

IT IS a matter of grave concern that comparatively new public universities as well as those outside Dhaka are failing to attract students for their poor performance due mainly to shortage of teachers and inadequate infrastructure. The number of vacant seats at these universities, mostly at the new ones and those in the outlying districts, tripled in the last three years. About 4,100 honours and post-graduation level seats, according to University Grants Commission, as New Age reported on Monday, were vacant in session 2016-2017 in public universities — an increase by three times from 1615 seats vacant in session 2014-15. Academics have rightly blamed hasty and unplanned opening of higher seats of learning without paying any heed to the creation of the needed infrastructure and recruiting required number of teachers for such a situation. Hence, it would not be an exaggeration to say that students and their guardians do not repose trust in the new universities and those in outlying districts as these institutions have failed to earn their confidence. Allegations are rife that corruption, irregularities and nepotism in the recruitment of teachers have facilitated appointment of a good number of less qualified teachers.

The latest UGC annual report, placed at parliament in the second week of February, shows that in 2016-17 session 4,098 out of 82,948 seats at honours and master's level were vacant. The same report shows that no seats remained vacant at Dhaka University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Bangladesh University of Textiles, Islamic Arabic University, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and Jahangirnagar University at honours and master's levels. Spreading higher education cannot be dispensed with but to make that happen, emphasis should be laid on issues of adequate number of qualified teachers, laboratories and infrastructure when one goes to set up new universities. Appointment of less qualified teachers is bound to have an adverse impact on competent, qualified teachers, who become frustrated at this kind of recruitment as newly appointed incompetent teachers have a propensity to infect the whole academic atmosphere like a contagious disease, keeping the academic environment hamstrung. Failure to woo students by the new public universities and by those in outlying districts should be attributed to these factors. It is because of these incompetent teachers and absence of proper infrastructure that most students are not evincing interest to take admission to these new universities most of which have failed to turn into proper universities.

The role of a university is to facilitate social continuity by enriching our youths with our history, our collective knowledge and culture. Universities need to be truly visionary, creating an environment where youths can engage in the quest for knowledge to become informed and self-reliant adults. To facilitate these, academic institutions need to have qualified teachers and adequate butressed proper infrastructure. To attract students, therefore, it is necessary to take steps to appoint an adequate number of qualified and skilled teachers, develop proper infrastructure and to set up university laboratories for the purpose of imparting lessons to students for self-improvement and social elevation.

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