

## Universities must do what they need to create knowledge

REUTERS' second annual ranking of the Asia-Pacific region's Most Innovative Universities, a list that identifies and ranks the educational institutions doing the most to advance science and invent new technologies, has been published. But no universities, public or private, in Bangladesh, the region's fifth-most populous country, has, sadly, earned any place in the list of 75 universities based on a number of criteria mostly related to patents and article citations. There are 39 public universities and 95 private universities in Bangladesh. There are more than a dozen science and technology, agricultural and medical universities, which are supposed to work to advance science and invent new technologies more than other general universities do, among the public institutions. But none of them unfortunately could make their mark. The situation as reflected, or not reflected, in the Most Innovative Universities ranking, suggests that Bangladeshi universities have failed in areas of patent volume, patent success, global patents, patent conditions, patent citation impact, percentage of patents cited, patent-to-article citation impact, industry article citation impact and in similar issues that the authorities considered to be criteria for the ranking.

Earning a place among the 10 or 20, or even 100, best universities of the region or of the world may not mean something to die for, but failing to have any place in, or not even being considered for, such rankings certainly means that these institutions, which people of Bangladesh take pride in when they talk about them, lacks in what they should do — to create knowledge — in the first place. Universities in Bangladesh have hardly made any significant mark in such university rankings for years and such rankings, whenever they are published, ring the alarm bell, only the government, the University Grants Commission and the university authorities do not wake up to the reality. If the authorities concerned and students want to take their institutions of higher education to the international standards, they need to pull up their socks before it becomes too late. Problems such as inadequate allocation for research and below-the-mark laboratory and library facilities keep plaguing the universities in Bangladesh. But the foremost of the problems is the politicisation of teacher recruitment, to a large extent, and of other appointments, as a whole. With politicisation creeping in, especially in teacher recruitment, which places political clout above merit, universities have ceased to be seats of liberalism and seats to create and advance knowledge. Teachers appointed on political considerations are only expected to toe partisan line and then they fail to defend intellectual liberty or to create knowledge.

The government and managers of universities, both public and private, are thus left with a bit of soul-searching to do to decide their own future. Universities need to be meaningful, offering quality education, creating knowledge and advancing science and technology so that the graduates they make come of use to the nation and the world. Conscious section of society, including students who strive for quality higher education, must also raise their voice in this regard.