

THE BUSINESS STANDARD

WEDNESDAY 30 OCTOBER 2024

Innovation at the core: Dr M Azizur Rahman on Uttara University's unique programs

Dr M Azizur Rahman, founder and chairman of Uttara University, shares his thoughts on the university's journey, research ambitions, curriculum reforms and entrepreneurial efforts. He discusses how Uttara University has evolved into an academic powerhouse, aligned with global standards and poised to shape Bangladesh's future through education and innovation



TBS REPORT

How many of the original goals have you achieved since Uttara University was founded? Where do you see the institution in the next 10 years?

I feel deeply honoured as I look back on Uttara University's journey. From the start, our mission was rooted in social responsibility, innovation, and quality education. Every step we took was intentional, building a sanctuary for knowledge and personal growth. The dream of founding this institution was inspired by my experiences at Vanderbilt University and with USAID, shaping a vision for what we could achieve in Bangladesh.

When we launched Uttara University, one of our primary goals was to offer education to students who couldn't secure seats in public universities. Alongside that, we wanted to cultivate individuals who could positively impact society, promote research, and ensure academic excellence.

I am proud of how far we have come, expanding programs and building collaborations. For instance, 2024 marked a milestone as we entered international rankings for the first time and secured 12th place in the Student Support and Engagement category at WURI 2024. Over the next decade, I envision Uttara University leading the region in research and innovation. Our focus will be on enhancing academic quality, promoting international partnerships, and fostering student and faculty exchanges—all aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

What areas hold the most potential for research growth? Are there specific fields or projects you want to prioritise?

Uttara University has become a leader in research and innovation. We have de-

veloped five advanced research centres, 20 research cells, and over 40 state-of-the-art laboratories. Our flagship research hubs, such as the Generative AI Lab and the Embedded Systems and IoT Lab, are at the forefront of Industry 4.0, connecting academic knowledge with industrial application.

One of our unique research areas is Sports Science. Our Physical Education Department, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, is leading the way in this emerging field. Moving forward, we aim to focus on interdisciplinary research through global collaborations to create real-world solutions that benefit both society and the academic community.

Research funding is often a challenge for Bangladeshi universities. How do you plan to address this?

Even without government funding, we've built a strong research culture by reinvesting our surplus into innovative projects. A prime example is the Health Humanities Lab—the first of its kind in South Asia—which focuses on mental well-being and medical humanities.

We are also exploring emerging fields such as sustainable nanoparticle synthesis, blockchain, and FinTech to stay ahead in technological advancements. To support researchers, we recognize and reward those who publish in indexed journals and offer financial support for conference participation and publication fees.

To further strengthen our research capabilities, we actively pursue partnerships with industries and international organisations. Additionally, we encourage student entrepreneurship by backing research projects that have commercial potential, fostering a culture of innovation across the university.

How are you ensuring students graduate with the skills that employers demand? Are you planning any curriculum reforms?



One of our unique research areas is Sports Science. Our Physical Education Department, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, is leading the way in this emerging field.

We continuously refine our curriculum to align with industry needs. Practical training, field visits, internships and soft-skills development are integral to our programs. We work closely with industry leaders to make sure our graduates are equipped with the real-world skills employers seek.

Bridging the gap between academia and industry is a challenge everywhere, not just in Bangladesh. To address this, we emphasise hands-on learning and skill-based training.

Today's job market demands more than textbook knowledge, we focus on producing graduates ready to compete globally and thrive in the 21st-century workforce.

With the growing startup culture in Bangladesh, how is Uttara University supporting students with entrepreneurial ambitions?

To nurture entrepreneurial talent, we have established an Innovation and Incubation Lab that offers mentorship, funding opportunities, and resources for student-led startups. We also organise workshops, seminars, and networking events featuring successful entrepreneurs to inspire and guide students.

Our goal is to build a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem within Uttara University. By forming strategic partnerships, offering expert mentorship and providing essential resources, we help students turn their ideas into successful ventures.

This not only fosters individual growth but also contributes to Bangladesh's rapid economic development.

How are you enhancing collaboration with international institutions?

International partnerships are a priority for us. We have already established collaborations with leading universities and organisations worldwide. These partnerships enable joint research ini-

tiatives, knowledge exchange and student mobility programs.

Our students benefit immensely from these collaborations, gaining opportunities to study and work abroad, which enriches their academic and professional experiences. We are also actively engaged with international and regional associations to further strengthen these efforts and expand global opportunities for our students.

How do you plan to align your engineering and business faculties with the evolving needs of Bangladesh's economy?

We are committed to adapting our engineering and business programs to meet market demands. As the economy evolves, we've introduced an interdisciplinary curriculum that combines elements from both fields.

Developed by experts in curriculum design and project management, this program will prepare students for careers that require a blend of technical and business expertise.

Over the last decade, we have seen a shift, engineering programs have become more popular than traditional business studies. By integrating both disciplines, we offer students a well-rounded education, equipping them with skills that meet current market demands.

Through partnerships with local businesses, we provide internships that offer practical work experience, helping students build careers and contribute meaningfully to the economy.

Dr Rahman's vision for Uttara University is clear and ambitious, focusing on research, innovation, entrepreneurship and global collaboration. With a strong foundation in place and a commitment to continuous improvement, the institution is well-positioned to shape the future of education in Bangladesh and play a key role in the country's socio-economic development.