

What are we teaching in private universities?

The country's economic landscape is changing. Domestic corporate houses are coming up at a faster pace than ever. The business schools have to strategically predict the future in order to prepare their intakes for business environment four years down the line. The challenges are multi-faceted.

MAMUN RASHID

THE poor quality higher education in some private universities is much more dangerous than the lethal anthrax," said University Grants Commission Chairman Professor Nazrul Islam at a recent seminar in Dhaka. He continued: "Anthrax can cause harm to some animals and human beings, but poor education in higher studies can kill the prospects of the entire nation."

I could not but agree hundred percent with Professor Islam. However, I should play this safe and start with a disclaimer -- I, myself, am engaged with more than one top-tier private universities. So don't yet dismiss my opinion as coming from "the other side." I have been teaching in many public and private universities since 1993. However, my experience and opinions are mostly pertaining to the scope of business education.

The first business school of Bangladesh was the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) under University

of Dhaka. Business education was subsequently initiated by both public and private universities in the context of growing demand for BBA and MBA degrees among the youngsters despite their parents' initial uncertainties and traditional preference towards engineering and medical professions.

We are aware of the fact that the public universities are constrained by capacity and, among other issues, session jam. Therefore, the emergence of private sector in the higher education segment was graciously welcomed by the business community. The hard-core corporate executives looked forward to meeting a new bunch of impressive interviewees during the recruitment process, the parents were glad to have more alternatives, and students were excited to find flexible and dynamic course offerings which were a bit more aligned with the western world. But how many of these expectations are being met in reality? I regret to say -- not many.

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are coming up at a faster pace than ever. The business schools have to strategically predict the future in order to prepare their intakes for business environment 4 years down the line. The challenges are multi-faceted.

First of all, the ratio of core staff to total number of students in the private universities is too small, which puts immense pressure on the core team to maintain business as usual. The dean is often bogged down with administrative details due to unavailability of a suitable designate. When is he supposed to do the strategic thinking and change the face of the organisation? Shortage of quality teachers is a chronic problem I see the schools face



A degree in hand, but what has he learned?

day in and day out. The teacher sometimes has no hands-on experience in or about the corporate world, which in turn creates text-book oriented and inward-looking faculty members. The archaic teacher sitting in a chair and dictating the same class notes for 10 years in the same

monotonous voice cannot be a picture of a business school. However, this is a common scene.

Visiting faculties and top executives are invited to take one or two semesters. If the busy CEO does not have the passion for teaching and merely agrees not to upset his

good friend in the university, it creates lack of ownership among the teachers and disappointment among the students. The guest lecturer must not dissociate his

image from the branding of the university he visits at least thrice a week. The university should do its part to support the busy executives by providing capable teaching assistants to free their time and let them focus on teaching rather than house-keeping matters.

The input and output of a business school are the students. In order to reach break-even point financially, some universities are forced to take in a minimum number of students every semester. When the focus shifts to quantity rather than quality, there is no worse signal for the education sector. I would humbly request the VCs to bear some loss in the short term but not to compromise on the intake quality.

In the end, quality will speak for itself. The alumni can play a role here by arranging grants and donations to minimise the gap. More importantly, large business houses can come forward in this regard. Recently, I was very intrigued by a news item saying "after Mahindra's \$10 million, Tata donates \$50 million to Harvard."

My experience with teaching MBA students suggests that the working crowd score the highest in exams and assignments as they are better able to relate the study with real-life scenarios. An MBA is recommended for the professionals who have had minimum work experience. Go about, get yourself engaged in some job, see a bit of the world and then join the MBA programme. It is not a degree to enrich your resume, it is a rigorous

programme to turn you into a "hard nut to crack."

An administrative cadre must be built up to free up quality time of the thinking men around. The universities should embed a transparent feedback process for evaluating teachers. This should be shared with the teacher concerned and his views must be taken into cognisance. It is in the universities' interest that they should do their level best to keep the highest rated faculties on board. The alumni should have a strong association and work for the benefit of their alma mater.

Each university should have a rich library, modern computer centre with the fastest internet connection, and cutting edge research facilities as a bare minimum to qualify as a university in the first place. Going forward, the differentiating ones must look at attracting distinguished teachers/researchers from abroad and apart from teaching encourage them to put up research on Bangladesh and global issues.

These infrastructural aspects are important as the lack of these hold back the students from exceeding and bringing accolades for the organisation. Good business schools are a must to support the economic growth we all aspire to attain in the coming years. Good business schools with better private universities can of course do more with nation building.

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Combating child labour, not a child's game

In every country politicians should enact laws to prevent child labour and find solutions. In combating child labour, it is necessary, therefore, to consider carefully its various forms, making a distinction between work and exploitation, and analyse the developmental and cultural contexts.

SHARMIN AFIA ADIBA

CHILD labour has been an acute problem in developing countries like Bangladesh. A number of reasons lie behind the problem. Different reports show that the countries trying their best to alleviate poverty are associated with child labour. According to estimates by the Bureau of Statistics of the International Labor Organization (ILO), the number of working children between the ages of 5 and 14 is at least 120 million worldwide. The overwhelming majority of these are in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

According to the National Child Labour Survey 2008, carried out by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, there are approximately 72 lakh child labourers in the country, and 23 lakh are engaged in the worst form of work. Some common causes of child labour are poverty, parental illiteracy, social apathy,

ignorance, lack of education and exposure, and exploitation of cheap and unorganised labour.

The practice of inculcating traditional skills in children also pulls them into the trap of child labour, as they never get the opportunity to learn anything else. Furthermore, boring and unpractical school curriculum and cheap labour are some other factors that contribute to child labour.

In Bangladesh, child labour is found in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, domestic service, hotels and restaurants, and even the underworld of drug trafficking and prostitution. The worst form of child labour is work that, by its nature or the circumstances, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

There is a direct linkage between child labour and education. Nearly 55% of primary school students dropout before they reach Class 5 and take up some form of employment. The high dropout rates are

correlated with the low quality of public primary education, low adult literacy and lack of awareness of the importance of education.

A number of other causes also prevail in our country, like the tendency of having several marriages, no birth control, inadequate health and medical services etc. But people's antipathy is largely responsible for child labour. We do not give enough privileges and freedom to the children who work in our homes. Isn't it our duty to give them similar opportunities that we generally give our own children?

The working child population of the country needs the following essential facilities:

- Free education for the disadvantaged children;
- Compensation by the employers in case of accident during work;
- Food, clothing, lodging, education and medical treatment have to be provided by the government at free of cost.

As child labour is one of the major obstacles in developing the children's human qualities, the government is formulating a "National Child Labour Policy" to give priority to welfare of the children. A recent survey shows that high rate of population growth and broken families are the root causes of child labour in Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh government ratified

the ILO convention and signed the UN children rights agreement in 2001 for eradication of child labour. A research report shows that in Bangladesh approximately 90% children are engaged in non-traditional and risky jobs. Of them, 77% are working in agricultural sector and the rest in various non-traditional sectors in urban areas. Therefore, the authorities in the sectors concerned need to act wisely to eliminate child labour. ILO has taken the following steps, especially for developing countries, to eradicate child labour:

- Carrying out a situational analysis to find out about child labour problems in a country;
- Assisting with developing and implementing national policies on child labour;
- Strengthening existing organisations and setting up institutional mechanisms;
- Creating awareness on the problem nationwide, in communities and workplaces;
- Promoting the development and application of protective legislation.

This year, "World Day against Child Labour 2010" was observed with the theme "End Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016." The government of Bangladesh and non-government organisations expressed their honest desire to eliminate child labour at any cost.



Carrying bricks instead of books.

Non-elimination of child labour proves our inhumanity and diminution of values. The level of awareness on the issue of child labour, and laws prohibiting it, is still low. Society in general has a rather indifferent attitude towards the problem. In many cases, it is not realised that the children who are employed in, for example, domestic service, often have no access to education or medical care.

In every country politicians should enact laws to prevent child labour and

find solutions. In combating child labour, it is necessary, therefore, to consider carefully its various forms, making a distinction between work and exploitation, and analyse the developmental and cultural contexts. It shouldn't be forgotten that children are our future and we have to take care of them if we want a better future.

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Let all nuclear weapons disappear forever

It is now obvious that NPT or CTBT has not helped much in preventing nuclear proliferation. Many countries believe that the two treaties are discriminatory. The world will not be safe as long as nuclear weapons exist, no matter which countries possess them. It is, therefore, time to put new efforts for a total and global nuclear disarmament.

ABDUL MATIN

THE president of the United States of America, often described as the most powerful leader of the world, can hardly perform any of the functions vested upon him by the US Constitution without the approval of the Senate. He is, however, empowered to order a nuclear strike. Out of frustration, President Lyndon B. Johnson once said that the only power he had got was that of the bomb, but "Alas! I can't use it."

President Harry S. Truman was the only US president to have allowed the US military to drop two atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the World War II. The two nuclear explosions were enough to force Japan to surrender on August 15, 1945.

It is reported that President Bill Clinton misplaced the nuclear code card, popularly known as the "biscuit," which allows the US president to access his "nuclear briefcase" containing the codes to order a nuclear attack. The card was actually missing for months. This was disclosed by former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Hugh Shelton in his memoir,

Without Hesitation: The Odyssey of an American Warrior.

The "nuclear briefcase," in its present form, was developed during the Cuban Crisis when President Kennedy wanted to have direct control over the nuclear weapons. The mode of operation of the code card is a state secret. The card contains some numbers to open the briefcase and allows the president to use the nuclear codes.

The briefcase is carried by a trusted presidential aide who accompanies the president everywhere. He stands next to the president on all occasions, walks close to him and sits nearby in his car, plane or helicopter. The briefcase is transferred from one president to another on the day of inauguration at noon when the official transfer of power takes place.

Clinton was not the only president to misplace the "biscuit." President Carter had left the code card in a pocket of his jacket which he had sent for dry-cleaning. The card was missing for a while after the assassination attempt on President Reagan, who carried it in his wallet. President Ford once left the briefcase along with his aide on a plane during a visit to Paris.

President Carter did not allow his aide to sleep in his farm in Georgia during his visits. The aide used to sleep in motels with the briefcase miles away from his farm. The senior Bush once left his aide in a tennis court. The aide had to hire a taxi to follow him. Clinton also made his aide run after him for fifteen minutes, carrying the heavy briefcase, when he had left him in the middle of a road after attending the 50-year anniversary ceremony of Nato in Washington in 1999.

Such incidents, though amusing, show how the nuclear code card or the nuclear briefcase went beyond the reach of the US president temporarily. Can we assume that these incidents at least reduced the probability of a US nuclear strike during the periods the devices were missing? In that case, can we not think of a world without the nuclear code cards, the briefcases and the bombs?

Thank God, the code card has not been used since its invention. The atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were dropped by an executive order of the US president. What will happen if, God forbid, the code card is ever used? In the words of President Jimmy Carter: "In an all-out nuclear war, more destructive power than in all of World War II would be unleashed every second during the long afternoon it would take for all the missiles and bombs to fall. A World War II every second -- more people killed in the first few hours than all the wars of history put together."

Will the survivors of a nuclear war be lucky? No, as President John F. Kennedy said: "For they would inherit a world so devastated by explosions and poison and fire that today we cannot conceive of its

horrors." The actual condition of the survivors was more aptly described by Chairman Nikita Khrushchev of the former Soviet Union, who said: "The survi-

of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Besides the five permanent members of



Get rid of nukes before the world explodes.

vors would envy the dead."

The consequences of a nuclear war being such, it is unfortunate that the number of countries possessing nuclear weapons has been increasing gradually in spite

the UN Security Council, at least three countries, India, Pakistan and North Korea, have confirmed their nuclear weapons capability. Israel, believed to possess a large nuclear arsenal, neither confirms nor

denies allegations regarding possession of nuclear weapons.

It is difficult to predict the number of the aspiring nuclear weapon states. With every addition of a new member to the so-called "nuclear club," the world comes closer to the brink of a nuclear war. Already surrounded by Pakistan, India and China and with allegations of Myanmar's intention to become a nuclear power, the position of Bangladesh has become particularly precarious.

The present anti-terrorism drive around the world has virtually pushed the goal of a total and global nuclear disarmament to the rear seat. Both the drives deserve equal priority and should proceed simultaneously and vigorously. The consequences of nuclear proliferation will be worse in case some nuclear weapons or dirty bombs fall into the hands of terrorists trying to capture state power in some countries.

It is now obvious that NPT or CTBT has not helped much in preventing nuclear proliferation. Many countries believe that the two treaties are discriminatory. The world will not be safe as long as nuclear weapons exist, no matter which countries possess them. It is, therefore, time to put new efforts for a total and global nuclear disarmament.

The five permanent members of the Security Council must take the initiative and start talks with other nuclear weapon states on this issue in order to make the world a safer place to live, for them as well as for others. They must move fast and have a target date for total elimination of all nuclear weapons.

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