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Public universities must put more funds into research

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RESEARCH is important for universities and this is more so in low- and middle-income countries as it plays a crucial role in developing effective academic systems and makes it possible for the countries to join the global knowledge society. Public universities continue to forget this proposition as they appear tight-fisted when it comes to set aside money for research when they prepare budget. Public universities allocate between 2 and 5 per cent of their total budget for research when about three-fourths of it go to pay salary, allowance and pension to members on the teaching and other staff. The University of Dhaka, the premier seat of higher learning in Bangladesh, in its budget for the 2019 financial year proposed on June 27 allocated only 4.94 per cent for research, or Tk 360 million out of Tk 7.41 billion. The university had an allocation of only 2.1 per cent, or Tk 140 million, for the 2018 financial year and 1.83 per cent, or Tk 121.6 million, for the 2017 financial year. Jahangirnagar University, which missed a date for budget placement, is reported to have set aside less than 2 per cent, or Tk 20 million out of Tk 2.34 billion. Jahangirnagar University allocated only 0.75 per cent, or Tk 17.5 million out of Tk 2.32 billion for the 2018 financial year.

Allocation for research for the 2019 financial year in Shahjalal University of Science and Technology is 2.22 per cent of the total budget, or Tk 29 million out of Tk 1.30 billion, and in the University of Chittagong less than 1 per cent. While such a meagre allocation constrains research work in universities and experts believe that the allocation for research should account for 10 to 15 per cent of the budget, the University Grants Commission, brushing aside the allegation of inadequate budget for research, seeks to say that in some cases, universities fail to spend the money allocated for research as some of them do not have the capacity to spend money. But for the university budget, the commission says, there is a scope for teachers to do research with grants from the commission but it does not get qualified people to take the grants. It transpires that while the universities keep a very low amount of money set aside for research, the teachers are also not willing to do research as, keeping to what the University Grants Commission says, some money kept with the commission for research are hardly approached.

Because of inadequate, or non-existent, research, none of the 39 public universities in Bangladesh could earn any place, and not graceful place when they do, in international university ranking. A situation like this is not only demeaning for the institutions of higher learning but also for the nation as a whole. Seats of higher learning in Bangladesh must, therefore, spend more on research and the University of Dhaka should light up the way for other institutions to follow. The government and managers of universities are left with no option but to step up to the plate on research front to make universities work like universities.



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