Appeal to University Grants Commission for rules on cross border education

WE the alumni and students of the Dhaka Study Centre, Victoria University, and Melbourne, Australia are greatly perturbed by the recent university Grants Commission (UGC) media announcement declaring the operation of VU Study Centre in Dhaka illegal, along with 55 other study center's of foreign universities. It was mentioned national dailies demanding all foreign education providers to register with UGC by 31st August 2003 to avoid closure of their operations.

We would like to draw the attention of all concerned that for us the Dhaka Study Centre of Victoria University, Melbourne has been a blessing, which has made it possible for us to obtain the same MBA degree that is offered in Melbourne at one-fifth of the tuition that is charged at Melbourne. The study center at Dhaka has been in operation since 2001 and so far over 150 students from Dhaka Study Centre have been conferred the MBA degree from the University's main campus in Melbourne. The graduates are well placed in national and international organizations, including government, armed forces, multi-national corporations, international agencies and foreign missions in Dhaka. They not only help in earning foreign exchange for us but it also enhances the image of our country.

It is beyond our understanding when UGC has already drafted a separate policy (issued on 21st August 2005) for registration of foreign university study centers, on the basis of the dialogue that was held between the UGC authorities and representatives of the foreign providers at the British Council on 24th August 2003, how it can at the same time declare closure of the foreign education providers. In the dialogue, that took place at the British Council in the presence of Dr. M. Osman Faruk the Honorable Minister of Education at that time, conclusion was drawn that there was a need for quality control of foreign education providers, which can be achieved with the assistance of the high commissions and embassies of the respected countries represented by the foreign institutes. This was perceived to be logical as it was not possible for a foreign provider offering only one or two programmes in Dhaka, through its local counterparts/partners, to comply with the existing criteria for registering under the private universities act of 1992 (amended in 1998). These criteria, among others, include having a full time Vice-Chancellor, a Pro VC, deans of faculty (at least 3 numbers), full time professors and other faculty members, 5 acres of land and Tk 5.00 crore security deposits in the bank. We find it difficult to comprehend how it is possible for a provider like VU Dhaka Study Centre to meet these criteria for the one single programme it is offering in Dhaka. Apart from Dhaka, Victoria University, Melbourne has offshore study centers in different countries including China, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Germany. If all these countries demand VU to have a Vice Chancellor in each of its study centers the courses would have been costlier than it is in Melbourne.

As such, we appeal to the UGC and other authorities concerned to kindly formulate a separate policy for foreign education providers so that Bangladesh as a nation does not fall behind in receiving internationally recognized global education at its doorsteps at an affordable cost. This should have been the natural follow up of the draft proposal that was prepared by UGC on 21st August 2005, for registration of foreign university degree providers. Instead of barring the off-shore study centers of foreign universities we request the government that it takes up measures to encourage reputed foreign universities, like Victoria University, Melbourne to set up operations in Bangladesh so that our country becomes a hub of cross border education, like Malaysia and Singapore.

We humbly urge the UGC to consider immediate withdrawal of all restrictions on foreign university degree providers and instead take effective measures to register the genuine institutions under separate terms and conditions than that of the local private universities.

Alumni and students of the Dhaka Study Centre, Victoria University