



VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHOON

# Dhaka University's 'game of departments'



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People who are hypersensitive about Dhaka University's glorious past would rather not accept that it is the Ordinance of 1973 itself that has brought this so-called "Oxford of the East" to its current mess and malaise. The prevalent narrative is that everything at this institution prior to 1973 were attempts to maintain the government's control over the institution. One DU website entry characterises this milestone ordinance as when "democratic norms and autonomy became integral features of the institution." Yet, because of the adherence to rules and regulations during those first 50 or so years, there weren't many adverse effects on the academic aspects of this university or its faculty. Now, it is clearly a different story.

Democracy needs its voters; and in the case of Dhaka University, this meant recruiting enough of the right kind of voters, those willing to preserve its mediocrity and guarantee both political and financial control. If there are more students to serve, an institution may justifiably recruit more faculty members by making sure the overall student-to-faculty ratio remains invariant. The faculty recruitment strategy used at DU, thanks to the ordinance, was unusual and agenda-driven. The number of students increased from 22,500 in 2000 to 37,018 today, a 64 percent increase. Yet, the number of faculty members doubled to 1,992. During the eight-year tenure of one former vice-chancellor, at least 78 of the 907 recruited faculty members did not meet the minimum qualifications. Globally ranked universities do increase the number of faculty members to meet the teaching needs of a larger student body, but without increasing the number of departments and associated bureaucracy. When these institutions recruit new faculty members, they view this as an opportunity to bring in only those talents who will bolster the institution's reputation.

The surge of faculty members at DU has resulted in offices and corridors that are often devoid of faculty members since a large number of them are busy teaching at private universities. The ordinance has allowed DU to create evening programmes which are now run by 35 departments, involving 36.4 percent of the university's faculty members. Thus, those active in these two activities have little or no time left for either teaching or research.

Unlike in India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand, and Singapore, public universities in Bangladesh have settled on a minimal set of criteria for promotion and recruitment. Even though the ordinance dates back to 1973, public universities waited 48 years (in the name of autonomy) before agreeing to

adopt their rather trivial promotion criteria. Private universities, thanks to the University Grants Commission, settled on nearly the same promotion criteria but only in 23 years. This fact alone is why some of the better private universities in Bangladesh are beginning to get ahead of most public universities in global rankings.

To justify a 100 percent increase in the number of faculty members, DU created never departments whether this made any academic sense or not. The university that began operations in 1921 with three faculties and 12 departments grew to have five faculties and 29 departments by 1973. By 2000, there were 47 departments. And now that number is 83, an increase of 186 percent since the Ordinance of 1973. Each new department means a new head and the possibility of someone becoming a head every few years. During the last two decades, the number of institutes has increased from nine to 13, and the number of research centres and bureaus increased from 16 to 56. It's clear that this increase in the number of institutes, research centres, and bureaus hasn't translated to an improvement in the university's research reputation, as evidenced by the latest global rankings.

What has been transpiring at public universities since 1973 has little or no academic rationale to support it, while students and their families have been the victims of uncertain futures. Much like George RR Martin's Game of Thrones, waged for control over the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros, the DU has also been playing a game of departments for decades.

The Physics wing of DU, established in 1921, gave birth to four offspring, two of which had positive impacts while the same cannot be said about the other two. Physics underwent a legitimate pre-1973 transition which resulted in the creation of Applied Physics in 1965. By 1974, post-ordinance, this unit had a name change and became Applied Physics and Electronics. By 2021, it had evolved to become Electrical and Electronic Engineering (now with 36 faculty members - 14 professors, five associate professors, eight assistant professors, and nine lecturers) and is now part of a booming Faculty of Engineering and Technology. Theoretical Physics was introduced in 1975, only to be folded in 1978 following the end of the first term of its first head. In globally ranked universities, Theoretical Physics is rarely a department in itself, unless it hosts a large number of researchers. But DU decided to revive its Theoretical Physics department in 2008 with a head for only three faculty members, including the head - one professor and two associate professors. The

same year, another group diverged from Physics to create Biomedical Physics and Technology - with a head for six faculty members, including the head (one associate professor, two assistant professors, and two lecturers). Then, in 2011, Nuclear Engineering came out of Physics, and currently has 15 faculty members. Because of its appeal and what it can offer to its students, Nuclear Engineering has become a part of the Faculty of Engineering and Technology. Both Theoretical Physics and Biomedical Physics and Technology have remained anaemic and wouldn't have been created or revived if not for the 1973 ordinance. Additionally, Biomedical Physics and Technology isn't applied enough yet to become a part of the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, and thus, will need to continue being a part of the Faculty of Science.

Another play by DU involves Chemistry, which was established in 1921 and underwent a legitimate pre-1973 transition when a part of it became Pharmacy in 1964. Then, after 39 years, thanks to the ordinance, Pharmacy gave birth to triplets: Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacology, currently having 25 faculty members; Pharmaceutical Chemistry, with 21 faculty members; and Pharmaceutical Technology, hosting 21 faculty members. The parent department was eliminated but was resuscitated in 2014 after a hiatus of 11 years. This revived department now has one person heading its two faculty members, including the head. The net result of this bizarre game of departments is a new Faculty of Pharmacy which now shelters four independent departments and four new heads.

An investigation of the different ongoing games of departments within the non-science and non-engineering departments of DU also reveals that, except in the rarest cases, the creation of new departments hardly ever reflected changes in the market, the knowledge base, or student demands. In the majority of these cases, the changes were results of considerations that had little or nothing to do with academic needs. Mass Communication and Journalism, which has existed since 1962, branched out into Television, Film, and Photography in 2012, and Printing and Publication Studies in 2015. Meanwhile, there has been overlap between the offerings of the parent department and those of Television, Film, and Photography. Similarly, a part of the Sanskrit and Pali department, which has roots going back to 1921, moved on to create Pali and Buddhist Studies in 2006.

Despite the frequent introduction of departments at Bangladesh's public universities, they altogether attracted only 767 international students in 2020. Twice as many international students typically join the country's private universities. The ordinance that guides the private institutions is thankfully free of this game of departments. Related to this, in 2022, according to Unesco, over 49,000 students left Bangladesh for destinations overseas, a large majority of whom may never return. This number was 22,905 in 2012 and 12,390 in 2002.

# Tackling inflation

Country must consider global influences, too



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High inflation in the US has affected most currencies. To control this surge of prices, the US Federal Reserve System increased interest rates. This led to the fall of many foreign currencies, such as the taka, against the US dollar under a managed float foreign exchange rate regime. Inflation has thus become a worldwide phenomenon, not only specific to the developing world. Inflation in the Global

of goods and services rises. This, in turn, causes a drop in purchasing power.

Theoretically, there are four main drivers of inflation. Among them is 1) cost-push inflation, or the decrease in aggregate supply of goods and services stemming from an increase in production cost, and 2) demand-pull inflation, or the growth in aggregate demand, categorised by the four sections of

9.60 percent in June), while inflation edged higher for food products (9.76 vs 9.73 percent). Inflationary pressure was higher in rural areas at 9.75 percent (as opposed to 9.82) than in urban areas at 9.43 percent (9.45 in June). It thus appears that inflation has been fluctuating and stood at 9.69 percent in July 2023, beyond the comfort zone.

Is our country decoupled from the global economy? Only two countries, Bangladesh and Turkiye, thought they were isolated from the financial crisis. So, policymakers were traditional in implementing ideas. The central bank's indecision to raise interest rates and the absence of appropriate foreign exchange rate policies generated macroeconomic chaos. Although both countries realised it later on, it was too late. In these two economies, importers took full advantage of this situation to meet



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FILE PHOTO: STAR

South, particularly in Bangladesh, may further rise due to the recent decision to raise Fed rates and increase crude prices.

Against this backdrop, it is helpful to look at the inflation numbers in the developed world or Global North. For example, US inflation reached 9.1 percent in June 2022, something not witnessed in several decades. Inflation in the UK peaked at 11.1 percent in October 2022. In July 2022, EU inflation was at 9.8 percent.

Experts argue that Covid-19 led to rising inflation across the world. But how? The countries wanted to create typical Keynesian demand. For example, in the US, many households were given money (stimulus cheques), leading to increased government expenditure and high fiscal deficit. The same was seen in other countries, including Bangladesh. The basic idea behind such an intervention was to stimulate economies operating at a low level. In the process, however, the general price level increased due to the extra supply of money.

How can one explain the recent inflation? It can mainly be attributed to rising oil prices due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, though this is just a partial explanation. Worth noting is the fact that inflation does not mean an increase in prices of select commodities, but it is the rate at which the general price level

the macroeconomy: households, businesses, governments, and foreign buyers. The other two contributing factors include 3) an increase in money supply and 4) the decreasing demand for money.

Theorists argue that one type of inflation can lead to another, further exacerbating the situation. Besides, the steps to control inflation are the same as the ones to maintain the taka's value under the managed float regime.

Food and energy comprise a significant part of Bangladesh's consumer price index - with food alone weighing nearly 60 percent, following gross rent, fuel and lighting (17 percent). The index also includes clothing and footwear (seven percent); transport and communication (four percent); recreation, entertainment, education and cultural services (four percent); miscellaneous goods and services (four percent); medical care and health expenses (three percent); and furnishing (three percent). The more international price swings affect these goods and services, as many are imported, the less control the central bank has in influencing the overall price level.

According to government statistics, the annual inflation rate in Bangladesh dropped slightly to 9.69 percent in July 2023 from 9.74 percent the previous month. Prices eased for non-food products (9.47 vs

the pent-up demand through cheap bank borrowings. In Bangladesh, an opportunity for supernormal profit was created as syndicates formed.

It is ideal to raise interest rates based on economic principles. Business communities are not altruists but need to pass on the benefits of low-cost borrowing to citizens. Interestingly, their "animal spirit" has neither been controlled nor regulated. Worth mentioning, this pent-up demand is the result of a period of subdued spending.

In India, the government brought down the repo rate during the pandemic to stimulate the economy and improve liquidity. With inflation growing, the rate was raised, which resulted in all other interest rates in the system to increase as well. Consequently, there was a tightening of credit. This was possible because policymakers perceived that India is not decoupled from the global economy. Besides, the country has a food surplus economy, except for edible oil. In addition, it has efficiently managed crude oil imports from Russia.

The issues derived from the financial crises and their management are learning opportunities for countries, and reiterate that general governance problems and political interventions should not be the deterrent to efficient macroeconomic policymaking.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

### ACROSS

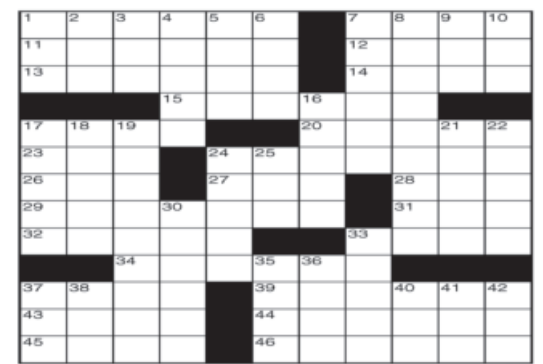
- 1 Pop's Justin
- 7 Mob revolt
- 11 Come in
- 12 Visitor to Siam
- 13 Growing plot
- 14 Dance unit
- 15 Lead on
- 17 Tibia's place
- 20 Bakery buys
- 23 Cariou of "Blue Bloods"
- 24 Fork-tailed bird
- 26 Granola bit
- 27 Chum
- 28 Wisdom bringer
- 29 Ale producer
- 31 Upper limit
- 32 Scatter
- 33 Top-rated

- 34 Less leisurely
- 37 Fluffy wraps
- 39 Rust and the like
- 43 In the past
- 44 Ryder of "Stranger Things"
- 45 Yuletide
- 46 Unwavering

### DOWN

- 1 Do a checkout job
- 2 S&L offering
- 3 Mess up
- 4 46th president
- 5 Smooth
- 6 Monthly bill
- 7 Scoundrel
- 8 Weave together
- 9 Low number
- 10 Spigot

- 16 Naples' nation
- 17 Messy sorts
- 18 Body pump
- 19 PC desktop, e.g.
- 21 Forum garb
- 22 Cleaned, in a way
- 24 Gushes forth
- 25 Fighting
- 30 Mink's cousin
- 33 Salty mixture
- 35 Road rescues
- 36 Way to go
- 37 "-voyage!"
- 38 Music's Yoko
- 40 1949 film noir classic
- 41 Close
- 42 Utter



## FRIDAY'S ANSWERS

T	A	M	P	A	G	A	L	A	S
O	C	E	A	N	A	R	E	N	A
T	H	E	L	I	O	N	K	I	N
S	E	T	M	U	D	S	E	E	
B	A	S	I	L	R	I	F	F	S
A	P	E	X		J	O	E	L	
N	E	W	E	R	B	O	O	Z	Y
A	D	D	I	A	R	O	T		
B	R	O	T	H	E	R	B	E	A
C	A	M	E	O	D	O	N	H	O
S	W	E	A	T	S	P	O	U	T

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