

Jagannath University left out of UGC's HEAT project research fund

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Despite allocations being made to 39 public and private universities including Dhaka University, Rajshahi University, and Jahangirnagar University -- Jagannath University has been excluded from the research fund under the University Grants Commission's (UGC) flagship Higher Education Acceleration and Transformation (HEAT) project.

According to sources, the five-year HEAT project, jointly funded by the Bangladesh government and the World Bank, began in July 2023 with a total budget of Tk 4,016.57 crore. Of this, Tk 2,033.46 crore is being provided by the government and Tk 1,983.11 crore by the World Bank.

One of the key components of the project is funding faculty-led research. Around 300 proposals are under review, with more than Tk 600 crore awaiting disbursement.

However, Jagannath University did not receive approval for any of its submitted research proposals, although two projects had reportedly passed the initial blind review stage which accounts for 90 percent of the evaluation and were shortlisted for the final presentation phase. Following a 10-minute presentation round, both projects were dropped without explanation.

"We submitted proposals under several categories, including lab facilities, research, and departmental development," said Md Azam Khan, professor of economics at JnU. "But we don't know why our proposals were rejected."

Prof AJ Saleh Ahmed of the chemistry department echoed the concern. "It is extremely unfortunate that Jagannath University's name is missing from the list. We were never given a clear explanation. Even prominent researchers from other universities didn't get selected. It feels mysterious."

A faculty member, requesting anonymity, alleged that JnU is being subjected to discriminatory treatment by UGC. "Most other universities had at least one project approved. Jagannath University's exclusion may be linked to its recent student protests over the HEAT project, residential halls, and the second campus," the teacher said.

When contacted, JnU Vice Chancellor Prof Md Rezwaul Karim said, "We were not informed of the reason behind the exclusion. Only UGC can clarify this."

UGC member Prof Dr Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan said the selection process was highly competitive. "The evaluation was done through blind peer review, followed by a presentation. Jagannath University applied under Category A, which had intense competition. Even strong departments from other universities did not make it. I saw JnU's name in the early stages, but I don't know why it was later excluded."