

#LS EDITOR'S NOTE

On the winding N2 highway

Bangladesh is gorgeous in Monsoon; the trees are happy sporting their green foliage, and the cloudy sky gives a respite from the stifling summers. The incessant rain or even the light drizzle quenches the scorched brown earth and our parched, fatigued souls.

I am sure you all will agree with me that once you reach the outskirts of our beloved metropolis Dhaka, Bangladesh becomes even more beautiful. The change in landscape gives us an instant relief; the rolling fields of paddy reaching onto the horizon, the crop in season swaying in the breeze — these undoubtedly make us relive the golden Bengal synergy.

I love monsoon; so much so that I will always go on a long drive on my favourite highway, route N2 towards Sylhet or Habiganj or Sreemangal, simply to hear the sounds of the rains.

N2 is shaded on the either side by a canopy of foliage from large trees. As soon as you cross Narsingdi or enter the municipality, you will find villagers sitting by the roadside in makeshift bamboo stalls, selling seasonal fruits or vegetables grown on their homestead. Pineapple, coconuts, local dates, and so many other interesting bits and pieces of their livelihood are on display for you to buy.

Just this weekend, I went on this romantic ride on N2 highway and fell in love once again with our nature. It is the season of the *lotkon*, a sour-sweet fruit in lime yellow colour with a faint rusted orangish hue. Found in Narsingdi during rainy season, *lotkon*, which contains high amounts of vitamin B, is called Burmese grape in English,



and scientifically called *Baccaurea motleyana*.

The roadside bazars were filled with a bumper harvest of *lotkon* this time around, and the heaps of the lime yellow stacked in mounds lend the rain-soaked bazars a beautiful yellow light.

Going towards the outskirts of Narsingdi, the scene changes like that of a theatre; as if you are watching a drama staged by Monsoon itself.

The bazars are piles with *kakrol*, the lesser favourite emerald green spiky vegetables. The villagers, sitting in vans, were carrying baskets full of *kakrol* or Teasele gourd, as it is called in English. The bright green vegetable,

which is not liked by many, is actually divine in taste once cooked in a light soup with potato and carp fishes.

It can be made into fritters also, but the hot favourite, especially with farmers is its *bhorta* or mashed recipe, seasoned in mustard oil, onions, and green chillies with a dash of salt. However, the trick is to poach it, while boiling rice, until soft; the starch adds an extra flavour.

The villagers are simple and will not go the extra mile to sell to you in retail. They are in the market to sell the harvest to middlemen or wholesale dealers. You have to look around a little to find the farmer's

markets selling fresh vegetables and fruits.

Retail therapy or not, these long rides are indeed soothing and we must indulge in these whimsical rides just to keep the spirits high.

This week is special here at Star Lifestyle, because we are celebrating 100 years of Dhaka University. Read our exclusive stories, watch our interesting videos on DU alumni reminiscing about their days in the university. And all these, while romancing monsoon.

— RBR
Photo: LS Archive

What students don't say

While most alumni of Dhaka University will tell you that they cherish the time spent there, our memories are tinted pink, through our glasses fashioned of nostalgia. While students, at least in the last two and a half decades and perhaps more, students of Dhaka University have and continue to face some common problems. Let us make a handy list, for anyone with deep pockets who feels inclined to take up a pet project, like perhaps the government!

The Website

There is a University of Dhaka website, and it has fairly updated information about the contact information of faculty members of various departments. But other than that, in terms of other details, the website is woefully barebones, and not up to par with the prestige associated with the country's largest and premier public university. There are entire faculties of students and expert teachers with the requisite skills to improve the website. The project could even be fashioned into an internship programme.

The classrooms, common spaces and washrooms

The Dhaka University campus is very large, with numerous buildings, many of these new. Yet, compared to the number of students, the facilities remain inadequate.

Although work has been steadily going on to improve the infrastructure, a marked disparity can be seen in the facilities available to students of the well-off departments versus those of the less in-demand subjects. Class times overlap, and there is a real need for more study spaces like common rooms and reading rooms.

For the lucky departments with strong alumni networks, funds are relatively easier to manage, and hence they can offer better infrastructure to their students. But for the other departments the quality and quantity of classrooms remain a problem. Washrooms also need further improvement, better and timely maintenance, and ensured cleanliness.

The residential halls

The problems beleaguering the residential halls of Dhaka University are perhaps the most commonly known. There is still an alarming shortage of rooms compared to the number of students, and thus issues regarding overcrowding persist. To make matters worse, there is a vice grip of politically involved students on those who are non-political, and assignment of rooms is something young student can be blackmailed or bullied for. There are many instances of first year students being thrown

out of the halls entirely, by these so-called student leaders.

Toxic culture

There is also a toxicity in the senior-junior culture apparent in DU, where a lot of times egos are larger than those who house them! The relationship between seniors and juniors is supposed to be that of cordial camaraderie peppered with respect, but in many places the meek or soft spoken, and sometimes the young and restless, get abused because of inflated egos and so called 'disrespect.' This problem affects the students staying at the halls far more than it does those who have homes in Dhaka or live in rented accommodations.

Food

The quality of food at the hall kitchens and TCS and DUCSU have ample room and scope for improvement. The items offered, the quality and quantity per serving are all areas that students have concerns over. Increased transparency in the day to day running can also help improve things.

Career and Student Counselling

Apart from the career fairs organised by student bodies or associations, there should also be a faculty-wide career counselling office for students to access throughout the year. Apart from that, mental health

counselling is also becoming of paramount importance given the ways things have progressed in the last few years.

Quality and number of buses

The university's fleet of buses is inadequate compared to the sheer number of students it needs to serve. Some of the buses also need refurbishment and better interiors with intelligent design to sufficiently improve the commuting experience.

Complicated bureaucracy and accountability

The DU bureaucracy is notoriously complicated, and slow to boot. The processes need to be streamlined, and information about all the steps needed for various tasks should be posted clearly on the website, and updated on a regular basis. Officials, and also a section of the teachers need to be accountable for the completion of their duties at the university, and timeliness of classes needs to be ensured.

Dhaka University is a place of pride for Bangladesh, and her students too, but to claim this pride with a right, steady and consistent improvement across the board are a demand of the times.

By Sania Aiman