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The upcoming election will be challenging, and we have to overcome this challenge... Nobody can defeat Awami League, if we stay united.

OBAIDUL QUADER
Awami League
general secretary



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Now vice-chancellors are engaged in corruption in universities, those who are working in the health ministry are engaged in corruption... there is not a single place without corruption.

MIRZA FAKHURUL
ISLAM ALAMGIR
BNP secretary general



Not even the students of DU, who call Kala Bhaban their home, know of Nilkhet Barrack and its connection with the Language Movement.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The Language Movement did not just come to be. Behind the historic movement, that brought about a turn of events for Bangladesh, are a million stories — of people, of premises, of places. In this 10-part series, we explore some of the places and premises vital to the movement. Establishments that we've lost to time, buildings that today bear no sign of the glories they once played host to. For part eight, we take you to Nilkhet Barrack, a residential area for government staffers who stepped up for the movement.

From Nilkhet Barrack to 'Kala Bhaban'

DIPAN NANDY and SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Over the years, Aparajeyo Bangla and Kala Bhaban have become enduring symbols of Dhaka University. Before the '60s, the same spot housed a residential area for government staffers, known as Nilkhet Barrack.

During the Language Movement, it was a bastion for those who demanded Bangla as the state language. After the police brutality of February 21, the Nilkhet Barrack was abuzz with protest. But with the passing of time, this historical fact has become dead and buried, with not even students of the Kala Bhaban aware of their premises' significance for the movement.

The barrack was built near the tail-end of 1947, to resolve the housing crisis of DU staffers. Though a residential area, its bamboo-made houses resembled an army camp, which is why it came to be known



as Nilkhet Barrack. Even before February 21 of 1952, its residents extended their support to the movement when it was still a grassroots movement in 1947-48.

In his "Ekushey'r Dinlipi", Language Movement veteran Ahmad Rafiq said, "To this day, memories of the Nilkhet Barracks come rushing to me every time I come across that big tree opposite the VC's office. It saw everything, from meetings to protest rallies, and it all feels surreal coming from a staffers' quarter."

The barrack has now given way to the arts building. While that may be a necessity of time, the fact that the premises don't even have a sign or plaque to immortalise its historical significance robs the

thousands who visit it every day of the chance to feel proud of their institute.

"I didn't even know it used to be called the Nilkhet Barrack, let alone its significance for the Language Movement," said Sheikh Mumtaz Athoi, a student of theatre studies.

"The authorities should do something about this, even if for our sake."

Lamenting Nilkhet Barrack's lack of spotlight, Ahmad Rafiq told The Daily Star, "It was a big sacrifice by the government staffers, who chose to take a strong stance for the movement though it might have hampered their careers. If nothing else, the area should at least have a memorial plaque to signify its importance."

Contacted, DU pro-VC (administrative) Prof Muhammad Samad said, "It's not a bad idea to have such a memorial plaque here. It might help future generations know more about the history of this place."

Where readers and writers meet

DIPAN NANDY

Besides being a place to buy and sell books, the Boi Mela is also where readers get to meet and greet their favourite writers.

While the more popular authors attract bigger crowds to their publishers' stalls and pavilions with an appearance, for more obscure authors, this is the chance for them to get acquainted with their readers.

The Boi Mela opened its doors at 11:00am yesterday, as it was a holiday. From the beginning, book enthusiasts started pouring in.

Yesterday also saw the ninth and tenth volumes of the popular "Mujib" graphic novel's unveiling. Published by the Centre for Research and Information (CRI), educationist Muhammad Zafar Iqbal and author Anisul Haque unveiled the volumes yesterday.

During the ceremony, Muhammad Zafar Iqbal recalled the time when attempts were underway to remove Bangabandhu's name from history.

He said this graphic novel can represent the visionary leader to future generations.

Muhammad Zafar Iqbal ended up staying at the fair grounds through the afternoon, being swarmed by fans and autograph hunters the entire time.



The fair was also graced by popular novelist Imdadul Haque Milon. "There's been a constant flow of visitors to the fair this year. If they even come to touch the books without buying them, that's still a great thing for all of us," he said.

This correspondent came across garment trader Mosharraf Hossain, who came all the way from Banasree.

He was holding the book "Think Like CEOs" published by Daily Star Books. "I bet something good will come out of it if I can learn from this book and use it for my business," he told this correspondent.

Meanwhile, on the first day of its operation, a mobile court was vigilant in identifying and fining publishers and visitors for not following hygiene rules at the fair.

According to Bangla Academy, 143 new books were published at the fair yesterday.

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