

Private univs driven by profiteering

Ignores humanities, social sciences negating UGC directive

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ALMOST all the private universities are market-driven, offering only those courses that sell the best and yield the highest returns in terms of tuition fee.

Courses in humanities and social sciences are marginalised by business, computer science, and information and communication technology courses in exact negation of the scenario recommended by their regulator, the University Grants Commission.

As a rationale of the upside down situation, private universities owners claim students primarily try to take courses that will offer them the best job prospects. It is why, they say, at almost every private university the business school has the largest number of enrolment followed by IT-related subjects.

And, since tuition and others fees are the main sources of funding the operations, maintenance, and expansion of the universities, they offer courses which have more demand on the market, they add with a sort of pragmatism.

The UGC, which recommends that the private universities should increase the number of courses in humanities and social sciences, mentions in its not-yet-published report for 2011 that only four of the

54 universities are offering courses in Bangla language and literature.

The country presently has 71 private universities, with 16 joining the league last year, and the last this year.

From 1992, when the Private University Act came into effect, to 2010 about 50 universities had been established. The University Grants Commission observes with concern that ... years after recognition of Bangla as an international language, only three or four private universities so far have opened departments of Bangla language and literature, notes the report.

The UGC also grieves the fact that 'The mother tongue for which the nation's bravest sons sacrificed their lives on February 21, 1952, that Bangla and its literature remain neglected in the curricula of private universities.'

Meanwhile, historians in a seminar organised by the Bangladesh Itihaas Sammilani on January 21 said none of the private universities was offering any history course.

The UGC report recommends that the universities should start offering courses in Bangla language and literature, history, geography, social sciences, environmental sciences, political science, and public administration, among others.

Continued on page 4 col. 1

Private univs

Continued from page 1

According to the report, in 2011, as many as 122,837 of the total 280,822 private university students took business administration courses, followed by 71,346 taking courses on engineering and ICT.

Private universities, of course, are market-driven, affirmed The Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh vice-chairman Abul Quasem Haider.

'Subjects like Bangla and History don't have much market demand. So, students don't want to get enrolled into those subjects. And we can't afford the cost of running courses on those subjects, if we don't get enough students,' he said nonchalantly.

UGC chairman AK Azad Chowdhury told New Age, 'Private university courses should not remain limited to two or three disciplines. They should offer courses on all subjects to become fully-fledged universities.'