

THE DAILY STAR CAMPUS STARS

ULAB looks to promote creative skills

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

"The Daily Star Campus Stars" is a show that highlights promising individuals who have excelled in their academics and extracurricular activities, alongside securing success in their professional paths. The second episode of the show took place on June 1, 2021, featuring panelists from University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

The online event was hosted by Shuvashish Roy, Head of Business, *The Daily Star*. The speakers included Professor Imran Rahman, Dean, School of Business, ULAB, Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, Department of English and Humanities, ULAB, and Dr Samiya Ahmed Selim, Director, Centre for Sustainable Development (CSD), ULAB.

ULAB alumnus Ghulam Sumdany Don, Corporate Trainer and Chief Inspirational Officer, Don Sumdany Facilitation, and Soudatun Nahar Abony, a student of BBA, School of Business, ULAB, were also present.

ULAB strives to incorporate values of liberal arts and sustainability in their curriculum. According to the Times Higher Education Impact Ranking 2021, the institution is

placed at 156 in SDG 17 among 1115 global universities.

"Liberal arts teach people to think critically and question assumptions," shared Shuvashish Roy. Manzoorul Islam regarded ULAB as the pioneer of liberal arts education in Bangladesh.

Imran Rahman emphasised on the importance of students having co-ownership in the learning process. "The pandemic has shown how students are taking charge of their learning. At ULAB, we promote this culture by making them passionate about active learning," he asserted.

Looking back at his university days, Don Sumdany appreciated the role ULAB played in making him what he is today. "ULAB's robust curriculum allowed me to major in Media Studies and Journalism. I also earned a minor degree in Business Studies. It introduced me to a range of extracurricular activities and made me explore my hidden skills," he added.

Soudatun Nahar said that the institution has a welcoming atmosphere, as the teachers support students in all their endeavours. She is the current Vice President of ULAB Chess



Club and is actively involved with several other clubs. "I have dealt with unprecedented circumstances by gaining real-life experiences. These things go beyond classroom learning and enhance our life skills," she further said.

ULAB also promotes sustainability in

their courses as they integrate Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the educational curriculum. "We have introduced a minor course in sustainable development, thereby linking it to various other courses. Furthermore, we have mapped the SDGs to all our courses," shared Dr Samiya Ahmed.

Recently, ULAB collaborated with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for building youth capacity in online communications for the SDGs. "We are going beyond classroom learning, using creative skills to achieve these goals. Through active involvement of students, we wish to incorporate these skills into their lifestyles," added Dr Samiya Ahmed.

ULAB encourages real-life learning amongst students, and supports many of them by providing financial assistance. To ensure the mental well-being of their students, they collaborated with Moner Bondhu, from where students can avail confidential one-to-one counselling.

"Individuals need to chase their passions to excel in life," shared Manzoorul Islam. "Teachers must motivate students to work outside the class curriculum. At ULAB, we help students find their passions, and identify their strengths and assets."

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NURTURING DREAMS

The orchard of hope: Brothers change family fortune

MIRZA SHAKIL, FROM TANGAIL

As the household's only bread earner, Abdur Razzak, a rickshaw puller by profession, could not bear the educational costs of his kids, besides looking after a five-member family. His sons, Jewel, 24, and Alamgir, 22, worked in brick kilns and crop fields as day labourers to continue their studies. They are from Ratan Borish village in Tangail.

Jewel is a master's student of Economics at Rajshahi University, while Alamgir is a second-year student of Government and Politics at Jahangirnagar University. The siblings also run multiple online businesses.

"Our father stayed in a mess with other rickshaw pullers in Dhaka. He sacrificed a lot for educating and looking after us. I was determined to earn money on my own to support my family," shares Jewel.

However, after getting into university, Jewel's education took a hit due to financial constraints. Fortunately, he received a scholarship for two years from the non-profit organisation, Manush Manusher Jonno, USA.

During their summer vacation in 2018, Jewel and Alamgir started collecting mangoes from orchards in Rajshahi, and selling them online. They invested their savings from tutoring jobs into the business.

They also opened an online store for *Qurbani* animals, in preparation for Eid-ul-Azha.



Currently, Jewel and Alamgir are working from a mango orchard at Baneshwar village in Rajshahi.

PHOTOS: STAR

More recently, when their universities were closed in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, they started an online business for date syrup and natural honey from Rajshahi.

Furthermore, Jewel and Alamgir took their father back home from Dhaka, and set up a cattle farm near their house. During the Eid-ul-Azha season, Jewel released that the cattle-rearing business is quite profitable. "We did not want our father to be a rickshaw puller in Dhaka anymore, as it is a strenuous job, and he was unwell. For the last few months, he has been taking care of the cows at our farm," he says.

Currently, Jewel and Alamgir are working from a mango orchard at Baneshwar village in Rajshahi. They take orders under the banner of their virtual market, Fruits Hunt.

"When we started out, we supplied close to 30,000 kilograms of different mangoes across the country. This year, we aim to sell 50 tons of mangoes," Alamgir says.

Jewel and Alamgir's father shares that no matter what his sons do, he wants them to be honest human beings.

In the future, the siblings plan to create employment opportunities in agriculture for people in their village.

SPOTLIGHT

Beginning 'campus life' virtually

TIASHA IDRAK AND RUBAIYA CHOWDHURY

With educational institutions in Bangladesh shifting their activities to virtual platforms in the wake of Covid-19, we caught up with some first-year undergraduates to find out about their experiences with distance learning, and their expectations once campuses reopen.

Azra Humaira, a Mass Communication and Journalism student from Dhaka University (DU), finds it difficult to retain information while being confined to her home. She, however, enjoys bonding with her fellow classmates over their mutual disdain for online classes. She also added that her teachers are immensely understanding.

Fardeen Azwad, a student of English at ULAB, was looking forward to the social aspect of university life – on-campus events, and face to face interactions with his teachers and peers. "But online classes and flexible deadlines mean that I can work on my own time and the process feels a lot more personal than a dictated style of teaching," he added.

Being in front of a screen for six to seven hours a day is nerve-wrecking and led to eye problems for Ayat Subah Alam who studies Electrical, Electronic, and Communication Engineering at Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST). Samia Nawsheen, a Mechanical Engineering student from the same university, often finds it difficult to concentrate during online classes.

Many students are still struggling to adjust to online classes due to poor network connections and financial constraints. "We have been accustomed to learning in classrooms for a long time. So, the concept of online learning is completely new," said Faria Fatema Sneho, a Mass Communication and Journalism student at



ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD

DU. Session jams are also causing distress amongst public university students.

"Even though we are losing years to session jams, the loss of lives in case any students get infected, will be irreplaceable," asserted Sneho. As most of the students explained, vaccinations take precedence over in-person academic activities.

With daily life being shaped by the "new normal", these first-year students hope to live their university days to the fullest once these turbulent times are over. From co-curricular club activities and hangouts to resolving session jams, wishes pile up as they continue their learning online, for now.

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