

DHAKA UNIVERSITY : 70 YEARS AGO TODAY

First Vice-Chancellor Sir Phillip Gave the Institution a Great Start and a Vision for the Future

by Syed Murtaza Ali

On the occasion of the founding anniversary of the Dhaka University which had started functioning on July 1, 1921, admitting its first batch of 800 students a month later, we take a look at this great institution 70 years ago, with a profile of its first Vice Chancellor, Sir Phillip Hartog.

A Sad Anniversary

Had there been normal conditions prevailing in our universities, today would have been a day for celebration in one of them, in the premier seat of higher learning in the country. It was on this day, 70 years ago, that the University of Dhaka formally started its operation, opening its doors to the first batch of 800 students a month later. This makes today the founding anniversary of an institution that has played a historic role in the life of our people, in the field of learning as well as in creating the national awareness that, in 1971, led to the liberation of Bangladesh. Yet, it is no occasion for rejoicing. If anything, it is a sad anniversary that passes virtually unnoticed by the university authorities, the intellectual community, the teaching staff and the students.

The media, including this newspaper, has again and again dealt with the situation in our seats of higher learning, especially in Dhaka University. In this institution as well as in several others, rampant lawlessness, in-fighting among student groups and sessions jams had, over a long period, reached alarming proportions, especially during the last years of the Ershad regime. While the ruling cliques exploited the volatile situation and allegedly provided arms to warring student factions, opposition parties assumed that the fall of the authoritarian government of Ershad would automatically set things right in all the universities of Bangladesh. Here, we have been proved wrong, dangerously wrong.

The continuing violence which has acquired most dangerous proportions, especially in the halls of Dhaka University in recent months, with increasing use of arms and weapons, has alarmed and frightened almost the entire educated community in the country. It has also caused great concern among leaders of the country, including— or rather especially — Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

In her exclusive interview to The Daily Star, published yesterday, Begum Zia was forthright in condemning the student violence, expressing her disappointment that the restoration of democracy in the country has not changed the climate inside our universities.

The Prime Minister is probably right in seeing the present crisis as one touched off, at least in part, by personal rivalries among student factions fighting for the control of various halls. On the other hand, her government, especially the Home Ministry of which she is in charge, must have identified several other factors, including some political ones, which have contributed to the worsening of the situation.

An academic discussion on this subject has its place and time. What we need just now is a determined move on the part of the authorities to set things right and to restore to Dhaka University the normalcy it so badly needs. During her conversation with senior staff members of the Star on Thursday, the Prime Minister had indicated her readiness to join in a dialogue with all sections of the community, including political parties, to establish a national consensus on this issue. Let this dialogue start now, involving the Chancellor of Dhaka University, the Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, Vice Chancellor Maniruzzaman Mian and Minister for Education, Prof. A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury. It is possible that such consultations among people who are directly responsible for the affairs of our university are already on, but they have not produced any visible results. We urge upon Prime Minister Begum Zia to take charge of the process, with a strong signal to all concerned that her government was ready to take firm measures, she hinted during the interview, to bring sanity back to our leading educational institution. We have missed one founding anniversary of Dhaka University. Let us not miss the next one.

A Valued Friendship

This journal wishes to felicitate the people and the government of Canada on the occasion of the 124th anniversary of Canada Day. On this occasion we recall with pride and considerable satisfaction the warm and friendly relations that exist between our two countries. Canada has been a good friend to Bangladesh and a partner "in need", the latest example of which has been their generous and timely assistance during the April calamity.

Though Bangladesh is the highest recipient of Canadian aid, it is not in terms of their assistance that we judge Canada's friendship, but more so for their commitment to see genuine development take root in this struggling and resource constrained developing country. Unencumbered by the absence of their own superpower ambition and encroached upon by the overbearingness of their own powerful neighbour, Canada is in many ways more perceptive of the Third World sensitivities than other industrialised countries. This is often exhibited by their positions in global negotiations on economic issues and on the floor of the United Nations and their affiliate bodies.

In our case Canada has been our partner in two of the most successful and effective poverty alleviating projects — the Grameen Bank and BRAC — and has been intimately involved in programmes for the rural poor and in the electrification of the rural areas. In an incisive interview given to this journal on the occasion of the Canada Day, High Commissioner Emile Gauvreau makes a very interesting point of developing our industries to meet the demand of our local markets and not to go only for export oriented industries. We welcome his government's keen interest in developing our energy sector and urge our government to look into the prospect of developing Bangladesh-Canada collaboration in this vital area. While keeping a firm control on this precious natural resource, our government should explore all avenues, especially with countries like Canada who are sympathetic to the acute developmental needs of a country like ours. We take note of High Commissioner Gauvreau's point that Bangladesh is not very well known in Canada, and urge our government and also the private sector to increase their official and unofficial contacts with their Canadian counterparts and make more effective attempts to attract Canadian investment into Bangladesh. While we appreciate Canadian aid, it is the Canadian investment that we should aim for.

Dacca University started working in July, 1921 with Sir Phillip Hartog as Vice-Chancellor. Before coming as Vice-Chancellor, he was member of the Calcutta University Commission. Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, then Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, Dr Ziauddin Ahmed of M A O College, Aligarh, were the only Indian members of the Commission of which Sir Michael Sadler, the distinguished British educationist was the Chairman.

Sadler Commission toured 11,000 miles to collect evidence. We must remember those were days when one had to do the whole distance by rail, road or river. They visited Poet Tagore in his house and were entertained with music by him. They visited Taj Mahal which so enthralled Hartog, the prosaic educationist, that he burst into the following sonnet:

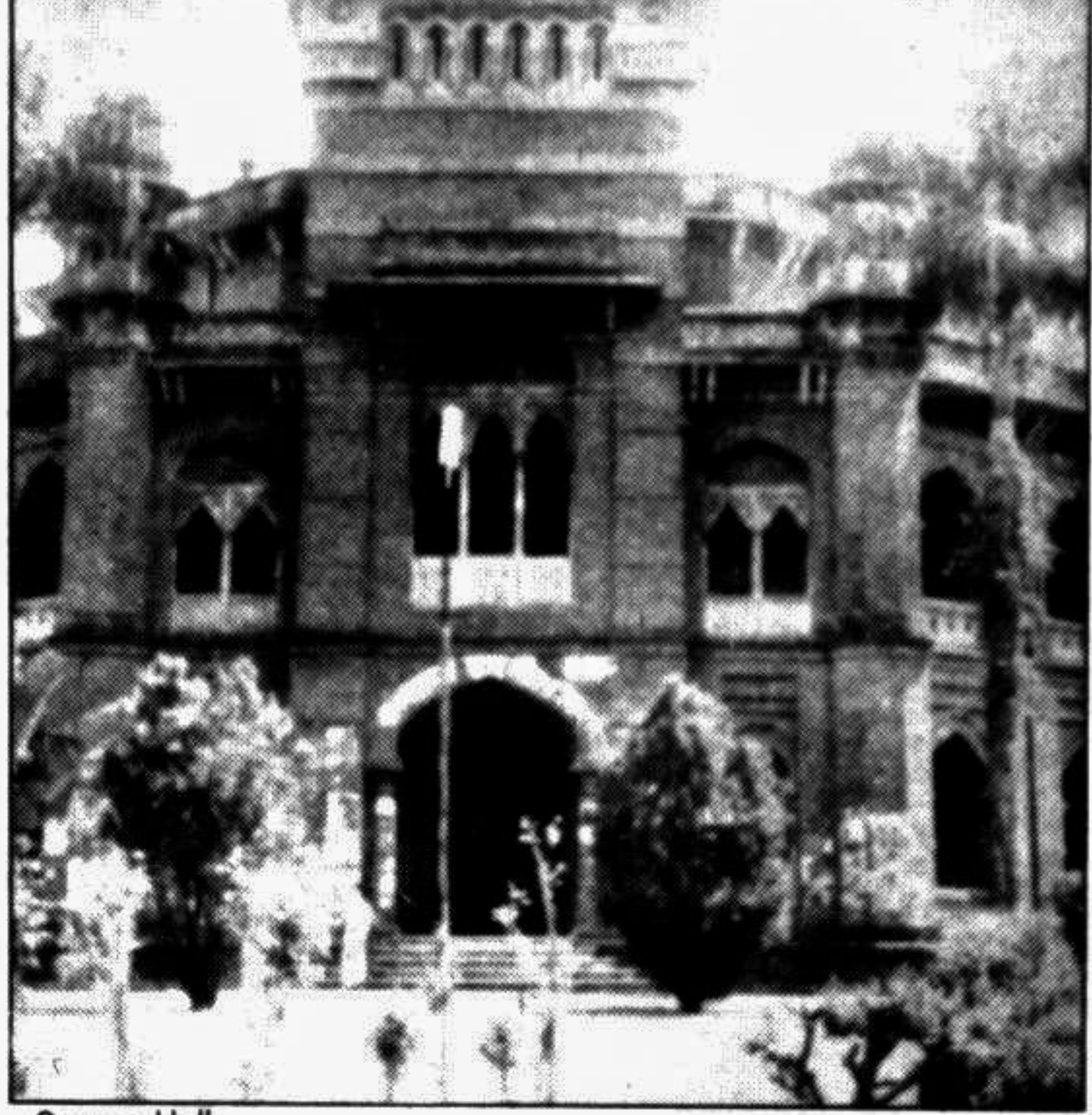
'They both lie here, the Harem's lovely flower, And he who made the dazzling whiteness rise To tell his grief to saddened earth and skies, And built for Death an 'im-memorial tower. On any grave the lilies have their hour; Not so those gem-illumined effigies, Carnelian, Jasper, and Chalcedonies, As fadeless as the fadeless marble tower. The hard sun mocks; and transmutes with light To trivial shapes that im-mortality. But when the moon walks through the solemn night And sheds her pearl and shadow o'er the land The building lives, and, living, seems to sigh, And speaks of those dead lovers, hand in hand.'

Hartog came over to India in the latter part of 1920 with his wife and two sons. The University started in July, 1921 with Dacca College, which was a well-established Government College, as nucleus. To start with the University had three halls — Dacca Hall, Muslim Hall, and Jagannath Hall. Classes were held in the ground-floor of the present Medical College, while the top-floor housed the boarders of the Muslim Hall.

The Government House of the old East Bengal

Government, now used as High Court, had been earmarked for the residence of the Vice-Chancellor. But Hartog declined the honour as he considered a Vice-Chancellor without paraphernalia of Secretaries or ADC without paraphernalia of Secretaries or A. D. C. would be misfit in such an imposing building. Unfortunately for Hartog the non-co-operation movement was at its height when the University opened its doors. He was up against a difficult situation. He addressed the students of Dacca College 'I won't advise you to do anything against your own conscience. If you really think that you can help your country and its political ideals better by leaving the College and being idle than by continuing your studies, you should do so. But don't put your conscience in the keeping of others.' The exhortations bore fruit and Dacca College did not have to close its doors.

The University was formally opened in August, 1921 by Lord Ronaldshay, the Chancellor with 800 students. The Vice-Chancellor encouraged a close relationship between the Professors and the students, a relationship of intellectual companionship which was a new development in India. Hartog was fully con-



Curzon Hall

scious of important role Libraries have to play in a university. Starting with a nucleus of 18000 volumes Hartog was able to collect nearly 40,000 volumes before he left the University. He was much ahead of his times in his ideas about the importance of vernacular in education. He wrote 'I think it is equally essential for the Indian educated communities that they should cultivate their own vernaculars and a knowledge of their own history, art and civilization, to a far greater extent than they have done hitherto.'

On the teaching side of the University he regarded the introduction of the tutorial system as undoubtedly the most important new element. So far as he could the Vice-Chancellor kept in direct touch with the students. He was a firm believer in the old Indian custom of giving audience, and he never refused to see young men who appeared at awkward hours on his verandah, or to help those in need of special assistance.

The true aim of University was enunciated by him in a lecture. He said, 'A University degree should be regarded as a passport to practical life. But passports lose their validity after a certain period and need renewal. A young man must renew this passport by achievement. Then years after a man has taken his degree, it matters little what degree he has taken. The question to consider is what he has done since... The University degree at its best tests only a portion of the qualities required for a position in the social scheme of things; the tests of life are far severer. A man who gets a first may have very little common sense, a man who gets a third may have a great deal. One of the reasons why I attach so much importance to the part played by students in the social and athletic side of the University is because they give the training which the examination system leaves almost untouched. They supply the

When Mr Hartog retired from the University in 1926 the students of Dacca Hall said in a farewell address, 'When the University was started in 1921 the educational system of the country was threatened with disruption; but your tact, judgement and resourcefulness did much to stem the tide of these adverse forces. The University stands to-day on unshakable foundations, a monument of your untiring zeal and unflinching interest in the welfare of the institution.' In the course of his reply Hartog mentioned 'I hope this University has done something to help its hundreds of students on the path to scholarship, to independent thinking and to the fulfilment of the ideal of a citizen. I had my failings and made my mistakes; but gentlemen I think I can say with a good conscience that there have been very few days and very few waking hours that have not been given to this University since I first entered it.' In recognition of his meritorious work for the cause of education he was knighted in 1926.

After retirement from Dacca University Sir Phillip came out again to India in September, 1926 as Member, Public Service Commission. He resigned from this job in 1930 and returned to England. He lived to ripe old age of 83 and passed away in 1947, full of years and honours. He had played a leading part in the founding of Dacca University and School of Oriental and African Studies, London. He united a talent for administration with the vision and ardour of a reformer; a wide and varied range of intellectual interests with a passion for minute accuracy; a dogged tenacity of purpose, with a nature emotional and sensitive. His wife Mabel Hartog published an interesting memoir of her husband in 1949. Some of the materials of this article has been collected from that excellent book.

The author, the late Syed Murtaza Ali was a distinguished civil servant, historian, writer and a former Chairman of the Press Institute of Bangladesh. The above piece has been reproduced from his book, 'Personality Profiles', published from Dhaka in 1965, with permission from the late author's near relatives.

African Fortune Hunters Stranded in USSR

Charles Quist Adade writes from Leningrad

Driven from Africa by unemployment and deteriorating economies, many Africans head for Moscow, trying to find an illegal way into the West. But they have been found out by Soviet authorities who refuse to issue them with exit visas. Many of these "refugees" now face a grim existence on the streets of Moscow and Leningrad.

HUNDREDS of African fortune hunters trying to enter Western Europe (illegally) are stranded in the Soviet Union. Most are from Nigeria and Ghana and call themselves political or economic refugees.

For the past year or so they have been following a trail that has taken them from West Africa to Libya, to Bulgaria and thence to Moscow, hoping to reach the West from there. Instead, they are being apprehended in areas such as Finland and Armenia, then handed over to Soviet immigration authorities who take them back to Moscow.

The refugees make their way overland from West Africa across the Sahara to Libya, where they are usually able to get casual work and build funds for the hop across to Europe.

Some report that they had to flee Libya after attempts by the Libyan government to draft them to fight in Chad. From Libya they make their way to Bulgaria or to Moscow, from where they have been told it is easy to reach the West. The basis of this (mistaken) advice is that Africans can enter the USSR easily enough with tourist visas, and that the Soviet authorities do not insist that the travellers have documentation for the West before leaving the Soviet Union.

This has reportedly angered some African diplomats in Moscow who assert that Soviet border authorities should insist on proper documentation rather than being preoccupied with the dollars that the refugees bring.

The government daily Izvestia reported recently that

the KGB in Armenia had detained four citizens of the Gambia, Somalia and Botswana, who were travelling on a train between Turkey and Moscow, for not having relevant travel documents.

A few days earlier, a Ghanaian and a Nigerian were similarly detained. The Nigerian told Soviet officials that he had taken part in the last coup plot against the Babangida government. The Ghanaian, on the other hand, said he was an army deserter.

An earlier group of these African fortune-seekers entered Finland by persuading border officials that they were political refugees. Later groups have not been so lucky, and Finnish authorities have alerted the Soviets.

Thus hundreds of Africans seeking to enter the West by posing as tourists have been turned back at Finnish borders and returned to Moscow, where new problems await them.

There are few private hotels in Moscow, and state hotels demand proof of valid visas from their guests. In the case of the African "refugees" their visas have generally long since expired, and many have used up the permitted two renewals.

Anyway, the cost of accommodation is usually beyond the pockets of even those with valid visas.

The upshot is that some are put up, for a time, by African students in Moscow and Leningrad. This accommodation is limited. Student dormitories already have up to five students in a cubicle. Most of the African travellers have to spend their nights camped in frigid, crowded railway stations.

The Ghanaian Embassy is worried more by something else. The vagabonds, many of whom cannot even write their names, claim they are political refugees, concocting fantastic stories of political repression by the Rawlings government.

The Embassy has sought to repatriate those willing to return home by arranging visas and tickets. However, the Soviet Ministry of the Interior is said to have declined a Ghanaian Embassy request to issue exit visas.

The "refugees" face grim days. Many have no money and have begun auctioning off their belongings. Some of the women have resorted to prostitution and soon the men may begin begging in the streets.

Jobs are difficult. The Soviet job market is effectively controlled by government and their is little chance of being employed by private business.

Living as they do, their lives are in real danger. One was killed by armed robbers in Moscow. In Tallin, the



Estonian capital, others have been beaten up and their money and passports stolen. For African students in

Moscow and Leningrad the presence of their countrymen and women is embarrassing. Said one: 'We find it difficult

deciding whether to entertain them or throw them out and risk being branded as inhuman and un-African.'

And in Leningrad a student said: 'Considering the harsh winter nights, the mounting crime wave, coupled with growing xenophobia in the USSR, you cannot but accept them back.'

The "refugees" remain cheerfully defiant. Samuel Ankomah, 42, said he was a poultry farmer who set out for greener pastures when his bank refused him a loan for his business. He had now invested so much in his Western Europe trip that he could not accept returning to Ghana empty-handed.

Several attribute their situation to the cost of living and mounting unemployment back home. They say that economic adjustment programmes prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) led to spiralling costs and mass unemployment.

Some remain tempted by the tales of fellow travellers who return from Western Europe with a whole range of musical gadgets, cars and stories about a land of milk and honey.

Their determination is summed up by Samuel Doku, an elementary school dropout, recovering from a head wound inflicted by Vietnamese bandits in the Estonian capital of Tallin:

'My dream is to buy a tipper truck to help cart foodstuffs from my village to Accra. Should I do this, it is going to help the Ghanaian economy as a whole, not just me and my family.'

CHARLES QUIST ADADE is a Ghanaian journalist

To the Editor...

An appeal to Begum Khaleda Zia and Begum Hasina Wazed

Sir, Having spent more than five decades in the Dhaka University, a great seat of learning in the east and being one of its senior-most teachers, I am much distressed at the fast deteriorating condition arising out of terrible clash between student political groups. In my write-up published in your esteemed daily on May 15, I analysed causes of campus violence and appealed

to the MPs, political parties, government and opposition to save the University from ruination. The condition has deteriorated alarmingly and the helpless Vice-Chancellor is desperately asking for help from political leaders. It is said, if you want to destroy a nation destroy its education. Time is running out.

May 1, for the sake of greater interest of our nation, appeal to our two great leaders — Begum Khaleda Zia and Begum Hasina Wazed — to save the University and thereby the nation from destruction. I am confident, vast student majority

of our people join me in appealing to them.

Moftazzuddin Ahmed Professor Emeritus Dhaka University

Traffic jam in Pabna

Sir, In Pabna town the coach (bus) stand is situated at the centre of the town on the busiest Abdul Hamid Road. So, naturally, a great traffic blockade is created there regularly. It is creating a lot of problems for the town dwellers.

Though there is a bus terminal at a little distance from the heart of the town, it remains almost out of service. It

may be mentioned that the authority is not taking any measure to solve this problem. We urge for an early and effective solution.

Mirza Mamun Sadat and Ashfaqur Rahman Dilalpur, Pabna.

Aid Club works

Sir, 2.3 billion US dollars for 1991-92 FY pledged by Bangladesh Aid Consortium (BAC) in Paris against Bangladesh's request for 2.4 billion US dollars is much higher than that of previous year and has endorsed an added sympathy for the vic-

times of the second most disastrous cyclone plus tidal surge in the recorded history of Bengal Delta.

BAC's gesture has echoed the global sentiment over the nature's assault on this LDC. Now the questions remain: How long will Aid Club be supporting a state? Is this a part of the "new world order"? What if the Aid Club thinks twice?

With the covetous aids, the Bangladeshi economy has gained a new lease-of-life only if Mother Nature behaves herself next time around. Meanwhile, should aids become a regular club affair, the

possibility of an AIDS-like symptom contaminating the 8th largest nation belonging to the five poorest countries in the world should not be ruled out.

Unless fast-paced supplementary strategies including increased GDP are adopted, the doubts about the competence of Bangalee scholars despite aids are not unlikely to regenerate. Regardless of who gains what and how, the scenario appears as if running a sovereign state with aids is a prestigious business on earth.

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