

## How to Save Our Universities?

# Counterproductive Acts

by Hayat Hussain

**University Acts have not made the teachers or the universities truly free from the grip of the government... teachers have to act very lowly to satisfy the government and at the same time the university administration is also badly tied up with the government through its nominees in the various statutory committees of the university.**

THE near disaster situation now prevailing in our universities calls for urgent attention of the highest authority. This has come as a legacy of the past, and now it is at its worst. Our education system has already lost much of its importance and credibility and if we can't check and reverse it at this stage then it will soon cross the point of no return. And if education is the backbone of a nation and the main vehicle of progress then we will have to do without all these in the coming days.

In order to save the four main universities, i.e., Dhaka Chittagong, Rajshahi and Jahangir Nagar universities, first of all, we have to scrap the University Acts of 1973. A few persons, not many, may disagree with this view because by now it has become clear to everybody what a disaster these Acts have spelt on the universities. Actually, it is for the greater interest of the country and our education that we need some serious rethinking on this matter. These Acts were introduced to replace the black law ordinance of 1960 imposed by Ayub Khan which deprived the universities of the minimum freedom they needed to run the administration without Government interference. So the demand for a democratic Act came spontaneously from all quarters of the university teachers but it never materialised till the independence of Bangladesh. It happened some time in late 1973, nearly two years after liberation, when our national parliament, having started with Dhaka University, passed the bills for the above-mentioned four universities. Unfortunately, our experience, since then, has been very bitter. It is reported that even the then prime minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, while putting his signature on those papers, expressed skepticism about their ultimate impact on the universities. In fact, that fear came true in no time.

### Scraping the University Acts '73

The beginning of the '73 Acts, truly speaking marked the beginning of a new era of chaos and indiscipline in our major universities. Instead of democratising these institutions they demonized them with teachers becoming more busy with politics than teaching. The Acts provided for the election of teachers to countless statutory bodies or committees of the university like the senate, syndicate, Academic Council, Finance Committee and finally

to the very important posts of the Vice-Chancellor and faculty deans. These elections kept the teachers busy round the year in group politics creating disunity and bad blood among themselves and in the process what is affected most is the academic atmosphere of the university. When teachers fight among themselves students cannot be silent watchers. They also toe the line and get involved in the shadow of the national politics. Infact, these Acts also provide for the election of several student representatives to the university senate, which most of the universities have ignored so far and only Dhaka university, having tried once, discontinued.

The election of teachers, as mentioned above, continued to divide the teaching community as never before. In the past the election of the university teachers' association did not have much divisive effect on the teachers as it did not affect their job, career promotion etc., but the election of the deans, syndicate members and the Vice-Chancellor did a lot and so the polarisation often took a swing in favour of those in power. And being in power they could give their blessings to their supporters and such blessing is required only to promote irregularities, especially for undue promotion, scholarship and to protect partymen from charges of corruption etc. On the other hand the door is often closed for the promotion of the opponents, no matter how genuine their cases may be and in they same way they are also deprived of foreign scholarships and other benefits. Sometimes these things become a matter of negotiation causing absolutely unprincipled and shameless somersaults of the concerned teachers from one party to the other dismissing the values a teacher should not only stand for but also teach his students. The deans' election divide the teachers of the faculties and those of the syndicate and the Vice-Chancellor divides the whole university.

The election of the Vice-Chancellor has reduced the

universities to farcical proportions. According to the University Acts of 1973 any Tom, Dick and Harry can contest for the vice-chancellor's post only if he is a graduate of the concerned university. Even a degree pass certificate from any of the affiliated colleges of that university will entitle anybody, whether he is a contractor or shop keeper, to contest for the same. Once, during the Ershad regime, an ordinary college teacher secured the highest number of votes in the senate election of Dhaka University. Fortunately, good sense prevailed on Ershad that instead of insulting the Dhaka University teachers, which he had many reasons to do, he appointed a DU teacher who secured the third position in the election. The worst thing about the Vice-Chancellor's election is that the candidates have to go to a large electorate which includes persons as described above and ask for their votes in a way that is not befitting with the dignity of the Vice-Chancellor's post. But the Acts of '73 has forced them to do so promising big contracts to the business class and promotion and other benefits to the teacher voters. The bandwagon of teachers and senate members also follow their chosen candidates and keep on making promises. This is how the polarisation gets a new impetus and the elected Vice-Chancellor becomes the Vice-Chancellor in real sense, not of the university but of his own group.

### Elected V.C.'s Do Not Last

Now, a close observation will reveal another serious contradiction in or after the implementation of these Acts. These Acts were intended to democratise the university administration by having the chosen representatives of the teachers as Vice-Chancellors instead to being directly appointed by the Government as before. But what happened after that? So far most of the elected Vice-Chancellors had to resign or discontinue in their first or second term of office under the pressure of teachers' movements or resentment as the

Vice-Chancellors became or had to become very controversial and partisan because of the prejudiced election system. Alter the election if they try to be a bit fair and neutral then they are a graduate of the concerned university. Even a degree pass certificate from any of the affiliated colleges of that university will entitle anybody, whether he is a contractor or shop keeper, to contest for the same. Once, during the Ershad regime, an ordinary college teacher secured the highest number of votes in the senate election of Dhaka University. Fortunately, good sense prevailed on Ershad that instead of insulting the Dhaka University teachers, which he had many reasons to do, he appointed a DU teacher who secured the third position in the election. The worst thing about the Vice-Chancellor's election is that the candidates have to go to a large electorate which includes persons as described above and ask for their votes in a way that is not befitting with the dignity of the Vice-Chancellor's post. But the Acts of '73 has forced them to do so promising big contracts to the business class and promotion and other benefits to the teacher voters. The bandwagon of teachers and senate members also follow their chosen candidates and keep on making promises. This is how the polarisation gets a new impetus and the elected Vice-Chancellor becomes the Vice-Chancellor in real sense, not of the university but of his own group.

Another intriguing aspect of the '73 Acts, it should be remembered here, is that they do not diminish or reduce Government influence in the internal affairs of the university. There are a sizeable number of Government nominees in the senate, the highest statutory body of the university where they can play a key role at the time of Vice-Chancellor's panel election. The most powerful executive body of the university, syndicate, also has four Government/Chancellor's nominees. Out of seven there are about three Chancellor's nominees in every selection board that deals with the appointment and promotion of associate professors and professors. There are also Government nominees in the Academic Council and in the governing bodies of the institutes. So the Government is there everywhere. Only the university knows how it is still suffering

for to enroll themselves in the costly private universities of the country like the North-South or the Independent University. So it is the "bad money" that is now ruling the major universities of the country. These universities have now become dens of criminals where good people dread to enter.

Now, how to stop this rot in our universities? In the beginning I have said the first essential condition is to scrap the Acts of 1973 or, at least, we should be prepared to amend them drastically scrapping most of the elections. Some people tend to get emotional at this and say that the sacred document of Bangabandhu cannot be touched as if he was a Prophet. Had he been alive to see what these Acts have done to the universities he himself would have abolished them long ago. Cheap sentiment should not blur our vision or wisdom where greater national interest is involved. Which is more important — the Act or the nation? The choice should be clear to any patriotic choice.

### '73 Acts have Not Reduced Govt. Influence

It has been mentioned earlier how these Acts have prejudiced the university administration and polarised the teachers into two hostile groups dividing everything in the university on the party line. This has led to Gresham's theory of "bad money driving good money out of circulation" in the university as good teachers and good students are really small in number these days. Most of the outstanding teachers have not only left the universities, they also left this wretched country. Students, who can afford, are going out to India and other countries of Europe and North America while some pre-

for this. The files that go to the Chancellors' office, always via the Education Minister as a rule, get stuck for months, if not years. But things are at its worst at the time of the vice-chancellor's election and appointment. In the earlier days when the Act was not there the Government had a wide range of choice for such an appointment and teachers had nothing much to do with it. But the Act has limited the choice to a panel of three persons elected by the senate from which the Government has to choose one. Here, on the one hand the Government is sometimes hard put to find a competent person and on the other a new polarisation begins among the teachers in support of the three elected candidates. These teachers can go to any length or stoop very low to curry favour of the Government cajoling the respective ministers, bureaucrats, politicians and finally the Chancellor for their respective candidates. Even if all the three candidates are elected from the same panel or group these nasty things cannot be avoided because of the greed for power or that exalted post of the Vice-Chancellor. So the end result is that these Acts have not made the teachers or the universities truly free from the grip of the Government. On the other hand, as stated above, teachers have to act very lowly to satisfy the Government and at the same time the university administration is also badly tied up with the Government through its nominees in the various statutory committees of the university. So what good has this new legislation done to the universities?

### Abolition of Student Politics

The next important thing is the abolition of student politics. The atmosphere now obtaining on most of the campuses is anything but academic. If there is a referendum on student politics 90% of the people are likely to vote against and this national mood was rightly perceived by President Justice Shahabuddin who made a public statement about two years ago advising the Government to ban student politics. There was a mixed reaction about this in the political as well as intellectual circle who, actually, spoke from their respective party standpoint as they love their party more than their country. There is hardly any doubt that the strong political ideology of the pre-liberation student politics has now given way to vandalism and greed for money and in the process they have become musclemen or instruments of torture for their political mentors. Thus the student politicians of those day who were loved and respected most by the people are hated most today.

Next: *The Blemished Façade*

The author is a teacher in History and ex-Dean of Arts Faculty, Chittagong University.

## In Memoriam

# Dr Mahanambrata Brahmachari

by Priyabrata Brahmachari

He is Divine grace Dr Mahanambrata Brahmachari, a spiritual leader, president of Mahanam Sampradaya and Bangladesh Sant Mahamandal, champion of Soantam Dharma and pioneer of the religion of humanity passed away at the age of 96 at Calcutta, India on October 18, 1999, leaving millions of followers across the sub-continent in profound grief and despair.

He was the guest lecturer at 29 universities and colleges of America and also lectured at scores of high schools and social civic clubs there. On invitation, he visited several places in Canada and delivered lectures filled with profound spiritual knowledge. Thereafter he left for India in February, 1939.

He wrote about 50 books on Hindu scriptures and philosophy such as Veda Bichita, Gita Dhanya, Upanishad Bhavana, Chandi Chinta, Srimat Vagabata Bhashya, Gout Katha, Uddhava Sandesh and Vaisnava Vedanta. All the books are highly appreciated by the spiritually enlightened people of the world. Besides, he wrote innumerable essays which also earned immense appreciations.

He obtained Ph.D on Vainas Vedanta from Chicago University in 1937. He was conferred D. Litt degree from Vrindavan University and Mahamohopadhyay title by the Tiropani Sanskrit University and Sita Ram Das Omkar Nath Sanskrit Shiksha Parisad for his outstanding contribution to Indian philosophy.

He had to his credit the erection of Maths, Temples, in Nabawip, Puri, Vrindaban, Krishnanagar, Calcutta in India and at several places in Bangladesh.

During the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971, he took a vow not to take rice until Bangladesh was liberated from subjugation of the then Pakistan. He personally visited thousands of relief camps opened in India where 10 million of people from Bangladesh took shelter.

When the news of his death was broadcast from Radio and Television a shadow of profound grief descended upon the millions of people of the sub-continent. The spiritual world lost a great master of humanity.

The writer is Secretary General, Bangladesh Sant Mahamandal.

## Office of the Project Director

Project Implementation Unit  
Dhaka Urban Transport Project  
Dhaka City Corporation  
12th Floor, Nagar Bhaban, Dhaka

আপনার পরিবেশ সুন্দর ও পরিজ্ঞান রাখুন  
আপনার শিশুকে টিকা দিন

## Invitation for Bids (IFB) Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) Credit No 3163 BD

- The People's Republic of Bangladesh has received a credit from the International Development Association in various currencies hereinafter referred to as the IDA towards the cost of Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP). It is intended that part of the proceeds of this credit will be applied to eligible payments under contracts (G) VIEC3 for the Supply and Installation of Computers and other accessories for Project Implementation Unit, Dhaka Urban Transport Project, Dhaka City Corporation.
- The Project Director, Project Implementation Unit, Dhaka Urban Transport Project, Dhaka City Corporation, 14th Level, Nagar Bhaban, Dhaka, now invites sealed bids under the National Competitive Bidding (NCB) procedures from eligible bidders for the supply and installation of Computers and other accessories for the project implementation Unit, Dhaka Urban Transport Project, Dhaka City Corporation.
- Payments made under this contract will only be in Bangladesh Taka. Interested eligible bidders (including foreign bidders who are willing to receive payments in Bangladesh Taka) may obtain further information from and inspect the bidding documents at the office of the Project Director, Project Implementation Unit, DUTP, DCC, 14th Level, Nagar Bhaban, Dhaka. Telephone: 9562732.
- A complete set of bidding documents may be purchased by interested bidders on the submission of a written application to the undersigned and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of Tk 1500/- (one thousand and five hundred) in the form of Bank Draft or Pay Order from any scheduled bank in Bangladesh in favour of Project Director, Project Implementation Unit, Dhaka Urban Transport Project, Dhaka City Corporation, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 14th Level, Dhaka from the following offices: up to 23.01.2000.
  - Project Director, Project Implementation Unit, DUTP, DCC, 14th Level, Nagar Bhaban, Dhaka.
  - DSM Consultant's office House # 115, Road # 23, Banani, Dhaka-1213.
- The provisions in the instructions to bidders and in the general conditions of contract are the provisions of the World Bank "Standard Bidding Documents: Procurement of Goods (SBD), National Competitive Bidding (Trial Edition-August 1997), issued by the World Bank Resident Mission in Bangladesh. The sample forms (except price schedules) of the SBD remain unchanged.
- Bids must be delivered to the office of the undersigned on or before 12.00 hours on 24.01.2000 and must be accompanied by a bid security of Tk 70,000/- (Seventy thousand taka) in the form of Pay Order or Bank Draft in favour of the undersigned from any schedule bank in Bangladesh.
- Bids will be opened in the presence of Bidders' representatives who choose to attend at 12.30 hour at PIU, DUTP, DCC office, Nagar Bhaban, 14th Level, Dhaka on 24.01.2000 at the office of the undersigned.

