

Achieving our higher education targets

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Many of these promoters refuse to believe that universities are meant for providing education and not for business. Because of such self-serving promoters, this potential sector now faces a credibility crisis. Unfortunately, these promoters often use the protection of politicians to mislead the admission seekers.

In spite of the fact that tertiary level education does have some inbuilt and inherent problems, it can be corrected by overhauling the system. First, the management of tertiary level education should be left to educationists with experience and vision. Unnecessary interference by politicians in running these higher seats of learning must be stopped.

Most of our universities are absolutely inward-looking, having little or no interaction with the global community. Every university should have an international office, and promote their activities and academic achievements with international academia. UGC has already provided public universities with internet facilities and modern virtual classrooms that are connected via the Bangladesh Research and Education Network, whereby they can establish visual interactive contact amongst themselves and connect with

In spite of the fact that tertiary level education does have some inbuilt and inherent problems, it can be corrected by overhauling the system. First, the management of tertiary level education should be left to educationists with experience and vision. The unnecessary interference by politicians in running these higher seats of learning must be stopped.

any university or research organisation from around the world. Through the university digital library facility (UDL) installed at UGC, all universities, both

public and private, now have access to more than 7,000 academic journals and reference books from internationally reputed publishers. The facility is available to both students and faculty members.

Regular updating of the curriculum has to be given the topmost priority, and wherever needed, there should be continual interaction between and amongst local and international researchers and the industry. One good way of doing this is to regularly organise national and international seminars besides motivating faculty members to attend similar events outside the country.

IT or computer literacy amongst young graduates in Bangladesh is far from satisfactory. According to the Global Competitiveness Index published by the World Economic Forum, amongst 138 countries, Bangladesh is ranked 106th in terms of IT competitiveness. So much for 'Digital Bangladesh'. It is tragic that the concept of IT amongst the majority of computer users is confined to internet browsing or Facebook. Most top IT related jobs in this country are taken up by foreign IT experts. Some of the major public and private universities do not even feel the necessity of having their own dynamic website.

Without further delay, institutional facilities must be developed for the continuous training of university teachers. So far the focus has been on increas-



ing the number of learners. Now it is time to pay more attention to the quality aspect of education. Compromising on quality will destroy all that we have achieved since independence.

One thing must be realised. Tertiary level education cannot reach global standards unless the lower level of the education pyramid is overhauled and restructured. Unnecessary examinations should be done away with and learning for the sole purpose of passing should be discouraged. It should be substituted with learning for knowledge and becoming competent. To that end, the budget earmarked for education has to be radically increased. Currently, less than 2 percent of the GDP is allocated for edu-

cation, and 2 percent of that 2 percent goes to higher education. It is the lowest in all of South Asia. With this meagre allocation, not much can be done to improve higher education or promote technical and vocational learning.

UGC operates with a mandate that dates back to 1973, with limited autonomy, unlike similar statutory bodies anywhere in the world. Restricting the Commission to meet current needs was felt some 10 years back. UGC has been advocating for converting itself into a Higher Education Commission since 2008. The Prime Minister and the Education Minister were convinced back then, but nothing has happened so far.

The entire tertiary education system

of the country must be viewed holistically. Piecemeal solutions will not take us far. Given the right experience, knowledge, skills, and education, these young people can become an invaluable source of wealth for the nation, and through them, the much talked about Vision 2021 and Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved. Let the policymakers realise it and give it a try. Things will change for the better.

The writer is the Chairman of the Bangladesh University Grants Commission (UGC).

“SUCCESS CONSISTS OF GOING FROM FAILURE TO FAILURE WITHOUT LOSS OF ENTHUSIASM”

Winston Churchill