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TBS Report

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Sketch: TBS

Uttara University was established in 2003 with the motto "Quality Education at Affordable Tuition" and this affordability has changed the lives of thousands of students for the better over the years.

However, education requires investment and quality comes at a price.

Keeping tuition fees at a minimum or even at a break-even point while providing quality education is not an easy thing to do at times, said Prof Dr M Azizur Rahman, vice-chancellor of Uttara University (UU), during an interview with The Business Standard.

What is the vision of your university?

Our vision is to create a compelling and knowledgeable young population that will take this country forward through education, research, hard work and dedication.

Do you think you have reached your goal following your vision?

It has been nearly 20 years that we are pursuing our vision. Around 28,000 students have graduated from UU. The university aims to serve a particular section of people who basically come from lower and middle-income groups.

This section of people is the majority in this country. So, I aspired to improve the lives of the children of this section by providing affordable education and changing their lives for the better.

That being said, UU does not compromise on the quality of education or research.

What is the achievement of the university till now?

We have 14 departments offering a total of 35 programmes, which include some exclusive departments that have not been seen in other private universities, such as Math, Physics, Education and Physical Education.

These are basic subjects taught in all schools and colleges.

These are practical subjects. But most private universities do not offer them due to the shortage of potential students wanting to pursue these degrees.

What is the speciality of your university?

The affordability of higher education that we offer to students is our speciality. Besides, our relentless pursuit of quality education is our strength and foundation.

Are you producing market-oriented graduates?

All our departments are linked to the industry. Our curriculum is updated to keep up with the changes in the economy and to stay industry relevant. In recent times, we have been following Outcome Based Education (OBE) as suggested by the University Grants Commission (UGC), the regulatory body of higher education in Bangladesh.

Our teaching methods are task-based and practical-oriented. We prepare students both inside and outside the classroom. Our co-curricular activities and volunteer work build leadership, team spirit, hard work, a challenging attitude, as well as a pro-people mentality. Students of this university learn from hands-on practices. As a result, a lot of them secure employment towards the end of their degree.

Why would the students choose your university?

The economic condition of most people in the country is not in good shape. But people want to progress, want to improve their condition. Education is the means for this progress and improvement.

Uttara University believes education is a fundamental right for all. The government is doing a great job at heavily subsidising public universities, unlike any other country.

UU, as a non-government university, is providing education at a low cost which is our unique offering compared to other private universities. So those who come here for education have a thirst to excel in their field.

What are the challenges?

We have many challenges. Two of them are as follows:

- a) Ensuring quality is our backbone and we can never compromise it. It becomes difficult to maintain it at times given that the country lacks resourceful individuals who can contribute to academia.
- b) Education requires investment and quality comes at a price. Keeping tuition fees at a minimum or even at a break-even point and going forward as a university with quality is not an easy situation at times.

What is the future plan of the university?

From 2003 to 2022, we have held seven convocations. We have conferred degrees to thousands of students. Our alumni are all employed and doing well in their respective fields. Our alumni list of employment is a testament to our achievements.

Our future plan is to take this achievement forward. We will be moving into our permanent campus by June 2023.

The campus is an ultra-modern architecture work with state-of-the-art facilities including an amphitheatre and a large field designed to give maximum facility to the students.

Both academic and co-curricular activities will be emphasised.

We have already applied to open Pharmacy and Architecture departments. We plan to increase the number of departments so that we can offer more options to the students. We also plan to open subjects in the future which are not available in the country.

We plan to make a mark at international rankings within the next five years and are heavily focusing on Scopus-indexed research publications, global outlook and other criteria laid out in the league tables.

Do you think education migration can be reduced?

Private universities were set up to reduce education migration. The number of public universities is not enough for our students who want to pursue higher education abroad.

So, the need for private universities arose. And now we have private universities that are producing students who are equally competent and competitive with other universities abroad.

Our graduates now have the same level of knowledge and skills as foreign students. Recently, an initiative was endorsed by the UGC, Association of Private Universities Bangladesh and Ministry of Education at Dubai where a team from Uttara University had participated.

We are trying to attract non-resident Bangladeshi (NRB) and foreign students to pursue higher education in Bangladesh. This will reduce our brain drain and increase remittance inflow. It is a gradual process and I firmly believe we are not far from achieving it.

FEATURES