



Then and now: 100 years of Dhaka University

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR AND
SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Nearly a century ago, Lord Lytton, the First Chancellor of Dhaka University, had envisioned that the university would spread the fame of the city beyond the region by creating new areas of knowledge and disseminating it to society at large.

"In my opinion, this university is Dacca's [Dhaka's] greatest possession and will do more than anything else to increase and spread the fame of Dacca beyond the limits of Bengal or even India itself," Lytton said during the first convocation of the university a year after its establishment.

His prophecy proved to be true as within a few years the university went on to become the intellectual centre of Bengal, playing a pioneering role in the social, political and cultural life of the Bengalis.

Since its inception, the DU had distinguished scholars as faculty members who enriched the global pool of knowledge by making notable contributions.

The university served as a central premise for freethinking and democratic practices, playing a decisive role in the formation of Bangladeshi national identity.

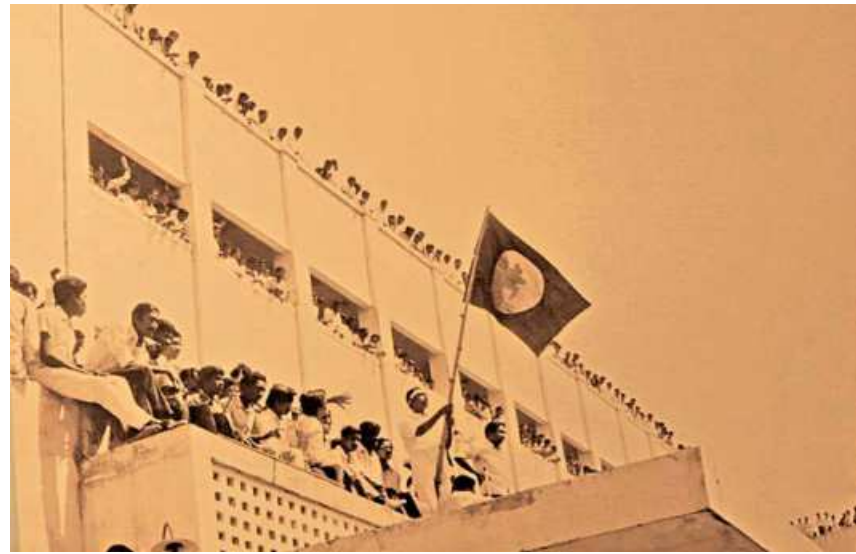
It acted as the foundation of awakening in every moment of national need and eventually became the centre of the movement that led to the creation of the country in 1971.

In fact, a single university has rarely had such an immense contribution to making a nation and spreading knowledge in society as DU did.

But as the country's highest echelon of academic excellence celebrates its birth centenary, educationists are now sceptical that the university's fame is now limited to the region.

"Dhaka University cannot be judged on the basis of a generalised definition of a university," said Serajul Islam Choudhury, professor emeritus at the DU.

It has a huge contribution to political and cultural development, but it is also true that it is lagging now in upholding its academic excellence and reputation,



In a historic student rally held at Dhaka University premises, the first Bangladesh flag was hoisted (March 2, 1971)

he added.

The university's world ranking is disappointing.

In the latest Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) world university ranking published in June 2021, the DU was placed in the 801-1,000 bracket, whereas eight Indian and three Pakistani institutions are in the top 500.

One of the reasons, academics pointed out, is the lack of basic research, the key factor behind a university's academic strength and fame.

The university has grown in size but failed to improve the standard of education and research, Choudhury said.

"It seems the university hardly encourages research and publications."

Instead of creating new knowledge, many teachers remain busy with non-academic activities including politics, according to Choudhury.

"Many teachers are doing research with individual initiative and capacity, but there are questions over their quality," he added.

The budgetary allocation for research is also dismal.

In fiscal 2019-20, only Tk 9 crore out of the budget of Tk 810 crore was allocated for the research centres and

teachers' personal and departmental research.

There are 57 research centres and bureaus at the DU. But many of them do not have enough manpower and offices.

The latest annual report (2019-2020 academic year), which contains information on 46 such centres, shows 27 did not conduct any research in that year. The remaining 19 centres conducted 146 research projects.

The Centre for Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue of the DU could be a case in point.

Founded in 2007, the centre did not conduct any research all these years.

"We are holding seminars and discussions on inter-religious issues," said Fazrin Huda, its director.

Nazrul Research Centre has had no research or publication for several years, said Begum Akter Kamal, who was the centre's director from 2017 to 2019.

The centre had been running without a fixed office, employees and research assistants for long, she said, adding that it got an allocation of Tk 1.5 lakh to Tk 2 lakh. The amount was spent on seminars.

Educationists said the lack of research and quality publications

kept the university at the bottom of international rankings.

The DU's publications are also in a sorry state. The university had published only four books in 2019, one each in 2018 and 2017, according to the catalogue of DU Publications Bureau.

"Research is a common and vital parameter of all international rankings. If it is published in a quality journal, citation plays a big role in rankings," said ABM Faroque, who teaches at the DU's pharmaceutical technology department.

SMA Faiz, former vice-chancellor of the university, thinks fund crunch is a major problem for research.

"A public university is solely dependent on government funds -- we did not get enough funds," he added.

Faroque, however, thinks there should be a mechanism to monitor whether the monetary allocation was spent properly.

"Bearing in mind the lower allocation, we have to carry out research in a planned way so that research can contribute to the society," he said.

Contacted, DU VC Md Akhtaruzzaman said as part of the 100-year celebration, the government made a special allocation for research.

The process to increase the number of research projects is going on, he said.

A number of teachers think that the university somewhat loses its character of a centre of free-thinking as the space of freedom of speech and differences of opinions are being squeezed of late.

Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan, who teaches international relations at the university, said during his student life there were robust discussions on sensitive state and government issues and religion in the classroom.

"But nowadays, there is strong self-censorship among many teachers. It happened as the university has more or less turned into a structurally a government-controlled university, although it is run by 1973 order."

Teachers associations have also become a part of the administration, he said.

"Teachers who want to practice freedom of speech do not get the protection they need," he said.

Khan pointed out that the unruly activities of the ruling party-backed student organisations got in the way of freedom of speech and extinguished differences of opinion.

On top of it, recent allegations of plagiarism against several teachers in their research and thesis papers have dented the university's reputation.

"It was beyond my thought that a teacher could indulge in such activities. It is a new phenomenon," Choudhury said.

And the coronavirus pandemic has exposed how ill-equipped the country's premier institution was when it comes to online education.

The university has been closed since March last year with all its dormitories almost vacant. With many students staying back home, the university could not ensure proper remote learning for its students.

Moreover, some activities helped earn a bad reputation for the institution.

The testing of Covid-19 is one such example.

The authorities started conducting Covid-19 tests at its laboratories on May 5 last year but stopped it a few days later citing unavailability of funds.

They said the laboratory facility would be used for academic and research purposes and that they needed at least Tk 15 to 20 lakh a month to do the testing.

Later, they resumed testing but only for its teachers and students, fixing the rate at Tk 1,500.

As the university celebrates its 100 years of journey, the accommodation crisis for the students remains acute. In some cases, at least 20 students stay in a room that has four single beds.

The students are forced to join political programmes to get a seat in the hall. There remains the "gono room" culture.

The students do not have adequate seating arrangements at the libraries and lack modern medical treatment facilities and spacious classrooms.

Regarding the crisis in getting residential and others facilities, Akhtaruzzaman said there are efforts to address the issues.

Let the 100-year
glory prevail



Heartfelt Wishes
ISPAHANI

এমডিবি বাটপট

মিডল্যান্ড ব্যাংকের ওয়েবসাইট
অথবা এমডিবি মোবাইল অ্যাপ
(মিডল্যান্ড অনলাইন) এর মাধ্যমে
জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্র (এনআইডি)
ও ফটো ম্যাচিং করে
অ্যাকাউন্ট খুলুন বাটপট

ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের
১০০ বছর পূর্তিতে
মিডল্যান্ড ব্যাংকের
শুভেচ্ছা



Please visit:
www.midlandbankbd.net

To download midland online



Contact Centre 24/7
16596
09617016596, 09611016596

midlandbank Ltd
bank for inclusive growth

মিডল্যান্ড ব্যাংক
ইসলামী ব্যাংকিং