



# “What Dhaka University thinks today, others think tomorrow”

IN CONVERSATION WITH DHAKA UNIVERSITY VICE-CHANCELLOR PROFESSOR MD AKHTARUZZAMAN

*The Daily Star (DS): How do you evaluate the 100-year-journey of Dhaka University?*

**Akhtaruzzaman:** Dhaka University is our pride. This university has had an immense contribution in nation-building and the spreading of humanitarian values. The history of the university is interconnected with Bangladesh and with the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. We are celebrating its 100 years with the slogan, “Achieving the sustainable development goals and building the university suitable for the

*quality of education at the university. What should be done to improve this?*

**Akhtaruzzaman:** It is important that many will make valuable comments regarding Dhaka University’s position in rankings and its quality of education. The university’s position in rankings and whether the quality of education has improved or not are comparative matters. It is true that we will need continuous initiatives to improve the quality of education. For that, the university should ensure library facilities, state of the art research centres, residential facilities, advanced research conducted by the teachers, and a congenial atmosphere for learning—these are all demands of the time.

We do have different initiatives. The university master plan has recommended the development of infrastructure and the educational atmosphere, connectivity, a green campus, and others. A master plan does not necessarily mean that there should be high-rise buildings; rather, it is a plan for how a university can become an academically excellent institution.

*DS: Why is the university, in its 100th year, yet to ensure facilities for students and teachers? What can students and teachers do to help bring back the glorious tradition and improve the standard of education at DU?*

**Akhtaruzzaman:** If we want something from students, we will need to fulfil their important needs. Many of them are deprived of many things. There is a lack of residential seats for students. Often, they do not get proper calorie intake; they don’t have proper seating arrangements in the libraries, modern medical treatment facilities, spacious classrooms, etc. I want to thank our students for performing well here at DU and when they go for studies abroad, without having access to many of these facilities.

The first and foremost duty of a teacher is to teach and do research, and to remain busy with regular studies. But we have not been able to ensure teachers’ facilities in order for them to perform the above-mentioned jobs. Tutorial classes are an important feature,

but we can’t provide them with a well-equipped and modern technology-enabled teachers’ room. Sometimes, two teachers even share the same room. They do not have modern labs to conduct research.

This is the reality. We are trying to address the issues while keeping this reality in mind. We believe that if we do not take necessary steps now, the university will fall farther behind in international rankings, let alone see any improvements. We have to do an analysis as to why the university cannot ensure facilities for students and teachers.

*DS: What kind of changes should be made in the university curricula to meet with the diversifying job market?*

**Akhtaruzzaman:** Dhaka University’s aim is not only to produce graduates for the job market, but also to create

and global demands. All faculties and departments have been urged to change their curricula keeping this in mind. We have to prepare our graduates with employability skills. If we do not give graduates pragmatic knowledge, help them to learn corporate etiquettes, and attain language proficiency, they will fall behind others in the global competition. We will chalk out some skills development programmes for them alongside the traditional curriculum.

*DS: How should a modern and progressive university administrative body work?*

**Akhtaruzzaman:** The Dhaka University campus is already modern and progressive. What Dhaka University thinks today, others think tomorrow. This institution is an extraordinary centre for the development of humanitarian values,

*DS: There is the criticism regarding student and teacher politics at DU. They often work to serve the interest of political parties instead of working for the interests of the country. How should student and teacher politics at the university operate?*

**Akhtaruzzaman:** These are comments made by journalists or others. Dhaka University’s first VC, PJ Hartog, had said that this university is of political origin. So, there has always been a connection to politics in this university. It is unthinkable that the university’s teachers and students will not have “political minds” (rajnaitik manosko). When they earn a degree from DU, our graduates will lead the nation and the international arena. Politics is the strongest institution for preparing for such leadership.

*DS: To what extent are students and teachers not working for the interests of the country?*

**Akhtaruzzaman:** It is a matter of comparative judgement; but our expectation is that the university should prepare graduates with political knowledge, so that they are able to work for the betterment of the nation.

*DS: There are also criticisms about the teacher recruitment process—teachers are said to be recruited only through oral examinations, and nepotism and political considerations are said to outweigh the merits of candidates. What is the ideal process of recruiting a university teacher?*

**Akhtaruzzaman:** During a selection process, Dhaka University is watchful of people who have merit, academic standing and experience, and the qualifications for becoming a teacher.

*DS: Do you suggest, then, that there is no need to bring changes in the teacher recruitment process?*

**Akhtaruzzaman:** With the changes of time, there could be some additions to and deductions from the process. The selection committee is independent, they apply tactics in the viva board, and sometimes they ask aspirants to demonstrate in class and others.



fourth industrial revolution and creating skilled manpower”. We will have to make strong pillars so that the university can celebrate its bicentenary by making sure that the seat of learning meets the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution and the SDG goals.

*DS: DU was once considered the Oxford of the East, but we are seeing a decline in its position in international rankings. Academics believe that this has happened due to the declining*

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entrepreneurs, self-motivated employers, and more. After joining a two-day international conference arranged by the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Solutions Network, we decided to form an SDG Response Cell at the university which would incorporate the SDG goals into DU’s teaching and learning processes. We are emphasising on research and innovation as well as redesigning of the curriculum, with interdisciplinary and post-disciplinary focus. There is no alternative to national and global partnership. As Helen Keller has said, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much”. The curriculum will be redesigned while focusing on preparing for national

non-communalism, and the spirits of liberalism. It has a strong tradition of being a safe space for the difference of opinions; it is an equitable university. There is no discrimination in its offering of facilities. Teachers also have very high humanitarian values. We often learn from media reports that a teacher has allowed their students to stay in his house so that the students can sit for examinations.

Now, we will need to work using modern technology while coordinating with our moral values. We have to be innovative and depend on modern technology to ensure transparency and accountability. We have to ensure quality of services.

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