

# Chittagong University And The Crisis - II

Hayat Hussain

but, unfortunately, once again those wise men of the university prevailed. In fact, with many new owners of land and houses among the teachers, officers and employees in the area the vested interest group opposing the shifting of the campus was stronger than before. The chapter seemed closed for ever but, in fact, it was not. In 1997 just one year after Awami League came into power a strong delegation of the entire university syndicate led by the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Abdul Mannan himself met the prime minister and chancellor of the university Sheikh Hasina. It was in fact, an Awami League delegation with the Vice-Chancellor himself known as an Awami activist and there was a great deal of hope and enthusiasm among the general teachers, students and others that this time a real decision was going to come and they were already in a mood to celebrate it. A decision did come, in deed, and it sealed the idea of shifting the campus once for all. Sheikh Hasina made it categorically clear that the idea of shifting the university at this stage was unacceptable and absurd. So the old wise men of the university and their new partners continued to remain triumphant on this issue and it is also true that now it is too late for a change. If any of the earlier Governments, say from 1972 to 1980, acted a bit wisely and take a determined step to shift the campus leaving the present one to the Forest Department or any other institution suited to this place, things would have been much different today and the Government could save a lot of money.

I mentioned in the beginning that in 1973-74 Chittagong University's transport expenses averaged between taka 5 and six lakh. Now it is about one and half a crore. In this respect, I think, this is the costliest university in the world. Significantly, half of these money is being spent for the transportation of the students. The old university railway station was about two miles away from the university and they had to reach the campus by detouring a hill that stood almost on the entrance of the university. On these considerations some buses were engaged to transport the students between the station and the university even after the introduction of the shuttle trains. As the number of students was multiplying every year the transport involvement was also getting bigger. In 1973-74 the then Vice-Chancellor Prof. Abul Fazal took an attempt to make a road through the hill by cutting it down in the middle and though the work was started in good earnest it was abandoned after he left the university to join late Ziaur Rahman's Government as an adviser in December '75. It was again in 1982-83 when Prof. Abdul Aziz Khan became the Vice-Chancellor that some serious and sincere efforts were made to complete the road through the hill as an extension of Sahid Abdur Rob Road which runs from

the main Hathazari road to Chittagong University gate. Levelling the road with high powered bulldozers and at the same time maintaining the slopes on two sides in scientific proportions required lot of money as well as good engineering skill. Vice-Chancellor Abdul Aziz Khan contacted the army in the near by cantonment and acquired their service at the cost of fuel only to bulldoze the hill. Having done a good job, at one stage, the army had to leave. Thereafter Prof. Khan contacted the local agent of a foreign company, called Ital Montagi which having laid the Bhakrabad gaslines near the university was resting its instruments including bulldozers and other earth cutting machines. At that time I was a member of the university syndicate and we also used the good office of my old class friend C.M. Mohsin, the then M.D. Of Bhakrabad gas Ltd., to persuade the Ital Montagi people to help the university levelling that road free of cost and they agreed. They also could not complete the job but left after doing almost 80% of the job. There after the Vice-Chancellor asked the engineering department to invite contractors and earth merchants to cut down the rest of the soil and take them free or for something like Tk 5 per truck. This method also worked well and the ultimate goal of completing the road seemed well in sight.

The completion of the road also became urgent in order to withdraw the student buses plying between the station and the faculties. In the mean time a significant development had taken place. By 1984 a new university railway station was constructed at the entrance of Chittagong University and an extra line was set between this station and the main Hathazari line at a cost of nearly three crore taka. Soon after the inauguration of the new station the university administration decided to cancel the bus service for the students since the distance between the station and the faculties was now greatly reduced. But immediately there was student's demonstration opposing the decision of the university to withdraw bus service for the students. The students maintained that although the distance was reduced by more than half still they had to walk a great distance, almost half a mile, around the hill as the road through the hill was not yet complete. They however, promised to support any such decision of the university as soon as the road is completed. But in April 1985 Prof. Abdul Aziz Khan who made the greatest contribution to this university was replaced by a new Vice-Chancellor and the road, since then, remained as it was. In the intervening years many Vice-Chancellors have come and gone but no effort was made to complete the road.

In fact, some quarters in the university or involved in the affairs of the university did never want the road to be completed as it would go against their vested interest. For instance, the

Hathazari Bus Owners' Association and their Drivers' Association who have been supplying and driving these buses for more than last three decades have become inextricably linked with the vicious racket that has been sucking the blood of this university like anything. Sometimes, some local student leaders also get involved with them for their personal benefit rather than that of the university. The University transport section and a part of the Accounts's office which deals with transport money are a part of the same. There is no accountability or transparency in the transport sector as there is no proper monitoring system. Out of 20 to 30 buses hired everyday for the students and others none can tell how many buses or drivers really reported for the job but they would take the cash every day from the Accounts' office without fail. Transport officials who certify their presence only share the money. So the truth and the tragedy of the whole things is that of the total amount of nearly one and half a crore taka now being spent for the transports at least 30% to 40% are going down the drain. The University Grants Commission officials sometimes write letters to the university to minimise transport expenditure but they have never taken any practical measures to suggest how it should be done or how corruption can be stopped.

Now the present crisis of the university stems from the fact that after the completion of Abdur Rab Sarak through the hill linking the station with the faculties the university administration decided to discontinue the bus service for the students between these two places. The students are not ready to accept this decision of the university. They also seem to have forgotten the word of honour given by their predecessors that once the road is completed through the hill they would not oppose discontinuance of their buses. Now they claim that it is a part of their basic rights. They have come to the university not to walk even if it is for 5 minutes, but to study. But the real studious students are hardly in this movement. They possibly do not know how much the students have to walk in the highly developed western world where most of the students have their own cars but are not allowed to go inside the campus with them. The same is true with many communist countries and I have personally seen it in the Beijing University of China in where I and my guide had to disembark from the car nearly quarter a mile from the Faculty.

What about the general people in the West, whether young or old, they have to walk ten to fifteen minutes or even more to take the train, bus etc., from the nearest stop or station. There is no rickshaw, baby taxi or tempo and so everybody has to walk. But our students are lords and they can't walk even for five to ten minutes. They have forgot-

ten the fact that they are paying only Tk. 10 per month as shuttle train fare which should normally be more than Tk. 500%. For this the university has to pay the railway something around Tk 30 lakh yearly or so and again more than double of that for free travel from the station to the Faculties by bus. What can be more unreasonable and illogical than this?

I think it should be more reasonable on the part of the students to ask for some rain shelters on the way from the station to the Faculties instead of asking for bus etc. They can also demand introduction of private tempo service from the main Hathazari road to the entrance of the university. Whatever may be the new arrangement they should be prepared to walk a little distance everyday which is also good for health. But taking the law into their hands is no solution and they are doing that. They are doing that in presence of three hundred policemen stationed in the university for the last three years. What a wonderful police we have who love to watch people fighting from a safe distance. When the students lock the gates of the Faculty buildings and the main gate of the university or stop teachers bus from entering the university they enjoy watching it standing like statues nearby. Then what is the use of maintaining such a large police force on the campus. They are being paid by the university and at the same time they are using university transports and other facilities but why? Just the other day, while watching a gun fight between two groups of students, four policemen were injured by astray bullets. So miserable is there condition and so bad is their training. If with so many policemen present in the university killings take place one after another and the university has to close down indefinitely again and again then it is better not to have any police at all.

In fact, it is the responsibility of the Government to come and stand behind the university authority when it is trying to do something in the greater interest of the university and the country. Unfortunately, our Governments have never taken any interest in such things as they are more busy using the police force against their political opponents and such other things. Moreover, they are more interested to use the campuses for their political ends rather than for education and by looking at the Government or the parliament one can easily understand the difference between education and our politicians. Speaking frankly from the day one after independence there has been a continued dictatorship of ignorance on this poor country and that continues to be a shaming indictment on our political system from which there seems to be no escape in the near future.

*At the author is a teacher in History and former Dean of Arts Faculty, Chittagong University.)*