

Revisiting the Dhaka University Order, 1973

Education has been plunged into deep crisis, at a time when there is need for fundamental educational reform, including introduction of curriculum changes to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The degeneration of the University of Dhaka through political patronisation in appointment and promotion, admissions and even granting of classes, and the patronisation of arms and party politics which reached deadly proportions in recent years, must be seriously addressed.

KAMAL HOSSAIN

THE University of Dhaka has had a central role in our history. Upon its establishment in 1921 it was viewed as an institution which would nurture the best and the brightest among those seeking university education. It became the envy of many in the University of Calcutta for its beautiful residential campus, for its high academic standards and for a faculty which earned for it recognition as a centre of excellence of an international standard.

Its reputation continued to grow as it produced graduates who proved themselves in the professions, in the civil service and in academia. Those who were to be in the forefront of the emerging middle classes were the proud products of this institution. Following 1947 it became the principal centre of higher learning in East Bengal. It was propelled into an historic role during the language movement in 1952 when some of its students suffered martyrdom, while many students and teachers played a proactive role.

The Shaheed Minar emerged as a universal symbol of commitment to a just cause -- the vindication of the right of the people to recognition of their mother tongue as the state language -- having a pride of place in the University campus. The growth of nationalism, through which we attained independence, can also trace its creative roots to the

University, both among teachers and students. Their dynamic role in the sixties forged national unity and gave strength to the people's liberation movement in 1971. The brutal assault on the campus on the night of March 25/26 resulted in martyrdom of teachers and students and demolition of the Shaheed Minar, thereby acknowledging the inspirational role of the University.

Distinguished teachers and spirited students were actively involved in the liberation struggle, and shared the prize of victory. It was, therefore, understandable that the University was to be a pivotal institution in the building of the new nation, and many of the teachers played a key role. The deputy chairman and members of the Planning Commission, vice-chancellors, heads of ministries, chairmen and members of important commissions, including Public Service Commission, Education Commission, were drawn from among its teachers, and many of them were consulted for their wise counsel on important issues.

It was in this setting that the senior teachers who had been actively involved in the liberation struggle deliberated together to produce the draft of the 1973 Dhaka University Order. A constitution has been described as the autobiography of a nation, since it aims to build safeguards in the light of the negative experiences of the past. The Dhaka University Order was a clear response to negative experiences of

the sixties, when the government had damaged the institution by extending patronage to those seen as "loyalists" and harassing those who did not succumb to its pressure. The scandalous assault on Professor A.N.M. Mahmood can be recalled as one of those black episodes, a symptom of that period, as was the show cause notice issued to some of the most respected teachers, including Professors Abdur Razzaque and Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury.

The exhilaration of independence brought with it high hopes and expectations of complete academic freedom and protection from external interference by bureaucrats and wielders of state power. Thus, it was thought that academic freedom would be secured by providing for elections to most key offices in the University. The vice-chancellor was to be appointed from a panel of three candidates elected by the Senate. Members of the Syndicate and the deans were also to be elected. These elections would, it was believed, effectively protect the University from external intervention and, thus, would ensure academic autonomy and freedom, and standards of excellence in the pursuit of truth and knowledge. A more idealistic aspiration could not be imagined.

It was my privilege as a young teacher, appointed as Minister of Law in 1972, to receive the draft law from our most respected senior teachers, Professor Habibullah,

Professor Qazi Motahar Hossain, Professor Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury and others. I think it provides a revealing footnote to history to record Bangabandhu's reaction after he went through the draft that I handed to him, saying that this was the work of all our "respected Sirs," and, therefore, we could accept and pass it. He smiled, and said that he also respected those who had prepared it as his "Sirs." He then paused, and with a remarkable degree of prescience said: "Do you think it would be possible to digest so many elections, so many elected offices in the University?"

What even he might not have foreseen was how elections not only became a magnificent, but a terrible and destructive, obsession pursued within the University, exercising the pursuit of excellence and upholding of academic values and standards, and afflicting an increasing number of teachers with a kind of appetite for power politics, and pursuit of narrow self-interest, with no holds barred and no values respected, and working only along the narrowest of party lines. This unhealthy development in national politics and in our universities, which became infected with the virus of doliohoron, was responsible for the occupation by armed cadres of every residential hall under the patronisation of whichever party was in power. The ordinary students were reduced to hostages, and they lived in fear.

A power structure emerged which, on party lines, asserted control over appointments and promotions, and on the award of lucrative contracts in different sectors ranging from building contracts to provision of supplies and services. The confrontational and unprincipled politics that began to develop during the late seventies saw institutionalisation of armed cadres and doliohoron in the uni-



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versities. Academic corruption through patronisation by the ruling party as well as by those who were to be the guardians of the University, the Vice-Chancellors and others in powerful positions, served in these positions as instruments of those in power. They could pride themselves in claiming they had established peace and harmony by dividing patronage on the basis of awarding 60 percent of the prize to the students supporting the ruling party and 40 percent to the students supporting the opposition party.

One of the lowest points was hit in 2002. A promising woman student of Buet, Sony, was gunned down in broad daylight in the campus during a shoot-out between the rival groups of "students" competing to extort money from university building projects. In the same year, citizens throughout the country had expressed their shock at the brutal assault on women students of Shamsunahar Hall in the University

of Dhaka, when they were protesting the activities of armed cadres. The resignation of the vice-chancellor over this episode acknowledged the failure of the authorities to fulfill their responsibilities.

The sanctity of educational institutions calls for effective action to protect residential halls from occupation by armed cadres who enjoy impunity through those in power. The criminal armed elements on campus and their patrons within the University and outside should not remain above the law. A legal framework, which has enabled this to happen, must be critically revisited as students continue to be victims of violence, a symptom of sick politics.

It is a testimony to the courage of the students, conscientious teachers and conscious citizens throughout the country that they raised their voices and launched a movement to demand justice and effective

action against those responsible for the brutal police action in 2002 on the female students of Shamsunahar Hall, and on those who were protesting against such action. The inquiry into the incident of violence in Shamsunahar Hall, which was conducted by a judge of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, pointed out some of the real roots of violence on the campus as did the more recent judicial enquiry into violent occurrences.

If corrective measures are to be seriously considered, would not the 1973 Charter have to be critically reviewed and amendments carried out? Education has been plunged into deep crisis, at a time when there is need for fundamental educational reform, including introduction of curriculum changes to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The degeneration of the University of Dhaka through politi-

cal patronisation in appointment and promotion, admissions and even granting of classes, and the patronisation of arms and party politics which reached deadly proportions in recent years, must be seriously addressed.

In recent weeks, the university has in certain cases become an arena for different types of unprincipled acts of violence clearly being manipulated from sources outside the campus. The recent eruption of violence among different student groups around factional political disputes bears no relation to the pursuit of knowledge and truth. This should arouse the conscience of all as we seek to retrieve our heritage and revive democratic institutions through national unity and national consensus. Should not all of us who venerate Dhaka University join hands to re-generate that institution by agreeing to amendments to the 1973 Order?

In the light of experience and the negative consequences of elections and party or regime selection, should not academically credible processes for appointment to key posts, including those of deans and vice-chancellors, be introduced, such as national and international search committees? This challenge can be met through meaningful dialogue, and seeking consensus transcending partisan and personal interests.

Bangabandhu was right. Too many elections resulted not only in indigestion but also in food poisoning, through intense self-serving power politics. The time has come to attend to these ailments and to restore the University to the status which it deserves as a recognised centre of excellence with a respected past and the promise of similar greatness in the future.

Dr. Kamal Hossain is President, Gono Forum.

Transferring regulatory and promotional functions

Bangladesh is considered as over-regulated in many areas. Unnecessary regulations impose huge hassles on the ordinary citizen's life and maximise cost to firms while minimising benefits to the public. The present government has very appropriately set up a Regulatory Reforms Commission for the benefit of the people, which has already submitted a set of proposals before the CTG.

A.B.M.S ZAHUR

THE relationship between the government and the private sector is changing due to fast moving global market, and technological and political changes. The private sector in Bangladesh needs to realise its full potential and play its proper role. The role of the government needs redefining, overhauling of the rules and processes of conducting its policy and decision-making functions, and streamlining of the regulations.

Thus, the government intends to accelerate the growth of industry and trade through assigning the major responsibility of promoting industrial investments and exports to the private sector.

This needs transfer of certain regulatory and promotional functions to the important private sector institutions (PSIs), and abolition of certain regulatory

functions.

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The present government has very appropriately set up a Regulatory Reforms Commission for the benefit of the people, which has already submitted a set of proposals before the CTG.

The government is committed to the market economy and is pursuing policies to enable the private sector to play a dominant role in the country's development efforts. Matters relating to the private sector are mainly dealt with by the ministries of industries and commerce.

The RMG sector has proved that the economic growth of the country can be accelerated if some of the regulatory and promotional func-

tions are transferred to the private sector immediately, while some can be transferred within about two years.

All the East Asian countries have industrial and investment promotion agencies to ensure extensive and continuous consultations between the government and the private investors to the extent of coordinating investment strategies.

In those countries, a system has been developed on competition between private sector players, in which the state plays the role of a referee. Bangladesh may seriously consider adopting a similar system to accelerate its growth.

For better coordination and decision making within key ministries (industry, commerce, jute and textiles) it may be advisable to transfer all state owned enterprises out of these ministries and consolidate all policy making and related functions in a single ministry of

commerce and industry.

Some of the public agencies, like the office of the CCI & E, Supplies and Inspections etc., need not exist. Issue of trade licenses by the municipality is not justified, and may be transferred immediately to the district chambers. Import registration and export registration may be transferred to the private sector without much difficulty.

In implementing the transfer, however, we have to consider the welfare of the citizens. Thus, enactment of some laws to ensure fairness of dealings of the PSIs with common men may be necessary. New Zealand enacted such a law, the Fair Trading Act, 1987. We may take some lesson from such an act.

Pending finalisation of the recommendations of the Regulatory Reforms Commission, it may be advisable to consider transfer of some regulatory and promotional functions of the ministries of commerce and industry quickly to private sector institutions to speed up the processes. The following functions may be considered for transfer:

- All functions of CCI & E. A recommendation for abolition of the office was made earlier several times. No action was taken;
- All functions of the offices of

National Productivity Organisation and Bitac may be transferred and the offices abolished;

- All promotional functions relating to exports to be transferred;
- All functions of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation may be transferred in phases;
- To make the Export Processing Zones more efficient the private sector may be involved in important decision-making;
- Functions of the office of Controller of General Insurance may be transferred in a year or so.

It is well known that the government of Bangladesh is oversized. Even with the huge expenditure from public funds people are not getting enough service. It is time that some meaningful step is taken to stop this wastage.

More professionalism is needed to face the challenges of administrative needs. Despite so much hassle we have been able to attain remarkable efficiency in some sectors, like disaster management.

Similar success is possible in the field of trade and industry with the partnership of the private sector provided that the govern-

ment strongly supports the capacity building of private sector institutions.

In consideration of following factors the need for transfer has become urgent:

- Reduction of revenue expenditure and lessening of pressure on the funds for development;
 - Decreasing availability of talented students in the government sector due to loss of status and prestige and poor compensation, and increased attraction for private sector jobs due to higher emoluments and better opportunity to utilise innovative skills;
 - Increase of capacity of the government to pay higher emoluments to its employees to upgrade the quality of their work; and
 - Less harassment of public and less scope for corruption of government officials.
- We have good reason to believe that the capacity building of private sector agencies may not take much time, and they would be able to fully participate in the development effort of the government.

A.B.M.S. Zahur is a former joint secretary.

A conversation about what's worth the fight

Sen. John McCain spoke with Newsweek's Michael Hirsh about the confrontation with Iran, renewed violence in Iraq and his temper, among other issues. Excerpts:

Hirsh: Why do you think radical Islam is the "transcendent challenge" of the century? When did you decide that?

McCain: I was always concerned. When I traveled abroad I saw the madrasahs, and I certainly was briefed on the rise of extremism. There were other signs of it you could trace back to bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut [in 1983]. I don't think there's any doubt 9/11 brought it home dramatically. In 1983, you urged restraint -- the pullout of the Marines.

Actually, I was urging that they be pulled out because I feared... [they were] a token force without sufficient planning or support to have an influence on the ground. I'm curious whether since that time your views on the use of force have evolved. Some people suggest that the success of the U.S. military in the first gulf war made

you more willing to deploy forces abroad.

No, I don't think so. If a similar situation such as Beirut were proposed today, I'm sure I would object to that. I have a strong conviction that we have to do whatever we can to prevent the spread of radical Islamic extremism or the increase in influence of Iran in the Middle East, but there has to be a viable proposal to conduct our national security interests [to commit troops].

In your speech in Los Angeles, you seemed intent on dispelling any suspicions that you might draw America into a wider war, perhaps with Iran.

No, not so much. I first said that in the 1990s, when I wasn't running for president, I was trying to express my views that the veteran hates war more than anyone else, because they mourn the loss of a

comrade and know the horrors of war firsthand. I'll repeat this time after time -- that armed conflict is the last option.

On Iran, if all diplomatic options are exhausted, and economic pressure fails to force a halt to its nuclear program, would you consider going to war?

Well, if I could not evade your question but put it in a more sensible form, I think we have to exhaust every possible option. I think there are many options that are viable, including those in conversations I had with [French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister Gordon] Brown on my recent trip to Europe, on a meaningful path to sanctions. But I will also state unequivocally that we cannot afford to have Iran... acquire nuclear weapons because of the obvious consequences -- proliferation in the region, the

threat to the existence of Israel, etc. In your discussions with Sarkozy and Brown, did you agree on any sanctions that might be adopted beyond what has been put in place by the Bush administration?

No, we didn't get into those specifics... What I discussed with them was this concept of nations acting together in an emphatic and impactful way to, hopefully, successfully dissuade the Iranians and convince them that the path of nuclear-weapons acquisition would lead to consequences which would be too high a price to pay, economically as well as diplomatically.

Do you agree that we are engaged in a "War on Terror," as President Bush has defined it?

I think it's a military, intelligence, diplomatic and ideological conflict. Most importantly, in the long run, it is an ideological struggle... within the Muslim community, between those who are extremists and those who are moderate. And then another struggle exists between everything we stand for and value and the extremists who

have gained significant influence in some parts of the world.

I notice you use the word "struggle" and not "war."

I don't like to use the word "war" particularly because it's a multifaceted struggle, which may have armed and military components. But at the end of the day I think it's a matter of ideology.

In your book "Worth the Fighting For," you say your temper "has caused me to make most of the more serious mistakes of my career." Which ones?

I was referring to when I see corruption, when I see earmarks and pork-barrel spending that goes to wasteful and unnecessary projects when the men and women who are serving don't have what are obviously higher priorities, the equipment and training. When I see people who are disrespectful of standards and values we sacrifice for, sometimes I have -- although certainly not in recent years -- lost my temper and said intemperate things. I feel passionately about issues, and the day that passion goes away is the day I will go down

to the old soldiers' home and find my rocking chair.

In your speech in Los Angeles, you said anyone who doesn't accept that Islamic extremism is the transcendent challenge of the 21st century isn't fit for the White House. Is it fair to dismiss the view that perhaps other major challenges -- like the credit crisis, global warming, the resurrection of Russia -- might be equal or greater?

I'm not dismissing [that] position. But no one, I believe, should sit in the Oval Office and not understand that this is the transcendent challenge of the 21st century. I believe this economic challenge is deep and tough and maybe the most difficult since World War II. But I have the fundamental confidence in America's economy. I do not believe that anyone who fails to understand the dimensions and enormity of this [extremist] challenge is qualified to serve as president of the United States.

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ONLY IN ASIA
by Nury Vittachi

Intelligent elevators are out of place on an unintelligent planet

THEY are spreading throughout our cities. They are set to appear soon in an office block near you. Someone may be assembling one in your building at this moment. They are a menace and your life will never be the same. I am talking about the Intelligent Elevator.

These things are following me around. Twice I have moved office, only to find them appearing between me and where I want to go.

They look pretty much like normal lifts until you get in and notice there's no panel of numbers. They belong to a school of design known as "minimalist" (Latin for "utterly impractical"). This is how they are supposed to work.

A herd of passengers meanders into the building. They notice a pad of numbers on the approach to the lift lobby. Each uses a foreleg to tap in a floor number. The Intelligent Elevator's hidden collective brain does an instant calculation and flashes a letter of the alphabet at each passenger. He or she gets in the lift marked with that letter and arrives at the chosen floor 20 seconds earlier than usual because "efficiency has been maximised."

That's the plan. Here's the reality. Typical unintelligent passenger (i.e. me) staggers into lift lobby in a state of deep coma, walks right past the pad of numbers and get into the first elevator that comes.

Propelled only by residual signals from my brain stem, my arm reaches out to press the number for my floor, which is seven. That's when I remember that there are no numbers. I watch, helpless, as I am whisked straight past my floor and up to floor 31, stopping several times on the way.

"Bother," I say to myself. "I'll get off at my floor on my way down."

Several people get in at floor 31. Each one gets off at a different floor. No one stops at floor seven, and there are no buttons to enable me to pause there as we fly past again.

We reach the ground floor. I leap out, race to the entry point of the lift lobby, find the key pad, press number seven, and then scamper back to the lifts.

A minute passes, during which time my mind has wandered to the ten things that men think about (a) early on the morning and (b) at all other times of the day: sex, food, football, food, sex, football, food, sex, football and sex.

I am soon deep in a fantasy in which I am scoring a goal with a burger in one hand and Scarlett Johansen in the other. An elevator arrives. Scarlett, the burger and I get into it.

I realise I have forgotten to look at the letters of the alphabet. This time it takes me to the 42nd floor.

Now multiply this by a dozen sleepy people in each elevator repeatedly making the same series of mistakes that I make.

The result is that the Intelligent Elevators that are supposed to take 20 seconds off our travelling times actually add minutes, if not hours or days to each journey. I had a visitor once who was so unnerved that he abandoned the appointment and now refuses to approach my building.

On the plus side, my mother-in-law no longer visits me at work.

Elevators which wish to complain can write to our columnist via www.vittachi.com.