



MOHAMMED FARASHUDDIN Ph.D.

FOUNDER VICE CHANCELLOR (1996 - 1998) AND
PRESIDENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS, EAST WEST UNIVERSITY

His excellency Professor Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed, the Hon'ble President of the Republic and Chancellor of East West University, Dr. M. Osman Farruk MP. Hon'ble Education Minister, Professor Dr. Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, the Convocation Speaker, the distinguished former education ministers of the Republic, esteemed Chairman and Members of the University Grants Commission, Vice Chancellors, Founder Directors of East West University, Professor M. Musa, the Pro Vice Chancellor, Deans of Faculties, Convocation Marshal, other beloved faculty members and non-teaching colleagues of East West University, proud parents and guardians, friends from the electronic and print media, very dear graduating students, and distinguished guests
Assalamu Alaikum,

Please accept our thanks for your presence on this joyous occasion.

This is of course a very special day for the 387 graduating students, their family members and their teachers. I congratulate you, the graduating students on this memorable day and on the accomplishment of your mission. I extend the most glowing tributes to your intellect and to your hard work; we are really proud of you. The three gold medal winners, in particular, fill us with admiration.

Hon'ble Chancellor and Distinguished Guests,

Today we celebrate the Fourth Convocation of East West University; the Hon'ble Chancellor will confer the bachelor degree to 241 successful candidates in three disciplines. He will also confer MBA/EMBA and M A in English degrees to 146 young men and women. As we rejoice, it is perhaps appropriate to reflect on the state of higher education in the country. Many skeptics have expressed dismay at the rapid growth in the number of universities and the prevailing quality of tertiary education in the country. I beg to disagree with them as far as the number is concerned. Bangladesh now has 76 universities - 23 public and 53 private for a population of 140 million. This compares very favourably with 220 plus universities in Indonesia for a population of 200 million, and with 160 plus universities in Pakistan with a slightly higher population than ours. Moreover, with a mere twenty to thirty percent share in the total university-going population, private universities are just beginning to complement the role of our public universities.

Certainly, the quality of higher education in some of the universities is a matter of great concern. If we say that the country's economy operates in a market environment and the signals in the market will sort out the good from the bad amongst the universities, we certainly have the right to do so. But we will then, in my view, be doing a disservice to those students who may incur irreparable loss at the end of a four year studies in a private university only to find that the market i.e. the potential employers, did not care for his/her degree and considered it to be not more than a mere piece of



paper. Offering market solutions to the precious service called tertiary education is thus very unjust. That is precisely the reason why it is necessary to monitor closely the quality of education provided by all the universities in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, the Bangladesh University Grants Commission (UGC) works under a severe constraint because in the 1973 Ordinance, no role has been assigned to it for monitoring the quality of education in private universities. The prospect of the formation of an Accreditation Council For Quality Assurance in Higher Education is something to look forward to. I understand that the proposed Council will have provisions for collection and evaluation of data on the quantity and quality of infrastructure, both physical and social, and an objective method of ranking individual universities. I should like to ring the alarm bell, though, and for three reasons. Firstly, the accreditation process should be universally applicable to all universities - public and private. Secondly, the Council must have complete financial autonomy. One way to ensure this is to give it a handsome Endowment Fund as seed money. Finally, and most importantly, since the Council or the accreditation exercise can only be as good as the quality of its leadership, I believe that only a person of acknowledged erudition, recognized neutrality, and impeccable integrity should be chosen as the Chairperson of the proposed Accreditation Council. Surely, there are people in the country that will fit this criteria with distinction.

Another important issue that is often raised in discussions about higher education in private universities is the high costs involved. Indeed, tuition costs at most of the well established private universities are high certainly when compared to the nominal fees charged at public universities. It may be argued that the well-known dictum of "righting the price for maximizing welfare" should not really be applied to education in the name of a democratic right of access to education for every citizen. Even then, it can be demonstrated as has been done in a recent study by Dr. Manjur Alam Tipu and Mr. Niaz Faizullah, that when all the extra costs and benefits are factored in, the apparent costs differences all but disappear.

In my view, the more pertinent question in respect of higher costs in the private university is the issue of entitlement because of the inadequate purchasing power of the majority of students. It is here that the healthy growth of philanthropic practices can provide significant help. Our experience at East West University has shown that an objectively managed merit scholarships fund and need-based financial assistance scheme is capable of nurturing the merits of those who are relatively under-privileged, including those who come from outside the metropolis. 693 of our students (18 percent of the total enrolment) received an amount of taka one crore ninety lakhs (8 percent of the tuition revenue) in the year 2004 alone. For the current year 2005, at least a 20 percent growth is foreseen. Our scholarship schemes cover full tuition costs (Merit Scholarships), half-tuition costs (Medha Lalon Fund Scholarships) and one-third tuition costs in case of need-based financial assistance. The largest number of beneficiaries get need based financial assistance. The absolutely non-profit nature of East West University envisioned by the fifteen selfless and visionary founding fathers has enabled this generous funding support, which has been very greatly appreciated in academic circles all over the country. Let me point out here that our ability to extend more support could be facilitated by the provision of income tax exemption for donations to scholarship funds such as the Medha Lalon Fund of East West University. Please note that exemptions from income taxation for voluntary donations for education purposes were discontinued in the early nineties due to alleged misuse by some unscrupulous individuals. If misuse is the problem, this can be very effectively eliminated through a system of pre-declaration by the donor and the recipient institutions and submission of complete documentation and disclosure of the use of the funds or the income therefrom. I make a most fervent appeal to your Excellences, the President and the EWU Chancellor and the Hon'ble Education Minister to consider exempting donations to Scholarship Funds from income tax cuts.

As I conclude, let me turn to the members of the audience who have occasioned this memorable ceremony.

Dear Graduates,

So this is the big day for which you have burnt so many midnight candles. I wish you all the best as you leave East West University to begin the next phase of your lives. Some of you may not yet be knowing what you will be doing next month or next year. But I know and your professions know that in earning an East West University degree you are well prepared to handle whatever challenges come next, and what will come in the distant future. The only certainty is that your lives will change from today and then change again, hopefully for the better. But to make the very most of your life and the opportunities you have been given, you must rise to the occasion. You must also give something back to your beloved country. As the years pass, your generation will be judged and you will begin to judge yourselves not only on what you do to yourself and to your family but on the contributions you make to others to your country, your communities and your children. If the ideals of East West University and its faculty members have been able to generate a sense of commitment and empathy in you for the relatively under-privileged, you will be able to contribute selflessly, to building a just and prosperous society where hunger, disease, shelterlessness, illiteracy and deprivation will surely have no place. I hope with my heart that yours respond to this important call to build a better tomorrow for Bangladesh. May Allah help you in this and in all your endeavours.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you all for giving me a patient hearing and for blessing our graduates this morning.

