



ECHOES BY
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A Subtle Emptiness at Dhaka University

I
After my HSC, I stood at a crossroads. I reached a fork where only “two roads diverged”. And I had no option but to take one of the two roads and embrace the next phase in my life. I didn’t formally study Economics till then, but I was aware any decision would be irreversible. Because we’ll always be “sorry [we] could not travel both” roads, like the Robert Frost poem.

When I passed my higher secondary in 1987, the choice of universities was far less than today. Going outside Dhaka was an option, but not feasible because the two best general universities of that time were located in Dhaka city. My choices therefore narrowed down to one of the following two: University of Dhaka, or Jahangirnagar University.

II
My father had studied Economics at the University of Dhaka. He started his journey in 1958, and he was affiliated with Sir Salimullah Hall. Through my father and his friends, I grew up on stories of the University of Dhaka as a centre of many centres. Long before I made the decision on where to go for my higher studies, the University of Dhaka was already in my psyche and imagination.

Later on, in 1970, my father joined the Department of Economics at Jahangirnagar University as an Assistant Professor. He was in the group of the first faculty members to be recruited in Jahangirnagar. As I grew up in its green campus in Savar, the university was slowly building a reputation of its own.

By the end of the 1980s, some departments of Jahangirnagar were already on par with Dhaka. When my time came,



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I was in a dilemma. I “could not travel both” roads. I also couldn’t go back once the choice was made.

What would it be? Physics, Mathematics, or Economics? Had I known then that Mathematics is much more than just counting numbers, I probably would have gone for the subject, or maybe even Physics. The choice then narrowed down to just Economics. But then again, where? Dhaka or Jahangirnagar? A divine intervention came into play.

I am my late mother’s first-born. All first-borns have a special relation with their mother. I was tempted to leave Jahangirnagar. When I asked my mother for her opinion, she smiled, but with no life in it. My fate was sealed. It was Econom-

ics at Jahangirnagar University.

III
I didn’t regret my decision then, and still don’t to this day. However, there’s always been a silent “what if” that has left a subtle emptiness in my heart.

I was living with my parents at Jahangirnagar, but our family in Dhaka has lived in New Elephant Road from the mid-1950s. Whenever I’d come to Dhaka, the university area was only a walking distance from home. In spite of all its natural beauty, then and still now Jahangirnagar, or any other university, can’t compare with Dhaka University.

As you walk from New Elephant Road towards Katabon, the air starts to smell different. Take a diversion and walk towards

Nilkhet. When you come to the intersection of Katabon, Zahir Raihan Road and Nilkhet Road, the air changes once again. The afternoon sun from the West in New Market tells you, you’ve started to breathe history. No other institution in Bangladesh, or perhaps the world, can give you this feeling.

From day one, the students of Dhaka University are exposed to historical landmarks inside the campus. Zahir Raihan Road stretches out and joins with Dhaka Medical College, BUET, High Court and other iconic landmarks and establishments. Wherever you go, inside and around the campus, the ambience is different.

When I would visit Dhaka University in my student days, there was never a lack of warmth in people accepting me as one of their own. The campus was mine too, just as much as it was theirs, and anybody else’s in Bangladesh. But, that subtle “what if” of an emptiness was also there.

Nowadays, when I cycle around the campus of our oldest university, one-hundred-years-old today, I feel happy. I feel happier when my daughter rides along with me. Even after a century, the campus stands silently and accepts with open arms the child of one university alumnus.

And, who knows? Maybe one day Dhaka University will accept the grandchild, when her turn comes to make a major decision in life.

Asrar Chowdhury teaches Economics in classrooms. Outside, he watches Test cricket, plays the flute and listens to music and radio podcasts. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

Korean Ambassador Lee Jang-keun visits IUB campus

A CORRESPONDENT

H. E. Lee Jang-keun, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in Bangladesh visited Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), one of the leading private universities of the country on June 17, 2021 located at the capital’s Bashundhara Residential Area.

Ambassador Lee met with IUB’s Vice Chancellor Tanweer Hasan, PhD as part of maintaining a bilateral relationship with the university and working together to strengthen the academic and cultural collaboration between IUB and Korean universities. This significant meeting was called by Korean culture expert and eminent film researcher and the Head of the Department of Media & Communication at IUB Professor Zakir Hossain Raju. The Pro-Vice Chancellor, Professor Niaz Ahmed Khan, Treasurer Khandker Md. Iftekhar Haider and Registrar Brig. Gen. (Retd) Md. Anwarul Islam were present during this time.

Ambassador Lee focused on facilitating the setup of the



Korean Language Learning Centre by Korean faculty members and also discussed setting up a Korean Center at IUB with the objective of developing academic and cultural exchanges. This meeting carries a great significance in emphasising IUB’s status as a high-quality international institution in the local and global arena. Professor Hasan shared how

IUB has repositioned its vision and mission.

Later, Professor Raju, who has developed a semester-long course on Korean Cinema and Society which he has been teaching at IUB from 2016, accompanied the Ambassador to the Broadcast Journalism (TV) Lab and Audio Visual Post Production Lab of the Media & Communication Department.

The Ambassador, his entourage and the Dean of School of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences Professor Dr. Taiabur Rahman, Professor Zakir Hossain Raju, and the coordinator of IUB K-Club Raiyana Rahman attended a cultural presentation in honour of the Ambassador.

Ambassador Lee thanked Professor Raju for promoting Korean studies in Bangladesh, particularly in IUB as Korean cinema is taught at leading universities around the globe to discuss Korean studies. This course at IUB is the only such course taught in South Asia under the leadership of Professor Zakir Hossain Raju. The presentation was organised by the IUB K-Club.