The Daily Star

CELEBRATING **26** YEARS OF Journalism without Fear or Favour

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 25, 2017
FALGUN 13, 1423 BS

BUILDING BLOCKS OF TOMORROW

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT **FROM EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT**

10

Attaining global standards in our universities

including political elements, regulatory bodies, accreditation bodies, bureaucracy, experts, associations, the legal system, and more.

The overall evidence points to the need to establish a discipline or programme—academic administration—for those who vie for administrative positions. Without training, it is perilous to hand over the reins of management to them. On this matter there is much research to be done and volumes to write.

Academic programmes
Rather than just a mere pathway for fulfilling degree requirements, innovative academic programmes must engage students to explore new ideas and challenging problems. Duke's students are not only encouraged to think about future career opportunities, they are also given the tools necessary for a lifetime of learning and global citizenship. In Bangladesh, too, we need vibrant programmes, exciting curricula, and student engagement with the real world to bring alive what they learn in the classroom. Providing students with a mere certificate at the end of a four-year programme does not a university make!

Resources and facilities
The growth of any system can be constrained by the amount of resources available to it. Overall, financial allocations to the education system in Bangladesh has been pitiful. According to World Development Indicator (WDI) data, Bangladesh has an education budget of only 1.9 percent of GDP (roughly over the last 14 years), whereas Afghanistan has 4.6 percent, Bhutan 5.6 percent, Nepal 4.1 percent, India 3.9 percent, and Pakistan 2.5 percent. One study indicates that the percentage of "university" allocation from the education budget is less than 10 percent. Of this, private universities get nothing—nada!

As for facilities, in a study we recently concluded, students indicated the role and importance of adequate facilities such as a permanent campus to give them freedom, dignity, identity and friendships. Facilities that truly facilitate are thus vital to the functioning of a high quality university.

Conclusions
Global standards are not attained overnight. There is much to be done in "effective management," especially realigning roles and responsibilities without which the universities will generally run in crisis mode. The structure of a university must also not be imposed from outside. As an example, at Macquarie University, the Vice Chancellor is supported by "five" Deputy Vice Chancellors and a Chief Operating Officer, each in turn supported by their own substantive teams. In Bangladesh, the structure, laid down by external bodies, is inflexible and significantly constrains managerial responsiveness. There must also be significant and continuing capacity building efforts at various levels.

At a higher level, there must be a collective will among the key stakeholders to strive for global standards. A leadership role must evolve from this collectivity to guide the effort. Added to these conditions is the need for relevant stakeholders to work painstakingly on the five-factor holistic model. Only then can we make serious progress towards attaining global standards in higher education. That's when we will be creating human assets of high value.

The author is Vice Chancellor of BRAC University and Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Pennsylvania State University. This article draws upon previous writings of the author on higher education.