

**PROFESSOR ANISUZZAMAN**

PROFESSOR EMERITUS
UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA

I am happy to learn that East West University is going to hold its 8th convocation on the 7th April 2009.

The occasion is a reflection of the years of hard work of students, the sincerity and dedication of faculty members and staff and the relentless support of parents. I am happy to be a part of this great occasion and take the opportunity to convey my heartfelt felicitation to the graduating students, their parents, the faculty members and the administration of East West University. A University is the highest seat of learning. It is natural to expect that, at this level students would equip themselves with qualities required to take up the challenges of the present time. I sincerely believe that, with their acquired knowledge and skills, graduating students are ready to respond to the need of the time and carry on their journey with a vision that will help not only themselves but the nation as well.

I wish them and the convocation all success.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Anisuzzaman'.

Professor Anisuzzaman





ADDRESS CONVOCATION SPEAKER

PROFESSOR ANISUZZAMAN

Professor Emeritus
University of Dhaka

Your Excellency the President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Chancellor of the East West University, the Minister for Education, the Vice Chancellor, the Chairman and members of the Bangladesh University Grants Commission, the President and members of the Board of Directors of the University, fellow members of the Faculty, students and guests,

Please allow me to express my deep sense of gratitude to the authorities of the East West University for having asked me to speak before you this morning. It is indeed a great honour for me. The East West University is a distinguished institution of higher education in Bangladesh. Although it is only in the thirteenth year of its existence, it has made a mark by imparting quality education and by refusing to treat education as a commodity for business.

I have referred to the youthfulness of the East West University. As a matter of fact all the universities in Bangladesh are relatively young. The oldest of them — the University of Dhaka — was founded in 1921. Oxford and Cambridge, which inspired Dhaka, came into being in the 12th or 13th century. They were modelled after the University of Paris while the University of Bologna was still older. Rabindranath Tagore had claimed that the counterparts of the western universities in India were the Takhasila, which flourished between the 7th and 3rd century B.C., the Nalanda, founded in the 6th century A.D. and the Vikramasila, active in the 8th century A.D. The claim was made not out of chauvinism, but from an analysis of their objective, organization and curricula. It was noted that all the universities — eastern or western — started with the study of theology and went on to develop logic and medicine. As a discipline, law found favour with the western universities while linguistics had a special place in the Indian ones.



The fact remains that the growth of universities in India has not been continuous like that in Europe. That is why when the University of Calcutta was established in 1857 it came to be known as the first ever university in India.

The British colonialists were not interested in imparting education to their Indian subjects. When circumstances compelled them to do something in the area, they formed a Committee of Public Instruction in 1823. It was obvious that they had instruction and training rather than education in their mind. We may recount that until the other day the government official responsible for education was known as the Director of Public Instruction. It is not surprising, therefore, that the University of Calcutta was not modelled after any established western university. It was made to be an examining body and an authority to supervise schools and colleges established in India under private or public initiative. Its writ was extended to Burma and Ceylon, but it took it almost fifty years to introduce teaching under its own aegis.

The University of Dhaka closely followed the model of Oxford. It was meant to be a residential and teaching university and it did not bother with conducting examinations for others or overseeing schools and colleges. With the partition of Bengal in 1947 it was forced to undertake the responsibilities of looking after the colleges in East Bengal and examining their pupils. That burden has now shifted to the National University, but the sheer weight of number and the politics of conflict have dealt a heavy blow to the residential character of the University of Dhaka and of other public universities. The halls of residence, which used to be the centres of co-curricular activities and contribute to the academic development of the students as well, have been reduced to — what are known in the popular parlance as — messes. We all have contributed to this mess and I doubt whether it would be ever possible to restore the residential character of the universities developed along the same lines. I take note of the fact that, in Britain itself, with the transformation of large polytechnics into universities, there is now a growing tendency to cater for the day-scholars rather than follow the Oxbridge model. Private universities in Bangladesh serve the same purpose although most of them still offer courses in limited disciplines.

One of the problems of higher education in Bangladesh is that the system has been inherited from the colonial times. From the days of Sparta and Athens, every nation has found its own system of education. We have remained happy with the alien. Another problem stems from overcrowding. Please do not think for a moment that I am against the expansion of higher education, but I think that higher education is not for everyone, it is for the deserving. I have found that many students get themselves admitted into fields in which they have no interest at all but they do so because they want to study at the university. I have known occasions when courses were introduced to enable some student leaders to get into the university and those who took such courses did not have any love for them. Lack of interest can hardly make one study with seriousness and the results are obvious. Lack of employment opportunities also leads many to opt for higher education. The indiscriminate introduction of Honours and Masters courses in colleges has not served the cause of higher education well.

Growth of student-roll calls for recruitment of more teachers and sometimes people who have no interest in teaching are recruited. Teachers' interest elsewhere has also harmed the process of higher education. A university is not only a place for transmitting received knowledge, it must create new knowledge. This is where we lag behind.

Higher education cannot meet with success if it is not laid on a solid foundation. We have not paid enough attention to the primary and secondary levels from which the students come to receive higher education. Every citizen has a right to primary education. We have not been able to give this minimum quantum of education to all, although, time and again, we have set target dates for that. It has been the unanimous view of all educators that the primary education in Bangladesh should be extended upto class VIII because five years' schooling is hardly adequate for any learner. Teaching of languages — both Bengali and English — has been unsatisfactory at the primary and secondary levels. Without sufficient command of these languages the pursuit of lighter education is bound to suffer.



Fortunately we are becoming increasingly aware of the problems that I have mentioned. One, therefore, reasonably hopes that the awareness will lead us to act so that these obstacle are removed.

We frequently talk about meeting the challenges of the 21st century. Sometimes I ask myself : have we already met all the challenges that the 20th century put before us? Rhetorics are good, but these become worthless if we don't mean what we say. In a country like ours there are so many problems that we cannot really think of catching up with the best of educational scenarios in the world. We must strive for it and do all that we can to prepare ourselves towards reaching the goal. Achievement of an individual or two is not the same as collectively crossing hurdles. But, I am sure, the bright faces I see around will help us move forward.

Convocations are occasions of great rejoicing. This is a great moment for the graduating students who are entering a new phase of life. I congratulate them and wish them every success. I would like to remind them that they have a debt to this country which sooner or later they shall have to repay. I would also like them to bear in mind that their conduct, character and attainments will reflect on their alma mater. Let me seize this opportunity to congratulate their parents and teachers for the success of their wards and pupils.

Thank you all for your patience.

