

Evening courses at Dhaka Univ need to be sorted out

EVENING courses at the University of Dhaka coming to harm, as it appears, the education of regular students is gravely concerning. Such a course was first introduced in the business faculty in October 2001, now leading at least 34 out of the 83 departments and 12 institutes to offer evening courses for master's, certificate, diploma and other professional degrees. Fifteen of the departments and institutes started offering evening courses after January 2009, when the incumbent vice-chancellor assumed office. Although such courses were intended to spread higher education to professionals to advance their knowledge and skills, the university has, over the years, showed a growing predilection for evening courses, as New Age reported on Monday, because of the amount of money that such courses fetch the teachers, the staff and the university. In the process, the education of regular students is harmed as teachers need to reserve a considerable teaching time for evening courses, giving a short shrift to the regular ones. The situation worsens in cases teachers are engaged in taking courses in private universities. All this together also eats away the time that the teachers need to spend on MPhil and PhD students.

But in the process, the evening courses also come to be harmed as the system has started corrupting itself. Allegations, both by teachers and students, are there that the system, because of the money ranging between Tk 1,50,000 and Tk 2,84,000 lakh depending on the course and associated profiteering attitude, has degraded itself by lowering the admission process, answer script evaluation standards and the quality of evening course graduates. While the initiative is tarnishing the image of the university, the premier of the country's highest seats of learning, by way of producing low-quality graduates, this has pushed regular students into challenges. Senior teachers are allowed to drop or pass courses onto their fellows as they need to spend time with MPhil and PhD students. But occasions are not rare that some of them do this only to make time for teaching in private universities, with or without permission, and in evening courses. The authorities, however, sought to explain that with the issues thus running, the university does not face budget constraints. But earning money, and that too to run the university, should not always drive the authorities. This appears more so especially for the University of Dhaka.

The regular responsibilities of the university is to attend to regular students in the most effective way. It can offer irregular courses if it has the time and resources, but never at the cost of regular education. With evening courses proliferating in the University of Dhaka, other public universities are also trying to catch up the trend. If this continues unbridled, the purpose of the public universities could be completely defeated. Managers of national education must, therefore, pause and think to what extent public universities should go commercial and the government should stem the rot even if by increasing the their budgetary allocation. But the issues need to be sorted out in a pragmatic manner.

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