

HEAT initiative: UGC to ink deals for 151 sub-projects with universities

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Photo: Arafat Rahaman/Star

The University Grants Commission (UGC) will sign agreements with public and private universities today for 151 sub-projects under the Higher Education Acceleration and Transformation (HEAT) initiative.

The signing ceremony will be held at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital's Agargaon, UGC officials announced at a press briefing yesterday at the commission's auditorium.

At the welcome speech, UGC Chairman Prof SMA Faiz said the selection process was conducted with "100 percent transparency".

Responding to allegations of nepotism or political favouritism, Prof Faiz said the commission took all necessary measures to ensure accountability and fairness throughout the evaluation process, which he personally monitored at every stage.

He said individual submissions were not allowed. "Sub-project proposals were submitted by faculty members through academic committees and with approval from university vice-chancellors," he said.

"UGC does not assess applicants' political ideology; it is beyond our jurisdiction," Prof Faiz added.



He also said neutral reviewers and qualified university faculty were involved in the evaluation, with national interest given the highest priority.

HEAT Project Director Prof Md Asaduzzaman explained that the sub-projects were selected through a multi-stage process involving screening, expert reviews, and presentations.

The HEAT project, implemented by UGC under the Secondary and Higher Education Division of the Ministry of Education, has been running since July 2023 and will run till June 2028.

Its goals include improving teaching and learning, expanding digital infrastructure, ensuring quality assurance, fostering research and innovation, and promoting women's leadership in higher education.

At the core of the initiative is the Academic Transformation Fund (ATF). Under component 2.2, universities were invited to compete for grants through an open call. A total of 1,481 proposals were submitted following 46 proposal-writing workshops held across campuses.

Of these, 239 proposals were dropped during initial screening, and 1,242 proceeded to expert review. Evaluation was conducted by committees of experts across seven thematic clusters. Each proposal was scored out of 100 by two reviewers, with a third reviewer added when necessary.

Industry-linked proposals were reviewed by two academics and one industry expert. Shortlisted applicants also gave presentations worth 10 marks.

The ATF has a total allocation of Tk 1,224 crore, with Tk 857 crore earmarked for the first round. From this round, nine pandemic-related projects, 40 focused on teaching-learning infrastructure, and 102 advanced research projects have been approved. Among the research projects, four address climate change, 12 are led by junior faculty, and 86 fall under the general category. Thirteen proposals in arts and social sciences are set to be reassessed.

UGC Member Prof Tanzimuddin Khan addressed the question-and-answer session at the programme. Dr Shamsul Arefin, director of Public Relations and Publications, moderated the event.

UGC members Prof M Anwar Hossen, Prof Masuma Habib, and Prof Mohammad Ayub Islam, alongside UGC Secretary Fakhrul Islam were present at the briefing.