

Time for govt to mend fledgeling universities

THE state of education and academic environment in newer public universities set up after 2000 — 24 out of the total 38 — as it came up in the annual report of the University Grants Commission of 2013, paints a grim picture of tertiary education in the public sector and speaks of a conspicuous absence of planning and higher education management on part of the government. The commission, which is the regulatory and granting authority of all universities in Bangladesh, in the report, which was published in 2015, listed acute teacher shortage, inadequacy of research, library and laboratory facilities, and halls of residence for students, all that make a university, as factors impeding the quality of teaching. The saddest part of all this is that, according to a report that New Age published on Sunday, there has been no change in the state of affairs in the universities even after the University Grants Commission enlisted the shortcomings in 2013. Over the past 14 years, successive governments have only hastily set up the universities, without looking into what is needed to run them efficiently but these institutions have till date yet to get off the ground effectively, thus, failing to win people's confidence.

Many of the newer universities have so far failed, as the New Age report said, to create a proper academic environment. There is no full professor in a university and there is only one such professor in three universities. There are no research initiatives and even no efforts, mainly because of the absence of senior teachers to work as guides, to offer M Phil and PhD degrees in many of them. While two of the universities are yet to begin student enrolment, three of them have no halls of residence for students. The shortage of teacher, lack of infrastructure and absence of academic initiatives, persisting till now since their establishment, only point to a tendency of successive governments to play to the gallery and not to mean education in the establishment of the universities. Educationists and educationalists have rightly blamed the hurried opening of the institutions, appointment of teachers on political considerations and, last but not least, inadequate funding for this dismal state of higher education in these public-sector institutions. While adequate funding for these universities is absent, there has been no let-up in the squandering of money in many other sectors. The situation leads us to believe that the government has put the cart before the horse in creating these universities.

Now that these institutions are in existence, and in operation, the situation needs to change for better, both for the government and for people. In doing this, the government should iron out some issues in the first place. It has to recognise what is needed for an efficient and effective running of these institutions of higher education. It should work out a comprehensive plan and make adequate budgetary allocations for them to execute the plan in a sustained manner. It should stop politicising appointment of teachers at the universities and enable the University Grants Commission more to oversee the development of these institutions into fully-fledged, fully-functional universities in the nation's efforts to create better-equipped human resources.