

# Who runs these pvt universities?

UGC finds nearly half of 84 active private universities run without VCs

WASIM BIN HABIB and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Nearly half of the country's 84 operational private universities are without vice-chancellors and are mostly run by acting VCs.

The situation is even worse when it comes to the posts of pro-VC and treasurer. Sixty-nine of the institutions have no pro-VC and 50 have no treasurer.

Shockingly, all three posts lie vacant at 25 universities. Only five institutions currently have the three top posts filled, according to a list the University Grants Commission (UGC) released on August 21.

However, most of the top universities have VCs and at least one of the two other posts -- pro-VC and treasurer -- filled.

The list shows 37 universities have no VCs. Appointment of VCs to six of those was pending with the education ministry.

The six universities are World University of Bangladesh, Pundra University of Science and Technology, Presidency University, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Chittagong Independent University and Northern University of Business and Technology, Khulna.

The tenure of the VC of Gono Bishwabidyalay expired recently while the VC of EXIM Bank Agricultural University Bangladesh resigned lately, the UGC report mentioned.

Jesmin Pervin, deputy director at the Private University Division of the UGC, said most of the 37 universities are run by acting VCs appointed by the board of trustees.

But as per the act, the board cannot do that, she said.

The Private University Act-2010 makes it mandatory for a university to recommend names to the president, also the chancellor of public and private universities, to pick one for the post of VC.

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The law does not cover the appointments of acting VC, pro-VC and treasurer.

However, UGC officials say, the universities are allowed to be run by acting VCs only when the VC's tenure expires. On expiry of the VC's tenure, a university makes a teacher acting VC for an interim period until the next VC is appointed.

Getting the chancellor's approval through the education ministry for the appointment of a VC should not take more than a month, said an UGC official, wishing not to be named.

But since the law does not stipulate any specific time limit, some universities take advantage of it and keep the acting VCs in their posts for a longer period of time, while others simply do not follow any rules, added the official.

Educationists and private university teachers said the board of trustees, in many cases, is reluctant to appoint vice-chancellor and pro-vice-chancellor to make sure it has control over the university administration.

This has been going on for too long with the education ministry and the UGC allegedly showing indifference. Experts said it is harmful both for the students and the universities.

The latest UGC report shows the situation has worsened over the last two years.

In a 2014 report, the UGC, the statutory apex body for higher education, stated that 20 private universities out of 79 did not have VCs while the posts of pro-VC and treasurer were vacant at 61 and 49 institutions respectively.

According to the latest report, only American International University Bangladesh, University of Development Alternative, Eastern University, Metropolitan University and United International University have all three posts filled.

Since the beginning of the journey in 1992, private universities have been playing a significant role in accommodating a large number of

students pursuing higher education.

Around 4.63 lakh students are now studying at 84 universities and they account for 65 percent of the campus-based students in Bangladesh.

Eight more private universities have got approval from the UGC recently, but they are yet to start academic activities.

There are allegations that many of those have not met conditions set out in the law.

Requesting anonymity, the vice-chancellor of a private university said, "This is not a normal situation. If the leader of an institution is not a full-time staff, it would obviously disrupt its normal functioning."

Universities without full-time VCs face problems in decision-making and development activities, he told The Daily Star.

The VC also said there is a scarcity of competent professionals who can take up top leadership roles at universities.

"In many cases, the board of trustees doesn't find candidates who would be loyal to them," he added.

Although the board members are supposed to give strategic directives, they often get involved in day-to-day activities of the universities and perform duties that are supposed to be carried out by the VCs and pro-VCs, the VC went on saying.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid also acknowledged the problems facing private universities.

"We are putting pressure on them and at the same time, we are trying to persuade them to fulfil the conditions," Nahid told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We don't want to be hostile to them because we need to develop this sector further as it has huge potentials. So our approach is persuasive so that this problem can be resolved," he added.

Noted educationist Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam said that in most cases, politically or financially influential people were granted approval for setting up private universities. They were given permission mostly

on political grounds.

"Therefore, they cannot be touched," he said.

About the government's role, he said since the government granted permission, it must take the responsibility for overseeing whether the universities were run properly.

The UGC has not been empowered enough to deal with the matter. It does not have adequate manpower to monitor the universities as well, added Manzoorul.

He stressed the need for forming the much-awaited Higher Education Commission with a strong mandate so that it can take action against any rule breakers.

"We can't compromise on education as it is linked with our future," he said.

Sheikh Kabir Hossain, president of Private University Association of Bangladesh, said getting competent people for the three posts has become difficult.

"As the universities cannot find capable aspirants, they do not follow due recruitment process," he told The Daily Star.

"In fact, I have been looking for a competent and qualified candidate for the post of treasurer in my university for quite a long time, but I am yet to find one," said Kabir, also chairman of the board of trustees of Fareast International University.

Asked about the practice of running universities with acting VCs, he did not give a clear answer.

He, however, refuted the allegation that private universities want to have people of their choice in the top posts.

Terming the situation unwarranted, UGC Chairman Prof Abdul Mannan said it is the duty of the respective universities to ensure appointments of VC, pro-VC and treasurer as per law.

The commission has nothing to do with the matter as the Private University Act-2010 allows only the chancellor to appoint a VC for a four-year term from a panel of candidates recommended by the trustee board, he added.