

GOODBYES, CALLS, and the weight of distance

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AZRA HUMAYRA

Every evening in Dhaka, when the house quietened, Rokeya Huq kept the family computer open and waited for the familiar Skype ring. On the other end were her children, Reza Ul Karim, calling from his Cambridge dorm, or Roksana Karim from Melbourne, ready to share their day.

“My son would share everything with me, his daily activities, his friends, what he did that day,” she recalled. She mostly listened, offering advice sparingly. The ritual kept distance at bay, even if the ocean never truly shrank.

DISTANCE PULLS

For parents, a child’s decision to study abroad is both pride and endurance. Safety, finances, emotional support, and independence become daily questions once the plane takes off. Parents must prepare their children for practical realities while learning to manage their own fears.

For Monica Margaret, whose son Ernest Prottoy studied Strategic Management and Organisation at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in Japan, success abroad begins with community and responsibility. “They should have good relationships with their classmates and their teachers as well, and should develop financial management skills

to avoid financial crises,” she said. To her, thriving is about building bonds that make a new environment feel less hostile.

Financial planning, she added, starts long before departure. “If parents have an aim to send their child abroad to study, they should have a savings scheme for that.” International education is costly; without a long-term plan, families may struggle under tuition and living expenses. Once overseas, students must sharpen budgeting skills and prepare for emergencies, and parents should remain a steady source of reassurance. “The parents should assure their child that they are always there for him or her... whenever he or she faces any problem, whether it is financial or emotional.”

THE NEED TO PROTECT

That reassurance needs calibration. The urge to protect often clashes with the need to grant independence. Rokeya found balance in listening, while her husband, Mohammad Karimul Huq, emphasised physical presence even briefly. “We always made sure our children came home after every semester, even though it was expensive,” he said. Those trips home reminded the children that their lives abroad were still anchored in family. “We worried about whether they had good company, whether

they got sick, how they would manage, but we did everything we could to make sure they were comfortable.”

The Huqs also looked outward, learning from peers who had navigated the same journey. “We also listened to our friends living abroad to understand which places might be better for our children, so that we could make informed decisions about their future,” Rokeya said. Advice from others often filled the gaps that geography created.

In all this lies a central dilemma: how to trust without retreating, how to guide without controlling. Monica is clear. “Parents can do that in a very subtle way. I believe that the most important thing is to keep track of what your child is doing. They should have the mental strength to let their child start a new life abroad. So, they should not push their child into preferring to lie by mistrusting and overprotecting. They should let him or her enjoy the independence and at the same time become their sanctuary.”

LEARNING TO LET GO

Her words capture the paradox of distance. Parents must learn to live with absence while inventing new forms of presence. Children gain freedom yet lean on family in unseen ways. Behind every semester, every tuition bill,

and every video call is a quiet interdependence.

The departures hurt and the worries linger. Yet parents continue to let their children go, believing the world beyond home will help them shape their own lives. The sacrifice doesn’t get easier with routine; it’s carried with resolve call by call, semester by semester until the children return as adults,

moulded by distance.

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