

Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman

Former Chief Justice of Bangladesh & Former Chief Adviser

Caretaker Government of Bangladesh

Honorable President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Honorable Vice-Chancellor, respected teachers and officers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, dear students. It is a great honor and a privilege to be invited to address this august audience and speak to the students who are being conferred their degrees on this auspicious occasion.

Two to three hundred years back it was often suggested that the sum of human knowledge would double every half a century. These days people may argue whether the doubling time of knowledge is eight or ten years. Presently we are witnessing an overwhelming predominance of things that are new over those that are old.

We are witnessing colossal changes, cognitive, technical and practical ones in our day-to-day lives. The enormity and rapidity of these changes mean that we suffer from a kind of desiccation. Presently, we find it extremely difficult to keep in mind what happened in the past and unite all our fond memories with our present commitments. Because of these, problems of adjustment we have to endure the imbalance and uncertainties that prevail in society.

Nowadays, King Canute was wrongly counseled by his advisers and sycophants. The roaring sea did not tarry a while. But no matter how painful and insistent the problem of adjustment is we must not only endure the imbalance, we must vow that in the end we shall overcome it.

A university is not a college. It is not even a congeries of colleges. It is something more than that. It is nothing if it does not foster free thinking, innovation and research. A university functions to locate and identify problems and suggest remedies for the maladies that are bedeviling society. It may even be expected to perform certain functions that belong to the realm of governmental activities and social reforms.

The object of higher education should be not only to impart what we think is now known but also to help students to 'learn how to learn'. This need for continued and higher and better education is growing at an accelerated pace. The importance of constantly upgrading our understanding and skills can hardly be overemphasized.

An Education pundit like J. Robert Oppenheimer advised us "Try to learn something seriously very well indeed. And do not just learn in general terms. Learn as a practitioner, and learn to do a thing well. And stop while you are doing it enough to see the beauty of it" But I would not quite stop with that; I would add, "But learn something else as well that is quite different. Get some sense of the span of things human, the span of things that the intelligent man can cope with."

It's said that we now live in a "credentialed society." The extensive use of educational credentials forces the education system to be society's gatekeeper. By generous scholarships and

governmental subvention systems we are, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, "to bring into action that mass of talents which lies buried in poverty for want of means of development."

However, some private universities in our country have created a very sad mess. Their names are exotic and intentionally made beguiling but only for obviously fraudulent purposes. If one wants to incorporate a public limited company one has to comply with certain "do's" and "don'ts".

The sad stories of sheer fraud and mismanagement that circulate about some of the private universities also reflect the callousness, narrow partisanship and thorough incompetence of the government's regulatory roles. Presently, however some attempts are being made to stop some shameful and nefarious activities in this area. I must add that East-West University is a bright exception to this unfortunate situation. It has already earned a good name. I hope thus it will not get embroiled in non-academic profiteering ventures.

Universities all over the world now flourish in close collaboration with the business world. For their expansion, for attracting and engaging capable young persons, and for incorporating the new knowledge, it is incumbent on the part of business leaders to encourage and be munificent towards private universities. Let me point out a recent event this university hosted in collaboration with the Association of Computing Machinery, the International Collegiate Programme Contest in February 2007. Such instances of collaboration need to be replicated.

A university is a place where all thoughts regarding human beings and the universe where they sojourn must converge. It cannot be conceived without freedom. It breathes and flourishes in freedom. It should be spacious enough for all kinds of exercises of the mind and body.

Academic freedom for the teachers is wider than the civil freedom. It is enough if in the teacher's activities there is evidence, in the words of Professor Edward Shils, of the "concern to teach the truth, to attain the truth and to publish the truth." However, the civil freedom of teachers does not extend to the conduct of political propaganda for the simple and obvious reason that the university is not an institution for the pursuit of partisan or sectarian objectives.

Teachers should, therefore, discipline themselves. If they conscientiously teach the subjects they were appointed to teach, they ought not to suffer for their utterances on political or religious grounds outside the classroom. A teacher is, however, not entitled to protection on the ground of academic freedom if he tries to indoctrinate or persuade students to accept his particular views on political or parochial matters that are totally extraneous to the subject that are being taught by him in the institution.

Teaching is a profession where that dereliction of duty in imparting instruction is very difficult to detect and prove beyond reasonable doubt. Teachers thus should not be entitled to protection on the ground of academic freedom if they do not seek and respect truth in teaching and doing research according to their best efforts, or if they fabricate, falsify or plagiarize the results of their research, or if they make or endorse statements that are flagrantly and arbitrary unrelated to easily accessible evidence.

Needless to say, there is no place for an agitator or a rumor-monger in an academic institution. If in the extramural world there is a roaring sea of grievance and discontent it will be difficult to build a protecting dam. In the last thirty-seven years unfortunately we had not had even a five years respite from commotion and unrest. It is no wonder that we have failed to produce and deliver goods according to our potentials and capabilities. Let peace and order prevail in this country so that we can all work unhindered in our dream of building a Shonar Bangla.

Thank you all for listening and thank you, the administrators of East West University, for inviting me for deliver the convocation speech on this important and memorable occasion.