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HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ENHANCEMENT Tk 75cr grant for research

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Prof Nazrul Islam yesterday said up to Tk 75 crore might be allocated for research activities in universities under the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP).

This will mark a big leap from the usual grants allocation of Tk 3 crore, and encourage more innovative and quality research activities, he said at a media orientation organised by the UGC at Cirdap auditorium in the city.

The grants will be allocated through the Academic Innovation Fund (AIF) under the HEQEP - a Tk 681 crore project supported by the World Bank, said Prof Dr Md Tajul Islam, a member of UGC, in his keynote paper.

As a major component of the project, the AIF would distribute Tk 372 crore to private and public universities for sub-projects to improve their quality of teaching, learning and research, he said.

Islam went on to add that private universities would need to meet a set of criteria to qualify for the grants. They need to have their own campuses, experience of arranging at least one convocation and positive audit reports of past two years.

Public and eligible private universities would send their project proposals to the UGC. The projects to receive the grants would be selected on a competitive basis.

However, private universities would not receive more than 20 percent of the Tk 372 crore fund, as it is public money and is aimed mostly to enhance the higher education system in public institutions, Islam said.

Prof Nazrul Islam said only 3 or 4 private universities presently qualify for the AIF grants

and indicated that more institutes may meet the criteria if the proposed private university ordinance is passed.

The ordinance relaxed the requirements for qualifying as a private university by decreasing the required land area of campus from five acres to one acre. This would legalise many of the present private universities, he said.

Pointing towards the massive grafts in allocating research funds by the science and ICT ministry during the regime of the previous government, the UGC chairman said researchers who received grants but has not conducted any research activities during that time would have to finish their existing work before applying for new grants.

The other components of the project would bring the local universities under high-speed Internet connectivity, digitise their libraries and allow sharing of knowledge through the Bangladesh Research and Education Network (BdREN), he said.

"Such project to enhance the quality of higher education has been undertaken for the first time in the country," he said. "Therefore it has to be ensured that the activities are transparent and effective."

Information on the five-year project as well as updates, announcements and developments would be available at the project website for public viewing, he added.

The first set of grants would be allocated to selected projects in December and the second one in 2011, said Tajul Islam.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid inaugurated the 'Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP)' on May 14, 2009.