

## DU confers degrees on 17,000 students

Muktadir Rashid and Sardar Mahabbat Ali

THE University of Dhaka on Saturday conferred degrees on more than 16,000 graduates and researchers amid protest against the attendance of the World Trade Organisation chief as the speaker in the university's 46th convocation.

The president, Zillur Rahman, also the chancellor of the university, conferred the degrees on 16,984 students who earned their bachelor's and master's degrees, 55 who earned their M Phil degrees and 104 researchers who earned their PhD degrees.

He also decorated 43 students and researchers with

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gold medals for their outstanding academic performance.

Zillur called on all to ensure an undisturbed academic atmosphere on the campus.

'The freedom of expression is universal in a democratic system... But all must practise democratic norms and should have tolerance to opinions of others to ensure that the freedom of expression is carried further in a peaceful manner,' he told the graduates in the programme in the university playground that spanned two hours.

The chancellor also called on the students to contribute more to nation-building reviving the past glory of the university instead of getting involved in intra-party clashes for personal gains or party interest.

'The nation does not expect that student organisations to get involved in in-party clashes over minor individual or party interest,' he said.

The university conferred an honorary doctor of law degree on the World Trade Organisation director general, Pascal Lamy, who was

the convocation speaker.

Former European Commissioner for Trade Lamy, also a member of the French Socialist Party, was honoured for his contribution to ensuring tariff-free access of Bangladeshi goods to European Union countries, the vice-chancellor, AAMS Arefin Siddique, said.

Zillur congratulated the graduates and asked them to play their role in various activities of the national life with the knowledge they have acquired.

The president emphasised expanding and intensifying research in universities to keep abreast of the current global advancement in information technology and biotechnology.

'The fruit of the research can be used to improve the living standards of the people,' he said.

Terming the university a centre of the nation's hopes and aspirations, Zillur said that the contribution of the university to all the movements for autonomy, independence and democracy would be recalled for ever.

Lamy in his speech said that as the world's most populous least developed country, Bangladesh had a natural

leadership role to play.

He said that Bangladesh's ability at translating WTO flexibilities for the world's poorest nations into trade and development outcomes is an example for all LDCs.

'Of course,' he said, 'if Bangladesh is to continue in its leadership role, it needs leaders.'

Bangladesh obtained a waiver on services liberalisation which gives legal coverage to the WTO members willing to offer privileged access on a non-reciprocal basis to LDC service providers, Lamy said.

He said, 'Bangladesh's garment sector has not just survived, it has thrived. Removing the quotas revealed Bangladesh's comparative advantage. Unilateral preferences have also helped Bangladesh's competitive edge. Simplification of the rules of origin governing duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market in 2010 has led to a surge in Bangladesh's garment exports.'

He said that similar achievements had also been registered in Bangladesh's pharmaceutical industry, which has seen its growth consolidated by the flexibilities offered to LDCs under

the WTO's intellectual property rules.

The WTO chief pointed out that one challenge for Bangladesh was to expand the progress in the garment sector to other sectors of the economy.

Lamy said that Bangladesh's Vision 2021 provided a compelling image of how Bangladesh sees itself going forward.

'The government is well on track to meet many of these time-bound targets, including achieving a middle-income status by 2021,' he claimed.

He said, 'I encourage Bangladesh to continue its leadership role on trade issues among LDCs. I encourage you, the students of this fine institution, to deliver on the vision of a Golden Bengal through your individual and collective efforts.'

Festivity was in the air as current and former students of the university gathered on the day.

The Progressive Student Alliance, a combine of leftist student's organisations, burnt Lamy in effigy and brought out a procession on the camps protesting at his attendance at the programme.