

Glorious past beckons, present struggle persists

SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Withstanding all blows in the past, Dhaka University rose again and again, like the mythical Phoenix burning itself to ashes and springing back to life once more, taking the country past great moments like the Language Movement to Liberation War to the anti-autocratic movement.

Though the golden days of the century-old university are over, there is hope for it to rise again and build the next generation who will lead the nation through the coming future, Prof Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said at the centenary celebration ceremony of the university yesterday.

Attendees at the programme included students, teachers, alumni and several lawmakers. They all recommended improving the university's quality of education and emphasising research work.

"Once upon a time, Dhaka University was known as the Oxford of the East. Today, it doesn't even make top 1,000 university lists," said Rakhi Ganguli, an alumna who passed from the psychology department 21 years ago.

The ceremony marks the start of the

two week-long twin celebrations of the university's 100 years and the golden jubilee of the independence of the country. As part of the festivities, the campus is adorned with lights and colours. Throughout the day, current and former students were seen taking photos with the sculptures and buildings of the campus.

Talking to The Daily Star, former student and lawmaker Kazi Kaniz Sultana said, "The political thought that was born and nurtured within these premises is the main pride of my life."

Chancellor of the university President Md Abdul Hamid inaugurated the celebrations at noon. The ceremony was supposed to be held on July 1, but was postponed as a safety measure against the coronavirus.

After the inauguration programme, a discussion session chaired by Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury was held.

"The state wanted loyalty, but this university wanted freedom," he said at the session. "University teaches us socialism, democracy and secularism," he added.

He said the university played this matriarchal role by introducing morality and sensitivity into the practice of

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A resilient spirit, unrecognised

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Monowara Begum does not know her exact date of birth. All she can recall is that she was a seventh-grader during the Liberation War.

Born in Badla village in Barishal's Babuganj upazila, her father passed away when she was still a child. "My mother Jobeda Khatun took responsibility of me and married another man," said Monowara, who's likely in her mid sixties at present.

But just as things were falling in place, in came the Liberation War.

"All of a sudden, we started hearing the Pakistan military could arrive any day. My grandmother Mayjan Bibi used to assure us, saying the military can't cross the river."

She said she can't recall the date for sure, but it was monsoon, sometime around June or July, when they decided to go to Charkaua village on the banks of the Kirtankhola for safety.

However, Monowara and her grandmother appeared at a burning Charkaua village. The military had already arrived, rampaging the village. Many villagers were shot dead on the banks of Kirtankhola on that day.

"We got scared and ran to Nawab Ali Bepari's residence, but it was burnt down too. My grandmother asked me to leave at once and hide behind a tree," she said.



Monowara points at the building that was used as a torture cell to put countless like her through unimaginable misery during the Liberation War.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Monowara added, "I was spotted by a military man, who pulled me by my hair and took me to their gunboat. I saw a couple of women and girls were being held hostage there. They took all of us to the fourth grade quarters of the medical college at Chadmar area [in Barishal city]."

Not even in her worst nightmare could Monowara have predicted what lay in store for her. "It was as if hell came down on our lives," she told this correspondent.

Along with the group of captive girls, Monowara was taken to the Pakistan military's mini-cantonment in the city's Wapda area. For the remainder of their stay there, till December, they were subjected to horrific violence and

rape.

They were tortured till late night, sometimes four to five military men bearing down on them. "Even when I fell sick, they wouldn't stop the brutality. We weren't even fed properly. Sometimes they would come in, throw food at us, and leave," Monowara said.

The mini-cantonment and its torture cell played host to numerous killings, at least eight to 10 per day, according to Monowara. Gunfire at night would frighten the captives, who weren't allowed to wear saris or scarves to prevent suicide.

"One day they brought over a woman and asked her 'Mukti kaha?' (where are the freedom fighters?). As she kept mum, one of the soldiers stood over her body,

charged with a bayonet, and started beating her up, until she was dead." They later threw the body in a canal, Monowara recalled.

"I could not see the sky until the country was liberated."

"One day, we found out that all the military men were gone. We found the torture cell unlocked and stepped out," she continued. "But before reaching the freedom fighters, I lost consciousness and fell down on the field."

Monowara discovered herself at Barishal General Hospital. While being treated, doctors told her that her genitals had to be operated on.

After returning to Badla, Monowara's stepfather refused to let her stay with them. With no

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'Govt plans to form subservient EC' Say speakers at virtual programme of Shujan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although there were demands from all quarters to enact a law for forming future election commissions (EC), it now seems that the government is determined to form a "subservient EC" through a "subservient search committee", said speakers at a virtual programme yesterday.

They also rejected the law minister's claim that formation of a new law in this regard is not possible due to time constraints.

Shushasoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), a civil-society platform, organised the programme.

"The expectation was that the government would form the next election commission in a transparent manner. The first step of the process was to enact a law in this regard. But it's clear that authorities don't want to do that," said noted jurist Shahdeen Malik.

"It's clear from the speeches and behaviour of the government and law minister that we won't be able to cast

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NOTED JURIST
SHAHDEEN MALIK

GREENHOUSE GAS Put pressure on major emitting countries

Qazi Kholiuzzaman tells BIDS conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Alongside undertaking different adaptation measures, Bangladesh should put pressure on countries that are largely responsible for greenhouse gas emission, said noted economist Qazi Kholiuzzaman Ahmad yesterday.

"We only emit one-third of a tonne of greenhouse gas per capita annually," he added.

He said this while speaking at a session on the inaugural day of Annual BIDS Conference on Development 2021". The three day event was organised by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, at a city hotel. It was also broadcasted virtually.

Kholiuzzaman said when compared, Bangladesh's emission is one-sixth of annual per capita emission of a

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He will live on through his work

National Prof Rafiqul Islam laid to rest



After being given guard of honour at the Central Shaheed Minar premises, National Professor Rafiqul Islam was buried at Azimpur Graveyard, beside his father's grave yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Professor Rafiqul Islam emerged as a polymath and pioneering scholar through his work across diverse fields. Long after his demise, he will remain alive among the people through his work.

Eminent citizens as well as people from all walks of life made these remarks as Rafiqul Islam was laid to rest at Azimpur graveyard, near his father's grave, yesterday noon.

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12 years of inaction

Say speakers on forming sexual harassment committees at instts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It has been 12 years since the High Court gave the judgment that all educational institutes and workplaces must have sexual harassment committees, but the reality could not be more different, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

The judgment was given by the HC in 2009. "According to the constitution, the judgment should act like a law until an actual law is enacted, which should be binding," said Salma Ali, executive director of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA).

The roundtable was organised by BNWLA and Fair Wear Foundation at the capital's Jatiya Press Club.

The judgment stated that all workplaces must have a five-member committee, which will include two external members to ensure neutrality, said Bablur Rahman, country representative of Fair Wear Foundation. "But this is almost never seen."

In places where there are committees, they say that they do not receive any cases, said the speakers. "The strength of the committee can only be proved by the number and complexity of cases dealt with," said Rahman.

Ali pointed out that because of the lack of committees, victims only air their experiences after leaving a job.

"As petitioners who brought the judgment, BNWLA holds the right to go to workplaces and demand to see what kind of committees they have," said Ali.

Dr Raseda Akhtar -- Jahangirnagar University's teacher and treasurer, who also leads the university's sexual harassment committee -- spoke about the lengths that the committee goes to in order to ensure proper investigations.

"In one instance, we even approached law enforcement to conduct digital forensics on an audio recording and verify whether the voice in the recording matches that of

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Isolated incident or widespread practice?

Teen found driving microbus while driver sleeping in the back



Emon, the nineteen-year-old, said he has been driving for four years when protesting students stopped the vehicle.

PHOTO: STAR

RAFIUL ISLAM

Amid the ongoing student protests for safe roads, the teen demonstrators came across someone similar to their age driving a microbus, while the actual driver was dead asleep.

Emon, the 19-year-old behind the steering wheel, could not show his driving licence or any other paper when students intercepted the vehicle yesterday.

"I've been driving this vehicle for about four years... I didn't face any trouble. I never had an accident till date. I couldn't obtain a licence, as I'm too young for that," Emon told The Daily Star confidently.

One has to be at least 21 years old to obtain a professional driving licence.

Although Emon claimed that he is 19, student protestors suspected that

he is much younger. They claimed such drivers are killing people on the roads, and authorities overlook the matter in exchange for bribes.

When the students were arguing with Emon, 25-year-old Sumon Hossain, the actual driver, woke up.

"I had a headache. That's why I was sleeping and asked him to drive," Sumon told the protesters, as he was requesting them to let the vehicle pass through.

In the meantime, a passenger of the microbus, who arrived from Oman yesterday morning, offered money to a student -- triggering outrage among the protestors.

"You can influence everyone with money, but not us. We are students. We don't want money; we want safe roads," shouted a protester at the

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Fund collector of abduction ring held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There territory was in the Bay of Bengal, adjacent to Barguna, Patharghata and Patuakhali districts. They used to conduct robbery in fishing boats. At times, they would abduct anglers and collect ransom from their families.

They did this relatively risk-free. From their Narayanganj safehome, they asked for the money to be transferred over mobile financial services (MFS).

All of this came to light after Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested one of the robbers' fund collectors, Elias Hossain Mridha (28), from Rupganj in Narayanganj on Tuesday night. Rab also seized around Tk five lakh from his possession.

Addressing a briefing yesterday, Khandaker Al Moin, director of legal and media wing of Rab, said Elias controlled the financial transaction network from Narayanganj.

Recently, Elias had received Tk 7 lakh on behalf of the gang's leader, the Rab official said.

Khandaker Al Moin said anglers from Pirojpur, Patuakhali and Barguna districts go to the deep sea in mid-November to catch fish.

His arrest came after abducting seven anglers from the bay, within 30-35km from the coast of Patharghata and Barguna districts. On information, a

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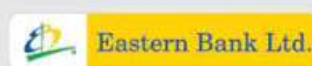


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