

# Jahangirnagar as I See it

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

A span of fifty years separates Dhaka and Jahangirnagar, the first and the sixth universities to be established in what is now Bangladesh. In 1920/21, when Dhaka was established we were in British India, still a good quarter century away from freedom. And in 1970, when Jahangirnagar Muslim University was born, we were a part of Pakistan, nominally free but actually in semicolonial bondage and with the freedom in a far more real sense just round the corner. Dhaka was professedly an 'imperial Concession' of the British to the Mussalmans of East Bengal. Jahangirnagar was Centre's — more precisely General Ayub's — concession to Governor Monem Khan.

Jahangirnagar is celebrating the completion of twenty-five years of its life. This has been a quarter century marked by growth and the pangs of growth. Dhaka was extremely fortunate in the circumstances of its birth, with all those imposing buildings and excellent bunglows and the well-laid-out suburban Ramma just waiting to be occupied. No such good luck was there for Jahangirnagar. The site was a barren wilderness and it has taken these twenty-five years to turn it into a beautiful campus. In mid-1973, the year I joined this university, the campus wore a sad look, — mostly empty spaces and a rather small community of teachers, students and other employees occupying the few structures that had been built during the past five years or so. Soon after the formal launching of the university, the country was plunged into the war of liberation. The university was more dead than alive during 1971. In mid-1973, when I came, it was still struggling to be on its feet. As I recall those difficult years, and the eight years of my

stewardship of the university as its vice-chancellor starting in May, 1976, I regard both the survival and the growth as something little short of a miracle.

Not many people will remember today that in the years following liberation the very rationale of the university — the dream fulfillment of Monem Khan — was seriously questioned by many, including the higher bureaucracy. As vice-chancellor Dr M Enamul Haq told me, Bangabandhu, in his capacity as Prime Minister had suggested closing the teaching departments and converting JU into a purely affiliating university. He must have had this idea put into his head by someone anxious to restore DU to its original shape and to do the same favour to Rajshahi and Chittagong universities. Dr Haq was able to persuade the Prime Minister that Jahangirnagar, purely teaching and fully residential, could be a good experiment in higher education, in fact serving as a 'laboratory' to that end. Three factors in combination saved the university. — that Act, the ready wit of the vice-chancellor and reasonableness of the man whose word was law.

JU happens to be the one university which was planned as unitary in structure and which, despite pressures and provocations from time to time, has been able to remain so. Since the appearance of an affiliating university, all universities are now unitary, so that distinction is gone. The only remaining distinction is its full residential character.

JU initiated one academic concept which has had wide currency in the national system of higher education: I mean the course system. Earlier, the semester concept, tried out in some other places — BUET and DU —

proved difficult of implementation. Not that the course system — equally a US idea like the Semester concept and the two being interrelated — had proved easier to adopt. Acclimation of both on alien soil is taking time. Still, JU can be credited with the fact of having given the course system its first serious and determined trial. And the idea has proved seminal in the context of the larger system.

The widely held belief that JU was planned as a purely Science-oriented university is not supported by the earliest documents. The first five-year plan submitted to ECNEC and (presumably) approved by it around 1970, made provision for three science based faculties, a faculty of Arts and Humanities and a faculty of Social Sciences. No doubt it was conceived as a balanced university with a distinct bias for the sciences. Later development has not fully realised this vision.

The experiment of a fully residential university in a rural setting with no municipal services available to start with has proved to be a painful one, putting undue, sometimes intolerable strains on administration. JU has its own special problems. Its own resources being virtually nil, and with government funding spread too thinly over an expanding system of higher education, the picture of growth presented by JU reveals an inner contradiction in common with the other universities: academic growth lagging rather behind linear growth, i.e., growth of student enrollment and staff size. JU started with a motto of excellence. To achieve that goal will be its challenge for the next quarter century.

The author is a Professor of English and ex Vice-Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University.

## A Glorious Past and a Step towards a Better Future

Professor Amirul Islam Chowdhury, Vice Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University, talks to Gobinda Bar

A quarter of a century ago, when I joined Jahangirnagar university on 1st January 1971, it had only a modest start with 150 students and 22 teachers. Today, however, it has grown into a moderately medium sized university with more than 300 hundred teachers and 4,000 students. Fortunately, unlike many new universities, JU has been able to establish standards of academic excellence without much delay.

As an institution of higher learning, the objective of this university, like any other university is the advancement of learning and JU seeks to achieve this by combining teaching with research. Unfortunately, the cost of laboratory equipment, reference books and journals has risen to such a height that it has become difficult with limited available resource to enhance the quality of faculty and manage the needs of the university in other sectors.

Shortage of resource for faculty development is one of the biggest stumbling-blocks for quality development in future. However, JU, with the cooperation of some link programmes and scholarships from different agencies and associations, along with assistantships offered by or

arranged with foreign universities, is trying hard to meet the growing need of competitiveness of university education and research.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) should take initiative in allocating special funds for laboratory and library development and teacher training. JU expects to devote a sizeable amount of its development expenditure received from the UGC for this cause in the next three years.

The university, though was almost free from session jams for a long period, has once again fallen into this crisis. It may be mentioned here that the actual number of working days during a session have increased in recent years which may help in removing session jam in the near future. Moreover, the students jealously guard the non-closure of the university and strongly demanded the introduction of an academic calendar, which is expected to be implemented from this month. This twin effort may be great help in this respect.

JU, like every other university of the country, is also not immune from violence. Unfortunately the complex problem of student unrest and violence have received very little attention from the

politicians. It should be looked in details, keeping in mind the needs, emotion and also the democratic rights of the students. Students' unrest and violence cannot be totally eliminated until and unless the political parties cooperate with the administration. The government should extend more resources to the university for the development of extracurricular, especially cultural activities of the students which may keep the students away from 'unnecessary politics' and violence.

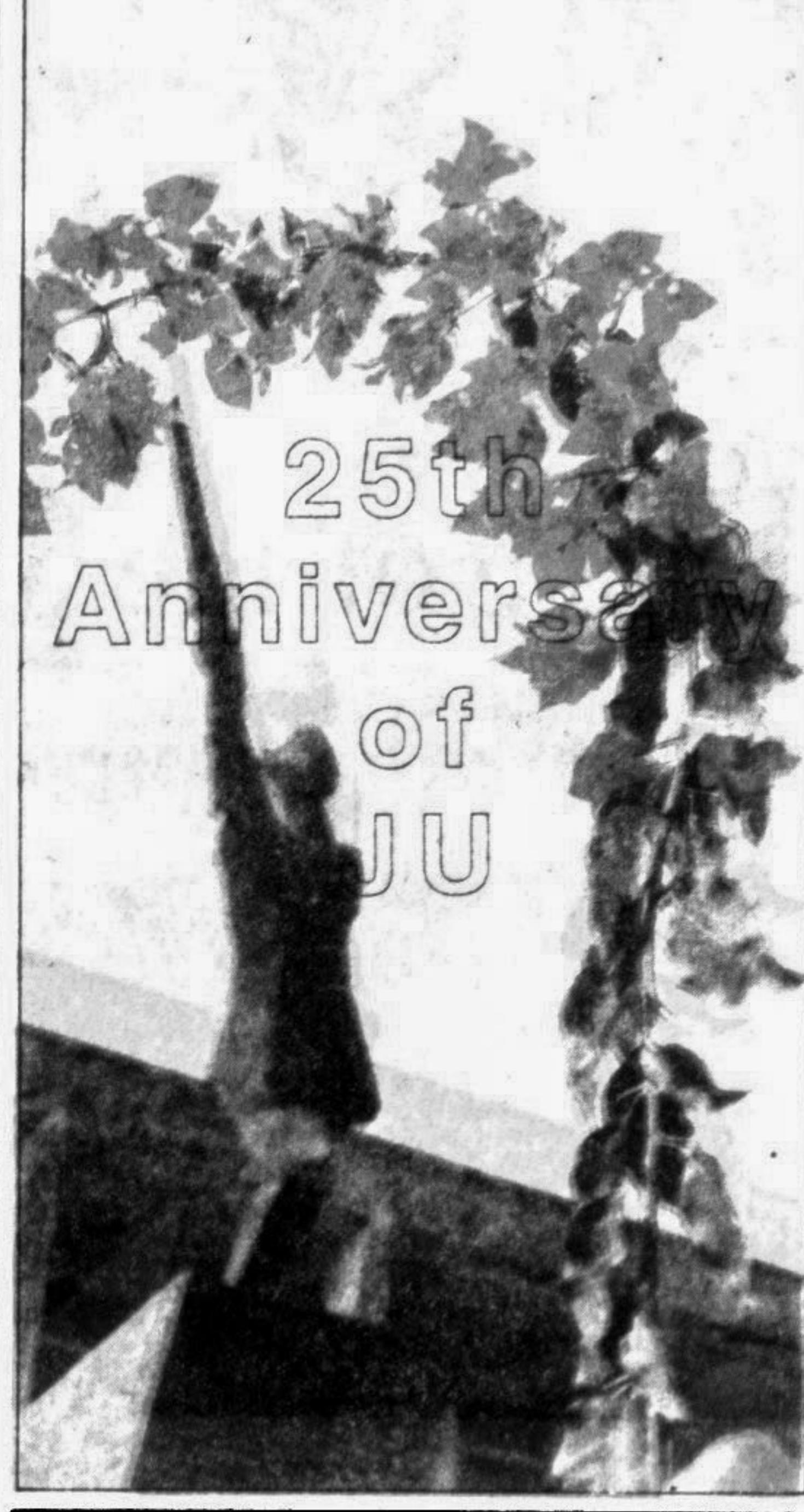
The existing resource constraints, not only work as a hindrance towards the full-fledged working of the departments and administration, but also discouraged the setting up of much needed new departments. However, JU, keeping the needs of the country, expects to open up two to three new departments in the next couple of years or so.

JU in the last twenty five years, with limited number of teachers and sizeable number of students, has already achieved a level of excellence. While its teachers have earned national and international accolades, the students on the other hand are well-placed in various fields of the society.

## JU at a Glance

1. Present Name	: Jahangirnagar University (From 1973)
2. Former Name	: Jahangirnagar Muslim University
3. Location	: Four kms towards north from Savar, and 32 kms towards north-west from Dhaka city.
4. Area	: 697.56 acre
5. Low lands and lakes	: 125 acres
6. Character	: Residential
7. Foundation	: August 20, 1970
8. Inauguration	: January 12, 1971.
9. Class Begins	: January 04, 1971.
10. Initial Depts	: Economics, Geography, Mathematics, Statistics.
11. Initial session	: 1970-'71
12. Total students of 1st batch	: 150 (all male)
13. Female students of 1st batch	: 19 ( 1971-72 session)
14. Initial Hall	: Al-Beruni (Male)
15. Officials in the beginning	: 12
16. Present students	: 4178 (till June 1995)
(i) Male	: 3135 (do)
(ii) Female	: 1043 (do)
17. Male-Female (students) ratio	: 3.006 : 01
18. Total graduates	: 4907 (Till 1993-94 session)
19. Total post-Graduates	: 4050 (Till 1993-94 session)
20. Total M. Phil recipients	: 18
21. Total Ph. D recipients	: 18
22. Total Dormitories	: 09
(i) Male	: 05
(ii) Female	: 04
23. Faculty	: 08
24. Institute	: 01
25. Present Depts	: 20
26. Name of Former VCs	: Mafizuddin Ahmed, Syed Ali Ahsan, Enamul Haq, Zillur Rahman Siddique, Md. Noman (Acting), A F M Kamaluddin, Kazi Saleh Ahmed, Abul Hossain (Acting), Amirul Islam Chowdhury.
27. Total Teachers	: 328

Compiled by : Gobinda Bar



Central Library

## Jahangirnagar — Twenty-five Years of Glory

Asrarul Islam Chowdhury

JAHANGIRNAGAR University is celebrating its twenty-fifth year today. Although twenty-five years may not seem a long time for a university, today's silver jubilee celebrations on the campus is significant as it coincides with the twenty-five years of the glorious independence war of Bangladesh. It may be noted that the flag of independent Bangladesh was first hoisted in the then Social Science building, now the Life Science Institute by one Mr Motiur Rahman. This momentous incident later inspired him to get admitted in the university in the Department of Geography, although at a late age. He later joined the university as a teacher and is now teaching in North America. The present narrative is a tribute to this milestone in the history of the university.

The university is governed by an Act of the Parliament. The Act provides both academic and other administrative functions through the Senate, the Syndicate, the Academic Council, Finance Committee and other statutory bodies. Most of these bodies have representatives from different concerned groups and affiliated bodies for a democratic administration.

The students also have elected bodies both at the central, popularly known as JUCSU (Jahangirnagar University Central Students Union), and hall levels. These bodies look after various extracurricular activities of the university. In the absence of such student bodies, the administration along with various student organizations facilitate these activities.

Currently, Jahangirnagar consists of three faculties, namely, Arts and Humanities, Mathematical and Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences, and one institute, which is in fact a faculty, the Institute of Life Sciences. Jahangirnagar is proud to be the first in introducing three departments in Bangladesh, namely, Anthropology, Drama and Dramatics, and Archaeology. Besides, there is an Institute of Computer Information and Technology and also some other centres which are involved in various types of academic research. The teachers-student ratio of Jahangirnagar is a matter of envy for many universities in Bangladesh which was designed to supervise an intensive course-system, the first of its kind in this country. The initial course and annual examination system of the university still exists, but has been made more scientific and pragmatic, over the seven and eighth centuries.

Establishing a residential university in the vicinity of the capital mainly arose from the necessity of easing pressure on our oldest, and most reputed, University of Dhaka. Besides, there was also an aim to enhance the quality of higher education, especially at the Post-Graduate level.

Jahangirnagar University began only four full-fledged departments, namely, Economics, Geography, Mathematics and Statistics and two departments with subsidiary teaching only, namely, Bengali and English. Besides, there were 150 students (all male), 21 teachers, 12 officials, 125 clerical and other staff and only one hall of residence, Al-Beruni. Twenty five years since its inception, today, Jahangirnagar has 20 departments, more than 4,000 students (both male and female), over 300 teachers, 100 officials, nearly 1000 staff and 9 halls of residence (5 male and 4 female). No female students were enrolled in the first academic session. Nineteen female students were enrolled for the first time in 1972 during the second academic session, which represented only seven per cent of the total enrollment. Today, fortunately, this relative figure stands at one-third.

The university is spread over some 700 acres of land of which 125 acres is low-land and water bodies. From

an environmental point of view, the campus is probably the most picturesque in the country. Jahangirnagar has some beautiful lakes. Migratory birds, mainly originating outside the country, have found a safe place in this campus in their brief visits to Bangladesh during the winter. There are green belts around the campus, and their luxurious growth is a source of rich environmental preservation which draws various types of birds, including the migratory birds, which has enriched the present sanctuary. The residents of Jahangirnagar are extremely friendly with the migratory birds in particular.

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The idea of opening a residential university in this country, which was then a part of Pakistan, had been discussed from the fifties. However, a concrete form took shape in the late sixties. It may be noted that Jahangirnagar is the first, and only, residential and non-affiliating general university of the country. In the initial stage, the university project was looked after by Dr Surat Ali Khan, an eminent educationist hailing from the Savar-Dhamrai area. The university was ultimately established in August 1970, while the formal opening was made on 12th January 1971, twenty five years from today, with Professor Mafizuddin Ahmed as the first Vice-Chancellor.

The name of university was taken from that of the capital of Bengal, now Dhaka, during the reign of the Mughals. The site was initially selected at Salna, Joydebpur. However, late it was shifted twenty miles to the north of capital Dhaka to Savar, which is considered by many as the capital of the Sambhar principality and the Buddhist centre of learning during the seventh and eighth centuries. The name of university was taken from that of the capital of Bengal, now Dhaka, during the reign of the Mughals. The site was initially selected at Salna, Joydebpur. However, late it was shifted twenty miles to the north of capital Dhaka to Savar, which is considered by many as the capital of the Sambhar principality and the Buddhist centre of learning during the seventh and eighth centuries.

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while around 36 per cent of them have PhDs. Although arrangement for higher studies, one of the principal causes of the genesis of Jahangirnagar, was not successful in its initial stages, till today, nearly forty students have received MPhil and PhDs from this university.

As was stated at the beginning, twenty five years is not a long time in comparison to other universities of the world, nevertheless, the students of Jahangirnagar have not lagged behind their counterparts in Bangladesh as they have managed to achieve enviable success, both nationally and internationally.

Others work in other universities of both Bangladesh and those in North America, England and Australia. The civil service is where the students of this university have an enviable comparative advantage over students of other universities. Jahangirnagar students, in recent times, have fared better than their counterparts in Bangladesh in the various competitive examinations of our civil services, especially in the education cadre.

Session-jam is one disease which has unfortunately plagued almost every university in Bangladesh. Even a few years back, Jahangirnagar could proudly boast of being ahead of other universities in this aspect. However, in most cases due to incidents beyond the control of the university, currently Jahangirnagar has fallen behind the desired academic schedule. Steps are being taken in this regard and in recent months the university has successfully managed to reduce the session-jam to a certain degree.

The architecture of the buildings at Jahangirnagar is one thing that cannot escape the eyes of the creative person. Red brick buildings coupled with the greenness of the land would have easily made Jahangirnagar a tourist attraction had it not been selected to become a university. Besides, Jahangirnagar is the only university in the country which has proudly dedicated a sculpture to the glorious language movement of 1952. It is situated between the Central Cafeteria and the Social Sciences building and called "Amar Ekushey". The sculptor is Jahana Parveen. There is also the Central Shaheed Minar, which is situated in the triangular garden in the heart of the campus, also dedicated to the language movement. It is made of bronze plated iron having sharp mechanical edges which splendidly captures the speed, agility, and courage of our martyrs who sacrificed their lives for our glorious independence war in 1971. It is called "Sangsaptak", located in front of the Central Library. 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