

## Private universities' failure to conduct research unacceptable

HIGHER education institutions all across the world are evaluated in terms of their contribution to research, alongside the quality of education provided to students. It is no secret that the quality of research carried out in universities in Bangladesh is fairly low, which also in some ways relates to the myriad problems these institutions face with regards to the quality of education. If the latest findings of the University Grants Commission annual report are anything to go by, it would seem that the situation is getting worse by the day, with 13 out of 51 private universities in the country virtually spending no money on research, a direct violation of the Private University Act, while the overall research budget of private universities dwindled by more than Tk 10 lakh from 2009 to 2010. Given that private universities charge a much higher rate from students to provide education this is certainly an unacceptable situation. In fact, the overall budget of private universities in 2010 was more than Tk 19 crore of which about 2.5 per cent made its way into research. In fact, it would be fair to say that the private universities, which have been around since 1992, have not had any notable contribution to research in the past two decades.

The task of universities is, actually, to manufacture knowledge. Not only is knowledge imparted through universities to the future generations, knowledge is also created, dispersed and cultivated through universities, the primary tool of which is research. While public universities is also fall drastically short in carrying out this responsibility, mostly because of poor funding and lack of organization, private universities meanwhile have shown hardly any inclination to even develop this faculty. Instead, a bulk of such universities not just violate this rule, but run out of temporary campuses and hire part-time teachers, in the end operating much like a private coaching centre.

Research is not just a strong component of a university, it is the driving force of a nation — where the best minds are meant to converge and create and find ways to contribute to the overall development of the country. Without such faculty, education institutions do not necessarily earn the right to be called a university. Private universities, meanwhile, came into being in this country because the public universities were failing to meet the increasing demand for higher education. However, if they fail to meet the bare minimum requirements of knowledge and education that defines a university, they only help to exacerbate the problem rather than solve it, by churning out poor quality graduates, something the commission report has also expressed concern about.

The commission must immediately intervene to ensure that private universities comply with the need to conduct research, and not just in bare minimum terms, but also explore regulatory options to encourage them to actively carry out research so that it may benefit the overall development of the country. Meanwhile, the commission should also take disciplinary action against the universities that violated the law.