



The making of Dhaka University and a new Society

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 54

The Government of Bengal appointed a committee to work for the proposed Dhaka University scheme. This committee is commonly known as Nathan Committee. There were thirteen members in the committee. The president of the committee was R. Nathiel. The other members of the committee were G.W. Kuchler, Dr. Rashbehary Ghose, Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury, Nawab Sirajul Islam, Ananda Chandra Ray, Mohammad Ali, H.R. James, W.A.T. Archbold, Satis Chandra Acharji, Lalit Mohan Chatterji, C.W. Peake, Samsul Ulama Abu Nasr Muhammad Wahed and D.S. Fraser. The Nathan committee submitted its final report regarding the foundation of Dhaka University quite promptly (1912). The committee estimated capital expenditure for the construction of university as 53 lakhs and recurring expenditure as 12 lakhs. The Nathan committee also suggested that the university should be a teaching, residential and state university. This should not be a federal university and should only supervise colleges in Dhaka city. Apart from Nathan committee, the Government made a separate commission called Calcutta University Commission. The Calcutta University Commission also separately investigated the feasibility of Dhaka university and was convinced of necessity of a new university in Dhaka. The Commission made several valuable recommendations. The beginning of the First World War, in 1914, and related issues delayed the foundation of the university. Consequently, Muslim leaders doubted the British intention. On March 20, 1917 Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury brought a resolution saying, 'Eastern Bengal had been assured of a university as a 'compensation' for the readjustment, and that serious doubts were entertained when the war broke out lest the University question were identifiably shelved or postponed.' The representative from Bengal government assured him that they were working on this but unavoidable reasons caused the delay.

The Dhaka University Act was finally passed and got the governor general's approval on 23rd March, 1920. Dhaka University formally began its journey on 1st July 1921 at the heart of Dhaka city, Ramna, with three faculties: Arts, Science and Law. Initially there were twelve departments: 1. English 2. Sanskrit and Bengali 3. Arabic and Islamic Studies 4. Persian and Urdu 5. History 6. Economics and Politics 7. Philosophy 8. Mathematics 9. Physics 10. Chemistry 11. Law and 12. Education. The university began with 60 faculty members and 1105 students in different programs including B.T., LT and medical students. The first Vice Chancellor of the University was Sir. P.J. Hartog. His tenure was between 1920 and 1925.

After its foundation, the university of Dhaka soon became the center of intellectual life in Bengal. Dhaka university began to draw scholars from different parts of the Indian subcontinent and beyond. Most of the authors who have written about Dhaka university mainly highlighted the contribution of Dhaka university in the political domain. Since its foundation the university produced an intellectual vibrancy in East Bengal and a community came into existence in Eastern Bengal. In the course of time, the number of Muslim students increased remarkably. As surplus farmers gained access to surplus cash through the cultivation of commercial crop, their children attained the Dhaka university. This was a democratic moment in the intellectual life. Instead of education being confined to service elites of an empire or landed gentry, a community of vernacular elite embedded in rural community, emerged due to the establishment of the University. Dhaka university created an affordable access to higher education for the people of Eastern Bengal.

Despite many shortcomings, the university prospered in first few years of its establishment. The university got a good number of prominent academicians. Among them the three vice chancellors, Sir P. J. Hartog, Professor G.H. Langley and reputed historian Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumder were notable. Through decades, the university was home for some great scholars and litterateurs like Professor Satyendra Nath Bose, Dr. J.C. Ghose, Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah, Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Abu Mohammed Habibullah, Buddhadeb Basu, Shamsur Rahman, Ahmed Sharif, Ahmad Safa, Anisujjaman, Abdur Razzak, Akhtaruzzaman Elias, and so on. In 1924, Satyendra Nath Bose at the Physics Department of the Dhaka University wrote a paper in the field of Quantum statistics and sent the article directly to Einstein. Einstein translated the article into German and submitted it on Bose's behalf to the prestigious Zeitschrift für Physik. Dhaka University professors attained international fame.

As the University's fame spread a number of famous personalities visited Dhaka University. Rabindranath Tagore was one of them who visited Dhaka University as early as 1926. He stayed Dhaka between 7 and 14 February. Tagore was welcomed warmly and was given receptions by different organs of Dhaka university, among which was the Dhaka University Students' Union. It was not only Nobel laureate poet Tagore but reputed anthropologist Levi Straus also visited Dhaka university for a while. Poet Nazrul Islam repeatedly visited Dhaka and was closely associated with University faculties. The university attracted several reputed scholars to visit Dhaka and teach at the Dhaka University. More importantly, many among the university professors in its early stage were associated with Buddhir Mukti Andolon or emancipation of intellect movement. They questioned what they perceived as dead weight of tradition. In later years, Tamaddun Majlis, Purbo Pakistan Renaissance society, Pakistan Sahityo Samsad drew its sustenance from the University faculty and students.

In the first fifty years of its existence, the university of Dhaka functioned as a critical center of academic and intellectual life. The university suffered a setback during the Partition of India as many reputed Hindu academicians and scholars left Eastern Bengal but regained its reputation as a center academic excellence in the region in 1950s. In 1971 the university experienced an upheaval as many erudite scholars of the university were killed by the Pakistani army. Students were murdered and several intellectuals disappeared for ever. In the aftermath of independence political interference by unpopular military dictators or politicians undermined University's academic reputation and autonomy. Ironically, a University that commenced its career as the symbol of decolonization of intellectual life experienced a sad decline in its reputation in independent Bangladesh.

Subho Basu is Associate Professor, Department of History and Classical Studies, McGill University. Azizul Rasel is Senior lecturer and Research Associate Center for Advanced Theory, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh.

Scientific Revolution at Dhaka University

The University in need of an independent research institute

ZEBBA I. SERAJ

Having worked tirelessly to achieve high standards in biotechnological research at the University of Dhaka (DU) from 1988 till date, I dream of a scientific revolution in the Sciences and Biological Sciences, Engineering and Medical Faculties. My colleagues in different departments produce publications in prestigious journals when carrying out postdoctoral work in reputed universities abroad. But why are these same scientists not generating high-quality work once they re-join Dhaka University?

Unfortunately, a PhD from DU, particularly in the Sciences, is considered 'subpar' by colleagues. The quality of graduate PhD work should be judged by the quality of publications from their work. Instead, our colleagues, particularly those in 'selection boards', seem to have a problem with the label, "PhD from Dhaka University", with the implication that the student did a PhD from DU solely because they did not get a chance elsewhere. Instead of raising our ability to perform the best graduate science work at DU, we look down upon the programme. If we truly desire improvements in our country's standards and solutions to our problems of food security, resource recycling, energy generation and climate change, we must consider creating sandwich fellowships where our students could gather expertise and work with state-of-the-art facilities — something that DU lacks.

DU is admittedly the country's premier university. Yet, it does not have a research cell, which would look after the inevitable administrative work behind any research grant, both local and foreign. It does not have a designated office to work on or sign for Material Transfer Agreements (MTAs). It also has no designated office to deal with patents that may arise from the research work or a liaison office with the industry. Most scientists have to work out necessary paperwork on an ad hoc basis. The papers go through a series of administrative sub-offices, none of whom understand the concepts of MTAs or patents. This results in inordinate delays in signing and approving grants. Unnecessary delays cause problems in the implementation and efficiency of the execution of the grant.

On the other hand, Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) has an effective research system called Bangladesh Agricultural University Research System (BAURES), which coordinates and manages research projects from local and foreign sources. It also has an online method of submitting requisite information. The system has a director and at least six other administrative officials from the PhD faculty, ensuring efficient management. There are 12 other non-PhD staff who take care of the complete administrative paperwork of the research proposals.

DU needs a similar well-managed system to take care of the University's research needs. There should be ethical and biosafety committees under this research management system. The government taxes reagents and



World-famous scientist Satyen Bose at Dhaka University in Bangladesh in the 1930s. In 1921, he moved from the faculty of the University of Calcutta to that of the University of Dhaka. A month after he moved, he wrote to his friend and colleague Meghnad Saha: "Work has not yet started. [The university has] quite a few things but due to utter neglect they are in a bad way. Perhaps I need not elaborate. On the table of the sahibs are scattered lots of Nicol prisms, lens and eye-pieces. It would require a lot of research to determine which one belongs to which apparatus. We do suffer from a lack of journals here, but the authorities of the new university have promised to place orders for some of them along with their back numbers. Talk is going on about having a separate science library." Satyen Bose left Dhaka University in 1945.

equipment used for research at the source. The University Grants Commission (UGC) provides reimbursements when claimed, but the process is fraught with debilitating paperwork. The research cell could efficiently manage this taxation system as well. It could also have engineers who would service instruments and repair them when needed.

As scientists, we have the freedom to choose any research topic to work on. However, it would be ideal to have an overall research goal for the University, such as a five-year, 10-year and even a 100-year plan for what we would like to contribute towards the country's development. DU authorities could then request the government for funds accordingly. Any research is more effective if it is collaborative. Central management of specific research projects in the country's service is bound to yield fruit if appropriately planned. The VCs

of DU should consider raising funds for research and equipment under their terms of reference (TOR).

In many universities in Bangladesh, such as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University (BSMRAU), laboratory start-up funds of one to five lakhs taka are provided to scientists to start their own laboratory once they return after earning their higher degree abroad. This is not the case in DU. Some of the Prime Minister special PhD fellowships should be allocated for DU since there is a severe dearth of such fellowships here.

Most universities abroad have a central facility with state-of-the-art equipment accessible to all faculty members. However, there are established rules which allow usage for high-quality research. Any advanced instrument has a dedicated researcher to help you with its use for a nominal fee charged to your grant automatically. Alternatively, regular training sessions are held once or twice

a year, where training for using the instrument will be provided. Once you are trained, you can use the instrument free of charge.

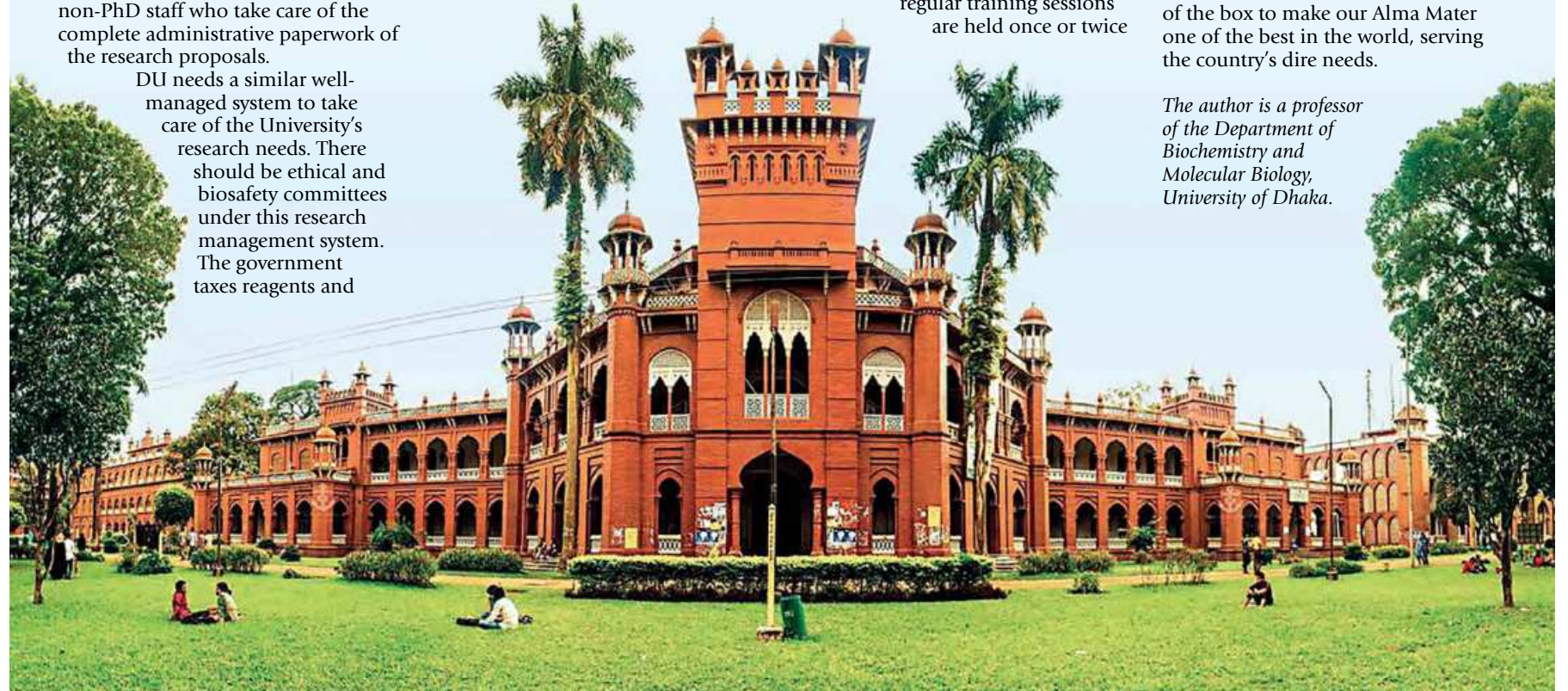
In contrast, the DU centre called CARS (Centre for Advanced Research in Sciences) does not have dedicated scientists for most of its advanced instruments. No training is conducted, and for the most part, the facilities are not accessible. Moreover, the research work carried out within CARS is constricted due to a lack of available funds.

I propose establishing a state-of-the-art research institute at DU with an independent administration, so it does not suffer the same fate as CARS. Dedicated and highly motivated researchers lead most high-profile research institutes all over the world with specific developmental goals. Their board of governors also consists of various highly successful scientists in different fields. Following the same standard, the proposed institute should be run by scientists. It may have deans, other DU representatives, and government representatives but only as observers who will ensure financial accountability. The institute should also have a scientific board of advisors consisting of famous Non-Resident Bangladeshi (NRB) and foreign scientists, depending on identified needs. The institute will have state-of-the-art computing and research facilities with dedicated scientists and engineers as core staff with their goal-defined research projects. However, their TOR would be to facilitate project-based research activities of DU faculty members, other public or private universities or even industry, provided suitable overheads are given to the institute through their project grants. In other words, this research institute would service the whole country's needs, provided the researcher can bring in their own research funds.

There should still be a regular stream of PhD and postdoctoral fellowships from UGC and other government resources. Most importantly, funds for the core work and core staff should be set aside for five to ten years, with the aim that the institute would become self-sufficient in 10 years. One way to achieve self-sufficiency could be the core staff and other collaborative and project scientists producing products for the pharma industry for a fee. Moreover, some of the projects would lead to patentable products, which would earn revenue for the institute.

The independent research institute can conduct lucrative research on modern drugs and vaccines, genome editing for producing designer crops to fight climate change, recycling water and resources, using the microbiome for better nutrition, health, plants and environment. However, this proposal is by no means exhaustive. We must think out of the box to make our Alma Mater one of the best in the world, serving the country's dire needs.

The author is a professor of the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, University of Dhaka.



Between Class and Nation: Dhaka University and the Emergence of a National Liberation Movement

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 56

of" (nirbisheshe) religion and caste, though it was congenitally unequal to itself, being limited to East Pakistan. The All Party Students Action Committee that came up with the 11-points was at the center of national politics after the 1969 insurrection.

I would end with a brief methodological remark. When we try to pinpoint the structure of the

agency of mass movements, the common tendency to attribute the origin of action to a center or a top in the form of a single leadership or a secret 'nucleus' fails to take into account the complex feedback systems involving the amorphous ontology of the people, the symbolico-practical structure of various mediating institutions, and the creative subjectivity of historical movements. It was all these factors together

that constituted the conditions of possibility for a popular habitus for the national liberation struggle. In March 1971, as soon as Yahya Khan cancelled National Assembly convening, the University students immediately walked out of classes down to the streets, joining the tens of thousands of people, chanting slogans and blocking the roads with sticks and rods. The birth of a new nation-state was thence ineluctable.

Tahmidal Zami is a Researcher and the Coordinator of Bengal History Collective

Reference
Rafikul Islam, Swadhinata Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay, Dhaka: Aitijhya, 2004.
Nirmalendu Goon, Mahajibaner Kabya, Dhaka: Kothaparakash, 2013.
Sardar Fazlul Karim, Dhaka Bishwabidyalay o Purbabangia Samaj: Adhyapak Abdur Razzaker Alapcharita, Dhaka: Sahitya Prakash, 2014.