

International

ASIAN STATE

**Empowering Education:
The Role of Private Universities in Bangladesh**



Internationally Affiliated by



ISSN Print: 3105-7268; ISSN Online: 3105-7276

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Publish On: 17 May 2026

Edition: First.

Price: 5\$



Cover

Empowering Education: The Role of Private Universities in Bangladesh

Cover Design by

Agency Corporate Service & Consulting Firm

Published by

Asian State International Journal

ISBN BAR Code



ISBN QR Code



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Editorial Message

In recent decades, Bangladesh has witnessed a remarkable expansion in higher education, with private universities playing a pivotal role in this transformation. These institutions have emerged as vital platforms for nurturing talent, providing access to quality education, and fostering innovation. Unlike public universities, private institutions often offer diverse programs, modern curricula, and exposure to global perspectives, enabling students to compete in an increasingly interconnected world.

Private universities have also addressed the ever-growing demand for higher education, bridging gaps left by limited capacity in public institutions. They foster an environment where students can explore research opportunities, engage in extracurricular activities, and develop critical thinking skills. Importantly, many of these universities emphasize practical learning, internships, and industry collaboration, equipping graduates with the skills required in today's competitive job market.

However, maintaining quality standards remains a challenge, and regulatory oversight is crucial to ensure academic integrity. With proper governance and continued investment in infrastructure, faculty development, and research, private universities in Bangladesh can further contribute to national development. By empowering the youth with knowledge, creativity, and professional competence, these institutions are not just shaping careers—they are shaping the future of the nation.



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North Bengal International University

Special Interview with
Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman
Vice-Chancellor
North Bengal International University

The conversation was conducted by Md. Imam Hossain, Country Editor of Asian State's Bangladesh chapter.



Asian State: How would you assess the current state of higher education in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Thank you for the question. Over the past few decades, the higher education sector in Bangladesh has expanded significantly. Alongside public universities, the growth of private universities

has greatly increased access to education. Particularly, under the supervision of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, new institutions have been established, making higher education more accessible.

However, alongside this progress, several important challenges exist. First, the quality of education is not uniform across institutions—research activities are limited in many places, and modern facilities are lacking. Second, the curriculum often does not fully align with labor market demands, which leads to employment challenges for graduates.

Moreover, some institutions face a shortage of qualified faculty and limited opportunities for skill development. In many cases, administrative inefficiencies and political influence also affect the educational environment.

On the positive side, there has been growth in Outcome-Based Education (OBE), digital learning, and international collaborations. The government and relevant institutions are focusing on accreditation and research to improve quality.

Asian State: What do you think needs to be done to further improve this sector in the future?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: In my view, ensuring the quality of education is the most important priority. This requires increased investment in research, improved faculty training, and making the curriculum more job-oriented. Additionally, stronger connections between universities and the industry are necessary so that students can gain practical skills. Finally, establishing a transparent and accountable administrative framework will make Bangladesh's higher education sector stronger and internationally competitive.

Asian State: How do you view the role of private universities in the expansion of higher education in the country?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: In my

opinion, private universities play a very significant and positive role in expanding higher education in Bangladesh. Due to limited seats in public universities, a large number of students previously had no access to higher education; private universities have largely filled this gap. Under the supervision of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, these institutions have further broadened access to education.

Another major contribution of private universities is offering demand-driven and modern programs. For example, they quickly introduce programs in IT, business, engineering, and other career-oriented fields, providing timely education that makes students competitive in the job market. Furthermore, many private universities have modern infrastructure, digital classrooms, and opportunities for international collaboration, exposing students to global standards of education.

However, some challenges remain. The quality of education is not consistent across all private universities—some institutions face issues such as limited research activities and a shortage of experienced faculty. Additionally, high tuition fees remain a barrier for many students.



Asian State: What do you think needs to be done to make this sector more effective?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: In my opinion, to ensure the quality of private universities, a stronger monitoring and

accreditation process is needed. Additionally, increasing investment in research, recruiting and training qualified faculty, and establishing close links with the industry are extremely important. Overall, with proper policies and oversight, private universities can make Bangladesh’s higher education sector more dynamic and internationally competitive.

Asian State: What do you see as the main differences between public and private universities?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: In the context of Bangladesh, several key differences between public and private universities can be observed:

1. **Management and Funding Structure:** Public universities are funded and managed by the government, while private universities are mostly established through private initiatives or trusts, relying on tuition fees. In both cases, the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh supervises them, although the nature of oversight differs.
2. **Admission Competition and Opportunities:** Public universities have limited seats, leading to intense competition. In contrast, private universities admit comparatively more students, providing greater access.
3. **Cost Differences:** Tuition at public universities is relatively low, making education more accessible to ordinary students. Private universities, on the other hand, charge higher fees.
4. **Learning Environment and Infrastructure:** Private universities often have modern classrooms, digital facilities, and quickly implement international curricula. Public universities, meanwhile, benefit from tradition,

established research culture, and experienced faculty.

5. **Research and Academic Culture:** Public universities generally lead in research due to long-standing academic traditions and available research funding. However, some private universities are also beginning to invest in research.
6. **Administrative Structure:** Administrative processes in public universities tend to be slower and sometimes politically influenced, whereas decision-making in private universities is generally faster and more flexible.

In summary, both types of universities have their own strengths and limitations. A student's choice depends on financial situation, preferred field of study, and future goals.



Asian State-1: How much do private universities contribute to increasing higher education opportunities for students?
Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: I believe private universities play a very significant role in expanding access to higher education in Bangladesh. Due to the limited seats in public universities, many students are left without opportunities for higher education each year. Private universities help fill this gap. Especially under the approval and supervision of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, private universities have extended access to higher education across various regions. As a result, students no longer have to move only to major cities; many can now pursue higher education in their own district or nearby areas. Another important contribution is that private universities can quickly introduce

relevant, career-oriented programs in fields such as IT, business, pharmacy, and engineering, equipping students to compete in the job market.

Moreover, many private universities provide scholarships, tuition waivers, and financial aid, enabling talented but financially disadvantaged students to access education. However, some limitations remain: high tuition fees are a barrier for many, and the quality of education is not uniform across all institutions—some need to improve academic quality and research activities.

In conclusion, private universities play an essential role in expanding access to higher education in Bangladesh. To make this contribution more effective, greater attention must be given to quality control and affordable education.

Asian State: In your view, what is the greatest strength of private universities?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: In brief, the greatest strength of private universities is their ability to quickly adapt to change. More specifically, several aspects stand out:

1. **Rapid implementation of relevant programs:** These universities can quickly introduce demand-driven programs such as IT, Data Science, and Business Analytics, allowing students to acquire skills directly aligned with the job market.
2. **Administrative flexibility:** Decision-making processes are relatively fast, enabling the easy implementation of new initiatives, international collaborations, and curriculum updates.
3. **Modern infrastructure and technology-based learning:** Many private universities have smart classrooms, digital learning platforms, and industry-linked training opportunities.
4. **Student-centered approach:** Smaller class sizes allow closer teacher-student

interaction, improving the quality of learning. Under the supervision of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, quality control frameworks further strengthen the sector.

Overall, the greatest strength of private universities lies in providing flexible, practical, and adaptive education aligned with the rapidly changing global environment. Leveraging this strength can enable them to contribute even more to the higher education sector in Bangladesh.

Asian State: In which areas do you think private universities need to improve?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Although private universities play an important role in expanding higher education in Bangladesh, improvement is needed in certain key areas:

1. **Ensuring quality education:** Recruitment of qualified faculty, regular training, and stronger academic monitoring are essential.
2. **Enhancing research activities:** Many institutions currently conduct limited research. Developing international-standard research projects, publications, and funding mechanisms is necessary.
3. **Strengthening industry-academia linkage:** Increasing internships, project work, and hands-on experiences will make students more competitive in the job market.
4. **Modernizing curricula:** Curricula need regular updates to align with the rapidly changing global economy.
5. **Increasing financial support:** Many talented students are unable to pursue higher education due to high tuition fees, so scholarships, fee relief, and financial aid must be expanded.

Additionally, strengthening the quality control and oversight mechanisms of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh can further

enhance the entire sector. In summary, the main areas for development in private universities are: educational quality, research, practical/industry-relevant learning, and financial inclusivity.

Asian State: How can private universities play a more effective role in improving the quality of higher education?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: The role of private universities in enhancing the quality of higher education is crucial and can be further strengthened in the future. Several key areas can have a major impact:

1. **Faculty development and training:** Recruiting experienced teachers and providing regular training, research opportunities, and academic updates are vital for ensuring quality education.
2. **Investment in research and innovation:** Developing international-standard research projects, laboratories, and a publication culture naturally raises the quality of higher education.
3. **Strengthening industry-academia collaboration:** Hands-on education, internships, and project-based learning equip students with practical skills.
4. **Modern curriculum and full implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE):** Ensuring that learning outcomes are directly linked to practical skills is critical.
5. **Increased use of digital learning and technology:** Smart classrooms, online platforms, and AI-based learning tools can further improve education quality.

Effective monitoring and quality control by the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh can also reinforce these improvements. In summary, if private universities prioritize faculty quality, research, technology, and industry collaboration, they can play a more effective and leading role in enhancing the quality of higher education in Bangladesh.



Asian State: What is the potential of private universities in research, innovation, and technology-based education?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: In my view, the potential of private universities in research, innovation, and technology-based education is extremely bright, provided it is utilized effectively. Currently, private universities are relatively more capable of adapting to rapidly changing educational environments. They can readily adopt modern technologies such as digital learning, smart classrooms, online resources, and AI-based education systems, giving them a natural advantage in technology-driven education.

Their potential in research is also increasing. Many private universities have started investing in research centers, innovation labs, and industry-based projects. However, there is still room for expansion on a larger scale. A key factor is cultivating a culture of innovation—students must be encouraged not just to rely on textbooks but to develop problem-solving skills, startup ideas, and the ability to tackle real-world challenges. The University Grants Commission of Bangladesh can further strengthen this potential through policy support and quality assurance.

Overall, if private universities prioritize research funding, skilled faculty, and technology use, they could become a major driving force for research- and innovation-based higher education in Bangladesh in the future.

Asian State: How successful are private universities in creating linkages between

industry and academia?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: In my view, private universities in Bangladesh have achieved partial success in connecting industry and academia. Currently, many private universities offer internships, career placements, and industry-based courses for students, which is a positive development. Particularly in fields such as Business Administration, IT, and Engineering, opportunities for students to engage with industry have increased significantly.

However, this connection is not yet fully institutionalized or robust. In many cases, direct collaboration between research/innovation and industry is weak, and companies are not regularly involved in academic activities. Thus, private universities have made a good start, but more time and initiatives are needed to reach the desired level. In the future, joint efforts by universities and industry to expand research, innovation, and skill development programs could make this linkage more effective and productive.

Asian State: How well do private universities align their curricula with labor market demands?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: This is a very important issue in the context of current higher education. Private universities in Bangladesh have made partial progress in aligning their curricula with labor market demands, but significant gaps remain. On the one hand, many private universities have introduced Outcome-Based Education (OBE), skill-based courses, internships, and industry-oriented training. As a result, students are gaining more practical knowledge and skills than before. However, studies show that there is still a clear mismatch between curricula and industry requirements. In many cases, the curriculum emphasizes theoretical knowledge while practical skills—such as problem-solving, communication, leadership, and technical expertise—are not adequately

covered. Employers also note that many graduates lack practical experience and work readiness, which forces organizations to provide additional training. Another important issue is that institutional and regulatory constraints (e.g., lengthy approval processes) hinder timely curriculum updates.

In summary: Private universities have introduced some industry-focused curricula, but they have not yet fully kept pace with the rapidly changing job market.

Recommendations for the future:

- Develop industry co-designed curricula
- Implement mandatory and effective internships
- Increase practical and project-based learning
- Regularly update curricula based on industry feedback

Asian State: What kind of policy changes do you think are necessary to ensure quality in higher education?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Ensuring quality in higher education is one of the most critical challenges of our time. In my view:

1. **Strong and effective quality assurance framework:** Policies alone are insufficient; strict monitoring and regular evaluation are essential for proper implementation.
2. **Relevant and skills-based curriculum:** Curricula should be regularly updated according to labor market demands, and the effective implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is necessary.
3. **Faculty development:** Transparent recruitment, regular training, incentives for research, and international exposure are crucial for improving teaching quality.
4. **Investment in research and innovation:** Universities should not be limited to teaching but evolve into research-based institutions,

encouraging joint research with industry.

5. **Accreditation and accountability:** Each university should be assessed against defined standards, and results should be transparently published so that students and guardians can make informed decisions.

6. **Digitalization and technology use:** Expanding smart classrooms, online learning, and data-driven management systems is necessary.

In summary: Ensuring quality in higher education requires:

- Strong policies and effective implementation
- Skills-based education
- Qualified faculty and research
- Accountability and use of technology

Asian State: How important is the university's role in shaping students' ethics, values, and social responsibility?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: The university's role in shaping students' ethics, values, and social responsibility is extremely important—indeed, it is one of its fundamental responsibilities. A university is not just a place for imparting knowledge; it is a center for developing a student's personality, thinking, and humanity. Students learn tolerance, integrity, leadership, and responsible behavior through diverse social, cultural, and intellectual experiences.

1. **Curriculum-based ethical education:** Including courses on ethics, professional conduct, and social responsibility helps students make sound decisions in real life.
2. **Co-curricular activities:** Activities such as debates, volunteering, social service, and club participation foster leadership, teamwork, and social accountability, preparing students for real-life challenges.

- 3. Role of faculty and administration:** When teachers exemplify integrity, responsibility, and humanity, students are likely to follow their example.
- 4. Inclusive university environment:** A campus that respects diversity, freedom of expression, and social justice helps students grow not only as skilled professionals but also as responsible citizens.

In short, universities play a vital role in building a strong and humane society.



Asian State: How should tuition fees be balanced with quality education?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Balancing tuition fees with quality education is a critical and sensitive issue. While fees are essential to maintain quality—providing infrastructure, skilled faculty, and research opportunities—excessive fees can burden students.

- 1. Transparent and reasonable fee structures:** Universities should clearly communicate what benefits students receive in exchange for their fees.
- 2. Scholarships and financial aid:** Support systems should be provided for talented students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 3. Efficient management and technology use:** Reducing unnecessary costs through better management and technology ensures that resources benefit students.

- 4. Industry partnerships and research funding:** Expanding these income sources can reduce dependence on tuition fees.

Finally, a collaborative initiative by the government, universities, and private sector to implement inclusive education policies is essential to ensure financial barriers do not hinder students from pursuing their dreams.

Asian State: What steps are needed to make higher education more accessible to students?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Making higher education accessible requires coordinated and long-term initiatives:

- 1. Improving educational infrastructure:** Increase the number of quality universities and institutions so that students can access higher education in their own regions.
- 2. Financial support:** Introduce scholarships, stipends, and education loans with easy terms to remove financial barriers, enabling middle- and low-income students to pursue higher education.
- 3. Digital infrastructure development:** Online classes, blended learning, and virtual laboratories allow students in remote areas to receive quality education.
- 4. Safe housing and hostels:** Especially for female students, safe accommodation must be ensured to allow uninterrupted study.
- 5. Career guidance and counseling:** Strong career services help students make effective use of higher education opportunities.

Finally, a collaborative initiative by the government, universities, and the private sector is essential to implement an inclusive education policy, ensuring that geographic or socioeconomic barriers do not impede students' dreams.

Asian State: How prepared are universities in Bangladesh for digital education, online learning, and smart campus systems?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Universities in Bangladesh have made significant progress toward digital education, online learning, and smart campus systems, but full readiness has not yet been achieved—this remains an ongoing transformation process.

- Particularly after COVID-19, universities rapidly adapted to online education. Within a short period, online classes were conducted with participation from hundreds of thousands of students, marking a significant positive change.
- Many private universities have implemented virtual classrooms, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and cloud-based platforms. Some universities are also developing digital infrastructure, data centers, automation systems, and campus-wide networks as part of smart campus initiatives.
- The government has initiated major projects to enhance digital connectivity in higher education, providing modern networks and Wi-Fi across public universities.

However, challenges remain: insufficient technological infrastructure, limited faculty digital skills, and lack of access to the internet and devices for students in rural areas are major constraints. Recent analyses indicate that the success of digital transformation depends heavily on infrastructure and capacity.

In summary: Universities in Bangladesh have made notable progress in digital education and smart campus initiatives, especially post-COVID, but full preparedness has not yet been achieved. This is a continuous transformation process.

Quote: “Bangladesh’s higher education sector is moving toward a digital future, but sustainable and inclusive development requires

coordinated planning, investment, and skilled human resources.”

Asian State: What areas should our universities focus on to ensure international-standard higher education?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: To achieve international-standard higher education, universities must strategically focus on several key areas:

1. **Curriculum modernization and internationalization:** Curricula must align with global standards and be regularly updated to ensure students are competitive in the international job market.
2. **Investment in research and innovation:** The quality and impact of research is a key indicator of international-standard universities. Adequate funding, research grants, and opportunities for publication in international journals are essential.
3. **Qualified and skilled faculty:** Faculty development programs, international training, and exchange programs enhance educational quality.
4. **International collaboration and academic partnerships:** Joint research, dual-degree programs, and student exchange initiatives help elevate education to a global level.
5. **Digital education and smart campus infrastructure:** Modern technology enhances the effectiveness and accessibility of education.
6. **Quality assurance and accreditation:** Strong systems of evaluation, transparency, and accountability ensure standards are maintained.
7. **Student skill development and ethical training:** Emphasis on both professional skills and ethical development ensures students become responsible global citizens.

Quote: “Achieving international standards is not just about infrastructure—it is a holistic culture where quality education, research, and global connectivity work together.”



Asian State: What positive outcomes can result from increasing collaboration between public and private universities?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Increasing collaboration between public and private universities would create strong coordination in higher education, which would play a significant role in the country’s overall development.

1. **Knowledge and resource sharing:** Combining the research experience of public universities with the modern infrastructure of private universities can enhance the quality of education.
2. **Joint research and innovation:** Faculty and researchers from both sectors can work together on large-scale projects and produce international-standard research.
3. **Faculty and student exchanges:** Exchange programs increase opportunities for mutual learning, enhancing skills and experience.
4. **Curriculum development and standardization:** Collaboration allows for a more consistent standard across the higher education system.
5. **Stronger industry-academia linkage:** Joint initiatives can expand internships,

training, and employment opportunities.

In conclusion, such collaboration can help build an inclusive and sustainable higher education system where a culture of cooperation complements competition.

Quote: “When collaboration is prioritized over competition, a country’s higher education system becomes truly strong.”

Asian State: What initiatives are essential to strengthen faculty development, research support, and the academic environment?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Building a strong academic environment, supporting research, and developing faculty require coordinated and sustainable initiatives:

1. **Regular Faculty Development Programs (FDP):** Provide opportunities for domestic and international training, workshops, and seminars to improve teaching methods, research skills, and technology use.
2. **Research funding and incentives:** Competitive research grants, publication incentives, and support for international journal publications increase both the quality and quantity of research.
3. **Modern infrastructure and resources:** Access to up-to-date laboratories, libraries, and databases is essential. Investment in digital libraries, journal subscriptions, and research facilities is crucial.
4. **Protected research time and reduced workload:** Faculty need dedicated time to focus on research.
5. **International collaboration and exchange programs:** Joint research, visiting scholar programs, and academic networking broaden faculty expertise and perspective.
6. **Independent and transparent academic environment:** Ensure freedom of expression, research

autonomy, and clear administrative structures. Merit-based recruitment and promotion are key to long-term educational quality.

Quote: “No university can sustainably provide quality education without strengthening its faculty and research—this is the key to progress.”

Asian State: Where do you envision Bangladesh’s higher education sector in the next decade?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: In the next decade, I envision Bangladesh’s higher education sector transforming into an internationally recognized, research-based, and technology-rich system.

1. **Global competitiveness:** Universities should not only compete nationally but also internationally, enabling our students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge globally.
2. **Research and innovation leadership:** Universities should become centers for knowledge creation and technological advancement, with close collaboration with industry to enhance practical application of research.
3. **Digital and smart education systems:** Blended learning (online and offline integration) should make education more accessible and effective.
4. **Inclusive higher education:** Students from rural and marginalized areas should have equal access to quality education, reducing financial and geographic barriers.
5. **Qualified faculty, strong research culture, and transparent administration:** These will establish a sustainable academic environment.

Ultimately, I hope to see a higher education sector that serves as a driving force for Bangladesh’s economic development, innovation, and social progress.

Quote: “The goal for the next decade should be to establish Bangladesh’s universities as global centers of knowledge, innovation, and humanity.”

Asian State: What message would you like to give to students, teachers, and policymakers in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Students, teachers, and policymakers all play critical roles in Bangladesh’s higher education sector.

- **To students:** Study not just for a degree, but for knowledge, skills, and ethics. Prepare yourself to be globally competitive. Regular learning habits, technological literacy, and responsible behavior are essential.
- **To teachers:** You are the true creators of knowledge. Your responsibility is not merely to teach but to shape students into thoughtful, humane, and competent individuals. Engagement with research, innovation, and modern teaching methods enhances educational quality.
- **To policymakers:** Treat higher education as a national investment. Increasing research funding, ensuring autonomy, implementing quality accreditation, and developing technology-driven education are urgent needs.

If students, teachers, and policymakers work responsibly together, Bangladesh can rapidly transform into a knowledge-based and innovative society.

Quote: “The advancement of education is not the responsibility of a single party—it is a joint commitment, where everyone builds the future together.”

Asian State: How do you explain the concept of “Empowering Education”?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: By “Empowering Education,” I mean an education system that does not just provide information

or degrees, but develops students into skilled, confident, thoughtful, and responsible individuals. The core goal is to structure education so that students can recognize their potential and apply it in real life. This approach emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity over rote memorization. Ultimately, empowering education prepares students not only for jobs but also to become agents of social change.

Quote: “Empowering Education is an education that does not just provide knowledge—it gives people the power to shape their own future.”



Asian State: What steps are needed to transform higher education from just degree acquisition into a force for nation-building?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Transforming higher education into a force for nation-building requires both conceptual and structural changes:

1. **Practical and skill-based curricula:** Focus on applied knowledge, problem-solving, research, innovation, and real-world applicability.
2. **Research and innovation culture:** Universities should become centers of knowledge creation where faculty and students work on new ideas and technologies.
3. **Strengthened industry-academia linkages:** Integrate education with the workplace through internships, project-based learning, and joint research.

4. **Ethics, values, and social responsibility:** These should be core components of education to produce not just skilled but responsible citizens.

5. **Digital and smart learning systems:** Use technology to make education more accessible, modern, and effective.

Ultimately, achieving this transformation requires coordinated, long-term efforts among teachers, students, universities, and policymakers.

Quote: “The true success of higher education is achieved when it becomes not just a degree, but a foundation for strong nation-building.”

Asian State: In the era of globalization, what is essential to make Bangladesh’s universities competitive?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: In this era of globalization, several strategic priorities are critical for Bangladesh’s universities to remain internationally competitive:

1. **Quality and internationalization of education:** Regularly update curricula to meet global standards and emphasize Outcome-Based Education (OBE) so students can compete internationally.
2. **Prioritize research and innovation:** Increase international-standard research, publications, and innovation initiatives to strengthen global standing.
3. **Skilled and research-oriented faculty:** Faculty development programs, international training, and academic exchange programs enhance teaching quality.
4. **International collaboration and networking:** Joint degrees, research projects, and student exchange programs with foreign universities are necessary.
5. **Digital education and smart campus infrastructure:** Modern technology ensures education is accessible, contemporary, and technology-driven.

6. **Quality assurance and accountability:** Strengthen systems to maintain a consistent international standard across all universities.

Quote: “In the era of globalization, survival in competition requires more than just degrees—quality, innovation, and global connectivity are the real strengths.”

Asian State: How do you assess the criticisms and controversies surrounding private universities?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Private universities face some criticisms and controversies, such as variations in quality, high tuition fees, limited research, and administrative weaknesses. However, it is important to evaluate these constructively rather than unilaterally.

1. Private universities play a significant role in meeting Bangladesh’s higher education demand, creating opportunities for a large number of students and making higher education more accessible.
2. Many institutions have introduced modern teaching methods, technology-driven classrooms, and industry-oriented curricula, helping students gain employable skills.
3. While some criticisms are valid, solutions lie in effective quality control, strong accreditation, increased research investment, and transparent administration.
4. Private universities should prioritize the social responsibility of education, not just a business perspective.

If criticisms are seen as opportunities for improvement rather than weaknesses, private universities can evolve into a stronger and high-quality higher education system in the future.

Quote: “Criticism is not a weakness—if embraced correctly, it can become the most

powerful tool for development and quality improvement.”

Asian State: In your view, how significant is higher education as a driving force for Bangladesh’s future?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Higher education is one of the main driving forces for Bangladesh’s future. A country’s economic development, technological advancement, and social transformation fundamentally depend on skilled, knowledgeable, and innovative human resources created through higher education.

1. **Skilled human resources:** Higher education produces professionals who play vital roles in industry, technology, administration, and research, accelerating employment and economic growth.
2. **Research and innovation hub:** Universities generate new knowledge, technologies, and solutions, contributing to a knowledge-based economy.
3. **Social awareness and leadership:** Higher education develops ethical and responsible leadership, essential for a stable and progressive society.
4. **Global competitiveness:** Skilled graduates enhance Bangladesh’s representation on the international stage.

Quote: “The foundation of an advanced Bangladesh lies in quality higher education—because the nation’s future is built in classrooms, laboratories, and centers of knowledge.”

Asian State: In one line, what is your comment on the future of higher education in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: Bangladesh’s higher education will become more research-driven, technology-oriented, and globally competitive if quality

improvement and innovation are prioritized today.

Asian State: What are your three key recommendations to make private universities effective and world-class?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: To make private universities effective and world-class, I emphasize three main areas:

1. **Strengthen research and innovation:** Research is the foundation of world-class universities. Adequate funding, modern laboratories, and opportunities for publication in international journals are essential to enhance knowledge production and application.
2. **Faculty development and quality recruitment:** Recruiting qualified, experienced, and research-oriented faculty, along with regular training, workshops, and academic exchange programs, is necessary to improve educational quality.
3. **Enhance industry–academia linkage:** To make curricula practical, universities must build close relationships with industry. Internships, project-based learning, and joint research prepare students for the professional world.

“Quality, research, and practical education—these three pillars build a world-class university.”



Asian State: What is your inspirational message for young students in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. M Sayedur Rahman: My message for the young students of Bangladesh is—never underestimate your potential. Today’s world is rapidly changing, and to keep

pace, you need not only textbook knowledge but also skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Do not fear—dream big, and work hard to turn those dreams into reality. Failure is never the end; it is a step toward learning. Prepare yourself to become not just a job seeker but a creator of the future.

Quote: “Dream big, and turn those dreams into reality through knowledge and hard work.”



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Special Interview with
Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed
 Vice-Chancellor
 Chadpur Science & Technology University

The conversation was conducted by Md. Imam Hossain, Country Editor of Asian State's Bangladesh chapter.



Asian State: How do you assess the current state of higher education in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Higher education in Bangladesh is undergoing significant change. Student numbers are increasing, new universities are being established, and technology-driven education is expanding. However, challenges remain in quality, research, skilled faculty, and meeting international standards. I believe this is a promising period. With proper policies, accountability, and academic enhancement,

Bangladesh can strengthen its higher education sector further.



Asian State: How do you view the role of private universities in expanding higher education?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Private universities play a crucial role in expanding higher education. Public universities cannot provide access for everyone; private institutions offer alternatives and wider opportunities. They particularly facilitate urban students and introduce new, practical, and technology-based programs, making a positive contribution.



Asian State: What are the main differences between public and private universities?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Public universities generally have long traditions, extensive research infrastructure, and offer low-cost education. Private universities can make faster decisions, launch programs based on market demand, and often lead in technology use. Despite differences, both aim to provide quality education, and cooperation matters more than competition.

Asian State: How much have private universities contributed to increasing higher education access for students?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: They have made significant contributions. Many students seek admission each year, but public seats are limited. Private universities fill this gap and provide specialized, flexible, and career-oriented programs.



Asian State: What do you see as the greatest strength of private universities?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Their adaptability. They can quickly launch relevant courses, design curricula aligned with industry needs, and foster student-centric environments. Coupling this with research, quality control, and faculty development can strengthen their role further.



Asian State: In which areas do private universities need improvement?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Research culture, full-time skilled faculty, campus development, robust lab and library facilities, and academic quality need attention. Many

focus on teaching but lag in research and innovation. International collaboration and academic productivity should be enhanced.

Asian State: How can private universities play a more effective role in quality enhancement?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: By updating curricula, training teachers, funding research, connecting with industries, and emphasizing outcome-based learning. Internal quality control must be strengthened, and critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills must be nurtured.

Asian State: What is the potential for research, innovation, and technology-driven education in private universities?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: The potential is high. Private universities can adopt technology rapidly and implement new ideas flexibly. Increased research funding, skilled faculty recruitment, and industry partnerships can create opportunities, especially in IT, health, environment, entrepreneurship, and emerging tech sectors.



Asian State: How successful are private universities in connecting with industries?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Some do well with internships, corporate ties, career support, and skill-based courses. Overall, deeper, structured collaboration is needed through joint research, labs, guest lectures, project-based learning, and continuous industry linkage.

Asian State: How do private universities align curricula with job market demand?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: They are relatively ahead, updating courses based on market needs. Beyond job readiness, student mindset, leadership, language skills, research ability, and ethics must also develop. Curricula should be dynamic to keep up with rapid market changes.

Asian State: What policy changes are needed to ensure quality in higher education?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Strengthen quality control, focus on faculty recruitment, research evaluation, curriculum development, student outcomes, and enhance accountability and transparency. Accreditation should be practical, emphasizing quality over quantity.



Asian State: How important is the university's role in shaping students' ethics, values, and social responsibility?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Universities shape responsible citizens, not just professionals. Values like ethics, tolerance, social responsibility, leadership, and humanity develop through curricula and co-curricular activities, service programs, debates, and humanistic practice.

Asian State: How should tuition fees balance with quality of education?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Fees should allow institutions to provide quality education without burdening students. Transparency, scholarships, merit-based or need-based support, and justified expenditure are necessary. Education is not a commercial

product, but investment is required to maintain quality.

Asian State: What steps are needed to make higher education accessible for students in rural and underdeveloped regions?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Expand quality regional universities, online/blended education, scholarships, dormitories, digital infrastructure, and career counseling. Many talented students are left behind due to financial and geographic constraints, so regional planning is essential.

Asian State: How prepared are Bangladesh's universities for digital learning, online education, and smart campus systems?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Preparation has begun, but much remains. Some universities have online classes, learning management systems, digital libraries, and smart facilities, but infrastructure, technical skills, and policies are uneven. Future universities must be technology-rich, data-driven, and student-centric.



Asian State: What areas should universities emphasize to ensure international standards?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Research, academic freedom, skilled faculty, modern labs and libraries, outcome-based education, and international collaboration. Communication in English, publications, joint research, exchange programs, and awareness of global ranking standards are crucial. Long-term commitment to quality is essential.

Asian State: What positive outcomes can arise from greater cooperation between public and private universities?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Joint research, faculty exchange, lab sharing, conferences, training, and coordinated national initiatives. This encourages learning rather than competition. Combining public universities' experience with private universities' agility strengthens higher education.

Asian State: What initiatives are needed to strengthen faculty development, research support, and academic environment?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Regular faculty training, research funding, international conferences, publication support, incentives for higher degrees, and merit evaluation. Academic freedom and research-friendly environments are critical. Faculty motivation directly improves student learning.



Asian State: Where do you see Bangladesh's higher education sector in the next decade?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: A sector that advances quality, research, technology, innovation, and global recognition. Universities will produce skilled, ethical, and research-driven human resources. Regional disparities will reduce, industry linkages will grow, and Bangladesh will move toward a knowledge-based economy.



Asian State: Message to students, teachers, and policymakers in Bangladesh:

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Students—focus on skills and character, not just degrees. Teachers—lead in knowledge cultivation, research, and student development. Policymakers—see higher education as long-term national investment. Responsibility from all ensures global-standard education.

Asian State: How do you interpret “Empowering Education”?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Education that does more than impart knowledge—it enables. It teaches students to think, make decisions, develop skills, and impact society. Empowering education builds confidence, values, leadership, and innovative mindsets. It becomes a force for freedom, progress, and human advancement.



Asian State: How can higher education become a force for nation-building, not just degree attainment?

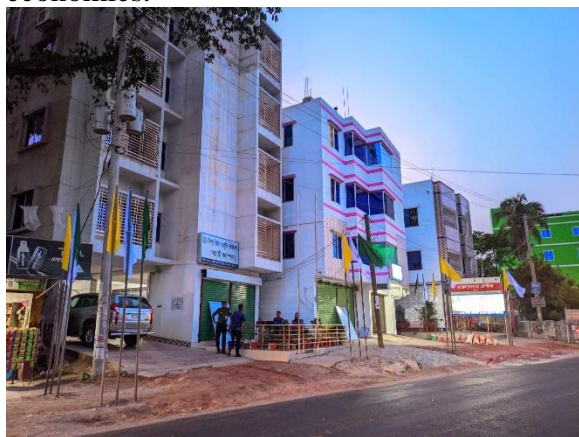
Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Education must be practical, value-driven, and research-oriented. Universities should cultivate problem

solvers, entrepreneurs, and responsible citizens. Curricula must integrate social, environmental, technological, leadership, and ethical elements. Applying knowledge beyond degrees drives nation-building.



Asian State: What is most crucial to keep Bangladesh's universities competitive in globalization?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Quality education, research, international collaboration, technology capability, language proficiency, and innovative culture. Leadership, administration, and curriculum development aligned with global standards are also essential. Universities should meet local needs while contributing to global knowledge economies.



Asian State: How do you view criticisms of private universities?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Criticism is inevitable and not always negative; it can guide improvement. Concerns about quality, fees, faculty, or infrastructure should be addressed, but their contributions should also be

recognized. The focus should be on enhancement, not defense.

Asian State: How significant is higher education in shaping Bangladesh's future?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Extremely significant. National development depends on knowledge, skills, research, and innovation. Universities produce future scientists, policymakers, teachers, entrepreneurs, and leaders. Investing in higher education is investing in the country's future.



Asian State: In one line, what is your comment on the future of higher education in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Bangladesh's higher education has a bright future if expansion, quality, research, ethics, and innovation are equally prioritized.

Asian State: What are your three key recommendations to make private universities effective and world-class?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: 1) Increase mandatory investment in research and faculty development. 2) Strengthen quality control, transparency, and accountability. 3) Build deeper connections with industries, international partners, and technology-driven education. Meeting these ensures global-standard institutions.

Asian State: What is your inspirational message for young students in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. Payer Ahmed: Do not underestimate your dreams. Acquire

knowledge, enhance skills, learn to question, and do not fear failure. Strive to be a good person, not just achieve good grades.



With honesty, hard work, and confidence, success is inevitable. Your hands shape Bangladesh's future.



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Dr. Neyamat Ullah Bhuiyan
Senior Secretary
 Member of Planning Commission
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The Poverty of Initiation

Becoming initiated is more important than merely becoming educated. Education informs; initiation transforms. Education teaches; initiation demonstrates. Education is a flame; initiation is the guiding lamp. The vehicle of education is books and texts; the vehicle of initiation is vows and commitments. Education is a blueprint for the future; initiation is the resolve to realize a dream. The driving forces of education are intelligence and intellect; the driving forces of initiation are conscience and reflection. Initiation is the wealth earned through spiritual discipline, whereas education is the fruit of study—or, metaphorically, a begged treasure, though not in a negative sense. A student, after all, is a seeker of knowledge at the teacher's door. Thus, the more educated one

is, the more one may be called a seeker. Yet even that treasure is grasped only by the mind. Where the mind is absent from learning, the inattentive student's inner storehouse cannot retain the wealth of knowledge. From the unsettled platform of a restless mind, knowledge slips away unnoticed. Education remains secure only in the forest of penance, patience, and perseverance.

From childhood we have been accustomed to hearing the paired expression “education and initiation.” These days, however, we hear only “education.” “Initiation” has been sidelined. Education has become like a wingless fairy—unable to fly, lying helpless. Initiation, on the other hand, has grown wings and flown away. Endless plans for educational development are visible everywhere, yet the corresponding radiance of image and substance is absent. Image, after all, means the complete form of thought and feeling. Today, only the “thought” exists; the “form” does not. The condition resembles that of planning itself. The fairy of planning does not exist in reality either, for imagination itself is unreal. What reality emerges from the union of two unrealities—only realists may know. In any case, education and initiation together constitute true education. Today, education has lost contact with initiation. They no longer walk hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder. There is no harmony between them. They have parted ways—“today the two have taken two separate paths, bending in different directions.” This pains me deeply. That is the true reason behind my advocacy for initiation.

The Bengali word *shikkha* (education) derives from the Sanskrit root *śās*, meaning to discipline or instruct. The English word *education* comes from the Latin *educere* or *educatum*, meaning “to lead out”—that is, to bring forth inner potential. This inner potentiality refers to latent life force and dormant talent. Education awakens this talent, arousing sleeping energies. The awakening of possibility breaks inner bonds and expands into

the outer world, tearing the limits of the finite to befriend the infinite.

The Bengali word *diksha* (initiation) derives from the Sanskrit roots *dī* (to give) and *kṣi* (to destroy). Its English equivalent, *initiation*, means “to go into.” The essence, therefore, is the nurturing of a transcendental power deep within the soul—one that destroys all seeds of ignorance and leads to the vision of truth. Initiation is akin to divine knowledge. As the Rebel Poet wrote, “Let the new full moon of creation smile upon the chest of destruction.” Initiation does the same: it shatters arrogance, annihilates sin, destroys evil. From this very act of destruction emerges the seed of new possibilities for the pursuit of truth—an indomitable urge for the welfare of the world, a resolve as hard as steel.

Education is the continuous practice of fully developing potential. The complete expression of a developed personality is education—comparable to a fully blossomed flower. A flower blooms in the open sky, yet its roots remain embedded in fertile, living soil. Likewise, for the complete expression of a developed personality, education must remain connected to the roots of the mental world, the realm of truth-seeking, the depths of the inner self, the impulses of life, and the rhythms of the heart. The heart here does not mean the physical organ. The heart is not merely a pump; motivation arises from the realm of the heart’s sensibility. Everyone possesses a physical heart, but not everyone possesses a true heart. Just as being human does not automatically make one humane. Insects are effortlessly insects, but a human being must strive arduously, through sincere discipline, to become truly human. Therefore, population growth cannot be equated with an increase in humanity. Just as the expansion of a garden does not necessarily mean an increase in trees—there may be weeds as well. An increase in the number of scholars does not necessarily mean an increase in knowledge. A rise in

literacy rates does not necessarily mean a rise in true education.

People do not seem to increase; only the population increases.

More than trees, weeds now capture everyone’s attention.

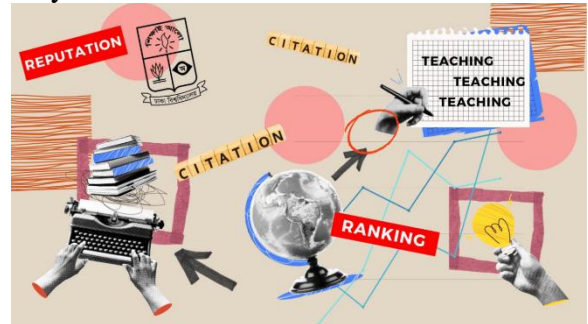
Prices keep rising, but values keep declining.

Lacking initiation, burdened with mere learning, lives suffocate in despair.

Literacy rates rise, yet the quality of education falls.

Certificates multiply, unemployment grows, and the burden on the state accumulates.

As excuses increase, hands of action wither away.



No amount of suits and ties can conceal the shame of the mind.

The *bay'at* of Muslims, the Baptism of Christians, and the *mantra-dīkṣā* of Hindu scriptures are not my concern today, because these are religion-bound matters, constructed upon a firm foundation of faith. In my view, religion is the greatest philosophy of human civilization. The *dīkṣā* I am discussing here is not scriptural or ritualistic; rather, it is action-oriented. This is because *action speaks louder than words*, and action is the fundamental prerequisite of all success and fulfillment.

A person who is *dīkṣita* (initiated in action) is honored through work. There is no movement of such a person in the despised alley of laziness. Renouncing comfort, they engage in strenuous effort. Tears are not their weapons; they purchase achievement with the price of sweat. They are tempered by hardship—hardship upon hardship turns them into a touchstone. They undertake rigorous discipline. The path of falsehood is easy; the

path of truth is perilous. Because they are initiated into truth, they do not lose their way like blind travelers even in the darkest night. To them, alternatives hold no necessity against resolve. Being initiated into truth, their vow is firm:

“What is difficult, that is what must be achieved; I shall stand upright in the world—I shall not choose the easy path, I shall not fall into the mire.”

Though this may sound somewhat rhetorical in Nazrul’s voice, the articulation of arduous devotion to truth is incisive: *“The Mighty Mother cannot be attained by tears; therefore the Shakta devotee binds Her with the cord of devotion.”*



Education demands care, practice, affection, and nurturing love. Without such attention, education cannot survive or remain vibrant. Without tending the seed, education cannot be sown; it cannot sprout, leaf, bloom, flourish, adorn itself, spread fragrance, or bear fruit. Without the watering of practice, it cannot be kept alive. Mere immersion in the continuous cascade of learning does not make education stagnant or lifeless, nor does it lose momentum or choke in the algae of narrow-mindedness. The philosopher Socrates viewed education as *the unfolding of truth and the elimination of falsehood*. Aristotle defined education as *the creation of a beautiful mind in a sound body*. Only when the educated are formed in this way does truth cease to be hostile to them.

The inner potential of human beings unfolds through education. Potential is the womb of prosperity; from the seed of potential arises the great tree of progress. Potential is the measure of future expectation. Such potential also exists underground, known as natural resources—like

a diamond mine. Unless extracted, the gem remains worthless. Potential buried under soil may be wealth in name, but it has no utility. What value do file-buried information, ash-covered fire, affection-veiled ethics, obscured vision, suppressed pain, poetry submerged in silence, or truth shrouded in mystery hold? If what is within does not come out, who will recognize it, who will know it? Perhaps this is why Rabindranath sought the flowering of the inner self:

“Let my inner being bloom, O Inmost One; Make it pure, radiant, and beautiful—Unite it with all, free it from bondage, Infuse all actions with Your rhythm of peace.”

“Light be in my heart and in my thinking; Light be at my end and my departing.”

The figures in S. M. Sultan’s paintings are robust and powerfully muscular. They appear almost unreal, as if they do not belong to the ordinary world. Sultan’s straightforward reply was: *“I do not paint human beings; I paint the limitless potential of strength that exists within human beings.”* By infusing the invisible, inner potential-force with emotional and aesthetic sensibility, Sultan endowed it with a stable and enduring grandeur of form. Muscles, in his work, are merely an ornamental expression of that inner strength. Sultan himself knew well that muscular power and brute force are synonymous. Brain power belongs to the wise and the heroic; arm power belongs to the demonic. Philosopher Bertrand Russell aptly remarked, *“God is not foolish; that is why He placed the brain above the arms.”*

The human brain, weighing barely one and a half kilograms, can process at least one million pieces of information per second. It contains around 150 billion neurons, with a storage capacity of nearly one million gigabytes. It functions like a digital video recorder, capable of storing so many visual impressions that it would take a continuously running television 342 years to display them all. The speed of the brain is approximately one million times faster

than that of a computer; measuring such speed would require at least 24,000 processors. And the eyes? Their capacity is equally astonishing. At a single moment, the eyes can observe about 1.5 million objects and distinguish nearly 7 million colors with fine precision. All this makes it clear how trivial mere physical or muscular strength truly is.

There is proportion everywhere in creation—mathematical or geometrical, literal or numerical, linear or symbolic. Perhaps this is why the astronomer Galileo stated, “*Mathematics is the language with which God created the universe.*” The Qur’an likewise declares: “*Allah has set a due measure for everything*” (Surah Al-‘Alaq, verse 3). Through twenty-five years of research, Stanford University has concluded that the human face, bodily structure, heartbeat, aspects of DNA, the design of the solar system, the arrangement of leaves on trees, snowflakes, the human body, galaxies, the Egyptian pyramids, Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, the North and South Poles, and latitude and longitude—all conform to the ratio 1.618. This proportion is known as the Golden Ratio, the Divine Proportion, or the Golden Mean.

Education is the worship of truth, because truth is beauty, and beauty is truth—*Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*. As the poet John Keats believed:

*“Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”*

The sweetness of beauty is imperishable. Beauty is never meaningless. Its glory is ageless, immortal, indestructible, and inexhaustible. Education teaches truth. The lesson of education is such:

“Today we shall surrender our minds to truth alone...

We shall understand truth, worship truth, and seek the treasure of truth.

Even if we are burned by suffering, we shall not harbor false thoughts.

Even if we have to endure poverty, we shall not commit false deeds.

Even if we have to bear punishment, we shall not utter false words.”

The vehicle of the white-clad Goddess of Learning, Saraswati, is the royal swan. This too has a significance. Mud does not cling to the white feathers of the swan. Moreover, the swan can separate even minute particles mixed in water by filtering them out. The symbolic meaning of this is that scholars too must remain pure and immaculate like the royal swan. No stain of temptation should be able to pollute them. Through the sieve of education, the educated will discard falsehood, evil, and adulteration. Through the filter of knowledge, they will reject ugliness, vulgarity, and untruth, and accept pure, benevolent, welfare-oriented, and even harsh truths.

This is because the surrounding environment is gradually being taken over by the corrupt. Social conscience and human values are becoming entangled in the web of adulteration. To purify intellect and awareness, what is needed is that sieve of education, that filter consecrated by the vow of sacrifice. Today, the glory of sacrifice is gasping under the greed for profit. The ears of conscience have been locked with self-interest. Falsehood is being passed off as truth under glittering and attractive packaging. Salt is mixed with sugar, water with milk, stones with rice, oil with ghee; greed with profit, excuses with action, bribes with salary, nepotism with good governance, obscenity with poetic aesthetics, flattery with praise—such mixtures and adulterations are taking place freely and relentlessly.

The responsibility of saving the authentic from being devoured by counterfeit lies with the educated person. Yet the problem is that education itself comes in two forms: good education and bad education. Bad education is simply the opposite of moral education.

“The root of education is bitter, but the fruit of education is sweeter”—this statement by Aristotle points to the hardship and discipline involved in the pursuit of knowledge. Because without hardship, success cannot be achieved.

‘Kesto’ means Krishna in one sense, and success in another. However, it is not entirely true that the fruit of education is always sweet. If the fruit is an orange, it is sweet. But if it is a poisonous fruit? Then it is not sweet at all; rather, it is something to be discarded. Such a fruit is a danger to oneself and a threat to others. Education, which is called the backbone of a nation, is not literally a rod. It is an arrangement of several vertebrae. Education is similar. Through a gradual process, each subject of education must be intricately woven into the thread of initiation. Then this duality becomes education–initiation. These two are companions, siblings, kin, and friends. In their harmony, heaven is created on earth; in their separation, the earth becomes a desert. Education without initiation is a lost traveler, and initiation without education may hinder progress. If education accompanies initiation and becomes a truth-seeking journey, only then can one say:

“You I have made the pole star of my life;
In this vast ocean, I shall never lose my way again.”

Just as a teacher is an instructor of learning, so too is he a guide of initiation. Arjuna’s achievement was not solely due to education. His guru Drona was not only a teacher but also an initiator. Even if practice does not reach perfection, sincere effort is never wasted.

“The flower that fell to the ground before blooming,

The river that lost its flow in the desert—
I know, O I know, they were not lost.”
Effort itself is what matters.

“Bless me, O Lord,

In successful effort and even in unsuccessful endeavor.”

“In the flower garden of the world-tree, we are gardeners;

At the root of the tree of human life, we pour water.”

This truth resonates not only in the speech of teachers but also in their very conduct. Therefore, the teacher’s job is not to clear

jungles. The teacher’s task is to irrigate the deserts of students’ minds and intellect with the water of knowledge, so that from the seeds of practice may grow the harvest of benevolent initiation.

Teaching does not mean providing answers to all questions; rather, it means showing the means by which answers can be found. The more a teacher can awaken curiosity and motivation to know in a student’s mind, the more successful that teacher is. The observation of American writer William Arthur Ward is noteworthy:

“The mediocre teacher tells.

The good teacher demonstrates.

The superior teacher explains.

The great teacher inspires.”

The sage Confucius rightly said that every truth has four corners. The teacher shows only one corner of this quadrilateral truth to the student; discovering the remaining three is the student’s responsibility.



Robert Brault said, “*The average teacher explains complexity; the gifted teacher reveals simplicity. He who opens a school door, closes a prison.*” Although Victor Hugo said this, institutional education is essentially a mansion of life-education whose foundation is natural education. The height of the Himalayan peak above the earth’s surface is only 9 kilometers, but its roots beneath the ground extend 125 kilometers—nearly fourteen times its visible height. Our institutional education may be compared to the 9 kilometers above the surface, while the 125 kilometers of roots beneath the ground resemble natural education—

“In the vast notebook of this earth,
The pages that serve as lessons.”

That education forms the roots of the educated person's learning. Natural education is the ring, and institutional education is the craftsmanship upon that ring. To be well-educated means to be self-educated.

Only the integration of education and initiation can fulfill the true purpose of education. When education and initiation together build a society, that is called true civilization.

The educated without initiation are excessively pragmatic and intellectual. They move according to the dictates of intellect and brain. The initiated are people of heart; they run by the commands of the heart. When work is done by reasoning alone, it can be done efficiently, because it follows grammar, formulas, mathematics, and logic. It revolves within the boundaries of reality and sometimes crosses limits—but in pursuit of gain. The kite of intellect may soar in the sky, but the spool remains in the hand of the intellectual. Such a person becomes the ruler of his own world.

“Step outside yourself and stand beyond;
Within, you will hear the response of the universe.”

This call seems trivial to them. To climb higher, they discard the trivial; speed increases, progress comes gradually, wealth and prosperity accumulate, fame and reputation follow, and cash comes into hand.

“If you have money in hand and sharpness in mind,
Many will come calling you uncle and kin.
If you have money, you grow wings to fly;
The history of misdeeds is covered up with money.”

The condition of such intellectuals resembles my uncle:

“My uncle Motlob Ali is extremely clever;
He sinks himself in the swamp of sin
And seeks purification for others later.”

In intellectual work, inner approval is irrelevant. It neither seeks nor respects the consent of the heart. Profit and loss are intelligible to intellect. When intelligence alone is insufficient, it resorts to cunning strategies

and wins. It masters every tactic to win life's battles. The path chosen to reach the goal need not be ethical. Ethics are seen as the affection or misfortune of the weak. Achievement alone matters. Sacrifice is a disease; indulgence is health. Just as everything is considered permissible in love and war, so too for them, virtue and vice become equivalent. The cry of conscience is nonexistent to them.

The educated worship speed; the initiated follow emotion. Without emotion, noble achievement is impossible. Speed is the sibling of motion; emotion becomes the motion of stillness. It becomes the guardian of the helpless, the shore of the shoreless, a source of empathy and companionship. The educated are knowers; the initiated are fighters. Sensitivity is the hallmark of the initiated.

“Suppressing the wicked and nurturing the virtuous”

is their ideal. They become illustrious in their mental pursuits. The educated perform actions; the initiated perform actions and also understand their essence. Faith is their armor. Selfishness burns the initiated with remorse; the pyre of conscience consumes them. Without the approval of the heart, the initiated do not display efficiency.

They say:

“From the heart I gather words,
Create a world of joy,
Pour streams of lyrical delight
Upon the dust-laden world.”

Any work that lacks inner consent, compassion, joy, warmth of affection, and loving tenderness does not belong to the initiated. The initiated are inspired by patriotism just as

“Stars awaken in the chest of a dark night,
And springs awaken within stone caves.”

In 1971, imbued with the mantra of independence, every freedom-loving person of this country became, in effect, a freedom fighter. Moreover, at least 105,000 freedom fighters directly and actively participated in the Great Liberation War across various sectors.

Three million independence-seeking people sacrificed their lives. Two hundred thousand of our mothers and sisters became Biranganas (war heroines). Yet at that time, our literacy rate was only 16 percent. Without initiation into the mantra of liberation, how could this have been possible?

During the October Revolution, 60 percent of Russia's population of 120 million was illiterate. When the ruling regime opened fire on a gathering of 500,000 people in July, 56 people laid down their lives. More than 400,000 workers joined strikes. Was this due to education, or due to initiation into a revolutionary mantra? The autocratic Tsar Nicholas forcibly sent 11 million poor common people into the World War. During the French Revolution, in addition to killing 1,400 innocent civilians imprisoned in Parisian jails, nearly 15,000 people were beheaded, and 25,000 people were indiscriminately killed. Even then, the revolution could not be stopped. Yet at that time, 50 percent of the French population was illiterate. Without initiation into the mantra of liberation from exploitation, the illiterate masses could not have made such a revolution successful.

By way of another example, Japanese trains run so punctually that there is no record of an average delay exceeding 18 seconds. Is this merely an achievement of education, or does the mantra of initiation also play a role? Everyone knows that the treatment provided by an educated physician is beneficial only when that physician is initiated into the mantra of service; otherwise, the consequence is the patient's death.

What, then, is a mantra? A mantra is not the name of some meaningless or incomprehensible incantation. The true purpose of a mantra is to assist contemplation—to awaken new waves in the realm of thought. Educated people without initiation may be wealthy, yet they die repeatedly before death. Why? Because they die every day in fear of the day they will

actually die. They know that their enormous wealth of indulgence will end up in the garbage heap after death. Hence they say, "I do not wish to die in this beautiful world." But which world? Certainly not the natural world. It is the colorful world they themselves have constructed. That world alone appears supremely beautiful to them. They are enchanted and utterly absorbed by its allure.

"On glittering, velvety, delicate beds, Sleepless nights pass in the shame of conscience."

At that time, they have neither peace nor comfort. Yet they do not realize that—

"After suffering through all eight watches to live in heaven on the sixth floor, In the ruined nest of a fallen god lies their evident destruction."

And the initiated? Yes, they too wish to die before death—but to keep death in remembrance, so that they never forget that one day they must die. Therefore, they do not deviate from truth. Like Nazrul, they declare:

"He who is the death of death, I have taken refuge in Him;

There is no fear of death left in my heart."

The initiated sacrifice their lives for the greater welfare of humanity. In this way, they conquer death:

"He who avoids death is drawn by death; Those who face death head-on alone know how to live."

Then they joyfully proclaim:

"O death, you are as dear to me as my beloved."

Education without initiation is not dedicated to human welfare. An educated person not initiated into human welfare survives alone but does not save others. The initiated, considering their own survival trivial, save others. To live, they live with everyone; to die, they die themselves and let others live. Then—

"The world says: for you there is a garland of welcome;

The sky says: light millions of lamps for you; Death says: I row your boat of life."

The initiated do not build monuments of memory; their seat is laid upon the living platform of human hearts. Their heaven is attained through sacrifice. They do not merely seek truth; they vow to establish it. The educated also search for truth and falsehood, but cannot fully establish truth because they fear losing convenience. Hence they become compromisers. There is no heroism or greatness in compromise—no sense of self-respect. They compromise like cowards but wish to walk like heroes.

An educated person not initiated into the principle of “all for one and one for all” is narrow-minded and self-centered. Without self-respect, there can be no values. Such a person neither understands their worth nor knows themselves. Self-enrichment is not their pursuit; wealth accumulation is their mantra. “Know thyself” means discovering one’s potential, one’s spiritual power, and one’s true self: “Today I have known myself; all bonds have opened.”

The educated person who knows themselves declares:

“Ever uplifted be my head,”
or, “I bow to none but myself.”

Awakening inner potential from its dormant state, they then pray like the initiated:

“Grant strength to the one upon whom You bestow Your flag, so that they may bear it.”

Rabindranath Tagore’s observation—

“Today there is neither practice nor perfection;

Alongside learning there is verbosity,

Alongside vigor there is arrogance,

And alongside austerity there is cunning”

—helps us understand why

“A strange darkness has descended upon the world today;

Those who are blind see the most.”

And if we speak of our beloved motherland—

“The nation moves upon the back of a grotesque camel.”

“Reading between the lines” is the mantra of the educated. “Reading beyond the lines” is the

mantra of the initiated. And both the educated and the initiated, inspired by the mantra of “doing between the sighs,” distribute the sweetness of achievement amid sighs of limitation and advance civilization.

Those accustomed to petty theft steal pens; and educated people without initiation steal *with* pens. Which is more harmful—this judgment is left to the honorable reader. Education without initiation is blind.

“If blind, does the apocalypse stop?”

No, it does not. Therefore, one must be initiated into both the light of education and the mantra of liberation. When an educated person is also initiated, it is perfection upon perfection. The union of these two can erase all afflictions of the world and restrain all injustices. It can transform a leaf-hut into a golden palace. The duality of education and initiation “protects the weak and strikes down the wicked.”

The chariot of civilization has two wheels. Both wheels must be of equal size; otherwise, the chariot cannot move forward. Just as a family is a two-wheeled vehicle—one wheel called husband, the other wife—and unless both move in equal measure and rhythm the family becomes dysfunctional, so too the chariot of civilization has one wheel called education and the other initiation. Unless these two wheels move in harmony, the vehicle of civilization cannot reach its destination.

I conclude with a verse from Jalaluddin Rumi’s *Masnavi*:

“Listen to the reed as it tells its tale,
Complaining of separations.”

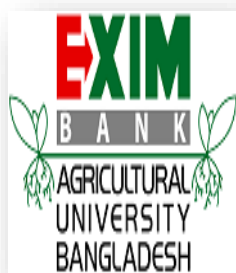
“Listen with the ears of the heart to the reed flute’s melody of separation—how it weeps in poignant, sorrowful tones, lamenting the deep pain of being torn away from the reed bed.”

The longing born of separation from initiation is like that flute. Initiation cries helplessly in separation from education and seeks release from this agony. Education wishes to stand beside initiation in times of sorrow; initiation wishes to be the companion of education in times of joy. Education seeks to be initiated by

initiation, and initiation seeks enrichment through education. Through their combined effort, they wish to glorify the motherland and build a civilized society. They know that education is not merely preparation for life; education itself is life, and initiation is the soul of that life. To open the golden gate of civilization, a key with two grooves is required—one groove named education and the other initiation. And only then is that golden key called “**Education–Initiation.**”



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**Exim Bank Agricultural University
Bangladesh**

**Special Interview with
Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari
Vice-Chancellor
EXIM Bank Agricultural University
Bangladesh (EBAUB)**

The conversation was conducted by Md. Imam Hossain, Country Editor of Asian State's Bangladesh chapter.

Asian State-1. How would you assess the current state of higher education in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Bangladesh's higher education is currently undergoing a period of transformation. On one hand, student enrollment is increasing, new universities are being established, and technology-driven education is growing; on the other hand, challenges remain in quality, research, skilled faculty, and meeting international standards. I believe this is a period of opportunity. With proper policies, accountability, and academic quality improvement, Bangladesh can achieve a

stronger position in higher education. Bangladesh University Grant Commission (UGC) & Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) Already have been taking a member of imitative which can help to achieve this destination.

Asian State-2. How do you view the role of private universities in expanding higher education in the country?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Private universities play a very important role in expanding higher education. Public universities cannot accommodate all students, and in this regard, private universities provide an alternative and broadened access. They have particularly eased entry to higher education for city-based students. Additionally, by introducing new subjects, career-oriented programs, and technology-based curricula, private universities are making a positive contribution.

Asian State-3. What do you see as the main differences between public and private universities?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Public universities generally have long-standing traditions, large research frameworks, and offer education at lower costs. In contrast, private universities can make decisions relatively quickly, launch new programs based on market demand, and often lead in technology adoption. However, both share the same goal—providing quality higher education. Therefore, while differences exist, cooperation is more important than competition.

Asian State-4. How much do private universities contribute to increasing higher education opportunities for students?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: In my view, private universities have made a significant contribution to expanding higher education opportunities. Each year, many students wish to enroll in universities, but public universities

have limited seats. Private universities effectively fill this gap. They not only increase access but also, in many cases, provide specialized programs, evening classes, flexible academic structures, and career-oriented courses, offering students practical advantages.



Asian State-5. In your view, what is the greatest strength of private universities?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: The greatest strength of private universities is their adaptability. They can rapidly introduce timely courses, design curricula aligned with industry demands, and remain flexible in technology adoption. They are also attentive to creating student-centered learning environments. If this strength is further supported by research, quality control, and faculty development, their role can become even stronger.



Asian State-6. In which areas do you think private universities need to improve?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari:

Improvements are needed in cultivating a research culture, hiring full-time skilled faculty, developing permanent campuses, strengthening laboratories and libraries, and creating a high-quality academic environment. Many institutions remain teaching-focused and lag behind in research and innovation. Increasing international collaboration and academic productivity between faculty and students is also essential. In short, their goal should be to become centers of knowledge, not merely degree-awarding institutions.

Asian State-7. How can private universities play a more effective role in enhancing the quality of higher education?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Private universities can play a more effective role in quality improvement if they focus on updating curricula, faculty training, research grants, industry collaboration, and outcome-based education. Additionally, internal quality assurance cells must be fully functional. It is important to cultivate students' critical thinking, communication skills, and problem-solving abilities. Quality education should not be confined to the classroom; it must be reflected throughout the entire academic culture.

Asian State-8. What is the potential of private universities in research, innovation, and technology-driven education?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: The potential is very high. Private universities can rapidly adopt technology and are relatively flexible in implementing new ideas. If they increase funding for research, recruit skilled faculty and researchers, and develop joint projects with industry, they can create significant innovation opportunities. They can play a major role particularly in sectors such as information technology, health, agriculture, entrepreneurship, and artificial intelligence.



Asian State-9. How successful are private universities in creating linkages between industry and academia?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Some private universities are doing quite well, especially through internships, corporate connections, career support, and skill-based courses. However, overall, deeper and more structured linkages are needed. Research on industry challenges, joint labs, guest lectures, project-based learning, and continuous bridges to employment should be developed. The stronger the connection between education and industry, the more workplace-ready students will be.

Asian State-10. How well do private universities align their curricula with labor market demands?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Private universities are relatively advanced in this area because they can quickly update courses according to market demands. However, preparation should not be limited to employment alone—students’ mindset, leadership, language skills, research capability, and ethics must also be developed. As the job market changes rapidly, curricula need to be dynamic rather than static. Planned efforts are still needed in this regard.

Asian State-11. What kind of policy changes are needed to ensure quality in higher education?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: First, the quality control system must be strengthened. Second, faculty recruitment, research

assessment, curriculum development, and student learning outcomes need to be prioritized. Third, university accountability and transparency must be enhanced. Additionally, the accreditation process should be practical and outcome-focused. Policies should create an environment where institutions prioritize quality over quantity.

Asian State-12. How important is the university’s role in shaping students’ ethics, values, and social responsibility?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: A university is not just a place for imparting knowledge; it is a place for shaping people. Students should become responsible citizens in addition to skilled professionals. Values such as ethics, tolerance, social responsibility, leadership, and humanity are developed during university life. These qualities should be cultivated not only through curricula but also through co-curricular activities, social initiatives, debates, volunteer work, and humanitarian practice.

Asian State-13. How should tuition fees be balanced with the quality of education?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Tuition fees should allow institutions to provide quality education while not becoming an unreasonable burden for students. To maintain this balance, transparent financial management, scholarships, merit- and need-based aid, and rational expenditure are essential. Education cannot be treated as a commercial product, yet investment is necessary to maintain quality. Therefore, fairness, humanity, and quality must be considered together.

Asian State-14. What steps are needed to make higher education accessible to students in rural and underdeveloped regions?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Expansion of quality universities at the regional level, online and blended learning, scholarships, hostel facilities, digital infrastructure, and career counseling are necessary. Many talented

students fall behind due to financial and geographic constraints. Therefore, alongside central development, regional planning must be implemented. Ensuring higher education is not limited to the capital is one of the major challenges today.

Asian State-15. How prepared are Bangladesh's universities for digital education, online learning, and smart campus systems?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Preparation has begun, but much remains to be done. Some universities have advanced in online classes, learning management systems, digital libraries, and smart campus systems. However, not all universities have the same infrastructure, technological proficiency, or policy readiness. The universities of the future will be technology-rich, data-driven, and student-centered. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen digital capabilities now, provide training for faculty and students, and ensure safe technology use.

Asian State-16. To ensure international-standard higher education, what areas should our universities focus on?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: To achieve international standards, universities must emphasize research, academic freedom, skilled faculty, modern labs and libraries, outcome-based education, and international collaboration. Additionally, English communication skills, publications, joint research, exchange programs, and awareness of global ranking criteria are crucial. Most importantly, international standards cannot be achieved without a long-term commitment to quality.

Asian State-17. What positive outcomes can result from increasing collaboration between public and private universities?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Increased collaboration can lead to joint research, faculty

exchanges, access to shared labs, conferences, training, and coordinated initiatives to address national challenges. This creates an environment of mutual learning instead of competition. The combination of public universities' experience and research strength with private universities' rapid decision-making and technological flexibility can significantly advance higher education in Bangladesh.

Asian State-18. What initiatives are essential to strengthen faculty development, research support, and the academic environment?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Regular faculty training, research grants, opportunities to participate in international conferences, publication support, incentives for higher degrees, and merit-based evaluation are essential. Additionally, academic freedom and a research-friendly environment must be ensured. When faculty are motivated, student learning quality also improves. Therefore, faculty development should be viewed as an investment, not an expense.

Asian State-19. Where do you envision Bangladesh's higher education sector in the next decade?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: I envision a higher education sector where quality, research, technology, innovation, and international recognition advance together. Universities will become centers for producing skilled, ethical, and research-oriented human resources. Regional disparities will decrease, industry linkages will strengthen, and Bangladesh will progress steadily toward a knowledge-based economy. The next decade can be the decade of transformation for our higher education system.

Asian State-20. What is your message to students, teachers, and policymakers in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: To students: Focus not just on degrees but on skill and character development. To teachers: Lead in knowledge creation, research, and student development. To policymakers: Treat higher education as a long-term national investment. If each group acts responsibly in their role, Bangladesh's higher education can reach world-class standards.



Asian State-21. How do you explain the concept of “Empowering Education”?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: “Empowering Education” is an education that does not merely provide information but equips people to act. It teaches students to think critically, make decisions confidently, develop skills, and become capable of driving social change. Education is empowering when it fosters confidence, values, leadership, and an innovative mindset. In other words, education becomes a force for freedom, development, and human progress.

Asian State-22. How can higher education be transformed from merely obtaining a degree into a force for nation-building?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Higher education must be practical, value-driven, and research-oriented. Universities should be places where students develop not only as job seekers but also as problem-solvers, entrepreneurs, and responsible citizens. Curricula should integrate society, environment, technology, leadership, and ethics. The application of knowledge beyond degrees is the core strength of nation-building.

Asian State-23. In the era of globalization, what is most important to make Bangladesh’s universities competitive?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: The most important factors are quality education, research, international collaboration, technological capability, language proficiency, and an innovative culture. Leadership, administrative efficiency, and curriculum development aligned with global standards are also crucial. Universities should be structured to meet local needs while contributing to the global knowledge economy.

Asian State-24. How do you assess the criticisms or controversies surrounding private universities?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Criticism is natural and not always negative. Often, it points the way toward improvement. Concerns about quality, fees, faculty numbers, or infrastructure should be carefully considered. At the same time, their positive contributions must also be recognized. Our goal should be to respond to criticism not defensively, but through continuous quality improvement.

Asian State-25. In your view, how significant is higher education as a driving force for Bangladesh’s future?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: Higher education is one of the main driving forces for Bangladesh’s future. A country’s development depends on its knowledge, skills, research, and innovative capacity. Universities produce the future scientists, policymakers, teachers, entrepreneurs, and social leaders. Investing in higher education is, therefore, investing in the country’s future. To build a smart, humane, and prosperous Bangladesh, there is no alternative to higher education.

Asian State-26. In one line, what is your comment on the future of higher education in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: The future of Bangladesh’s higher education is bright if we give equal importance to expansion, quality, research, ethics, and innovation.

Asian State-27. What are your three key recommendations to make private universities more effective and world-class?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari:

1. Increase mandatory investment in research and faculty development.
2. Strengthen quality control, transparency, and accountability.
3. Build deeper connections with industry, international partners, and technology-driven education systems.

Ensuring these three areas will allow private universities to evolve into world-class institutions.

Asian State-28. What is your inspirational message for young students in Bangladesh?

Professor Dr. Md. Shafiqul Bari: I would tell young students—not to underestimate your dreams. Acquire knowledge, develop skills, learn to question, and do not fear failure. Aim not just for good grades but to be good human beings. The future of Bangladesh lies in your hands. With honesty, hard work, and confidence, success is inevitable.



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Probiar Bikash Sarkar
Children’s writer, fiction writer, and
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From Japan

Fundamental Reform Needed in Bangladesh’s Educational Thought and System

The foundation of a nation’s holistic development lies in **childhood education**, which must instill both a sense of nationalism and universal values. No state can achieve progress without proper early education. History of developed countries confirms this principle.

Education manifests itself clearly in **human behavior**—whether in family, academic, or social contexts. Intellectual learning is reflected in both action and thought. Behavior

and work culture reveal where and how a person has been educated. Education carries the legacy of **family, lineage, and national identity**.

Globally, various forms of education exist, and its importance to a nation cannot be overstated. Education, however, is not uniform. **Advanced education** emphasizes subject knowledge, scientific and technological understanding, and practical skills. In contrast, **underdeveloped education**, often religious or spiritual, is largely non-productive outside the family. Countries dominated by religious instruction lag far behind those with modern education systems. Bangladesh is a clear example: widespread religious schooling has hindered the country from achieving modern educational standards.



For centuries, Bangladesh’s **formal education system** has been not only laughable but also disappointing and tragic. It is a vivid remnant of the **British colonial education model**, which persists even in the rapidly changing global landscape of the 21st century. Astonishingly, in the past 55 years, little to no modernization has been introduced.

The greatest opportunity arose immediately after **1972**, when independence offered a chance to overhaul the education system and emulate **modern, global standards**. Even a glance at Japan’s education system, then Asia’s only advanced system, could have provided a roadmap. In **1973**, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Japan and observed its

institutions, but this did not appear to inspire significant reforms.

Early in independence, flaws became evident. The then Education Minister **Professor Yusuf Ali**, without consulting Bangabandhu's government, unilaterally declared “**auto-promotion**” in schools. Bangabandhu was reportedly distressed by this decision. Whether or not the story is entirely accurate, auto-promotion did **not benefit students or the nation**; instead, it fostered **government arbitrariness and moral decline** among learners. Education is the backbone of society; damage to it spreads slowly but pervasively, weakening the entire structure. Bangladesh's education history reveals little but deep wounds, and even what remained intact was eroded by the **2024 mass uprising**, further weakening ethical standards, civility, and social behavior.

Creativity is crucial in education. Learning should not be limited to rote memorization; knowledge must translate into production, innovation, and practical application. Previously, schools, colleges, and universities published literary compilations, wall newspapers, and hosted cultural competitions. After 2000, such initiatives rapidly disappeared. Today, education institutions lack subtle cultural engagement or aesthetic cultivation. Even **music teacher positions in primary schools** have been removed, signaling a broader threat to humanistic values.

Recent attacks on the decades-old cultural institution **Chhayanaut**, including destruction of valuable instruments, have left a deep negative impression on students. The gradual erosion of creative and ethical education in Bangladesh poses a serious challenge to the nation's intellectual and cultural development.

Revolutionary Reform of Bangladesh's Stagnant and Unproductive Education System

Bangladesh's stagnant, dysfunctional, and unproductive education system must be fundamentally and revolutionarily reformed.

There is no alternative but to align our students with the standards of students in developed countries in line with global changes. The current education system is not only creating unemployment but is also unproductive, placing a heavy burden on the state and the nation. It is producing only physical laborers, many of whom, suffering from unemployment, become addicted to substances and engage in various crimes. Under the state's manpower export policy and through human traffickers, millions of unemployed youth are being sent abroad as cheap labor. Countless are subjected to extreme hardships and even death overseas. This has driven Bangladesh's dignity and reputation to the lowest level. Government negligence and irresponsibility are largely to blame.



Just as a country needs physical laborers, it also requires skilled and knowledge-based labor. Maintaining this balance is essential, particularly in terms of economic security and regular income—something that is currently absent in Bangladesh.

Having lived in a developed country like Japan for four decades and gained modest experience with its education system, I find it necessary to propose the following suggestions:

1. Maximum Priority to Education:

- Education is a fundamental right of a nation and must be given the highest priority.
- Educational subjects and methods are constantly evolving. Modern education is

the primary driver of civilization.

- Continuous research on education is essential, conducted by well-educated teachers and distinguished researchers under government supervision.

2. Mother Tongue Instruction at All Levels:

- Textbooks must be written in the mother tongue at all levels.
- There is no substitute for mother tongue education in early childhood.
- Foreign books used in higher education, medicine, and law must be translated into the mother tongue. Mother tongue education forms the foundation of national progress.

3. Primary Education (up to Grade 5):

- No formal examinations.
- For children aged 6–12, emphasis on manners, social education, creativity, fine arts, outdoor activities, visits to important national institutions, physical exercise, and interaction with animals is essential.
- Education should include mother tongue, basic arithmetic, money handling, environmental and nature knowledge, and general knowledge about maps.
- Such learning will cultivate children’s awareness of societal structure. No examinations are necessary. Limited home assignments may be given during long holidays.

4. Qualified Staff at Education Boards:

- All staff at district education boards or councils must be well-educated.

- The board’s director general should include not only prominent educators but also distinguished citizens in positions such as director, planner, manager, and accountant.

5. Oversight and Accountability:

- Education boards must not only fulfill prescribed responsibilities but also monitor and ensure accountability in all public and private educational institutions.
- They must safeguard natural and civic environments, educational-cultural institutions, and heritage architecture, as these serve as resources for nurturing creative and responsible citizens.

6. Implementation of Proper Teacher Recruitment:

- Establish a proper system for teacher recruitment.
- Ensure maximum remuneration and full economic security for teachers.
- Guarantee zero nepotism and corruption in teacher appointments.
- Introduce exemplary punishment for any form of harassment or abuse of teachers.

7. Ban on Screening Schools, Private Tuition, and Notebooks:

- Completely prohibit screening schools, tuition centers, and rote learning notebooks.
- Create opportunities for teacher-student interaction and exchange of ideas.

8. Extensive Part-Time Job Opportunities for Students:

- Provide ample part-time employment opportunities,

equivalent to “student jobs” in developed countries.

- Students, starting from age 14, should be allowed to work on an hourly wage basis in factories, offices, courts, hospitals, shops, and business establishments.
- Ensure that students from all educational institutions have access to these opportunities.
- Early work experience will help adolescents gain practical social exposure, make future career choices easier, and promote economic self-reliance.

9. Restriction on Private Vehicle Use:

- Implement a rule that students, teachers, and all staff at schools, colleges, universities, technical institutes, and education boards should not use private cars or motorcycles to reach their institutions.
- Arriving on foot or by bicycle is preferable.
- Using private vehicles fosters laziness and a sense of inequality. Walking or cycling encourages effort and physical activity among students.

10. Standardized Social Greetings and Secular Etiquette:

- Greetings should follow secular customs, except during religious festivals.
- Exchange greetings such as “Good Morning,” “Good Noon,” “Good Afternoon,” “Good Evening,” and “Good Night” with everyone, both local and foreign.
- This is an international standard. Being a citizen of Bangladesh must go hand-in-hand with being internationally courteous.

11. Monthly Teacher and Student Assemblies:

- Education boards should organize monthly assemblies for teachers and students.
- Discussions should cover familial, institutional, and social issues, crises, and new ideas.
- Cultural activities including music, drama, literature, debates, and sports must be an integral part of every educational institution.
- Education boards must take a leading role in promoting these activities.

The country’s leaders must thoughtfully decide how the current education boards will function, enforce regulations, and implement reforms. However, the greatest barrier to Bangladesh’s development is politics. Every responsible high-ranking officer, employee, teacher, and student must maintain a tradition and ethical standard of remaining unentangled with political parties.

- School committees, management committees, grant committees, and seminars should avoid the involvement of political leaders or politically affiliated individuals.
- While political awareness is desirable, becoming a political leader or worker is not.
- Directly engaging in politics immediately after completing education reflects a lack of general knowledge.



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Thoughts on Education Kudrat-e-Gul

The education we receive is often rooted in the problems of nature and society. From these experiences, textbooks are created. Therefore, if we organize education in a practical way from its very foundation, we can expect better outcomes.

A human being is like a tree. When sunlight falls on a tree, its shade spreads within a visible area. Everyone takes shelter under this shade, finding relief from the harshness of the sun. This is a simple scientific explanation. Similarly, education is like the sun. When education enters a person, it begins to illuminate the mind, fostering awareness, reasoning, reflection, creativity, new ideas, concepts of justice and injustice, wisdom, and self-reliance. Under this “shade” of education, people find protection from calamities and misfortunes. Education casts light into the dark regions of the human mind, continuously cutting through ignorance. Undoubtedly, this is a lifelong process. If proper education does not reach a person, its protective “shade” will not

form—just as sunlight cannot penetrate through dense fog. Through education, a person gains the opportunity to deconstruct and rebuild themselves, to know, understand, and express knowledge anew. Education transforms humans from mere animals into rational beings.

It is said that education is light. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, “My liberation is in light, in light.” When the light of education enters a human being, the person becomes enlightened. This enlightenment makes them self-reliant and independent. This is where human liberation lies. A person attains maturity and the ability to establish themselves at a unique height. Regarding this concept of enlightenment, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote a concise essay in 1784, titled *Aufklärung* in German, which translates into English as *Enlightenment*. In Bengali, it is rendered as “Alokprapti” (illumination or enlightenment). Kant defined enlightenment as the ability to think independently, free from the authority of others. Being self-reliant is central to enlightenment. He emphasized that as long as a person is not enlightened, they are not truly free—they follow the directions of others. In other words, human freedom depends on enlightenment.

It should be noted that in the post-colonial period, Kant’s concept of enlightenment has been given various political interpretations and analyses, but exploring them is beyond the scope of this discussion.

We often say that enlightenment itself is education. Yet the question remains: how effectively does enlightenment reach the lives of children? A glaring concern becomes evident—our focus is trapped solely within textbooks. This web gives us only one thing: results. It is reminiscent of the famous saying about the “frog in the well”; the well is its entire ocean. But when students venture into the vast ocean of knowledge, they often flounder. Before the light of knowledge can reach them, it seems trapped in a foggy veil. Consequently,

the sense of inner and outer freedom that should come through enlightenment remains incomplete. In other words, the ability for free thought and expression becomes blunt, giving rise to a dull generation. This means we fail to mature fully.

Rabindranath Tagore, a pioneer of educational thought, in his famous essay *The Transformation of Education*, advised combining essential textbook learning with independent reading beyond the prescribed texts. He stated: “Without merging essential learning with independent reading, a child cannot become a fully developed human being—even after reaching maturity, much of their intellect remains childlike.” Everyone knows that a child, if left unchecked, can act unpredictably; nothing is safe in their hands, and any harm can arise at home or outside.

It is important to remember that textbooks are only models. For example, when a textbook presents a poem or a story, its purpose is not merely to understand the meaning, particular words, or notes. Rather, it is to cultivate an interest in the countless poems and stories beyond the textbook. It shows the way to engage with the wider world of literature, preparing the mind to read and write similar poems and stories. Learning about a discovery in a textbook does not mean stopping there; it is meant to open windows to thousands of other discoveries, igniting curiosity and a passion for exploration.



This work must happen both at home and outside: at home, the parents play their role, and outside, the educational institution and teachers carry the responsibility. In other words, parents and teachers must act as catalysts. There is no alternative to this. Yet, this critical aspect often goes unnoticed. Generosity is not lacking, but somewhere, a deficiency in urgency or proactive effort exists. As a result, the true purpose of education often remains stifled.



Another alarming trend we have absorbed wholesale is the mentality of “Take cash, put it in your hand; leave the rest blank on the sheet.” There could hardly be a more disastrous slogan in education. When learning is reduced to such a crude calculation of gain and loss, there can be no true education, no matter what else exists. The renowned contemporary thinker Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has remarked, “Greed for gain leads to collective loss.” The apparent gain in this context is that a bright student mechanically memorizes the curriculum, closes their eyes, ears, and mouth like a disciplined pupil, and transfers it blindly onto the answer sheet; if a job is secured afterward, everything seems accomplished. The torch of knowledge, the books, never have to be touched again—this is mistakenly regarded as success.

While such gain may appear acceptable to the individual, the collective harm becomes evident upon reflection. Traditional rote learning or routine adherence may allow personal advancement, but it cannot ensure collective progress. True societal development

occurs only when individuals transcend themselves and integrate into the larger collective. Education that does not represent collective enlightenment and freedom is inherently limited in its effectiveness.

It is widely acknowledged that the content of education often emerges from nature and social problems, and textbooks are created from this foundation. Therefore, if practical education is implemented at its roots, meaningful outcomes can be expected. As children, we read lines from poet Sunirmal Basu: *“The whole world is my classroom; I am the student of all...”* We seem to be forgetting this timeless message. Forgetting it harms us. To remedy this, libraries must be established throughout neighborhoods so that children can connect their textbooks with external knowledge, fulfill their intellectual curiosity, and explore new ideas. This would multiply their desire to learn manifold.

If we wish to experience the true light of education, this library initiative must become a social movement, extending from the center to the periphery. Otherwise, the light will merely be an illusion. Additionally, every community should have centers for drama, dance, music, and sports. Such institutions serve as supplementary education, keeping the children’s sensory perceptions alert, nurturing refined talents, and stimulating humane thinking. Through the touch of an advanced culture, we can achieve the ultimate objectives of education. Many proposals are made to overcome this collective challenge, and voices are raised. Yet, they often vanish into the unknown like the cry of a helpless, thirsty wanderer in a vast desert. It is hoped that these clouds will clear, sowing seeds of awareness in the minds of the people.



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The Crisis in Education and Ways to Overcome It

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This day may provide an occasion to think anew about education, yet it seems unlikely that anyone will take such an initiative. Education, however, is not a matter for just one day; we must reflect upon it throughout the year. Unless our achievements in education surpass all other accomplishments, we cannot gain global recognition, and our educational philosophy will remain incomplete.

We must move forward acknowledging the crises in education. These crises include the lack of access to education for many, and for those who do receive it, the quality is often inadequate. Other aspects of the crisis include student dropouts from primary and secondary levels, high failure rates in examinations, insufficient educational materials, lack of well-

equipped classrooms and libraries, and the shortage of competent teachers. Students' growing reliance on guidebooks and coaching centers, as well as their weaknesses in mathematics and languages, further exacerbate the crisis.

Although we have formulated a national education policy, its rigorous implementation remains limited. We are experimenting with various teaching methods, but we have not yet innovated an approach suited to our culture and social needs. Our education system is gradually becoming certificate-oriented rather than knowledge-oriented. Our scientific, philosophical, and social thinking is confined within a narrow scope.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote in his essay "Union in Education", "Education must align with the pursuits of the present age." Are we seeing such signs in our country? It is noteworthy that Tagore mentions *pursuit*—the practice and application of one's highest abilities. We now live in an age of information. Thanks to the internet, information is extremely accessible, and each connected mobile phone is like a personal library. Yet, does our education encourage the pursuit required to process information into knowledge and then elevate knowledge into wisdom? Does it create opportunities for such pursuit?

At the root of our educational crisis lies society's attitude toward education. While attending school, we were told, "Study hard so that you can ride in cars and enjoy wealth." A major flaw in this perspective is reducing knowledge merely to a tool for performing tasks efficiently. Society treats education as an opportunity, not as a right. Even today, if we consider both Bangladesh and West Bengal, 30 to 40 percent of Bengalis remain deprived of education. While we acknowledge that colonial subjugation until 1971 significantly hindered educational progress, why has a large portion of the population still not gained the light of education since independence?

When our economic capacity was limited, governments could not invest adequately in education. But even after capacity improved, the investment did not increase proportionally. One reflection of society's perspective on education is its attitude toward teachers. On paper, teachers are highly respected; they are called "craftsmen of human development." Yet, society has continually shown reluctance to facilitate their livelihoods or accord them proper social status.



The state has also maintained this pattern of stinginess. As a result, these laborers in the struggle for life—particularly teachers at the primary level who bear this responsibility—face obstacles; if they demand even a few of their rights, they confront the police's water cannons. Recently, a new salary structure was announced, primarily benefiting those who, through education, are able to ride in cars. Those who lay the very foundation of education—the teachers—are excluded from this salary framework.

Reports indicate that in many primary schools, the playgrounds have been occupied by local power holders. In the government institutions that are supposed to provide teachers' pensions, many teachers still cannot access their pensions despite prolonged protests. How, then, can one claim that society truly respects teachers and education? Public examinations have now been introduced even in grades five and eight. Surveys conducted under mass literacy campaigns show that this increases rote learning, dependence on notes, and coaching-based practices. The national public service exam (BCS) has become so important—since it is a gateway to the privilege of riding in cars—

that I once heard someone suggest that how to succeed in this exam could even be included as a topic in undergraduate textbooks, irrespective of the discipline.

The commercialization of education plays a major role in creating this crisis. Our constitution declares education a fundamental right. Education should never be treated as a commodity; this principle forms the foundation of our educational philosophy. However, when English-medium schools and later private universities were established, and coaching centers flourished, education began to acquire the traits of a commodity. This has happened for multiple reasons, one being the creation of a global culture of commodification through globalization. This culture is immensely powerful. In the West, after television became popular, religious propagation itself became profitable. The proponents of "televangelism" earned millions of dollars by spreading religion on TV. Observing this, American novelist Don DeLillo humorously remarked that television even commodifies religion. Compared to that, education is far easier to commodify. And when education becomes a commodity, the pursuit of higher knowledge is suppressed, while market demand takes precedence.

There are solutions to these crises. Effective practices from outside—those proven to expand education and improve its quality—can be adopted, provided they are adapted to our culture and social realities. Blindly applying foreign teaching methods or pedagogies, however, can lead to disaster. Two examples illustrate this:

First, the communicative method imposed on English education since the 1970s. The previous grammar-translation method, while imperfect, had its merits. The new method required numerous prerequisites, most of which were absent, so it yielded no meaningful results. The method was good, but without the necessary conditions, it failed, creating chaos in English education.

Second, the adoption of the Western “semester” system in Dhaka and other universities. The necessary prerequisites for effectively implementing this system are absent in most of our universities, making this approach potentially harmful to education. In my experience, the semester system will not benefit subjects like literature or philosophy unless its required conditions are fulfilled first. Various manifestations of the educational crisis exist, and solutions require careful preparation. First, political and state will and commitment; second, sufficient investment; and third, placing education at the forefront of national educational thought. While it is claimed that education receives the highest allocation, it remains insufficient relative to need. Countries that have achieved remarkable progress, and which we admire and sometimes envy, have all invested heavily in education, often beyond their means, such as Cuba and Korea. Despite long-term economic blockades imposed by the United States and other Western countries, Cuba has not faltered in investing in education, and the benefits are now evident. An entire generation, educated to international standards, has achieved remarkable progress in science, journalism, fine arts, and agriculture. The United States now seeks to engage with Cuba, which has been allocating 9 percent of its GDP to education for several years. In contrast, we allocate only 2.1 percent—even less than Nepal.



The quality of education cannot improve without competent teachers; without quality textbooks and educational materials; if

teaching and learning are not enjoyable; if there are administrative distortions; if the system is fragmented across multiple streams; if every school lacks libraries, playgrounds, and well-lit, comfortable classrooms. The salaries we offer primary school teachers are insufficient to attract talented individuals to the teaching profession. The “respect” we accord them is too low to encourage anyone to choose teaching as a noble profession. The educational crisis will not be resolved overnight. But if the state and society are committed to eliminating this crisis, substantial progress can be made. With visible commitment reflected in investment, the quality, scope, and depth of education will gradually increase.

We can collaborate in business, commerce, communication, and even government operations—but no compromise is possible in education. Education is the best place to invest, and its benefits are reaped by the entire nation.



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Sustainable Development is Impossible Without Quality Education

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Experts assert that for any development in a country to be sustainable, a sustainable education system is essential. This is because the foundation of all development lies in the knowledge of the relevant field. Without such knowledge, a country must depend on experts from other nations. It is widely acknowledged that education is the backbone of a nation. If this backbone is weak, the country and its people can never become strong. Consequently, the country's development cannot be sustainable. Therefore, there is no alternative to a sustainable education system for achieving sustainable development.

To clarify, consider an example. Currently, nearly 1.5 million foreign workers are employed from Bangladesh. They are paid according to their education and skill levels. Reports indicate that the minimum wage for these workers is 200,000 BDT. These foreign workers are highly competent and skilled in

their respective fields. They are employed for years as personnel in Bangladesh's development projects. Most of the workforce for mega projects such as the Padma Bridge, Metro Rail, and Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant are foreign workers. Similarly, most experts occupying critical positions in these projects are foreign nationals. Local engineers often work as assistants to these experts.

Under these circumstances, a natural question arises: What "product" are our public universities producing? Furthermore, it is reasonable to ask: What is the future of our development? How sustainable is this development?

It is true that literacy and education rates have increased in the country. The number of students achieving GPA-5 has grown. Currently, there are 39 government medical colleges and 70 private medical colleges. However, questions remain about the quality of education in these institutions. The standard of services provided by hospitals is far from satisfactory.

Most students prioritize the BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service) as their career choice. There are 28 cadres in the BCS system. Most students primarily choose administration, police, or foreign affairs posts. Almost all candidates assign the "education cadre" as their last preference. This means that positions with money and power are preferred over teaching posts. The low salary and limited influence in the teaching profession discourage candidates, creating a major obstacle to national progress. Due to the overall weaknesses in the education system, the quality of education in Bangladesh is among the lowest in South Asia. According to an international standard, the education quality in Bangladesh is 2.8%, compared to 20.8% in India and Sri Lanka. Pakistan's education quality is significantly higher than Bangladesh. This study demonstrates that the national education system is fundamentally flawed.



The foundation of education in any country starts at the primary level. Bangladesh has nearly 66,000 primary schools with approximately 400,000 employed teachers. These 400,000 teachers form the backbone of nation-building, dedicating almost the entire day to schools. Yet, at the end of the month, their total salary is only 17,000 BDT. Each receives a monthly meal allowance of just 200 BDT, which is only 6.66 BDT per day. The social and professional status of these teachers is lower than that of a peon in the Secretariat. Due to these conditions, even top-performing graduates from public universities are reluctant to join the teaching profession.

At the secondary level, 97% of educational institutions are private. There are 26,000 private institutions receiving MPO (Monthly Pay Order) support, employing approximately 500,000 teachers. Entry-level salaries for these teachers are 12,500 BDT, with a monthly medical allowance of 500 BDT. By comparison, a single consultation fee of a good doctor is 1,000 BDT, while rent allowances for teachers amount to only 1,000 BDT per month. Even a single room in a slum cannot be rented out with the wages teachers receive. For generations, the government-determined allowance has been what teachers survive on. There is no meal allowance, no promotion, no transfer. In today's market, their meager salary cannot even last ten days. As a result, they cannot focus fully on teaching. To support their families, they are forced to choose other jobs, some take up private tuition.

Next is the higher secondary level. Colleges at this stage are trapped in the rigid MPO (Monthly Pay Order) system. Here too, there

are neither promotions nor transfers. A teacher may remain an assistant lecturer for 30 years! They join as assistant lecturers and retire in the same position.

Moving on to higher education institutions, universities are the apex of any country's education system. While promotions exist, there is little academic motivation. Research is conducted, but it often does not meet international standards. Even recruitment involves various calculations and considerations, so after joining, many shift their focus from research to other areas. As a result, Bangladesh's universities lag in international rankings.

Our students are being educated in a system where they neither learn moral education, scientific education, nor technological education. Even students who grow up with patriotism are not being nurtured effectively. Highly talented individuals occasionally enter the teaching profession, but often they cannot be retained. Since this profession lacks attractive benefits, it fails to draw them in.

Historically, the socio-economic condition of teachers in Bangladesh has been very low. Currently, those employed in this profession are socially marginalized to some extent. They lack economic solvency, and therefore their social status is low. The bureaucratic governance system inherited from the British era still persists. In this system, high-ranking civil servants enjoy vast economic solvency, social prestige, and administrative power. Meanwhile, the very craftsmen who train these bureaucrats—the teachers—remain neglected in society.

For example, civil servants are the highest beneficiaries of state facilities. In addition to their salary, they receive numerous allowances. For instance, they receive 16,000 BDT per month as a cook's allowance, 16,000 BDT for residential security allowance, and at least 2–3 lakh BDT per year as TA/DA for foreign travel. They can purchase cars without interest, valued between 5 million to 10 million BDT

depending on rank. They receive 20,000 BDT per month for car fuel, plus allowances for telephone, mobile, internet, hospitality, domestic support, and more. After retirement, a civil servant receives substantial wealth, guaranteed security, and opportunities for their children's education abroad. Many invest their earnings abroad, ensuring their children's prosperous future. They themselves often migrate overseas, securing a stable and prosperous life.



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Role of private universities in Bangladesh: Driving economic growth & providing education

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Bangladesh, a developing nation in South Asia, has been witnessing impressive economic growth over the years. One crucial factor behind this progress has been the contribution of private universities to the country's economy. Despite facing significant challenges and a lack of substantial financial support from the government, these institutions have demonstrated remarkable resilience and have played a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape and driving economic development in Bangladesh.

**EXPANDING STUDENT SIZE AND
DEVELOPING NEW CAMPUSES:**

Private universities have stepped up to address the educational gap in Bangladesh by offering diverse and specialised courses that were previously limited to a few public institutions. With a student size of nearly 450,000 spread across 110 private universities, these institutions have provided opportunities to thousands of students who, otherwise, might have struggled to access higher education due to limited seats in public universities. However, to continue this growth, developing new campuses for the universities requires appropriate land size, which can be obtained from government khas land.

SEEKING FOREIGN FUNDING FOR CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT: To address the funding challenges associated with developing new campuses, UGC can take the initiative to talk with organizations like the World Bank, ADB, and other foreign donor agencies. Seeking long-term soft loans can enable the universities to build state-of-the-art campuses that can accommodate the increasing number of students and further contribute to the economy. These funds can be allocated to projects such as constructing research centers, improving infrastructure, and investing in advanced technology to enhance the quality of education.

TRANSFORMING NON-PROFIT STATUS TO ATTRACT INVESTMENT:

At present, private universities are running in non-profit status, which restricts potential investment from private and foreign sources. To encourage investment in this sector and boost economic growth, it is essential to change the non-profit status. By opening up the market to private and foreign investments, private universities can receive the necessary funding for expansion and development. However, measures should be put in place to ensure that the quality of education and the welfare of

students remain the primary focus amidst the influx of investments.

PROMOTING AUTONOMY FOR QUALITY EDUCATION:

Private universities must have relaxed autonomy to ensure quality education and innovation. For this purpose, the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Accreditation Council can collaborate with the Association of Private Universities, which leads this sector as a guardian. This collaborative approach will help maintain educational standards while allowing room for creativity and improvement. Flexibility in curriculum development, faculty hiring, and resource allocation can foster a culture of excellence and responsiveness to the evolving needs of the job market.



FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA COLLABORATION:

Private universities in Bangladesh have already fostered a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. Some of these institutions have established incubation centres and research hubs to encourage students and faculty members to pursue groundbreaking research projects and turn their ideas into viable

businesses. To further promote industry-academia collaboration, private universities can work closely with various industries and form partnerships that align curricula with the needs of the job market. Concrete examples of successful collaborations can include innovative startups, industry partnerships, or research breakthroughs with direct commercial applications.

EMPOWERING WOMEN'S EDUCATION:

Private universities have played a vital role in promoting women's education and empowerment in Bangladesh. By providing a conducive learning environment and addressing gender disparities, these institutions have encouraged more women to pursue higher education and enter the workforce. This increased participation of educated women in the job market positively impacts economic growth by improving household income, health, and education outcomes for future generations while reducing poverty levels. Private universities in Bangladesh have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to contributing to the nation's economic growth and development, despite limited financial support from the government. By addressing the education gap, seeking foreign funding for campus development, attracting investments, promoting autonomy, fostering entrepreneurship, and empowering women, these institutions have become integral to Bangladesh's economic success story. With recognition of their significance and support from the government and other stakeholders, private universities can further strengthen the education sector, boost economic growth, and pave the way for a more prosperous Bangladesh.



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**Empowering Education:
The Role of Private Universities in
Bangladesh**
Professor Dr. AZM Obaidullah



Education has always been the cornerstone of societal progress, shaping individuals and nations alike. In Bangladesh, higher education is experiencing transformative growth, and private universities have emerged as significant contributors to this evolution. These institutions not only expand access to higher education but also foster innovation, research, and global competitiveness. By addressing the increasing demand for tertiary education and adopting flexible, technology-driven programs, private universities play a pivotal role in empowering students to become skilled, responsible, and forward-thinking citizens. This essay explores the multifaceted role of private universities in Bangladesh, analyzing their contributions, challenges, and future potential in shaping the nation's educational landscape.

**The Growth of Private Universities in
Bangladesh**

Since the 1990s, the higher education sector in Bangladesh has witnessed an unprecedented expansion, largely fueled by private initiatives. With limited capacity in public universities, private universities emerged to fill the gap, offering students alternative pathways to quality education. Currently, there are more than 100 private universities operating across the country, providing programs in diverse fields such as engineering, business, health sciences, social sciences, and information technology.

Private universities have grown not only in numbers but also in academic breadth, introducing innovative courses tailored to market demands. Unlike public institutions, which often face bureaucratic hurdles and rigid curricula, private universities can adapt quickly, ensuring that students receive contemporary, relevant education. This flexibility enables the sector to respond effectively to the evolving needs of the labor market and the broader economy.

Expanding Access to Higher Education

One of the most significant contributions of private universities in Bangladesh is increasing access to higher education. Public universities have limited seats, leaving thousands of qualified students without opportunities for tertiary education. Private institutions fill this critical gap, ensuring that a larger pool of students can pursue academic and professional aspirations.

Additionally, private universities often provide flexible learning options, such as evening programs, online courses, and modular curricula, catering to working students or those from non-traditional educational backgrounds. This inclusivity empowers students from diverse social, economic, and geographic backgrounds, promoting equitable access to education and social mobility.

**Enhancing Academic Quality and
Innovation**

Private universities have introduced several innovations in teaching and learning methodologies in Bangladesh. Many institutions emphasize technology-driven education, integrating digital tools, smart classrooms, online libraries, and learning management systems. By embracing modern pedagogy, private universities enhance student engagement, improve learning outcomes, and foster critical thinking.

Moreover, these institutions encourage interdisciplinary programs, combining fields such as technology, entrepreneurship, and social sciences, to equip students with versatile skill sets. Practical learning, internships, and industry collaborations are prioritized, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application. Such exposure prepares graduates to navigate complex professional landscapes effectively.



Research and Knowledge Creation

Research is a key driver of national development, and private universities are gradually playing an important role in fostering a research culture in Bangladesh. Many institutions are investing in research infrastructure, establishing laboratories, and supporting faculty and student research initiatives. Collaborative projects with industries, government agencies, and international partners further enhance research capacity.

Although challenges remain, including limited funding, shortage of skilled researchers, and inadequate research culture in some universities, private institutions show

significant potential. By encouraging innovation, problem-solving, and scientific inquiry, they contribute to knowledge creation and technological advancement in the country.

Industry Collaboration and Employability

Private universities in Bangladesh are uniquely positioned to align academic programs with labor market demands. Through partnerships with industries, corporate internships, and career development programs, they enhance students' employability. This linkage ensures that graduates possess the practical skills, professional competencies, and industry exposure required to succeed in competitive job markets.

Additionally, private universities often organize workshops, seminars, and networking events, fostering relationships between students, faculty, and professionals. These initiatives bridge the gap between theoretical education and practical application, empowering students to contribute meaningfully to economic growth and innovation.

Challenges Facing Private Universities

Despite their contributions, private universities in Bangladesh face several challenges that must be addressed to realize their full potential.

1. **Quality Assurance:** Ensuring consistent academic standards is a critical issue. Some institutions focus primarily on enrollment and revenue generation rather than rigorous education and research. Strengthening internal quality control, accreditation, and oversight is necessary.
2. **Research and Innovation Gaps:** Compared to global standards, research output in many private universities remains limited. Encouraging faculty and student research, providing funding, and promoting international collaboration are essential for innovation.

3. **Faculty Development:** Recruiting and retaining skilled, experienced, and research-oriented faculty is a major challenge. Professional development programs, competitive salaries, and incentives for research can improve teaching quality and academic output.
4. **Infrastructure and Resources:** Some private universities operate in temporary or inadequately equipped campuses. Investment in modern facilities, libraries, laboratories, and technology is essential for providing a conducive learning environment.
5. **Equity and Accessibility:** While private universities expand access, tuition fees can pose a barrier for students from low-income backgrounds. Scholarships, financial aid, and need-based support are necessary to ensure inclusive education.

Empowering Students Beyond Academics

Education is not only about academic achievement; it is about shaping well-rounded individuals capable of contributing to society. Private universities in Bangladesh play a vital role in promoting ethical values, leadership, social responsibility, and critical thinking among students. Co-curricular activities, volunteer programs, debates, and cultural events complement classroom learning, fostering holistic development.

By empowering students to become responsible citizens, ethical professionals, and innovative thinkers, private universities contribute to the nation's socio-economic development and sustainable progress.



International Collaboration and Global Competitiveness

Globalization necessitates that higher education institutions operate within international standards. Many private universities in Bangladesh have established partnerships with foreign universities, enabling student and faculty exchange, joint research, and global exposure. English-language proficiency, adherence to international curricula, and participation in global conferences enhance competitiveness.

By embracing international collaboration, private universities equip students with the knowledge, perspectives, and skills required to compete globally. This approach not only raises the quality of education but also strengthens Bangladesh's presence in the global knowledge economy.

Policy Recommendations

To maximize the impact of private universities, several policy interventions are recommended:

1. **Strengthen Quality Control:** Implement robust accreditation, internal quality assurance mechanisms, and periodic evaluations to maintain academic standards.
2. **Encourage Research and Innovation:** Provide funding, establish research centers, and foster partnerships with industry and international institutions to cultivate a strong research culture.
3. **Faculty Development:** Prioritize training, mentoring, and incentives for faculty to enhance teaching quality, research output, and student mentoring.
4. **Access and Inclusivity:** Offer scholarships, financial aid, and flexible programs to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds can access higher education.
5. **Industry and Community Engagement:** Promote partnerships with industry, NGOs, and government

agencies to ensure curricula remain relevant, practical, and socially responsible.

The Future of Private Universities in Bangladesh

The future of private universities in Bangladesh is promising. With strategic planning, investment in quality, and a focus on research, innovation, and student empowerment, these institutions can become global-standard centers of learning. By nurturing skilled professionals, ethical leaders, and innovative thinkers, private universities can play a transformative role in nation-building.

The next decade could mark a renaissance in higher education, where private universities not only expand access but also enhance quality, international recognition, and research-driven growth. With sustained commitment from educators, policymakers, and students, the vision of a knowledge-based, inclusive, and empowered Bangladesh can be realized.



Private universities in Bangladesh are pivotal in empowering education. They bridge gaps in access, introduce innovative curricula, enhance employability, and foster research and critical thinking. While challenges remain in quality assurance, faculty development, and resource allocation, strategic interventions can strengthen their impact.

Education that empowers goes beyond degrees—it cultivates skills, values, and leadership that transform individuals and society. Private universities, by embracing inclusivity, innovation, and global

collaboration, have the potential to shape Bangladesh’s future, contributing to sustainable development, social progress, and a knowledge-driven economy.

In a rapidly changing world, the role of private universities is not just to educate, but to empower—ensuring that students emerge as capable, ethical, and forward-thinking citizens ready to lead Bangladesh into a brighter tomorrow.



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ISSN Print: 3105-7268; ISSN Online: 3105-7276

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Email: asian.state48@gmail.com; Web: www.asianstate.net

Facebook Official Page: Asian State Magazine; Contract Number: +8801821824101

Language based Country & Office location

It's Published Seven Language (Bangla, English, Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Chinese)



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