

# Foreign students at univs, medical colleges decrease

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The number of foreign students in universities and medical colleges in Bangladesh has decreased significantly in recent years, statistics show.

The number of foreign students is decreasing more in private tertiary educational institutions.

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Educationists and owners of private institutions said that poor quality of higher education, political instability, lack of investment in education, difficult admission processes, lack of accommodation and transport facilities, language barrier and cultural shock are the main reasons for the decline.

They said that the government should take initiatives to promote more foreign students in the country, as well as to improve the quality of tertiary-level education.

Professor SMA Faiz, the chairman of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, said that Bangladesh was moving forward but could not make improvements in the education sector as some other countries like Malaysia did.

‘The government’s investment in the education sector is very low,’ he added.

The UGC's latest 50th Annual Report shows that the number of foreign students studying in the country's public universities was 633 in 2023, 670 in 2022, 677 in 2021, and 767 in 2020.

The number of foreign students studying in the country's private universities was 826 in 2023, 1,287 in 2022, 1,604 in 2021, and 1,550 in 2020.

The data of the Directorate General of Medical Education show that the number of foreign students studying in government medical colleges was 97 in FY2024-2025; 103 in FY2023-24, 94 in FY2022-23, 102 in FY2021-22, and 105 in FY2020-21.

According to the Bangladesh Private Medical College Association, the number of foreign students studying in 49 private medical colleges was 1,320 in FY2023-24, 1,669 in FY2022-23, 1,595 in FY2021-22, and 1,409 in FY2020-21.

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According to the Bangladesh Bank, the country received \$50 million in FY2024-25, \$64 million in FY2023-24, \$56 million each in FY2022-23 and in FY2021-22 and \$37 million in FY2020-21 from the foreign students.

Currently, the country has 56 public universities, 116 private universities, 37 government medical colleges and 66 private medical colleges.

The Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh treasurer Qayum Reza Chowdhury blamed political instability as the main reason for the decreasing number of foreign students in Bangladesh.

Qayum, also a member of the Board of Trustees of the University of Asia Pacific, said that the number of medical students from India to Bangladesh had been declining since 2024 for political reasons.

He also identified lack of residential facilities as another big reason for the decrease in the number of foreign students.

Professor Imran Rahman, a veteran academic at the School of Business, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, said that the reason behind the drop in the number of foreign students in FY2024-25 was definitely political.

School supplies

In general, he said, Bangladesh is not a destination country for foreign students because of the poor quality of education in the universities, which do not have top-ranking positions.

He said that the big universities like Dhaka University and the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology had no initiatives for attracting foreign students.

‘The visa processing and study permit processes here are very complex, instead of a one-stop service,’ he said, adding, ‘Our whole system is not very convenient for foreign students or facilities to come here.’

Dhaka University has only one residential hall, out of 20, for foreign students. At present, 117 foreign students, 49 early-career teachers, and three officers reside in the hall, Sir PJ Hartog International Hall, according to the university website.

The hall provost and history department professor Mohammad Abul Kawser said that many of the foreign students there are medical students.

He said that the number of foreign students in the hall always remained low but, in 2024, some Chinese students came there under an exchange programme.

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Rubina Yasmin, additional director general (medical education) at the Directorate General of Medical Education, said that the number of seats in the government medical colleges was few and the number of reserved seats for foreign students was also a few.

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About the reason of decreasing the number of foreign students in government medical colleges in FY2024-25, she said that the admission guidelines were ‘government-to-government-based’ and no Indian students came to Bangladesh in 2024 due to the changed political situation.

Some Indian students came later in 2024, but some of them were sent back to their homeland for submitting forged documents, she said.

According to the directorate’s MBBS/BDS Admission Circular for Foreign Students in Government Medical Colleges/Dental Colleges/ Dental units of Bangladesh (Session 2025-2026), the number of reserved seats for the foreign students from SAARC and Non-SAARC countries is 224.

A very few students from non-SAARC countries come to Bangladesh against the quota for them, Rubina added.

Bangladesh Private Medical College Association officials said that, in FY2023-24 and FY2024-25, many seats remained vacant in the private medical college hospitals as the number of foreign students, especially from India and Nepal, declined.

The association pointed at increased seats in medical colleges in these countries and a strict government system for the students of these countries as reasons for the decrease in foreign students.

The association executive director, Md Motiur Rahman, said that most foreign students came here mainly from India to study in the private medical college hospitals for similarities in culture and customs.

Since 2024, the number has reduced significantly due to visa-related complexities, he added.

UGC member professor Mohammad Anwar Hossen said that foreign students struggle to find out the admission-related information, campus culture, facilities, tuition fee dimension and communication facilities from the Bangladeshi universities.

‘The universities here lack the international standard facilities,’ he said.

He said that the foreign students experienced a language barrier and cultural shock here, while it became difficult for them, especially the female ones, to use the public transport and get proper accommodations.

In many tertiary-level educational institutions, lectures are delivered in Bangla instead of English.

Professor SMA Faiz said that the scenario would change if the government invested more in the education sector. ‘The UGC is working to improve the situation.’