



ASIFUR RAHMAN AND TUHIN SUBHRA ADHIKARY

HOW TO BE A VC

PHOTOS: SHEIKH NASIR

At least 12 teachers associated with DU, who held posts with the Blue panel or were elected to different administrative posts after being nominated by the Blue panel, are now VCs of different universities.

Although there are no specific rules for the appointment of vice-chancellors (VCs) in public universities, there appears to be an unofficial yet mandatory criterion—a teacher has to be affiliated with a pro-government teacher's panel to be nominated for the top post.

Or so the data suggests. The Daily Star found that at least 39 out of 48 VCs of public universities have held posts in different pro-government teachers' wings during their career.

Although it could not be ascertained whether five other VCs held such posts, they were widely considered to be "pro-government"; two even held posts in different government agencies before being appointed as VC.

The Daily Star reached this conclusion based on an analysis of the CVs of VCs, interviews with campus sources, published media reports and various websites.

It was also found that the chances of appointment rose exponentially if one was tagged with the AL-backed Blue panel at the University of Dhaka (DU), which produced the highest number of VCs in the country.

At least 12 teachers associated with DU, who held posts with the Blue panel or were elected to different administrative posts after being nominated by the Blue panel, are now VCs of different universities.

Two more DU teachers are also holding the top posts in two other universities, although it could not be ascertained whether they held posts with the Blue panel.

Such affiliations can easily triumph over qualifications. For example, a PhD degree—once a mandatory requirement for being a professor—now appears optional for those with political affiliations.

Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), who has been facing a huge backlash over the past two weeks, has no PhD degree. Neither does Prof Abul Kashem of Bangladesh University of Textiles (BUTEX).

Despite repeated attempts, Prof Farid and Prof Mashur could not be reached for comments.

Blue is the most powerful colour
Six of the VCs, who hailed from DU, were involved with a faction of Blue panel formed to oppose the panel backed by the then DU VC Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, while one was affiliated with the pro-Siddique panel.

Among other VCs, Prof Rafique Ullah Khan of Sheikh Hasina University in Netrokona was convener of the Blue panel at DU. Prof Imdadul Hoque of Jagannath University was elected dean of the Biology faculty with the backing of the Blue panel in 2017.

Prof Akhtaruzzaman of DU also served as secretary and vice president of DUTA nominated by the panel.

Meanwhile, all public universities have pro-government and anti-government teacher panels under different names, even if they are not called the Blue or White panels.

Prof Matiar Rahman Howlader of Sylhet Agricultural University was a leader of Bangabandhu Krishijibi Parishad, a pro-AL professional body.

Prof Goutam Buddha Das of Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University is

Chattogram University (CU) and even took part in an election of the teachers' association in 2009.

But later he was appointed VC of the university because of his "good rapport with a former top official of Prime Minister's Office", CU sources said.

Contacted, Prof Ahsan outright rejected his involvement with the White panel. "This is a blatant lie. I was not a very active member of [AL backed] Yellow panel but I was always associated with the Yellow panel," he added.

Ousted VCS
During the 13-year tenure of this AL-led government, four VCs were forced to leave their posts following the protest of students or teachers.

Prof Shariif Enamul Kabir of Jahangirnagar University (JU) was forced to resign in 2012 when a student, Jobayer Ahmed, was killed by the cadres of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL).

Then DU teacher Prof Anwar Hossain took charge but he too was forced to resign in January 2014 following months of agitation by a section of teachers and students on different issues including his inaction over assaults on a teacher by a BCL leader.

Prof Khondokar Nasiruddin of

Guideline needed to appoint VCs: UGC Chairman

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

There should be a guideline for appointing vice-chancellors to public universities to reduce political manoeuvring in the appointment process, opined University Grants Commission Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah.



The candidates should have strong academic credentials and administrative acumen for becoming VCs. Besides, a VC should be appointed for one term only to reduce "politicking", he proposed. "There should be no scope for

someone to raise questions about the academic excellence of the VC of a public university," Prof Shahidullah told The Daily Star.

Currently, there is no guideline in place that can determine who is eligible or disqualified to be the vice-chancellor of a public university.

"In our country, in good faith, it is assumed that anybody who is a professor, theoretically, becomes eligible to be appointed as a VC," he said.

The UGC chairman also said that a person aged at least 52 years and experienced at least for 10 years should be appointed as VC.

Until now, respective laws of four large public universities—Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Jahangirnagar universities—have provisions that VCs of these universities would be appointed by the President after getting elected by the senate of the respective universities.

But, in most cases, un-elected VCs run the universities. Currently, VCs of RU and CU are not elected.

However, there is no criteria for the appointment of VCs in other universities.

As per the rules of those universities, the President holds the jurisdiction to appoint a VC, but he does so following the consent of the prime minister after the Education Ministry sends a list of potential candidates.

The UGC prepared a Strategic Plan for Higher Education for 2006 to 2026 which recommended that the existing system of appointing VCs needed to be changed, as it left much "scope for political manoeuvring".

The chancellor could form a national search committee, giving it adequate legal backing to recommend the appointment of VCs, it proposed.

The BNP government at the time did not implement any of the recommendations choosing, instead, to appoint loyalists.

"If someone can fulfill the criteria like having sound academic track, 25 years of teaching and

POLITICALLY APPOINTED VICE CHANCELLORSHIP

39/48 VCs of the country's public and government universities have held posts in a pro-Awami League teachers' panel.

WHAT'S IN A COLOUR?

At least 12 DU teachers who previously held posts with the Blue panel are now VCs at different units.

Among these 12, 6 VCs can be found involved in a divided Blue panel, which was formed as an opposition of former DU VC Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique. The Blue panel is made up of DU teachers aligned with Awami League.

All the public universities have pro-government and anti-government panels in different names.

4 Vice Chancellors left their posts following student protests in the last 13 years—the tenure of the Awami League govt.

10 former and present VCs (at least) face allegations of staff appointments as favours and graft during the Awami League's rule.

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- Prof M Maniruzzaman Miah National Education Commission of 2003 and UGC's 20 year plan (2006-26) made recommendations for appointing VCs through a committee. But the then BNP-led government did not follow it, and instead picked VCs on the basis of political affiliation.
- The army-backed caretaker government appointed VCs of several universities through search committees in 2008.
- Successive governments of the AL-led grand alliance then reverted to the old ways of picking political loyalists.

a lifetime member of Bangabandhu Krishibid Parishad, another pro-AL professional body.

Prof Shahidur Rahman Khan of Khulna Agricultural University was the general secretary of Ganotantrik Shikkhok Forum, Bangladesh Agricultural University.

Prof Shahidur Rashid Bhuiyan, VC of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University in Dhaka, was elected president of its teachers' association after being nominated by the AL-backed forum.

Prof Giashuddin Miah, VC of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University (BSMRAU) in Gazipur, was president of Ganotantrik Shikkhok Parishad, the pro-AL teachers' panel.

Prof M Kamruzzaman, VC of Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University in Dinajpur, was member secretary of BSMRAU's Shikkhok Parishad.

The rest, too, AL men
Although The Daily Star could not ascertain whether the VCs of five universities—Chandpur Science and Technology University (CSTU), Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET), Bangladesh University of Textiles (BUTEX), Islamic University (IU) of Kushtia, and Noakhali University of Science and Technology (NUSC)—held posts in any pro-AL teachers' panels, most of them did have some form of affiliation with these bodies.

For instance, Prof Didar-ul-Alam of NUSC, originally a DU teacher, tried but failed to receive nomination from the Blue panel in 2017 for dean elections, sources said.

DU teacher Prof Sheikh Abdus Salam, now VC of IU, used to take part in meetings of the Blue panel and served as an acting dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of DU in 2009. He was director general of the Press Institute of Bangladesh in 1996 during the first tenure of the AL-led government.

BUTEX VC Prof Abul Kashem served as director general of the Directorate of Technical Education before being appointed to his current position.

The only VC to come from a non-AL background is that of Islamic Arabic University.

Prof Muhammad Ahsan Ullah was involved with the BNP-Jamaat-backed White panel in

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University in Gopalganj was forced to resign in September 2019 amid student protests over his alleged involvement in irregularities and corruption.

In April 2019, SM Imamul Haque, VC of Barishal University, was sent on forced leave over similar allegations.

VCs who completed their tenure despite allegations

A probe committee of the Education Ministry in May 2021 found that the immediate past VC of Rajshahi University, M Abdus Sobhan, had violated the constitution, university law, and a government embargo by appointing 137 teachers and staffers on his last day at office



Only those who have sound academic background and can play the role of a guardian should be appointed as VC. Under no circumstances should they be partisan.

The main job of a VC should be to create an enabling environment on campus in which all bodies, including student unions, are functional, and cultural activities and critical thinking can flourish. There should be exchange of ideas between teachers and students beyond the classroom. The process of social and cultural development is absent in our universities.

Though four universities have their own laws, it's the government who ultimately picks the VC. That's a fact. Universities should be seen as academic institutions—otherwise nothing will change. The overall environment of universities needs an overhaul. I cannot even imagine universities that don't have student unions.

Serajul Islam Choudhury, Professor Emeritus, DU

as well as relaxing the rules to appoint his daughter and son-in-law as teachers at the university.

Prof Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, former VC of Begum Rokeya University, hogged the headlines with his absence on the university campus. He was absent for a total of 1,207 days during his 1,447-day tenure.

Prof Kalimullah allegedly withdrew many allowances without any proper reason. A group of teachers and students published a 'white paper' containing 111 allegations, which he denied.

Former VC of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University Prof Kamal Uddin Ahmed faced allegations of appointing teachers and officers in violation of rules.

No action was taken against any of them.

administrative experience, it would reduce the chance of politicisation," Shahidullah said.

"I don't see a problem if political connection can play a 20 per cent role," he added.

Shahidullah said a search committee on many occasions does bring desired results, but then the question arises, who are the members of the committee and are they independent.

Regarding the corruption allegations against VCs, Shahidullah said that UGC had probed different allegations charges against 13-14 VCs in recent years.

In many cases, the allegations hardly had substances, he claimed.

"We have probed and in some cases forwarded the report to the education ministry. They are supposed to take actions," he said.



Besides, eight VCs obtained PhDs from Bangladeshi universities, while nine VCs obtained their degrees from India, nine from Japan, seven from European countries, and the rest from other countries.

No one obtained a PhD from the United States, which has the highest number of universities in the top 100 list by the prestigious QS World University Rankings.

Controversial past not a hindrance
It appears that a teacher's controversial past at his/her respective university did not act as a deterrent when it came to their appointment as VC.

For example, SUST VC Prof Farid Uddin, who served as president of Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) from 2013-16, was implicated in scandals over leakage of question papers for the admission test of D unit in 2015 and 2017.

He was the dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the time, and his office was directly involved in the process of supervising the tests.

Allegations of plagiarism were also raised against at least three articles published in the Social Science Review, when he was the editor of the publication.

Prof Mashur Rahman, a teacher of the Sociology Department of DU, once faced allegations of plagiarism, but managed to dodge punitive action allegedly because of his affiliation with the Blue panel. He unsuccessfully contested the syndicate election from the Blue panel.

He was appointed as Pro-VC of National University in 2017 and later promoted to VC in 2021.