Is research university an oxymoron?



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Derived from Greek words oxys actually followed these routines (sharp, pointed) and *moros* (stupid), the word "oxymoron" often denotes a meaningless and self-contradictory expression. It is also a literary device in which contradictory words are placed together to convey a deeper meaning. For example, Badiuzzaman Bay, in a recent column in this daily commenting on Bangladeshis being close to the bottom on a UNinitiated happiness index, wrote that Bangladeshis are "happily sad," not willing to do anything about the causes inducing the sadness. Is the term research university as an oxymoron a meaningless gibberish, or is there a deeper message in it?

Syed Saad Andaleeb and colleagues including Ahrar Ahmad, Adnan Z Morshed, Halimur R Khan and others have been writing recently about the higher education experience in Bangladesh. The Daily Star is to be commended for providing the space for the "Academic Experience Project."

One would mostly agree with the diagnostics of the problems the writers have put forth. We are familiar with the stress and strain that students and teachers suffer, the nature of desired pedagogy in

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diligently. Is there a misreading of the character of university research in

richer countries? And how relevant is it to try to compare apples and oranges, i.e. to measure universities in the US, UK or even China and those in Bangladesh by the same measuring scale, such as the global university ranking tables? The National Science Foundation

of the US reports that academic institutions in the country have been responsible for performing about half of all basic research and about 10 - 15 percent of total research and development (R&D) in the US. Over 85 percent of R&D, largely in applied research and experimental development, are undertaken by the corporate sector. In academic research, there is a dominance of basic research (generating new knowledge) with two of every three academic R&D dollars spent on basic research. Two fields – biological and biomedical sciences and engineering have primarily seen increases

in academic research, driven by

funding in these fields provided

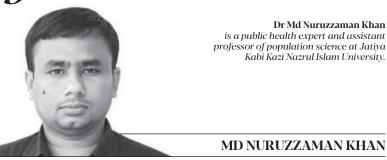
higher education institutions. The rest are of all kinds directly and primarily engaged in teaching. These include full universities, fouryear colleges, and even cosmetology institutes.

Two points to be noted from the above sketch of research in the US are: research and teaching are twin functions of higher education, but the main task for the large majority of institutions is good teaching. And universities are not the main sources or locale of research in any country. In Bangladesh, the total research effort is meagre, but one should note that a lot of developmentrelevant research is being carried out outside the universities. Research and experiments by Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) has enabled the country to feed its growing population over the years. One can also name Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) in the public sector, and non-state research institutions such as the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Education Watch of CAMPE, the latter producing an annual survey-based research on education for almost two decades.

The World Economic Forum, in a review of the relevance of the world university league tables, considers the high value placed on these rankings in higher education decision-making in developing countries as "disturbing and alarming." The criteria for the mostly by the federal government ranking of universities are based on

GENDER IMBALANCE IN BANGLADESH

The disturbing trend of selective abortion



MD NURUZZAMAN KHAN

The natural sex ratio (SR, ratio of boys and girls) is typically over 100 as the number of girls born is naturally lower than the number of boys. This may be nature's way of offsetting the higher risk that men have of dying male babies are biologically weaker than females. Any deviation from this natural distribution is a cause for concern as it suggests human interference.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh has experienced such a disruption, with an SR of 98.04 according to the 2022 census, representing a significant decline from the SR of 108 recorded in 1974. The ratio decreased to 106 in 1981 and remained stable over the years, until it declined again to 100.3 in 2011 and further to 98.04 in 2022. In some divisions, such as Chattogram and Mymensingh, the SR is even lower. This SR is man-made through selective sex determination with the aim of getting rid of the girl child, early death due to neglect, and infanticide.

There is evidence to suggest that the reported decline in the SR between 1974 and 1981 was mainly due to inaccurate SR calculation in the 1974 census. However, the consistent decline in SR since 2001 suggests that this is not simply an enumeration error. Also, it is unlikely that such errors would occur now, as Bangladesh has experienced several rounds of successful censuses. The use of ultrasonography to determine child sex early and stagnation in contraception use since the early 2000s may shed light on why this is happening in Bangladesh.

1970s, During the technologies were introduced globally that allowed for the identification of foetal sex in utero. One such technology, ultrasound, became popular quickly in low- and middle-income countries in the

cost, providing up to 98 percent reliable results after the seventh week of pregnancy. In Bangladesh, it became popular in the early 2000s, around the same time when the SR began to decline.

The association between the use of ultrasonography and aborted female foetuses was further established through research in Bangladesh. Consequently, the health ministry banned the use of ultrasonography to determine an unborn child's sex. In February 2020, the High Court also banned gender detection to protect unborn babies and pregnant women. Despite these efforts, gender detection of the unborn is still a common practice in the country, and medical and associated non-medical personnel often support it.

Although ultrasonography can be used for both medical and nonmedical reasons, such as satisfying parental curiosity, monitoring foetal development, and ensuring the health of the mother and child, in Bangladesh, its use has resulted in the selective abortion of female foetuses due to the country's patriarchal traditions. This is because male children are traditionally viewed as breadwinners and providers, essential for the continuation of the family name and lineage. Furthermore, male children are believed to be better earners and capable of contributing to agricultural work and caring for their parents in old age, while female children are often regarded as a financial burden due to dowry expectations and limited opportunities for education and career advancement.

These misconceptions preferences for male children, coupled with a natural higher importance of girls and women and number of conceptions of female foetuses, have resulted in a higher 1980s. It is a non-invasive procedure unmber of abortions in Bangladesh. foetus is aborted in Bangladesh, and that can be performed by medical. This not only contributes to a that a female foetus has an equal and non-medical personnel at a low declining SR, but also poses right to be born as a male foetus.

challenges to maternal and child health as abortion is completely restricted in Bangladesh, except in cases where it is required to save a woman's life. As a result, abortions in Bangladesh are mostly performed outside formal healthcare facilities, which accounts for 13 percent of total maternal mortality in the

Moreover, menstrual regulation (MR), a form of abortion, is legal in Bangladesh up to 13 weeks of conception. The government legalised it in 1974 to reduce the burden of unintended conception, as the use of modern contraceptive methods was low at that time. While the current rise in the use of modern contraceptive methods suggests that the need for MR may not be as vital as it was in 1974, around 22 percent of live births are still unintended at conception. Furthermore, Bangladesh experiencing a stagnation in the use of modern contraception, resulting in an increase in births due to contraceptive failure, and up to 48 percent of eligible couples still do not use modern contraception. Therefore, a complete ban on MR in Bangladesh may not be appropriate.

However, the use of ultrasonography to determine the foetus sex after the seventh week of pregnancy and the legalisation of MR services up to 13 weeks give a window of around six weeks to selectively abort female foetuses.

The implications of a declining SR are significant and far-reaching. It has the potential to create a gender imbalance in the country's population, increase the sharp rise in violence against women, create shortage of brides leading to a rise in bride trafficking and forcible marriage of widows, as well as a surplus of unmarried men, leading to a rise in crime rates.

To address this, the government first needs to ensure that healthcare and associated personnel do not disclose the sex of an unborn child by any means. Investing more in increasing women's education and empowerment, as well as awareness campaigns to promote the value and gender equality, are also important. We need to ensure that no female



VISUAL: STAR

a higher education institution, the infrastructure inadequacies and the meagre resources, and the dystopic mindset that these conditions generate among all the actors involved. But then, are we looking only at the symptoms of a deeper malaise that should be probed and

In a day-long Asiatic Society seminar on March 18 this year, I had the opportunity to speak about "Higher Education Priorities for a Prosperous Bangladesh." A question posed was: do we have a consensus or common understanding about the criteria and relevance of higher education for a developing country?

A commonly argued point by the university academics, reflected to an extent in the columns in the Academic Experience Project, is that the most important function of the university is research (some may argue it's more important than teaching), and that universities are the only place where research happens. So we hear such broad assertions as, the epicentre of research is the university. A research university is the engine for change and transformation of society. Examples of university research in developed countries such as the United States and newly emerging economies such as China are cited.

With a tone of disapproval, the academics say that our universities are engaged mainly in undergraduate teaching with a strict UGC-mandated curriculum focused on building basic student competencies. The teachers teach a course, administer tests, and grade students with little academic space to cultivate critical thinking and a

research mindset among students. The thought that strikes me is, is something wrong with universities giving attention to undergraduate teaching? Cultivating research mindset and critical thinking among students is important, but does this require foregoing the necessary academic routine of "teaching a course, administering tests, and grading students"? I personally would be very pleased if universities fraction of the total of over 4,000 unless the basic failure is addressed.

We cannot have within the space of this column a discussion on how the university charters both for public and private universities established by law are actually being applied and enforced, the overall governance capabilities and practices of the principal bodies such as the **University Grants** Commission (UGC), education ministry and the respective governing bodies of universities, and the meagre public funding for higher education. Discussion on these issues in various forums makes it amply clear that there is a massive political failure to

supplemented by corporations.

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About 150 universities, described by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education doctoral universities with a high level of research activities, performed more than threequarters of academic R&D. All of these doctoral universities, with strong postgraduate research and teaching activities, also have highly regarded undergraduate teaching programmes. These add up to a

certain premises and assumptions,

Primary and secondary education prepare and equip most higher education students with foundational skills of reading, writing and study habits.

* They have a safe place to stay on or off campus, can partake of necessary nutrition at an affordable price, and can live and study without being harassed or tortured by their

* They have access to free computer labs and affordable internet and well-stocked library open for long hours.

They can go to a gym, engage in sports of their choice, and join in entertainment and cultural activities in the student centre.

Their professors and administrators are appointed fairly for their ability and integrity, not for

their loyalty to political patrons. These conditions are taken for granted in the ranking criteria, so are not included in the criteria. But these are the basic conditions we have not been able to provide for our students in our best and oldest universities, even in the "Oxford of the East."

Where do we stand on the national commitment and political priority, and commitment of resources, for achieving the quality and relevant goals of higher education? We cannot have within the space of this column a discussion on how the university charters both for public and private universities established by law are actually being applied and enforced, the overall governance capabilities and practices of the principal bodies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), education ministry and the respective governing bodies of universities, and the meagre public funding for higher education. Discussion on these issues in various forums makes it amply clear that there is a massive political failure to nurture and protect a quality higher education system. The academics' dream of the ideal students, teachers and ambiance cannot be fulfilled



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বাংলাদেশ অ্যাক্রেভিটেশন কাউপিলের অনুনুমন খাত হতে অফিস সরঞ্জম সরবরাহকারী খ্যাতনামা প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে নিমুলিখিত শর্ভে দরপত্র আহ্বান করা

21	মন্ত্রনালয়/বিভাগ	:	মাথ্যমিক ও উচ্চ শিক্ষা বিভাগ।		
21	বান্তবায়নকারী সংস্থা	1	বাংলাদেশ অ্যাক্রেভিটেশন কাউন্সিল।		
७।	প্রতিনিধি	:	সচিব , বাংগাদেশ অ্যাক্রেভিটেশন কাউন্সিল।		
81	বাজেট প্রাপ্তির উৎস	:	বিগ্রসি অনুন্নয়ন তহবিল।		
Q1	দরপত্র নং ও তারিখ	;	৩৭.২৮,০০০০,১০৩.৪৩,০০১.২০- ৯৭১ তারিখ-১০/০৪/২০২৩ খ্রি.।		
&	সরঞ্জমাদির বিবরণ	:	অফিস সরঞ্জম সরবরাহ।		
		:	মালামালের নাম	米朝	
		:	ক্রেস্ট সেল্ফ	০১ (এক) টি	
		:	ফাইল ক্যাবিনেট/সেল্ফ	০৪ (চার)টি	
		:	scanner	০১ (এক) টি	
		:	LED TV	০৫ (পাঁচ)টি	
		:	সিন্ধুক	०५ (पूरें) हि	
91	টেভার সিকিউরিটি	1	টাকা = ১৬,০০০/- (যোল হাজার) মাত্র।		
b l	দরপত্র সিভিউল ক্রয় মূল্য	1	টাকা = ১০০০/- (টাকা এক হাজার) মাত্র (অকেরৎ যোগ্য)।		
Þ١	দরপত্র সিডিউল প্রাপ্তির স্থান	:	বাংলাদেশ আক্রেডিটেশন কাউন্সিল(বিএসি), বিএসএল অফিস কমপ্রেক্স-২(৩য় তলা) ১ মিন্টো রোড, রমনা ঢাকা-১০০০।		
So	দরপত্র সিভিউল ক্রয়ের সময়	:	২৪/০৪/২০২৩ ব্রি. অফিস চলাকাশীন পর্যন্ত।		
22 1	দরপত্র দাখিলের ছান ও সময়	1	বাংলাদেশ অ্যাক্রেভিটেশন কাউন্সিল(বিএসি) অফিস, বিএসএল অফিস কমপ্লেক্স-২(৩য় তলা) ১ মিন্টো রোড, রমনা, ঢাকা-১০০০। তারিখ ও সময় :- ২৪/০৪/২০২৩ খ্রি ,তারিখ বেলা- ১.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত।		
251	দরপত্র খোলার সময় ও ছ্র্ন		২৪/০৪/২০২৩ খ্রি. তারিখ বিকাল ২.০০ ঘটিকা, বাংলাদেশ অ্যাক্রেভিটেশন কাউন্সিল (বিএসি) অফিস, বিএসএল অফিস কমপ্লেক্স-২(৩য় তলা) ১ মিন্টো রোভ, রমনা, ঢাকা-১০০০।		
100	কার্য সমাপ্তির সময় সীমা	:	ক্রয় আদেশ থেকে ৩০(ত্রিশ) দিন পর্যন্ত (প্রয়োজনে হ্রাস/বৃদ্ধি হতে পারে)		
184	বিশেষ দুষ্টব্য	:	 ১) দরপত্রের শর্তাবলি টেন্ডার সিভিউলে পাওয়া যাবে। ২) কর্তৃপক্ষ যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা সকল দরপত্র বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন। 		
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