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What Type of University should we be in for the 21st Century?

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It requires no illustration to clarify that advancement in education sector is the pressing need of the hour especially for the third world countries. This condition is much more acute in Bangladesh at the present time. Once government universities were held in high repute, taking pride in highly distinguished faculty members. But things have changed for the worse since then and the situation now is far from satisfactory. To satisfy the demand for quality education, private universities, since 1993, have been providing the right educational zeal with competent faculty members and congenial educational atmosphere. We now have a number of quality private educational institutions to choose from. This is, however, not a pointed tendency of disparaging government institutions but rather an unreserved effort to depict the reality.

First, let's look at the difference in curricula and related matters between government and private universities. When judging the superiority of one university over another, we are traditionally inclined to look at the number of students, years of operation, method and quality of instruction, number of faculty members and so on. But we tend to overlook the syllabus, academic calendar, teaching policies etc., which are no less important factors in providing education. Of course, the qualification of the faculty members of any government university is beyond question. But that's all. One will be surprised when comparing the syllabus of the same course taught in a first grade private university and a government university. For example, one of the leading private universities here in Dhaka offers "Java" along with concepts of "Visual

Basic" as a 100 level course in keeping with the market demand, whereas the view is absolutely different in most government universities. In many liberal arts courses, the syllabuses are not up to the mark to meet the challenges of the new millennium. More or less, the same deficiencies characterize commerce and business courses.

Now let's focus on the academic calendar of government universities. The pages of the calendar are found dotted with holidays, both scheduled and unscheduled. We all know about the prolonged Eid vacations and similar other scheduled holidays in government universities. Moreover, 'Hartal', political unrest, gunfight over control of residential halls etc., result in cancellation of classes sine die (unscheduled holidays). Recently, sexual harassment of female students has taken a turn for the worse causing quite a number of rapes in a government university. Government universities have been thoroughly unsuccessful in curbing violence on campus. Student politics is one of the dominant features of all government universities. Under the protection of armed cadres, political leaders and workers can do almost whatever they want to.

In marked contrast, private universities are committed to imparting quality higher education in Bangladesh through teaching, training, research and public service with a view to helping individuals increase their intellectual, social and personal potential so as to enable them to actively participate in the socio-economic development of the nation. Backed by eminent Board of Directors and top-notch faculty members, private universities are dedicated to inculcating improved ways of thinking into

their students, thereby seeking to separate education from urban politics. Also, they offer a viable alternative to the high cost of educating talented students outside the country. The very first private university has already had its third convocation while most of the other private universities either have had or are soon expecting to have their first convocation.

Graduates can expect to find high paying jobs in a very competitive job market, especially in private companies, private banks and multi-national companies etc., thanks to the excellent syllabus, busy academic calendar and superb teaching method. If we take a closer look at the syllabuses of private universities, the difference with those of public universities will be manifest. Private universities are committed to highest academic standards to prepare its graduates who are expected to fill positions of leadership in government and private organizations. These academic standards are maintained through identification and recruitment of faculty members based upon evidence of their excellence in teaching abroad and also at home, and excellence in research. Through developing and maintaining a modern well-designed curricula and utilization of well-equipped computer labs and well-stocked libraries, private universities provide their students with state-of-the-art learning experiences throughout their years at college.

Although the fact remains that private universities are relatively more expensive to attend, those who can afford to pay seriously consider education in a private university as they think it to be wise investment that should pay rich dividends in the future.