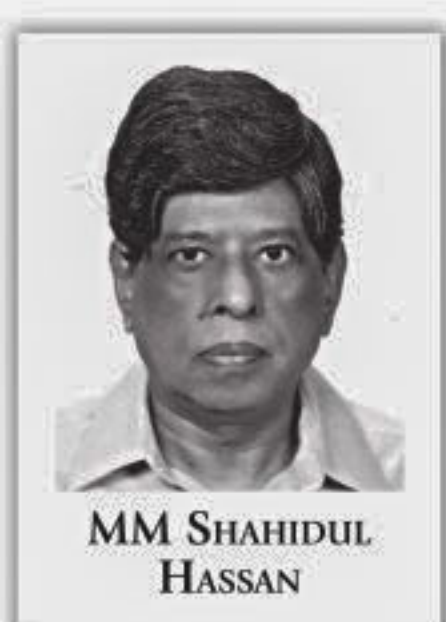


Research universities can light the way for tomorrow's Bangladesh



MM SHAHIDUL HASSAN

HIGHER education is rapidly expanding in developing countries. There were only four public universities at the time of Bangladesh's inception as a sovereign country in 1971. The country has now a total of

43 public and 103 private universities. The number of students enrolled in universities has shot up from 4,11,717 in 2008 to 10,28,314 in 2018 (BANBEIS). But what does it mean for economic development?

If universities can produce graduates having thinking and innovation skills, they will become more employable in the national and global job markets; and they will play a key role in the economic development of the country. The role of universities is to provide unique environments that prepare students to be master thinkers and able to grasp a wide array of skills and comprise the most adaptable workforce. The classroom lecture model that prevails in universities in developing countries needs to be replaced by a model of pedagogy that views the classroom as a community of learners and a place where students develop collaborative skills and share knowledge through verbal questioning, analysing and problem-solving. Universities should, therefore, undertake a transformation in teaching, learning and assessment towards educating employable or self-employable students.

In many universities, the conditions of work and levels of remuneration are not adequate, involvement in institutional governance is often limited, and the autonomy to build both an academic career and academic programmes is also

constrained. A majority or a significant minority of academics in universities, mostly in private universities and in a few public ones, holds just a bachelor's degree. However, senior academic positions almost always have people with higher academic qualifications, but much of the academic labour force has modest qualifications for their jobs. This lack of qualification creates a barrier to academic upward mobility for many junior faculty members. Also, the level of expertise possessed by many teachers is quite modest, affecting the quality and depth of the instruction provided to students. The continued increase in the number of universities and enrolment results in the requirement of a large number of new teachers, while selectivity is becoming minimal.

The enrolment growth will be almost double in a few decades. The challenge of providing teachers to instruct these students will place a severe strain on the limited capacities in the universities. Universities must make efforts to upgrade academic skills and increase capacities. A gap between the thin wedge of highly qualified personnel and the large, poor, and marginally qualified group of teachers is increasing. In many private universities, there are curious contradictions in the nature of academic appointments. Even the teachers who are hired in regular full-time positions have little formal job protection, and interestingly, few appointees are removed from their academic posts. Academic systems do not offer a tenure system that protects academic freedom or inhibits interference by university authorities in the intellectual life of the academic staff. By contrast, in public universities, where teachers are appointed in full-time positions, they can continue their service without any risk of removal from their academic posts. There are

no such tenure track positions. Universities set high qualifications including a requirement to publish a good number of research papers in world-class journals, which cannot be achieved by a marginally qualified group of teachers.

Many of the 146 universities are not actively involved in basic and innovative applied researches. In this context, establishing them as teaching-oriented institutions to meet the needs of the domestic demands of Bangladeshi society will be justifiable. While the basic role of academics everywhere is teaching, research and service, the teaching-oriented universities can appoint academics who are mainly teachers with research and service a minor part of their work. There will be another group of teachers

who are mainly researchers with teaching a minor part of their work.

The country also needs to establish research universities with the aim to produce highly-qualified PhD degree holders and innovative research. Research universities are defined as academic institutions committed to the creation and dissemination of knowledge, and featuring the appropriate laboratories, resourceful libraries, and other facilities that permit teaching and research at the highest possible level. Advanced nations have moved towards knowledge-based economies. As such, these nations no longer compete for industrial capacity or access to natural resources, but rather for skilled workers, intellectual property and knowledge

(EMBO report 2007).

Bangladesh has set itself the goal to become a developed country by 2041. So preparation should be taken to establish a knowledge-based society and economy. Research universities today work on problems that matter to people; in that sense, this is applied research. They do research on deeply intellectual problems as well, without the obvious and immediate commercial use. Given the pressure on universities to help societies become more economically competitive, universities will likely continue to work on applied research. Every research university has to balance the need to be connected with the marketplace, economy and society, with the need to do innovative and exploratory research.

Research universities are expensive and require more funding than other universities. Universities need to attract the best staff and students and to provide the infrastructure necessary for high-quality research and teaching. The "cost per student" is higher than the average across an entire system. Adequate salaries for faculty, well-equipped libraries and laboratories, and scholarships for bright but needy students are examples of the expenditures required. Bangladesh cannot afford many research universities. The government may start with two or three such universities at this stage. The government may also select a few public universities and gradually build them as research universities. Most of tomorrow's economy is being born today in university research laboratories. The contribution of research universities towards the economic growth of the country will be more recognised with the passage of time.

MM Shahidul Hassan is Vice Chancellor, East West University. Email: vc@ewubd.edu

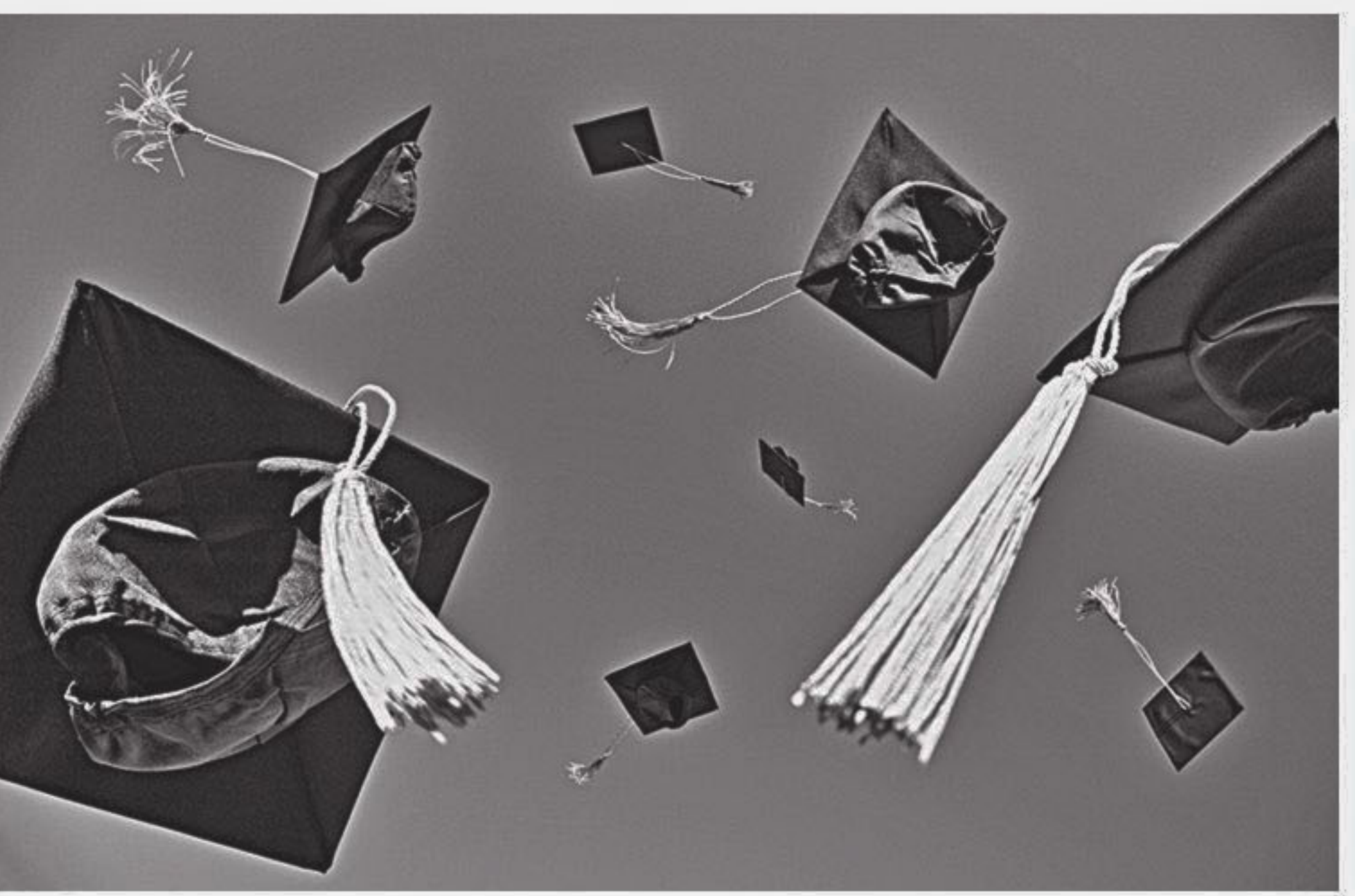


PHOTO: COLLECTED

Women's rights are key in slowing down population



SIVANANTHI THANENTHIRAN

THE increase in world population by 2 billion in the next 30 years will present a serious global challenge, especially if we do not find new paradigms of

development thought and renewed global political leadership.

Our regions, Asia and the Pacific, is already home to 60 percent of the world's population—some 4.3 billion people, with India and China being the most populous countries.

A further increase in population means it will be harder to achieve the 17 SDGs with the 169 different targets—aimed at fighting poverty, reducing inequality, addressing climate change, ensuring quality primary and secondary education for all children, gender equality, and reduced child mortality—to ensure nobody is left behind.

Marginalised populations already suffer from deprivations: poor women and women living in rural and hard-to-reach areas are unable to gain access to contraceptive services even when they desire to have a smaller family size. This unmet need amongst those left behind needs to be addressed—if we are looking at ensuring that these groups do not get left behind anymore.

We are currently facing heightened conflicts over resources, accelerated effects of climate change, political

strife and economic collapse in a world marked by inequalities.

These trends cannot be contained within borders and will spill over and the global community must be aware that this will raise poverty levels, increase the number of displaced persons, refugees and migrants.

Besides these already well documented impacts, the most affected will be women and girls. In most developing countries where women and girls are already marginalised, they will be further pushed into poverty.

In areas we have conducted research in, we can see that climate change has effects on food security—forcing women and girls into hunger and malnutrition; there are lower opportunities for education and increased incidences of child marriages.

This essentially impacts the whole gamut of women's rights, particularly their sexual and reproductive health and rights. This is why we track and monitor governments' implementation of the landmark International Conference on Population and Development's Programme of Action (ICPD POA) that took place in Cairo in 1994.

Signed by 179 countries across the world in 1994, the PoA put human rights as the corner stone to address population and development issues, and called for a comprehensive approach to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, especially for women and girls.

Governments agreed that reproductive rights, gender equality, equity and women's empowerment

are essential for improving quality of life, achieving steady social and economic growth and sustainable development.

At the juncture of the 25th anniversary of the ICPD, it is essential for us to look at holistic, rights-based global frameworks to help us get a grip on the challenges we are facing today.

The prediction that the world population will increase by 2 billion in the next 30 years is based on ground realities like high incidence of child marriage and fertility rates. When girls are married off younger, they drop out of school and often also get pregnant at a young age.

They have little or no access to comprehensive sexuality education which impacts their knowledge of contraception, limits their accessibility towards abortion services which leads to unwanted pregnancies. Those who are already marginalised, will suffer from further deprivations.

Governments in the region should have the political courage to ensure eradication of child marriages, ensure provision of comprehensive sexuality education, and providing access to sexual and reproductive health services to young people regardless of their marital status.

UN data shows that population in the group of 47 least developed countries (LDCs), which includes countries in Asia, is growing 2.5 times faster than the total population of the rest of the world, and is expected to jump from 1 billion inhabitants in 2019 to 1.9 billion in 2050.

It is also predicted that half of the world's population growth will be

concentrated in just nine countries: India, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, Ethiopia, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United States of America, Uganda and Indonesia.

However, women's rights are key in slowing down population. It is no coincidence that in many of the above countries in our region as well as others, the status of women and girls is demeaned. It is a fact that sexual and reproductive rights are integral to individual autonomy, to freely decide on matters of sexuality and reproduction, to have the right to consent and bodily integrity. Women need to have control over their bodies and should be able to decide whether or not to have children, including when and how many to conceive.

In 2016, a study from the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and the Asian Demographic Research Institute (ADRI) at Shanghai University showed that if the world could achieve the 17 SDGs by 2030, it could slow down global population growth to 8.2 from 8.7 billion by 2100.

The Goals 3 and 5—of good health and well-being and gender equality—help build an enabling environment for the achievement of all other goals—which is why it is so critical for us to ensure our governments implement the ICPD PoA.

Empowering women is the key to slowing down population. However, population growth cannot be achieved through coercive measures like sterilisation or family planning methods that limit women's

reproductive choices.

Instead, we need to ensure comprehensive sexuality education for in and out-of-school children and youth, eliminate child, early and forced marriage, tackle teenage pregnancies, invest in health care programmes and policies, ensure universal health coverage for all, including the most vulnerable and marginalised a rights-based approach to family planning where women have access to contraceptive and family planning services of their choice.

Besides these, we need to simultaneously ensure access to safe abortion services to all women and girls and remove all barriers that hinder the accessibility to abortion so there are no unintended, unplanned or forced pregnancies.

There is also a pressing need to increase investments in girls' education & remove barriers that prevent girls from attending schools. Similarly, we need to raise women's participation in the labour force, which means addressing gender inequalities inside homes and making work environments safer.

When we shift the focus to people's development, and enable marginalised women and girls to have choices and exercise decision-making over their life choices, we pave the way for the necessary changes needed for the world's population.

Sivananthi Thanenthiran is the executive director of the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), a regional feminist NGO based in Malaysia championing sexual and reproductive health and rights in Asia Pacific. Copyright: Inter Press Service

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



JULY 3, 1971

Jim Morrison, the lead vocalist of the Doors, dies in Paris at age 27

He was found in a bathtub at his apartment. The official cause of death was listed as heart failure, although no autopsy was performed, as it was not required by French law.

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