Walking in Chandni Chowk felt like walking through Lahore streets'

DAMINI NATH

Fifty-three students and two faculty members from Lahore University of Management Sciences arrived in India via the Wagah border on Monday.

As Ahsan watched the India-Australia World Cup match on a stranger’s phone on the Delhi Metro, the 20-year-old Pakistani student forgot he was in a foreign land.

“I even celebrated with the guy when India got a wicket,” said the B.A. student.

Part of a group of 53 students and two faculty members from Lahore University of Management Sciences, Ahsan was in India to meet students like him, go sight-seeing and learn about a country he was “warned” against.
The group crossed the Wagah border on Monday, spent a day exploring Amritsar and its Golden Temple, before making their way to Delhi. On Thursday, the students visited Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi for an interaction with students.

“What struck me the most was that Delhi and Lahore are almost twin cities. We have similar structures like the Red Fort and Jama Masjid. And walking in Chandni Chowk felt like walking through Lahore streets,” he said.

Another student Hania Zaidi said she had to keep reminding herself that she was not at home.

“I didn’t feel that I was out of Pakistan since we crossed the border. We were under the impression that people would not be very welcoming. But everywhere we went, people were so nice” said the 23-year-old undergraduate student.

Visiting Professor Ishtiaq Ahmed, who teaches the students a course on the Partition of Punjab, said the idea behind the trip was to facilitate interaction between students of the two countries.

“We wanted the students to cultivate a sense of what is India, what are the differences and, even if there are any, that they don’t matter. Right from the border crossing, which can be tedious, our experience has been great,” said Prof. Ahmed, who is also Professor Emeritus at the Stockholm University in Sweden.

Apart from seeing the historical sites in the Capital, shopping at Dilli Haat and checking out some night clubs, the students even managed a day-long trip to see the Taj Mahal in Agra. On Friday, they participated in an academic discussion and cultural programmes at the O.P. Jindal Global University in Sonepat, before getting ready to leave on Saturday.

After a “life-changing visit”, Ahsan said Pakistanis and Indians should remember that “politics doesn’t make sense”.

“We are forced to think negatively about each other; my family had warned me about not telling people that I was from Pakistan. But at Dilli Haat, I sat at a stall, chatting with the owner as he had relatives in Karachi. I didn’t even buy anything, but he was happy talking to me,” said Ahsan.