and producing professional IT audit reports. Participants will work in teams using realistic fictional MSME profiles (clinic, logistics firm, café, school, and retail shop). They will identify assets and threats, apply the STRIDE threat-modelling method, build and score risk registers, run professional security tools such as Lynis, Microsoft Baseline Analyzer, and OpenVAS/Nessus Essentials on prepared virtual machines. They will write formal findings using the 5C structure and map results against ISO 27001 Annex A controls.

A full ransomware tabletop exercise following the NIST 800-61 incident response lifecycle will allow students to practice detection, containment, communication, and lessons-learned processes. The final days will focus on remediation planning, technical validation of fixes, and the production of complete audit reports suitable for real MSME clients.

This intensive, practice-oriented approach ensures every participant leaves with immediately usable competencies in risk assessment, gap analysis, incident response, and IT auditing. Graduates of the programme will contribute directly to the centre's goal of supporting at least 300 digitally vulnerable organisations through hands-on assessments and advisory support. The initiative is backed by the APAC Cybersecurity Fund (The Asia Foundation, with support from Google.org).

UCBD's "Vision & Vogue" celebrates young fashion talent

Universal College Bangladesh (UCBD), in collaboration with the University of Lancashire, UK, hosted "Vision & Vogue", a fashion competition focused on creativity, sustainability, and innovation through designs made from recyclable materials.

Organised by UCBD's Department of Fashion Promotion & Marketing, the event was held at the UCBD Gulshan campus on August 1. Students from grades 11 and 12, as well as GED students aged 15-23, participated in the competition individually and in teams. A total of 15 shortlisted entries were presented at the live fashion showcase, with participants showcasing Bangladeshi-themed outfits made from recyclable materials.

Alongside their designs, participants presented brand concepts and the stories behind their creations, exploring how fashion can bring together design, sustainability, cultural identity and storytelling.



The designs were evaluated by a panel comprising Paresh Parmar, Associate Dean at the School of Arts and Media, University of Lancashire, UK; Richard Antony Brame, International Partnerships Project Manager, University of Lancashire, UK; Zainab Maqsood, Managing Director, AMIRA by Experience Group; Prof. Muhammad Ismail Hossain, Provost, UCBD; and Zarin Rashid, a health coach and fashion designer.

Drawing inspiration from Bangladesh's cultural heritage, including traditional crafts, colours, and cultural identity, participants reimagined these elements through contemporary and sustainable fashion.

The showcase concluded with a prize-giving ceremony, with the top three entries receiving prizes worth BDT 60,000. The top 15 participants were awarded scholarships in recognition of their work.

Commenting on the initiative, Kingshuk Gupta, Chief Operating Officer of UCBD, said, "Vision & Vogue shows how creativity can be combined with sustainability, cultural storytelling and brand thinking. We want young creators to see fashion not only as a form of expression, but also as a space for innovation and positive change."

Paresh Parmar said, "It was encouraging to see participants use sustainable materials to explore ideas around design, identity and storytelling. Initiatives like this can help young people build the confidence and creative thinking needed for the evolving fashion industry."

The first-prize winner, Maliha Nawer, said, "Vision & Vogue gave us an opportunity to look at fashion differently. Turning everyday recyclable materials into something meaningful and wearable was both challenging and rewarding."



ILLUSTRATION: **AZRA HUMAYRA**

OPINION

THE DIGITALISED PUBLIC COURT

Behind private Facebook faculty review groups

SUMAIYA TASNIM

Before selecting a course, Sisyphus finds himself anxiously looking up the faculty initials to read the shared experiences of his fellow Sisyphuses to discover whether he might also have to carry the burden of the grades on a rocky hill or a smooth slate with rollerblades. The culture of Facebook groups for faculty reviews serves as a hideout for the students from the keen eyes of surveillance. Serving as a communal space, Facebook groups for faculty reviews informally assess faculty members, their desired courses, and assessment strategies.

In search of an easygoing section and faculty, the hunt for wishful thinking continues, as it is in human nature for us to find easier and shorter routes to decode the unknown for uncertainties.

10 years ago, I, too, stumbled upon a Facebook faculty review group, anxiously trying to decode my science electives as a humanities major. Being on the other side of the discourse, I find myself sympathetic to both parts of the academic ecosystem. Informal, student-friendly online spaces serve as an effective medium for first-year students to connect with students and the campus in a manner that seems more accessible to their "survival" throughout the semesters. While in the West, "Rate My Professor" is globally accessible, the practice of review groups in Bangladesh is more gatekept. Because universities carry an institutional hierarchy, students seek solace through these internet spaces in navigating this newfound individual agency.

The transitional evaluation cycle of each semester is almost loop-like. A teacher assesses students, and students later assess the faculty member in two ways: one in an official system organised by the university and another in social media groups. While it is a standard practice of confidentiality on university official portals, students tend to share their frustrations with the faculty members on online forums through anonymous posts. Most reviews entail a detailed list that can often come across "accusatory" without evidence and at times reads more personal than providing constructive criticism on pedagogical approaches.

With the lack of monitoring towards anonymous posts, this space creates an unsettling form of confirmation bias amongst the students. Reputation aside, such posts affect the grading and course design, along with the emotional anxieties that prevail for the faculty member. Between burnout followed by research deadlines and endless academic chores, an anonymous evaluation pining against a faculty member on social media inevitably impacts their teaching philosophy.

We must put into perspective how, amidst LLM-based writing and lack of enthusiasm towards literary discourses, the space for curiosity and open-ended conversations has been met with mostly symbolic cricket noises with occasional responses from the same set of one or two students, creating almost an unintentional echo chamber. Being viewed only in numbers and in the binary of "would and would not recommend", one can't help but feel a strange empathy towards fast food joints on review groups oscillating between three and five stars.

Of course, actionable feedback increases academic rigour, but the lack of accountability on anonymous reviews only causes further anxieties for both parties. That being said, it is almost urgent for universities to hold mandatory departmental town hall meetings between the students and the department. A recurring debate amongst students is that university-based teacher and course evaluations are ineffective. At a time when there is a rise in the number of student intakes in private universities, it is, without a doubt, important to have a space for open dialogue between departments and their students. As most evaluations are conducted at the end of the semester, it is also necessary for faculty members to offer anonymous surveys mid-semester to improve and effectively incorporate honest feedback from their classrooms.

Under the constant need to improvise a certain CGPA, it has almost become an archaic culture to pursue the end goal without preparing oneself for challenges. The rising discourse on the effectiveness of higher education providing any value other than climbing the corporate ladder is yet another journey Sisyphus must dread. The tension between the facilitator and the student is not merely dependent on the teacher-student relationship but a larger cultural shift in philosophy surrounding education. Whether one needs to attribute it to lifelong learning is hardly a conversation when the number of graduates is known to be highly dissatisfied with their degrees and their job availability. As a result, the need for a commendable grade requires fast-paced gratification, and without one, the rise of apprehension becomes more targeted towards a person rather than the overall systemic change. Academic camaraderie affects the way we often find difficulties in sustaining a community of trust and effective communication.

The challenge is neither the Facebook groups nor the students, but rather the question of what and how we channel our voices via digitalism. While faculty should seriously reflect on the evaluation comments, it is equally important for the students to create a space to communicate through critical thinking with the determination to not only focus on the teaching skills but also to improvise in curating a better academic culture for the student community.

Regardless of what material the boulder is, Sisyphus must move forward.

Sumaiya Tasnim is a lecturer at the Department of English & Humanities, BRAC University.

EDUCATION

A BANGLADESHI PHOTOJOURNALIST'S CHEVENING JOURNEY



PHOTO: **COURTESY**

MAHMUD HOSSAIN OPU

For years, I wanted to become part of the Chevening community. I knew about Chevening and admired its reputation for developing leaders, but there was always one question in my mind: would a photojournalist fit into a journalism fellowship that seemed to attract mostly reporters, editors, and broadcasters?

My career has been built around documentary photography and photojournalism. For more than a decade, I have documented some of Bangladesh's defining moments, from political unrest and humanitarian crises to climate change, migration, and the Rohingya refugee emergency. Through my work with the Associated Press, Al Jazeera, and other international publications, I learnt that photographs can often communicate what thousands of words often cannot.

Yet, I also understood that journalism is constantly evolving. To remain relevant, journalists must continue learning.

That realisation led me to apply for the Chevening South Asia Journalism Fellowship (SAJP) at the University of Westminster.

Ironically, I almost missed the opportunity.

In September 2025, while planning my upcoming political assignments and thinking about Bangladesh's rapidly changing political landscape, I came across the SAJP on LinkedIn. I was busy preparing for what I believed would be one of the most important periods of my career as a photojournalist.

The application itself surprised me. Instead of feeling like an ordinary online form, it felt like a professional assessment of my entire journalism career. Every question encouraged me to reflect on my experiences, leadership, achievements, and the impact of my work. Since the fellowship requires several years of professional journalism experience, I realised that every assignment I had covered over the years mattered.

I submitted my application on the final day. One of the most valuable lessons I learnt during the application process is that you should never underestimate your own experience. Sometimes the work you consider routine becomes the strongest evidence of your professional growth.

On December 29, 2025, I received an email informing me that I had been shortlisted for the interview. At that moment, I was covering the funeral of former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia while simultaneously working on political assignments for the Associated Press.

Preparing for the interview was different from preparing for any job interview I had experienced before. It wasn't about giving perfect answers; it was about honestly explaining my professional journey, why journalism matters to me, and how I wanted to contribute to the future of the profession.

Receiving the final Chevening award letter was one of the most emotional moments of my career.

Looking back, another international opportunity had already transformed my perspective. In 2024, I studied documentary practice and visual journalism at the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York. That experience introduced me to photographers and journalists from around the world and showed me the importance of global collaboration, cultural exchange, and lifelong learning. Chevening became the next chapter of that journey.

Arriving in London and beginning classes at the University of Westminster was inspiring from the very first day. Our fellowship brought together journalists from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. We debated media ethics, press freedom, conflict reporting, misinformation, digital journalism, and the future of news in an era increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence.

The fellowship itself extended far beyond lectures. We visited some of Britain's most respected media and cultural institutions, including the BBC, *The Guardian*, the British Library and several museums that preserve centuries of history and knowledge. These visits allowed us to observe how globally respected news organisations operate and how journalism continues to evolve while maintaining public trust.

One moment remains especially personal: seeing the works of one of the Renaissance masters, Raphael, in London. Standing before paintings I had previously known only from books reminded me that visual storytelling has always shaped the way societies understand the world.

Another privilege of the fellowship was learning from distinguished scholars and journalists, including Prof. Jean Seaton, an internationally respected media historian and the Official Historian of the BBC, and Prof. David Loyn, an acclaimed foreign correspondent with decades of international reporting experience who shared invaluable lessons from covering conflicts, diplomacy, and global affairs. Learning from professionals of their calibre was both humbling and inspiring.

People often ask me what made my application successful. There is no single answer. I believe it was the accumulation of experiences over many years: covering humanitarian disasters, photographing elections, documenting the lives of refugees, reporting on climate change, working with international news organisations, and receiving opportunities such as the US Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) in 2021–2022. None of these experiences existed in isolation. Together, they told a story about who I am as a journalist.

If you are considering applying for the SAJP, my advice is simple: don't wait until you think your career is perfect. Apply when your work genuinely reflects your passion, leadership, and commitment to journalism. Write honestly and reflect deeply. Don't try to become the person you think the selection committee wants to meet. Instead, help them understand the journalist you have already become.

Most importantly, remember that every assignment, every challenge, and every lesson you have experienced may become part of your story.

The world is becoming increasingly connected, yet journalism faces unprecedented challenges.

AI is reshaping newsrooms. Disinformation spreads faster than facts. Public trust in the media continues to be tested. This is precisely why international fellowships like the SAJP matter. They allow journalists to step outside their daily routines, exchange ideas across borders, learn from global experts, and return home with new perspectives that strengthen their reporting and leadership.

About the author

Mahmud Hossain Opu is a Bangladeshi photojournalist and documentary photographer. He works as a stringer for the Associated Press and contributes to international media outlets including Al Jazeera.

Opu is an alumnus of the US Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) and the 2026 Chevening South Asia Journalism Fellowship at the University of Westminster.