

Teachers can really make a world of difference

Vice Chancellor of Rajshahi University Professor Sayeedur Rahman Khan tells Zafrin J Chowdhury

IN August this year, Professor Sayeedur Rahman Khan took charge as the 18th Vice Chancellor of Rajshahi University. A professor of physics, Dr. Khan has been teaching at the university for three decades now. During this period, he has proved his prowess both as an academic and an administrator. He has done his doctoral and post-doctoral research in England on solid state physics. Professor Khan has authored two books on physics, published by Bangladesh Academy and dozens of articles in internationally renowned scientific journals. His academic career took him to various countries and earned him several awards.

In a candid conversation with The Daily Star held recently, the Rajshahi University Vice Chancellor outlined his vision of the educational institution he is at the helm of and how he plans to take it into the new millennium. Excerpts: **The Daily Star (DS): In your first meeting with the faculty members, you have talked about improving the academic atmosphere at the university. Where do you think the current academic atmosphere falls short and how do you plan to do away with the inadequacies?**

Sayeedur Rahman Khan (SRK): I meant a number of things when I said that. As you know, two and a half years ago this campus was under siege. We have been able to overcome that situation, now we do not want to give terrorism any chance. There are issues and concerns encompassing both teachers and students and having great bearing on the academic atmosphere of the university that need urgent attention. We shall try to address some fundamental issues. To begin with, classes at various departments are not held regularly. The major share of this responsibility goes to the teachers. Regular classes determine a lot of other events that follow: progress of degree, timely examinations and results. If we are unable to ensure smooth progress of our degree programmes, we shall not move forward. There is also the urgent need to update and modernise our degree programmes and curricula to keep pace with global standards. Only by overcoming our own problems, can we aspire to match the international environment.

The university's goodwill is another issue. Sometimes we see in the press things about the university that are not very complimentary. Some are stray incidents but they tarnish the image of the whole community and reflect our failures as teachers. Each one of us should be careful not to be contributory to any such incident. A university's ranking depends not so much on its physical facilities, as it does on its activities and on its teachers' performance in the classroom, their contributions and their achievements in research. These add to the university's prestige in a way that nothing else can.

DS: There are allegations that the quality of university level education is deteriorating. What are your comments on this with regard to Rajshahi University?

SRK: It is difficult to defend our position in the face of this criticism. I admit that Rajshahi University is also a victim of such a deteriorating trend. But I also firmly believe that we can and must turn around. I reiterate the importance of our attention to regularise classes, exams and results. Upon taking the basics, other things will also turn around. A sound academic atmosphere will allow us to invest our efforts to improve in other areas. I am hopeful of turning things around with the help of my colleagues.

DS: Do you have any specific plans for the teachers to get more involved in academic research activities?

SRK: Yes, I believe exchange programmes are one way that can benefit us. As a teacher at the Department of Physics, I worked to establish link programmes with some foreign universities, for example the Department of Physics has Sandwich Programme with the Uppsala University in Sweden and it has been of tremendous benefit. We have gained in every possible way, from their valuable experience, expertise and research opportunities. We also took advantage of their advanced laboratories and sophisticated equipment, most of which we cannot afford. I will encourage my senior colleagues in Rajshahi University to take initiatives to establish link programmes for their respective Departments. I will also encourage the teachers to produce quality publications for international journals. We have some faculty members in this university who are internationally reputed in their respective fields. Others should also come forward with their contributions to the academic arena. Rajshahi University already has a staff development programme and I will see to it that more teachers make effective use of this.

DS: It is evident from different unattended needs that the university is faced with fund constraints. Are any measures taken to attract more funds?

SRK: Universities are run on a limited budget. The government allocated funds through the University Grants Commission. A sum of money is distributed by UGC according to the budget placed by a university and its requirements. The allocation for Rajshahi University in 1998-99 was Tk. 30 crore. In the current fiscal year we have received 36 crore taka. But this increase is not proportionate to our growing needs. Over the last two years we have recruited 150 teachers, and some staff. It is having an impact on the budget. Salary and allowances cannot be deferred. We have a Tk 2.75 crore deficit in this sector. Teachers are not getting their exam remuneration and other bills due to this shortage.

DS: Why then such a large number of recruitment?

SRK: Because many departments needed more teachers. Many posts were also lying vacant. Among the 150 recruitment that I mentioned, only 30 to 40 posts have been created. Others were already there to be filled. We have put a hold on recruiting administrative staff for the time being.

DS: What steps have you taken to manage this shortage?

SRK: We have approached the Ministry of Finance through UGC to increase our allocation. But you know the government also has its own fund constraints. Shortage of funds is a reality we live with. But I would say lack of coordination is no less a problem than deficit. Optimising use of our facilities and better financial management will enable us to allocate funds for under-served needs. For example, duplication of valuable equipment causes wastage of resources in the Science Faculty. Creating a central facility that different departments can share could prevent this. Some journals are also of common interest to various departments. Copies can be made instead of each department subscribing the same journal separately. The money saved here can be spent to get other texts or journals.

We are also working to mobilise internal funds, which the government also suggests that we should do. Rajshahi University is rich in land property. We have agricultural projects underway. We have rented out shops around the university stadium. Hopefully, we shall have more shops for rental on the Natore Road. These are some of the income generating projects of the university.

I can show you an optimistic picture here. These projects are managed by the Pro-Vice Chancellor's office. I was in that office for the last two and half years, therefore, I know. We have been able to make a net profit of seven to eight lakh taka annually from a new housing project near the Shaheed Shamsujjoha Hall for house tutors. It solved some of the accommodation problems for teachers. We shall invest our future income in similar and other areas and projects.

We shall also think about revising students' fees. It is very low even compared to other universities. We can generate some resources for the university by increasing the fees realistically but within the means of our students.



Terrorism is under control now, but not totally eliminated. There are different kinds of terrorism, and the terrorists are on the lookout to create unrest. We are doing whatever necessary not to give them a chance. The university administration is vigilant, we have been able to put a strong proctoring in place. Presence of police forces on campus once was considered unholy, something that students opposed and resisted. Now the students themselves ask for it at times.

university. We are working to resolve the accommodation problems as I said earlier. Foundation stone has been laid for a new residential hall that will be named after the father of the nation. This will largely ease out students' accommodation problem. Session jam is creating a huge pressure on students' accommodation facilities. 20,000 students are living on campus instead of 8,000 we can normally expect if we do not have session jam. Construction of a Teacher-Student Centre is nearly complete, and will be inaugurated early next year. The fourth science building is under construction. Most departments have computers. Social Science Faculty has a central computer pool for teachers and students. Plans have been made to build a dean's office with conference facilities that will connect all three buildings of the Social Science Faculty.

I think sports and cultural activities are in order. Few universities will match the physical set-up that we have for those activities. We have our own stadium, gymnasium, football, cricket and hockey grounds, tennis and squash courts. Tournaments are regularly held. We have a full-fledged Physical Education Department well equipped with instruments. If enough is still not happening, it is because of lack of initiative and enthusiasm. We have a large auditorium for cultural events. The Kazi Nazrul Islam Auditorium. It is engaged almost every evening. Cultural events are part of everyday activities on the campus. I am in favour of extra-curricular activities, they help create congenial atmosphere among students.

DS: How would you respond to the complaint that our academic curricula are not suited to the real need of our country. Instead of teaching out student things with which they can contribute positively to our development, are we not giving more emphasis on foreign, theory-based curricula which is unrelated and irrelevant to us and serves no practical purpose?

SRK: University as the name implies should impart knowledge that is universal. We try to give a student the footing in his or her discipline. At the same time, we must also study the job market as we offer subjects and courses. The current market demands are for subjects such as computer programming. I agree that we should design and update courses in such a way that they respond to and suit the needs of the market. But in university education there will always be contents that may not be market-driven, but are important for learning and acquiring knowledge. Otherwise it won't be university-level education.

DS: The University administrative offices are in most cases overstuffed and inefficient. There are too many people doing too few things. Even ordinary businesses do not get done in due course. Where do you think the problem lies, and how can it be rectified?

SRK: I have started to address administrative issues. Some of the problems are old and deep-rooted in the system. I have called explanations from some of the staff for being slow and negligent. This should be a lesson for others. You know what, it is difficult to change things that have been allowed to grow such deep roots in the past. A standing committee that

Expanding access to outdoor facilities

by K. N. M. Hossainul Haque

FOR more than last one decade, people of the world have been consistently told about 'Health for All by the year 2000'. But at the last leg of the 20th century, we come to know that 2004 is the new deadline of 'Health for All'. The main reason underlying this rescheduling is known to be lack of preparedness of most developing countries.

As a front-line LDC (Least Developed Country) the situation is not very different in case of Bangladesh. Despite her well-published successes in the fields of population control, prevention of diarrhoeal diseases, mother and child care, primary health service and immunization yet there are still many disadvantages as well. The existing state of primary health service can be cited as an example. In last one decade, trilateral effort of government agencies, private entrepreneurs and national and international NGOs have largely enhanced the quality and the quantity of primary health service facilities. But increase of facilities does not necessarily ensure access to those facilities. Wide access to primary health service is still a far cry for general people, particularly those living in metropolitan areas like Dhaka city.

The meaning of 'outdoor'

Before elaborating on outdoor facilities of Dhaka city in detail, let me explain what the term 'outdoor' stands for in this write-up. In all the medical facilities, be it full scale hospital or simple health centre, there are two wings in general: outdoor and indoor. Almost all the departments of a medical facility have both outdoor and indoor. When a person goes to a hospital for treatment, he/she at first registers his/her name at the outdoor of respective department. If the attending doctor of the outdoor finds that the person needs to be admitted, he/she will take steps to admit that person into indoor. On the contrary, if the person's problem is treatable in outdoor, he/she will be rendered necessary treatment at once. If the doctor decides that minor diagnosis is not enough for a person's treatment, he/she may advise for some detail tests (i.e. X-ray, ECG etc.). Such tests are generally done by diagnostic laboratories of the hospital which is also situated in the outdoor. Now-a-days, diagnostic facilities are also available outside hospitals and clinics. Besides, advice and training on particular health complications is also available in outdoor. For example, the family planning department of Dhaka Medical College operates consultancy and training programme for

Outdoor facilities of Dhaka city: The dynamics

Now let us take a look at the range of outdoor facilities currently available in Dhaka city. Medical facilities that provide outdoor services in Dhaka can be broadly grouped as follows mainly in terms of size, ownership, service coverage and treatment method. In terms of size, the health facilities of Dhaka can be classified as very big, big, medium and small. Very big facilities are hospitals with 500 or more beds (i.e. Dhaka Medical College Hospital). Hospitals with 100 to 500 beds (i.e. National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases and Hospital) are big facilities. Hospitals and clinics or dispensaries with 50 to beds (i.e. Dhaka Hospital) and 0-50 beds (i.e. Dhaka Dental College Hospital) are medium and small facilities respectively.

In terms of service coverage, medical facilities of Dhaka city can be classified as general and specialized general medical facilities and treat all diseases in general. Specialized medical facilities can be sub-divided into two: those which treat particular kinds of disease (i.e. cancer, chest disease, diabetes) and those which treat particular kind(s) of patient (i.e. labourers, government, employees, police).

In terms of treatment method, medical facilities of Dhaka city can be classified as Allopathic, homeopathic and ayurvedic. Majority of hospitals, clinics and dispensaries of the city use allopathic treatment method. However, there are a good number of homeopathic dispensaries and ayurvedic dawkhanas around the city. Besides, the only government-run homeo medical college-hospital and the only government-run ayurvedic medical college-hospital of the country are also situated in the city.

Extension of outdoor facilities: Alternative course

From my point of view, any reform concerning outdoor facilities of Dhaka city should fulfill two tasks: both quantitative and qualitative expansion of outdoor facilities in the city and ensuring the access of middle and low income people to outdoor facilities ought to be ensured. For achieving these goals, I propose the following steps:

1. Setting up one dispensary or clinic at each ward of Dhaka city. It will provide a host of outdoor facilities including treatment, diagnostic tests, advice and training for patients. For doing this, private clinics and diagnostic centres of the city can be organized under a single network and utilized for this purpose. An arrangement may be worked out with these institutions that everyday for couple of hours, they will render outdoor service to general people at a minimum cost.
2. Private hospitals, both general and specialized, can be brought under a single network. The whole city can be divided into several hospital districts with each hospital in charge of one district. Like the clinics, the hospitals will provide outdoor service for some hours everyday at minimum cost.
3. Facilities of homeopathic and ayurvedic treatment have to be increased and expanded all over the city. As the cost of these treatments is generally very low, their increased availability will be of great help for low-income people.
4. Quantitative and qualitative development of district, thana and union level health facilities on an equal basis with Dhaka city. Particularly, increased number of specialized hospitals has to be set up at other parts of the country. This will reduce the outside pressure on medical facilities of Dhaka city.

P.S. The author of this article is indebted to UMIS of the Directorate-General of Health Services, Mohakhali, Dhaka.

Bofors scandal inching closer to resolution

By Tarun Basu from New Delhi

FOR well over a decade, it has been the metaphor for corruption in high places in India.

As the tortuous investigation into the Bofors gun purchase scandal moves into its final stages, the windup into one of the murkiest business deals that involved bribery, abuse of power and political cover-ups, finally seems close to being cracked. From a perusal of the formal charges filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the federal investigative agency, it is clear that it may not be possible for those tracking the destination of the kickbacks in the estimated \$ 1.2 billion deal to finally nail the Indian recipients. But what investigators are seeking to establish is the existence of a criminal conspiracy and breach of trust, among other things, by the accused to gain advantage for themselves or for their alleged beneficiaries.

Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has been formally charged by the CBI, along with four others, with "entering into a criminal conspiracy" and "abuse of official position". He is also accused of "causing wrongful gain to private persons/others and corresponding wrongful loss to the government of India" in the deal signed between the Indian government and AB Bofors of Sweden on March 24, 1986, for the purchase of 400 units of 155 mm howitzer guns, vehicles and ammunition for the Indian Army.

However, Gandhi's name has not been sent up for trial as he died in 1991 and hence figures in what is called "column 2" of the CBI charges.

Others named as accused are former Defence Secretary S.K. Bhatnagar, Indian businessman Win Chadha, Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, who was known to be close to the Gandhi family and Martin Ardbo, former president of AB Bofors of Sweden, ereshile manufacturers of the howitzer gun. All were accused of committing offences under the country's Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947.

Britain. Thereafter, only Sofma and Bofors were shortlisted by a negotiation committee set up by the government for the purpose of clinching the deal.

When negotiations picked up between the Indian government and the representatives of these companies some time in mid-1985, with New Delhi insisting that there should be no middlemen in the deal, there was the curious entry into the negotiations by businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, whom the CBI court document described as the "Italian family friend of (then) Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi".

Quattrocchi apparently, acting through AE Services of Britain, entered into a consultancy agreement with Bofors in November 1985 under which it was to be paid three per cent of the total value of the contract if Bofors got the deal. So sure was AE Services of getting through the deal that, according to a clause in their agreement, it would have ceased to effect if by April 1, 1986, the contract was not awarded by the Indian government to Bofors. AE Services was finally paid an equivalent of \$7.3 million, which was exactly three per cent of the advance paid of the government to Bofors at Nordfinanz Bank, Zurich.

Following this, in a sudden volte face, the Army Headquarters suddenly put up a note saying that while both guns met the minimum parameters, "Bofors gun enjoyed a clear edge over the French gun". Bofors finally got the Letter of Intent from the Defence Ministry on March 14, 1986, which was duly approved by Gandhi, who was also the Defence Minister at the time.

another set of commissions to Win Chadha who continued to represent Bofors in India despite denials by the company that it was acting through its Indian agents.

CBI officials believe that they have got closest they can get to having a watertight case but acknowledge the extradition of key accused like Chadha, Ardbo and Quattrocchi could pose problems.

Ardbo, for instance, has scoffed at suggestions of extradition and the Swedish Foreign Ministry has backed him by saying "we have never extradited any Swedish citizen so far".

"There is no question, whatsoever, that Sweden will extradite him to India, whatever the circumstances," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Asa Arvidsson said in a statement. Ardbo himself said it was wishful thinking on the part of the Indian government to have him extradited and said "the Indians know precisely which persons have been paid the money and how much and where". All the accused have earlier denied allegations of involvement in the scandal. Gandhi had during his term as Prime Minister denied in Parliament that he had taken any kickbacks in the deal.

When one is a teacher, or holding an office of the university, he should forget about any external influences that may prevent him in carrying out his responsibilities in all fairness.