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Dhaka University approaches its 100th year

The nation expects more from it in the years ahead

DHAKA University was established 99 years ago on July 1, 1921. From any university, a community expects both academic excellence and political consciousness. From DU, we first got academic excellence during its early years and then political consciousness as the university was at the heart of all our important historical movements, at least as far as the youth and student community is concerned. Disappointingly, however, a considerable amount of time has now passed since the university managed to provide the country with either of the two. And as DU enters its 100th year in 2021, it needs to do some in-depth soul-searching.

The university has lost its status as being a centre of academic excellence and is not even considered in the list of top 1,000 universities in the world according to global rankings—not is it even ranked as the number one university of Bangladesh. And its professional publications receive little to no recognition internationally. A university has to play its role as the intellectual centre of a country, and DU needs to think about when and where it went wrong in fulfilling that responsibility.

There is no denying that vested interests have held it back from doing the type of soul-searching it needs to do. As a result, administratively it is in chaos and academically it is in the doldrums. And there has been a total deterioration of its student politics, which was once its pride.

Having pride is good but sometimes that same pride may prevent us from looking at things objectively. Thus, perhaps it is time for DU to form a special commission of noted intellectuals who can formulate a strategy that can help the university reinvigorate itself. The university also needs significant investment. But that investment needs to be based on clear ideas—not simply for the sake of throwing more money in. As we are now firmly living in the digital age, DU must invest in digital technologies also and try to catch up in that department before it falls further behind. For an institute with such a glorious past, it must not now fail to look to the future and provide the nation with the kind of academic excellence, intellectual capacity and political consciousness that it truly deserves.

Brutal torture inflicted on a child domestic worker!

Her employers must be brought to justice

THE brutal torture of a child domestic worker in the capital's Uttara has once again exposed the inhuman conditions in which many of our child domestic workers are forced to live. According to a report by *The Daily Star Bangla*, the 14-year-old girl started working in a household in Uttara one year ago and had been facing various forms of verbal and physical abuse at the hands of her employers since then. The torture on her intensified in the last four months during the lockdown. Her employers would make her work all day and would not let her sleep. If she felt tired, they would beat her up with sticks and burn her body with lit cigarettes and hot cooking oil. She was confined in the house and was not allowed to talk to her parents. As her physical condition deteriorated recently, she was sent to her parents at her village home.

Although there is no specific data available on the condition of domestic workers, including child domestic workers, as they are forced to stay inside their employers' house because of the lockdown, it can be guessed from some of the incidents reported recently that lockdown might have made their condition worse. There must be many other children like the one in Uttara who have been suffering in silence.

The sad reality in our country is that poor parents often send their children to work in urban households with the hope that their children will at least get three square meals a day. However, in many cases their hopes get shattered as their children end up being abused and tortured by the household members while others are even killed.

According to Ain O Salish Kendra, from January until May 2020, at least 9 child domestic workers between the age of 13 and 18 were tortured, raped or killed—2 of them were physically tortured while 2 others succumbed to torture; 2 of them were raped while 1 was killed after rape; and another 2 committed suicide. During these five months, one child aged between 7 and 12 was physically tortured while another one died after torture (this is based on newspaper reports only).

The parents of these children rarely dare to file cases against the abusive employers as the latter usually belong to the influential section of society. In several instances in the past, when cases were filed against the torturer employers, they intimidated the victims' family and forced them to withdraw the cases. Therefore, we think the state should take the responsibility in such cases and file lawsuits against the perpetrators of such heinous crimes. At the same time, the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy 2015 should be implemented immediately so that our child domestic workers are protected by the law.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Surplus power

Not long ago, the problem of load-shedding was a serious one for the nation, causing economic losses due to prolonged power outages. However, the situation is quite opposite now. Since the pandemic struck Bangladesh, our demand for power significantly fell, increasing the financial pressure on the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPPDB). Reports further suggest that Bangladesh is on course to have the capacity to generate 58 percent more power than what the nation needs by 2030. Therefore, the authorities must be attentive in this regard. If possible, they should consider selling the surplus power being generated. In order to turn things back to normal, the government should take measures to ensure its efficient management.

Nafees Ahmed, Chattogram

A global wake-up call for leaders



ANTÓNIO GUTERRES

FROM Covid-19 to climate disruption, from racial injustice to rising inequalities, we are a world in turmoil. At the same time, we are an international community with an enduring vision, embodied in the United Nations Charter, which marks its 75th anniversary this year. That vision of a better future—based on the values of equality, mutual respect and international cooperation—has helped us to avoid a Third World War that would have had catastrophic consequences for life on our planet.

Our shared challenge is to channel that collective spirit and rise to this moment of trial and test.

The pandemic has laid bare severe and systemic inequalities both within and between countries and communities. More broadly, it has underscored the world's fragilities, not just in the face of another health emergency, but in our faltering response to the climate crisis, lawlessness in cyberspace, and the risks of nuclear proliferation. People everywhere are losing trust in political establishments and institutions.

The emergency is compounded by many other profound humanitarian crises: conflicts that are continuing or even intensifying; record numbers of people forced to flee their homes; swarms of locusts in Africa and South Asia; looming droughts in southern Africa and Central America... all amid a context of

rising geopolitical tensions.

In the face of these fragilities, world leaders need to be humble and recognise the vital importance of unity and solidarity. No one can predict what comes next, but I see two possible scenarios.

First, the "optimistic" possibility. In this case, the world would muddle through. Countries in the global North would engineer a successful exit strategy. Developing countries would receive

populism and xenophobia. Each country could go it alone or in so-called coalitions of the willing to address some specific challenges. In the end, the world would fail to mobilise the kind of governance needed to address our shared challenges.

The result may well be a global depression that could last at least five or seven years before a new normal emerges, the nature of which is impossible to predict.



Passengers wearing masks walk at the Shanghai railway station in China.

PHOTO: REUTERS/ALY SONG

enough support and their demographic characteristics—namely, the youth of their people—would help contain the impact.

And then perhaps a vaccine would appear in the next nine months or so, and would be distributed as a global public good, a "people's vaccine" available and accessible to all.

If this happens, and if the economy starts up progressively, we might move towards some kind of normality in two or three years.

But there is also a second, bleaker scenario in which countries fail to coordinate their actions. New waves of the virus keep occurring. The situation in the developing world explodes. Work on the vaccine lags—or even if there is a vaccine relatively soon—it becomes the subject of fierce competition and countries with greater economic power gain access to it first, leaving others behind.

In this scenario, we could also see greater movement toward fragmentation,

It is very difficult to know if we are moving in one direction or the other. We must work for the best and prepare for the worst.

The pandemic, as horrible as it is, must be a wake-up call that prompts all political leaders to understand that our assumptions and approaches have to change, and that division is a danger to everyone. This understanding could lead people to recognise that the only way to address global fragilities is through much more robust mechanisms of global governance with international cooperation.

After all, we cannot simply return to the systems that gave rise to the current crisis. We need to build back better with more sustainable, inclusive, gender-equal societies and economies.

In doing so, we must reimagine the way nations cooperate. Today's multilateralism lacks scale, ambition and teeth—and some of the instruments that do have teeth show little or no appetite to bite, as we have seen in the difficulties

faced by the Security Council.

We need a networked multilateralism, in which the United Nations and its agencies, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, regional organisations such as the African Union and European Union, trade organisations and others work together more closely and effectively.

We also need a more inclusive multilateralism. Governments today

are far from the only players in terms of politics and power. Civil society, the business community, local authorities, cities and regional governments are assuming more and more leadership roles in today's world.

This, in turn, will help lead to an effective multilateralism with the mechanisms it needs to make global governance work where it is needed.

A new, networked, inclusive, effective multilateralism, based on the enduring values of the United Nations Charter, could snap us out of our sleepwalking state and stop the slide towards ever greater danger.

Political leaders around the world need to heed this wake-up call and come together to address the world's fragilities, strengthen our capacity for global governance, give teeth to multilateral institutions, and draw from the power of unity and solidarity to overcome the biggest test of our times.

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António Guterres is the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Glimpses of the man behind the visionary

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

I have often been tongue-tied in the presence of Latifur Rahman. Was it his impassive face and intense eyes that would look right through you, his relentless demand for accurate, precise answers? Was it because he was one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the country who had managed to turn every single company he founded into profitable, sustainable businesses? Was it because he wore so many impressive hats—founder chairman and CEO of Transcom Group, seven times president of MCCI, president of Bangladesh Employers' Federation, chairman of the Bangladesh government's Trade Body Reforms Committee, and member of innumerable prestigious entities, among others? Was it his incredible insight into things you wouldn't imagine he would bother about, like what kind of career path a clueless college graduate should pursue? Between intimidation and awe, the result was the same—me completely losing my voice or mumbling something unintelligible.

That was how it has been since I was an awkward third-grader who became best friends with his eldest daughter. And throughout my childhood and teenagehood when I became almost a permanent fixture at his house and family gatherings, my emotions oscillated between paralysing fear and reverential awe, with the latter emotion remaining well into adulthood and after.

When as a child I saw him first with his wife, I thought they looked a bit too young to be parents. He was this dashing young man in a perfectly tailored suit, reserved and reticent, and she was this beautiful, stylish young woman. They had met each other in Shillong, Meghalaya when they went to their respective boarding schools—St Edmund's (for boys) and Pine Mount (for girls)—thus exuded the sophistication typical of graduates of such institutions. But those were just the first impressions. Once you met them, you would be engulfed in an ocean of warmth and generosity. If you ask anyone who knew this couple—popularly known as Joyu and Shamim (with Aunty, Uncle, Bhabi, Bhai or some other term next to those names)—they would tell you how incredibly at home they would make you feel every time you stepped into their home. They would tell you of the countless kindnesses this

couple have bestowed on them and the innumerable crises they have solved for others.

You may wonder why I am referring to the two of them when it should be a tribute to Latifur Rahman. The truth is, it is almost impossible to talk about him without talking about the extraordinary woman behind the man, the one who stood by him steadfast as he started from scratch to build an empire that now consists of 16 operational entities ranging from medicine, foods, lighting, electronics to media and is the local business partner of international brands Pizza Hut, KFC, PepsiCo and Philips, employing 17,000

process. Even as his breathing became heavy with grief, he talked about the possibilities of the young people of today and how they would take the nation forward.

And all the while, his life partner and soulmate kept him going along with his children: Reaz his son, Simeen his eldest daughter and Faraaz's mother, and Shazreh, his second daughter, and his daughters' children, his delightful grandsons, all of them bright, caring, enterprising young men who adored their grandparents. The loss of Faraaz was thus the last blow he could not really recover from.



Latifur Rahman (1945-2020).

PHOTO: STAR

people. She has also been the one to hold his hand as it first trembled when his dear little Shazneen, their youngest daughter, was taken from them in a macabre murder inside the home. And again when his beloved grandson Faraaz was taken in a meaningless terrorist attack on July 1 four years ago, the same date he has left this world. Even after such immeasurable grief, he held his head high and carried on, an incredible stoicism that he passed on to his family. Instead of cowering down despite his broken heart that eventually broke his health, he mustered up the courage to talk to people about Faraaz's act of courage in not abandoning his friends and giving up his life in the

Being a grandfather was perhaps his most favourite avatar and he never ceased to derive immense joy and pride from his four young grandsons, whether it was a football match victory or a perfect score on a school report card. He had always been a workaholic, maintaining impossible office hours. But that never stopped him from being a family man, getting everyone together for dinners and lunches and of course family holidays whenever possible.

While his softer, playful side came out at home, he was very serious when it came to teaching values to his children and grandchildren. For one thing, he taught them where they belonged—

Bangladesh—and that it was their moral duty to do something for their country. This is why Latifur Rahman never once thought of acquiring anything other than a Bangladeshi passport for himself or his family. He educated all his children abroad but insisted they come back, and they did. His daughter Simeen, MD and CEO, Transcom Distribution Co. Ltd (TDCL) and Eskayef Pharmaceuticals Ltd, has been involved in the business for over two decades and has internalised his work ethic, ideals and astute business sense.

One of the most important ideals that he has established is doing ethical business. His track record of honesty and integrity is well-known throughout the business circles, virtues that have evoked respect and admiration. He received the Oslo Business for Peace Award 2012. In a culture where tax evasion is a given, he has been recognised as one of the highest corporate and VAT taxpayers of the country.

To say that he was a successful businessman would be a gross understatement. He was so much more—a visionary who valued independent journalism and its role in keeping democracy alive, resulting in his investing, along with other enterprising individuals, in *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*. He had foresight and believed that taking care of those who worked for him was a prerequisite to doing business. He was a leader and a mentor, a loyal friend, brother to many who were not related by blood. He was articulate, assertive and knowledgeable and insightful about what people were capable of even before they knew it themselves.

There are so many things about this exceptional personality that should be mentioned—this space can never be enough. For the family of Latifur Rahman, his loss will be excruciatingly obvious at every moment of their lives. For us and the world, it will be the loss of yet another precious guardian who gave us continuous hope in the possibilities of the future.

I will no longer have to be tong-tied and awestruck by the presence of the man who literally pushed me into journalism in his usual, matter-of-fact manner. But how I wish I could get back those precious moments. I would have so much to say.

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