## 100 YEARS OF DHAKA UNIVERSITY

# The illusive autonomy and the partisanship

BLACK, WHITE AND GREY

ALI RIAZ

THE founding anniversary of any organisation offers an opportunity for introspection; a centenary makes introspection an imperative. In its centenary, the important task Dhaka University faces is identifying its most significant achievement in the last hundred years.

In assessing the achievements of Dhaka University, one must consider whether Dhaka University has been able to ensure the essential condition for conducting intellectual exercise to produce new knowledge; that is to attain and practice academic freedom. There are two elements to the concept of academic freedom, freedom to teach and freedom to acquire knowledge. Additionally, there are two aspects of academic freedom—freedom of teachers and students and the institutional autonomy of the university as an institution. Without institutional autonomy, it is not possible to guarantee freedom for teachers and students. As a result, the question of institutional autonomy has always been at the centre of the discussion on academic freedom.

The answer to the question of whether Dhaka University has been able to ensure academic freedom requires us to examine the laws which have served as the legal basis for the functioning of the university, and how they have been used within the University. In the past 100 years, there have been three laws about Dhaka University—during the British period in 1920, during the Pakistan period in 1961 and in independent Bangladesh in 1973. In broad strokes, these laws represent the three phases of Dhaka University's history.

The history of the establishment of Dhaka University is intrinsically linked to the 1905 partition of Bengal. The annulment of the partition in 1911 outraged many Muslims in East Bengal, and the decision to establish a university in Dhaka was intended to quell the anger. The proposal hit a roadblock due to World War I. But since political considerations were the driving force behind the decision, the cloud of uncertainty disappeared after the war; the university was finally established in 1920 and curricular activities began on July 1, 1921.

The relationship between the powers that be and the University has been fraught with problems since the emergence of universities, especially in Europe. The question about the role of the government came to the fore prior to the establishment of Dhaka University. The Nathan Commission, constituted in 1912, recommended the establishment of a "state university" in Dhaka. But in 1917, the Sadler Commission, which was asked to advise on Dhaka University, recommended against a "state university". It is against this backdrop, two teachers of the Dhaka College, Naresh Chandra Sengupta and TC Williams, made strong statements on the autonomy of the University.

The 1920 law described the Governor General of India as the "Visitor" to the university. The law stipulated that the Governor of Bengal would be the Chancellor. He will appoint the Vice-Chancellor at the recommendation of the executive council. But ways to influence the executive council were built into the law. The act said that the university would have a court, which is akin to what is now called the Senate. It will have two types of members—the ex-officio members will be the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, treasurer (appointed by the Chancellor), registrars (who will be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor subject to the Chancellor's approval), provosts and wardens (who are appointed by the Vice-Chancellor), professors and readers. Apart from this, the second category of members will be elected from registered graduates, five elected lecturers, representatives of various organisations and 10 life members whom the Chancellor will appoint.

Evident in these are the extent of the power and influence of the Vice-Chancellor. The executive council was responsible for recommending the Vice-Chancellor's name to the Chancellor, but the court had the power to determine the procedures of the council. As a result, the Chancellor, by extension the government, held incredible power over the institution. This system was by no means conducive to the institutional autonomy of the university. Although some of the Vice-Chancellors had stellar academic credentials and played commendable roles, Dhaka University as an institution failed to be developed as an independent seat of learning.

After the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, as Dhaka University was run under this act, the influence of the central and provincial governments continued. The situation took a turn for the worse in 1961—the Dhaka University Ordinance was issued by the military regime of Ayub Khan. It changed the administrative structure of the University and brought it under the direct control of the government. A significant aspect of the law was the dissolution of the court. The executive council was renamed syndicate, all its members were to be ex-officio and only at the nomination of the administration; its power was made advisory only.

Under the 1961 Act, the Vice-Chancellor was to be appointed by the Chancellor for four years. With no institutional structure for university teachers to lodge complaints against the actions of the VC, or file grievances, and providing enormous power to the VC, the government established its firm control. Political consideration became the principal factor in the appointment of the Vice-Chancellors. Additionally, teachers were barred from participating in politics.

More than a year after the country became independent, the Dhaka University Ordinance, 1973, was issued to change the administrative system of the university. The genesis of the Ordinance lies with pre-independence efforts of the University professors. During the 1969 mass movement, demand for autonomy of the university was raised by teachers and students. A committee of teachers headed by Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid prepared a draft containing 14 points on various aspects of autonomy and met Air Marshal Noor Khan, representative of the then Pakistani rulers, and presented these proposals (Maniruzzaman Mia, *The Daily Star*, 12 May 2008). But before any progress was made, the war of independence began.

After independence, two committees were formed. One was on behalf of the teachers headed by Professor Abdur Razzak, while another was led by Vice-Chancellor Muzaffar Ahmad Chowdhury on behalf of the administration. Based on discussions with the teachers, the Administrative Committee presented proposals to the government. The Dhaka University Ordinance was proclaimed on February 15, 1973, with retrospective effect from December 16, 1972.

The 1973 order not only established the Senate, but also provided for representation of people from different walks of life and professions in syndicates and academic councils. The procedure for appointing a Vice-Chancellor was stipulated that the Senate will elect a panel of three from which one will be appointed by the Chancellor. The participation of teachers and graduate representatives was ensured through elections. Election to the post of dean was included. To avoid the domination of a single person in the post of head of the Department, rotation system based on the length of service was introduced.

These systems are clearly participatory and apparently democratic; but within this, the control of the government was built-in. Considering the Chancellor's authority in appointing a Vice-Chancellor, it should be remembered that he is the Head of State, and the Constitution of Bangladesh stipulates that the Head of State will act on the advice of the Prime Minister. As such, the appointment of the VC has been left with political operatives. The 1973 ordinance provides for elections at all levels, including in posts where appointments based on academic achievements should have been considered. The post of Dean is a case in point.

Under the new system, from the beginning, political considerations became the determining factor in the appointment as well as removal of the Vice-Chancellors. Prof Abdul Matin Chowdhury is a case in point. It is well known that he had allowed the regular interference of the ruling party in the administration of the university. In similar vein, his removal at the beginning of the military rule in 1975 and various unjust measures against him were predicated by politics.

The post of Vice-Chancellors of the university has now become so dependant on the politics of the ruling party that it is easy to predict who will be appointed as the Vice-Chancellor, when the post falls vacant. The extent of this politicisation, more appropriately the partisan grab of the position, can be understood from the question posed by Professor Moinul Islam in the *Prothom Alo* on October 10, 2018—"Can any Vice-Chancellor of a university now claim that the government has appointed him Vice-Chancellor in recognition of his scholarship?"

Although the VC's appointment draws the most attention and is widely discussed, it is neither limited to a single position, nor is it a recent phenomenon. Although the process began in 1973, over time, particularly since the mid-1980s, a few distinct features have emerged. First, the ruling party's control over appointments and the partisan nature of these appointments have become the norm. It makes no difference who is at the helm of state power. Second, the trickle down of partisanship—that is, the VC appoints the individuals whose loyalty is unquestionable and politically aligned with the ruling party who in turn does the same under him/her. This has vitiated the entire administrative system. Third, it went further as the appointments of teachers have not been left untouched. Party affiliation has gained prominence over merit. Unconditional loyalty to the ruling party has become a principal criterion of becoming a teacher, save a few exceptions.

Despite the promise of the Dhaka University Ordinance 1973 that the institution will enjoy autonomy, it has been moving away from that for quite some time. Except one instance, when a VC resigned from his position protesting blatant interference of the government, the role of the remaining 13 permanent VCs has not been any different. They have tried their best to be in the good books of the ruling party. The 1973 ordinance restored the rights of the university teachers to participate in politics, but that provision has been used rampantly to create a partyarchy within the University. Nowhere is it so evident than in the Teachers Union election, where the competing panels are known as the BNP-supporters panel or the AL-supporters panel. It is not unusual for teachers to be divided into different groups; the absence of healthy dissent would have been considered rather perilous. But unfortunately, their division is based on their party affiliation, not on the question of issues related to profession. These divisions are wrapped around ideological differences, but whether they are ideological remains an open question.

Since 1991, the partyarchy has encroached into every facet of the University. In the last decade and a half, the situation has deteriorated significantly. Eleven teachers of Dhaka University wrote in the *Prothom Alo* in September 2019, that in the absence of the exercise of knowledge and in the attraction of power, the sense of right to self-government has almost been lost. "We have completely forgotten that a conflict between independent exercise of knowledge and authoritarian state power exists. We are not hesitant a bit to sacrifice free thinking and conscience for the sake of unprincipled, selfish, blind party politics."

The situation has been created by abusing the 1973 University Ordinance. The entire academic freedom issue has been reduced to holding elections, that too under the banner of partisan affiliation, and the notion of accountability has been abandoned. Betraying the spirit of the Ordinance, they have sacrificed autonomy and made a "public" university—a university of the government. Most of the teachers, at the behest of the incumbents and political parties, discarded the responsibilities of upholding moral standards, creating an institution that focuses on production and dissemination of knowledge, and insists on independent thinking.

The consequences of these have not only been felt in the administrative appointment, recruitment policies, and "teachers' politics", but also in student politics. Since the VC and the administration have become dependent on the ruling party's favour, the control of the university has been handed over to the student body of the ruling party. The university authorities' acquiescence to allotting rooms by student activists of the ruling party or turning a blind eye to the presence of so-called "*gono* rooms" in the dormitories under the control of the ruling party student activists, are because the fate of the administration depends on these activists. Due to party loyalty, the relationship of student workers with teachers has become more like that of a fellow soldier of the same group than that of teachers and students. Moreover, teachers loyal to the same party often do not get the opportunity to reach higher up the party echelon. Consequently, student leaders have become their vehicles to reach the higher-ups. These are a few examples of how the absence of academic freedom and institutional autonomy have permeated every sphere of the University. Perhaps the state of the university is best described by a jointly authored opinion piece in *Prothom Alo* by 11 teachers in September 2019: "The gates of the University and the doors of the buildings and may be open, but there is now a permanent strike in the university in terms of thoughts, rules, research and creative practices; breaking that strike is the demand of the hour."

The widespread misuse of the Dhaka University Ordinance, the enthusiasm of the ruling party in violating the spirit of the law for immediate gains, the penchant for establishing blatant control over all institutions, the lack of conscience among teachers, and prioritising loyalty to political parties have brought the university to its present state. The first step to break the cycle is to acknowledge it.

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**Dhaka University Campus.**

PHOTO: **SAZZAD IBNE SAYED**

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ
পুলিশ সুপার এর কার্যালয়
ইন্ডাস্ট্রিয়াল পুলিশ-০৬
বাড়ি নং-২৯৩, রোড নং- ২০, মুজগুন্নি আবাসিক এলাকা
খালিশপুর, খুলনা।

স্মারক নং- ৪৪.০১.৫৫০৬.০০১.০৭.০১৯.২০২১/৬৩৩ তারিখ- ২৯/০৬/২০২১খ্রিঃ।

পুনঃ দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

"The Public Procurement Act-2006" & "The Public Procurement Regulations-2008" ও তদ্বীয় সংশোধনী মোতাবেক ২০২১-২২ অর্থবছরের ১ম ও ২য় কোয়ার্টার ইন্ডাস্ট্রিয়াল পুলিশ-০৬, খুলনার নিম্নবর্ণিত লটে উল্লিখিত মালামাল ক্রয়/সরবরাহের লক্ষ্যে প্রকৃত বাংলাদেশী অভিজ্ঞ ঠিকাদার/সরবরাহকারীর নিকট হতে নিজস্ব প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্যাডে সীলমোহরকৃত, মুখবন্ধ খামে প্রতিযোগিতামূলক উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

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| ক্রঃ নং | মন্ত্রনালয়/বিভাগ | ঃ | স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রনালয়/জননিরাপত্তা বিভাগ |
| ১. | সংস্থা | ঃ | বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ। |
| ২. | ক্রয়কারী কার্যালয় প্রধান | ঃ | পুলিশ সুপার, ইন্ডাস্ট্রিয়াল পুলিশ-০৬, খুলনা। |
| ৩. | দরপত্র আহ্বানের উদ্দেশ্য | ঃ | পুলিশ সুপার, ইন্ডাস্ট্রিয়াল পুলিশ-০৬, খুলনা এর বিভিন্ন সামগ্রী ক্রয়/সরবরাহ সংক্রান্ত। |
| ৪. | দরপত্র স্মারক নং | ঃ | ৪৪.০১.৫৫০৬.০০১.০৭.০১৯.২০২১/৬৩৩ |
| ৫. | তারিখ | ঃ | ২৯/০৬/২০২১খ্রিঃ। |
| ৬. | দরপত্রের পদ্ধতি | ঃ | উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি (OTM)। |
| ৭. | বাজেট ও অর্থনৈতিক খাত | ঃ | রাজস্ব খাত। |
| ৮. | দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি পত্রিকায় প্রকাশের তারিখ | ঃ | ৩০/০৬/২০২১খ্রিঃ। |
| ৯. | দরপত্র বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ | ঃ | ১৩/০৭/২০২১খ্রিঃ তারিখ অফিস চলাকালীন সময় পর্যন্ত। |
| ১০. | দরপত্র জমা প্রদানের সর্বশেষ তারিখ ও সময় | ঃ | ১৪/০৭/২০২১খ্রিঃ ১২.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত। |
| ১১. | দরপত্র উন্মুক্তের তারিখ ও সময় | ঃ | ১৪/০৭/২০২১খ্রিঃ ১২.৩০ ঘটিকা। |
| ১২. | দরপত্র ডকুমেন্ট/সিডিউল বিক্রয়কারীর অফিস, দরপত্র জমাদান ও উন্মুক্ত করার স্থান। | ঃ | পুলিশ সুপার এর কার্যালয়, ইন্ডাস্ট্রিয়াল পুলিশ-০৬, বাড়ি নং-২৯৩, রোড নং- ২০, মুজগুন্নি আবাসিক এলাকা, খুলনা। |
| ১৩. | প্রাক দরপত্র সভার স্থান, তারিখ ও সময় | ঃ | পুলিশ সুপার এর কার্যালয়, ইন্ডাস্ট্রিয়াল পুলিশ-০৬, বাড়ি নং-২৯৩, রোড নং- ২০, মুজগুন্নি আবাসিক এলাকা, খুলনা। ০৬/০৬/২০২১খ্রিঃ ১০.৩০ ঘটিকা। |
| ১৪. | দরপত্র প্রস্তাবকারী যোগ্যতা | ঃ | (১) হালনাগাদ ট্রেড লাইসেন্স (২) TIN–নম্বর এবং হালনাগাদ আইটি পরিশোধের প্রত্যয়নপত্র (৩) ভ্যাট রেজিষ্ট্রেশন এবং হালানাগাদ ভ্যাট পরিশোধের প্রত্যয়নপত্র (৪) ব্যাংক সলভেন্সি সার্টিফিকেট (৫) নাগরিকত্ব সনদপত্র (৬) কালো তালিকাভুক্ত নহে মর্মে নিজ প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্যাডে মুচলেকা (৭) সংশ্লিষ্ট কাজের অভিজ্ঞতার সনদপত্র, (৮) দরপত্র দলিলে উল্লেখিত অন্যান্য কাগজপত্র (৯) সদ্য তোলা ০২ (দুই) কপি পাসপোর্ট সাইজের রঙ্গিন ছবি |

কাজের বিবরণঃ-

| | ক্রঃ নং | আইটেম | | পরিমাণ | সিডিউলের মূল্য (টাকা) অফেরতযোগ্য | নিরাপত্তা জামানত | কার্য সম্পাদনের সময়/মেয়াদ |
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| ১৫. | ০১. | সয়াবিন তৈল সরবরাহ | ঃ | চাহিদানুযায়ী | ৭০০/- | ২০,০০০/- | ২০২১-২২ অর্থবছরের ১ম ও ২য় কোয়ার্টার (জুলাই/২১খ্রিঃ-ডিসেম্বর/২১খ্রিঃ পর্যন্ত) |
| | ০২. | জ্বালানী কাঠ সরবরাহ | ঃ | চাহিদানুযায়ী | ৫০০/- | ১০,০০০/- | ২০২১-২২ অর্থবছরের ১ম ও ২য় কোয়ার্টার (জুলাই/২১খ্রিঃ-ডিসেম্বর/২১খ্রিঃ পর্যন্ত) |
| | ০৩. | নিলাম বিক্রয় (খালি চট ও প্লাস্টিকের বস্তা) | ঃ | মজুদ মোতাবেক | ৩০০/- | ২,০০০/- | ২০২১-২২ অর্থবছরের ১ম ও ২য় কোয়ার্টার (জুলাই/২১খ্রিঃ-ডিসেম্বর/২১খ্রিঃ পর্যন্ত) |

দরপত্র সম্পাদনকারীর বিবরণঃ-

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| ১৬. | দরপত্র আহবানকারী কর্মকর্তার নাম ও পদবী | ঃ | এম এ জলিল, পুলিশ সুপার, ইন্ডাস্ট্রিয়াল পুলিশ-০৬, খুলনা। |
| ১৭. | দরপত্র আহবানকারী কর্মকর্তার ঠিকানা | ঃ | পুলিশ সুপার এর কার্যালয়, ইন্ডাস্ট্রিয়াল পুলিশ-০৬, বাড়ি নং-২৯৩, রোড নং- ২০, মুজগুন্নি আবাসিক এলাকা, খুলনা। ফোন-০৪১-৭৬০২০৩ ফ্যাক্স-০৪১-৭৬২৫৬১। |
| ১৮. | বিশেষ নির্দেশনা<br>১। ব্যক্তি বা প্রতিষ্ঠানের ক্ষমতা সম্পন্ন প্রতিনিধির স্বাক্ষর ও পূর্ণ পরিচিতি সম্বলিত আবেদনের মাধ্যমে নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর কার্যালয় হতে মূল্য পরিশোধ পূর্বক সিডিউল ক্রয় করা যাবে।<br>২। নির্ধারিত সময়ের পরে কোন অবস্থাতে দরপত্র জমা নেওয়া হবে না।<br>৩। ক্রয়কারী সত্ত্বা কোন কারন দর্শানো ব্যতীরেকে যে কোন লটের বা সম্পূর্ন দরপত্র বাতিল করা অধিকার সংরক্ষন করেন।<br>৪। ক্রয়কারী সত্ত্বা দরপত্রে উল্লেখিত পণ্যে বা সেবার পরিমান হ্রাস বা বৃদ্ধি করার অধিকার সংরক্ষন করেন।<br>৫। অনিবার্য কারণে নির্ধারিত দিন ও সময়ে দরপত্র জমা ও উন্মুক্তকরণ সম্ভব না হলে পরবর্তী কার্যদিবসে একই সময়ে একই স্থানে উক্ত দরপত্র সমূহ গ্রহণ ও উন্মুক্ত করা হবে।<br>৬। মূল্যায়নের ক্ষেত্রে অনিবার্য পরিস্থিতির কারনে নির্ধারিত সময়সীমা সামান্য কম/বেশি হতে পারে।<br>৭। সম্পূর্ণ ক্রয় প্রক্রিয়াটি পিপিএ ২০০৬ এবং পিপিআর ২০০৮ সহ সংশ্লিষ্ট ফরমেট ও নির্দেশনার ভিত্তিতে সম্পন্ন করা হবে। | | |

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GD-1285