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# Latitudes: Amid a government crackdown at home, Bangladeshi students in the U.S. speak out

1 message

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# Latitudes

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## Students from Bangladesh condemn violence at home

Abdus Salam Azad’s thesis defense was on Monday, but the computer-science doctoral student was operating on just two hours’ sleep, concerned about political violence and unrest in his home country, Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi students in the United States have been speaking out about their government's crackdown on student protests. More than 1,800 students at some 100 American colleges have signed a [petition](#) in solidarity with the demonstrators.

Azad and other graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in the Bay Area and Silicon Valley gathered on Friday at the University of California at Berkeley's Sather Gate, site of many protests over the years, to try to bring greater attention to the turmoil at home. The Bangladesh government has imposed a nationwide curfew, and nearly 200 have been killed and many more injured, according to news reports. (The police have not released official figures.)

University campuses in Bangladesh have been closed, and internet and phone services were cut off. ATMs are not working. (Limited internet service had been restored on Wednesday, according to the [Associated Press](#).)

Students in Bangladesh have been agitating for weeks over a quota system for government jobs that favored certain groups, such as the families of those who fought for independence from Pakistan five decades ago. Demonstrators say the positions should be awarded by merit, and on Sunday, Bangladesh's high court [ruled](#) that just 5 percent of jobs could be set aside for particular groups.

Azad and his fellow students in the United States said they wanted to [draw attention](#) to the increasingly harsh response to initially peaceful rallies and to the suppression of free speech. "It's not about the quotas anymore," he said. "We want accountability. We want justice."

Amid a strict curfew, police and military forces have been given "shoot on sight" orders. Azad said a friend in Dhaka, the capital, saw a teenager returning from a nearby mosque shot and killed in front of his home.

Urmita Sikder, a postdoc in electrical engineering at Berkeley, worries about the safety of her father, a doctor who is going to work at a hospital every day despite the curfew. “The city is either like a battleground or a cemetery,” she said he’d told her.

Sikder said tear gas had seeped into her family’s fourth-floor apartment when police officers used it to break up a protest on the street below. But since the government shut down internet and cellular networks last week, students abroad have largely been unable to contact family and friends “The worst part is that we are receiving all this horrible news, and we can’t be certain our families are OK,” Sikder said.

Azad, who will receive his Ph.D. in August, also from Berkeley, said some American students and professors, as well as community members, had joined the Berkeley demonstration. Students elsewhere in the country have also held rallies, including at the [Texas State Capitol](#).

About 13,500 students from Bangladesh studied in the United States in the 2022-23 academic year, most at the graduate level, according to the [Institute of International Education](#). It is among the top 15 sources of foreign students at American colleges.

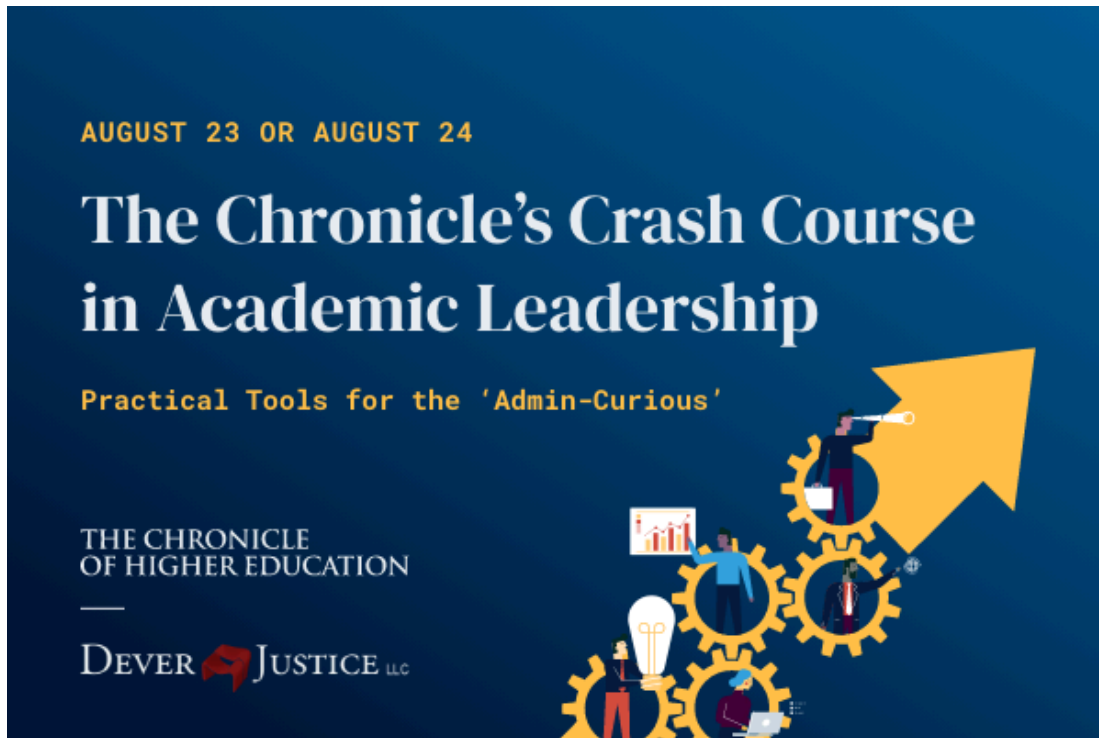
Azad and Sikder said they were not activists but hoped to bring awareness to political and human-rights abuses. They are reaching out to American lawmakers to try to put pressure on Bangladesh’s government, although they said they didn’t know how much of an impact they could have as student-visa holders, not voters.

“I didn’t know what to do,” Azad said, “but I needed to do something.”

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## **Growing interest, not pent-up demand, is behind big increases in Indian students**

The number of Indian students enrolling in American graduate programs has swelled since the pandemic, but pent-up demand does not account for much of the surge, according to research from the [Council of Graduate Schools](#).

Using enrollment trends from the four years before the pandemic, the graduate-schools association estimated the number of Indian students expected to start academic programs in 2021 and 2022.

But gains in first-time enrollment in those years dwarfed the increases that should have occurred even if all students who deferred admission in 2020 decided to restart their studies. At the height of the pandemic, consular closures and border restrictions [prevented](#) most new international students from coming to the United States.

Almost 60 percent of the post-Covid growth among students from India was not attributable to pandemic deferrals or delays, the council found.

A post-pandemic rebound “cannot mathematically account for” all the new students from India, the study’s author, Alessandro Regio, a research analyst, wrote.

Last year India [overtook](#) China as the top source of international students in the United States. Some three-quarters of Indian students study in graduate programs, most at the master’s level.

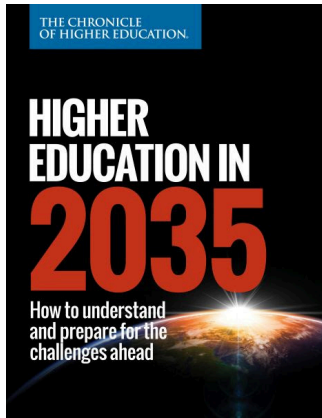
That’s a marked shift, the analysis notes. In the years prior to the pandemic, both first-time and total enrollments of Indian students in American graduate programs declined.

The report explores some potential reasons for the trend, including improving educational attainment and the growth of India’s middle class. The council did not look at factors that may make the United States more attractive to Indian students, which it examines in its [regular enrollment reports](#), Regio said.

Understanding those forces will be [critical for graduate schools](#) — today, a third of the students in their classrooms are from abroad. Without big increases in international students, particularly from India, enrollment in American graduate programs would have shrunk.

Meanwhile, larger numbers of Indian students studying abroad have increased the country’s [deficit](#).

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## International exchanges benefit hosts, according to a new report

Studying abroad offers important cultural and academic benefits to participating students.

But a [new report](#) suggests that international exchange also has a positive impact on families that host foreign students.

The report — from AFS Intercultural Programs, which operates youth exchanges — is based on a worldwide survey of more than 3,000 former host families. It suggests that exchanges can have broad benefits for entire families, among them:

- Host siblings improve socio-emotional skills, such as communication, and report greater curiosity about the world. Six in 10 families said their children had greater interest in different cultures and languages, even if they didn't go abroad themselves. Bonds formed between host siblings were as important to successful exchange experiences as the relationships between students and their host parents, and possibly more so, AFS said.

- Families said learning about and sharing cultures, their own and others, was a primary benefit of hosting an international-exchange student. More than half like the opportunity to have new, extended family members. “Amazing family relationships [are] created and lasting,” a host parent in Australia wrote. “Love those strong relationships and seeing our ‘children’ become amazing adults all around the world.”
- As units, families became more open and adaptable after their exchange experiences. Lasting impacts include improved empathy and greater global awareness.

The exchange organization said the study was the first to examine benefits to host families.

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## Around the globe

**One new field, environmental and natural-resources economics,** has been added to the [list of STEM majors](#) that allow international graduates of American colleges to stay in the United States and work for three years, rather than just one, as part of the optional-practical-training program. Two years ago, the Biden administration [added](#) nearly two dozen fields.

**The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has extended,** through March 2026, special student relief for students from [Ethiopia](#) who are facing economic hardship because of the conflict and crisis in their home country.

**A new rule will make [undocumented students](#)** eligible for federal programs that provide outreach and support to students in low-income and other disadvantaged groups.

**Harrisburg University of Science and Technology** said it would [close programs](#) in Panama and the United Arab Emirates after investors withdrew their support. The private institution also faces financial challenges on its home campus.

**Britain's new government** will support [international recruitment](#) as part of an effort to stabilize college budgets, a shift from the previous administration.

**Officials re-elected to head the [European Commission](#) and the [European Parliament](#)** said they would prioritize investment in scientific research.

**Lithuania will stop [subsidizing](#)** the college education of newly arrived Ukrainian refugees.

**Harvard and Virginia Commonwealth Universities** have started a program to host [scholars displaced by the Russia-Ukraine war](#).

**Universities in Hong Kong are offering [generous scholarships](#)** to keep students from studying overseas.

**Seattle's police department has fired** an officer whose "cruel comments" and "callous laughter" about an Indian graduate student who was struck and killed by a police car were [caught on tape](#).

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**And finally ...**

Fulbright grants help students and scholars study around the world, even the North Pole.



Twenty researchers from seven countries will spend 18 months in the Arctic as part of an effort to increase security and sustainability in the region. As part of the [Fulbright Arctic Initiative](#), they will study climate change and Arctic resources, Arctic security and governance, and mental health and well-being.

This is the fourth cohort in the program, which started in 2015.

Thanks for reading. I always welcome your feedback and ideas for future reporting, so drop me a line at [karin.fischer@chronicle.com](mailto:karin.fischer@chronicle.com). You can also connect with me on [X](#) or [LinkedIn](#). If you like this newsletter, please share it with colleagues and friends. They can [sign up here](#).

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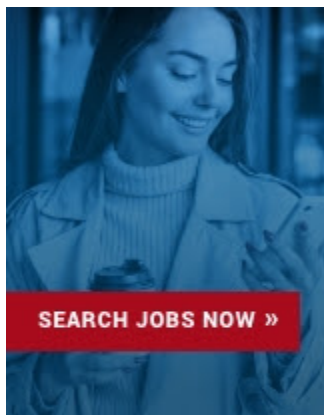
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