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Govt must act on teacher shortage in public univs

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THE University Grants Commission recommendation provides for ensuring at least one teacher for 16 students in science universities and at least one teacher for 22 students in other universities. But the teacher-student ratio is far from satisfactory, which greatly compromises the quality of education, in some public universities in Bangladesh. A new batch of students ready to be enrolled in the universities is likely to further aggravate the problem. The Bangladesh Education Statistics 2017, which the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics published in July, shows the poorest ratio of 1:67 in Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur, among general universities, and of 1:63 in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, among science universities. The report shows at least six other universities, both in general and science universities, having at least one teacher for more than 34 students. Thirty-four public universities, excluding the National University and the Open University, have 13,072 teachers for 2,64,084 students and about a fifth of the total teachers remain on leave, as commission officials say. The situation being such, a batch of 47,000 students, who mostly enrol on public universities, ready for admission would further compound the problem.

The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2018 shows that the University of Oxford, which has topped the ranking, has the staff-student ratio of 1:11.2 while the University of Cambridge, which came second, has the ratio of 1:10.9; and the third ranking California Institute of Technology has the ratio of 1:6.5. A lower ratio helps students to have closer relationship with lectures and quicker access to feedback, improving the quality of education. The government's biggest challenge in the field of higher education in the public sector has, thus, been to attend to the problem of teacher shortage, which needs to be addressed to prepare a system to enable the younger generation for reaping the benefits of higher education. Higher education officials say that it is difficult to find qualified teachers, especially for comparatively new universities in outlying districts. Many join such universities, work there for some time and then move to other universities, especially in cities, within a very short time. This mostly happens because teachers do not find good education for their children and health facilities for the family in outlying areas. If the government wants to retain teachers in outlying universities, it would need to develop other facilities, in a holistic approach, in the areas similar to what are available in big cities.

The University Grants commission in its latest annual report in February has proposed the deputation of teachers to new universities with lucrative benefits and re-appointment of retired teachers, on a contractual basis, to address the issue of teacher shortage in outlying universities. This could be an interim solution to the problem at hand, but the authorities need to work out a retention policy for teachers in universities outside the capital city. The government must also make facilities available outside the capital so that not only teachers, physicians and others professionals could feel comfortable working in outlying areas.



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