

## 'Not just a curriculum, need international mindset as well'



Professor Dr Vincent Chang Mehedi Hasan/Dhaka Tribune

Professor Dr Vincent Chang of USA, who has 30 years of teaching, research, and administrative experience at university level in the Far East, Middle East, and USA, was appointed the vice-chancellor of Brac University in February. He is one of the first foreigners to take on such a role in a Bangladeshi university. The **Dhaka Tribune's** Ashif Islam Shaon recently caught up with him to dive into his thoughts

**What made you decide to come to Bangladesh and take on this role?**

Bangladesh is what I would like to call a "frontier economy". Just 50 years ago, countries like China, Japan and [South] Korea were where Bangladesh is now. We have seen how these countries have advanced. The wave of development then moved westward, towards countries like Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. Bangladesh and its economy are placed right where these countries were just a few decades ago. There is a clear development trend and Bangladesh, at the frontier of that development wave, is highly likely to be the next emerging economy.

The dominance of youths in the population of Bangladesh particularly excites me. We just need to educate them in the right way to turn them into skilled manpower, not just at the factory level but also as mid and higher-level managers. As technologies develop, more foreign investments will come eventually. So, we need to have our youth ready to tap into the new opportunities.

Brac is a big brand globally that has been doing wonderful work for the economy of Bangladesh for many years. Now, Brac University—one of the top universities in Bangladesh—can play a big role by bridging education and economic development.

**Tell us something about your plans for the next four years, serving as the vice-chancellor of Brac University.**

Brac University is the number one private university in Bangladesh which is a very good achievement itself. But, we shouldn't stop here; we need to aim high. Now we should try and become an international university. Building a true international university does not only mean having more foreign professors and international curricula. First and foremost, the mindset needs to be international. I have three specific plans for the "internationalization" of Brac University:

Firstly, I'd try to attract more international scholars and talent to join the Brac faculties. If you look at all the international universities in the world, they are open. They have foreign teachers and students. They have open campuses which mean they are open to new ideas and knowledge. We want to develop more international partners through an exchange of students and faculty members with globally high-ranked universities. We would try and hire experienced professors from overseas. My job is to make sure they come, and they stay.

Secondly, we'd try to build world-class research centres. The focus areas will be closely aligned with the work of the greater Brac family. For many decades, Brac has been working in sectors such as public health, education and poverty reduction. So, our primary focus for the research centres could be poverty management and economics. We'd focus on areas that we are best at. There is no point in competing in unknown fields, such as aerospace or high-speed railway, for example.

Thirdly, we'd try and ensure that every student comes out with a "Brac experience", which is something that a typical university cannot offer. At Brac University, it won't be just about grades. The curriculum will be designed in such a way that students can easily find out their own interests. For example, we might go to the schools and colleges and tell them about the importance of a quality education; what they should keep in mind when they choose their subject for higher education. We might also educate parents. We'd also work on building better and stronger industry linkages. Brac, the largest development organization in the world, has all the experience and linkages and this would be of great help to us in developing the Brac experience.

### **How could Bangladesh attract more international scholars like you?**

There are certain logistical barriers, such as visas, which have to be made easier. The infrastructure — roads, highways, electricity, traffic, etc — needs to be better as well. University professors are global citizens, their knowledge is also global. The government could help by easing the visa process for foreign professors. Even if we manage to bring the foreign professors, ensuring that they stay here will be a tough challenge unless we have the right infrastructure.

**Brac has always been known as a pro-poor organization. However, tuition fees at Brac University are among the highest in Bangladesh. If you hire international professors, your expenditures will rise. Won't that impact tuition fees?**

I agree that our expenditures will increase if we hire foreign professors. We will have to strike a balance so we can manage without affecting the tuition fees. We are also seriously considering how we could accommodate more students from poorer communities.

## **What does success look like to you?**

When it comes to university education, improvement is a lengthy process. Results won't be visible overnight. The changes we make today will take many years to breed results. Someday, I want people to look at a Brac University graduate and say this is the person I want to hire. This may take 10 years — or maybe even 20 years. Who knows where I will be then, but today, I want to be a part of it as we begin the transition.